MAKING WAVES

SAIIE 35

Proceedings

20 - 22 October 2025

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SAIIE 35

Proceedings

OF THE 35TH ANNUAL SOUTHERN AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING CONFERENCE

20 – 22 October 2025
Lagoon Beach Hotel, Milnerton, Cape Town,
South Africa

ISSN: 2308-8265
ECSA CPD Nr: SAIIE/CPD/I/1-25

Editor:

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Contents available on the SAIIE website: www.saiie.co.za/publications
Published by: Southern African Institute for Industrial Engineering (SAIIE)

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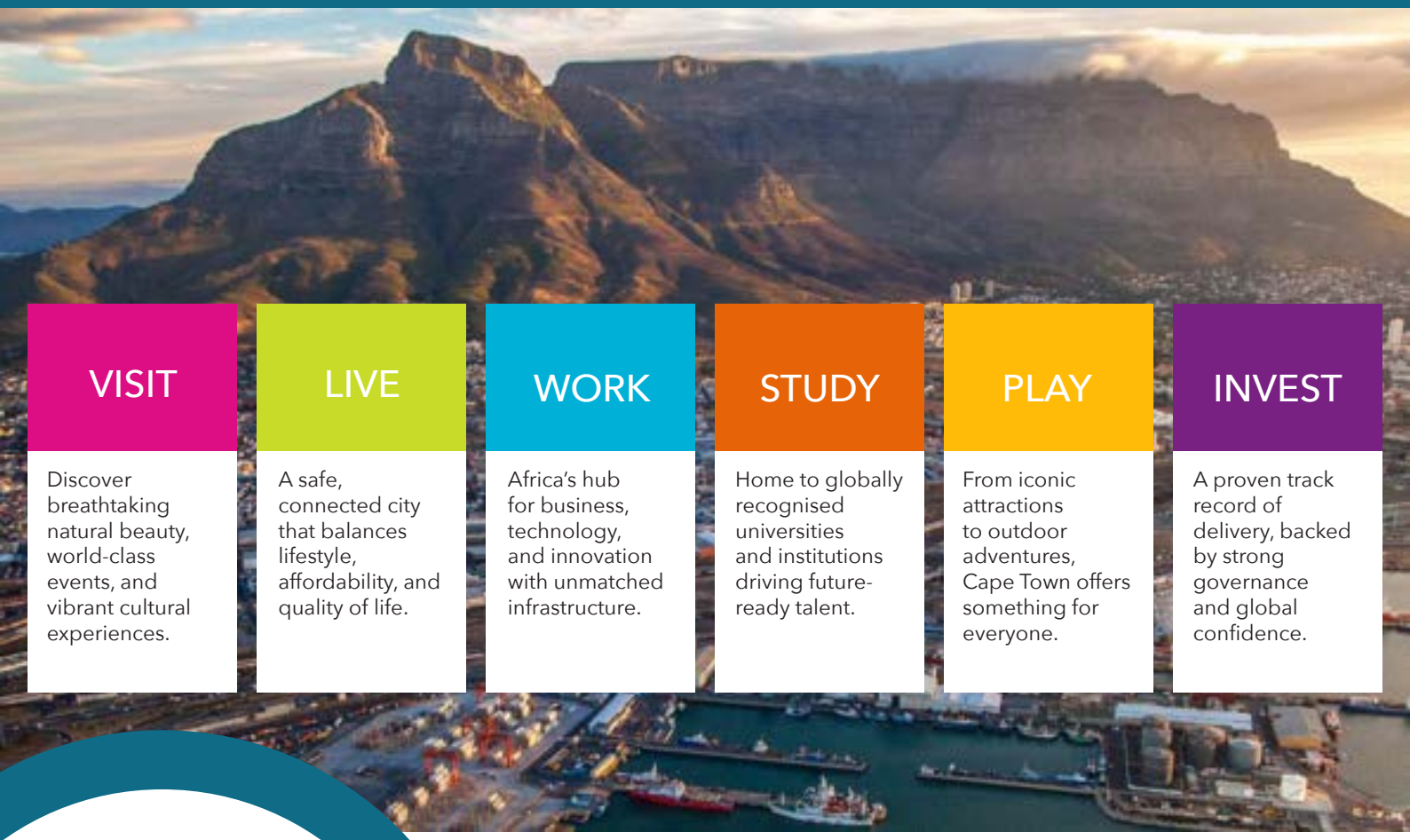

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Preface

The Southern African Institute for Industrial Engineering (SAIIE) annual conference continues to be a vital platform for connecting academia, industry, and government through the shared mission of advancing the field of Industrial Engineering. Over the years, this gathering has grown into one of the most anticipated events in the discipline, bringing together professionals, researchers, and students to exchange ideas, showcase innovations, and contribute to the body of knowledge that strengthens our profession.

The 35th SAIIE Conference carries the theme "Making Waves", reflecting the power of Industrial Engineers to create meaningful impact, whether through bold innovations that redefine industries or small, steady improvements that ripple across organisations. Just as waves represent motion, disruption, and connection, this year's theme invites participants to share how their work is shaping industries and communities through creativity, resilience, and collaboration.

The submission and review process

This year, we received a record total of 183 full paper submissions and 10 presentation-only abstracts, representing contributions from 15 academic institutions and multiple industry partners. Notably, no single institution contributes more than 30% of the total papers published, a reflection of the diversity and inclusivity of the Industrial Engineering community across the region.

Following the double-blind peer review process, 165 papers were accepted, of which 144 are included in these proceedings and 17 were selected for publication in the special edition of The South African Journal of Industrial Engineering (SAJIE). These papers reflect a diverse spectrum of topics spanning operational excellence, sustainability, data-driven decision-making, human-centred design, and digital transformation.

Abstracts for the full-paper track were screened for suitability, and successful authors were invited to submit full-length papers. These were screened using Turnitin plagiarism software to uphold academic integrity before being reviewed through a double-blind peer review process. The review process was managed via the online conference management system, which enables reviewers to provide feedback and ensures that all editorial decisions are transparently recorded. Each paper was reviewed by at least two reviewers, often pairing experienced academics with industry experts to facilitate a credible and developmental process. Only papers that passed this rigorous review were included in these proceedings.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the authors for entrusting us with their work, to the reviewers for their generous time and expertise, and to the editorial and technical teams whose commitment made this publication possible. Your collective efforts ensure that the SAIIE conference remains a credible and enriching forum for advancing Industrial Engineering research and practice in Southern Africa and beyond.

Finally, as we gather at Lagoon Beach Hotel, Cape Town, with Table Mountain on the horizon and the Atlantic Ocean at our doorstep, may this year's conference inspire us to continue making waves through innovation, collaboration, and the pursuit of excellence.

Dr Philani Zincume (Dr Zee)
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LEAN-GREEN DYNAMICS TO ENHANCE POSTAL SUSTAINABILITY: THE POSTAL CASE

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ABSTRACT

The ability of Posts to be effective and efficient in a 21st-century world driven by complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity (VUCA) is a challenge that the postal sector must confront with determination to expand its reach, become resilient, remain relevant, and assure service reliability. The recent coronavirus contagion has exposed vulnerabilities in the postal sector's ability to respond to uncertainty. At the same time, the pandemic's consequences in bringing it to a halt have resulted in improvements in the natural environment as pollution on land, air, and waters receded. Therefore, sustainability is a crucial dimension of a sustainable Post, which demands adopting lean thinking and green thinking principles for greater humanity. A literature review focused on lean thinking and green thinking in the context of the postal sector in South Africa, which operates in the 21st century. The insights from the literature review were used to develop a lean-green dynamics conceptual model through a causal loop diagram, which illustrates the interaction of lean-green variables in a dynamic setting for postal sustainability. The research culminated in two reinforcing loops, which begin with lean thinking principles and green engineering principles, which reduce or even best eliminate the eight and environmental wastes, respectively, creating value that drives operational performance and reinforces a sustainable Post. A sustainable post that pursues the four sustainable development goals bolsters value creation for stakeholders.

Keywords: Lean Thinking, Green Thinking, Green Engineering, Value Engineering, Lean-Green

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1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The world is changing rapidly and is driven by VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity). These drivers force companies to become more efficient and competitive in order to remain in business. Uncertainty denotes a lack of certainty and momentous likelihood of surprise. The word complexity is denoted by an array of determinants underlined by disarray and confusion, and the word Ambiguity is characterised by fuzziness, a high likelihood of misconstruing conditions [1]. The current health crisis in the form of coronavirus, better known as COVID-19, is another uncertain prospect that no one has seen coming, and it has squeezed out businesses, resulting in their closure. It has put enormous financial pressure on companies and organisations. Climate change, which is wreaking havoc worldwide, has necessitated the international community to adopt Agenda 2030 with a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which address an array of social, environmental, and economic challenges facing humanity in the 21st century.

Ranganathan and Dey [2] postulate that the postal service is the most elementary and common means of communication in most countries. The postal service sector is caught in a vicious cycle of poor financial performance, which triggers a lack of investment, thereby inhibiting either improvements in the quality of service or expansion, which generates even lower usage of the sector and mail volumes, further perpetuating the downward spiral. [2]. The haulage of materials, resources and products throughout the postal value chain has a considerable impact on businesses from a financial perspective due to costs associated with moving an array of materials, which includes letters which are currently on the decline, parcels which are exponentially rising due to e-commerce which has prompted a high demand for parcels, and distribution of social grants, resources. These movements across the postal value chain enormously impact the environment due to direct and indirect emissions generated from operations. Operations include a massive fleet operated by the postal sector and massive buildings operated by the postal industry, with the postal network present in almost all areas in the country, including even the remotest areas. Customer centricity, which is one of the core tenets of a lean system, demands that organisations, and in this context, the postal sector, respond to new customer demands from environmentally conscious customers in addition to complying with international, continental, regional, national, and local environmental laws and regulations. This requires organisations to have a complete mental shift in conducting business on the strategic, tactical, and operational levels.

Gupta [3] postulates that green thinking aims to manage consumption and reduce ecological impacts and burdens, while lean thinking seeks to eliminate waste; there seems to be a natural synergy between these two approaches. However, research on integrating these approaches is still progressing. This paper presents a literature review on the postal sector, lean manufacturing, and green engineering to develop a theoretical framework. To develop the theoretical framework, the main research question addressed in this study is:

1. What are the core determinants that underpin the postal sector?
2. What are the dimensions and constructs of lean thinking?
3. What are the dimensions and constructs of green thinking?
4. Can a causal system dynamic model be developed that illustrates the dynamic relationship between lean and green thinking principles in the postal sector in South Africa?

This article aims to determine how the postal sector in South Africa can improve its business performance to improve its reach, reliability, resilience, and relevance to attain its socio-economic imperatives through an integrated Lean-Green approach. To achieve this, the article establishes that combining Lean and Green thinking to leverage their strengths and bolster

each other. The article will develop a causal loop conceptual diagram that assimilates Lean and Green thinking for the postal sector in South Africa.

In the subsequent part of the article, a literature review is presented on Lean and Green thinking as individual approaches. The logic for integrating the two approaches as an assimilated approach is presented. Subsequently, the research methodology part of the article articulates how this study was conducted. The results part of the article articulates the analysis and the key findings. The discussion part of the articles articulates the intricacies and dynamics of the proposed Lean-Green framework. The article concludes with insights that a lean-green approach offers superior benefits such as cost reduction, improvement of process flows, reduced lead times, compliance with environmental laws and policies, meeting customer expectations and reduced environmental burden.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The postal sector and its evolution

DTPS [4] postulates that globally, the traditional postal services sector is undergoing reform prompted by the introduction of the digital society and the Internet. The proliferation of electronic mail, as well as other communication media, poses both challenges and opportunities for the postal services sector. Post Offices worldwide are transforming and innovating to include providing such services, given the decline in traditional mail volumes. [4]. To offer sustainable digital postal services, Posts must rely on their competitive advantages and transform key aspects of their business [5]. This view is supported by researchers who argue that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have transformed social and business communications and have engendered a substantial decline in the traditional letter-mail business. In response, postal operators diversify and provide new e-services to their clients [6].

UPU [7] argues that the upsurge of digitalisation, paired with other long-term socio-economic transformations, has triggered Posts to grow their services well beyond the physical delivery of mail. The postal sector substantially contributes to promoting socioeconomic development. This is because affordable, efficient and universal postal services substantially reduce transaction costs between economic agents, giving them access to an extensive communications and infrastructure network. In this sense, the postal sector actively contributes to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [8].

UPU [9] asserts that the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are ambitious universal agendas to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The SDGs aim to address urgent global challenges that humanity faces in the context of poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, prosperity, peace, and justice. The UPU (Universal Postal Union) asserts that its assessment revealed that four SDGs show high correlations for postal development and are measurable in the context of the postal sector. The four goals identified as having a high correlation with postal development are goals 8, 9, 11, and 17, which are decent work and promote economic growth, build resilient infrastructure, make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, and partnerships for the goals [10].

Taking the above SDGs into perspective, It is clear that to make the postal sector sustainable from an economic, social and environmental standpoint; it is essential for the postal sector at national levels to take urgent and appropriate steps to implement activities that will result in lessening the environmental burden, continuing to play a role that the Post has played for more than 100 years which is socio-economic development, and rendering affordable yet cost-effective postal services to ensure financial sustainability of the postal sector. The socio-

economic role played by the postal sector cannot be overemphasised, and this is reinforced by the report of [11], which asserts that with approximately 677,000 post offices, 5.3 million staff and physical infrastructure covering 192 countries, the postal sector plays a critical socio-economic role. According to [12], the regional landscape of the Southern African postal sector comprises 50 sorting centres and a delivery infrastructure of 16,064.394 delivery points; South Africa accounts for 26 sorting centres and 14,106.896 delivery points. This makes South Africa the most extensive network, accounting for 52% of sorting centres and 88% of the delivery points.

The Post in South Africa is responsible for managing its operations efficiently and ecologically for the benefit of society, pursuing its historical mandate of socio-economic development, and connecting people.

2.2 Lean thinking as a standalone approach

Sundar et al. [13] assert that Lean concepts progressed from Japan, particularly Toyota. Lean manufacturing is a waste elimination method, as several authors have advocated [14];[15]; [16]. However, lean manufacturing amplifies the product's value by eliminating waste [13]. Lean manufacturing is built on the concept of producing products without waste. Waste can take many forms and shapes and can be found anywhere throughout the organisation's business processes. It may be hidden in standard operating procedures (SOPs), systems, methods, designs, and business processes. Waste devours resources without adding value to the goods, services and business processes [17].

Bicheno and Holweg [16] argues that the best way to represent Lean is through the difference between load and capacity, which triggers a gap. They say that Load is the amount of work imposed on a system and is composed of two types of demands which are the failure demand, which is triggered by failure to act or failure to execute an action correctly, first time every time and value (true) demand made up from runners, repeaters, and strangers which have an impact on levelling demand. On the other hand, capacity is defined as the resources available to do the work. Understanding the nature of demand is the initial aim of Lean because shifting and levelling demand frees capacity [16].

Prasad and Sharma [17] Suggests that to cultivate the culture of lean thinking in organisations, it is imperative to implement a set of lean tools to support the endeavour; this notion is supported by [18], postulating that to put Lean Production into practice, organisations must implement various tools and techniques that support Lean Production. Leksic et al. [19] identified 5S, Bottleneck Analysis, VSM, Continuous Flow, Heijunka, Muda, Andon, OEE, PDCA, Poka-Yoke, SMED, Root Cause Analysis, Visual Factory, Gemba, Six Big Losses, Standardised Work, Tack Time, and TPM as the most applied techniques to deal with an array of waste, which their research revealed [16] Reinforces this assertion and includes seven quality tools, SOPs, Kaizen, Kanban, and 5 Whys, to the arsenal of techniques that enable a culture of waste elimination in organisations.

Coetzee [20] proposes that improving operational performance in organisations is a key success factor in sustaining and growing the organisation, and suggests that lean manufacturing is generally considered a philosophy underpinned by ongoing improvement. Thangarajoo and Smith [21] argue that lean thinking is an approach to define value from a customer’s perspective, implement value-creating activities in the correct sequence, execute these activities without interruption when customers demand, and perform the activities efficiently and effectively. They suggest that the principles that underpin lean thinking could be articulated as (a) specify value from the viewpoint of the customer, (b) categorise the value streams, (c) ensure uninterrupted flow of value, (d) ensure implementation of a pull-based system, and (e) strive for ongoing improvement continuously.

The key goal of the five principles is to establish a flawless value stream by incessantly recognising and eliminating activities deemed wasteful and concentrating on endeavours that create value [21]. These principles are used in conjunction with specific Lean tools and methods to maximise the value-adding components in an organisation by using less human effort, space, and time to produce high-quality products and render high-quality service as efficiently and economically as possible while being highly responsive to customer demand [22].

Dekier [23] argues that one principal fundamental tenet of Lean Thinking is ceaseless endeavouring for excellence, owing to which the system incessantly progresses. An organisation that endeavours to implement lean should have robust customer centricity, be passionate about continuously eradicating waste from business processes, and have the incentive for sustainability [24]. The waste streams to be eliminated by a lean management approach are (a) Overproduction, (b) waiting, (c) Unnecessary transporting, (d) Over-processing, (e) Excess raw material, (f) Unnecessary movement, (g) Defects, and (h) Unused employee creativity (Talent).

Beitinger [25] postulates that lean is a philosophy aimed at bringing the ensuing benefits: (a) Produces a vigorous inter-dependent support system, (b) Lessens the organisational costs involved in other popular methods, (c) Emphasises waste elimination, (d) Particularly highlights unnecessary cost generating points, (e) Conveys an improved control over daily events, (f) Lessens the cycle time, (g) Implements socially answerable techniques, (h) Encourages environment-friendly practices, and (i) Act as a powerful tool for competitive co-existence.

The complete offerings can be summed up as an enhanced production system that optimises the utilisation of resources and deliveries. Lean manufacturing is about “delivering the extraordinary through ordinary resources by building extraordinary processes” [25]. According to [16] sustainability has become an essential topic in Lean. Sustainability is certainly important from an environmental point of view, and the idea of optimising resources and reducing emissions matches more significant lean ideas exceptionally well [16].

2.3 Green thinking as a standalone approach

Kozień [26] argues that mainstream thinking concerning sustainability is grounded in sustainable development, which is underpinned by an interlocking circle comprising environmental, social, and economic sustainability dimensions. Sustainable development was coined in the Brundtland Report commissioned by the United Nations’ World Commission on Environment and Development, which defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the current generation without sacrificing the needs of future generations. [27]. This report rings alarm bells about an interlocking crisis facing humanity, characterised as an environmental, developmental, and energy crisis threatening humankind [27]. Green thinking is an attempt to address the environmental crises currently facing humanity, which have devastating effects on society.

Mokgohloa [28] suggests that the concept of environmental sustainability ranks high on the legislative agendas of most governments, and sustainability issues are of increasing concern due to global warming resulting from the exploitation of fossil fuels, which results in climate change, which is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century. Environmental sustainability is maintaining the qualities valued in the physical environment [29]. This is reinforced by [30], postulating that environmental sustainability as meeting the resource and service needs of current and future generations without compromising the health of ecosystems that provide them. As a condition of balance, resilience and interconnectedness allows human society to satisfy its needs while not exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the services necessary.

Patel et al. [31] hypothesise that it is impractical to visualise life without the products produced by businesses because they are used in every facet of modern life. Green thinking, or rather environmental sustainability thinking, on the other hand, is articulated in this paper as a notion of Green Engineering. Green Engineering is designing, unearthing, and applying engineering solutions with cognisance of prospective benefits and difficulties from the ecological, economic, and societal perspectives throughout the design lifecycle [32]. On the other hand, Graedel and Allenby [33] describe Green Engineering as the design and application of engineering solutions that contemplate environmental sustainability concerns throughout the life cycle of the design.

According to Prasad and Sharma [17], green manufacturing is defined as a method of production that reduces waste and ecological pollution by applying research and process design. It is also a practice which supports and sustains a renewable way of manufacturing products or rendering services in a way that protects the environment. Green manufacturing aims to conserve and protect the environment and conserve resources for future generations. This goal supports the definition in the Brundtland Report, also known as "Our Common Future", which defines sustainable development as "development that meets the requirements of the current without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs" [27]. The assertion by [17] is reinforced by [34], postulating that the purpose of green thinking is to reduce environmental risks and impacts while improving the ecological efficiency of firms.

Mihelcic and Zimmerman [32] articulates the 12 Green Engineering principles, providing a framework to comprehend the concepts and practices essential to ensure sustainable engineered solutions to problems. These key principles are (a) Integral rather than incidental, (b) Prevention rather than treatment, (c) Design for ease of separation, (d) Maximization of mass, (e) Energy, space, and time efficiencies, (f) Output-pulled rather than input-pushed, (g) Conserve complexity, (h) Durable rather than immortal, (i) Meet needs and minimise excesses, (j) Minimization of material diversity, (k) Integrate local energy and materials value streams, and (l) Design for commercial after-life. This view is complemented by [35], proposing that the key principles of green chemistry, which is an approach to the design, manufacture and use of chemical products to reduce or eliminate chemical hazards intentionally are (a) Prevention (b) Atom economy, (c) Less hazardous chemical synthesis, (d) Design for safer chemicals, (e) Safer solvents and auxiliaries, (f) Design for energy efficiency, (g) Use of renewable feedstocks, (h) Reduce derivatives, (i) Catalysis, (j) Design for degradation, (k) Real-time analysis for pollution prevention, and (l) Inherently safer chemicals for accident prevention. There is a perfect correlation between green engineering and green chemistry principles as articulated by the respective principles. The twelve principles provide a framework to guide engineers in considering suitability through all design stages. They encourage the redefinition of the task by considering the entire lifecycle, inputs, and outputs [36]. Mihelcic and Zimmerman [32] asserts that the tools and techniques that are used to implement green engineering are lifecycle analysis (LCA), design for the environment (DFE), material flow analysis (MFA), environmental risk management and systems thinking.

Florescu and Barabaș [37] proposes that wastes associated with green manufacturing include air pollutants such as carbon dioxide emissions, energy use, wastewater discharges and solid waste generation. In the postal context, IPC [38] suggests that delivery efficiency, fuel consumption, and electricity consumption are directly proportional to carbon emissions due to the massive fleet and infrastructure in which the postal sector operates.

Pejic [39] postulates that the green thinking paradigm is realised by implementing green initiatives supported by tools and methods, including green operations, environmental management systems, green buildings, sustainable value stream mapping, life cycle assessments, and ecological design. IPC [38] asserts in the quest to become environmentally

sustainable, the postal sector has identified Sustainable Development Goal 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure), Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), Goal 12 (Responsible production and consumption), and Goal 13 (Climate action) as key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the global postal. These four SDGs are linked with priority areas: resource efficiency, waste management and air quality, procurement, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

2.4 Rationale of Lean-Green thinking as an integrated approach

Cherrafi [40] suggests that the Lean and Green concepts have gained popularity recently, even though their underpinning principles and tools are not new. Lean and Green are compatible strategic approaches because they focus on reducing waste and efficiently using resources. Lean thinking and the green thinking approach, as standalone systems, have different measures and objectives to make organisations effective and efficient by eliminating waste and optimising costs across the value chain. While lean thinking is underpinned by five principles that strive for flow and perfection, green thinking, as espoused by green engineering, is underpinned by 12 principles encompassing the sustainability component in good engineering design of products and processes. While lean thinking is geared towards improving operational performance by eliminating waste, green thinking, on the other hand, is geared towards minimising waste and pollution [17].

Wei Dong et al. [41] proposes that the Lean and Green Thinking approaches have demonstrated a common cause focused on reducing and eliminating non-value-added activities for the final product or service. The synergy of Lean and Green thinking will eliminate the non-value-added activities in the process and reduce implementation time in attaining their common outcome. As lean tends to emphasise waste elimination or reduction, it offers a conducive environment to implement green thinking paradigms, approaches, and tools. In this case, the similarity between the two paradigms is logical, which is waste reduction. However, green thinking goes deeper than waste reduction as it is also immersed in process efficiency, reduction of material consumption, 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle), and customer satisfaction. From this perspective, it is possible to identify several synergies between the lean and green concepts: waste reduction, lead time reduction, and using different approaches and techniques to manage people, organisations, and supply chain relations. [42].

Faydy and Abbadi [43] argue that the benefits of the lean-green approach are cost reduction, improvement of process flow, reduction of lead times, reduced risk of non-compliance with regulations, meeting customer expectations, improved quality of the natural environment, and improved employee morale and engagement. They argue that barriers to implementation of lean-green initiatives are not short and suggest that fear of failure, lack of expertise, poor quality of human capital, lack of stakeholder support in to integrate lean-green practices, lack of top management involvement in adopting lean-green initiatives, poor corporate culture that separates environmental and continuous improvement decisions, and lack of environmental awareness amongst employees and even managers.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is a general research process that determines the shape and form of the research to be undertaken and starts from the philosophical worldview, research approach, research choice, research strategy, time horizons, and research techniques and procedures [44]; [45]. This paper adopted a pragmatic philosophical worldview, which is grounded on the research question which guides the research, an inductive approach, which is grounded on a building research approach, a qualitative research choice, a literature review as the chosen research strategy, time horizon of 10 years for relevant literature reviewed, and data collection was conducted through identification of relevant literature and analysis of the relevant literature was used to extract pertinent insights to develop an artefact in the

form of a conceptual framework. A literature review is a chronological means to accumulate, understand, comprehend, use, examine, integrate, and appraise quality literature to provide a solid ground for a topic and research method [46]. The system dynamics approach was then applied to develop a causal loop conceptual model to articulate the interaction of lean and green thinking variables in pursuit of organisational performance.

The research model that underpins this study is depicted in Figure 1. The research model culminates with articulating the research question that guides the research, followed by locating, selecting, and assessing relevant literature that relates to the research question, followed by synthesis and analysis of selected literature. The chosen literature's synthesis and analysis culminate in insights used to develop a causal loop conceptual model and conclude by reporting the findings that respond to the research questions.

The search method was completed with a desktop search of the body of material already published on the topics of investigation. To ensure that the reviewed articles were relevant to the field under study, the criteria also included limiting the reviewed papers to those written in English and performing a general overview of the research area. The search followed the requirements that were used to search open-journal sites and industry sites, and focused on the following topics:

- Lean Thinking
- Green Thinking
- Value Engineering
- Sustainability
- Green Engineering

One hundred fifty-five (155) articles came up in our initial search with the search terms. We reviewed the abstracts of all the chosen papers for primary evaluation, which allowed prioritisation to concentrate on the most relevant material. Table 2 lists the evaluation criteria in detail. Fifty (52) publications were found by applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and these were used for the literature evaluation.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

ID	Decision Type	Assessment Criteria
EX1	Exclusion	Duplicated papers
EX2	Exclusion	Informal literature
EX3	Exclusion	Papers not written in the English language
IN1	Inclusion	Recent publications (Papers not older than 10 years)
IN2	Inclusion	Papers categorically mentioning business process management, maturity models, strategy alignment, and information technology in the postal sector.
IN3	Inclusion	Relevance concerning the area under study

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The postal sector operates a massive fleet of delivery vehicles, mail centres, delivery depots, and retail outlets responsible for the end-to-end process from collecting mail items and parcels to their sortation and transportation to their destination. Articles reviewed suggest that while lean thinking and green thinking differ in their respective objectives, the former focuses on value addition and elimination of waste, and the latter focuses on reducing environmental impacts and environmental burden to the natural environment and utilising natural resources effectively and efficiently. It is apparent that while they have respective goals, they have a similar objective, waste reduction, as both approaches are geared towards reducing and eliminating waste across the product and business value chains.

Leksic [19] asserts that Lean was developed for the manufacturing environment, and its importance is related to operational and strategic mindset shifts, while [47] It asserts that the concept of green thinking in manufacturing applies green strategies and innovative techniques, including products and processes that consume less material and energy to reduce environmental waste and environmental burden to the planet.

The overall argument amongst the articles reviewed is centred on the potential benefits of implementing an integrated approach to attain efficiencies in the context of organisational and environmental objectives within the firm's operations and business processes. In essence, the papers suggest that while lean thinking and green thinking practices have been around as standalone approaches, there has been an upswing in research to integrate the two methods in recent years. The literature review points to a meeting of minds between lean thinking and green thinking, in which the concept of waste reduction can characterise, ideally, waste elimination. Literature suggests that integrating the two approaches would substantially benefit the organisation and, in this case, the postal service. The substantial benefits can be summed up as the eradication of waste, which leads to improved efficiencies, which suggests improved bottom-line and reduced environmental burden through the reduction of environmental wastes.

A value engineering methodology was applied, as depicted in Figure 1 and described in Table 2, to synthesise the literature associated with the two approaches into the purpose, which answers the question of why; an objective, which answers the question of where; functions, which answer the question of what; and activities, which answer the question of how. The information-gathering stage is characterised in this research by the detailed literature review. The information-gathering stage incorporates articulating the purpose or, put simply, the reason for existence. This approach was adopted to streamline the insights extracted from the literature review. The purpose of the approaches is to facilitate streamlining, the functions that underpin the principles pertinent to the approaches, and the activities that articulate how the two methods are applied. As a result, only three tenets of the value engineering methodology are utilised to streamline the insights of the literature review.

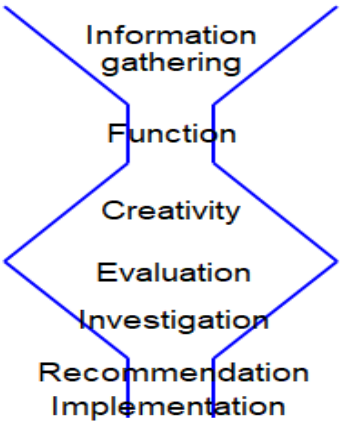

Figure 2: Value Engineering Methodology [48]

Table 2: Synthesis of concepts and variables on lean and green thinking

Underpinning Philosophy	Lean thinking	Green thinking
Purpose (Why?)	Lean Thinking establishes a flawless value stream by incessantly recognising and eliminating activities that are deemed wasteful and concentrating on endeavours that genuinely create value [21].	Green Engineering is the design, unearthing and application of engineering solutions with cognisance of prospective benefits and difficulties from the ecological, economic, and societal perspectives throughout the design lifecycle [32].
Functions (What?)	(a) Specify value from the viewpoint of the customer, (b) Categorise the value streams, (c) Ensure uninterrupted flow of value, (d) Ensure implementation of a pull-based system, and (e) Strive for ongoing improvement continuously [23].	(a) Integral rather than incidental, (b) Prevention rather than treatment, (c) Design for ease of separation, (d) Maximization of mass, (e) Energy, space, and time efficiencies, (f) Output-pulled rather than input-pushed, (g) Conserve complexity, (h) Durable rather than immortal, (i) Meet needs and minimise excesses, (j) Minimization of material diversity, (k) Integrate local energy and materials value streams, and (l) Design for commercial after-life [29.
Activities (How? Wastes)	Reducing or, at best, eliminating the eight wastes. (a) Overproduction, (b) Waiting, (c) Unnecessary transporting, (d) Over-processing, (e) Excess raw material, (f) Unnecessary movement, (g) Defects, and (h) Unused employee creativity (Talent). [14]	Reducing or, at best, eliminating the environmental (ecological wastes. (a) Solid waste (b) Wastewater discharge (c) Air pollution (d) Resource wastage [37].
Activities (How? Tools)	5S, Bottleneck Analysis, VSM, Continuous Flow, Heijunka, Muda, Andon, OEE, PDCA, Poka-Yoke, SMED, Root Cause Analysis, Visual Factory, Gemba, Six Big Losses, Standardised Work, Tack Time, and TPM [19].	MFA, DFE, environmental risk management, and systems thinking [32]. EMS, Green Buildings Ratings, sustainable VSM [36].
Lean-Green Benefits	Cost reduction, improvement of process flow and lead times, reduced risk of non-compliance with regulations, meeting customer expectations, improved quality of the natural environment, and improved employee morale and engagement [43].	

The insights from Table 1 were used to develop a system dynamic causal loop model and depicted in Figure 2.

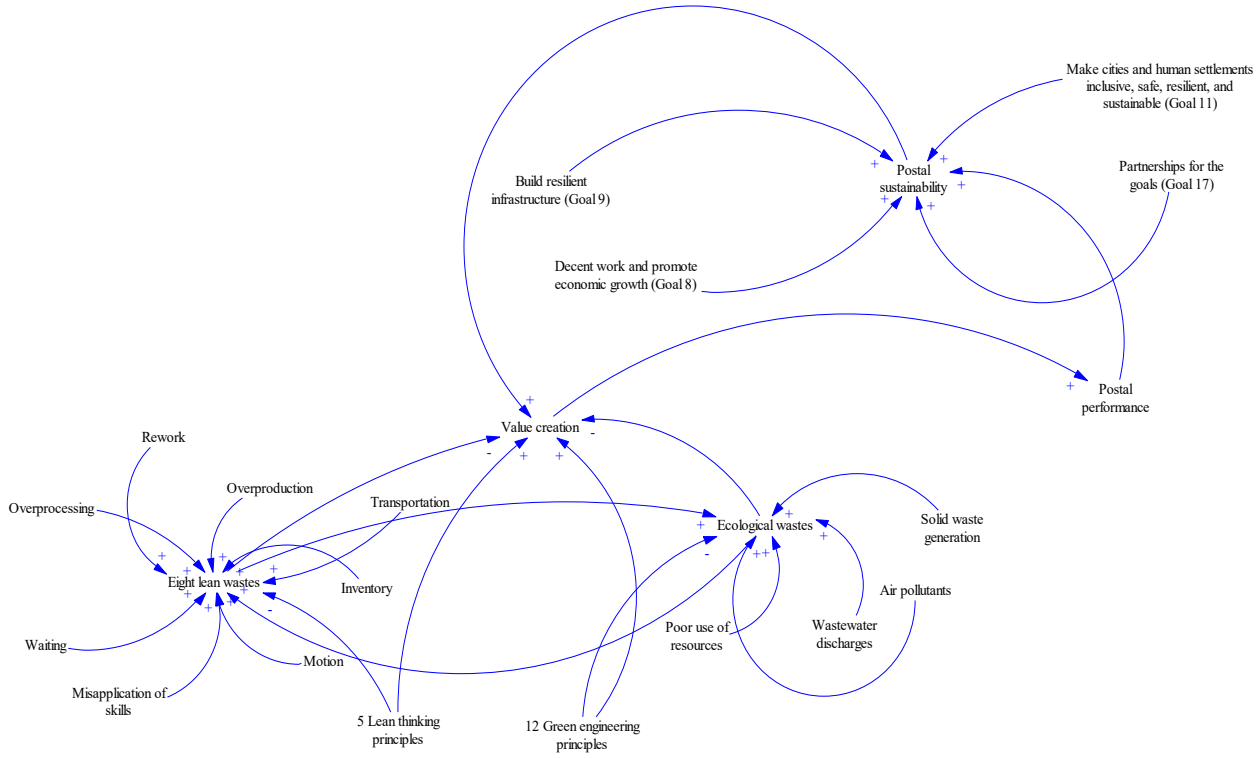

Figure 2: Lean-Green Dynamics

To demonstrate the effects of reduction or, even better, elimination of waste and creating value from a customer perspective, a system dynamic causal loop conceptual model is presented in Figure 2. The causal loop diagram demonstrates the variables that interact in a dynamic setting and articulates the five lean principles, which are (a) value, (b) value stream, (c) flow, (d) pull systems, and (e) striving for perfection are fundamental is reducing and at best eliminating the eight lean wastes (waiting, motion, inventory, misapplication of skills, overproduction, transportation, overprocessing, and rework). The propagation of the eight wastes within the business value chain reinforces the eight waste types and ultimately reduces value creation. On the other hand, adopting lean thinking principles reduces or, at best, eliminates the eight wastes, leading to improved value creation, resulting in improved performance of the postal organisation and ultimately leading to postal sustainability, which reinforces value creation for stakeholders.

The causal loop diagram further explains the 12 principles of green engineering (a) Integral rather than incidental, (b) Prevention rather than treatment, (c) Design for ease of separation, (d) Maximization of mass, (e) Energy, space, and time efficiencies, (f) Output-pulled rather than input-pushed, (g) Conserve complexity, (h) Durable rather than immortal, (i) Meet needs and minimise excesses, (j) Minimization of material diversity, (k) Integrate local energy and materials value streams, and (l) Design for commercial after-life are crucial in preventing environmental waste throughout the lifecycle of products, systems and processes are fundamental in reducing or at best eliminating ecological wastes.

The proliferation of ecological/environmental wastes ultimately diminishes value; green consumers increasingly demand environmentally friendly products and services, and businesses must implement both product and process green strategies. Contrastingly, adopting

green thinking principles reduces or, at best, eliminates environmental/ecological waste by designing products and services that are less harmful to the natural environment over their lifecycle, triggering the creation of value. Creating value leads to meeting the demands of green consumers prevalent in the 21st century, as sustainability is a leading global issue. The value created by green engineering initiatives leads to postal sustainability, which reinforces value creation for stakeholders in the postal sector.

Adopting the four sustainable development goals by the postal sector and their attainment reinforces postal sustainability, which sequentially creates value for the industry and society at large, which it is mandated to serve.

Two reinforcing loops (R1 and R2) are identified in Figure 2, which demonstrate the following dynamics:

R1: Lean thinking practices ⟶ Value creation ⟶ Postal performance ⟶ Postal sustainability ⟶ Value creation

R2: Green thinking practices ⟶ Value creation ⟶ Postal performance ⟶ Postal sustainability ⟶ Value creation

R1 asserts that implementing lean practices creates value for the stakeholders, which improves the performance of the postal sector, drives postal sustainability and further reinforces the value creation continuum. R2, on the other hand, suggests that implementing green engineering practices creates value for the stakeholders, which improves the performance of the postal sector, drives postal sustainability and further reinforces value creation, creating a value creation continuum.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The decline in traditional mail due to digitalisation has forced the Postal Sector to re-examine its business model and transition into the digital era. Digitalisation is aimed at integrating vertical and horizontal value chains, digitalisation products and service offerings, and digitalisation business models and customer access. Digitalisation can be viewed from a lean and green thinking perspective as it reduces the costs through the end-to-end processes and, at the same time, removes inefficiencies due to wastage. The raging concerns on climate change and the planet's sustainability have given rise to the demand for companies to be responsible corporate citizens who put the earth first by minimising their impact on the natural environment and reducing the environmental burden.

While lean thinking was not aimed at reducing ecological impacts in its inception, it can provide environmental benefits while improving organisational efficiencies through the reduction or, at best, elimination of waste in organisations' operations and business processes. The research highlights pertinent relations between lean thinking and green thinking; the first and foremost relationship is that both approaches share a common goal: waste reduction and, at best, waste elimination. The second relationship, as articulated in the causal loop diagram, is linearity in that an increase in lean waste will increase green waste. In contrast, a decrease in lean waste will reduce green waste. An example is that overprocessing items, a form of lean waste, will lead to resource wastage (electricity) and unnecessary carbon emissions in scope two or indirectly due to electricity use.

The causal loop diagram reveals that implementing green and lean thinking principles creates value for the postal organisation by eliminating lean and environmental/ecological wastes and creating value for customers. Creating value leads to postal organisation performance, which drives postal sustainability. Postal sustainability reinforces value creation for stakeholders, thereby creating a value continuum. As captured in the causal loop diagram, the interrelations demonstrate how the Post can improve its performance by implementing a system approach that integrates lean thinking and green engineering principles. The causal loop diagram is a

starting point on which the postal organisation may build and deepen its complexity to represent the real world and use the model to optimise its performance and, ultimately, its sustainability.

The literature points out that it is beneficial to combine the two approaches as costs are guaranteed to be optimised, business processes are set to be improved, lead times will be shortened, and the risk of non-compliance with environmental regulations will be reduced. The benefits of the lean-green approach are cost reduction, improvement of process flow, reduction of lead times, reduced risk of non-compliance with regulations, meeting customer expectations, improved quality of the natural environment, and improved employee morale and engagement.

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DEVELOPMENT OF A BUSINESS PROCESS MANAGEMENT CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN POST OFFICE: A LITERATURE REVIEW PESPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The South African Post Office (SAPO) has struggled to maintain market relevance due to strategic misalignment, over-reliance on procurement-driven projects, and neglect of core business processes. This study proposes a Business Process Management (BPM) conceptual framework to realign SAPO's strategy with operations, strengthen governance, and enhance service reliability. Using an interpretivist, inductive, and qualitative archival research approach, literature on BPM, postal sector transformation, and maturity models was reviewed, alongside analysis of the Universal Postal Union's Integrated Index for Postal Development (2IPD). Results indicate SAPO's BPM maturity is low, with critical weaknesses in relevance and reliability, despite moderate resilience and reach. The proposed BPM framework integrates strategic alignment, process modelling, governance structures, technological enablement, and workforce capability development to drive agility, process standardisation, and customer-focused service delivery. Implementation is expected to improve SAPO's 2IPD score, operational efficiency, and competitiveness, offering a replicable model for postal sector transformation in emerging markets.

Keywords: Business Process Management, postal sector, strategy alignment, governance, maturity models

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1 INTRODUCTION

Companies in the postal sector operate in an environment that demands continuous improvement in products and their associated business processes, as Mokgohloa et al. [1] explained that compounded emerging technologies broadened the industry scope and brought the postal sector to near collapse. As a result, companies' business models and strategies are constantly in flux. This postal sector fluidity was articulated in [1], who saw that its value proposition was evolving in communities. This has resulted in conflict between the static and the dynamic business process maturity models.

This study was conducted in the context of the South African Post Office (SAPO) beginning a journey of investigating a way to survive. In the context of evolving customer demands in this age of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, mentioned by [2], SAPO's loss represents one-third of its revenue [3]. SAPO's international obligations have compounded this. As an implementation agent for South Africa in meeting its universal postal service obligation [4], SAPO must deliver to all citizens of the country and collect postal items for citizens of the world. Hence, it can be described as an international company operating nationally. In such a case, SAPO has to be a world-class organisation (WCO). WCOs position themselves to improve continuously and achieve sustainable results [5].

Successful organisations in this era require a culture capable of radical or breakthrough change, coupled with continuous improvement, if classified as a WCO. In the search for a business model that enables continuous improvement and sustainability based on [6], SAPO has fallen victim to a permanent turnaround project paradigm. This project orientation is explicit in its implementation roadmap. As postulated by [7], projects by nature are detached from present reality. Therefore, it is unsurprising that a purist project approach leads to radical innovation and misalignment with daily operations. Major revenue generators are in the scenario for SAPO business processes rather than projects. Considering the inherent high failure rate of projects [7], this approach has led to financial disaster reported in [3].

Tunc [7] identifies two approaches for strategy implementation, namely the project approach and the process approach. The problem in SAPO was a disproportional emphasis on projects, resulting in neglecting the business processes when implementing a strategy. This led to a misalignment between the strategic corporate plans and daily operations. The evidence of the misalignment is in the company's dismal strategic failure and financial unprofitability [3]. Moreover, the inflexible or stagnant business processes eroded its ability to deliver on the new value proposition. Strategy performance measures were biased towards project completion over business process relevance and compliance [6].

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Strategy Implementation and Business Process Management

As business processes are critical factors in implementing the strategy and are one of the aspects of achieving a WCO, it must be understood. According to [8], a process is a sequence of events to produce value. It is also defined as a set of transformative activities that interact with each other [7]. With this level of strategic importance, processes should be managed appropriately as they interact [7] [8]. This interaction of many processes might create chaos and cloud clarity. At this point, Business Process Management (BPM) comes into play. BPM is defined as the definition, improvement and management of a firm's end-to-end enterprise business processes to achieve outcomes crucial to a performance-based, customer-driven firm [9] [10]. According to [7] it is a discipline and [8] views it as a methodology that assists in identifying, designing, executing, measuring, monitoring and controlling business processes to achieve the targeted results.

In choosing an appropriate strategy, companies use an industry view, a resource view or a combination of both perspectives [7]. The output of strategy is products that meet market requirements and capabilities to deliver value defined in the product. A capability is composed of processes, people and technology. Therefore, BPM as a tool to implement a process orientation is vital in developing capabilities for a successful strategy [11]. Interestingly, BPM is a capability, meaning it has a process to implement process orientation, professionals to optimise processes and technology for processes. Therefore, there is a measurable maturity level for BPM in a company or ecosystem of companies. [11]. In Figure 1, [11] Portrays six capability areas that are utilised to measure BMP maturity.

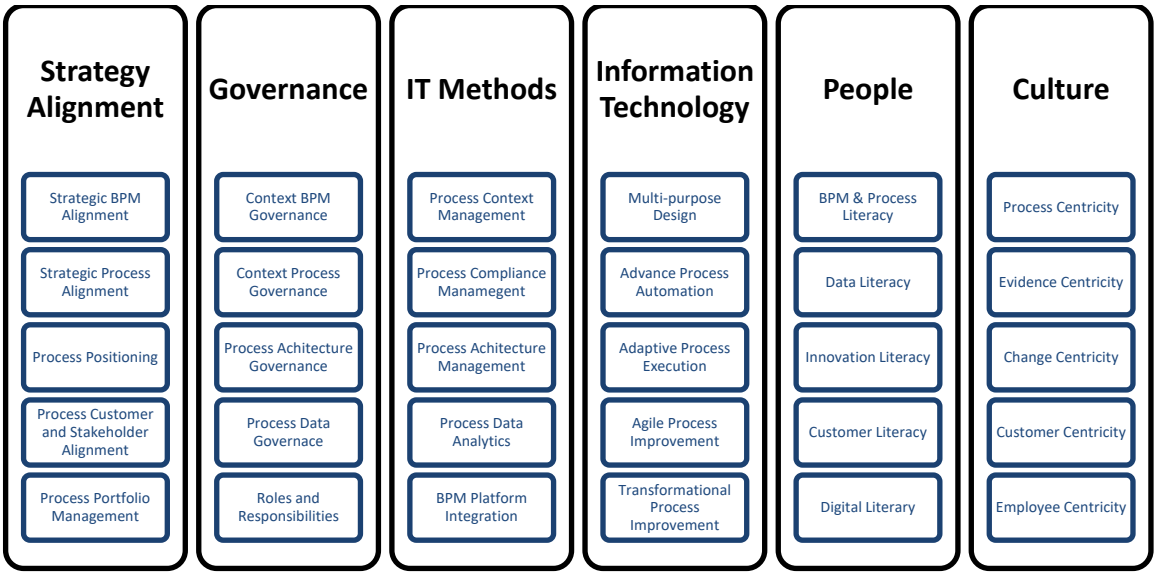

Figure 1: BPM Capability Framework [12]

2.2. Strategy Alignment

Competition pressures and technological advancement in the business environment force organisations to revise their strategies to remain competitive and relevant [13] [2] [11]. Every organisation operates in the environment that surrounds it. Therefore, a management team must ensure that their organisation is closely aligned with the environmentally critical elements [14]. For this reason, improving an organisation's internal processes should be guided by a vantage point that reflects the reciprocal relationship between an organisation and its environment [15]. Aligning the portfolio and services with the needs of the core business (processes) leads to maximum added value for the company. It contributes optimally to the overall performance of the organisation [13]. The strategic plan is to contain the strategy maps, themes, and the balanced business scorecard for performance measurement.

2.3. Governance

BPM governance is implemented through an architectural approach from the strategy context [11]. Business process architecture is defined as the type of processes within the organisation and the relationship among them [16]. Organisations must understand their business processes better and, in more detail, to be more agile and react faster to market changes [17].

Nelis in [18] argues that process architecture is an essential step in an organisation as it ensures that processes designed or developed meet its objectives and fit within its strategy. He further states that processes are aligned with how the business is performed and can provide the products/services to customers. He explains that processes are to be aligned with the IT architecture and applications, as the IT has to support the current and future processes.

There is more to consider beyond a process flow when designing and modelling a process [19]. A process model must describe the definition of tasks, the sequence of tasks, the resources needed to operate them, the environment in which they operate and the business objectives they fulfil.

Dijkman et al. [20] further states that in the framework, processes are both organised and identifiable by creating a hierarchical breakdown of the business functions in an organisation; the breakdown does not go deeper than two or three levels. The author [9] further recommends that the process maintain top-down traceability across the various process levels, and a process defined at any level must be traceable to the highest level [12]. The multiple levels of the process, the target audience and purpose are indicated in Table 1, below.

Table 1: Process Level Approach

Level	Description
L0 Enterprise Contextual	This level targets the executive, strategies and board members. The purpose is to provide the context of the organisation's business model, depicting the business aligned with the mission.
L1 Macro Conceptual	This level targets the executive, strategies and board members. It defines the cross-functional macro processes within the business. It can also be referred to as the value chain.
L2 Business Process: Logical	This level targets the business owner, architects, information office and general management. This level defines the unique business process per macro process. The processes can be assigned to a business owner and can be measured.
L3 Sub-Process: Logical	This level targets the business owner, architects, information office and general management. It depicts the breakdown of the business process into sub-processes and the process flow with individual operational steps.
L4 Activity Logical	This level targets the trainer, business analyst, and accountable manager. Defines the operational view of each sub-process, depicting the inputs, outputs and role accountability for each activity. At this level, the documents used are Manuals, Standard Operating Procedures and Work Instructions.
L5 Task Physical	This level targets the responsible role user. Depicts the procedure level of the process where a step-by-step guide is defined at the task level for each activity.

According to [21] there are six primary business process modelling techniques which can be used for various process levels: Object Oriented Model (OOM), Data Flow Diagram (DFD), Petri Net (PN), Flow Chart, Role Activity Diagram (RAD) and Integration Definition for Function Modelling (IDEF).

2.4. Information Technology with Associated Methods

In the era of hyper automation identified by [2], BPM is not left behind. As BPM has a strategic intent on increasing customer value, digitisation requires agility in changing business processes. [7]. Beyond the strategic intent, successful implementation of BPM requires technology to facilitate process modelling, process design, process mining, process orchestration, process interoperability, model management and process mining [22].

Kemsley [23], identifies mobile applications and cloud computing as influential technologies in developing BPM as a discipline. Data-producing events, big data and analytics methods further empower these technologies. Emerging technologies and methods enhance BPM

systems to facilitate building social collaboration and distributed co-creation that make employees, customers and suppliers interact at a whole new level [23] [22].

2.5. People: Competence and Culture

BPM drives organisational agility to speed up service delivery to stakeholders, which is vital [7]. According to [24] Agility enables the firm to respond quickly to unanticipated changes in the marketplace, and change is managed as a matter of routine. It allows the organisation to thrive and prosper in an environment of constant and unpredictable change[24]. Over and above, BPM is a change catalyst, and its implementation and maintenance impact employees' lives. It is considered a prerequisite for sustainable competitive advantage so that it can quickly and effectively adjust to environmental changes [25] [26].

BPM, in its essence, transforms an organisation into a change organisation [26]. Tumbas and Schmiedel [27] emphasise that there should be a link between an organisational culture supportive of BPM and a BPM culture that is encompassed by values of customer orientation, excellence, responsibility, and teamwork [28]. Appropriate managerial approaches play a vital role in the development of organisational cultures [29].

In order to handle the social and emotional side of people and improve their competencies and culture, a change administration model has to be chosen to increase the probability of success. Dijesh and Roseline [26] Identify the ADKAR Change Model, Lewin's Three Stage Model and Kotter's Eight Steps Change Model as the widely used or dominant change models. There are no substantial differences between these change models, and the choice depends on the competency of the change leader on a particular model. Organisations should instead choose a human resources management strategy for consistent upskilling.

2.6. BPM Maturity Assessment

To undertake a BPM implementation program, a company must comprehend its maturity. Fourie and Schoeman [24] Observe that the successful implementation of agility was greatly enhanced by prior implementation of ISO 9000, total quality management (TQM) and business process redesign (BPR), rooted in sustained competitiveness. Many key business processes form the basis of business capabilities. A business requires a mature discipline that drives corporate success through effective and efficient business processes. [11]. The maturity model presented in [12] is helpful in this assessment. This model (Figure 2) has three perspectives for consideration: maturity levels, management factors and process domains. The model's sophistication arises from the possibility that management factors at different levels of development and process domains may develop at a varying pace. As BPM maturity level is a cultural matter, organisations with other cultures will require other interventions. Pinto and Santos [30] mention the following steps a company can take to climb the maturity ladder in BPM implementation to attain success as defined in a predetermined culture and predestined strategy goals.

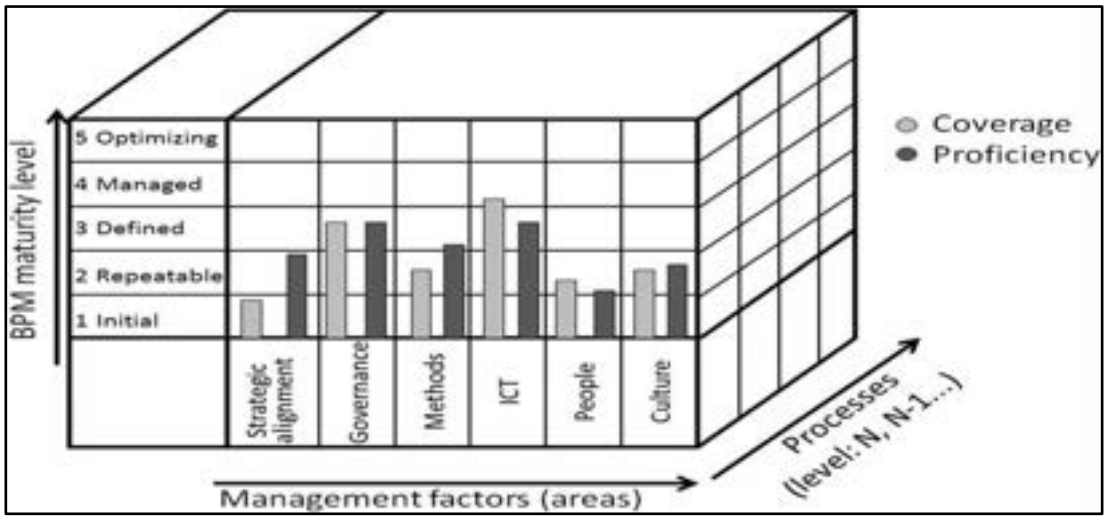

Figure 1: BPM Maturity Model

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted an interpretivist philosophical worldview, an inductive research approach, a qualitative methodological choice, and an archival research strategy, which entailed a critical review of the literature to crystallise insights on BPM for the conceptualisation of the Business Process Management conceptual framework for the South African Post Office. An analysis of the literature is necessary for a critical review. To maximise the breadth of the examined literature, the initial step was to highlight the core concepts connected to the study. Expanded to guarantee comprehensive and extensive coverage, the study encompasses concepts such as BPM, the Postal Industry, Digital Ecosystems, and Digital Disruption.

The search method was completed with a desktop search of the body of material already published on the topics of investigation. To ensure that the reviewed articles were relevant to the field under study, the criteria also included limiting the reviewed papers to those written in English and performing a general overview of the research area. The search followed the criteria that were used to search open-journal sites and industry sites, such as the Universal Postal Union on the following topics:

- Business Process Management (BPM)
- Strategy Alignment
- Information Technology
- Maturity Models

One hundred and fifteen (115) articles came up in the first search with the search terms. The abstracts of all the chosen papers underwent primary evaluation, which allowed prioritisation to concentrate on the most pertinent material. Table 2 lists the evaluation criteria in detail. Fifty (50) publications were found by applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and these were used for this preliminary literature evaluation.

Table 2: Evaluation criteria

ID	Decision Type	Assessment Criteria
EX1	Exclusion	Duplicated papers
EX2	Exclusion	Informal literature
EX3	Exclusion	Papers not written in the English language
IN1	Inclusion	Recent publications (Papers not older than 10 years)
IN2	Inclusion	Papers categorically mentioning business process management, maturity models, strategy alignment, and information technology in the postal sector.
IN3	Inclusion	Relevance concerning the area under study

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SAPO's failure to implement and execute a strategy that fulfils a market-appropriate value proposition was expected to positively correlate with its business processes management maturity in line with the [12] views. It was reported in [33] that South Africa (ZA) was in the fourth of ten levels of the Index for Postal Development (2IPD). 2IPD results in Figure3 represents a maturity ladder based on similar management factors or measures of organisational success in [12] [30].

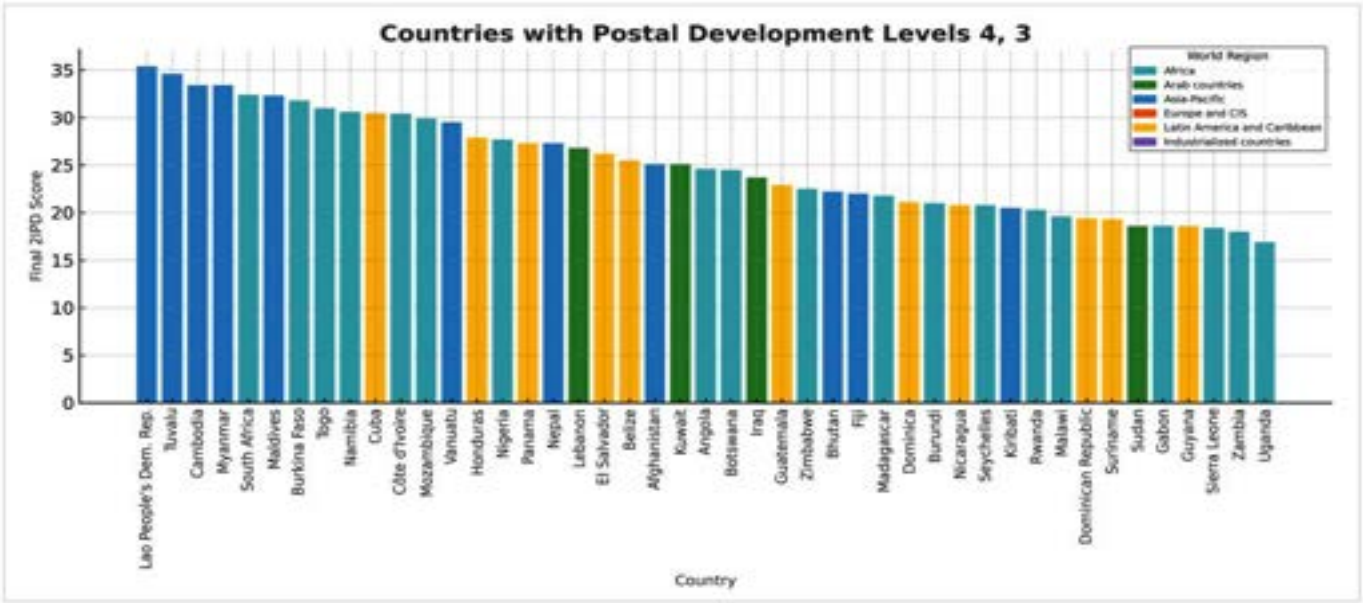

Figure 3: Index for Postal Development

SAPO should review their strategies to remain relevant to competition pressures and technological enhancements, as organisations should, as argued by [13] [1] and [11].

Cicerone et al. [14] encourages organisations to improve their internal processes. This should be guided by a vantage point that reflects their typical relationship with their environment. However, SAPO does not strive to maintain a relationship with its external and internal environment, thus creating a misalignment between the organisational levels; hence, the strategy evolves at the strategic level and remains static at the operational level.

Appel-Meulenbroek et al [15] indicates that strategic planning at the corporate level is crucial as it induces strategic thinking at all levels and helps align the portfolio and services with the core business. Sapo does not have a track record of inducing strategic thinking at a lower level in the organisation's portfolio, and its services are not aligned. As a result, Sapo does not obtain maximum added value as the business and optimally contributes to its overall performance.

SAPO's failure to implement and execute a strategy that fulfils a market-appropriate value proposition was expected to correlate with its BPM maturity positively [12]. 2IPD results represent a maturity ladder based on similar management factors or measures of organisational success [12] [30].

2IPD measures resilience, relevance, reach and reliability. South Africa scored 4 of 10 levels or 38.7 over 100 points [33]. This meant that South Africa, through SAPO, was approaching conditions necessary to serve customers. It did not fulfil all requirements of repeatability in BPM maturity, which emphasises compliance with standards.

The overall score was 65.7 over 100 for resilience, 2.7 over 100 for relevance, 40.9 over 100 for reach and 35.7 over 100 for reliability. The resilience results reinforce the argument that procurement projects undertaken by SAPO strengthen its ability to survive external environment shocks. The relevance score reinforces its misalignment with revenue sources. The procurement projects undertaken do not build a business model that responds to customer requirements. The postal connectivity had a broad international reach. This indicator was driven by the spread of countries receiving goods from South Africa via SAPO. There was an opportunity for SAPO to be the preferred small goods logistics partner for all South African trade partners. Lastly, the reliability score illustrated the unpredictability of the service.

Considering the results of 2IPD, BPM implementation support service repeatability in the short term must be introduced, and the journey must be initiated towards a definable level of maturity or a minimum of 60 out of 100 on 2IPD. This would be in line with [14], who encourage organisations to try to improve the internal processes guided by a vantage point that reflects the typical relationship with their environment.

BPM as an implementation philosophy and 2IPD as a performance indicator demand a systematic approach towards maintaining a relationship with SAPO's external and internal environment, thus providing an appropriate vantage point for strategic alignment at all organisational levels. This provides an outline of the strategy to be developed from the strategic level to the operational level. As acknowledged by [15], implementing strategic thinking at all levels within the organisation helps to align the portfolio and services with the core business. The entirely project-focused approach to strategy implementation did not induce strategic thinking at a lower level to deliver the SAPO portfolio and services. As a result, SAPO did not gain maximum added value as a business or optimally contribute to its overall performance.

Sabuhari et al. [25] and Dijesh and Roseline [26] argue that to achieve competitive advantage and maintain business sustainability, companies need their employees' flexibility and ability to adapt to the changing environment. SAPO cannot preserve its sustainability because of the misalignment within the organisational levels. BPM will assist SAPO in introducing interventions to increase employee competencies in its core business to respond to changes.

The proposed Business Process Management conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 4.

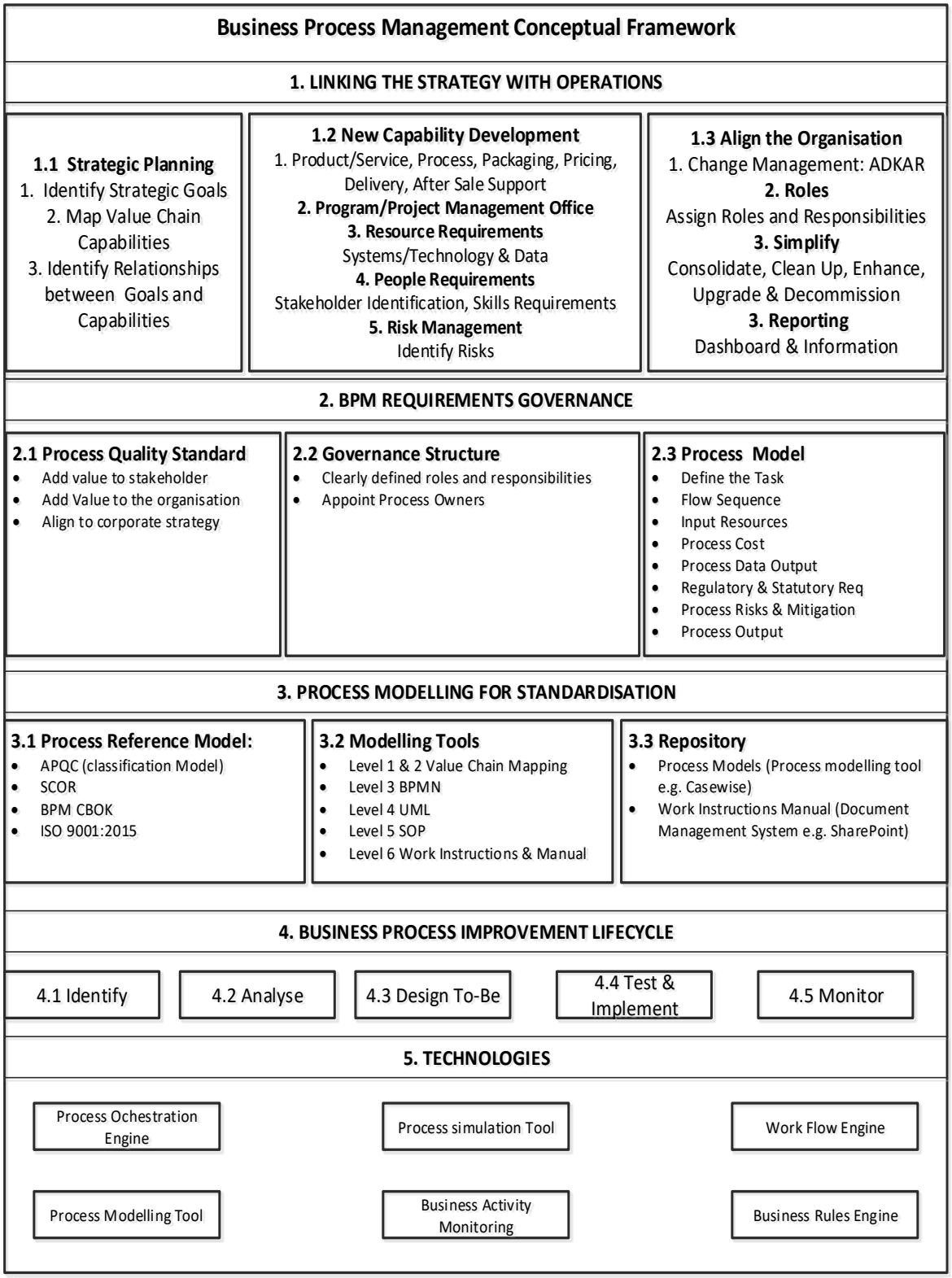

Figure 4: BPM Conceptual Framework

The Business Process Management (BPM) Conceptual Framework depicted in Figure 4 outlines how SAPO can systematically link strategy with operations, ensure governance, standardise processes, and drive continuous improvement through technology. The SAPO BPM conceptual model is explained in detail below:

1. Linking the strategy with operations

This section ensures that SAPO's high-level strategic goals translate into practical, operational actions.

1.1 Strategic planning

- Identify strategic goals**:** For SAPO, this means setting clear objectives aligned with restoring market relevance, improving reliability, and capturing e-commerce logistics opportunities.
- Map the value chain: Identify every step from parcel acceptance to delivery, including payment processing, to find where value is added or lost.
- Identify relationships between goals and capabilities: Link goals such as "increase reliability" to capabilities such as "real-time parcel tracking."

1.2 New capability development

- Products/services: Diversify beyond traditional mail into parcel logistics, last-mile delivery, and financial services.
- Processes: Standardise sorting, tracking, and customer service workflows.
- People and technology: Train staff in BPM methods and deploy tracking & automation tools.
- Risk management: Address threats from competition, technology disruption, and declining mail volumes.

1.3 Align the organisation

- Change management (ADKAR): Prepare SAPO staff for changes in processes, culture, and technology.
- Role assignment: Make process ownership explicit at all levels.
- Reporting: Introduce dashboards showing real-time performance (delivery times, customer complaints, process bottlenecks).

2. BPM requirements governance

This ensures SAPO's processes add value, are managed effectively, and meet strategic priorities.

2.1 Process quality standard

- Align all processes to corporate strategy and customer expectations.
- For SAPO, this means delivery times, payment processing, and tracking updates must consistently meet standards.

2.2 Governance structure

- Assign process owners for logistics, payments, customer service.
- Define roles to avoid duplication and accountability gaps.

2.3 Process model

- Clearly define tasks, inputs, outputs, risks, costs, and compliance requirements for each core process.

- Example: The “Parcel Delivery Process” should specify timelines, technology used, resource allocation, and quality checks.

3. Process modelling for standardisation

This is about creating consistent processes SAPO can repeat and improve.

3.1 Process reference model

- Adopt industry frameworks like **SCOR** for supply chain processes.
- Adopt ISO 9001:2015 quality management standards.

3.2 Modelling tools

- Value chain mapping: Identify end-to-end postal and logistics processes.
- BPMN and UML: Standardise process documentation for clarity.
- SOPs and work instructions: Ensure consistent execution.

3.3 Repository

- Store all process documentation in a central, accessible location (e.g., SharePoint) to support training and compliance.

4. Business process improvement lifecycle

The five stages for continuous process improvement:

1. Identify – Find underperforming processes (e.g., delayed parcels).
2. Analyse – Determine root causes (e.g., bottlenecks in sorting).
3. Design to-be – Create an improved process model (automation, better routing).
4. Test and Implement – Pilot the changes, then roll them out.
5. Monitor – Use KPIs (on-time delivery, customer satisfaction) to track success.

5. Technologies

Technology enables process efficiency, consistency, and monitoring.

- Process orchestration engine: Automates workflows across departments.
- Process simulation tool: Test changes virtually before implementation.
- Workflow engine: Controls and sequences postal processes.
- Business activity monitoring: Tracks operations in real-time for rapid intervention.
- Business rules engine: Enforces compliance and consistency in decision-making.

Applying this framework would:

- Shift focus from procurement-heavy, project-centric strategies to process-driven, customer-focused operations.
- Standardise and automate logistics and payment processes for higher reliability and relevance.
- Improve governance by assigning ownership and accountability for each core process.
- Increase BPM maturity and raise SAPO’s 2IPD score (especially in Relevance and Reliability).

- Enable agility to adapt to e-commerce growth, technological shifts, and competitive pressures.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For an organisation to be recognised as a world-class organisation and to remain competitive, it must acquire a culture capable of bringing a radical change. Strategic planning from the corporate level is crucial as it induces strategic thinking up to the lower levels of the organisation. The literature further recommends that they should be aligned with the core processes. Aligning the corporate level with the operational level ensures that the day-to-day activities support the organisation's core business. The misalignment within the different levels creates difficulties in the strategy implementation, and therefore, governance becomes crucial to implement. The organisation must adopt a business process management phase to ensure continuous process improvement. Business processes consist of the organisation's capabilities and assets, which need to be managed and controlled at all levels.

5.1 Strategic realignment to a market-oriented value proposition

- Shift from project-driven to process-driven strategy: Replace the heavy focus on procurement projects (which have high inherent failure rates) with strategies that strengthen logistics, payment processes, and customer-centric services—the real revenue engines of the postal sector.
- Adopt a customer value-driven model: Use market research to identify current and future customer needs, especially in e-commerce fulfilment, last-mile delivery, and financial services.
- Define a clear market position: Position SAPO as *South Africa's trusted small parcel logistics and payment solutions provider*, leveraging its broad international reach.

5.2 Business Process Management (BPM) Implementation

- Establish BPM governance: Create a dedicated BPM office responsible for process architecture, monitoring, and continuous improvement.
- Map and optimise core processes: Document all logistics, payment, and customer service processes; identify inefficiencies; redesign for speed, reliability, and cost efficiency.
- Embed process ownership: Assign process owners at operational and strategic levels to ensure alignment between daily operations and organisational strategy.
- Implement performance repeatability: Standardise processes to achieve at least a "Definable" BPM maturity level (minimum 60/100 on 2IPD metrics).

5.3 2IPD-driven performance improvement

- Resilience (current score: 65.7/100):

- Strengthen supply chain agility to absorb market shocks.
- Build redundancy in critical operations (e.g., backup logistics partners, IT systems).

- Relevance (current score: 2.7/100):

- Redesign services to directly respond to customer needs (e.g., trackable deliveries, flexible pick-up options, mobile payments).
- Partner with e-commerce platforms to create bundled shipping services.

- Reach (current score: 40.9/100):

- Capitalise on existing international connections to become the preferred small goods logistics partner for trade partners.
- Develop export-friendly packaging, pricing, and customs facilitation services.

- Reliability (current score: 35.7/100):

- Introduce strict service-level agreements (SLAs) with monitoring.
- Invest in tracking technologies to provide customers with real-time updates.

5.4 Strategic thinking and alignment across organisational levels

- Cascade strategy downwards: Ensure corporate-level strategy is broken into measurable, department-level goals and operational actions.
- Align services with core business: Review the portfolio to eliminate non-core activities and focus resources on logistics, payments, and customer trust-building.
- Foster cross-functional collaboration: Introduce cross-departmental process improvement teams to ensure operational and strategic cohesion.

5.5 Workforce capability and change management

- Upskill employees for agility: Provide training in customer service excellence, digital tools, and adaptive problem-solving.
- Introduce BPM culture: Embed continuous improvement as part of performance reviews and team objectives.
- Leadership development: Train managers at all levels in strategic thinking, process management, and change leadership.
- Internal communication: Maintain transparent updates on strategic changes to improve employee buy-in.

5.6 Digital and technological enablement

- Invest in process automation: Use workflow automation to speed up sorting, tracking, and payment processing.
- Digital customer experience: Upgrade the SAPO website and mobile app for easy parcel tracking, service booking, and payment processing.
- Data-driven decisions: Implement analytics dashboards to track performance across 2IPD dimensions and BPM KPIs.

5.7 Short-to-medium-term targets

- Short-term (0–12 months):

- Implement BPM governance.
- Map all core processes and identify “quick win” improvements.
- Increase 2IPD relevance score from 2.7 to at least 20.

- Medium-term (1–3 years):

- Achieve a minimum score of 60/100 on 2IPD.
- Position SAPO as the leading small goods logistics partner in the region.
- Maintain service repeatability and customer satisfaction ratings above 85%.

5.8 Key expected outcomes from implementing the conceptual framework

- Improved operational efficiency and service predictability.
- Clear market positioning that responds to competition and technological disruption.

- Enhanced organisational agility through process standardisation and workforce competence.
- Measurable improvement in all 2IPD performance dimensions.

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OPTIMISING CUTTING ROOM EFFICIENCY: LEAN SIX SIGMA AND 4IR INTEGRATION IN CLOTHING MANUFACTURING

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ABSTRACT

The clothing manufacturing industry struggles with material waste and process inefficiencies. This impacts SA manufacturers' competitiveness against countries like China, India, Indonesia who benefit from lower labour costs and cheaper materials. This study applies lean six sigma and fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies to improve cutting room processes. Manufacturers can enhance their processes and sustainability by incorporating automated cutting systems and Lean Six Sigma methods. Using Saunders' research onion, the study systematically analyses cutting room processes through a case study analysis using direct observation as the method of data collection thereby identifying opportunities for improvement. The focus is on an organisation in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Keywords: industrial engineering; process optimisation; lean six sigma

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1 INTRODUCTION

The clothing industry greatly contributes to the global economy, employing millions worldwide. In South Africa alone, the industry employs approximately 230 000 people, making it a vital sector for economic growth. However, the South African clothing industry faces numerous challenges, particularly from cheap imports brought into the market from overseas countries that have since disrupted local markets and threatened the livelihoods of many South African employees [1]. To remain competitive, South African manufacturers have to look at ways to optimise their production processes, particularly in the cutting room, where material wastage and production inefficiencies are prominent. This is where Lean Six Sigma and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technology become relevant. These two innovative approaches will assist manufacturers streamline processes, reduce waste, and improve productivity [2].

Lean Six Sigma is a proven industrial engineering methodology that assimilates the principles of lean management and Six Sigma principles to eliminate waste and minimise process variation. 4IR technology, on the other hand, offers cutting-edge innovations like automation, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things (IoT) that can enhance efficiency and reduce production costs. By exploring the integration of Lean Six Sigma and 4IR technology, this research aims to identify opportunities for improvement in the cutting room operation of clothing manufacture. This case study will provide valuable insights into the potential of these innovative strategies to enhance the competitiveness of South African manufacturers in the global clothing market [3].

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Lean Six Sigma

Lean Six Sigma is a popular approach for process improvement that is been widely adopted in various industries to increase efficiency and reduce waste. Lean principles eliminate non-value-added activities by continuously improving the product based on customer demand. On the other hand, Six Sigma methodologies focus on reducing variation and defects to ensure high product quality and customer satisfaction. Despite its limited use in clothing manufacturing, Lean Six Sigma holds significant potential for adaptation, especially in the cutting room. The industry's unique complexities and challenges, such as complex operations, high production variation, and short production schedules, have deterred its widespread adoption. However, it is essential to recognise that Lean Six Sigma can be tailored to intricate clothing manufacturing processes, such as pattern making, marker marking, and labour-intensive sewing operations. Moreover, the variation in apparel products can be managed effectively using Six Sigma methodologies, offering a promising path for process improvement in the clothing industry. The clothing industry operates on short production schedules to meet consumer demand and respond quickly to market or seasonal trends. Quick response to market demands is crucial for success in the apparel industry, as evidenced by companies like Zara and TFG in South Africa [4]. However, the short lead times limit the implementation of time-consuming Six Sigma projects requiring extensive data collection, analysis, and process optimization. In a fast-paced environment, there may be pressure to prioritize speed over process improvement initiatives, resulting in under-utilization of Lean Six Sigma methodologies. While Lean Six Sigma can bring significant benefits to the clothing manufacturing sector, it is equally important to address the challenges and limitations of its implementation [5].

2.2. Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technology

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has brought about transformative technologies that could potentially revolutionise manufacturing processes in the clothing industry. One such technology is the Gerber Paragon cutting system, launched by Gerber Technology in 2019. This cutting-edge technology has advanced features such as intelligent software, smart sensors, integrated control, and an intuitive interface, making it a game-changer for apparel manufacturers. The Gerber Paragon cutting system, combined with the Gerber spreader, is an automated machine that streamlines the fabric laying and cutting process. This system is significantly more efficient than traditional manual processes, producing higher quality output while reducing material waste by up to 30%. This is substantial, considering fabric costs account for 40% to 60% of the total apparel production cost. Gerber's comprehensive ecosystem supports the Gerber Paragon, offering market-leading hardware and software solutions that streamline the process from CAD files to cutting [6]. This ecosystem includes advanced CAD software for pattern design, automated spreading machines for fabric preparation, and a network of cutting machines that can be controlled and monitored remotely. This technology leverages 4IR advancements like automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, and advanced data analytics to optimise operations, improve decision-making, and enhance productivity. Integrating 4IR technology like the Gerber Paragon into apparel manufacturing processes can potentially revolutionise the industry. These automated systems far surpass traditional labour-intensive processes, which require hundreds of man-hours to produce a fraction of what automated systems can produce. This transformative potential inspires a new era of efficiency and sustainability in the clothing industry [7].

However, it is crucial to consider the expected output volume when selecting technology to avoid under-utilization. Most cut-make-trim (CMT) factories produce a few thousand units weekly, while the Gerber cutter can produce a few thousand units daily. This underscores the importance of careful evaluation and planning to ensure the technology is utilised to its full potential, leading to efficiency and resource optimization [8]. Therefore, apparel manufacturers must carefully evaluate their production needs and consider the potential of 4IR technology like the Gerber Paragon to optimise their operations and improve sustainability. However, it is crucial to carefully consider the expected output volume and ensure proper implementation and utilisation to avoid under-utilisation and maximise the benefits of this technology [9].

2.3. Sustainability in the Apparel Industry

The clothing industry alone is a R14.8 trillion industry, producing around 150 billion garments yearly, nearly 19 items for every human being [10]. Enes and Kipoz [11] surveyed 130 companies to raise awareness about waste management and investigate their methods. The study revealed that manufacturing companies employ various waste management strategies to minimise environmental impact. These methods include waste avoidance (such as using digital patterns to reduce paper waste), reduction (by optimising production processes to reduce excess fabric), reuse (by repurposing fabric scraps for other products), recycling (by sending fabric waste to recycling facilities), and environmentally friendly disposal (such as using waste-to-energy technologies). Although none of the companies could eliminate waste completely, they did find ways to minimise or reduce it. From production to consumption, the industry's waste management practices have a substantial impact on the environment [12].

2.4. 3D Printing of Garments

3D printing in the fashion industry has gained momentum recently, with several researchers and designers exploring its potential for garment production. The advantages of 3D printing lie in its ability to create complex designs and structures that cannot be achieved through traditional manufacturing methods. Additionally, 3D printing allows for customisation and

personalisation of garments, which is a growing trend in the fashion industry. However, there are still several limitations and challenges associated with 3D printing of garments. One of the main limitations is the lack of suitable materials that are flexible, absorbent, and comfortable to wear [13].

2.5. The future of the clothing industry

The fourth industrial revolution is characterised by the combination of physical, digital, and biological systems. This revolution is expected to transform the clothing industry in various ways, including using advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and the Internet of Things (IoT). One of the key trends in the future of the clothing industry is the use of sustainable and circular business models. This includes using recycled materials, upcycling, and closed-loop production systems [14]. Another trend is the increasing use of digital technologies such as 3D printing, as discussed above, virtual reality, and augmented reality (VR/AR)). Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) are also expected to play a significant role in the future of the clothing industry. In addition, the clothing industry is expected to become more global and connected, using blockchain technology and IoT sensors to track production and supply chains [15]. However, the future of the clothing industry also poses several challenges, including the need for workers to develop new skills and the potential for job displacement due to automation. Overall, the literature suggests that advanced technologies, sustainable and circular business models, and increasing globalisation and connectivity will characterise the future of the clothing industry in the fourth industrial revolution [16].

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research onion was adopted to guide this study. This onion illustrates the range of choices, paradigms, strategies, and steps the researcher follows during the research process. This research study adopted an ontological approach, capitalizing on the data available in the organisation that can be quantified and enhanced. The research methodology adopted an inductive approach. This involves analysing theories around existing information regarding lean Six Sigma and 4IR technology and applying them in the apparel industry cutting room context. The research strategy involved collecting data from cutting room processes and analysing the impact of Lean Six Sigma and 4IR technology in process improvement [17]. The research employed a case study approach. Data collection methods involved observation of cutting room processes, secondary data from industry specialists and analysis of production data. The cutting room process depends on demand planning, where textile material is received in bales and spread on a table. Paper patterns are then placed on the fabric and cutting takes place using a band knife.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The garment manufacturing process begins in the cutting room, where fabric is transformed into components, namely garment panels. These panels form the foundation of various garment parts like fronts, backs, sleeves, and collars. In mass production, workers arrange multiple layers of fabric on a cutting table. This process is called laying or spreading, and then they cut these layers. The cutting process involves several intricate procedures to ensure accuracy, efficiency, and quality.

4.1. Demand Planning

The Master Production Schedule (MPS) is a critical planning tool used in manufacturing and production management. It serves as a detailed timetable outlining the production requirements for finished goods over a specific period, typically covering several weeks to months ahead. The MPS is critical in coordinating and synchronising production activities with

customer demand, inventory levels, and overall business objectives, ensuring the system's efficiency. The MPS fulfils the following functions.

- Demand Aggregation: The MPS aggregates demand from various sources, such as sales forecasts, customer orders, and inventory requirements. It consolidates this demand into a unified plan that guides production activities.
- Time Horizons: It typically spans a medium-term planning horizon, breaking down production requirements into specific periods (e.g. weekly or monthly).
- Product Details: The MPS details the specific products or product families to be manufactured, along with their quantities and timing. It categorises products based on attributes like style, colour, size, or SKU (Stock Keeping Unit), depending on the complexity of the production process and the level of detail required.
- Resource Allocation: Based on the MPS, production managers allocate resources such as labour, materials, and equipment to ensure that production schedules are feasible and efficient.
- Integration with Other Systems: The MPS is closely integrated with other planning systems and processes within the organisation, such as Material Requirements Planning (MRP), inventory management, and sales forecasting. This integration ensures that production plans are aligned with broader business goals and operational capabilities.
- Flexibility and Adaptability: The MPS, while providing a structured plan, also allows for adjustments in response to changes in customer demand, production disruptions, or shifts in market conditions. This adaptability of the MPS reassures production planners that they can continually review and revise the plan to maintain alignment with evolving business needs [18].

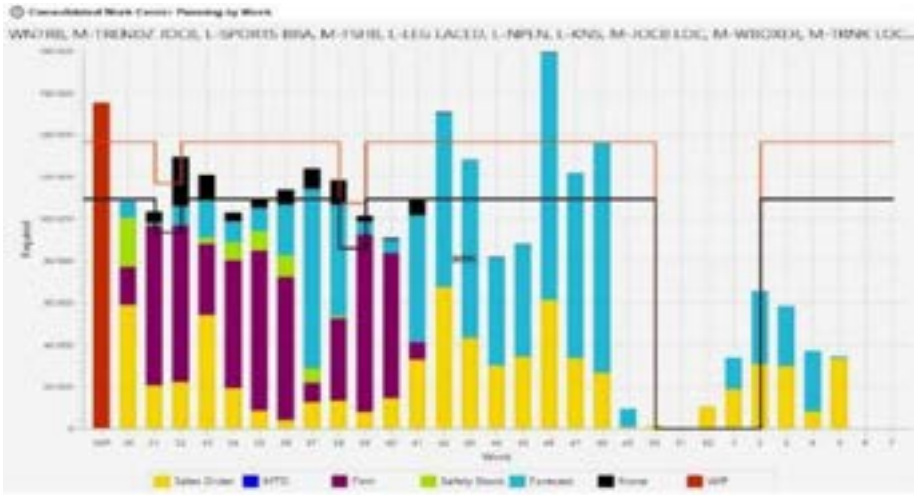

Figure 1. Erratic nature of demand in the clothing industry

4.2. Demand Grouping

Within the MPS, demand is grouped into categories such as basic cotton stretch panties, men’s vests, woven boxers, men’s pouch trunks, ladies' seamless panties, men’s and ladies' undershirts, and winter tops and bottoms. There is also a sub-group under each garment type that separates demand by colour and size. This structured grouping facilitates streamlined production planning and resource allocation. Due to machinery and skills, the product types are not inter-changeable and each category represents a sewing line on the production sewing floor that is set up for that product/garment type. Following the organisation of demand in

the MPS, sales coordinators create work orders that align with the identified production needs both to fulfil customer orders and keep supply to the cutting room and sewing floor. Each work order is designed to accommodate specific garment styles, sizes, colours, and their respective lead times [18].

4.3. Fabric and Sewing Trims Warehouse

The fabric and sewing trims are stored offsite due to limited space within the building premises. When a work order is created, a detailed sewing trim picking instruction or picking list is automatically generated. This instruction triggers the process of gathering and delivering the necessary trims from the dedicated storehouse. Each order precisely outlines the quantities of trims required for production, ensuring that the exact amounts are retrieved and transported. To mitigate delivery costs, work orders are created once a day. The delivery schedule is then aligned accordingly accommodating 1 to 2 trips per day based on the volume of fabric pieces and trims that must be transported. Multiple trips are often necessary as fabric pieces occupy significant space within the delivery trucks and other sewing trims also need transporting as per the picking instructions [19].

4.4. Pattern and marker-making

A pattern is a template or design used to create a specific garment. Patterns are typically created on paper or digitally using computer-aided design (CAD) software. A pattern includes essential details such as the garment piece's shape, size, layout, and any necessary markings, such as grain lines, fold lines, or cutting lines. There are different types of patterns, including basic patterns, master patterns, and variant patterns. Basic patterns are simple patterns used to create essential garment pieces, such as fronts, backs, sleeves, and collars. Master patterns are more complex patterns used to create a complete garment, including pockets, buttonholes, and zippers. Variant patterns are modified versions of basic or master patterns used to create different garment variations.

Markers, a crucial tool in the garment creation process, come in various forms, each with its unique benefits. Manual markers, for instance, are created by hand, using a pencil or pen to draw the patterns onto the fabric. On the other hand, computer-aided markers are created using computer-aided design (CAD) software, automatically fitting the panels on the set length and width of paper as efficiently as possible, while allowing for enough space for the cutting tools operators to manoeuvre when cutting. Plotter markers, another type, are used to plot digital markers onto fabric, offering a high level of precision in the cutting process [20].

4.5. Cutting works order

The fabric requirement for an order is calculated based on the average consumption of fabric from the marker. This calculation considers the specific fabric usage for each garment piece, fabric grams per square meter (GSM), and fabric yield, ensuring that the correct amount of fabric is allocated for cutting in a particular work order. In cases where an order involves multiple colours, the fabric requirement is calculated separately for each colour, ensuring that the correct quantity of each coloured fabric is allocated.

In addition to calculating fabric requirements and issuing fabric to cutting, the fabric department also ensures that fabric quality standards are met. This includes inspecting fabric for defects, ensuring that the fabric is appropriately stored and handled, and maintaining accurate fabric inventory and usage records [21].

4.6. Fabric spreading or laying

In the fabric layering or laying stage, multiple fabric sheets are carefully layered on top of each other, maintaining a pre-defined marker length, fabric ply height (i.e. the number of fabric plies layered on top of each other) and precise ply tension to achieve fabric plies. This

step ensures the fabric is aligned correctly and stacked to achieve optimal cutting quality. The fabric sheets are layered up to a certain height to avoid any cutting quality problems that may arise, primarily caused by the fabric plies being too high or too low. The layering process can be done manually, where skilled operators carefully place each fabric sheet on top of the other, or automatically, using a specialised layering machine or a spreader. The length of each fabric lay is determined by the marker or works order, influenced by factors such as order size, garment style, and fabric colour. Optimal lay lengths typically range from 5 to 8 meters, balancing efficient machine operation and minimising equipment wear and tear [22].

Figure 2. Fabric laying process

4.7. Fabric Cutting

The cutting process involves precisely cutting layered fabric into individual garment components. This process carefully cuts along marked lines on the fabric, ensuring that each piece meets precise specifications. Various cutting methods are used based on the fabric type, pattern complexity, and desired accuracy.

Straight knives are commonly used for cutting straight lines and simpler shapes, offering versatility in handling various fabric types. Rotary blades are used to precisely cut curved lines and intricate shapes. Laser cutters and water jets provide unmatched precision for complex designs.

Block cutting involves dividing the fabric lay into smaller, more manageable blocks, making it easier to handle and transport to shaping tables where individual panels are cut out according to the pattern's outline. Shaping tables is where operators use stationary saws specifically designed to cut through layered fabric, ensuring stability by increasing the number of plies or using clamps for slippery fabrics with fewer plies. In cutting, skilled operators carefully separate garment components and remove excess fabric. This stage requires careful attention to detail to avoid errors that could lead to defective garments, emphasising the importance of precision throughout [23].

Figure 3. Fabric cutting Process

4.8. Sorting Processes

Cut components are organized and prepared for the next production stage in the sorting process. The sorting method depends on the specific production system, such as make-to-order, progressive bundle, or one-piece flow system. Two sorting methods are used at the organisation: size-wise sorting and colour sorting. These two methods are used in conjunction with each other in the sorting process. Size-wise sorting involves grouping components by size, ensuring that all components for a particular size are together. This makes assembling garments of the same size easier, reducing errors. Colour-wise sorting involves grouping components by colour, ensuring that all components of the same colour are together. This is particularly important when producing garments with multiple colours, as it ensures that the correct colours are used for each component. Garments are grouped by size, colour, garment type and destination, i.e. which sewing line those garments are going to. This ensures that all components are correctly routed to the correct sewing line or production area, streamlining the production process, and reducing errors.

4.9. Bundling Processes

Several garment panels are tied together to form a bundle in the bundling process. These bundles contain all the panels required to make a set number of garments. To create these bundles, the ERP systems generate a bundle breakdown sheet based on the number of units cut in the cutting process [24].

Once the bundling is done, a sticker or coupon for that bundle is generated with all the necessary information for that bundle, including the following:

- Bundle number: A unique identifier for the bundle
- Style Name: The name of the garment style
- Size number: The size of the garments in the bundle
- Quantity of pieces: The number of garments in the bundle

This information is used in tracking and managing the production process, ensuring that the correct components are sent to the correct production line for sewing.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The Lean Six Sigma methodology was employed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the cutting room operations and identify critical areas for improvement. This involved a systematic approach to process mapping, data collection, and statistical analysis. Through the application of Lean Six Sigma tools and techniques, such as value stream mapping, root cause analysis. The following recommendations have been identified in the study.

5.1. Styles Combinations

As mentioned previously, the planning department typically creates work orders per style. However, it was discovered that grouping work orders by fabric quality and colour would be significantly more efficient. This can be achieved by creating works orders with the same style, fabric quality, and colours in one single work order. Style combinations on work orders can be done by creating combination markers and the pattern-making stage since that is the feed into the automatic marker-making system.

The image above shows a marker created with two distinct patterns for two different garment types. This type of marker is ideal for orders comprising multiple styles or garment types that utilize the same fabric quality and colour. The size ratio of the marker can be adjusted to accommodate specific order requirements. Tests conducted on six different markers using the same format achieved an average efficiency rate of 82-87% (see Table 6). However, there are limitations to this method. The total marker length cannot exceed 9 meters, as this is the maximum usable length on the laying table. This restriction is due to the presence of laying machines on either side of the 22-meter-long cutting table. Notably, the longest average length for an underwear marker is 7 meters, leaving a significant portion of the table underutilized. In contrast, factories working with larger garments may require marker lengths of up to 20 meters, which would effectively utilise the marker format for combining their smaller unit orders, while getting the most out of their laying machine and available fabric. The other notable drawback is the possibility that the garment panels might get mixed up during the soring process however the panels can be tagged after laying, before cutting to indicate which style they belong to. Through this method, the following could be achieved:

- Improved fabric utilization: Grouping work orders by fabric quality and colour enables us to create longer lays, making the most of the fabric's length and reducing waste by reducing the fabric end allowance, i.e. which is the fabric allowance given at the beginning and end of each fabric marker as well the edges of the marker.
- Increased productivity: By marking different styles next to each other, one can create longer lays that supply multiple sewing lines, maximizing the use of the laying table and the speed of the laying machine.
- Reduced setup time: Instead of setting up the machine twice for two separate lays, one can do it once for two lays, saving time and increasing efficiency.
- Enhanced flexibility: Grouping work orders by fabric quality and colour allows us to accommodate changes in production demand or fabric availability more easily.
- Better resource allocation: By optimizing the laying process, one can allocate resources more effectively, reducing labour costs and improving overall productivity [26].

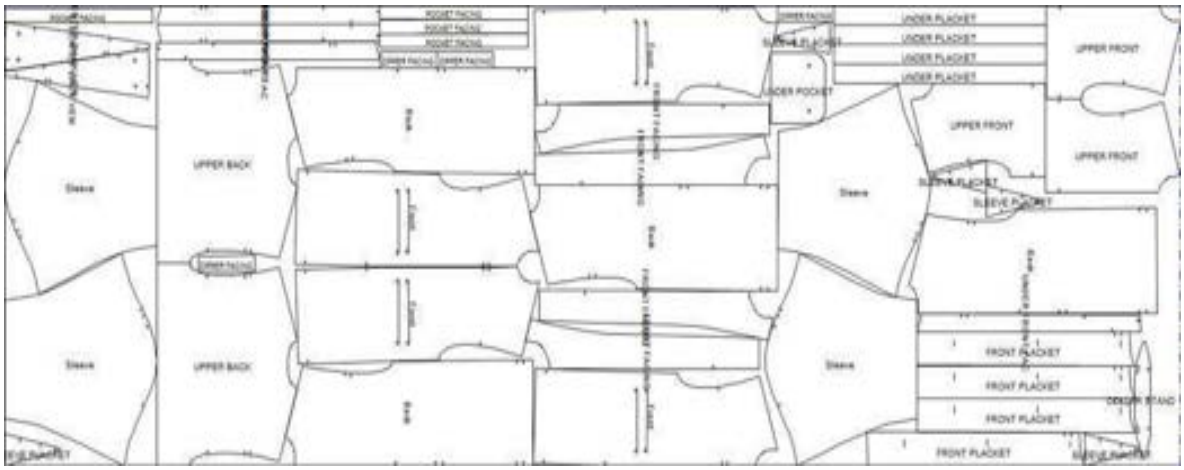

Figure 4. Combination of styles

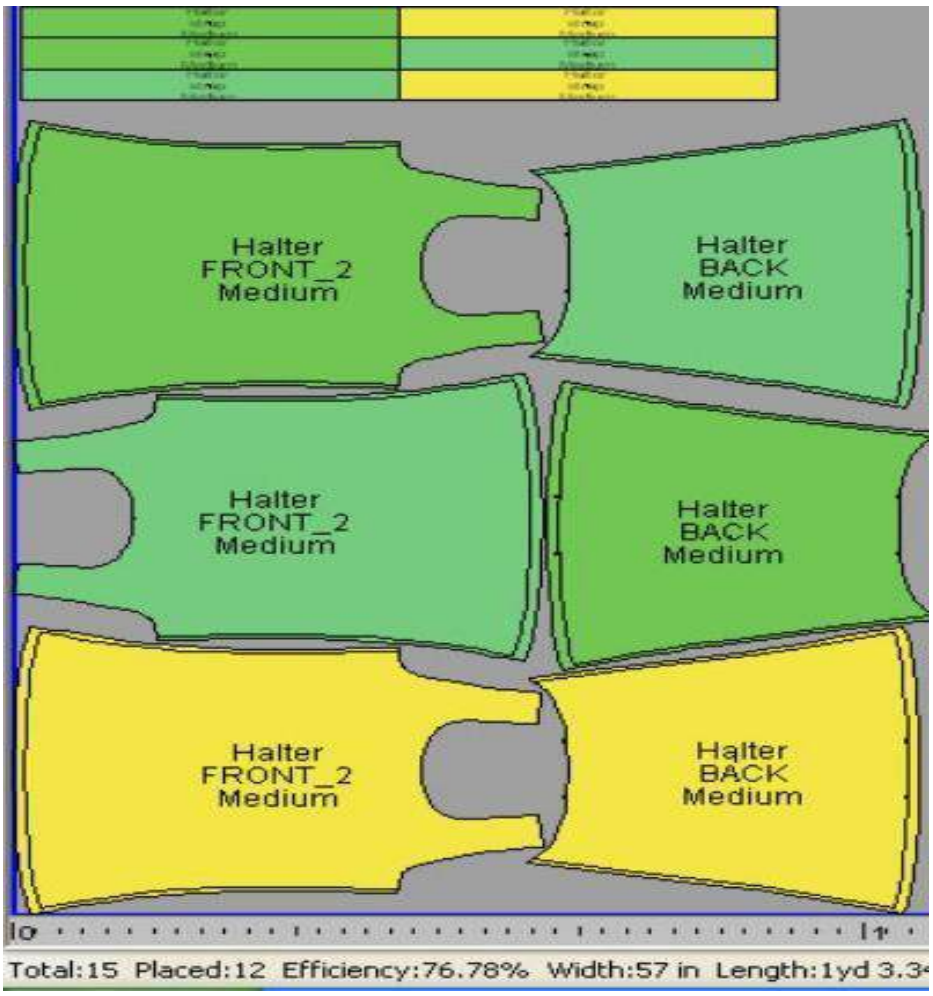

Figure 5. Current marker application

Table 1: Marker efficiencies from combination markers

Fabric Item	Item Description	Saving %	Plies	Quantity	AWO Id	Cost Length	Marker Efficiency	Fabric Width
9833	95/5% COMBED COTTON LYCRA BCI CERTIFIED	0,147	40	200	AW485015	0,68	84,8	166
9833	95/5% COMBED COTTON LYCRA BCI CERTIFIED	2,927	10	30	AW485015	0,41	82,21	166
9833	95/5% COMBED COTTON LYCRA BCI CERTIFIED	3,017	50	400	AW485035	1,79	87,07	166
9833	95/5% COMBED COTTON LYCRA BCI CERTIFIED	-7,768	40	200	AW485035	1,12	87,08	166
9833	95/5% COMBED COTTON LYCRA BCI CERTIFIED	-34,556	20	80	AW485035	0,9	86,33	166
9833	95/5% COMBED COTTON LYCRA BCI CERTIFIED	-2,208	40	280	AW485038	1,54	87,07	166

An alternative method involves creating separate work orders and patterns, marking them individually, but plotting them side-by-side on the automated making system. This approach eliminates the risk of panel mix-ups during sorting, as each marker cuts separately. However, the average fabric recovery percentage is 82%, which is lower than the previously suggested method. Note that this method still requires identical fabric quality and colour for all involved work orders, and is subject to maximum lay length limitations.

5.2. Automated Fabric Calculation

Fabric is one of the most significant cost factors in the clothing industry as it represents the highest cost of a garment. Determining how much fabric will be utilised based on fabric parameters gives manufacturers an edge over their competitors. Assyst Automarker has an AutoCost module that allows manufacturers to calculate fabric costs accurately, considering factors like fabric width, thickness, and grain and generating optimised markers that minimise fabric waste and reduce costs. Using AutoCost, clothing manufacturers can significantly reduce fabric waste and costs, improve cutting efficiency and productivity, and enhance accuracy in cost estimation and fabric calculation, ultimately streamlining their production process.

5.3. Laying Process Efficiency: Data capturing

The study identified that laying operators dedicate a substantial amount of time to paperwork throughout the laying process. Time studies revealed that 23% of the laying process is spent on data capture tasks. Operators manually capture data to calculate fabric efficiency, marker efficiency, fabric consumption, machine utilisation, and fabric recoveries on a recovery sheet document. This process involves manual calculations of fabric utilisation as well as transferring of information from three distinct documents, i.e. the works order report detailing with units required and garment specifications, the marker report containing marker length, ratio, and costed width, and the fabric picking list detailing fabric quality, dye lot information, weight, and width onto the recovery sheet. Once the laying operator completes data entry on the recovery sheet and finishes the laying process, the document is handed over to a clerk to capture the information on the recovery sheet and send it to the ERP system. This study proposes automating the data capture directly onto the ERP system. All three documents

already exist within the ERP, allowing seamless transfer to a device such as a scanner or tablet to be used by the laying operators. Instead of manually entering data, operators scan or input necessary information into the device. The tablet or scanner would then automatically calculate marker efficiency and fabric recoveries, reducing the manual workload significantly. Each document mentioned above is already equipped with a QR code for all the information to be captured. By having laying operators input data directly into the scanner or tablet, all information would flow directly into the ERP system without requiring manual input from a clerk [27].

According to the cutting room manager, this streamlined approach enhances operational efficiency by reducing paperwork and manual calculations, which often involve calculation errors. It also minimises the potential for other errors inherent in manual data entry. By leveraging existing ERP capabilities and integrating modern scanning technology, one can optimise the laying process, improve overall productivity, and ensure more accurate data management throughout production. In addition to the immediate benefits of reducing paperwork and manual data entry, implementing scanners or tablets for data capture during the laying process offers several strategic advantages. These include:

5.3.1. Real-time Data Integration

By integrating scanners or tablets with the ERP system, data captured by laying operators is instantly fed into the centralised database. This real-time integration ensures all stakeholders access up-to-date information regarding fabric efficiency, marker efficiency, and other critical metrics. The ERP system plays a crucial role in this process, enabling managers to make informed decisions promptly based on accurate and current data.

5.3.2. Enhanced Accuracy and Consistency

Manual data entry is prone to errors, which significantly affect production planning and cost management. Automated data capture decreases the likelihood of errors due to human input. Consistent and reliable data improve the quality of production metrics and financial reporting.

5.3.3. Operational Efficiency

The time saved from manual data entry and calculations allows laying operators to focus more on their core responsibilities—ensuring precise fabric cutting and layout. This efficiency speeds up the laying process, reduces lead times, and consistently meets production deadlines.

5.3.4. Cost Savings

While the initial investment in scanning technology may be required, the long-term savings from reduced labour hours, improved process efficiency, and minimised errors more than justify the expenditure. Additionally, eliminating the clerk's role in data entry post-laying further reduces operational costs and frees up resources for other value-added tasks.

5.3.5. Scalability and Flexibility

As our manufacturing operations grow, the automated data capture system can quickly scale to accommodate increased production volumes and additional product lines. Integrating scanners or tablets allows flexibility and adaptability to future technological advancements and operational needs.

5.3.6. Employee Satisfaction and Training

Simplifying data capture through user-friendly devices like tablets or scanners enhances the user experience for laying operators. Training on these devices is typically straightforward, minimising downtime during implementation and ensuring quick adoption by the workforce.

5.3.7. Compliance and Audit Trail

Automated data capture provides a robust audit trail for compliance purposes. Detailed records within the ERP system enable easier traceability and accountability, seamlessly supporting regulatory requirements and internal audits.

5.4. Fabric waste eliminations: Stabilisation

The fabric undergoes significant tension during the rolling process, leading to stretching and potential shrinkage. If left unchecked, this tension can cause garments to lose shape or improperly fit after production. For fabrics with this shrinkage problem, an additional 2 cm allowance is added on either side of the lay with a length. This additional fabric cost adds fabric waste to the garment, making manufacturing less cost-effective. To prevent this, the fabric is carefully unrolled and spread out to its full width, allowing it to relax and stabilise. This enables the fabric to recover from its stretched state and return to its natural dimensions. This process, known as fabric relaxation or stabilisation, prevents fabric distortion and ensures optimal garment production. The fabric is left to rest for an extended period, typically 24 hours, to ensure complete relaxation. This step is particularly critical for knit fabrics, which are more prone to stretching and shrinkage than woven fabrics. By allowing the fabric to relax and stabilise, manufacturers can ensure that their garments retain shape and size throughout the production process.

5.5. Cut Room Efficiency

As mentioned, cutting room operations lack standard measuring tools or methodologies widely used in the industry, like how sewing operations have Standard Minute Values (SMVs). This is primarily due to the complexity of the cutting operations. However, implementing the following methods can significantly improve efficiency and accuracy in the cutting room operations:

5.5.1. Develop a standardised cutting room methodology

Establish a consistent approach to measuring cutting room efficiency, considering factors like garment complexity, fabric type, and garment group types. Garments that use similar fabrics are cut the same way. Garments that use slippery fabric will need clamps when cutting; garments with bigger panels do not need to be cut on the stationery saw table.

5.5.2. Create a garment Cutting Room Standard Time system

Similar to SMVs, develop a standardised time measurement system for cutting operations. This involves conducting time studies on garment group types based on pattern similarities. This will give an average cycle time for cutting each garment type, and this cycle time can be applied to the master pattern, meaning that all garments that use a specific master pattern would take approximately that amount of time to cut.

5.5.3. Implement a complexity rating system

Assign a complexity score to each garment design, considering factors like pattern pieces, fabric types, marker efficiency and cutting techniques. This helps normalise efficiency metrics across different garments.

5.5.4. Use technology and data analytics

Leverage cutting room software, sensors, and data analytics to track operator performance, garment complexity, and production times provides valuable insights for optimisation and efficiency improvement. It could also be used on stationery saw tables, equipped with sensors that measure saw revolutions per second, visual recording devices like cameras, and other machine utilisation measures.

5.5.5. Continuous monitoring and feedback

Regularly monitor cutting room efficiency, provide feedback to operators, and adjust the standard times as needed. This ensures accuracy and fairness in our operations, giving everyone a level playing field.

5.6. Future technology

The following list outlines potential machines for future development and research, informed by observations from the study. These machines aim to enhance cutting room operations, catering to the needs of smaller manufacturing companies. While cutting-edge technologies like the Gerber cutter/spreader can revolutionise high-volume production, their high cost and under-utilisation in low-volume environments make them less suitable for smaller factories. Instead, there is a need for affordable, operator-assisted technologies that improve quality and efficiency in these settings. Thought should be given to a cutting-room facility only, that works for several clothing manufacturers.

5.6.1. Laser-guided manual cutting machine

These machines will be equipped with a light or laser guidance system to monitor the cutting process and detect deviations from the pattern line. When an operator cuts outside the designated line, the machine will alert them with a visual or auditory signal, indicating a cut error and preventing further inaccuracies.

5.6.2. QR Codes on Printer Marker Panels

Implementing QR codes on printer marker panels can assist operators in sorting and bundling areas. By simply scanning the QR code on the top marker paper, the scanner will instantly identify the corresponding bundle assignment, eliminating manual errors and increasing efficiency.

5.6.3. Reject detecting sensor laying machine

During the literature review, no existing machine was found that could detect standard fabric rejects during the laying process in the cutting room. While quality control machinery is available for textile manufacturing, none specifically addresses the cutting room needs. An ideal solution would be a machine or attachment that can be integrated with any laying machine, detecting fabric rejects as the roll is unrolled and laid on the table. Upon detection, the machine would alert the operator and halt the process, allowing for the reject to be removed. A sensor-based attachment would be a preferred solution, enabling seamless integration with existing laying machines.

6 CONCLUSION

This analysis of cutting room operations, guided by the Lean Six Sigma methodology, has highlighted key areas for improvement and developed actionable strategies to enhance efficiency. Key findings include the benefit of grouping work orders by fabric quality and colour, which improves fabric utilisation and productivity. The study also recommended automating data capture during the laying process to reduce manual errors and streamline operations. Additionally, fabric relaxation techniques and potential future technologies, such as laser-guided cutting machines and reject-detecting sensors, offer significant opportunities for improving accuracy and reducing waste. Implementing these recommendations, including optimising work orders, automating data capture, and adopting advanced technologies, can help the cutting room achieve better fabric utilisation, enhanced productivity, and reduced costs. These improvements will streamline the cutting process and contribute to higher-quality and more efficient garment production [27;28].

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DEVELOPING COMPANY XYZ'S ASSET CARE EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to address Company XYZ's underutilized maintenance data, hindering the adoption of proactive maintenance procedures. Applying maintenance data to increase asset dependability and operational effectiveness was the key goal. To determine the underlying causes of downtime and data inconsistencies, a mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative analysis of maintenance records with qualitative insights from process observations. The study's conclusions showed that inadequate staff training, gaps in process standardization, and data inaccuracies were the main causes of poor maintenance management. As a result, the study created tools for data analysis, standardized maintenance procedures, created a framework for choosing strategies based on Reliability-Centered Maintenance, and integrated the concepts of Total Productive Maintenance. When these interventions were put into practice, downtime decreased, indicating operational gains. This study adds to the body of knowledge in maintenance management by providing empirically supported methods for enhancing decision-making and maintaining reliability gains.

Keywords: Industrial Engineering; Asset Care; Maintenance Strategies; Reliability Metrics

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1 INTRODUCTION

Cost-cutting measures are essential for maintaining supply and generating income in the cutthroat automobile parts manufacturing sector. This industry is heavily dependent on equipment, and reducing downtime gives manufacturers a significant edge in terms of increased operational effectiveness, lower costs, and the capacity to continuously satisfy client expectations. Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and Tier 1 suppliers in the South African market, as well as overseas export markets, receive a wide range of components from Company XYZ, a respectable and skilled maker of automobile parts. High-capacity equipment is the foundation of production and income in the asset-intensive operations of the company. However, these assets are vulnerable to unforeseen malfunctions because of their high utilization rates. Such malfunctions cause a great deal of downtime, which puts the company at a competitive disadvantage and consequently contributes to missed or delayed customer deliveries.

Frequent outages in Company XYZ's high-capacity assets cause delays and interruptions in customer delivery. Customer satisfaction and operational efficiency are compromised by this issue. It is necessary to reconsider current maintenance practices and implement more efficient methods of enhancing asset reliability rather than relying solely on expensive investments in new machinery. The company's downtime and its high-capacity assets lead to delays and disruptions in customer deliveries. This problem undermines operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Rather than defaulting to costly investment in new equipment, there is a need to re-evaluate existing maintenance strategies and adopt more effective approaches to improving asset reliability. This study's major goal is to assess and suggest maintenance plans that reduce downtime and increase the dependability of Company XYZ's high-capacity equipment. By tackling these goals, the study hopes to provide useful insights into maintenance optimization in the automotive parts manufacturing sector and provide Company XYZ with doable tactics to improve asset competitiveness and reliability.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, there was an exploration of how authors have developed aspects of their asset care excellence framework and have applied methodologies and concepts to develop Company XYZ's asset care excellence framework.

This literature will be relevant to developing an asset care excellence framework for Company XYZ, which will play a significant role in gaining accurate data that will be used in minimizing downtime, improving overall asset reliability, and selecting maintenance strategies, thus tackling the problem of underutilization of data to proactively respond to maintenance downtime and addressing data inaccuracies.

2.1. Maintenance Strategies

Equipment and systems deteriorate over time, which can lead to decreased operational efficiency and increased downtime [1]. Over time companies have identified this and have implemented maintenance practices and strategies to minimize downtime, improve overall asset reliability, and optimize the lifespan of equipment and systems. There are four common maintenance strategies that most companies employ: reactive maintenance, preventative

maintenance, predictive maintenance, and proactive maintenance. Each has its own advantages and challenges that will be explored in this section of literature.

2.1.1. Reactive maintenance

Historically one of the first maintenance practices and strategies was to run your equipment to failure [2], and then repair or replace that equipment [3]. During this time operations within companies consisted of mainly physical labour [2]. The run to failure maintenance method came about in the past when operations used equipment that was simple, equipment failures did not cause total operations stoppage, technology was limited, and there was limited knowledge available about maintenance [2]. This maintenance practice and strategy is ineffective as a breakdown can lead companies to unexpected downtime, thus hurting the business. This strategy is coined as reactive maintenance, whereby maintenance teams or third-party service providers will be requested to repair or replace equipment. Today, there are many companies that still use Reactive maintenance as its core maintenance strategy. If this strategy is used alone, it can lead to unexpected downtime, unexpected costs, extra wastage of time waiting for maintenance teams or third-party service providers to arrive and replace/repair, and lastly possible loss of business.

Although Reactive maintenance is not a suitable strategy for all equipment, it may be suitable to employing reactive maintenance to equipment with low consequences of failure and high availability [4]. In [4] paper, they had explored where Reactive maintenance can be applied as a maintenance practice, and had determined that it can be applied to equipment where the cost of applying more preventive or proactive or predictive maintenance strategies would actually cost more than allowing the equipment fail. In their paper, the equipment they used as an example to apply reactive maintenance was on a light bulb, which would be relatively cheaper to buy when the fuse is blown than to apply preventive or proactive or predictive maintenance strategies [4]. To determine if reactive maintenance is suitable for equipment, one must determine if the cost of preventive or proactive or predictive maintenance outweighs the potential risk and impact of that equipment's failure [4].

2.1.2. Preventative maintenance

As equipment and technology had developed and advanced during the 20th century, operations involved more complex equipment and systems, thus leading to failures having a greater impact to operations and line stoppages [2]. As a result of failures having a greater impact on operations, preventative maintenance was developed. Preventative maintenance was the first maintenance practice to consider the health of the equipment with the aim of prolonging its lifespan and preventing equipment failure. Preventative maintenance involves scheduling maintenance tasks and activities like inspections, cleaning, lubricating, and other servicing of the equipment ahead of time to prevent unexpected downtime due to failure. This allows for equipment to be in good working condition, thus minimizing downtime as issues with the equipment can be identified and dealt with before becoming a bigger problem [5]. Preventative maintenance assists in extending the equipment's lifespan and reliability, because when the equipment is regularly maintained, early failures can be identified, flagged, and prevented [5].

Preventative maintenance can also be referred to as time-based maintenance and scheduled maintenance, as it involves performing maintenance activities at predetermined intervals. Scheduling intervals of the preventative maintenance activities can be calendar based or usage based. Calendar based preventative maintenance scheduling involves performing maintenance activities on equipment every week, month, quarter etc., which can be planned in advance. Usage based preventative maintenance involves performing maintenance activities after a predetermined number of hours of operation [6;7].

Although preventative maintenance is an effective practice and strategy, it is very costly to set up spares, lubrication, tools, and a skilled maintenance team is required to conduct maintenance activities on a regular basis. It would also involve maintenance activities to be done on equipment on a regular basis irrespective of the health and condition of the equipment, which can cost a company money to replace spares that do not need to be replaced, cost the maintenance team time to carry out maintenance activities on equipment that is already in a good condition, and could disrupt operations by needing to commence maintenance activities on equipment that is a good condition [1]. This maintenance strategy alone is suitable for equipment that is not used in operations frequently or is used in operations seldomly. There would need to be a balance between choosing calendar based and usage based preventative maintenance to perform. To determine which time-based maintenance method should be used, one can develop a calendar schedule for the selected equipment, monitor the usage of the equipment, and perform maintenance activities at the earliest occurring method.

2.1.3. Predictive maintenance

As equipment and technology developed further, and more knowledge was available with a deeper understanding of the importance of maintenance was gained from implementing preventative maintenance and learning from information from reactive maintenance; predictive maintenance emerged as a valuable maintenance practice and strategy to further improve the reliability of equipment. Predictive maintenance uses predictive tools to analyze historical data and identify if a failure is likely to occur in the future by monitoring the equipment's condition [8]. By using predictive maintenance, companies can proactively address possible failures before they actually occur and become costly breakdowns or accidents. Predictive maintenance is a heavy data driven maintenance practice that relies on historical data such as past work orders with work done on equipment, schedule maintenance work completed, the downtimes that the equipment experienced, the breakdowns with its root cause analysis, the equipment's performance, and the equipment's parameter settings [5]. With this data artificial intelligence and machine learning can be applied to proactively address possible failures before they actual occur and can also provide the maintenance personal valuable troubleshooting information to repair equipment, thus minimizing downtime or improving overall reliability [5]. Although this is the most effective maintenance practice in minimizing downtime and improving equipment reliability, it requires sensors or people consistently recording data, storage of the data, processing of the data, analysis of the data, and lastly requires a predictive model which can become very costly and time consuming. This maintenance practice should be applied to critical equipment to operations and advanced equipment with built in sensors and systems like PLCs.

In [9] paper the author explored the use of predictive maintenance in the refractory insulation of high temperature units in the metallurgical industry. [9] used predictive maintenance by continuously monitoring high temperature equipment like furnaces and ladles to extend their lifespan, reduce downtime, and ensure efficient production. They performed experiments by monitoring damage of the high temperature equipment by visual assessment, temperature measurement, and mathematical modeling to make informed decisions on performing maintenance activities based on the data [9]. The experiment resulted in [9] establishing relationships between failure parameters and diagnostic signs, thus leading them to develop rules based on these relationships to predict failures based on the current conditions of the equipment.

With the development of industry 4.0 and technologies such as Internet of Things (IOT) and cyber-physical systems to collect and analyze data from equipment sensors companies are able to gain real-time insights to making data driven decisions. In [10] paper they explored using a data-driven approach of continuously monitoring and forecasting potential failures through predictive maintenance on an Engel Injection molding machine. Since the injection

molding machine was older, they explored retrofitting external sensors to the machine which would collect raw data and also explored using Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA), Manufacturing Execution System (MES), or Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems to store the raw data for analytics by combining edge and cloud based computer systems [10]. They used the edge-based computing (edge computing involves linking data from sensors to the SCADA/ MES/ ERP systems) to handle time-sensitive data processing to detect anomalies in real time whilst also reducing bandwidth, and cloud-based computing for more complex data analysis for predictive models [10]. They explored integrating data like barrel pressure, clamp force, cavity pressure, screw position, and strain from sensors to develop predictive models to detect maintenance issues more effectively [10].

With the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) companies are realizing that there is a vast number of applications for them including predictive maintenance. In [8] paper they explored using ML model for predictive maintenance which involved historical data selection, data preprocessing, model selection, training, and validation, and model maintenance. [8] explored the use of Random Forest (RF), Artificial Neural Networks (ANN), Support Vector Machine (SVM), and k-means ML models for Predictive Maintenance which resulted in cost reductions and process efficiency.

2.1.4. Proactive maintenance

As equipment and technology developed further, and information gathered from preventative maintenance and reactive maintenance was available, companies started learning from equipment failures and implementing solutions to prevent the same failure happening again, thus proactive maintenance emerged. Proactive maintenance involves anticipating potential equipment failures from historical data collected on equipment and system failures before they can lead to failure and downtime.

Root Cause Analysis (RCA) is applied to problem solving after a problem has occurred. Its purpose is to identify the causes of the problem. One commonly used tool is the fishbone diagram. The fishbone diagram uses the 4Ms which is: Man, Machine, Methods, and Materials to determine the possible causes of the problem from the perspective of each of the 4Ms. RCA methodologies aim to uncover the causes for the failure/ downtime. Once these causes are realized, countermeasures are brainstormed, developed, implemented, and then monitored for effectiveness on minimizing downtime. If the countermeasures prove to be effective, then they can be standardized and become part of the company's maintenance practice and would improve the overall reliability of the equipment.

2.2.Other Maintenance Strategies

In addition to the four common maintenance strategies mentioned in the previous section of the literature there are other effective maintenance strategies that uses a combination of these four common maintenance strategies, which can be employed by companies to minimize downtime and improve overall equipment reliability. There are two that will be covered in this section: Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) and Reliability-centered maintenance (RCM).

2.2.1. Total Productive Maintenance (TPM)

Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) involves reducing costs and downtime by having zero unplanned failures, zero product defects, and zero accidents. Its approach is slightly different to other maintenance strategies, where its focus is on effective training and skills development of employees, thus creating a culture of commitment to maintenance to improve equipment effectiveness, minimizing downtime, and improve product quality [11]. TPM consists of eight pillars and was built on the foundation of 5S. The eight pillars of TPM defined based on [12] paper are Autonomous Maintenance, Planned Maintenance, Quality Maintenance, Focused

Improvement, Development Management, Education and Training, Safety, Health, and Environment (SHE), and Office TPM.

In [11] paper they explored using TPM to improve equipment effectiveness, minimizing downtime, and improve product quality, by elimination of "main problems", Autonomous maintenance, schedule maintenance, and training. Elimination of "main problems" looked into identifying RCA, implementing solutions and standardizing procedures like in proactive maintenance [11]. Autonomous maintenance involved getting employees to perform **basic** inspections and cleaning activities of equipment, which where structured into employee's daily, weekly, and monthly tasks [11]. Schedule maintenance tasks that can only be completed by maintenance teams were scheduled taking into account of operations [11]. Lastly training of employees which involved them gaining theoretical and practical knowledge about equipment to prevent unexpected downtime, and creating supporting documents that they can refer back to if need be [11].

2.2.2. Reliability-centered maintenance (RCM)

Reliability-centered maintenance (RCM) is a maintenance practice and strategy that first came about in the aviation industry [13]. It involves systematically analyzing equipment components using failure mode and effect analysis (FMEA) to identify critical parts and potential failure modes, then selecting maintenance activities to reduce or eliminate failures [4].

Failure Mode and Effects Analysis (FMEA) involves determining potential failure modes of components, and determining their criticality based on the frequency of occurrences, detectability, and severity of the failure [13]. These are then scored on a scale (example 1-10), and a Risk Priority Number (RPN) is calculated from these scores, helping prioritize maintenance activities based on the criticality of each component's failure modes [13].

In [13] paper they explored the use of RCM in a subsystem of a Continuous Emissions Monitoring System (CEMS), they identified the main causes for component failure through FMEA and targeted maintenance strategies to be employed on components of the FMEA outcomes. They used mean time between failures (MTBF) to determine the intervals between faults in the CEMS to assist them in selecting a maintenance strategy to be used [13]. They were able to improve the reliability of the CEMS by targeting failing components and applying an appropriate maintenance strategy to these components [13].

2.3.Reliability metrics

Building on the maintenance strategies in the previous two sections of the literature, reliability metrics can be used to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of these maintenance strategies in improving equipment reliability and minimizing downtime. By analysing reliability metrics companies can evaluate the impact of different maintenance strategies on equipment performance. This allows companies to make data driven decisions on which maintenance strategies to prioritize and invest in, to improve overall equipment reliability and minimize downtime.

2.3.1. Mean time to failure (MTTF)

Mean time to failure (MTTF) is a reliability metric that is used to determine the average time it takes for non- repairable equipment to fail by calculating the average time between the equipment's start of operation and its failure [14]. MTTF is useful in determining the expected lifespan of equipment and allows for proactive maintenance strategies to be implemented, reducing the risk of unexpected failures and minimizing downtime.

2.3.2. Mean Time Between Failures (MTBF)

Mean Time Between Failures (MTBF) is a reliability metric used to determine the reliability of repairable equipment or systems by calculating the average time between failures [15]. MTBF

is the ratio of the total operational time of an asset to the total number of failures of the asset [16]. MTBF is useful to determine the overall reliability of the equipment or system and can used to determine the maintenance schedule for usage based preventative maintenance and expected downtime for the equipment or system so that operations can plan accordingly and minimize disruptions to productivity.

2.3.3. Mean Time to Respond/ Mean Time to Acknowledge (MTTA)

Mean Time to Respond or Mean Time to Acknowledge (MTTA) is a reliability metric used to determine the average time it takes for the maintenance team to arrive and carry out maintenance activities by calculating the average time between the start of the downtime to the arrival of the maintenance team [17]. MTTA is useful in determining the response time of the maintenance team and identifying any delays or gaps in the maintenance process.

2.3.4. Mean Time to Detect (MTTD)

Mean Time to Detect (MTTD) is a reliability metric that is used to determine the average time it takes to diagnosis the reason to an equipment failure by calculating the average time between equipment failures and failure diagnosis [15] [17]. MTTD is useful in determining how long it takes to identify and diagnose the cause of equipment failure.

2.3.5. Mean Time to Repair (MTTR)

Mean Time to Repair (MTTR) is a reliability metric used to determine the average time taken to repair an equipment failure by calculating the average time it takes to complete equipment repairs on a number of equipment failures [14]. MTTR is useful in determining how long it takes to restore equipment to a working condition so that operations can plan around potential downtime. This metric is also useful in determining the effectiveness of maintenance strategies and identifying possible gaps in the capability maintenance team, as a shorter MTTR indicates timely repairs and a strong capable maintenance team.

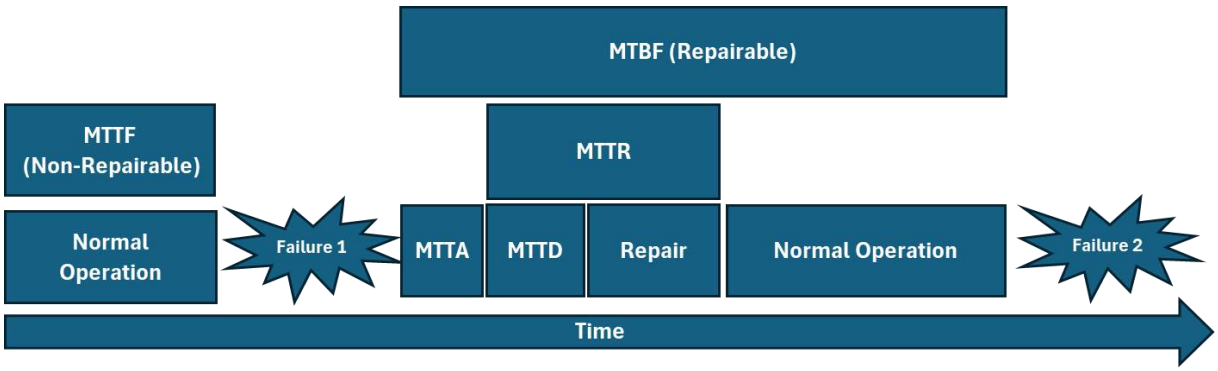


Figure 1: Reliability Metrics Sequence

These reliability metrics have been employed by many companies and can be highly effective in planning preventative maintenance with production, thus decreasing the chance of downtime during peak production demand. [18] has also used these reliability metrics to plan preventative maintenance which resulted in reduced downtime, improved overall asset reliability, and optimized maintenance strategies.

In [16] paper they used these MTBF and MTTR as a foundation to compare the improvement made before and after the Implementation of Autonomous Maintenance in a Beer Processing Plant, to determine the effectiveness of Autonomous Maintenance.

2.4.Framework to selection of maintenance strategies for Asset care excellence

Based on the explored maintenance practices and strategies in the earlier part of the literature, a method for choosing which strategy to use for equipment needs to be determined.

In [19] paper they explored a framework through RCM by selecting equipment, classifying the equipment as critical and non-critical, and then applied a maintenance strategy based on the equipment and their classification. This framework proved to be effective in identifying and implementing asset care excellence by providing a systematic approach to choosing a maintenance strategy. In Figure 9, an Asset Care Excellence Selection Framework based on [19] framework was developed, with the addition of equipment systems, and determining if minor or major before choosing a maintenance strategy. The framework will be discussed further in the recommendations of this paper.

3 METHODOLOGY

The research onion as explained by [20], serves as the methodological framework for this investigation. The research onion offers an organized framework for planning and carrying out research by outlining a number of levels, from data collection methods to philosophical presumptions, that the researcher gradually traverses to reach suitable methodological decisions. It is useful because it guarantees methodological consistency and openness all the way through the study process. The study's ontological position, which recognizes the reality of objective realities in the form of measurable production and maintenance data, serves as the philosophical foundation. This is consistent with the study's emphasis on quantifiable downtime, efficiency, and reliability metrics.

This study ensured methodological rigor, coherence between research philosophy and practice, and transparency in the decision-making process by methodically navigating the research onion. The framework improved the research's replicability and contribution to the maintenance and process optimization fields in addition to bolstering its internal validity. In this methodology, the research philosophy, approach, strategy, time horizons, and methodology choices are detailed and are based on the research onion by [25]. The selected methodology to solve the research problem of the organization’s inaccurate data and the underutilization of data to proactively respond to maintenance downtime is explained. In this research paper, the pragmatism philosophy was used as a guiding framework. This philosophy has allowed the selection and combination of different approaches to be used from multiple sources of literature, and tailor Company XYZ’s Asset care excellence framework to what would realistically work best for the organization.

In this research paper, the deductive approach was used. By using the deductive approach, the application of existing concepts mentioned in the literature review section was used and determined whether they could effectively address the research problem of the organization’s inaccurate data and the underutilization of data to proactively respond to maintenance downtime. Additionally, this approach aligned with the research objectives and questions, as it focused on exploring how the organization could use data analytics to identify patterns and trends to address maintenance challenges.

For this research project, the action strategy was used. Using the action strategy has enabled the planning and application of solutions from the literature to address the research problem of the organization’s inaccurate data and the underutilization of data to proactively respond to maintenance downtime. After implementation of the various solutions, enabling observation and reflection on the effectiveness of the solutions. Through observation and reflections of the various solutions, adjustments and changes were made based on the results of the solutions, which has assisted in bringing positive change with more practical solutions to addressing the problem. This strategy has allowed more active involvement and participation in the research which has assisted in convincing the staff of the organization to follow the suggested solutions.

The mixed-methods methodology was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. This mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding of contributing factors

to maintenance downtime and allowed for a more accurate analysis of the data. These mixed methods approach also gave a more accurate picture of the problem, as it considered a more holistic view of maintenance from a numerical perspective and a subjective perspective from the maintenance and production teams.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data was gathered from the organization's asset management records and Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) to facilitate the methodical creation of maintenance performance reports. Extraction of precise, time-bound data on malfunctions and reactive maintenance work orders was the key goal. The necessity to monitor asset dependability, maintenance effort, and recurrent failure patterns served as the basis for data gathering. The data collected enables the establishment of reports in Figures 2 and 3, and data used in the development of the dashboard, i.e., data in 4.1.2 and 4.1.3.

4.1.Utilization of maintenance data

Previously, at the organization, maintenance data was too inaccurate and unreliable to be used for analysis. With the interventions put in place during this research, Company XYZ has seen a positive change in gaining data that can be used to complete maintenance downtime analysis.

4.2 Downtime and repair time analysis reports

To gain a view into the organization's asset failures, I decided to create reports that are used for analysis of breakdowns and reactive work orders created and completed over the year, and for the month. These reports would be routinely created every month to identify any trends and patterns of the various assets. These reports would then be printed and added to the KPI board for management to review in one of their weekly management meetings of the month. This includes the following Reports:

- Report 1: Breakdowns- Downtime versus Repair hours
- Report 2: Reactive- Downtime versus Repair hours
- Report 3: Breakdowns- Downtime versus Occurrences
- Report 4: Reactive- Repair Hours versus Occurrences.

Figure 2: Breakdowns- Downtime vs Repair hours report

Figure 3: Breakdowns- Downtime vs Occurrences Report

These reports are essential for the organization to gain a deeper understanding of asset reliability and to identify issues that can lead to further investigation. These reports assist the organization in comparing Downtime, repair time, and the occurrence of failures, which can assist in identifying trends and patterns, and be used for focused improvement initiatives.

4.1.1. MTBF and MTTR analysis reports

To analyse Company XYZ's data for MTBF and MTTR, I decided to create a robust tool through reports. These reports will also be routinely created every month and throughout the year, with the purpose of analysing MTBF, MTTR, downtime, and repair times. It will be printed and added to the KPI board for management to review in one of their weekly management meetings of the month. This includes the following 3 Reports:

- Report 5: MTBF vs MTTR
- Report 6: Interactive- Downtime vs MTBF
- Report 7: Interactive- MTTR vs Repair hours

These reports are essential to the organization as they can be used for further analysis and investigations of the asset's conditions, identifying root causes, and also assisting in the implementation and monitoring of the maintenance strategies mentioned in the literature.

4.1.2. Work order analysis reports

To gain a view into what type of work artisans were requested to do and to show progress of reducing the work orders backlog, I decided to create a maintenance work order KPI report. This KPI report will also be routinely created every month throughout the year. It will be printed and added to the KPI board for management to review in one of their weekly management meetings of the month.

- Report 1: Total Work Orders created.
- Report 2: Work orders backlog.

- Report 3: Predetermined Maintenance by Asset
- Report 4: Corrective Maintenance by Asset

These reports are essential to the organization as they provide an understanding into the types of work being requested of the maintenance team, the progress being made in reducing the backlog of work orders, understanding the total generated work orders, the current backlog, and comparing predetermined and corrective maintenance activities to help the maintenance managers make informed decisions about resource allocation, staffing, and determine overall maintenance effectiveness.

In addition to graphically presenting the reports, a dashboard design that incorporates derived KPIs and trends is established to provide management with quick access to actionable insights. The data collection process made it possible to produce structured reports that included early warning signs of asset reliability issues in addition to historical performance data. The regular production of these reports promoted proactive decision-making, guaranteed ongoing monitoring, and made it easier to align maintenance performance with organizational goals.

4.2.Application of Maintenance strategies

As one of the objectives of this research, I wanted to investigate maintenance strategies which can be implemented to reduce and prevent maintenance downtime. Through the literature I have identified the five main strategies that were applied and investigated.

4.2.1. *Total Productive Maintenance (TPM)*

As mentioned in the literature of this paper about TPM, it is proposed that Company XYZ's asset care excellence is built on the Foundation of TPM. Throughout this research the Education and Training, Planned Maintenance, Autonomous Maintenance, Safety, Health, and Environment (SHE), and Focused Improvement pillars of TPM have been applied. As mentioned in the literature that TPM's 8 pillars are built on the foundation of 5S, which is developing well at the organization through other initiatives in place outside of this research.

4.2.2. Preventative maintenance

Since the organization currently employs calendar based preventive maintenance as its main maintenance strategy, this strategy was not researched at length. However, investigating the possibility of moving away from calendar based preventive maintenance to usage based preventative maintenance did occur. It is propose that the organization uses the MTBF chart to determine the average time between failures for equipment within 24 hours (3 shifts) before or after this value, determine the lead time of the required spares for the preventative maintenance to order spares in advance, use the MTTR for preventative maintenance to determine how long the maintenance activities will take place- so that production a plan accordingly, and monitor the usage of the assets as it approaches the MTBF value. The MTBF value with the other factors mentioned can be used to determine the usage based preventative maintenance intervals, which should be updated regularly based on the updated data month to month.

4.2.3. Proactive maintenance

Since the organization has maintenance related data with much improved data accuracy, they are able to utilize their data from past failures. With the reports created on Power Bi, the organization can use their work order data and do further investigations of root causes of failures. The Power Bi reports would be key to proactive maintenance on past failures, and as more accurate data becomes available, it would be easier to identify patterns and trends of Asset failures. These reports are the cornerstone to shifting the organization to taking proactive measures to making assets more reliable, and also being able to initiate focused

improvements to where it is needed most, whilst also tracking the effectiveness of these improvements.

4.2.4. Reliability-centered maintenance (RCM)

As part of applying RCM at Company XYZ, it was decided to do a purpose sample asset of 533 which was an eccentric press. This press was chosen based on it being available to analyse and based on it being one of many eccentric presses of the organization. It was decided that an FMEA for asset 533 would be developed. As mentioned in the literature FMEA involves determining potential failure modes of components, thus requiring interviews with an experienced Artisan who knows the functionality of all components, and the role the components plays in the operation of the press. Before interviewing the artisan, all components of the press were listed, and then the artisan were interviewed on the functions of component and the possible failures based on his experience over the years. With the completed FMEA, it was duplicated and edited for the other eccentric presses. The purpose of the FMEA was to determine all possible failures that could happen, give an RPN based of the likelihood of occurrence and the risk, and also to be used as a guide to determine what the failure could be with the remedy to that failure. With the FMEA diagnostic times would decrease, thus leading to shorter downtimes.

4.2.5. Predictive maintenance

As part of a separate project for Company XYZ's Ecoating line, a system that takes inputs from users and plots these inputs into a Statistical process control (SPC) chart in real time was developed. Part of predictive maintenance, it was decided to use the water pressure parameter of tank two of the Ecoating line for predictive maintenance. Below is the SPC chart of tank two.

Figure 4: SPC chart for Tank 2 of the Ecoating line

By using the system designed and applying predictive maintenance to tank 2 of the Ecoating line, monitoring and tracking a continuous drop in water pressure was possible, thus leading the organization to predict that one of the nozzles of tank 2 would soon fall off into the tank. By continuously monitoring the SPC chart, it was able to predict that there would be a loss in water pressure soon. Since water pressure is not something you can see problems until it

actually becomes a problem, the SPC chart was used to be able to identify issues through recording and comparing historical data. The issue with the nozzle was easily fixed long before it could become a big issue, which could have resulted in rework of all parts processed, which would have only been identified five tanks later. This also saved the other tanks from contamination, as tank two plays an important role in washing off degreaser and debris.

5 RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to increase dependability and operational performance, this study addressed Company XYZ's high-capacity asset downtime and maintenance inefficiencies. The integrated production data is used in conjunction with expert insights and observations, guided by the research onion technique. In order to facilitate trend analysis and management decision-making, monthly reports were created to track malfunctions and reactive maintenance.

The results showed that current maintenance procedures lacked uniformity and efficient data utilization, and that the majority of downtime was caused by a small sample of high-capacity equipment. The study suggested standardized maintenance procedures, data analysis tools, employee training, and the integration of Reliability-Centred Maintenance (RCM) and Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) by utilizing Lean Six Sigma and Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) principles.

Through KPI reporting, these actions enhanced operational visibility and reduced downtime. The study offers useful tactics for boosting competitiveness in equipment-intensive manufacturing, decreasing operational disturbances, and improving asset reliability. It provides a template for comparable firms looking to enhance maintenance using data.

From the accurate work orders data, I was able to create interactive reports on Power BI to be able to analyze downtimes and failures of assets at the organization. These reports consisted of data from various sources within the organization, thus creating a holistic view of maintenance's role within the organization and integrating maintenance data into other business systems, which was not possible in the past.

These reports visualize the data from the work orders and other data sources to easily identify patterns and trends for Downtime of assets, Repair hours used by artisans for maintenance activities, the number of occurrences of maintenance activities, show MTBF of the sample assets, and show the MTTR for maintenance activities. Furthermore, the organization was now able to identify and analyze patterns and trends of asset downtimes and failures with the ability to drill down deeper into the data when further investigations are required.

From the initiatives of this research, it can be concluded that Company XYZ has seen a reduction in its average downtime. Lastly, with the monitoring and tracking initiatives put in place for work orders, it was observed that Company XYZ has made outstanding improvements to reduce the backlog of work orders.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE WORKS

6.1. Asset Care Excellence framework

From the literature review of the various means employed by other authors to maintain assets, improve data accuracy, as well as through the various investigations and initiatives of this research, a framework was developed which is recommended that the organization employ for its asset care excellence. This framework would greatly assist the organization improving its data integrity, allow for the utilization of maintenance data to proactively respond to and reduce maintenance downtime, assist the organization to choose a maintenance strategy to be applied for each asset, and lead to improved overall reliability of assets.

Figure 5: Asset Care Excellence Framework

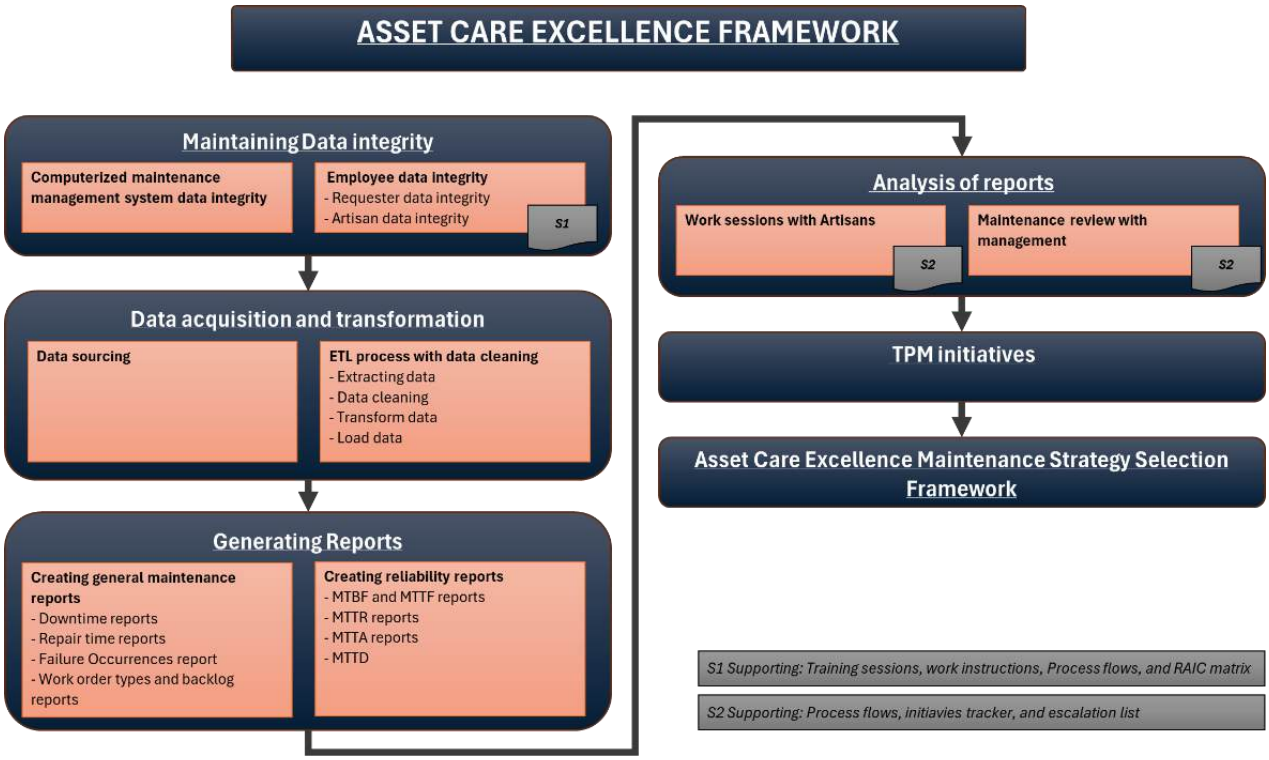
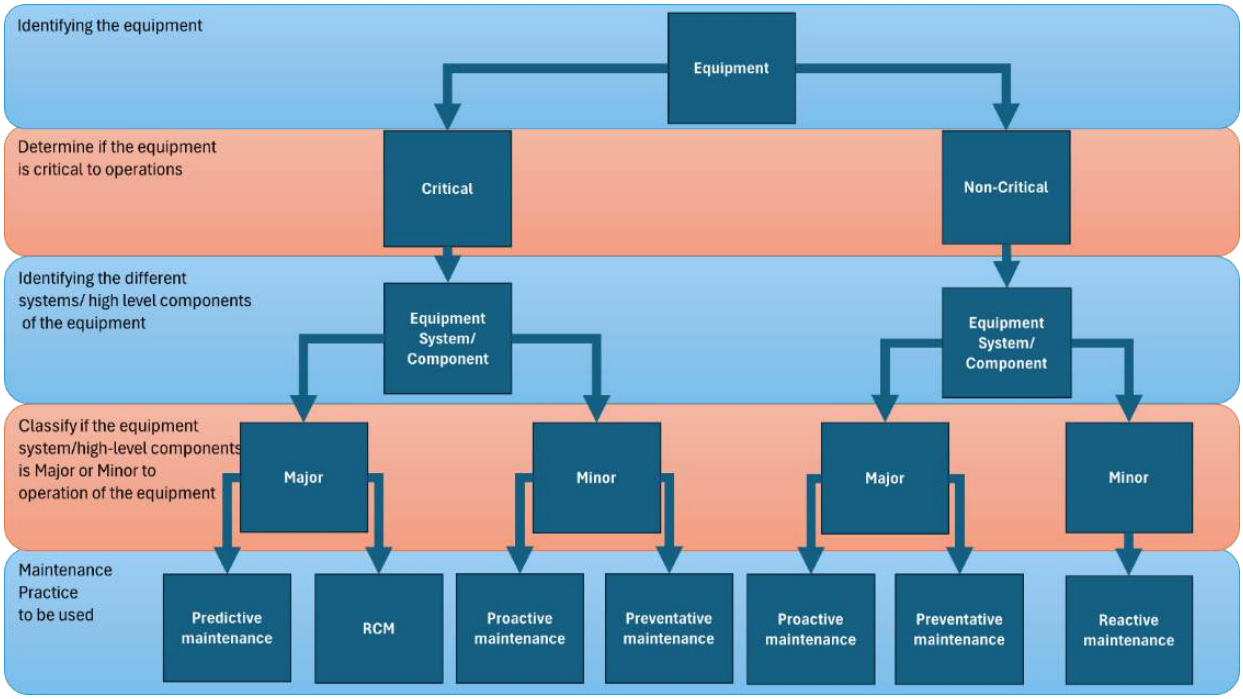


Figure 6: Asset Care Excellence Maintenance Strategy Selection Framework [19]



6.2. Predictive maintenance on technologically advanced assets

Many machines and equipment such as the robotic welders and progression presses of the organization have PLC's which may be used to retrieve data from sensors of those machines and equipment in real time. Company XYZ can use this data to implement predictive maintenance, by charting the data and monitoring. Tools such as Statistical process control (SPC) can be utilized to identify variations in the data, which could alert maintenance team members to investigate. It is recommended that Company XYZ get a quotation from a control systems specialist consultant to extract data from the machine or equipment sensors and compare this quotation to the cost of hours lost for repairs done on control systems. If the cost of the repairs and the manhours lost (Maintenance and Production) is substantially higher, then it is suggested that the organization proceed with the quotation from the control systems specialist.

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THE WEAKEST LINK? MANAGING THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN CYBERSECURITY

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ABSTRACT

The importance of cybersecurity has become an indisputable reality in an increasingly digitised world; the escalating frequency, severity, and public visibility of cyberattacks underscore the increased demand for robust, holistic cybersecurity measures. This systematic literature review (SLR) proposes to conduct a thorough review of the role of the human element in cybersecurity and subsequent relationships with both organisations and management. Multiple elements inform cybersecurity behaviour, including personality dimensions, risk-taking tendencies, decision-making styles, demographic factors, protection motivation, and environmental stressors. The manner in which individuals interact with systems, their understanding of cybersecurity, and their actions are critical components in protecting against cybersecurity incidents. This review demonstrates that organisations need to invest in cybersecurity training and awareness programmes.

Keywords: cybersecurity, human factor, cybersecurity behaviours, cybersecurity management

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1 INTRODUCTION

Cybersecurity has become a critical component of operational resilience in today's digitised and interconnected systems. As industrial systems grow increasingly complex, so does integrating IT, operational technology, and human interaction; as such, the need for robust, system-wide cybersecurity measures is more urgent than ever. The World Economic Forum reports a staggering 358% rise in malware attacks and a 435% increase in ransomware incidents since 2020, underscoring the expanding risk landscape [1].

While technological defences continue to advance, the human element remains a key vulnerability. Human behaviour directly impacts system integrity; a study by Stanford University and Tessian found that 88% of data breaches stem from human error [2]. In industrial systems, where downtime or security incidents can result in severe operational and financial losses, understanding and mitigating these human-related risks is essential.

Despite the prevalence of awareness training, current practices often fall short. Cognitive overload, fatigue, and behavioural inertia reduce the effectiveness of interventions [3]. Organisations frequently default to assigning blame, overlooking systemic and behavioural insights that could improve resilience [4], [5].

This systematic literature review (SLR) investigates how cybersecurity behaviours are assessed and what strategies are used to mitigate the human element in cyber risk. It also identifies the key attack vectors that target human vulnerabilities. By framing cybersecurity as a socio-technical challenge, this work aligns with industrial engineering's focus on optimising system performance, enhancing reliability, and integrating human factors into risk management frameworks. The findings aim to inform the design of more effective, human-centred cybersecurity strategies within complex organisational systems.

1.1 Research Question

This research aims to examine and synthesise the existing literature on the relationship between human elements and cybersecurity. The following research questions were developed to help determine which aspects would be explored within this work:

RQ1. What cybersecurity behaviours do employees exhibit within an organisational structure?

RQ2. How do these behaviours contribute to the cybersecurity posture of an organisation?

RQ3. How can businesses or employers manage the human element of cybersecurity risk successfully, across all organisational levels?

1.2 Related Work

Due to the importance of the interaction between the human element and cybersecurity systems, several literature reviews have been conducted.

Alsharida et al. [6] reviewed 93 studies on human cybersecurity behaviour, revealing a growing interest in the field and highlighting the dominance of certain theoretical models that require broader investigation. The article details that various cybersecurity behaviour theories require further study, as certain theories tend to be favoured in research. Jeong et al. [7], in a review of 27 articles, found a persistent technical bias in cybersecurity research, underlining the neglect of human factors. They identified personality traits, demographics, and cultural context as key influences and called for interdisciplinary, qualitative studies.

Rahman et al. [8] analysed 24 articles, framing cybersecurity as a sociotechnical issue. They noted cultural biases (particularly Western-centric perspectives) affect generalisability. They identified 17 human factors, with awareness, privacy, and trust perceptions as the most prominent. Kannelønning and Katsikas [9] reviewed 26 studies on how cybersecurity

behaviours are assessed, noting a reliance on subjective self-assessments and adapted measurement scales. They recommend developing more objective evaluation methods.

Our research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3) align with the practical concerns of businesses and employers, addressing not only the identification of these cybersecurity behaviours but also their direct implications on the overall cybersecurity posture of an organisation. By concentrating on organisational-level implications, this SLR aims to bridge the gap between theoretical constructs and actionable insights for decision-makers at an organisational level.

2 METHODOLOGY

This SLR adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement [10]. Prior to conducting the SLR, a review of related work was performed to investigate whether similar reviews had been conducted. No reviews were identified that would diminish the significance of this review's contribution to the body of knowledge, pertaining to the research questions posed in this study.

2.1 Search and Selection

To ensure that all relevant literature has been identified and selected, a well-developed search strategy is crucial. The search strategy has been refined using two methods, both “building blocks" and “pearl growing”. The building block method required determining the correct vocabulary for each discrete fact or concept, which was then combined into a final search, as seen in Figure 1.

```
(TITLE-ABS-KEY ( “cybersecurity” OR “cyber security” ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( human W/2 element ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( human W/2 factor ) OR TITLE-ASB-KEY ( human W/2 behavio*r ) )
```

Figure 1 Example Search Strategy

In addition, to mitigate the risk of overlooking important articles, a combination of pearl-growing and building blocks search strategies was used. The pearl growing method relies on a “pearl” article, which is an authoritative article in a field of relevance to the topic of enquiry. This method has the result of identifying the right set of descriptors to find other relevant literature [11]. The “pearl” articles were identified (sources [12] and [13]) and related articles were explored using an online citation-based literature mapping tool, ResearchRabbit.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria

Relevant articles were selected for the SLR using defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were excluded if they did not address the human element of cybersecurity, were non-academic (e.g., news articles, editorials, presentations, or posters), were not in English, focused on physical or general information security, lacked full-text access, were published before 2010, or were duplicates.

2.3 Keywords and Data Sources

This SLR investigates the impact of human (employee) behaviour on cybersecurity. As outlined in the search strategy (Figure 1), relevant literature was sourced from Web of Science and Scopus, being two multidisciplinary, internationally recognised databases known for their extensive coverage of academic, indexed publications related to technology and other fields [14].

2.4 Screening and Selection

This SLR has been conducted according to the guidelines of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) [10] guidelines. The flow diagram of the process followed is illustrated in Figure 2.

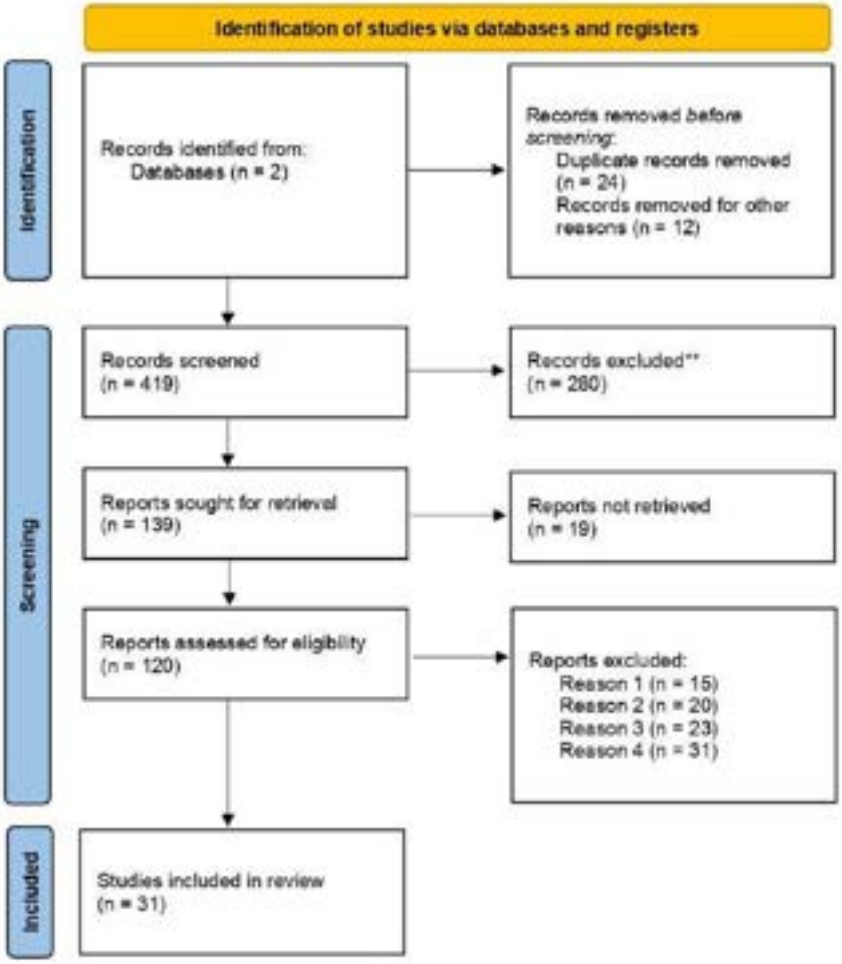

Figure 2 PRISMA Flow Diagram

The screening criteria discussed in Section 2.4 were used to exclude irrelevant retrieved reports, as seen in Figure 2. Titles and abstracts that were evidently irrelevant were removed during the first screening pass, which did not require justification. Thereafter, justification was required for all excluded reports. Four main reasons were considered, namely:

1. The article was a literature review, analysed separately in Section 1.2.
2. It did not sufficiently address the human element of cybersecurity.
3. Its focus was on technical systems or modelling, not behavioural aspects.
4. It examined behavioural topics outside the scope of this study (e.g., threat actor motivation).

2.5 Data Extraction and Quality Assessment (QA)

The screened data were imported into ATLAS.ti, and read in full, for qualitative content analysis, including coding and thematic categorisation [15]. QA is necessary for ensuring the reliability and validity of findings in a SLR [16]. While no single QA standard is universally applied, this study adopts criteria based on the PICOC framework:

- Population: Individuals or employees across various organisational contexts,
- Intervention: Cybersecurity behaviours, measures, or management strategies,
- Comparison: Between different practices or with studies lacking specific interventions,
- Outcome: Employee participation in cybersecurity, breach involvement, or mitigation effectiveness,

- Context: Organisations of any size, industry, or geographical location.

2.6 Method of Synthesis and Analysis

Employing ATLAS.ti in conjunction with the data extracted from the 31 studies, we performed an analysis of the data collected to support the review questions. We meticulously reviewed the selected research articles, examining them thoroughly and then coding the relevant qualitative and quantitative information based on the topics addressed in each study.

3 FINDINGS

Seen in Figure 2, a total of 419 records were extracted from Scopus and Web of Science. After removing duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened, resulting in the exclusion of 280 irrelevant records. Of the remaining 139 articles, 19 could not be retrieved. A second screening of introductions and conclusions reduced the final sample to 31 studies.

Concept / Reference	Total relevant concepts per source	Demographic Factor: Age	Decision-making Style	Demographic Factors (General)	Demographic: Gender	Personality (FFM)	PMT	Risk-taking	Socio-Economic	Weakest Link	Environmental Stressors	Policy	Awareness and Training	Holism and STS
Total Sources per concept		7	6	10	13	6	5	7	2	15	9	7	14	7
Aboushan et al. 2021a	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Aboushan et al. 2021b	5	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alotaibi et al. 2016	6	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
Alsharif et al. 2022	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Baluta et al. 2017	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Bolpagni 2023	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
Collier et al. 2023	7	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Debb & McClellan 2021	3	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Duzenci et al. 2023	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Ergen et al. 2021	8	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
Ghaffr et al. 2018	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Gratian et al. 2018	7	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Jadhav et al. 2022	7	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Kalhoro et al. 2022	4	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Klein & Zwilling 2023	5	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
Klimburg-Witjes & Wentland 2021	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
Lahcen et al. 2020	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
López-Aguilar & Solanas 2021	4	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Mancuso et al. 2014	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Marin et al. 2023	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
McEvoy & Kowalski 2019	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Nair & Achary 2023	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Neigel et al. 2020	4	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Pollini et al. 2023	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Shepherd & Archibald 2017	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Torten et al. 2018	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Trang & Nastjuk 2021	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Upadhyay et al. 2021	4	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Williams et al. 2018	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Xu et al. 2023	3	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Egelman et al. 2016	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 3 SLR Sources and Concepts

Figure 3 above describes the sources and corresponding concepts covered in the 31 analysed studies.

3.1 The Weakest Link

The notion that the human factor is the weakest link in cybersecurity is a recurrent theme in the reviewed literature, with various perspectives considered. Debb and McClellan [17] discuss a widespread assumption that the human is conceptualised as the weakest link in maintaining

cybersecurity across numerous sectors. Furthermore, Klimburg-Witjes and Wentland [18] state that while both technology and humans are considered risk vectors in cyberphysical systems, human susceptibility to errors is a common narrative. During their interviews with cybersecurity professionals, an overwhelming sentiment was prevalent: humans are categorically seen as the weakest link.

Our review found that this sentiment was echoed in seven studies [5], [12], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23] However, the perception that the human element of cybersecurity is only a "part of the problem" has changed to viewing humans as a possible "part of the solution" in three studies [18], [24], [25]. Ergen, Ünal and Saygili [25] interviewed a pool of eight cybersecurity professionals across different sectors; whilst most participants in the study agreed that humans are the weakest link in cybersecurity, there was disagreement. In particular, it was argued that a well-trained human may be able to enhance technical systems, and that "naming [a] human as the weakest link in the chain would affect their risk perceptions negatively". Klimburg-Witjes and Wentland [18] discuss the perception of a "deficient use", lacking the ability to comprehend the complexities of cyberphysical systems. This narrative can be reductive, overlooking the valuable contributions of laypeople, and minimising the possible benefits of continued education. Although human error can undoubtedly contribute to cybersecurity vulnerabilities, different points of view are emerging.

3.2 User-centric Threats

Cyber-attacks can be executed through two approaches: system-centric and user-centric. The former involves exploiting vulnerabilities in a system, computer, or network, while the latter leverages user negligence or errors as a potential avenue for an attack [26].

In this study, various user-centric threats are discussed. Figure 4 illustrates the density of codes related to threat types. The review found that the most discussed threats include social engineering, phishing (including spear-phishing), and insider threats.

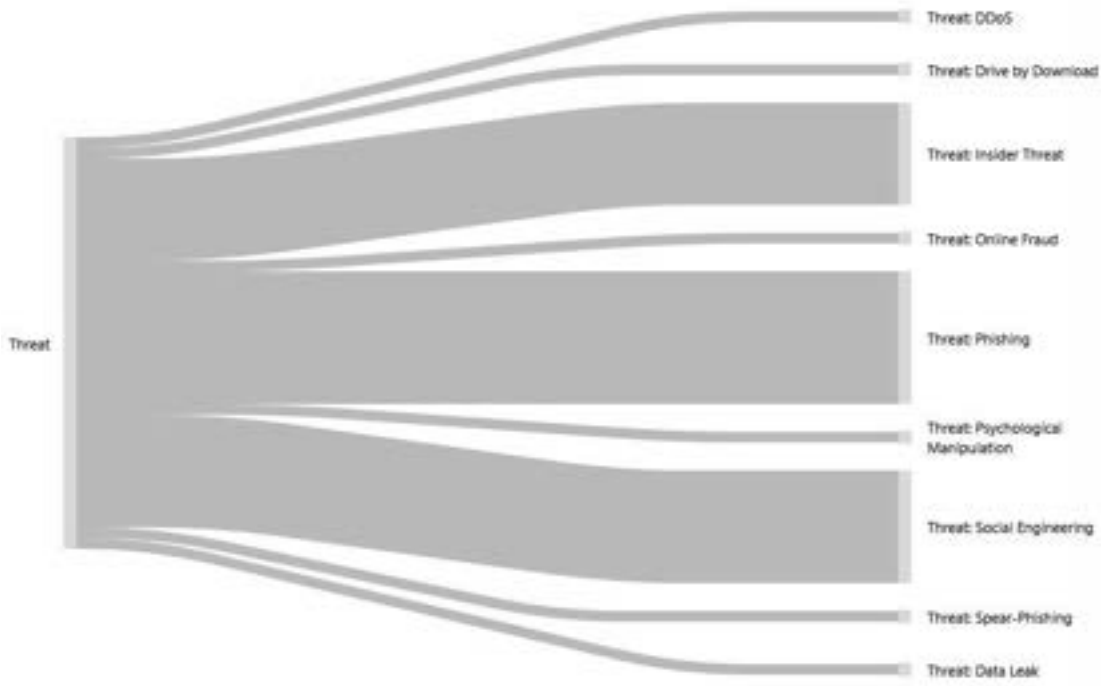

Figure 4 Threat Vectors

Social engineering encompasses techniques aimed at manipulating individuals into revealing confidential information, often through emotional or psychological tactics [27]. A common

form of social engineering is phishing, which involves deceptive websites, emails, or images designed to extract personal data from victims [28]. Insider threats, another significant risk, may be either malicious or unintentional. Malicious Insider Threats (MITs) involve individuals with authorised access who intentionally misuse sensitive information to harm the organisation. In contrast, Non-Malicious Insider Threats arise from carelessness or accidental actions that compromise security [5]. These user-focused threats exploit the human element of cybersecurity. The next sections explore the factors that influence vulnerability to such threats.

3.3 Research Questions 1-2

> *"What cybersecurity behaviours do employees exhibit within an organisational structure? How do these behaviours contribute to the cybersecurity posture of an organisation?"*

The balance between viewing employees as great assets to an organisation, while also being perceived as one of their biggest potential threats to cybersecurity, is precarious [19]. An individual's behaviour, attitude, and personality have been linked to their cybersecurity behaviours and intentions [12].

3.3.1 Personality Traits

The Big Five personality traits, or Five-Factor Model (FFM), are a widely used framework for describing individual differences in thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. The five dimensions include openness (intellectual curiosity), conscientiousness (organisation and dependability), extraversion (sociability and energy), agreeableness (cooperativeness), and neuroticism (emotional instability) [29], [30].

Six studies in this review explore the relationship between FFM traits and cybersecurity behaviours [12], [19], [20], [31], [32], [33]. Alotaibi, Furnell, and Clarke [19] used the Big Five Inventory to examine behaviours such as clicking email links, updating antivirus software, and deleting suspicious messages, concluding that personality traits influence cybersecurity risk. Gratian et al. [12] found strong links between neuroticism and phishing susceptibility, and noted associations between openness or extraversion and weaker privacy settings. Kalhoro et al. [20] reported positive cybersecurity behaviours among individuals high in conscientiousness and agreeableness.

López-Aguilar and Solanas [31] focused on neuroticism, noting mixed findings: while one study found high neuroticism increased phishing risk, another showed a decrease in online social network contexts. They also observed that men with high extraversion and neuroticism, and low agreeableness and conscientiousness, were more vulnerable to virtual offences.

Marin et al. [32] found conscientious individuals more likely to follow organisational security policies, whereas those low in conscientiousness and agreeableness were less compliant. Similarly, Upadhyay et al. [33] reported that extraversion and conscientiousness were linked to better device security, and extraversion and agreeableness to proactive cybersecurity awareness, supporting findings by Gratian et al. [12].

3.3.2 Risk-Taking Behaviour

Risk-taking behaviour is often listed as one of the root causes of cybersecurity threats. These behaviours affect numerous areas, such as phishing susceptibility, proactive cybersecurity behaviours, password management, and keeping software updated [34]. The review found that risk-taking behaviours are discussed in seven articles [12], [13], [20], [25], [34], [35], [36].

There are five dimensions of risk-taking: ethical, financial, health or safety, recreational and social [12]. Risk-taking is a measure of risk attitude that shapes decision-making in relation to risky behaviour, in any of the five dimensions; this can be measured using the Domain Specific

Risk-Taking (DOSPERT) inventory [37]. The instrument is presented as a 30-item assessment with five subscales. It uses a seven-point Likert scale ranging from “very unlikely” to “very likely” to determine risk-taking tendencies [12].

Both Gratian et al. [12] and Egelman, Harbach and Peer [36] indicate that risk-taking is a significant predictor of cybersecurity behaviours; willingness to take safety risks is inversely correlated with proactive cybersecurity behaviours. Furthermore, users who are averse to risk have a much lower incidence of phishing susceptibility [38]. These factors indicate a link between risk-taking behaviours and cybersecurity behaviours. Jadha, Haggag and Haggag [13], Ergen, Ünal and Saygili [25] and Abroshan et al. [35] agree with these points.

Kalhoro et al. [20] state that risk-based decision-making can be associated with optimism bias. Individuals often think that they are not in danger and that good things should occur; they may be optimistic that the probability of adverse effects happening to them will be very low. This can increase the incidence of risk-taking behaviours, subsequently influencing cybersecurity vulnerability.

3.3.3 Decision-making Styles

Decision-making is a cognitive process influenced by a person’s knowledge, experience, available information, and skills [5]. As individuals perceive and interpret data differently, their decisions also vary [39]. The General Decision-Making Style Inventory (GDMS), developed by Scott and Bruce in 1996 [40], categorises decision-making into five styles: avoidant (delaying decisions), intuitive (instinct-driven), spontaneous (quick decisions), dependent (seeking external input), and rational (logic-based). The GDMS consists of 25 Likert-scale questions across five subscales.

Six sources in this review explore how decision-making styles influence cybersecurity behaviour [5], [12], [13], [35], [39], [41]. Duzenci, Kitapci, and Gok [39], using Harren’s topology [42], found that rational decision-makers showed higher cybersecurity compliance, while intuitive and dependent decision-makers demonstrated lower awareness.

Abroshan et al. [35] used GDMS to study phishing susceptibility. While no significant link was found for early-stage phishing (e.g., opening an email), decision-making styles appeared more influential at later stages (e.g., clicking links). Limitations in the study may explain inconsistencies with other findings. Collier et al. [5] offer a broader view, examining how moral, ethical, and cultural factors shape security decisions. They question whether culture can be reliably measured or generalised in this context.

Gratian et al. [12] and Egelman, Harbach, and Peer [41] applied GDMS to analyse cybersecurity behaviour. Both noted a strong link between rational decision-making and secure device practices, though they differed on password generation: Gratian et al. found avoidant styles most correlated, while Egelman et al. identified both rational and avoidant styles. Jadhav, Haggag, and Haggag [13] used these findings to propose personalised training based on behavioural factors, including decision-making.

3.3.4 Demographic Factors

Differences in demographic factors such as education, gender, and age can directly or indirectly affect cybersecurity behaviour.

3.3.4.1 Age

Seven studies discuss the correlation between age and cybersecurity behaviours [12], [13], [22], [25], [33], [35], [43]. Ergen, Ünal and Saygili [25] indicate that people aged 30-65 tend to have greater awareness of cybersecurity compared to people aged 18-29. The 18-29 age group is correlated with higher phishing susceptibility; this is echoed by Gratian et al. [12] and Ergen, Ünal and Saygili [25]. Jadhav, Haggag and Haggag [13] and Upadhyay, Singh and Singh

[33] indicate that this age range is rather 18-25. Jadhav, Haggag and Haggag [13] attribute the vulnerability of younger age groups to the larger online footprint that younger people tend to have on social media; the frequency of interaction with cyber systems also increases the likelihood of being targeted by a certain threat. However, Upadhyay, Singh and Singh [33] further state that older age groups tend to be less efficient in Internet security than their younger counterparts.

Neigel et al. [22] suggested that as people get older, their knowledge of cyber hygiene increases. They found that older individuals had a more positive attitude toward cyber hygiene and were more likely to participate in activities related to it. Xu, Singh and Rajivan [43] investigated personalised persuasion in spear-phishing attacks, but did not find that age had a significant impact on spear-phishing performance. Furthermore, Abroshan et al. [35] indicates that age did not have any direct association with clicking on a phishing link.

3.3.4.2 Gender

Twelve sources examine the relationship between gender and cybersecurity behaviours [12], [13], [17], [19], [20], [22], [25], [28], [31], [33], [35], [43].

Abroshan et al. [35] found that gender may indirectly influence susceptibility to phishing due to disparities in technical knowledge and training, which can vary culturally. Alotaibi, Furnell and Clarke [19] reported that most insider incidents involved male employees. Alsharif, Mishra and AlShehri [28] identified gender-based differences in the adoption of cybersecurity measures such as two-factor authentication, anti-spam tools, and phishing awareness.

Several studies indicate that women tend to score lower than men in areas such as password generation, proactive awareness, and overall cybersecurity self-efficacy [12], [13], [17], [20], [25]. Jadhav, Haggag and Haggag [13] found significant gender differences in self-efficacy, experience, and computer skills, suggesting the need for gender-specific interventions. López-Aguilar and Solanas [31] linked higher neuroticism scores (more correlated to women) to increased phishing susceptibility.

Conversely, Neigel et al. [22] found that women exhibited greater knowledge and engagement with cyber hygiene practices than men. Similarly, Xu, Singh and Rajivan [43] and Upadhyay, Singh and Singh [33] reported no significant gender-based differences in spear-phishing susceptibility or intentions toward secure online behaviour.

3.3.4.3 Socio-Economic Factors

Bolpagni [44] argues that the human development index, the GDP, and the level of democracy and peace play a role in the prevalence of cyber risk. The results of the analysis suggest that human development is a major factor in reducing cyber risk. It is likely that a stronger economy will lead to the adoption of more advanced technologies, thus reducing the chances of exploiting vulnerabilities. Furthermore, a good education system can be expected to promote skill development and better policies. According to Alotaibi, Furnell and Clarke [19], organisational culture and regional or national culture should be considered when studying insider threats, as these can significantly influence the effectiveness of information security and behaviour. Jadhav, Haggag and Haggag [13] recommend specific cyber-awareness required, informed by cultural background, depending on regions such as America, Europe, Asia or Africa.

3.3.5 Perceived Threat, Self-Efficacy and Protection Motivation Theory (PMT)

Seven sources in this review discuss Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) and the role of self-efficacy in response to perceived cybersecurity threats [17], [21], [23], [25], [32], [39], [45].

PMT is a widely used framework for explaining why individuals engage in protective behaviours [46]. It posits that behavioural intentions are shaped by two key components: threat appraisal

(how severe and likely a threat is perceived to be) and coping appraisal (how confident individuals feel in managing the threat, or self-efficacy) and what costs are associated with doing so. Prior experience and knowledge also influence these appraisals [47]. Security self-efficacy refers to one's belief in their ability to safeguard personal information against cyber threats [48]. PMT has been applied to understand risky cybersecurity behaviours, even when users are aware of potential consequences [39].

Duzenci, Kitapci, and Gok [39] argue that PMT is applicable in cybersecurity contexts, especially given the growing digital exposure through personal devices and smart technologies. They found that perceived vulnerability, severity, and self-efficacy varied with decision-making styles and influenced cybersecurity compliance.

Debb and McClellan [17] identified correlations between self-efficacy, past experiences, perceived threat, peer behaviour, and vulnerability to cyber risks. Ergen, Ünal, and Saygili [25] found that nearly all PMT factors influenced employees' willingness to follow cybersecurity policies. Klein and Zwilling [21] showed that awareness of cyber threats increased users' motivation to learn protective behaviours.

Marin et al. [32] found a strong link between self-efficacy and phishing reporting intentions, which greatly benefits organisational defence. Torten, Reaiche, and Boyle [23] showed that all five PMT components (perceived severity, vulnerability, self-efficacy, response efficacy, and response cost) except perceived vulnerability, significantly predicted secure desktop behaviours. Williams, Hinds, and Joinson [45] suggest enhancing self-efficacy in online security through features like warnings, peer verification, and expert feedback. These could help users identify phishing attempts, build confidence, and reduce reliance on technical systems alone.

3.3.6 Environmental Stressors

Stress-inducing stimuli, or stressors, can be classified as short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic) [49]. Five sources have discussed the impact of these stressors on cybersecurity behaviour in this review [20], [34], [49], [50], [51].

Abroshan et al. [34] state that stress and anxiety are correlated with increased susceptibility to phishing. They recommend psychological methods to address these feelings, such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). This therapeutic approach can be used to treat stress and anxiety, to address the root cause of certain cybersecurity behaviours. Baluta et al. [50] state that stress is a highly variable factor, which can change over time according to circumstances. Kalhoro et al. [20] state that people who experience emotional distress may be more likely to act recklessly when it comes to cybersecurity. Furthermore, they state that a high neuroticism score implies that a person is more likely to have irrational thoughts, lack control over their impulses, and struggle to manage stress, linking back to the FFM. Maalem Lahcen et al. [51] indicate that insider threats were strongly correlated with stressful events, while Trang and Nastjuk [49] indicate that stress induced by time constraints negatively affected non-compliance with policies significantly.

3.4 Research Question 3

> *"How can businesses or employers manage the human element of cybersecurity risk successfully, at all organisational levels?"*

Given that the human element of cybersecurity is multifaceted, another question remains: How can businesses or employers manage the human element of cybersecurity risk successfully, at all organisational levels? Within this paper, the evidence indicates that holistic, sociotechnical solutions must be investigated, as well as tailored awareness training.

3.4.1 Policy

Organisational Cybersecurity Policy is a formally defined document that specifies user behaviour deemed acceptable and unacceptable, which acts as a baseline statement on which cybersecurity tasks should be carried out by employees [19]. In this review, authors Bolpagni [44], Ghafir et al. [52] and Klein and Zwilling [21] stress the importance of robust and easily understood cybersecurity policies.

In addition, Alotaibi, Furnell and Clarke [19] report a positive correlation between organisational security and employees' understanding of security policies. They highlight a general lack of awareness among end users regarding the importance of information security and associated organisational requirements. Non-compliance is categorised into three behaviours: malicious (intentional harm), negligent (intentional policy violation without intent to harm), and unaware (lack of knowledge or understanding). Many organisations fail to regularly review and update their security policies, and designing effective policies that align with strategic goals can be resource-intensive. Regular awareness training and education are essential for policy effectiveness; without them, such policies are likely to fail.

Collier et al. [5] point out that certain issues can lead to policy noncompliance. If the policies are too complicated or too strict, people will try to find a way to bypass them, while appearing to be compliant. Additionally, when people do not have a robust justification for the rules and regulations they are expected to follow, they are less likely to adhere to them or may not follow them at all.

Klimburg-Witjes and Wentland [18] indicate that experts from various fields and policy areas define and evaluate what constitutes the correct knowledge and practice of IT security. Consequently, their objective is to identify, "diagnose," and "solve" problematic cases at an organisational level. Furthermore, the employee is not only seen as a problem, but is also prevented from having any control over security practices, thus limiting their work life. They argue that it appears that large organisations are increasingly consolidating their decision-making processes while transferring the repercussions to their employees. They suggest that companies and policymakers create and nurture a culture of cybersecurity and accountability to try to address these problems.

Both Zimmermann and Renaud [4] and Pollini et al. [24] argue that cybersecurity approaches have taken a holistic sociotechnical system perspective, which includes governance and policy-making considerations, user-centred issues that focus on customers and hackers, and external conditions such as physical, technological, and economic factors. The concept of sociotechnical approaches and holism in addressing the human factor of cybersecurity is discussed in more detail in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**.

3.4.2 Awareness Training

Awareness training is widely recommended to counter human-targeted threats in sociotechnical systems, yet its implementation faces challenges. Common issues include one-size-fits-all approaches, information overload, poor organisation, lack of follow-up, and insufficient context [17], [24], [52], [54]. While awareness programmes are known to improve knowledge and behaviour, poorly designed training can lead to disengagement or a false sense of competence.

Effective training should be interactive, creative, and scenario-based, incorporating tools like gamification or AR/VR to boost engagement and retention [24]. Overly frequent training can result in employee resistance; hence, personalised approaches using risk scores, based on human factors such as risk tolerance, gender, age, and emotion, are more effective [11], [33].

Long-term success also depends on integrating awareness into daily routines and adjusting content for hybrid or remote work environments [20], [52]. Incentive programmes can

reinforce good cybersecurity behaviour by rewarding diligence and encouraging peer learning [31].

Additional support tools, such as decision aids (e.g., email banners), emotional feedback mechanisms [55], and threat-based message filtering [56] can enhance training effectiveness by drawing immediate attention to potential risks. A tailored, engaging, and integrated awareness training strategy, which is supported by technical tools and organisational culture, offers the best chance to improve cybersecurity behaviour.

3.4.3 Holism and Sociotechnical Systems

Our review identified seven sources that emphasise the importance of a holistic, sociotechnical approach to cybersecurity [5], [24], [25], [44], [51], [53], [54]. Pollini et al. [24] highlight the overreliance on technical solutions (e.g., firewalls, antivirus) and argue that combating cyberattacks requires addressing both technical and human factors.

Zimmermann and Renaud [4] propose "Cybersecurity, Differently," an approach that views humans as integral to the solution rather than the problem. Instead of assigning blame to individuals for breaches (e.g., phishing attacks), they advocate for designing secure sociotechnical systems (STS) that are user-friendly and resilient. This includes investing in awareness and training initiatives.

Mcevoy and Kowalski [54] critique the narrow focus on compliance and training, proposing a more integrated method using sociotechnical and human factor analyses to identify weaknesses in organisational practices. Bolpagni [44] supports this, noting that a sociotechnical framework best captures the complex interplay between human, technical, and organisational elements, which they used to develop a composite index. Collier et al. [5] and Ghafir et al. [52] also underscore the need to embed human factors into training and everyday practice to foster a strong cybersecurity mindset and create more resilient systems.

4 DISCUSSION

A common cliché in cybersecurity is the notion that the human is the "weakest link" in the chain [17], [55]. Specific cyber-attacks target human behaviours, while inattention, naïveté, and lack of awareness can provide a foothold for various threats. User-centric threats, such as phishing, social engineering, and insider threats, pose financial and reputational damage for organisations [26]. The increasing frequency, severity, and public visibility of cyberattacks contribute to the demand for robust, holistic cybersecurity strategy. The purpose of this literature review was threefold. First, it aimed to determine the cybersecurity behaviours employees exhibit, as well as the underlying motivations. Second, it aimed to investigate the effects these behaviours have on an organisation's cybersecurity posture. The connection between specific behaviours and damaging cybersecurity practises was investigated. Thirdly, organisational approaches to mitigate potential negative impacts of the human element of cybersecurity were explored.

The first two review questions can be discussed in tandem. Cybersecurity behaviours are shaped by individual traits and contextual factors. Many sources link behaviours to personality, particularly the Big Five traits, risk-taking tendencies, and decision-making styles [12], [13], [20], [25], [34], [35], [36]. These are often measured through subjective tools like DOSPERT and GDMS, though such methods risk bias due to convenience [9].

Demographics also matter. Individuals aged 30–65 tend to show greater cyber awareness than their younger counterparts [12], [13], [25], while gender effects remain inconsistent. Some studies found that women score higher in hygiene awareness and participation [22], but lower in password creation and self-education [12], [20]. Self-efficacy gaps between genders suggest that tailored training may be beneficial [13], [17], [31], though not all studies agree on gender

significance [33], [43]. Socioeconomic background also influences training needs [13], [19], [44].

Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) and self-efficacy correlate strongly with secure behaviour [17], [21], [23], [25], [32], [39], [45]. Key factors include perceived severity, vulnerability, skills, and peer influence. High stress and workload negatively impact compliance and decision-making [20], [34], [49], [50], [51], with mindfulness and CBT recommended to reduce risk [35], [55].

Our second review question aims to determine actionable interventions that organisations can use to manage the complex human element. As we have established, these behaviours are multifaceted; personality dimensions, risk-taking tendencies, decision-making styles, demographic factors, perceived threat and protection motivation, and environmental stressors all contribute to cybersecurity behaviours. Addressing human risk requires multilayered strategies. Clear, understandable cybersecurity policies are foundational [19], [21], [44], [52], but overly strict or poorly justified policies can drive non-compliance [5]. Involving employees in policy formation may enhance accountability and adherence [18].

Awareness training, though widely used, often suffers from a generic design and low engagement [19], [52]. More effective approaches include interactive, scenario-based modules [25], routine integration [52], and personalised training based on risk profiling [35]. Training should consider demographic, cultural, and emotional factors [13], and may be supported by incentive schemes that reward good practices [32]. Technical augmentations like emotional feedback and automated threat recognition can further enhance training impact [56], [57]. Ultimately, cybersecurity demands a sociotechnical, holistic approach [5], [24], [25], [44], [51], [52], [54]. Technical defences alone are insufficient; successful strategies integrate human behaviour, culture, and system design. Several studies advocate moving beyond blaming human error to addressing system-level factors that shape user decisions [4], [5].

4.1 Limitations of this Review

Our review presents a structured and comprehensive analysis of the literature, guided by defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to minimise bias and ensure balanced coverage. However, several limitations should be acknowledged.

Quantifying human behaviour remains challenging. Many studies on risk behaviour, decision-making styles, personality traits, demographic factors, and Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) rely on self-reported data, which may introduce bias. Nonresponse in surveys further threatens external validity. Additionally, while some sources consider cultural factors, regional biases, such as those in Abroshan et al. [35] and Jadhav, Haggag and Haggag [13] , may affect generalisability. Cultural perceptions of cybersecurity vary widely, and broader representation is needed to account for these differences. Lastly, although individual-level factors are well explored, organisational culture, leadership, and systemic influences receive comparatively less attention.

5 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

As cybersecurity becomes an increasing threat, organisations grapple with navigating human behaviour and its intersection with cybersecurity. Employee behaviour can greatly affect policy compliance, influencing an organisation's cybersecurity posture. Despite considerable investments in technical solutions, the human element remains an essential, yet nebulous, part of cybersecurity. This review highlights that user behaviour is undeniably critical to effective cyber defence.

The *way* in which people interact with cybersecurity systems is informed by multiple elements: personality dimensions, risk-taking tendencies, decision-making styles, demographic factors,

perceived threat and protection motivation, and environmental stressors. Attempting to create policies that disregard these aspects leads to eventual noncompliance and weakens the organisation's cybersecurity posture. A socio-technical approach is the best way to address the human element. This approach considers cybersecurity as a system made up of interconnected hardware, software, people, and communities. It also recognises that the human element is not the weakest link in cybersecurity, but rather a part of the solution. To address the human element of cybersecurity, organisations must invest in cybersecurity training and awareness programmes. They also need to design systems that are easier for humans to use and harder for attackers to exploit.

The existing literature on the relationship between personality traits, demographics, and cybersecurity behaviours is fragmented, with inconsistent findings and limited practical application. While this review found relative consensus on the influence of decision-making styles and the quantification of risk-taking behaviours, greater variability exists in studies examining demographic factors and personality traits. Notably, gender-related findings show the most divergence. Future research should aim to use larger, more representative samples to improve the reliability and generalisability of conclusions regarding the impact of personality traits on cybersecurity behaviour. Second, the synthesised findings provide a strong foundation for developing integrated conceptual frameworks that model the interactions between personality dimensions, risk-taking tendencies, decision-making styles, and environmental factors in shaping cybersecurity behaviours. Third, these theoretical developments should be empirically tested within specific Industrial Engineering contexts, such as manufacturing control systems, supply chain cybersecurity, and operational technology environments, where human-system interactions are critical to both productivity and security outcomes.

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ASSESSMENT OF ORGANISATIONAL READINESS FOR ADOPTING PREDICTIVE MAINTENANCE PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PLATINUM PROCESSING INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the readiness of the South African platinum processing industry to adopt predictive maintenance strategies. It compares current capabilities against the architectural components and functionalities necessary for successful implementation. The maturity levels of Operational Planning, Work Management, Cyber-Physical Systems, Internet of Things, Internet of Service, and Data Management measure adoption readiness. Data from 34 participants representing two platinum group elements concentrator plants reveal that, although architectural components exist, overall readiness is medium, and functionality is low due to the inadequate integration of predictive maintenance into legacy systems. Significant gaps include resourcing and planning within Work Management systems and substandard use of data for prognostics in Data Management and the Internet of Service. These findings underscore the industry's need to improve legacy systems integration and data utilisation to adopt predictive maintenance effectively, offering critical insights for advancing South Africa's platinum processing sector.

Keywords: Cyber-Physical Systems, Internet of Things, Internet of Service, Operational Planning, Work Management

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1 INTRODUCTION

The South African Platinum Group Elements (PGE) processing industry is a key player in the global market, with organisations controlling the entire mine-to-market process value chain [1]. The substantial presence of engineering assets and equipment in the PGE processing value chain highlights the critical importance of asset reliability and availability for South Africa's long-term PGE production. Under the current hypercompetitive business environment, processing companies need to continuously increase the utilisation and efficiency of their production processes [2]. The business environment has highlighted maintenance and made its role even more crucial for business success [3]. making maintenance management strategies critical to business strategy. Preventive maintenance strategies are the preferred approaches to processing equipment and assets in the PGE industry. However, equipment failure frequently occurs between the predetermined maintenance intervals, posing a significant challenge to the industry. Critical equipment failure creates unstable production systems, reducing throughputs and product quality [4].

Industry 4.0 modernisation offers industrial operations unique capabilities made possible by Cyber-Physical Systems, Internet of Services, Data Management and the Internet of Things components [5]. Predictive maintenance systems require modularity to integrate into existing infrastructure and operational business models [6]. In the context of Mining 4.0, the components are collaboratively used to create a system that collects, exchanges, stores and analyses real-time equipment data into information used to make maintenance decisions. The primary objective of adopting predictive maintenance is to provide equipment owners with critical real-time information on the equipment's health and performance. Equipment owners can make statistical data-based decisions with readily available historical, real-time and prognostic data and information. Predictive maintenance offers the opportunity to monitor the health of operating equipment, progressively predicting the optimal service time before failure. The real-time health monitoring and the remaining useful life predictions allow maintenance to be planned in time to resource and execute work with minimum impact on productivity and process efficiency.

Mining process operations in the South African platinum industry continue to rely heavily on preventative maintenance strategies, typically executed through costly scheduled plant shutdowns. Although such shutdowns are designed to prevent unplanned breakdowns, equipment failures frequently occur between these predetermined intervals. As a result, organisations still depend extensively on corrective maintenance to restore equipment functionality, creating inefficiencies and production losses. This approach has been entrenched for many years, often without a systematic evaluation of the underlying drivers of shutdown maintenance. The persistence of these limitations highlights a pressing need to move beyond traditional maintenance practices towards predictive maintenance strategies. By leveraging real-time data and remaining useful life estimations, predictive maintenance has the potential to address the shortcomings of current approaches and improve asset availability, reliability, and overall operational performance.

This study evaluates the readiness of the South African platinum processing industry to adopt and exploit predictive maintenance, a need that is becoming increasingly urgent. The study compares current capabilities against the architectural components and functionalities necessary for successful implementation.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Background of the Platinum Group Elements industry

Platinum group elements (PGEs) are a valuable resource for various applications, including automotive catalytic converters, hydrogen fuel cells, jewellery, food and medical technology.

PGEs include platinum, palladium, rhodium, ruthenium, iridium, and osmium. The mineral-bearing ore is mined underground and in open-pit mining operations. The world PGE reserves estimate approximately 14kt in relatively few areas, with South Africa accounting 86% of the world's reserves [7]. PGE-bearing ores in South Africa are found in the Bushveld Complex, containing gold, considered a by-product with the six PGEs [8]. The primary production of South Africa contributes over 58% of the world's newly mined PGEs and over 80% of Platinum [1]. The mined ore is concentrated in metallurgical processing plants, including concentrators, smelters and refineries. Processing the volume of mined ore to the final refined PGE product requires considerable engineering assets and equipment capacity.

2.2 Business Operating Models

Until now, growing business and scientific interest have focused on the technical implications of predictive maintenance. However, the managerial implications have received little attention, even though they are significant barriers to adopting predictive maintenance solutions [9]. Extracting business insights and knowledge from the vast amounts of data from the intense employment of IoT technology and cyber-physical systems across the industrial value chain is arguably a significant technical challenge for predictive maintenance. Other technical implications are listed below [10].

- There is a lack of widely accepted standard solutions and the inability of current cybersecurity technologies to guarantee complete effectiveness in corporate data protection.
- The availability of sufficient and appropriate data, both real-time and historical.
- The integration of predictive maintenance solutions into legacy systems and expert knowledge modelling.

2.2.1 Operational Planning

Operational planning plays a significant role in implementing business strategies by translating strategic plans into functional activities [11]. Operational planning is required to specify the confidence of meeting business expectations by translating strategic plans into functional activities. It ties data and specifications from operations directly to business strategies at an organisational level.

Mateljak & Mihanović [12] measure the operational planning maturity level by planning raw materials, work, tools, equipment capacities and drafting and releasing various records and performance terms. Efficient operational planning focuses on preparatory tasks that lead to effective production processes capable of reaching the set operational key performance indicators (KPIs).

2.2.2 Business Performance

To achieve world-class performance, more and more companies are replacing their reactive firefighting maintenance strategies with proactive ones [13]. This includes all financial considerations for execution within the budgetary limits. The full potential of predictive maintenance practices can be measured using the multi-dimensional performance measurement model, the Balanced Scorecard (BSC), developed by Kaplan and Norton [14]. Van Looy and Shafagatova [15] express the need for organisations and scholars to measure the performance of business processes more holistically, considering the implications for different target groups. The BSC takes a four-dimensional approach to organisational performance: Financial performance, Customer performance, Internal business process performance and learning and growth performance. The BSC translates the organisational business strategy into operational performance indicators and objectives targeted at each dimension of performance.

Depending on use cases, predictive maintenance shows significant benefits, such as increased machine uptime, reduced maintenance hours and material used, more stable machine outputs, reduced lead times, and forced outages [16].

2.3 Predictive Maintenance

Sang et al. [17] categorise the maintenance management approaches into run-to-failure, preventive maintenance, condition-based maintenance and predictive maintenance. The complexity and efficiency increase with predictive maintenance, ranking as the most efficient yet complex.

Predictive maintenance practices improve production by optimising condition-based maintenance practices. When maintenance is predictive, it ensures that each part is checked and examined when it is most likely to need attention, rather than adhering to an arbitrary schedule that allocates equal time to every part. Predictive maintenance is carried out by continuously measuring equipment parameters that assist in monitoring the health of operating equipment, progressively predicting the optimal service time before failure.

The real-time health monitoring and the remaining useful life predictions allow maintenance to be planned in time to resource and execute work within the smallest amount of planned equipment downtime. Failure prediction also protects equipment from further damage, reducing the cost of auxiliary spares. In summary, the advantages of predictive maintenance include;

- High equipment utilisation and process production - equipment that requires maintenance remains in service and only shuts down for service before imminent failure [18].
- Reduction in high maintenance costs related to catastrophic failure damage to equipment. Including auxiliary equipment [19].
- Increasing equipment availability and reliability, increasing production operating time, and extending equipment life [20].
- Safe operation of equipment [21].

2.4 Maintenance Management Effectiveness

By implementing Predictive Maintenance strategies and technologies, processing companies gain a significant competitive advantage [20]. Kumar Mishra and Mahapatra [19] summarise the industry-observed distinctions between corrective, preventative and predictive maintenance strategies by the maintenance nature, basic philosophy, applications, advantages and disadvantages. The key takeaway is the distinct similarity between preventative and predictive maintenance strategies. They are both based on a common goal of repairing or replacing equipment before failure. The critical difference is the nature and basic philosophy of achieving this goal; preventative maintenance is time-based as opposed to condition-based predictive maintenance, yielding an estimated 8-12% cost savings.

2.4.1 Operational Maintenance Work Management

The primary goal of the maintenance work management process is to establish a clear link between maintenance activities and their outcomes to assist the company in meeting its strategic objectives [3]. There is frequently sufficient discretion within these parameters to effectively manage work scope and timing to deliver all performance targets (effectiveness, sustainability, and efficiency).

The maintenance work management process consists of task identification, work order requests, maintenance planning, scheduling and execution management (assigning and completing the work order task), and analysis and improvement [22]. Work orders are

generated to assist maintenance managers in organising, assigning, prioritising, tracking, and completing critical maintenance tasks. Work orders are essential to an organisation's maintenance operations, and each maintenance work order has a lifecycle that includes three major phases: creation, completion, and recording.

Maintenance work management enables operations to plan, manage and execute work efficiently. By predicting the failure of a specific equipment component, adequate work resourcing can take place before a failure occurs, allowing for shorter downtimes on equipment. Mining organisations with complex maintenance systems use a computerised maintenance management system (CMMS). CMMS systems automate most logistical functions performed by maintenance staff and management. Typical CMMS functions may include work order generation and tracking by equipment/component, tracking of scheduled and unscheduled maintenance activities, and complete parts and materials inventory control with automated reorder capabilities. One of the most significant advantages of the CMMS is eliminating paperwork and manual tracking activities. It should be noted that a CMMS's functionality is defined by its ability to collect and store information in an easily accessible format.

2.5 Predictive Maintenance Framework

Wang [6] defines Industry 4.0 as a collective term for technologies and concepts of value chain organisations based on the technological concepts of Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS), the Internet of Things (IoT), the Internet of Service (IoS), and Data management. To have a Smart Mine in the context of Industry 4.0, CPS monitor physical objects and processes to create a virtual copy of the physical world and make decentralised controls and decisions. The Internet of Things and cyber-physical systems communicate and cooperate with humans in real-time. In Data Management and the Internet of Services, internal and cross-organisational services are offered and utilised by participants of the value chain [6].

The modularity and integration of each component are crucial to realising predictive maintenance systems. Processing based on Cyber-Physical Systems and service innovations is two unavoidable trends and challenges for the processing industry. Modular design is a practical approach to reducing production costs and increasing mass customisation and personalisation in industries. Implementing modularisation requires the support of the entire technical system and a comprehensive understanding of modularity in product, service and supply chains [23]. Organisations should be able to transfer data across organisational borders needed to perform business functions, maximising production capacity through collaborative partner interactions.

2.5.1 Cyber-physical systems

Cyber-physical systems are equipped with network-capable sensors, actuators, and intelligent analytics for machine health monitoring and degradation predictions. By incorporating CPS into current industrial practices, today's operations would be transformed into Industry 4.0 facilities with significant economic potential. Lee et al. [24] further proposed a Five-level CPS structure; the architecture provides a step-by-step guideline for developing and deploying a CPS for processing applications, characterised by;

- Identification technologies like RFID tags, which allow unique identification of equipment.
- The physical equipment in the operation is transferred into the virtual environment.
- Storage and analytics have to be provided as a centralised service.

From the perspective of predictive maintenance, the second-generation Data-to-Information Conversions Level attributes are sufficient for a self-aware and self-maintained machine

system, considered a system that can self-assess its health and degradation, and further utilise similar information from other peers for informed maintenance decisions to avoid potential faults [25].

2.5.2 Internet of Things

The task of this module is to select a suitable sensor and optimal data collection strategy to extend the physical world using a variety of sensing, detection, and identification techniques and connect the objects or enable them to interact with each other [26]. Sensors collect raw data from equipment; temperature, humidity, pressure, current, vibration, air quality, and weight are just a few of the popular industrial IoT-enabled sensors used to monitor and collect data in real-time [27].

The data acquisition process transforms the sensor signals into domains that contain the most information on the condition of the equipment. Wireless Data collection networks allow continuous data acquisition, real-time condition-based monitoring, and machine health status. IoT also allows for sensors and equipment to interact and communicate. Practical challenges remain in several areas, such as security and privacy protection, network protocols, standardisation, identity management and trusted architecture [26].

2.5.3 Data Management

The generated digital data stream is saved as a database file on an organisation's local intranet or a secure centralised or remote cloud location. Data from IoT sensors is sent via Wi-Fi to a centralised cloud server or via Cellular networks or Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) technology to remote locations [28]. Generally, there are two steps to deal with the signals from sensors. The first is signal processing, which enhances the signal characteristics and quality through filtering, amplification, data compression, data validation, and de-noising. The other is feature extraction, which extracts features from processed signals characteristic of an incipient failure or fault. Generally, the features can be extracted from three domains: time domain, frequency domain, and time-frequency domain [6].

Techniques for maintenance decision-making can be divided into diagnostics and prognostics classes. Processed signals are transformed into relevant information about the equipment, and the relationship between the collected data and the actual condition is identified, enabling the equipment's failure period to be model-predicted [5]. The most used prognostic tool is determining the equipment's remaining useful life (RUL). Predictive maintenance continuously monitors and predicts the RUL using data-driven models to find the relations between the RUL and the condition of the machine or component [6].

2.5.4 Internet of Services

Although IoT has taken centre stage, the real innovation in processing systems is in the Internet of Services. Operations must consider their business model and integrate how a product becomes a service with a long-term revenue stream. IoS addresses the business standpoint; it represents a set of services that improve the company's ability to do business with customers and suppliers. It is a project philosophy characterised by modularity, separation of concerns, service re-use, and composition from a technological standpoint [28].

An IoS platform is typically used as a front end or a dashboard to present and process equipment health. It depends on communication protocols and standardisation levels, critical to developing a prosperous and resilient solution, whether an organisation builds its IoS system in-house or hires a vendor [27]. The Internet of Services comprises business models, a service infrastructure, services, and participants. Various vendors provide integrated services that provide value-added services that are communicated to end-users and accessed through multiple methods for decision making [6].

2.5.5 Analyse and Improve

Relevant data assists managers with making proficient maintenance decisions. The models for decision support may be partitioned into four categorical models: physical, statistical model, data-driven and hybrid. Given that historical data and information can be easily retrieved, data-driven techniques are exceptionally great for distinguishing the cause of failure and assessing the condition of the equipment. The hybrid methods that combine the data-driven and model-based techniques can effectively evaluate the machine's condition if historical data is not fully available [17].

The critical asset performance measures in the PGE processing industry typically include equipment availability, uptime, and efficiency for the process and equipment.

2.6 Predictive Maintenance Architectural Layers

This section provides an architectural overview of predictive maintenance, including its fundamental components, principles, and significant benefits that drive maintenance effectiveness. According to Jagatheesaperumal et al. [29], intelligent machines and devices in the Industry 4.0 ecosystem fall under five architectural layers of operations;

- The device layer includes the machines, robots, PLC and controllers.
- The edge layer stores the data acquired from the industrial machines through communication protocols, such as Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, loaded onto cloud servers.
- The cyber layer manages the supply chain and handles information from web services. It also engages the networking of machines with trusted services and solutions.
- The data analytics layer runs specific machine learning algorithms and performs cloud analytics on the IoT data.
- The application layer can be enabled with several components, such as a dashboard, user visualisation resources, augmented reality, and chatbots; modularity is critical.

The device layer involves the real-time acquisition of raw sensor data in different domains and ultimately stores data and information from multiple sources in the edge layer. Resourcing, supply chain, peer-to-peer machine monitoring, and information from different IoT or web services are managed in the cyber layer. Data is commonly stored in historian servers and is available for extraction and analysis by in-house or external personnel in the data analytics layer. The data is translated and presented as KPI information in the application layer, ultimately used to monitor and support maintenance decisions.

3 CONCEPTUAL METHOD FRAMEWORK

To fully exploit the potential of predictive maintenance in the context of Industry 4.0, companies need a higher level of maturity in process monitoring, data management, performance measurement and inter-organisational capabilities. Predictive maintenance allows operations to identify potential equipment failures in time to allow maintenance planning to be executed when necessary before failure. The notifications for maintenance planning are generated automatically in the CMMS for oversight and approval from the responsible maintenance manager, with the necessary accountability for decision-making. To achieve optimal maintenance decision-making, a new approach should be in place to integrate multiple data sources from different domains. Production data, machine operational data, and sensor data are all required to analyse and build frameworks for predicting machine failure, reducing downtimes, costs, poor product quality and process inefficiencies [17].

3.1 Framework Introduction

The framework directly links predictive maintenance practices to delivering on business expectations, measured using performance drivers. Internal business processes, learning and growth processes are measured as leading indicators, to best predict outcomes regarding financial, customer, supplier and environmental performance, classified as lagging indicators. The current industry practice characteristics are used to assess predictive maintenance architecture and functionality readiness for adoption.

3.1.1 Capability Matrix and Indicators

Figure 1 overviews the proposed conceptual predictive maintenance framework, which ties the maintenance strategy to business objectives. This is done through tracking and making decisions using the available leading indicators. There are several prerequisites: focusing on the right equipment, gathering a sufficient amount of data, building, testing, validating, and continuously improving a predictive framework [16].

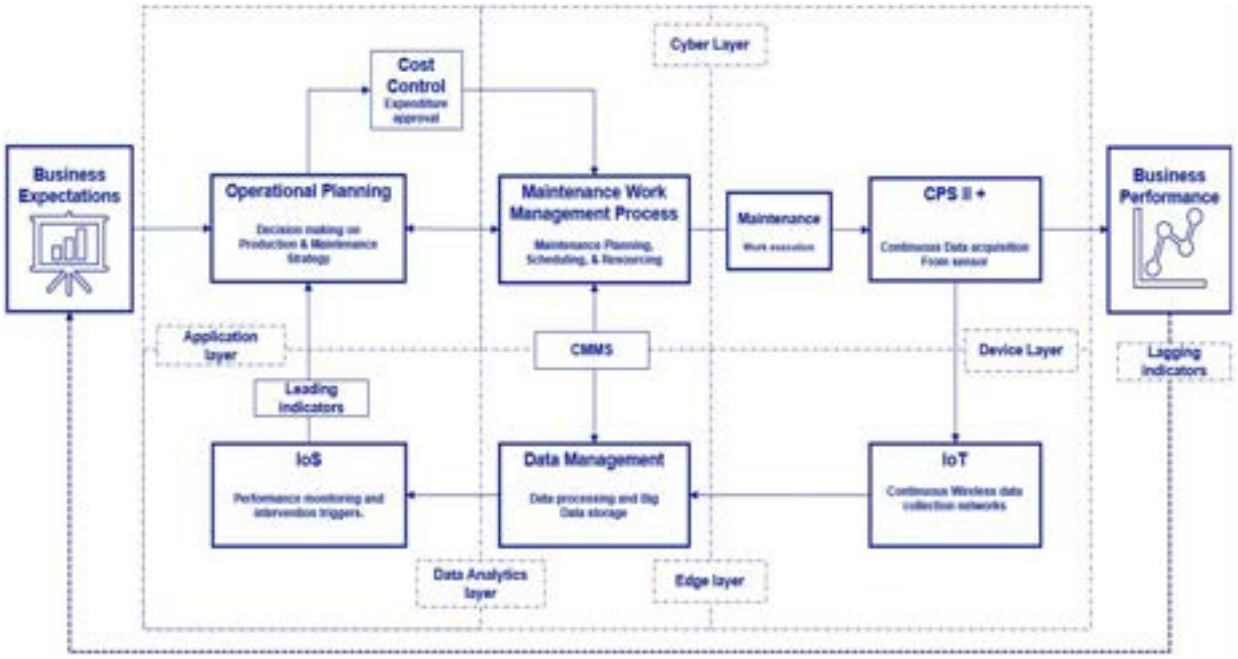

Figure 1: Proposed predictive maintenance management framework.

The architectural layers of predictive maintenance are adopted from the layers of operations in smart industries with the Industry 4.0 framework by Jagatheesaperumal et al. [29]. The architectural layer components were determined using the intelligent predictive maintenance framework by Wang [6]. The two frameworks were used in conjunction to highlight the integration of the operating framework into the intelligent predictive maintenance framework. The architectural layers have been summarised as:

- Device layer: integrating 2nd-level Cyber-physical systems and IoT smart sensors. This layer features error correction actions (optimisation and maintenance work).
- Edge layer: integrating IoT and data management with particular attention to data storage.
- Cyber layer: integrating 2nd-level Cyber-physical systems and work management, including supply chains
- Data Analytics layer: integrating IoS, algorithms, and analytics on the acquired IoT data.

- Application layer: integrating IoS performance dashboards and operational planning decision-making.

The effectiveness of predictive maintenance in Industry 4.0 is highly dependent on integrating predictive maintenance into legacy operational planning and maintenance work management process structures. The organisation's business operating models is used in conjunction with the intelligent predictive Maintenance framework by Wang [6]. The Matrix assesses the current maintenance capability in the South African platinum processing industry. Additionally, the matrix provides an assessment of the readiness of each component. The readiness is measured according to the architectural components' maturity.

To have a Smart Mine in the context of Industry 4.0, CPS monitor physical objects and processes to create a virtual copy of the physical world and make decentralised controls and decisions [6]. This is broken down into the following functional requirements;

- Physical equipment is transferred into the virtual environment
- Retrieve real-time equipment data wirelessly.
- Remaining useful life predictions on equipment.
- A dashboard view of equipment health and performance
- Analyse and improve initiatives.

The functional capabilities are a function of the maturity of the associated architectural components.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A case study design is used to explore the maturity of the architectural components for predictive maintenance. A survey questionnaire is used as a data collection method to acquire the necessary data for analysis. The survey is used to gain structured information and data, with the questions aimed at assessing the operations' maturity according to the conceptual framework discussed in Section 3. The adoption readiness is measured using a 5-point Likert ordinal scale. Frequency analysis and a one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test were used to make deductions and interpretations of the results.

Two platinum processing concentrator plants were selected due to the more extensive equipment footprint of the concentrators compared to downstream operations. According to operational roles, a clustered approach is adopted for the employees involved in maintenance management. The research has scientific relevance in the research body of Mining 4.0. The descriptive teleological objective is used to gain new insight into how reactive and proactive maintenance practices can be successfully transformed into effectively proactive, predictive maintenance practices. The research is categorised under applied research as it tries to solve existing maintenance challenges experienced in the platinum industry with theoretical application techniques in predictive maintenance and Industry 4.0.

5 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Individual Profiles

The survey respondents perform roles interacting with the operational equipment, production, and maintenance management. The information gathered is grouped according to the level of work complexity, giving insights into the availability of tools and systems at each level of work associated with maintenance. Operational management accounts for 41% of the respondents' distribution. The front-line managers in maintenance planning and execution are well represented with a cumulative 47% distribution. The remaining 12% is attributed to the maintenance engineers managing the front-line managers.

5.2 Industry Maintenance Strategies

Predictive maintenance evaluates the adopted maintenance practices by the operations. Most respondents rank preventative maintenance as the most common strategy used in the operation, representing 29% of the total distribution. Breakdown and corrective maintenance represent 26%, Condition-based maintenance 18%, and predictive maintenance represents 1% of the total maintenance strategy distribution.

100% of the respondents agree to practice preventative maintenance in the operations. A one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that the median of 5.00 was significantly different from 3, $Z = 5.09$, $p < .05$. This is consistent with our proposition that the operation conducts periodic cycle maintenance, which is the basic philosophy of preventative maintenance, according to Kumar Mishra and Mahapatra [19].

The data indicates that 47% of respondents perceive a monthly shutdown cycle and 50% on a six-weekly basis. 3% of the respondents cited a 2-monthly shutdown maintenance. The split in responses on the maintenance cycles entered by respondents highlights that the drivers of shutdown maintenance are currently time-based; the results are that shutdowns are conducted on a predetermined schedule without considering the condition of the asset/equipment. This is consistent with Muganyi and Mbohwa [31], highlighting the disconnect between organisational business strategies and the need to conduct shutdowns.

5.3 Descriptive Statistics of Results

5.3.1 Architectural Components

The data indicates that 91% of the respondents agree that the architectural components required for adopting predictive maintenance are present in their operations. A one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed that the median of 4.00 was significantly different from 3.00, $Z = 18.50$, $p < 0.05$. The results support the presence of the architectural layer framework components defined by [29] and the Intelligent Predictive Maintenance system framework by Wang [6].

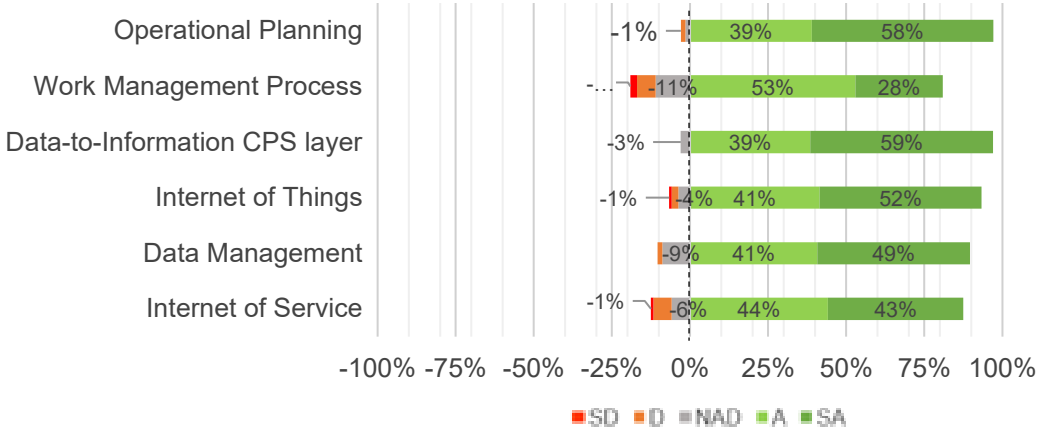

Figure 2: Summary of conceptual predictive maintenance architectural model components in operations

Of the respondents, 97% agreed to conduct operational planning activities, and 98% agreed to the presence of CPS capabilities in the operations. Additionally, 93% agreed to the presence of IoT capabilities. There is an evident variation in respondents' experience with work management, data management and IoS. Although most respondents confirm the capabilities, many remain undecided or disagree relative to other framework components.

5.3.2 Functional Components

The functional requirements of predictive maintenance are highly dependent on the maturity level of the architectural components. The functional requirements integrate predictive maintenance into the operational business framework. Figure 3 shows that 88% of the respondents agree that the functional components required for adopting predictive maintenance are present in their operations. A one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that the median of 4 was significantly different from 3, $Z = 12.69$, $p < 0.05$.

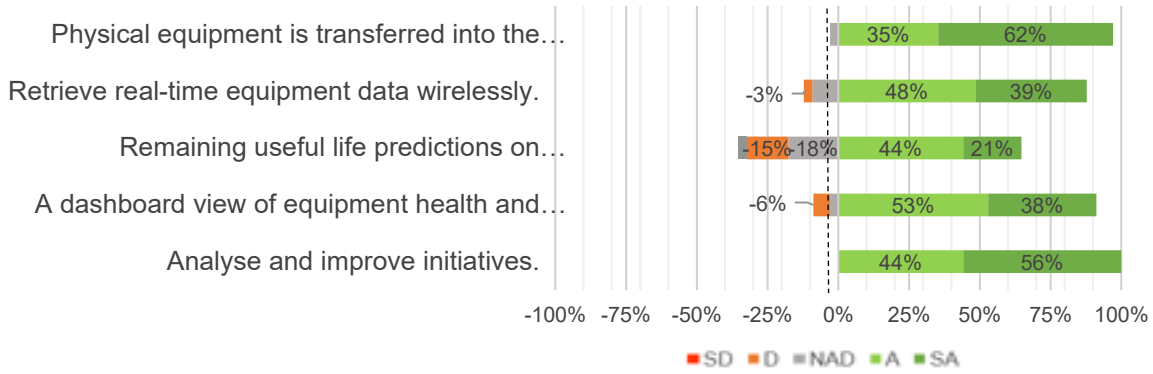

Figure 3: Contributing Factors to the Functional Framework Requirements

The operations indicated a high capability of transferring equipment into the virtual environment and analysing and improving initiatives. Only 65% of respondents agree with the performance of remaining useful life predictions on equipment. There is an evident variation in respondents' experience with equipment RUL predictions; this can be investigated further to probe whether the projections were statistical or based on expert knowledge. Interestingly, 91% of the respondents indicated the usage of dashboards for equipment health and performance; the low performance of RUL predictions indicates that the dashboards and maintenance information does not include prognostics.

5.4 Adoption Readiness Assessment

Table 1 indicates the operation's architectural and functional maturity for adopting predictive maintenance. The data analysis shows the capability of the operations in the conceptual framework.

Table 1: Predictive Maintenance Adoption Readiness of Architectural and Functional Components

Architectural Component	Readiness	Median	Mode	Q1	Q2	Q3	IQR
Operational Planning	High	5.00	5	4.00	5.00	5.00	1.00
Work Management Process	Low	4.00	4	4.00	4.00	5.00	1.00
Data-to-Information CPS layer	High	5.00	5	4.00	5.00	5.00	1.00
Internet of Things	High	5.00	5	4.00	5.00	5.00	1.00
Data Management	Medium	4.00	5	4.00	4.00	5.00	1.00
Internet of Service	Low	4.00	4	4.00	4.00	5.00	1.00

Overall	Medium	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.50	5.00	1.00
Functional Component	Functionality						
Physical equipment is transferred into the virtual environment	High	5.00	5	4.00	5.00	5.00	1.00
Retrieve real-time equipment data wirelessly.	Low	4.00	4	4.00	4.00	5.00	1.00
Remaining useful life predictions on equipment.	Low	4.00	4	3.00	4.00	4.00	1.00
A dashboard view of equipment health and performance	Low	4.00	4	4.00	4.00	5.00	1.00
Analyse and improve initiatives.	High	5.00	5	4.00	5.00	5.00	1.00
Overall	Low	4.00	4	4.00	4.00	5.00	1.00

5.4.1 Architectural component readiness

The existing operating business framework is represented by operational planning and work management. CPS, IoT, IoS and data management represent the predictive maintenance framework. The operations scored a medium overall architectural adoption readiness level.

Operational Planning: The results indicate a high adoption readiness level for operational planning. However, there needs to be more visibility of production and maintenance review actions at the lower managerial levels. Empowering all levels with a view of the strategic outlook can further improve decision-making in the lower levels of management.

Work Management: The results indicate a low adoption readiness level for work management, influenced by the supply chain misalignment with applied maintenance strategies on a tactical level, as defined by Crespo and Gupta [32]. Consistent with the need to comprehensively understand the modularity in product, service and supply chains [26].

Cyber-Physical Systems: CPS data-to-information conversion level from Lee et al. [24] ranks as the ideal architectural level, as it supplies decision-makers with information from the collected data. The results indicate a high adoption readiness level in the operations. Further improvements in the level of maturity will include using similar information from other peers for smart maintenance decisions to avoid potential faults [24]

Internet of Things: The results indicate a high adoption readiness level for the Internet of Things in operations, mainly due to their established wireless data collection networks, which allow for continuous data acquisition on sensors and transmitters.

Data Management: The results indicate a medium adoption readiness for data management. The operations indicate a strong capability for collecting and storing data. However, the use of data for diagnostics and prognostics is generally lower, highlighting the opportunity to decentralise decision-making by converting data to information using data analytics.

Internet of Service: The results indicate a low adoption readiness level of IoS in the operation. It is a valid concern as IoS addresses the business standpoint; it represents a set of services that improve the company's ability to do business with customers and suppliers. Since multiple service suppliers are required in the IoS component, modularity, separation of concerns, service re-use, and composition play a vital role from a technological standpoint [28]. The

common feature in predictive maintenance is the need for a comprehensive understanding of modularity in product, service and supply chains [33].

5.4.2 Architectural Layers and Functionality

The maturity of the architectural layers is expected to enable the functional requirements of practising predictive maintenance.

Device layer: Transferring physical equipment into a virtual environment is a functional capability of the device layer. The functionality is high owing to a high adoption readiness of CPS and IoT device layer components within the operations.

Edge layer: Wireless retrieval of equipment data is a functional capability from the edge layer, integrating IoT and data management. The functionality is low, and although IoT adoption readiness is high, the data management component is measured as a medium adoption readiness. Further investigation is required, possibly on organisational data access restrictions and cybersecurity protocols.

Cyber layer: The cyber layer integrates the 2nd-level Cyber-physical systems and work management, including supply chains enabling maintenance error corrections. Although CPS has a high adoption readiness level, a work management component is low, negatively affected by the gap in operational maintenance planning and supply chain activities. As a result, the respondents were not entirely confident about the effectiveness of maintenance work planning.

Data Analytics layer: RUL predictions and equipment health and performance dashboards are functional capabilities of the data analytics layer, integrating IoS, algorithms, and processed data in the data management component. The RUL prediction and performance dashboard view page functionality is low, consistent with the low adoption readiness of IoS and medium adoption of data management components. The operations indicated a high availability of real-time and historical data. However, the data utilisation remains low.

Application layer: Analysing and improving initiatives indicates the application layer, which integrates IoS performance dashboards and operational planning decision-making. The functionality is high, suggesting strong support for initiatives by decision-makers in operational planning, with or without IoS. The prognostics' low functionality on remaining useful life predictions of equipment and the lower predominance of dashboard views of equipment health and performance negatively affect the Internet of Service adoption readiness.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

This study assessed the organisational readiness of the South African platinum processing industry to adopt predictive maintenance. The findings show that, while the architectural components required for predictive maintenance are generally present, the overall readiness is only medium, and the functional capability remains low. The gap is most evident in work management processes, data utilisation, and the Internet of Service, where integration with existing legacy systems is insufficient.

The results highlight that predictive maintenance cannot be effectively adopted without strengthening these weak components. Although operational planning, cyber-physical systems, and the Internet of Things demonstrate high maturity, their benefits are undermined by poor alignment with work management and limited use of data for prognostics. This imbalance constrains the industry's ability to move beyond preventative maintenance and achieve the benefits of condition-driven strategies. This is visually shown in Figure 4.

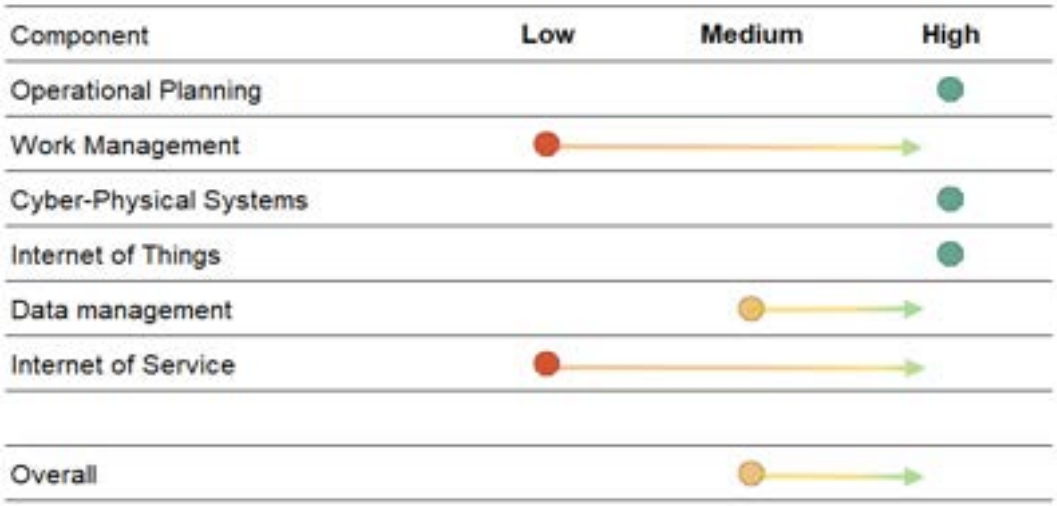

Figure 4: Summary of predictive maintenance architectural journey model.

Addressing these gaps requires focused investment in data analytics capability, integration of predictive functions into existing maintenance systems, and the development of Internet of Service platforms that support resourcing, spares planning, and decision-making. Improvements in these areas will position operations to exploit predictive maintenance more effectively, reducing unplanned downtime and improving asset reliability.

Overall, the research shows that the South African platinum processing industry stands at a transitional stage. By systematically strengthening functional capabilities and aligning them with existing architectural maturity, organisations can move towards predictive maintenance as a core business strategy. Doing so will not only enhance equipment availability and reliability but also provide a sustainable competitive advantage in an increasingly demanding global market.

6.2 Recommendations

The study findings point to specific areas that require attention if predictive maintenance is to be effectively adopted in the South African platinum processing industry. Work management processes should be prioritised, particularly the alignment of maintenance planning with supply chain resourcing, to reduce the deferral of critical tasks due to unavailable spares. Data management also needs strengthening, with greater emphasis on analytics and prognostics to convert the industry's extensive real-time and historical data into actionable insights.

In addition, developing Internet of Service capabilities will be crucial to support decision-making dashboards, resource planning, and equipment health monitoring. Organisations can begin with a staged integration approach, embedding predictive functions into existing legacy systems while progressively building modular IoS platforms. Investment in analytics capability and machine learning expertise will further enhance Remaining Useful Life predictions, which remain below the standard required for predictive maintenance practice.

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8 APPENDIX: SURVEY DATA

Q#										
OP	**Capability assessment**	**SD**	**D**	**NAD**	**A**	**SA**	**Missing**	**Outliers**	**Mean**	**SD**
7	Yearly view of monthly production requirements	0	0	0	15	19	0.00	0.00	4.56	0.50
8	Yearly view of monthly planned maintenance days	0	0	0	15	19	0.00	0.00	4.56	0.50
9	Conduct monthly production & maintenance reviews	0	2	2	11	19	0.00	2.00	4.38	0.84
10	Conduct financial approval processes before maintenance work is planned	0	0	0	12	22	0.00	0.00	4.65	0.48
	Overall			136			0.00	2.00	4.54	0.58
WM	**Capability assessment**	**SD**	**D**	**NAD**	**A**	**SA**	**Missing**	**Outliers**	**Mean**	**SD**
11	Maintenance work is planned and scheduled well in advance.	0	1	3	22	8	0.00	12.00	4.09	0.66
12	Maintenance is rarely deferred due to unavailable resources	3	7	9	13	2	0.00	0.00	3.12	1.08
13	Maintenance work orders are generated prior to work execution.	0	0	2	18	14	0.00	0.00	4.35	0.59
14	A computerised system is used to generate work orders	0	0	1	19	14	0.00	0.00	4.38	0.54
	Overall			136			0.00	12.00	3.99	0.72
CPS	**Capability assessment**	**SD**	**D**	**NAD**	**A**	**SA**	**Missing**	**Outliers**	**Mean**	**SD**
15	Use of online tag numbers for equipment and instruments	0	0	0	14	20	0.00	0.00	4.59	0.49
16	A computer screen view of equipment measurements	0	0	1	12	21	0.00	0.00	4.59	0.55
17	Use of equipment and process interlocks to stop unsafe operating conditions.	0	0	0	16	18	0.00	0.00	4.53	0.50
18	Ability to change process setpoints and equipment outputs in the control room.	0	0	3	10	20	1.00	1.00	4.52	0.66
	Overall			135			1.00	1.00	4.56	0.55
IOT	**Capability assessment**	**SD**	**D**	**NAD**	**A**	**SA**	**Missing**	**Outliers**	**Mean**	**SD**
19	Ability to remotely view equipment measurements	0	0	1	15	18	0.00	0.00	4.50	0.56
20	Ability to change process setpoints and equipment outputs remotely.	1	1	0	15	17	0.00	2.00	4.35	0.87
21	Ability to remotely view real-time data from equipment sensors and instruments.	0	1	3	16	13	1.00	2.00	4.24	0.74

22	Availability of automated SMS notifications when critical equipment stops.	0	1	1	10	22	0.00	1.00	4.56	0.69
	Overall	135					1.00	5.00	4.41	0.72
DM	**Capability assessment**	**SD**	**D**	**NAD**	**A**	**SA**	**Missing**	**Outliers**	**Mean**	**SD**
23	Process and equipment data storage in a historian server.	0	0	3	10	21	0.00	0.00	4.53	0.65
24	Use of historic data to perform equipment failure diagnostics.	0	1	3	18	12	0.00	1.00	4.21	0.72
25	Maintenance activity data is stored in a computerised system.	0	0	2	14	18	0.00	0.00	4.47	0.61
26	Availability of a data analytics team within the operation.	0	1	4	13	15	1.00	2.00	4.27	0.79
	Overall	135					1.00	3.00	4.37	0.69
	Capability assessment	**SD**	**D**	**NAD**	**A**	**SA**	**Missing**	**Outliers**	**Mean**	**SD**
27	A dashboard view of equipment health and performance.	0	2	1	18	13	0.00	2.00	4.24	0.77
28	A web-based view of the plant KPI performance	0	1	1	12	20	0.00	1.00	4.50	0.70
29	A clear view of the predicted equipment failure time/period - prognostics.	1	5	6	15	7	0.00	1.00	3.65	1.05
30	Availability of a multi-disciplinary team that continuously improves plant performance.	0	0	0	15	19	0.00	0.00	4.56	0.50
	Overall	136					0.00	4.00	4.24	0.75

ASSESSING THE READINESS FOR INDUSTRY 4.0 IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN MINING INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY OF A MINING COMPANY'S UNDERGROUND MACHINERY MAINTENANCE STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

Industry 4.0 is poised to revolutionise industries globally, and the South African mining sector stands to benefit significantly. This study assesses the readiness of a South African mining company to adopt Industry 4.0 technologies in its maintenance strategy. A conceptual readiness assessment model, integrating elements from the IMPULS, PwC, and Industry 4.0 Maturity models, was developed to evaluate critical dimensions. The research employed a mixed-methods approach. Findings reveal that while there is strong leadership commitment to Industry 4.0 at a strategic level, gaps exist in key areas such as real-time data integration, predictive maintenance capabilities, and workforce readiness. The study emphasises the critical importance of change management and employee training for the successful implementation of Industry 4.0 technologies. The study outlines a clear roadmap for overcoming barriers to Industry 4.0 adoption, paving the way for improved competitiveness and sustainability in the mining sector.

Keywords: Industry 4.0, Underground Mining, Predictive Maintenance, Readiness Assessment, South Africa

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The South African mining industry is a cornerstone of the national economy and employment, but faces volatile commodity prices, ageing infrastructure and persistent safety risks [1]. Harsh underground conditions accelerate equipment wear, driving costly unplanned downtime. Industry 4.0 technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT) sensors, big-data analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled automation promise safer, more efficient operations by supporting real-time condition monitoring and predictive maintenance [2].

Traditionally, the mining industry has been slower to adopt new technologies compared to sectors such as manufacturing and logistics. Companies that adopt the modern concept benefit from maximum flexibility and a major competitive advantage [3]. Predicting equipment failures and optimising maintenance schedules are particularly important, as downtime can result in significant financial losses and operational disruptions. Additionally adopting Industry 4.0 technologies is essential for the mining industry to maintain competitiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

Despite clear benefits, the mining industry faces challenges in adopting these technologies. Harsh underground conditions, high temperatures, dust, and vibrations can hinder the deployment of sensitive IoT devices. Additionally, the workforce may lack the skills to manage and maintain advanced technologies, necessitating significant investment in training and education [2]. The initial costs of implementing Industry 4.0 technologies can also be prohibitive, especially for small and medium-sized mining companies. Furthermore, implementing new technologies without properly assessing the organisation’s readiness can lead to suboptimal outcomes such as increased costs, decreased productivity, and compromised safety.

1.2 Objectives

This study aimed to assess one South African mining company’s readiness to embed Industry 4.0 in its underground maintenance strategy. The particular mining company operates several underground coal mines for the largest petrochemical company in South Africa, making it ideal for a case study.

In order to achieve the study's objective, the following research questions were asked.

- What factors determine the level of readiness for Industry 4.0 adoption in this sector?
- What is the current level of readiness for Industry 4.0 adoption in this sector?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Industry 4.0

Industry 4.0 represents the fourth industrial revolution, characterised by the integration of digital technologies such as IoT, AI, big data analytics, and cyber-physical systems into industrial processes. These technologies enable real-time data exchange, automation, and enhanced decision-making, which are crucial for improving operational efficiency, reducing costs, and increasing productivity [4].

A key feature of Industry 4.0 is the creation of "smart factories", where machines and systems communicate to optimise performance and autonomously adapt to changing conditions [5]. In maintenance, this revolution allows for predictive analytics and real-time monitoring, facilitating the shift from reactive maintenance strategies to more efficient, data-driven approaches [6].

The mining industry, heavily reliant on continuous machinery operation, stands to benefit significantly from Industry 4.0 adoption. Integrating IoT and AI can enhance machinery

monitoring and maintenance, leading to improved equipment uptime, safer working conditions, and reduced maintenance costs. However, successful implementation requires overcoming barriers such as the harsh and uncertain operating environments of remote mines, the complexity of integrating new systems into existing processes, and the need for skilled personnel and cross-disciplinary collaboration to manage advanced technologies effectively [7].

2.2 Challenges to Industry 4.0 Adoption in Mining

Several challenges hinder Industry 4.0 adoption in mining. A short discussion on some of these follows.

- **IT Infrastructure Limitations**: Underground connectivity issues can impede reliable data transmission from IoT devices [7, 8].
- **Workforce Resistance**: Employees accustomed to traditional methods may resist new technologies involving automation or data-driven decision-making [2].
- **High Implementation Costs**: Significant financial investment is required for new systems and training, which can be challenging for smaller companies [9].

Effective change management strategies are essential to address these challenges, ensuring employee engagement and successful technology integration. Organisations must prioritise communication, training, and involvement of the workforce to reduce resistance and build a culture that embraces technological change.

2.3 Readiness Assessment Models for Industry 4.0

Readiness assessment models provide a structured framework for evaluating an organisation's preparedness to implement advanced technologies associated with Industry 4.0. These models are crucial for identifying gaps in capabilities and guiding organisations through the transformation process. Models such as the IMPULS readiness model, PwC's Industry 4.0 self-assessment and the Industry 4.0 Maturity Model are designed to evaluate readiness across multiple dimensions, including strategic alignment, technological adoption, workforce competencies, and organisational culture [10].

The IMPULS readiness model assesses Industry 4.0 maturity by focusing on the extent of digital technology integration within core operations. It consists of 6 measurement dimensions: people (employees), strategy and organisation, smart factories, smart operations, smart products, and data-driven services [11]. It emphasises critical components such as IT infrastructure, employee skills, and leadership commitment, which are essential for enabling successful technology adoption. A key strength of this model lies in its comprehensive approach to evaluating how effectively digital technologies are embedded into the organisation's operational fabric. It not only measures technical capabilities but also the organisation's ability to leverage these capabilities to achieve operational excellence [12].

PwC's self-assessment model takes a broader view, evaluating not only technological readiness but also the organisation's strategic capacity to leverage new technologies for long-term, sustainable transformation. This model emphasises the importance of integrating IoT, AI, and data analytics into business processes to foster innovation and resilience. Additionally, it evaluates whether the organisational culture supports continuous learning and adaptation, which is crucial for maintaining a competitive edge in an evolving technological landscape [13].

Figure 1: IMPULS Industrie 4.0 Readiness [12]

	1 Digital novice	2 Vertical Integrator	3 Horizontal collaborator	4 Digital champion
Digital business models and customer access	First digital solutions and isolated applications	Digital product and service portfolio with software, network (M2M) and data as key differentiator	Integrated customer solutions across supply chain boundaries, collaboration with external partners	Development of new disruptive business models with innovative product and service portfolio, lot size 1
Digitisation of product and service offerings	Online presence is separated from offline channels, product focus instead of customer focus	Multi-channel distribution with integrated use of online and offline channels; data analytics deployed, e. g. for personalisation	Individualised customer approach and interaction together with value-chain partners. Shared, integrated interfaces.	Integrated Customer Journey Management across all digital marketing and sales channels with customer empathy and CRM
Digitisation and integration of vertical and horizontal value chains	Digitised and automated sub processes. Partial integration including production or with internal and external partners. Standard processes for collaboration partly in place	Vertical digitisation and standardised and harmonised internal processes and data flows within the company; limited integration with external partners	Horizontal integration of processes and data flows with customers and external partners, intensive data use through full integration across the network.	Fully digitised, integrated partner ecosystem with self-optimised, virtualised processes, focus on core competency; decentralised autonomy. Near real-time access to extended set of operative information
Data & Analytics as core capability	Analytical capabilities mainly based on semi-manual data extracts. Selected monitoring and data processing, no event management	Analytical capabilities supported by central business intelligence (BI) system isolated, not standardised decision support systems	Central BI system consolidating all relevant internal and external information sources, some predictive analytics Specific decision support and event management systems	Central use of predictive analytics for real-time optimisation and automated event handling with intelligent database and self-learning algorithm enabling impact analysis and decision support
Agile IT environment	Fragmented IT architecture in-house.	Homogeneous IT architecture in-house. Connection between different data cubes developing.	Common IT architectures in partner network. Interconnected single data lake with high-performance architecture	Single data lake with external data integration functionalities and flexible organisation. Partner service bus, secure data exchange
Compliance, security, legal & tax	Traditional structures, digitisation not in focus	Digital challenges recognised but not comprehensively addressed	Legal risk consistently addressed with collaboration partners.	Optimising the value-chain network for compliance, security, legal and tax
Organisation, employees and digital culture	Functional focus in "silos"	Cross-functional collaboration but not structured and consistently performed	Collaboration across company boundaries, culture and encouragement of sharing	Collaboration as a key value driver

Figure 2: PwC maturity model - Industry 4.0 capabilities develop across seven dimensions and four stages [13]

The Industry 4.0 Maturity Model provides a structured framework to assess an organisation's readiness and progression in adopting Industry 4.0 concepts. It was developed to integrate both technological and organisational perspectives and comprises nine dimensions: Strategy, Leadership, Customers, Products, Operations, Culture, People, Governance, and Technology. Each dimension contains specific maturity items (62 in total) that capture critical enablers such as digitalisation of products and services, leadership commitment, ICT competence, and regulatory alignment [10]. An extract of this can be seen in Table 1.

These models offer a holistic view of an organisation's maturity concerning Industry 4.0 adoption. The IMPULS Readiness Model places significant emphasis on the digital integration within the organisation, assessing the robustness of the IT infrastructure and the readiness of the workforce to engage with these technologies. It also underscores the role of leadership in driving digital transformation initiatives, ensuring that strategic goals align with technological capabilities [12]. In contrast, PwC's self-assessment model provides a more comprehensive evaluation framework that encompasses both technological adoption and the strategic capabilities needed to leverage these technologies for long-term, sustainable business transformation.

Table 1: Dimensions and maturity items of Industry 4.0 Maturity Model [10]

Dimension	Exemplary maturity item
Strategy	Implementation I40 roadmap, Available resources for realisation, adaptation of business models, …
Leadership	Willingness of leaders, Management competences and methods, Existence of central coordination for I40, …
Customers	Utilisation of customer data, Digitalisation of sales/services, Customer's Digital media competence, …
Products	Individualisation of products, Digitalisation of products, Product integration into other systems, …
Operations	Decentralisation of processes, Modelling and simulation, Interdisciplinary, interdepartmental collaboration, …
Culture	Knowledge sharing, Open-innovation and cross-company collaboration, Value of ICT in the company, …
People	ICT competences of employees, openness of employees to new technology, autonomy of employees, …
Governance	Labour regulations for I40, Suitability of technological standards, Protection of intellectual property, …
Technology	Existence of modern ICT, Utilisation of mobile devices, Utilisation of machine-to-machine communication, …

3 MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT IN THE MINING INDUSTRY

Maintenance management is critical for ensuring efficiency, safety, and longevity in mining operations. Traditionally, maintenance has followed reactive or preventive models. Reactive maintenance addresses issues post-failure, while preventive maintenance schedules regular checks based on time intervals or equipment usage [14]. Both approaches have limitations, especially in the complex underground mining environment, where unplanned equipment failure can lead to safety risks and costly delays [15].

Industry 4.0 introduces predictive maintenance, leveraging real-time data from IoT-enabled sensors to predict equipment failures, allowing maintenance teams to act before breakdowns occur [6]. Predictive maintenance reduces downtime and optimises resource use, as maintenance tasks are performed based on actual equipment condition rather than fixed schedules [16]. Additionally, condition-based maintenance is becoming more prevalent in the mining sector. Condition-based maintenance uses data from machine sensors to determine the actual state of equipment, allowing for maintenance to be performed precisely when needed [17]. This approach minimises unnecessary maintenance, maximises equipment uptime, and reduces overall costs.

3.1 Maintenance Practices

The effectiveness of maintenance practices directly impacts the production output of the mining company. These practices can be broken down into three main approaches: corrective maintenance, predictive maintenance, and condition-based maintenance, each of which serves a distinct purpose and is applied depending on the criticality of the machinery and the consequences of potential failures.

- **Corrective maintenance**: This is one of the oldest forms of maintenance, characterised by a reactive approach. It is performed after a system or equipment has failed, often resulting in considerable downtime and high repair costs. Corrective maintenance typically involves a highly skilled maintenance team ready to respond to equipment breakdowns. This method is suitable for non-critical equipment where the failure has minimal impact on safety and production. However, it is not ideal for high-capital assets or critical equipment, as unplanned downtime can significantly affect production targets and incur high costs. The approach lacks any form of advanced planning or budgeting, which contributes to its inefficiencies.
- **Predictive maintenance**: Predictive maintenance is a more advanced, data-driven approach that relies on continuous monitoring of machinery using installed sensors and data analytics. The aim is to predict failures before they occur, thereby avoiding unplanned downtimes. Technologies such as machine learning algorithms and real-time monitoring tools are used to identify abnormal patterns in parameters like vibrations, temperature, and lubrication oils, which serve as indicators of potential faults. For instance, in Industry 4.0, predictive maintenance leverages smart data analysis, AI, and IoT sensors to continuously monitor asset conditions. When abnormalities are detected, maintenance activities can be scheduled accordingly. This proactive maintenance strategy reduces the likelihood of unexpected breakdowns and extends the lifespan of equipment, making it an essential practice in the mining industry where reliability and efficiency are crucial.
- **Condition-based monitoring**: Condition-based monitoring is another proactive maintenance strategy that focuses on detecting signs of wear or defects before they evolve into major failures. Condition-based monitoring utilises various sensors and diagnostic tools to monitor the health of machinery components continuously. The P-F curve, a key concept in Condition-based monitoring, represents the progression from the point where a defect is detectable (P) to the point of failure (F). Effective maintenance during this interval helps avoid total system failure and ensures the reliability of the equipment. Techniques such as lubricant analysis, vibration analysis, and motor current analysis are common in condition-based monitoring. Lubricant analysis identifies contaminants or wear particles, which may indicate component degradation, while vibration analysis and motor current analysis help detect early signs of mechanical issues. By maintaining equipment based on actual conditions rather than fixed schedules, organisations can optimise maintenance resources, extend asset life, and minimise unplanned downtime.

3.2 Critical Maintenance Elements in the Mining Company

In the context of the mining company, critical maintenance elements have been identified to ensure systematic and efficient maintenance practices. These elements include the work management process, defect elimination, and defining maintenance tactics. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in ensuring high equipment reliability and availability, which is essential for the smooth functioning of mining operations.

3.2.1 Work Management Process

The mining company employs a detailed work management process to effectively manage maintenance activities. This process is central to improving asset reliability and is supported through weekly meetings, including maintenance and cost meetings. The work management process includes seven steps:

1. **Identify Work**: This step involves logging defects detected during inspections, ensuring that issues are documented for future maintenance.
2. **Prioritise Work**: After identifying the issues, they are prioritised based on their criticality. This helps in focusing on defects that, if left unaddressed, could lead to severe consequences.
3. **Plan Work**: In this step, the required tools, spares, and resources are determined to ensure readiness for execution.
4. **Schedule Work**: Establishing a timeline for maintenance activities ensures that work is carried out efficiently without interfering with production schedules.
5. **Execute Work**: The planned work is executed by the maintenance team, ensuring adherence to the schedule.
6. **Work Order Feedback**: Feedback is essential to capture details such as the time taken, spares used, and any delays experienced during execution.
7. **Work Order Status Control**: Finally, the work order is logged and closed in the system once the maintenance task has been completed. This structured approach ensures all maintenance activities are carried out systematically, thereby enhancing asset reliability.

3.2.2 Defect Elimination

Defect elimination is a critical process focused on improving asset reliability by addressing the root causes of defects. Using the "5 Why's" root cause analysis tool, defects are investigated until the fundamental reason is identified. Once identified, corrective actions are taken to prevent reoccurrences. This continuous process of identifying and addressing root causes contributes to the reduction of unplanned downtimes and ensures higher equipment reliability and performance.

3.2.3 Defining Tactics

The mining company employs Reliability-Centred Maintenance (RCM) to define maintenance tactics. RCM is used to determine failure modes, maintenance activities, and schedules, considering Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) recommendations. This approach ensures that maintenance tasks are aligned with the specific needs of each piece of equipment, enhancing operational reliability. The RCM process involves reviewing and updating maintenance schedules regularly, particularly when equipment is replaced or modified, to ensure the relevance of maintenance tasks.

4 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

This research proposes a conceptual model for assessing the Mining Company's readiness in terms of its maintenance strategy. The conceptual model combines the strengths of the IMPULS readiness model and the PwC self-assessment model, providing a comprehensive and tailored

approach to address the unique challenges and opportunities in the mining industry. This conceptual model, illustrated in Figure 3, is employed to evaluate the company's readiness across seven key dimensions, offering a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of both technical and organisational capabilities required for Industry 4.0 adoption. Each dimension is critical in facilitating a successful transition towards advanced, data-driven mining operations, particularly within the realm of underground machinery maintenance.

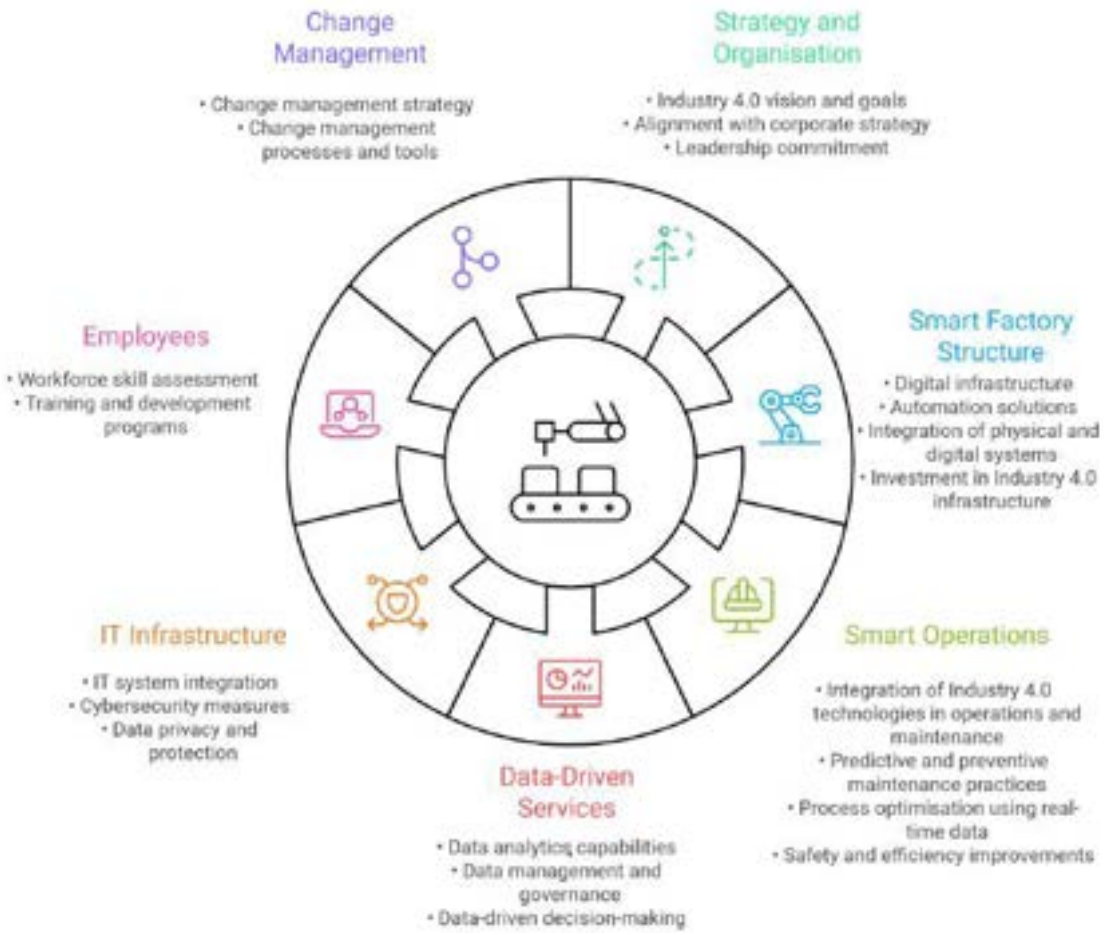

Figure 3: Conceptual model

4.1 Strategy and Organisation (IMPULS & PwC)

This dimension focuses on the strategic aspects of Industry 4.0 implementation, including defining the vision and goals for Industry 4.0 in the mining sector, evaluating the alignment of Industry 4.0 strategies with overall corporate strategy, and assessing leadership commitment and support for Industry 4.0 initiatives.

4.2 Smart Factory Structure (IMPULS)

Smart factory structure addresses the physical and digital infrastructure required for Industry 4.0 implementation. It involves assessing the current state of mining infrastructure, identifying areas for improvement in digitalisation and automation, and determining the necessary investments for upgrading mining infrastructure to support Industry 4.0 technologies.

4.3 Smart Operations (IMPULS & Industry 4.0 Maturity Model)

Smart operations focus on the integration (horizontally and vertically) of Industry 4.0 technologies in mining operations, particularly in maintenance processes. It includes evaluating the current level of integration, analysing the impact of these technologies on productivity, safety, and efficiency, and identifying best practices in predictive and preventive maintenance using Industry 4.0 technologies.

4.4 Data-Driven Services (IMPULS & PwC)

This dimension addresses the role of data in Industry 4.0 implementation. It involves assessing the current state of data analytics and management in the mining sector, identifying opportunities for improvement in data-driven decision-making, and evaluating the potential for new business models based on data-driven services.

4.5 IT Infrastructure (IMPULS & PwC)

The IT infrastructure requirements for implementing Industry 4.0 technologies in the mining sector are discussed in this dimension. It includes assessing the current state of IT infrastructure, identifying potential challenges and solutions for IT integration in the maintenance space, and evaluating the cybersecurity measures needed to protect data and systems.

4.6 Employees (IMPULS & Industry 4.0 Maturity Model)

This dimension addresses the workforce's readiness for Industry 4.0 implementation. It involves determining the skill sets required for employees to effectively utilise Industry 4.0 technologies, assessing the current state of workforce readiness, and developing training and development programs to upskill employees for Industry 4.0 implementation.

4.7 Change Management (PwC & Industry 4.0 Maturity Model)

This dimension focuses on the organisation's capacity to manage change during Industry 4.0 implementation. It includes evaluating the organisation's change management capabilities, developing a change management strategy tailored to the specific needs of the mining sector, and ensuring that the transition to Industry 4.0 technologies is smooth and well-managed.

By integrating elements from these established readiness assessment models, the conceptual model delivers a comprehensive analysis of both technical and organisational readiness for Industry 4.0 adoption. It pinpoints areas that require further enhancement and provides actionable insights to support the development of targeted strategies aimed at improving readiness in underground machinery maintenance. The conceptual model not only assesses the company’s current capabilities but also facilitates the creation of a structured roadmap for ongoing improvements.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to rigorously evaluate the company’s readiness for Industry 4.0 adoption, particularly in the context of underground machinery maintenance. The quantitative component involved the use of structured questionnaires distributed to key personnel, designed to measure critical dimensions such as leadership commitment, technological adoption, Information Technology (IT) infrastructure, employee competencies, and change management. The IMPULS readiness questionnaire was adapted to incorporate the additional elements from the conceptual model. After making the necessary adjustments, the questionnaire instrument comprised 23 quantitative questions. An extract of the questionnaire can be seen in Table 2. A Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree) was used as the appropriate scale for the questionnaires. The initial section of the questionnaire requests

respondents to provide details on the organisational framework of their businesses. Primarily, this information is employed to reinforce projections and ensure the survey's representativeness. Subsequently, the core of the survey comprises the fields that constitute the 7 dimensions of the conceptual readiness model, which assess the degree to which each field is present.

The target population included employees involved in the maintenance of underground machinery within the mining company, but at least at the middle management level. A stratified sampling method was employed to ensure representation across different departments, positions, and experience levels (Mouton, 2001).

Table 2: Extract from survey questionnaire

Dimension	Questions
Strategy and Leadership	• To what extent does your organisation have a clear vision and strategy for Industry 4.0 implementation in the maintenance of underground equipment? • How committed are the top leaders in your organisation towards Industry 4.0 implementation in maintenance operations?
Technologies and Solutions	• How effectively does your organisation identify and evaluate Industry 4.0 technologies relevant to the maintenance of underground equipment? • To what extent does your organisation have a technology implementation roadmap for Industry 4.0 in maintenance operations?
Smart Operations	• How well are Industry 4.0 technologies integrated into your maintenance operations for underground equipment? • To what extent does your organisation utilise predictive and preventive maintenance practices for underground equipment?
Data-Driven Services	• How well-developed are your organisation's data analytics capabilities for maintenance operations? • How effective is your organisation's data management and governance in the context of maintenance operations?
IT Infrastructure	• How well are your IT systems integrated to support Industry 4.0 implementation in maintenance operations? • How scalable is your IT infrastructure to accommodate Industry 4.0 technologies in maintenance operations?
Employees	• How well do your employees' current skills align with the requirements of Industry 4.0 technologies in maintenance operations? • How effective are your organisation's training programs for upskilling employees in Industry 4.0 technologies related to maintenance operations?
Change Management	• To what extent does your organisation have a well-defined change management strategy for the implementation of Industry 4.0 technologies in maintenance operations? • How effectively does your organisation communicate and engage stakeholders during the implementation of Industry 4.0 technologies in maintenance operations?

Quantitative data collection was conducted via an online survey administered through Qualtrics, which facilitated convenience for respondents and ensured efficient data capture. The response rate achieved was 76%, with 16 valid responses used in the subsequent analysis. Data preparation entailed a rigorous cleaning process, including the removal of extraneous

metadata, conversion of Likert scale responses to numerical values for analysis, and imputation of missing values to prevent bias. Column names were standardised to maintain consistency, thereby enhancing the quality and reliability of the dataset for analysis.

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the University of Pretoria's Research Ethics Committee. Participants were fully informed about the objectives of the study and assured of their right to withdraw at any stage. Data security protocols were implemented to protect the collected information, ensuring compliance with relevant data protection regulations. This research methodology provides a robust and systematic framework for assessing Industry 4.0 readiness, ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings through rigorous data collection methods and adherence to ethical standards.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Data Gathering Process

The study utilised a structured questionnaire to collect data on the company's readiness for Industry 4.0 implementation in its underground machinery maintenance strategy. The questionnaire focused on key areas such as technological integration, workforce skills, and strategic alignment.

6.2 Readiness Assessment

Responses were categorised into key dimensions, and median scores were calculated to assess readiness levels and are shown in Figure 1

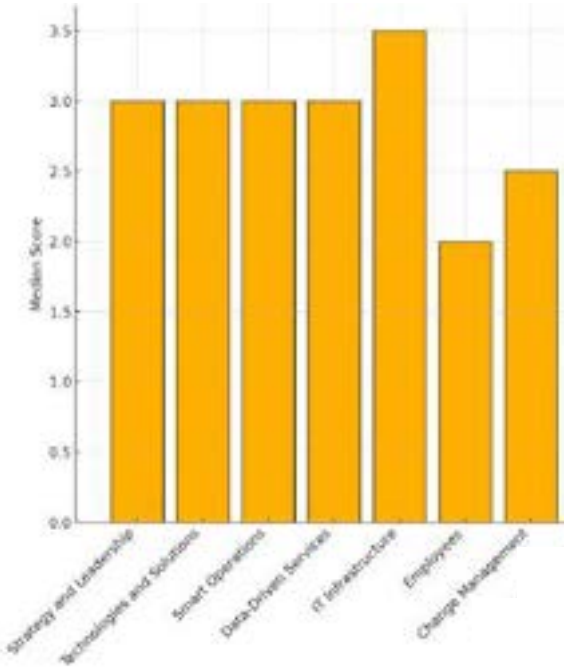

Figure 4: Median Score by Dimension

The results indicate moderate readiness in areas such as Strategy and Leadership and IT Infrastructure, but significant challenges in Employees and Change Management, suggesting workforce preparedness and organisational change are critical areas needing improvement [18].

6.3 Statistical Analysis

Various statistical tests were conducted to ensure the validity of the data and the robustness of the findings. **Normality Tests**: Shapiro-Wilk tests, Table 3, indicated that some variables deviated from normality, necessitating the use of non-parametric tests for those variables.

Table 3: Shapiro-Wilk Test

Variable	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	p-value
Strategy and Leadership	0.927	0.222
Technologies and Solutions	0.932	0.262
Smart Operations	0.878	0.036
Change Management	0.892	0.061
Vendor Collaboration	0.921	0.175
Maintenance Technology Integration	0.927	0.218
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	0.922	0.185
Performance Measurement and KPIs	0.862	0.021

Linearity: Pearson correlation coefficients, Table 4, showed that most key variables exhibited linear relationships with the dependent variable.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Coefficients

Variable	Pearson Correlation	p-value
Strategy and Leadership	0.66	0.003
Technologies and Solutions	0.74	0.002
Smart Operations	0.57	0.012
Data-Driven Services	0.64	0.004
IT Infrastructure	0.69	0.004
Employees	0.60	0.009
Change Management	0.60	0.009

Homogeneity of Variances: Levene's test and Brown-Forsythe test, Table 5, results indicated that while most variables met the assumption, some variables, such as Change Management, did not, suggesting heteroscedasticity.

Table 5: Levene's Test and Brown-Forsythe Test Results

Variable	Levene's Test Statistic	Levene's Test P-value	Brown-Forsythe Test p-value
Strategy and Leadership	1.23	0.276	0.291
Technologies and Solutions	1.67	0.206	0.217
Smart Operations	2.02	0.158	0.164
Data-Driven Services	1.89	0.174	0.181
IT Infrastructure	2.45	0.130	0.139
Employees	2.31	0.137	0.142
Change Management	4.58	0.041	0.045

Multicollinearity: Variance Inflation Factors (VIF), Table 6, were all below 10, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern.

Table 6: Variance Inflation Factors (VIF)

Variable	VIF
Technologies and Solutions	2.45
Process Optimisation using Real-Time Data	1.85
Strategy and Leadership	2.31
Maintenance Technology Integration	2.05
Change Management	1.40

6.4 Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression model was developed, with the dependent variable being Readiness for Industry 4.0 Implementation. Independent variables can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Multiple linear regression coefficients

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	2.15	0.58	3.71	0.003
Leadership and Management	0.141	0.045	3.13	0.011
Technology Readiness	0.139	0.047	2.96	0.015
Smart Operations	0.064	0.039	1.64	0.110
Data-Driven Services	0.075	0.042	1.79	0.088
Employees	0.052	0.038	1.37	0.195

The model explains nearly 100% of the variance in Industry 4.0 readiness, indicating a strong fit. Leadership and Management and Technology Readiness emerged as significant predictors.

7 FINDINGS

Through the conceptual model, 7 dimensions were identified that influence the level of readiness for Industry 4.0 adoption, which was used to determine a readiness assessment. The readiness assessment conducted that the Mining Company is at an intermediate level of readiness for Industry 4.0 adoption. This intermediate stage suggests that while the company has begun integrating digital technologies, several key areas need improvement before full-scale implementation can occur. The company scored well in the *Strategy and Leadership* dimension (mean = 3.8), indicating a strong commitment to Industry 4.0 from the leadership team. However, the lower score in the *IT Infrastructure* dimension (mean = 2.6) highlights a significant barrier to progress.

One of the major findings is the misalignment between the company's strategic goals and its operational capabilities. While leadership supports the adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies, the current infrastructure is insufficient to support these technologies at scale. This is consistent with the findings of Schumacher, et al. [10], who argue that organisational readiness must extend beyond leadership intent to include robust IT systems and workforce development.

The readiness assessment also revealed challenges in the workforce dimension. Employees expressed concerns about their ability to manage new technologies, as reflected in the relatively low score in the *Employees* dimension (mean = 2.8). The lack of skilled personnel presents a significant challenge to the company's digital transformation efforts. As Sony and Naik [18] noted, workforce readiness is a critical component of Industry 4.0 adoption. Without adequate training programs and continuous upskilling, the company risks falling behind in its digital transformation journey.

The company's readiness is further impeded by the complexity of integrating legacy systems with new digital technologies. The Mining Company relies heavily on older machinery that is not easily compatible with IoT systems or real-time analytics platforms. This finding is supported by Zambetti, et al. [19], who note that one of the main barriers to Industry 4.0 adoption in heavy industries is the challenge of upgrading or replacing legacy equipment.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to evaluate the readiness of a South African mining company to integrate Industry 4.0 technologies into its underground machinery maintenance strategy, using a conceptual model that combined elements from the IMPULS, PwC, and Industry 4.0 Maturity Models. The findings indicate that the mining company has demonstrated an intermediate level of readiness. While leadership commitment and strategic intent are evident, significant gaps exist in IT infrastructure, workforce readiness, and change management capabilities. These gaps represent critical barriers to scaling up digital transformation efforts.

From a practical perspective, the company should prioritise investment in scalable, secure IT infrastructure capable of supporting real-time data acquisition, processing, and analytics. Concurrently, a structured workforce development programme should be implemented, focusing on continuous upskilling in digital competencies and change management to foster an organisational culture that embraces technological innovation. The gradual retrofitting of legacy machinery, coupled with the adoption of interoperable IoT platforms, would enable a smoother integration of new technologies without necessitating wholesale equipment replacement. Establishing cross-functional teams to drive pilot projects can further support knowledge transfer and reduce resistance to change.

It is important to acknowledge that this study was based on data from a relatively small sample within a single organisation. While this approach enabled an in-depth examination of context-specific factors, it limits the generalisability of the findings across the broader mining sector. Future research should expand the sample size and include multiple organisations across different commodities and operational environments to enhance the robustness and applicability of the readiness model.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK THAT INCLUDES DIGITALISED MAINTENANCE DATA IN THE MINING INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The mining industry is the backbone of the South African economy, serving as the country's most significant primary economic sector. The South African mining industry is plagued with rising operational costs, declining commodity prices, deteriorating rail infrastructure and increased pressure to operate sustainably. Maintenance is a significant driver of operational expenses, accounting for as much as 70% of total asset lifecycle costs. This study explored the maturity of the South African mining industry in adopting Maintenance 4.0 technologies, focusing on the digitalisation of maintenance data. Despite the global push towards digital transformation, this study's findings indicate that South African mining organisations depend on reactive maintenance philosophies. Utilising interviews and a semi-structured survey, professionals working within the technology, mining and maintenance domains were engaged on their experiences around Maintenance 4.0. Lack of training programs, cultural resistance and financial constraints are among the top barriers to ushering in digital transformation. Remediation includes leadership support, digitalisation strategies, and improved change management to curb the gap.

Keywords: Maintenance 4.0, Mining, Predictive Maintenance, Data Digitalisation

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The world is experiencing a paradigm shift towards increased automation, connectivity, and the demand for data-driven decision-making. Industries must adapt their operational frameworks to enhance their competitive advantage and generate value sustainably. Several factors are driving the increased generation of data that can be used to improve the execution of maintenance activities, including the emergence of cloud computing, the increased availability of mobile and electronic communications, and the decreased costs associated with advanced data computation [1].

Maintenance, a traditionally reactive and routine function, has evolved into a critical operational strategy. Maintenance is described as all the activities necessary to restore equipment to an operational condition [2]. Additionally, the Global Forum on Maintenance & Asset Management (GFMAM) describes maintenance management as the decision-making process that aligns maintenance delivery activities with corporate objectives and strategies [3]. Maintenance decisions span across long-term (strategic), medium-term (tactical) and short-term (operational) horizons [2]. The strategic aspect entails supporting the production function to ensure the organisation achieves a competitive advantage. The Tactical element refers to the effective utilisation of resources and finding the optimal interventions to ensure asset availability. The Operational aspect refers to the day-to-day operational and scheduling decisions regarding the sequence in which the work will be performed and the best personnel to execute the tasks.

The increased implementation of maintenance management information systems (MMIS) enhances data processing reliability and efficiency. According to a report by PwC, organisations that have implemented Predictive Maintenance (PdM) have achieved, on average, 9% more uptime from their assets, therefore capacitating them to generate increased financial value [4]. Maintenance and diagnostics play an important role in promoting equipment uptime, given that equipment maintenance can exceed as much as 30% of the total operating costs and between 60% and 75% of equipment lifecycle costs [1].

Apart from reducing costs, the benefits of maintenance include extending the physical asset lifecycle, improving product quality yield, reducing the volume of components that need to be replaced, increasing organisational profitability, and increasing process efficiency, which has an overall positive impact on the organisation’s production performance [5].

Despite the clear benefits of digitalising the maintenance function, a preliminary scoping review has shown that there needs to be more literature discussing guidelines for digitalising maintenance within the South African mining context. Some authors have covered ground on this topic in cross-border industries like manufacturing from an international perspective; however, there is still a gap in understanding whether these frameworks can be applicable within the South African mining context.

This study aims to develop a maintenance data digitalisation framework that can be adapted for the South African mining industry.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The South African Mining Industry

In partnership with the World Economic Forum, Accenture, a global professional IT services company, highlighted that the South African mining industry has the potential to unlock up to R213 Billion by 2026 through deploying a combination of initiatives aimed at bridging the digital gap, including smart sensor technology, advanced analytics, integrated platforms and remote operations centres [6]. A combination of these enabling technologies will empower

frontline operators to carry out operational activities with a greater degree of accuracy, increased safety, and a more proactive approach to diagnosing asset performance faults, enabling strategic, tactical, and operational decision-making backed by data.

The mining industry is the cornerstone of the South African economy and remains its most significant primary economic sector [7]. In 2023, the South African mining sector employed over 477,000 workers and contributed R426 billion to the Gross Domestic Product, as well as over R90 Billion to the South African government in profit taxes [8]. Benefits from this sector include foreign investment, economic activity driven by commodity exports, national revenue from government taxes, and job creation for the local population [9]. Despite the numerous benefits of a thriving mining industry, the sector faces critical challenges, including declining ore grades, falling commodity prices, ambitious production targets, and logistical challenges, all of which impact its overall contribution to the economy [10]. In light of these challenges, mining companies in South Africa must adopt technological innovations to enhance production efficiency, lower operational costs, and maintain a competitive edge in these turbulent markets. Maintenance cost is a significant driver of operational expenditure for mining organisations [7]. Effective maintenance management is a strategic lever that can be used to achieve substantial cost savings and operational efficiency.

The mining industry lags behind the manufacturing industry when levied in terms of digital transformation of the maintenance function. This lag is driven by minimal investment in Information Technology/Information Communications Technology infrastructure, the disparity between the business strategy and the digital strategy (the inability to link business objectives with information data, effective change management, and the practical application of technology) [11]. Some South African mining companies have begun adopting the fourth industrial revolution technologies; however, many digital technology implementations still need to realise better success [11]. It is essential to note that retrofitting innovative processes across the mining value chain will necessitate supporting technology platforms to ensure reliability in data collection, processing, analytics, and coordination. The introduction of digital transformation will result in the creation of big data, which will require flexibility in the mining organisation's IT infrastructure; furthermore, human resources with computer and data analytics skills will also be needed to complement the roll-out of digital technologies.

2.2 Maintenance Management

A maintenance strategy can be defined as a planned approach to preserve and conserve equipment in an acceptable functional state, comprising actions that include identifying, researching, and executing decisions to inspect, repair, and replace equipment [12]. The maintenance strategy requires executable and tactical plans, in the form of policies and actions, to preserve and conserve equipment, along with a decision-making support system for maintenance events.

The delivery of effective maintenance depends on three main factors, namely Technical, Human, and Economic [13]. The Technical aspects refer to maintenance products and services, as well as the methods, strategies, resources and materials used to deliver these services. The Human aspects refer to the internal relations between the maintenance department and other departments (both internal and external to the organisation), such as production, finance, labour bodies or government. The Economic aspects involve the financial considerations that influence maintenance decisions, including budget constraints, cost-benefit analyses, return on investment, and the long-term economic impact of maintenance strategies on operational performance. Leaders of organisations should strive to integrate management skills, personnel, policies, equipment, and practices in order for organisations to achieve the objectives of maintenance [2].

2.3 Maintenance Digitalisation

The world is currently experiencing the information age, where several industries, technologies and applications are adopting and implementing a digital approach to their ways of work; this is synonymous with the increased usage of smart devices, reliance on big data, advancement in the computational capacity of computers and the maturity of Artificial intelligence and Machine Learning [14]. Digital transformation can empower maintenance tasks by facilitating a shift from reactive and corrective practices towards a more data-driven approach that enhances operational efficiency and reliability. This is driven by the provision of real-time visibility into equipment health, thereby supporting evidence-based decision making instead of reliance on delayed reporting or operator intuition. Furthermore, digital transformation of maintenance data is ultimately the foundation for automating repetitive processes such as work order generation, data entry and overall reporting [15].

The adoption of advanced technologies, such as machine learning, AI, data analytics, big data, and cloud computing, has transformed traditional maintenance into a more innovative and efficient framework that enhances service delivery and asset performance. The core of this transformation is underpinned by Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS), which integrate physical assets such as heavy mining equipment with computational components capable of autonomous decision-making, data exchange and process control. These systems are enabled by retrofitting legacy equipment with Internet of Things (IoT) sensors, thereby converting conventional machines into intelligent, connected environments. In an industrial context, such as mining, this is referred to as the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT). IIoT is particularly valuable for the mining industry as it facilitates the real-time condition monitoring of assets, enabling early anomaly detection and the conversion of physical and mechanical signals into digital data streams that form the foundation for predictive maintenance [16].

Despite the pronounced benefits of adopting digital practices to enhance maintenance frameworks, numerous challenges exist in achieving this prospect. The limited availability of good quality data inhibits the effective use of maintenance optimisation models [2]. Big data analysis will be a key driver in the next wave of economic innovation; however, the shortage of personnel with the skills needed to derive insights from big data will serve as a stumbling block [1]. Assets used in the mining industry are often sourced from various Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM). This diversity introduces challenges to maintenance data digitalisation such as legacy system integration, limited cross network communication, vendor lock-in, lack of a strategic vision and overall scalability issues [1]. It is often challenging to justify the business case for ripping and replacing legacy technology, especially when assets are still functional. In addition, differences in system architectures and communication protocols across vendors lead to cross platform integration difficulties.

2.4 Benefits of Digitalisation in Maintenance

Maintenance personnel spend approximately 45% of their time obtaining instructions from documents; as such, digitalisation in maintenance can relieve their workload by simplifying processes and shortening the time it takes to diagnose and repair issues [16].

Combining digital tools (along with data) and remote facilities will allow maintenance teams to detect and prevent failures in advance, resulting in more reliable assets with high production volumes and reduced service delivery costs [17]. Utilising updated data and optimised equipment processes will assist with monitoring, diagnosing, troubleshooting, predicting and optimising maintenance activities [18].

The systematic implementation of targeted measures to reduce asset downtime will enable organisations to optimise the functionality of their assets, enabling them to perform at their

peak, consistently. This will fortify the organisation's ability to meet and exceed performance objectives [19].

3 CONCEPTUAL METHOD

3.1 Introduction

The foundation for deriving the conceptual model for the research stems from the work of Umair et al [16], who detailed a range of critical factors that are known to hinder the effective implementation phasing of technology within maintenance, particularly in the manufacturing industry. This work was adapted and applied within the South African mining industry and served as the guidance for this study.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study is illustrated in Figure 1: Conceptual framework. According to the framework, organisations should only pursue digitalisation efforts for maintenance data after addressing the critical factors and key enablers highlighted.

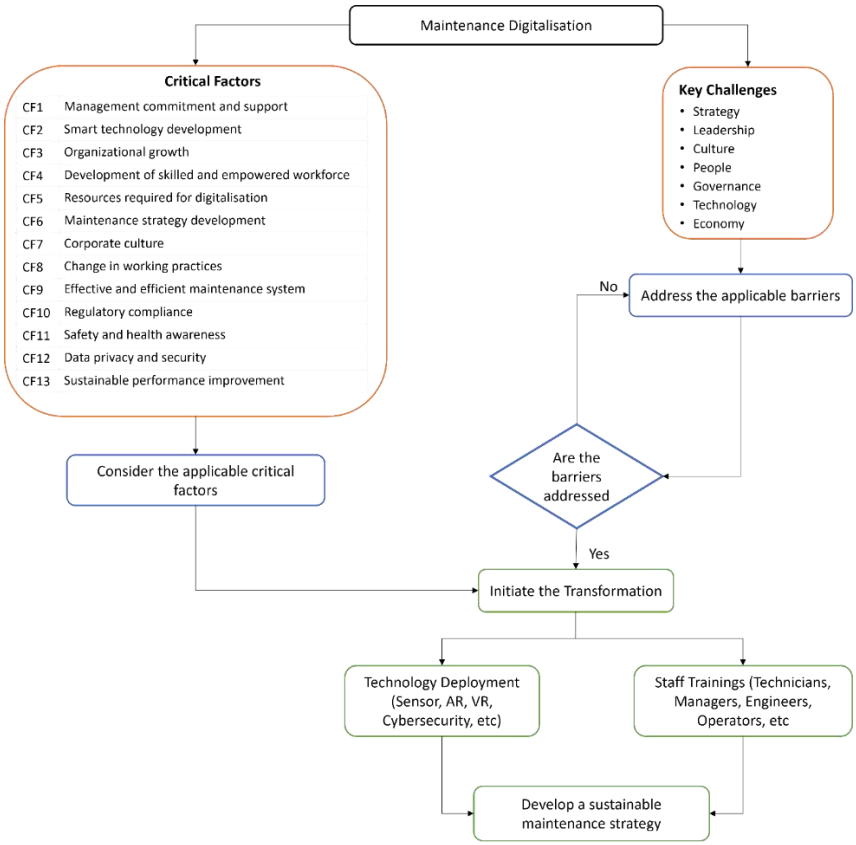

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

3.3 Propositions

The following propositions were tested within this study.

Proposition 1: The adoption of maintenance digitalisation tools will improve the effectiveness of maintenance execution within South African mining companies:

- Improved information management (the degree of ease to find maintenance data)
- Integration of maintenance systems (cross functional communication among systems)
- Increased ability to identify issues and devise remediation strategies

Proposition 2: Organisational culture moderates the relationship between digitalised maintenance data and maintenance performance.

- Support for learning and development
- Openness to change
- Innovation drive
- Policy, norms and values around digitalisation

Proposition 3: Organisations that use digitised maintenance data experience superior maintenance performance than organisations that rely on traditional maintenance data collection practices.

- Higher Overall Equipment Effectiveness
- Optimised maintenance scheduling
- Reduction in unplanned downtime

4 RESEARCH APPROACH

4.1 Introduction

The research design was based on mixed methods, allowing the researcher to harness the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data was collected from qualifying candidates through a combination of semi-structured interviews and online surveys.

The following criteria were used to identify eligible individuals for consultation, in line with the research study's objectives.

- Works for a South African mining company
- Works with the Engineering/Maintenance department
- Has over five years of experience in maintenance or digitalisation

4.2 Data Collection Methods and Tools

Literature reviews, surveys, and semi-structured interviews were used to gather information for the study. Scopus and Google Scholar were used to facilitate the scoping review and chart existing literature about the subject matter. A survey with sections comprising of company background, current maintenance practices and human factors was created in Qualtrics and shared with the qualifying participants. To ensure data validity and reliability, the researcher acted as the sole distributor of the surveys and the only interviewer, thereby maintaining consistency in the interpretation of the results. The questions for the survey were pre-tested with fellow scholars and mentors in the field (i.e., peers and study supervisor) to ensure its logical consistency before release. Interviews conducted in person and online were based on the same line of questioning to simplify data aggregation. No data was collected in contravention of the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act. The objectives of the study were explained to the respondents prior to the commencement of the survey, allowing them to provide written informed consent to either participate in the study or decline entirely of their own free will.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The survey was shared with 36 companies that operate within the South African mining industry. The range of companies included traditional mining companies and technology services companies that provide maintenance digitalisation services (i.e., Internet of Things, systems integrators and digital asset management consulting services). As shown in Table 1: Survey Responses, 86% of the survey responses were valid, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the data.

Table 1: Survey Responses

Description	Frequency	%
Test Responses	5	7%
Incomplete	6	6%
Valid Responses	54	86%
Total Survey Responses	81	100%

The following sections outline the information that was extracted from the various participants and the analysis thereof.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

This section provides insight into respondents' roles, experience, organisational type and perspectives on their current maintenance practices. This information was gathered to contextualise the participants' responses by understanding their experiences.

5.2.1 Respondent Profiles

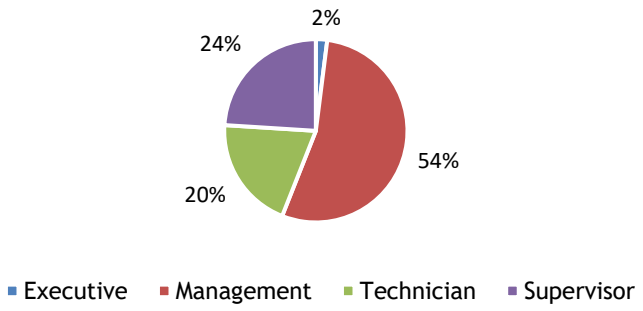

Figure 2: Respondents by Title

The majority of respondents were early to mid-career professionals with up to a decade of work experience, reflecting a strong hands-on practical experience. It should be noted that engagement from executive leadership was minimal, highlighting a potential gap in perspectives related to strategic and long-term organisational objectives.

5.2.2 *Mean, Median, Mode and Interquartile Range*

Respondents were asked to rate the level of satisfaction they had with their organisation's current maintenance practices on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 signifying extreme satisfaction. The mean, median, mode, and Interquartile range were used to measure satisfaction with current maintenance practices and to derive the overall respondent sentiment. Upon analysis, the mean score for overall satisfaction was 6, as expressed by 30% of the respondents. The

modal value was also 6. Based on the interquartile range, 50% of the scores were clustered between a score of 5 and 7. These results indicate that the current maintenance practices are perceived to be functional but not yet optimised, highlighting room for improvement.

5.2.3 Maintenance Philosophies

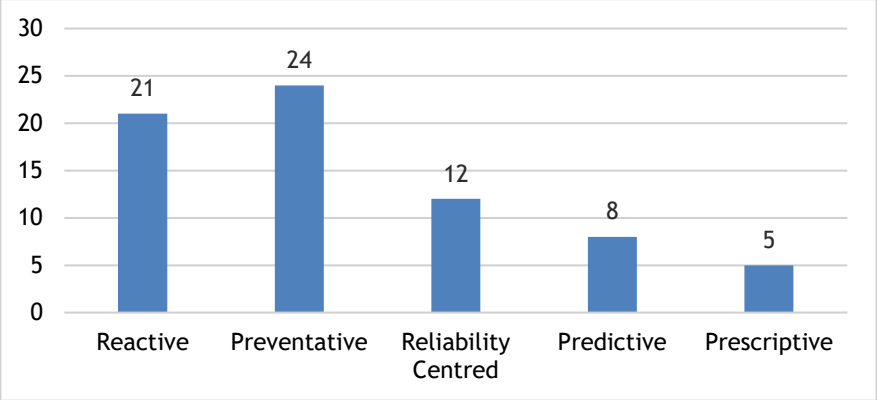

Figure 3: Maintenance Philosophies

64% of respondents indicated that they follow both reactive and preventive maintenance strategies as highlighted by Figure 3: Maintenance Philosophies.

5.2.4 Data Collection Methods

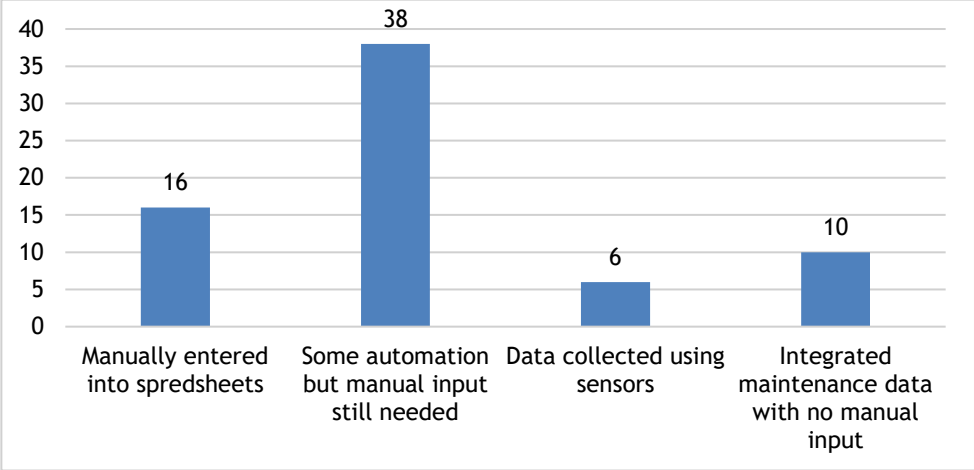

Figure 4: Data Collection Methods

An overwhelming 77% of respondents indicated that they use a combination of manual data capturing methods and have an immature level of automated data capturing. Furthermore, 55% of these respondents added that their organisations do not augment maintenance practices with digital technologies. These findings highlight the risk of computational errors which may compromise the analysis, leading to misinterpretations of the data. Manual data management also means that technicians and supervisors spend a significant amount of time collecting, cleaning, and synthesising the data. This data management approach leads to isolated data sources that may present contradictions, therefore undermining the reliability of the data. Delays in data interpretation limit timely decision-making, leading to missed opportunities for implementing effective maintenance.

5.3 Qualitative Analysis

Respondents were asked to respond to an open-ended question regarding their perceived barriers, benefits and support needed for the successful digitalisation of maintenance data. The survey tool's built-in semantic analyser was used to apply data codification to the different responses, preparing the data for thematic analysis.

5.3.1 Barriers to Maintenance Data Digitisation

Based on the thematic analysis performed, Figure 5: Barriers to maintenance data digitalisation outlines the identified barriers. The most recurring theme was the lack of skills enrichment programs tailored to the vast demographics of the maintenance workforce.

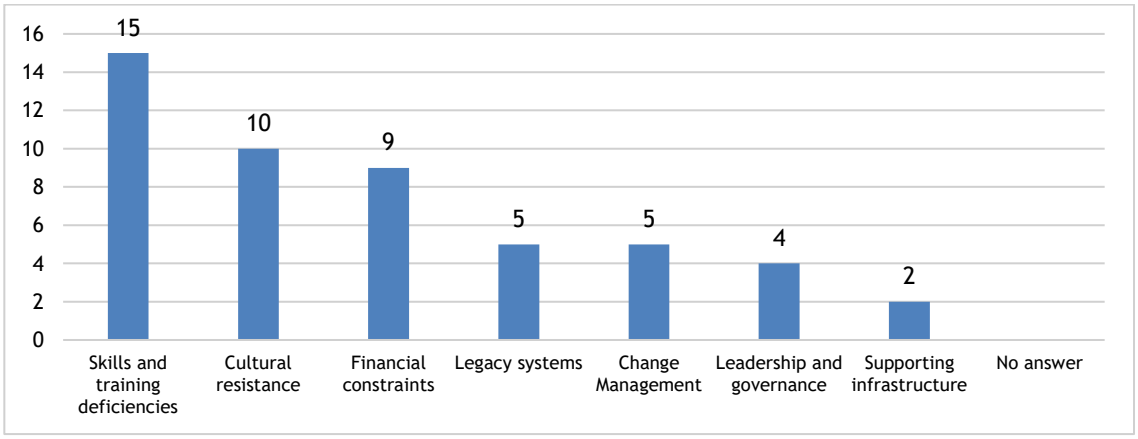

Figure 5: Barriers to maintenance data digitalisation

5.4 Maintenance Data Digitalisation benefits

Organisations that had made strides towards implementing digital technologies to collect and process their maintenance data were asked to comment on some of the key benefits that they had experienced. Based on a thematic analysis conducted, the results are summarised in Figure 6: Maintenance Data Digitalisation Benefits

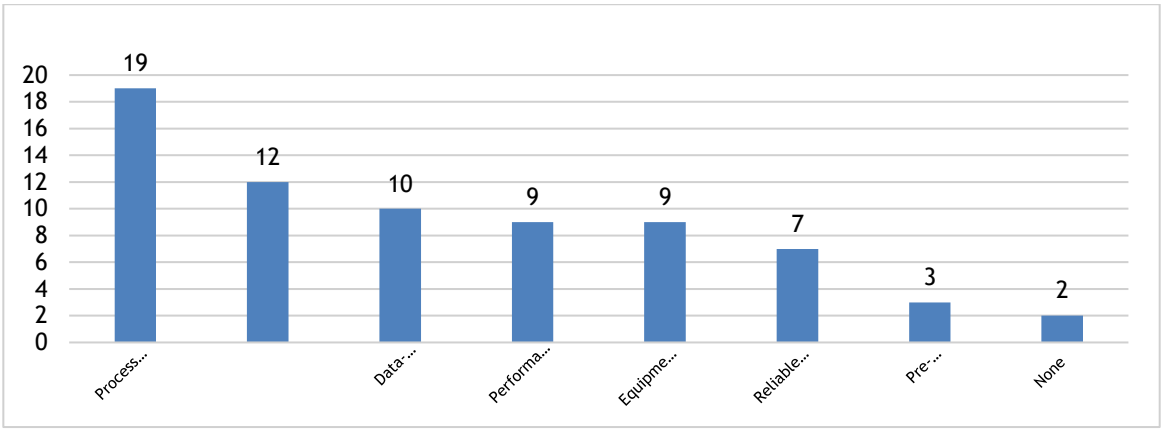

Figure 6: Maintenance Data Digitalisation Benefits

Augmenting technology with optimised workflows enables personnel to spend less time conducting repetitive data management tasks and more time analysing it and drawing conclusions to support equipment uptime. Using technology for data collection allows the data to be centralised, ensuring a single version of the truth about the current state of equipment. Data centralisation simplifies the prospect of information management (e.g., data retrieval, data sharing and processing), creating opportunities for the data to be used for various use

cases. Additionally, the availability of data enables personas such as the reliability engineer and the maintainer to proactively identify issues with equipment, paving the way for predictive maintenance.

5.5 Additional Support Required

Respondents were asked to provide open-ended responses on what they perceive as the support required to empower them in their functions. The findings are presented in Figure 7: Digitalisation Support Required.

Notably, 50% of the responses focus on the need to raise awareness regarding emerging technologies and invest in training programs to upskill the workforce in effectively utilising these technologies.

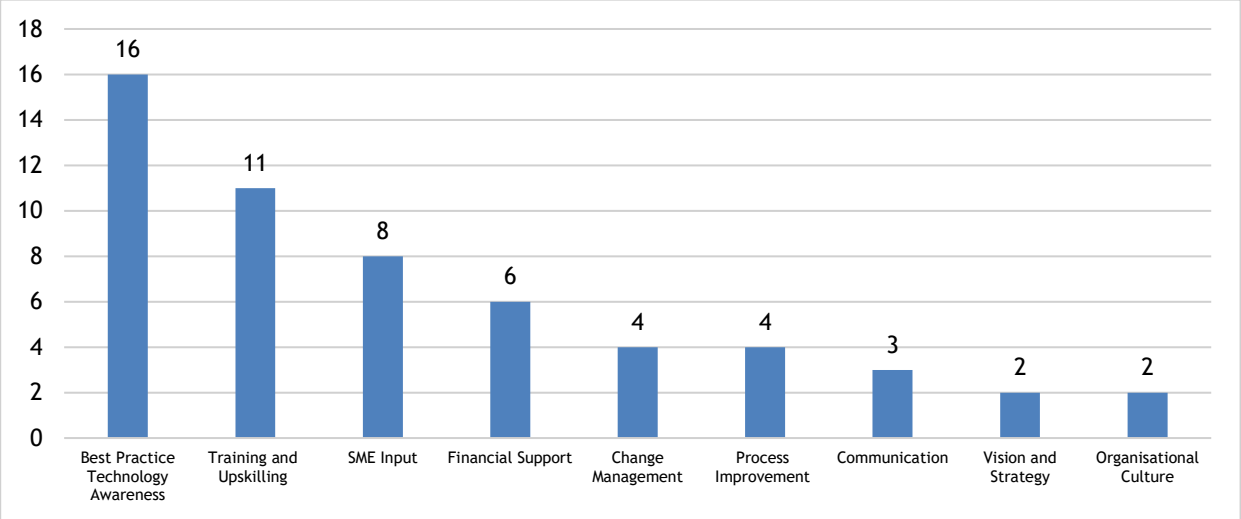

Figure 7: Digitalisation Support Required

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Summary of key findings

The South African mining industry is undergoing a transitional phase in adopting digital maintenance data. The dominant use of reactive and preventive maintenance, alongside manual data capturing through spreadsheets, suggests that while maintenance systems are in place, they often lack the intelligence and agility that digital technologies can offer. This presents a significant risk of data fragmentation, potential human error, and latency in decision-making, thereby hindering the adoption of predictive and performance-oriented maintenance strategies.

The study also highlighted critical barriers to broader digitalisation efforts. The lack of skills and training, cultural resistance to change, and financial constraints were some of the most frequently cited challenges. These factors suggest that the limitations to widespread maintenance digital transformation are not merely technical but also organisational and behavioural. The lack of clearly defined digital strategies that complement the business strategies also adds to some of the top barriers. Mining organisations understand the need for such a strategy; however, due to pressures to perform and deliver in the near term, there is little focus on the mid-term (tactical) and long-term (strategic) aspects of maintenance management. Organisations that have defined their digitalisation implementation plans are still in the infancy stages of realising value, suggesting that the South African mining industry is still warming up to Maintenance 4.0.

Despite these limitations, organisations that have adopted digital maintenance technologies have experienced notable benefits. The most common benefits are enhanced process efficiency, advanced information management and data-driven decision-making. These benefits demonstrate a clear correlation between digital adoption and improved operational and strategic outcomes, particularly in areas such as equipment performance, data reliability, and predictive maintenance. The conceptual model for this study has been revised to provide guidance on how South African mining organisation can phase their maintenance data digitalisation efforts as presented in Figure 8: Adapted Maintenance Data Digitalisation Framework.

6.2 Conclusion

6.2.1 Theoretical Framework Factors

The following factors were identified and validated through the study in comparison to the work of [16] carried out in the manufacturing industry. These factors were raised in the survey responses and interviews.

- Management commitment and support
- Smart technology development
- Organisational growth
- Development of a skilled and empowered workforce
- Resources required for digitalisation
- Maintenance strategy development
- Corporate culture
- Change in working practices
- Safety and health awareness
- Data privacy and security

6.2.2 Prepositions

Preposition 1: The adoption of digitalisation tools for maintenance will improve the effectiveness of Maintenance within South African mining companies.

The first proposition was validated based on the cited benefits realised by organisations implementing maintenance practices. Organisations that had successfully adopted digital tools experienced improved access to their data, enhanced remote monitoring of equipment, and improved process efficiency, allowing the workforce more time to conduct other value-added activities.

Proposition 2: Organisational culture moderates the relationship between digitalised maintenance data and maintenance performance.

The second proposition was also validated. The data indicates that having the tools at one's disposal is not enough. Social factors, such as change management and willingness to learn, contribute to the successful implementation of digital maintenance data. Organisations must develop comprehensive change management programs that address this aspect.

Proposition 3: Organisations that use digitised maintenance data experience superior maintenance performance than organisations that rely on traditional maintenance data collection practices.

The third and final proposition could not be validated statistically due to the lack of access to formal maintenance performance reports and metrics (e.g., OEE data, downtime logs). The proposition was however validated through perception-based measures captured in the survey responses. Analysis of the responses indicates that organisations reporting higher adoption of digitised maintenance practices also consistently perceived superior outcomes across these performance dimensions when compared to organisations relying on traditional, manual data collection. This validation is consistent with the literature study.

6.3 Revised Framework for Maintenance Data Digitalisation

Based on the findings of this study, the following guidelines have been developed to guide organisations in adopting maintenance data digitalisation efforts.

Step 1: Perform a structured organisational diagnosis

Establish a clear understanding of the organisation's operating environment, maintenance practices and digital maturity to align technology integration with business needs and priorities.

I. Stakeholder Engagement

- Conduct structured interviews/workshops with stakeholders including maintenance managers, reliability engineers, IT personnel, technicians, digital value chain leads and executive leadership to capture current maintenance challenges, digital priorities and readiness for transformation

II. Current State Assessment

- Map existing maintenance processes, workflows, tools and reporting structures
- Document how maintenance data is captured, stored and processed

III. Digital Maturity Analysis

- Use a verified digital capability maturity framework to benchmark the organisation in terms of data management, automation and decision making
- Identify gaps across people, processes and technology between current capabilities and desired future state

IV. Business Context Analysis

- Align findings with operational, tactical and strategic organisational goals (e.g., productivity improvement, cost reduction, improved safety or sustainability)

Artefacts to be produced:

- AS-IS report detailing business processes, tools in use, current challenges and an understanding of current maintenance ecosystem, digital readiness and identification of critical areas where maintenance digitalisation can add value
- Stakeholder map showing roles and responsibilities, reporting line and hierarchies
- Context alignment matrix showing relating maintenance needs and organisation objectives

Step 2: Assess Barriers

Assess the prevalent barriers to digital transformation across the critical factors (i.e., strategy, leadership, culture, people, governance, technology, and economy)

I. **Barrier Identification Workshops**

- Facilitate workshops with cross-functional teams to identify barriers from the wider workforce

II. **Categorisation of Barriers**

- Group the identified barriers under Strategy, Leadership, Culture, People, Governance, Technology and Economic/Financial

III. **Conduct a Barrier Intensity Assessment**

- Apply a scoring framework (High, Medium or Low) across the following criteria:
    - **Impact:** Degree to which the barrier hinders digitalisation efforts
    - **Likelihood:** Probability of the barrier persisting if there is no intervention

IV. **Root Cause Analysis**

- Conduct root cause analysis for high priority barriers using lean tools such as the 5-Whys and/or Fishbone diagrams

Artefacts

- Barrier Inventory Register across the seven themes
- Barrier Heat Map visual based on intensity (impact and likelihood)
- Root cause analysis report detailing structural and systemic causes

Step 3: Develop Mitigation Actions

Develop tailored actions to address the prevalent barriers across the various themes. These actions must be measurable in terms of both time and performance.

I. **Barrier-to-Action Mapping**

- Translate each high/medium priority barrier into one or more mitigation actions, ensuring that each action is linked to a barrier root cause

II. **Define Action Framework**

- Define SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) actions
- Group actions into short-term (0-6 months), medium-term (6 – 18 months) and long-term (18+ months) interventions, based on effort and impact
- Use a RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed) matrix to assign the actions to owners

III. **Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms**

- Define KPIs and success measures for each action
- Establish a cadence (monthly/quarterly) to review progress of KPIs

Artefacts

- Mitigation Actions for each barrier and root cause
- Action Roadmap detailing time horizon for each mitigation action
- RACI Chart (roles and responsibilities per action)
- KPI score card to track action, progress and impact

Step 4: Develop a Maintenance Data Digitalisation Strategy

Formalise and implement a digitalisation strategy that outlines measurable key goals and objectives of maintenance data digitalisation.

I. **Set Scope and Boundaries**

- Use steps 1-3 to define the data digitalisation sequence (e.g., critical assets first, high-maintenance equipment second, etc)
- Determine integration requirements required to support future state business processes (i.e., which systems must communicate in order to achieve desired goals)

II. **Roadmap and Milestones**

- Create a phased technology roadmap (short-term, medium-term and long-term) and align it with mitigation actions

III. **Establish Governance and Control Mechanisms**

- Define data governance policies (data ownership, quality standards, etc)
- Establish cadence for reviews and audits

IV. **Change Management and Communication**

- Launch a Change Management Program to communicate the upcoming change, impact and benefits to frontline workers

Artefacts:

- Digital Strategy document
- Implementation roadmap with milestones
- KPI framework and dashboard
- Change Management plan

Step 5: Deploy Relevant Digital Technologies

Identify, select and deploy digital technologies that enable the effective capturing, processing and utilisation of maintenance data

I. **Technology Selection and prioritisation**

- Evaluate technology options based on identified needs and objectives
- Conduct a cost benefit analysis of the technology options on hand considering scalability, vendor maturity and integration capabilities
- Select technologies for phased deployment, starting with high-impact and low-cost initiatives (i.e., quick wins)

II. **Pilot Projects**

- Run controlled pilots of selected technology on sampled assets and processes
- Capture lessons learned, and use lessons to refine full deployment

III. **Change Enablement and Training**

- Provide hands-on training to impacted stakeholders on using new tools

- Identify digital champions among frontline workers to drive peer learning
- Establish support structures to maintain and sustain the transformation

Artefacts to be produced:

- Technology deployment plan
- Vendor evaluation matrix
- Training material and user guides

Figure 8: Adapted Maintenance Data Digitalisation Framework highlights the refined conceptual model.

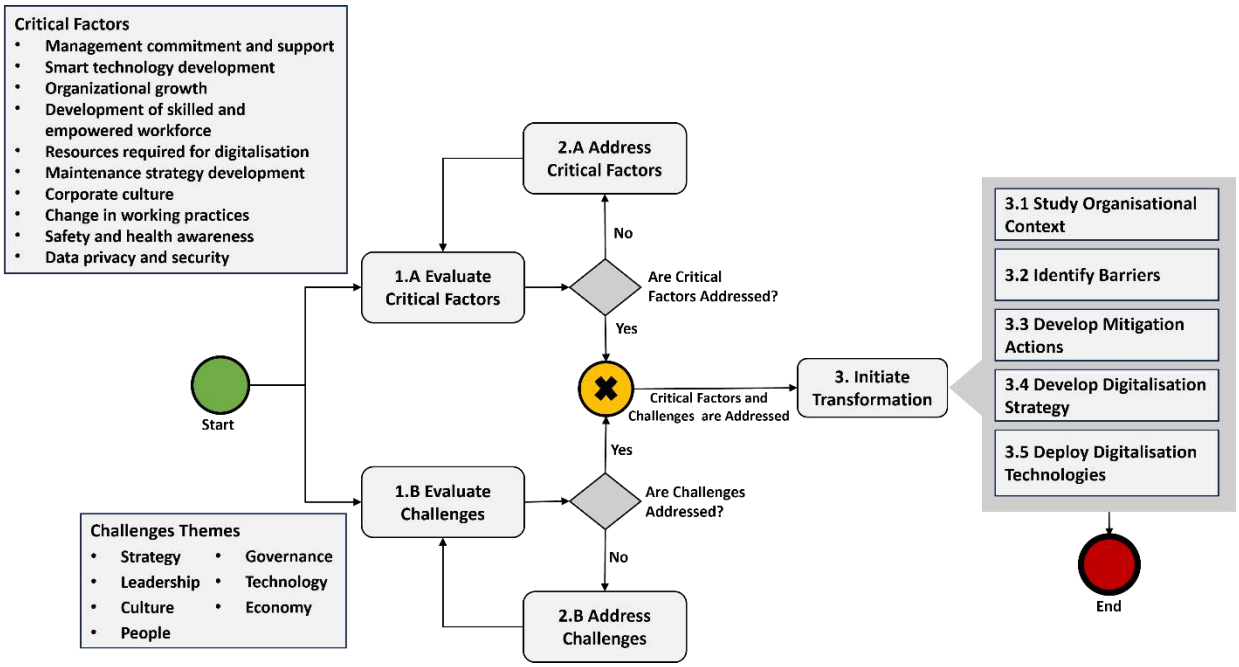

Figure 8: Adapted Maintenance Data Digitalisation Framework

6.4 Contributions of the study

The conceptual framework for this study was originally developed for the manufacturing industry but was adapted for this study on the premise that both manufacturing and mining industries rely fundamentally on the optimal functioning of engineering assets to generate economic value. The results of the study demonstrate that the linkage of these sectors is not only conceptual but also operational, as confirmed through the responses of maintenance personnel in the South African mining industry. By validating the applicability of the theoretical model within this new context, the study provides evidence of its transferability and robustness beyond its initial domain of conception.

Furthermore, the study makes a significant contribution by identifying barriers that hinder the adoption of digital maintenance practices in the South African mining context. In doing so, it offers decision-makers a structured approach to anticipate, prioritise, and address the critical organisational, technological, and human factors that could otherwise undermine maintenance data digitalisation efforts. This enables organisations to mitigate risks before undertaking full-scale digitalisation implementation, thereby improving the likelihood of successful transformation.

Due to the constraints of the study, the framework was only validated within the mining context, it does however exhibit strong potential for generalisability to other asset-intensive

industries, including energy, transportation, and utilities, which share comparable dependencies of asset reliability and face similar digitalisation challenges.

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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF AI IN SYSTEMS ENGINEERING USING COGNITIVE WORK ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Systems Engineering (SE) must confront increasing complexity with innovative methods and tools to enhance its processes and decision-making. Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into SE tools has the potential to assist in handling all sorts of complexities. In this study, we apply Cognitive Work Analysis (CWA), a framework for modelling complex sociotechnical systems, to analyse SE processes' fundamental structures and constraints. Through CWA, the research identifies potential areas where the integration of AI could serve as an enabling element to upgrade SE practices. With AI embedded into the CWA model, this study aims to evaluate how AI can assist in further decision-making, adaptability, and task performance within SE domains. Initial findings reveal that AI could help conduct complex analyses more easily while allowing for efficiency and support in dynamic responses to system constraints. The results offer valuable insights to researchers and practitioners who seek ways to improve SE capabilities in an ever more interconnected and complex world.

Keywords: Systems Engineering, Artificial Intelligence, Large Language Models, Requirements Elicitation, Cognitive Work Analysis (CWA), Abstraction Hierarchy (AH), Work Domain Analysis (WDA)

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1 INTRODUCTION

Increased system complexity has forced Systems Engineering (SE) to play a vast and crucial role in grappling with multi-faceted technical and organisational problems. SE must consider complicated technical specifications, stakeholder interest, the fast pace of technological change, and operating environment dangers [1]. As SE develops in such sociotechnical contexts, the view is gaining support among SE researchers that human cognition plays a vital role in system design and integration [2]. This requires different tools to analyse how SE is practised and where modern technologies, most conspicuously Artificial Intelligence (AI), can help manage complexity.

AI technologies, especially those at the forefront, such as the Large Language Models (LLMs), can assist the cognitive work of systems engineers by automating, enhancing, or transforming a taxonomy of tasks traditionally dependent on human judgment. Injecting AI into SE is not merely the next technical refresh; it is about the reconfiguration of workflows, redefinition of decision points, and re-examining human-machine interaction within a sociotechnical framework [3, 4]. To make sense of and govern such an integration, it is imperative to have a framework that encapsulates the intricacies of SE both as a technical and cognitive activity.

When it comes to applying AI in SE, the framework must identify the impacts of this “new” technology on the SE process and indicate its contribution to managing complexity. The framework needs to distil the cognitive processes in SE before inserting the AI capabilities to make the differences explicit. The prominence of the term Sociotechnical System (STS) is increasing in SE literature [5]. While definitions may differ, the common understanding is that STSs are about both social (people) and technical components [6].

This recognition is essential since systems engineers strive to solve technical challenges and societal considerations, which aligns with a vision such as the International Council on Systems Engineering (INCOSE) Vision 2035 [7]. By its very nature, SE is concerned with integrating heterogeneous elements such as people, processes, tools, and technologies to develop and manage complex systems. This fits with the STS concept, which accentuates the interdependence of social and technical elements within organisational settings. Viewing SE as an STS helps underline social and technical concerns as important considerations in engineering approaches.

For that reason, Cognitive Work Analysis (CWA) will be used to develop the AI integration framework for this paper. CWA is a well-established method for modelling complex STSs, emphasising constraints, goals, tasks, strategies, social interactions, and competencies involved in real-world work [8, 9]. Applying CWA to the SE process will systematically expose cognition and structural dimensions of SE, including mapping how AI can embed to support or disrupt those dimensions.

CWA provides a systematic methodology to analyse the complex interactions between your system's social and technical elements, leading to more effective and adaptable system designs. Therefore, applying CWA to the SE process should expose the cognitive aspects of SE. AI also has cognitive-like characteristics, making CWA lend itself well to considering its potential impact as a new tool in the SE process in the modern complex world. The analysis in this paper focuses primarily on the Work Domain Analysis (WDA) phase of CWA, using it to construct an Abstraction Hierarchy (AH) model that captures SE’s functional purposes, processes, and tools across system life cycle stages [10, 11].

The research approach follows a qualitative, design-science methodology. It begins with a generic SE process model based on international standards and the INCOSE SE Handbook [1], which is then deconstructed through the WDA to identify where and how AI tools can contribute. The resulting models serve as analytical artefacts and practical guides for

identifying high-value opportunities for AI integration. Future work will extend this analysis across additional CWA phases to further explore control task analysis, task strategies, organisational factors, and human competencies [5, 6, 7].

A scoping study has established the state of the art regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence for for Systems Engineering (AI4SE). AI features such as Machine Learning (ML), automated design exploration, generative design, Natural Language Processing (NLP), Large Language Models (LLM) were identified as some of the key AI approaches that can be used in the broader SE domain [12].

2 METHOD

Performing a CWA on the SE process requires a carefully planned research approach, drawing on qualitative research methods and systems modelling methods. Existing literature on applying CWA in organisational and design settings suggests using a case study or field study approach enriched with expert input to gather the necessary data for each analysis phase [9, 13]. The CWA is iterative and integrative. Insights from one phase may lead to refinements in another. The whole CWA process provides an in-depth, iterative analysis of the work domain, environmental constraints, and users' tasks and knowledge requirements (in this case, the practitioners of the SE process). The end result is a set of models/diagrams and structured information that collectively describe the SE process in sociotechnical terms.

Therefore, the first step is to analyse and delineate the scope of the SE process in the form of a generic SE workflow model derived from standards. The goal is to gather sufficient information to populate all CWA modelling levels from high-level objectives down to individual decision-making processes. The WDA provides a blueprint of the SE work domain –a map of what needs to be achieved and what means are available. It can illuminate how different technologies or methods contribute to SE goals, helping foresee how changes, such as adopting a new modelling tool, might ripple through the process [10].

Performing the WDA will first identify the core purpose of the SE process, its values and priorities (e.g. deliver a safe, effective system; meet stakeholder needs; adhere to cost/schedule), the functions and processes that make up SE (requirements analysis, trade studies, integration, verification, etc.), and the physical or informational resources used (tools, models, documents, teams). These are often captured in an Abstraction (and Decomposition) Hierarchy model, which links the high-level purposes to the functional activities and the physical elements that support them. For example, an AH might reveal that a value like “minimise project risk” is supported by risk analysis and design review, which rely on concrete resources like simulation software, review meetings, and expert knowledge [11].

From a research design standpoint, performing CWA on the SE process can be framed within the design science research paradigm or a qualitative SE research method. Design science research is appropriate because it focuses on creating and evaluating artefacts (here, the CWA models and possibly improved process designs) to solve identified problems. It emphasises a rigorous process of problem identification, artefact development (the models), demonstration, and evaluation, which aligns well with how a CWA study would proceed [3].

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Systems Engineering

Over the past decades, SE has matured and established itself as a suite of robust interdisciplinary methodologies that facilitate the successful development of complex systems. It integrates various engineering domains and technical specialisations into a coherent and structured process, spanning the entire system lifecycle—from initial concept development through to production, deployment, and sustained operation [14]. Importantly, SE practice is domain-agnostic with standards like ISO/IEC/IEEE 15288 that define generic life

cycle processes for any system created by humans [15]. These methodologies systematically address technical and organisational challenges across various sectors, including aerospace, defence, automotive, energy, healthcare, and manufacturing [14], [15].

SE is fundamentally concerned with systems' design, integration, and management throughout their entire lifecycle. Its practices aim to enhance system efficiency, quality, and performance while managing cost and mitigating risk. At its core, SE strongly emphasises understanding stakeholder needs and defining system functionality at the project's outset. This includes maintaining a holistic, system-wide perspective while eliciting and documenting requirements, system design and performance validation [16]. A critical contribution of SE lies in its ability to manage the inherent complexity of modern systems. Therefore, key and fundamental focus areas in SE include [16]:

- **Requirements Engineering**: Identifying, analysing, and documenting stakeholder needs to derive system requirements.
- **System Design**: Developing a system architecture and design specifications that address the system requirements.
- **Integration and Testing**: Implementing and combining system components and verifying their correct interaction and performance.
- **Verification and Validation**: Ensuring the system meets its requirements through verification and fulfils its intended purpose in its operational environment with validation.

Traditionally, SE focused more on the technical integration of system components, but modern thinking recognises that the SE process is embedded in an STS context. Therefore, performing SE is not just a technical endeavour because it involves people, tools, procedures, and organisational structures interacting as a unified system to manage complex problems.

3.2 Socio-technical Systems

An STS encompasses social and technical elements, emphasising the interaction and interdependence between people, technology, and the organisational environment in achieving system goals. This concept recognises that technical systems (e.g., software, hardware, tools) and social systems (e.g., human roles, culture, communication) must be designed and managed to optimise overall performance and effectiveness [4, 17]. An STS is typically defined as a combination of humans applying technology to perform work through processes within a social structure to achieve a particular objective [3]. The SE process fits this definition: it comprises human teams (social), engineering methods and tools (technical), and defined workflows within an organisation, all aimed at delivering a system that meets stakeholders' needs. System engineers and other stakeholders use SE processes and tools to perform the system engineering function. It is a complex interaction between people and technical systems.

Complex engineering projects often exhibit emergent behaviour and unanticipated social and technical interactions, especially when introducing new technologies or processes. A traditional reductionist approach (breaking a problem into isolated components) can miss these emergent properties. Simply decomposing a system and designing components in isolation may overlook changes needed in information flows, roles, or procedures when a new technology is integrated into a socio-technical environment. If such social-technical interactions or newly "emerging requirements" are ignored, the result can be misaligned systems or outright failures in practice. In short, the success of a complex system depends not only on its technical soundness but also on how well the engineering process accounts for human and organisational factors [4].

The STS theory itself underlines the inseparability of social and technical elements. At the core of this theory is the notion that the performance of a complex system "can only work satisfactorily if the 'social' and the 'technical' are considered together". Optimising purely technical subsystems while neglecting human/workplace aspects leads to sub-optimal outcomes. SE practices must be coupled with understanding team dynamics, user needs, and organisational context. Baxter and Sommerville [2] argue for a socio-technical SE framework that bridges traditional engineering with considerations of work design, human-computer interaction, and organisational factors. Embracing the SE process as an STS applicable across domains and over the whole life cycle ensures that critical human factors (communication, decision-making, teamwork) and technical factors (methods, tools, technologies) are addressed in tandem at every stage [18].

Treating the SE process as an STS provides a broader, more realistic model of executing complex projects. It acknowledges that SE involves a complex interaction between social humans and technical systems [3]. By adopting an STS perspective, we can better manage emergent behaviour, align system development with organisational needs, and ultimately deliver robust and well-integrated systems into their operational context [19]. This sets the stage for implementing AI tools to improve the SE process.

3.3 Artificial Intelligence

AI is, in essence, computer programs created to engage in activities requiring human intelligence if done by humans, such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and understanding natural language [20]. This recent surge in AI development has enhanced its use in healthcare, finance, transport, and education industries. In healthcare activities, AI exhibits assistance in diagnosis and personalised treatments [21]. It is a powerful financial fraud detection tool and implements advanced trading techniques. AI can smooth the way for intelligent automobiles and smart city infrastructures, thus enhancing safety and efficiency. Education is another industry where AI-based personalised learning models promote better accessibility and efficacy. This is where a widely accepted AI begins industrial revolutions, hence innovations and disruptions of computer-human interface. However, the question that perhaps arises is: How can AI be used within and for SE tools in the SE process?

Public awareness regarding LLMs has increased since ChatGPT launched at the end of 2022. Increasingly, these models are used for writing various forms of formal creative and technical content, triggered only through the natural language prompt, enabling the user to specify the information and style they want. SE activities involve considerable language use, including gathering, documenting, and validating system requirements from stakeholders. The explicit nature of this language makes these tasks suitable for AI support [22, 23].

This study analysed how AI could be incorporated into the SE development process to tackle the rising complexity of systems and assist in better decision-making. AI technologies can automate operations, improve efficiency, and foster innovation by generating adaptive and resilient systems that react to real-time data and varying conditions. Hence, integrating AI with SE systems may lead to significant benefits like cost savings, efficient resource allocation, and superior user experiences. AI-powered systems give companies competitive advantages because they provide new capabilities and functionalities, which are much needed in today's and tomorrow's technological market.

3.4 Cognitive Work Analysis

CWA enables the assessment and design of complex STSs, especially in dynamic environments where human operators interact with technology. It was developed mainly to understand how people cope with unforeseen situations and adapt to evolving environments [24]. The use of CWA applied to SE offers several advantages [25, 26, 27]:

- **Understanding Work Constraints**: CWA looks at the constraints imposed by the work environment and helps analyse how systems can support different work practices, but it does not prescribe particular procedures. This is especially useful in SE, where flexibility and adaptability are required.
- **Modelling Complex Interactions**: With the help of tools like the AH, CWA allows the representation of interactions at different levels of systems, from goals at the highest level down to physical components. This holistic view helps us understand how various aspects of the SE process interact and affect each other.
- **Enhancing System Design**: Cognitive-dependent systems will probably be more resilient and susceptible to alignment with human thoughts. For instance, studies demonstrated that CWA is conducive to system design when considering the complex interactions that characterise human-machine relations in different domains.
- **Supporting Decision-Making**: Using CWA allows one to analyse decision-making methods in SE, with possible improvement and optimisation areas emerging due to the capabilities of a new technology.

The key phases of CWA are discussed below.

3.4.1 Work Domain Analysis

The first phase of CWA focuses on understanding the system and the operating domain's structure and constraints without considering the operator's specific tasks or goals. It represents the system's operation under all normal and abnormal conditions [28]. The WDA uses the AH tool, representing the system at multiple levels, from physical components to high-level system purposes. The AH is a method for modelling complex socio-technical systems, representing the functional relationships at different levels of abstraction, from the system's purpose to its physical form [10]. In addressing the research questions, the AH provides a framework to identify the impacts at the different levels. This will enable a focus on the relevant areas that are affected. Below is a template for creating an AH, typically organised into five levels [11].

Table 1: Abstraction Hierarchy Description

Level	Description
Functional Purpose	The overall purpose or goal of the system
Abstract Function	The high-level principles or concepts that fulfil the system's purpose
Generalised Function	The processes or tasks that need to be performed to achieve abstract functions
Physical Function	The physical actions or operations required to carry out the tasks
Physical Form	The hardware, software, or physical entities involved in the system

By identifying these levels, it becomes possible to investigate the impact of AI on this world in a structured manner and provide meaning and context to the different types of functions. This categorisation then helps define the effects at the various levels.

3.4.2 Control Task Analysis (ConTA)

This phase identifies the tasks or functions required for operating within the system. It focuses on what needs to be done rather than who does it or how it is done. The goal is to understand the functional requirements that must be satisfied under various operating conditions. Understanding functional requirements is fundamental within SE. Applying this principle to SE

by investigating what has to be done will lead to some clarity on research questions aimed at finding where the most potential benefit of AI for SE is [29].

3.4.3 Strategies Analysis

This level explores different strategies or methods that can be used to perform the identified tasks. It identifies various ways operators can achieve the system's goals, given the flexibility and constraints of the system. By investigating how specific tasks can be done from a strategic perspective, guidance is given towards answering the research questions of how AI can best benefit SE [10, 28].

3.4.4 Social and Organisational Analysis

This phase addresses the interactions between people, teams, and the organisation. It focuses on communication, coordination, and allocating roles and responsibilities. It helps in understanding how social factors and organisational structures influence system performance. Social factors are essential when introducing change into an established discipline. Issues like trust in the technical systems, such as AI tools being added to SE, are paramount. All relevant communication, roles and the like have a strong bearing on factors that affect the questions of crucial factors that contribute to the successful adoption of AI in SE [10, 28, 30].

3.4.5 Worker Competency Analysis

The final phase deals with individual competencies, such as knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform tasks. It links the design of functions and systems to the cognitive capabilities of the operator. The required competencies of system engineers lead to a specific type of skill profile found in System Engineering. Understanding what factors in this typical profile may aid or deter the successful use of AI in SE will guide answering the research questions regarding the critical factors for successful adoption [28, 29].

3.4.6 Summary of CWA Phases and Methods

The diagram below is a graphical summary of the CWA phases and methods. Each phase uses particular methods and may influence the other phases. This research focuses on the WDA, focusing on the purpose, abstraction and decomposition of SE. The other phases will be conducted in future research.

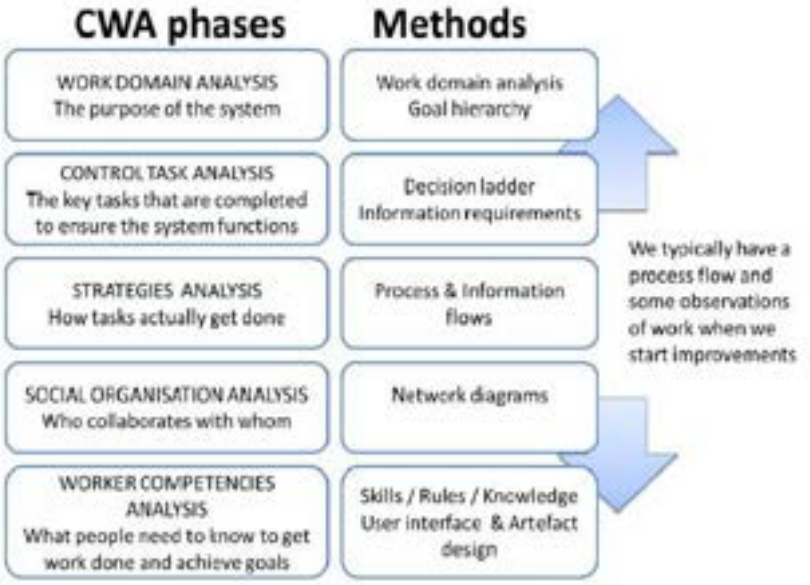

Fig. 1 Graphical Summary of CWA phases and methods [31]**.**

3.5 Modelling the Systems Engineering Process with Cognitive Work Analysis

A CWA offers a powerful model and analysis framework because the SE process is an STS with inherent complexity. As a conceptual framework, it was initially developed to model complex STSs that focus on understanding work constraints (instead of prescribing specific task procedures) [32]. In essence, CWA provides a multi-dimensional, formative analysis of an activity or process, helping to uncover the deep structure of work – the goals, constraints, decisions, strategies, and interactions that shape how the work gets done [28]. Therefore, CWA is useful for examining the SE process:

- **Holistic, Constraint-Based Modelling**: CWA enables analysts to construct a structured model of the work domain of SE, capturing its purposes, functions, values, and resources in an AH. This helps make explicit the goals and constraints under which systems engineers operate. By focusing on fundamental constraints (e.g. safety, budget, stakeholder goals) rather than just sequences of tasks, CWA reveals why certain engineering activities are necessary and how technical and organisational limits bound them. Such insight is invaluable for SE and often reconciles conflicting constraints (performance vs. cost, technical requirements vs. human capabilities). Modelling the SE process via a WDA can, for example, link the functions provided by different engineering tools or methods to the higher-level objectives and requirements of the project. This ensures that any analysis or improvement of the SE process keeps the overall system purpose in view [3].
- **Handling Complexity and Emergence**: Because CWA is a formative analysis (it explores the space of possible activities under varying conditions), it is well-suited to dealing with unanticipated events and emergent behaviours. SE processes must often adapt to changes, such as new stakeholder needs, technology insertion, or unexpected problems. A CWA model of the SE process is "event independent", meaning it is not tied to one specific scenario; instead, it characterises the constraints and affordances that apply across many situations. Analysts can ask "what if" questions and foresee how the engineering process might respond to novel challenges or failures. During requirements, analysis helped uncover potential emergent requirements and design implications when introducing new technology. Traditional methods might overlook such emergent interactions, but the CWA model exposes them, thus helping to mitigate undesirable outcomes early. In general, by capturing the invariant structure of the work (the underlying rationale and relationships), CWA supports more resilient process designs that remain effective even as conditions change [4].
- **Integration of Social and Cognitive Factors**: The SE process is carried out by people (systems engineers, designers, testers, managers, etc.) who's decision-making and collaboration significantly impact success. CWA explicitly accounts for the cognitive and cooperative aspects of work. Beyond mapping the domain's physical and functional structure, later phases of CWA examine tasks/activities, the strategies people use, how work is shared among roles, and the competencies needed. This is crucial for SE as it highlights how information is propagated, how decisions are made under pressure, and where there may be bottlenecks or mismatches between human capabilities and process demands [25,33]. Applying this to SE, CWA treats the engineering team and tools as a joint system, thereby identifying opportunities to support better human cognitive work through improved decision support tools or process adjustments [34].
- **Proven Utility in Abstract Domains**: While CWA originated in analysing operational environments like nuclear power plants or aviation, its utility has extended to more abstract, process-oriented domains. It can be applied to analyse and design engineering processes and methodologies. CWA is not limited to examining how humans interact with a finished system; it can also discuss how humans work to create a system. This makes it an appropriate choice for studying the SE process, which involves

abstract activities like requirement negotiation, trade-off analysis, and collaborative design. Modelling the SE process with CWA provides a rigorous, human-centred analytic view, helping improve the process and ensuring that engineered systems are developed with full awareness of social and technical constraints [4, 35].

SE promotes a holistic framework wherein diverse elements such as user experience, cognitive ergonomics, and operational constraints are interwoven [2]. It is precisely in this space that conceptual frameworks like CWA significantly overlap with SE. Both disciplines strive to optimise complex systems by understanding and leveraging the intricate interplay between human cognition and physical tools [10]. Applying CWA to a system aligns naturally with the layered structure of SE. Both frameworks have a fundamental separation between abstract and physical dimensions. In SE, abstract user needs are progressively transformed into user requirements, system requirements, system architecture, detailed design, and physical implementation [1]. CWA's AH provides a rigorous method for modelling this separation, allowing systematic tracing of how decisions and constraints at one level impact other levels [11]. Performing CWA on SE is analogous to performing SE on the SE process itself [34]. As the cognitive aspects of SE are examined, the analyst must ask: What cognitive functions are system engineers performing? How do these cognitive functions relate to the physical tools and actions involved in SE? [35].

Physical artefacts in SE (software, documents, models) do not themselves exhibit cognition—they are manipulated and interpreted by human engineers [29]. However, modern computer systems augment human cognition by enabling data storage, management, transport, and transformation, allowing the human mind to focus on higher-level cognitive tasks [32]. AI technologies now introduce a further shift. While not truly cognitive, AI employs statistical and algorithmic techniques to perform functions traditionally attributed to human cognition [20, 21]. Recent advances, particularly in Large Language Models (LLMs), have made this capability highly visible [22, 23].

This raises an important question when applying CWA to AI-enabled SE tools: At what level in the AH does an AI tool reside? Physically, it is hardware and software. Yet, the tasks it performs may be classified, at least from the observer's perspective, as cognitive [28]. This challenges traditional views of role allocation in SE and necessitates careful modelling of AI's impact on the human-machine division of labour [34, 36]. With AI capabilities, cognitive functions that were once the sole domain of humans are increasingly being offloaded onto physical systems [32, 33]. The traditional view that only predictable, repetitive tasks should be automated is no longer valid [18, 37].

When seeking areas where AI can offload human cognitive functions in SE, the most promising opportunities are those deemed tedious, error-prone, or cognitively fatiguing [22, 36]. Many engineers would welcome AI tools that remove such tedium and improve consistency, provided trust and transparency are adequately addressed [36, 37]. By applying CWA in this context, we can systematically identify which SE tasks are suitable for cognitive offloading, where AI integration may yield the most value, and how to preserve human oversight and accountability in AI-augmented workflows [10, 18].

Therefore, CWA offers a means to systematically analyse the SE process as a complex sociotechnical work system. It clarifies the purposes and constraints governing SE activities, accommodates the unpredictability of real-world projects, and keeps human and organisational factors at the forefront of analysis. By doing so, CWA can support the design of better SE processes. Indeed, a structured CWA of the SE process can become a tool for process improvement, for instance, identifying where new methods or tools are needed, where communication breakdowns might occur, or how to structure teams for maximum effectiveness. This aligns with the broader goal of the INCOSE SE Vision 2035: to expand SE's

capability to address social and human elements in system development. CWA provides the analytical framework to realise that vision in practice [7, 17].

3.6 Requirements Engineering

Requirements Engineering (RE) software tools are explicitly intended for authoring, eliciting, capturing, analysing, classifying, valuing, validating, specifying, communicating, measuring the quality of, verifying, and managing requirements [16]. These capabilities are foundational to ensuring that the engineered system ultimately satisfies stakeholder needs and system objectives [1]. Within the broader scope of SE, the verification and validation processes also serve as critical pillars that bridge the conceptual realm of user needs with the tangible outcomes of system implementation. These steps ensure that what is built aligns with what was envisioned, maintaining accountability and coherence across all layers of system development [15]. At the heart of this is the iterative refinement of requirements, from high-level user needs to detailed technical specifications [2].

Toolchains designed for RE play a pivotal role in enabling this iterative refinement. By employing advanced software capable of modelling, simulating, and visualising complex systems, engineers can anticipate downstream challenges and address them early in the design phase [3, 27]. This proactive approach is particularly critical in layered systems where interactions between abstract and physical elements can introduce emergent complexities that are otherwise difficult to manage [18]. The traditional RE methods and techniques are not entirely suitable for meeting the needs of Industry 4.0 systems. Many opportunities remain to improve RE [38]. AI-enabled systems are strong candidates for enhancing the current shortcomings present in RE.

4 WORK DOMAIN ANALYSIS APPLIED TO SYSTEM ENGINEERING

The abstraction hierarchy in Table 2 offers a clear and systematic way to understand and manage the SE process as an STS by organizing it across multiple layers of abstraction, each serving a distinct role in the SE process. An abstraction hierarchy provides an activity-independent representation of a work domain's intentional and physical capabilities and constraints. It is structured as a two-dimensional matrix. The vertical axis represents an AH comprising five levels: system purpose, domain values, domain functions, technical functions, and physical objects. The horizontal axis captures a decomposition hierarchy, reflecting the levels identified during analysis as necessary for understanding the functional structure of the work system. We can view the physical form as a tool at the lowest level of the hierarchy.

At the highest level, the Functional Purpose defines the fundamental reason for the system's existence. This purpose is not technical in itself but speaks to the mission or business goal that the system must achieve. In the context of an STS, which integrates human, organizational, and technological elements, this purpose typically addresses broad societal needs, organizational objectives, or market demands. Considering the abstraction hierarchy categories, deriving an abstraction hierarchy of the SE process begins with identifying the following functional purpose of SE:

"The purpose of SE is to conceive, develop, produce, utilise, support and retire the right product or service within budget and schedule constraints." [1]

As seen in the top level in Table 2, the SE process is about application within each life cycle phase, focusing on the right product or service with explicit budget and schedule constraints. This provided the top layer of the abstraction hierarchy. This can be decomposed into the main life cycle phases, which can be listed as follows [1]:

- Conceive
- Develop

- Utilise
- Support
- Retire

Each life cycle phase has specific pertinent aspects from conception through to retirement. Table 2 maps the relationship between the high-level purpose life cycle phases and the abstract function technical processes. The Abstract Function layer translates this purpose into a set of conceptual processes required to realize it. Each SE Technical Process is considered part of an SE process over the project's life cycle [1]. They provide guidelines on executing the SE process in various contexts. These processes encompass both the technical and non-technical aspects of system development — from business or mission analysis to stakeholder requirements, system architecture definition, and beyond to operation and disposal processes. This level ensures that all critical dimensions of system development are accounted for by addressing human and organizational factors inherent in STSs and ensuring that the system is technically sound but also sustainable, acceptable, and usable within its intended operational context.

Table 2 Abstraction Hierarchy Description

Level	**Description**
Functional Purpose	SE aims to conceive, develop, produce, utilise, support and retire the right product or service within budget and schedule constraints.
Abstract Function	• Business or Mission analysis • Stakeholder Needs and Requirements Definition • System Requirements Definition Process • System Architecture Definition Process • Design Definition Process • System Analysis Process • Implementation Process • Integration Process • Verification Process • Validation Process • Operation Process • Disposal Process All of the above is in the list of technical processes in [1].
Generalised Function	The processes or tasks that need to be performed to achieve abstract functions. The activities typically required for each process are defined in Input Process Output (IPO) diagrams [1].
Physical Function	The physical actions or operations required to carry out the tasks.
Physical Form	The hardware, software, or physical entities involved in the system are often software tools running on computer hardware.

The next layer, the Generalised Function, further decomposes abstract functions into specific tasks and processes that systems engineers perform. The generalised function typically consists of activities required per SE process over the system lifecycle. It bridges the conceptual and the executable functions, which are typically described through structured Input-Process-Output (IPO) models. These models facilitate understanding how data and resources flow through the system, how processes transform inputs into outputs, and where

human or machine interventions are required. When mapping down to the generalised function level, the diagrams fan out significantly.

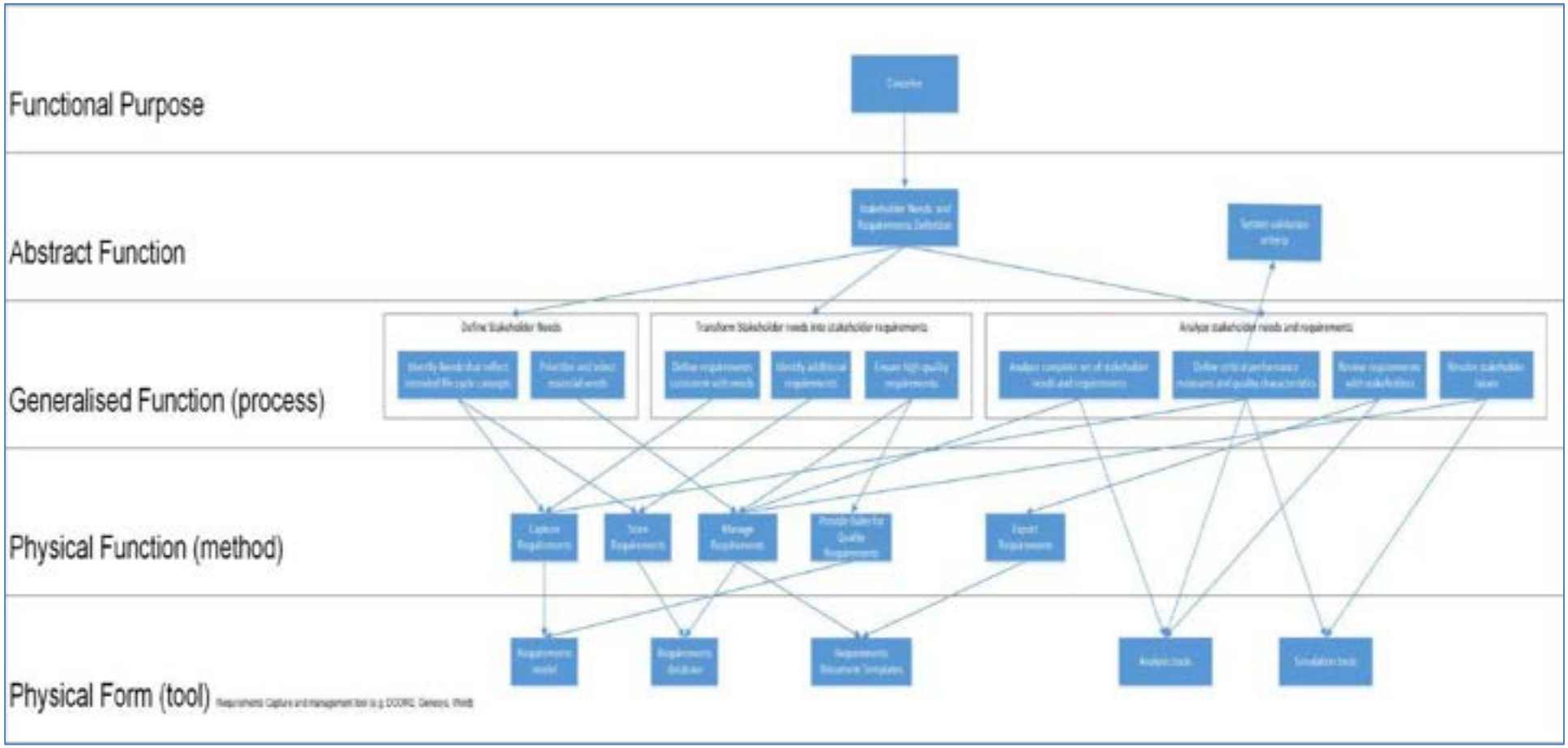

Fig. 5 Work Domain Analysis for Systems Engineering Process for the First Phase [30]**.**

Taking a slice down from “conceive” to the generalised function of Stakeholder Needs and Requirements Definition to the lower level of the abstraction hierarchy gives the view in Figure 5. For STSs, these functions are critical for explicitly modelling interactions between technologies, people, and organizational processes and supporting human-technology integration [1]. At the generalised function level, processes such as “Define Stakeholder Needs” can be grouped as separate, related aspects of “Identify needs that reflect the life cycle concepts” and “Prioritise and select essential needs”.

Skipping to the Physical Form layer represents the tangible elements, the actual software, hardware, and physical entities that realise the system and embody the system’s capabilities, and design choices that affect usability, safety, and organizational performance. For sociotechnical systems, this often includes technological artefacts, tools, work environments, and physical infrastructure that support human work. The lowest level, the physical form, typically manifests as software tools running on computer hardware. These provide the physical actions and operations required in the Generalised Function layer. These include manual operations, automated actions, physical manipulations, and interactions between various system components.

The physical function layer can also be the physical actions or operations in their simple form. In order to carry out such generalised functions, physical functions such as “Capture Requirements”, “Store Requirements”, and “Manage Requirements” are performed. Such physical functions also apply to other aspects of the generalised function, as indicated in the diagram. At the physical form level, the software tools typically required are tools that can be classed as “Requirements Model”, “Requirements database”, and “Requirements Document Templates.”

In summary, the abstraction hierarchy provides a framework for managing the inherent complexity of SE as an STS. It enables engineers to maintain clear traceability from high-level societal or organizational goals to the implemented system components, ensuring that the final system is technically effective and well-aligned with its broader human and organizational context. By systematically addressing each layer, SE practitioners can create systems that are functional, adaptable, resilient, and supportive of human and organizational well-being. In STS contexts, this layer highlights the importance of ergonomics, human-machine interfaces, and workflow design, ensuring that the physical realization of the system supports its intended human use. The high-level ADS view in Table 2 enables analysis per life cycle and abstract function to identify phases and levels to determine the possible high-level grouping of AI application areas.

Table 3 provides a more detailed model of the SE processes in an abstraction hierarchy. In this model, the horizontal axis is the life cycle phase that measures decomposition. This macro-level view across the life cycle phases and abstraction levels guides the focus areas of potential AI application areas. At lower levels, the details can provide more specific guidance. Considering the abstraction hierarchy, one typically can add a new tool, method or process into the current system and analyse its impact on neighbouring layers. Adding an AI tool into the SE process STS is somewhat different.

The type of functionality AI can provide is associated more with what is typically associated with higher abstraction levels. This is due to the cognitive type nature of AI functionality. The impact is not adding a tool but of a physical or general function being performed by a tool or assisting the SE in carrying out the function. When viewing the function that is impacted by using AI, the result could be that the function performed by humans may change. For example, if AI is used to “capture requirements” and even at the generalised functional level to “Identify stakeholder needs”, the cognitive human function could change from “Capture Requirements” to “Review AI captured requirements” Alternatively, AI could be used in a

reviewer type role so that a human could capture requirements and AI can be used to review the quality of requirements with suggested improvements. Transforming Stakeholder needs into Stakeholder Requirements is also something that AI can perform.

Table 3 Abstraction Hierarchy Description

Level	System Lifecycle Phases					
Functional Purpose	Conceive	Develop	Implement	Utilise	Support	Retire
Abstract Function	Determine needs and constraints	Develop architecture and design	Manifest the design into physical deliverables	Derive functional utility of the system in situ	Sustain and support the system use in situ	Remove the system from use
Generalised Function (process)	Define needs and requirements	Define structure and interfaces	Manage physical implementation	Manage the operation of the system	Manage the sustainment of the system	Dispose or transform the system
Physical Function (method)	Capture, store, and manage requirements	Manage system architecture and design	Build, integrate and test the physical system	Operate and monitor the system	Monitor, maintain, and service the system	Transform, remove system
Physical Form (tool)	Requirements model, database, templates	Architecture and design model, database, artefacts	Manufacturing and testing devices	Operational mechanisms	Maintenance and support tools	Disposal tools and mechanisms

AI's transformation is in the tools themselves, carrying out generalised or physical cognitive functions. Some of these functions may be split, where the AI tool performs the function, and the person then has more of a supervisory or accountability role in managing the AI tool and ensuring that the tools are used correctly and that the quality of the outputs is in line with the abstract function and the functional purpose.

5 CONCLUSION

The AH has highlighted that AI applications are quite different from what is commonly perceived as software tools. AI adds direct value to physical and generalised functions, which are typically performed by humans using software tools to frame, model and capture the requirements when defining stakeholder needs and requirements. The impact is mainly on the SEs themselves and how they need to adapt to this new paradigm. Trusting a tool to perform a function that has been the domain of the human mind may not be an easy transition for many. Initially, this will likely manifest mainly in AI performing an assistant role, where suggestions from AI give input to the SE. As the technology matures and improves, and SEs start to appreciate the advantages and improvements in efficiency and quality that such AI assistants may provide, more reliance on AI performing more SE functions may manifest.

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A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING ADOPTION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY: A QUANTITATIVE MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Additive Manufacturing (AM) in the South African automotive industry can enhance production efficiency, reduce material waste, and promote innovation. However, its integration is constrained by technological, organisational, and industry-specific challenges. This study proposes a conceptual model to examine determinants of AM adoption, including relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, cost, management support, human factors, external factors, organisational culture (readiness and capacity for change), and intention to adopt. A quantitative approach was employed, utilising survey data from 30 automotive industry professionals. The measurement instrument, developed from literature-derived constructs, was evaluated for internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha. In addition to the reliability assessment, descriptive analysis was conducted to provide preliminary insights into their perceptions of AM adoption across the measured constructs. The pilot results yielded coefficients ranging from acceptable to excellent across all constructs, indicating satisfactory reliability of the instrument. These findings provide an empirically validated basis for subsequent, more extensive empirical analysis of AM adoption determinants in this context. The study contributes to research on AM adoption by providing a validated measurement instrument and a structured model for analysing the relationships between technological, organisational, and environmental factors in the automotive manufacturing context.

Keywords: Additive Manufacturing, Automotive Industry, Conceptual Model, Technology Adoption,

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1 INTRODUCTION

The global automotive industry is undergoing a significant transformation driven by the rise of Additive Manufacturing (AM), also known as 3D printing. AM introduces a fundamentally different way of designing and producing vehicle components, enabling manufacturers to shift away from rigid, traditional processes toward more flexible and innovative approaches. With capabilities such as rapid prototyping, complex geometrical design, weight reduction, and on-demand production, AM is becoming a powerful tool for improving product performance, enhancing customisation, and streamlining supply chains [12; 10]. In automotive applications, AM extends beyond prototyping to include the manufacture of end-use parts, custom tooling, and low-volume production runs. These benefits contribute to greater agility in product development and improved fuel efficiency through lightweight design. The potential for AM to minimize material waste and reduce time-to-market also offers substantial value in a highly competitive manufacturing landscape [17].

However, despite its potential, AM adoption is not without challenges. Companies must evaluate a range of internal and external factors, including technological maturity, organizational capacity, supply chain integration, regulatory compliance, and economic justification [14;12]. Adoption frameworks that address these dimensions are critical to guiding a successful transition toward AM-enabled production models, particularly in emerging economies such as South Africa, where local constraints and opportunities must be carefully considered.

While South Africa has made strides in AM research and investment through institutions such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and national initiatives like the South African Additive Manufacturing Strategy, adoption within the automotive sector remains limited. Barriers such as insufficient technical expertise, high initial investment costs, and a general lack of awareness among key stakeholders continue to hinder widespread implementation [7;8]. To address these challenges and bridge the existing knowledge gap, this study aims to explore the factors influencing AM adoption in the South African automotive industry. By developing and testing a conceptual model grounded in the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework, the research seeks to provide insights into the technological, organizational, and environmental determinants of AM adoption. This study therefore aims to explore the key factors influencing the adoption of AM technologies in the South African automotive industry through the development and testing of a context-specific conceptual model. The research addresses the following objectives:

- To identify and analyse the perceived benefits and barriers to adopting AM technologies in the South African automotive sector.
- To develop a conceptual model that integrates technological, organisational, and environmental factors influencing AM adoption.
- To assess the reliability of the proposed model and its constructs through a pilot study involving industry professionals.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Several scholars have investigated the factors influencing the adoption of AM within the automotive industry, presenting diverse perspectives based on empirical evidence, theoretical models, and sector-specific studies. Their findings consistently reveal that AM adoption is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, shaped by a confluence of technological attributes, organisational readiness, supply chain integration, and the broader environmental context. These factors not only determine whether AM is adopted but also influence the rate and maturity of its implementation.

Technological factors have been widely acknowledged as foundational to AM adoption. Studies by Delic, Eyers and Mikulic [6] emphasise the significance of perceived relative advantage, compatibility with existing systems, complexity, and cost as key technological drivers or barriers. In their study of 124 automotive firms in Europe, they found that AM improves supply chain integration and firm performance, but only when firms perceive the technology as offering clear strategic value and when integration costs are manageable. The perceived complexity of AM technologies, especially in relation to design tools and materials can also negatively influence intention to adopt, particularly among small to medium manufacturers with limited technical capacity.

Organisational readiness is another dominant theme in the literature. Weller, Kleer and Piller [21], through a structured literature review, identified the availability of skilled human resources, leadership support, and alignment with internal strategies as essential enablers of AM implementation. This view is echoed in the work by Mona and Nkosi [15], who argue that AM adoption is strongly influenced by internal organisational dynamics such as knowledge management, training, and innovation culture. Firms that exhibit a strong learning orientation and encourage experimentation are more likely to embrace AM, particularly in environments where incremental innovation is necessary to remain competitive.

Environmental and market-related factors also play a critical role. Steenhuis and Pretorius [19], conceptualise AM adoption as a phased process influenced by external stimuli, categorising AM maturity into four phases: equilibrium, supply chain evolution, product evolution, and business model transformation. Their model suggests that automotive firms initially adopt AM to improve supply logistics or prototyping before evolving toward full-scale integration that transforms business models. Similarly, Cotteleer and Joyce [5], emphasise how market dynamics, regulatory frameworks, and technological uncertainty shape strategic decisions related to AM. These external pressures are particularly salient in emerging economies such as South Africa, where industry ecosystems and institutional support structures are still evolving

In addition to these factor-based insights, various scholars have developed conceptual models to better explain the adoption pathways of AM in automotive contexts. Table 1 below summarises a few notable models:

Table 1: Conceptual Models of AM Adoption in Automotive Contexts

Author(s)	Model Type	Key Constructs	Sector Focus
Delic et al. (2019)	SEM-based empirical model	Technological fit, supply chain integration, firm performance (RBV framework)	EU automotive firms
Steenhuis & Pretorius (2017)	Stage-based adoption model	Equilibrium → SC evolution → Product evolution → Business model transformation	Global, incl. SA
Weller et al. (2020)	Organizational factors framework	Innovation culture, management support, economies of scale, technical complexity	Manufacturing
Ahmad et al. (2023)	AHP decision model	Cost, tech maturity, resources, design for AM capabilities	Malaysian automotive

In the South African context, several scholars have highlighted the importance of a more integrated approach to understanding AM adoption, especially within the automotive manufacturing industry. Booysen, Blankley and Moses [3], argue that while technological capacity is an essential enabler, it is insufficient on its own to ensure successful adoption. Organisational innovation capabilities, such as absorptive capacity and learning orientation, play a crucial mediating role. Likewise, Mudzingwa and Chinomona [16] emphasise that government policy, institutional support, and local infrastructure significantly influence technology diffusion across South African manufacturing sectors. Similarly, Steenhuis and

Pretorius [19] suggest that AM adoption is hindered by a fragmented value chain, lack of standardised regulations, and insufficient awareness of AM's strategic benefits among industry stakeholders. These findings collectively suggest that a localised, context-sensitive framework is necessary to fully understand and address the multi-dimensional barriers to AM adoption in the South African automotive sector.

3 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

3.1 Theoretical Foundations

This study uses the Technology–Organisation–Environment (TOE) framework and the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) to develop the conceptual model for understanding the adoption of AM in the South African automotive industry [20;18]. These two frameworks offer a structured way to examine the different factors that influence the adoption of new technologies in organisations. The TOE framework identifies three main categories that affect technology adoption: the technological context, the organisational context, and the environmental context. The technological context refers to the characteristics of AM technologies, such as their benefits and complexity. The organisational context includes internal factors like leadership support, available skills, financial resources, and the organisation's openness to change. The environmental context considers external influences such as market conditions, competitors, suppliers, and government regulations. The IDT focuses on how innovations spread within and between organisations. It explains adoption based on how potential users perceive the innovation, especially in terms of its relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability [18]. These perceptions influence whether organisations view AM as a useful and practical solution.

Recent studies have extended these theories to account for current trends in digital transformation and smart manufacturing. For example, Chong and Weng [4] highlight the importance of organisational readiness, including digital skills and leadership, in successful technology adoption. [13], point out that data capabilities and the ability to manage both exploration and exploitation (known as innovation ambidexterity) help organisations adapt to uncertain environments. Al-Okaily, Ameen and Al-Hattami confirm the usefulness of the TOE framework in emerging economies by showing how it explains the adoption of digital technologies in resource-constrained settings.

By combining TOE and IDT, this study can examine AM adoption from multiple perspectives. These include:

- Technological factors, such as the advantages of AM and its complexity.
- Organisational factors, such as internal support, infrastructure, and employee capabilities.
- Environmental factors, such as competition, customer demand, and regulatory requirements.

3.2 Constructs and Hypothesized Relationships

The conceptual framework is built around six key constructs:

- Technological Factors: Comprising relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, and cost—these affect the perceived value and ease of integrating AM into existing manufacturing processes.
- Organisational Factors: Include management support and human resources. These elements determine the organisation's internal readiness for adopting AM.
- Environmental Factors: External conditions such as market dynamics, regulatory frameworks, industry ecosystems, and technological uncertainty that shape the contextual landscape for adoption.

- Technology Readiness: Encompasses support for experimentation, openness to change, competitiveness, and learning culture—factors that mediate the ability to adopt new technologies.
- Organisational Culture and Capacity for Change: Highlights cultural drivers such as continuous learning, leadership, resource availability, and innovation orientation as key enablers.
- Intention to Adopt AM: Serves as the dependent variable and is influenced by all preceding factors, representing the organisation's commitment and preparedness to implement AM technologies.

Hypothesized Relationships:

Table 2: Summary of Hypotheses

Construct	Relationship Path	Hypotheses
Relative Advantage (RA)	RA → OC-Readiness RA → IA-AM RA → OC-Readiness → IA-AM	H1, H2, H3
Complexity (CX)	CX → OC-Readiness CX → IA-AM CX → OC-Readiness → IA-AM	H4, H5, H6
Compatibility (CO)	CO → OC-Readiness CO → IA-AM CO → OC-Readiness → IA-AM	H7, H8, H9
Cost (CT)	CT → OC-Readiness CT → IA-AM CT → OC-Readiness → IA-AM	H10, H11, H12
Management Support (MS)	MS → OC-Readiness MS → CC MS → IA-AM MS → OC-Readiness → IA-AM MS → CC → IA-AM	H13–H17
Human Factors (HF)	HF → OC-Readiness HF → CC HF → IA-AM HF → OC-Readiness → IA-AM HF → CC → IA-AM	H18–H22
External Factors (EF)	EF → OC-Readiness EF → CC EF → IA-AM EF → OC-Readiness → IA-AM EF → CC → IA-AM	H23–H27
Mediators	OC-Readiness → IA-AM CC → IA-AM	H28, H29

3.3 Conceptual Model for the adoption of Additive manufacturing in the automotive industry

Figure 1 illustrates the key factors influencing the adoption of AM in the South African automotive industry. The conceptual model is structured around three primary independent variables: technological factors, organisational factors, and environmental factors. These collectively influence the adoption process. Additionally, two mediating variables, technology readiness and capacity for change, shape the relationship between these factors and the intention to adopt AM, which serves as the dependent variable. The relationships within the model highlight the interconnected nature of these factors, demonstrating how organisational culture, external pressures, and technological attributes interact to drive AM adoption decisions.

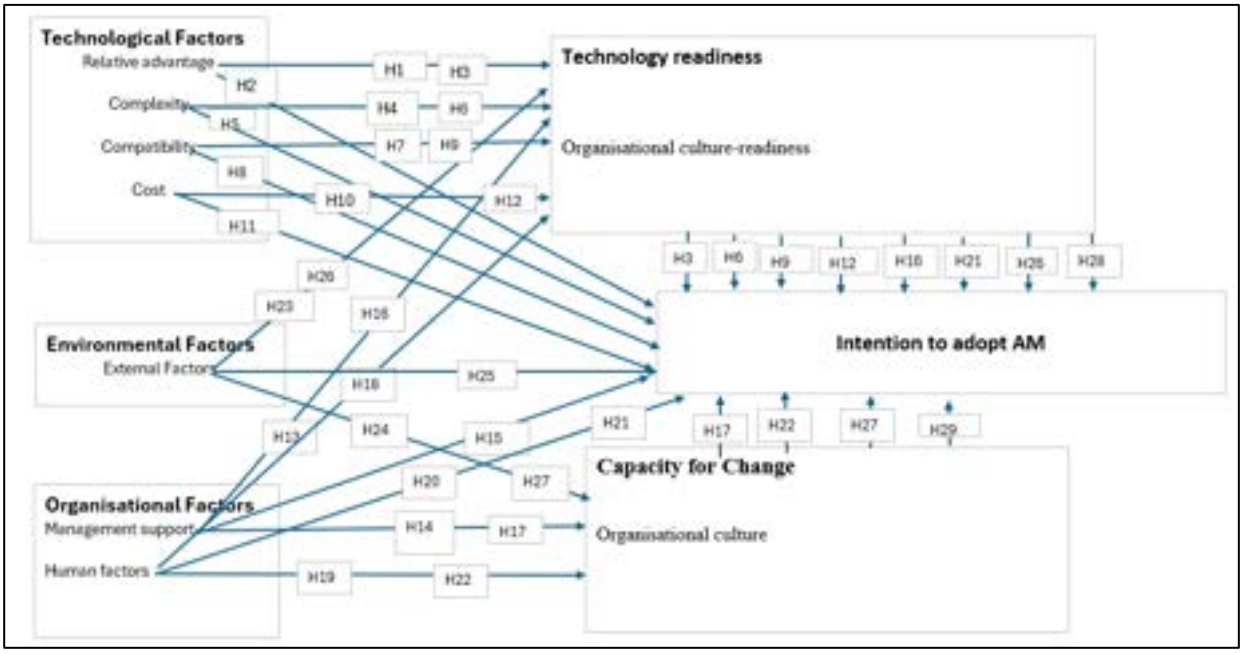

Figure 1: Conceptual model for Additive Manufacturing Adoption in the South African Automotive Industry

4 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic research methodology aimed at investigating the factors influencing the adoption of AM technologies within the South African automotive industry. The methodology was structured into three primary stages: literature review, conceptual model development, and pilot survey administration.

4.1 Literature review

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to establish a solid theoretical foundation for the study and identify key factors affecting AM adoption. Relevant scholarly articles, industry reports, and policy documents were sourced from academic databases including ScienceDirect, Scopus, IEEE Xplore, and Google Scholar. The search process focused on publications from 2015 onward using targeted keywords such as “Additive Manufacturing,” “technology adoption,” “automotive industry,” and “South Africa.” Inclusion criteria ensured that selected literature was directly related to AM technology and its application within manufacturing or organisational contexts. Data extracted from the literature were thematically analysed to identify core constructs and inform the development of a conceptual model grounded in the Technology–Organisation–Environment (TOE) framework and the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT).

4.2 Conceptual Model

Based on the literature review, a conceptual model was developed to guide this investigation. The model integrates technological, organisational, and environmental factors as independent variables influencing the intention to adopt AM, with organisational culture—readiness and capacity for change included as mediating variables. Each construct was defined using established concepts from prior technology adoption research and adapted to reflect the context of the South African automotive industry. Hypotheses outlining the expected relationships among these constructs were formulated to provide a theoretical foundation for future empirical testing.

4.3 Pilot Design and Administration

To assess the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument, a pilot survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed based on the constructs identified in the conceptual model and comprised multiple items for each construct. Each item was measured using a five-point Likert scale, where respondents indicated their level of agreement with each statement (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). This scale was chosen for its effectiveness in capturing the degree of respondent agreement and generating ordinal data suitable for reliability analysis. The pilot survey was distributed electronically to a purposive sample of 30 professionals working in or closely affiliated with the South African automotive sector. These individuals were selected for their industry expertise and practical knowledge, allowing them to provide informed feedback on the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the questionnaire items. The sample size of 30 was deliberately chosen as it aligns with standard practice for pilot studies, providing sufficient data to evaluate the reliability and validity of the instrument while maintaining feasibility for initial testing. For specialized environments like the automotive sector, this sample size is considered adequate to capture expert insights and assess the questionnaire's applicability within the industry context. This size enables preliminary assessment of the questionnaire's internal consistency and identification of potential issues before full-scale deployment. Responses from the pilot were analysed primarily to assess internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients calculated for each construct to ensure the reliability of the scales before the main data collection phase. The questionnaire consisted of carefully worded items grouped under key constructs drawn from the conceptual model. Table 3 below outlines the construct codes, summarised item statements, and the Likert scale used for measurement.

Table 3: Survey Instrument: Factors Influencing the Adoption of Additive Manufacturing in the Automotive Industry

Relative advantage	RA1	AM reduces waste and supports sustainability.
	RA2	AM improves efficiency and speeds up prototyping.
	RA3	AM saves costs, justifying the investment.
Complexity	CX1	AM is too technically complex to adopt.
	CX2	Material strength limits AM scalability.
	CX3	AM is too slow for mass production.
Compatibility	CO1	AM fits with future manufacturing.
	CO2	AM works with current supply chains.
	CO3	AM aligns with current practices.
	CO4	AM meets quality and manufacturing standards.
Cost	CT1	High initial costs are a major barrier.
	CT2	Ownership and maintenance costs are barriers.
	CT3	Training costs hinder AM adoption.
	CT4	AM costs still strain budgets.
Management Support	MS1	Management would provide needed resources.
	MS2	Management supports innovation and learning.
	MS3	Management sets goals and addresses AM challenges.
	MS4	Management clearly communicates AM plans.
Human Factor	HF1	Workers would adapt and see AM benefits.
	HF2	Industry would invest in AM training.

	HF3	Workforce is open to AM despite resistance.
	HF4	Staff would embrace upskilling for AM.
External Factors	EF1	Customer demand would influence AM adoption.
	EF2	Market trends would drive AM use.
	EF3	Regulations challenge AM adoption.
	EF4	Industry collaboration is key to AM adoption.
Organisational Culture - Readiness	OCR1	Our organisation supports trying new tech.
	OCR2	Our organisation is open to tech change.
	OCR3	We see AM as key to competitiveness.
	OCR4	We encourage learning and adapting to AM.
Organisational Culture - Capacity for Change	OC1	We promote continuous learning.
	OC2	We value new tech adoption.
	OC3	Leaders drive AM adoption.
	OC4	We have resources to adopt AM.
Intention to Adopt AM	IA1	We intend to use AM if available.
	IA2	We're likely to adopt AM soon.
	IA3	AM will be part of our production.
	IA4	We're willing to invest in AM.

5 PILOT STUDY RESULTS

5.1 Reliability analysis

To evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of the constructs used in this study, a pilot survey was conducted. The table below presents a summary of the pilot study results, reflecting the number of items per construct, their corresponding Cronbach's Alpha values, and the resulting reliability assessment. All constructs demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency, indicating that the scales used are dependable and suitable for further analysis.

Table 4: Summary of Pilot Study Results- Construct Reliability and Internal Consistency

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Assessment
Relative Advantage (RA)	3	0.705	Good internal consistency; scale is reliable.
Complexity (CX)	3	0.636	Acceptable internal consistency; construct is considered reliable.
Compatibility (CO)	4	0.782	Good internal consistency; scale is reliable.
Cost (CT)	4	0.866	High internal consistency; construct is highly reliable.
Management Support (MS)	4	0.940	Excellent internal consistency; construct is highly reliable.
Human Factor (HF)	4	0.801	Good internal consistency; scale is highly reliable.
External Factors (EF)	4	0.843	Good internal consistency; scale is highly reliable.
Organisational Culture - Readiness (OCR)	4	0.937	Excellent internal consistency; construct is highly reliable.
Organisational Culture - Capacity for Change (OCC)	4	0.863	Good internal consistency; scale is highly reliable.
Intention to adopt (IA)	4	0.759	Good internal consistency; scale is reliable.

5.2 Descriptive analysis of pilot study responses

To further understand the pilot study responses, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were calculated for each survey item as illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive analysis of the pilot study responses

Construct	Items	Mean	Standard deviation
Relative advantage	RA1	4,4	0,545
	RA2	4,333	0,733
	RA3	4,6	0,482
	RA4	4,233	0,704
	RA5	4,266	0,715
Complexity	CX1	3	0,894
	CX2	4,033	0,912
	CX3	2,967	1,048
	CX4	3,533	0,805
	CX5	3,367	1,048
Compatibility	CO1	3,967	0,836
	CO2	3,9	0,831
	CO3	3,967	0,836
	CO4	3,833	1,003
Cost	CT1	3,833	1,213
	CT2	3,4	1,2
	CT3	2,867	1,118
	CT4	3,567	1,146
Management Support	MS1	3,5	1,024
	MS2	3,667	0,977
	MS3	3,567	0,989
	MS4	3,3	0,862
Human factor	HF1	3,833	0,819
	HF2	4,1	0,539
	HF3	3,933	0,814
	HF4	3,933	0,771
External factors	EF1	4,233	0,803
	EF2	4,133	0,884
	EF3	4,133	0,846
	EF4	3,9	1,136
	EF5	4,133	0,957
Organisational culture readiness	OCR1	3,7	1,005
	OCR2	3,533	1,024
	OCR3	3,767	0,989
	OCR4	3,733	0,928
Organisation culture capacity for change	OCC1	3,933	0,771
	OCC2	3,933	0,727

	OCC3	3,7	0,9
	OCC4	3,6	0,879
Intention to adopt AM technologies	IA1	4,2	0,748
	IA2	4,133	0,763
	IA3	4,167	7,734
	IA4	4,2	7,748

The mean reflects the general level of agreement with each statement, while the standard deviation indicates the degree of variation in responses.

Overall, participants expressed strong agreement with the perceived benefits of AM (Relative Advantage), particularly in terms of cost savings (RA3, M = 4.60, SD = 0.48) and sustainability (RA1, M = 4.40, SD = 0.55). Perceptions of complexity were mixed, with some agreement that material strength supports scalability (CX2, M = 4.03, SD = 0.91), but concerns that AM is too slow for mass production (CX3, M = 2.97, SD = 1.05). Compatibility ratings suggested that AM aligns with future manufacturing (CO1, M = 3.97, SD = 0.84) and meets quality standards (CO4, M = 3.83, SD = 1.00), though integration with current systems showed moderate variability.

Cost-related items reflected concerns about initial investment (CT1, M = 3.83, SD = 1.21) and ongoing expenses (CT2, M = 3.40, SD = 1.20), with higher standard deviations suggesting differing organisational capacities. Management Support and Human Factor scores were moderately high, indicating general confidence in leadership support and workforce adaptability. External Factors such as customer demand (EF1, M = 4.23, SD = 0.80) and market trends (EF2, M = 4.13, SD = 0.88) were seen as influential drivers of adoption.

Organisational culture scores revealed moderate readiness (OCR3, M = 3.77, SD = 0.99) and capacity for change (OCC1 & OCC2, M = 3.93, SD < 0.80). Finally, intention to adopt AM was rated highly (IA1, M = 4.20, SD = 0.75), although IA3 and IA4 showed unusually high standard deviations due to outlier responses, suggesting the need for review before the main study.

6 DISCUSSION

The results of the pilot study provide initial support for the usefulness of the proposed conceptual model in understanding the adoption of AM technologies in the South African automotive industry. A descriptive analysis of the pilot study responses indicated that most constructs recorded mean scores above the midpoint of the measurement scale, suggesting generally positive perceptions toward AM adoption across the sampled respondents. The standard deviation values for these constructs were relatively low to moderate, reflecting a reasonable level of agreement among participants. This consistency in responses supports the reliability findings and implies that the instrument was well understood by participants, with limited extreme variation in responses. The high reliability scores for most constructs, especially organisational readiness, management support, and capacity for change, show that internal organisational factors are likely to play an important role in influencing adoption. This suggests that successful AM adoption depends not only on the technology itself but also on the organisation's leadership, culture, and willingness to change. Technological factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, and cost also showed good internal consistency, indicating that they are important considerations when evaluating the value and practicality of AM. However, the construct of complexity showed slightly lower reliability, which may reflect differences in how complex AM is perceived by professionals, depending on their experience or exposure to the technology. Environmental factors, including regulatory conditions and market influences, also showed good reliability, suggesting that external conditions play a significant role in shaping the intention to adopt AM. The results further

confirm that the intention to adopt construct is reliable and appropriate for measuring future adoption behaviour.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

This study set out to explore the key factors influencing the adoption of AM technologies in the South African automotive industry by developing and testing a conceptual model grounded in technological, organisational, and environmental dimensions. The pilot study confirmed that the model's constructs are reliable, with all Cronbach's Alpha values indicating acceptable to excellent internal consistency. A descriptive analysis of the pilot study results further provided preliminary insights into the sample's characteristics and adoption trends, helping to identify potential patterns and refine the survey instrument for future studies. The results indicate that while technological factors, such as relative advantage and cost, remain significant, organisational readiness, shaped by internal capabilities, management support, human capital, and a culture that embraces change, plays a central role in influencing adoption. In addition, environmental factors, including regulatory policies and market pressures, emerged as important contextual drivers. These findings highlight the importance of adopting a holistic perspective on technology adoption, particularly within industries characterised by high capital intensity and stringent regulatory oversight, such as automotive manufacturing. Looking ahead, future research should aim to validate the proposed conceptual model using a larger and more representative sample, with structural equation modelling (SEM) employed to examine the strength and direction of the hypothesised relationships. Longitudinal designs would allow for the examination of how adoption readiness develops over time, particularly in response to changes in policy, market conditions, and technological advancements. Incorporating qualitative approaches, such as interviews, focus groups, or case studies, could yield deeper insights into organisational behaviours and external influences that may not be fully captured through quantitative surveys.

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COMPARISON OF THE MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AT COAL-FIRED POWER STATIONS AND THE MAINTENANCE FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED BY GFMAM

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, South Africa faced frequent power outages due to problems with its electricity supply. One cause of these outages was the deteriorating condition of the aging coal fired power stations, resulting in breakdowns and failures.

A research study was performed to compare the maintenance management used at the auxiliary plant at five selected coal-fired power stations with five elements of the Global Forum on Maintenance and Asset Management (GFMAM) maintenance framework. An online survey questionnaire was used to gather data from personnel involved in engineering and maintenance activities at these power stations. The questionnaire included five elements of the subject groups mentioned in the Maintenance Framework.

Results indicated that most of the principles outlined in the five elements of the GFMAM framework have been implemented and applied at power stations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of maintenance activities and management.

Keywords: Maintenance Management, Maintenance Management Framework, Maintenance Tactics, Maintenance Strategy

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Eskom Holdings SOC, a state-owned utility in South Africa, generates 96.7% of the country's electricity and supplies 45% across Africa [1]. With three divisions i.e., Generation, Transmission, and Distribution, the utility operates 13 coal-fired power stations with a capacity of 46,47MW. Due to deferred maintenance, these aging plants experience frequent outages, leading to unreliable supply and load shedding to prevent blackouts. This disrupts the economy and deters investors. The executive team at Eskom introduced a strategy for operational recovery through improved maintenance management to enhance plant performance and eliminate load shedding [2]. An effective maintenance management system is crucial for achieving operational recovery of the power stations and improve plant performance, availability and reliability.

1.2 Objectives

The main objective of this research study was to investigates the application, performance, and effectiveness of the maintenance management system within Eskom (Generation Division) in comparison with the maintenance framework developed by the Global Forum on Maintenance and Asset Management (GFMAM) [3]. The following five propositions were formulated to guide the study.

1. Various maintenance tactics and associated tasks are used to effectively maintain the different plant systems at the power stations.
2. Asset maintenance strategies for plant systems are being developed and implemented.
3. Materials resource management principles are being implemented to effectively manage maintenance spare parts.
4. A maintenance work management process is adopted.
5. The maintenance data and information management system are used to manage all maintenance activities.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

The number of power stations that could be included in this research study was restricted. The scope of this study focused on five coal-fired power stations within Eskom's generation fleet namely Lethabo, Kendal, Matimba, Duvha, and the Tutuka.

Due to the geographical distribution of Eskom's power stations across the country, it was not practical to physically access all power stations. Therefore, data was collected through an online survey questionnaire. However, this method of data acquisition is bound by limitations such as low response rates from participants.

Due to the complexity of systems and infrastructures found within a coal-fired power station, the scope of the research study was restricted to the supporting auxiliary plant/systems. The maintenance management system for the entire power station was not considered. Additionally, the research study focused on assessing the application, performance, and effectiveness of five subject groups/elements from the GFMAM Maintenance Framework, out of the total nine. The selected subject groups were:

1. Maintenance Tactics and Task Types
2. Asset Maintenance Strategy Development
3. Material Resource Management
4. Maintenance Work Management
5. Maintenance Data and Information Management

2 LITERATURE

2.1 Maintenance Classification

The main objective of the study was mentioned in the introduction. The topics used for the literature survey and discussed in this paper are therefore related to maintenance management frameworks and maintenance management strategies and tactics.

Dzulkifli et al. [4] categorised maintenance activities into planned and unplanned maintenance as illustrated in Figure 1. Planned maintenance is organised, controlled, and adheres to predetermined procedures, aiming to maximise asset performance while avoiding operational failures. It requires an understanding of the asset's operational and performance levels to develop critical work cycles and activities [5].

Unplanned maintenance is conducted in response to unexpected asset breakdowns or failures that are not supported by predetermined maintenance plans and schedules [6]. Numerous research studies have demonstrated a relationship between planned maintenance and reduced maintenance costs. When maintenance activities are planned, it is easier and less expensive to execute than unplanned work. Planned and scheduled maintenance activities are both effective and efficient.

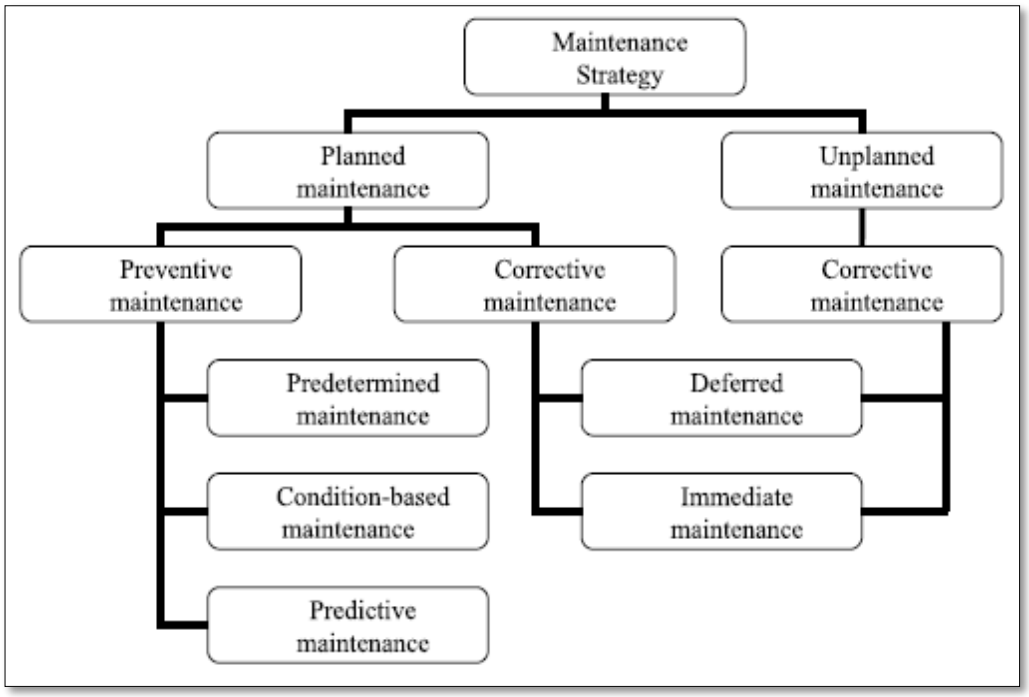

Figure 1: Maintenance classification [4]

2.2 Maintenance Types:

Two main maintenance categories or types are well-known and generally used by most companies, namely preventive maintenance and corrective maintenance. A third maintenance type could be added, namely failure finding maintenance. This type involves periodic checks to determine whether a hidden function is available when required. Further categorisation of maintenance types is illustrated in Figure 2. Preventive maintenance is “carried out at predetermined intervals to reduce the probability of failure or degradation of equipment's functioning”. Corrective maintenance is “carried out after fault recognition to restore the equipment's function”. Corrective maintenance is classified into two categories namely immediate and deferred. [7].

2.3 Maintenance Management Frameworks

Maintenance management frameworks are either prescriptive or descriptive. Prescriptive frameworks outline methodologies, while descriptive models explain maintenance management phenomena [8].

2.3.1 Maintenance framework of Márquez:

During the development phase of his maintenance framework, Márquez [9] noted that maintenance management must be aligned with the actions related to the three levels of business activities i.e., strategy, tactical, and operational levels). The proposed framework comprises three pillars namely the “IT pillar”, the “Maintenance engineering methods pillar” and the “Organisational (or behavioural) pillar”.

The “IT pillar” of the framework entails the implementation of a CMMS system within the company. This system allows employees to store, monitor, control plan, and analysis maintenance data related to all assets owned by the company. The “maintenance engineering methods pillar” comprises techniques associated with Reliability-centred Maintenance (RCM), Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), and optimisation models. The principles related to this pillar assist in designing and defining the maintenance plans to ensure equipment reliability and improve overall equipment effectiveness (OEE). The final pillar i.e., “organisational or behavioural”, involves the human aspect of maintenance management which can foster relationships among the various stakeholders.

2.3.2 Maintenance framework of Campbell & Reyes-Picknell

Campbell and Reyes-Picknell [10] developed the "Pyramid of Excellence" to enhance maintenance management principles and techniques. The pyramid consists of three levels i.e., leadership, essentials, and choosing excellence. Leadership focuses on strategy and human resources, essentials include work management, materials management, performance management, information system, and basic care. The “choosing excellence” level emphasises principles of RCM, continuous improvement, and evidence-based asset management (EBAM).

2.3.3 Maintenance framework by GFMAM

GFMAM [3]) developed a maintenance framework comprising nine subject groups, as illustrated in Figure 2. These nine groups aim to promote a common understanding of maintenance roles and values, assisting companies in achieving their goals. The framework is based on the “plan-do-check-act” (PDCA) cycle of an asset. The first group focuses on business requirements and organisational context, while the second group considers asset creation and acquisition. The third group focuses on maintenance tactics and task types, while the fourth group develops an asset maintenance strategy. The fifth group focuses on maintenance work management, while the sixth group focuses on asset performance and condition management. The seventh group focuses on maintenance data and information management, while the final group focuses on maintenance program management. The GFMAM framework aims to help companies achieve their goals by focusing on these key areas and implementing effective maintenance strategies across various industries and end-users. The three main deliverables (or value) of maintenance are **performance, risk, and cost**.

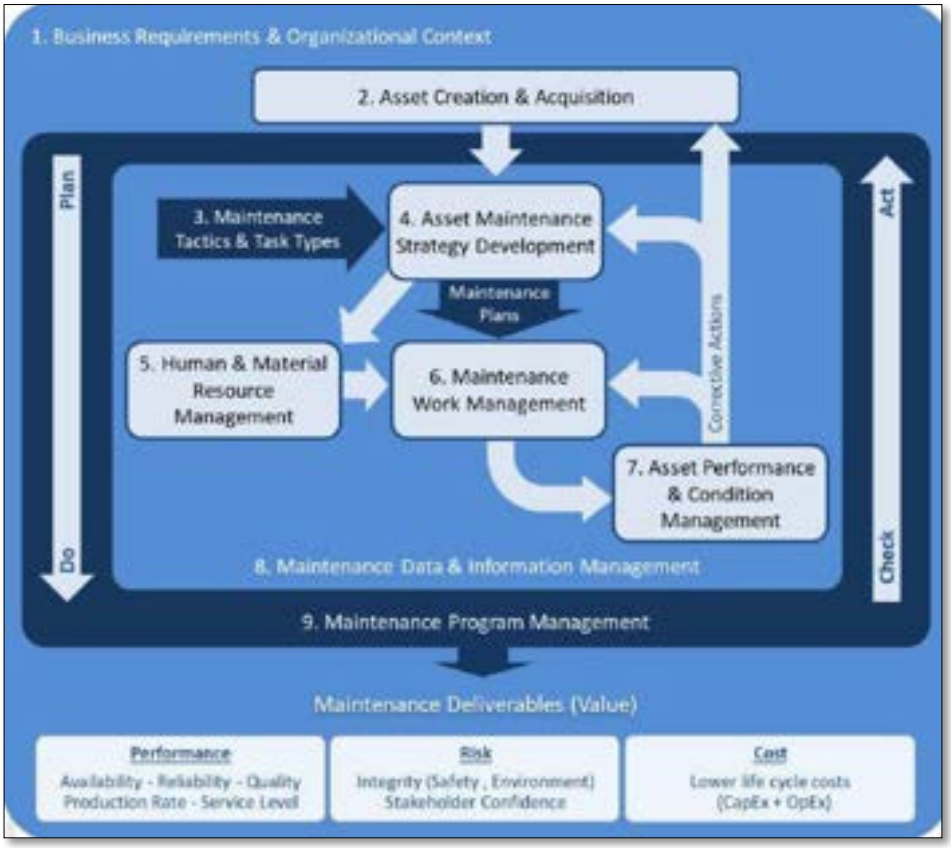

Figure 2: Maintenance framework according to GFMAM [3]

2.4 Maintenance Strategies or Approaches

A maintenance strategy is a long-term plan for a company's assets, considering asset features, resources needed, and service level. Fraser et al. [11] identified 37 maintenance management approaches across various industries. However, RCM, TPM, BCM appear repeatedly in literature and is discussed briefly.

2.4.1 Reliability Centred Maintenance (RCM):

RCM is a structured methodology that identifies maintenance activities and frequencies for physical assets in their operating context. It requires defining an asset's functions, identifying potential failures, and developing preventive maintenance tasks [12]. The success of this process relies on a detailed functional analysis by a review team, including employees from various functions within the company. The output of an RCM process is a life plan for each system component. The most important tool in RCM is Failure Mode and Effect Analysis (FMEA), which identifies failure modes, causes, frequencies, and potential effects of specific failures.

2.4.2 Total Productive Maintenance (TPM)

TPM is a structured approach developed based on productive maintenance concepts to maximise equipment effectiveness, eliminate breakdowns, and promote autonomous maintenance by operators [13]. It involves various company functions to improve asset availability, performance, quality, reliability, and safety. The goal of TPM is zero defects, accidents, and breakdowns.

2.4.3 Business-centred Maintenance (BCM)

Kelly [5] developed the Business-centred Maintenance (BCM) approach as a cost-effective maintenance model that prioritises safety and can be applied across various industries. It aligns maintenance functions with company objectives and involves a detailed analysis of system operations. A life plan is developed, outlining maintenance procedures, activities, and tactics (condition-based, fixed-time, or operate to failure) for each unit, ensuring a well-planned and efficient maintenance schedule.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

This research study used secondary data from Eskom's SAP system and Hyperwave knowledge management system to gather historical data on maintenance activities at the coal-fired power stations. The SAP system captures maintenance activities, while the Hyperwave system manages records, reports, and investigations.

Primary data was collected through self-administrated online survey questionnaires distributed to employees in the maintenance and engineering departments at the five power stations. The online survey questionnaire, structured into six sections, comprised 29 questions. The questionnaire includes sections on demographics, maintenance tactics and task types, asset maintenance strategy, material resource management, maintenance work management, and maintenance data and information management. The questionnaire also included questions about the implementation of maintenance strategies, the use of spare parts, inventory stocking methodology, and the five-step maintenance work management system.

A survey questionnaire was generated using Qualtrics software and distributed to 695 participants via email. The link was unique for each participant's email address, preventing duplication of responses. The response rate was monitored on Qualtrics XM, and participants received three reminders to complete the survey. Data was collected for four months, with the link suspended once the required number of responses were received.

This study focused on the engineering and maintenance departments of coal-fired power stations which act as baseload stations for meeting electricity demand. A population of 695 employees was studied from five coal-fired power stations. This population included 172 engineering personnel, 429 maintenance personnel, and 94 works management personnel. Eighty-nine (89) useful responses were received; therefore, the response rate was 12,8%.

3.2 Data Analysis

Pre-testing of the survey questionnaire was done to identify potential issues and improve reliability. The pre-testing involved 10 engineering colleagues and the study leader, who did not form the target population. The study leader revised questions to eliminate ambiguity and misinterpretation, and the time required to complete the questionnaire was determined. All participants supported the research and recommended adding "not sure" choices, a timeframe, and a consent condition.

A survey questionnaire collected quantitative data on maintenance management systems at coal-fired power stations. The results were presented in tables, graphs, and charts using Microsoft Excel, allowing for easy communication of recommendations and conclusions.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Statements and questions in the questionnaire were formulated for each of the five subject groups that were included in the study.

4.2 Maintenance Tactics and Task Types

4.2.1 Maintenance tactics

Various preventive and corrective maintenance tactics are employed in maintaining assets utilised in electricity generation. Participants were asked to indicate which of the six maintenance tactics, as defined by Duffuaa et al. [14], are implemented for maintaining the Auxiliary Plant Systems in a coal-fired power station. The results are illustrated in Figure 3.

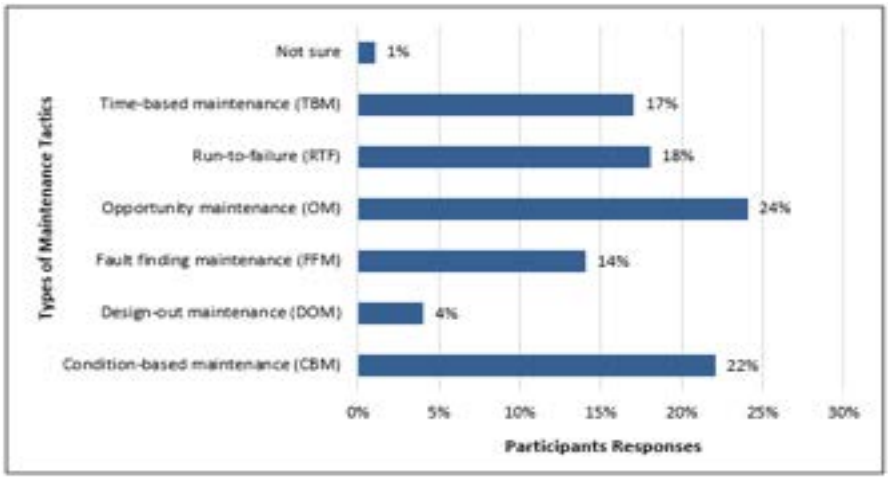

Figure 3: Maintenance tactics used for the auxiliary plant systems (APS)

Opportunity maintenance and condition-based maintenance is mostly used while the use of fault-finding maintenance (FFM) is quite low at 14%. This tactic could be increased since a power station has many protective systems and items e.g., high temperature trip, safety valve on pressure vessels, and high-speed cut-out on rotating equipment. More failure-finding tasks can decrease the hidden failures associated with backup and protective devices. Eskom's coal-fired power stations use a combination of preventive and corrective maintenance strategies. The power stations also conduct regular inspections, routine upkeep, and monitoring to mitigate plant degradation and failures.

4.2.2 Maintenance activities

Maintenance tactics comprise of a set of maintenance activities or tasks that can be employed by maintenance technicians. Participants were requested to indicate which of the five maintenance activities or tasks, as defined by Márquez [7], are used in maintaining the Auxiliary Plant System (APS).

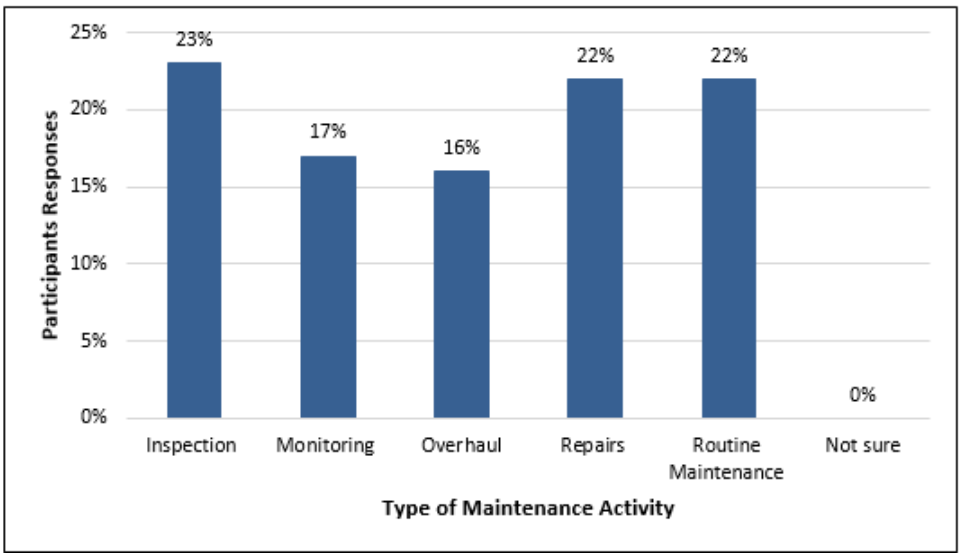

Figure 4: Maintenance activities or tasks used for the APS.

As shown in Figure 4, all five maintenance activities or tasks are employed with inspections the highest response of 23%. Effective maintenance departments use all these activities and tasks, but the ratios differ due to different equipment and skills available.

4.2.3 Condition monitoring

Condition monitoring methods are implemented to detect potential failures of an item or component before a functional failure occurs. Participants were asked to specify which of six condition monitoring methods are utilised at the APS. The results are shown in Figure 5.

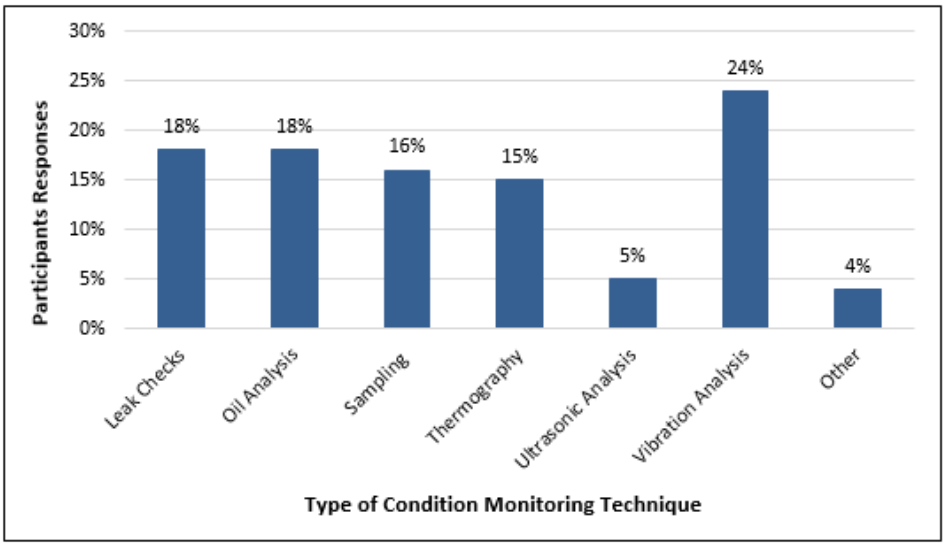

Figure 5: Condition monitoring methods used for the APS.

Vibration monitoring and analysis is the method that is mostly used. This is expected since many rotating equipment is used at a power station e.g., pumps, compressors, turbines, and motors. Ultrasonic measurement and analysis are only used for certain specialised equipment.

4.3 Asset Maintenance Strategy

4.3.1 The role of a maintenance strategy

The operational efficiency of a power station is dependent on the availability and reliability of its plant systems and equipment. Respondents were asked to indicate whether a maintenance strategy was in place. Most respondents (89%) said yes, thus, indicating that a maintenance strategy plays a crucial role in maximising the power station's life-cycle value. A second question asked the participants to indicate which of six benefits are achieved when implementing a maintenance strategy at the power station. The results are illustrated in Figure 6.

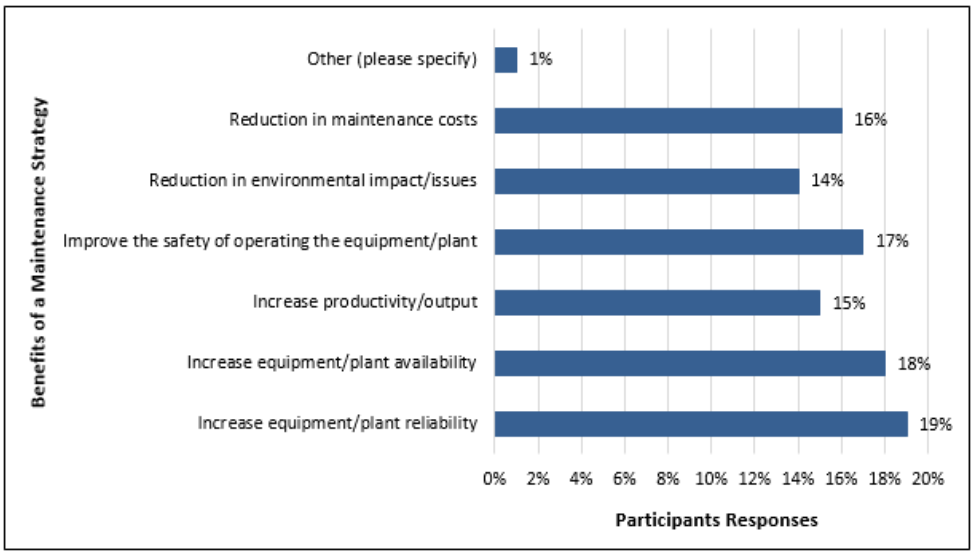

Figure 6: Benefits of a maintenance strategy

The findings indicate that a maintenance strategy significantly enhances plant reliability (19%) and availability (18%) and improve overall productivity (15%). Furthermore, the strategy improves plant safety (17%) and reduces maintenance costs (16%). However, a small percentage of respondents mentioned other benefits such as reduced failure incidents, increased plant life span, and optimized performance optimisation.

Secondary data obtained from the document management system revealed that Reliability Based Optimisation (RBO) [2] program is utilised as a maintenance strategy to determine and record the required maintenance activities on the plant systems and equipment. The process involves a step-by-step approach that considers plant-specific knowledge, maintenance history, health and safety, compliance with legislation, optimal operational costs, and environmental and corporate responsibilities. The primary objective is to establish an effective preventive and condition-based maintenance program to contribute to Eskom's generation goals of improved personnel safety, optimal equipment, plant availability and reliability, maximised plant life, and optimal operational costs.

4.3.2 Maintenance approaches

When developing a maintenance strategy, information about the asset's failure modes, operating context, and operational history is crucial. Participants were asked to indicate which of the five maintenance approaches (RCM, TPM, BCM, RBM, and RBI) were used at the power station. The results are shown in Figure 7.

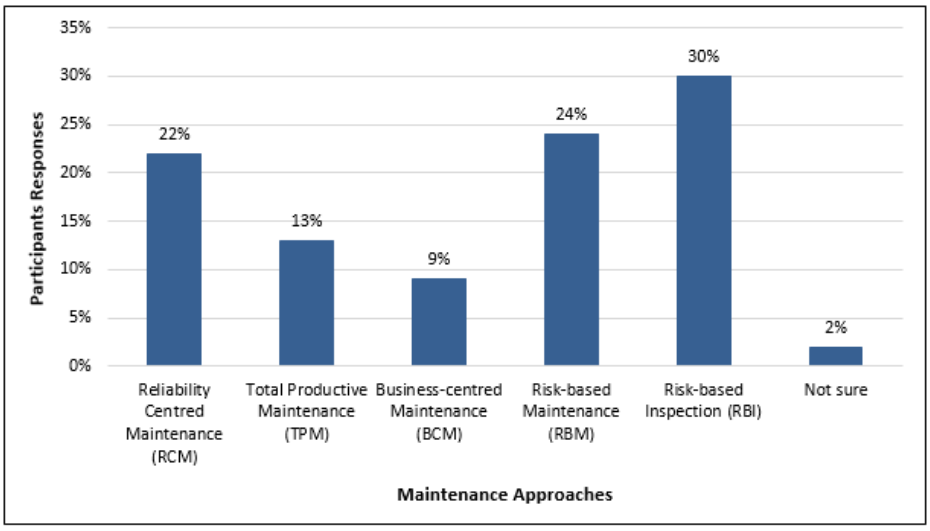

Figure 7: Maintenance approaches used for the APS.

The risk-based approaches, RCM, RBI and RBM, account for 76% of all five approaches. This finding indicates that asset managers and maintenance managers value safety and risk as particularly important.

4.4 Maintenance Resource Management

4.4.1 Management of spare parts

The process of identifying, cataloguing, and acquiring maintenance materials is critical for planning and conducting maintenance activities at the power station. Participants were asked to indicate which of five methodologies are used to identify maintenance spare parts at the power stations. The results are illustrated in Figure 8.

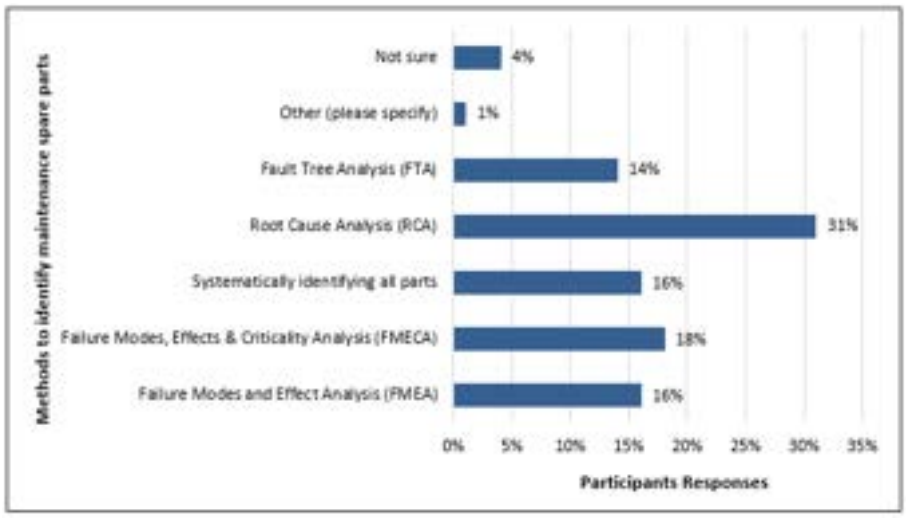

Figure 8: Analysis methods for identifying spares usage.

Root cause analysis (RCA) is mostly used to identify which spares and how many of each should be stocked and procured to deal with similar failures in the future. Other techniques like FTA, FMEA and FMECA are also used since such techniques are important in applying the RCM methodology.

The power stations utilise a materials management system to ensure the availability of spare parts and materials for maintenance activities. This system uses RCA and FMEA approaches to

identify and catalogue spares, with a bill of materials (BOM) being used for inventory control. Common criteria for stocking include asset criticality, projected usage, potential downtime, and material lead time.

4.4.2 Stocking inventory

It is important to have spare parts and materials readily available to prevent delays in maintenance activities. Participants were asked to indicate which of the four methodologies, as defined by GFMAM [1], are implemented when stocking maintenance spare parts for the power station. The results are shown in Figure 9.

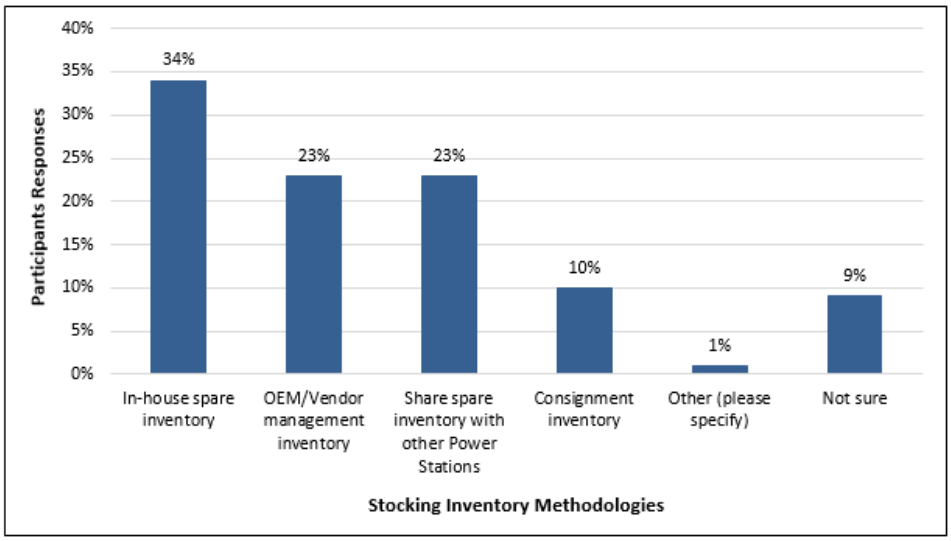

Figure 9: Methodologies adopted to stock spare parts.

The findings illustrated that coal-fired power stations use a combination of methodologies to stock maintenance spare parts and materials. In-house inventory (34%) is mostly used but OEM/Vendor management inventory and sharing spare inventory with other power stations is also used to improve availability and reduce plant downtime.

4.5 Maintenance Data and Information Management

4.5.1 Data management systems

An effective maintenance department collects, stores, and manages data and information relating to the company's equipment, operations, and maintenance. Participants were asked to indicate which of five data management systems are used at the power station. The results are shown in Figure 10.

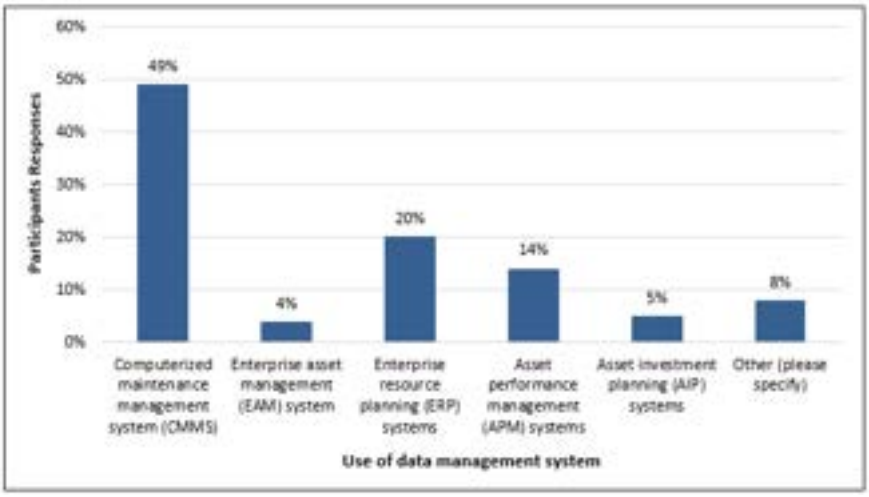

Figure 10: Data management systems used at the power station.

Eskom uses a CMMS (SAP system) and a Hyperwave system for efficient maintenance management in power stations. The CMMS allows employees to create, assign, and track work orders, materials, spare parts, and consumables. It also captures relevant asset data for informed maintenance decisions, ensuring efficient plant operation.

4.5.2 Data recorded

The asset data collected provides managers with valuable information for making informed decisions related to equipment replacement or refurbishment. Participants were asked to indicate the specific data recorded for all plant assets. The results are shown in Figure 11.

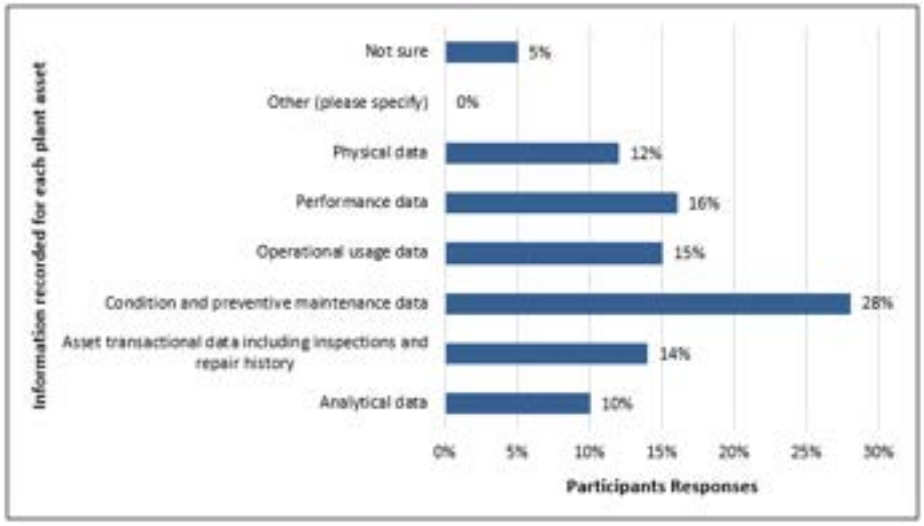

Figure. 11. Data recorded for plant assets

The findings indicate that various types of data are recorded for each plant asset at the power station. A notable number of respondents (28%) indicated that condition and preventive maintenance data is recorded for plant assets. A follow-up question requested participants to indicate the completeness of the information captured in the data management system to make informed decisions on the plant. The results reveal that there is a mixed perception regarding the completeness of information in the data management system. While most respondents (52%) agree that the data is sufficient for making informed decisions, a number disagreed (25%) or were uncertain. This suggests that 48% of the participants lack confidence in the data's accuracy and adequacy.

4.6 Summary of Results

The findings discussed in the previous sections were used to assess the acceptability of the five propositions mentioned earlier.

Proposition 1: *Various maintenance tactics and associated tasks are used to effectively maintain the different assets at the power stations.*

The results indicate that Eskom uses a combination of maintenance tactics to maintain its coal-fired power stations. Two commonly used tactics are opportunity maintenance (i.e. used during periods of reduced demand or brief shutdowns) and condition-based maintenance. The findings further indicate that a comprehensive maintenance approach is adopted, with condition-based inspections used to identify wear, deterioration, or abnormal behaviour in components. Condition monitoring techniques like sensors that measure temperature, pressure, vibrations, and oil conditions, are used to track and compare data trends to predefined thresholds or historical data. This aids in identifying early signs of potential equipment failures so that repairs can be done. These findings support the proposition.

Proposition 2: *Asset maintenance strategies for plant systems are being developed and implemented at the power stations.*

An authorised maintenance strategy is crucial for achieving the life-cycle value of a power station. Most respondents perceived the strategy's implementation positively, but a small percentage (11%) were "not sure" or "disagreed" with it. The benefits observed when implementing a maintenance strategy were well-maintained equipment operating at optimal efficiency levels and correct safety systems, reducing accident risks and complying with environmental regulations and safety standards. Risk-based and data-driven analytical approaches are adopted when developing a maintenance strategy for the plant systems. The results support the proposition.

Proposition 3: *Materials resource management principles are being implemented to effectively manage maintenance spare parts at the power stations.*

RCA and FMEA are key methods for identifying maintenance spare parts in coal-fired power stations. They help understand equipment failure and manage critical components. Combining these with FMECA optimises inventory by prioritising essential components, ensuring availability, and reducing excess costs. Strategies like in-house spares inventory, OEM/vendor management, and inventory sharing are common. Criteria such as asset criticality, projected usage, potential downtime, and lead-time are used for stocking spare parts.

Proposition 4: *A maintenance work management process is adopted at the power stations.*

All maintenance tasks at the power stations are managed using a six-step process (i.e. work order procedure) to ensure that completed work is done safely, effectively, and efficiently. Preventive maintenance work packages are developed according to approved maintenance strategies, containing all necessary planning information for successful maintenance work. This reduces rework and corrective maintenance, improving plant availability and reliability. The maintenance department employs various strategies to reduce work order backlogs, including improving the team's skills and capabilities, incorporating a 13-week look ahead, and assigning additional resources for urgent tasks. However, the practice of conducting reviews during maintenance work closeout is not commonly implemented, hindering the effectiveness of the maintenance department. The findings demonstrate that a work management system (i.e. a six-step process) is implemented at Eskom’s coal-fired power stations.

Proposition 5: *Maintenance data and information management system is used to manage all maintenance activities at the power station.*

Eskom's coal-fired power stations use a computerised maintenance management system (CMMS) to manage and track maintenance activities, resulting in improved equipment reliability and reduced downtime and maintenance costs. The CMMS is widely used in engineering and maintenance departments of Eskom. It includes features like condition and preventive maintenance, material management, and work order management, allowing employees to create and manage schedules based on time, usage, or condition-based triggers. Users can also create, assign, and track work orders for various maintenance activities, including materials, spare parts, and consumables. Employees have differing opinions on the accuracy and adequacy of the data captured. Based on the findings, the proposition is supported.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The unplanned maintenance ratio in power stations is below the world-class ratio of less than 15%. To improve this, managers should implement a rigorous maintenance plan, refurbish older equipment with modern technology, ensure well-trained personnel, and foster a culture of collaboration among maintenance teams. The power stations should prioritise capturing diverse data types for each plant asset to improve maintenance management and optimise performance. Analytical data collection will provide engineers and maintenance personnel with a comprehensive understanding of trends, enabling informed decisions to enhance operational efficiency, compliance, safety, and overall performance. Integrating data analysis tools into the maintenance management system can facilitate improved preventive maintenance.

6 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The research study explores the maintenance management systems and practices used by coal-fired power stations in South Africa, focusing on improving plant reliability and performance. The study found that the principles and framework developed by the GFMAM can be applied to power stations to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. The study confirms that the principles and framework are being implemented to maximize plant efficiency and effectiveness. The study highlights the importance of maintenance strategies, tactics, data management, material management, and work management systems.

7 CONCLUSION

This research study investigated the current maintenance management system and practices at the auxiliary systems of five coal-fired power stations. The findings were obtained through primary and secondary data collection. A survey was conducted to determine to what extent five of the subject groups or elements of the Maintenance Framework of the GFMAM are applied and used at the power stations. It was found that the basic principles of the framework are used to a fair extent to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of maintenance activities, thereby improving the plant systems' reliability, availability, and performance.

It was determined that five of the major maintenance tactics i.e., time-based maintenance, run to failure, condition-based maintenance, opportunity maintenance and failure-finding maintenance are all used at the power stations. This indicates a balanced approach in maintenance and reliability management. Another important finding was that five condition monitoring techniques or methods i.e., oil analysis, vibration, thermography, leak checks and sampling (water, gas) are an integral part of preventive maintenance at the power stations that were investigating in this study.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors thank the Graduate School of Technology Management (GSTM) at the University of Pretoria for supporting this study, and Eskom Holdings SOC, and the five power station managers for allowing data collection.

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BALANCING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE WITH HUMAN JUDGEMENT WHEN MODELLING

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming systems engineering by enhancing efficiency, accuracy, and reliability across various stages of the engineering lifecycle. This paper examines the integration of AI into modelling, balanced with human intelligence (HI). HI uses judgement to make decisions, which often relies on ambiguity, past experiences, and other intangible considerations. In the deployment of AI, possible gaps between the decision-making capabilities of artificial intelligence and those of human judgement in modelling is investigated. We explore the key difference and synergies for a human-centered and AI-based approaches for simulation and modelling, highlighting their potential to improve decision-making, automate complex tasks, and optimize system performance. A population model was used as a case study to understand the key similarities and differences between AI and HI generated population models. This research provides an analysis of the gaps and advantages of integrating both AI and HI.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, systems engineering, human intelligence, population model

* Corresponding Author

1 INTRODUCTION

The development and operation of modern systems are inherently complex, often requiring interdisciplinary collaboration to manage technical and organizational intricacies effectively [1]. Systems engineering was established as a discipline to coordinate diverse teams of experts in addressing such complexity by facilitating the structured integration of knowledge, tools, and processes throughout a system's life cycle. As systems become more intricate and interconnected, they demand an increasingly broad spectrum of technical expertise and adaptive thinking to resolve emerging challenges [2]. A defining strength of systems engineering lies in its capacity to enable collaborative innovation—where large, cross-functional teams can embed advanced concepts, including emerging technologies, directly into system architectures [3]. From the perspective of systems engineers, systems are not only technological artifacts but also socio-technical entities shaped by human interaction, cooperation, and expertise.

The individuals involved—and the tacit knowledge they bring—are fundamental to the success of complex systems projects. As digital transformation accelerates, systems engineering is increasingly influenced by advances in information and communication technologies, which are now more accessible, integrated, and dependable. Effective systems engineers require a blend of skills, including collaborative leadership, integrative problem-solving, and the agility to navigate and interconnect legacy and contemporary systems [4]. More recently, there has been growing momentum toward integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into systems engineering, particularly in the areas of modelling, simulation, and decision-support [5]. AI methods—such as machine learning, natural language processing, and predictive analytics—are increasingly employed to enhance system performance, reduce complexity, and improve operational readiness in dynamic environments [6].

In this paper, we explore the key differences and synergies between a population model generated using AI and one developed through human intelligence (HI), incorporating tacit knowledge and contextual judgment as a basis for comparison.

2 BACKGROUND

The advent of AI has brought great progress and convenience to the global society across multiple applications [7]. Predictions on AI surpassing human intelligence appear to approach reality, even though some argue the possible unintended consequences [8]. Real concerns rise in the future interplay between human and artificial intelligence. Studies reveal the unprecedented role of human-centric, adaptable, and continuously self-evolving intelligence in facing global challenges. If developed, excessive dependency on AI may limit adaptive decision-making in real time and the capability for managing natural, complex systems [9]. On the other hand, aggressiveness in maintaining system performance might stimulate humans' fear and distrust in ultimate consequences.

Contrary to the primary design of systems that mimic human intelligence, human intelligence (HI) provides great advantages in terms of adaptability, creativity, integrative thinking, interpersonal skills, and continuous self-learning [10]. Indeed, many tasks—from long-term strategy decision-making to real-time agility under uncertainty—are extremely difficult to learn and are hardly performed by a typical AI system [11]. It is well known that AI excels in tasks like number recognition, text translation, and medical diagnosis because these are rule-based and operate in well-defined problem spaces. More importantly, AI model development generally relies on large-scale pre-collected data for training. When the environment deviates significantly from this data distribution, it can lead to invalid or brittle decisions.

Furthermore, the integration of human and artificial intelligence into systems engineering has gradually become a top priority in engineering and digital transformation domains [12]. The

premise explored here is that, for many human-oriented engineering challenges, significant benefits can be derived from simulating systems to better blend HI and AI—and that niche of systems engineering is increasingly critical [13].

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology followed included a literature review of AI, HI and systems model development. Using an AI platform, a population model was developed. Through group model building, variables were then identified that were not included in the AI generated population model. A gap and the synergies between the AI generated model and the human discussion-based model was then noted. The original AI model was then modified to include the HI identified factors.

4 SURVEY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

A scan of existing literature on AI, HI and systems simulation & modelling integration was conducted.

4.1 Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) spans a wide array: from systems that interact with the world slowly and effortfully to those that handle sensory inputs in real time with ease [7]. But if an AI system encompasses a broader range of capacities, what fundamentally constitutes artificial intelligence? Artificial intelligence is the engineering and study of computational systems that perceive, reason, learn from data, communicate, and act in open-world, complex, uncertain, unbounded, and changing environments, towards perception- and cognition-related tasks that normally require human intelligence [14]. This includes foundations such as deep learning, Markov decision processes, and game theory and the study of systems with a wide array of capabilities, from rule-based systems to high-performance robotic manipulators [15]. At the core, however, are principles such as perception, reasoning, and learning that underlie any functioning AI system. From these first principles, systems can be situated on a spectrum by way of their complexity, and systems outside the field entirely can be evaluated by way of these first principles. Although tremendous leaps have transpired in AI systems in recent decades, advances that can think and feel and can design a scientifically robust model is still questionable [11]. Still, even the utilization of first-order narrow AI systems can produce extensive impacts [16]. Therefore, systems engineering and various mutual applications that relate to artificial thinking require in-depth consideration regarding the AI system being interactive with [17].

4.2 Human intelligence in systems engineering

Human beings have some characteristics and capabilities, including common sense, that distinguish them from artificial intelligence, and imitating this sort of knowledge may have a disconnect with the reasoning of an artificial system. Another facet of human intelligence that is hard to formalize is the flexibility of the mind. Appropriate thought is considered such, that distinguishes humans from artificial intelligence, operates despite the lack of clarity and uniformity, makes sense to logical minds but not to the rest, has multiple facets of reasoning and consequently does not admit an easy definition of intelligence. The fact that computers and robots have been created so as to work and learn rapidly but they do not use common sense. It is therefore important to understand when not to rely completely on AI and when HI may be required or even a hybrid when modelling and simulating.

4.3 Challenges and opportunities in integrating human and artificial intelligence

Human intelligence is a multi-faceted construct encompassing skills like problem-solving, abstract reasoning, memory, and learning [18]. It also comprises emotional intelligence (EI), interpersonal and intrapersonal capabilities that allow individuals to understand and manage

their emotions as well as perceive and influence the emotions of others. Emotional intelligence can involve reading unspoken messages, such as picking up on an excited tone when proposing a project in a meeting. Human intelligence is contextual, drawing on experience, feelings, and unconscious brain function, all of which are difficult to conceptualize with algorithms and mathematics [19]. Initially, integrating human and artificial intelligence may appear quite straightforward. AI has been developed to automate various activities that have conventionally depended on humans, and machine learning algorithms have been established to learn and replicate human decision-making and reasoning. The assumption then follows that systems engineering would easily make use of AI to carry out complex decision-making, processing, and recognition tasks.

However, the process demands considerable forethought and sensitivity. The introduction of AI in system engineering processes, especially the modelling step, can be considered as disruptive and may necessitate changes in the methods and processes applied by systems engineers. Nonetheless, methods that make intelligent use of data and algorithms can support, assist, and automate tasks for systems engineering in engineering projects. Systems artificial intelligence suggests that consequent changes will challenge systems engineering practices and thereby introduce implications that warrant consideration from a human systems integration standpoint. Human systems practitioners, researchers and domain experts adapting these practices to emerging methods and technologies are in a position to both identify new challenges and influence the nascent field of systems artificial intelligence. System engineering processes frequently put the ability to analyze extensive quantitative data and derive patterns from that data, as well as interpret the automated processes derived from the data to good use. Therefore, AI systems automating these tasks have strong potential to contribute to the efficiency of systems engineering processes, wherein the complex systems' view on data processing is required alongside a good understanding of both the theory and the topic. With the advancements in machine learning and the availability of big data, such AI systems and respective methods have become feasible and widespread.

There are several technical difficulties currently affecting the integration of human intelligence into AI techniques. First, many artificial intelligence algorithms are based upon the assumption of structured in-out data, with internal analysis often performed against normalized and statistically, ordered data. This is a significant limitation, as non-normalized data contains most of the complexity of the real-world situations and decisions fostered by AI technologies are better adopted, more acceptable, and more insightful when they carefully reflect the real-world situations and not just the data. Furthermore, while it is widely recognized the fundamental effect of personal traits and immediate emotions on every cognitive process, it is currently difficult that AI techniques carefully replicate the modelling and reflection of this data. In this framework, AI and its current experiments represent an under-estimate of the complexities that are linked to representing real life systems when modelling and simulating.

While AI streamlines the modelling process, human oversight remains essential, as domain experts refine AI-generated models to enhance accuracy and relevance. Additionally, human intervention ensures model interpretability and correctness, maintaining reliability and trust in the AI-driven process. In terms of societal aspects, productivity using AI may displace human resources and increase human redundancy. This study was comparative based on qualitative and quantitative approaches. Additionally, chances of social isolation may become rife. AI may be able to simulate empathy but would lack human connection.

Table 1 provides a summary of the difference between HI and AI modelling [20].

Table 1: Summary of Human-AI Collaboration in Simulation and Modelling [20]

Task	AI Role	Human Role
Model Development	Auto-generates models from data	Refines and validates models
Simulation Optimization	Uses AI to optimize scenarios	Adjusts objectives and constraints
Decision Support	Provides predictive analytics	Interprets insights and makes strategic decisions
Data Processing	Cleans and generates data	Ensures accuracy and removes bias
Continuous Learning	Adapts models with new data	Provides feedback for improvement
Visualization	AI-driven graphics and 3D models	Interprets and modifies outputs
Predictive Simulations	Runs probabilistic models	Integrates real-world judgment

4.3 Population models

Demands on policymakers to address social, economic, and environmental issues have given rise to an array of modelling methodologies that attempt to depict the multiple ways in which population structure is linked to transitions in these spheres [21]. Population models describe how populations change over time. They can give rise to political and strategic decisions by predicting how populations will develop. The basic model can build up from factors such as birth, death, and migration rates [22]. For a population, it is often of interest to measure how the population size changes with time. Many factors may affect these dynamics, but the four fundamental variables that affect how the population changes its size over time have been identified, referred to as birth rate, death rate, migration rate, and resources [23]. Birth rate is defined as the rate of births per unit time per individual, death rate is defined as the rate of deaths per unit time per individual, and migration rate is defined as the rate of individuals entering or leaving the population per unit time per individual, exerted at the border of the population [24].

Resources, in turn, can be conceptualized in two parts: the carrying capacity of the environment (denoted as H) and a density-dependent measure of how population pressure modifies vital rates [25]. When resources are scarce or overutilized due to high population density, they influence the birth rate negatively. In closed populations with a fixed resource utilization rate, these interactions can result in oscillatory dynamics in population size, driven by feedback loops between resource consumption and demographic processes [26]. Such models demonstrate how resource availability indirectly governs birth and survival rates, producing periodic cycles in population growth and decline.

In this study, AI generated variables will be identified to develop a population model and then human identified variables will be integrated in the model to create an integrated population model.

5 RESULTS

As a first step, an AI generated model was developed, the second step was to consider those variables that are identified through HI (through group model building). The last step was to take the HI generated variables to incorporate it back into the original AI model to develop an integrated model based on both AI and HI. Fictional numbers were used in order to create graphical illustrations of the system behaviours over time.

5.1 AI generated population model

ChatGPT [27]was used to identify all the critical variables impacting a population model. The fundamental equation governing population dynamics is the logistic growth equation with modifications to account for various influencing factors. The drivers that were considered

included biological, environmental, economic, and social factors that would affect population growth and decline. Equation 1 is the mathematical representation of the model.

$$\frac{dP}{dt} = (B - D + I - E)P - f(P, K, E_c, H) \quad (1)$$

Where:

P = Population size

t = Time

B = Birth rate (per capita per unit time)

D = Death rate (per capita per unit time)

I = Immigration rate

E = Emigration rate

K = Carrying capacity (limit imposed by resources)

E_c = Environmental conditions (climate, disasters)

H = Human impact (technology, healthcare, policies)

$f(P, K, E_c, H)$ = Feedback function accounting for carrying capacity, environmental factors, and human intervention.

The variables that influenced birth and death rates are explained as follows.

5.1.1 Birth Rate (B) Influences

Fertility Rate (F): Number of children per woman

Healthcare (H_m): Access to maternal and infant care

Cultural & Social Factors (C_s): Family planning, gender roles

Economic Conditions (E_c): Cost of raising children, employment

Education (E_d): Women's education and reproductive knowledge

Mathematically, birth rate can be modelled as shown in Equation 2:

$$B = F(H_m, C_s, E_c, E_d) \quad (2)$$

5.1.2 Death Rate (D) Influences

Age Distribution (A_d): Proportion of elderly and youth

Healthcare Quality (H_q): Availability of treatments and vaccines

Nutrition (N): Access to sufficient food and clean water

Environmental Hazards (E_h): Pollution, climate change, disasters

Conflict & Violence (C_v): Wars, crime, pandemics

Death rate can be modelled as shown in Equation 3:

$$D = D(A_d, H_q, N, E_h, C_v) \quad (3)$$

5.1.3 Immigration (I) and Emigration (E) Influences

Economic Opportunities (E_o): Job availability in destination country

Political Stability (P_s): Conflict, human rights in origin country

Climate Conditions (C_c): Natural disasters, desertification

Government Policies (G_p): Immigration laws, border control

Immigration is shown in Equation 4 and emigration by Equation 5.

$$I = I(E_o, P_s, C_c, G_p) \quad (4)$$

$$E = E(E_o, P_s, C_c, G_p) \quad (5)$$

5.1.4 Carrying Capacity (K)

Carrying capacity is determined by resource availability as shown in Equation 6.

$$K = K(R, A, T, P_o) \quad (6)$$

Where:

R = Available resources (food, water, energy)

A = Agricultural and industrial output

T = Technology improving resource efficiency

P_o = Pollution and environmental degradation

If population P exceeds K, growth slows down due to resource scarcity.

Figure 1 shows the AI generated results. Four scenarios were run which include:

- **Scenario 1: Exponential Growth** where births are greater than deaths and no resource constraints exist;
- **Scenario 2: Logistic Growth** where if population reaches carrying capacity and leads to stabilization;
- **Scenario 3: Decline** where if deaths are greater than births or emigration is high; and
- **Scenario 4: Boom and Bust** Cycles where rapid growth is followed by resource exhaustion and collapse.

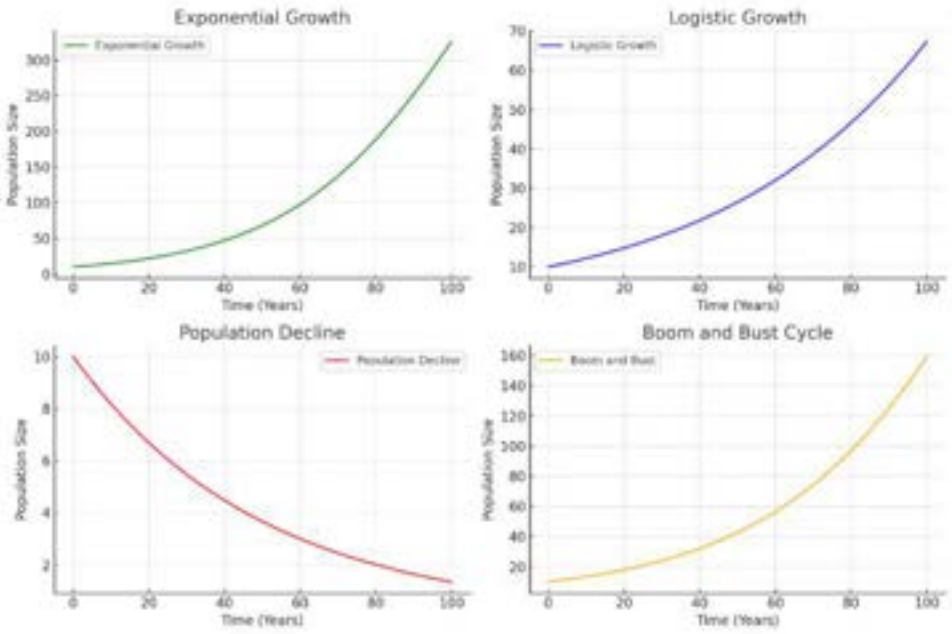

Figure 1: AI model results

With Scenario 1 (Exponential Growth), the population grows rapidly without constraints since births are greater than deaths and no resource limits exist. In Scenario 2 (Logistic Growth), growth starts fast but slows as the population approaches the carrying capacity. In Scenario 3 (Population Decline), the population continuously decreases because deaths are greater than births or high emigration has taken place. With Scenario 4 (Boom and Bust Cycle), the population grows rapidly but then collapses due to resource depletion over time.

5.2 HI generated population model

In a population system dynamics model, many variables can be measured quantitatively (e.g., birth rate, death rate, resource availability). However, certain variables require human intelligence to interpret, predict, or generate, as they involve subjective decision-making, cultural influences, or emergent social behaviours, as shown below:

5.2.1 Cultural and Social Norms

- **Family size preferences**: Varies by region and societal values.
- **Marriage patterns**: Age of marriage, arranged vs. love marriages.
- **Religious beliefs**: Influence on contraception, abortion, and gender roles.
- **Urbanization trends**: Driven by lifestyle aspirations, not just economic factors.
- **Work-life balance**: Social attitudes toward parenting and career.

These norms evolve dynamically and cannot be easily quantified without surveys or qualitative studies.

5.2.2 Political and Policy Decisions

- **Immigration policies**: Border control, refugee acceptance, labour migration laws.
- **Family planning policies**: e.g. pro-natalist policies (Hungary) [28].
- **Education reforms**: Investment in female education influences fertility rates [29] [29, 1].
- **Healthcare policies**: Impact on longevity and infant mortality.
- **Climate policies**: Regulations on pollution, conservation efforts affecting resources.

Policies are shaped by ideology, public sentiment, and leadership decisions, which are unpredictable and require human judgment.

5.2.3 Technological Innovations

- **Medical breakthroughs**: Cures for diseases, longevity treatments.
- **Agricultural advancements**: Vertical farming.
- **Energy production**: Shift from fossil fuels to renewables affecting sustainability.
- **AI and automation**: Impact on employment and economic migration.
- **Contraceptive technologies**: Birth control accessibility and effectiveness.

Innovations emerge unpredictably, driven by research, funding, and socio-political factors.

5.2.4 Economic Shifts and Crises

- **Job market trends**: AI replacing jobs, remote work changing urbanization.
- **Recession effects**: Economic downturns reducing birth rates.
- **Wealth distribution**: Inequality affecting access to healthcare and education.

- **Consumer behaviour**: Changing spending habits affecting family planning.
- **Financial policies**: Interest rates, social safety nets influencing migration.

Economic shifts depend on complex, human-driven financial systems and speculative behaviours.

5.2.5 Geopolitical Events

- **Wars and conflicts**: Affecting mortality, migration, and stability.
- **Refugee crises**: Humanitarian responses determine long-term population trends.
- **Diplomatic relations**: Trade agreements shaping economic migration.
- **Nationalism vs. globalization**: Shifting attitudes toward open borders.

Political tensions and alliances involve strategic human decision-making and are difficult to model.

5.2.6 Psychological and Behavioural Factors

- **Risk perception**: Will people have children during uncertain times?
- **Social movements**: Feminism, environmentalism influencing reproductive choices [30].
- **Aspirations and happiness**: Birth rates dropping as people prioritize lifestyle.
- **Crisis response**: Public reaction to pandemics, climate change, economic crashes.

These involve emotions, culture, and personal choices that AI struggles to predict accurately.

While biological and resource-based factors follow natural laws and can be modelled mathematically, variables driven by human intelligence, decision-making, and culture require interpretation, forecasting, and subjective judgment.

5.3 Integrating AI with HI factors with the population model

In this step, an advanced population system dynamics model was built that integrated both quantifiable variables (birth rates, death rates, resources) and human-intelligence-driven factors (culture, policy, psychology, and innovation).

5.3.1 Modified birth rate with human factors

$$B = B_o \times F\left(G_p, C_s, P_s, E_d, T\right) \quad (7)$$

B_o= Baseline birth rate

C_s = Cultural & social norms

G_p = Government policies

P_s = Political stability

E_d = Education levels

T = Technological impact

5.3.2 Death Rate (D) with human factors

$$D = D_0 \times \left(1 - H_q\right) + \left(C_v + E_h\right) \quad (8)$$

where:

D_0 = Baseline mortality rate

H_q = Healthcare quality

C_v = Conflict & violence.

E_h = Environmental hazards

5.3.3 Immigration and Emigration with Policy & Social Impact

Instead of static migration rates, we define:

$$I = I_o \times M(E_o, P_s, C_c, G_p, S_n) \quad (9)$$

$$E = E_o \times M'(E_o, P_s, C_c, G_p, S_n) \quad (10)$$

where:

I_o, E_o = Baseline immigration/emigration rates

M , M'= Migration response functions

E_o = Economic opportunity in destination country

P_s = Political stability

C_c = Climate change impact

G_p = Government policies (strict vs. open immigration laws)

S_n = Social norms

5.3.4 Carrying Capacity with Technology & Policy

Traditional models assume fixed carrying capacity. We modify it as:

$$K = K_o \times R(T, P_o, G_p) \quad (11)$$

where:

K_o = Natural carrying capacity (land, water, food supply)

$R(T, P_o, G_p)$= Resource function

T = Technological advancements (increases food production, medical care)

P_o = Pollution and environmental degradation (lowers carrying capacity)

G_p = Government sustainability policies

5.3.5 Psychological & Behavioural Factors

A new human-driven variable (B_h) influences all components:

$$B_h = f(R_p, S_m, C_c) \quad (12)$$

where:

R_p = Risk perception (do people feel safe to have kids?)

S_m = Social movements (feminism, environmentalism)

C_c = Crisis response (e.g., COVID-19 changed work & birth trends)

Scenarios were then simulated, shown in Figure 2 where:

Scenario 1: Technological Boom,

Scenario 2: Climate crisis, and

Scenario 3: Global war and Nationalism.

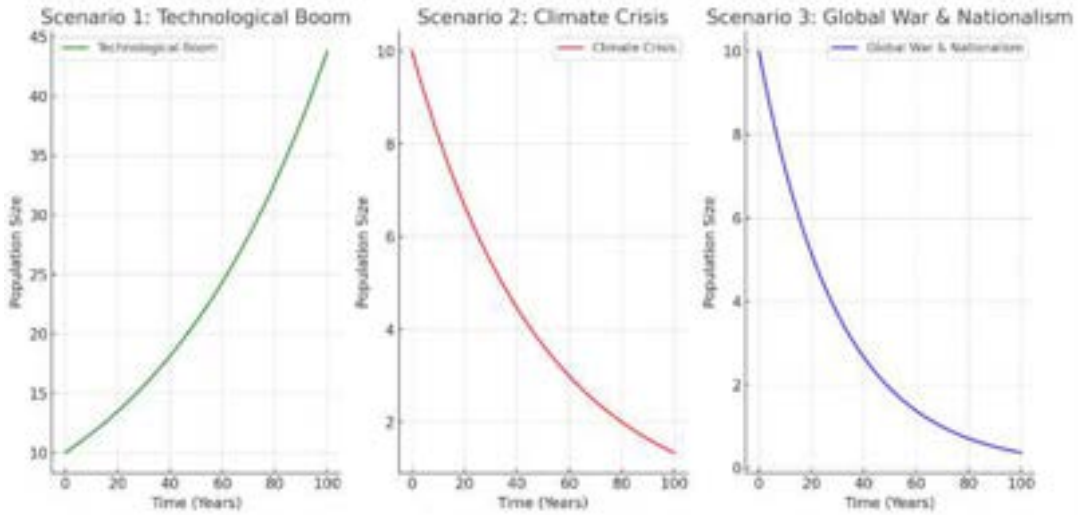

Figure 2: AI and HI combined model results

In Scenario 1, the population grows slowly but steadily due to improved healthcare, food, and tech. Migration helps sustain the population and growth stabilizes at a higher carrying capacity. In Scenario 2, the Population declines due to lower birth rates, high emigration, and disasters. The decline is gradual with fluctuations, representing regional instability while the Carrying capacity is lower, causing stagnation. In Scenario 3, there is a sharp population decline due to high death rates from war. Strict immigration policies prevent recovery and the low carrying capacity worsens the decline.

The main differences between the first set and the second set of graphical results lies in the underlying causes of population change, summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of core difference between the 2 models

Feature	First Set (Basic Growth Models)	Second Set (Human-Driven Scenarios)
Main Drivers	Birth rate, death rate, resources	Policy, war, technology, climate, migration
Carrying Capacity	Fixed	Dynamic (changes over time)
Migration	Not included	Included
Complexity	Simple growth/decline	Real-world geopolitical & environmental effects
Instability	Smooth trends	Fluctuations due to external shocks

Table 3 summarises the key differences between the AI generated population model and the model that integrated human intelligence.

Table 3: Summary of Human-AI Collaboration in Simulation and Modelling

Task	AI-Generated Models	Human-Driven Models
Predictability	High (Stable trends)	Lower (External shocks & uncertainty)
Complexity	Simple (Basic biology, resources)	Complex (War, tech, climate, policy)
Policy Impact	Limited (Fixed equations)	High (Governments can intervene)
Best Use Case	Long-term forecasting (growth limits)	Crisis response & policy design

6 CONCLUSION

With respect to AI models, these are excellent for predicting general population trends based on mathematical rules. They help understand biological constraints (birth, death, carrying capacity), however, the simple models miss external shocks like war, climate, and policy changes.

With respect to the models that integrate human intelligence, they factor in unpredictable events like technological advancements, war, climate disasters, and migration. They capture fluctuations caused by human choices and external pressures, but they are less deterministic, meaning policies and interventions can alter outcomes.

When using AI models, adjust them with real-world intelligence for policy planning and crisis management. The feedback loops between AI automation and human expertise ensure adaptability, reliability, and practical applicability of simulations.

AI can simulate "what-if" scenarios, but human intelligence must interpret and apply them to real-life policymaking.

Going forward, human and artificial intelligence (AI) are likely to be more integrated in model development than before. more complex rules and reasoning typology needed to integrate human and AI effectively. By making such AI systems aware of their human counterparts, not only the machine intelligence may be more effectively leveraged, but it may also lead to a revolutionary change in the way engineers engage in the model development.

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AN INVESTIGATIVE ANALYSIS INTO THE INDUSTRY 4.0 READINESS OF A MULTINATIONAL SUBSIDIARY LOCATED IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

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ABSTRACT

There has been an uptake of research focusing on the adoption level and the ability of developing countries to catch up in Industry 4.0 implementation. However, little information is available on the level of Industry 4.0 readiness for multinational firm subsidiaries. This study aimed to apply a readiness assessment model to international food manufacturing firms located in Eswatini to measure their level of readiness while establishing the causative relationship between Industry 4.0 readiness and location. Two research tools were utilised: quantitative and qualitative surveys. The results of this study revealed that subsidiaries of multinational firms in Eswatini are transitioning towards a state of maturity in Industry 4.0. The assessment also highlighted the impact of location on the readiness level, revealing that location is an umbrella factor for the barriers faced by companies located in developing countries.

Keywords: Industry 4.0 readiness, adoption level, multinational firm subsidiaries, developing countries

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1 INTRODUCTION

The term Fourth Industrial Revolution, also called Industry 4.0, German “Industrie 4.0” or “IR 4.0”, refers to the cutting-edge technologies representing the core of change in industrial settings, which aim to deliver a significant transformational change either in the organisation or in the management of industrial processes [1]. We live in an era of this revolution, where competitiveness and relevance are largely dependent on a business’s ability to align its operations with the requirements of Industry 4.0.

Industry 4.0 is built on systems, structures, and processes that are capable of improvement [1], in speed and flexibility to production processes, and are integrated. This integration is not only limited to production systems but has also resulted in an intertwined supply chain system in the production industry. Different authors in the literature have recorded the underlying principles of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. For example, authors Rajnai and Kocsis [2] describe Industry 4.0 as the digital transformation of manufacturing processes based on intelligent machines and devices. The features of the revolution, as described by Maisiri and van Dyk [3], are technological evolution taking place at an exponential pace, in-depth advancement of technologies, which is a combination of multiple technologies, and finally, its impact across the entire system affecting industries, companies, and even countries. In simple terms, Industry 4.0 is an integration, adaptation, and optimisation of the technologies of all preceding revolutions. While the implementation of these main technologies, practices, and technologies is the basis and pillar of Industry 4.0 implementation, it does not necessarily mean all technologies must be implemented at once. The composition of technologies is dependent mainly on the needs and main functions of a business, industry, or organisation.

Despite several factors affecting the decision of manufacturing firms to adopt Industry 4.0, Kee, Khin and Ho [4] noted in their study that limited literature has addressed these. The authors highlighted a claim made in literature that companies and researchers have focused more on the barriers to Industry 4.0 implementation compared to the driving or facilitating forces due to their adverse effects. Market factors such as customer requirements and competitors, benefits such as cost reduction and turnaround time, as well as strategic, operational, environmental, business model innovation, and social opportunities are considered as positive drivers for Industry 4.0 [4]. In addition to driving forces are the facilitating factors, which indirectly influence Industry 4.0 implementation of Industry 4.0, such as governmental and financial support and skills given to employees of an organisation.

Industry 4.0 is becoming more popular and relevant, and is gaining attention from not only scholars but also leaders of countries who seek to adopt it to advance their manufacturing industries and position themselves to compete in the global space. Developing and least-developed countries are also in the same quest and currently have limited manufacturing bases and potential in Industry [5]. For developing countries, whose economies grow fast because they produce different products, Industry 4.0 is an important enabler of improved production [6]. Developed countries have seen greater success in this endeavour, while some countries are still lagging behind. Research in Industry 4.0 and internationalisation is also still a new phenomenon. Over the past decades, scholars have increasingly paid attention to changes in business management and firms’ international activities concerning Industry 4.0 [7]. An established relationship between the two phenomena is that ‘Industry 4.0 changes internationalisation strategies, transforming, for example, the structure of global value and supply chain’ [8], or the dynamics of competition [9]. It is also noted from the review that the international configuration of firms and countries' characteristics influence the choice of Industry 4.0, but what is lacking in the evidence on how and to what extent?

The objective of this study is to apply a readiness assessment model to international food manufacturing firms operating in Eswatini to measure the level of readiness while located in

a developing country, to establish the variance in performance to firms of the same business located in developed locations, and identify the dimensions of Industry 4.0 readiness that are impacted by location, and determine the causative relationship that leads to success in Industry 4.0 implementation. The study will focus on six dimensions, i.e., organisational strategy, people, infrastructure, operations, products, and data-driven decision-making. This article is presented in six sections, where section two will present a literature review on readiness assessment models that are available in the literature. Section three will highlight the methodology that this research followed, and the results in section four of this study. The last two sections will cover a discussion of the results and the conclusion thereof.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Industry 4.0 readiness

Preparedness for the implementation of Industry 4.0 is subjective and depends on a lot of factors. Thus, measuring preparedness level by organisations can be beneficial to the overall success in Industry 4.0. Readiness models are thus used by organisations, entities, and countries to evaluate their capacity for Industry 4.0, which facilitates change and actions to eliminate current shortcomings. Authors Genest and Gamache [10] highlighted, though, that the implementation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution requires the implementation of several technologies, which require large investments for companies. On the other hand, organisations must indeed realise and comprehend that industry 4.0 readiness is not only concerned with one level, which is the technology investments only. Preparedness is effectively measured from the top, at the organisational strategy level to the commitments made by management towards implementation [2], until the final product produced by an organisation.

2.2 Assessment models of Industry 4.0

Generally, the two terms, maturity and readiness, are described and utilised in different ways. According to Schumacher, Erol and Sihn [11], maturity is a state of completeness and implies some progress in the development of a system. Readiness refers to preparedness considering the conditions, attitudes, and resources, at all levels of a system, needed for achieving its goals [12]. The difference between the two assessment models, i.e., the maturity model and readiness model, is that readiness assessment must occur before the maturing process starts [13]. The aim of the readiness model or assessment, as described by the authors, is the initialisation of the transformation process for Industry 4.0, while a maturity model will diagnose the level of maturity a company is in. Company-specific assessments are referred to as self-assessments [14]. The practice is that surveys target general information on awareness, perception, attitudes, and more [2]. Some surveys, though, focus more on the enterprises, manufacturing, and branch-specific data. Both angles are important since they give a true picture of the company's position. Firms' management must be aware of the already existing trends and be self-aware of their current position for them to start on the digital transformation journey. Industry 4.0 assessment thus seeks to identify the phase of an organisation's digital transformation [3].

Maisiri & van Dyk [3] referenced a two-phased assessment model, comprising a macro-level and micro-level Industry 4.0 readiness index from the literature. The macro-level Industry 4.0 index classifies countries into four categories, presented in Table 1, considering the level of sophistication of production processes in a nation's industry, including the level of automation, how innovative the workforce is, and what their attitude towards innovation is like [15].

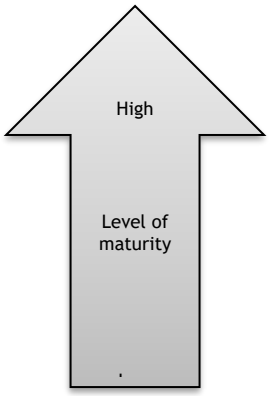
Table 1: Industry 4.0 readiness categories at the macro level [3]

Industry 4.0 readiness category	Description
Frontrunners	Manufacturing has a large share in GDP, is innovative, dictates technologies, and path leaders
Potentials	Manufacturing on a downward trend in previous years, innovative attitudes, and pathfinders
Traditionalists	Manufacturing has a noticeable share in the GDP, underdeveloped technologies, and production methods
Hesitators	Manufacturing and technology require development, and uncertainty in adopting digitalisation.

The micro-level industry 4.0 readiness index places manufacturing firms into four different development levels, based on their Industry 4.0 digital solutions application and adoption:

- Digital novices- entities with isolated digital applications and solutions, focusing on products and not customers, their operations in functional silos, and manual processes. Little IT (Information Technology) architecture is in place.
- Vertical integrators- emphasising digitalisation, have unstructured cross-functional collaborations and isolated analytical capabilities with limited integration with the external supply chain.
- Horizontal collaborators- here, digitalisation activities are observed across the whole value chain, internal and external supply chain, with thorough data use and comprehensive data analytics.
- Digital champions- at the top of the categories are the champions who have developed novel digital models, with collaborations extending beyond their value chain partnerships. These entities are completely digitalised and utilise predictive analytics in real-time optimisation.

The author, Nagy [15] noted that the criteria for each of the levels described above were getting more and more complex. Thus, it was difficult to classify a company or country as a digital champion using these models. Also, the two models assume some relationship between the financial performance of a country or company and Industry 4.0, which might not always be true. Forester's digital maturity model measures the complexity and maturity of enterprises in digital transformation in four dimensions, i.e., Culture, Technology, Organisation, and Insights [3]. Four maturity levels are utilised as seen in Figure 1:



Maturity segment	Characteristic behaviour	Strategy	Score range
Differentiators	Leverage data to drive customer obsession	Blend the digital and physical world	72-84
Collaborators	Breaking down traditional silos	Use digital to create a competitive advantage	53-71
Adopters	Investing in skills and infrastructure	Prioritise customer relationship over production.	34-52
Skeptics	Just beginning the digital journey	Prompt a willing attitude	0-33

Figure 1: Forrester's four levels of digital maturity readiness levels [16]

This model can grasp both the complexity and maturity of the digital transformation of enterprises. Its application uses a quantitative approach, which is often criticised in literature for its lack of clarity on the method of application.

Schumacher et al. [11] applied Becker's step-by-step process for the development of maturity models and followed a systematic literature review, expert interview, conceptual modelling, and validation approach to develop their model. The procedure applied included initially creating an understanding of Industry 4.0 among industry leaders, crafting a core structure of the model, and finally testing the model in an industry to verify its usability. From the numerous numbers of models available, the authors were able to consider a total of 72 maturity models, most of which had five levels and four to six dimensions to consider. The authors thus came up with a three-step procedure that can be used in the assessment of Industry 4.0 maturity.

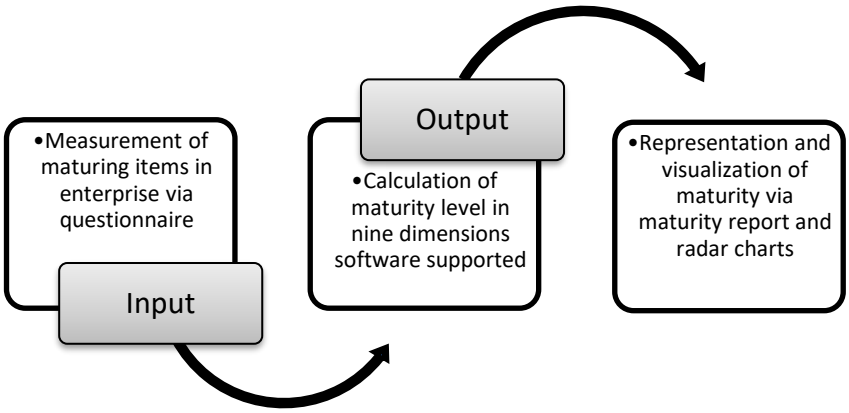


Figure 2: Three-step procedure to assess industry 4.0 maturity [11]

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches within a case study framework to assess Industry 4.0 readiness among international food-manufacturing firms in Eswatini. Given the small population of such firms in the region, a census-based non-probability sampling (quota sampling) strategy was employed, focusing on senior decision-makers, including CEOs, CTOs, and engineering

managers. Data collection was conducted via Qualtrics over a six-week period, utilising two key instruments: a quantitative survey adapted from the VDMA Industry 4.0 Readiness Model [17;3] and a qualitative survey with open-ended questions. The quantitative survey assessed maturity across six dimensions—Organisational Strategy, Smart Factory, Smart Operations, Smart Products, Data-Driven Services, and Employees—while the qualitative component explored contextual barriers and enablers of Industry 4.0 adoption.

For deeper insights, a focused analysis was conducted within a single firm (IFM0100), where 36 employees from IT, Engineering, and Quality departments completed the quantitative survey, yielding 19 usable responses. Additionally, 8 senior and middle managers participated in qualitative interviews, though time constraints led most to prefer written responses over live discussions. Data analysis followed a triangulation approach: the VDMA Impuls Industry 4.0 Readiness Online Check provided baseline maturity scores, supplemented by descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation to examine relationships between Industry 3.0 technologies and production systems. Qualitative responses underwent thematic content analysis, with open coding used to identify recurring themes.

The mixed-methods design strengthened validity by cross-verifying findings across different data sources, while the VDMA framework ensured alignment with established Industry 4.0 assessment criteria. This methodology provided a comprehensive evaluation of technological readiness in a developing economy context, balancing scalability (through the quantitative survey) and depth (via qualitative insights).

4 RESULTS

This section presents and discusses the information collected as part of the research. Its first part provides a descriptive analysis of the profile of the sampled firms operating in Eswatini. The section progresses to discuss the analytical models that have been used in testing the hypotheses and propositions under analysis in this study.

4.1 Maturity determination

Results from the online survey are presented below, comparing the participating firms at the six dimensions the IMPULS model measures maturity at: Strategy and organisation, Smart factory, Smart operations, Smart products, Data-driven services and finally Employees.

4.1.1Descriptive statistics of the overall maturity levels

Below is a table of the maturity levels of the four different firms that participated in the survey. The table represents the maturity level, based on the maturity items under each dimension.

Table 2: Industry 4.0 overall readiness results

FIRM ID	Readiness level	Level description	Employee size
IFM0100	3	Experienced	100 to 249
IFM0200	4	Expert	500 or more
IFM0300	1	Beginner	20 to 99
IFM0400	1	Beginner	100 to 249

The mean readiness level of the sampled firms is 2.25, which is at the intermediate level. From the statistics above, the mode is 1 and 2 out of the 4 firms were found to be at level 1 of readiness. The highest level of readiness obtained from the gathered data was at level 4, representing the expert level. Table 3 summarises the readiness level for each of the firms in the different dimensions. All firms are not yet capable of data-driven services.

Table 3: Summary of dimension-specific readiness level

FIRM ID	Strategy and organisation	Employees	Smart factory	Smart operations	Smart products	Data-driven Services
IFM0100	4	4	1	2	5	0
IFM0200	4	5	3	4	5	0
IFM0300	0	1	1	2	0	0
IFM0400	2	2	0	2	0	0

4.1.2 Dimension-specific readiness

The Strategy and Organisation dimension is rated at 0.254, according to the IMPULS Industrie 4.0 readiness study. The results for this dimension revealed that most of the firms have already implemented the Industry 4.0 strategy. The rating of the model contains five levels, with level 5 being the highest level of maturity, and most firms are at level 4 of strategy implementation, with only one firm having no strategy in place. From the results of the employees' dimension, we can see that the participating firms have at least a minimum of the skills required for Industry 4.0 readiness, with more skills still requiring acquisition. Also, some of the firms have made investments in line with ensuring that employees acquire the required and missing skills.

The results of the smart factory dimension revealed that IFM0200 was a leading Smart factory, rated at the experienced level, with future functionalities satisfied and having upgradable technologies. From the VDMA assessment, it is shown that hurdles towards reaching beyond level 3 in this dimension are mainly due to machine and systems infrastructures that do not meet all future requirements. The collection of data is not consistently digitised [17]. It was determined from the results that the firms are somewhat engaged in Smart operations, with an average score of two for most of the firms. The highest-scoring firm obtained a score of 4, which represents a high level of information sharing, cloud usage, IT security and autonomous processes.

Two of the firms are rated level 5 for smart products, where their products feature comprehensive functionalities that are add-ons, and there is comprehensive use of data for various functionalities [17]. All the firms scored zero for data-driven services. It is apparent that there is none among the sample of firms that was rated anything above zero (outsider level). This can be interpreted as simply that firms have not met any of the requirements that determine readiness in this dimension. Lichtblau et al. [17] explained that this simply means firms are focusing on the traditional product, with no data-driven services offered.

4.2 Firm-specific survey

As highlighted in the data collection sub-section, the quantitative data collection was split into two phases. The first phase has been discussed above, where representatives from different firms were requested to fill in a quantitative survey to measure readiness in Industry 4.0. For the second phase, the quantitative survey was sent to a group of 36 associates within IFM0100, focusing on Industry 3.0 transition into the current revolution.

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for participating departments within IFM 0100. The majority of the participants are from the engineering department, with equal representation of 15.8% from three departments, i.e., Finance, Quality, Safety and Environment, and Operations.

Table 4: Participants' departments descriptive statistics

Department	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I.T.	3	15.8%	15.8%
Engineering	7	36.8%	52.6%
Finance	2	10.5%	63.2%
Quality, Safety and Environment	3	15.8%	78.9%
Operations	3	15.8%	94.7%
Operational Excellence	1	5.3%	100.0%
Total	**19**	**100.0%**	

Table 5 displays descriptive statistics for the participants' tenure. About 74% of the respondents have work experience of 0 and 9 years. Only 26.3% of the respondents have been with the company for more than 15 years.

Table 5: Participant's tenure descriptive statistics

Year range	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0-4	7	36.8%	36.8%
5-9	7	36.8%	73.7%
10-14	0	0.0%	73.7%
15 and more	5	26.3%	100.0%
Total	**19**	**100.0%**	

Industry 3.0 is characterised by specific technologies and a typical design of the production company. Therefore, the quantitative survey had one section focusing on interrogating the presence of these technologies and the typical design of the production system. These questions sought to understand the state of the firm's case towards Industry 3.0 implementation. The aim of these questions was to establish if the firm under study had fully transitioned to Industry 3.0 before the Industry 4.0 era. Also, the aim was to understand the relation between the Industry 3.0 implementation and the typical production system associated with the Industry 3.0, and finally, the technologies associated with it.

A. Descriptive summary data for Industry 3.0

From the results in Table 6, we can basically summarise that the firm had already transitioned fully into Industry 3.0 and had implemented most of the technologies that characterise Industry 3.0. Table 6: Descriptive summary on Industry 3.0

Question	Possible Response	Code	Frequency
Q3. Which of the following statements is true about your company concerning Industry 3.0?	A. The company had fully implemented the technologies of the preceding Industrial Revolution	1	6 (31.6%)
	B. The company had mostly implemented Industry 3.0 technologies	2	13 (68.4%)
	C. The company had only partially implemented Industry 3.0 technologies	3	0 (0%)
	D. No technologies from Industry 3.0 had been implemented	4	0 (0%)
Q4.1. Which of these technologies from Industry 3.0 had been fully implemented in your company before the Industry 4.0 era? – *Computers*	A. Yes	1	19 (100%)
	B. No	2	0 (0%)

Q4.2. Which of these technologies from Industry 3.0 had been fully implemented in your company before the Industry 4.0 era? - *Electronic systems*	A. YES B. NO	1 2	19 (100%) 0 (0%)
Q4.3. Which of these technologies from Industry 3.0 had been fully implemented in your company before the Industry 4.0 era? - *Information systems*	A. YES B. NO	1 2	18 (94.7%) 1 (5.3%)
Q4.4. Which of these technologies from Industry 3.0 had been fully implemented in your company before the Industry 4.0 era? - *Programmable logic controllers*	A. YES B. NO	1 2	17 (89.5%) 2 (10.5%)
Q5. Does your company layout follow the typical Industry 3.0 production system, which is made up of the mechanical workshop, the assembly workshop, and additional departments including planning, logistics, optimisation and so on? -	YES NO NOT ENTIRELY COMMENT	1 2 3 4	17 (89.5%) 0 (0%) 1 (5.3%) 1 (5.3%)

This is evident in that 68.4% of the participants believed that almost all the technologies had been implemented, while the rest (31.6%) submitted that the company had all the technologies in place. Computer and electronics were implemented fully, while 94.7% submitted that IT infrastructure had not been fully implemented. We explored the correlation of these results using data analytics.

B. Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis between Industry 3.0 implementation and the typical 3IR production system was conducted. The results revealed that there is a positive relationship between the two variables: Industry 3.0 implementation and having a typical production system, with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.23. Although the strength of the correlation is weak, which means that as the score of one variable changed, the other changed an amount considered to be weak in magnitude. The 0.05 significance signifies that there is less likelihood that this could have been due to chance. Thus, the results show that although the correlation is positive, the relationship is statistically less significant, which means a firm could have implemented Industry 3.0, while it does not have the typical mechanical workshop, assembly workshop and additional departments layout as suggested by Zakoldaev, Shukalov & Zharinov [18]. It is important to note, though, that 89.5 % of the participants had submitted that the firm does have a typical Industry 3.0 production layout.

Table 7 presents the correlation between Industry 3.0 implementation and the implementation of the technologies, which, according to the literature, characterise the Third Industrial Revolution.

Table 7: Correlation between 3IR and its technologies

	3IR	**Computers**	**Electronic systems**	**Information systems**	**Programmable logic controllers**
3IR	1.00				
Computers	0.00	1.00			
Electronic systems	0.00	0.00	1.00		
Information systems	0.16	0.00	0.00	1.00	
Programmable logic controllers	0.23	0.00	0.00	-0.08	1.00

The results show a positive correlation between 3IR implementation and the presence of two technologies: Information systems and Programmable logic controllers, as much as the relationship is weak.

4.2 Qualitative Interviews Results

The interviews targeted senior and middle management (or their delegates) within IFM0100, with 15 individuals invited and 8 responses collected. The majority of respondents (50%) were from middle management, while 37.5% were senior management and 12.5% were other delegates. Participants came from various departments, including Operations, Quality, and Supply Chain, with tenures ranging from 5 to 20 years — 37.5% had 10-14 years of experience, and another 37.5% had 15-20 years.

Regarding Industry 4.0 adoption, nearly all participants agreed their firm was at an advanced stage, embedding technologies like robotics, automation, and cloud computing into operations. Respondents highlighted a steady progression toward maturity, supported by mindset shifts and digital transformation initiatives. Benchmarking against sister firms in developed countries revealed that the local firm was a "fast follower," though lagging in fully automated processes and advanced infrastructure.

Implemented technologies included automated data collection, digital dashboards, cobots (collaborative robots), and real-time monitoring systems, improving efficiency and proactive issue resolution. However, opportunities for further growth remained, particularly in end-to-end data integration, AI adoption, and cultural change toward automation. Barriers included capability gaps, slow learning curves, inadequate infrastructure, and geographical challenges (e.g., unreliable IT networks in the African region). Location was seen as a significant hindrance, though some believed commitment could overcome these limitations.

Incentives from Industry 4.0 included operational efficiency, faster decision-making through real-time data, and improved compliance. Key enablers for sustained progress were strong leadership, clear strategic roadmaps, and workforce agility. Finally, firm-specific opportunities centred on leveraging AI, reducing project waste, and maximising existing technologies. Overall, while the firm has made substantial progress, challenges in resourcing, change management, and infrastructure must be addressed to achieve full maturity.

5 CONCLUSION

Industry 4.0 is indeed ever evolving and introducing new technologies that enterprises need to keep abreast of, but it would be futile for enterprises to simply focus on technology while neglecting the foundational principles of Industry 4.0. The method of assessing readiness is meant to guide enterprises in a holistic transformation journey. Although developed countries have made such huge progress in Industry 4.0, the level of preparedness remains unclear. This research's findings are that subsidiaries of multinational food manufacturing firms located in developing countries are also transitioning towards Industry 4.0 maturity. A relationship between the identified gap and the location of the firms was established when it was gathered from data collected in this study that location is in fact the main driver of any barriers relating to Industry 4.0. For example, capabilities and capability building were identified as a limitation in this part of the world, which is taking longer to overcome due to the slow pace of learning.

As much as the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the whole population of firms that are in Eswatini, the study revealed that there are noticeable challenges relating to smart services, operations, and products, while the area of data-driven services still requires more focus since there was no indication these are available. It is recommended that firms, as much as they are linked to international subsidiaries, establish their roadmap to follow and implement when it comes to Industry 4.0. It was apparent during the duration of this study

that most of these subsidiaries mainly rely on already established road maps. It is also true that one strategy succeeding in one location does not mean it will be the same for another location. Thus, the importance of adopting and adapting Industry 4.0 in consideration of the location. There needs to be a huge focus on skills building or skills transfer from developed countries. This study has laid a foundation for many interesting issues that can benefit organisations tremendously in considering future strategies. Further, to increase the generalisability of this study type and address its limitations of a small sample size, it is recommended that the same research be carried out with the inclusion of the overall population of firms (including other industries) located in the study location.

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EXPLORING COGNITIVE BIASES IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT DECISION-MAKING

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the impact of cognitive biases on decision-making in Project Management, particularly in ambiguous versus straightforward scenarios. Cognitive bias can lead to suboptimal decisions and unforeseen project challenges. A mix of intuition and experience influences the decision-making process, shaping how information is processed. This research addresses real-world challenges by offering strategies to mitigate biases amid increasing project complexity and uncertainty. Using mixed methods, data were gathered through interviews with project managers and surveys and analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Statistical analyses examined how bias awareness impacts project complexity and decision-making quality. The research establishes that biases are more prevalent in ambiguous situations than in straightforward ones. Managers aware of biases make better choices in straightforward scenarios, though no significant relationship was established in ambiguous situations. Cognitive biases negatively affected project outcomes. The findings contribute to understanding how cognitive biases influence project outcomes and suggest areas for further research.

Keywords: Cognitive Biases, Project Management, Decision-Making, Uncertainty, Mitigating biases.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In Project Management, understanding how cognitive biases influence decision-making is crucial. In civil engineering, these biases are particularly significant, as decisions often involve conflicting evaluation criteria and long-term consequences [1]. Research by Chadee, et al. [2] highlighted the impact of heuristics on time and cost in construction projects, affecting performance throughout various phases. The Engineering Council of South Africa identifies judgment and decision-making as core competencies for professional engineers. These competencies emphasise the importance of understanding cognitive factors that influence decisions in complex engineering activities [3]. Thus, exploring cognitive biases offers valuable insights for improving project outcomes and enhancing engineers' decision-making abilities. Recent research has explored various facets of cognitive biases, particularly in the context of decision-making in ambiguous versus straightforward scenarios [1], [4], [5], [6]. Despite the extensive research, gaps still need to be addressed. These gaps underscore the importance of the proposed research, which aims to clarify the nuances of cognitive biases in Project Management.

1.2 Objectives

In project management, understanding the intricacies of decision-making is paramount. This paper aims to present and discuss the following:

- Identify the most common cognitive biases affecting decisions and examine how these biases influence decision-making in different scenarios.
- Assess the impact of these biases on key project performance indicators, such as stakeholder satisfaction, productivity, and overall project success.

1.3 Research questions

This paper will also endeavour to uncover potential research gaps associated with cognitive biases in project management decision-making by answering the following questions:

1. How do cognitive biases influence project performance measures?
2. Are there instances where repeated cognitive biases have led to systemic issues or failures in project management?
3. Which cognitive biases have been extensively studied and documented in project management?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

> *"The physician's hunch initiates a deliberate search for the ailment, and a musician's conscious and meticulous practice is the very basis from which those precious moments of flow emerge, where improvisation progresses without conscious guidance" [7].*

When making decisions in life situations or circumstances, people rely on intuition and factual information, which can be influenced by personal biases and past experiences that impact how choices are ultimately made. These biases can contribute positively to the decision-making process, but often, negative outcomes are derived from cognitive "guessing" when decisions are made [8]. Understanding the effect of cognitive biases on project management stems from the realisation that cognitive biases can profoundly influence the outcomes of projects, potentially leading to suboptimal decisions and unforeseen challenges. The following sections will delve into the identified main concepts: cognitive biases, how cognitive biases significantly affect decision-making in project management across straightforward and ambiguous scenarios, and the impact of biases on project outcomes.

2.1 Cognitive biases

In decision-making, heuristics can lead to cognitive biases, influencing our intuitive judgments and our observable behaviours (behavioural biases) [9]. While heuristics and intuition can help in efficient decision-making, especially under time pressure or complexity, they can be susceptible to errors due to cognitive biases. By being aware of the potential for cognitive biases to influence heuristics, intuition, and behaviour, steps can be taken to mitigate their impact. In summary, while heuristics, behavioural biases, and intuition are distinct concepts, they are all related to cognitive biases in the sense that cognitive biases can influence and often explain the mechanisms behind these other phenomena in human thought and behaviour [9]. Current literature often merges these concepts without clear distinctions despite their unique cognitive and psychological mechanisms. In this research, intuition, heuristics, and behavioural biases are considered subsets within the broader category of cognitive biases.

The cognitive biases identified to date include more than 200 items, according to Flyvbjerg [9]. External pressures affect some biases, such as strategic misrepresentation, while the project manager's internal factors cause others, like the uniqueness bias. This alludes to the fact that project management biases will differ and are scenario-specific. “Behavioural science tells project planners and managers, 'Your biggest risk is you. It is not scoping changes, complexity, and so forth in themselves that are the main problem; it is how human beings misconceive and underestimate these phenomena, through optimism bias, overconfidence bias, and strategic misrepresentation” [9]. Flyvbjerg [9] notes that these biases can be summed up into the ten most important biases and, if not identified and managed at the initiation stage and during execution, could negatively impact project outcomes.

Flyvbjerg [9] delves into several biases that commonly influence project decisions and outcomes, highlighting the importance of their recognition and mitigation. Optimism bias is a cognitive bias where individuals, including experts, are overtly confident about the consequences of planned actions [10]. This bias leads to decisions based on idealistic visions of the future, resulting in overestimating benefits and underestimating costs and risks. Kahneman, et al. [11] emphasise that when people feel optimistic about something, they often do not realise how positive their outlook is.

Fink and Pinchovski [12] use an empirical approach to investigate the time-saving bias and its effect on software development projects. Their research focuses on the plan-based and agile project management approaches. Implementing agile development approaches could result in better instinctive decision-making but may also be susceptible to cognitive biases. “To counteract this, managers should insist on using formal methods of time estimation even when heuristics are readily available” [12]. Their findings reveal that bias can be mitigated by providing reliable information but not eliminated. They provide only one mitigation specific to the project management approach, and their empirical studies are ongoing.

Flyvbjerg [9] argues that political bias stems from power dynamics, not cognitive factors, and involves deliberate distortions. In large projects with significant political and organisational influence, political bias plays a key role, particularly through strategic misrepresentation. However, this paper focuses only on cognitive biases, not behavioural biases. While cognitive biases like heuristics often provide the best solutions, especially when optimisation is challenging or inaccurate due to computational issues or estimation errors, Love, et al. [13] note that heuristics are used not only because of cognitive limitations but also due to environmental factors like complexity. In uncertain environments, good decision-making may involve ignoring some available information [13]. Okoli and Watt [14] emphasise that while intuition often precedes analytical thinking, both strategies can provide value when their application is clearly understood. This leads to the concept of scenario-specific cognitive

biases, which will be explored in relation to decision-making in straightforward and ambiguous situations.

2.2 Decision-making

A company's success is a result of good decision-making. Understanding project managers' decision-making processes can help identify why many projects fail. In their 2012 analysis, the Gartner Group identified that 61% of technology projects do not meet success criteria. Echoing this, McKinsey & Company, in collaboration with the University of Oxford in 2011, highlighted a troubling trend: a significant portion of projects fail to meet their objectives and pose existential risks to their companies. They found that projects typically exceed budgets, are often delayed, and fail to deliver expected value [15].

Nikolić [5] believes that simplifying the decision-making process using heuristics negatively affects the quality of decisions. However, Julmi [16] argues that previous research has focused on the negative effects and believes that there is a shift towards benefits of intuition, and it "…may be as good or even superior to analytical thinking". Intuition has its strengths and weaknesses, and should not be considered inferior to analytical decision-making when making practical decisions Julmi [16].

Tsiga and Emes [15] call for research into project decision-making processes to uncover the causes of high failure rates, particularly in complex projects. Cristofaro [17] notes studies linking cognitive biases to decision-making effectiveness, with psychological research exploring how personality types influence this Nikolić [5]. emphasises that decision-making is influenced by economic, psychological, and personal factors. While Nikolić examines the impact of cognitive traits on decision-making, Cristofaro focuses on the role of personality types. Project managers often fall victim to cognitive biases, as they are "very often victims of cognitive biases" [17].

Nikolić's concept of bounded rationality highlights cognitive limitations in decision-making. While aiming for rationality, decision-makers simplify complex problems using heuristics, leading to biases like overconfidence, framing effects, and confirmation bias [5]. Nikolić [5]suggests that though efficient in some contexts, this approach often leads to suboptimal decisions, particularly in complex situations with multiple variables and outcomes.

Decision-making in an ambiguous situation is difficult because it is often unclear what the problem or potential solutions may entail. In a straightforward situation, the situation or problem is clear; however, it is still challenging to predict the outcomes as a result of any decision due to a lack of information about events in the future. Julmi [16] introduces the organisation information processing theory, which considers that "it is equivocality and not uncertainty that determines intuition effectiveness". Julmi states that ambiguous situations are better suited for intuitive decision-making due to high equivocality. In contrast, in straightforward environments where information is available, decision-making is often centred around assessing risks and developing contingency plans. This concept is further reinforced by Mousavi and Gigerenzer [18], who state that in the face of fundamental uncertainty (ambiguity), the probability that is used to calculate risk may be irrelevant, whereas "fast and frugal heuristics can provide robust decisions under risk versus uncertainty strategies that can perform well under uncertainty".

2.3 Cognitive bias influence on project outcomes

Chadee, et al. [2] explore the causes of cost overruns in public-sector construction projects, emphasising the influence of cognitive biases, particularly the planning fallacy, a form of optimism bias [9]. Project planners often overlook historical data and past experiences, underestimating time and effort despite similar tasks requiring more time. Interestingly, the planning fallacy also leads to negativity when assessing others' tasks, often overestimating the

required time. Optimism bias is a key factor in project delays and budget overruns, with Chadee, et al. [2] proposing contingency time windows in contracts to mitigate its impact. Current methods lack safeguards like "plan reliability" to counteract optimism bias.

Forecasters rarely attribute their predictions to optimism bias, instead blaming misrepresentation and common challenges such as scope changes and weather [19]. Chadee, et al. [2] connect cognitive biases to key project performance measures like cost, schedule adherence, and quality. Mousavi and Gigerenzer stress the importance of identifying biases without suppressing beneficial cognitive functions, as both reason and intuition are essential for decision-making [7]. entrepreneurship often involves decision-making in uncertain (ambiguous) situations [19]. Wang [20] argues that recognising and addressing biases is crucial for decision-making integrity.

Cristofaro [17] highlights the need for a multi-faceted approach to mitigating biases, combining quality control tools, psychological instruments, and an understanding of decision-makers' cognitive and personality traits to promote rational and objective decisions.

In summary, cognitive biases like optimism bias, overconfidence, and planning fallacy significantly impact project outcomes, leading to cost overruns and delays. These biases were found to be more prevalent in straightforward scenarios but potentially more harmful in ambiguous ones. These insights inform the conceptual model developed in Section 3, providing a framework for further research.

3 PROPOSED MODEL OR CONCEPTUAL METHOD

A conceptual model is developed guided by the literature discussed in the previous section. The model aims to answer research questions and highlight the research's contribution to existing knowledge [21]. It focuses on the prevalence of cognitive biases in different scenarios and their impact on project performance. A conceptual framework is developed first, which then leads to the development of a conceptual model. Cognitive psychology, decision theory, project complexity and outcomes were determined as the focus areas for the conceptual framework.

3.1 Cognitive psychology and decision theory

Acknowledging the influence of biases on judgment and decision-making is crucial for improving decision quality. Systematic mistakes caused by biases can be mitigated through awareness and a critical decision-making approach [5]. To address the research questions, this research will only focus on some of the biases that Flyvbjerg identified: overconfidence, anchoring, optimism, and confirmation bias as well as planning fallacy, some of which Flyvbjerg did not list. The studies analysed in Section 2 revealed that these biases were the most prevalent in discussions about the effects of biases on decision-making by different authors. These biases were chosen largely due to their direct and blatant correlation with project outcomes, which seek to answer research question 1.

In a study by Abatecola, et al. [22], the authors give an example of a manager who realises they may have been overly favourable towards a subordinate due to empathy falling prey to the affect heuristic. They say the manager should consider how this bias might have led to other cognitive errors, such as a shallow evaluation. They conclude that recognising the complex interplay between various heuristics and biases allows decision-makers to control their judgments better.

Managers regularly encounter complex decision-making scenarios that are better suited for traditional analytical methods. In such cases, they tend to depend on simple heuristics or rely on their intuition for judgment [23]. The research by Stingl and Geraldi [23] reinforces the idea that using simple heuristics can benefit decision-makers.

Based on the above information, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1a: Project managers aware of cognitive biases make better decisions in straightforward scenarios.

H1b: Project managers aware of cognitive biases will make better decisions in ambiguous scenarios.

3.2 Project complexity

Project complexity moderates the relationship between project managers' cognitive bias awareness and the quality of their decision-making. This means that the simplicity or complexity of a project characterised as straightforward or ambiguous affects how significantly cognitive bias awareness impacts decision quality. This section seeks to address research question 2 by exploring how cognitive biases manifest more prominently in ambiguous and complex project scenarios, potentially leading to systemic issues or failures. Ambiguous situations, characterised by multiple stakeholders, perspectives, interests, and uncertainties, necessitate using problem structuring methods and quality control tools designed to address cognitive distortions [17]. The discussion implies that the complexity and ambiguity inherent in these situations heighten the risk of biases.

Chadee, et al. [2] allude to the fact that individuals tend to overestimate their ability to identify and manage risks, and these biases are prevalent in ambiguous situations with unclear objectives. Osmani [24] acknowledges that ambiguity in information and the complexity of decisions can influence the prevalence of biases. Julmi [16] highlights the importance of understanding which contexts intuition is applied “before making strong claims about its performance", further strengthening the formulation of the hypothesis below.

Based on the above information, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H2: Cognitive bias is more prevalent in ambiguous than straightforward situations in project management.

3.3 Project outcomes

The literature explored in Section 2 of this research suggests that better decision-making, presumably resulting from effective cognitive bias management, leads to better project outcomes. This section addresses research question 3 by identifying specific biases such as optimism bias and overconfidence, which have been shown to adversely affect project outcomes. Flyvbjerg [9] explains that the core issue in project cost overruns and benefit shortfalls lies in bias rather than error, meaning attempts to correct these errors are misguided and ineffective. He notes that the focus should be on de-biasing estimates and decisions, which is different from merely eliminating errors. The root cause is the underestimation of costs and the overestimation of benefits, with overruns being a secondary effect that occurs downstream, often years after the initial miscalculations. Addressing these problems requires a shift in perspective from treating symptoms (cost overruns) to addressing the underlying biases [9]. Chadee, et al. [2] identify that optimism bias and its effects negatively impact project time and costs and, consequently, project outcomes.

Having considered literature that suggests that cognitive biases affect project outcomes negatively, it should still be understood that biases are part and parcel of humans, an inborn ability,” according to Dane and Pratt [25]. In some situations, decisions need to be made quickly.

Based on the above information, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H3: The presence of specific cognitive biases in decision-making processes negatively affects project outcomes.

Having discussed the conceptual framework, the proposed conceptual model was developed, as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**Figure 1. It emphasises the pathway from cognitive bias awareness among project managers to high-quality decisions, ultimately contributing to successful project outcomes. Project complexity is highlighted as a key factor influencing this dynamic.

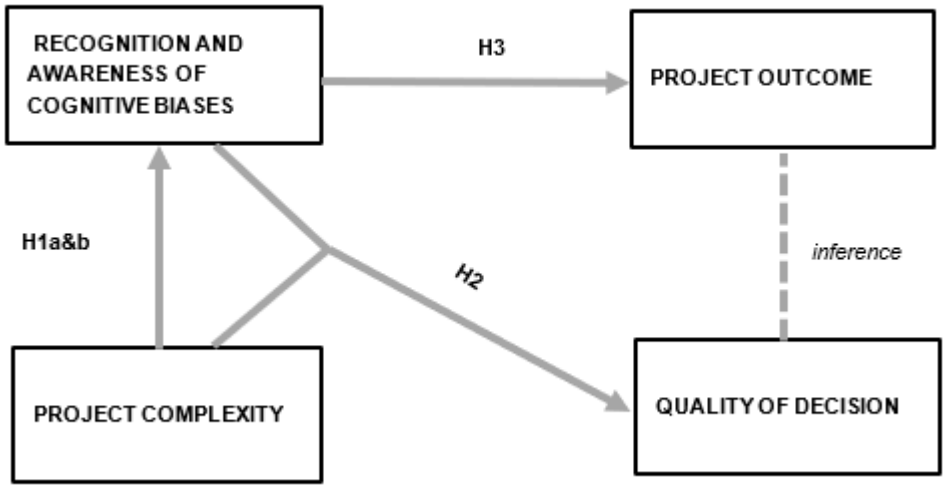

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model

4 RESEARCH METHOD OR APPROACH

4.1 Research design

This research used mixed methods as the preferred research method. A convergent parallel mixed methods design was used, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods analysed separately with data collected in parallel, analysed separately, and then merged as described by Creswell and Plano Clark [26]. By using mixed methods, it will be possible to operationalise the key concepts identified in Section 3 in measurable terms, allowing for data supporting or refuting each hypothesis. Creswell likens it to how doctors often combine laboratory results (quantitative data) with a patient's personal history and symptoms (qualitative data) to make more accurate diagnoses and treatment plans.

4.2 Sampling strategy

The research took place at an international engineering consulting firm based in South Africa, which provides professional services across the lifecycle of infrastructure projects. The company prides itself on delivering solutions for complex challenges, making it the ideal environment for studying instances where repeated cognitive biases may have led to systemic issues or failures in project management.

The target population for the survey consisted of project practitioners, such as project managers, engineers, etc., engaged in project work. The research relied on a non-probability sampling method of snowballing that involved referrals. Respondents with vast project experience were selected and asked for referrals within the company; this is known as multiplicity (snowball) sampling [27].

4.3 Data collection

For qualitative research, a semi-structured interview was used to assist in acquiring insights regarding the expertise and cognitive strategies employed by experienced professionals to execute complex tasks [28]. Stingl and Geraldi [23] recommend this cognitive task analysis

approach for studying managerial decision-making, where the experts describe how they make decisions step by step.

Nisbett and Wilson [29] examine the reliability of verbal reports on cognitive processes, arguing that individuals often do not have direct access to their processes, a weakness associated with interviews in psychology research. However, they further give conditions under which individuals are correct in their verbal reports, such as the presence of influential stimuli and plausible causes of the response. The semi-structured interviews were structured so that some examples or scenarios helped make these stimuli more accessible, and questions were framed in a way that allowed interviewees to connect their actions or decisions with specific cognitive biases.

For quantitative research, a survey was conducted using Qualtrics. One significant limitation of surveys is their susceptibility to survey bias. Heeringa, et al. [30] define statistical bias as the "tendency of a statistical estimate to deviate systematically from the true value it is intended to estimate across replications of the survey process". Surveys are particularly prone to non-sampling biases arising primarily from measurement bias and survey nonresponse. While surveys are invaluable tools for statistical estimation, they are heavily dependent on the methodological diligence applied in their design and implementation. Therefore, the potential biases were addressed through rigorous survey methodology.

4.4 Data analysis

4.4.1 Qualitative data analysis

ATLAS.ti software was used for coding and thematic analysis of interview transcripts. "Data are coded and categorised until themes are identified or emerge" [31]. The interviews were held via Microsoft Teams to overcome geographical limitations.

4.4.2 Quantitative data analysis

Inferential statistics were used to test hypotheses stated in Section 3 and analyse outcomes derived from various statistical techniques [31]. IBM SPSS Statistics was used to compute all the chosen statistical techniques. Non-parametric techniques were chosen for their suitability to ordinal data and their ability to provide insights into relationships and group differences without assuming a normal distribution, as recommended by previous research [32]. This statistical approach will offer a rigorous analysis of cognitive biases in decision-making.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Data collection overview

Data was collected using a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the impact of cognitive biases on decision-making in project management. The paper involved semi-structured interviews with a sample of project managers and survey data collected from 150 participants across multiple industries, achieving an 87% completion rate. The data were analysed using statistical tools such as Spearman's correlation and Mann-Whitney U tests to assess the relationship between cognitive biases and project outcomes. The research explored how cognitive biases affected decision-making, particularly in straightforward versus ambiguous scenarios, and the resultant effects on key project performance indicators such as budget adherence and meeting deadlines.

5.2 Data gathering

For qualitative data, interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how cognitive biases affect decision-making in project management. These interviews aimed to uncover the perceptions and experiences of project managers regarding cognitive biases in both straightforward and ambiguous situations. For quantitative data, a questionnaire link was

distributed internally via email. The interviews and survey were conducted at a large global engineering consulting firm. The interview request was sent to 10 project managers, and the response rate was 80%. The response rate for the questionnaire was unknown due to the sampling strategy used; however, the completion rate for the 77 participants who attempted was 87% after screening the responses for missing data and incomplete responses. According to Pallant [33], errors in data can distort some analyses due to outliers, and as such, outliers were removed from the data set

5.3 Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti, identified three key themes: awareness of cognitive biases, complexity in project management, and decision-making processes. Participants commonly described cognitive biases as "lenses through which people view the world," acknowledging their subconscious influence on decision-making outcomes. One respondent reflected, "Inevitably, you make decisions based on those filters, and if you are unaware of it, it can sometimes be fatal or detrimental." This highlights the often-unseen impact of biases in shaping project decisions. Complexity emerged as a significant factor, with many participants discussing the challenges posed by limited information and competing project outcomes, such as balancing risks with commercial and quality considerations. One interviewee noted the difficulty of navigating these complexities: "Project factors often have competing outcomes... it's about managing these trade-offs effectively". Finally, the theme of decision-making revealed a pattern of overconfidence, where participants admitted to overestimating their capabilities. One participant shared, "I overestimated myself in terms of what I am able to do... I assumed I could do it myself", illustrating how biases can lead to taking on unrealistic workloads and, subsequently, poor decision outcomes. Recognising biases during the decision-making process remains a challenge, as another respondent observed: "Sometimes you only see the bias when things become clearer to you... the difficult part is realising in the moment".

These insights underline the need for increased awareness and strategies to mitigate the influence of cognitive biases in complex project environments. The network diagram constructed using analysis results from Atlas.ti illustrated in Figure 2 shows how all the themes are interconnected and linked to the research questions.

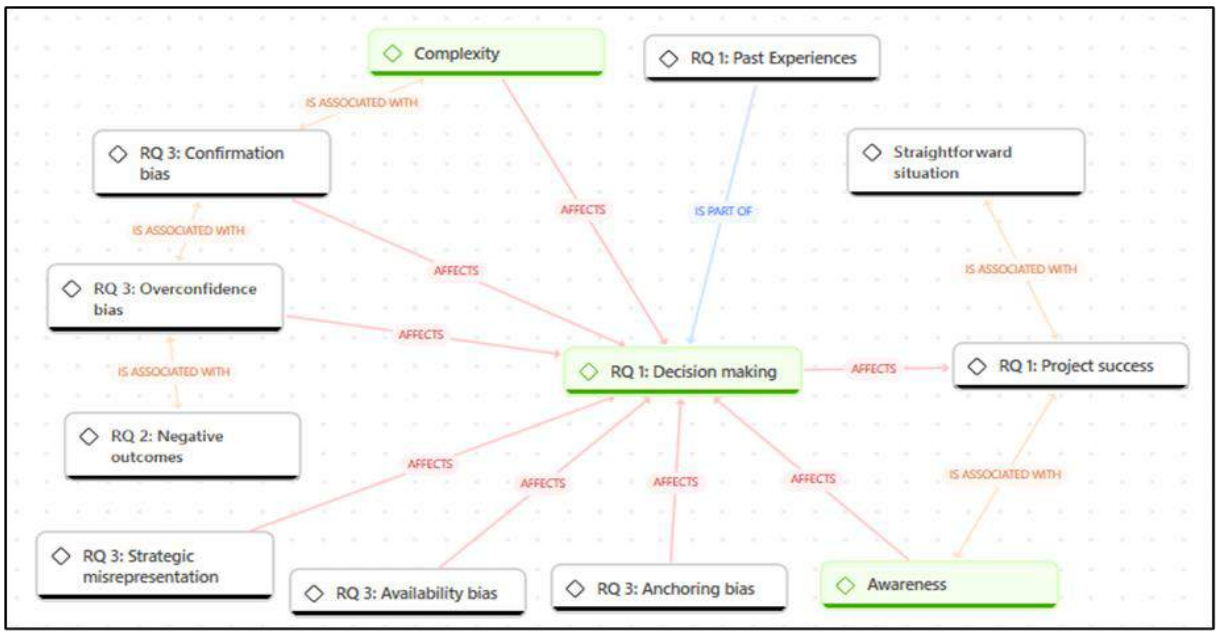

Figure 2: Network Diagram

In addressing RQ1, the diagram illustrates how decision-making in project management is shaped by awareness, complexity, and past experiences, with biases like confirmation, anchoring, and overconfidence often distorting decisions in complex projects, leading to delays and budget overruns. For RQ2, the diagram highlights that complexity exacerbates cognitive biases, negatively affecting outcomes, though awareness and experience can help mitigate these effects, particularly in straightforward scenarios. Addressing RQ3, participants acknowledged various biases, including power and political biases, but found them challenging to mitigate, underscoring the importance of active strategies to prevent these biases from impacting project outcomes.

5.4 Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data analysis was done through IBM SPSS Statistics. The data was exported from Qualtrics and coded for input into SPSS. Each survey question was entered as a variable and classified according to data type, such as nominal, ordinal, or scale data. Descriptive statistics and hypothesis tests were carried out on some of the data and revealed key findings about cognitive biases in project management. Normality tests indicated a non-normal distribution, prompting the use of non-parametric tests for analysis.

5.4.1 Hypothesis testing

Table 1 summarises the results of various statistical tests concerning the three main hypotheses: Spearman's Rank Correlation, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, and the Mann-Whitney U Test. These hypotheses were designed to explore the relationship between cognitive bias awareness and decision-making quality in straightforward and ambiguous scenarios and the impact of cognitive biases on project outcomes. The corresponding test result accompanies each hypothesis, statistical significance (p-value), effect size or correlation coefficient (r/R^2), and a conclusion as to whether the hypothesis was supported or not. The table provides a clear and structured overview of the statistical findings and their implications for the research questions.

Table 1: Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Test Used	Result	p-value	Effect Size/Correlation (r/R^2)	Conclusion
H1a	Spearman's Rank Correlation	Positive correlation, but bias-aware managers made riskier decisions	< 0.001	R^2 = 18.8%	Not Supported
	Mann-Whitney U Test	Statistically significant difference between low and high-bias groups in straightforward scenarios	0.003	r = 0.367 (Moderate Effect)	Supported
	Spearman's Rank Correlation (Peer Review)	Negative correlation indicating peer reviews improve decision quality in straightforward scenarios	< 0.001	R^2 = 20.9%	Supported
H1b	Spearman's Rank Correlation	No significant correlation found	0.068	R^2 = 5.2%	Not Supported
	Mann-Whitney U Test	No significant difference between low and high-bias groups in ambiguous scenarios	0.607	r = 0.064 (Small Effect)	Not Supported
H2	Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test	Significant difference in decision behaviour between ambiguous and straightforward situations	< 0.001	r = 0.427 (Moderate to Large Effect)	Supported
H3	Spearman's Rank Correlation	Significant correlations found between biases and negative project outcomes (budget adherence, deadlines)	< 0.001	R^2 = 24.5% - 31.6% (Moderate to Strong)	Supported
	Mann-Whitney U Test (Budget Adherence)	Significant difference between low and high-bias groups for budget adherence	0.002	r = 0.391 (Moderate to Large Effect)	Supported

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Qualitative data

Using mixed methods to gather data improved validity through triangulation [34]. Participants understood how cognitive biases, such as anchoring, confirmation, and overconfidence, affect project performance, particularly in decisions about timelines and budgets. These biases align with those identified by Flyvbjerg [9] and Chadee, et al. [2] as having negative impacts on project outcomes. Many managers acknowledged being unaware of biases during decision-making despite reflecting on them afterwards. This supports the idea that bias awareness and structured decision-making processes help mitigate biases [5]. Participants also recognised how systemic issues, such as power dynamics and political pressures, distorted decisions even when better options were evident. This is consistent with Flyvbjerg [9] who asserts that political bias arises from power dynamics rather than cognitive factors. Decision-making, influenced by complexity, awareness, and past experiences, plays a crucial role in project success. As Cristofaro [17] notes that project managers often fall victim to cognitive biases. Complexity can exacerbate biases, though awareness can mitigate their effects, leading to better outcomes. Participants also found that decision-making in straightforward situations was less prone to biases, resulting in more successful outcomes, though some bias still occurred. This finding aligns with Tsiga and Emes [15], who call for further research into the causes of high failure rates in complex projects.

6.2 Quantitative data

Hypothesis 1a was tested using the Mann-Whitney U Test to examine the relationship between bias awareness and decision-making quality in straightforward scenarios. The results showed a moderate effect size, with high-bias participants making riskier decisions. The test supported Hypothesis 1a, indicating a significant difference in decision-making behaviour between low- and high-bias-aware participants. Hypothesis 1b, which tested the relationship in ambiguous scenarios, showed no statistically significant correlation, contrary to expectations and existing literature by Cristofaro [17], which suggests that bias awareness improves decision quality.

Hypothesis 2 was tested using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, which showed a statistically significant result with a moderate to large effect size. The findings indicated more cautious decision-making in straightforward scenarios and riskier decisions in ambiguous ones, supporting Hypothesis 2. This result suggests that cognitive biases are more prevalent in ambiguous situations, where decision-makers rely more on intuition, as highlighted by Julmi [16]. In uncertain scenarios, decision-makers often turn to heuristics due to the inability to apply traditional risk-based methods [18].

Hypothesis 3 explored the relationship between cognitive biases and negative project outcomes. Spearman's rank correlation revealed weak to strong correlations between biases (such as planning fallacy, overconfidence, and sunk cost fallacy) and missed deadlines. Similarly, confirmation and availability biases showed moderate to strong correlations with budget adherence. The Mann-Whitney U Test further supported Hypothesis 3, revealing a moderate effect size and statistically significant result, indicating that higher bias awareness significantly impacted budget adherence. These findings align with Chadee, et al. [2] and Strang and Vajjhala [35], who identified cognitive biases as major contributors to poor project performance.

The analysis demonstrated a clear relationship between the qualitative and quantitative results. Bias awareness improved decision-making in straightforward scenarios, supporting H1a, but had little effect in ambiguous scenarios, failing to support H1b. The prevalence of biases in ambiguous situations supported H2, while biases negatively impacted project outcomes like deadlines and budgets, supporting H3. These findings underline the importance of managing bias awareness and complexity to improve decision quality and project success.

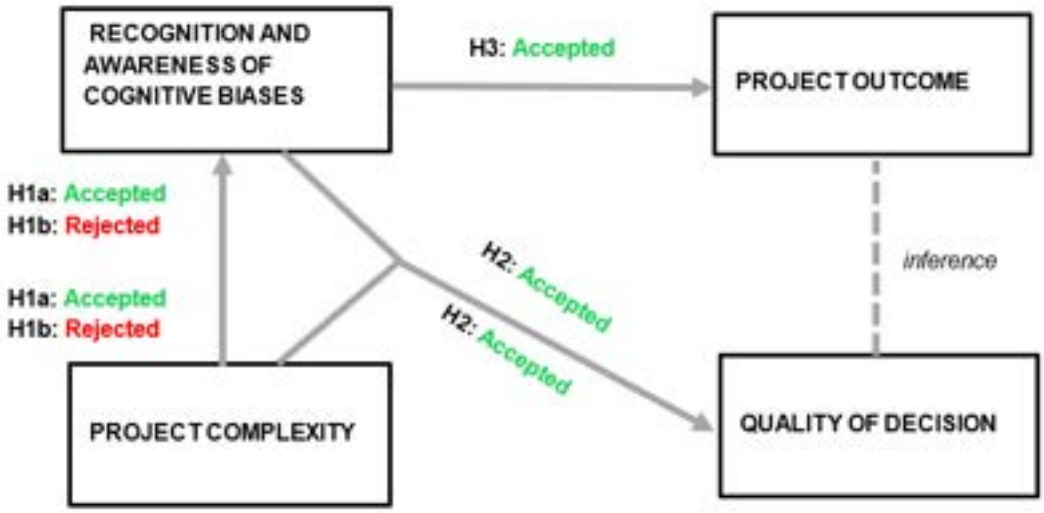

Figure 3: Research Model Results

Figure 3 illustrates the research model results, demonstrating the relationships between recognition and awareness of cognitive biases, project complexity, decision quality, and project outcomes. The model evaluates three hypotheses (H1a, H1b, H2, and H3) and their influence on decision-making and project performance. The hypotheses align with the findings and support the inference that bias awareness and project complexity directly affect decision-making quality and project success.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper explored how awareness of cognitive biases, project complexity, and decision-making quality affect project outcomes. This research provides valuable insights and practical recommendations for project managers. Further research with more diverse samples is recommended to validate and expand upon these findings.

7.1 Summary of results

Cognitive biases such as planning fallacy, confirmation bias, and overconfidence were present in straightforward and ambiguous scenarios. However, their impact differed depending on the project's complexity. Bias awareness improved decision-making in straightforward situations, supporting the hypothesis that managers aware of cognitive biases make better decisions in these scenarios. However, in ambiguous situations, where uncertainty was higher, the impact of biases was more subtle and varied, indicating a more complex relationship. The data also revealed that cognitive biases were more common in ambiguous than straightforward ones, supporting the hypothesis regarding their increased frequency in such scenarios. Qualitative insights solidified these findings, showing that project managers often struggle to recognise and address biases in complex decision-making. The research supported the hypothesis that cognitive biases negatively impact project outcomes, particularly regarding budget adherence and meeting deadlines. Overall, the findings aligned with the research objectives and revealed important insights into how cognitive biases affect decision-making in project management.

7.2 Implications for theory and practice

Theoretical Contributions: The research reveals how biases like planning fallacy, overconfidence, and confirmation bias impact decision-making and project outcomes, especially in different scenarios. While bias awareness aids straightforward decisions, it has a limited impact in ambiguous situations. This challenges the assumption that awareness always improves decisions. The study also highlights the interaction between cognitive and political biases, suggesting that bias mitigation must consider power dynamics.

Practical Implications: Organisations should integrate bias awareness training with peer reviews, particularly for ambiguous projects. Scenario-based training can better prepare managers for uncertain conditions. Additionally, fostering a transparent, collaborative culture is crucial to reducing the impact of power dynamics on biases.

7.3 Recommendations

- Incorporate bias recognition tools (checklists, peer evaluations) into training.
- Use structured tools to manage biases in uncertain situations.
- Separate political biases to focus on cognitive biases.
- Combine qualitative and quantitative data in research for a complete view.

7.4 Future research

- Explore why bias awareness doesn’t always improve decisions using simulations.
- Study how bias awareness evolves and affects decision quality.
- Investigate the intersection of cognitive and political biases in high-stakes projects.
- Develop real-time decision support systems to alert managers to biases.

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PERCEIVED USABILITY OF AN ONLINE TOOL FOR BUSINESS MODEL INNOVATION WHEN USING THE EDU-BMI METHOD

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ABSTRACT

The usability of any tool or system must be assessed in relation to its context and appropriateness. This article assesses the perceived usability of a collaborative online tool, MURAL, when used in a specific context of Participative Modelling (PM). Additionally, we evaluate the perceived usability of a method, the EDU-BMI, when embedded within MURAL to support participants in the process of business model innovation (BMI). Our study therefore provides an academic usability evaluation within a specific context and advances knowledge about the intersection of tools, methods, and usability. Data collected from 30 respondents through the System Usability Scale (SUS) indicate that both MURAL and the EDU-BMI method are acceptable for our specific context (with average SUS scores of 77.25 and 74.42). User feedback and over 110 hours of recorded observations are used to deepen our understanding of usability in context and propose refinements to the EDU-BMI method.

Keywords: business engineering, business model development tools, business model innovation, engineering education, participative modelling, system usability scale

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1 INTRODUCTION

According to Shah et al. [1], among the transformational forces shaping our world are two concurrent trends that continue to change how we look at and approach problems: (1) A surge in user-friendly and widely available technologies that cater to a digitally savvy generation and (2) A growing need for businesses to develop solutions for problems confronting society. The ability to generate novel ideas is becoming increasingly important to develop new solutions, with idea-generation skills proving valuable across disciplinary boundaries [2]. An example of a tool that offers straight-forward business language and an actionable process for innovation and change is the Business Model Canvas (BMC) [3]. The BMC is unique as it focuses on understanding what customers value while providing users with a single page to quickly outline and verify the "most salient and relevant information related to the business idea/innovation or initiative" [4].

In a study by Venter and De Vries [5], a group of participants used the virtual whiteboard software "MURAL" [6] for remote participative modelling (PM) of a BMC. Jackson et al. [7] have classified MURAL into the "Artifact management: virtual whiteboard software" technology type, along with tools such as Miro [8] and Google Jamboard [9]. The study by Venter and De Vries [5] found that MURAL is an acceptable system during participative enterprise modelling (PEM) when using the BMC, based on the System Usability Scale [10]. The study also found that the BMC templates within MURAL were insufficient for the systematic transformation of a traditional Business Model (BM) into a new iteration.

This is not surprising as, according to Szopinski et al. [11], the usefulness of a Business Model Development Tool (BMDT) depends on several factors such as a user's prior knowledge, the number of users, team location, and the user's workload. As an example, beginners need more guidance whereas experts may find this restricting/frustrating. Similarly, Pepin et al. [12] found that even though several tools have emerged to stimulate *sustainable* business modelling (SBM), these tools are often too complex for nonexperts in business modelling or sustainability, and thus insufficiently user-friendly for educational contexts. To address this limitation, Venter and de Vries [13] enhanced the BMC within the context of undergraduate engineering education. In their article, they propose a method, EDU-BMI, specifically designed to support students during PM sessions focused on Business Model Innovation (BMI) activities within the MURAL platform.

1.1 Background

While several websites offer comparisons of collaborative online tools like MURAL, e.g. Guinness [14] and Erdem [15], there appears to be a lack of academic studies that specifically compare these tools or examine their usability in the context of PM. Additionally, even though some researchers such as De Vries and Opperman [16] and Venter and De Vries [17] have already experimented within the knowledge area of Participative Enterprise Modelling (PEM) and online tools, there is no guidance available on which online tool should be used within a specific *context* of PEM to ensure that an appropriate and user-friendly modelling tool is selected.

1.2 Research objectives

The present study aims to understand the perceived usability when participants work together to develop a BMC using the EDU-BMI method embedded in MURAL. To achieve this objective, the following research questions (RQs) are posed:

RQ1: How user friendly is the *online tool* MURAL when innovating a business in the context of undergraduate engineering education during business modelling innovation?

RQ2: How user friendly is the EDU-BMI *method* itself when used in the context of undergraduate engineering education during BMI?

RQ3: What features contribute to this specific use-in-context, i.e. embedding the EDU-BMI method within MURAL within an undergraduate engineering education context?

Answers to RQ1 will further expand knowledge on the usability evaluation of MURAL, but within the context of a more prescriptive method when creating a BMC. This addresses a limitation identified in Venter and De Vries [5]. RQ2 will assess the EDU-BMI method, focusing on its ability to guide participants effectively through the process of BMI. RQ2 will inform areas for improvement for the method, which can be used to refine the EDU-BMI method for future iterations. RQ3 will be used to extract the features that contribute to this context of PEM, so that these features can be used to inform further studies about the development of a generic tool selection method.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Enterprise models and participative enterprise modelling

The term "model" is used in various ways as highlighted by Dietz and Mulder [18]. In their chapter on The MU Theory: Understanding Models and Modelling, it is stated that the only common denominator in the plethora of model notions is that a model is “a simplified representation of a thing, made for the purpose of studying those aspects of the thing that one is interested in” [18]. *Enterprise Modelling* (EM), which is an “integrated and multi-perspective way of capturing and analysing enterprise solutions” [19] is used to document the current or a desired future state of a company in a graphical and comprehensible way [20].

According to Smetschka and Gaube [21], participatory modelling (PM) is a method which uses models in three ways: (1) As a means to create knowledge, (2) To achieve knowledge integration and (3) To enable societal impact. By using this method, models can be used to obtain a better understanding of system dynamics, to reconstruct system dynamics, to develop future scenarios, and to structure communication processes around recommended actions [21]. For EM, innovative approaches such as *participative enterprise modelling* (PEM), a “fruitful method of eliciting information and creating enterprise models at the same time”, have been introduced with stakeholders actively taking part in the modelling sessions [20]. During PEM, participants are typically co-located and encouraged to collaborate to avoid conceptual misalignment. Today, people communicate more online than offline [22] which is leading to an embrace of online tools instead.

2.2 Business models and business model innovation

Schwarz and Legner [23] define a Business Model (BM) as “the blueprint of an organisation’s logic for value creation, delivery, and capture”. The BMC consists of nine basic building blocks that summarise the main areas of a business [3]. These blocks include key activities, key partners, key resources, cost structure, customer relationships, customer segments, value propositions, channels, and revenue streams [3]. By using the BMC, stakeholders have “a shared language for describing, visualising, assessing, and changing business models” [3]. According to Ladd [24], however, even though the BMC is appropriate for describing or visualising business models, it lacks guidance on the related innovation processes.

Business model innovation (BMI) takes place when BM elements and/or architecture is changed in a deliberate and observable way [25] and certain methods have been developed to address specific tasks during the BM design and implementation [23]. For example, an integrative conceptual framework for systematic BMI is proposed by Hoch and Brad [26] and a method that creates a visual roadmap of a business model’s evolution that assists in navigating the versions created, is proposed by Fritscher and Pigneur [27]. As mentioned in section **Error! Reference source not found.**, Venter and de Vries [13] proposed a method specifically designed to support students during PM sessions focused on BMI activities within the MURAL platform.

The EDU-BMI consists of seven main sections: (1) An introduction to MURAL and how the outline functionality [28] works, (2) An introduction to the participants (i.e. who the four team members are and what motivates them), (3) Background information on BMs and BMI, (4) Information on the initiation step, including examples and a fictitious use case, (5) Information on ideation, focusing on the business model pattern cards [29] and the similarity and confrontation principles [30] to innovate the use case, (6) Idea prioritisation, where the participants decide which idea is most relevant and how the idea impacts the current BM of the use case, and (7) Translating the use case's new business model onto the BMC.

The EDU-BMI method embedded in MURAL is shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**. T he left side includes the workspace, and the right side includes the outline and steps. Clicking on a step takes you to the relevant section, as shown in Figure 2. These figures are for illustration only, i.e. to demonstrate the core concepts and how they're applied in MURAL.

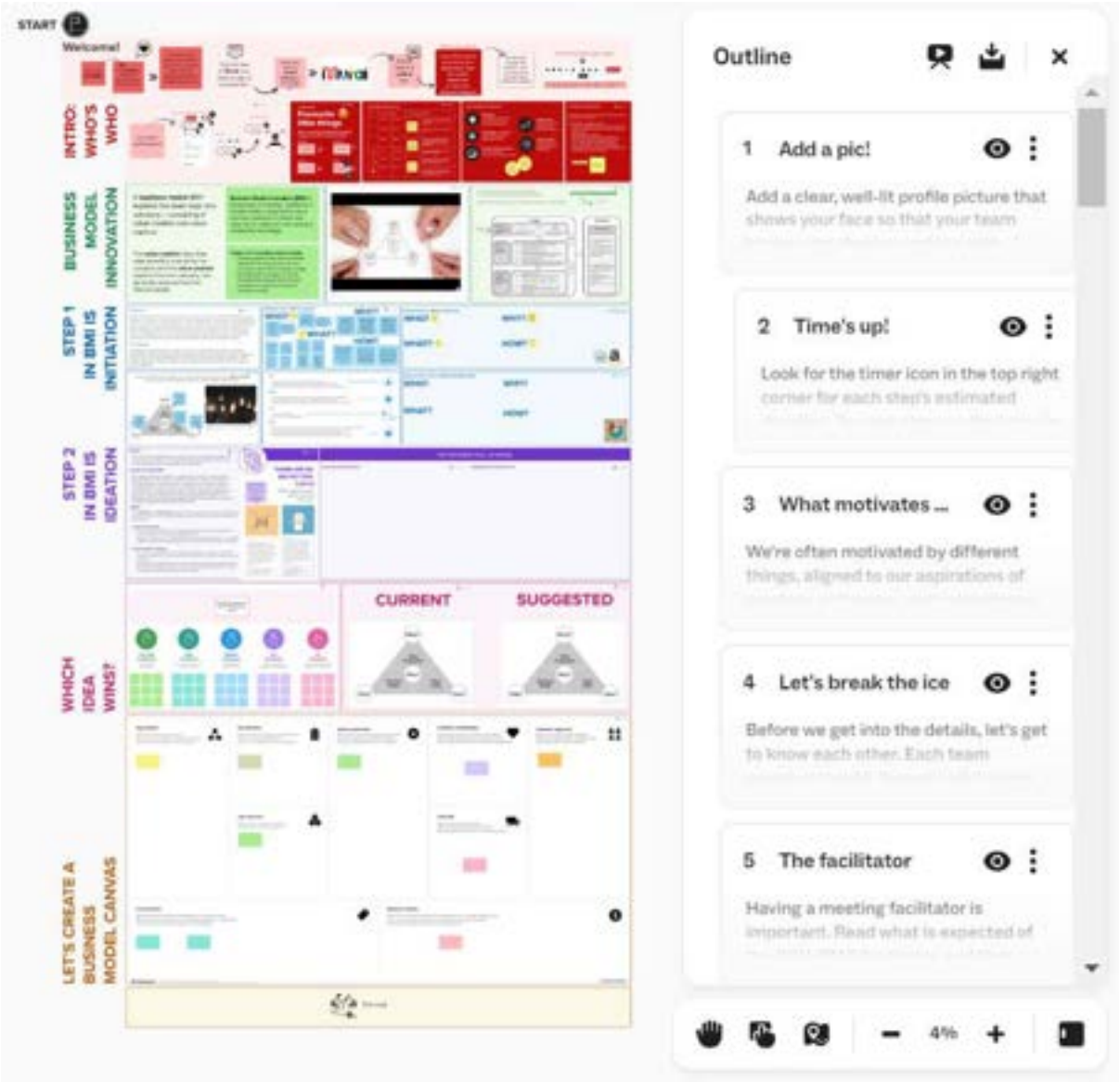

Figure 1: A visual overview of the EDU-BMI embedded in MURAL

Figure 2: Extract of Step 1 and how one is navigated to a specific section on the canvas

2.3 Usability evaluation methods (UEMs)

Techniques or methods are used to evaluate usability, defined by the International Organisation for Standardisation [31] as ''the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specified context of use''. In a Usability Evaluation Method (UEM) taxonomy created by Ivory and Hearst [32], method classes and method types per class are defined. As an example, in the inquiry method class, users provide feedback on an interface which could include methods such as interviews, surveys, or user feedback. Lu et al. [33] state that the UEM taxonomy remains highly relevant today, and found that most usability studies on educational technologies focus on e-learning in higher education, predominantly using *inquiry* methods such as questionnaires to assess technological usability. They also found that few studies address pedagogical or socio-cultural aspects, highlighting a gap in the broader evaluation of usability.

Standardised usability questionnaires, a type of questionnaire designed from metrics based on the responses obtained from participants, assess user satisfaction with perceived usability of a system [34]. The most widely used standardised usability questionnaires for the assessment of usability at the end of a study, according to Sauro and Lewis [35], include the Questionnaire for User Interface Satisfaction (QUIS), the Software Usability Measurement Inventory (SUMI), the Post-Study System Usability Questionnaire (PSSUQ), and the System Usability Scale (SUS).

2.4 The system usability scale (SUS)

The SUS is a "simple, ten-item scale giving a global view of subjective assessments of usability" [36] which is generally used after the respondent has had an opportunity to use the system being evaluated but before any form of discussion. When using the SUS, participants are asked to score the ten items, with one of five responses that range from Strongly Agree to Strongly disagree.

According to Lewis and Sauro [37], there are three primary goals with metrics like the SUS: (1) To estimate the SUS for a population from one sample, (2) To determine whether a SUS score exceeds a benchmark (such as 68, the average score), and (3) To compare SUS scores for comparable products or the same product over time. According to Sauro and Lewis [35], the more formative the focus of the test (e.g. focused on problem discovery) the less it is like a traditional experiment, whereas the more summative the focus (e.g. focused on measurement) the more it should resemble the mechanics of a traditional experiment.

According to Brooke [38], the individual statements aren't supposed to have diagnostic value in themselves or to relate to the specific features of a particular system. A single number representing a composite measure of the overall usability of the system being studied should

therefore be used [36]. To calculate the SUS score, the scale is first converted to a rating, e.g. 'strongly disagree' scores one point and 'strongly agree' scores five points. For odd-numbered items (i.e. positively worded), 1 is subtracted from the user's rating. For even-numbered items (i.e. negatively worded), the user's rating is subtracted from 5. The adjusted scores for the 10 items are then summed, and multiplied by 2.5 to scale it to a range of 0 to 100.

The SUS is suitable for small sample sizes as low as 12, as Tullis and Stetson [39] have shown that the same conclusion as a full dataset is reached at least 90% of the time with this sample size. However, larger sample sizes may provide a more precise estimate (i.e. narrower confidence intervals) [37]. According to Sauro [10], SUS scores can be interpreted using various frameworks, such as an acceptability scale (not acceptable, marginal, acceptable) or descriptive adjectives (worst imaginable, poor, OK, good, excellent, best imaginable).

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research participants

The study included all students enrolled in a tertiary education module at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 7 [40]. This resulted in an initial participant group of 111 students, all of whom were introduced to MURAL and the embedded EDU-BMI method by the primary researcher. The primary researcher then created 22 groups on the web-based learning management system 'Blackboard' [41]. Members could either join one of the 22 groups themselves, or be allocated to a random group if they had not joined a group by a specified date. Each group consisted of four members, with the exception of one group that consisted of five members.

3.2 Applying the EDU-BMI

The EDU-BMI was utilised in three online sessions (or deliverables), during which groups collaborated to complete the method's steps. These sessions were scheduled during dedicated tutorial time slots, providing students approximately two hours on three Wednesday mornings, totalling about six hours, to complete the EDU-BMI collaborative assignment. Groups were required to record their collaborative efforts throughout the process, as their teamwork was assessed alongside other criteria, such as adherence to the prescribed method.

3.3 Obtaining and evaluating the results

After conducting the three online sessions, the 111 members obtained access to a usability survey conducted via Blackboard. According to vom Brocke et al. [42], if knowledge is already available to solve a problem identified, this knowledge can be applied following routine design, which does not constitute Design Science Research (DSR). The surveys used in the previous studies [16, 43], as well as UEMs such as standardised usability questionnaires were already available. Questions were therefore reused in our study, and modified where necessary, to create a new survey that extracts both quantitative and qualitative data, i.e. *mixed methods research* [44]. The survey included 59 questions in total, of which 30 questions (about 51%) were free-text questions encouraging participants to motivate their answers.

Aligned with our approved ethical clearance application conditions, members were informed that participation in the survey is voluntary, that a participant could withdraw at any time without penalty, that their privacy would be protected throughout the survey, and that their participation would remain confidential. The first question was used to obtain consent, linked to the conditions for our approved application for ethical clearance and the second general question was used to obtain feedback on the participant's modelling experience, using MURAL as a modelling tool. After these initial questions, the survey included questions from the SUS by Brooke [36], as well as free-text fields in which motivations could be provided per question.

It should be noted that if a participant left a question unanswered, it was updated to "neither agree nor disagree".

The first ten SUS questions were focused on evaluating the usability of the *online tool* (i.e. MURAL). As students engaged with MURAL during group assignments in this module, the wording of the SUS statements was updated to reflect this specific context, e.g. "2. I found the system unnecessarily complex" was changed to "I found MURAL unnecessarily complex during group assignments". This ensured that participants' responses were framed within the scenario in which they had actually used the tool, thereby improving the accuracy and relevance of their feedback. The term "system" was also replaced with "MURAL" to minimise confusion, as Bangor, et al. [45] found that using terms such as "product," "application," or "website" instead of "system" does not change the results.

The second set of SUS questions focused on evaluating the usability of the *method* (i.e. EDU-BMI), e.g. "I found the EDU-BMI unnecessarily complex during the group assignments". While the objective of the SUS is to measure people's subjective perceptions of *system* usability in a short amount of time [39], the EDU-BMI, being embedded within a system, can still be evaluated by the SUS. Additional questions were also included to assess the method's effectiveness from an educational perspective (refer to section 4.2.1).

A few additional questions with supporting motivations were also included, such as whether the participant would recommend the tool MURAL, whether they preferred face-to-face modelling, and whether they experienced any tool and/or method frustrations.

Of the 111 members, 30 agreed to participate in our survey (about 27%). The primary researcher analysed the survey results, deriving a usability score from the standardised usability questionnaire used (see section **Error! Reference source not found.**). Supporting t ext feedback (or user feedback) was also obtained as the user could motivate their answers (see section 4.2). All groups' modelling sessions were observed as part of the group assessment, amounting to over 110 hours of recorded data. To manage the extensive viewing time, the recordings were occasionally reviewed at increased playback speeds. Key observations from these recordings are included in section 4.3.

4 RESULTS

4.1 System Usability Scale (SUS) results

As aforementioned, survey feedback was obtained from 30 participants. The margin of error of the SUS scores calculated at a 95% confidence level would therefore be approximately ±6.33 points. This is using a standard deviation of 17.7 based on an average calculated by Lewis and Sauro [37]. The SUS calculations for our study are available here.

4.1.1 MURAL online tool

The average SUS score for MURAL as an online tool, when combining all participants' scores, is 77,25. The SUS scores per participant are shown in Figure 3. Only two participants scored MURAL 50 or less (i.e. as "not acceptable").

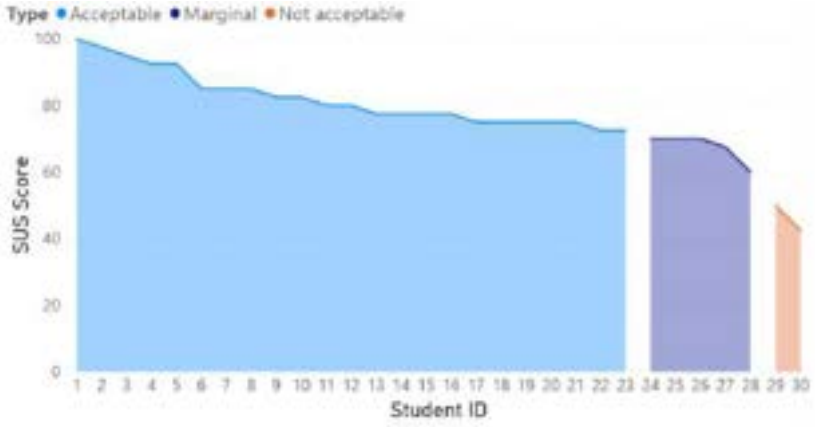

Figure 3: SUS score per participant for MURAL as an online tool

Responding to the ten SUS questions, participants provided feedback on how they felt regarding the statement by providing a ranking of strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree or strongly agree [36]. The odd-numbered SUS questions are positive-oriented. In these questions, agreement or strong agreement with the statements would indicate participant satisfaction with MURAL in the evaluation context. The positive-oriented SUS question feedback is summarised in Figure 4.

QuestionWithNumber	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
1) I think that I would like to use MURAL frequently to create a Business Model Canvas (BMC)/innovate a business with the EDU-BMI method.	0	2	3	14	11
3) I thought MURAL was easy to use during the group assignments.	0	1	1	18	9
5) I found the various functions in MURAL were well integrated for the purpose of the group assignments.	0	0	4	17	9
7) I would imagine that most people would learn to use MURAL very quickly.	0	3	2	15	10
9) I felt very confident using MURAL during the group assignments.	0	0	5	14	11

Figure 4: SUS positive-oriented question summary

Two participants expressed that they would not frequently use MURAL to create a BMC and/or innovate a business. One participant added that MURAL is "Not the best software" while another elaborated "If I have a template already, I think adding text boxes on it can be easier. Using MURAL requires internet access and sometimes you want to open something quickly see it. With MURAL it's a process to get onto the website whereas with Word, you can just open it". Participants who disagreed that people would learn how to use MURAL quickly mentioned "I think it depends how good you are with technology" noting that some people may struggle to adopt online tools. Another participant added that "Older people who have not used online collaboration tools might not be able to navigate with zooming in and out, using sticky notes as quickly".

The even-numbered SUS questions are negative-oriented. Figure 5 summarises the answers per negative-oriented SUS question.

QuestionWithNumber	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
2) I found MURAL unnecessarily complex during the group assignments.	5	21	3	1	0
4) I think that I would need the support of a technical person to be able to use MURAL.	11	16	3	0	0
6) I thought there was too much inconsistency in MURAL during the group assignments.	5	22	3	0	0
8) I found MURAL very frustrating to use when creating a BMC/innovating a business with the EDU-BMI method.	4	20	5	0	1
10) I needed to learn a lot of things before I could get going with MURAL.	7	16	5	2	0

Figure 5: SUS negative-oriented question summary

A participant that found MURAL unnecessarily complex during the group assignments added that learning "how to use the site and its functionality was a bit overwhelming, I still am not quick enough using it. It is a useful tool if given time to learn how to use". A participant that

agreed that they needed to learn a lot of things before they could get going with MURAL added that they "still don't know how to use some of the functions". Another participant that agreed clarified that "to a certain extent one does need to learn how to use MURAL and to get comfortable with the controls of MURAL. But I personally felt that it was intuitive, and then over time I was able to feel completely comfortable using MURAL".

4.1.2 EDU-BMI method

The average SUS score for EDU-BMI as a method embedded in MURAL, when combining all participants' scores, is 74,42. The SUS scores per participant are shown in Figure 6. Three participants scored the EDU-BMI 50 or less (i.e. as "not acceptable").

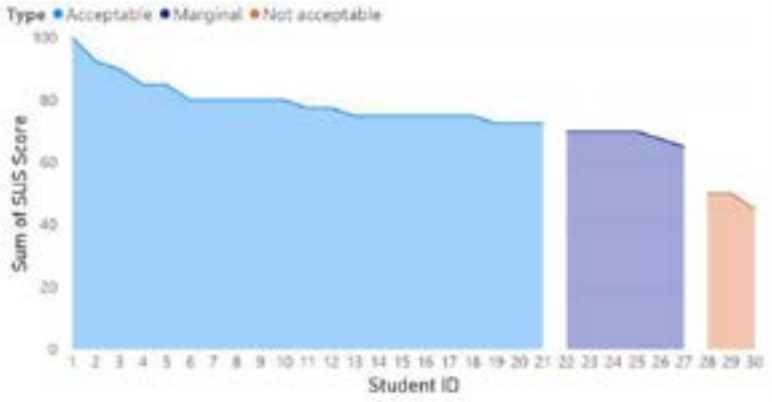

Figure 6: SUS score per participant for EDU-BMI as a method

As aforementioned, the odd-numbered SUS questions are positive-oriented. In these questions, agreement or strong agreement with the statements would indicate satisfaction with the EDU-BMI method. The positive-oriented SUS question feedback is summarised in Figure 7.

QuestionWithNumber	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
1) I think that I would like to use the EDU-BMI frequently to create a BMC/innovate a business.	0	0	6	19	5
3) I thought the EDU-BMI was easy to use during the group assignments.	0	0	3	20	7
5) I found the various functions in the EDU-BMI were well integrated for the purpose of the assignments.	0	0	4	20	6
7) I would imagine that most people would learn to use the EDU-BMI very quickly.	0	0	8	17	5
9) I felt very confident using the EDU-BMI during the group assignments.	0	2	2	18	8

Figure 7: SUS positive-oriented question summary

One student who did not feel confident using the EDU-BMI explained, "I feel like my peers know more, which frustrates me as I try to keep up." The other participant who disagreed with this statement did not provide a justification.

The even-numbered SUS questions are negative-oriented. Figure 8 summarises the answers per negative-oriented SUS question.

QuestionWithNumber	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
2) I found the EDU-BMI unnecessarily complex during the group assignments.	6	21	3	0	0
4) I think that I would need the support of a technical person to be able to use the EDU-BMI.	5	21	2	1	1
6) I thought there was too much inconsistency in the EDU-BMI during the group assignments.	4	20	5	1	0
8) I found the EDU-BMI very frustrating to use when creating a BMC/innovating a business.	6	19	3	2	0
10) I needed to learn a lot of things before I could get going with the EDU-BMI.	3	19	5	3	0

Figure 8: SUS negative-oriented question summary

A participant that agreed that there was too much inconsistency in the EDU-BMI during the group assignments added that "We had to do so many magic triangles it just felt very repetitive and almost like we were getting nowhere". Another participant that found the EDU-BMI very

frustrating to use commented that their group "had some struggles adapting to it and finishing it within the deadline". Another participant added that "It is quite a long process because you have to choose different business model cards and then do like 3 magic triangles". When asked whether they needed to learn a lot of things before they could get going with the EDU-BMI, one participant said "I first had to learn what business model innovation was, the different steps and components before the EDU-BMI started to make sense. Once I understood it, the EDU-BMI became really helpful".

4.2 User feedback results

4.2.1 EDU-BMI design requirements

In the specific context of teaching and training BM ideation, Schlimbach et al. [2] emphasise the importance of (and interplay between) educational, social, and motivational layers. Five design requirements were identified and incorporated into the EDU-BMI method [13]. The survey was therefore used as a means to evaluate whether the design requirements were met or not, as summarised in Figure 9.

Questions	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
The EDU-BMI provided a common base of knowledge on business model ideation.	0	0	2	23	4
The EDU-BMI prompted learners to connect and recombine ideas.	0	0	3	18	9
The EDU-BMI guided the learners through the ideation process and thinking modes.	0	0	2	26	8
The EDU-BMI enabled learners to interact and collaborate with real/digital entities.	0	1	5	19	5
The EDU-BMI considered different types of learners and their drivers for motivation.	0	1	8	17	4

Figure 9: Method design requirement feedback

Reporting on the high-scoring responses, about 93% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the EDU-BMI *provided a common base of knowledge* on BMI and the same percentage agreed or strongly agreed that the method guided them through the *ideation process and thinking modes*. Additionally, about 90% agreed or strongly agreed that the EDU-BMI prompted them to *connect and recombine ideas*.

Reporting on less-optimistic responses, 80% of participants agreed that the method *enabled them to interact and collaborate with real/digital entities*. However, user feedback highlighted areas of improvement. One participant noted that they "feel like better examples could have been used during the MURAL assignment - we could not really innovate a lot with a 'university'". Another participant, who selected "neither agree nor disagree", admitted that they "don't understand what is meant by 'real/ digital entities'", which may explain the lower agreement.

Reporting on the least-optimistic responses, only about 70% participants agreed that different types of learners and their *drivers for motivation were considered*. Eight participants (about 27%) selected "neither agree nor disagree" indicating an area for improvement. The participant that *disagreed* simply commented "It just doesn't".

4.2.2 Preference of face-to-face communication

Participants were asked: "If I had to create a Business Model Canvas and/or innovate a business with the EDU-BMI in future, I would prefer to use face-to-face collaboration and drawing on a physical whiteboard, rather than using online modelling like MURAL". About 27% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while another 27% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Some of the feedback provided by participants that either agreed or strongly agreed is included below:

- "You can engage more with someone in front of you"
- "I would agree, because in person it is easier to communicate during collaboration sessions. You can read facial expression better and I have experienced that it is easier

to talk 'over' someone when doing something online. I would love to rather have a face-to-face meeting but working on MURAL during that session with the Mural shown on a big screen"

- "Internet connection is not always reliable- some days the line is great and other days the connection is really bad, we can't control that. Also moving between MURAL and Blackboard was not nice - we can't see each other's faces on MURAL so when we are confused or don't understand it becomes harder (if) that person does not want to voice that they are confused"

About 47% disagreed with the statement, with none providing comments to support their response.

4.2.3 Frustrations identified

Participants were asked to share any frustrations they experienced with MURAL's functionality and the EDU-BMI method. The user feedback obtained is included in Appendix A. Some participants mentioned frustrations under the MURAL section that were also (or more) applicable to the EDU-BMI method, and vice versa. For example, one participant noted: "The first time, the outline disappeared and not all of us could click on it. I think only the facilitator could see it, but then it became hard to navigate through what needed to be completed." While this was categorised as a MURAL/online tool frustration by the participant, it could also be interpreted as a method-related issue. For instance, the EDU-BMI method could have clarified that only the facilitator would initially see the outline and provided guidance on updating permissions to ensure broader visibility.

Another example is a participant mentioning that "It took us a while to turn off everyone's cursors. It is distracting when everyone is moving across the page when trying to contribute". Although classified as an EDU-BMI frustration, another participant classified the same concern as a MURAL/tool frustration ("It took us a session and a half to realise you can remove the cursors on your screen individually so that it doesn't block what you're trying to see"). As a result, participants sometimes find it challenging to determine whether frustrations stem from MURAL or from the method itself.

Some participants mentioned other frustrations, like *issues communicating online* ("the only frustrating part was the online communication and the group work itself") and *team members being distracted* ("The only frustration I faced was that a group member who seemed to be distracted while working, i.e. not keeping up with where we were in the template and what we needed to do", "It's way too easy to go off topic and talk about your weekend").

Some participants *did not experience any frustrations*. One participant commented "With the assignments, the instructions were clear and quite straight-forward, making it easy to use MURAL. We also mostly used sticky notes and typed on it, which was really easy to do. The guideline on the right-hand side was also really helpful. Overall, my group and I did not experience any serious or frustrating issues with MURAL." Another participant said that "Once we got the basic idea of it down, it was easy to understand and complete".

4.3 Observation results

Not reading instructions. As mentioned in section 2.2, the EDU-BMI was utilised in three sessions (or deliverables). In the first deliverable, several challenges were observed. Many participants were uncertain about how to use the outline. Some groups forgot to utilise it, instead scrolling through the board without fully understanding the expectations. Additionally, some participants did not read the introduction section or watch the accompanying video, likely due to time constraints or oversight. This led to confusion about the outline's purpose and functionality.

Confusion on reusability of icons. In the first deliverable, participants were tasked with identifying their motivations using six predefined categories (e.g., socialiser, philanthropist). The instructions read: “Take a quick 5 minutes to reflect: what truly motivates you? Once you've identified your driver, drag the icon that best represents you to your sticky note in the 'Favourite Little Things' section and briefly discuss it within the group”. However, some groups mistakenly believed that once one person dragged a motivation icon, it could not be reused by others, seeing as the icon had been removed from the section. This led to confusion and incomplete discussions.

Effectiveness of the badge system. The badge system aimed to encourage collaboration and recognise contributions. The step in the EDU-BMI includes the following: “Throughout the modelling process, you can recognise contributions by awarding badges to your team members. Simply copy the badge and add it to the deserving player's name card”. Participants were also encouraged to create their own badges. Despite this, few participants added custom badges (e.g., a ‘lighten the mood’ badge was added by one group), and many forgot to assign badges altogether.

Instruction overload. While some instructions were simplified based on prior feedback [13], issues remained with the instructions and outline. Participants struggled with lengthy instructions and commented on the overwhelming number of details (e.g., “there are a million instructions”). As a result, critical information was often missed or misunderstood. For example, some groups were unclear whether they should discuss or simply choose cards and whether card choices needed to align with the business context or could be selected at random. Some participants also mistakenly researched the use case’s company online, found real-world results, and based their work on the actual company instead of the intended fictional context.

Confusion on using the outline. In the first deliverable, all participants had access to the outline. However, in subsequent deliverables, only the facilitator had access due to technical issues when recreating templates. This limited access caused confusion and frustration within groups, as participants were unsure why they could not find the ‘outline’ icon. Similarly, participants were unclear about the functionality of private mode, mistakenly believing all members needed to activate it. Participants expressed mixed feelings about the time allocation, with some finding it too short and others too long. Additionally, many were unclear about the timer’s purpose e.g. whether it applied to reading, modelling, or both in one step. One participant suggested adding a timer reminder and clarifying its intended use in the outline per step.

Facilitation skills. Some participants struggled with basic MURAL functions, such as adding or duplicating sticky notes. This information was available in the introductory video, but many participants missed it. Sometimes, a sticky note was also accidently added when a user double clicked on the Mural. Groups were also unsure whether they could use external tools like Google or AI for support. Clarifying this in future sessions is essential, as the EDU-BMI encourages leveraging external tools for ideation and problem-solving [13]. Lastly, team facilitation emerged as a critical factor in the success of the modelling process. While most facilitators performed well, some groups lacked effective guidance, such as the facilitator not reading instructions aloud or managing group discussions. Additionally, some participants watched videos without sound, not realising that audio was included, further impacting comprehension.

5 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Some participants indicated a preference for face-to-face collaboration over using an online tool like MURAL. Reasons included limited engagement when using an online tool, difficulty interpreting non-verbal cues, unreliable internet connections, and the complexity of

navigating between platforms. Despite these concerns, MURAL still obtained a SUS score of 77,25, making it an acceptable tool, according to the score interpretation guidelines provided by Sauro [10]. Taking into consideration that the mean SUS score could fall within ±6.33 points of the calculated score, the tool would still be considered acceptable.

When using the SUS to evaluate the usability of the EDU-BMI method embedded within MURAL, an average score of 74,42 is obtained. This score indicates that the EDU-BMI, as implemented in MURAL for business innovation, is generally perceived as an acceptable method within its context. Considering the confidence interval, the method's usability may range from marginal to acceptable. Several concerns and opportunities for improvement were identified. Appendix B summarises the suggested changes to the EDU-BMI method based on the concerns identified in sections 4.1.2, 4.2.1, 4.2.3, and 4.3. A 27% response rate may limit the representativeness of the findings. With less than a third of the members participating in the survey, the views of respondents may differ systematically from those who did not participate. This can reduce the generalisability of the conclusions to the broader group.

Features and functionality that impact the usability of MURAL within different contexts have been sourced and initial categorisation of the findings has been presented in Venter and De Vries [5]. In Figure 10, frustrations and features that were also mentioned in this study have been emphasised using **bold and underlined text**. 'Connection problems' were seen as a separate issue in our current study, as there was no mention of work lost due to the connection problems.

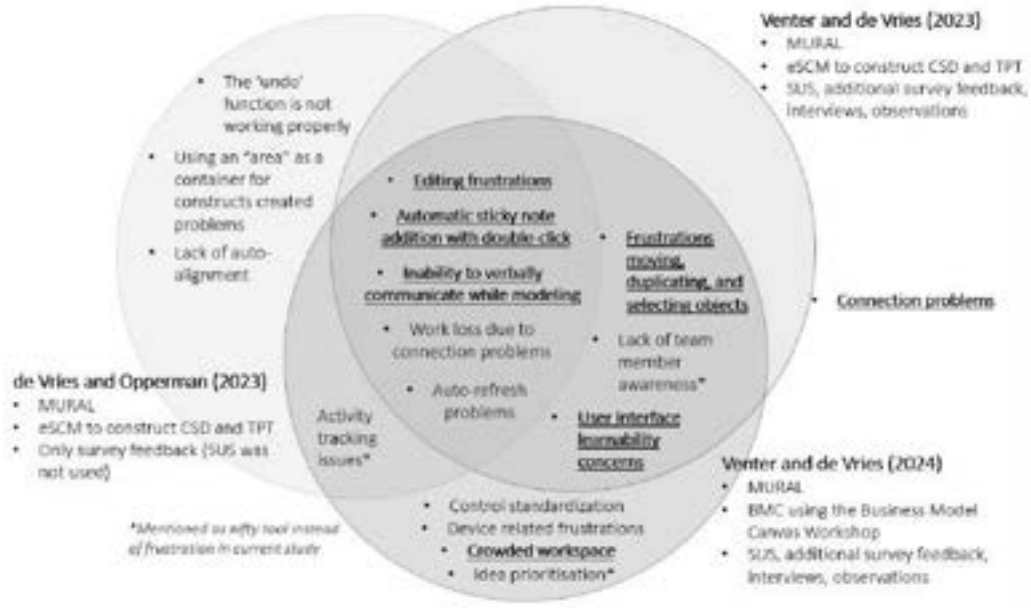

Figure 10. Venn diagram depicting frustrations identified in different studies

Using the identified frustrations and features, a more systematic classification of PEM requirements and evaluation of MURAL against these criteria is suggested. This approach is particularly necessary as the diagram in Figure 10 has become increasingly difficult to update. Future work could include the creation of a feature prioritisation tool (FePT) in which a more structured classification takes place. Additionally, conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) is proposed to explore decision-making methods that can leverage data from the FePT to guide users in selecting the most appropriate tool.

For future research, the usability of alternative modelling tools, such as FigJam or Miro should be assessed within the same context, so that different tools' usability can be compared to each other. As an example, undergraduate participants could use the EDU-BMI (method) to

create a BMC (model) in Figjam. Additional insights could then be obtained with regards to the features within these different tools, and how this impacts the perceived usability.

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7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix A

Section comment was mentioned by participant	Participant quote	Potential relevance	
		Online tool (MURAL)	Online tool (MURAL)
MURAL	"Functionality was quite faulty as it would randomly disconnect saying that the network was bad when it wasn't"	X	
MURAL	"Had some frustrations w.r.t. the outline and the location it takes when you click on each step. Maybe it could have been a bit clearer as to where we need to go, but then again we should also figure out stuff on our own"		X
MURAL	"It kept freezing, the stickies disappeared, we didn't know how the timer thing worked and had to keep a backup timer"	X	
MURAL	"When someone selected a sticky at the same time as you did, it disappears or freezes or just malfunctions"	X	
MURAL	"The first time the outline disappeared and not all of us could click on it, I think only the facilitator could see it but then it became hard to navigate through what needed to be completed"	X	X
MURAL	"Didn't know where certain settings/functions were and there was not an intro when opening the app of where each button were and what it does etc."	X	X
MURAL	"The only problem we had was the G1 whereby we did not know where to make the outline appear again but after a few minutes, we discovered where to find it"	X	X
MURAL	"One thing that frustrated me was that you have to select every sticky that you want to move. There is no intuitive 'select a column/row' function"	X	
MURAL	"Difficulty with finding certain functions inside MURAL"	X	
MURAL	• "It sometimes happened that I still want to add to my sticky, but then someone else is typing there and I cannot access it. • It took us a session and a half to realise you can remove the cursors on your screen individually so that it doesn't block what you're trying to see. • If someone accidently click on the template and it wasn't locked they might move it which can be a bit disturbing or frustrating. • I sometimes found it frustrating that I couldn't make a sticky wider if I wanted to add more text, it can only make the text smaller"	X X X X	X
EDU-BMI	"I have mentioned them above, but the biggest issue was time and MURAL randomly freezing even if I had a good Wi-Fi connection"	X	
EDU-BMI	"We would have appreciated the time for the timer to be indicated on the 'Outline' for easier accessibility"		X
EDU-BMI	"Too long for the limited time set"		X
EDU-BMI	"Sometimes it would take you to a certain part of the template but then you are not sure what to do there and then only realise that it was just an intro for the next step where you add information"		X
EDU-BMI	"It took us a while to turn off everyone's cursors. It is distracting when everyone is moving across the page when trying to contribute"	X	X
EDU-BMI	"A link to a YouTube video would have been a bit more convenient than to download a video"		X

7.2 Appendix B

Concern/opportunity identified	Section	Suggested solution for next iteration of the EDU-BMI
Repetition of activities.	4.1.2	Instead of requiring participants to create multiple versions of the same deliverable for the example companies and the use case, we could incorporate different methods/visual aids. As an example, participants could watch a video demonstration of someone else performing the activity and then apply the learning to the use case.
Difficulty finishing within time frames.	4.1.2, 4.2.3, 4.3	Some instructions could be made more concise to improve clarity and efficiency. Additionally, addressing time-consuming issues, such as clearly explaining where to find the outline, could help optimise the modelling process and reduce concerns about time constraints.
Different use cases required ("we could not really innovate a lot with a 'university'").	4.2.1	A university was selected as we wanted an organisation/business that participants, as students, would understand. An alternative is using a business that is first discussed and explained in class in detail, to create shared context, and for that business to be used as the EDU-BMI use case.
Participants (as students) don't understand what 'real/ digital entities' are.	4.2.1	This is only relevant to future evaluation cycles. An explanation of what is meant by 'real/ digital entities' should be included in the survey.
Outline issues and confusion about outline navigation.	4.2.3, 4.3	Inform participants of the outline in-person before-hand, in addition to the video content that is provided.
Confusion that only the facilitator could see outline.	4.2.3, 4.3	Include more information in the outline.
Did not find/see the introduction; unsure how things work.	4.2.3, 4.3	Inform participants of the introduction section in-person before-hand, in addition to the video content that is provided.
Unsure how to find outline again after if disappears.	4.2.3	Inform participants of the introduction section in-person before-hand, in addition to the video/intro content that is provided.
Distracting cursors.	4.2.3	Include more information in the outline/introduction video.
Time limit is not always available in the outline as well.	4.2.3, 4.3	In addition to the time limit on the board, also include a time limit per step in the outline.
Unclear instructions (e.g. should something be done, or is it just information).	4.2.3, 4.3	Refine the instructions based on the feedback received. Simplify statements and shorten sentences.
Link to Youtube video instead of a video download.	4.2.3	Upload the video and provide a link in the Mural for easier access.
Confusion with 'what motivates you' section.	4.3	Refine the wording of instructions to enhance clarity and usability. For instance, replace "drag" with "copy" to better align with the tool's functionality, and explicitly inform participants that multiple individuals can share the same motivation.
Forgetting about badges.	4.3	Build reminders/tasks into the outline so that participants are reminded of badges and how they work, and encouraged to use it during the modelling.
Uncertainty about use case entity.	4.3	Explicitly state that it is a fictional entity which means that it is based on fabricated information.
Uncertainty about how 'private mode' works.	4.3	Include more information in the outline/introduction video and/or in the step itself.
Uncertainty about use of Google/AI	4.3	Include more information in the outline/introduction video.
Facilitation concerns.	4.3	Additional support could be offered to assist in selecting a facilitator. For example, a brief checklist outlining key qualities of an effective facilitator could guide the decision-making process. Alternatively, an anonymous vote could be implemented to assist in the selection.

Concern/opportunity identified	Section	Suggested solution for next iteration of the EDU-BMI
Some participants watched videos without the sound on.	4.3	Inform participants in the step that the video has sound and that they should ensure that they are able to see and hear the video.

EXPLORING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORKS IN THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Commercial banks are investigating new strategies to compete with innovative financial technology banks with a digital upper hand. Large financial service organisations can not merely pivot their digital strategy and change to another platform within a short period of time. Thus, another improvement strategy is required, while a digital transformation strategy focuses on large-scale initiatives. To address the objective of this paper, continuous improvement (CI) strategies were selected to identify if they can assist financial service organisations in improving their processes incrementally without disrupting large-scale initiatives. A conceptual CI model was designed by aggregating the generic elements of existing CI models. A questionnaire survey research methodology was selected to test the conceptual model of CI in the financial services industry. The survey results indicated traces of existing CI strategies in the financial services industry. However, it is not fully implemented. The survey results also indicated that the suggested CI model for the financial services industry might succeed.

Keywords: continuous improvement, continuous improvement model, financial services, service industry

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1 INTRODUCTION

In a modern world with recent technology and disrupters being published every day, continuous improvement (CI) strategies are becoming increasingly critical for any organization [1]. While commercial banks or large financial services organizations spend time investigating digital solutions, startups are capitalizing on Financial Technology (FinTech) solutions to expedite their business development. Slowly, the traditional “brick and mortar” banking model is being replaced (or combined) with digital banking [2]. Financial services include organisations such as banks, as well as insurance, tax, and investment organisations.

It is noticeable that a lot of money is spent on large project initiatives that involve implementing information technology (IT) systems. Not all these projects are successful, and they take an exceptionally long time to be implemented. In 2013, a study was conducted on insurance policy replacement systems. It was found that large insurers took 20 months to complete initial system rollouts and 40 months to deploy the full solution [3]. Introducing incremental improvements that will not disrupt large-scale initiatives (like system rollouts) requires holistic design thinking. People are still unsure how to approach the paradigm shift in industries with existing frameworks [4]. Therefore, there is a need to establish if the existing CI frameworks can cater to CI in the financial services industry (FSI).

Based on the premise that the FSI is continuously changing and includes new products, service types, and industry branches, there is a need to be able to adapt to change and improve on a smaller scale during periods when an enterprise undergoes pivotal changes. Leaders and employees should be able to identify opportunities and implement improvement changes within their teams and environment to move forward, while the enterprise-level strategies are refined with each new disruption.

1.1 Research objective

The objective of this study is to establish a CI framework specifically for the FSI.

1. Establish if existing CI frameworks are relevant to the FSI.
2. Establish what elements of a CI framework will impact the development of an organization in the financial industry by testing a proposed CI model aggregated from existing models.

Given the objectives, the research questions are:

1. RQ1: Are the existing CI frameworks relevant to the FSI?
2. RQ2: What elements of a CI framework will make an impact to develop an organization in the FSI?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

CI is an intentional, systematic approach introducing ongoing incremental improvement to an existing process [5]. CI can be described as “improvement initiatives that increase success and reduce failures” [6]. Bessant explains CI as “a company-wide process of focused and continuous incremental innovation” [7]. Scrutinizing existing literature, the definition of CIs has not changed, and most recent articles tend to quote Deming and Bessant’s definitions from the 90’s. Thus, CI can be summarised as continuous incremental changes to enhance and develop the existing processes. There is a need for studies to integrate CI strategies into other industries, especially since the Fourth Industrial Revolution [8].

2.1 Continuous improvement in the financial industry

The research was conducted to establish CI frameworks currently in the FSI to respond to RQ1.

2.1.1 CI levels of maturity

To establish the impact a CI framework has on a specific industry, the level of CI maturity needs to be understood within the organization being tested. Organization and process maturity models are research-based instruments to assess a specified area of an organization objectively [9]. The model is dependent on the area being measured. There are many organization capability and business process maturity models [9]. Since the coming of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, new models have also been developed, such as the digital transformation capability maturity model (DX-CMM) [10] , [11], and many other proposed Industry 4.0 maturity models, which focus on the manufacturing industry [12], [13].

The CI Maturity Model (CIMM) measures an organization's maturity level, especially in the CI capability. The model consists of structured CI (CI), managed CI, predictable CI, capable CI, and world-class CI [9]. There is another model called the Continual Improvement Maturity Model by Robert Falkowitz. The Robert Falkowitz continual improvement maturity model consists of five elements: Understanding, Value, Performance, Consistency, Method, and Intent. The skillset of CI can easily be planned or implemented in an organization, but the sustainability of the strategy is more complicated. Only 1.6% of the organizations that received recognition of the Shingo Prize or Best Manufacturing have sustained the CI journeys [14].

Currently, the most appropriate model to assess organization CI maturity is the Bessant and Caffyn Five Stages of Maturity in the CI. This CI Maturity Model describes the CI process in five stages, namely [9]:

1. Natural/background CI
2. Structured CI
3. Goal-oriented CI
4. Proactive CI
5. Strategic CI

2.1.2 Elements to measure CI framework maturity

The following criteria have been identified in successful CI initiatives [15], [16]:

1. Effectively utilizing communication systems.
2. Solving problems.
3. Measurements and feedback.
4. Knowledge sharing and training.
5. Cross-functional/departmental cooperation.
6. Policy deployment.
7. Strategic planning.
8. Incentives and pay.

To be able to establish an environment where employees are prone to continuously improve, encouragement, participation, and inclusivity are required [7]. The environment should also be conducive to support and ongoing change [17], [15].

Themes of CI failure have been narrowed down to the following by Antony and McLean [18]:

1. Expectations and motives.
2. Organizational environment and culture.
3. Management leadership.
4. Implementation approach.
5. Training.
6. Project management.
7. Levels of involvement from employees.
8. Results and feedback.

2.2 Continuous improvement frameworks

Further research was conducted on existing CI tools to address research question 2.

There are many CI methodologies that are adopted by different industries. The purpose of this section is to identify which methodology, or combination of methodologies, may work best in the financial industry. CI methodologies across industries include Six Sigma, Lean manufacturing, Kaizen, Agile software development, Quality management and Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA). In this section, the various methodologies will be addressed within industry types [19], [20].

2.2.1 CI in Six Sigma

Six Sigma is a methodology that utilizes statistics and process improvements to eliminate defects and improve quality [21], [22].

CI in Six Sigma refers to the incremental changes within the organization. The CI of Six Sigma is grounded in learning and improving based on experiences. This cycle has four stages, namely, planning, execution, assessment/progress tracking, and revision [23].

One of the tools used in Six Sigma to implement CI is the Deming Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle. The PDCA cycle promotes learning through iteration [24]. In the planning phase, the process is observed and analyzed, and a hypothesis for improvements is established. Each hypothesis has a criterion to be measured. In the Do phase, the plan is implemented. In the Check phase, the improvement is monitored, and learnings are documented. In the act phase, the new process is standardized, and the next target is set [25]. The purpose is for each iteration to create quality and get closer to a more efficient process [22].

Six Sigma tools and PDCA are mostly implemented in the manufacturing and construction environment, with some case studies in the healthcare industry [26]. Recent studies are starting to explore Six Sigma in the service industry [25], [27].

2.2.2 CI in lean manufacturing

Lean manufacturing is a waste reduction methodology that focuses on maximizing value by minimizing waste [28], [29]. Lean manufacturing focuses on waste and is driven by the 3Rs: reduce, reuse, and recycle [30]. Lean focuses on value and efficiency.

CI within the lean methodology is known as Kaizen. According to lean manufacturing research, CI requires employee training, engagement, and adaption, teamwork with leadership engagement, motivation, and initiative [28]. Kaizen combines 2 Japanese words, “Kai” and “zen”. Kai means change, and zen means for the better. Thus, the theory behind Kaizen is to change things for the better. Within the lean methodology, Kaizen consistently changes things for the better by reducing waste to be more efficient and get closer to the goal. Kaizen focuses on improving three areas such as Muda (waste), Mura (discrepancy), and Muri (strain). Kaizen is the methodology with various tools such as Total Quality Control, Automation Zero Defect, Total Productive Maintenance, Quality Control Circle, and Kanban [31], [32].

There are studies looking at the implementation of Kaizen in the healthcare industry, textile industry, manufacturing industry, and construction industry, but no clear case studies of Kaizen in the financial industry. Focusing on a study of Kaizen in small and medium enterprises (which may contribute to Fintech companies), successful factors to implement Kaizen include [31]:

1. Effective communication from top management downwards and from lower levels upwards.
2. Include Kaizen in the corporate strategy, goals, and policies.

3. Allocate a Kaizen champion as the link between lower levels and senior levels when sharing innovative ideas.
4. A horizontal and autonomous organizational structure allowing collaboration.
5. A “can do” mindset and attitude in the organization.
6. Compensation (and motivation).
7. Training.

The same paper has identified the following challenges:

1. Ability to implement the improvements identified.
2. Resistance to changes.
3. Lack of motivation.

2.2.3 Continuous Improvement in Agile software development

The finance industry is very reliant on the software industry, especially with FinTech starting to overtake the market [33]. This is because even though the products are financial, software supports most processes. Looking at Fintech organizations, of which the core is software, larger finance organizations that are not reliant on technology as much have a larger gap to fill when trying to improve quickly [34]. With this in mind, the Agile methodology is also unpacked. Studies have shown that the utilization of Agile methodologies increases the efficiency of software development processes in the FSI [35]. This could indicate that the same methodology would be useful for CI strategies in FSI.

The Agile methodology is based on an Agile manifesto developed with various principles to adhere to. The principles are guidelines for an organization to operate in, instead of a structured approach with fixed steps. Key values included in the manifesto are [36], [37]:

1. Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.
2. Working software over comprehensive documentation.
3. Customer collaboration over contract negotiation.
4. Responding to change over following a plan.

The agile methodology is based on iterative and incremental implementations.

In a study to unpack an overlap between lean and agile in software development, the following elements were identified as critical to ensure the successful implementation of CI and the reduction of waste [36], [37]:

1. Customer involvement.
2. Dedication to value-add improvements that are not lost in the day-to-day activities.
3. Metrics to create awareness of the impact.

Challenges identified in the same study as above include [36]:

1. There can be buckets of work not completed if Agile is not implemented correctly.
2. Extra enhancements are easily identified and create scope creep.
3. Relearning is required if there is no clear communication.
4. Agile does not support metrics for measurement of success, which was identified as critical in the above section.
5. Agile does not have CI methods and is expected to include improvement opportunities in daily tasks. Hence, dedication to value-added improvements is identified in the above section.

3 PROPOSED MODEL

The conceptual model has two phases to be able to address the research questions:

3.1 Phase 1: Maturity model

The Bessant model is selected to see which of the five stages of maturity the organizations tend to fall into in response to RQ1 [7], [15]. This model was selected under the guidance of the knowledge gathered in the literature review that Bessant is currently the most appropriate model to evaluate the CI maturity at a high level. Bessant was selected because the model allows for improvement evaluation on a general level [38]. This study focuses on the CI frameworks in the FSI and not the maturity model; hence, only a general classification is required.

3.2 Phase 2: Continuous improvement tools

The proposed CI model aggregates the generic elements of the existing CI frameworks. The model is designed to test the appropriateness of the elements in the FSI

The proposed model has four pillars illustrated in Figure 1: principles, people, process, and improvement. The pillars were established by identifying elements of the existing CI maturity models and CI frameworks, and associating the elements as responses to the challenges identified by Antony McLean and Dahlgaard [39].

- Principles are the guidelines within which the model needs to operate.
- People are the core of identifying and implementing the change.
- Process is the method, the how. The phases have been derived from the existing CI framework process steps.
- Improvement is the final output and metrics thereof. This would be organization and process-dependent.

3.2.1 The principles of the model

The suggested principles are derived from the existing models.

1. **Understand the environment:** Understand the current economy, organization, strategy, and people dynamics. This requires people to work together and operate outside of silos. This principle was selected from the Robert Falkowitz continual improvement maturity model [14]. This principle was selected as it is a common requirement across all the existing continuous improvement frameworks investigated in the literature review.
2. **Knowledge retention:** Ensure change is documented or communicated in such a way that the next person can continue. This principle was selected from Six Sigma, PDCA, Lean, and Kaizen [23] [25] [28] [31]. This principle was selected as it was a common challenge across all the existing continuous improvement frameworks in investigated in the literature review.
3. **Success management:** Ensure ideas are captured, implemented, and measured to provide the necessary and deserved incentives. This principle was selected from the Bessant and Caffyn CI maturity model, as well as Six Sigma [9] [23]. This principle was selected as it was a common challenge across two of the existing continuous improvement frameworks in investigated in the literature review.

3.2.2 The people of the model

The people pillar of the model includes the individuals conducting operations and leadership. Each element pertains to people in the organization who may typically be involved with the CI framework. The elements were selected from the existing model.

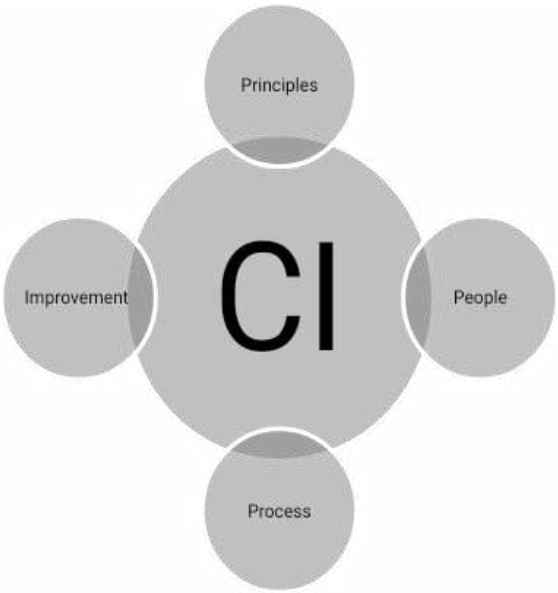

Figure 1: Conceptual model

1. **Motivation and buy-in:** All groups of people, high and low, should be aligned to the CI strategy. Incentives should be put in place for the individuals who participate. This element was selected from Agile, Lean, and Kaizen [36] [28] [31]. This element was selected as it was a common requirement across all the existing continuous improvement frameworks investigated in the literature review.
2. **Support:** Leaders are required to support the operations staff for implementation. Operations staff are required to support the leader with ideas and during implementation. Support functions are required to support the improvement culture and be able to act accordingly, e.g., IT. This element was selected from Agile, Lean, and Kaizen [36] [28] [31]. This element was selected as it was a common requirement across all the existing continuous improvement frameworks investigated in the literature review.
3. **Structure learning and training:** All groups of people must be trained accordingly using the relevant tools. This element was selected from Six Sigma, PDCA, Lean, and Kaizen [23] [25] [28] [31]. This element was selected as it was a common challenge across all the existing continuous improvement frameworks investigated in the literature review.
4. **Process:** Visibility of the process is required, as are ideas logged, processed, implemented, and succeeded. This element was selected from Theisens CI maturity model, Bessant and Caffyn CI maturity model, Robert Falkowitz continual improvement maturity model, Six Sigma, PDCA, Lean, and Kaizen [14] [23] [25] [28] [31]. This element was selected as it was a common requirement across all the existing continuous improvement frameworks investigated in the literature review.

3.2.3 Model process

CI requires iteration through the process to continuously improve the environment. The process in Table 1 requires an individual to revisit the first phase every time something has been completed, much like the PDCA cycle. The process steps in the table below were selected from the existing models. The process steps are aligned to the principles established in section 3.2.2.

Table 1: Conceptual Model Phases

	Iterative Phases	Element from existing Continuous Improvement model
Pre	Understanding the current landscape (Principle 1)	• Theisens CI maturity model [9] • Bessant and Caffyn CI maturity model [9] • Robert Falkowitz continual improvement maturity model [14]
	Conceptually introduce the change (Principle 1)	• Theisens CI maturity model [9] • Bessant and Caffyn CI maturity model [9] • Robert Falkowitz continual improvement maturity model [14]
Pre	Impact analysis (Principle 1 and 3)	• Theisens CI maturity model • Bessant and Caffyn CI [9] maturity model [9] • Robert Falkowitz continual improvement maturity model [14]
	Planning (Principle 1 and 3)	• Robert Falkowitz continual improvement maturity model [14]
During	Implementation (Principle 2 and 3)	• Theisens CI maturity model [9]
Post	Measure success (Principle 3)	• Theisens CI maturity model [9] • Bessant and Caffyn CI maturity model [9] • Robert Falkowitz continual improvement maturity model [14]
	Understand the new landscape (Principle 1)	• Theisens CI maturity model [9] • Bessant and Caffyn CI maturity model [9] • Robert Falkowitz continual improvement maturity model [14]
	Continuous monitoring (Principle 2 and 3)	• Bessant and Caffyn CI maturity model

4 RESEARCH METHOD

4.1 Research approach and strategy

Exploratory research is used to discover something new [40]. Exploratory research is required to answer RQ1 and RQ2 because there is little literature available on CI in the FSI, and the phenomenon is quite new.

A mixture of qualitative and quantitative research approaches has been selected for this study. Comparative research can be conducted using mixed methods, qualitative and/or quantitative methods. Charles Ragin designed qualitative comparative analysis to be between qualitative and quantitative research, resulting in a mixed-method approach [41].

The teleological research attribute type exploratory study is selected as there is not much research on the phenomena of CI in the financial industry, as seen in the literature review. There will be a deductive linkage to theory to test the research questions. The conceptual model is designed via experimental development, deduced from research.

4.2 Research design and methodology

A survey research methodology has been selected for this study. Survey research creates an opportunity to reach a wide audience, especially in an exploratory context like this study [42]. Qualitative surveys consist of open-ended questions, whereas quantitative surveys consist of close-ended questions [43]. This means a mixed survey is required for a mixed-method approach.

4.2.1 Data collection instrument

For this study, a questionnaire was used as an instrument to collect primary data to test the suggested model conceptually. Questionnaires are used for quantitative data research where individuals are asked a series of questions to gather an understanding of a specific topic [44].

A questionnaire survey is structured with questions purposefully asked to answer the identified research problem [45]. The questionnaire was distributed via a digital online form, distributed to friends, family, and colleagues, as well as published to social media platforms.

4.2.2 Sampling methodology

Convenience sampling (or accidental/haphazard sampling) is when a sample is selected from a population based on easy access and availability [46], [47], [48]. Convenience sampling can be used in qualitative and quantitative studies. It is also used to emphasize the generalization of the topic that is analyzed [46]. Convenience sampling relies on respondents being at the right place at the right time. This means that the type of respondents can include biases [49], [50]. A second consideration for convenience sampling is that the data can be skewed by outliers that do not belong in the data [46].

There are only two selection criteria for the questionnaire, namely, the FSI and the topic of improvement strategies. Incomplete questionnaires and responders not currently employed at a financial services organisation will be eliminated. The size of the organisation is not taken into consideration, and no personal identifying questions are asked. Refining the selection criteria too much would run a risk of excluding essential elements that should be considered for a CI strategy in the FSI.

4.2.3 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed in five sections. All the sections were multiple-choice questions, and only requested free text when “other” was selected:

1. Section 1: Confidentiality and anonymity clauses.

Ensuring the scope is adhered to:

2. Section 2: Industry in which the respondent is employed, and in which capacity (i.e. self-employed or full-time employee).

Addressing RQ1:

3. Section 3: The opinion of the CI Maturity of the organization where the respondent finds themselves. Questions evaluated respondents’ knowledge on improvement strategies in their organisation, training, improvement projects, and improvement success reward systems. Questions gave options to select what improvement can look like, asking the responder to select what they know, how well improvement is managed, and how long improvement projects take.
4. Section 4: The opinion of the CI strategies in place in the respondent's organization. This section was a Likert Scale questionnaire with CI framework elements, requesting the responder to rate on a scale of Strong Disagree to Strongly Agree if the elements are present in their organisation. Questions about training, autonomy to improve, and execution of projects were included.

Addressing RQ2:

5. Section 5: Testing the concept of the new model elements with the respondent. This section was also a Likert Scale questionnaire with the suggested CI model elements, requesting the responder to rate on a scale of Strong Disagree to Strongly Agree if the elements would work in their organisation. All questions started with “I would like to be able to” and included the availability of talking to leadership about improvements, rewards for successful ideas, brainstorming culture, and formal improvement project processes.

The questionnaire was pilot-tested and adapted before distribution.

5 RESULTS

The questionnaire data was analyzed per section to create a picture of CI in the FSI. Fifty valid responses were analyzed. The remainder of the questionnaires were discarded because the respondents were in the incorrect industry.

The results were as follows:

1. **Section 1:** All questionnaires agreed to the relevant clauses.
2. **Section 2:** This section ensured that any responses unrelated to FSI were excluded from the analysis. Of the 50 questionnaires analyzed, all respondents participated in the FSI. The other questionnaires were discarded.

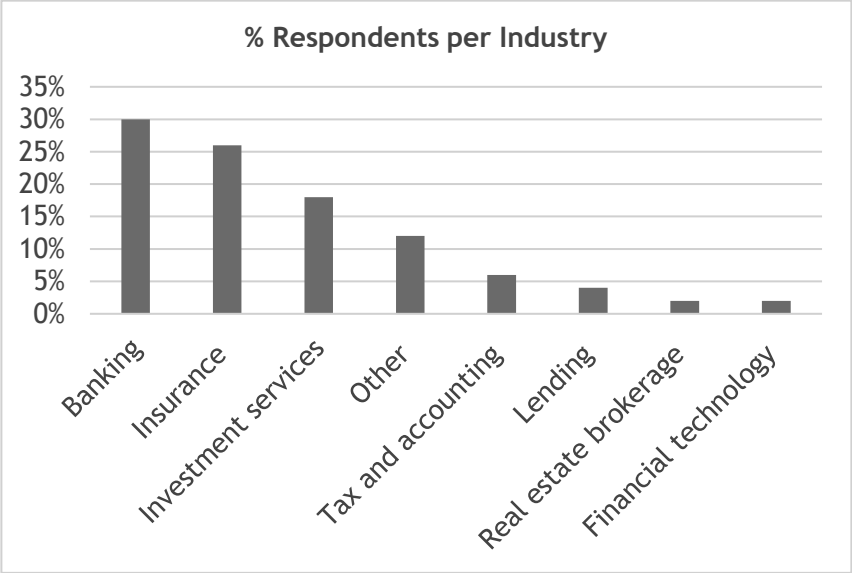

Figure 2: Number of respondents per financial services industry

3. **Section 3:** The Bessant Maturity Model was used to establish the general maturity of CI in the FSI. The Bessant Model has five maturity levels across six categories, and the final results for the FSI are listed below. The results indicate that the FSI does have knowledge of CI frameworks but does not necessarily reward participation in CI activities:
    a. Integration of CI into the organization - Level 4 indicates that there is a presence of a CI unit in the FSI.
    b. Extent of CI projects – Level 2 indicates that there is a presence of CI projects in the FSI.
    c. Management support – Level 2 indicates that there is a process for team members to communicate CI ideas with the relevant management teams.
    d. Strategic performance management – Level 3 indicates that there are processes to initiate the implementation of CI ideas in a financial services organization when the idea is aligned with the organization's strategic direction.
    e. CI training and learning – Level 4 indicates that employees of financial services organizations are trained in CI-related tools or are allowed to innovate and experiment.

f. Reward systems – Level 1 indicates that even if there are processes to submit CI ideas, these ideas are usually not rewarded or necessarily implemented.

Table 1: Continuous Improvement Maturity Analysis

Bessant Maturity Model Category	Level Scored in Financial Services Industry
• Reward systems	**1- Natural/background CI** Random CI and problem solving
• Extent of CI projects • Management support	**2 - Structured CI** Formal CI attempts
• Strategic performance management	**3 - Goal-oriented CI** Formal CI deployment and measurement
• Integration of CI into the organization • CI training and learning	**4- Proactive CI** CI assigned to problem solving units
• No category tested scored level 5	**5- Strategic CI** CI is a way of life

4. **Section 4:** The opinion of the CI strategies in place in the organization where the respondent works. This section tested the various existing models to establish whether the elements are present in financial services organizations.

   a. The study showed that 52% of the participants indicated that incremental improvements are present in their organization.

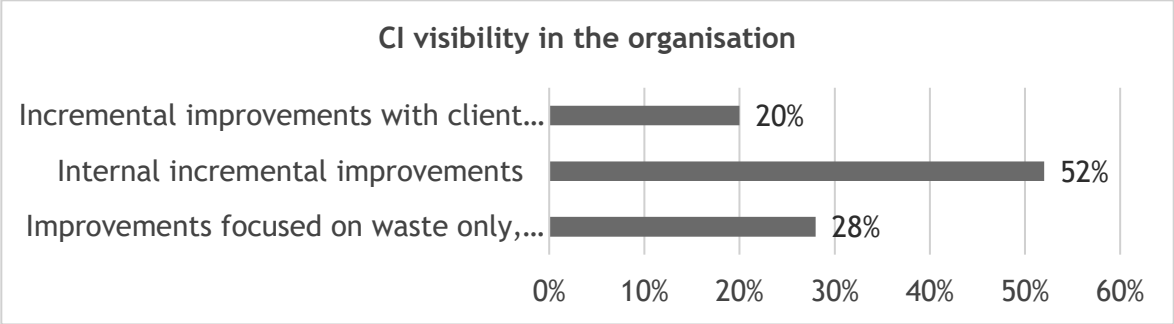

Figure 3: CI visibility

   b. The respondents agreed that existing CI elements (communication, CI strategy, customer involvement, documentation, CI champion, and autonomy) are present. However, the respondents did not agree that compensation for improvements, or success management, was present in their respective organizations.

Table 2: Likert Interpretation of existing CI elements in the financial services industry

Element	Mean	Likert Interpretation
Communication	76%	Positive agreement
CI strategy	71%	Positive agreement
Documentation	80%	Positive agreement
CI champions	77%	Positive agreement
Autonomy	72%	Positive agreement
Compensation/Reward	46%	Neutral, close to negative
Success measurement	60%	Neutral

   c. The respondents agreed that the existing challenges are present as per the existing CI frameworks in organizations, excluding the challenges of time and motivation for improvements. Organizations struggle with continuously improving over time. It is also clear that employees resist change, which impacts their adaptability to continuous change. However, the study indicated

that there is not a challenge with time and motivation for improvement in organisations.

Table 3: Existing CI challenges in the financial services industry

Challenge	Mean	Likert Interpretation
Continuous implementation	64%	Positive agreement that CI is not continuous
Resistance to change	71%	Positive agreement that there is resistance
Lack of motivation or time	46%	Very negative agreement

5. **Section 5:** Testing the concept of the new model elements with the respondent. This section tested the various sections of the suggested model to establish if it would benefit individuals in the FSI.
    a. 86% of the respondents agreed, and strongly agreed, with the proposed principles for a CI strategy in the FSI. With a mean of 84% results show very positive agreement according to the Likert scale.
    b. 79% of the respondents agreed, and strongly agreed, with the proposed elements for a CI strategy in the FSI. With a mean of 82% results show a positive agreement according to the Likert scale.
    c. 88% of the respondents agreed, and strongly agreed, with the proposed process steps for a CI strategy in the FSI. With a mean of 85% results show very positive agreement according to the Likert scale.

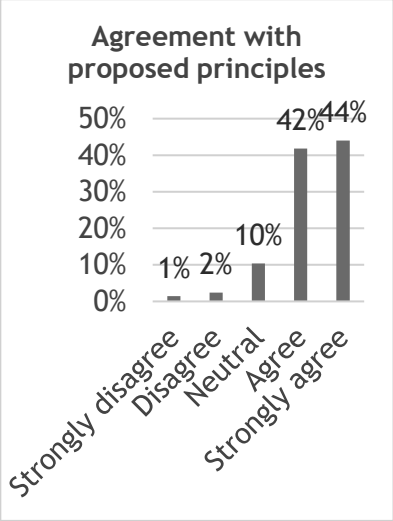

Figure 4: Principles

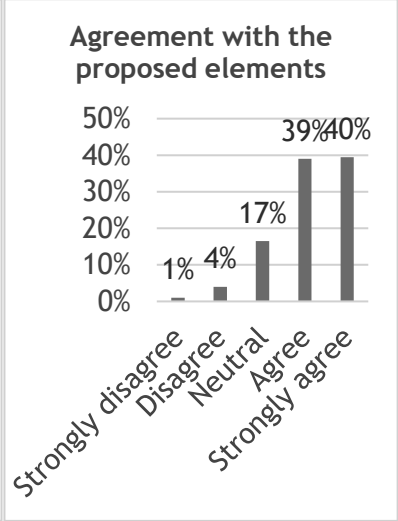

Figure 5: Elements

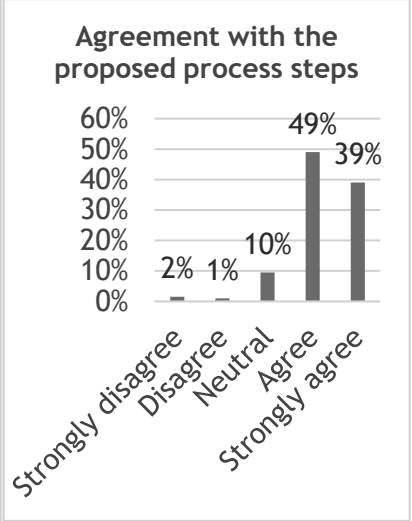

Figure 6: Process steps

Two research questions are posed to establish a CI framework in the FSI. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information that would answer the research questions posed.

RQ1: Are the existing CI frameworks relevant to the FSI?

RQ2: What elements of a CI framework will make an impact to develop an organization in the financial industry?

The following objectives were stated in the beginning:

1. Establish if existing CI frameworks are relevant to the FSI.
2. Establish what elements of a CI framework will impact the development of an organization in the financial industry by testing a proposed CI model aggregated from existing models.

The data gathered shows that the existing CI frameworks are present in the FSI. However, there seems to be a lack of application of CI ideas. This is based on the CI Maturity Level tested in the questionnaire. Research does not test the success rate of implementing CI projects.

Based on the data, existing CI frameworks can be used in the FSI, as there is currently a footprint of these frameworks. The correlation was positive agreement of all CI framework elements tested, excluding the rewards system, and success management, which was neutral. However, because it does not seem like the implementation of CI initiatives is successful, there is space for a new CI framework that emphasizes the implementation and measurement of the initiatives identified for CI. To test which existing elements of CI frameworks would work in the FSI, a new model was proposed with a combination of elements and tested with the same audience. The proposal suggests that a CI framework could bring all the elements currently working in the industry together to form a powerful framework that would impact the industry and prove the first proposition to be correct.

To respond to research question one, “Are the existing CI frameworks relevant to the FSI?”, it is clear that the frameworks are present and that improvement projects are initiated. However, there is a lack of execution, and tracking of successful CI projects. This was proven by the positive agreement result of the study.

To respond to research question two, “What elements of a CI framework will make an impact to develop an organization in the financial industry?”, by testing the suggested CI framework for the FSI, it has been found that the respondents are in positive agreement that the suggested framework with existing CI framework elements would be a success in the FSI.

In conclusion, the questionnaire sections supported the following:

Section 2: The questionnaire was completed by financial services related respondents.

Section 3: According to the Bessant CI Maturity Model analysis, the FSI fluctuates between Level 2 and Level 4 of CI maturity in the organization.

Section 4: Based on the responses, there is knowledge of CI methodologies in the FSI. However, there is a lack of execution, rewards systems and success management.

Section 5: The respondents are in positive agreement with the suggested new CI model principles, elements, and process steps.

Thus, the proposition that existing CI frameworks can be used in FSI is accepted. It has also been established that there is space for a new CI framework.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, it was established that even if there is limited literature on CI frameworks in the financial service industry, the existing frameworks have been present in this specific industry. However, the data also suggested that implementing improvement initiatives is not as successful as the existing frameworks require. The analysis also revealed that the participants agreed with the new suggested CI framework.

6.1 Results

Table 2 summarizes the results relating to the research questions posed for this study.

Table 2: Summary of the results

Research Question	Test	Results	Conclusion
RQ1: Are the existing CI frameworks relevant to the financial services industry?	Section 2: Industry in which the respondent works.	The questionnaire was completed by financial services respondents.	Yes, existing CI frameworks are present in the financial services industry; however, they are not fully implemented
	Section 3: The opinion of the CI Maturity of the organization where the respondent finds themselves.	According to an analysis of the Bessant CI Maturity Model, the FSI fluctuates between Level 2 and Level 4.	
	Section 4: The opinion of the CI strategies in place in the organization where the respondent works.	There is proof that there is knowledge of CI methodologies in the FSI (very positive agreement). However, there tends to be a lack of execution (neutral), and reward systems (neutral).	
RQ2: What elements of a CI framework will make an impact to develop an organization in the financial industry?	Section 5: Testing the concept of the new model elements with the respondent.	The respondents are in positive agreement with the suggested new CI model principles, elements, and process steps.	The suggested CI framework aggregated from existing CI frameworks proved that it will potentially impact the financial services industry

6.2 Recommendations for future research

This study was conducted on the general FSI with a small sample size to establish the presence of CI strategies in the industry and a general view of a potential new model.

Future research in terms of scope would be required on the sub-sections of financial services such as insurance, banking, investment etc. It would also be required to establish the knowledge and investment in CI on the various levels of the organizational structure.

Future research in terms of the new model would be required to test the new model practically on a small scale and then test the model on a scaled approach in larger communities. This would prove that the principles, elements, and process steps are practical. The analysis shows that the CI model theory is available in the FSI. Thus, a practical test of the new model is required to establish whether it would fill the current application gap in the industry.

A practical test would also be required to establish if the application and implementation of CI ideas are indeed lacking or if there is another reason the respondents seem unaware of the implementation of improvement ideas.

6.3 Conclusion

There is a footprint of CI in the financial service industry, but there is a large gap in implementing CI initiatives in this market. Most CI frameworks cater to the manufacturing industry, and some adaptation has occurred for the financial industry. However, more study is required. Combining the current CI frameworks into a new model seems appropriate, but thorough practical testing is required.

In conclusion, this study has proven that a new continuous improvement framework is not required for financial services as a specific industry, even though most models and frameworks are created with the manufacturing industry at their core. However, this study has also proven that there is a lot of work required for the adoption of continuous improvement strategies in the FSI.

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THE IMPACTS OF ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGIES ON ACHIEVING THE OBJECTIVES OF SOUTH AFRICA'S AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY MASTER PLAN 2035: A COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Additive Manufacturing (AM) has the potential to support the South African automotive industry in achieving the objectives of the South African Automotive Master Plan 2035 (SAAM 2035), including increasing local content to 60 percent, expanding employment in the value chain, and raising South Africa's share of global vehicle production to 1 percent. This qualitative study was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved a comprehensive review of academic literature, industry reports, and policy documents to identify global best practices in AM adoption. The second phase analysed a set of secondary case studies, selected for their relevance to advanced manufacturing capabilities and policy frameworks, from Germany, the United States, China, and Italy. Thematic analysis, guided by a coding framework, identified key themes including cost reduction, skills development, standards and regulation, supply chain localisation, and technology infrastructure. Findings indicate that AM can enhance production efficiency, reduce material waste, and support the development of domestic manufacturing capabilities, but its adoption is constrained by high capital costs, skills shortages, and regulatory gaps. The study contributes to the literature by synthesising international lessons to inform South Africa-specific AM strategies and by providing a thematic framework applicable to future research on AM adoption in the automotive sector.

Keywords: Additive Manufacturing, SAAM 2035, Technology Adoption, Industrial Policy, Local Content, Employment, Automotive Manufacturing

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1 INTRODUCTION

The automotive industry remains a key pillar of South Africa's industrialisation and economic development strategy, representing one of the largest manufacturing sectors in the country. In 2020, the sector contributed approximately 4% to national GDP and accounted for nearly 28% of manufacturing output [25]. The industry is dominated by multinational corporations and is deeply integrated into global value chains, consistently producing vehicles that meet international standards. Recent data indicate that vehicle exports were around 300,000 units in 2020, with significant contributions from automotive components, reflecting the sector's ongoing role in trade and industrial integration [24]. Direct employment in vehicle manufacturing is estimated at over 110,000, supporting several hundred thousand indirect jobs across the wider economy, highlighting the sector's importance for quality employment and skills development [5, 12].

Despite these achievements, the South African automotive industry continues to face challenges, including a relatively stagnant domestic market, increased import competition, and limited progress in raising local content and employment. Structural constraints such as technological gaps, reliance on imported components, and a fragile supplier base have constrained industrial expansion [7, 8]. Government interventions, including the Motor Industry Development Programme (MIDP) and the Automotive Production and Development Programme (APDP), have provided critical support, yet systemic barriers persist. Strengthening domestic manufacturing, fostering supplier development, and increasing local value addition remain central national priorities [7].

The South African Automotive Industry Master Plan 2035 (SAAM 2035) articulates a long-term vision to enhance competitiveness, industrial sustainability, and technological capacity in the local automotive sector. Achieving these objectives requires comprehensive understanding and innovation across the automotive value chain, from raw material sourcing to component manufacturing, vehicle assembly, and end-of-life recycling [7]. Technological innovation, particularly in advanced manufacturing, is essential to improving production efficiency, supply chain resilience, and environmental performance [12].

Additive Manufacturing (AM), also known as 3D printing, has emerged as a transformative technology capable of reshaping the automotive value chain. By enabling layer-by-layer fabrication of components from digital designs, AM is reported offers benefits such as reduced material waste, increased design flexibility, faster prototyping, and production of complex parts with minimal tooling [14]. These capabilities support localisation, reduce dependency on imports, and create opportunities for high-skilled employment while contributing to resource efficiency and environmental sustainability [9, 3]. As global automotive markets increasingly adopt AM, South Africa's integration of this technology will be crucial for sustaining industrial competitiveness [12].

This study examines the potential contributions of AM to the South African automotive sector, focusing on advancing the objectives of SAAM 2035. The research addresses the following questions:

- What is the role of Additive Manufacturing in improving local content across the automotive value chain?
- To what extent can Additive Manufacturing contribute to increasing vehicle production output in South Africa?
- How can Additive Manufacturing influence job creation in South Africa's automotive sector?

2 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore the potential contributions and challenges of AM technologies in supporting the objectives of SAAM 2035. The research design focuses on a comprehensive literature review, including secondary case-based examples drawn from existing academic and industry sources. The methodology followed a structured process as outlined below:

- Formulation of Research Objectives: The study began with the formulation of clear research objectives aimed at examining how AM technologies can influence key goals of the SAAM 2035, including increased local content, higher vehicle production levels, and expanded employment in the automotive sector. These objectives guided the entire research process.
- Literature Review and Data Collection: A detailed literature review was conducted to gather relevant information from academic journals, policy documents, industry reports, and published case studies. The following databases were comprehensively searched: ScienceDirect, Scopus, IEEE Xplore, and Google Scholar were used to access reliable and up-to-date sources. Key search terms included: “Additive Manufacturing in Automotive,” “3D printing and employment,” “SAAM 2035,” “local content South Africa,” and “automotive innovation.”
- To ensure the relevance and quality of the literature, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles and industry publications from 2010 onward, chosen because this period marks a significant acceleration in the development and adoption of AM technologies in the automotive sector globally. Selecting 2010 as the base year allows the review to capture contemporary advancements and policy developments relevant to current industry practices. Studies that lacked a clear focus on AM or were not applicable to the automotive sector were excluded.
- Screening and Selection: The identified literature was screened in two stages. First, titles and abstracts were reviewed to assess relevance. Then, the full texts of the selected articles were examined to confirm their suitability for in-depth analysis. Only sources that provided valuable insights into AM adoption, benefits, challenges, and policy implications were retained.
- Data Extraction and Synthesis: From the selected literature, data were extracted on AM applications, success factors, limitations, and their implications for the automotive industry. Some of the selected literature included international case-based examples from countries such as Germany, the United States, China, and Italy, which provided context on how AM has been implemented in advanced manufacturing environments.
- Data Analysis and Thematic Categorisation: The extracted information was analysed using a thematic approach. Patterns and themes were identified based on recurring issues such as production efficiency, skills development, employment creation, and local content. These themes were then aligned with the strategic pillars of SAAM 2035 to assess how global AM practices could inform South Africa’s approach.
- Contextualisation for South Africa: Finally, the global insights from the literature were interpreted within the context of South Africa’s automotive industry. Factors such as local policy frameworks, technological readiness, infrastructure, and skills availability were considered to evaluate the feasibility and potential impact of AM adoption in the country.

This structured and systematic approach allowed the study to build a strong theoretical and contextual foundation. The findings aim to guide policymakers, researchers, and industry stakeholders in understanding the role AM could play in advancing South Africa’s automotive industrial development goals.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 South African Automotive Master Plan 2035 (SAAM 2035)

3.1.1 Overview of the South African Automotive Industry Master Plan 2035

SAAM 2035 is a long-term strategy aimed at strengthening the local automotive industry. Its main goals include increasing local content in vehicle production, creating more jobs, and improving the industry's position in global markets [9]. However, the industry still faces challenges such as a weak supplier base, limited technology, and heavy reliance on imported parts [5]. To overcome these challenges, SAAM 2035 highlights the need to adopt new manufacturing technologies. AM is one such technology that can help by enabling local production of parts directly from digital designs. This reduces the need for expensive tooling and can increase the local content of automotive components, supporting the plan's goal to raise local content from about 39% to 60% by 2035 [10;14]. AM is also reported to offer flexibility, allowing manufacturers to quickly adjust production to meet changing demands or supply chain disruptions [3]. This is important given the unpredictable global economy and rising quality and environmental standards [16]. In addition, AM encourages innovation by allowing the creation of complex and custom parts, which can help South African companies compete internationally. The use of AM is also expected to create new jobs in areas such as design, engineering, and digital manufacturing. This fits with SAAM 2035's goal to grow employment, especially in skilled roles [9]. Furthermore, AM is more environmentally friendly than traditional manufacturing methods, as it produces less waste and uses energy more efficiently, which supports national sustainability targets [3]. Thus, the success of SAAM 2035 depends partly on adopting technologies like Additive Manufacturing. These technologies can help increase local production, improve efficiency, encourage innovation, and support job creation in South Africa's automotive sector.

3.1.2 Current State of the Industry

The South African automotive industry remains a vital component of the national economy, contributing approximately 5.3% to the country's GDP and playing a significant role in the manufacturing export sector [25]. Despite its importance, the industry faces several persistent challenges that hinder its growth and competitiveness. High production costs intensified global competition, fluctuating demand, and inadequate infrastructure continue to restrict domestic expansion [5;8]. A significant issue is the decline in local content within vehicle production, primarily due to a heavy reliance on imported components. This dependence weakens the development of a robust local supplier network and limits value addition within the country [24]. Consequently, the industry struggles to capture greater economic benefits and maintain sustainable growth.

3.1.3 Strategic Importance of Additive Manufacturing in the Automotive Industry

AM presents significant opportunities for advancing the strategic objectives of SAAM 2035. These technologies are particularly valuable in enhancing production efficiency and enabling the localised manufacturing of complex, customised components. Both of these capabilities are essential for meeting the Master Plan's targets related to increased local content and employment generation [12]. AM allows for the creation of intricate geometries that are difficult or impossible to achieve through conventional methods. This enables the production of structural and functional components such as drive shafts, brake systems, and lightweight assemblies that are commonly used in high-end or low-volume vehicles [15; 26]. The ability to customise and adapt designs supports local component manufacturing, reduces reliance on imports, and strengthens the domestic supply chain [27]. In addition, the rapid prototyping capabilities of AM significantly reduce the design-to-production timeline. This accelerates innovation in product development and supports a more responsive and competitive

automotive sector [2; 17]. AM is also highly material-efficient, minimising waste and allowing for the use of lightweight materials, which supports broader sustainability goals [3]. The widespread adoption of AM has the potential to generate high-skilled employment opportunities in areas such as digital design, process engineering, and advanced manufacturing. This aligns directly with SAAM 2035's aim to double direct employment in the automotive value chain by 2035 [12; 29]. Therefore, the strategic integration of AM technologies provides a compelling opportunity to transform the South African automotive industry and position it for long-term, globally competitive growth.

Despite these advantages, a clear research gap remains. While several studies have explored the potential of AM in global automotive manufacturing [14; 26], limited literature has examined how AM adoption specifically aligns with the strategic objectives of South Africa's Automotive Masterplan 2035 [5; 11]. Existing South African studies focus largely on high-level technology policy or general manufacturing challenges, without a comprehensive assessment of AM's feasibility, scalability, and integration into local supply chains [23; 7]. Current adoption in the country is still limited, with use cases primarily limited to research institutions, specialised tooling, and niche aftermarket parts [23; 7]. This knowledge gap creates uncertainty for policymakers and industry stakeholders seeking to leverage AM to achieve SAAM 2035's goals of increasing local content, job creation, and competitiveness. Addressing this gap requires situating AM's technological capabilities within South Africa's specific industrial, infrastructural, and policy context, supported by evidence from early local implementations.

3.2 International Experiences with Additive Manufacturing in the Automotive Sector

To demonstrate the potential of AM in supporting SAAM 2035, this section presents a comparative analysis of how selected countries have successfully integrated AM into their automotive sectors. These international examples illustrate the varied benefits of AM adoption, from localising supply chains and accelerating product development to stimulating high-tech employment and supporting small-scale, customised production. By examining these cases, South Africa can better understand the strategic pathways available for leveraging AM to achieve SAAM 2035 targets related to local content, industrial competitiveness, innovation, and job creation.

3.2.1 German: Enhancing Local Content and Supply Chain Resilience

Germany's automotive sector is a global benchmark for manufacturing excellence and innovation. Major Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) like BMW, Audi, and Volkswagen have made significant strides in embedding AM within their production and R&D frameworks. BMW, for example, employs AM extensively to produce customised tooling, assembly jigs, and lightweight structural components for both its electric and combustion-engine vehicles [19]. By shifting tooling production in-house through AM, BMW has not only accelerated product development cycles but also reduced supplier dependency and logistics complexities. This internalisation has led to a more resilient and flexible supply chain, crucial in times of global disruptions such as those seen during the COVID-19 pandemic [34]. Moreover, BMW's approach integrates AM within its Industry 4.0 initiatives, combining digital twins, sensor networks, and machine learning to optimise production workflows and predictive maintenance [29]. Audi, meanwhile, utilises AM for lightweight parts made from advanced polymers and metal alloys, improving vehicle fuel efficiency and performance. The capacity to rapidly prototype and test complex geometries without tooling constraints has allowed Audi to accelerate innovation in electric powertrains and autonomous vehicle components [19]. The German government supports these industry efforts through policies promoting Industry 4.0 adoption and funding for AM research hubs, fostering a robust ecosystem for innovation. Additionally, vocational

training programmes have adapted curricula to upskill workers in AM technologies, addressing skills shortages in advanced manufacturing [21].

Implications for SAAM 2035: South Africa can replicate these integrated AM strategies to localise production, decrease reliance on imported components, and create a more resilient supply chain. Coupling AM adoption with digitalisation and workforce development will be key to advancing the automotive sector's competitiveness and sustainability goals.

3.2.2 United States: Accelerating Innovation and Prototyping

The U.S. automotive industry has been a pioneer in leveraging AM for innovation, prototyping, and tooling optimisation. Companies such as Ford and General Motors (GM) have embedded AM into their engineering and production processes since the early 2000s. Ford's internal reports highlight a reduction in design-to-market time by approximately 25% due to AM's rapid prototyping capabilities [13]. Ford employs AM to create functional prototypes, custom tools, and even end-use components, particularly in its electric vehicle (EV) and autonomous vehicle platforms. This flexibility has allowed Ford to respond quickly to changing market demands and regulatory requirements, shortening feedback loops between design and manufacturing teams [13].

The U.S. government's America Makes initiative, a public-private partnership, has been instrumental in making AM technologies accessible to a wider range of manufacturers beyond large OEMs. This programme funds collaborative research projects, facilitates knowledge sharing, and supports workforce training across the additive manufacturing supply chain, especially targeting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) [28].

GM has also invested heavily in AM, using it to develop complex parts such as brackets, housings, and prototypes for its Cadillac and Chevrolet brands. By integrating AM with traditional manufacturing, GM achieves cost savings and improved design freedom, enabling lightweighting and performance optimisation [30]. In addition to prototyping, the U.S. automotive industry utilises AM for low-volume production runs, enabling customisation and reducing inventory costs. This capability is particularly valuable in EV battery component production and specialty vehicle manufacturing [9].

Implications for SAAM 2035: South Africa can enhance its automotive innovation ecosystem by adopting AM technologies for rapid prototyping and tooling. Government-supported initiatives similar to America Makes could catalyse adoption among SMEs, expanding the technology's impact across the industry. These measures will improve product development efficiency and help South Africa compete globally in emerging automotive technologies.

3.2.3 China: Driving Employment and Industrial Scale Production

China's national strategic focus on AM, embedded in its "Made in China 2025" industrial policy, reflects a comprehensive approach to modernising manufacturing and advancing automotive production capabilities. Automotive giants such as SAIC Motor and Geely have been early adopters of AM, particularly for EV components and injection mould tooling. Geely, one of China's largest automakers, has reported that over 30% of its vehicle moulds are now produced using AM, significantly cutting lead times from months to weeks while reducing costs by up to 40% [20]. This shift has allowed Geely to rapidly iterate designs and scale production for new EV models to meet growing domestic and international demand. Beyond production efficiencies, China's AM deployment has stimulated job creation in advanced manufacturing roles [32]. document the emergence of specialised positions in digital design, AM machine operation, maintenance, and quality assurance. These roles require a higher skill level, contributing to workforce upskilling and aligning with national goals to increase high-tech manufacturing employment. China's coordinated investment in AM infrastructure includes dedicated manufacturing parks, research institutes, and cross-sector collaboration platforms

that integrate automotive firms with material suppliers and technology developers. This ecosystem accelerates technology transfer and fosters innovation clusters [33].

Implications for SAAM 2035: South Africa can leverage AM not only for production enhancement but also as a driver of industrial employment and skills development. Government-backed industrial parks and innovation hubs, coupled with targeted training programmes, can replicate China's success in creating a vibrant AM manufacturing ecosystem that supports broad-based economic growth.

3.2.4 Italy: AM for Niche and Custom Vehicle Markets

Italy's automotive sector, renowned for luxury and performance vehicles, offers a unique perspective on leveraging AM for specialised and low-volume manufacturing. Brands such as Ferrari, Lamborghini, and Maserati have embraced AM to produce complex components that would be difficult or costly to manufacture using conventional methods. Martina et al. [22] highlight that Italian manufacturers utilise AM to enable shorter product life cycles and rapid customisation, especially in high-performance parts such as turbocharger housings, aerodynamic elements, and lightweight structural components. AM's ability to produce intricate designs with high precision supports Italy's brand identity of craftsmanship combined with cutting-edge technology. The flexibility of AM also allows smaller Italian automotive firms and startups to enter niche markets, developing bespoke vehicles and aftermarket components that cater to enthusiast and luxury segments. This dynamic supports a decentralised innovation model where design houses and small manufacturers co-create alongside larger firms [4]. Italian universities and research institutions actively collaborate with industry to advance AM materials and processes, integrating academic research with industrial applications. This ecosystem nurtures skilled talent and drives continuous innovation in manufacturing techniques [16].

Implications for SAAM 2035: South Africa's growing aftermarket, customisation, and small enterprise sectors can benefit from adopting AM for niche vehicle parts and specialised production. Support for design innovation and collaboration between industry and academia will be critical in realising this potential, fostering entrepreneurship and enhancing local value creation.

3.3 Summary of Global best Practices

The following table summarises the key outcomes from each country's integration of AM technologies and their relevance to SAAM 2035 objectives:

Table 1: Summary of Global Best Practices in Additive Manufacturing and Their Relevance to SAAM 2035

	AM Use Case	Outcomes	Relevance to SAAM 2035
Germany	Tooling, lightweight components	Increased local content, supply chain resilience	Raise local content to 60%
USA	Prototyping, SME support	Faster innovation cycles, broader technology access	Improve competitiveness
China	EV component production, molds	Expanded employment, cost reduction	Double employment
Italy	Niche production	Customisation, SME growth	Stimulate local entrepreneurship

4 DISCUSSION

This section provides an integrated analysis of how AM adoption in the South African automotive industry can contribute toward achieving the three primary goals of the South African Automotive Master Plan 2035: increasing vehicle production output, raising local content, and doubling employment. Drawing from international best practices and contextual

realities in South Africa, this discussion critically evaluates both the opportunities and constraints associated with AM integration.

4.1 Potential Impact of AM on Vehicle Production Output

The integration of AM technologies has shown the potential to significantly improve both production efficiency and throughput in the automotive sector. In addition to accelerating design iterations and reducing time-to-market for new vehicle models, AM can also optimise production workflows by enabling faster tooling replacement, reducing downtime, and allowing for on-demand production of complex components. International case studies demonstrate that firms leveraging AM for both prototyping and manufacturing applications achieve measurable gains in output capacity. For example, Ford's implementation of AM shortened the development timeline for electric vehicle components by approximately 25%, which in turn freed production resources for scaling output. In the South African context, such efficiencies could enhance the production capacity of domestic OEMs and Tier-1 suppliers, directly supporting the Master Plan's objective of increasing vehicle production volumes to contribute 1% of global output. However, the sector currently lacks widespread access to AM infrastructure and skilled expertise, particularly among SMEs. Addressing these gaps through public–private partnerships, targeted investment incentives, and technology transfer programs will be essential to translating AM's rapid development advantages into sustained increases in production capacity.

4.2 Enhancing Local Content Through Additive Manufacturing

AM facilitates localised production by enabling on-demand manufacturing of complex components, reducing the need to import high-value parts. Germany's use of AM for tooling and jigs has demonstrated how localised capabilities can boost domestic value addition. In the South African context, AM presents a unique opportunity to develop local supply chains for specialised components such as brackets, air intake systems, and housings components that are currently sourced externally due to tooling constraints. Increased local sourcing through AM could significantly raise the percentage of local content in South African-assembled vehicles, moving toward the 60% target set by SAAM 2035. Furthermore, by enabling low-volume, high-complexity production, AM allows small enterprises and start-ups to enter the value chain as niche suppliers, potentially broadening the local supplier base and enhancing industrial diversification.

4.3 Job Creation and Skills Development in the AM Economy

One of the most debated aspects of AM is its dual impact on employment: while automation can displace traditional roles, it also creates new high-skill opportunities in design, software, digital maintenance, and operations. The Chinese case study illustrates this dynamic—specialised AM roles emerged in tandem with the growth of digital manufacturing platforms. In South Africa, AM could catalyse job creation in areas such as CAD modeling, AM machine operations, material science, and post-processing services. Importantly, AM adoption could benefit Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions by updating curricula to prepare students for future job roles in digital manufacturing. Policy incentives that encourage companies to invest in workforce reskilling and AM training centers could help mitigate displacement concerns and contribute toward the Master Plan's employment goals.

In South Africa, the integration of AM can catalyse employment in the following areas:

- **Design for Additive Manufacturing (DfAM):** Empowering engineers and technicians with DfAM skills enables the industry to fully exploit the geometric and functional advantages of AM.

- **Machine Operation and Maintenance:** As AM machines become more prevalent, demand for technicians who can operate, maintain, and calibrate these systems will rise.
- **Material Science and Quality Control:** Specialised knowledge will be required to manage AM material properties and ensure part reliability in safety-critical automotive applications.
- **Entrepreneurship and SME Growth:** Small-scale AM enterprises can enter niche markets, offering customised solutions and aftermarket products.

5 CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO ADOPTION

Despite the transformative potential of AM in advancing the goals outlined in SAAM 2035, particularly in enhancing localisation, reducing lead times, and improving competitiveness, its widespread adoption remains limited due to several interrelated barriers. One of the most prominent challenges is the high capital investment required to acquire industrial-grade AM equipment capable of producing functional, end-use automotive components. These costs, coupled with recurring expenses for specialised materials, skilled labor, and maintenance, are especially prohibitive for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that dominate the Tier-2 and Tier-3 supplier ecosystem [14; 9]. The problem is further intensified by limited access to affordable financing mechanisms tailored to AM innovation [11]. In addition, the industry suffers from a significant skills gap; AM demands expertise in design for additive manufacturing (DfAM), materials science, and digital workflow management, competencies that are not widely available in the local labour market [16]. Although some academic institutions have introduced AM-related programs, these remain poorly integrated and often disconnected from the practical needs of the automotive sector [10]. The absence of standardised certification frameworks for AM parts also hampers their integration into safety-critical automotive systems, as Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and Tier-1 suppliers require strict quality assurance protocols [18]. Without recognised national standards for testing and validation, the reliability and compliance of AM components remain in question. Furthermore, the South African AM ecosystem is still emerging and characterised by uncoordinated efforts across academia, startups, and research entities, resulting in duplicated R&D, limited knowledge exchange, and underutilised infrastructure [3]. Adding to these challenges is the lack of explicit policy incentives and regulatory guidance to support AM adoption. Despite its strategic alignment with SAAM 2035, AM has not yet been incorporated into industrial policy instruments such as tax incentives or supplier development programs, which negatively impacts investor confidence and slows the pace of technology diffusion [10; 11].

6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

To fully harness the transformative potential of AM for achieving the goals of SAAM 2035, a coordinated, multi-faceted strategy is required. The following recommendations focus on creating an enabling environment that promotes innovation, strengthens industry capabilities, and accelerates adoption.

Table 2: Strategic Recommendations for Advancing Additive Manufacturing in South Africa's Automotive Sector (Aligned with SAAM 2035)

Recommendation Area	Action	Policy Implication / Impact
National AM Strategy	Develop a roadmap aligning AM with SAAM 2035 goals, targeting high-impact components and milestones.	Encourages focused development, coordinated stakeholder efforts, and incentivises early adoption.
Regional Innovation Centres	Establish shared AM hubs with equipment, training, and incubation facilities.	Lowers entry barriers for SMEs, boosts local innovation, and builds regional capacity.
Education & Skills Development	Integrate AM in higher education and vocational curricula; fund internships and apprenticeships.	Builds a skilled workforce ready to implement AM technologies across the automotive value chain.
Standards & Certification	Develop local standards with SABS and align with global benchmarks.	Ensures quality, improves trust, and supports market access for AM-produced components.
Financial Incentives	Offer AM-specific tax relief, grants, and procurement preferences.	Stimulates private investment, especially among local OEMs and Tier-2/3 suppliers.
Collaborative Research & Industry Partnerships	Create consortia for joint R&D, with matched funding mechanisms to reduce risks.	Drives innovation, fast-tracks commercialisation, and strengthens industry-academia-government collaboration.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the potential contributions of Additive Manufacturing (AM) to the South African automotive sector, with particular emphasis on advancing the objectives of SAAM 2035. Specifically, it addressed three critical questions: the impact of AM on vehicle production output, its influence on local content within automotive manufacturing, and its potential to foster high-skilled job creation. The findings indicate that AM holds considerable promise for enhancing production efficiency through flexible, cost-effective manufacturing processes. Additionally, AM adoption supports the development of a skilled workforce in advanced manufacturing roles, contributing to SAAM 2035's employment targets.

Despite these potential benefits, AM adoption in South Africa remains constrained by limited technological awareness, skills gaps, infrastructure deficits, and regulatory challenges. Strategic interventions such as coordinated policy, targeted capacity building, and public–private collaboration are essential to realise these benefits fully.

This study is primarily based on secondary data and selected international case studies, reflecting the current paucity of empirical evidence on local AM adoption. Consequently, the findings offer sector-level insights but may not capture firm-level variations in implementation, productivity, or local content outcomes. Future research could address this limitation by conducting in-depth case studies, pilot projects, or longitudinal analyses to quantify the real-world impact of AM on vehicle production, local supply chains, and employment within the South African context.

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HUMAN FACTORS INFLUENCING CYBERSECURITY SUSCEPTIBILITY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN MINING INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The mining industry has undergone digital transformation through the adoption of 4IR technologies such as IoT, CMMS, and AHS. The adoption is mainly for the purposes of a competitive edge and increasing the safety of mining operations. A key consideration, being cybersecurity, was overlooked during the integration of the new technologies, exposing the mining operations to potential cyberattacks with catastrophic consequences. These mining operations are most vulnerable through their weakest link, which is the human component of cybersecurity. A model was developed to address the correlation between personality traits, demographic factors and defence mechanisms. The model aims to relate these factors to susceptibility to cyberattacks in efforts to inform training and awareness programs, improve cybersecurity policy, and lend itself to creating a culture of digitally responsible employees within the industry.

Keywords: cybersecurity, human factors, social engineering, South African mining industry, five-factor model, personality traits, defence mechanisms

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The mining industry has seen an increase in technological advances due to the 4th industrial revolution [1], [2]. Terms such as digitalisation and automation are becoming increasingly synonymous with the industry. Digital transformation is digitalisation at its core, but it significantly changes business practices, company culture and customer experiences [1]. Examples of Digital Transformation in the mining industry include Internet of Things (IoT), Computerised Maintenance Management Systems (CMMS), and Autonomous Haulage Equipment (AHS). A few reasons behind the trend in digital transformation for the mining industry are to allow for better integration both internally and externally, safety of operations, remaining competitive, enhanced productivity, greater control, increased profitability, and better monitoring [1], [2], [3].

The Digital Transformation movement, in the already data-sensitive sector, increases the risk of cyberattacks [2], [3], [4]. The risks associated with cyberattacks in the mining industry include financial loss, employee safety, damage to reputation, and data theft [4]. Given the severity of the cybersecurity risks, the mining industry has been slow to react, even after most of the mining industry has fallen prey to cyberattacks [2], [3], [4].

Common attacks that have been reported to plague the mining industry are cyber espionage, phishing, and vulnerabilities in third-party software [3]. From these attacks, phishing in the mining industry has seen the highest rate compared to other industries [3] and has the highest occurrence probability of all the cyberattacks [2]. Literature has mentioned a skills deficit in the mining industry with the coming of Digital Transformation and highlights that an organisation's cybersecurity is only as strong as its weakest link. Thus, investing in cybersecurity training is of significant value to the industry [1], [4], [5].

1.2 Research problem statement and objectives

1.2.1 Research problem statement

Cybersecurity threats are becoming an increasing occurrence in the mining industry, and due to the increased digitalisation, the cybersecurity threats could result in large losses of money, facility downtime, and in extreme cases, even sabotage, loss of life and closing of the facility.

The problem is that the defence against these attacks is only as strong as its weakest link, and in the case of cybersecurity attacks, that link is the human element, which can be manipulated and exploited through social engineering techniques.

1.2.2 Research objectives and questions

The objectives of the research are firstly to identify and analyse the human factors which contribute to cybersecurity breaches in engineering asset data systems (RO1) and, thereafter, to develop a conceptual framework linking human factors to cybersecurity defence mechanisms within the South African mining industry (RO2). These objectives will be achieved through the development and answering of research questions. The research questions which will aid in achieving the two research objectives are as follows:

RQ1) Which human factors have the most influence on a successful cybersecurity breach?

RQ2) Which human factors have the most influence on countering a cybersecurity breach?

RQ3) What are the essential components of a conceptual framework that effectively integrates human factors into cybersecurity defence mechanisms in the South African mining industry?

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design

A mixed methods approach was selected for the literature review as it is a relatively unexplored field. An initial scoping review served to identify the literature gap associated with cybersecurity in the mining industry.

The systematic literature review was then utilised to uncover human factors and the associated models that have been developed and utilised in other industries within the context of cybersecurity.

2.2 Database and search strategy

A database search was undertaken in Scopus and Web of Science due to the site's credibility and quality. Only peer-reviewed and published articles were considered. The strings utilised for the search can be seen in Table 1, where the highlighted cells indicate the datasets that were considered for screening.

Table 1: Database search

Key Phrase	Scopus	Web of Science
Cybersecurity AND “Mining Industry”	12	1
Cybersecurity AND Countermeasures	1404	119
Cybersecurity AND Countermeasures AND Mining	28	0
“Social Engineering” AND “Human Factors”	138	-

2.3 Screening process

The extracted articles were further screened using a scale of applicability, as information relating to data mining, cryptocurrency, and forensics was allowed through the filters and was irrelevant to the topic. The scale and results from the screening process are seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Screening criteria

Screening Description	Scale	No. of Articles
Not Applicable	1	214
Contains Information that could be useful	2	59
Applicable to the topic	3	25

The screening process was carried out according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The PRISMA diagram for the study can be seen in Figure 1.

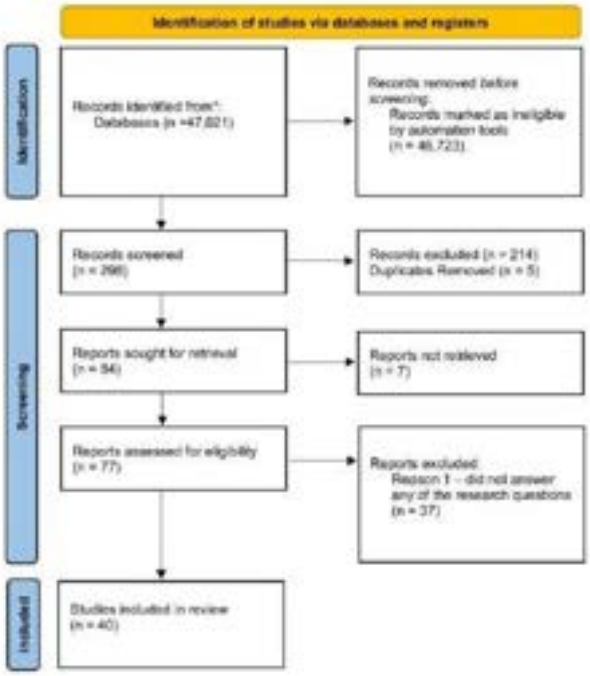

Figure 1: PRISMA diagram

2.4 Data analysis approach

The content from the 40 selected articles was reviewed within the frame of the research questions, and the extent to which each research question was answered. A summary of the data analysis exercise is presented in Table 3. Although all the papers addressed the research questions, they were only partially answered.

Table 3: Summary of data analysis

Description	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
Cybersecurity AND "Mining Industry"	6	1	1
Cybersecurity AND Countermeasures	0	0	3
"Social Engineering" AND "Human Factors"	7	4	0
Percentage Contribution (Partial)	33%	13%	10%

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The themes identified from the scoping review were consolidated into a Sankey diagram for each of the dataset strings from Table 3.

3.1 Cybersecurity AND the mining industry

The first dataset, being "Cybersecurity AND Mining Industry", yielded themes of cybersecurity threats and the need for cybersecurity prevention. There was a total of 6 articles which contributed to the identified themes. The visualisation of the interaction between the themes and articles is seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Cybersecurity AND mining industry Sankey diagram

The first theme being “the need for cybersecurity prevention”, was made up of a few topics. The first topic was the need for training and awareness of employees within the mines. The second topic involved employing individuals with an in-depth level of understanding of cybersecurity to ensure the IT networks in the mining operations are protected. The final point involved the implementation of certain high-level technical solutions to prevent cybersecurity attacks.

The second theme of “cybersecurity threats” describes that cybersecurity is one of the biggest threats to the mining sector, following the increased use of IoT devices. The cyberattacks specific to the mining industry that were described included phishing, malvertising, watering hole, 3rd party vendors, network spoofing and vulnerability exploitation. The body of knowledge in this sector was very limited, which further motivated the argument of the knowledge gap within the sector.

3.2 Cybersecurity AND countermeasures

The second dataset, being “Cybersecurity AND Countermeasures”, uncovered themes of “Cyber Attacks”, “Training”, and “Human Factors”. A total of 8 articles contributed to the uncovered themes. The visualisation of the interaction between the themes and articles is seen in Figure 3.

The “Cyber Attacks” topic reported on various types of cyberattacks experienced within industries other than mining. The cyberattacks that were reported, in addition to the mining-specific attacks, included system misconfiguration, ransomware, insider threats, dumpster diving, scareware, deepfakes, and shoulder surfing.

The need for training was discussed in the majority of the articles reviewed, and the articles began making mention of human factors associated with cybersecurity attacks; however, not provide an in-depth knowledge of how the human factors were responsible for successful cybersecurity attacks.

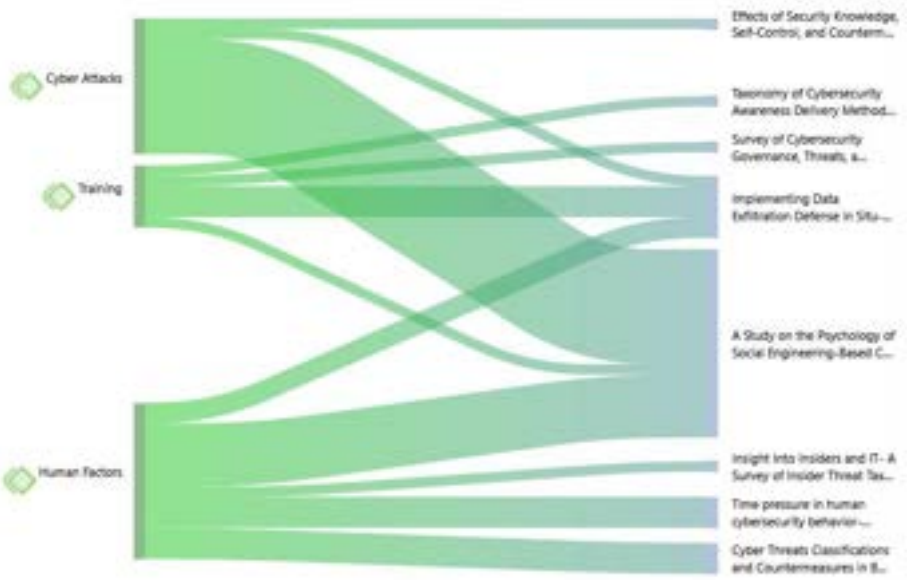

Figure 3: Cybersecurity AND countermeasures Sankey diagram

3.3 Social engineering AND human factor

The final dataset, being "Social Engineering AND Human Factors", uncovered themes of "Cybersecurity Defence", "Human Factors", and "Cybersecurity Motives". A total of 10 articles contributed to the uncovered themes. The visualisation of the interaction between the themes is seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Social engineering AND human factor Sankey diagram

The themes considered among the articles in the final dataset were specific to social engineering and included cybersecurity motives in the form of a social engineering attack model. The theme of "Human Factors" included an in-depth view of models that have been used in cybersecurity literature. These included psychological, personality traits, behavioural and criminology perspectives. The final theme was "Cybersecurity Defence Mechanisms" and proposed options of educational training, organisational policies, and cybersecurity tools to

defend against cyberattacks. The effectiveness of the training methods and the effectiveness of training delivery methods were also topics within the theme.

3.4 Social engineering attacks

Social engineering attacks are categorised into two types, namely, direct and indirect attacks. Direct attacks require the attacker to be present, while indirect attacks can be launched utilising an online medium [6]. An article by Tubis et al. [2] proposed a probability of attack occurrence ranking within the mining industry. The most frequent results can be seen in Table 4. A commonality between the most frequent mining attacks and the types of social engineering attacks is that the mining industry is mostly susceptible to indirect attacks. This is due to the difficulty in obtaining access to the sites to perform direct attacks.

Table 4: Probability of attack occurrence [2]

Attack method	Definition	Occurrence probability
Phishing	Scam emails that are sent by attackers, this method of Social Engineering (SE) attack is among the most successful [7].	72%
Vulnerability exploitation	Attackers capitalise on unaddressed vulnerabilities/bugs in system software to take control of the system [2].	33%
Watering hole	The attacker searches for information on the browsing habits of employees for a chosen organisation in order to compromise a frequently visited website and infect victims and networks when they visit the website [7].	27%
Malvertising	Attackers inject malicious advertisements containing malware onto legitimate advertising networks' webpages for victims to fall prey to [2].	27%

The new interaction of Large Language Models (LLMs) with social engineering attacks allows for high-quality, convincing phishing emails to be created in a fraction of the time, increasing the frequency at which all industries are attacked [8].

3.5 Social engineering models

The literature review uncovered two human factor-specific cybersecurity models which addressed the issue from the perspective of the victim. A description of the cybersecurity models can be seen in Table 5 which have all been developed from the Five Factor Model.

Table 5: Social engineering models summary

Model	Model context	Author
Social Engineering Personality Framework	A model which allocates correlation from literature and highlights how increases and decreases in individual personality traits allow for better or worse susceptibility to the principles of influence utilised by Social Engineers	Uebelacker et al. [9]
Adapted phishing susceptibility framework	A model that looked into personality traits that make individuals susceptible to phishing attacks in the workplace. Additional variables of a self-monitoring trait, as well as experiential factors, were also included.	Anawar et al. [10]

3.6 Demographic variables

Articles by Alshraif et al.[11] and Khonji et al. [12] explain that the demographic element also has an influence on cybersecurity. Gender and age were found to strongly correlate with phishing susceptibility in a demographic study conducted by Steve Shen et al. where he found that females would click on links more often when compared to males, and that individuals between the ages of 18 to 25 had a higher probability of falling victim to phishing attempts compared to other age groups [12].

The experiential factors addressed in the study by Anawar et al. [10] also fall into the category of demographic variables, where they have a probability of affecting cybersecurity susceptibility in employees.

3.7 Social engineering prevention strategies

Social Engineering prevention strategies are categorised into three groups. The first group is knowledge-based measures, where an individual is trained/educated. The second prevention strategy is achieved through software/tools enhancement to better classify SE attacks as well as prompt users on possible attacks. The final prevention strategy is organisational policies, which aim to enhance information security measures by outlining the desired personnel behaviours [12], [13], [14].

In a critical review by Aldawood & Skinner [13], contributions and limitations of the three prevention strategies were collected and summarised. The limitations associated with knowledge-based and policy-based defence mechanisms were the human element, being attributed to the difference in personalities, as well as their skill level.

The limitations proposed were also motivated in an article by Workman, as cited in [15] where not considering human factors in education-based measures leads to users "knowing better but not doing better".

3.8 Relevance of the research

A study by Dalal et al. [16] collected possible opportunities for research at the intersection of organisational science and cybersecurity, focused on employees. Dalal et al. stress that the most important requirement for contributing to this pool of literature is to minimise end-users' cyber misbehaviour through understanding and reporting on the organisational and individual difference factors that can predict this misbehaviour. A framework for future study was proposed within the study, as seen in Figure 5.

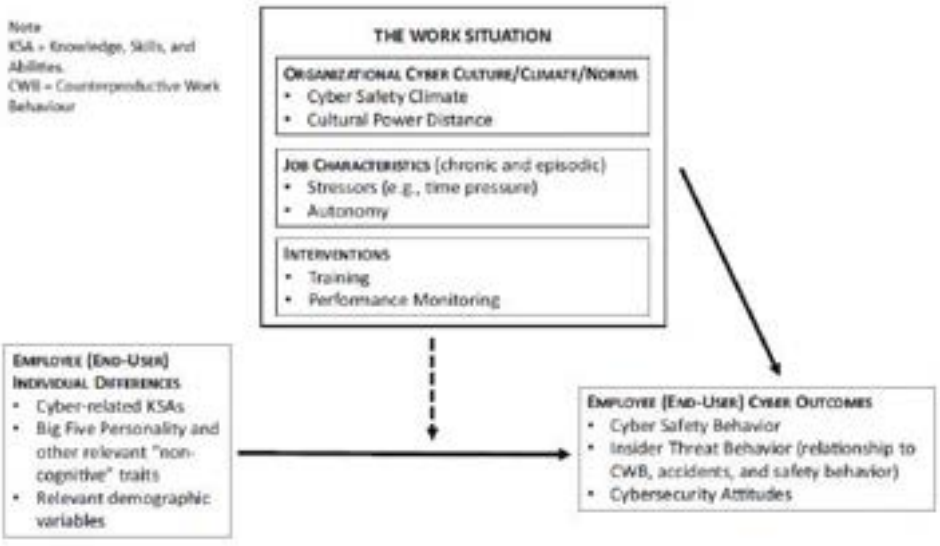

Figure 5: End-user future work organising model [16]

The framework considers personality trait models and relevant demographic variables as the starting point, bringing into consideration the work situation. The combination of individuals' differences and the work situation informs the end-user outcomes. This approach served as the starting point for the conceptual model development.

4 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

4.1 Approach

The non-comprehensive organising framework for future work was developed by Dalal et al. [16] shown in Figure 5 acts as the framework for the theoretical model. The literature study undertaken reports on psychological factors, personality traits, demographic variables and experience.

The Big Five Personality model is a suitable basis to cover both the psychological and personality traits and will be utilised in conjunction with the additional variables to cover the Human Factors/ Cybersecurity Behaviour of the study. The defence mechanisms will be considered in the conceptual model in order to comment on the correlation between human factors and defence mechanisms.

Social Engineering influence techniques have appeared in most of the models described in the body of knowledge; however, in the case of this study, the focus is on the human factor interaction with susceptibility, as well as human factor interactions with the defence mechanisms. Influence techniques are an enabler in the background, which is not considered for this study.

4.2 Conceptual framework

The conceptual model is shown in Figure 6 where the variables will be discussed in the rest of the section. The model is multivariate in nature, where in the first instance, the human and demographic variables are the independent variables, and the user susceptibility is the dependent variable, and in the second instance, the defence mechanisms are the independent variables, and human factors are the dependent variables.

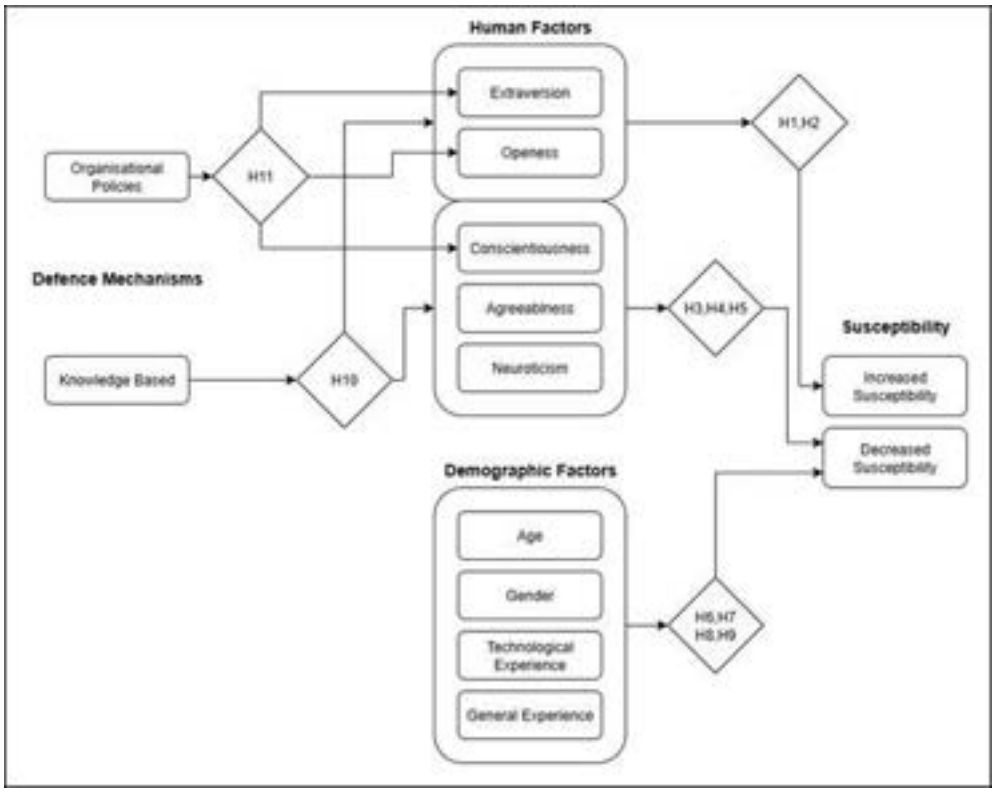

Figure 6: Conceptual Model

4.3 Big 5 personality traits

The big 5 personality traits model has been developed over an extensive period of time by experts in the field of personality psychology, which started off as an extensive pool of what makes humans unique and has been refined to the 5 traits of conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, openness and neuroticism [17]. These traits exist as the broadest grouping of taxonomies, which allow for a distinction between the uniqueness of human beings and should be treated as a slider from a low affinity for the trait to a high affinity for it.

The Big 5 Personality Trait model is suitable for commenting on the human factors associated with cybersecurity in the South African mining industry. The model aligns with the direction provided in Dalal [16] and appears in a considerable amount of the social engineering cybersecurity literature.

4.3.1 Extraversion

Extraversion is made up of traits of Gregariousness, Assertiveness, Activity, Excitement Seeking, Positive Emotions and Warmth [17]. These traits stem from their Revised Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) Facets.

The studies by Albladi & George [18], Gottker, Watson & Van Sintemaartensdijk [19], and Uebelacker & Quiel [9] hypothesise that high levels of extraversion increase individuals' susceptibility to falling victim to cyberattacks. The excitement-seeking/adventurous characteristic leads these individuals to click on phishing links and be more cooperative in social engineering attack attempts.

The paper by Albladi & George [18] found that high levels of extraversion correlated with an increase in user susceptibility to cyberattacks. The study by Gottker, Watson & Van Sintemaartensdijk [19], however, it was inconclusive around this personality trait.

The following hypothesis is suggested for Extraversion:

H1. High levels of Extraversion in personality increase user susceptibility to social engineering cyberattacks in the South African mining industry

4.3.2 Openness

Openness is made up of traits of Ideas, Fantasy, Aesthetics, Actions, Feelings, and Values [17]. These traits stem from their Revised Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) Facets.

Studies by Albladi & George [18], Van De Weijer & Leukfeldt [20], Shappie [21], and Uebelacker & Quiel [9] hypothesise that high levels of openness in personality lead to a higher susceptibility to cyberattacks. The hypothesis is based on the fantasy associated with new experiences that lead these users to have a higher susceptibility.

Uebelacker & Quiel [9] also added that technological experience in the case of openness has the opposite effect, as the users then have better detection capabilities; however, the study by Anawar [10] found that technological experience only influenced extroversion and agreeableness, and general work experience impacted all personality traits except for openness.

The results from the paper by Albladi & George [18] found no correlation between the personality trait and cyberattack susceptibility; however, in the case of Van De Weijer & Leukfeldt [20], and Shappie [21], the results showed that users with high levels of openness are more susceptible to cyberattacks.

The following hypothesis is suggested for Openness:

H2. High levels of Openness in personality increase user susceptibility to social engineering cyberattacks in the South African mining industry

4.3.3 Conscientiousness

According to the work carried out by Costa and McCrae [22], Conscientiousness is made up of traits of Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement striving, Self-discipline and Deliberation [17]. These traits stem from their Revised Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) Facets.

Studies by Albladi & George [18], Van De Weijer & Leukfeldt [20], Shappie [21], and Gottker [19] all hypothesise that high levels of conscientiousness in personality reduce the susceptibility of an individual to fall victim to cyberattacks. The personality trait leads to behaviours of following company policy, exercising awareness online and keeping their laptops up to date with the latest malware software. Through their data gathering, these studies were able to uncover correlations between high conscientiousness in user personality and reduced susceptibility to cyberattacks.

In the model proposed by Uebelacker & Quiel [9], the hypothesis is agreed with on the basis that the company has good cyber security policies; however, a caution is given to social engineering influence techniques of Authority, Reciprocity and Commitment & Consistency.

The following hypothesis is suggested for Conscientiousness:

H3. High levels of Conscientiousness in personality reduce user susceptibility to social engineering cyberattacks in the South African mining industry

4.3.4 Agreeableness

Agreeableness is made up of traits of Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, Compliance, Modesty, and Tendermindedness [17]. These traits stem from their Revised Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) Facets.

Studies by Albladi & George [18], Gottker [19], Shappie [21], and Uebelacker & Quiel [9] hypothesise that high levels of agreeableness in user personality lead to a greater susceptibility to cyberattacks. The reason for the hypothesis is that the trusting nature is seen as exploitable by social engineers; this is also described in Kevin Mitnick's social engineering attack cycle.

The results related to this hypothesis Gottker [19], and Shappie [21] were inconclusive; however, the results from Albladi & George [18] found a correlation between high agreeableness and a reduced susceptibility to cyberattacks. This opposition to the original hypothesis was attributed to the higher likelihood of these individuals adopting security software when compared to other users and a higher information security awareness.

The following hypothesis is suggested for Agreeableness:

H4. High levels of Agreeableness in personality decrease user susceptibility to social engineering cyberattacks in the South African mining industry

4.3.5 Neuroticism

Neuroticism is made up of traits of Anxiety, Angry Hostility, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness, and Vulnerability [17]. These traits stem from their Revised Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) Facets.

The studies by Albladi & George [18], Gottker [19], and Uebelacker & Quiel [9] hypothesise that the anxiety and self-consciousness associated with high levels of neuroticism lead to a decreased susceptibility to cyberattacks.

The results of the studies in the case of by Albladi & George [18], and Gottker [19] found that heightened levels of neuroticism does lead to a reduced susceptibility to cyberattacks due to the untrusting nature coupled with anxiety. Albladi & George [18] also found that users with

medium levels of neuroticism find it difficult to deal with stressful situations making them less able to protect themselves in cyberattack situations.

The following hypothesis is suggested for Neuroticism:

H5. High levels of Neuroticism in personality decrease user susceptibility to social engineering cyberattacks in the South African mining industry

4.4 Demographic variables

The literature finds that the demographic variables of gender and age affect cyberattack susceptibility. In the work by Fadi Aloul, Ahmed El Zarka and Ali Darwish [9], it is stated that younger individuals and women have higher levels of agreeableness, providing a link between demographics and personality traits [9].

4.4.1 Age

Studies by Alsharif [11], Khonji [12], and, Van De Weijer & Leukfeldt [20] hypothesise that there is a difference in how individuals of different ages approach cybersecurity, all three papers found a correlation between employees of a younger age, between 18 and 25 and an increased susceptibility to cyberattacks.

The following hypothesis is suggested for Age:

H6. Employees above the age of 25 show a decreased user susceptibility to social engineering cyberattacks in the South African mining industry

4.4.2 Gender

Studies by Alsharif [11] and Khonji [12] found that women are more susceptible to cyberattacks when compared to men, this is specifically for phishing and saw that they activated two-factor authentication more often when compared to women and that they were less likely to click on links contained in emails. The study by Van De Weijer & Leukfeldt [20] however finds the opposite result, where men are more susceptible to online consumer fraud.

The following hypothesis is suggested for Gender:

H7. Male employees show a decreased user susceptibility to social engineering cyberattacks in the South African mining industry when compared to female employees.

4.5 Experience

The study by Anawar [10] investigated the effect of both general and technological experience on the big 5 personality traits with respect to cyberattack susceptibility.

4.5.1 Technological and general experience

The paper by Anawar [10] found that the technical experience of employees working in the IT field showed a correlation with extraversion and agreeableness. This correlation was attributed to individuals with technical experience having knowledge of the usage of security software and technologies.

General experience was found to correlate with the personality traits of extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness; however, the study only obtained responses from individuals working in IT-related companies, which may result in the “general” experience not being as general as intended [10].

The following hypothesis is suggested for Technological Experience:

H8. Both the Technological and General Experience of an employee is synonymous with a reduced susceptibility to cyberattacks.

4.5.2 Technical versus general experience

Both Technical and General experience were found to correlate with a decreased susceptibility to cyberattacks [10], however, the contribution between each individual type of experience is relatively unexplored.

The following hypothesis is suggested for General Experience:

H9. The Technological Experience of an employee contributes more than the General Experience towards a reduced susceptibility to cyberattacks.

4.6 Defence mechanisms

The social engineering prevention strategies comprise of education/knowledge-based measures, software/tools, and organisational policies [12], [14], [13].

The software/tools defence mechanism still presents vulnerabilities to targeted SE attacks and has no way of defending against them [13]. The software/tools will therefore not be included in the model.

4.6.1 Knowledge-based

The knowledge-based defence mechanism is made up of three subcategories, which include training, awareness programs and self-education. The literature review by Aldawood & Skinner [13] reported improved cybersecurity behaviour and motivation for self-education, and increased awareness was reported for training and awareness programs. The limitations associated with this defence mechanism are reported as not a one type fits all due to the difference in personalities, skills and adaptation.

The paper by Uebelacker & Quiel [9] highlights that individuals differ according to their personality types and therefore a difference in defence mechanisms is proposed in their framework. Awareness programs and training are proposed for the personality traits of Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Self-education and E-learning systems are proposed for the personality trait of Openness.

The following hypothesis is suggested for the Knowledge-Based Defence Mechanism:

H10. Knowledge-based defence mechanisms have a positive effect on all personality traits, leading to users of decreased susceptibility to cyberattacks.

4.6.2 Policies

Organisational policies have been reported by Aldawood & Skinner [13] to result in a better security culture and access control. The limitations reported were the skill levels of users and the time taken to completely understand and adhere to the organisational policy. Uebelacker & Quiel [9] proposes organisational policies for the personality traits of Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Openness.

The following hypothesis is suggested for Policy-Based Defence Mechanism:

H11. Policy-based defence mechanisms have a positive effect on Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Openness personality traits, leading to a decreased susceptibility to cyberattacks.

5 CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of human factors in the cybersecurity landscape of the South African mining industry. As digital transformation continues to redefine operational processes through technologies like IoT and CMMS, the industry's susceptibility to cyber threats—particularly those exploiting human vulnerabilities—has grown significantly. The

literature review underscores a substantial gap in mining-specific cybersecurity literature, particularly concerning the human element.

By incorporating psychological and demographic variables through frameworks like the Five Factor Model, the research establishes a foundation for understanding user susceptibility to cyberattacks. It further links these human characteristics to effective defence mechanisms.

The proposed conceptual model serves as a guide for developing a workforce that is both aware of and resilient to social engineering threats. Improving cybersecurity in this context requires not only technical safeguards but also a strategic focus on the human dimension, being the weakest link, enabling mining operations to build a more secure digital future.

6 FUTURE WORK

6.1 Model outcome

The conceptual model was developed from existing social engineering models found in the literature, but centred within the context of cybersecurity in the mining industry. The model is to be empirically tested. Once the model has been validated, the practical uses of the model include:

- Development of personality-centred cybersecurity training and awareness programs which aim to educate individuals on the interplay between their personality types and cybersecurity susceptibility.
- Refinement of existing cybersecurity awareness programs to strengthen employees' understanding of the strengths and weaknesses associated with their personality traits.
- Informing the development of cybersecurity policy to include worst-case scenarios attributed to personality traits.
- Improving the cybersecurity awareness culture within the company by contextualising the personality traits, strengths and weaknesses.

These outcomes, once validated, provide possible use cases to inform industrial engineering, risk management, human resources and organisational psychology within industrial contexts as seen in Figure 7.

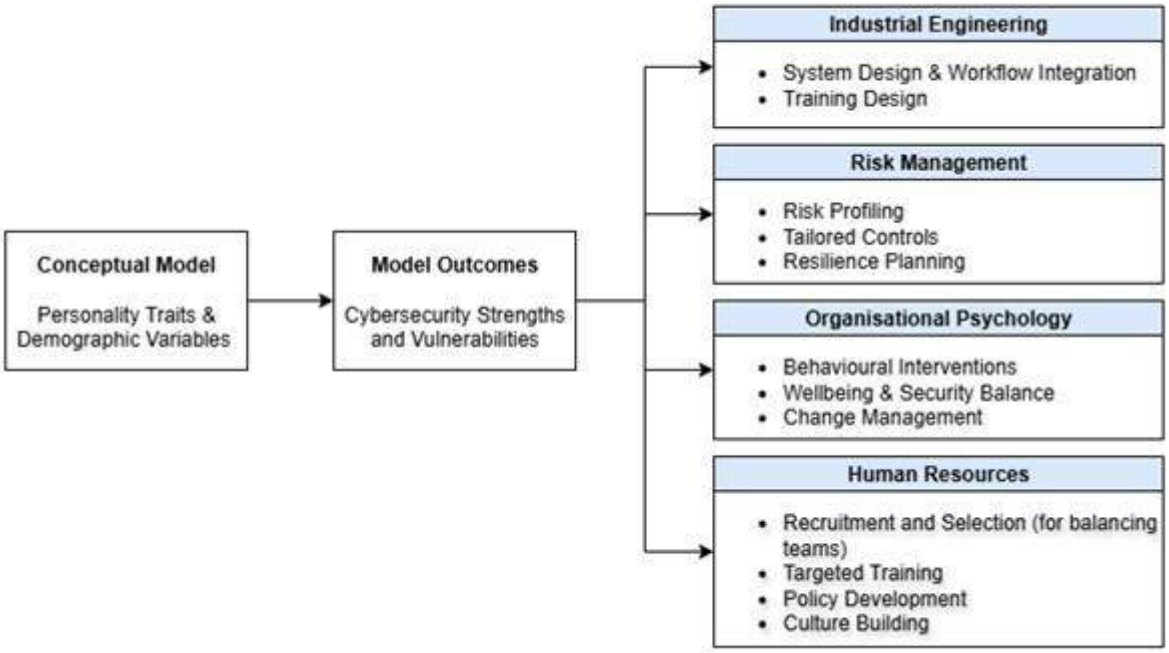

Figure 7: Model use cases

6.2 Model validation

The conceptual model was developed to undergo hypothesis testing in order to validate and uncover any additional topics within the field. A prominent limitation associated with experimental testing is gaining access to highly confidential mining house IT networks. This was considered through the development of the conceptual model. This limitation is a driving factor in a qualitative study as opposed to a quantitative one.

Qualitative data regarding the human factors, demographic variables and defence mechanisms will be collected and analysed. The target population for the study to validate the model is cybersecurity experts within the South African mining industry. These experts include IT security coordinators, cybersecurity consultants to the mining industry, and cybersecurity specialists.

The Delphi method was selected as the preferred research instrument as the literature relating defence mechanisms to human factors in the mining industry is not extensively developed as yet. The Delphi method proves to be suitable for exploring emerging issues like these. The method is primarily a quantitative technique, but can be used in conjunction with qualitative analysis [23].

A thematic analysis is proposed to analyse the Delphi survey response according to the 6-step framework developed by Braun & Clarke [24]. A thematic analysis provides the potential to generate rich insight from expert views on the topic. The experience-backed response from the participants will contribute to the credibility of the model.

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IMPROVING PRODUCT ENGINEERING PROCESSES IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY PROJECTS THROUGH MBSE

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ABSTRACT

How can engineering processes in multidisciplinary manufacturing projects be optimised? This research explores improving product development in SMEs through model-based systems engineering (MBSE). Due to limited resources, expertise, and communication barriers, multidisciplinary projects often challenge SMEs. MBSE offers solutions by enhancing collaboration, integrating technical disciplines, and boosting efficiency. The study examines SMEs in manufacturing, detailing MBSE implementation processes and presenting a model guide. Results highlight MBSE's ability to streamline product development and foster team integration. Insights into MBSE adoption using a project management model provide practical strategies for SMEs to overcome challenges and optimise engineering processes.

Keywords: model-based systems engineering, SME, product engineering, multidisciplinary projects

1 INTRODUCTION

When companies design and build new products, the process is often managed as a project from idea to launch, for example, SpaceX's Falcon 9 project. The consistent fulfilment of requirements through systematic product development requires careful planning and attention to detail. Mandel et al. [1] state that today's product development processes must adapt to increasing customer requirements, especially regarding functionality, safety and environmental compatibility. Product development often occurs as part of interdisciplinary teamwork, increasing the complexity of the systems and the development process [2].

An unprecedented level of interconnectedness and integration of systems characterises today's world, driven by rapid advancements in technology and globalisation [3]. This trend introduces new challenges for systems engineering and demands a more robust and holistic approach to complex system development [4]. Czaja et al. [5] argue that future technical systems will surpass traditional mechatronic designs through inherent intelligence. They discuss how this depends on a change in conventional product development methods since a holistic and comprehensive understanding is now required to fulfil customer requirements. They argue that Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) may be the most viable approach to address these complexities.

According to Czaja et al. [5], intelligence must be designed into systems to make production and product systems more reliable, user-friendly, and resource-efficient. Most of the benefits are realised from the interaction between different components and technologies. There are subsequent demands on developing products, such as a thorough appreciation of the system of interest (SoI) and upfront product lifecycle considerations [6]. There needs to be more than the traditional way of developing these by analysing individual specialist disciplines. One needs to consider the system components' short– and long-term interactions seriously. New ways of conceptualising SoI are thus required to meet the challenges of future systems.

Having established the complexity and increasing obscurity of product engineering as grounded above, the researcher then aims to address the following research questions:

1. How can digital engineering, particularly MBSE, improve design and decision-making activities during the product development process?
2. What is the value of applying meta-models early in product engineering projects?
3. Which frameworks help SMEs to implement effective communication of ideas, decisions, and specifications in complex, multidisciplinary projects?

In order to explore the above aims, this article will first explain the theoretical background of the key concepts on which the research is based. This includes defining the context encompassing African SMEs, systems engineering, MBSE and a particular project management model. The research methodology is outlined, and a conceptual model based on the theory is presented. Finally, the results concerning the objectives are discussed before conclusions and recommendations are made.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are companies with relatively few employees and limited sales volumes [7]. They are the backbone of many economies and are crucial for job creation and economic growth. SMEs can be defined by, e.g., number of employees, annual turnover, or total balance sheet, with the exact definition varying from country to country. SMEs drive the economy by significantly contributing to GDP through employment opportunities and innovation. They also promote entrepreneurship and competition and help diversify the economy by providing goods and services in niche markets. With limited access

to capital, difficulties in obtaining credit, and limited resources for research and development, SMEs face many challenges. However, SMEs are critical to a balanced and diverse business landscape and continue to play an essential role in the growth and stability of the economy [7].

2.2 Systems engineering

Systems engineering is a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach that combines various engineering disciplines, such as structural, electrical, mechanical, power, and human factors engineering. It provides an integrated effort for designing, managing, and integrating complex systems throughout their life cycle [8]. Therefore, the goal is to create a coherent system not dominated by the perspective of a single domain [3].

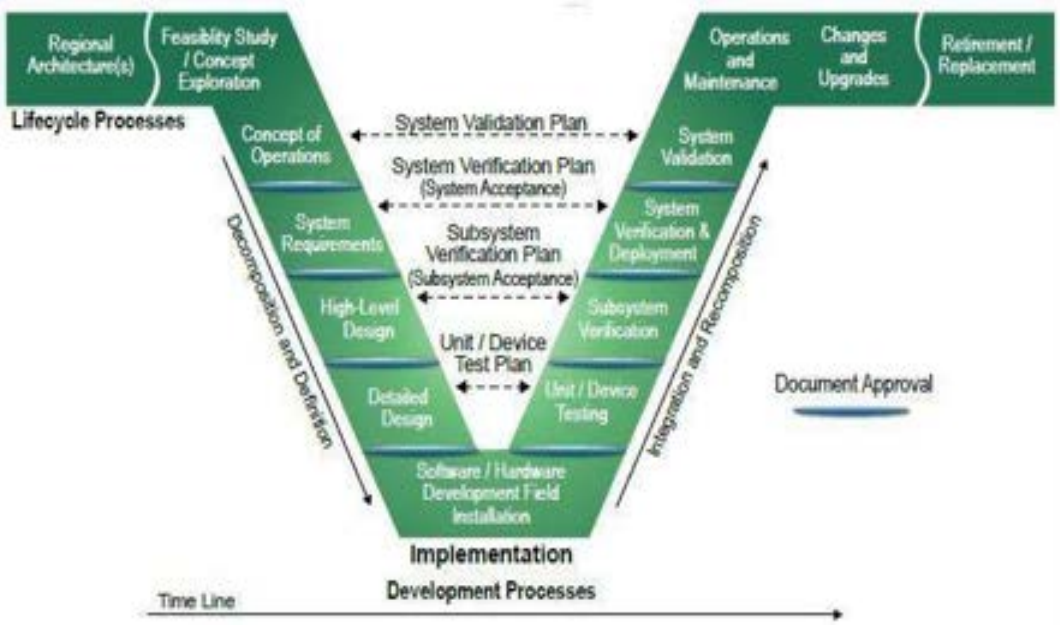

Figure 1: Systems Vee-model (adapted from [9])

The Vee model in Figure 1 is a widely recognised systems engineering framework that guides complex systems' systematic and structured development[10]. This model outlines a set of interconnected stages that guide the systems engineering process, beginning with the conceptualisation of the system and culminating in its final acceptance and deployment [10].

MBSE is defined as “the formalised application of modelling to support system requirements, analysis, design, verification and validation activities beginning in the conceptual design phase and continuing throughout development and later life cycle phases” [11]. It relies on models and simulations to represent the system under development [12]. MBSE has been widely applied in product engineering, as it helps reduce the time, risk and cost associated with complex product development [13]. Numerous research studies and papers have been published on MBSE in product engineering. Some key research areas include MBSE methodologies and frameworks, MBSE tools and technologies, and the benefits and challenges of using MBSE in product engineering [14].

The INCOSE Systems Engineering Vision 2020 envisions MBSE as part of a long-term trend. It expects a model-centric approach to widely replace traditional document-centric approaches in the near future [12], [15]. The manufacturing sector in Africa, particularly among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), faces significant challenges in achieving sustainable and efficient production processes [16].

MBSE is a suitable methodology to address these challenges. It relies on creating and utilising system models to support complex systems' design, analysis, verification, and validation [17]. The Vitech systems meta-model, shown below in Figure 2, is a comprehensive framework to support MBSE. It facilitates the integration and management of the complex interactions between different system components throughout the lifecycle of a system. MBSE focuses on creating models that represent not only the physical aspects of a system but also its functional, behavioural and organisational elements. As described in detail by [17], the key aspects of the systems meta-model are:

- **Hierarchical structure**: the meta-model provides a multi-layered, hierarchical representation of systems, allowing engineers to break down a complex system into manageable subsystems, components and relationships.
- **Function-behaviour-structure (FBS) paradigm**: The meta-model is closely linked to the FBS paradigm in MBSE, making it possible to model a system's functions, behaviour and interactions.
- **Requirements traceability**: The meta-model supports the traceability of requirements through the design, verification, and validation phases. Traceability is critical to meet all stakeholder requirements throughout the system lifecycle.

This model-centric approach is central to MBSE's goal of simplifying the management of complex systems, thereby reducing errors and ensuring better collaboration between multidisciplinary teams. Figure 2 shows how the requirements link with functions, states and resources in the context of organisational risks and constraints.

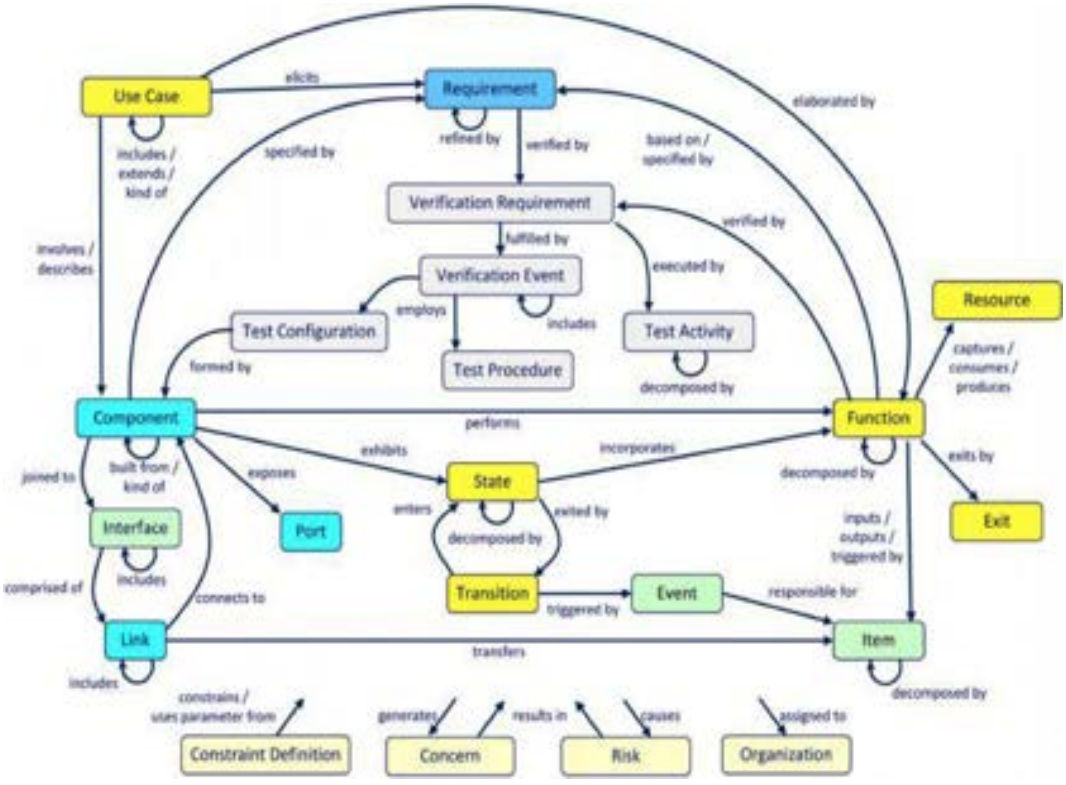

Figure 2: Vitech Systems Meta-Model (adapted from [17]**)**

The MBSE meta-model provides a key approach that aligns with the Vee model in Figure 1 by providing a model-centric and structured framework for systems engineering. In MBSE, a comprehensive system model is a central artefact for facilitating communication,

collaboration, and decision-making throughout the systems engineering process and possibly the system lifecycle [18].

The system model provides a digital system representation, which may include various views such as functional, behavioural, and structural, to enable engineers to simulate, analyse, and validate the system's design before physically producing it. By integrating MBSE into the Vee model, systems engineers can leverage the power of model-based approaches to enhance the traceability, consistency, and overall quality of the systems engineering process. Furthermore, the MBSE approach aligns well with the Vee model's emphasis on verification and validation because the system model can perform virtual testing and validation, reducing the risks and costs associated with physical prototype development [19].

Figure 3 illustrates how MBSE integrates with the Vee model. In the Vee model, systems engineering is a comprehensive and structured approach to developing complex systems. With MBSE, systems engineers can further enhance the reliability, transparency, and efficiency of the systems engineering process. In turn, this can ensure the successful realisation of systems and products that meet the diverse requirements of their stakeholders.

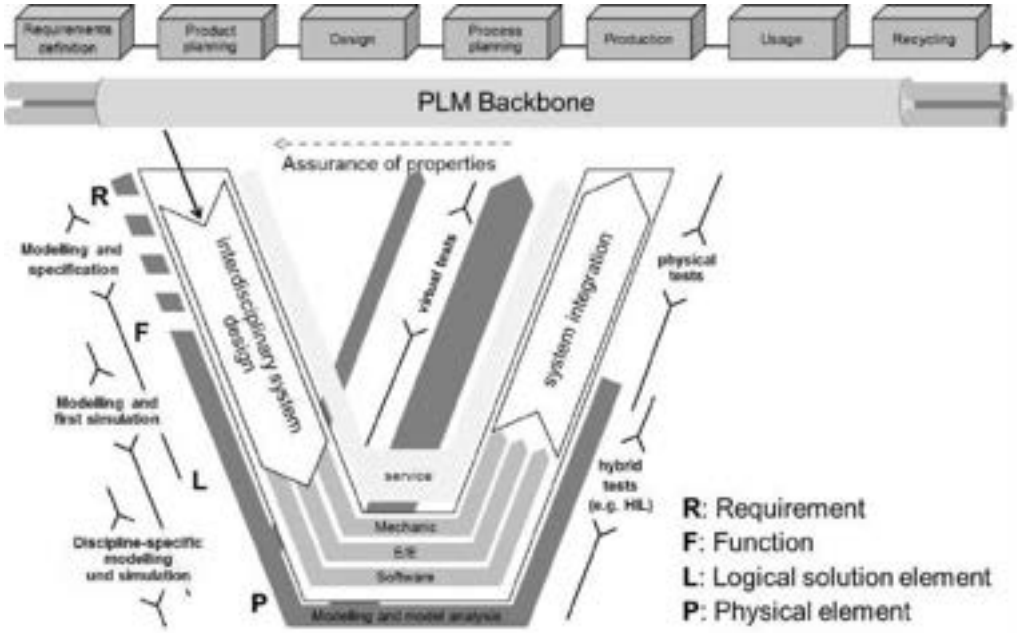

Figure 3: MBSE-tailored Vee-Model (adapted from [20]**)**

2.3 Agile-stage-gate project management

Edwards et al. [21] explore implementing a hybrid model of the Agile-Stage-Gate (ASG) in small to medium-sized manufacturing firms, as seen in Figure 4. The ASG hybrid model combines the two widely used approaches in product development: agile development principles and stage-gate methodology. Their paper presents case study results of three SME manufacturing firms that implemented the ASG hybrid model for their product development processes. This suggests that the ASG hybrid model can effectively improve the product development process in SME manufacturing firms. The model's flexible and iterative nature allows for more rapid development cycles and increased responsiveness to customer feedback. At the same time, the stage-gate framework provides a structured approach to managing risk and ensures that products meet the necessary quality standards.

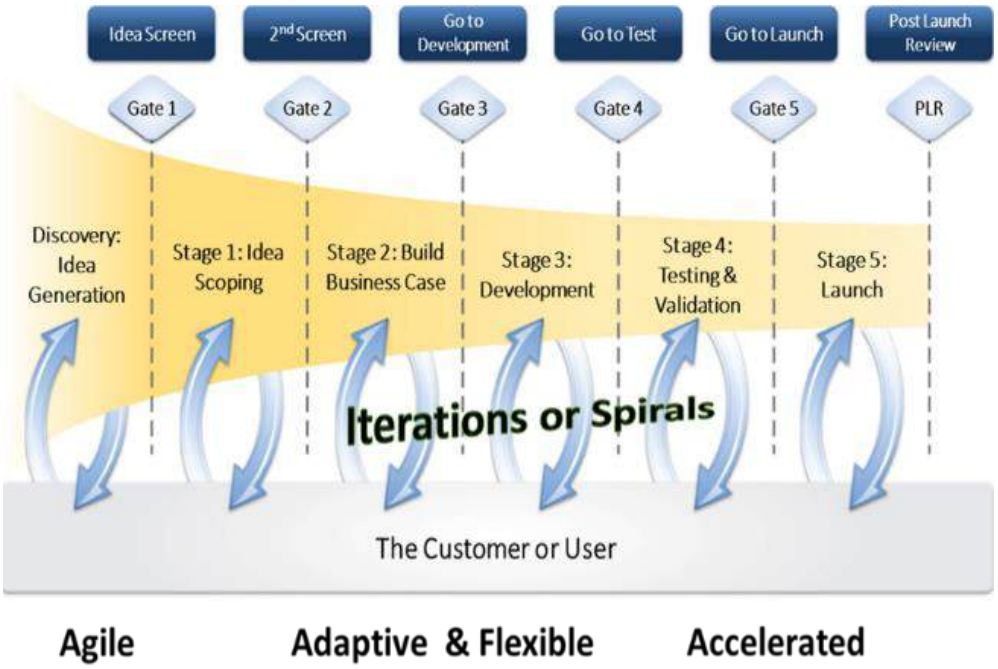

Figure 4: Agile-Stage-Gate Product Development Model (adapted from from [22])

The ASG model enables faster development cycles, greater responsiveness to customer feedback, increased collaboration and communication among team members and a quick, iterative workflow.

2.4 Summary of literature

The reviewed literature comprises current practices in product development and application (or lack thereof) of system engineering. Nanfuka and Oosthuizen [13] also expand on the value of MBSE in more detail, especially in African SMEs. The ASG model combines the principles of Agile and Stage-Gate methodologies, providing an iterative and flexible approach to product development while ensuring that projects are managed in a structured and disciplined manner. The ASG model enables faster development cycles, greater responsiveness to customer feedback, and increased collaboration and communication among team members. MBSE, on the other hand, provides a systematic and consistent approach to system development that enables the modelling of system requirements, behaviours and functions in a structured and consistent manner to manage complexity [21]. Therefore, the literature suggests that integrating the ASG model and MBSE can help improve the speed and quality of product development.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The application of MBSE harbours several challenges. Positivist ontology and objectivist epistemology have dominated research in this area [23]. However, this research assumes a relativistic ontology, where reality is viewed as socially constructed and fluid rather than fixed and independent of the researcher [24]. Multiple realities are believed to be shaped by the contexts and perspectives of the individuals involved [25]. The research follows a qualitative design and utilises a case study approach to investigate the adoption of MBSE in small and medium enterprises in South Africa. South Africa was chosen because the researcher is based there at the time of writing and because of the growing economy and increasing importance of systems engineering in our SME sector. The case study method lends itself well to the

relativistic and constructivist foundations of the study as it allows for the exploration of complex, contextualised phenomena through multiple data sources.

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with technical decision-makers in selected organisations. These include project managers, systems engineers and quality assurance engineers. The researcher, who now has a solid theoretical background in MBSE, will conduct these interviews. Other data sources may include project documentation, observation of systems engineering practices on the ground and other relevant organisational materials. An open-ended questionnaire structured around each development phase will guide the interviews (See Appendix B). Figure 5 below summarises the methodology followed by the researcher and notes the key activities and findings following the literature review and concept design.

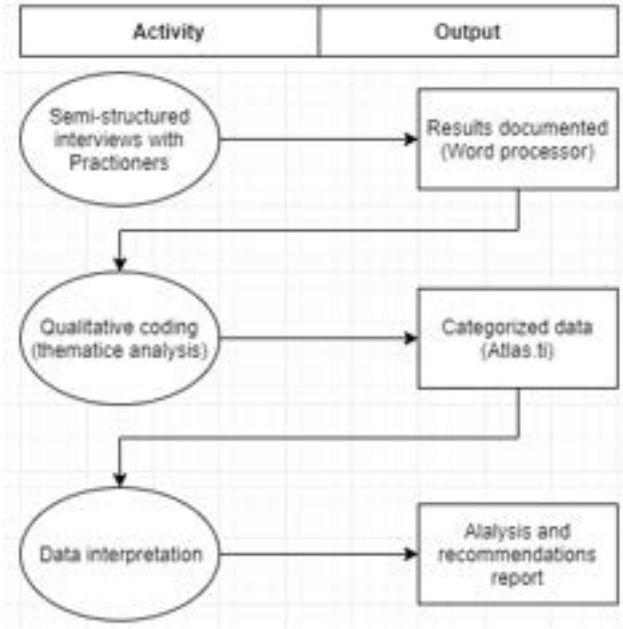

Figure 5: Methodology Overview

Qualitative methods are particularly well suited for this research as they enable the exploration of the complex socio-technical dynamics associated with multidisciplinary project teams and MBSE implementation [26]. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to capture rich, contextual data about the nuanced human and organisational factors that shape the effectiveness of MBSE processes in improving product development, which may not be easily quantifiable [26]. There are several reasons for choosing the qualitative rather than quantitative research method:

- **Flexibility**. Qualitative research is more flexible than quantitative research in this case. It allows the researcher to change the study design or the research questions if new findings emerge.
- **Understanding complex phenomena**. Qualitative research is well suited to understanding complex social and behavioural phenomena that cannot be easily reduced to numerical data. In this case, for example, some of the benefits of MBSE are felt rather than tangible.
- **Rich and in-depth data**. Qualitative research can provide in-depth and rich data, which is impossible with quantitative methods. The researcher can use some questions that relate to the people's subjective knowledge of the topic.

- **Exploring new or complex phenomena**. Qualitative research helps explore new or complex phenomena that may not yet be understood. Qualitative methods are used, for example, to understand the motivations of a new social context.

4 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

4.1 Introduction

MBSE and agile methods have emerged in recent years as complementary approaches to product development [27]. MBSE provides a structured framework for defining system requirements, modelling architecture, and managing system complexity. Similarly, ASG methods emphasise iterative development, rapid prototyping, and customer feedback to meet market needs better 22]. Integrating these two approaches has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the product development process [27]. In this section, the researcher proposes a conceptual model for implementing MBSE that addresses the challenges organisations face in adopting this approach. The model is based on a framework combining systems engineering theory and a project management model, the ASG model proposed by Cooper and Sommer [22].

4.2 Conceptual Model

From an in-depth literature analysis of the challenges in product development, systems engineering, and project management, the authors propose a conceptual process model combining the ASG model and MBSE to provide a structured yet flexible approach to product development, as shown in Figure 6. The model consists of six stages that align with the Vee model.

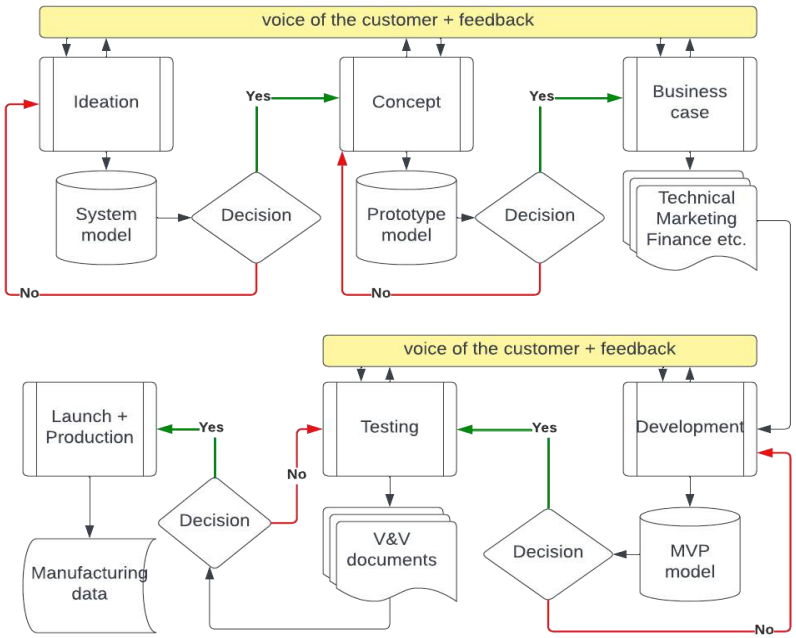

Figure 6: Proposed "Model-based Agile-Stage-Gate development"

The main advantage of the proposed model is that it combines the structured and disciplined approach of the stage-gate model with the flexibility and responsiveness of agile methods and the clarity of MBSE. MBSE provides a systematic and structured approach to system development that helps to manage complexity, while Agile methods offer the flexibility to adapt to changing customer needs and market conditions [21]. The model provides a framework that companies can follow to successfully implement this innovative approach. The model uses digital tools and platforms to enable remote collaboration, information sharing,

and model management. It is, therefore, particularly suitable for SMEs with limited resources or expertise in MBSE. In this model, teams from different geographical locations can successfully collaborate.

4.3 Advantages of the integrated framework over the stage-gate model

The stage-gate model is a standard process that divides new product development into different stages where a decision is made on whether to proceed to the next stage. It ensures rigorous decision-making, controls risks and improves resource allocation [22]. However, it can be challenging for African SMEs operating in a multidisciplinary environment. When multiple disciplines (mechanical, electrical, software, etc.) are involved, the lack of continuous integration can lead to mismatches, delays, or worse, bad quality and high costs. The integrated framework extends the stage-gate model by embedding MBSE processes that provide the following:

- **Better collaboration between disciplines**. By providing a standard system model, MBSE ensures that the specialists are aligned with system requirements, constraints and dependencies. This is particularly important for African SMEs, given the challenges arising from resource constraints. Collaboration and communication are critical factors for project success.
- **Continuous validation and feedback**. MBSE enables simulations and system validation at every stage and ensures that decisions made at every stage are based on real-time data. This prevents problems from manifesting only in the final stages, as is often the case with the traditional stage-gate model.
- **Informed decision-making**. Every gate decision is supported by system models that can simulate different outcomes, significantly reducing uncertainty and empowering the stakeholders to improve risk management.

4.4 Advantages of the integrated framework over the Vee model

The Vee model focuses on system development through rigorous verification and validation processes at each level of the system development lifecycle. It is beneficial for ensuring traceability from requirements to testing [9]. However, there are challenges associated with this model in the African SME context:

- **Dependence on upfront planning**: the Vee model requires a high level of upfront planning and design, which can be risky if requirements evolve or change during the project due to, say, economic or political volatility, for instance.
- **Rigid structure**: The rigid structure of the Vee model does not lend itself well to iterative or agile development, which SMEs often require due to the fast-paced, changing market and limited resources. By combining MBSE and stage-gate principles, the integrated framework negates such limitations.
- **Flexibility**: While maintaining the strong validation focus of the Vee model, the integrated framework integrates the gate structure of Stage-gate, enabling go/no-go decisions at key milestones. This reduces the risk of committing resources without a high probability of success.
- **Iterative refinement**: MBSE supports continuous refinement of the system model, even after some gates have been passed, allowing greater flexibility in responding to changing requirements. However, this requires solid configuration management.
- **Real-time data for better decision-making**: African SMEs often operate with limited budgets and resources in the face of fluctuating customer demands. MBSE enables engineers to simulate system designs and alterations early and throughout the

lifecycle, ensuring that changes can be validated before significant resources are committed.

4.5 The unique value of MBSE in the integrated framework

MBSE provides the synergy that integrates the Vee model and project management stage-gate development systems. In the context of manufacturing projects in African SMEs, MBSE offers remarkable advantages [12]:

- **Better interdisciplinary collaboration**: African SMEs often work on multidisciplinary projects spanning different specialist areas. By creating a central model, MBSE overcomes traditional silos and facilitates clearer communication between specialist practitioners and teams.
- **Scalable solutions**: Unlike large organisations, SMEs often have limited resources, making it difficult to manage complex, multidisciplinary projects. MBSE offers scalable solutions that provide robust systems engineering principles without requiring excessive overhead.
- **Intelligent risk management**: MBSE's ability to simulate, validate and trace requirements at every stage of product development reduces risk by identifying issues early in the process. Projects are almost always undertaken in risky environments with limited budgets.

Finally, the proposed integrated model addresses African SMEs' challenges when running multidisciplinary projects, such as effective collaboration with limited resources. This framework improves project/product development outcomes by combining the structured decision-making of the Stage-gate model with the rigour of the Vee model and MBSE's provision for real-time feedback and collaboration. African SMEs can use this integrated system to manage complex projects more effectively, reduce development risks, optimise resource allocation and bring innovative products to market faster.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Response rate

As discussed earlier, the study was conducted in South African SMEs. In particular, 38 interview requests were sent to companies in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape provinces. All 38 initially acknowledged the request and promised to avail themselves. In the end, only 18 participated, giving a response rate of ~47%. The rest could not make time or failed due to unknown constraints.

5.2 Industry sectors

All respondents operate in manufacturing; some operate in electronics design and assembly, some in mechanics, and some in optoelectronics. All respondents had software support systems in their product engineering and manufacturing. Table 1 below shows the distribution of respondents according to their niche. Appendix B (Table B.1) summarises the qualitative data obtained from the respondents and primes the reader with information on what each theme entails in terms of improving product engineering through MBSE. A more comprehensive version of the qualitative data is presented in Appendix A (Table A.1).

Table 1: Respondents by Industry Sector

Industry Sector	Respondents
Mechatronics manufacturing	38.88%
Electronics manufacturing	22.22%
Mechanics manufacturing	22.22%

Optics manufacturing	11.11%
Other	5.55%

The results from the survey were coded using the tool *Atlas.ti*, and the emerging themes are shown in Table A.1. Intentional coding was used, which aligns the themes with the research objectives and questions.

5.3 Aligning themes with research objectives

As a build-up to the discussion in the next section, the following select themes extracted from the analysis of the responses are elaborated on the research objectives outlined in the first chapter. This sets the researcher up for a grounded relativist argument for MBSE's value in projects involving product engineering.

5.4 Return on investment (MBSE frameworks)

5.4.1 Perceived costs and concerns

Almost all SMEs surveyed see MBSE as an expensive investment with unclear immediate benefits, discouraging them from implementing it. There is a lack of understanding of how MBSE will bring benefits in the short term.

- Keywords from respondents: hesitation, cost-benefit concerns, capital, gain

5.4.2 MBSE expertise/skills

None of the SMEs surveyed had the in-house expertise to implement MBSE frameworks. Of course, it can be challenging to make the paradigm shift. Training and upskilling staff to use MBSE tools would require additional investment, and SMEs are often uncertain if the risk is worth it. They have not expressed any intention of hiring MBSE experts anytime soon.

- Respondent keywords: skills, systems engineer, implement, training

5.5 Contemporary engineering processes

5.5.1 Collaborative sketching/ideation

The findings show that SMEs predominantly rely on traditional collaborative sketching techniques (brainstorming, workshops) without digital tools. While this approach is familiar, it carries inherent efficiency and traceability limits. Ideas are often recorded and repeated manually or in fragments, which can suppress the full innovation potential.

- Keywords used by interviewees: brainstorming, workshops, CAD, meeting

5.5.2 Iterative development

Iteration is a core element, but most SMEs rely on expensive physical prototypes, which lengthen development cycles. SMEs lack simulation tools to test design functions and behaviours early in the process, which could reduce errors and risks.

- Keywords from interviewees: feedback loops, risk management, iteration

5.6 Conclusions and Summary

This section summarises the study, drawing conclusions and highlighting the contributions made by the study. The researcher also reflects on the limitations and recommendations for future researchers around the said topic. Table B.1 (Appendix B) summarises the challenges relayed by respondents. It also shows how MBSE fits into the project context, notably which engineering challenges can be improved through MBSE and its benefits.

5.7 Proposed framework congruence (concept improvement)

The researcher now presents a culmination of the conceptual model presented earlier, incorporating the "lessons learnt" from the analysis of the results in this chapter. The model integrates systems engineering with project management more seamlessly in an easy-to-follow but rigorous manner. The integrated model combines the Stage-gate and Vee models, which are integrated with MBSE processes. Each stage on the left (Stage-gate model) corresponds to a parallel Vee-model phase on the right. It shows how MBSE activities can support decision-making and validation throughout the product development lifecycle.

The model below (Figure 7) was developed to optimise multidisciplinary teamwork in six phases, each of which feeds into the corresponding phases of the V-model. MBSE plays a role in improving communication and decision-making at each stage:

- **Ideation/Requirements**: High-level system requirements are defined, with MBSE capturing all stakeholder needs and constraints.
- **Scoping/Concept of Operations**: Detailed system requirements are linked in a model-based environment to ensure traceability to the high-level requirements.
- **Business case/System design**: Modelled system architecture and behaviour to support informed gate decisions.
- **Development/Function design**: System functions and subsystems are developed in parallel, with MBSE enabling the seamless integration of contributions from different disciplines.
- **Validation/Subsystem integration**: Testing is performed using digital twins and MBSE simulations to verify that all subsystems work together
- **System validation**: The complete system is validated against the original stakeholder requirements to ensure that the contributions of all multidisciplinary teams are consistent with the requirements.

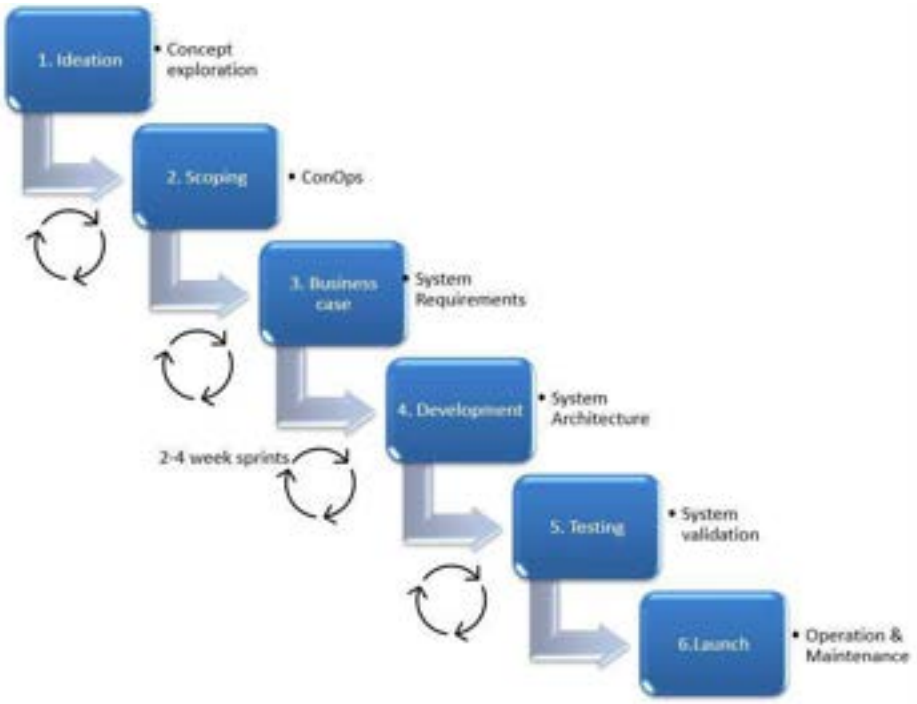

Figure 7: Proposed Concept Model for Process Optimisation

The proposed integrated framework combines the stage-gate model, the Vee-model systems, and MBSE, representing a superior approach to improving product development, especially in multidisciplinary projects undertaken by African SMEs. Each of these models has unique strengths and weaknesses. However, when integrated, they provide an improved model that promises to address the complexities and challenges SMEs face in product engineering.

6 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

6.1 Key challenges faced by South African SMEs

The study provides a detailed overview of the challenges SMEs face in South Africa when implementing MBSE in product development. Some examples from the survey are a lack of digital tools, economic and political volatility, financial and skills resource constraints, complexity and a lack of systems engineering expertise (MBSE in particular).

6.2 Reluctance towards MBSE adoption

The analysis shows why SMEs are reluctant to invest in MBSE frameworks, citing concerns about cost, lack of skilled labour and unclear short-term benefits. This provides valuable insights for researchers and policymakers looking to support the adoption of systems engineering in general and MBSE in particular. To promote uptake, African governments could consider measures such as:

- Establishing public-private partnerships to finance beneficial MBSE projects
- Providing tax incentives and subsidies for digital engineering technologies
- Supporting and promoting systems engineering education, including sending students to the best systems engineering institutions in the world
- Creating an attractive business environment for international systems professionals and digital tools vendors
- Accelerating regulations for the adoption of systems engineering /MBSE

Researchers, on the other hand, could use the findings of this study to:

- Expand research on demonstrating tangible ROI for MBSE investments
- Further, simplify and better align MBSE frameworks
- Work with SMEs (via educational institutions) to deliver real MBSE projects
- Conduct workshops and webinars to transfer MBSE knowledge progressively
- Pursue research partnerships between academia and industry

6.3 Limitations

6.3.1 Sample size

The study is limited by the small sample of SMEs, mainly from South Africa, which may not fully represent the broader SME landscape or the international context.

6.3.2 Lack of longitudinal data

The research does not characterise MBSE adoption over time. It cannot account for how human behaviour, processes or outcomes evolve as organisations become more familiar with MBSE frameworks.

6.3.3 Geography

The geographical focus on South African SMEs limits the scope of the study. The results may only be partially transferable to SMEs in other regions, especially those with significantly different economic and technological environments, such as skillsets or infrastructure.

6.3.4 Scope

The research focuses exclusively on manufacturing companies and does not include models that non-manufacturing projects or SMEs could utilise.

6.4 Conclusions

The conclusions from the qualitative data analysis show that SMEs use a wide range of processes and tools for collaboration, idea generation, quality control and stakeholder alignment. However, manual processes often constrain them and lack advanced tools such as MBSE. Key areas where improvements are needed include:

- Better integration and alignment between disciplines to avoid rework and meet or exceed all requirements.
- More efficient iteration and risk management processes, ideally supported by digital simulations.
- Stronger traceability and documentation systems, particularly for regulatory and quality compliance.
- Improved quality control throughout the development cycle, where system-level modelling can identify defects and risks earlier.

6.5 Recommendations for future research

The study lays the foundation for future research on implementing MBSE in SMEs by identifying the key issues and challenges. It opens the door for a more in-depth examination of specific industries or SMEs from a broader geographical spectrum. Some of the areas of research which could follow from this study are:

- Expanding research to examine the adaptation of MBSE to non-manufacturing projects and companies. For example, how can we fully utilise MBSE in construction projects?
- Investigate the development of systems engineering skills on the African continent. What can be done to raise awareness and produce more systems engineering professionals in the economy?
- Longitudinal studies of MBSE adoption: What happens over time as organisations adopt MBSE, and how does it fit with economic, political and technological changes over the years?

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Appendix A

Table A.1: Summary of coded qualitative data from respondents

Parent Theme	Sub-Themes	Manufacturing electronics+mechanics	Manufacturing (mechatronics)	Manufacturing (optronics)	Manufacturing (other)	Opportunity for improvement (OFI)
Alignment with stakeholders	Requirements management Customer satisfaction	Regular stakeholder meetings	Early involvement of key departments	Early customer engagement feedback loops	Occasional customer reviews	Mostly ad-hoc reviews. There is room for systematic requirements management.
Multidisciplinary collaboration	Collaboration Standardised notations Effective communication	Regular cross-functional meetings	Involving machinists, engineers, and supervisors early	Informal collaboration between engineering teams	Regular workshops involving all teams	Effective but inconsistent, lacks formal structure.
Ideation	Methods for Idea Generation Meta-models	Brainstorming, CAD tools	Collaborative sketching with CAD	Early prototyping, manual processes	Brainstorming, sketches	Largely manual, fragmented systems for data capture.
Concept development	Data capturing System interactions	Captured using CAD tools	CAD files, meeting logs	CAD models, manual documentation	Manual notes, document processors	Fragmented; there is no central system for ideation capture.
Quality Control (QC)	Built-in quality Inspections	Manual inspections, QC reviews	In-process inspections, Config checks	Quality checks during development	In-process checks, audits	Limited digital integration with development, manual controls
Iterative development	Iteration Cycles Verification Testing	Iterative reviews based on feedback	Prototyping, physical iterations	Iterative testing, limited digital simulation	Relies on customer feedback	Lacks simulation tools for efficient, cost-effective iteration.
Traceability	Documentation Requirements management	Meeting notes, spreadsheets Word processors	Traceability via documentation, CAD files	Excel sheets, CAD-based notes	Documentation on word processors	Manual, hence prone to error. Automated traceability is needed.
Simulation & MBSE use	MBSE tools Visualisation Source of truth	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	All respondents indicated a lack of MBSE tools or simulation.

Parent Theme	Sub-Themes	Manufacturing electronics+mechanics	Manufacturing (mechatronics)	Manufacturing (optronics)	Manufacturing (other)	Opportunity for improvement (OFI)
Minimum viable product validation	Specs for MVP Approval process	Customer reviews internal checks	Engineers, QC and customer feedback	Internal review, QC feedback	Customer & QC review	Unclear decision criteria for MVP.
Risk management	Technical viability Commercial Viability Risk monitoring and control	Stakeholder reviews Market reviews	Cost-benefit analysis, supply chain review	Technical viability reviews	Cost-benefit analysis	Risk management is ad-hoc; digital risk modelling is absent.
Post-launch support	Support Tools Warranty Reliability	A mix of virtual and physical support	Mostly on-site support	Partly virtual, partly on-site support	On-the-phone troubleshooting	Limited virtual support tools. Scenarios could be simulated through MBSE
Challenges faced by SMEs	Resource constraints Complexity Lack of digital integration	Automating manufacturing processes Skills	Complex designs Lack of skilled labour	Limited digital infrastructure	Lack of skilled labour No digital integration	General lack of resources. Most rely on manual processes and fragmented systems
Return on investment	Perceived costs MBSE expertise/skills	Raw materials cost Labour costs	Expensive software resources	Import/export expenses	Financial constraints	All respondents were reluctant to invest in MBSE due to ROI uncertainty
Contemporary engineering processes	Iterative development sketching	Sketching Physical prototypes	Physical testing and simulation	Limited simulation Optics calculators	Brainstorming No simulations	They all still use traditional methods. Minimal digital integration

Appendix B

Table B.1: Recommendations for process improvement through MBSE

Theme/Code	Associated challenge	Process Improvement through MBSE	Benefits
Multidisciplinary collaboration	Collaboration is informal, with limited structure	MBSE framework provides centralised, digital collaboration	Improved communication, less rework, quicker iterations
Ideation & concept	Ideas captured manually or in fragmented systems	Use MBSE to document and iterate on concepts digitally	Centralised ideation data, single source of truth, better concept tracking
Stakeholder alignment	Manual processes for managing stakeholder requirements	MBSE for systematic requirements capture and validation	Unequivocal alignment, avoidance of miscommunication risk
Iteration & risk management	Physical iterations are resource-intensive, with limited risk modelling	Use MBSE with simulation tools for virtual prototyping	Faster iteration, reduced cost, better risk mitigation
Quality Control	Quality checks are manual and prone to error & delays	MBSE integrated with QC comes close to real-time monitoring	Early defect identification, streamlined quality processes
Traceability	Manual documentation is slow & tedious (lacks automation and traceability)	MBSE allows for automatic traceability and documentation updates	Improved compliance, better oversight, fewer errors

A MODEL-BASED SYSTEMS ENGINEERING APPROACH TO SUPPLEMENTAL TYPE CERTIFICATION OF TRANSPORT CATEGORY AIRCRAFT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The Supplemental Type Certification (STC) process ensures the safety and regulatory compliance of modifications to transport-category aircraft. However, traditional STC methodologies face inefficiencies, lengthy timelines, and challenges in managing complex aviation systems. This study examines the integration of Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) into the Supplemental Type Certification (STC) process to enhance efficiency, traceability, and compliance. It compares document-centric certification with digital, model-based approaches and examines international best practices. A framework is proposed for integrating MBSE into South Africa's Supplemental Type Certification (STC) process, leveraging digital models, automation, and simulations to streamline compliance verification. The study highlights the potential benefits of MBSE, including reduced certification time, improved regulatory traceability, and enhanced integration of complex aircraft modifications. This research is qualitative, desk-based, and exploratory, with no empirical implementation, aiming to align South Africa's aviation certification processes with global best practices to improve operational efficiency and industry competitiveness.

Keywords: Supplemental Type Certification (STC), Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE), Federal Aviation Regulations 25 (FAR 25).

1 INTRODUCTION

The aviation industry is a cornerstone of modern transportation, playing a pivotal role in global connectivity, commerce, and economic growth [1]. Within this industry, ensuring the safety, reliability, and operational efficiency of transport-category aircraft is paramount [2]. Regulatory frameworks governing aviation are designed to uphold these standards, with the Supplemental Type Certification (STC) process serving as a critical mechanism for certifying modifications and enhancements to existing aircraft [3]. An STC is a type of certificate (TC) issued when an applicant receives approval from the relevant aviation authority to modify an aeronautical product from its original design. The STC, which references the associated TC, authorises not only the modification but also its impact on the original design [4]. In South Africa, stringent regulations mandate adherence to rigorous certification standards, reflecting a commitment to maintaining the highest levels of safety and compliance [5].

Despite the importance of the STC process, the traditional methodologies employed in its execution are increasingly challenged by the evolving complexity of modern aircraft systems. Traditional STC processes often face challenges such as lengthy timelines, high costs, and difficulties managing complex system integrations. Integrating advanced technologies and sophisticated subsystems into aircraft design has amplified the demand for streamlined and efficient certification processes [6]. Current practices in South Africa, which often rely on disconnected and manual systems, cannot fully address the intricacies of these advancements. This has led to inefficiencies, extended timelines, and heightened risks of non-compliance, which pose significant challenges for stakeholders in the aviation sector. Globally, adopting innovative methodologies such as Model-Based System Engineering (MBSE) has emerged as a transformative approach to managing the complexities inherent in engineering projects [7], [8]. MBSE emphasises the use of models to improve communication, traceability, and overall system development efficiency. This paradigm shift is particularly relevant to the STC process, where the coordination of multiple stakeholders, systems, and regulatory requirements necessitates a robust and integrated approach [9]. While the benefits of MBSE have been demonstrated in various industries and international aviation certification frameworks, South Africa has yet to fully embrace this methodology within its STC processes [10].

This gap in adoption limits the ability of local stakeholders to leverage MBSE's potential for enhancing operational efficiency and reducing errors. Given the global trend towards MBSE, there is an urgent need to explore its integration into South Africa's aviation certification practices to remain aligned with international standards and best practices. This research is conducted in the context of South Africa's dynamic yet challenging aviation regulatory environment, characterised by the dual pressures of maintaining compliance and fostering innovation. By investigating the applicability of MBSE to the STC process, the paper seeks to address critical inefficiencies and unlock opportunities for improvement. The research aims to provide a framework for integrating MBSE into certification practices, thereby enabling South Africa's aviation industry to achieve greater operational excellence, mitigate risks, and position itself competitively in the global aviation market.

The paper is structured as follows. Section II outlines the research problem, objectives, and methodology employed in this study. Section III reviews the relevant literature on applying Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) in civil aircraft certification. Section IV discusses case studies comparing document-centric and MBSE-based certification approaches. Section V identifies the key challenges and limitations within the current South African STC framework. Section VI provides recommendations for reform, outlines future research priorities, and Section VII concludes the paper with final remarks.

2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The South African aviation industry faces significant challenges in the Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) process, primarily due to outdated methods, system fragmentation, and the increasing complexity of aircraft. These issues lead to inefficiencies, increased certification costs, delays, and a higher risk of non-compliance. Despite global momentum towards Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) as a means to enhance communication, traceability, and system integration, South Africa has yet to adopt this approach within its STC processes formally. This paper addresses the urgent need to modernise certification practices by exploring the integration of MBSE to improve operational efficiency, ensure regulatory compliance, and align with international best practices.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The critical research question for the study is:

(1) How can the MBSE approach enhance the STC processes for transport category aircraft in South Africa?

The supporting research question is:

(2) What are the key challenges and opportunities in integrating MBSE into the current STC framework for transport category aircraft in South Africa?

4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are to:

- Investigate how the Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) approach can be effectively applied to enhance the Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) processes for transport category aircraft in South Africa, with a focus on improving efficiency, traceability, and regulatory compliance.
- Critically evaluate the existing challenges and inefficiencies within South Africa's current STC framework, particularly regarding complex aircraft modifications and systems integration.
- Identify the opportunities and potential benefits of integrating MBSE into the STC process, including its influence on cost reduction, timeline optimisation, and adherence to rigorous aviation standards.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, desk-based, and exploratory research design to examine the potential integration of Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) into the Supplemental Type Certification (STC) process for transport category aircraft in South Africa. It is structured around principles of desktop-based document analysis, systematic literature review (SLR), and comparative case study reflection. The purpose is to assess the effectiveness of MBSE relative to traditional document-centric certification approaches in improving efficiency, regulatory traceability, and compliance. The methodology draws exclusively on secondary data sources, enabling a comprehensive assessment of both local and international certification practices without direct empirical implementation. The qualitative focus reflects the study’s aim to identify indicative trends, challenges, and opportunities, rather than to produce performance metrics. In addition, the research is guided by policy-oriented goals, seeking to generate insights that can inform regulatory frameworks, support evidence-based decision-making by the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA), and contribute to aligning national certification processes with emerging global best practices. By doing so, the study aims to provide a knowledge base that is both academically robust and practically relevant for future policy development in the South African aviation sector.

5.1 Methodological Approach

Following recognised systematic literature review (SLR) protocols, including adaptations from PRISMA 2020, and established qualitative engineering research practices, the study was conducted in two main phases:

1. **Document Analysis** – An in-depth review of regulatory frameworks, guidance materials, and industry publications was undertaken. Sources included the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA), the United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). These documents were examined for insights into certification efficiency, process timelines, traceability, verification and validation workflows, digital artefact utilisation, and stakeholder coordination.
2. **Comparative Evaluation** – Drawing on the literature and two real-world case studies (including one from the researcher's professional experience within SACAA), the study compared traditional document-centric certification with MBSE-based approaches. Structured comparison matrices, conceptual modelling, and document mapping tools were used to analyse differences in traceability, efficiency, accuracy, scalability, change management, standardisation, and regulatory engagement.

The thematic analysis was guided by five core domains:

- Certification efficiency and process timelines
- Regulatory traceability and oversight
- Verification and validation workflows
- Digital artefact utilisation and modelling tools
- Stakeholder coordination and information flow

Where abstracts were insufficient for extracting value, full-text reviews were conducted to ensure data completeness. The findings are framed as policy-oriented and indicative rather than empirical, to inform future applied research and pilot implementations within the South African STC context.

6 LITERATURE REVIEW

6.1 Application of MBSE in Civil Aircraft Certification

Mirabella et al. proposed a digital certification pipeline (DCP) to replace traditional document-based processes, using MBSE to streamline compliance with EASA CS-23. The framework integrates SysML-based regulatory modelling, Simulink-driven test validation, and automated report generation. It enhances traceability through structured requirement mapping and supports emerging technologies like electric propulsion. While effective for general aviation, its application to CS-25 remains complex due to the scale of commercial aircraft certification [9].

Bendarkar et al. developed an MBSE-based certification framework to improve efficiency and accuracy in type certification for normal category aeroplanes. Built-in MagicDraw using SysML, the framework formalises certification rules and means of compliance into structured models. It comprises a Type Certification Profile, a Type Certification Package, and a Simulation Package, enabling automated compliance tracking, traceability, and rule filtering based on aircraft specifications. The system supports GUI-based inputs, generates compliance checklists, and facilitates gap analysis, particularly useful for emerging technologies like

electric propulsion. It benefits both regulators and manufacturers, aiding the shift toward fully digital certification [11].

Fazal et al. introduced an MBSE framework for modelling regulatory requirements under 14 CFR Part 25 for transport category aeroplanes. Using SysML in MagicDraw with the Cameo Simulation Toolkit, the framework structured regulations, compliance methods, and test activities into a traceable model. A dependency matrix enabled cross-referencing and automated compliance tracking. The approach improved traceability, regulatory transparency, and adaptability to emerging aircraft technologies such as electric and hybrid propulsion systems [12].

Xie et al. developed a simulation-based certification analysis module to embed regulatory compliance assessment, specifically FAR-25 Subpart B, into the early design phases of transport category aeroplanes. By converting textual regulations into quantitative MATLAB constraint functions, the module enabled dynamic simulation of key flight performance criteria using a six-degree-of-freedom flight dynamics simulator. Tested on a Boeing 737-800 model, the tool demonstrated high accuracy (error <8%) and supported early identification of compliance margins, enhancing traceability, reducing redesign effort, and supporting novel aircraft configurations. The approach lays the groundwork for integration into MDAO frameworks [13].

7 CASE STUDY STC PROJECT IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ABROAD

7.1 **Case Study 1:** The Role of the Lead Certification Engineer in the STC Approval for Installation of the L-3 Communication F1000 Flight Data Recorder on a Cessna Citation S550 – An Expert Certification Perspective.

This case study documents the researcher's professional experience as Lead Certification Engineer during a Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) project involving the installation of an L-3 Communications F1000 Flight Data Recorder (FDR) system on a Cessna Citation S550 aircraft. The project, undertaken while employed at the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA), provides a real-world example of the application of systems and regulatory engineering principles explored in this research.

The scope of the modification focused solely on avionics integration, including the FDR unit, an accelerometer, a G-switch, and associated mounting hardware. Structural modifications, such as support brackets, were addressed separately under a minor modification process and thus excluded from the STC's certification basis.

The certification process was governed by FAR Part 25, as amended through Amendment 25-17, with voluntary compliance extended to Amendment 25-144. No changes to emissions or noise certification status were introduced.

As part of the compliance demonstration:

- A comprehensive Electrical Load Analysis (ELA) was submitted by the applicant and reviewed by the researcher to confirm electrical compatibility with existing systems.
- A functional test flight was carried out to verify the FDR's operational performance and data capture capabilities, with results reviewed and accepted.
- While formal conformity inspections were not required, engineering verification activities were conducted to ensure adherence to approved design data, forming part of a risk-based oversight strategy.

The researcher also reviewed and approved key airworthiness documents, including:

- The Master Data List (MDL) is used to establish the configuration baseline,

- A Flight Manual Supplement reflecting operational implications,
- Instructions for Continued Airworthiness (ICA) detailing maintenance and inspection requirements.

Following the successful completion of technical evaluations and documentation reviews, the researcher formally recommended the issuance of the STC. The modification was determined to meet all applicable airworthiness standards, introduced no adverse safety or environmental impacts, and demonstrated full conformity to approved specifications. This project not only reinforced regulatory compliance knowledge but also demonstrated the practical value of structured certification processes. It highlighted the importance of traceability, stakeholder coordination, and systems thinking in delivering safe and compliant aviation modifications. Figure 1 below shows the SACAA STC Approval process.

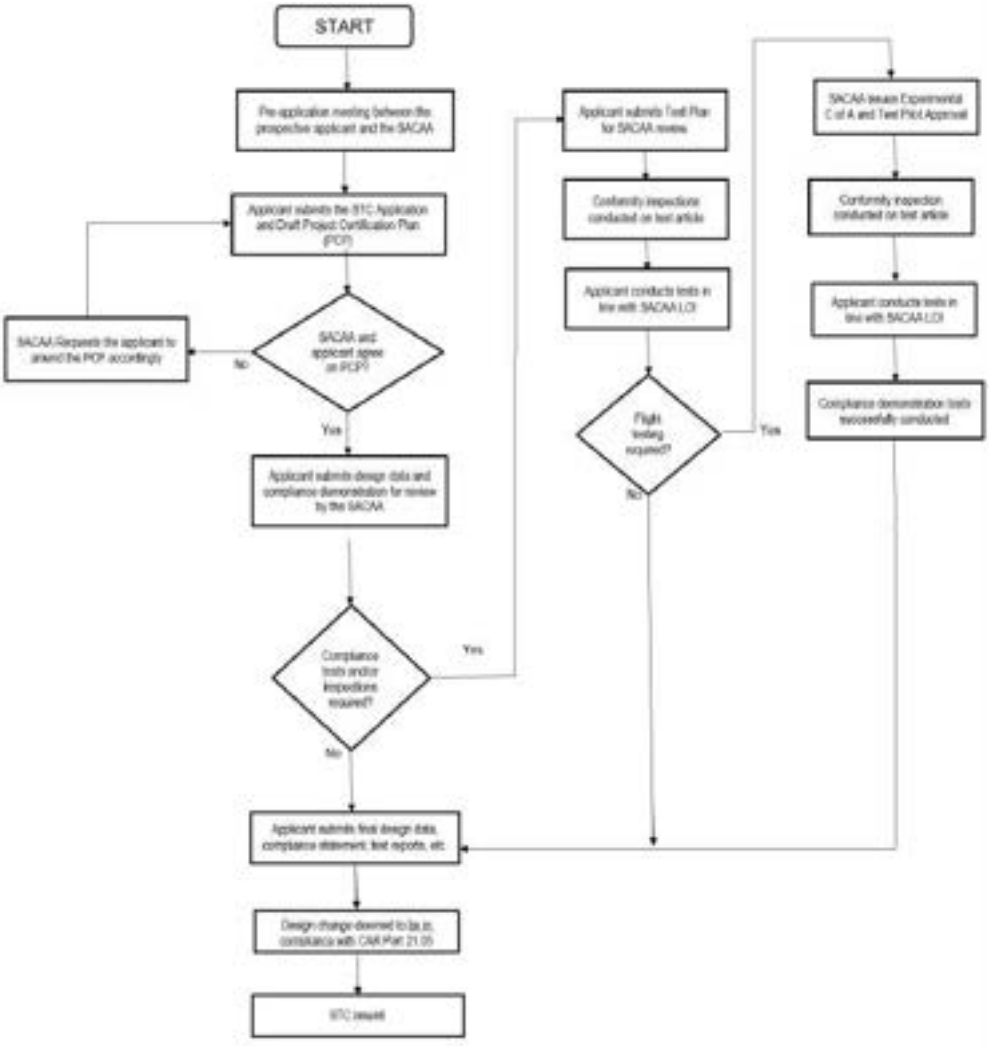

Figure 1:SACAA STC Approval process

7.2 Case Study 2: The Role of Analysis and Simulation in Aircraft Structural Certification

This case study, based on a white paper by Siemens Digital Industries Software, highlights the transformative role of digital analysis and simulation in modern aircraft structural certification. Traditionally reliant on extensive physical testing, the certification process is now increasingly enhanced by advanced simulation tools that improve efficiency, accuracy,

and cost-effectiveness. Structural certification requires compliance with strict FAA regulations, accounting for variables such as aerodynamic loads, speeds (Vs, Va, Vc, Vd), and worst-case scenarios. Engineers determine structural adequacy through static strength tests and design for ultimate loads, while fatigue and aeroelastic assessments address long-term integrity. Tools like stress-strain curves and S-N diagrams support predictions of fatigue life and stability under cyclic loading and flutter conditions. Digital simulation complements physical testing by enabling high-fidelity modelling of structural responses. Integrated platforms perform finite element analysis (FEA), margin of safety calculations, and automated reporting, improving traceability and standardisation. This digital approach, rooted in digital twin technology, supports faster, more consistent certification outcomes and aligns with evolving industry demands for safety, innovation, and efficiency [14], [15].

7.3 Comparative Analysis: Document-Centric vs MBSE-Based Certification Approaches

- Case Study 1: A document-centric approach, based on the researcher's professional experience during an STC for an FDR installation on a Cessna Citation S550.
- Case Study 2: An MBSE-driven approach, based on Siemens' digital simulation framework for aircraft structural certification.

Below is a structured comparison table that contrasts both approaches across key certification dimensions such as traceability, efficiency, accuracy, scalability, and regulatory alignment, and explains why MBSE proves superior in most areas.

Table 1:Comparative Analysis: Document-Centric vs MBSE-Based Certification Approaches

Dimension	Case Study 1: Document-Centric (STC for FDR)	Case Study 2: MBSE-Based (Structural Simulation)	Comparison summary
Traceability	Moderate – compliance linked via manual reports and documents [15]	High–traceability embedded within the system model using structured relationships [12]	MBSE provides automated, visual, and bidirectional traceability across requirements, design, and testing
Efficiency	The process relies on manual reviews, physical inspections, and sequential document handling [4], [6]	Simulation tools automate testing, calculations, and reporting [9]	MBSE significantly reduces time and workload through automation and integration
Accuracy	Dependent on manual interpretation and cross-checking [15]	High–FEA and simulation reduce human error and enhance result fidelity [13]	MBSE-driven certification ensures consistent validation across multiple load cases and failure modes
Scalability	Suitable for low-complexity modifications with narrow scope (e.g., FDR) [16]	Designed for high-complexity, system-wide evaluations (e.g., structural analysis) [17]	MBSE scales better with increasing system complexity and data volume
Change Management	Manual tracking of technical data and drawings [6]	The impact of changes propagated automatically across the digital model [11]	MBSE enables dynamic change management, improving configuration control
Standardisation	Dependent on the engineer's workflow and interpretation of SACAA/FAA procedures [3], [5]	Enforced by model constraints, parameter libraries, and digital certification logic [18]	MBSE promotes process consistency and regulatory alignment
Regulatory Engagement	Document-driven submissions are reviewed manually by the regulator. [19]	Digital twin environments support collaborative, visual compliance reviews [14]	MBSE enables a more interactive, model-based engagement with authorities like the FAA or EASA

7.3.1 Which Approach Was Better — and Why?

MBSE (Case Study 2) demonstrated clear advantages in:

- **Traceability**: With requirements, design logic, test cases, and simulation outputs all embedded within a single model, MBSE allows for real-time verification and transparent regulatory audit trails.
- **Efficiency**: The use of simulation tools, finite element analysis, and automated report generation reduces the need for redundant reviews and accelerates certification timelines.
- **Error Reduction**: Structured modelling eliminates inconsistencies common in document-based workflows and improves result accuracy.
- **Adaptability**: MBSE frameworks support novel technologies such as hybrid-electric propulsion, which require fast iteration and rigorous performance modelling.
- **Scalability**: Ideal for large, complex systems and early design phases where iterative assessments are essential.

Document-Centric Approach (Case Study 1), while effective in narrow, well-scoped certification projects like the **FDR integration**, faces limitations when:

- Multiple disciplines must coordinate
- Revisions and traceability are critical
- Real-time simulations or dynamic verification are needed.

7.3.2 In Summary

While document-based approaches remain viable for smaller, less complex projects, the shift toward Model-Based Systems Engineering offers transformative benefits for modern aviation certification. MBSE ensures greater traceability, regulatory consistency, efficiency, and scalability, making it the preferred approach for future-ready and safety-critical aerospace systems.

8 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF DOCUMENT-CENTRIC STC CERTIFICATION APPROACH IN SACAA

8.1 Regulatory Complexity and Bureaucracy

The SACAA follows an intricate regulatory framework in line with ICAO guidelines, supplemented by FAA and EASA principles. However, the STC approval process is often characterised by:

- Inconsistencies in regulatory interpretation lead to delays in certification outcomes.
- Protracted approval timelines are due to administrative inefficiencies and an absence of a streamlined MBSE approach.
- Redundant regulatory requirements result in unnecessary documentation demands that hinder efficiency.
- “According to [16], delays in updating regulatory standards often hinder the certification of modern aircraft systems. Similar delays and policy lags are evident in SACAA’s current STC processes.”

From my first-hand observations, a lack of clear interpretation exacerbates regulatory bottlenecks, creating significant hurdles for applicants seeking timely certification.

8.2 Limited Technical Expertise and Resources

There is a critical shortage of qualified Designated Engineering Representatives (DERs) and aviation safety inspectors with the specialised technical knowledge required for evaluating advanced STC modifications. This limitation particularly affects:

- Avionics modernisation, including advanced digital flight control systems.
- Emerging propulsion technologies, such as hybrid-electric and hydrogen-powered systems.
- New structural materials, including composites and additive-manufactured components.

Without a well-resourced pool of experts, the certification process remains slow and vulnerable to knowledge gaps in assessing novel aviation technologies.

8.3 Integration of New Technologies

The global aviation industry is witnessing rapid technological advancements, particularly in:

- Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) integration.
- Hybrid-electric and alternative propulsion systems.
- Advanced materials and smart monitoring technologies.

However, the current STC framework in South Africa lacks the adaptability to efficiently evaluate and validate non-traditional aircraft modifications, slowing down innovation and the adoption of sustainable aviation solutions.

8.4 Harmonisation with International Standards

While South Africa aligns with ICAO, FAA, and EASA standards, there remain discrepancies in compliance pathways and certification requirements, creating challenges in obtaining international validation for locally developed STCs. These regulatory misalignments:

- Increase approval times for international STC recognition.
- Reduce the competitiveness of South African-developed modifications in global markets.
- Create inefficiencies in reciprocal certification agreements with foreign regulatory bodies.

8.5 High Costs and Financial Constraints

The STC process entails extensive engineering analysis, compliance demonstrations, and regulatory documentation, resulting in significant financial burdens for operators, ADOs, and local aviation innovators. Challenges include:

- Lack of financial incentives for research, development, and certification.
- High costs are associated with flight testing and compliance demonstrations.
- Limited funding support from government agencies and aviation industry stakeholders.

8.6 Inefficiencies in Aircraft Reliability Programmes

Many STCs involve modifications aimed at enhancing aircraft reliability and operational efficiency. However, the absence of robust data-driven reliability assessments within the certification framework leads to:

- Limited integration of Six Sigma methodologies in STC evaluations.

- Suboptimal maintenance strategies are due to inadequate reliability engineering considerations.
- Reduced effectiveness in operational performance enhancements.

8.7 Lengthy Approval Timelines

The prolonged STC approval process remains a significant bottleneck due to:

- Administrative inefficiencies and paperwork bottlenecks.
- Incomplete documentation reviews require multiple rounds of corrections.
- Lack of a digitised submission and tracking system, leading to process opacity.

These inefficiencies adversely affect airlines, ADOs, and STC applicants requiring urgent modifications for fleet performance, operational cost reductions, and regulatory compliance.

8.8 Lack of Industry Collaboration and Innovation Drive

The South African aviation sector lacks strong collaborative frameworks between regulatory authorities, industry stakeholders, and research institutions. This results in:

- Limited knowledge exchange and best-practice sharing for STC development.
- Minimal participation of academia in certification research and policy development.
- Reduced synergy in advancing cutting-edge aviation innovations.

8.9 Potential Solutions for Reforming the STC Process in South Africa

To address these challenges, a comprehensive reform strategy is essential. The following interventions are proposed:

- Adopting MBSE to streamline the STC process and enhance regulatory efficiency.
- Expanding training programmes for regulatory personnel and engineers to strengthen expertise in advanced aviation technologies.
- Developing a digital STC submission and tracking system to reduce administrative delays and enhance transparency.
- Introducing financial incentives to support ADOs, operators, and innovators in funding certification projects.
- Strengthening international partnerships to ensure harmonisation with global certification standards, facilitating international STC recognition.
- Integrating Six Sigma methodologies and reliability engineering principles to improve aircraft performance modifications.
- Enhancing collaboration between academia, industry, and regulatory bodies to drive innovation and accelerate the adoption of new technologies.

8.10 Corroborating Literature Supporting Expert Testimony in Section 7 (Case 1)

The insights shared by the expert in Section 7 reflect and are strongly supported by existing academic and technical literature on STC processes. A central theme across these sources is the persistent inefficiency and procedural rigidity embedded within traditional document-based certification methods. For example, Mirabella et al. [9] and Bleu-Laine et al. [17] critique the limitations of linear, document-centric certification pipelines, highlighting how these obstruct the effective integration of emerging technologies into civil aviation. These findings align closely with the researcher's account of SACAA's difficulty in certifying complex modifications such as hybrid-electric propulsion systems and advanced avionics.

The challenge of regulatory misalignment with modern technology is further echoed by Glinski et al. [19], who demonstrate that existing frameworks are ill-equipped to assess novel aircraft configurations, particularly those not based on legacy fuel or propulsion systems. This corroborates the researcher's view that South Africa's current STC framework lacks the flexibility needed to support innovation. The observation that South Africa suffers from a shortage of technical expertise, especially among Designated Engineering Representatives (DERs) and safety inspectors, is consistent with findings by Fazal et al. [12]. These authors stress the necessity for multidisciplinary proficiency in MBSE and simulation tools as a prerequisite for modernising certification procedures and resources, which, according to the expert, are presently lacking within the South African context.

Additionally, the issue of administrative inefficiencies and bureaucratic delays is well documented in studies by Bendarkar et al. [11] and Mirabella et al. [9], who cite fragmented documentation practices and poor traceability as key barriers to efficient certification. These issues are similarly highlighted in the researcher's analysis, where the lack of digitised submission systems and the reliance on repetitive manual reviews were identified as major contributors to prolonged approval timelines. In terms of international harmonisation, the literature underscores the importance of aligning local regulatory practices with those of global bodies such as the FAA and EASA. The researcher's concerns regarding the misalignment between South African regulations and international standards are validated by Bleu-Laine et al. [17], who argue that such discrepancies hinder mutual recognition of STCs and limit the international competitiveness of domestic aviation products.

Financial barriers to certification also emerge as a consistent theme. The expert's commentary on the high cost of compliance and the lack of financial support for innovation is reinforced by Mirabella et al. [9], who note that the transition to digital certification entails significant upfront investment, often unattainable without government or industry support. Finally, the researcher's advocacy for integrating Six Sigma methodologies and MBSE into the STC framework is well-supported by empirical studies. Case-based applications in the literature show that MBSE, combined with simulation-driven compliance tools, can significantly improve process traceability, regulatory alignment, and certification efficiency, thus validating the proposed reform strategy.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper highlights the transformative potential of MBSE in modernising the Supplemental Type Certification (STC) process for transport category aircraft in South Africa. Based on the research findings, the following strategic recommendations and research directions are proposed:

9.1 Policy and Practice Recommendations

- **Develop Regulatory Guidelines**: SACAA should issue formal guidance recognising MBSE artefacts in certification submissions, aligned with FAA/EASA practices.
- **Invest in Training and Capacity Building**: Introduce accredited MBSE training for engineers, regulators, and ADOs to ensure consistent and competent implementation.
- **Launch Pilot Projects**: Demonstrate MBSE's effectiveness through SACAA-led pilot STC programmes to build institutional confidence.
- **Standardise Tools and Infrastructure**: Promote interoperability by defining standard SysML tools and digital submission platforms.
- **Align with International Standards**: Harmonise certification approaches with global regulatory norms to ensure international recognition of South African STCs.

- **Encourage Cross-Sector Collaboration**: Foster partnerships between regulators, academia, and industry to co-develop MBSE frameworks and share expertise.
- **Incentivise Adoption**: Introduce policy incentives, such as grants or fast-track reviews, for organisations implementing MBSE.
- **Integrate MBSE into Education**: Embed MBSE in engineering curricula and professional development programmes to build a future-ready workforce.

9.2 Future Research Priorities

- **AI-Driven Compliance Tools**: Explore artificial intelligence for automated model verification and compliance assessment.
- **Performance-Based Certification**: Investigate real-time, data-driven compliance models using flight data and sensor feedback.
- **Extension to Emerging Aircraft Types**: Adapt MBSE frameworks to support UAS, UAM, and electric aircraft certification.
- **Digital Twin Integration**: Leverage digital twins for continuous compliance monitoring and predictive maintenance validation.
- **Toolchain Standardisation**: Develop interoperable MBSE modelling protocols to support digital continuity across jurisdictions.
- **Regulatory Impact Assessment**: Evaluate legal, audit, and data governance implications of digital certification adoption.
- **Change Management Research**: Study organisational strategies for transitioning from document-based to model-based workflows.
- **MBSE Education Impact**: Assess the long-term effectiveness of MBSE education and training in supporting sustainable implementation.

10 CONCLUSION

This paper proposes modernising South Africa's Supplemental Type Certification (STC) process for transport category aircraft through the integration of Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE). Current document-centric methods struggle to address the complexity of modern aircraft, leading to inefficiencies, delays, and challenges with traceability and compliance. Key weaknesses in the South African framework include reliance on manual processes, fragmented data handling, and limited adaptability to emerging technologies such as electric propulsion and digital flight control systems. In contrast, MBSE employs digital models, structured system architectures, and simulation-based verification to enhance compliance efficiency, traceability, and regulatory oversight. Drawing on global literature and industry practice, the study synthesises MBSE frameworks developed by Mirabella et al., Bendarkar et al., Fazal et al., and Xie et al., all of which demonstrate improved traceability, faster certification timelines, and reduced errors. Two case studies illustrate this comparison: a document-based STC project for installing an FDR system on a Cessna Citation S550, and a simulation-driven structural certification using Siemens Digital Industries Software, with the analysis showing MBSE to be more efficient, scalable, and accurate.

The study makes four key contributions: identifying limitations in the current South African STC framework; providing a comparative analysis between document-centric and MBSE-based certification methods; presenting a policy-oriented framework for integrating MBSE into the STC process; and proposing a structured roadmap for MBSE adoption, including regulatory guideline development, training programmes, pilot projects, tool standardisation,

international alignment, and innovation incentives. Looking ahead, future research priorities include AI-enabled compliance verification, the use of digital twins for real-time certification, extending MBSE to emerging aircraft categories such as UAS and AAM, and standardising MBSE toolchains for regulatory interoperability. As the findings are based on literature, regulatory analysis, and professional experience, the study is qualitative, desk-based, and exploratory, with no empirical implementation or performance measurement, and should therefore be interpreted as indicative and policy-oriented rather than definitive. Future work should include empirical validation through operational trials, simulations, or pilot projects to assess MBSE's practical value in the South African STC context and refine the proposed framework using real-world evidence.

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ASSESSING THE PERCEIVED USABILITY OF FIGJAM AND THE EXTENDED STORY CARD METHOD DURING PARTICIPATIVE ENTERPRISE MODELLING

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ABSTRACT

Participatory enterprise modelling (PEM) is an emerging research area that promotes a collaborative online approach when multiple stakeholders are involved during enterprise modelling. Multiple online modelling tools are emerging to support PEM. However, limited research exists on assessing and comparing these modelling tools regarding their perceived usability. This article assesses the perceived usability of a collaborative online tool, FigJam, when used in combination with the extended story card method (eSCM). The study contributes towards knowledge about the combined use of online tools within a particular method context. Assessing perceived usability, the System Usability Scale (SUS) extracts survey feedback on both the online tool, FigJam, as well as the modelling method, the eSCM. In addition, we use an interactive online discussion session to identify method frustrations, suggesting further enhancements to the eSCM, named the e1SCM.

Keywords: enterprise engineering, FigJam, system usability scale, participative modelling, extended story card method

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1 INTRODUCTION AND RELATED WORK

Disruptive technologies brought about fundamental changes to society's culture, including that of enterprises. Some of the disruptive information technologies include robotics, cloud computing, big data, robotics and artificial intelligence that change the *way in which enterprises operate*. Prior to understanding enterprise operation and how these operations need to transform, we start with some definitions of the *enterprise*. Giachetti [1] defines the enterprise as a "socio-technical system that comprises interdependent resources of people, information, and technology *that must interact* with each other and their environment in support of a common mission". Dietz and Mulder [2] define the *enterprise* as: "all kinds of *organised human activities"* including companies, agencies, institutions, and supply chains, but also the organisation of a birthday party." Both definitions highlight the role of the human being and its *interaction* with other human beings as well as with technical systems.

Changes in the environment and the advancement of technology, require a continuous effort of enterprise re-design, where various design domains of the enterprise need to be re-designed concurrently [3, 4]. Although many enterprises still emerge in an ad hoc way, the discipline of enterprise engineering (EE) pursues coherent and consistent design, emphasising employee involvement for improved enterprise productivity, customer satisfaction, product and service quality, and coping with enterprise complexity, uncertainty and dynamics [5].

When human beings at an enterprise coordinate around work that needs to be done in delivering products and services to customers or clients, they need some guidance on how this coordination should proceed. Dietz and Mulder [2] propose that the enterprise designer starts with an understanding of the *essence of enterprise operation*, using a modelling language named the Design and Engineering Methodology for Organisation Specification Language (DEMOSL) to depict the *essential model* via four aspect models, i.e. cooperation model, action model, process model and fact model.

We use the supply chain operations reference (SCOR) framework, as discussed by Harmon [6] as a benchmark, to understand how the aspect models provide a different representation of operations. The SCOR framework decomposes supply chain operations, using 4 different levels: Level 0 (indicating the scope of the investigated value chain, i.e. the products and services that form part of the value chain; Level 1 (the value chain processes, consisting of *plan*, *source*, *make*, *deliver*, and *return*); Level 2 (decomposing each value chain process); Level 3 (using *flow-chart notation* to indicate sequential tasks per value-chain sub-process).

Whereas SCOR mainly focuses on the decomposition of processes, without linking an actor role to any of the detailed tasks, aspect models depict essential *human* coordination and production acts and facts. Since human beings are activated through commitments towards each other, aspect models highlight the essential chunks of responsibilities to produce products and services for a predefined scope of analysis.

Deviating from flow-chart thinking, one of the aspect models, the cooperation model (CM), depicts enterprise operation, emphasising the interaction patterns between actor roles. Using this new way of thinking, additional facilitation is required when a DEMOSL-knowledgeable enterprise designer extracts operational knowledge from enterprise stakeholders. The extended story card method (eSCM) creates a bridge between storytelling that uses flow-charts or narratives about enterprise operation, and aspect models that use a different symbolism to depict the essence of enterprise operation [7]. Encouraging real-time interactive modelling between a DEMOSL-knowledgeable *facilitator role* and an enterprise representative as *colleague role*, a software tool, MURAL [8], was used by De Vries and Opperman [7] to experiment with the eSCM. The experimental study evaluated whether MURAL *encouraged participative modelling* and evaluated the *level of participation* during interactive modelling.

In addition, the study evaluated the quality of the resulting models [7], indicating that participants experienced numerous difficulties in applying the eSCM.

Since the study of De Vries and Opperman [7] did not focus on the usability of MURAL, a different study applied a standardised usability questionnaire, the System Usability Scale (SUS), indicating that MURAL scored above average on usability [9]. The study of [7] did not address the quality issues of the resulting models. Since both studies ([7] and [9]) reported on several tool frustrations that participants experienced, when using MURAL in combination with the eSCM, an opportunity existed to experiment with a different participative modelling tool, such as FigJam [10].

The eSCM, used by [7] and [9], was based on the 2020 publication of Dietz & Mulder [11], whereas a new book has since been published in 2024 [2], associated with a new version of DEMOSL [12]. The previous experimentation context provided an opportunity to pose new research objectives.

In summary, the aim of this study is to address 3 objectives: *Objective 1:* Extend the eSCM towards an e1SCM, addressing the DEMOSL changes, incorporated in [2, 12]. *Objective 2:* Indicate how the e1SCM should be implemented within a new tooling environment FigJam [10], as compared to the implementation within the previous tooling platform MURAL. *Objective 3:* Measure the usability of FigJam and the usability of the e1SCM separately.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applies a Design Science Research Methodology (DSRM) where DSRM may start with "an already designed version of an artefact" [13], such as the eSCM developed by [7]. Given the context provided in the previous section, we apply DSR to answer the following research question:

How can the eSCM be extended towards an e1SCM and what is the usability of the e1SCM and the usability of FigJam when the e1SCM is used in combination with FigJam to model the essential operations of an enterprise?

2.1 Design science research

The eSCM is a *method* artefact [7] that complies with Mingers' [14, p 675] definition of a method, namely "a structured set of processes and activities that includes tools, techniques, and models, that can be used in dealing with a problem or problem situation". We followed the *five steps* of the design science research cycle (presented in [15]) in the following way:

Identify a problem: The eSCM [7] requires further extension, to accommodate the most recent changes of DEMOSL, as documented in [2, 12]. The eSCM was initially deployed within MURAL as the modelling tool, indicating some *frustrations* with the modelling tool, but also indicating that participants often reported on eSCM method frustrations and not tool frustrations [9]. An opportunity exists to experiment with a different modelling tool regarding its usability. In addition, tool usability and method usability should be clearly separated.

Define objectives of the solution: Addressing the two main problems, the study includes three main objectives, stated at the end of section 1.

Design and development: Addressing *Objective 1:* We extended the eSCM towards an e1SCM, addressing the DEMOSL changes, incorporated in [2, 12], presenting the e1SCM in section 4.1. Addressing *Objective 2:* We indicate, in section 4.2, how the e1SCM should be implemented within a new tooling environment FigJam [10], as compared to the implementation within the previous tooling platform MURAL.

Demonstration: The e1SCM, embedded in FigJam, was demonstrated to post-graduate participants during an interactive in-person session, using a comprehensive real-world case, at a research-intensive institution.

Evaluation: Addressing *Objective 3*, we focused on measuring usability separately, i.e. usability of the software tool versus the e1SCM usability, where 27 research participants applied the e1SCM to a real-world event management (EM) case with the opportunity to voluntarily complete a survey of 50 items. In addition, an interactive session was used to obtain further clarification on the frustrations that participants experienced.

2.2 Evaluating e1SCM artefact

This section provides additional context on preparing participants prior to applying the evaluation instruments, also providing context on participants' background.

2.2.1 Training sessions

The primary researcher used several mechanisms to ensure that participants were well-prepared in using both FigJam and the e1SCM:

- Participants received training on *aspect model theory* and DEMOSL, where all participants had full access to [2] and [12].
- The aspect models were demonstrated using several cases, including the Volley case and Rent-A-Car case from [2].
- We used a separate case to demonstrate the e1SCM, implemented within FigJam, also demonstrating how the participant, assuming the *facilitator* role, should be sharing their electronic whiteboard with their co-modeller, i.e. the participant assuming the *colleague* role.
- Participants completed a multiple-choice *knowledge test on aspect model theory*, with automatic feedback to ensure that they grasped essential concepts prior to applying the concepts to a new case, i.e. the EM case. The EM case was supplemented with detailed instructions on how each group had to systematically provide evidence of the graphical constructs that were developed when applying the e1SCM.
- Reducing the risk of facilitation influence and group dynamics, participants had to use FigJam's version history feature to save incremental versions of their electronic whiteboard. The assessor could thus validate that both group members modelled participatively, following the guidance of the e1SCM.

2.2.2 Research participants

The primary researcher introduced FigJam and the embedded e1SCM method to participants that enrolled for a post-graduate module in Enterprise Engineering. The primary researcher then created 15 groups on the web-based learning management system 'Blackboard' [16]. Members were assigned randomly, where each group consisted of two members. Participants had to indicate their existing role, tertiary education background, industry background and experience with other modelling tools. Only 21 participants chose to complete the survey, whereas 28 participants were present during the interactive e1SCM method evaluation session.

2.2.3 Survey participants background

Survey participants completed an engineering degree or engineering diploma, mostly full-time students (7 of 21), business process analysts (4 of 21), or engineers (4 of 21). Other than full-time students (7 of 21), participants represented different industries, i.e. mining (5 of 21) and single-instance representation from the following categories: retail, financial services, industrial manufacturing, oil and gas, utilities, consumer sector and the automotive sector, whereas 2 participants did not answer the question. Participants had modelling experience

with one or more tools, mostly using Visio (11 of 21) and Diagrams.net (5 of 21), whereas only 1 participant had no modelling experience.

2.2.4 Obtaining evaluation results

Evaluation results were obtained via multiple data-gathering instruments. We used a survey to obtain feedback about the usability of FigJam and the usability of the e1SCM. Assessing the quality of the models, the main researcher *extracted observations* regarding common problems that emerged, validating these problems during an *interactive e1SCM feedback session* to obtain further insight into the modelling errors produced by the participants. The *observations*, together with the *interactive e1SCM feedback session*, were used to corroborate findings in the survey.

Regarding the survey, participants were informed, according to the ethical clearance conditions for the study, that participation in the survey is voluntary, that a participant could withdraw at any stage without penalty, that their privacy would be protected throughout the survey, and that their participation would remain confidential. Question 1 was used to obtain consent from the participant to continue with the survey, as required by the conditions for our approved application for ethical clearance.

Questions 2 to 7 obtained background information about the participants regarding their undergraduate qualification, industry working context and modelling experience. After these initial questions, the survey included questions from the System Usability Scale (SUS) by Brooke [17]. Question 8 to 28 evaluated the usability of FigJam, whereas questions 29 to 48 evaluated the usability of the e1SCM. We adapted the phrasing of the SUS items slightly to ensure clarity on evaluating the usability of FigJam versus the e1SCM. Each SUS item also included a free-text question to encourage motivational feedback from the participant.

Questions 49 encouraged additional feedback on steps in the e1SCM that were problematic, and Question 50 inquired about the duration of completing the modelling effort when applying the e1SCM to the EM case.

3 LITERATURE

We provide background on one of the aspect models, used to model the essence of enterprise operation, called the cooperation model (CM) in section 3.1, whereas section 3.2 introduces the eSCM that translates sequential thinking into human-interaction thinking, using a participative/collaborative approach. Section 3.3 provides background on usability evaluation methods (UEMs) to measure tool usability.

3.1 The cooperation model

Dietz and Mulder [2] present four aspect models, the cooperation model (CM), action model (AM), process model (PM) and fact model (FM) to represent the essence of enterprise operation. The models are based on core theories about enterprises and their operation [2], summarised in subsequent paragraphs.

In this section, we explain some of the theoretical content of the CM, using the same case, applied by our participants, i.e. some event management (EM) operations. Some of the primary activities of the EM operations include *event identifying*, *event date selecting* and *event entrance controlling*.

The CM acknowledges that enterprise operations can be perceived as actor roles that perform multiple coordination acts and production acts. The coordination acts and production acts are performed in a particular sequence, called transaction patterns. Instead of modelling the detailed transaction patterns for each *kind of transaction* evident at the enterprise, the CM hides the detail of these consistent transaction patterns between two actor roles to hide some of the complexity, enabling human understanding [2]. Therefore, The CM will extract the

different *kinds of transactions* (e.g. *event identifying*, *event date selecting* and *event entrance controlling*), hiding the detailed coordination activities that form part of these transaction kinds.

The CM abstracts from technological implementation and realisation details, only representing *original* transaction kinds, excluding the informational, documental and material transaction kinds [2]. Using the EM context, the CM will include the original transaction kind *event entrance controlling*, but it will *exclude* its supporting transaction kinds to hide complexity. Even though *event entrance controlling* should be supported by informational transaction kinds, such as *guest entrance identity information sharing*, and technological details, such as *using a scanner to scan a QR code to obtain the guest's ticket information*, the CM will only include *event entrance controlling* as an original transaction kind.

The CM indicates that three different structures guide the operations of an enterprise, namely the *interaction structure*, *interstriction structure* and *interimpediment structure* [2]. We will elaborate more on these structures when we discuss the CM in more detail. The CM can be represented by a Coordination Structure Diagram (CSD) and Transactor Product Table (TPT) [2], using Figure 1 and Figure 2, where we only provide an extract of the TPT in Figure 2.

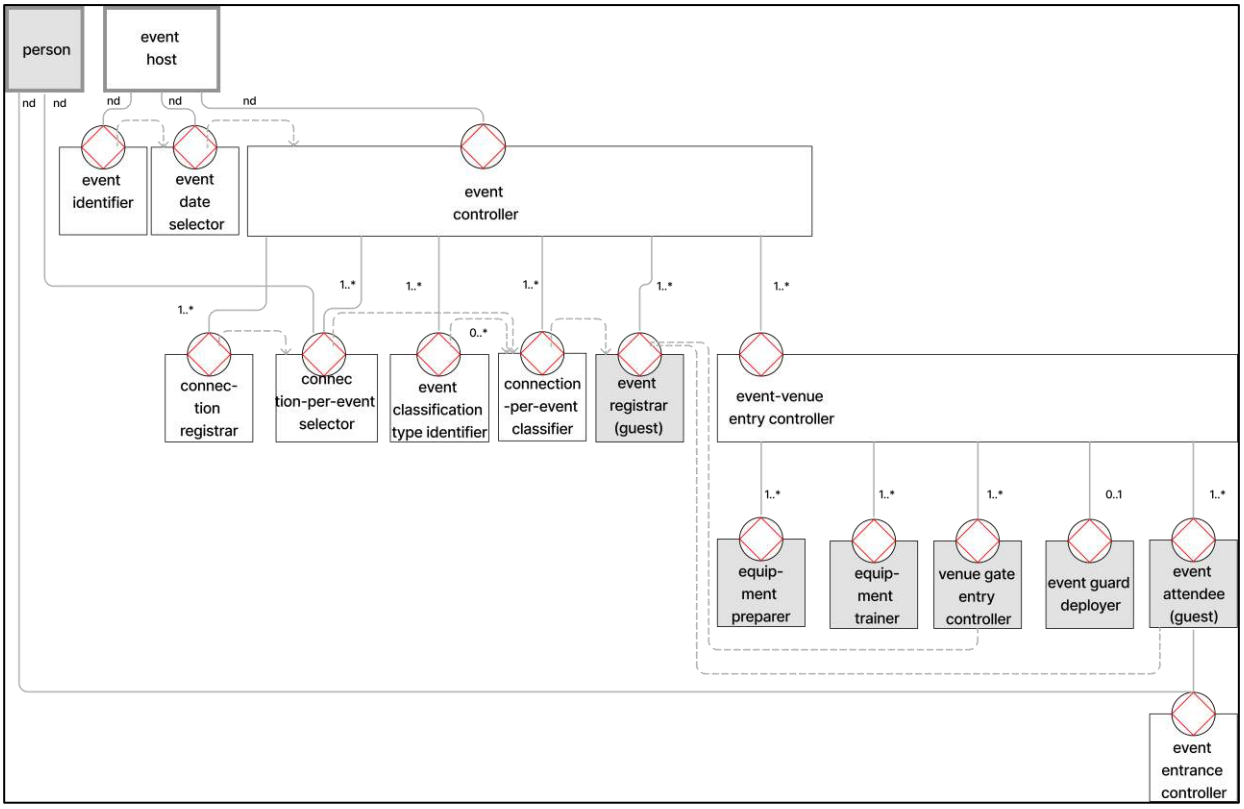

Figure 1: The cooperation structure diagram (CSD) modelled using FigJam

In discussing the main constructs of a CSD, Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of a CSD that consists of fifteen transactor roles. Each of the *elementary transactor roles* include two components, an actor role (quadrilateral) and a transaction kind (diamond-disc). The description of the transaction kind is provided on the TPT, indicated in Figure 2. Thus, the transactor role named *event identifier*, indicates that the actor role *event identifier* is the executor of a single transaction kind, called *event identifying*. The transactor role is a representation of a complete transaction pattern that exists when an initiator starts the transaction pattern for the transaction kind.

transaction kind	product kind (independent P-fact kind)	executor role
event identifying	[event] is identified	event identifier
event date selecting	the date of [event] is selected	event date selector
event controlling	[event] is controlled	event controller

Figure 2: An extract from the transactor product table (TPT) modelled using FigJam

The CSD and TPT presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively, provide a concise representation of *some* EM operations. The analyst must decide on the scope of interest (SoI), where all white quadrilaterals indicate human actor roles that are considered to be *inside* the selected SoI (e.g. event identifier), whereas grey-shaded quadrilaterals with a white diamond-disc indicate human beings that are within the direct *environment* (e.g. event registrar). Furthermore, the thin-bordered quadrilaterals indicate elementary transactor roles, whereas thick-bordered quadrilaterals indicate composite transactor roles.

The CSD, highlights three different kinds of *coordination structures*, including the (1) interaction structure, (2) interstriction structure, and the (3) interimpediment structure [2]. Partially explaining Figure 1 as a representation of *some* EM operations, demonstrating the three coordination structures, we use underline constructs that appear in Figure 1.

Interaction structure. Figure 1 includes solid lines between some constructs, to indicate interaction, e.g. an event host initiates interaction with an event controller. The event controller also initiates interaction with a connection registrar. Each of the initiation links includes an annotation to indicate the minimum and maximum number of initiation instances. The annotation "nd" should be interpreted as non-definable, whereas "1..* should be interpreted as *one-to-many*, i.e. for every one instance of event controlling promised, the event controller may initiate *one-to-many* instances of connection registering, executed by the connection registrar.

Interstriction structure. Figure 1 also includes a dotted line with no arrowhead, to indicate information access. The dotted line between the venue gate entry controller and the diamond-disk associated with the event registrar indicates that the venue gate entry controller needs to have access to facts that have been created already. The event registering facts restrict the operating behaviour of the venue gate entry controller, e.g. only guests registering for the event, will be allowed access to the venue gate.

Interimpediment structure. The dotted line with arrowhead, in Figure 1, is a wait link. Similar to the interaction links, interimpediment links may also include annotations, where an absent cardinality assumes the default of 1..1, interpreted as one-and-only-one. As an example, the coordination facts associated with one instance of event identifying, executed by event identifier, e.g. *accepting* that an event has been identified, impedes the progress of the event date selector for one-and-only one instance of event date selecting.

3.2 The eSCM and participative enterprise modelling tools

In this section, we explain the purpose of the eSCM as a participative enterprise modelling method, and different modelling technologies that are available to support the eSCM steps. The eSCM transforms a story about some enterprise operations into a CM to highlight the essence of the enterprise operations [7]. The eSCM content consists of 3 inputs and 13 method steps. A participative modelling tool is used to encourage interactive participation between a *facilitator role* and a *colleague role*, during the modelling process. Within an enterprise modelling context, the main objective of collaborative, participative and interactive modelling, is to obtain extended participation from actors that offer insight into enterprise operations [18, 19]. Voinov et al [20] define participatory modelling (PM) as a "purposeful

learning process for action that engages the implicit and explicit knowledge of stakeholders to create formalized and shared representations of reality".

Software tools that support participative enterprise modelling (PEM) are still emerging [21]. Previous studies ([7] and [9]) embedded the eSCM within MURAL as the PM software, but other software options are also available, such as FigJam [10] and Miro [22]. Since limited studies exist on measuring the usability of software tools that support PEM [9], this study experimented with FigJam, used in combination with the e1SCM. An extract of the 13-step e1SCM, deployed within FigJam, is shown in Figure 3.

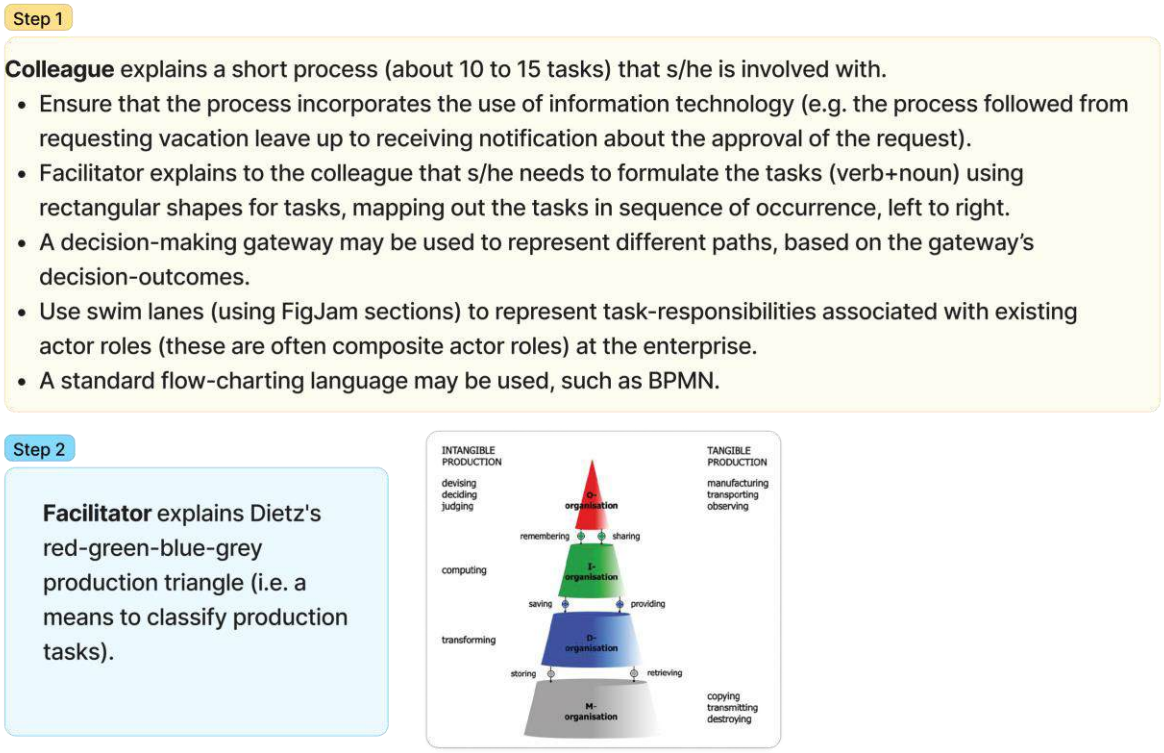

Figure 3: An extract of the e1SCM deployed within FigJam, including Step 1 and Step 2

3.3 Usability evaluation methods

This section provides some background on how practitioners can evaluate the *usability* of software tools, with the objective of evaluating FigJam, when used in combination with the e1SCM.

The human-computer interaction (HCI) community defines *usability* as a "desired quality of interactive systems and product" [23]. The ISO 9241-11 standard [24] also extends the definition of usability to a service, i.e. "the extent to which a system, product or service can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals of effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specific context of use". Sauro [25] believes that usability should be viewed in a broad sense, i.e. considering multiple interconnected psychological constructs such as appeal, trust, and loyalty, contributing towards the product's success.

When evaluating usability, Ivory and Hearst [26] suggested four dimensions to classify Usability Evaluation Methods (UEMs), distinguishing between method classes, method types, automation types and effort level, where a specific UEM is classified as a combination of the four dimensions. As an example, inquiry as *method class*, can be used with a survey as *method type*. Using the classification scheme of Fernandez et al.[27], with their focus on Web applications, UEMs can also be classified based on whether *empirical* or *inspection* methods

are used. *Empirical* methods capture and analyse usage data from end-users, whereas *inspection* methods are performed by experts, evaluating conformance to guidelines. Within the empirical methods category, questionnaires are often used [28], where three of the questionnaires demonstrate acceptable validity and reliability evidence, namely the Computer System Usability Questionnaire (CSUQ), the Post-Study System Usability Questionnaire (PSSUQ) and the System Usability Scale (SUS) [28].

The SUS is used "for global assessments of systems usability", consisting of a ten-item 5-point scale, position 1 to 5, where 1 is interpreted as *strongly disagree* and 5 is interpreted as *strongly agree* [29]. The 10 items include an alternation of positive and negative items to ensure that a respondent reads each statement and make an effort to think on agreeing or disagreeing with the statement [29]. An overall usability score is calculated, rather than focusing on the score of a single item [29].

To calculate the SUS score, the scale is first converted to a rating, where *strongly disagree* scores one point, and *strongly agree* scores five points. For positively worded items (i.e. odd-numbered items), the score contribution is calculated as the *scale position minus 1*. For negatively worded items (i.e. even-numbered items), the score contribution is calculated as *5 minus the scale position* [30]. The adjusted scores for the 10 items are then summed and multiplied by 2.5 to obtain a score range from 0 to 100. The SUS score can be used to address some of the following objectives: (1) Estimating the SUS for a population from one sample; (2) Determining whether a SUS score exceeds a benchmark; and (3) Comparing SUS scores for comparable products [30].

4 THE E1SCM ARTEFACT

This section focuses on the adaptations, converting the eSCM into the e1SCM, prior to embedding the e1SCM within the FigJam modelling platform.

4.1 Extending the eSCM

The new book on enterprise ontology 2024 [2], associated with a new version of DEMOSL [12], affected steps 2 and 3 of the eSCM. Both these steps are facilitator steps where the facilitator provides some *explanation* of aspect model theory that could affect modelling tasks, associated with Steps 4 and 5. The content of Steps 4 and 5 did not change, but the modelling results may be affected. Rather than repeating the eSCM construct, also available in [7], we only present Steps 2 to 5 in Figure 4 to highlight the main changes incorporated in the e1SCM.

- Step 2: Whereas [11] included three production sorts of original (red), informational (green) and documental (blue), [2] added a fourth category of production, namely material (grey), where "material production comprises storing, retrieving, copying, transmitting and destroying files" [2]. The implication for Step 4 is that modellers should find this additional category useful in excluding production acts that are not of an original sort.
- Step 3: The complete transaction pattern presented in [11] was extended in [2], allowing for a more comprehensive set of revocation acts. As an example, the act of *revoking* a *promise*, now accommodates the act of *revoking* either a *promise* or *decline* indicated as "rv/pm|dc" in Figure 4. The implication for Step 5 is that modellers could now identify tasks in the flow-chart that represent a *revocation* of a *decline*, due to the extended theory.

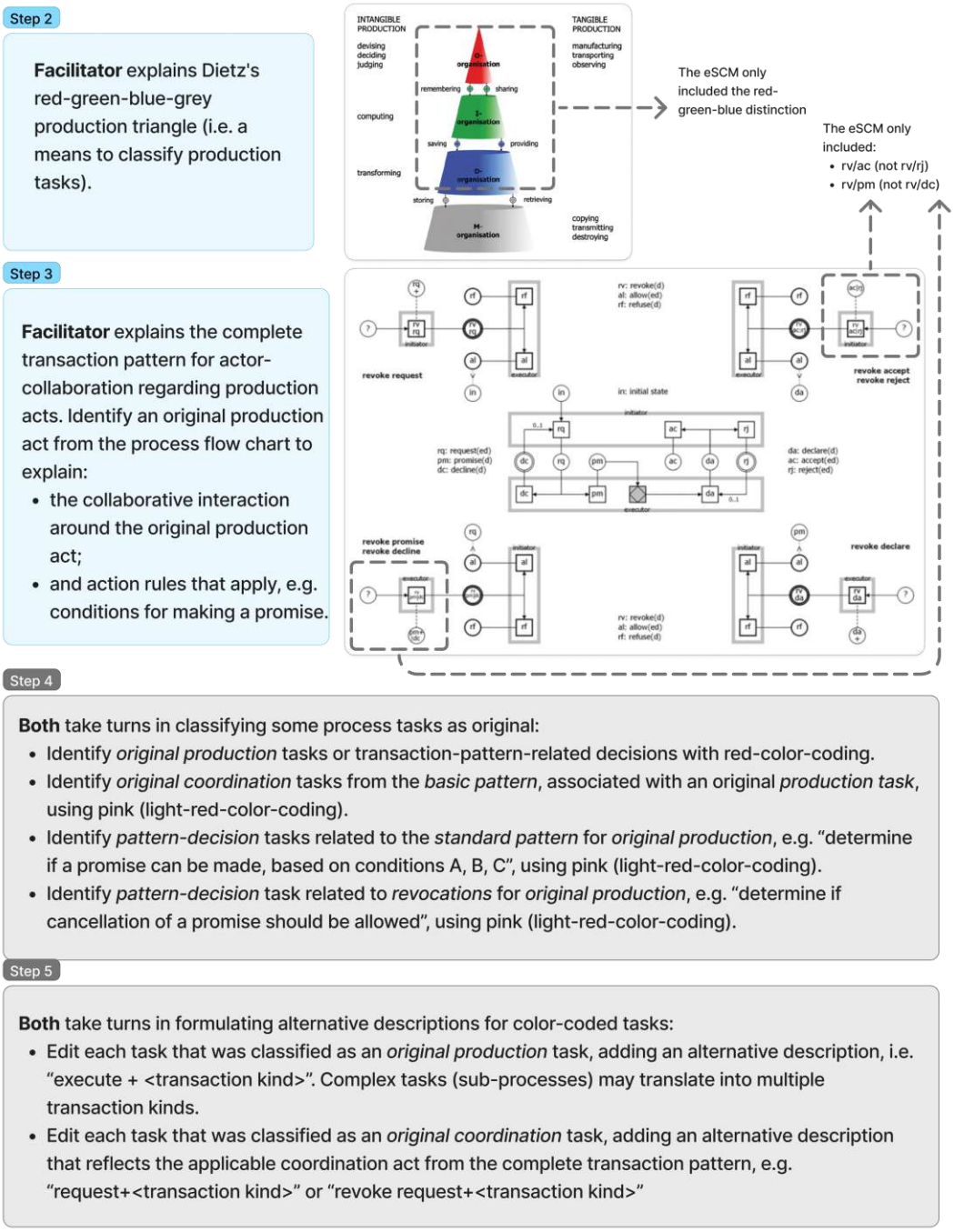

Figure 4: Steps 2 to 5 of the e1SCM, using dotted lines to compare with the SCM

4.2 Embedding the e1SCM within FigJam

From a designer's point of view, i.e. embedding the e1SCM into the FigJam platform, had the following restrictions when compared to the MURAL-embedded version discussed in [7]. MURAL [8] includes an *outline* feature, used to package the different steps of the eSCM. When a modeller clicks on a step in the outline, the modeller can be directed to the area on the whiteboard that is relevant for the step. FigJam [10] does not offer this feature and hence the instructions per step were positioned on the left-hand side of the whiteboard. For ease of

differentiation between responsibilities, i.e. the *facilitator* the *colleague* and *both* facilitator and colleague, we added colour coding to the steps, i.e. *blue*, *yellow* and *grey* respectively.

For Step 1 of the e1SCM, the *colleague* has to model the existing process, using a process flow chart. The MURAL-embedded version discussed in [7], provided some basic process modelling symbols as part of a template to support the modelling for Step 1. Due the extended design functionalities offered by Figma [31], the primary researcher extended the process model symbols that allowed for more freedom of expressing the flow-chart logic. The intent was to reduce the ambiguity of interpretation when using a very rudimentary set of process model symbols.

5 EVALUATION RESULTS

Three inquiry method types, as identified by [26], were used in our study. The study included: (1) *surveys* (the interviewer asks user-specific questions), (2) *user feedback* (the user submitted comments on FigJam frustrations and SCM frustrations), and (3) *assessor feedback*, i.e. when assessing the quality of the diagrams, the assessor identified common mistakes and provided feedback during an interactive online session.

5.1 System Usability Scale (SUS) results

We obtained survey feedback from 21 participants. Of the 21 participants, 2 participants submitted blank responses, leaving all questions (SUS and user comments) unanswered. These two responses were excluded from the study as it would impact the reliability of the SUS score. In addition to this, each survey section had two participants that only partially completed the survey. These partially completed surveys were included in the results, with unanswered questions being updated to "neither agree nor disagree".

The margin of error of the SUS scores calculated at a 95% confidence level would therefore be approximately ±7,95 points. This is using a standard deviation of 17,7 based on an average calculated by Lewis and Sauro [32].

5.1.1 FigJam usability as online tool

The average SUS score for FigJam is 73,82, indicating *acceptable usability*, when the 3-category grading scale of [33] is used, i.e. not acceptable, marginal, and acceptable. The SUS scores per participant are shown in Figure 5. All participants scored FigJam as Marginal or Acceptable.

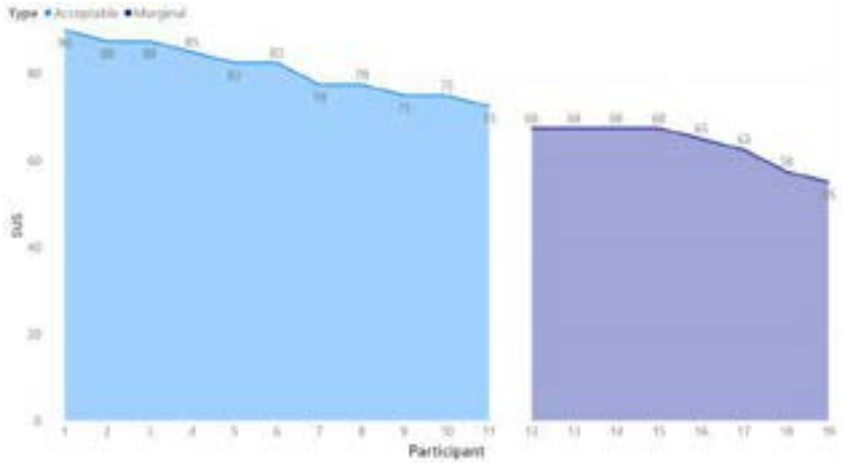

Figure 5: SUS score per participant for FigJam as an online tool

Responding to the ten SUS questions, participants provided feedback on how they felt regarding the statement by providing a ranking of strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree

nor disagree, agree or strongly agree [17]. The odd-numbered SUS questions are positive-oriented. In these questions, we would expect participants to agree or strongly agree to the statements, if they are satisfied with FigJam in the evaluation context. The positive-oriented SUS question feedback is summarised in Figure 6. Unfortunately, the participants that disagreed with Q 03 and Q 05 did not provide additional motivation.

Question	1. Strongly Disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither	4. Agree	5. Strongly Agree
01 - I think that I would like to use Figjam frequently				13	6
03 - I thought Figjam was easy to use		1	4	8	6
05 - I found the various functions in Figjam were well integrated	1		4	13	1
07 - I would imagine that most people would learn to use Figjam very quickly			2	13	4
09 - I felt very confident using Figjam			2	15	2

Figure 6: SUS positive-oriented question summary

The even-numbered SUS questions are negative-oriented. In Figure 7 we summarise the answers per negative-oriented SUS question. None of the participants strongly agreed to any of the negative-oriented SUS questions.

Question	1. Strongly Disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither	4. Agree
02 - I found Figjam unnecessarily complex	6	9	3	1
04 - I think that I would need the support of a technical person to be able to use Figjam	7	9	2	1
06 - I thought there was too much inconsistency in Figjam	4	12	3	
08 - I found Figjam very cumbersome to use		13	4	2
10 - I needed to learn a lot of things before I could get going with Figjam	2	10	4	3

Figure 7: SUS negative-oriented question summary

For Q 02, the participant did not provide a motivation. The participant agreeing with Q 04 indicated little support on the internet. Two participants agreed on Q 08, indicating that FigJam was very cumbersome to use, where one participant provided a motivation: “having to drag, minimize or maximize to work on something is quite time consuming and you are never sure about the right size of your text”.

5.1.2 The e1SCM usability as method

The average SUS score for e1SCM as a method embedded in FigJam, when combining all participants’ scores, is 58,55, indicating *marginal* usability, when the 3-category grading scale of [33] is used, i.e. not acceptable, marginal, and acceptable. The SUS scores per participant are shown in Figure 8. Five participants scored the e1SCM 50 or less (i.e. as “not acceptable”).

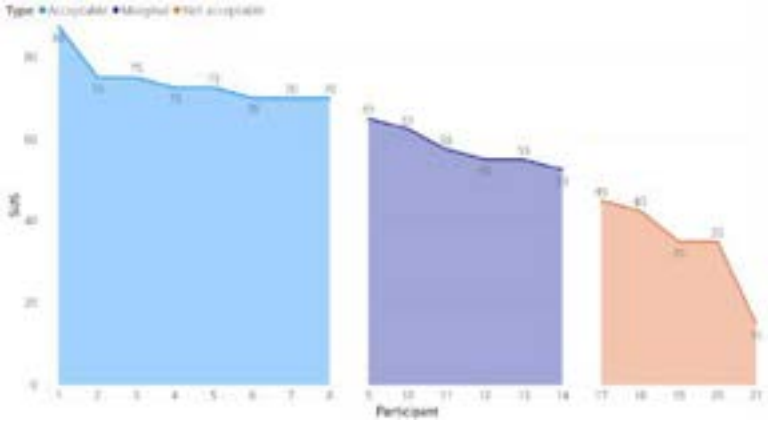

Figure 8: SUS score per participant for the e1SCM as a method

As aforementioned, the odd-numbered SUS questions are positive-oriented. In these questions, we would expect participants to agree or strongly agree to the statements, if they are satisfied with the e1SCM method, summarised in Figure 9.

Question	1. Strongly Disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither	4. Agree	5. Strongly Agree
01 - I think that I would like to use the story card method (SCM) frequently		1	5	12	1
03 - I thought the story card method (SCM) was easy to use	1	3	5	8	2
05 - I found the various method steps of the story card method (SCM) were well integrated		1	4	12	2
07 - I would imagine that most people would learn to use the story card methods (SCM) very quickly	3	1	5	10	
09 - I felt very confident using the story card method (SCM)	1	3	7	8	

Figure 9: SUS positive-oriented question summary

Feedback on Q 03 for the participant that strongly disagreed on whether the SCM was easy to use indicated: "I had no idea what I was doing". The statement is corroborated with the results of the *knowledge test on aspect model theory* (see section 2.2.1) indicating an average score of 8.9/20, where 28 candidates participated in the knowledge test.

Three participants indicated for Q 07 that they strongly disagreed that people would learn to use the SCM very quickly, where additional feedback indicates: "We still need time to fully understand the content" and "Understanding is required, and the colour coding can be difficult".

The even-numbered SUS questions are negative-oriented, i.e. we expected disagreement. In Figure 10 we summarise the answers per negative-oriented SUS question.

Question	1. Strongly Disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither	4. Agree	5. Strongly Agree
02 - I found the story card method (SCM) unnecessarily complex	1	11	4	2	1
04 - I think that I would need the support of a technical person to be able to use the story card method (SCM)	1	9	4	3	2
06 - I thought there was too much inconsistency in the story card method (SCM)	1	13	3	2	
08 - I found the story card method (SCM) very cumbersome to use		12	4	2	1
10 - I needed to learn a lot of things before I could get going with the story card method (SCM)		2	8	6	3

Figure 10: SUS negative-oriented question summary

A participant that strongly agreed with Q 02, i.e. that the SCM was unnecessarily complex, indicated that "there are just too many things to remember". Two participants strongly agreed with Q 04, i.e. that support of a technical person is required to use the SCM, indicating that "the terms are too confusing" and "we needed more time to process the content of the lecture". The participant strongly agreeing to Q 08, i.e. that the SCM was cumbersome to use, indicated that there are "too many terms to remember".

Three participants strongly agreed with Q 10, i.e. that they had to learn a lot of things before they could use the SCM, elaborating that "I had to learn and remember too many things", and "Coming from a different engineering discipline almost all the concepts were unfamiliar".

5.2 User survey feedback on FigJam frustrations

Participants were asked to share any frustrations they experienced with FigJam. The frustrations can be grouped into the following main themes:

- *Linking lines to symbols*. Links snap to a different position on a symbol than required, mentioned by three participants.
- *Difficulty in navigating on the board*. "The maximizing and minimizing are exhausting". Also, "it was difficult to move around the board or select shapes etc. without a mouse".
- *Board glitches*. A single participant indicated board freezing, which could also be linked to the computer hardware. Another participant indicated modelling glitches – "This can be solved by reloading the page."

- *Button to undo.* "Except for the Crtl Z function I wish there was an actual undo and redo button."
- *Lines.* When creating flow charts, some lines move. Also, "the links on the template made it difficult to set them straight on the model."

5.3 User feedback on the e1SCM

Some of the survey feedback was linked to particular steps in the e1SCM, whereas other feedback provided general feedback on using the e1SCM.

- *Step 4:* "Colour coding some of the tasks in step 4 was a bit challenging."
- *Step 9:* "Difficult to effectively translate the flow diagram into the CSD as there was a lot of abstraction that needed to happen."
- *Step 7 to 12:* "I Personally still need a lot of clarity, in understanding the CSD".
- *Combining steps.* "I believe some of the steps need to be combined together to work on the story card method effectively".
- *Interpretation of the problem.* "I believe the issue was with the analysis and interpretation of the problem".
- *Benefits of using the e1SCM.* "Dealing with someone with no technical background and you have to explain to them how they should contribute to model the SCM. It does not seem they would see this experience as beneficial."
- *Theory complexity.* "Basically, learning the theory covered in class was necessary so there were still a few challenges identifying what was what. But that is just because I think I didn't fully grasp all concepts".

For the 18 participants that answered Question 50 regarding the duration of the interactive modelling when using the SCM, participants spent an average of 7.6 hours with a standard deviation of 1.8 hours.

When presenting the memorandum of the constructs developed when applying the e1SCM to the EM case, participants provided the following feedback:

- Two participants indicated that the flow-chart, provided to all participants, about the real-world enterprise that offers *some* EM operations, could be interpreted in multiple ways. Even though additional flow-chart symbols were used, as indicated in section 4.2, to reduce ambiguity, the description per task still allowed for multiple interpretations.
- Another participant inquired about the positioning of cardinalities associated with the initiation links, since the current positioning, i.e. close to the initiator, also creates confusion. A suggestion was made to move the cardinality annotation to the executor side of the initiation link, indicating that the indicated cardinality only applies to one direction.

5.4 Assessor feedback on the e1SCM

From an assessment perspective, the main researcher observed the following:

- Some participants classified documental or material transaction kinds (TK), e.g. "Close the invite-acceptance link", as an original TK, named "invite-acceptance link closing". Another example is that "Scan-in guests for event attendance" is translated into a material TK, "guest scanning", but incorrectly classified as an original TK. Also "ticket generating" is incorrectly identified as an original TK. A possible explanation is that many of the participants do not have an information system background. Hence, they may have difficulty in classifying tasks that involve information system technology.
- Informational TKs synthesise, consolidate, or calculate existing facts. Hence, when reports or lists are generated from existing facts the reporting task should be classified as

informational. It seems though participants automatically translate the word “generate” into an original TK.

- A reminder for event registering is a duplication of a previous request. Some participants define a separate transaction kind, associated with the reminder request. Thus, whereas a single TK “event registering” should exist, an additional incorrect TK “event registration reminding” is created. The use of reminders are currently not included in [2].

6 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

In this section, we present our findings in relation to the research objectives outlined in Section 2.1.

Extending the eSCM towards an e1SCM, section 4 presented the e1SCM embedded in FigJam, confirming that it is possible to create the e1SCM within a different participative modelling tool than MURAL. However, the combination of using the e1SCM within FigJam, presented some usability challenges. FigJam did not offer the functionality of embedding the 13 steps within an *outline*, a function that was possible in MURAL, where clicking on a step in the outline would automatically navigate the user to the position on the board where modelling actions were required. As expected, user feedback on using FigJam, highlighted the navigation challenges on the board.

The *FigJam usability results*, indicated an average SUS score of 73,82, indicating *acceptable usability*. Qualitative feedback highlighted that modelling was time-consuming and using the appropriate font size for text is a challenge. Participants also highlighted required features including: (1) Improving the ability to snap lines to different positions on a symbol; (2) A button to undo, rather than using the Ctrl-Z keyboard shortcut; (3) Improving the ease of converting angled lines into straight lines on the diagram; and (4) The ability to move around on the board or select shapes without using a mouse.

The e1SCM usability results, indicated an average SUS score of 58,55, indicating *marginal usability*. Qualitative feedback indicated that participants had to deepen their knowledge on aspect model theory, prior to using the e1SCM. The required knowledge in grasping multiple new concepts created a barrier in using the e1SCM. Participants had to use a pre-defined flow-chart as a representation of some EM operations, and participants expressed the challenge to interpret these operations, also since the flow-chart could have multiple interpretations. An additional discussion of the operating context would be beneficial, prior to applying the e1SCM. A participant indicated that some ambiguity exists when interpreting the cardinality text associated with an initiating link. Some additional training is required to emphasize that the cardinality is one directional, i.e. from the initiating transactor towards the executing transactor.

Using SUS to evaluate the usability of the e1SCM, has *some limitations* to investigate other aspects of the e1SCM, such as the modifiability of the method and accuracy of the resulting representations, offering the opportunity for future work on usability assessment, as encouraged by [34]. The sample size of 21 valid responses limited the generalizability of the findings and we suggest future work where a broader participant base is involved. Although we used several methods to corroborate our findings, using survey results, assessor observations and an interactive feedback session, additional interviews with participants would further validate our findings.

Gill and Hevner [35] claim that DSR has thus far overemphasized immediate utility of an artefact to the expense of sustainable impact, encouraging research on the long-term impact of artifacts on organisations. Similar to the real-world demonstration of using aspect models when merging Air France Cargo and KLM Cargo into AFKL Cargo (see [2]), the e1SCM should be

used in an industrial setting, to further assess its useability, but also its scalability and adaptability across organizational levels.

Although we do not measure the effective use of the e1SCM at organisations, the e1SCM already encourages knowledge transfer between a DEMO-knowledgeable *facilitator* role and *colleague* role with no prior knowledge about DEMO. The successful transfer of DEMO knowledge, via the facilitator role, could be further enhanced in future, using hyperlinks to videos embedded in FigJam, to provide more explanation regarding different abstractions of production, and an explanation of the transaction pattern.

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EXAMINING LECTURER AND STUDENT PREPAREDNESS FOR FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TECHNOLOGIES: A CASE STUDY AT A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the preparedness of students and lecturers to integrate Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies into engineering education. A mixed-methods approach was followed, surveying six lecturers and 245 students to assess familiarity, confidence and challenges. Results show strong support for 4IR integration but highlight barriers like inadequate access, training gaps and infrastructural constraints. Students showed enthusiasm despite inadequate access, while lecturers pointed out the need for institutional development. The findings underscore the necessity of curriculum restructuring, professional development and strategic support to enable effective 4IR adoption, aligning educational outcomes with evolving industry demands and enhancing graduate employability.

Keywords: mixed-methods approach, 4IR, curriculum restructuring

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1 INTRODUCTION

The fourth industrial revolution (4IR) is the convergence of technologies, blurring the boundaries between the physical and digital domain, IoT and robotics[1], and is greatly changing industrial engineering (IE) practices. 4IR Lecturers are required to reevaluate traditional educational concepts such as lecture-based instruction and standardised assessments by integrating 4IR technologies (4IRT in short) into engineering education (EE) to fulfil and anticipate industry demands. 4IR has integrated engineering innovation into broader systems production and labour, thereby reshaping infrastructure and social frameworks[2]. Subsequently, production and social needs have been transformed on a global scale. Today, the engineering discipline requires continuous change to meet the ever-changing demands of industry[3]. The Industrial Engineering (IE) profession is industry-driven, and with IE's unceasing transformation, the changes between the past, present and future are remarkable[4]. Developing skills that align with technological advancements is essential for reducing graduate unemployment. To prepare students effectively, EE requires the inclusion of both technical and adaptive skills, encouraging a culture of lifelong learning that prepares graduates with succeeding in dynamic, technology-driven workplaces.

With the introduction of 4IR worldwide, technology and the need for technology in industry has increased rapidly. As 4IRT continues to evolve, the growing impact on industry highlights the urgent need for education systems to adapt accordingly. Digital transformation in education has been accelerated and fast-tracked by rapid changes in information and communication technologies (ICTs). The integration of ICT has reshaped modern learning environments, thereby enabling educators to adopt innovative teaching strategies at an unprecedented pace[5]. Similarly, advancements in ICT not only transformed teaching methodologies but also enhanced learner engagement in 21st century classrooms[6].

Students must be prepared to leverage innovative technologies for academic growth and industry application. Engineering accreditation bodies like the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), are responsible for ensuring that graduates are equipped with appropriate skills relevant to current and future industry demands[7]. The curriculum needs to prepare students for a work environment characterised by rapid technological advancements such as those driven by 4IRT[4]. ECSA requires programs to embed graduate attributes and show industry relevance. These attributes—problem-solving, lifelong learning and the application of modern tools—align closely with 4IR's emphasis on digital literacy, systems thinking and the ability to adapt to emerging technologies.

Just as industrial revolutions transformed education in the past, recent global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the shift towards digital learning. The mode of education is continuously undergoing significant changes, and COVID-19 acted as a disruptive catalyst[8], pushing the boundaries of innovation and adaption even further. The adoption of 4IRT in education was hastened, highlighting the potential to bridge gaps in availability, enhanced collaboration and developing problem-solving skills. Tertiary education underwent a complete digital transformation, with online platforms becoming more flexible and accessible [9] and innovative technologies such as simulations and 4IRT enhancing students' learning experiences. The focus shifted from merely providing information to students, to the emergence of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, preparing students to adapt to a fast-changing world. In South Africa, the integration of 4IRT into higher education is important for aligning global industry standards and enhancing the employability of graduates. Despite the potential benefits, studies indicated a low level of 4IRT adoption in EE in South Africa[10], often attributed to limited awareness among educators of the critical role these innovations play.

The study aims to identify factors such as lecturers' and students' preparedness that may negatively affect successful 4IRT integration into the engineering curriculum. Two research questions (RQs) were developed to explore the dimensions of 4IRT: ***RQ1****: How well-prepared are IE lecturers in implementing 4IRT into the curriculum?* and ***RQ2****: What are students' attitudes and levels of preparedness towards using 4IRT in their learning, and how do these factors influence student engagement and academic success?*

By gaining insight into student and lecturer attitudes towards 4IR, it becomes feasible to ensure purposeful strategies designed to promote an innovative culture and contribute towards optimising learning outcomes. The emergence of 4IR enables students to better equip themselves with skills that meet future industry demands.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW: PREPAREDNESS FOR 4IRT IN EDUCATION

The preparedness and readiness of students and lecturers using 4IRT in their teaching and learning is extensively covered in literature. The sections below explore themes around the preparedness, perceptions, challenges and opportunities of using 4IRT in education, thereby establishing the foundation for answering the RQs and achieving the study's aim.

2.1 Educational strategies supporting 4IR integration

As noted in[11], there is a need towards the integration of 4IR technologies into education to address the evolving needs of students within a rapidly changing technological landscape. Similarly, [12]found that transitioning to interactive and experiential learning methods better equip students with practical skills that align with industry demands. Integrating 4IRT modernizes pedagogical strategies and directly addresses the gap in areas like data analytics, automation and artificial intelligence. 4IR is reshaping how students engage in learning[13], while simultaneously bridging industry demands with academic outcomes[14]. By incorporating approaches like problem-based learning and challenge-based learning[15], lecturers are developing innovation and preparing students for the complexities of modern industries. The researchers in [16] argue that these methods enable students to address real-world challenges more effectively. Such advancements are essential to keeping EE relevant and equipping students with competencies needed to thrive in the 4IR era [17]. In[18], it is evident that these innovations enable more flexible, personalised and accessible learning experiences. AI-powered tools allow real-time feedback, and virtual labs replicate hands-on technical training in a virtual environment, addressing gaps in practical exposure. COVID-19 acted as significant catalyst for digital adoption, forcing educational institutions worldwide to embrace online learning platforms and other digital tools to ensure continuity[19].

2.2 Lecturer preparedness to use IR tools

Lecturers play a critical role in integrating 4IRT into education, but their ability to do so depends on training, resources availability and institutional support. Using XR tools to create immersive environments has the transformative potential to create interactive and engaging learning environments, but challenges like user fatigue and resource-intensive technical support remain noteworthy barriers[20]. To address these issues, practical exposure and targeted training programs are crucial for preparing lecturers. Virtual laboratories and online collaborative tools were highlighted as effective means to improve engagement and confidence among lecturers, preparing them for the technical demands of 4IR integration[21].

Generative AI tools like Scholar GPT offer a practical solution through personalised, real-time insights, thereby enabling lecturers to adapt their teaching strategies according to diverse learner needs[22]. These tools streamline routine tasks such as content creation so that educators can focus on deeper pedagogical strategies and design interactive, experiential lectures that meet the innovative and adaptive demands of 4IR[23]. Digital tools are critical

in overcoming resource limitations and facilitating the effective integration of 4IR principles in education[24]. It supports innovative curriculum design, encourages higher-order thinking skills, and enable lecturers to stay updated with the latest research and trends[25]. However, institutional support remains a fundamental factor in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives. Institutional support, in the form of professional development opportunities and robust infrastructure, is required to aid these efforts in addressing systemic barriers[26].

Continuous professional development (CPD) plays an important role in assisting lecturers with keeping up with rapid technological developments. Studies highlight the importance of interdisciplinary competencies that enable educators to navigate the multifaceted demands of 4IR environments[27]. Despite optimism about adopting 4IR tools, systemic challenges like insufficient infrastructure and inadequate training opportunities remain prevalent[28]. Addressing these barriers requires targeted reforms and accessible training initiatives adapted to institutional and individual needs.

Personal barriers, including time constraints and skill gaps, also block lecturers' readiness to engage with new technologies and tools effectively[29]. Resource shortages worsen these issues, leaving many educators feeling powerless about implement 4IR solutions efficiently[30]. To overcome these challenges, comprehensive strategies involving systemic support, resource allocation and targeted professional development must be prioritised.

Institutional support is critical for effective 4IRT adoption in higher education. Universities in developing regions often struggle with limited infrastructures, weak policy frameworks and inadequate development opportunities for educators. Targeted training, curriculum alignment and robust institutional support is imperative for equipping lecturers with the technical and pedagogical competencies important for 4IR integration[31].

2.3 Student preparedness to use 4IR tools for learning

While students showed high levels of enthusiasm towards 4IR-based learning, unequal access to technology and skills gaps remain persistent challenges[32]. Institutions should provide subsidised access to digital tools with low bandwidth for AI learning platforms and university supported mobile applications to address inequalities[26]. Students, as primary beneficiaries of 4IR tools, displayed a mix of enthusiasm and obstacles in studies conducted by [36,37]. Their research highlights motivational beliefs of students and facilitating conditions as critical factors in technology adoption. While researchers in [36], emphasise the accessibility of low-cost tools such as Google Cardboard for younger students, the researchers in [33] focus on rural students' acceptance of Industry 4.0 technologies using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

Discussing the educational potential of 4IR tools, the focus in [34] was on risk-free and interactive experiences provided by IVR games in Chemical EE, but caution against the steep learning curve and cost of high-end devices. Similarly, the researcher in Zatarain-Cabada, et al. [35] investigated how XR technologies have improved engagement and learning outcomes, particularly in physics education. In support, [36]note that AR and VR tools will enhance engineering students' comprehension of complex processes. Despite the advantages, systemic barriers like cost and difficulty to accessibility persist, echoing the concerns raised by[37]. Using gamified learning tools and AI learning platforms with university-supported mobile applications can address these inequalities and enhance student readiness by offering personalised, interactive and self-paced learning experiences[38].

2.4 Comparative perceptions of using 4IR tools in EE

Students and lecturers recognised the transformative potential of using 4IR tools to learn, but they also encountered systemic and practical challenges. While both groups valued the

interactivity of AI, IoT and XR tools, their concerns were different. Lecturers expressed concerns about AI's impersonal nature and the potential of being replaced in the classroom, losing their influence. Students were more concerned about accessibility and the high costs associated with content creation [31,41]. Lecturers' reluctance to adopt 4IR tools, rooted in fears of being overshadowed by AI, could slow adoption, while students' financial concerns may delay engagement and equitable access.

2.5 Challenges and opportunities in adopting 4IR Tools in EE

While 4IR tools offer significant advantages, their adoption into EE faces critical challenges, including high financial costs, infrastructure technical limitations, resistance to change and data privacy concerns [19, 21, 30]. Institutions need to address these barriers systematically to unlock the full potential of using 4IRT. As noted in [36] the impracticality of high-end devices like the Oculus Rift for classroom use, calling for more scalable and affordable alternatives.

The biggest barrier is financial cost, especially in resource-limited institutions. Small enterprises influence public-private partnerships in funding digital transformation[39], and universities could collaborate with technology firms such as Google, Microsoft and IBM to provide subsidised software licenses, cloud-based platforms and sponsored VR labs. A good example of this practice is the University of Cape Town partnering with Siemens to introduce IoT-enabled smart classrooms, reducing hardware dependencies while industry-aligned learning is being maintained. Another barrier is the lack of a structured faculty training program in using 4IR tools. The emphasis in [40] was on the importance of compulsory professional development programs with hands-on training session on XR, AI and IoT tools[41].

Ethical concerns around AI and the replacement of human instructors by AI also have a negative effect on lecturers' perceptions of using 4IR tools. AI should be used as teaching assistant [15], and not lecturer replacement. Universities can accomplish this by implementing AI-driven personalised learning assistants to automate grading and administrative tasks, allowing lecturers to focus on higher order pedagogical strategies[42].

Notwithstanding the challenges, 4IRT offers transformative opportunities to students and lecturers. 4IR can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application through immersive and interactive learning experiences [1]. One of the most promising benefits is stronger global competitiveness. Students proficient in using XR tools are better prepared for the demands of global industries[35], and these tools help learners acquire critical technical skills and develop a deeper understanding of complex industrial processes, e.g., manufacturing systems, supply chain optimisation and industrial automation.

Big Data, IoT and AI can, if integrated into university curricula, modernise educational methodologies as explored in the context of Dubai University [43] and prepare students for the digital future by aligning learning pathways with industry demands. These technologies simulate real-world environments, fostering cross-cultural collaboration and nurturing team-based problem-solving in virtual spaces[44]. Aligning classroom learning with industry demands through using 4IRT prepares students to perform well in competitive global markets, making them attractive candidates for multinational corporations. Recent finding in [27] encourage interdisciplinary learning and adaptive curricula that align with both educational systems and modern workforce needs. This study recognises and establishes the transformative potential of 4IRT for both students and educators. However, systemic barriers like infrastructure limitations, excessive costs and insufficient training persist across contexts. To fully recognise the benefits of 4IR, professionally developed infrastructure and policy frameworks are needed.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed methods approach, incorporating quantitative and qualitative data to explore both lecturer and student perceptions and preparedness of using XR technologies in education. The data was collected through an online survey via QuestionPro. A purposive sampling strategy was used for both participant groups to ensure relevance to the study's objective. The lecture sample comprises of 6 IE lecturers at a university of technology were targeted. This represented the entire department population, excluding the researcher and was the maximum available in the study context. While the small size limits generalisability beyond the department, it allowed complete coverage of the available cohort. The student survey was distributed in two phases: in 2024 (March—May), the survey was sent to 263 students across study levels 1 to 3, and in 2025, to 128 students on study level 1. The survey was viewed 437 times, suggesting multiple access attempts. The response rate was 30.43%, with 119 responses from the 391 surveys sent out. In total, 101 students completed the survey, yielding an 84.87% completion rate.

3.1.1 Data overview

The quantitative data includes demographics (age, gender), self-reported familiarity with 4IR and XR technologies, occurrence of XR technology use in the learning environment, self-rated knowledge and confidence in using XR tools. The qualitative data captured open-ended responses on perceived benefits and challenges of XR integration, recommendations to improve access, engagement and training, and views on the relevance of 4IR tools for industrial EE and careers.

3.1.2 Ethical considerations

Participation in the survey was voluntary. All respondents provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire. They were informed of the study's purpose and how their data would be used. Participants had the right to withdraw at any time without being penalised. The survey was designed to ensure anonymity, and confidentiality was retained throughout the research process. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee, ensuring compliance with academic research standards (Ethical Clearance number IREC 226/23).

3.1.3 Data analysis

Data was collected using a survey managed through QuestionPro an online platform that supports both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The closed-ended survey responses were analysed by means of descriptive statistics, using frequencies and percentages, presented in bar charts and tables, to summarise lecturer and student responses. The open-ended survey responses of the students and the lecturers were analysed using a hybrid thematic approach. The survey included questions such as "Briefly describe what you understand by the term *Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)*" and "Do you believe there is a need for integration of 4IRT in industrial EE?" QuestionPro, used to administer the survey, provided built-in tools such as word clouds to help visualise recuring terms and identify thematic patterns. Additionally, the Advanced Data Analysis features in ChatGPT were used to detect semantic patterns across responses. The AI-generated themes were manually reviewed and refined by the researcher to ensure an accurate reflection of the student and lecturer perspectives in alignment with the research objectives.

Inferential analysis was not conducted as the study was exploratory, focusing on patterns, preparedness and perceptions of participants rather than testing statistical significance across groups.

4 RESULTS

The survey trends offer valuable insights into the level of engagement and response behaviours of lecturers and students. The lecturer survey achieved 100% response rate, indicating a willingness to engage in the study. The student survey was conducted in two phases. A combined response rate of 30.43% and completion rate of 84.87% indicates that most participants were motivated to complete the survey. Despite the difference in response rate between lecturers and students, the high student completion rate suggests a meaningful level of engagement, strengthening the reliability of the findings.

4.1 Student perceptions

4.1.1 Demographics overview

Students were asked to indicate their age and gender. The demographics provide context for interpreting the findings, as age may influence prior exposure to technology and gender balance reflects inclusivity within Industrial Engineering. Many respondents (89.7%) were in the age range 18-24 years, and the gender distribution was nearly balanced, with 56,2% male and 43,8% female participants, illustrated in figures 1(a) and 1(b). The age distribution of students (89.7% between 18–24 years) replicates a typical undergraduate cohort who are generally more open to emerging technologies through early exposure to digital tools. Prior studies linked these demographics to higher self-confidence in adopting interactive and immersive learning platforms such as AR/VR [6].The gender distribution among students (56.2% male, 43.8% female) gives a balanced representation of perspectives. Gender inclusivity is important, as previous research notes that differing engagement patterns between male and female students can influence perceptions of technology-enhanced learning[32].

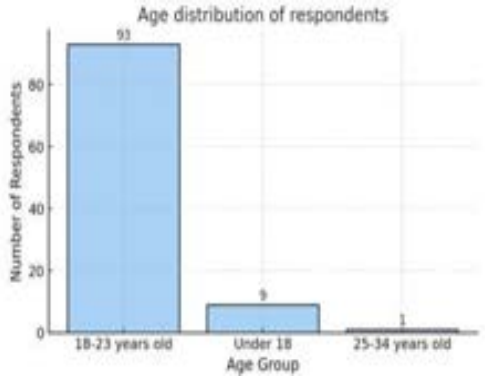

Figure 1(a): Age distribution of respondents

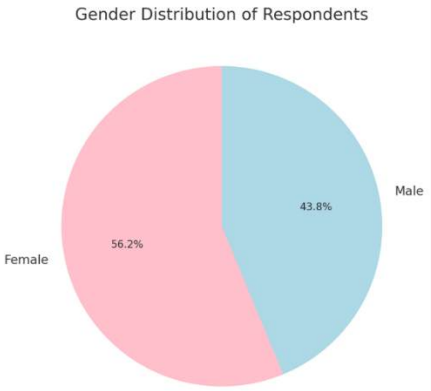

Figure 1(b): Gender distribution

4.1.2 Understanding vs. awareness: Gap in 4IR knowledge

In response to the question on how familiar the students are with the concept of 4IR, 82% reported familiarity with the concept. Only 41% rated their knowledge as “moderate”, indicating a gap between awareness and deeper understanding. Those who engaged with 4IR tools expressed optimism about the potential of enhancing learning, citing benefits such as improved engagement, better comprehension of industrial processes, and skills development. However, students lacking experience emphasised barriers like limited access to technology and infrastructure. Approximately 28% of students rated their familiarity “limited” or “very limited”. Figure 2(a) breaks down students’ familiarity with 4IR. Figure 2(b) indicates students’ knowledge levels.

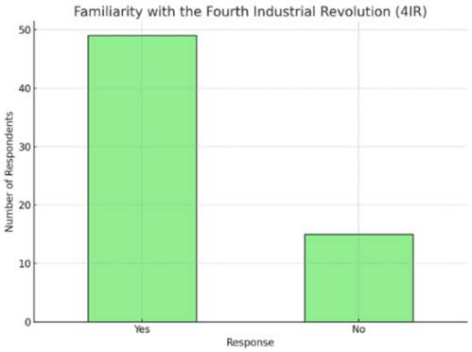

Figure 2(a): Self-rated knowledge

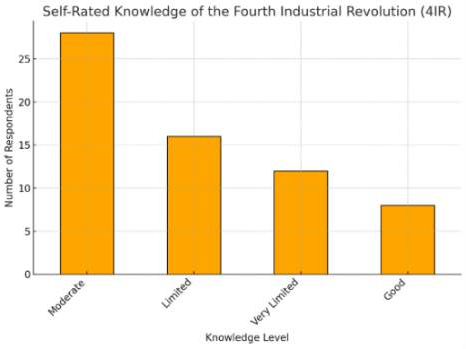

Figure 2(b): Students' self-rated knowledge of area of 4IR

It is evident that the students have a positive attitude towards using 4IR technology, based on a sentiment analysis conducted in QuestionPro (figures 3 and 4). Based on their responses, 37% of the respondents used 4IRT at some stage, 4% said they are uncertain, and 59% did not use any form of 4IRT. This low usage number could have been influenced by the modules students are currently registered for, as not all modules have incorporated 4IR yet.

Figure 3: Distribution of 4IR used by students

The sentiment analysis of students' views on integrating 4IRT into the education of IE (figure 4) reveals positive results, with an average score of 3.5 out of 5. Most of the respondents strongly agreed that such integration of 4IRT may bring greater productivity, innovation and preparedness for industry. This can be realised by enhancing the skills of students to align with modern competencies. The conditional advocates underline the cruciality of such development, but participants expressed concerns about implementation challenges, e.g., infrastructure, societal impacts and job displacement. Despite these concerns, consensus seemed to emerge that 4IRT integration into education is important to develop adaptable and future ready professionals, bridging resource gaps and minimizing potential negative effects to guarantee successful technology adoption.

Figure 4: Students believe if 4IR is needed in Education

4.2 Lecturer preparedness for 4IR technologies

This section explores how IE lecturers feel about using 4IRT to enhance EE. The results are divided in quantitative analysis (close-ended responses) and qualitative analysis (open-ended responses) to provide a deeper understanding of lecturer perspectives.

4.2.1 Teaching experience distribution

Shown in figure 5(a), 33% of lecturers have over 20 years of teaching experience, while the remaining have between 1 and 20 years. Figure 5(b) presents their self-rated knowledge of 4IR, with most reporting a "moderate" or "good" understanding despite not having received formal training. Fifty percent (50%) hold either a master's or doctoral degree.

Figure 5(a): Teaching experience

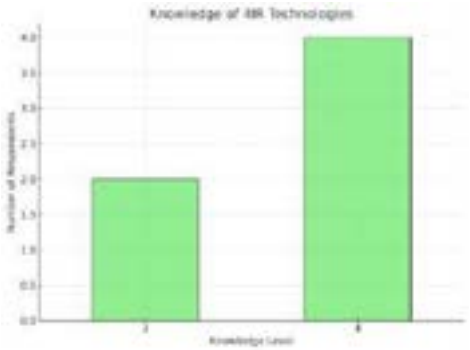

Figure 5(b): Lecturers' knowledge levels

4.2.2 Confidence in integrating 4IR technologies

In response to the survey questions about confidence using 4IR tools, the lecturers indicated "moderately confident" or "very confident" (figure 6(a)). When asked how often they use 4IRT in their teaching, most stated "occasionally" or "often" (figure 6(b)).

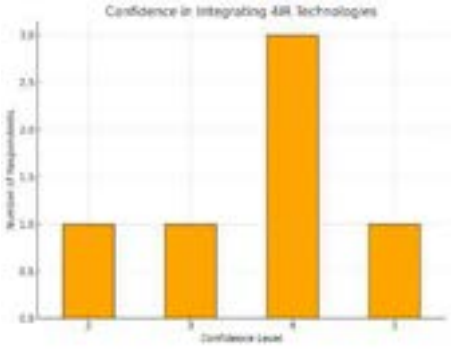

Figure 6(a): Confidence levels in using 4IRT

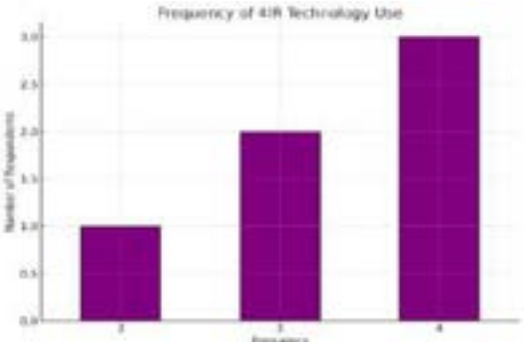

Figure 5(b): Frequency of 4IR integration in curriculum

Using an open-ended question, lecturers were asked whether they have experienced any improvement in student learning or interest after using 4IR tools. Three lecturers expressed positive sentiments, citing improved engagement and interest. Figure 7 reflects lecturers' overall sentiment towards using 4IRT in teaching.

Figure 7: Lecturer sentiment towards using 4IR technology in the curriculum

4.3 Themes identified

Five themes emerged through an AI-assisted analysis process conducted on the open-ended response data, reflecting student and lecturer perceptions on using 4IR in industrial EE. Each theme is supported by selected quotes to illustrate shared ideas and sentiments.

4.3.1 Improved learning

Students frequently emphasised how 4IRT, particularly immersive tools like XR, enhances engagement, skills acquisition and overall learning experiences. Many noted the innovative ways in which these technologies help to understand complex concepts. Responses included: "*Integrating 4IRT will improve learning outcomes and help students acquire industry-relevant skills*" and "*4IR tools like virtual reality can make learning more engaging and interactive*".

Lecturers echoed these sentiments, highlighting increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes because of incorporating 4IRT in teaching. Furthermore, second-year design students demonstrated improved design skills after completing 3D projects. Additionally, simulation tools were noted to deepen students' understanding of systems and processes. One lecturer commented on the strong interest students displayed in utilising 4IRT for their learning, further emphasising the potential to enhance engagement and comprehension.

4.3.2 Skills development and educational innovation

The potential of XR fostering new skillsets and sparking innovation was a recurring theme. Students appreciated how these technologies enable immediate feedback, facilitate energy efficiency and prepare them for advanced industrial environments. Responses included: "*4IR has really helped students/learners to get good education from the online learning platforms"* and *"It is important to include 4IR tools in industrial EE so that graduates can be equipped with the skills, knowledge, and mindset required to work in the continually evolving industrial landscape"*.

4.3.3 Technological advancement and industrial transformation

Respondents recognised 4IRT as a necessary requirement to stay updated with rapid technological developments vital for industrial transformation. Students linked XR adoption to improved efficiency, cost reduction and enhanced production capabilities. Responses included: "*Technology is improving every day, and integrating 4IR in education ensures students are ready for the future*" and "*Industries are massively investing in these advanced technologies to improve the functionality of the production process. So yes, it's very necessary to integrate 4IR into industrial engineering*".

4.3.4 Industry alignment and global competitiveness

Students highlighted the alignment of 4IRT with industry demands, emphasising the importance of preparing for the global industrial landscape. Many viewed XR as a bridge between academic theory and industrial practice, enabling graduates to meet global standards. Students responded as follows: "*Implementing 4IRT will establish a background for an evolving job market due to the increasing weight of automation and digitalisation on today's workforce*" and "*The 4IRT, including IoT, big data analytics, AI, and automation, are reshaping industries. Industrial engineers must understand and leverage these tools to optimise processes, enhance productivity, and drive innovation*".

4.3.5 Challenges and ethical concerns

Despite overwhelmingly positive sentiment, students expressed concerns about automation's social impact, particularly its potential to displace human labour. These apprehensions underscore the need for systematic evaluation and risk management. Responses included: *"I am not sure about integrating 4IRT because of the state of unemployment and the potential for automation to replace human labour"* and *"It will decrease job chances and increase unemployment because instead of a person, [they] use robots"*. While the concerns about job placements because of automation are valid[45], universities should balance automation with human-centric skills development.

5 DISCUSSION

There is strong alignment between literature and the participants' responses. Both students and lecturers acknowledged 4IRT's crucial link between theoretical learning and real-world industrial applications. From literature, it is evident that students and lecturers have mixed perceptions of using 4IRT in EE. While [28] highlights the impersonal nature of using AI and the possible reduction of lecturer attendance, lecturers acknowledged that using blockchain technologies improved classroom management. The systematic methodological approach followed in this study enhanced the ability to directly compare the findings with previous research, reinforcing the validity of the observed trends. While the primary focus of this study was not on contrasting smart machines with human values, the literature indicates that 4IR integration in engineering education should balance technological efficiency with human-centric considerations. Smart machines and automation can rationalise processes, improve accuracy, and enhance productivity; however, embedding human values such as ethics,

fairness, sustainability, and creativity ensures that technology adoption remains inclusive and socially responsible [49, 51].

Participants' responses to familiarity with 4IR reveals a gap between undertaking and deeper understanding. Students who engaged with 4IR tools cited benefits like improved engagement, increased comprehension of industrial processes and enhanced skills development. The students with limited experience reflected on barriers like restricted access to technology and infrastructure. Figures 2(a) and 2(b) illustrate survey responses corresponding with the study's key findings, reinforcing alignment between the data collection instrument and participants' experiences. The sentiment analysis in figures 3 and 4 indicates an overall positive attitude towards utilising 4IRT despite a low usage of these technologies.

Limited access to advanced tools and infrastructure, particularly in under-resourced educational institutions, may play a role in the high percentage of students not engaging with 4IR. In addition, there is a lack of awareness about 4IRT and applying 4IR in education and industry. Students may also face financial constraints, as some technologies, such as XR and IoT tools, often require significant investment in hardware or software. This limited engagement highlights the importance of integrating 4IRT into curricula to bridge the gap between academic preparation and industry requirements. By providing structured exposure to 4IRT through institutional support, subsidised access and targeted awareness campaigns, educational institutions can help students develop critical competencies and familiarity with emerging technologies. Participants who engaged with 4IRT during their studies found that using 4IRT enhanced their learning experiences and developed their skills. Some students however raised concerns about job displacement because of automation in industry.

The lecturer survey analysis shows all IE lecturers having a good understanding of 4IRT, but their familiarity with 4IRT varies. Fifty percent indicated familiarity with 4IRT, making use of it in their classrooms. Thirty-three percent had over 20 years of teaching experience (figures 5a and 5b), which could influence their adaptability and enthusiasm towards newer technologies. These positive perceptions align with the findings of [28] and [29] that the lecturers recognised the potential of 4IRT's positive impact on student learning and engagement. When asked about confidence in using 4IR tools, the lecturers were "moderately" or "very confident" (figure 6a) and indicated integrating these technologies/ tools "occasionally" or "often" in their teachings. The open-ended question on improvement of student learning had a positive response (figure 7). This segmentation, directly link to the survey questions, enhances the reliability of the findings.

6 THEMATIC INSIGHTS

AI-assisted thematic analysis of the open-ended responses, validated through manual review, revealed several key themes, reflecting both student and lecturer perspectives.

6.1 Improved learning

Students frequently noted that 4IRT, particularly immersive tools such as XR, can enhance student engagements and help facilitates learning. Students responded as follows: *"I integrated 4IRT will improve learning outcomes and help students acquiring industry relevant skills"* and *"4IR tools like virtual reality can make learning more engaging and interactive"*. The lecturers also observed improvements in designing skills and the comprehension of complex systems through simulation-based learning. [37]and [35] found that the students in their studies felt using XR technologies improved their learning outcomes and engagement with the study material. Concerns highlighted included data protection and the high cost of the software and hardware being used.

6.2 Skills development and educational innovation

A recuring theme was the ability of XR fostering new skillsets and stimulating innovation. Students appreciate the immediate feedback and preparation provided for advanced industrial roles. The hybrid analytical approach confirmed consistency of these findings across responses.

6.3 Technological advancement and industrial transformation

Students and lecturers recognised the necessity of 4IRT being current and aligned with rapid technological developments. Students linked XR adoption to improvements in efficiency, cost reductions and enhanced production capabilities.

6.4 Industry alignment and global competitiveness

Students and lecturers emphasised 4IR tools' help with bridging the gap between academic theory and industrial practice, thereby preparing graduates for global market demands.

6.5 Challenges and ethical concerns

Despite the positive outlook, some students expressed concern about potential social impacts of automation, specifically job placement. A responded stated the following: *"I am not sure about integrating 4IRT because of the potential for automation to replace human labour".* This theme underlines the need to address ethical and practical challenges in adopting 4IRT.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

To address challenges and take advantage of 4IRT, the following recommendations are made:

7.1 Professional development

CPD for lecturers is crucial in preparing them for 4IRT use in teaching. Tailored training programs focusing on tools like AR/VR and AI are highlighted in studies as effective methods to promote immersive learning[46], thereby emphasising the importance of workshops and training programs empowering educators to integrate 4IRT. Educators' technical capabilities are further enhanced through peer collaboration programs sharing innovative teaching strategies [47] and specialised certifications in emerging technologies like IoT and robotics[48].

7.2 Infrastructure investment

Investing in effective infrastructure for 4IRT is important. Institutions should prioritise creating AR/VR labs with advanced virtual reality devices, augmented reality controllers and other tools for immersive learning[49]. It is equally important to provide software platforms and licenses for educational simulations[50]. Hossain [47] highlights the need for robust technical support teams to assist in technology integration, while Grinshkun and Osipovskaya [51] emphasise upgrading network infrastructure to support high-performance applications and ensure uninterrupted, smooth learning experiences.

7.3 Strategy for balanced integration

The potential downsides of automation, especially job displacement, need to be addressed. Grinshkun and Osipovskaya [51]suggest integrating human-centric skills like creativity, problem-solving and emotional intelligence into curricula. Career counselling programs Ngomana [50] and proactive communication efforts can reassure students of the long-term relevance of these skills. The researchers in [52]encourage combining automation skills with teamwork, leadership, adaptability and negotiation attributes to enable students' success in roles that require strategic and creative thinking.

7.4 Proactive student engagement

Encouraging students to participate and become proactive in using 4IR initiatives is important. Partnerships with industry to offer real-world experiences like internships and capstone projects are critical[48]. Organising competitions and hackathons can further motivate students to solve real-world problems using 4IRT[52]. Participation in 4IR-focused clubs and activities, e.g., building prototypes for smart cities or developing AR/VR training tools, provides hands-on experience[49]. Recognising student achievements through awards and public showcases fosters confidence and creates a culture of innovation.[47]. In addition, blended learning modules can be considered as an effective way of relieving lecturers' concerns.

7.5 Recommendations based on thematic analysis

The thematic analysis revealed that infrastructure remains a critical barrier. Institutions should prioritise investments in robust technological infrastructure (highspeed internet, AR/VR labs and digital collaboration tools). To enhance lecturers' and students' proficiency in 4IR use, hands-on workshops, hackathons and project-based learning applications can be introduced. The analysis further revealed that many students are aware of 4IR, but practical use of these technologies is limited. Curricula should include mandatory modules on 4IR tools and relevant real-world applications. Another issue highlighted is the lack of collaborative learning environments. Establishing interdisciplinary programs and cross-departmental projects can foster a collaborative culture among students, preparing them for future team-based projects in industry. Concerns about job loss caused by 4IRT automatization were raised. Career counselling programs can raise students' awareness of human-centric skills, ensuring development competencies that complement rather than compete with automation. Furthermore, to maximise 4IR integration, targeted solutions that address blended learning models and institutional support are critical.

7.6 Blended learning and institutional support

Solutions bridging the gap between potential and implementation must be prioritised. Blended learning models arise as a promising method to relieve lecturer concerns. By integrating AI-driven automation with human-led interaction, lecturers can still retain their central role in promoting meaningful discussions, mentoring students and shaping the learning environment. AI can assist with managing everyday administrative tasks such as grading and attendance tracking, releasing lecturers to focus on higher-order teaching responsibilities. Professional development programs should focus on how these tools complement rather than replace their expertise. Workshops and hands-on training can help educators build confidence in using AI and IoT as resources that enhance, rather than diminish, their classroom presence.

Institutional support plays a key role in overcoming financial obstacles for students, e.g., subsidised access to XR tools, partnerships with technology providers, and creating open educational resources to make this advanced toolset more accessible. Clear and structured guidance on using these technologies effectively will ensure students and lecturers realise the full potential of 4IR [20, 34]. AR evokes better learning gains than VR and presents fewer technical and financial challenges [35]. Framing 4IRT beyond logistical solutions through advancing human connectedness and collaboration can address deeper apprehension about its place in education. For example, AI's capacity for personalised feedback can make interactions more rather than less meaningful. Addressing systemic issues and emphasising the practical benefits of enhanced engagement and improved readiness to the workforce are ways to make 4IRT integration achievable and transformative. With a balanced approach, educators will feel empowered, and students will be enabled to participate more in the learning process, thus allowing both parties to benefit from a technology-enhanced learning environment.

8 CONCLUSION

The study's results show a positive outlook towards using 4IRT in EE, with lecturers and students seeing the potential of 4IRT enhancing learning and aligning EE with industry needs. Challenges, including insufficient infrastructure, time management and fears of job displacement due to automation, need to be addressed. Investing in CPD for lecturers is important, equipping them with skills to use 4IR tools effectively. Investing in the necessary infrastructure is also important to support the technological shift. Balancing the introduction of automation with developing human skills can help minimise concerns about job displacement. As the landscape of education continues to evolve, proactive strategies and institutional investments in 4IR integrations will determine how effectively students and lecturers adapt. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of 4IR adoption in EE.

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CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT CULTURE ASSESSMENT USING THE 20 KEYS METHODOLOGY: FMCG FOOD MANUFACTURING

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ABSTRACT

In the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, continuous improvement is critical for maintaining quality, cost efficiency, and lead times. This study evaluates the effectiveness of the 20 Keys methodology in an organisation that has applied it for 23 years. Despite its long-term implementation, only 26% of employees actively engage in continuous improvement, with an overall performance score of 1.89 out of 5, significantly below the 2.75 operational excellence benchmark. Key challenges include cultural misalignment and a tendency to revert to old habits post-implementation. The study focuses on Key 2 (Goal Alignment) and 10 (Workplace Discipline), identifying gaps in leadership commitment (2.05) and communication (2.16), alongside moderate strategic alignment (2.67) and employee engagement (2.78). Recommendations include enhancing leadership visibility, structured performance appraisal systems, and employee involvement in workplace standards. This approach aims to elevate performance to a score of 2.5 for Keys 2 and 10, fostering a sustainable culture of continuous improvement.

Keywords: 20 Keys methodology, FMCG, Operational Excellence, Organisational Culture, Lean Manufacturing

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) environment, there is always pressure around the need to deliver high-quality products, at the best cost within the shortest lead times. This is the reason behind adopting the 20 Keys methodology (20Ks) for continuous improvement. The methodology focuses on working better, faster, and cheaper but is also centred around building an energised workplace.

The organisation has used the methodology for 23 years, however, a recent cultural engagement survey showed that only 26% of employees understand and implement continuous improvement-related initiatives. Using the 20Ks guidelines, on a scale of 1 – 5, the organisation has scored an average of 1.89 for the last 3 years. The requirement for operational excellence is an average score of 2.75 for all departments within the organisation.

The main concern is that in many instances projects fail after implementation as employees tend to reset to old habits when a new challenge occurs instead of viewing it as an opportunity for improvement. Operational resources, such as machines, tools, facilities, supplier support, among others, are readily available, however, cultural misalignment plays a role in the inefficient and ineffective use of the resources. This project analyses and assesses the current culture towards continuous improvement and the underlying reasons that prevent the organisation from reaching the status of operational excellence.

1.1 Problem Statement

Over the past three years, an FMCG organisation has achieved a score of 1.89 on a scale of 1 to 5 regarding operational excellence, falling short of the desired 2.75. Cultural misalignment is evident with only 26% of engaged employees and limited commitment to continuous improvement initiatives. Despite access to top-tier operational resources, the organisation's pursuit of excellence remains out of reach, risking its competitive advantage and vision of becoming Africa's most cost-effective manufacturer.

1.2 Aim

This project aims to develop and implement a sustainable approach towards continuous improvement initiatives and improve employee engagement levels using Key 2 and 10 from the 20Ks.

1.3 Research Objectives

The research objectives are to:

- Analyse the current organisational culture and employee engagement levels in alignment with Keys 2 and 10, within the 20Ks
- Develop a structured framework for enhancing employee engagement and aligning the continuous improvement culture with the 20Ks
- Develop an implementation plan necessary to achieve a benchmark score of level 2.5 for Key 2 and Key 10 within the 20Ks

1.4 Significance of Research

The research focuses on developing a positive organisational culture that will support continuous improvement initiatives. Therefore, focusing on the social impact within an organisation and its influence on improvement project sustainability.

The key contributions will be to (1) Identify cultural challenges, (2) provide mitigation actions for challenges, (3) align with the organisational vision.

1.5 Scope of Work

The scope will be focused on the implementation and development of Key 2 and 10 which is focused on the employee cultural alignment of the organisation. The aim of improving productivity will be focused on the human factor in relation to the employee's engagement within the organisation and the effect of misalignment on project sustainability.

1.6 Limitations

The study examines operational performance and cultural dynamics within a single organisation, which may introduce bias. Its focus on cultural alignment excludes factors like market dynamics, investments, technology, and employee skills. Time constraints may limit deeper issue resolution, and the lack of an industry benchmark hinders comparison. Despite these limitations, precautions will be taken to minimize bias, ensuring the research lays a foundation for improving project sustainability.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is the 20Ks?

The 20Ks was designed by Prof. Iwao Kobayashi who is considered as an expert in the field of Industrial Engineering focused on Continuous Improvement. The 20Ks can be adapted by any organisation to work better, faster, cheaper and building an energised workplace [1]. The principles, if implemented correctly, can help organisations increase productivity, reduce cost, and improve quality (Figure 1). However, the Keys are also focused on creating a culture of continuous improvement within the organisation. Each Key has a standard guideline which allows you to benchmark your organisation against world class practices.

The aim of the 20Ks is to assist organisations in identifying and eliminating wastes that affect the organisation's ability to provide high quality products at the right cost and within the stipulated lead times. Thus, giving light to the focus on improving Quality (Working Better), Cost (Working Cheaper) and delivery (Working Faster). The methodology is unique as it is centred around the focus of creating an energised workplace that creates a holistic approach to continuous improvement. The Keys are specifically focused on creating a foundation of a "Thinking Learning" workforce that is focused on continuously improving the organisations performance through the implementation of the 20Ks.

Figure 1: 20Ks Relationship.

2.2 Systematic approach to continuous improvement using the 20Ks.

The 20Ks was developed as a systematic approach towards continuous improvement. Each principle has measurable milestones that management can use for implementation. Prof. Iwao Kobayashi emphasised the role of managers for implementation. In a sense that, they are responsible to determine the room for improvement and the steps to take towards such improvement [2].

Therefore, the 20Ks Guidelines provides the systematic approach by: -

- Being based on the Plan–Do–Check–Act problem-solving cycle.
- Having a holistic view of the organisation and understanding the interrelations of factors. (Key 2 [1]).
- Developing a sustainable foundation to move forward in improvements.

The 20Ks also can be divided into 5 categories of improvement which is the basis of the programme and specific keys can be allocated accordingly (Figure 2). For the focus of this research to assess the workplace culture, Key 2 and 10 will be used as a baseline.

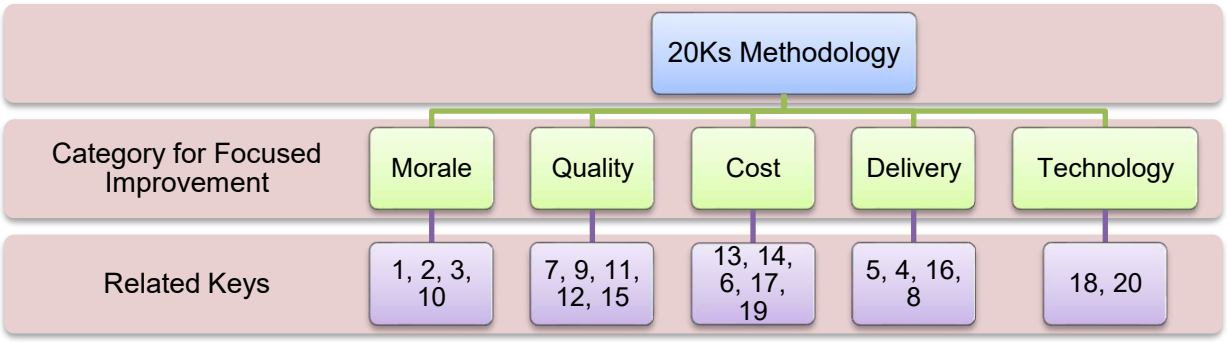

Figure 2: Keys Related to Category of Focused Improvement

2.3 What are the benefits of the 20Ks?

The 20Ks benchmarking standards help organisations improve productivity, reduce defects and costs, enhance employee skills and morale, and align teams toward operational excellence. The five-level framework allows organisations to assess their progress and set strategic goals. Departments can use the benchmarking to collaborate effectively, with a facilitator aiding implementation. Initial challenges may arise due to unfamiliarity with the program. However, the 20Ks approach is flexible, cost-effective, and accessible to all employees, making it suitable for any organisation, regardless of industry or financial position [3].Successful Implementation of the 20Ks.

Many organisations use the 20Ks to improve their businesses. Some of these organisations are based in Croatia, Egypt, South Africa, and Japan. Various industries have also adapted the 20Ks as the chosen continuous improvement strategy.

A case study conducted in Croatia by Erceg, showed that the organisation was able to decrease costs while increasing productivity by implementing the 20Ks. It is also highlighted that when the 20Ks were introduced, majority of the staff were reluctant to change as there had been previous attempts to improve that had failed. However, the 20Ks emphasis on management commitment and support allowed the team to develop and engage positively thus resulting in positive improvements [4].

The 20Ks is also not limited to the production environment, it can also be used within the service industry. As per Dabic's study conducted in Croatia, 18.75% of organisations studied operated in the service industry. The group of organisations studied showed an increase in

profit margins by 3.3%, employment growth of 14.1% and annual productivity growth of 6.9% that was achieved through the structured implementation of the 20Ks over a period of 4 years. This was also an indication of strong sustainable results achieved by using the program. The key point also revolved around the importance of employee understanding and employer support around the 20Ks to ensure effective and sustainable results [5].

2.4 Culture Alignment and Continuous Improvement

At the centre of the 20Ks relationship diagram (Figure 1), is an "Energised Workplace" which highlights that the methodology is centred around creating a culture of continuous improvement and ensuring energised employees [3].

Employee engagement plays a role in continuous improvement, especially for project sustainability. Every organisation consists of a human resource department that is responsible for employee relations and to some extent employee satisfaction. The research conducted by Rode showed that human resource practices have a direct effect on continuous improvement initiatives [6].

Erceg investigated the use of the 20Ks and its effectiveness for implementation within today's Global Market as the methodology was developed in 1995 and a lot has changed since then [4]. The research confirmed that the systematic approach used with the 20Ks guidelines is effective and efficient and strongly linked to the systematic implementation following from level 0 to 5. With Level 1 being the most crucial point that addresses and guides the development of the organisation culture focused on alignment and training [7].

In reviewing the methodologies available for process improvements, there is a clear link between the need for culture alignment to ensure the sustainability of continuous improvement projects. The points of employee engagement and management leadership plays a strong role in continuous improvement [7].

3 METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research study approach has been chosen to conduct the case study. This method is a systematic, formal, and objective process to collect the necessary data required. A detailed survey focusing on key organisational culture indicators was used to collect data. This data will allow a descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory review of the organisational culture.

3.1 Study setting.

The organisation is based in South Africa and operates within the FMCG industry. The plant to be studied currently employs ±3000 people. The organisation has been using the 20Ks for 23 years as the selected continuous improvement methodology but has been unsuccessful in sustainable implementation.

3.2 Sampling methods

The organisation consists of +3000 employees across the various departments and organisational levels. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation from different departments, levels of hierarchy, and functional areas within the organization. Stratification was based on factors such as departmental affiliation, job role, tenure, and demographic characteristics to ensure diversity and representativeness in the sample.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The data analysis for this research focused on evaluating the organization's cultural readiness across five key categories: Leadership Commitment, Communication, Training & Development, Strategic Alignment and Employee Engagement using responses from a 5-point Likert scale

survey. The Likert scale data is treated as ordinal data, non-parametric statistical methods, including descriptive statistics such as median and mode, was used to assess central tendencies in each category. There was a total of 90 employees that participated in the survey, which consisted of specifically supervisory and management roles within the organisation. The employees were asked to answer the survey questions by rating their agreement to each statement ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree".

4.1 Data analysis

The tables and graphs provide a summary of the survey responses in relation to the 5 categories tested. To assess the overall data distribution for each category, the mean was calculated, along with the percentage distribution of responses (Table 1).

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The overall reliability of the scale was excellent, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.95734, indicating high reliability.

Table 1: Summary of Responses Related to Categories

Category	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)	Mean
Leadership Commitment	40%	34%	13%	7%	6%	2.05
Communication	41%	27%	15%	8%	9%	2.16
Training & Development	25%	30%	21%	15%	9%	2.52
Strategic Alignment	19%	33%	23%	14%	12%	2.67
Employee Engagement	22%	29%	15%	19%	15%	2.78
Overall Survey Response	30%	31%	17%	12%	10%	2.44

The data is presented for both the lowest-rated results (Table 2) and the highest-rated results (Table 3) in the survey, enabling a focused analysis of the most relevant cultural gaps.

Table 2: Summary of Questions with Most Negative Responses

Category	Sub-Category	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
Communication	Employee Voice	57%	26%	9%	2%	6%	1.73
Leadership Commitment	Recognition & Praise	55%	32%	2%	3%	8%	1.78
Leadership Commitment	Feedback	50%	36%	6%	0%	8%	1.79
Communication	Organisational Environment	47%	32%	16%	2%	3%	1.83
Communication	Wellbeing & Resilience	52%	22%	19%	4%	3%	1.87

Table 3: Summary of Questions with Most Positive Responses

Category	Sub-Category	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
Employee Engagement	Willingness	13%	27%	23%	24%	13%	2.97
Training & Development	Resilience & Change Readiness	10%	21%	26%	27%	16%	3.14
Communication	Team Relations	11%	19%	29%	12%	29%	3.29
Employee Engagement	Commitment	10%	23%	14%	17%	36%	3.44
Strategic Alignment	Strategic Alignment	12%	16%	11%	37%	24%	3.46

In relation to the 20Ks benchmark framework, the overall mean of 2.43 indicates that the organisation is on a level 1.17 which is below the internal benchmark of 1.89 and the required standard of 2.5 for operational excellence.

4.2 Discussion of Results

The metrics for Keys 2 and 10 were used to develop the survey based on the requirements of level 2.5.

The results showed an overall mean of survey is 2.43 which is linked to the response of "Disagreement" towards each factor evaluated within the survey. This indicates that there is a need for improvement in the overall organisations culture toward continuous improvement. The overall mean established a baseline view to show that the level 2 requirements of Keys 2 and 10 are not met and, therefore, the organisational culture needs work to cultivate continuous improvement.

With a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.95734, the study demonstrated high reliability; however, this may suggest that the survey questions test multiple categories. Additionally, the mean of each criterion is skewed toward disagreement, complicating the identification of clear priority areas. To enhance the reliability and confidence of the results, it is recommended to conduct individual surveys for each category to better pinpoint key areas for improvement.

The overall results indicated that the organisation's employees are significantly dissatisfied with the culture of continuous improvement. The most negatively indicated categories of leadership commitment and communication indicate that the foundation implementation of the 20Ks needs attention. The basis of the benchmark score of 1.17 indicates that the organisation does not have the foundational factors in place to cultivate an operationally excellent organisation.

4.2.1 Leadership Commitment

The low mean score for this category indicates that there is a significant dissatisfaction from the survey sample. 74% of the participants disagreed with the statements posed. This is a clear indication that the participants felt that leadership is not committed to the goals of the organisation.

Key 2 is focused on goal alignment and leadership commitment, due to the low perception of commitment that may hinder the progress towards operational excellence. This may also be an indication of the participants' perception that leadership is disconnected from the overall organisation vision. There may also be a lack of leadership visibility and involvement that can negatively influence the overall organisational culture.

The results showed that 87% of participants indicated that they had only received feedback on performance less than once in the past year. 54% of participants indicated that they have

never received recognition or praise from their manager. This is an indication that there are no leadership communications. There are also no formal performance-based discussions in place which is a requirement for operational excellence as per the 20K guideline for Key 2.

4.2.2 Communication

41% of participants strongly disagreed and only 17% agreed with the statements that were focused on testing if communication within the organisation is effective. The mean score of the data is also low at 2.16. This is an indication of poor communication within the organisation. This directly impacts the achievement of goals within the organisation. If participants are not well informed it can lead to misalignment and a lack of understanding about the organisational strategy.

The survey also showed that 84% of participants indicated that their managers did not include them in decisions that impact them. This showed that participants feel disconnected from management and a gap in communication from when decisions are made to their execution. 73% of participants indicated that they believe that the organisation has not communicated openly and transparently with its employees. This aligns with the participants' indication that leadership commitment is lacking within the organisation. Despite this, 41% of participants feel that they can reach out to their extended teams for assistance if required. This showed that the teams work well together regardless of the lack of leadership commitment and communication.

4.2.3 Training and Development

The mean score of 2.5 indicates that the participants are not highly satisfied or dissatisfied. Even though 72% of participants are neither neutral nor dissatisfied, only 28% of the participants felt satisfied with the training and development opportunities within the organisation. This may also be related to the split between participants seeing value in the current initiatives provided and those who feel that there should be more opportunities provided.

68% of participants felt that they do not have sufficient opportunities to develop and use their skills within their roles. This is a concern as it leads to disengagement and a lack of continuous improvement initiative as employees are not utilising their strengths and investigating ways to develop personally that can also positively impact the organisations performance.

43% of participants had confidence that the team would be ready to accommodate changes in the future. This showed that the participants were confident in the team’s capability to adapt to change and develop within the organisation and align with requirements.

4.2.4 Strategic alignment

The mean score of 2.67 indicates that the participants are generally neutral but are leaning towards dissatisfaction concerning this category. However, 33% of participants agree or strongly agree that there is some level of alignment between their roles and the organisation’s goal. Even though there is an indication of alignment, the results still indicate that majority of participants are unclear or disconnected from the organisational strategy.

This may also be linked to the previous category of leadership commitment, and communication. As 61% of participants indicated that they understood the organisations strategy, therefore the gap may lie in the execution and communication of the strategy into day-to-day tasks. 80% of participants indicated that leadership has only communicated the organisational goals achieved once in the past year as opposed to every quarter recommended by the 20Ks.

The majority of participants (63%) indicate that they do not link their own strategic goals to the organisation’s goals. For operational excellence using Keys 2 and 10, it is required for

every employee Key Performance Indicator to be linked to the organisational strategy and goal to ensure alignment and achievement of such goals. This showed that the employees may understand the organisational strategy on a high level but have not developed the ability to link their tasks to its impact on achieving the organisations goals.

4.2.5 Employee Engagement

This category was rated best out of the 5 categories with a mean of 2.78. Although 66% of participants are disengaged or neutral, 45% of participants agree or strongly agree that they are engaged. This is a positive indication as it suggested that with improvement within the other 4 categories could result in additional improvement and will be received positively by the team.

Only 23% of employees felt appreciated within their roles and this may also be linked to the lack of leadership commitment and communication.

52 % of employees indicated that they believed in what the organisation stands for yet 55% of participants indicated that they feel like their ideas do not count within their roles. This can negatively impact the progress of continuous improvement as employees may be reluctant to engage or share ideas because of this.

5 SOLUTION DESIGN BASED ON RESULTS

Based on the gaps identified by the survey, a 3-phase action plan (Figure 3) is recommended to assist in the development of the culture required to cultivate continuous improvement. The plan is developed using the standard guidelines of Key 2 and 10, specifically focused on the requirements for Level 0 – 2.

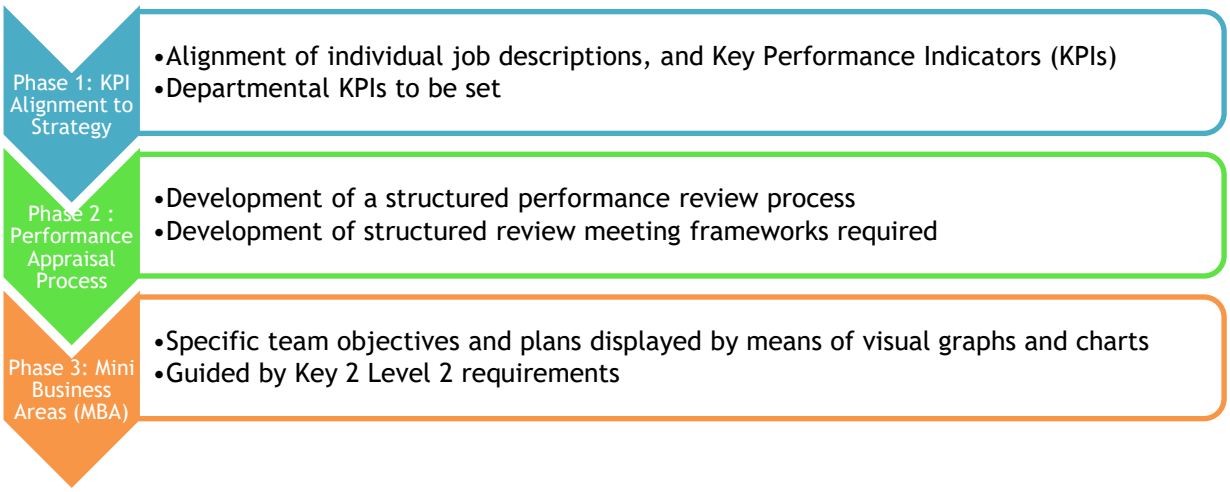

Figure 3: 3 Phase Implementation Plan

The 3 implementation phases reinforce the organisational hierarchy and facilitate the flow of goals from directors to individual employees (Figure 4). This structure ensures strategic alignment and highlights the importance of each role within the organization.

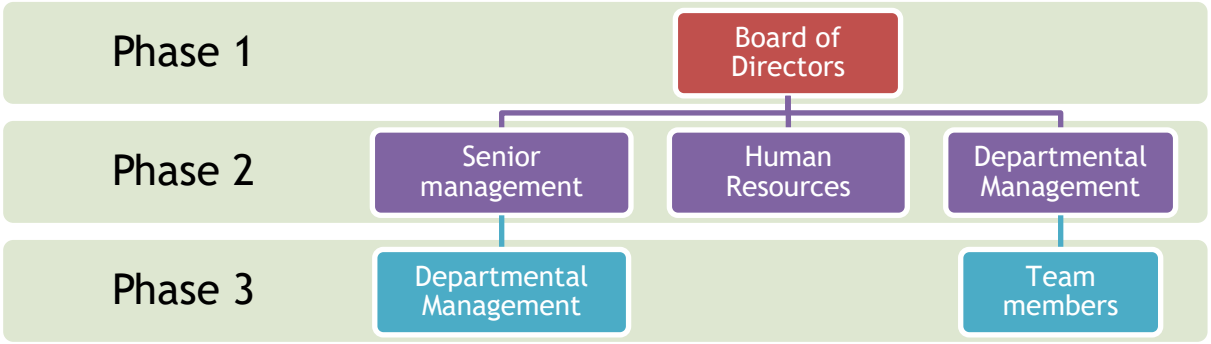

Figure 4: Key Decision Makers Per Phase

5.1.1 Phase 1: Key Performance Indicator Alignment

In this phase, the focus is to be placed on the overall organisational alignment to the strategic objectives and goals. This phase is focused on developing the strategic alignment, leadership commitment, and communication categories.

Within the organisation, the strategic and departmental goals are set, however, the gap lies with linking the strategic goals to departmental KPIs and the definition of individual deliverables. Therefore, the plan (Table 4) is focused on creating the links between individual and departmental KPIs to the organisational strategy that is defined by the Board of Directors.

The benefit of this phase is to ensure that employees understand how specific roles directly impact the overall strategy. This will give individuals clarity so that decisions can be made faster, and focus can be placed on value-adding activities. The alignment will also assist in optimising resource allocations and the adaptability of team members to change as the link between actions and strategy will be defined. The soft benefit of implementing the alignment is that individuals will have a sense of purpose and accountability for actions as they understand the impact of actions within the organisation.

For this phase, the Board of Directors (BoD), senior management (SM), departmental managers (DM), human resources (HR), and individual employees (EM) need to be involved in specific phases of implementation to ensure continuous communication and alignment.

Table 4: Phase 1 Overview Implementation Plan

No	Action Item	Responsible	Proposed Time Frame
1	**Definition of Organisational strategic goals**	**BoD**	**1 Month**
2	**Alignment of departmental KPIs**	**SM, DM**	1 Month
2,1	Draft of proposed KPIs per department	SM, DM	
2,2	Review with Department Leaders	SM, DM	
2,3	Finalisation of Team KPIs	EM, DM	
2,4	Roll out of Departmental KPIs within organisation	DM	
3	**Alignment of individual KPIs and Job descriptions**	**HR, DM**	2 - 3 Months (Depending on department size)
3,1	Draft of proposed KPIs	HR, DM	
3,2	Review of drafted KPIs with individual employees	EM, DM, HR	
3,3	Finalisation of individual KPIs	EM, DM, HR	
3,4	Roll out of Individual KPIs - Initiation of Phase 2	HR, DM	

5.1.2 Phase 2: Performance Appraisal Process

As per the survey results, the organisation has no formal or informal performance review process in place. Therefore phase 2 focuses on developing the necessary structure to develop and roll out a Performance Appraisal Program (PAP). The high-level steps required is detailed in Table 5. Critical communication platforms need to be included in the framework to support the team to meet deliverables and performing without communication blocks. The aim of the phase is to ensure that performance is periodically (monthly) monitored and reviewed within the organisation to ensure overall business success in alignment with the strategy.

This phase will also support development of all five categories evaluated by the survey by ensuring communication platforms, performance development opportunities, feedback loops, and strategic alignment. The formal PAP will allow employees and management to voice concerns and resolve conflict or mediocre performance strategically. Overall performance within the organisation will be improved.

The challenges that could be faced will be related to a resistance to change and misalignment to organisational goals. therefore, it is critical to ensure that phase 1 is implemented correctly. It is also necessary to ensure that all stakeholders are informed of changes and potentially allowed to contribute to development so that the culture of improvement can be initiated from the foundational phases.

Table 5: Phase 2 Overview Implementation Plan

No	Action Item	Responsible	Proposed Time Frame
1	**Industry Benchmarking**	**SM, HR**	1 Month
2	**System Design**	**SM, HR**	2 - 3 Months
2,1	Select the appraisal method based on benchmark	SM, HR	
2,2	Develop and document framework	SM, HR	

2,3	Design forms and tools to be used	SM, HR	
2,4	Create necessary training material	SM, HR	
3	**Pilot testing of system**	**DM, HR**	1 - 2 Months
3,1	Pilot Implementation	DM, HR	
3,2	Evaluation and review of pilot test	DM, HR	
4	**PAP Roll out and implementation**	**SM, DM, HR**	**2 - 3 Months**
5	**Post implementation review**	**HR**	**6 Months Post roll out**

5.1.3 Phase 3: Mini Business Areas (MBA)

The concept of an MBA is for each department to treat its departmental function like a business. In the sense that they focus on key deliverables that will make their "mini business" profitable. This is a concept detailed within the Key 2 guidelines of the 20Ks.

Phase 3 focuses on developing these MBAs by visualising the KPIs developed in Phase 1 and tracking the performance of the team to support Phase 2. These visual management charts can be used to enhance communication, increase transparency, and improve overall performance management by displaying Key team KPIs, opportunities for the continuous improvement project, tracking project progress, and other critical data in a way that is easily understood throughout the organisation (Figure 5). The aim will also be to display time real-time data simply to improve focus areas and quicker decision-making.

Data inaccuracy and resistance to change may be a challenge to be mitigated. Training can be developed to ensure teams are aligned with the goal of the MBA. The guidelines for the development and implementation of an MBA are structured and detailed within the 20Ks program.

Figure 5: Sample of a Mini Business Area at the Logistics Department

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 20Ks score of 1.17 revealed by the survey analysis supports the fact that the foundational implementation of the 20Ks has not been completed.

The organisations framework needs to align with the 20Ks in the following ways:

- Key 2: Focus should be placed on leadership visibility and communication. Developing a structured performance appraisal framework will help align individual KPIs with

strategic goals and enhance top-down and bottom-up alignment through development discussions.

- Key 10: The desired workplace standards and culture should be clearly communicated to employees, with their involvement encouraged in shaping a culture of continuous improvement. Positive leadership-employee engagement will foster discipline, while structured development discussions provide a clear platform for communication and workplace discipline management.

It is also recommended that an internal communication strategy be developed to define the rules of engagement within the organization to promote open communication. Transparency should also be practiced by developing Mini Business Areas as recommended by the Key 2 guidelines. This will allow the team to visualize and track the progress of team KPIs and potential continuous improvement opportunities.

The key starting point for implementation is to develop the alignment between individual job descriptions and the strategic alignment. This will lead to the development of:

- Leadership commitment through ensuring structured interactions and accountability for performance discussions with the team.
- Communication with opportunities for employees to engage with the management team and vice versa through multilevel meetings.
- Training and development as performance-based discussions can lead to the identification of skills gaps and opportunities to upskill the teams. This will also aid in the development of a skills matrix for all departments.
- Goal alignment within the organization with each employee understanding their value within the organisation and a holistic picture of the organisation's direction.
- The employee engagement levels will also improve as the team will have a sense of belonging within the organization through the above actions. This will also aid in building a continuous culture as communication channels, team relations, and organizational direction are clearly defined through the development.

It is also recommended that further investigations be completed to test the organisation readiness against the 20Ks Level 1 requirements as to identify the key gaps that need to be closed to build the foundation of continuous improvement that will support the organizational goal of operational excellence.

In conclusion, the research has provided significant direction concerning the gaps within the organisation that are hindering the development and successful implementation of continuous improvement culture using the 20Ks.

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ANALYSIS OF THE REQUIREMENT SPECIFICATION PROCESS DURING THE CONCEPT PHASE OF THE SYSTEM LIFECYCLE

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ABSTRACT

Armscor, South Africa's defence acquisition agency, provides systems engineering support for the Department of Defence. This study investigates requirements engineering processes at Armscor's Acquisition Organisation, then compares them with the processes of clients and contractors. A mixed-method was employed, and the results of a survey of 30 practitioners were combined with thematic analysis of qualitative inputs. The results show a strong implementation of requirements management tools across all groups, yet specific gaps remain in areas such as stakeholder involvement, iterative reviews, and specification clarity. Clients initiate requirements mostly internally; in contrast, Armscor and contractors attribute them to external stakeholders, which causes asymmetry in visibility and influence. Reviews are milestone-dominated and unresponsive to changes in operational requirements, causing cost and time overruns. The study emphasises that requirements engineering is better conducted with inclusivity, collaboration, and iterative procedures. Improving these processes may result in better project results and augment South Africa's defence acquisition capability.

Keywords: Systems Engineering, Requirement Specification, Acquisition Process, Requirement Management, Systems Life Cycle.

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1 INTRODUCTION

According to the South African defence review, Armscor has to acquire defence equipment on behalf of the Department of Defence (DoD), which is its major client, and it is essential to have the necessary armaments to carry out this function as mandated by DoD [1]. The armaments may be acquired or adopted through a comprehensive System Engineering (SE) approach. SE processes are crucial for the Acquisition Organisation (AO) business, and more so from the integrative nature of the company between the client, contractor, and defence industries. These three role players have one common goal: to provide services to the DoD and ensure the success of their mission [1].

SE processes positively benefit the contracting model, referring to the strategies and structure of the contract between the service provider and Armscor, the AO. This contracting strategy may enable a cost-effective system that meets the functional and operational requirements within the given schedule [2]. This paper focuses on requirements management during the conceptual phase of a system's life cycle. The requirement can be defined as a statement that captures the objectives and purpose of the proposed system for the end-user, with which all stakeholders have a mutual agreement [3]. Requirement Engineering (RE) is the reconciliation approach to technical and social challenges [4]. Overlooking the RE process may lead to failures, challenges and consequent risks that may be costly and catastrophic [3].

To reduce project failure risk, capturing and documenting requirements is crucial [3]. Previous research suggests that the three role players in the defence sector apply SE processes [5]. However, the standard SE processes have not been adopted entirely. Therefore, the following gaps exist according to [6]:

- The requirement specification structures lack substantial SE content and often prescribe a solution.
- Interpreting the SE processes creates various understandings among the stakeholders.
- Even though SE practices guide organisations, there is a lack of common adoption of a requirement specification.
- Customised and integrated SE practices and processes are lacking.

This research evaluated the AO's RE (specification and management) processes and their interfaces to the client and contractors. It also reveals how effective the current processes have been and how they could be improved to be effective and efficient. The study further identified gaps that arise from integrating the processes and made recommendations to close the gaps. The outcomes will benefit the stakeholders in utilising standardised RE processes, which may positively impact the deliverables of their projects.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Systems Engineering

This paper uses the definition of SE as provided in the International Council on Systems Engineering (INCOSE) handbook [2]:

> *"An interdisciplinary approach and means to enable the realisation of successful systems. It focuses on defining customer needs and required functionality early in the development cycle, documenting requirements, and then proceeding with design synthesis and system validation while considering the complete problem."*

The definition of SE also depends on the business's application and nature. From this definition, the importance of customer needs or requirements is evident, as it forms part of the process. These are translated into the definition of the functional system. Furthermore, iterative methods are necessary to realise the final product [2]. A project to develop a new system needs to consider the following phases of a system's life cycle, as shown in Figure 1 [7]:

- **Conceptual Design Phase**: This initial phase draws inputs from the operational deficiencies and the technology opportunities. The outputs of this phase will then be the system's functional specification and defined system concept.
- **Engineering Development Phase**: The system concept is translated into a physical system design that meets the end-user requirements: schedule, cost, and operation. Once the formulation and definition of the system concept are realised, the outputs of the concept development stage are fed into this stage.
- **Post Development**: This stage uses engineering development phase outputs to produce the system and support the system's operational, deployment, and retirement stages.

On a high level, these three phases show the stages of a system life cycle and outline high-level activities that give input and outputs until the end, usually a functional system and/or operational and maintenance documents.

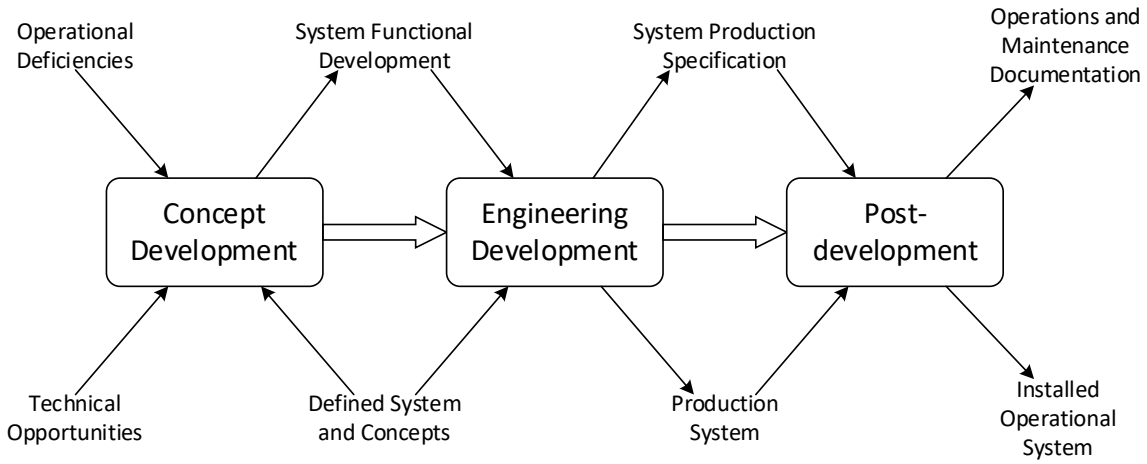

Figure 1: System Life Cycle Stages (adapted from [7])

Standard practice would first be for the client to identify a need or an opportunity. A demand-pull or technology-push method can determine the need or opportunity. Demand-pull opportunities stem from a need or a problem requiring a solution. Technology push, conversely, stems from the solution where the technology capability is combined with other systems to make a cohesive, complete system [8]. Hence, it can be stated that the SE method translates authorised operational demands and requirements into system-building elements suitable for operational use. It can aid in requirement management processes based on requirements or client needs. As a result, system life stages can be used to evaluate RE procedures.

2.2 Acquisition Organisation Management Documents

Management documents in the form of acquisition practices, standards, and policies guide programme managers (PM), SE, and other role-players within the AO. These Management Documents are tailored to close the gap identified as lacking in support of the SE processes as applied by the AO. The acquisition process, as mentioned, does not happen in isolation and has interfaces that link the stakeholders to the external processes, as shown in Figure 2 below.

The AO (Armscor) manages all projects through guidance from practices, standards, and policies. These are found in the organisation's management documentation system. The management documents have been tailored with extractions from some of the international standards mentioned above and customised to suit the organisational goals. These guiding documents are briefly explained in the following subsections. Two standards shall be evaluated according to what is practically being implemented to address the question of interest.

Documentation in the form of acquisition procedures, standards, and rules serves as a reference for PM, SEs, and other AO role-players.

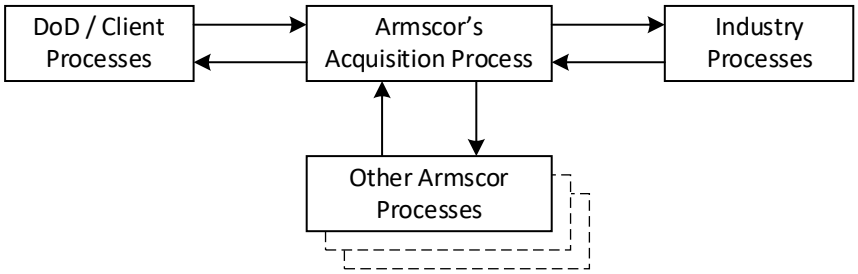

Figure 2: Acquisition Process Context Diagram (A-PRAC-1010)

The Acquisition and Practice (A-PRAC-1010) document was previously called the Systems Acquisition Management Practice (A-PRAC-1024), which, according to the previous analysis, did not address the SE standards of practice [9]. The international standard IEEE-15288 formed a basis for this newly developed A-PRAC-1010, consisting of four high-level processes, as seen in Figure 3.

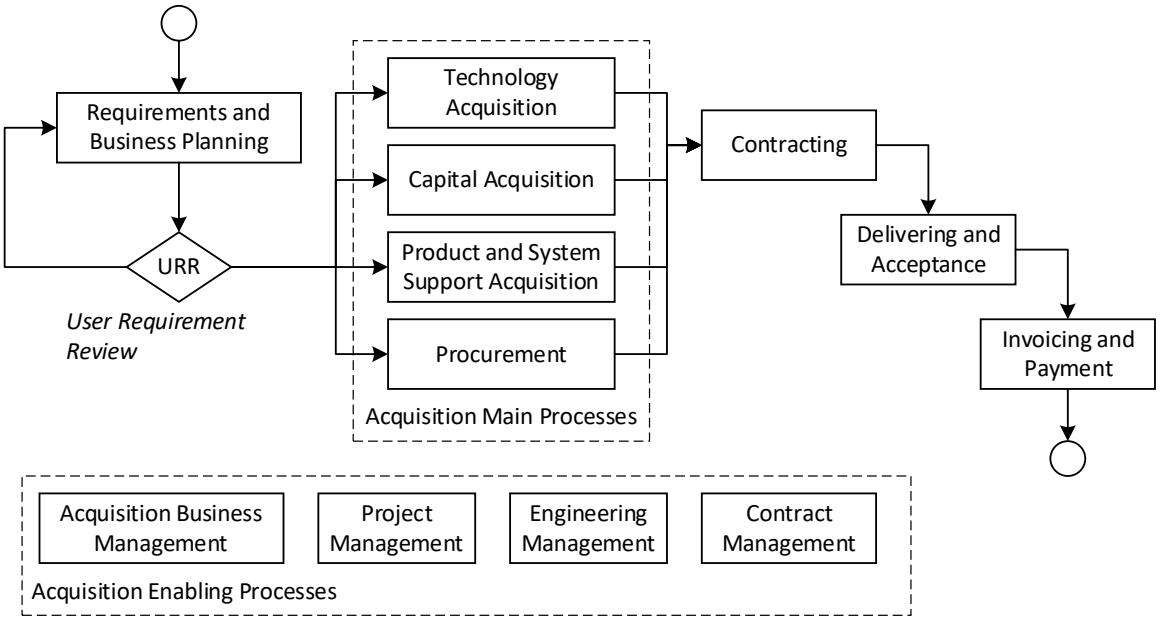

Figure 3: Acquisition Business Process Model (A-PRAC-1010)

The process of interest for this research is how to structure the requirement specifications under the Engineering Management enabling process. The process of acquiring the resources and the set of phases that make up the acquisition process, in which technology is developed and refined into workable concepts based on capital, product, and system acquisitions, is known as the Acquisition Main Process. The output is of primary interest as it is the input to the contractor's environment. The Acquisition Main Process, as shown in Figure 3, is described as follows:

- The Technology Acquisition Process applies to an upgraded or newly invented technology base established to be utilised to acquire equipment. These are referred to as Technology projects.
- The Capital Acquisition Process is applied for Capital Projects, which is translated from acquiring upgraded or new systems funded through a Department of Defence capital

budget. This process stipulates the phases that are applied in the capital acquisition of these projects.
- The Product and System Support Acquisition Process refers to material and services acquisition projects that complement and support existing operational capabilities.
- The Procurement Process aims to acquire already defined systems, support existing/new systems, and make them operational.

The Acquisition Enabling Processes are fed into the Acquisition Main Process (Figure 3), and the interest is in the requirement specification translated from the Engineering Management enabling process. Engineering Management, according to A-PRAC-1010, is aimed to:

- Define system requirements.
- Transform the requirements into an effective product.
- Allow for consistent reproduction of the product where necessary.
- Support the use of the product to facilitate the required services.
- Sustain the provision of services.
- Retire the product when it is no longer in use.

A Requirement Specification (RS) is a list of requirements that the equipment, design, product, or service must meet. The RS process specifies the impending system's network, hardware, software, and functional needs. The author seeks to underpin what standards are applied in implementing each project type and whether the RS processes are applied so that a custom or blanket approach is followed. Capital projects evaluate technology matured under Technology Projects during the Concept and Definition Phases. PSS and Procurement Projects support operational systems acquired under Capital Projects [10].

The Policy, Process and Procedure for the Acquisition of Armaments in the DoD (DAP-1000) is an addition to the A-PRAC-1010. It is a policy framework intended to govern the acquisition of armaments in the DOD and the Organisation. This document is a framework policy that outlines the various functions, interlinking them with the responsible roles. This policy document outlines the system's life cycle. The organisation also uses the RSA-MIL-STD-3 programme, which outlines the baseline requirements over a programme's lifecycle. The advantage of this Standard is that it serves as a guide to managing various baselines in the system development stage, reducing the programme risks. The risk management plan document created for each programme is used by the Department of Defence (DOD) acquisition environment to implement risk management for acquisition projects. A risk management strategy is required during certain acquisition phases, according to the RSA-MIL-STD-3 document. Lastly, the Standards for Technical Contract Condition (A-STD-61) stipulates the requirement for management of technical effort on contract execution. A-STD-61 formulates different sets of technical contract conditions that can be part of the Defence Acquisition Policy.

2.3 External Stakeholder Practices

Since the Acquisition Process does not happen in isolation, the client must know the Acquisition processes within Armscor and the Industry to a certain extent. This discussion aims to analyse the approach followed by the stakeholders to structure their requirements.

2.3.1 Defence Review Guiding Document

A defence review is a high-level document that the Minister of Defence drafts to ensure that the national defence needs are met [1]. This document is generated from a White Paper, a collective effort of all the units that fall under the defence. What stands out the most within this policy framework is that the defence review seeks to eliminate inefficiencies and minimise costs by ensuring the rationale of command and management principles. The concept has historically been frequently associated with considerable reductions to the armed forces and

their equipment programmes. It has come to be seen as little more than a justification for a policy of defence regression.

As stated in this policy framework, the expectation is for the acquisition process of armaments to be comprised of members from Armscor, SANDF, and the Defence Secretary to cope with the number of acquisition functions within the DoD. Therefore, a structured process of authorisation and decision-making is to be followed. Passing the responsibility to AO to make an acquisition translates to the need for risk management. However, the whole team is responsible for risk management and mitigation at the requirement phase and at each level of a system's life cycle where their roles are involved [11].

2.3.2 SEMBASE Model

The Systems Engineering Management Model, also called the SEMBASE model, is more formally structured for critical aspects of systems engineering management [12]. This model accommodates clients and direct stakeholders in the life cycle process design phase. The SEMBASE model addresses the interaction between the life cycle integration and the SE process [13]. The SEMBASE approach verifies requirements at the system level with the design and models at each development phase, and SE processes are applied concurrently to each life cycle phase. The concept model verifies and validates (V&V) the concept requirements. The SEMBASE provides a framework to analyse Armscor's standards application compared to the industry and will form the basis for comparing the findings with those of the client and the contractor [13].

Nyareli and Erasmus [14] bridged the defence industry gap relative to the SEMBASE Model. The SEMBASE model has been derived from the ISO/IEC 26702/IEEE Std 1220. This model emphasises the life cycle integration, which involves clients and stakeholders during the design phase [14]. Comparing the models used in the paper above may be relevant to this study. Here, the relationship of the defence industry SEM to those of the AO is investigated. The gap identified can be used to analyse the relationship between the three role players.

2.3.3 System Engineering Capability Model

The System Engineering Capability Model is promulgated from the EIA-731.1 standard and is intended to guide organisations in assessing the capability of application of SE processes [15]. The relevance of the model to this paper is that the stakeholders' involvement in all the stages of a system life cycle is shown in the early system requirement development activity [15]. The Vee model indicates the phases in the system life cycle using the defence industry as the project management model [16]. When formulating and analysing requirements, the client must share their knowledge. One of the driving forces of requirement statements is achieved through a collaborative process of acceptance and elimination of requirements [17].

2.4 Requirement Engineering Processes

The process for RE includes gathering, articulating, discussing, prioritising, defining, verifying, and maintaining system requirements, which is called requirement engineering. The specific, outlined criteria are the foundation for all future system development work. The organisation can achieve substantial financial benefits by preventing issues before the project's completion during the RE process. RE is typically considered a front-end activity in the creation of software systems. This is generally accurate. However, requirements frequently change during development and after a system has been in operation. As a result, RE is crucial to managing change in the software development process [18]. RE defines the following aspects of a project:

- Defining the constraints.
- Specifying the process involved.

- Documenting the process.
- Ensure that there is an improvement in the problems encountered.
- Identifies client's needs, leading to efficient decision-making.

Figure 4 below describes the requirements engineering process and outlines the relationship between stakeholders and the requirements. Another critical aspect is that the path derived from needs leads to requirements [4].

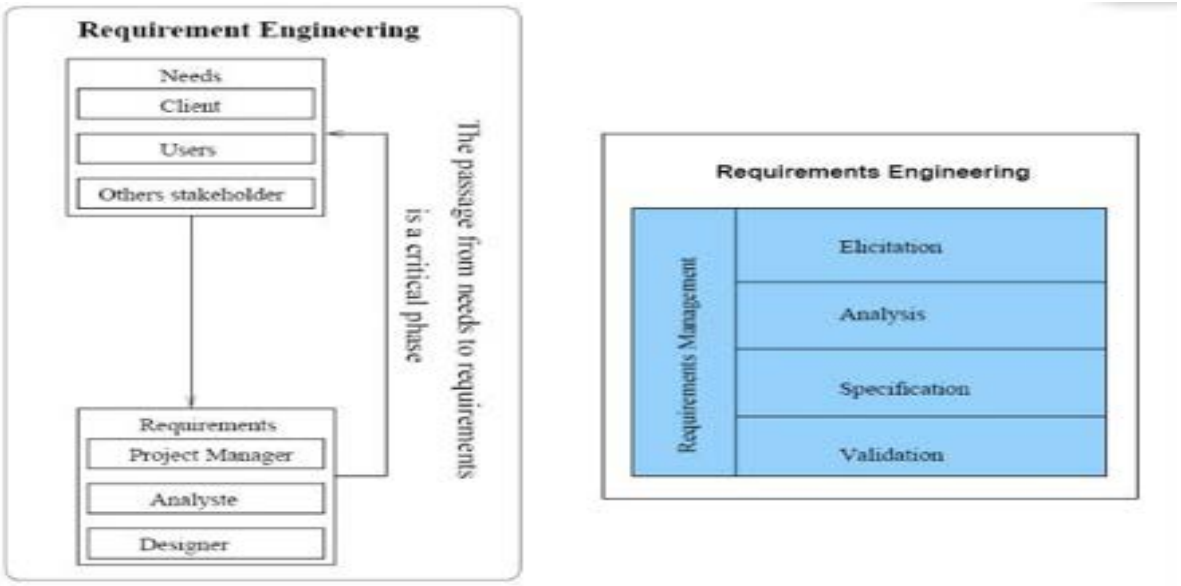

Figure 4: Requirements Engineering Process (adapted from [4])

According to Pandey and Pandey [19], several tasks, including requirements elicitation, requirements analysis, requirements negotiation, and requirements validation, are a part of the RE process. Identifying the needs for the proposed system is a process called requirements elicitation. Interpreting, analysing, modelling, and validating stakeholder information are all parts of elicitation. Problems are resolved, and agreement on requirement revisions is reached through requirements analysis. Every stakeholder has their requirements. Thus, those that address core functions should be given priority. Entity Relationship Diagrams, Data Flow Diagrams, State Transition Diagrams, Activity Diagrams, and Use-Case Diagrams are used in Requirements Documentation to show requirements at different levels of complexity. Once the issue is described, the various parties must confirm its nature through requirements validation and verification.

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The AO has four enabling processes encapsulated within the Acquisition Process. The process of interest for this research is how to structure the requirement specifications under the engineering management enabling process. The process of acquiring the resources and the set of phases that make up the acquisition process, in which technology is developed and refined into workable concepts based on capital, product, and system acquisitions, is known as the Acquisition Main Process. The output is of paramount interest as it is the input to the contractor's environment. The aspects of interest to this study in the Acquisition Main Process, as shown in Figure 3, are described as follows:

- The Technology Projects are upgraded or newly invented technology bases established to be utilised to acquire equipment. The requirements and specifications of technology-type projects are typically produced via a collective setting based on inputs

from the client, the AO, and the contractor. This requirement type is called the Project definition.

- Capital Projects are translated from acquiring upgraded or new systems funded through a Department of Defence capital budget.
- Product and System Support Projects (PSS) refer to material and services acquisition projects that complement and support existing operational capabilities. An example of a PSS project is maintenance and after-sales support to an existing system.
- The Procurement Projects aim to acquire already defined systems, support existing/new systems, and are operational. These are usually the commercial off-the-shelf systems (COTS) or the military off-the-shelf systems (MOTS).

An A-SPEC is a tool to translate requirements specifications into complete system specifications during the concept phase of a life cycle. The conceptual framework outlined in this study provided a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies involved in requirement specifications of project management, particularly within the context of Engineering Management in the AO organisation. By delving into various types of requirement specifications, stages of the requirements management process, characteristics of good requirement specifications, and requirement specification management, this framework offers valuable insights into the foundation of successful project initiation and execution. Clear and precise requirement specifications are imperative for project success, serving as the blueprint for design, verification, and maintenance processes. The framework emphasises the importance of unambiguous, complete, correct, understandable, verifiable, consistent, achievable, and executable requirement specifications, ensuring alignment with project objectives and stakeholder needs.

In addition, delineating project types within the AO organisation elucidates the diverse contexts in which requirement specifications operate, ranging from technology projects to capital projects, product and system support projects, and procurement projects. Each project type necessitates tailored approaches to requirement specification management, underscoring the significance of flexibility and adaptability in project planning and execution. The conceptual framework provides a roadmap for stakeholders involved in project initiation, offering guidance on formulating robust requirement specifications that lay the groundwork for project success. By incorporating insights from literature, theoretical frameworks, and practical considerations, this framework is valuable for enhancing project management practices and driving organisational effectiveness within the AO and beyond.

4 RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to evaluate Armscor's (AO) requirements specification and management processes and their interaction with clients and contractors. The design combined a quantitative survey of role players with qualitative follow-up analysis, ensuring both breadth and depth of insight into current practices and challenges. A comparative case study design was chosen, as the research objective required examining similarities and differences across the three stakeholder groups (AO, clients, and contractors).

4.1 Data Collection

The study population comprised professionals directly involved in acquisition and requirements processes:

- **AO**: project managers, systems engineers, and technical managers.
- **Client representatives**: project officers and systems managers.
- **Contractors**: system engineers, domain or research group leaders, and operations managers.

A total of 30 participants were surveyed, with distribution across groups as follows: AO (n = 13), Clients (n = 7), and Contractors (n = 10). This ensured representation of perspectives from all three primary stakeholders involved in the requirements lifecycle. Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire and distributed electronically. The survey contained closed-ended questions (quantitative) and open-ended prompts (qualitative). Key focus areas included:

- Initiation and elicitation of requirements.
- Methods of requirements gathering and documentation.
- Tools and processes for tracking, reviewing, and updating specifications.
- Approaches to prioritisation, conflict resolution, and quality assurance.
- Challenges encountered in requirements specification.

Where applicable, the survey provided categorical options (e.g., documentation methods, review frequency) alongside opportunities for free-text responses to capture nuanced practices.

4.2 Data Analysis

Quantitative responses were tabulated and analysed descriptively, with frequency counts and percentages used to highlight trends across stakeholder groups. Comparative analysis was employed to identify points of alignment and divergence among AO, clients, and contractors (e.g., in methods of initiation, documentation, and review). Qualitative data from open-ended responses were examined using thematic analysis, grouping responses into categories to capture recurring patterns and challenges. This enabled richer insights into the contextual issues underlying quantitative trends, such as stakeholder involvement gaps and communication challenges.

To enhance validity, the questionnaire was aligned with established requirements engineering practices as described in prior literature (e.g., INCOSE standards and SEMBASE model). Triangulation was achieved by comparing perspectives across the three stakeholder groups, reducing bias from any source. Reliability was supported by the structured survey format and consistency in data coding during thematic analysis.

5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Participants' Distribution

This section analyses the data obtained from the 30 survey participants. Most respondents, 43%, were from the AO, followed by 30% from Contractors and 26% from Clients.

5.2 Requirements Specification Process

5.2.1 Initiation of Requirements

Table 1 summarises how requirements are typically initiated in the projects across the AO, Client and Contractor groups. The results reveal some variances in the sourcing of requirements amongst stakeholders. All AOs and 70% of Contractors leverage external stakeholders to identify project requirements. This points to both these groups relying heavily on needs analysis from their outside ecosystem, including partners, vendors, technology firms and other entities. In contrast, only 1 out of 8 Client respondents named external stakeholders as project requirements initiators. It suggests that clients depend predominantly on internal sources to recognise new requirements aligned with their role in managing operational systems for end users.

Further evidence is seen in Client responses; all eight respondents stated that internal stakeholders help initiate requirements, with 50% naming technology capability as a driver. Clients, therefore, mainly identify needs by analysing current solution gaps or emerging

technologies that can address operational demands. On the other hand, no significant gaps exist between groups for internal stakeholder identification.

Table 1: How Requirements are Initiated

	AO (13)	Client (8)	Contractor (10)
Identified by external stakeholders	13	1	7
Identified by internal stakeholders	3	8	2
Technology capabilities	0	4	3

5.2.2 Requirement Gathering Methods

Table 2 presents the methods for gathering stakeholder requirements. Review of documentation was the most popular method used by all three groups overall. Prototyping was also a standard method. Observation and interviews were the least employed. Some participants also noted workshops, use cases, and the study of external vendor artefacts as other helpful methods for requirements gathering.

Table 2: Methods Used in Requirement Gathering

Variables	AO (13)	Client (7)	Contractor (10)	Total
Review of documentation	7	6	8	21
Interviews	2	4	1	7
Observation	2	1	2	5
Prototyping	5	3	5	13

5.2.3 Documentation and Tracking

Table 3 summarises how requirements are documented and tracked across textual documents, requirements management (RM) tools and project management software. Most respondents across the three groups indicated using RM tools (90%) and project software (90%) to manage specifications.

Table 3: How Requirements are Documented and Tracked

Variables	AO (13)	Client (7)	Contractor (10)	Total
Word documents	3	2	6	11
RM tools (e.g., DOORS)	13	8	6	27
Project management software	13	7	7	27

This points to the widespread adoption of systems built explicitly for requirements documentation. Word documents were still used by over one-third of participants, but were considerably lower compared to the dedicated tools. This indicates a need for flexibility where formal tools may be infeasible or unavailable. There should be standardisation in leveraging RM and project management tools for robust specifications tracking. Qualitative insights from some respondents also highlighted the use of Excel for tabulated tracing and architectural models for visualisation.

5.2.4 Review and Update Process

Figure 5 shows requirements review and update frequency across major milestones, continuous tracking and only when requested by stakeholders. The majority of AO participants (6 out of 13) indicated review as per stakeholder requests, while Clients (5 out of 8) and Contractors (4 out of 9) primarily performed updates at project milestones. However, no single approach stands out, reflecting variability in rigour for specifications' upkeep. Regular, extensive reviews are vital for optimising complex systems to meet evolving user, technology

and mission needs. The findings suggest opportunities across groups for more proactive, iterative evaluation compared to discrete milestone tracking.

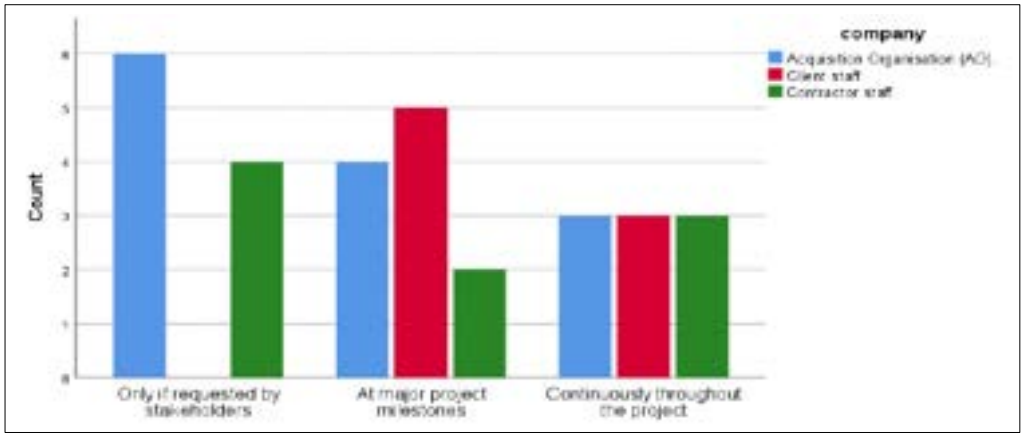

Figure 5: Requirements Reviewed and Updated after Initial Documentation

5.2.5 Prioritisation and Conflict Resolution

Table 4 shows how conflicts between stakeholder requirements are resolved. The most common approach indicated by 40% of respondents was prioritisation based on criticality, ensuring key user functionality is not compromised. 33% preferred negotiation and compromise amongst stakeholders, reflecting collaborative resolution. Only 13% of participants preferred deferring lower priority requirements instead of more decisive steps of elimination or negotiation. This allows less critical capabilities to be revisited later without entirely dropping them. Another 13% chose to eliminate requirements, causing conflicts altogether. This may reflect instances where needs significantly diverge and cannot be reconciled through other steps.

5.2.6 Quality Assessment

Table 5 lists the aspects utilised by the groups to assess the quality of requirements specifications in their projects. Key criteria evaluated by all participants include readability, traceability, completeness and testability of specifications. Alignment is needed in adopting fundamental quality checks, even if teams utilise different proprietary procedures or platforms.

5.2.7 Challenges Faced

Table 6 outlines the key challenges faced by the groups in developing robust requirements specifications compiled from the survey responses. The top challenge indicated by the majority was an incomplete understanding of client/stakeholder needs.

Table 4: How are Conflicts between Stakeholder Requirements Resolved

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Prioritisation based on criticality	12	40.0
Negotiation and compromise	10	33.3
Deferring lower-priority requirements	4	13.3
Elimination of requirements causing conflict	4	13.3
Total	**30**	**100.0**

Table 5: How Organisations Assess the Quality of Requirements Specifications

Variables	AO (13)	Client (7)	Contractor (10)	Total
Readability/clarity	13	8	9	30
Traceability	13	8	9	30
Consistency	9	7	9	25
Completeness	13	8	9	30
Testability	13	7	9	29

Table 6: Challenges Faced in Developing Requirements Specifications

Variables	AO (13)	Client (7)	Contractor (10)	Total
Incomplete understanding of client/stakeholder need	11	7	8	26
Lack of stakeholder involvement and sign-off	8	2	8	18
Insufficient details due to project deadlines	13	3	9	25
Poor communication among the project team	11	6	8	25
Unclear/ambiguous documentation	7	4	6	17

This is closely followed by insufficient specification details due to project deadlines and poor team communication, hampering requirements consensus. Contractors have relatively less autonomy and visibility while adhering to partners' specifications. However, broad challenges like comprehension of user needs, looming deadlines, miscommunication, etc., affect all groups. Participant comments also highlighted other issues, like technologically infeasible requirements and moving targets based on market trends.

5.3 Impacts of Requirements Specification

Table 7 shows the impact of unclear or misunderstood requirements specifications on project outcomes. 19 out of 30 respondents indicated major impacts, including significant delays and cost overruns.

Table 7: Impact of Unclear/Misunderstood Requirements Specifications on a Project

Responses	AO (13)	Client (7)	Contractor (10)	Total
Minor impact	0	0	2	2
Moderate Impact	5	2	2	9
Major Impact	8	6	5	19
Total	13	8	9	30

Table 8 summarises the practices adopted by groups for handling changes in requirements after the initial agreement. The most common techniques include careful requirements review, impact analysis and assessing schedule and cost implications. This highlights that a rigorous change review covers impact assessment and trade-off analysis. Respondents also pointed to negotiations in case of significant changes to establish new timelines and budget impact.

Table 8: Management Process for Changes to Requirements Specification

Responses	AO (13)	Client (7)	Contractor (10)	Total
Careful review and analysis of new/modified requirements	12	4	8	24
Assessment of schedule and budget impacts	9	8	8	25
Negotiation of new timelines and budgets	8	6	7	21
Reduction in project scope to accommodate change	4	1	2	7

5.4 Recommendations for Improvement

Drawing on the comparative analysis of specification processes and observed challenges, Table 9 consolidates suggested enhancements from survey participants across the three groups to elevate requirements engineering effectiveness based on the comparative analysis. The top recommendation chosen by 70% of respondents centred on increased involvement of all stakeholders throughout requirements processes from initial elicitations through change approvals. This indicates that inadequate visibility into user environments frequently undermines requirements fidelity today.

5.5 Discussion of Findings

The comparative analysis of requirements engineering processes amongst the AO, Client and Contractors offered valuable revelations on alignment areas but illuminated gaps needing abridgement [6]. This discussion connects the crucial findings to validate against prior academic work and practitioner perspectives from the field. This indicates recognition of the challenges highlighted in Laureani & Antony [20] regarding the risk of failure from inadequate requirements acquisition. The participatory, multi-modal elicitation aligns with system engineering principles, as Blanchard [10] emphasised, to gain holistic stakeholder inputs for converting to specifications.

Table 9: Management Process for Changes to Requirements Specification

Responses	AO (13)	Client (7)	Contractor (10)	Total
Increased involvement of all stakeholders	9	8	4	21
Better tools for managing and tracking	9	6	6	19
Develop templates for requirement types	10	6	6	22
Improve documentation processes	9	4	7	20
Increase reviews and updates of requirements	7	3	4	14
Enhance change management processes	2	5	3	10
Improve alignment with collaborating organisations	13	5	5	23

The widespread adoption of RM tools reflects the increasing alignment with international standards such as IEEE-15288, which informed the A-PRAC-1010 framework [2], [9]. This finding supports the literature's call for standardisation in AO practices while showing progress since earlier reports of inconsistent adoption. This endorses Armscor's transition from previous technical rigour gaps. Tool unification also facilitates the organisational maturity capability framework [16]. This limited contractor autonomy contrasts with the SEMBASE model, which stresses continuous involvement of all stakeholders throughout the lifecycle [13], [15]. The observed gap reinforces Nyareli & Erasmus's [14] finding that South African defence contractors operate with constrained visibility in requirements development. Integrating more comprehensive access protocols can prevent disjointed execution.

Armscor's challenge of transitioning specifications into complex integrated defence systems can likewise be gained through pilot-driven development. Tracing use case journeys early in prototyping stages reveals hidden, unviable gaps to capture solely via contract-driven specifications documentation. The emphasis on iterative, user-driven corrections aligns with collaborative elicitation approaches described by Konaté et al. [4], underscored by Joseph-Malherbe & Malherbe's [17] call for collaborative change management of requirements.

A glaring challenge raised by the majority was insufficient detailing attributable to project pressures. Trade-off conflicts then arise, as echoed by participant comments on balancing rework versus resources. Unreasonable deadlines suppress requirements, eventually slowing overall outcomes. Alignment is also impacted as changes require extensive negotiations

amongst groups. Project timelines must thus judiciously balance urgency and engineering necessities. While the discussion doesn't delve into some areas extensively, the recommendations from participants pave the way for advancing requirements excellence.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study evaluated the requirements engineering (RE) processes within Armscor's Acquisition Organisation (AO) and its interactions with clients and contractors. Applying a mixed-methods comparative case study revealed both areas of alignment and persistent gaps across the three stakeholder groups. While the widespread use of requirements management tools demonstrates progress towards standardisation and alignment with international frameworks such as IEEE-15288 and A-PRAC-1010, shortcomings remain in stakeholder integration, requirements detailing, and the predominance of milestone-driven reviews.

The value of this study lies in providing empirical evidence from the South African defence acquisition context, an area underrepresented in RE literature. It confirms that foundational practices are in place but highlights persistent challenges compromising effectiveness. By directly comparing perspectives from AO, clients, and contractors, the research offers a holistic picture of the requirements landscape, bridging a gap noted in prior studies that often focus on only one group of stakeholders. The findings carry direct implications for all three role players in the defence acquisition ecosystem:

- For Armscor's AO, the evidence underscores the need to strengthen continuous and iterative engagement with stakeholders, moving beyond ad-hoc or milestone-based reviews. Embedding iterative validation throughout the lifecycle would better reflect the evolving operational environment.
- For the Department of Defence as a client, the reliance on internally initiated requirements suggests a missed opportunity to integrate technology-driven and external stakeholder inputs. Broader engagement would ensure specifications remain responsive to emerging defence needs.
- For contractors, the reported lack of autonomy in requirements access highlights the necessity for earlier and more substantive involvement. Enabling contractors to participate meaningfully from the outset would reduce downstream misalignments and costly rework.

At a strategic level, improving requirements specification processes is not merely a technical adjustment but a pathway to enhancing mission readiness, cost efficiency, and timely project delivery. In a resource-constrained defence environment, refining RE practices translates into systems that better meet operational demands, minimise overruns, and strengthen the resilience of acquisition programmes. These improvements directly align with the intent of existing frameworks such as A-PRAC-1010 and SEMBASE, but also reveal where practice continues to diverge from their principles.

The study points to several avenues for further research. First, longitudinal analysis of acquisition projects would help establish how iterative improvements in RE processes affect project outcomes over time. Second, cross-national comparisons with other defence acquisition organisations would benchmark South Africa's progress against international best practice and identify transferable lessons. Finally, intervention-based studies that pilot collaborative and iterative approaches in live projects could provide practical pathways for embedding the study's recommendations.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that while the South African defence acquisition system has made notable strides in adopting requirements management tools and frameworks, gaps in inclusivity, detailing, and iteration persist. Addressing these challenges requires a cultural and procedural shift that places stakeholder engagement, iterative review, and practical

alignment with operational contexts at the heart of requirements engineering. By doing so, the AO, clients, and contractors alike can contribute to acquisition processes that are more efficient, resilient, and ultimately more effective in delivering mission-critical systems.

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POLITICAL INTERFERENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON HEALTHCARE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN AFRICA: CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS FROM GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Political influence affects the execution and sustainability of healthcare infrastructure projects across Africa. Through the lens of principal-agent, cultural risk and institutional theories, this study examines the nature and impact of political interference on government healthcare infrastructure projects in Ghana. Project data on past and ongoing healthcare infrastructure projects was also analysed to help identify patterns of political intervention and project delays. The review found that political interference manifests through partisan prioritisation, manipulation of procurement processes and weaknesses in project governance impacted timelines, financing, quality and sustainability of projects. The review also identified the need for institutional project governance reforms as strategies to manage political interventions. Promoting openness in procurement, fiscal devolution, capacity building and use of project management tools were emphasised as recommendations to tackle this problem. Findings from the review provide relevant insights for developing a contextually relevant risk management framework for government healthcare infrastructure projects in Africa.

Keywords: Healthcare Infrastructure, Political Interference, Ghana

1 INTRODUCTION

The development and sustainability of healthcare infrastructure are fundamental to a robust health system [1], [2], [3] and are crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 - Good Health and Well-being [4]. However, across Africa, public healthcare infrastructure projects face systemic challenges, including funding constraints, substandard quality and delays [5], [6], [7], thereby hindering the attainment of this goal. Despite the critical importance of healthcare infrastructure, the evidence observed points to political interference with project prioritisation, procurement, and overall execution, which plays a significant role in exacerbating these challenges [8], [9], [10].

Political interference can be described as actions by politicians or politically affiliated individuals pushing through their will on project decisions, side-stepping or overriding established project processes and administrative procedures [11]. In Ghana, as in many African countries, politicians make policies and decisions relating to public projects [12], [13], [14]. Their decisions shape key project management areas such as financing, scheduling, procurement and quality delivery, which in turn present risks that affect project outcomes [5], [8], [12], [15], [16]. Studies [8], [9], [12] have shown that these interferences significantly affect the effective execution and sustainability of government healthcare infrastructure projects across Africa. Some of the effects of political interference in these projects include project delays [17], [18], a wide design-reality gap [5], resource wastage [8], cost overruns [19], [20], institutional conflicts and project failure [9].

While this phenomenon of political interference is not unique to Ghana, the availability of project data, policies and a centralised project structure provides a compelling case study focus. Insights from this study are, however, transferable to other African countries having similar structures and challenges. This study was conducted to identify the nature of political interference, the consequences of these interferences, institutional and cultural factors moderating this phenomenon, and the strategies implemented to help mitigate these risks. These valuable insights will help in developing a comprehensive and effective risk management framework that will improve the outcomes of government healthcare infrastructure projects on the African continent.

This study also draws on the Principal-Agent Theory, Institutional Theory and Cultural Risk Theories to analyse the dynamics of political interference in healthcare infrastructure projects. The relationship between a party (the principal) that delegates authority to perform activities to another party (the agent) on their behalf [21], [22], [23], [24] can be beneficial or detrimental to projects [25], [26], while institutional structures and cultural risk perceptions may foster or hinder political risks in these project environments [27], [28], [29], [30]. Incorporating these theories helps to provide nuanced insights into how political interference arises and affects project outcomes.

A review of relevant literature is presented in the next section. A detailed explanation of the method used for the study follows this. The analysis of the scoping review is subsequently presented and discussed. Conclusions from the study are then made in the final section.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Healthcare Infrastructure Gap

Africa accounts for about 24% of the world's disease burden and contributes about half of the world's mortality due to communicable diseases [31]. It is projected that over 6000 new health facilities must be constructed to meet universal health care accessibility targets for Africa by 2030 [32]. Ghana, with over 60% of its healthcare facilities being government-run [33], is currently unable to meet the health needs in critical areas, including disease diagnosis [34], [35], surgical capacity, trauma care [35] and natal care [36]. This situation is attributed to

inadequate investments in healthcare infrastructure [35]. There is, therefore, a need to provide sustainable healthcare infrastructure [37], including physical buildings and structures, supply and waste management systems, medical devices, digital health systems and ancillary healthcare support systems [38] to help bridge this gap. However, Ghana has experienced many stalled projects in the healthcare infrastructure sector [37], [39].

2.1.1 Healthcare Infrastructure Project Structure in Ghana

The Ministry of Health is the state institution responsible for policy formulation and running the health system in Ghana [33]. The Infrastructure Directorate of the Ministry is in charge of initiating and overseeing health infrastructure projects [40]. The Ghana Health Service and Teaching Hospitals are agencies under the Ministry that run the health facilities [33], [41].

The legislation guiding the procurement of public goods and services, including health infrastructure in Ghana, is the Public Procurement Act, which was passed in 2003 and further amended in 2016 [42].

These structures have been established to ensure the efficient execution of health projects in the country. However, political considerations [41] have hampered the realisation of these ideals.

2.2 Political Interference in Healthcare Infrastructure

Politicians and politically affiliated persons are known to interfere with projects with acts such as influencing the selection of contractors and providers of goods and services [15], [16], [43], side-stepping cost-benefit analysis and impact assessment processes [10], by-passing project governance procedures [44], acts of corruption [9], [45] and even suspending projects [46]. Political commitment and competing interests largely influence the direction of public health policy in Africa [14]. Political interference with government projects in Ghana is usually carried out for the politician's gain or electoral advantage [15], [47]. These disruptions by politicians may not align with the project objectives and processes, thereby exposing projects to conflicts and causing undue delays [17].

Some classic cases of political interference in healthcare infrastructure projects in Ghana are the Ashanti Regional Hospital project in Sewua, which resulted in a tussle between the government and the project contractor [48] and the University of Ghana Medical Center project, where there was a conflict between the University and the Ministry of Health over the authority to manage the facility [49].

The political dynamics in Africa, typified by instability, corruption and governance challenges, distinctly impact healthcare systems [13], [50]. These dynamics make it important to develop context-specific strategies to mitigate political risks and enhance opportunities to ensure the successful delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects on the continent.

2.3 Effects of Political Cycles on Projects

Political cycles often influence infrastructure project development [51], [52]. In Africa, incumbents may prioritise projects for electoral gains, whereas government transitions risk altering project priorities, thereby undermining continuity and stalling essential healthcare infrastructure developments during and after election periods [51], [52]. In Ghana, a change in government presents a huge risk to projects commenced by the previous government. For example, the Fomena Hospital, Abetifi Hospital and Afari Military Hospital projects were all stalled once there was a change in government in 2017 [46]. There is, therefore, a need to understand the link between political cycles and projects and then develop project governance mechanisms to ensure the continuity and completion of critical healthcare infrastructure.

2.4 Contributing and Moderating Factors to Political Interference

2.4.1 Principal-Agent Theory

This theory explores the relationship between the politicians and the project executors. Principal-agent conflicts usually affect project scheduling [23], [26]. Conversely, a good principal-agent relationship may contribute to cost savings [23], better communication and collaboration [26] and meeting project schedules [25]. Dick-Sagoe [9] proposes that further research be conducted to investigate the role this relationship plays in contributing to project failure.

2.4.2 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory examines how institutional structures within organisations enable and shape political risks. It examines how rules, norms and practices at organisations promote or mitigate political interference [27], [28]. Institutional theory helps to understand the dynamics at public institutions that can be used to provide insights to help curb interference with these projects.

2.4.3 Cultural Risk Theory

Cultural perceptions of risk influence the management of political risks in the healthcare infrastructure space. Cultural Risk Theory examines the role cultural attitudes play in dictating how stakeholders identify, assess and respond to political interference [29], [30]. Such attitudes can amplify or downplay the likelihood of political interference in these projects. It is important to provide context-sensitive strategies that align with local dynamics to mitigate political interference.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research undertook a scoping review of the literature on political intervention in health infrastructure projects and an analysis of health infrastructure project data from the Ministry of Health in Ghana. Only journal and conference papers indexed in SCOPUS and Web of Science (WoS) were used for the review. The method used for this study was adopted from similar studies [9], [14], [15], [16], [17].

3.1 Scoping Review

A scoping review was conducted to compile and evaluate existing findings [53], [54], [55] on the nature of political interference, the effects of these interferences, institutional and cultural factors moderating this phenomenon, and the strategies implemented to help mitigate these risks. Given the limited academic literature on the subject in Ghana, relevant studies from other countries were included to enrich the insights and provide contexts applicable to Ghana and Africa. The review, relying on the PRISMA guideline, was conducted using the following procedure:

1. Search terms and phrases were used to find relevant literature. These terms and phrases included the following words: “political”, “politics”, “interference”, “influence”, “corruption”, “hospital”, “health facility”, “health infrastructure”, “health construction”, “ministry health”, “health department”, “health infrastructure project”, “public project”, “sustainability”, “project management”, “health governance”, “health policy”, “ehealth”, “health information system”, “digital health”, “project delay”, “procurement”, “failure”, “success”, “principal-agent”, “institutional structure”, “culture”, “Ghana”, “Africa”, “sub-Sahara”.
2. Search terms and phrases were used from 15th to 21st May, 2025.
3. The initial search resulted in 1214 papers – 917 from SCOPUS and 297 from WoS.

4. Duplicate papers were identified and removed.
5. The selection of papers for the review was based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 1.
6. A review and screening to identify relevant papers for the study was conducted. A backwards and forward search was also carried out from relevant papers to identify other relevant studies not seen from the original search.
7. After screening and reviewing relevant papers, 28 papers were selected for the review.
8. A concept frequency cloud was developed using the ATLAS.ti (version 25) software tools to visualise the frequently identified concepts in the papers.
9. The ATLAS.ti software was also used to identify, group and evaluate theories and themes relevant to the study.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	*Inclusion*	*Exclusion*
Project type	Public sector healthcare infrastructure projects, including public-private partnership projects	Sole private sector healthcare infrastructure projects or non-healthcare infrastructure projects
Study focus	Studies on political interference or project governance	Studies unrelated to political interference or project governance
Study period	All publication years	Not applicable
Study location	All publication locations	Not applicable
Publication type	Peer-reviewed literature	Unreviewed or grey literature
Language	English language publications	Non-english language publications

3.2 Project Data Analysis

A review of project data on government healthcare infrastructure in Ghana was conducted to complement the scoping review findings. The study accessed project data from the Ministry of Health in Ghana on the 23rd April, 2025. The data covers projects initiated from 2017 to 2024. This enabled the development of a regional distribution of projects, showing the areas prioritised by the government. The analysis of the documents captured the number of projects initiated and uncompleted, while linking them to political cycles. This provided empirical evidence on the effect of elections on healthcare infrastructure projects in Ghana.

4 RESULTS

This section presents the results from the scoping review and project data analysis.

4.1 Scoping Review

4.1.1 Publication Analysis

A total of 28 papers were included for the scoping review. The highest frequency of papers published was recorded in 2023, with 8 research papers. No publications were recorded for 2015, 2017 and 2019. No publications before 2014 were recorded for this study. The annual publication trend is shown in Figure 1. Some key journals where relevant papers for this study were published are listed in Table 2. Country-specific studies included in this review were

conducted in 13 different countries. 11 papers were included from Ghana, 2 from South Africa and Cameroon. Lesotho, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Libya, Brazil, India, Norway and the United States had 1 paper each. 3 studies were conducted in multiple countries.

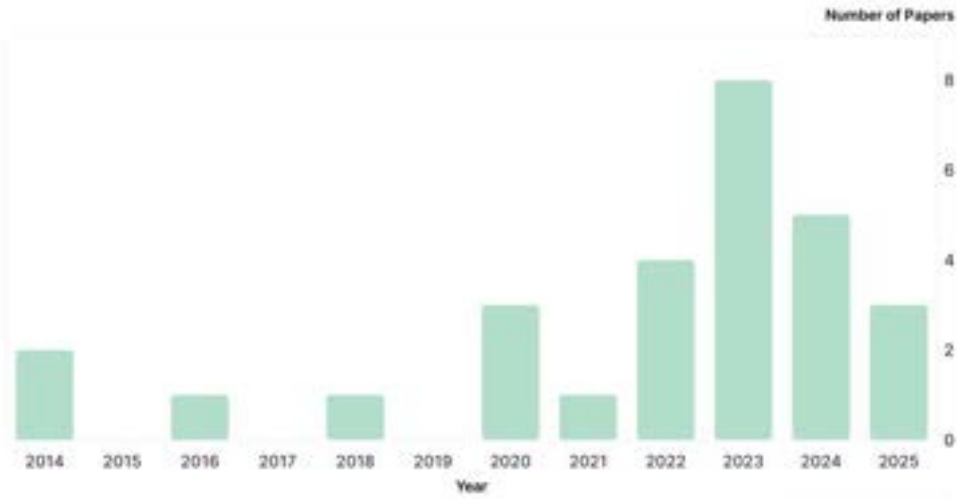

Figure 1: Annual publication trend

Table 2: Key journals

Title	*CiteScore*
Politics and Policy	2.5
Health Policy and Planning	6.0
Global Public Health	6.5
International Journal of Managing Projects in Business	7.0
JMIR Medical Informatics	7.9
Frontiers in Public Health	4.8
Health Research Policy and Systems	7.5
BMJ Open	4.4

Research studies included in the review used different research methods. These studies employed qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods approaches. The summary of the research methods used and their frequency is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Research methods used in studies

Method	*Number of Papers*	*Occurrences*
Systematic Literature Review	2	[33], [56]
Document Review/Analysis	8	[12], [57], [58], [59], [60], [61], [62], [63]
Interview	14	[41], [47], [60], [61], [64], [65], [66], [67], [68], [69], [70], [71], [72], [73]
Focus Group Discussion	2	[60], [72]
Survey	7	[9], [64], [66], [74], [75], [76], [77]
Model Testing	1	[78]

The concept frequency cloud, which was developed with ATLASti.25 software is presented in Figure 2. It illustrates that the papers included in the review focused on concepts relating to public health projects, which is relevant to the study.

Figure 2: Concept frequency cloud

4.1.2 Nature of Political Interference

Political interference in healthcare infrastructure manifests through a plethora of practices and conditions. The review identified the nature of political interference as presented in the various studies. These include politicised project prioritisation, changes in political leadership, procurement breaches, collusion and political appointments. These tend to undermine project planning, disrupt project continuity, endanger project quality, increase project costs and foster corruption. The areas and forms of political interference are grouped into thematic areas and presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Categorisation of Political Interference in Healthcare Infrastructure Projects

Theme	*Description*	*Occurrences*
Prioritisation and Policy Direction	Project priority, policy direction and decision-making based on political agenda.	[33], [41], [61], [62]
Political Transitions	Halted or abandoned projects after changes in political leadership.	[47], [65], [70]
Procurement	Undue influence over project procurement processes.	[47], [57], [59], [64], [74]
Collusion and Clientelism	Politicians collude with contractors and government officials for political or financial benefits through kickbacks, bribery and fraudulent payments.	[47], [74]
Misappropriation and Misallocation of Resources	Redirecting project funds for personal or political gains.	[61], [65]
Political Appointments	Favouritism in leadership appointments usually involves unqualified persons or persons with partisan affiliations.	[60]
Political Commitment	Lack of political leadership to ensure long-term health infrastructure development.	[56], [69], [74]
Technical Undermining	Disregarding or overriding technical recommendations, while prioritising personal or political gains.	[71]

General Corruption	Broad and unspecified references to corruption by politicians in the project cycle.	[63], [72], [78]

Focusing on Ghana, the Ministry of Health holds sole control over policy formulation and capital project execution, marginalising local managements, who lack real control over project budgets and execution [33]. Also, where there is no formalised prioritisation system, decision-making on projects becomes susceptible to political influence, as highlighted by Sandhu [61]. The absence of public participation in project selection and budgeting also creates room for projects to be inspired and championed solely by political considerations [47], [63]. These weaknesses in governance and accountability structures in the healthcare infrastructure system foster political interference.

4.1.3 Contributing and Moderating Factors to Political Interference

The scoping review encompassed papers that examined political interference in health systems through the lens of principal-agent theory, institutional theory or cultural risk theory. The review of the principal-agent problems is presented in Table 5. The results indicate a persistent misalignment in goals between political authority (the principal) and technical agents. It also indicates that political actors heavily influence project executors' autonomy in decision-making. This is as a result of the imbalance in power, poor oversight and a politicised resource allocation system. These conflicts are further exacerbated by conflicting authority structures and weak coordination channels.

Table 5: Principal-Agent factors to political interference

Theme	*Description*	*Occurrences*
Power Imbalance	Political leadership imposes their decisions or sidelines expert advice due to the disproportionate power it wields over project implementers.	[33], [41]
Communication and Coordination	Limited interaction between policymakers and the project implementers leads to mistrust and poor coordination.	[33]
Conflicting Authority and Roles	Overlapping mandates between political authority and technical agencies cause conflicts and inefficiencies.	[33]
Oversight Gaps	Agency oversight gaps, fostering manipulation of reports, costing and politicised contractor selection.	[64]

The review of papers that covered the moderating role institutional structure plays in fostering political interference is presented in Table 6. The results show that a rigid top-down hierarchical structure, unclear project roles at the local level, and inadequate project management capacity within institutions promote political interference in health systems. Additionally, the lack of continuity at local institutions hampers institutional memory and resilience, creating a conducive environment for political interference.

Table 6: Institutional factors to political interference

Theme	*Description*	*Occurrences*
Power Structure	The top-down hierarchical structure of the health system hinders lower-level discretion on decisions.	[41], [47]
Undefined Project Governance Roles	Undefined roles and weak institutional continuity at the local project level make projects vulnerable to political influence.	[33]
Technical and Financial Capacity	Weak project management capabilities reduce resistance to political influence.	[63], [69]

Cultural norms and practices play a moderating role in political interference in health projects. These cultural risk factors, which promote political interference, are summarised in Table 7. Cultural norms such as political and familial loyalty, along with deference to authority, fuel tolerance for political interference in project processes. Additionally, a lax public service discourages due diligence and whistleblowing, thus impeding objective project

governance. Furthermore, a culture that rewards political alignment over technical competence normalises political interference in projects. A system characterised by deep mistrust among technical authorities may lean towards political authority. A society exhibiting these features will be susceptible to political interference in public projects.

Table 7: Cultural risk factors to political interference

Theme	*Description*	*Occurrences*
Politicised Loyalty	Lack of objectivity and weakened professional conduct due to allegiance to and expectations of loyalty to the ruling party.	[47]
Distrust	Distrust among leadership in the health sector.	[33]
Deference to Authority	The cultural norm of deference to authority fosters political dominance over professional advice and practices.	[41], [66]
Public Work Ethics	The passive view of public work, low accountability and complacency promote interference.	[47], [66]

4.1.4 Impact of Political Interference

The review revealed the multidimensional impact that political interference has on healthcare projects. These impacts have been grouped into themes relating to key project management areas – schedule, quality, cost and procurement. There is an additional theme of state capture, which indicates the lasting effect of interference. These themes are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Impact of political interference

Thematic Area	*Description*	*Occurrences*
Schedule Management and Project Disruptions	Poor planning, unmeritorious project schedule extensions and project abandonments.	[9], [74]
Project Quality	Substandard work, delivery of inferior goods and services, leading to unsustainable projects.	[74]
Financial and Cost Management	Overcommitment of state resources, misapplication of funds and inflated costs.	[9], [47], [64], [65], [74]
Procurement and Contracts	Biased tendering process, contracts being awarded to partisan affiliates, insider sub-contracting and bribery.	[64], [74]
State Capture	Weak project monitoring, bypassing regulations and collusion between political actors and officials.	[69], [74]

Financial and budgetary mismanagement significantly results from political interference. Politicians tend to start more projects than there are available funds for [47]. In other instances, funds are misdirected from ongoing projects to new, politically motivated projects [65]. This stems from the highly politicised procurement process in public projects [64], [74]. Contracts for public projects that are awarded based on affiliation with the ruling party tend to have severe effects on these projects [74]. These politicised procurements and contracts tend to lead to issues such as weak project monitoring and bypass of regulations, which culminate in compromised quality and delivery of substandard goods and services [9], [74]. These practices of interference also often lead to project schedule delays and even result in project abandonment in instances of change in political leadership [9], [74]. The challenge of collusion among political actors, technical persons and contractors compromises the sustainability of projects in public health systems. Ultimately, the interference by politicians reflects deep systemic challenges in health systems.

4.1.5 Mitigation Strategies

This review identified an array of strategies for mitigating the challenge of political interference in healthcare infrastructure projects. These recommendations and strategies have been clustered into the seven thematic areas in Table 9.

Governance and Institutional Reforms were widely emphasised as essential to combating the problem of political interference in the health projects. Recommendations, including creating independent institutions to oversee projects [47], enacting legislation to protect technocrats and separating political and administrative roles [66] were made. These recommendations are to ensure professionalism and independence in managing these projects. Additionally, assigning clear project roles and building the capacity of project executors [12], [70], [77] was identified as a mechanism for mitigating the influence of politicians in health projects. The literature advocated for the involvement of academics and experts in planning and executing projects [75]. It was also highlighted that empowering authorities and communities at the local level could help manage this problem. It was recommended that reducing the directive powers of centralised authorities, promoting the involvement of grassroots and actively promoting fiscal decentralisation [65], [78] can enhance project performance and accountability.

Table 9: Proposed mitigation strategies

Thematic Area	*Description*	*Occurrences*
Governance and Institutional Reforms	1. Establish independent institutions to oversee projects. 2. Develop legal frameworks for institutions that empower technical personnel and separate administrative power from political power in institutions.	[12], [33], [47], [60], [66], [70], [73]
Clear Project Roles and Capacity Building	1. Assign well-defined project roles to qualified persons. 2. Promote professional skills development and engage academic or professional institutions for technical support.	[47], [60], [65], [68], [70], [75], [77]
Financial Management	Ensure the availability and disbursement of funds before projects commence.	[47]
Local Ownership and Decentralisation	1. Promote fiscal and political devolution to local authorities and communities to enhance local project planning and implementation. 2. Centralised bodies should play advisory roles.	[47], [65], [73], [78]
Transparency and Accountability	1. Open and digitalised procurement systems that allow for stakeholder and public oversight. 2. Guaranteeing whistleblower protection	[63], [64], [67], [74]
National Development Plan and Policy	Alignment of projects to a national development plan instead of political manifesto promises or arbitrary plans.	[47], [56], [69]
Project Planning and Risk Management	Promote the use of project management and data gathering tools and processes such as cost-benefit analysis, feasibility studies, review workshops and risk management tools.	[12], [58], [61], [70], [75]
Public Engagement and Oversight	Promote the involvement of citizens, the media and civil society organisations in project processes.	[57], [68], [74]

Promoting a transparent and accountable procurement process also emerged as a strategy to manage the influence of politicians in health projects. Papers stressed the importance of a fair tendering process, public monitoring of the procurement process, protection of whistleblowers, and the use of digital procurement systems to help enhance trust and eliminate favouritism [64], [67], [74]. Studies also highlighted the need for establishing a national development plan and aligning health projects with this plan [47], [56]. These studies argue that projects should stem from a well-developed national plan rather than from political

manifestos and promises. This will ensure the continuity of projects which are geared towards a common nationalistic vision.

The review found studies that underscored the importance of using project management and data gathering tools to help eliminate the occurrence of political interference. These studies [58], [61], [70], [75] recommend the use of risk management tools, cost-benefit analysis, feasibility studies and review workshops to aid in an evidence-based decision-making process. Other papers advocated for the need to empower and involve the public in project processes [57], [68], [74]. They contend that citizen and civil society participation will promote accountability and help reduce the prevalence of interference by political actors in these projects.

Findings from this review form a strong foundation for developing a contextually relevant risk management framework that will strengthen the effective delivery and sustainability of health infrastructure projects while reducing the undue influence of politicians.

4.2 Project Data

4.2.1 State of Health Infrastructure Projects from 2017 to 2024

A total of eighty-six (86) projects were initiated by the government between 2017 to 2024. These included the construction and rehabilitation of health centres, district and regional hospitals. Also included were Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) compounds and specialised health facilities. These projects were financed through government budget allocations, loans and grants from international partners. Contracts for executing these projects were awarded to either local or international contractors, with varying timelines.

Many of these projects faced implementation challenges, which led to a significant number (69.77%) remaining uncompleted. Table 10 shows that these projects were unable to meet their completion schedules, irrespective of their planned completion timelines. For example, 80.95% of projects scheduled for completion within one year remained uncompleted. This trend continued for projects scheduled for completion between four to five years and five to six years, where 77.14% and 75.00% non-completion rates were recorded, respectively. Projects scheduled to be completed between two to three years saw a 40.91% non-completion rate. However, all projects that were initiated without defined timelines remained uncompleted.

Table 10: Uncompleted projects based on planned completion timeline

Planned Completion (Years)	*Uncompleted Projects*	*Total Number of Projects*	*Percentage of Projects Uncompleted (%)*
0-1	17	21	80.95
2-3	9	22	40.91
4-5	27	35	77.14
5-6	3	4	75.00
No defined timeline	4	4	100.00

As reported in Table 11, this phenomenon of non-completion showed itself when categorising these health facility projects by their bed capacity. High-bed-capacity projects (201+ beds) recorded a 100% non-completion rate, whereas moderately low-bed-capacity projects (11-50 beds) recorded a 42.86% non-completion rate. Low-bed-capacity projects (0-10 beds) had an 81.82% non-completion rate. 51-200 bed-capacity projects recorded an 85.71% non-completion rate.

Table 11: Uncompleted projects based on bed capacity

Bed Capacity	*Uncompleted Projects*	*Total Number of Projects*	*Percentage of Projects Uncompleted (%)*
0-10	27	33	81.82
11-50	12	28	42.86
51-200	6	7	85.71
201+	5	5	100.00

4.2.2 Regional Distribution of Projects

The study examined the regional distribution of projects and generated a regional heat map, Figure 3, which shows the spatial location of the projects. The Ashanti, Greater Accra and Eastern regions had the highest concentration of projects. In contrast, regions such as Upper West, Savannah, Northern and Oti were heavily underrepresented. This uneven distribution of projects, prioritising regions of electoral strategic importance to the ruling government [79] and neglecting regions with a comparatively low access to healthcare infrastructure [80] aligns with the findings from the scoping review. Technical needs assessments [81] seem not to be the primary determinant of health infrastructure project siting, but rather political considerations.

Figure 3: Regional heat map of projects

4.2.3 Effect of Political Cycles on Projects

The study further analysed data based on political cycles. This was done to investigate the link between political electoral cycles and project initiation. As presented in Figure 4, 82.93% of projects that were initiated a year before elections (pre-election) remained uncompleted. A 76.00% non-completion rate was recorded for projects initiated during election years. Non-completion rates dropped significantly to 35.00% after election years (post-election). No

project was initiated during non-election years. This pattern suggests that healthcare infrastructure projects, despite their critical need, are used as a political tool.

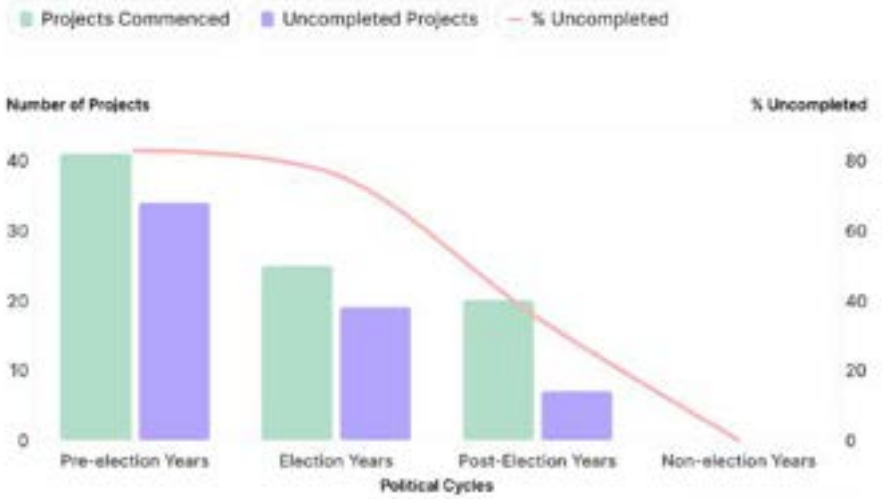

Figure 4: Distribution of projects initiated and uncompleted by political cycle

5 DISCUSSION

The scoping review identified the ways political actors interfere with public healthcare infrastructure projects. Interference is often carried out in project selection or prioritisation, contract awards and procurement selection, which leads to undesirable outcomes such as low-quality delivery, cost inflation, project delays and state capture of public projects. The review revealed that political interference typically occurs due to technical undermining, weak project governance structure, collusion between political actors and project stakeholders, and other forms of corruption. The review revealed that the enablers of political interference in health systems include power imbalances between political authorities and project implementers, weak institutional structures, and sociocultural attitudes prevalent in society. It is, therefore, essential to consider these enabling factors when developing effective solutions to this problem.

Focusing on Ghana, the health infrastructure project data analysis revealed that about 70% of projects initiated between 2017 and 2024 remained uncompleted. Official reasons for this high non-completion rate included delays in end-user training, delays in the supply of goods and services, project scope variations and land disputes. Other reasons included project relocation, project cancellations and reactivation, contract termination and government pause on project funding due to debt restructuring. Whereas factors such as natural disasters and COVID-19 may play a role in supply chain challenges [82], [83], [84] , these were not recorded as official causes for project non-completion.

The skewed distribution of projects seen in the regional project heat map developed from the project data affirms claims made in literature that it is political rather than technical considerations made when selecting and prioritising projects [71]. This confirms that political interference in these projects is deeply embedded in the project implementation process. The effect is a compromised health system with poor public health outcomes in underrepresented locations, which politicians deem less strategic.

Additionally, the analysis showed that projects typically commenced one year before (2019 and 2023) or during the year of a national election (2020 and 2024), whereas no healthcare infrastructure projects were initiated during non-election years (2018 and 2022). It can be argued that these projects were initiated as a political tool to garner

votes. Not surprisingly, projects initiated during political election periods recorded the highest rates of non-completion. This pattern, which aligns with findings from the scoping review, undermines the continuity and long-term sustainability of healthcare infrastructure in any health system, as elected governments may suspend, relocate or cancel projects [47], [65], [70].

The convergence of insights from the scoping review and project data thus provides triangulated evidence that political authorities interfere with healthcare infrastructure projects. Both sources identified the influence of political considerations in project implementation, specifically in the selection and siting of projects, as well as the use of projects as an electoral tool.

The scoping review identified useful strategies and recommendations that can help eliminate or reduce the occurrence of political interference in health projects. Key among them is separating political and administrative roles, developing open contracting systems, setting up independent bodies to oversee projects, encouraging public project involvement, fiscal devolution and utilising project management and data gathering tools. These measures are strongly believed to promote transparency and accountability and ensure evidence-based project decision-making devoid of the whims of political authority.

Insights from this review lay a strong foundation for developing an effective and relevant risk management framework tailored to the unique nature of the political environments in Africa.

6 CONCLUSION

This study examined the cause, moderating factors and mitigation strategies of political interference in public healthcare infrastructure projects. Relying on a scoping review and analysis of project data from Ghana, the study was able to identify that there is a systemic interference across the various stages of the project cycle. The procurement stage came out as the stage where political manipulation is most prevalent. It also emerged from the study that political cycles, cultural attitudes, and weak institutional structures play major roles in reinforcing this phenomenon.

The scoping review demonstrated the roles principal-agent theory, institutional theory and cultural risk theory play in driving political interference in these projects. It is, therefore, important to look at this subject matter through these lenses to provide holistic insights to tackle this problem. This study brought up meaningful strategies for tackling political interference in these critical projects. Separating politicians from administrative and project decisions, opening up the procurement process, as well as active citizen participation in projects, came out strongly as strategies to help mitigate the undue influence of political actors.

The limitation of this study was the unavailability of financial and contractor performance data, which could have enhanced the depth of the analysis. Another limitation was that publications made in only English-language texts were selected for the scoping review. This prevented the inclusion of useful insights from non-English publications.

Future studies should be widened to capture insights from more African countries to enhance the generalisability of findings. Studies incorporating project implementers, policymakers, end-users, public service workers and other relevant stakeholders will deepen the understanding and gather more useful mitigation insights. Further studies on developing and conducting empirical tests on a political risk management framework based on insights from this study may also be beneficial for improving healthcare infrastructure project delivery.

This study presents useful insights that can guide the development of a transparent and resilient project governance system to help mitigate political interference in health systems in Africa.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors acknowledge the Infrastructure Department of the Ministry of Health, Ghana, for providing access to the project data utilised in this study.

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A REVIEW OF STRATEGIC DRIFT: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS AND RECOVERY EFFORTS

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ABSTRACT

Strategic drift is a challenge organisations face when their strategy is misaligned with the external environment, leading to potential underperformance or failure. A systematic review of 54 research articles identified internal key factors: complacency, culture, decision-making, and misalignment, as well as external key factors, external environment, competition, politics, and economic pressures, which contribute to strategic drift. This scoping review aimed to analyse and synthesise the existing literature on strategic drift, focusing on understanding the primary internal and external factors and outlining how organisations attempt to recover from strategic drift through strategic realignment, management changes, innovation, and restructuring. The findings suggested that the external factors need to be understood, and the internal factors need to be aligned for recovery from strategic drift through proactive leadership, organisational flexibility and continuous innovation. Further research could include industry-specific factors and recovery strategies in a South African context.

Keywords: Strategic Drift, Strategic Management, Organisational Culture, Scoping Review

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1 INTRODUCTION

Literature defines strategic drift or inertia in various ways; Laird [1] defined the term as a mismatch between the organisation's environment and strategy in 1988. Based on this initial definition, Bonnici [2] further explained that it is when an organisation's strategic responses fall behind in the ever-changing environment due to internal dynamics. While strategic drift is not a new topic in organisational theory, it is noteworthy that many organisations still experience it to their detriment [3]. Existing literature will be reviewed, which will aim to answer the following two questions:

1. What are the key internal and external factors which contribute to strategic drift?
2. How do organisations recover from strategic drift?

This review is particularly relevant in rapidly changing organisations and industries, where external factors significantly influence strategic decisions. There is limited literature applicable to the South African context and manufacturing. Therefore, this review will look at the global perspective. The findings will be used to identify gaps and further research topics within the South African context to assist organisations experiencing strategic drift.

2 REVIEW METHOD

2.1. Inclusion criteria

A scoping review was chosen to review the literature to identify knowledge gaps [4]. The inclusion criteria encompassed a broad spectrum of studies using the PCC (participants, concept and context) framework to capture a holistic view of strategic drift and recovery. The organisations that have experienced strategic drift were considered participants; the concept was the internal and external factors contributing to strategic drift, and the context was defined as organisations struggling to keep up with a changing environment. A specific time frame was excluded as the topic has, to date, remained unchanged in its foundational theory [5].

2.2. Search strategy and evidence selection

The scoping review was conducted according to the JBI methodology recommended by Aromataris et al. [6]. The electronic databases Scopus and Web of Science were chosen for the preliminary search. Scopus has the most extensive database, and Web of Science has a broad range of literature [7]. The search string: ("strategic drift" OR "strategy drift" OR "strategic misalignment" OR "strategic inertia" OR "strategy deviation") AND ("strategy") AND ("organisation" OR "organisation" OR "corporate" OR "industry" OR "company" OR "corporation" OR "firm") was used in the databases. This initial search yielded 595 documents in Scopus, to which the following conditions were applied:

1. Conceptual Focus
2. Applicable to the research questions
3. Peer-reviewed journal articles
4. Written in English
5. Available electronically

2.3. Data extraction

Based on the above conditions, 107 articles were available for review. The abstracts of these articles were exported in CSV format to Excel. The abstracts were further reviewed, and 54 remained, which were found to be relevant to the research questions. These articles were then downloaded and encoded into ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software capable of classifying, organising and analysing large quantities of data to obtain insights and relevant

information. ATLAS.ti facilitated the articles' systematic analysis, ensuring no pertinent information was overlooked.

2.4. Limitations

The original search parameter of not having a publication year constraint remained, as it was confirmed that literature from 1988 to 2024 was relevant to the topic. However, more recent articles were focused on capturing the relevant developments and findings. The review did not consider any articles that were not written in English to ensure consistency in the analysis and data interpretation. Only published articles and textbooks available to the public were considered, not pending, confidential or unpublished works.

2.5. Publication Sources

Figure 1 depicts that the UK published the most articles (17) about strategic drift compared to the other 21 countries. Articles from various regions were reviewed to have a holistic view of the topic and to ensure that the research would be relevant to stakeholders, regardless of location.

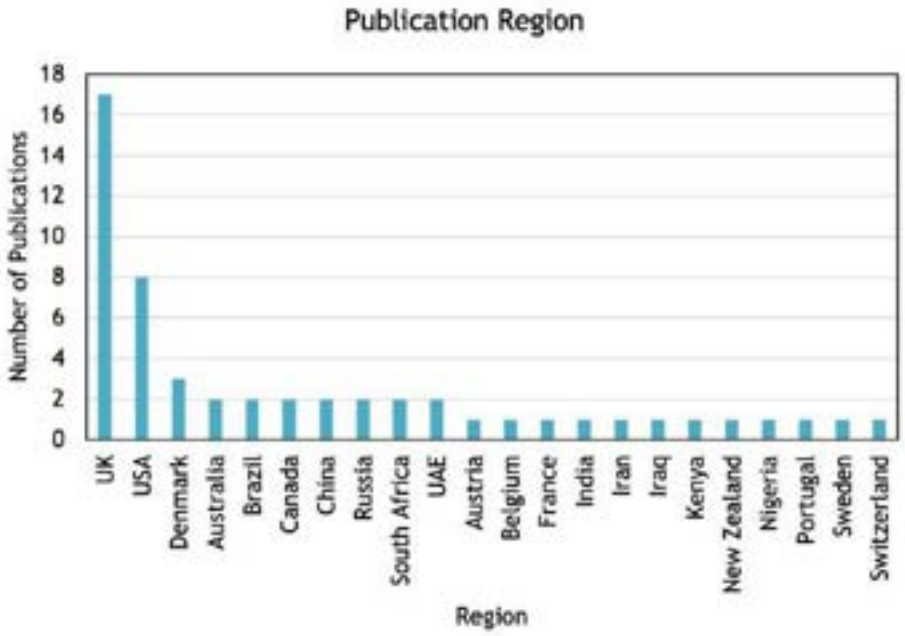

Figure 1: Graphic depicting the regions from which the reviewed articles were published.

From the reviewed articles, 42 mentioned internal factors, and 32 mentioned external factors which affect strategic drift. Many articles mentioned internal and external factors, which often influence each other.

3 RESULTS

3.1. Internal Factors

Internal factors are the contributing elements within an organisation that influence its strategic drift, as they hinder the organisation's ability to recognise or respond to changes in the internal environment [8]. As can be seen in Figure 2, there are a few internal factors which were identified as contributors to strategic drift. It was noted that these factors often overlap

and are interrelated. The findings of all internal factors are summarised in Table 1, and key internal factors are discussed below.

3.2. Complacency

Organisations and leaders become complacent due to successes in the past, which leads to failure in recognising and adapting to the changes that occur in the external environment [9]. The external environment moves rapidly for most industries where innovation is a central focus. Being complacent in this environment is detrimental to organisations as they resist change due to deeply ingrained practices and routines used during organisational success [3]. This is often referred to as organisational inertia [3]. Complacent organisations tend not to take as many risks, and the management of these organisations frequently has a defensive attitude about the organisation's performance [10]. However, organisations that don't take risks may face a higher risk of falling into strategic drift. On the other hand, successful organisations' management often has a cognitive bias through overconfidence, which may also lead to strategic drift [11]. This cognitive bias may hinder the drive to innovate and quickly adapt to counteract the changes in the external environment [10].

3.3. Culture

Complacency opens the gateway to many other internal factors, such as a culture that is resistant to change. Edwards [5] describes an organisation with a culture that did not learn from failure. This organisation adhered to traditional approaches, which caused a failure to adapt to new technologies, eventually resulting in organisational decline. Organisations cannot successfully adhere to strategies if there is a culture of teams operating in isolation and lacking communication [12]. Poor communication due to internal divisions makes ensuring the organisation is aligned with the strategy at all levels challenging, leading to strategic inertia [12]. Ness [13] recommends that the strategy align with the organisation's culture to avoid future clashes when necessary changes occur. Culture is a key internal factor as it affects an organisation's ability to be aligned with its external environment through strategy. When an organisation's culture does not promote innovation and change, it will foster conditions conducive to strategic drift [14].

3.3.1. Decision Making

Complacency and cultural misfits often lead an organisation to make poor strategic decisions. Effective decision-making is critical for strategic success as it determines an organisation's responses to the external environment [15]. In a fast-paced environment, fast and adequate decision-making is required to respond to change [16]. When management takes too long to make decisions due to hesitancy or cognitive biases, responses will be delayed, and the organisation will fall behind [16]. Poor decisions are often made due to a lack of data, such as market intelligence or consumer preferences, which causes organisations to be led astray from their strategic objectives [17]. The decision-making processes continuously require both internal and external feedback. When management takes too long to make decisions due to hesitancy or cognitive biases, responses will be delayed, and early signs of strategic misalignment or drift will not be recognised [2].

3.3.2. Misalignment

One primary form of misalignment leading to strategic drift is the disparity between the strategy set out by management and the execution [9]. This misalignment occurs due to poor communication, uncertainty, and lack of resources, ultimately leading to a strategic drift [18]. External environments are growing increasingly complex, which brings uncertainty, exacerbating the misalignment between internal capabilities and external demands [19] The misalignment between internal goals and external demands is a key internal factor as these

inefficiencies, which are caused by other internal factors, lead to missed opportunities and responses to changes in the external environment [20].

3.3.3. Management

The management of an organisation plays a vital role in strategic success; from the previous factors, it is evident that if there is no management support, strategic drift is inevitable. When management neglects certain parts of the strategic objectives and focuses on others, there is an increased risk of strategic drift [17]. Management needs to foster an environment conducive to innovation and adaptation, so there will not be resistance when external factors come into effect [21]. If the environment is not conducive to innovation, there will be significant hindrances to the responses to the external environment, once again causing strategic drift. Without management support, an organisation will eventually find its misalignment with its strategic objectives, with little hope of recovering unless drastic changes are made.

Table 1: Summary of internal factors found in literature.

Key factor	Findings	Reference
Complacency	Unable to meet supply and demand	[22]
	Resistance to take risks	[23]
	Core competencies which do not promote change	[24]
	Cognitive bias	[5]
Culture	Resistance to change causes a reluctance to enter thriving markets or leave declining markets	[25]
	Poor communication and working in silos	[12]
	Inflexible hierarchy which leads to cultural rigidity	[12]
Decision Making	High Capital Expenditure – decision made to expend capital to meet high demands which caused debt and financial fragility	[20], [26]
	Labour Disputes due to employees unhappy with the organisations decisons	
	Defensive attitude of managers causing ineffective decision making	[10]
	Slow Innovation and adaptation to changes in the external environment	[2]
	Rash decisions leading to high-risk situations with no pay-off	[16]
	Uncertainty of situations due to lack of data	[9]
Misalignment	Process Disparity	[27]
	Poor strategic execution	[28]
	Inappropriate strategy	[11]
Management	Dysfunctional leadership	[9]
	No management support	[29]
	Lack of strategic oversight	[17]
	Failure to foster an adaptable culture	[14]

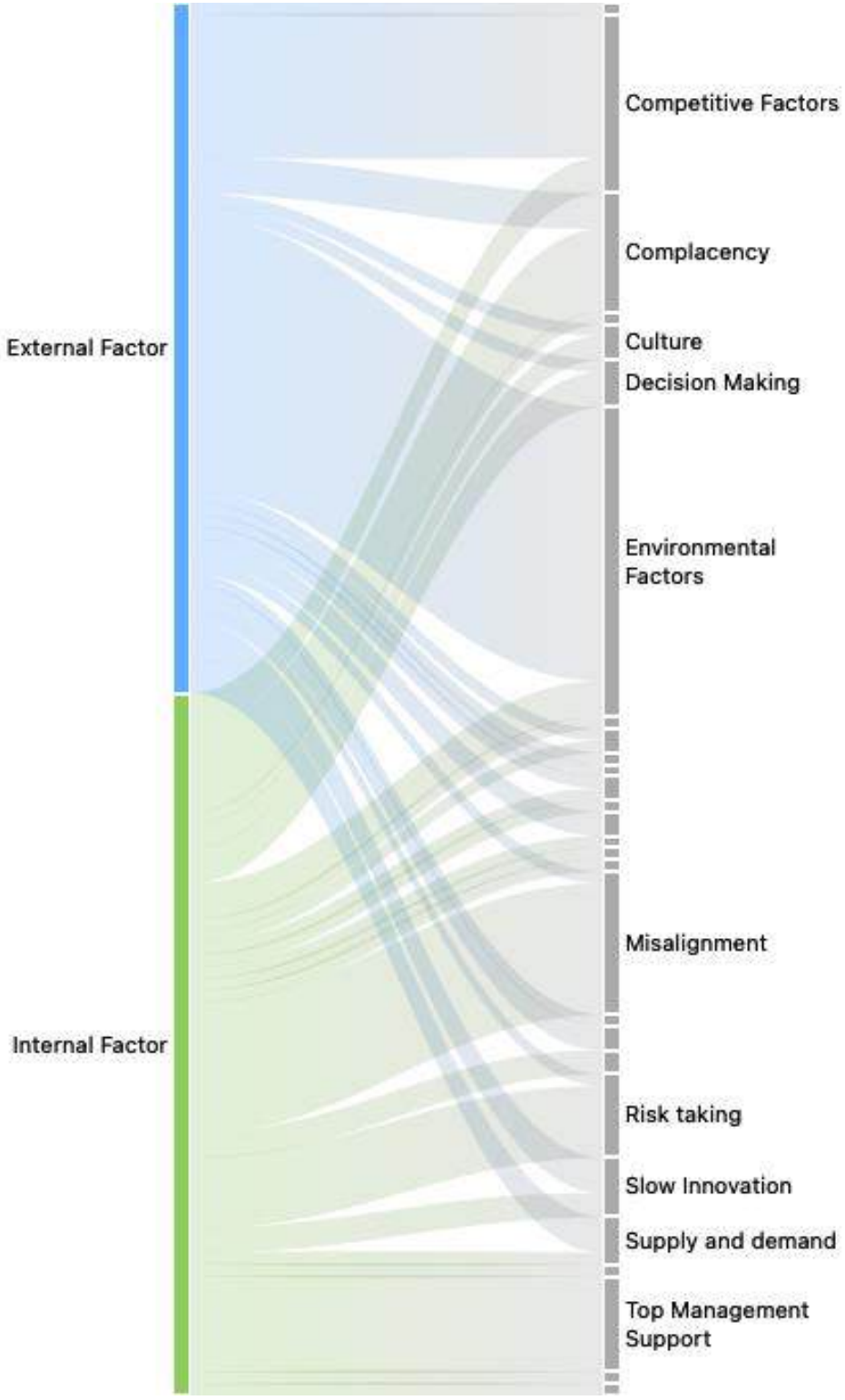

Figure 2: Key Internal and External Factors.

3.4. External Factors

External factors occur outside the organisation, such as the political, economic, technological, legal, global and social environment [8]. For most organisations, this environment rapidly changes, and it is necessary to understand and adapt to the changes to ensure that strategic

objectives are realised and that the organisation does not drift into failure. Numerous factors pose risks to the strategic objectives. However, it is impossible to predict and identify all of these factors, so it is necessary to clearly understand what the organisation can do to mitigate the risks posed [25]. Figure 2 depicts the key internal and external factors. From this figure, the most relevant factors are seen. The findings of all external factors are summarised in

Table 2, and key internal factors are discussed below.

3.4.1. Environmental Factors

This broad term has been used to group changes in the overall external environment, such as technological advancements, industry disruptions and regulatory changes [25]. Rapid environmental changes are generally caused by technological advancements that render existing products or services irrelevant to the market; this requires organisations to continuously adapt their strategies to ensure they do not fall behind in the industry [17]. The further breakdown of these factors is discussed below.

3.4.2. Competitive Factors

With the advancement of technology, globalisation has become an increasing threat to organisations [12]. There is an increase in competition as new markets are opened and available on a global scale; organisations who do not respond to this external factor by entering new markets will be at risk for strategic drift as the competitiveness of the organisation will drop compared to organisations who adapt their strategies to take advantage of globalisation [30]. Rapid technological advancements render existing products irrelevant or processes obsolete; organisations must adopt new technology to stay relevant and aligned with their strategy [17].

3.4.3. Political

Political instability, regulatory changes, and changes in government policy create challenges for organisations to remain aligned with their strategies. When the external environment is politically volatile, organisations may face disruptions that affect their operations [26]. If the strategy is adapted to the disruptive environment, organisations will be aligned and avoid the risk of strategic drift [17]. As the environment changes, new or changing regulations come into play to account for industry changes; organisations that do not modify their operations and strategies to comply with these regulations will find it difficult to operate in the environment [5].

3.4.4. Economic

The economy plays a significant role in how strategies are formed. Recessions, inflation and changes in supply and demand all significantly impact the strategy [31]. Failing to adapt to these changing conditions may result in strategic drift [32]. Economic recessions are a significant factor leading to strategic drift as organisations do not recognise the need for changes in time, leading to the strategic models being misaligned with the reduced consumer demand [18]. Another factor which reduces consumer demands, as well as operational costs, is inflation and cost pressures. The rise in costs and decline in demand result in operational inefficiencies and a drift from the strategic objectives [29]. Reduced consumer demand leads to performance declines. When this is unexpected, organisations find it challenging to return

to usual performance levels and achieve their strategic objectives, leading them to strategic drift.

Table 2: Summary of external factors found in literature.

Key factor	Findings	Reference
Competitive	Technological Advancements by competitors rendering existing products/services obsolete.	[33]
	New market entrants which floods the market	[20]
	Price competition	[18]
	Product Differentiation from competitors	[9]
	Innovation fatigue for organisations who cannot innovate as fast as competitors	[10]
Political	Political instability which cause disruptions to operations	[31]
	Labour disputes	[26]
	Government policies	[34]
	Foreign policy shifts which can limit the trade which happens with foreign markets	[23]
Economic	Reduced consumer demand	[12]
	Inflation	[35]
	Consumer spending patterns	[23]
	Currency Fluctuations	[8]

3.5. Recovery

Once an organisation recognises that it has drifted from its strategy, recovery to realign the strategy to the external environment begins. Realigning the strategy involves identifying the misalignment, which factors influenced the drift and then strategic realignment.

3.5.1. Strategic Realignment

Organisations recovering from strategic drift often begin by realigning their strategy by evaluating their core competencies, understanding their external environment, and adjusting their focus to better fit the external environment. Smith [12] identified an organisation which had fallen into a strategic drift but recovered successfully by determining that its outdated models and culture did not promote innovation. They embraced new business models that better suited the market and adjusted their culture, allowing the organisation to recover from the strategic drift [12]. To realign the strategy, organisations need to understand their strengths and weaknesses and the external threats and opportunities to take advantage of the market and recover by regaining market share and achieving strategic objectives [28].

3.5.2. Management Change

As mentioned, management is one of the key internal factors which cause strategic drift. Strong and visionary management plays a crucial role in recovering from strategic drift, as it is necessary to make bold changes to realign the organisational strategy with the external environment [19]. Transformational management is required to encourage a culture shift and promote innovation to overcome the inertia from strategic drift, as seen in the case study by Gajere [17].

3.5.3. Innovation

Driving innovation and adopting new technologies will assist declining organisations in keeping up with competitors in their industry. Lucas Industries failed to innovate as fast as its

competitors, leading them into a strategic drift; innovation was embraced to recover from this [5]. GKN recovered from its strategic drift by investing in new technologies, which assisted it in staying ahead of competitors through technological trends [36]. Organisations need innovation to recover from strategic drift and maintain their position in the marketplace.

3.5.4. Organisational Restructuring and External Market Analysis

Depending on the organisation and industry, it is often necessary to restructure the operations and processes to better align with the strategy. Anglo American Platinum restructured its operations to focus on core competencies to recover from strategic drift [26]. The effective recovery of strategy requires organisations to thoroughly understand their environment and external factors to restructure themselves internally.

4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This ScR identified primary internal and external factors as key contributors to strategic drift. Internal factors were identified as complacency, culture, inadequate decision-making and misalignment. Complacency, which is prevalent in previously successful organisations, happens due to resistance to change, risk aversion, and cognitive biases. Cultural elements, included resistance to innovation, poor cross-functional communication, and rigid hierarchical structures, created internal barriers to strategic adaptation. Decision-making deficiencies from management hesitancy, cognitive limitations, and inadequate data analysis hindered organisational responsiveness. Misalignment between strategy and execution occurred through process inconsistencies, resource allocation issues, and fundamental differences between strategy and the organisational environment. Primary external factors were identified as competitiveness, political, and economic pressures. Competitive factors included technological advancements making existing products obsolete, disruptive new market entrants, aggressive price competition, and innovation challenges. Political pressures emanated from regulatory shifts, labour disputes, and government policy changes. Economic pressures frequently resulted from demand fluctuations, inflationary environments, shifting consumer behaviours, and currency volatility.

The literature demonstrated that recovery from strategic drift necessitates addressing both internal dynamics and external pressures. Organisations began recovery by critically assessing their core competencies regarding environmental demands, subsequently modifying their business approaches and strategic focus. Transformation at the management level emerged as crucial, with leadership changes being necessary for cultural evolution and strategic redirection. Adopting innovative practices, particularly technological implementation, facilitated a new competitive advantage. Operational restructuring centred on core organisational strengths contributed significantly to successful recovery trajectories across multiple case studies.

The findings demonstrate that strategic drift represents a complex organisational phenomenon involving cognitive, cultural, structural, and environmental elements. Organisations that recovered successfully demonstrated the capacity to understand their external environment, realign their internal factors to match environmental demands, and implement changes in leadership, innovation approaches, and organisational structure. These interconnected recovery mechanisms suggest that addressing strategic drift requires a holistic organisational response rather than isolated strategic adjustments.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Through a systematic review of the literature, the aim was to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the primary internal and external factors which contribute to strategic drift?

2. How do organisations recover from strategic drift?

A review of literature databases revealed 54 papers relevant to the research topic. The review highlights that strategic drift results from a complex interplay between internal organisational dynamics (complacency, culture, decision-making processes, and strategic misalignment) and external pressures (environmental changes, competitive forces, political instability, and economic factors). This perspective advances understanding beyond the traditional view of strategic drift as a mismatch between strategy and environment. Recovery strategies were highlighted through strategic realignment, management changes, innovation, and restructuring.

This review offers several important insights for organisational leaders and strategic managers aiming to make waves. Proactive monitoring of internal and external factors is essential for early detection of strategic drift. Organisational culture serves as either a catalyst or a barrier to strategic alignment, making culture management a critical skill for leadership. Recovery from strategic drift requires a multifaceted approach involving strategic realignment, leadership changes, innovation adoption, and organisational restructuring. Successful organisations can be particularly vulnerable to complacency and cognitive biases, requiring deliberate efforts to maintain strategic vigilance.

This review highlights the limitations in the literature of insufficient industry-specific studies, empirical data on successful organisational recovery strategies, and how innovation and technology adaptation influence strategic drift in the South African context. Future research should address the following gaps identified in this review. Industry-specific studies examining how strategic drift manifests in different sectors, particularly South African contexts, would provide valuable contextualised insights. Empirical studies tracking organisations through the complete strategic drift and recovery cycle could provide valuable insights. Comparative analyses of recovery strategies would help identify which approaches are most effective under different conditions. Investigating how emerging technologies and digital transformation influence strategic drift dynamics is relevant in today's rapidly changing business environment. Developing practical diagnostic tools would help organisations identify early signs of strategic drift, enabling proactive intervention before significant performance decline occurs. The findings of this review provide valuable insights for both researchers seeking to address existing gaps in the literature and practitioners working to maintain strategic alignment in increasingly dynamic environments. By understanding the complex interplay of factors contributing to strategic drift, organisations can better position themselves to recognise early warning signs and implement appropriate recovery strategies when misalignment occurs.

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THE FIFTH INDUSTRIAL WAVE: SYNCHRONISING INDUSTRY 5.0 AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

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ABSTRACT

Harnessing the synergy between human-centric automation and clean energy, this paper explores how Industry 5.0 (I5.0) is not just riding the renewable revolution - but amplifying its waves. Grounded on the pillars of a human-centric approach, sustainability and resilience, I5.0 provides a well-developed structure that can be integrated with the continuous research and development of renewable energy. This study makes use of a systematic literature review (SLR) to explore the overlap of I5.0 and renewable energy that includes the scope, benefits, challenges and enablers. It was found that there is substantial overlap and shared concepts between I5.0 and renewable energy. The findings highlight the potential of the transformation of renewable energy with the overlap of I5.0, fostering a more resilient and sustainable future. I5.0 not only complements renewable energy but also strengthens the impact it has on the renewable energy innovations.

Keywords: Industry 5.0, Renewable Energy, SLR, Sustainability, Resilience

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1 INTRODUCTION

The growing urgency of climate change, rising energy demands, and the depletion of fossil fuels have catalysed global efforts toward adopting renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydro, and bioenergy [1]. These technologies form the cornerstone of the green energy transition, aiming to reduce carbon emissions, enhance energy security, and support sustainable development. However, despite significant advancements, challenges remain in optimising efficiency, integration, and scalability across various energy systems [2].

Parallel to this evolution, the industrial world is undergoing a transformation beyond the automation and interconnectivity of Industry 4.0. Industry 5.0 (I5.0) [3] emerges not as a replacement but as an enhancement, one that brings humans back into the loop, emphasizing a human-centric approach, resilience, and sustainability. Unlike its predecessor, which focused heavily on efficiency through cyber-physical systems and the Internet of Things (IoT), I5.0 promotes collaboration between humans and intelligent machines to address broader societal goals, including environmental stewardship [4].

The intersection of renewable energy and Industry 5.0 opens new avenues for innovation, particularly in how clean energy systems are designed, managed, and scaled. Integrating I5.0 principles into the renewable energy sector could lead to more adaptable, intelligent, and resilient energy infrastructures that align with societal and environmental needs. However, the extent to which these two paradigms complement and reinforce each other remains underexplored in academic literature.

This paper seeks to bridge that gap by conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) to investigate the overlap between Industry 5.0 and renewable energy. Specifically, it examines the scope of integration, key benefits, existing challenges, and potential enablers that arise from this intersection.

The central research question that is used as the backbone of this study is:

How does the integration of Industry 5.0 concepts enhance the development, deployment and impact of renewable energy systems?

The research question provides the opportunity to define the research aim: Conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to investigate the overlap between renewable energy and Industry 5.0 concepts and to what extent the overlapping concepts can be used to design an implementation framework.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study followed the SLR method. A SLR is a structured, unbiased method for identifying and synthesising existing research. It was used in this study to ensure a rigorous, evidence-based understanding of the overlap between Industry 5.0 and renewable energy, providing a credible foundation for the framework. The method consists of three phases: Planning, conducting and documenting. [5] The steps within these phases are detailed as follows:

A) Planning the review

- **Step 1 – Research purpose and objective**: Clearly set the purpose of the SLR
- **Step 2 – Develop research protocol:** Create the research protocol, which must include the inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, databases to be searched, keywords and quality assessment criteria

B) Conducting the review

- **Step 3 – Establish relevance criteria**: Establish which types of studies are relevant to the study (Update the inclusion and exclusion criterion)

- **Step 4 – Search and retrieve the literature**: Search the selected electronic databases for literature
- **Step 5 – Selection of studies**: Select literature based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria
- **Step 6 – Quality assessment for relevant studies**: Assess the literature for quality
- **Step 7 – Data extraction**: Extract data from the selected literature
- **Step 8 – Synthesis of studies (analysis)**: Extract facts and conclusions from the selected literature

C) Documenting the review

- **Step 9 – Reporting:** Report on the SLR in detail
- **Step 10 – Dissemination**: Publish the SLR findings in an academic source

2.1 Step 1 - Develop a research purpose

The purpose and objectives of the SLR are captured in both section 1 and section 2 of this research paper: To investigate literature on the overlap between Industry 5.0 and renewable energy. The aim was divided into four categories: the scope of integration, key benefits, existing challenges and potential enablers.

2.2 Step 2 - Develop a research protocol

The review protocol was developed and can be viewed in Table 1.

Table 1: Research protocol

Purpose of the study	Explore the overlap between Industry 5.0 and renewable energy to identify how their integration can enhance sustainability, resilience, and human-centric innovation in energy systems.
Inclusion criteria	- Literature including "Renewable energy" or "Industry 5.0" in their title, abstract or keywords
Exclusion criteria	- Literature older than 2020 - Non-English literature - Literature that focuses on the development of Industry 4.0 - Case study specific papers (i.e. Studies that do not contain any information regarding I5.0 or renewable energy, but rather how it is applied to a case study) - Literature that uses AI technology
Search databases	Searches were conducted on the following databases, namely: - ScienceDirect - Scopus - Web of Science - Emerald Insight Journals - IEEE Xplore
Keywords	The following keywords were used to search the databases: - **"Renewable energy" and "Industry 5.0"**
Quality assessment criteria	- Literature will be checked for relevance: any evidence of the scope of integration, key benefits, existing challenges, and potential enablers regarding I5.0 and/or renewable energy - Scientific and peer-reviewed literature was considered

2.3 Step 3 - Establish relevance criteria

To elaborate on what is mentioned in table 1, here is a breakdown of the criteria that wat used to assess the literature:

- **Direct Discussion of Industry 5.0 Concepts**: The paper must discuss key principles of Industry 5.0, such as human-centric design, collaboration between humans and machines, sustainability, resilience, and advanced digital technologies (e.g., AI, IoT, digital twins) in an I5.0 context.

- **Focus on Renewable Energy Systems**: The paper should address renewable energy types (e.g., solar, wind, hydro, bioenergy) or related infrastructure, integration strategies, or supply chain issues relevant to the renewable energy transition.
- **Conceptual or Strategic Integration**: The study must go beyond technical application and explore or propose conceptual frameworks, challenges, benefits, or enabling technologies that highlight how I5.0 principles intersect with renewable energy development.
- **Non-case-specific Generalisability**: Preference was given to papers offering generalizable insights over isolated case studies, ensuring broader applicability of the findings for framework development.
- **Alignment with Research Aim**: The content should contribute to the goal of identifying overlapping themes, synergies, or enablers between I5.0 and renewable energy to inform the design of an implementation framework.
- **Current Literature:** Only literature from 2020 onwards was included to capture the most recent advancements and policy directions, as Industry 5.0 emerged formally in 2021, and renewable energy technologies have rapidly evolved in the past few years. This ensures the review reflects current socio-economic, technological, and sustainability contexts.

2.4 Step 4 to 6 – Search, Selection and Quality Assessment of the resources

The literature selection process followed the PRISMA statement. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement is a standardised framework designed to enhance the transparency, rigor, and reproducibility of systematic literature reviews. It provides a structured process for identifying, screening, and selecting studies, typically illustrated through a flow diagram that outlines the number of records identified, included, and excluded, along with reasons for exclusions. The PRISMA approach ensures that literature selection is methodical and unbiased by clearly documenting each stage of the review process, from initial database searches and duplicate removal to full-text assessment and final inclusion, thus improving the overall quality and credibility of the review findings.

The literature selection process is illustrated in Figure 1. The initial search resulted in 133 resources from five databases. After screening the 133 resources based on the research protocol, a total of 17 were selected for the quality check. Resources were rejected due to the following reasons:

- Several sources were case-specific and did not have relevant literature
- Multiple sources solely focused on I5.0 and did not mention renewable energy
- Few sources were in the context of Industry 4.0 and focused on Industry 4.0 technologies

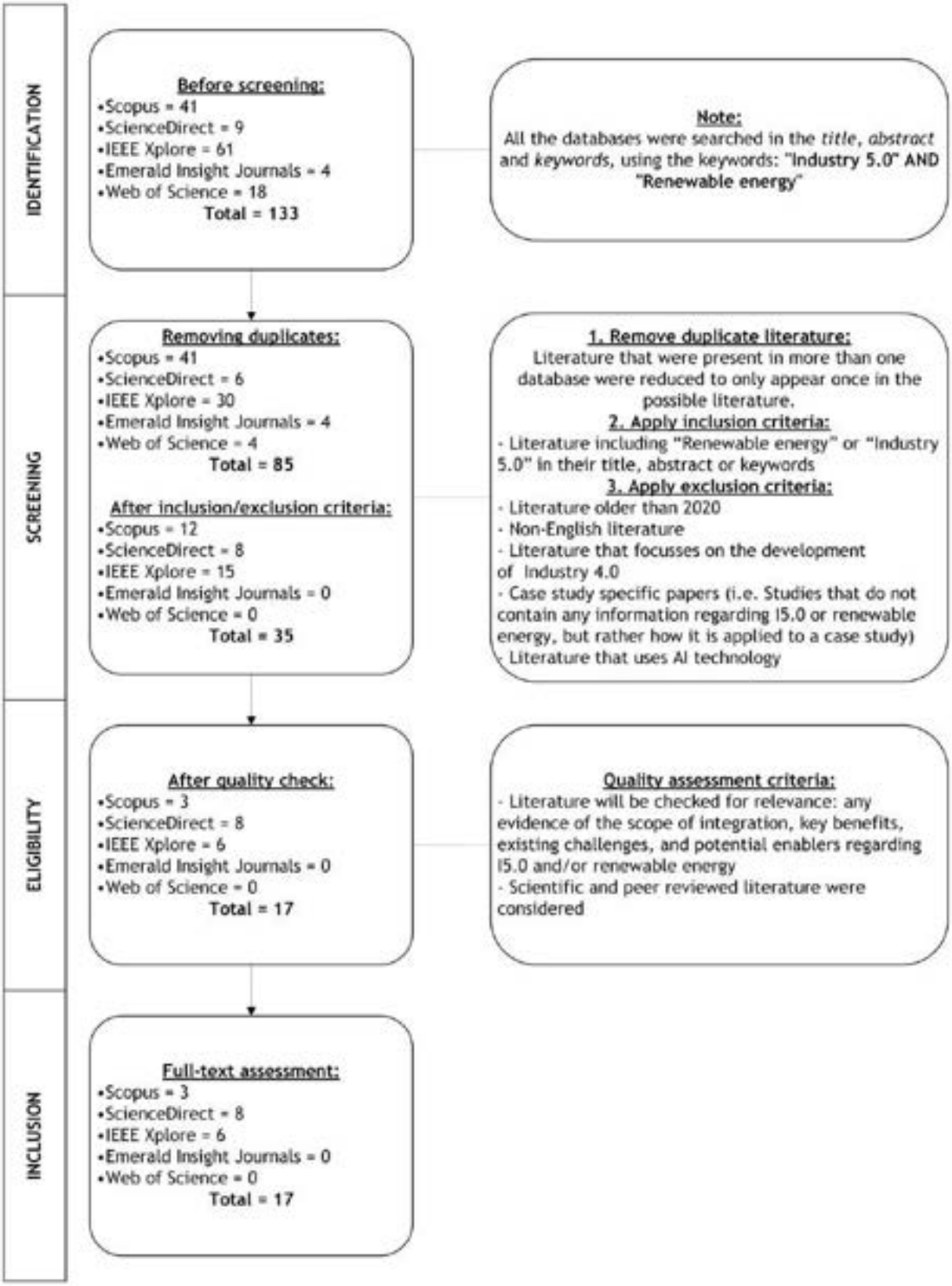

Figure 1: Literature selection process

After the selection process, these 17 resources passed the quality check and were included for full-text assessment. The final resources that were selected are detailed in Table 2, including the authors, year, title and the type of resource.

Table 2: Resources found

#	Author(s) and year	Title	Type of source
1	Chaikovska et al. (2024) [6]	Integration of Digital Economy, Knowledge Economy and Circular Economy in the Conditions of Industry 5.0	Conference paper
2	Onile et al. (2023) [7]	Emerging Role of Industry 5.0 Digital Twins in Demand Response Electricity Market and Applications	Conference paper
3	Chaudhari et al. (2021) [8]	A Novel Approach: Bioeconomy & Industry 5.0 Enhanced version	Conference paper
4	Habash (2022) [9]	Phenomenon-based Learning for Age 5.0 Mindsets: Industry, society, and Education	Conference paper
5	Szeredi et al. (2024) [10]	Smart Logistics and Sustainability in Logistics 5.0	Conference paper
6	Wilkening et al. (2024) [11]	Mixed-Critical Control Architecture for Industry 5.0	Conference paper
7	Khazaei et al. (2025) [12]	Renewable energy portfolio in Mexico for Industry 5.0 and SDGs: Hydrogen, wind, or solar?	Research article
8	Sharma et al. (2025) [13]	Innovating tomorrow: Industry 5.0's role in shaping the workforce and socio-economic development in the sustainable energy transition era	Research article
9	Masoomi et al. (2023) [14]	Do industry 5.0 advantages address the sustainable development challenges of the renewable energy supply chain?	Research article
10	Sawilam et al. (2025) [15]	Impact of Virtual Power Plants on grid stability and renewable energy integration in smart cities using IoT	Research article
11	Tehrani et al. (2024) [16]	A smart multiphysics approach for wind turbines design in industry 5.0	Research article
12	Lagorio et al. (2024) [17]	The future of green skills for the manufacturing sector	Research article
13	Khan et al. (2023) [18]	Resource efficient PV power forecasting: Transductive transfer learning-based hybrid deep learning model for smart grid in Industry 5.0	Research article
14	Hosseini Dehshiri and Amiri (2025) [19]	Evaluating challenges of implementing Industry 5.0 in the renewable energy supply chain toward sustainability: A comparative analysis using decision-making approaches	Research article
15	Zhironkin and Abu-Abed (2024) [20]	Fossil Fuel Prospects in the Energy of the Future (Energy 5.0): A Review	Review
16	Hu et al. (2025) [21]	Industry 5.0 and Human-Centered Energy System: A Comprehensive Review with Socio-Economic Viewpoints	Review
17	Tyagi et al. (2024) [22]	Significant Leap In The Industrial Revolution From Industry 4.0 To Industry 5.0: Needs, Problems, And Driving Forces	Research article

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Step 7: Data extraction

Following the selection process, data was systematically extracted from the 17 chosen resources. For each paper, key information pertaining to Industry 5.0 and renewable energy was identified and categorised according to the research objectives: scope of integration, key benefits, existing challenges, and potential enablers. This extraction involved a detailed reading of the abstracts, introductions, discussion sections, and conclusions to pinpoint explicit and implicit connections between the two domains. The extracted data formed the basis for the subsequent comparative analysis, ensuring that all relevant insights from the selected literature were captured for synthesis. Figure 2 shows the information that has been extracted from the relevant sources. The 'x' marks the category that has been extracted from the respective resource.

Findings / Author(s)	Industry 5.0				Renewable Energy			
	Scope	Benefits	Challenges	Enablers	Scope	Benefits	Challenges	Enablers
(Chaikovska et al., 2024)	x							
(Onile et al., 2023)	x			x				
(Chaudhari et al., 2021)	x	x	x	x				
(Habash, 2022)	x	x	x	x				
(Szeredi et al., 2024)	x				x			
(Wilkening et al., 2024)					x	x	x	x
(Khazaei et al., 2025)	x	x	x		x	x	x	
(Sharma et al., 2025)	x			x				
(Masoomi et al., 2023)	x	x	x	x		x	x	
(Sawilam et al., 2025)	x			x	x			x
(Tehrani et al., 2024)	x				x			
(Lagorio et al., 2024)	x				x			
(Khan et al., 2023)				x				x
(Hosseini Dehshiri and Amiri, 2025)			x				x	
(Zhironkin and Abu-Abed, 2024)						x	x	
(Hu et al., 2025)	x							
(Tyagi et al., 2024)	x	x	x	x				

Figure 2: Breakdown of categories found in resources

3.2 Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings

The intersection of Industry 5.0 and renewable energy represents a significant opportunity to reimagine sustainable development by aligning technological advancement with environmental and human-centric goals. Drawing from current literature, a comparison of these two domains across their scope of integration, benefits, challenges, and enabling conditions reveals both distinct trajectories and shared synergies.

A. Scope of Integration

The scope of integration for Industry 5.0 is largely defined by its focus on human-centricity[16] and the use of advanced digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), digital twins, and cyber-physical systems to create intelligent, adaptive, and collaborative manufacturing environments[6], [7]. This approach redefines productivity through personalisation[17] and social responsibility[21]. In contrast, renewable energy integration prioritises decentralised, sustainable energy systems, leveraging diverse sources like solar, wind, hydro, and hydrogen to reduce carbon emissions and fossil fuel dependency, particularly in developing countries[12]. Both domains share a reliance on digital tools and smart systems to improve performance, while collectively supporting resilient infrastructure, resource efficiency, and socio-technical innovation on a global scale[14].

B. Key Benefits

Industry 5.0 and renewable energy offer complementary yet distinct benefits. Industry 5.0 facilitates mass customization, increased adaptability, and enhanced worker satisfaction through human-machine collaboration and lifelong learning [14]. It also supports workforce resilience in the face of technological disruption [8]. Conversely, renewable energy provides environmental protection, energy security, and economic diversification, including job creation in emerging green sectors[20]. Shared benefits include improvements in system efficiency, operational resilience, and the advancement of sustainable development goals, indicating a natural synergy between the two [13].

C. Existing Challenges

Despite their promise, both fields face notable challenges. Industry 5.0 suffers from limited awareness, skills mismatches[18], and the difficulty of integrating cutting-edge technologies into traditional systems [8], [9]. There is also a gap in ethical and regulatory frameworks for managing human-machine interfaces. Renewable energy struggles with intermittency issues, market barriers, and the continued dominance of fossil fuel infrastructures in many regions, notably in Latin America [20]. Common challenges include investment gaps, fragmented policy environments, and institutional inertia, which together hinder cross-sector transformation [19].

D. Potential Enablers

Several enablers can facilitate the convergence of Industry 5.0 and renewable energy systems. For Industry 5.0, advanced simulation tools (e.g., digital twins)[11], collaborative robotics (cobots), and intelligent production platforms are critical drivers of innovation [22]. Renewable energy is enabled by technologies like smart grids, distributed storage, and community-driven models, which increase adoption and grid stability [15]. Both systems benefit from investment in digital education, public-private partnerships, and regulatory support that incentivize clean technologies and promote inclusive transformation[14]. A shared emphasis on collaborative governance and capacity building is crucial for bridging technological potential and societal readiness.

3.3 Step 9: Reporting

The conceptual framework derived from the systematic literature review is presented through a set of four Venn diagrams, each addressing a critical dimension of the integration between Industry 5.0 and renewable energy. These dimensions are Scope of Integration, Key Benefits, Existing Challenges, and Potential Enablers. Each diagram juxtaposes the defining features of Industry 5.0 and renewable energy, while highlighting areas of convergence at their intersection. The Scope of Integration (Figure 3) outlines overlapping trends such as the integration of AI, IoT, and digital twins into physical systems, as well as shared sustainability goals. Key Benefits (Figure 4) emphasizes the mutual advantages of adopting both paradigms, including increased efficiency, job creation, and reduced emissions. Existing Challenges (Figure 5) identifies common hurdles such as high capital investment requirements and infrastructure limitations. Finally, Potential Enablers (Figure 6) illustrates the strategic interventions needed to align policy, workforce development, and innovation to support this integration. This visual framework serves as both an analytical lens and a strategic guide for stakeholders aiming to harness the synergies between Industry 5.0 and renewable energy systems.

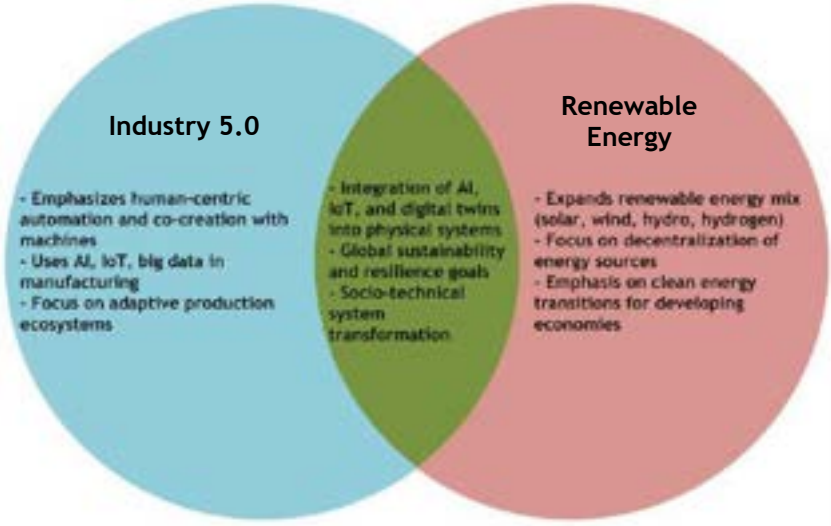

Figure 3: Scope of integration

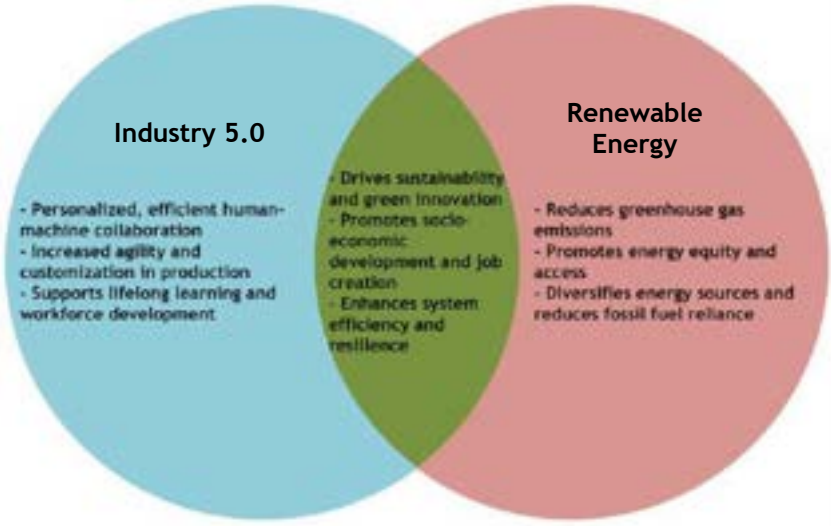

Figure 4: Key benefits

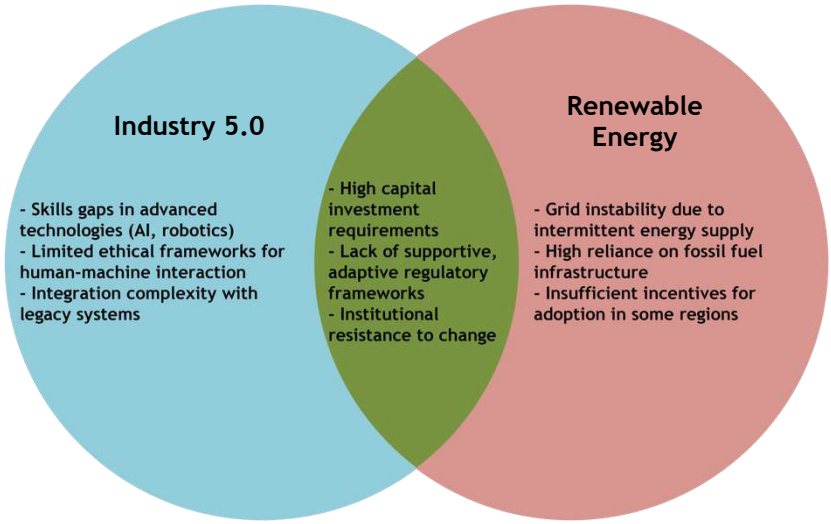

Figure 5: Existing challenges

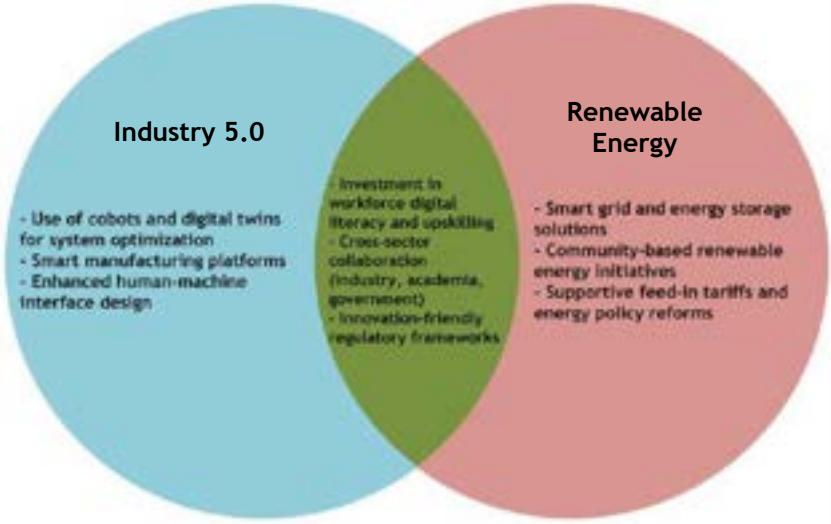

Figure 6: Potential enablers

4 CONCLUSION

The systematic literature review, visually represented through a series of Venn diagrams for each comparative component, vividly illustrates the substantial and strategic overlap between Industry 5.0 and renewable energy. This framework effectively highlights not only the distinct characteristics of each domain but, more importantly, the critical points of intersection where profound synergies can be harnessed.

The developed framework, illustrated through four Venn diagrams, offers significant insights into the integration of Industry 5.0 and renewable energy. One of the key implications is the clarity on a shared vision, especially evident in the Scope of Integration diagram. This visual highlights how both domains are aligned in their pursuit of a sustainable and resilient future, with common reliance on digital technologies such as AI, IoT, and digital twins, and a mutual emphasis on socio-technical innovation. These are not parallel developments but rather deeply interconnected movements. Additionally, the Key Benefits diagram identifies clear growth areas, revealing how the integration of these two paradigms can lead to

enhanced system efficiency, improved operational resilience, and accelerated progress toward sustainable development goals. These intersections suggest rich potential for future research, policymaking, and investment that leverages the strengths of both fields.

The Existing Challenges diagram further provides value by enabling targeted problem-solving. It outlines shared impediments such as high capital investment requirements, fragmented policy environments, and institutional resistance, indicating that overcoming these barriers requires coordinated efforts across industrial and energy sectors. Perhaps the most actionable insights come from the Potential Enablers diagram, which offers a strategic lens into how these challenges can be addressed. It emphasises strategic enablement through shared interventions such as digital education, public-private partnerships, and innovation-friendly regulation, clear areas where policy and practice can work together to facilitate progress.

The usefulness of this visual framework lies in its ability to enhance comprehension of complex interrelationships through the intuitive format of Venn diagrams. This makes it accessible to a wide range of stakeholders including policymakers, industry leaders, and academic researchers. Moreover, by clearly delineating overlaps and distinctions, the framework supports strategic decision-making related to resource allocation, technology development, and policy formulation. It also aids in the identification of research gaps, particularly in the non-overlapping sections, which may indicate underexplored areas ripe for investigation. Lastly, the overlapping zones highlight collaborative opportunities, encouraging joint initiatives among the manufacturing, technology, and renewable energy sectors to realise shared sustainability goals.

In essence, the Venn diagram framework not only synthesises the findings of this systematic literature review but also serves as a powerful tool for conceptualising and advancing the integration of Industry 5.0 and renewable energy. It visually confirms that Industry 5.0 is not merely riding the renewable revolution, but actively shaping and strengthening its impact, thereby fostering a truly resilient, human-centric, and sustainable energy future.

5 FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should explore how Industry 5.0's human-centric and sustainable principles can transform rural areas in developing nations through renewable energy deployment.

Several critical areas warrant further research to deepen the understanding and effectiveness of integrating Industry 5.0 with renewable energy, particularly in rural and under-resourced contexts. One key avenue is the development of context-specific Industry 5.0 models—exploring how these concepts can be adapted to the unique cultural, economic, and infrastructural realities of diverse rural communities to encourage local ownership and ensure long-term sustainability. Another vital area is the human-centric integration of technology, which stands as one of the primary differentiating factors between Industry 4.0 and Industry 5.0. While Industry 4.0 largely emphasised automation and efficiency, Industry 5.0 recognises humans not as peripheral operators but as central actors who collaborate with advanced systems. Future research should therefore explore strategies to upskill rural workforces, equipping them with both the technical competence and the confidence to manage, maintain, and co-create smart renewable energy systems. This includes designing intuitive, culturally relevant interfaces, embedding local knowledge into system design, and ensuring that technology adapts to the people rather than forcing communities to adapt to technology. Another critical focus is on the economic and social impacts, where research should aim to quantify the socio-economic benefits such as job creation, income generation, and community resilience, while also assessing how Industry 5.0-enabled renewable solutions can alleviate energy poverty and promote circular economy principles. Finally, the investigation must extend to supportive policy and governance, identifying effective frameworks and fostering

public-private partnerships that can mobilize resources, expertise, and investment for scalable rural development initiatives.

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A SYSTEMATISED SCOPING REVIEW ON LEAN ENGINEERING IN THE AUTOMOTIVE SUPPLIER INDUSTRY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The global expansion of Lean Manufacturing (LM) literature has significantly contributed to implementing conventional techniques effectively in the automotive industry. However, the domain of lean principles beyond production processes presents an avenue to explore lean principles in engineering functions that encompass organisational structures, leadership and processes. The implementation of Lean Engineering (LE) represents an innovative approach that integrates lean principles with lean manufacturing techniques to enhance the operational efficiency of engineering functions. While LE is underpinned by the foundational principles of LM, it broadly emphasises the importance of effective planning practices. These practices are crucial for ensuring predictability and responsiveness within engineering functions and projects. Therefore, this study conducted a systematised scoping review to identify the planning tools that enabled the implementation of LE within project-based environments, particularly, for the automotive industry. The study's findings supported the adaptation of planning tools used in LE.

Keywords: lean engineering, waterfall, agile, Scrum, Kanban, hybrid, Toyota Kata

1 INTRODUCTION

Lean Engineering (LE) is the systematic approach that ensures engineering organisations or departments have well-defined project management planning processes to reduce waste, enhance team productivity and achieve on-time project delivery [1]. Kämpf [2] conducted a comparative multi-case study that explored the application of lean practices within white-collar work environments, extending beyond the traditional industrial contexts. The results emphasised successful strategies towards cultivating autonomous, empowered and efficient teams in non-manufacturing environments [2]. This study further contended that the application of industrialisation principles, such as lean methodology, in white-collar jobs had the potential to foster a unified and goal-driven organisation of labour. As a result, Kämpf's [2] study expanded the understanding of lean thinking beyond conventional manufacturing environments to other professional fields. These principles redefine non-manufacturing labour through standardised processes, tools and metrics, reducing reliance on individual discretion and experience as well as fostering consistency in daily task execution [2].

However, the extensive literature continues to emphasise that, although these strategies change office-based roles, a gap remains regarding their adoption in specialised engineering work [1-7]. Additionally, insufficient project planning remains a pervasive concern across various sectors, project types and organisational scales. Heagney [8] asserts that numerous project managers emphasise swift execution at the expense of comprehensive planning, while businesses often allocate insufficient time to this essential phase. Consequently, this lack of planning frequently causes project teams to address errors to alleviate stakeholder dissatisfaction and manage delays; ultimately, making poor planning a key contributor to project failure [8]. In parallel to LE advancement, agile methodologies have gained popularity in software development owing to their flexibility and responsiveness to changing requirements [9]. However, their effectiveness in engineering tasks within the automotive sector remains uncertain [9].

Notwithstanding the presence of numerous project management methodologies, traditional approaches are often challenging to integrate and adapt within complex engineering environments, such as the automotive sector [2]. Traditional approaches, such as the waterfall method, tend to be inflexible owing to their repetitive nature, which constricts continuous improvement in professional settings where knowledge work requires evolving goals [3]. In contrast, agile frameworks often lack the necessary structure for engineering workflows in the automotive industry that are grounded in cross-functional collaboration and sequential task dependencies [3].

While attempts to bridge the limitations of these approaches have been attempted through hybridisation in conventional manufacturing, there is still a theory-practice divide in LE settings [5], particularly, the automotive industry, even when employing Advanced Product Quality Planning (APQP) [3]. APQP is a structured support tool for lean principles, which is intended to assure product quality assurance and process reliability [3]. Additionally, planning tools are often used in isolation without a clear understanding of how they can collectively support lean principles such as waste reduction, standardisation, team empowerment and productivity improvement [8]. As a result, there is a need to explore a range of project management methodologies, including waterfall, agile, Scrum, Kanban and hybrid approaches, incorporating APQP. This study sought to explore and integrate these tools into a unified approach that supported LE practices.

This study aims to contribute to the development of a unified framework by identifying and integrating key project management tools intended to support LE departments, thereby improving project team performance. To achieve this aim, the study conducted a systematised scoping review, following the methodology by Arksey and O'Malley [10]. For the study, this

systematised scoping review was used to identify relevant planning tools and extract core themes from existing literature that would inform the development of a conceptual framework that supported the adaptation and integration of lean principles in white-collar contexts to establish and foster the evolution of structured LE practices. While this approach provided a solid conceptual foundation, it is limited by its reliance primarily on existing literature and the absence of empirical validation. In doing so, the study further laid the foundation for the development of context-sensitive tools that could be tailored to the specific needs of LE teams.

2 RESEARCH METHOD: SYSTEMATISED SCOPING REVIEW

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, specifically a systematised scoping review, to comprehensively identify and analyse relevant literature. Following Arksey and O'Malley's [10] definition, the systematised scoping review serves as a "*methodological framework*" for systematically mapping key concepts and evidence in the field. Figure 1 illustrates the process, which involved several stages: defining the research problem and objectives (outlined in the Introduction); conducting systematic database searches to locate relevant studies; screening titles and abstracts to select studies (documented via a PRISMA flow diagram); charting data from included full-text articles (summarised in a data charting table); and collating and reporting the findings [10].

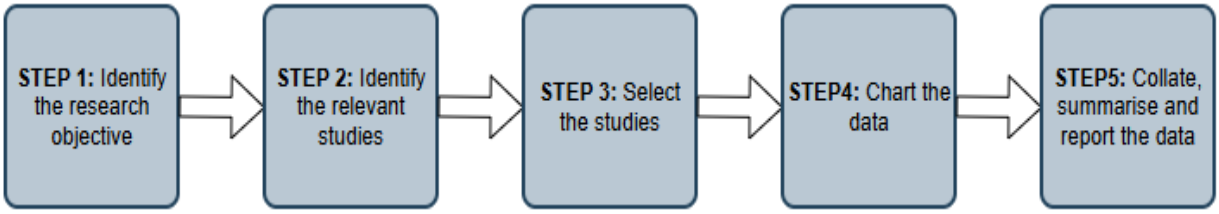

Figure 1: Scoping review approach (*adapted Arksey and O'Malley [10]*).

2.1. Identification of the research objective

The objective of this study is to identify and integrate planning tools from traditional, agile and hybrid methodologies into a conceptual framework that supports effective planning practices within LE environments.

2.2. Identification and selection of relevant studies

The relevant studies were identified by searching databases such as PubMed, Science Direct, and Springer using the appropriate keywords, including *lean engineering, agile project management, waterfall project management, traditional project management, hybrid project management* and *Toyota Kata*. A total of 327 reports were identified during the initial search and uploaded to Rayyan.ai, where the screening and selection processes were carried out. After the studies were identified, 19 duplicate records were removed before the in-depth screening of abstracts.

The relevant studies were selected based on four inclusion criteria. For example, studies had to (i) be published between 2010 and 2025 to allow for a wider capture of the development and growth of LE, (ii) contain at least one relevant keyword in the title, (iii) be written in English and (iv) focus on business or corporate-related contexts. Moreover, only studies that had open access were included. As a result, 279 records were excluded during the screening process, with an additional 15 records not having full-text articles available. As a result, the initial screening process yielded 13 articles for the full-text analysis. Additional sources, including grey literature such as conference proceedings, were identified through snowballing. These sources included the Systems Engineering Body of Knowledge (SEBoK), Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. From this search, 27 records were screened and included in the full-text

analysis, resulting in a final sample of 40 records in the scoping review. Figure 2 shows a summary of this process in the PRISMA diagram.

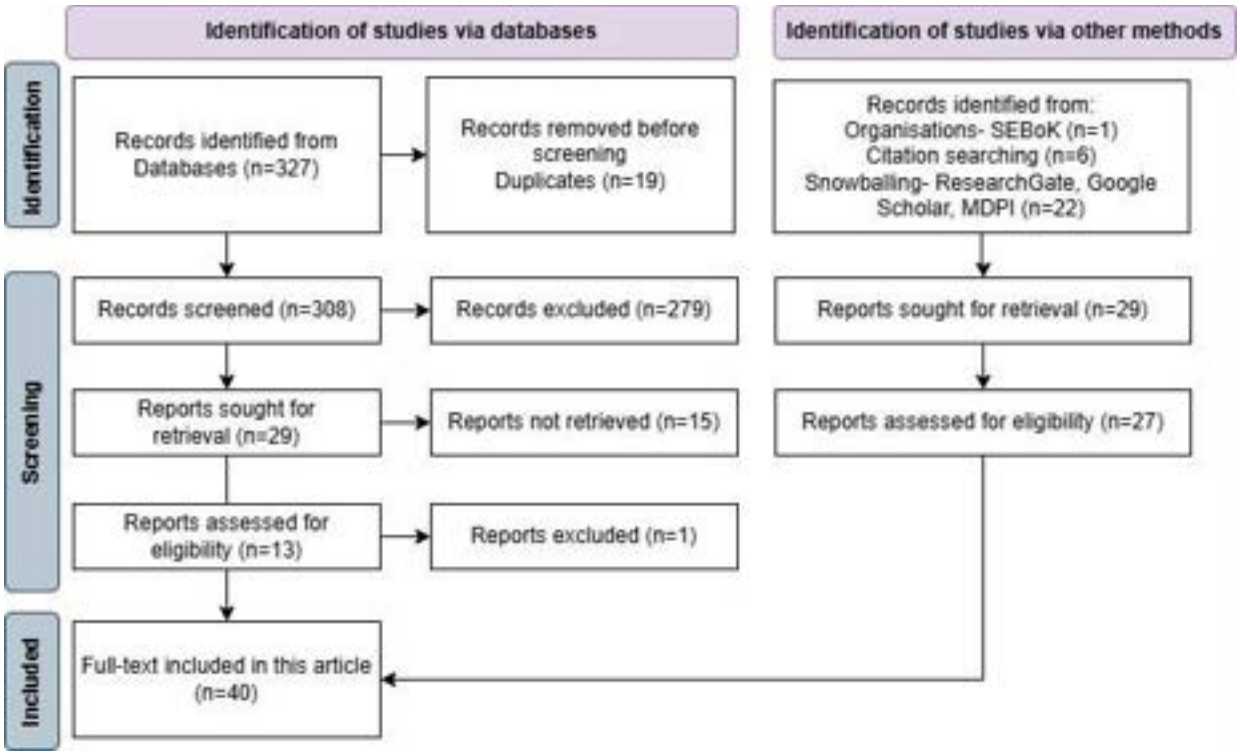

Figure 2: PRISMA diagram *(adapted from [10])*

2.3. Charting the data

Charting entails synthesising and sifting through qualitative data to extract and categorise it into meaningful concepts [10]. The concepts presented in the charting table were derived through a manual systematic coding process applied to the reviewed literature. Initial analysis of studies [1-7] revealed recurring themes related to the application of both waterfall and agile methodologies. These dominant themes guided subsequent citation searches and deeper analysis, which led to the identification of hybrid methodologies that integrated elements of both approaches. Similarly, the tools associated with each methodological approach were identified through thematic analysis, reflecting their repeated mention across the sources. This iterative process of coding allowed for the emergence of consistent patterns and concepts that formed the basis of the charting table.

As a result, in this study, the charting process was used to map key elements from the literature, which are visually represented in Table 1. This table highlights major themes relevant to the research, outlines the core concepts underpinning each theme, and identifies influencing factors within those concepts. It also demonstrates how these factors are supported by the literature, providing a clear linkage between findings and the conceptual framework being developed [10]. Overall, the charting process structured the data and enhanced understanding of how project management tools and methodologies interact within LE contexts.

Table 1: Data charting table (adapted from [10])

Concepts	Sub-concepts	Factors of influence	Literature to support

Lean engineering	Lean manufacturing and lean engineering	• Lean principles • Productivity improvement • On-time project delivery	[1-7]
Waterfall Project management	Planning phases	• Traditional and waterfall phases • Tools: Work breakdown structures, network diagrams, Gantt charts and resource planning	[8, 12-15, 17-19]
Agile project management	Overview of agile project management types	• Difference between agile project management and waterfall/traditional project management • Background of agile manifesto and methodologies	[20-24]
	Scrum agile project management methodology	• Scrum roles • Scrum ceremonies	[20, 25, 26, 43]
	Kanban agile project management methodology	• Concept of Kanban • Kanban board	[20, 27-29, 30]
Automotive project management governance	APQP	• Concept of APQP • Gates of APQP	[16]
Toyota Kata	Background	• Toyota Kata improvement and coaching • Tool for sprint retrospectives	[33-36]
Developing country context	Challenges	• Leadership commitment, infrastructure, resource constraints and risks when implementing agile methodologies	[37, 38, 40]

3 FINDINGS: SYSTEMATISED SCOPING REVIEW

The majority of the studies (75%) were published between 2015 and 2025, indicating a substantial focus on recent advancements in LE and agile methodologies. A limited number of studies were published between 2010 and 2014 (22.5%), providing foundational perspectives to LE and project management. Furthermore, a solitary study published in 1996 was included as it served as a fundamental reference for the development of lean principles.

3.1. Lean engineering background

As introduced by Womack and Jones in 1996, lean thinking proposes a broader scope of lean use, starting with removing waste and then applying the idea of a "value stream" to improve how products or services are delivered to the market more efficiently [11]. Building on this foundation, several studies [1-7] identify that Lean Systems Engineering (LSE) and Lean Engineering (LE) involve applying lean principles, methods and tools to engineering as well as related activities to maximise value and minimise waste. Its objective is to achieve optimal lifecycle value for projects using minimal resources, with value defined as the efficient delivery of successful project or product outcomes without waste [3].

Japanese projects were often viewed as “heavyweight” owing to the centralised leadership of program managers who exercised full control over budgets and staffing, which resulted in more structured project planning and control [4]. Interestingly, the study *Commentaries on ‘The lenses of lean’* [4] presents multiple perspectives on project management approaches. While some companies adopted heavyweight methods, Toyota considered these heavyweight methods, including waterfall methods, inefficient and contrary to lean thinking [4]. Toyota rejected these inefficient heavyweight approaches owing to the company’s emphasis on flexibility and continuous improvement [4]. As a result, Toyota aims to create a responsive production system, which aligns with an iterative approach [4].

In contrast, lean principles and Toyota-style production emphasise small teams, early defect detection through daily builds and continuous integration as well as flexible, overlapping workflows instead of rigid sequences [1, 4, 6]. This supports a more "lightweight" approach, which is a method that is streamlined, flexible and adaptable, such as agile methods [4]. Agile methods are lightweight, however, without attention to systematic components like early planning and design, even agile projects risk wasting engineering effort and may become inefficient at the portfolio level [4].

The lightweight approach translates to specific agile practices in many modern agile teams, where development is guided by a backlog of user stories and epics created by product owners or subject matter experts trained in story writing and acceptance criteria [5]. Durham and Michel [5] argue that this practice influences engineering design by encouraging iterative development, early validation of design assumptions, and incorporating stakeholder feedback into the design requirements. These stories are prioritised into sprints, where developers select tasks, build features and submit codes for testing and review [5]. While common, this workflow often suffers from communication gaps and limited shared understanding between stakeholders and developers [5].

Ultimately, agile alone does not guarantee a lean engineering process; nor do heavyweight, waterfall-based approaches [1-4]. Accordingly, this study's scoping review examined planning tools from both methods to inform a hybrid model that combines systematic planning with iterative delivery, supporting team productivity, minimising waste and ensuring on-time project completion to create a conceptual framework that supports planning in LE environments.

3.2. Traditional and waterfall project management

Traditional project management methodologies are defined by their structured and predictable nature, emphasising comprehensive planning. Despite evolving practices, many organisations persist in embedding these methods within their operational frameworks [12]. The five phases of project management include initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and control, and closing [13]. The waterfall project management model, named for its downward, uninterrupted flow like a waterfall, does not allow revisiting previous phases [14]. It is a type of traditional project management method that follows a strict, step-by-step sequence where each phase, namely, planning, design, implementation, testing and maintenance, must be completed before the next begins [13]. Although originally adapted for software development in the 1970s, waterfall project management mirrors traditional project management principles [14]. However, Heagney [8] emphasises that the planning phase is critical to project success. Accordingly, this review examined key planning tools used in traditional project management and waterfall project management methodologies, namely, Work Breakdown Structures (WBS), Network Diagrams, Gantt charts and resource planners [8, 13].

3.2.1. Work breakdown structure and APQP

A Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) organises all project work based on deliverables, outlining the complete project scope. It further divides the overall work into distinct tasks and arranges them in a structured, hierarchical format [15]. A WBS is a complete breakdown of all the work involved in a project, covering every task from start to finish [15]. Several studies show that a WBS is essential to project planning and can be used as a communication tool [14-17]. The studies by Sirsha *et al.* [14] as well as Devi and Reddy [17] emphasise that the WBS tool is aligned with waterfall approaches as the project scope and deliverables are defined upfront. Burghate [17] also argues that the WBS is a universal simplification tool that improves project clarity regardless of which methodology is used, hence, it can be utilised in agile projects as well.

Advanced Product Quality Planning (APQP) is a structured framework consisting of methods and procedures designed to guide product development, especially within the automotive sector [16]. Initially, implemented by General Motors, Ford, Chrysler and their suppliers, APQP provides a systematic approach for outlining and organising the steps involved in product development [16]. For Deshpande and Ekabote [16], APQP's primary goal is to ensure that both product design and quality planning align with the expectations of internal and external customers [16].

Figure 3 illustrates both the phases of APQP and the application of a WBS as guided by Deshpande and Ekabote [16] as well as Devi and Reddy [17]. Level 1 includes the entire projects scope, level 2 divides the scope into deliverables, and level 3 illustrates the work packages (smaller tasks) [17].

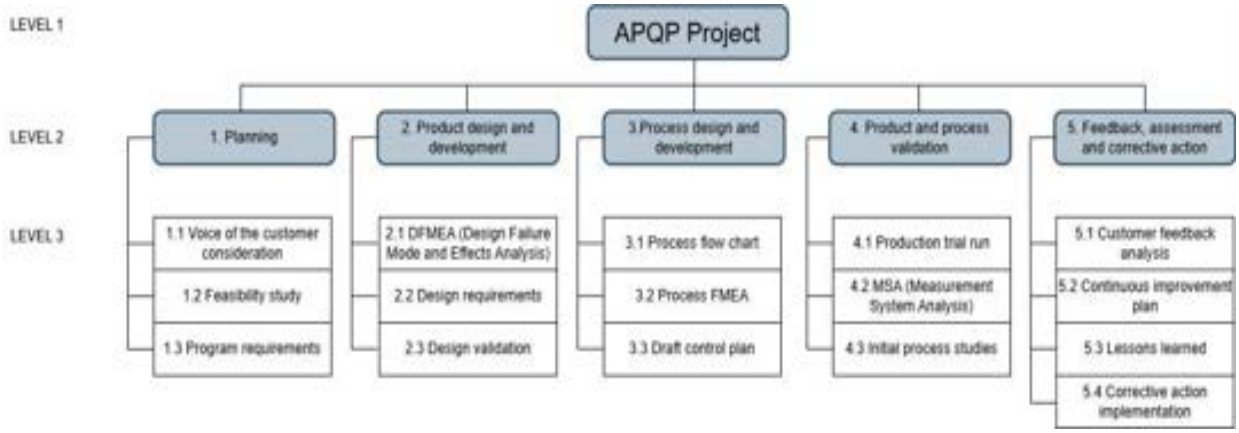

Figure 3: WBS of generic APQP project (as outlined *by Deshpande and Ekabote [16])*

3.2.2. Network diagram

A network diagram illustrates the sequence in which project activities are performed. It typically uses either activity-on-arrow notation, where arrows represent tasks and nodes; circles or boxes represent events or activity-on-node notation, where nodes represent tasks and arrows show the sequence of activities [8]. Two primary techniques used to construct network diagrams are the Critical Path Method (CPM) and the Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) [8]. According to Heagney [8], network diagrams are an effective scheduling tool. As a result, when these network diagramming tools are applied in the LE context, they can be utilised as collaborative project planning tools that lay the foundation for aligning the workflow with stakeholder expectations [6, 8].

3.2.3. Gantt chart and resource planner

A Gantt chart is a project management tool used to represent a project schedule visually. Predecessors, which illustrate task duration and interdependencies, thereby form a visual representation of the project timeline [8]. Deshpande and Ekabote [16] suggest that this tool has been used in APQP projects, however, with some challenges such as its rigidity, it contradicts the dynamic interdependencies in cross-functional teams. This affects the design phase, which often experiences delays [8] and shifts customer requirements [8]; consequently, hindering task sequencing and process variability, which is essential in LE [1]. Oppenheim *et al*. [1] contend that Gantt charts are limited to scheduling and sequencing; however, to support the planning phase effectively, resource planning offers an additional layer of integration that can enable LE practices in both agile and traditional environments.

For Ojo *et al*. [18], resource planning is used to compare the hours required per project with the available hours of each resource or team member, improving visibility of capacity utilisation and task demands. This can enable project managers to optimise the allocation of

human resources across multiple projects [18]. Moreover, Mayer and Bertoncelli [19] report that the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving (TRIZ) resource checklist can further support resource utilisation by helping teams leverage available resources. Mayer and Bartoncelli [19] emphasise the importance of resource planning when budgets are minimal. On the other hand, Ojo *et al*. [18] provide a guideline for calculating the optimal allocation of resources to a portfolio of projects at a strategic level. However, the Gantt chart remains the most effective low-level resource planning tool as it is project-specific [8]. While the findings from the three studies [8, 18, 19] focus on planning tools in isolation, their combined application could provide a foundation for LE by reducing waste related to human resource inefficiencies [6, 8 18, 19].

3.3. Agile project management

Agile promotes a mind-set focused on flexibility and responsiveness. As a lightweight approach, it is well-suited for managing evolving requirements and delivering functional software through incremental and iterative development [20]. Most software development life cycle models incorporate loops, as shown in Figure 4, where specific steps are repeated, known as iterations. Iterative models enable early feedback, which helps reduce project risks [21]. Agile design and architecture have also enhanced global software development through practices such as diagramming, prototyping and real-time communication [22].

In contrast, the waterfall model follows a linear, plan-driven approach, which is illustrated in Figure 4 [20]. Its primary limitations include inflexibility, and the high cost and time required to make changes. Agile, by comparison, is value-driven and emphasises continuous feedback through iterative cycles known as sprints. However, it also presents challenges, such as difficulty in estimating costs and timelines for large-scale projects, the need for experienced cross-functional teams, and the potential for insufficient documentation [20].

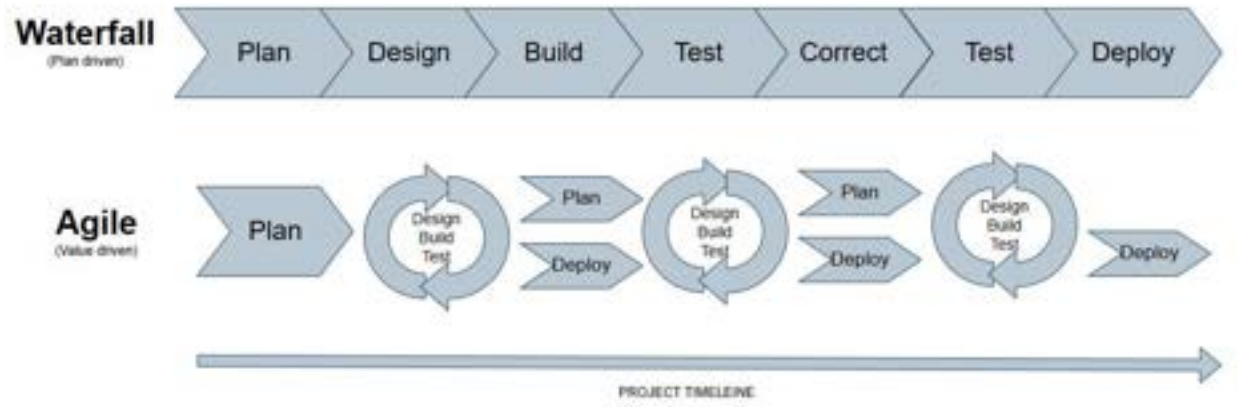

Figure 4: Comparison of waterfall and agile project management (a*dapted from [20])*

The agile manifesto is based on the values of people over rigid processes, a working product over extensive documentation, customer collaboration over strict contracts, and adapting to change over sticking to plans [20]. Common agile approaches include Scrum, Kanban, Extreme Programming (XP), Lean Software Development, Crystal, Feature-Driven Development (FDD), Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM), and Agile Unified Process (AUP) [23].

Four studies highlight the significance of agile principles such as iterative development, stakeholder communication and responsiveness to change [20, 21, 22, 23]. Boral [20], Kneuper [21] and Ferdiana *et al*. [22] illustrate the application of agile in software development environments, while Omonije [23] explores the broader impact of agile beyond software development. Omonije [23] illustrates that if agile is applied in engineering environments, it will enable the organisation to respond to changes swiftly, which will improve the productivity

of engineering teams to support LE. Of the four common agile approaches identified, Sunder and Deepalakshmi [24] highlight Scrum and Kanban as the most widely adopted and recognised. These two approaches were, therefore, the focus of further investigation in this study.

3.3.1. Scrum

Scrum is a widely used agile methodology that emphasises iterative and incremental software development. Its creators compared it to the game of rugby, where team members work closely together and continuously pass responsibility; just as they would pass a ball, to maintain momentum and competitiveness [20]. Boral [20], Sassa *et al.* [25] as well as Stettina and Smit [26] highlight that Scrum enables the rapid and continuous delivery of tasks in cycles of two to four weeks, known as sprints. A sprint, or iteration, is a time-boxed period that serves as the fundamental unit of development in Scrum [20, 25, 26]. Its duration is defined before the project begins and remains consistent throughout [20]. Three studies define three core roles in Scrum, namely, the product owner, who collaborates with stakeholders to gather requirements and manages the product backlog; the scrum master, who facilitates daily stand-ups and ensures adherence to Scrum principles by coaching the team; and the scrum team, a cross-functional group responsible for developing the product [20, 25, 26].

According to Stettina and Smit [26], key practices, also referred to as Scrum ceremonies, include portfolio reviews, project planning sessions, sprint backlog planning, sprint planning, daily stand-up meetings (daily Scrum), and sprint retrospectives. During sprint planning, the team and product owner select tasks from the product backlog to prioritise for the upcoming sprint [20, 25]. In daily stand-ups, team members discuss completed tasks, current work, and raise any blockers or *ad hoc* activities that may impact progress [20, 25]. Sprint retrospectives focus on reflection and improvement; the team discusses what went well, what did not, identifies potential causes of issues, reviews blockers, and creates an action plan for continuous improvement [20, 25]. The Scrum methodology, including its ceremonies, is illustrated in Figure 5.

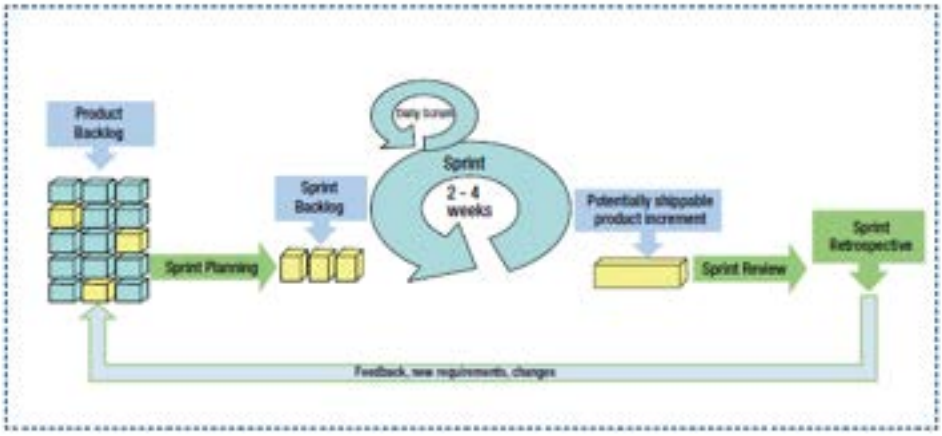

Figure 5: Scrum methodology [20]

While Boral [20] and Sassa *et al.* [25] present Scrum as an effective framework, Stettina and Smit [26] reveal potential drawbacks when Scrum is applied to multi-project environments, such as increased overhead and reduced efficiency owing to multitasking. This suggests that while Scrum can support lean engineering principles, its effectiveness may depend on flexible application rather than strict adherence to all its prescribed rules and resource requirements.

3.3.2. Kanban

Kanban is an agile methodology that visualises work using Kanban boards [20]. These boards typically display cards or sticky notes arranged in columns such as “Planned”, “In Progress” and “Done”, making it easy to track work in progress and identify bottlenecks [27]. A study by Parsons and MacCallum [28] explored the use of lean and agile in education by implementing the lean principles of pull and flow through Kanban boards and story cards, respectively [28]. Boral [20], Zasornova *et al*. [27] as well as Parsons and MacCallum [28] suggest that Kanban is guided by six key principles, namely:

1. Visualising the workflow: Using a board where cards move through stages (for example, from development to testing, as shown in Figure 6).
2. Limiting work in progress (WIP): Improving flow and minimising delays that can block tasks.
3. Managing flow: Focusing on just-in-time planning and quick issue resolution (for example, using an expedite row (as shown in Figure 6).
4. Making process policies explicit: Defining clear criteria for moving tasks between stages.
5. Implementing feedback loops: Using regular retrospectives.
6. Improving collaboratively and evolving experimentally: Adjusting WIP limits to meet project demands.

Figure 6 illustrates the workflow and principles of the Kanban methodology [20].

Figure 6: Kanban methodology [20]

For Mood [29], traditional Kanban applications often face workflow inefficiencies, task misalignment and bottlenecks caused by static configurations. Kanban works best when integrated with other agile methodologies. For example, both digital and physical boards promote collaboration; however, physical boards with sticky notes require less effort to update during meetings [30]. The Kanban approach aligns well with lean principles such as flow, pull and just-in-time, making it a valuable tool for implementing lean engineering. As potential workflow inefficiencies may arise if Kanban is used in isolation, it should be complemented with other methods or practices to ensure effective implementation of LE [5, 29].

3.4. Hybrid project management

Hybrid project management combines traditional and agile techniques to leverage the strengths of both while minimising their weaknesses [31]. Four common hybrid types include Water-Scrum-Fall, Waterfall-Agile, Hybrid V-Model, and Agile-Stage-Gate [31]. Water-Scrum-Fall integrates a traditional planning phase, a Scrum-based iterative development phase, as well as traditional implementation and closing phases. The Waterfall-Agile uses a waterfall approach for planning only, with agile methods applied during development and final phases. The Hybrid V-Model resembles Water-Scrum-Fall but replaces the waterfall method with the V-Model for the traditional phases. Agile-Stage-Gate divides the development process into stages combined with agile sprints, foregoing traditional tools like network diagrams and Gantt charts [31]. Since teams operate within traditional organisational structures, this often results in "agile islands in a waterfall", where agile and conventional development coexist [32].

Both studies by Reiff and Schlegel [31] and Kasauli et al. [32] suggest that neither waterfall or agile alone is sufficient for all contexts. A hybrid Waterfall-Agile model is well-suited for APQP projects, as it allows the structured planning phases to be executed using the waterfall approach, while agile methodologies can be applied to the iterative development and deployment stages. Furthermore, neither Scrum nor Kanban alone is sufficient to fully support LE implementation; therefore, a combined agile approach that integrates both frameworks is recommended to maximise flexibility, efficiency and continuous improvement [26, 29, 31, 32].

3.5. Toyota Kata

Reflection occurs during sprint retrospectives, where the team reviews its current state, defines improvement goals, and develops a plan to achieve them [33]. This process closely aligns with Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and Mike Rother's Toyota Kata. In a study by Özcan-Top and McCaffery [34], agile was implemented at a medical device company operating under regulatory constraints. During this study, value stream mapping was used in the prioritisation phase to identify bottlenecks [34]. The prioritised recommendations were then executed using the Improvement Kata, which supported iterative implementation until each recommendation was completed [34].

Various studies define Toyota Kata as a management and improvement methodology that embeds continuous improvement as a mind-set and habit [33- 36]. Rother [35], the originator of the concept, states that it is implemented through the Improvement Kata and taught using the Coaching Kata. With repeated use, these routines become second nature [36]. Although developed for manufacturing, the psychology behind the Improvement Kata is considered universal, with the methodology applicable across various domains. While the content may vary, the structured approach remains consistent [36]. Across four studies, the Improvement Kata involves these common four steps, namely, establishing a target condition or vision, understanding the current condition, identifying obstacles, and defining the next condition [33-36]. During sprint retrospectives, this approach could help teams plan and achieve their goals through its iterative and experimental nature. However, this would require amending the rules of the Scrum retrospective ceremony.

4 DISCUSSION

Several studies [37–40] argue that applying lean practices in developing countries requires adaptation to local economic realities, infrastructural limitations and cultural differences. For instance, Olu-Lawal *et al*. [37], in a comparative study between the USA and Africa, demonstrate that leadership commitment, organisational culture and workforce engagement are critical for successful implementation. However, these factors are often undermined by limited resources and weak infrastructure [37]. Similarly, agile methodologies such as Scrum and Kanban encounter contextual barriers in developing settings. Resource constraints may

prevent the appointment of dedicated roles like Scrum Masters or the allocation of separate spaces for tools such as Kanban boards [26]. Additionally, agile teams often rely on digital tools for workflow management, but technological immaturity in many developing countries makes this reliance challenging, particularly, in the automotive sector [37].

In response to these challenges, agile implementation must be tailored to local capacities through low-cost and accessible practices that maintain core agile values such as collaboration and transparency. Rahayu *et al.* [38], in their study of agile practices in Indonesia, identify frequent issues such as unclear requirements, poor documentation, unstructured teams, undefined roles, inadequate sprint planning, as well as the inconsistent use of daily stand-ups and retrospectives. These findings reinforce the need to customise agile methods and invest in capacity-building initiatives to improve adoption in resource-constrained environments.

To achieve effective implementation, a hybrid framework that balances structure with flexibility is essential. While agile promotes adaptability, certain structured planning tools from the waterfall model remain valuable [20, 26, 29]. For example, stakeholder engagement and documentation can follow the Advanced Product Quality Planning (APQP) framework, which aligns well with the planning stages of waterfall without compromising agility. To address spatial constraints, teams can place physical Kanban boards in existing workspaces such as boardrooms. Rotating the Scrum Master role among team members offers a practical solution to staff shortages. These adaptations reflect the findings of Stettina and Smit [26], who support multitasking and cross-functional roles to improve execution. Incorporating resource planning into routine Scrum activities further strengthens project management efficiency [8, 18, 19].

Moreover, a robust lean engineering framework must incorporate well-established lean principles. Studies on Lean Enablers [1, 3, 6] demonstrate consensus around six foundational principles, namely, respect for people, stakeholder value definition, waste elimination, process flow, customer-driven value delivery, and continuous improvement. Embedding these into the framework enhances its applicability. For instance, respect for people can be demonstrated through active participation and punctuality in daily stand-ups [20, 25]. Mapping stakeholder value across the project lifecycle aligns with agile values [21-23]. Waste can be identified through retrospectives that capture *ad hoc* and non-value-adding activities [20, 25]. Process flow improves through Kanban boards, and customer alignment is sustained through iterative feedback [27, 28]. Furthermore, applying practices such as Toyota Kata supports ongoing improvement across cycles [33-36].

In highly regulated environments, agile alone may prove insufficient. Hybrid models that blend agile and traditional project management have yielded better outcomes [39]. While agile typically uses a bottom-up approach, lean employs a top-down structure [39], and combining both offers a balanced solution. Omoruyi *et al.* [40] report that 71.7% of organisations in Nigeria use Scrum as their main agile framework, with 13.3% adopting Kanban. These figures provide a relevant benchmark for similar developing economies, reinforcing the framework's broader relevance. As shown in Figure 7, the proposed model accounts for these patterns by integrating both frameworks with contextual modifications.

Finally, incorporating design thinking further enhances the framework's effectiveness. Reiff and Schlegel [31] propose a Waterfall–Agile hybrid that uses traditional planning tools in conjunction with agile execution. Complementary studies [5, 28, 41] highlight the benefits of user story mapping, which bridges customer empathy with backlog prioritisation to guide development. Based on this evidence, the proposed framework introduces story mapping during the initial waterfall phase and continues its use through agile iterations. This integration ensures consistent customer involvement and helps teams create solutions that address real user needs. As illustrated in Figure 7, the framework brings together lean

principles, agile adaptability, and design thinking to form a context-sensitive approach tailored to the unique constraints of developing countries.

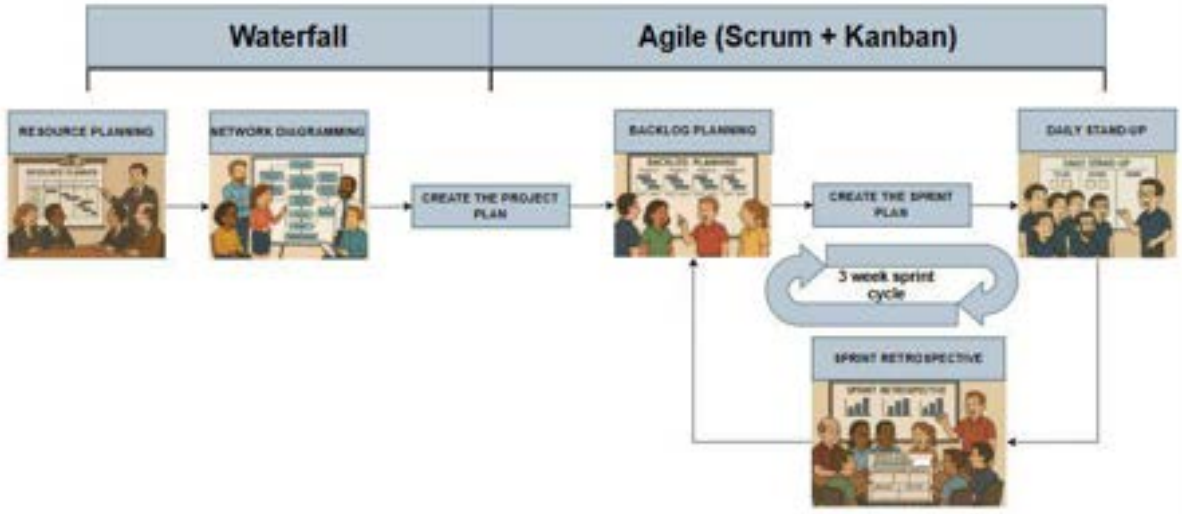

Figure 7: Conceptual framework (images generated from [42])

Figure 7 illustrates that the conceptual framework initiates with resource planning, where management evaluates team capacity in relation to project requirements. This step ensures the appropriate allocation of skills and availability prior to project initiation, aligning with the findings of previous studies [18, 19]. Following this, the team, comprising the product owner and cross-disciplinary engineers, conducts collaborative project planning. During this phase, a Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) and a network diagram are developed. These planning tools lay the foundation for a detailed Gantt chart and a formal project plan, both of which structure the project's timeline and dependencies [8, 14-17]. Stenholm *et al*. [3] and Heagney [8] suggest that the integration of the network diagram supports lean engineering principles by maximising planning lifecycle value and minimising waste.

Once the project plan is finalised, tasks are transferred to a backlog board, where they are refined into smaller, manageable tasks. These tasks are then grouped into at least four sprints to promote structured execution [20]. The team begins sprint planning by selecting tasks from the backlog and assigning them to the “Planned” column on a Kanban board, which includes the columns “To-Do”, “Doing”, and “Done” [20, 27, 28]. This visual workflow facilitates real-time tracking of progress. Task allocation considers individual capacity, with junior engineers often absorbing more tasks owing to their lighter involvement in strategic meetings compared to senior engineers. A key metric at this stage is the comparison between planned and actual hours worked, which informs team capacity and project efficiency.

Daily stand-up meetings, lasting fifteen minutes and facilitated by a rotating Scrum master, occur at the Kanban board [20, 28]. These meetings help the team track progress, identify blockers, and log time spent on *ad hoc* tasks. By ensuring rapid feedback loops and quick resolution of issues, these practices contribute to improved productivity compared to traditional waterfall approaches, where delays in communication and problem identification can hinder progress [20, 28]. The team reviews these metrics, planned versus actual hours and planned versus *ad hoc* effort, during sprint retrospectives, where performance is evaluated, and continuous improvement opportunities are discussed [25]. If performance falls short of targets, the Toyota Improvement Kata guides structured problem-solving through its iterative process, reinforcing the lean principle of continuous improvement [43].

Despite these benefits, the framework has certain drawbacks. Its implementation relies on a top-down approach, which can create challenges in securing senior leadership buy-in, particularly given its relatively recent emergence [20]. Furthermore, teams may initially resist participating in daily stand-ups and sprint planning sessions, as these practices introduce unfamiliar routines and ways of thinking [20].

Industry examples validate the practical application of variations of this framework. For instance, Ford's implementation of Lean Product Development (LPD) and their customised approach to lean engineering, achieved a 40% reduction in die construction lead times, a 50% reduction in tooling costs, and a 35% improvement in quality, while also enhancing employee morale by 30% [7]. These outcomes provide a valuable benchmark for automotive suppliers seeking to adopt lean engineering practices. By applying the proposed framework, organisations can align their project planning and execution strategies with proven lean methodologies to enhance performance, reduce waste and support sustainable development.

5 CONCLUSION

This study conducted a systematised scoping review to identify planning tools relevant to the implementation of LE. By examining existing literature, new insights were revealed that contributed to the advancement of LE practices. Key findings highlighted the integration of planning tools from both waterfall project management, such as Work Breakdown Structures (WBS), network diagrams and Gantt charts as well as and agile methodologies, including Scrum and Kanban. The investigation of hybrid project management approaches revealed the value of combining waterfall's structured planning with agile's iterative development, particularly through the waterfall-agile model.

Based on these insights, the study proposes a conceptual framework for LE that merges elements of waterfall, Scrum and Kanban. This model aligned well with the automotive industry's stage-gate process (APQP), where planning is traditionally based on waterfall methods, while implementation could benefit from agile practices. The analysis underscores the importance of this integration, as it offers a practical pathway for industries to transition towards more flexible and adaptive project management without abandoning the rigour of established processes. This contribution is significant as it bridges a gap in existing project management planning approaches by applying lean principles beyond the manufacturing environment. If adopted, the proposed approach is expected to enhance team productivity, reduce defects, shorten project delivery times and, ultimately, increase stakeholder satisfaction.

Future research should validate this framework across sectors through targeted case studies, evaluating its adaptability and long-term impact. Demonstrating its application in real-world contexts will reveal sector-specific challenges and opportunities, strengthening its practical relevance. In doing so, this study lays the groundwork for more adaptive, efficient and stakeholder-aligned engineering project management practices.

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THE INFLUENCE OF BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE INSIGHTS ON DECISION-MAKING AND ACTION

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ABSTRACT

Business Intelligence (BI) solutions occasionally fail to drive decisions and actions. This study identifies key factors that bridge the gap between BI insights and strategic decisions and actions, investigating how to ensure BI leads to decision-making and action. The research examines the influence of BI insights through five theoretical models: Decision Theory, Technology Acceptance Model, Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology, The Value of Real-Time Data Model, and the Perception-Cognition-Action (PCA) regulation process. A thematic clustering approach using ATLAS.ti and manual mind mapping, supported by Python and OpenAI, was used to analyse critical success factors. The study introduces a theoretical framework based on the PCA framework, integrating additional data processes to enhance the impact of BI insights. The critical success factors clustered findings contribute to improving data-driven decision-making by strengthening the generation and utilisation of actionable insights.

Keywords: Business Intelligence, BI, Decision-making, Actionable insight, Action

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1 INTRODUCTION

Business Intelligence (BI) has been widely adopted across various sectors to support data-driven decision-making and action. However, there remains considerable confusion and inconsistency in how BI is defined and interpreted. A review of existing studies reveals several common themes and emerging concepts in the definitions of BI.

*"BI is a broad category of applications, **technologies**, and processes for gathering, storing, accessing, and **analysing data** to help business users make better **decisions**." [1, p. 491]*

*"BI is a general category of applications and **technologies** used for collecting, accessing, and **analysing data to assist decision-makers in making** informed **decisions**." [2, p. 43]*

*"BI is a process driven by **technology** that **analyses** business **data** to provide information that can be **actioned** so that executives and managers can make better-informed business **decisions**." [3]*

The above definitions highlight three core concepts of BI: technology to analyse data, provide actionable insights, and make business decisions. It is important to note that recent literature has introduced the notion of "that can be actioned" in the definition. There has been an evolution of thinking that BI should incorporate actions. In this research, action is seen as physical bodily movements as well as digital workflows performed by computers.

Supply chains use BI for various reasons, such as to track, predict and optimise costs, monitor utilisation of assets and resources, and assess compliance with processes. BI helps executives understand what is happening in the operations of the supply chains and helps them make more strategic decisions and plans to act on.

Observations in the Supply Chain Industry suggest that BI solutions can occasionally fail to drive decisions and actions, and the full maturity of the solutions is not reached. BI-driven insights do not always translate into effective actions within the organisation. There is a gap between the insights resulting from BI systems and the organisation's response actions [4].

This study seeks to examine the key factors that affect the ability of BI solutions to effectively translate insights into organisational action. Given the general objective, the research questions are:

- Why do dashboards, on occasion, fail to drive action?
- What factors contribute to action being taken based on BI insights?
- How can the effectiveness of dashboards in driving action be improved?
- What technological features in BI tools enhance effective action based on insights?

The remaining sections of the article are structured as follows: first, the review methodology is presented, followed by the findings from the literature review. Next, a theoretical framework is discussed, and finally, the strengths and limitations of the research are examined, and concluding remarks are given.

2 REVIEW METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the literature review approach, guided by the research questions, along with the methodology used for selecting and analysing relevant sources.

2.1 Search Protocol

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, ResearchGate, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar, covering the entire period. The search strategy employed a combination of relevant keywords and phrases aligned with the research objectives. These search terms included: "Business Intelligence Action", "Business Intelligence", "Driving Action", "Reason for Action",

"Transforming Data into Action", "Business Intelligence Theories", "Business Intelligence History", "Business Intelligence Tools", "Dashboard", and "Business Process". Boolean operators and truncations were applied where appropriate to broaden the search scope and capture variations in terminology. Additionally, the derivative and prior works cited in reference [1] were reviewed. This source was identified as a foundational article with direct relevance to the research objectives of the present study and was therefore used to trace additional scholarly contributions within its citation network.

2.2 Selection Process

A total of 74 sources were initially identified through the database search. Following a structured screening process, 41 publications were selected for inclusion in the final review. The selection criteria were based on relevance to the research objectives and adherence to academic standards (Table 1). Specifically, only articles published in peer-reviewed journals or reputable conference proceedings were included.

Table 1: Selection criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Relevance to the research objectives	Not freely available
Academic publications	Not written in English
Seminal Work	Only possible to find abstract
	Reports and news articles

2.3 Data analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti to systematically examine the selected articles in accordance with the research objectives. The coding process focused on key themes, including "BI Failure Reasons", "Critical Success Factors", "Improvement Strategies", and "BI Technologies". To facilitate thematic organisation, ChatGPT was employed to assist in structuring the coded data within a predefined thematic framework, reflecting the stages of the BI lifecycle. For enhanced visualisation, the output was mapped using MyMap, an AI-based mind-mapping tool.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature content is extracted and analysed in alignment with the research objectives and questions. An assessment of decision-making gaps and dashboard failures is presented. Next, the factors leading to action based on BI insights and improving the effectiveness of BI reports are addressed. The technological features of BI tools are discussed, and finally, models linked to BI are presented. In this way, a comprehensive review clearly addresses the research problem, objectives, and questions to gain a broad understanding of BI and its challenges and technological solutions that align with the study goals.

3.1 Overview of Reviewed Literature

The articles originate from 24 different countries, with the United States (8) and Australia (7) contributing the highest number of publications. Overall, Asia stands out as the most represented continent, with 15 articles originating from 12 countries, followed by North America with 10 articles. In contrast, South America (1) and Africa (2) are the least represented, which may reflect limited BI-related research activity in these regions. The exclusion of non-English publications may have contributed to the underrepresentation of South American research outputs. As shown in Figure 1, the selected articles are drawn from all the major continents.

Figure 1: Literature Source Countries

Most of the reviewed literature was published after 2005, with a noticeable increase in scholarly output in recent years (Figure 2). This upward trend indicates growing academic interest in the concept of BI as a driver of data-driven decision-making and action.

Figure 2: Number of Publications by Year of Publication

The selected articles were retrieved from five distinct academic databases. Most sources originated from ResearchGate, followed by Scopus, which contributed a substantial portion of the reviewed literature (Figure 3).

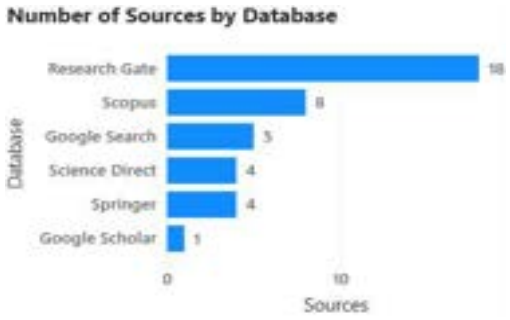

Figure 3: Number of Sources by Database

Most of the sources are peer-reviewed journal articles (31 of 42); however, the selection also includes six conference proceedings, two book chapters, as well as one book and one doctoral thesis, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Many literature studies explored various aspects of BI. A study in 2008 highlighted that theory formulation and literature review remained the most employed research strategies in the field [5]. A systematic literature review published in 2020 examined 84 studies from the period 2011 to 2020, further mapping methodological trends in BI research [6]. Jourdan [5] noted that the survey research strategy had been infrequently employed in BI. However, recent

research demonstrates an increased use of survey methodologies within the BI domain, indicating a shift toward more empirical studies [7], [8], [9], and [10].

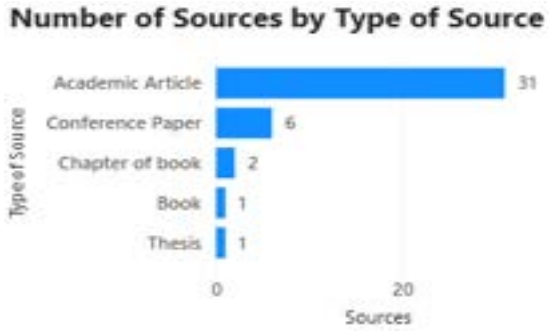

Figure 4: Number of Sources by Type of Source

3.2 Decision-Making Gaps and Dashboard Failures

In this study, the success of BI systems is evaluated based on their ability to drive actionable insights that lead to improved organisational efficiency. Any factor that impedes or disrupts this process is classified as a failure of the BI system. Based on the thematic analysis of the selected literature, BI system failures can be categorised into four primary themes (Figure 5):

- Lack of strategic alignment and analytical talent: The absence of a clear BI strategy, combined with a shortage of skilled personnel and ineffective data presentation, can undermine the successful implementation of BI systems [11], [12].
- Governance and adoption issues: Insufficient stakeholder buy-in, lack of governance structures, and unregulated system usage may lead to inconsistent application of BI tools, limiting their effectiveness [11], [13].
- Data Quality: Poor data quality issues, such as inaccuracies and inconsistencies across source systems [11], [13], [14]. Additionally, information overload also contributes to system failure [15].
- Integration and user-related challenges: Technical integration issues, limited user accessibility, and disconnects between developers and end-users can hinder BI from driving analytical insights into action [12], [16], [17], [18].

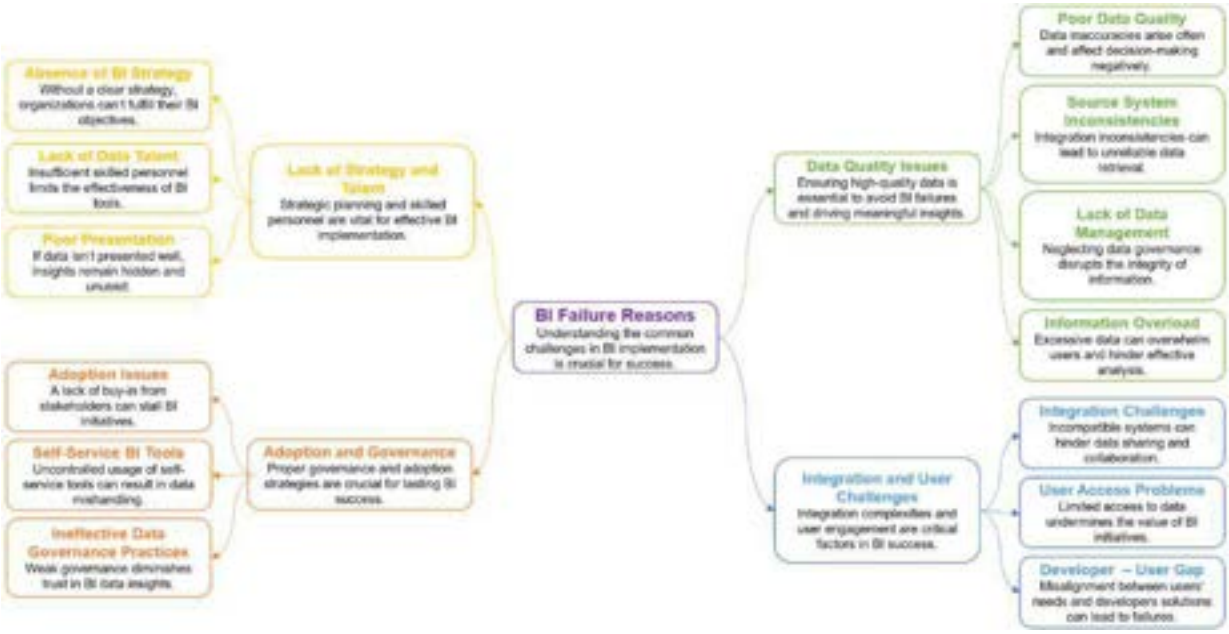

Figure 5: BI Failure Reasons Mind Map

3.3 Success Factors

Many studies have identified the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) for BI, and some of these could be considered action drivers within BI processes. Some studies have categorised CSFs [19], and others have ranked them by relative importance [20].

In this study, CSFs were systematically coded, and their quotations were extracted using ATLAS.ti. These quotations were then processed using ChatGPT, which was instructed to organise the CSFs into a sequential framework aligned with the typical BI process flow: from data capture, storage, analysis, and visualisation, interpretation and ultimately action. Additionally, the prompt directed the model to identify factors that are critical across all stages of the BI lifecycle. The result was then used to create the cycle in Figure 6. It is observed that different Critical Success Factors (CSFs) play distinct and pivotal roles at various stages of BI solution development, while certain foundational factors remain essential throughout the entire process.

Figure 6: Cycle with CSFs at Each Stage

The CSFs for successful BI implementation were also initially clustered using a Python script and OpenAI API and further refined through manual thematic grouping using ATLAS.ti and mind mapping to ensure alignment with the research context. The resulting common themes and categories are summarised in Table 2. The Python script will be made available upon request.

3.4 Improving the Effectiveness of BI Dashboards

This section discusses the strategies for improving a BI dashboard's effectiveness in driving action. Based on the reviewed literature, the ten best practices for BI dashboard design and implementation were identified and are presented and discussed in detail.

Table 2: CFS Themes and Codes

CFS Theme	CSF Codes
Strategy	Well-established business case, clear vision, business strategy link, well-defined vision, clear goals and objectives, strategic plan
Top Management Support	Executive buy-in, management support and commitment and sponsorship
Team and their skills	Developer skills, the team possess the right mix of skills, teamwork & composition, knowledge and technical capabilities of the BI team
Project Related Factors	Project management skills, Project planning, Project team competencies, Project scope is clearly defined and managed
Data Related Factors	Data quality, high quality of data at source systems, sustainable data quality, precision, consistency, data efficiency, and effective data management
Training	Education, formal education, training and support are in place for business vision, training users, and competency development
Ease of interpretation and usability	Easy to interpret, easy to implement insights, ease of use
Perception	Perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, perceived incentives, perceived usefulness, perceived value

External Factors	External environment, third-party interactions
Project Champion	Project leader/champion, a high-level champion from the business side
Development approach, incremental & iterative	Adaptive, evolutionary development approach, business-driven and iterative development approaches, flexibility, and design must adapt
Trust and Habit	Trust, habit, human factors like information behaviours, and hope for performance
User	Self-efficacy, user buy-in, user-oriented and friendly technologies, user expectations, user satisfaction, user support, user training, user participation
System Related Factors	Stable source systems are in place, appropriate technology, system integrity, system quality, alerts and notifications, IT infrastructure, ability to integrate with other systems
Change Management	Ability to manage change, attitude towards change, and user-oriented change management
Communication	Effective communication, the communication strength of the bi team, and communicating change management
Organisational Factors	Organisational size, organisational acceptance, organisational structure, organisational learning, and organisational competence
Culture	Organisational culture, subjective norms
Resources	Adequate resources, human resources, and technology experience
Cognitive Fit	Cognitive loads induced by the content of the dashboard, psychological state or 'mindset', creativity and original thinking, the sociotechnical fit and the cognitive fit
Speed of implementation, access and response	Rapid implementation, prototype is used as proof of concept, speed, timely response, timely access, user access, access to organisation data

1. **Define clear objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs).** By starting with specific goals for what you aim to achieve with BI, you provide the criteria to filter information based on data relevance [5]. You are also able to track progress and success.
2. **Engage stakeholders early.** "Business Intelligence solutions must be built with end users in mind, as they need to use it" [6, p. 75]. It's important to include end-users in the planning and design phases. This ensures that BI tools meet user needs and that reports, and dashboards are actionable and understandable.
3. **Ensure data quality and integrity.** Based on the BI failure reasons and the success factors discussed in the previous two sections, the topic of data quality came up. It is important to ensure data quality right from the point of data capture. As the famous saying goes, "Garbage in, Garbage out" [7, p. 28]. BI insights are only as good as the data they rely on. Regularly cleanse, validate, and standardise data to prevent inaccurate analysis and to build user trust in BI outputs.
4. **Use self-service BI Tools.** "Self-service BI equips business users with the flexibility and tools to explore their own data and, through a prototyping approach, express their information requirements" [8, p. 23]. You empower non-technical users to explore data independently. Self-service tools allow business units to run analyses without relying entirely on IT, fostering data-driven decision-making across the organisation.
5. **Foster a data-driven culture.** This emphasises the fourth level of sense-making in knowledge management [9]. "Knowledge embedded in organisational culture is usually implicit, assumed and taken for granted" [10, p. 4]. Data-driven culture supports the use of BI systems and fosters it by emphasising their economic and operational benefits [11]. Promoting the value of data-driven decisions through training and regular communication is important.
6. **Prioritise real-time or near-real-time data.** This is further discussed in the next section, which discusses the technological features of BI tools. It is important to deliver information at the right time, location, and form [12]. This enables faster decision-making and a more agile response to changes in the business environment.

7. **Focus on effective data visualisation.** Use clear, intuitive visualisations to present insights. Visualisations assist users in creating progressive visual representations of information. The capacity to imagine the information in a graphical set-up (rather than words or numbers) assists users with comprehending information in an insightful manner [13]. Complex data sets become easier to understand with effective visualisations, which increases user adoption and actionability.
8. **Implement role-based access and security.** According to [14], database security is one of the top 10 database features to have, and security is one of the top 5 dimensions in BI, according to [15]. Managing access to BI tools and data by roles to maintain security and ensure that users only see information relevant to the drivers of the problem is good practice.
9. **Enable mobile access to BI Tools.** Users require the freedom to access information anywhere and anytime. "Digitalised platforms such as mobiles and tablets have led to ease of data delivery in the business intelligence sector" [5, p. 34]. Mobile-friendly BI allows users to access insights on the go, improving accessibility and responsiveness. It is good practice to make BI dashboards mobile-friendly.
10. **Invest in training and support.** [14] mentions training as one of the five key factors in implementing BI solutions. [15] rank training as the 5th most important process for BI implementation, and [11] have training as their 4th critical success factor, to mention 3 out of the 28 sources that reference training. Comprehensive training ensures that users can fully leverage BI tools. Ongoing support and resources help users troubleshoot issues and maximise their productivity.

3.5 Technological Features of BI Tools

This section explores the key technological enablers of BI identified through the analysis of the selected literature. The discussion begins with an overview of Online Analytical Processing (OLAP), followed by an examination of various BI tools and platforms. The role of predictive analytics is then explored, alongside the emergence of embedded BI capabilities. The analysis continues with the development of Real-Time BI (RTBI) and the use of automated alerts to support timely decision-making. Finally, the section concludes with a discussion on design indicators for managing information load, which aim to improve user comprehension and actionability.

Online Analytical Processing (OLAP): A total of seventeen sources reviewed in this study mentioned OLAP as an important technological feature in BI systems. As described by Bataweel [21], "OLAP is a cube-like structure called a hypercube. It has facts that are numerical in nature and that are categorical in dimensions. The specific data and design of the cube are obtained from tables where measures are obtained from records in the fact table and its dimensions from the specific dimension tables". OLAP makes it possible for clients to inspect multidimensional data with speed and from **multiple perspectives** [13]. Similarly, OLAP is used to analyse data from different angles and distil it into actionable information [29].

BI Tools: Tripathi and Bagga [13] evaluated several BI tool solutions in 2020 and concluded Microsoft Power BI, Tableau and Qlik as the leaders among all. According to Google Trends, Power BI has been on the rise since 2015 (**Error! Reference source not found.**7). Price has a big influence on the choice of BI tools. While Tableau requires a substantial annual platform fee, Power BI offers more flexible monthly licensing options tailored to different user needs, making it a more cost-effective solution for many organisations.

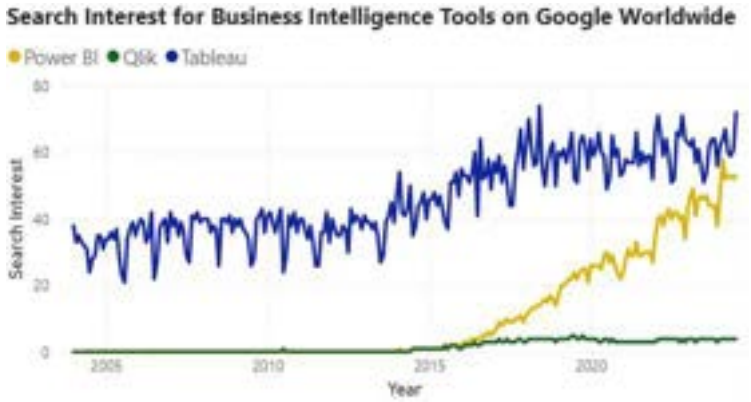

Figure 7: Google Trends Industry Leading BI Tools [16]

Predictive analytics: Eight literature sources within the reviewed literature highlight predictive analytics. It is broadly defined as "A group of analytical techniques and processes for finding relationships in data and using these discovered relationships to predict future outcomes" [1]. Predictive analytics involves investigating historical and current data to identify patterns, assess potential risks, and uncover emerging opportunities [13]. In the supply chain sectors, predictive analytics can be used to forecast logistic costs depending on volumes expected to be shipped using linear regression.

Real-Time BI (RTBI): Twenty-one (21) of the sources refer to real-time data, which shows its importance. "RTBI operates on operational data with zero delays and gives real-time modelling, data analysis and action based on insights" [17], [18]. The latency between the data capture and action significantly decreases the value of the data. The fundamental objective of RTBI is to remove this latency to get maximum value from the data. However, implementing RTBI poses technical and financial challenges. Based on the researcher's professional experience, most conventional BI tools, such as Power BI and Tableau, rely on scheduled refresh intervals, making true real-time functionality difficult to achieve. Achieving near real-time updates in Power BI through push datasets requires specialised configuration by data engineers and often incurs increased infrastructure and processing costs. Consequently, many RTBI solutions are built directly on web-based platforms, without using tools like Power BI and Tableau.

Embedded BI: Embedded BI is identified as a key future development in the evolution of Business Intelligence systems [16], [31]. This observation aligns with the researcher's professional experience: in 2022, the organisation where the researcher was employed began embedding dashboards directly into web-based applications. This integration significantly reduces context switching, allowing users to transition seamlessly from insight to action within the same application.

Automated alerts: Bijker and Hart [8] highlight alerts and notifications, which align with the third proposition of this research (Alerts are a crucial feature to drive action from a BI dashboard). Watson (2009) states: "Designing business processes with BI embedded in them (e.g., business activity monitoring (BAM) dashboards, alerts) makes BI part of the work system." Otherwise, not many people in the literature discuss alerts linked to BI. The researcher found this interesting as alerts are a key selling point for the company the researcher works for. Many BI Tools can send alerts based on the data presented in the dashboard. Interestingly, this capability was not highlighted as a critical success factor or future development in any literature reviewed. This could be seen as a gap in the literature.

Burnay et al. [19] state that it would be valuable to study the design of indicators for informational loads. This point is agreed with, as the researcher is a designer using BI tools,

and finds that it would be helpful to indicate the information load being conveyed to the user, depending on the design.

3.6 Models Linked to BI

In this section, some of the models linked to BI found in the literature are presented. The decision-making model and theory, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), then the Real-time value model and Perception-Cognition-Action regulation process are discussed.

Researchers have proposed the use of decision theory to guide BI system adoption [6], while others have explored how individual decision-making styles influence the use of BI tools [32]. These findings suggest that organisations may need to implement differentiated strategies to promote effective BI utilisation among users with diverse cognitive and behavioural decision-making preferences.

The TAM is widely used to comprehend new information systems' acceptance, adoption, and usage [6]. This article proposes that the successful adoption of the dashboard must ensure continued use and subsequent action. An advantage of the TAM is its simplicity and effectiveness in predicting user acceptance and behaviour; however, it doesn't take external factors into consideration and may be influenced by cultural bias.

The UTAUT2 has been applied to verify the factors affecting the implementation of BI tools [18]. The UTAUT2 (Figure 8) identifies the most important variable that influences both the behavioural intention and the actual usage [18]. The advantages of the UTAUT are the comprehensive nature of the framework and its strong predictive power in behavioural intention to use technology. However, its complexity is due to numerous constructs and moderating variables that can sometimes complicate analysis and interpretation.

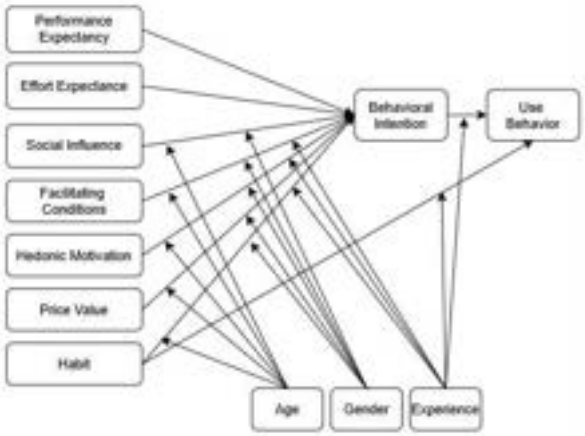

Figure 8: Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) [20]

Figure 9 shows how the value of real-time data decreases exponentially with time until action is taken. There is a latency between the occurrence of a business event and when action is taken in response to the event. This research focuses on the latency between information delivered and action taken, the decision-making latency. It is important to understand why delays occur in decision-making, or why action is sometimes not taken at all, despite the availability of relevant information. A key advantage of the real-time data value model is its emphasis on decision-making latency, which aligns closely with the objectives of this research. However, a limitation of the model is its narrow focus, as it considers only temporal delay as the source of data value loss, without accounting for other contextual or cognitive factors.

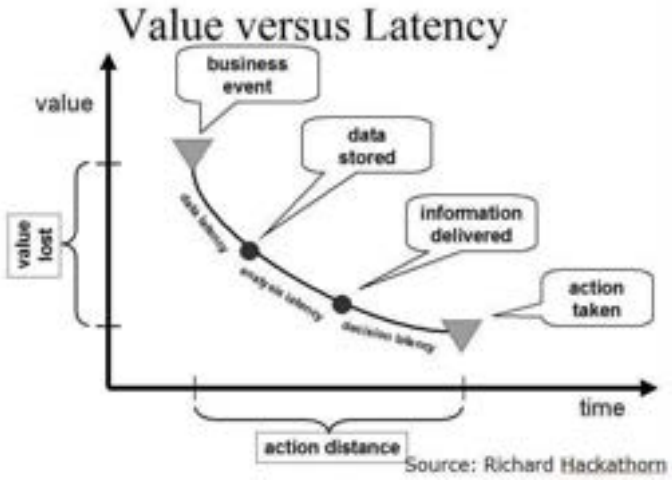

Figure 9: The Value of Real-Time Data [1]

The Perception-Cognition-Action (PCA) regulation process describes driving behaviour, involving a sequence of core mental activities that can also be applied to BI dashboard usage [33]. Users must first perceive the information displayed on the dashboard, followed by cognitive processing in which the data is interpreted and evaluated to support decision-making. This leads to a corresponding action. Subsequently, the impact of that action influences what is displayed on the dashboard, and the resulting insight becomes the new input to be perceived, creating a continuous PCA feedback loop (Figure 10).

This process has not been explicitly applied as a dominant framework in the context of BI. The advantages of the process are that it brings to the forefront the cognition steps required to translate perception into action. The model is simple, intuitive, and relatable, making it accessible to both researchers and practitioners. It is relatable. However, it may not naturally incorporate foresight or proactive strategies.

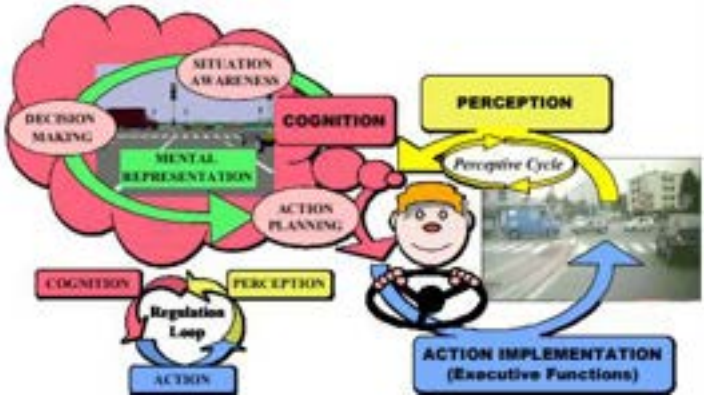

Figure 60: Perception-Cognition-Action regulation process [21]

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework developed in this research adapts the PCA regulation process [21],

tailored to the context of BI. While PCA has not been explicitly applied within BI research, its core components and underlying principles align well with BI, particularly in the context of organisational decision-making processes

Figure 11 presents the adapted PCA model within the BI context. Although the framework retains the foundational PCA functions, it incorporates additional data processes to close the

loop between action and perception through BI processes. The three data processes introduced to bridge this gap include: data sensing or capturing, data storage, and data analysis and updated visualisation. While data processing is not the primary focus of the model, it plays a critical intermediary role in enabling continuous feedback and adaptation between action and perception.

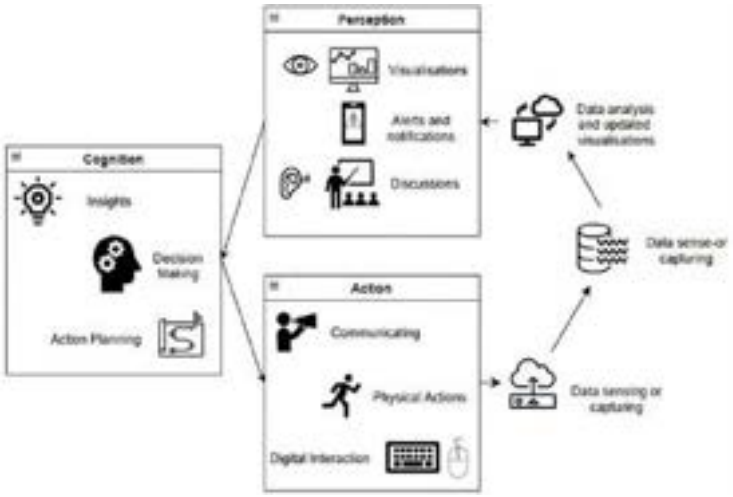

Figure 71: Theoretical Framework of BI-Guided PCA Loop (Adopted from Bellet et al. [33])

4.1 Perception

Once a BI dashboard is developed, the visualisation of data becomes the primary medium through which users perceive insights. The developer validates the content and structure of the dashboard involves iterative sessions with end-users to confirm that the dashboard can be trusted as an accurate source of insight to create a correct perception. Visualisations can be presented in various formats, but effective dashboards typically adhere to three core principles [22]:

- Directing user attention to key visuals: The most important visuals should be clearly highlighted, ensuring that users are not distracted by irrelevant or extraneous information.
- Minimising time to information: The time required for a user to look at the visuals to gain insight, referred to as perception latency, should be reduced. Lower latency enhances the efficiency and value of data-driven decision-making.
- Providing contextual information: Visuals should include relevant context, such as performance targets, historical benchmarks, or thresholds. This enables users to evaluate whether current performance indicators reflect desirable or problematic conditions.

The use of alerts and notifications from dashboards can also be perceived. Alerts can reduce the lag between data updates and user awareness, thereby increasing the timeliness and value of data. Alerts should be triggered when predefined thresholds or benchmarks are exceeded. It's important not to overwhelm people with excessive notifications and ensure that the appropriate audience is reached. Notably, positive alerts, such as those celebrating goal achievement, can be as impactful as warnings of underperformance [23].

Moreover, interpretive discussions that occur while viewing dashboards further enrich the perception process. For example, a user observing an upward trend in Turnaround Times might learn through conversation that the increase is due to a specific operational issue. This context

adds depth to the visualisation and enhances the insight derived from it. Such discussions linked to the visuals provide essential context, shaping how visuals are perceived and informing the subsequent cognitive phase of realisation.

4.2 Cognition

Following perception, the next cognitive phase in the decision-making process is cognition, wherein one of the key subprocesses is the generation of insights. In this context, insights refer to meaningful realisations derived from the interpretation of perceived data [24]. Individuals rely on internal mental models to make sense of information, and these models can change to new insights when a dashboard is perceived as a credible and accurate source of truth.

A course of action must be determined once the perceived information is understood and meaningful insight into the situation has been gained. Decision-making often involves time lags, which can diminish the value of data [1]. Striking a balance between thoughtful deliberation and timely action is essential. While decision-makers frequently seek additional data, statistics, and figures to enhance the quality of their choices, there are instances where time constraints necessitate rapid decisions based on the best available information.

Once a decision has been reached, it must be followed by the formulation of an action plan [21]. This may involve devising a strategy or, in simpler cases, outlining specific tasks in the form of an action list. For instance, an individual monitoring a weight-tracking dashboard may notice their weight exceeding a specific threshold, leading to the development of an exercise or behavioural plan.

4.3 Action

The cognition function is followed by action, the phase in which a tangible impact is realised, and the true value of data is ultimately extracted [1]. Once a strategy or task has been formulated, it must be effectively communicated and executed. The communication function, often delivered through instructions, is one of the CSFs for effective BI implementation.

Actions may take the form of digital interactions and physical activities. For example, a digital interaction could involve cancelling a planned load in a Transport Management System due to vehicle underutilisation and replanning to optimise capacity. A physical action might involve increasing the number of vehicles scanned at a facility to enhance compliance monitoring and collect more accurate turnaround time data.

4.4 Data Processing

Actions often generate new data points, either sensed automatically by electronic sensors or captured manually through operational activities. For example, vehicle movements can be monitored using telematics systems, which continuously collect location and usage data. Ensuring the accuracy of data sensing and capture is critical for maintaining high data quality, one of the most frequently mentioned CSFs in the literature.

The capability to expand efficiently as more data is accumulated is required for a sustainable system. Data can be stored in many different formats and data types. The data visualisation tools cater for ingesting data from these many different data storage locations. The security of the data storage locations is also essential to ensure that data is accessed and used for ethical means. Security is also vital so that the data doesn’t just get deleted.

After data is captured, it must be stored in appropriate repositories such as databases, data warehouses, or data lakes [37]. To support a sustainable and scalable system, these storage solutions must be capable of efficiently expanding as data volumes increase. Given the diversity of data formats and types, storage infrastructures must accommodate structured, semi-structured, and unstructured data [37]. Data visualisation tools are designed to interface

with a wide range of storage systems, allowing for flexible, integrated analysis across diverse data sources. Ensuring the security of data storage environments is critical to prevent unauthorised access, promote ethical data use, and protect against accidental or malicious data loss.

Data must be processed, analysed, and visualised to extract meaningful insights and ensure that the dashboard reflects updated information. Real-time updates are particularly valuable, as they eliminate the lag between an action and the perception of its results, enabling faster decision-making [1]. However, real-time data processing often demands significant computational resources, making batch processing with scheduled refreshes a more practical approach in many scenarios. In such cases, it is important to align refresh schedules with typical user access patterns to ensure that the most current data is available when dashboards are typically viewed.

5 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

This study is conceptual in nature, grounded in an extensive literature review and built upon an adapted PCA model that has not often been associated with BI implementation. The research offers a novel contribution by exploring the often-overlooked action phase within BI processes. Additionally, it advances the theoretical landscape by closing the PCA loop through the integration of critical BI components such as data capture, data storage, data analysis, and visualisation.

However, a key limitation of this study lies in the absence of empirical validation. The proposed theoretical framework has not yet been tested in practical settings, which restricts the ability to confirm its applicability and effectiveness. Future research should therefore focus on empirically testing the framework across diverse organisational contexts to evaluate its utility and generalisability. Further investigations could also explore specific elements of the framework, such as the factors influencing the perception of dashboard visualisations, as well as enablers and barriers related to cognitive processes within BI environments.

6 CONCLUSION

This research presents a conceptual framework that integrates the PCA process into the context of BI, offering a structured approach to enhance the impact of dashboards in driving organisational action. Through a comprehensive literature review and thematic analysis, the research identifies CSFs, common failure points, and best practices for dashboard design and implementation. By explicitly addressing the often-overlooked “action” phase, the study closes the loop between data perception and action, incorporating essential BI processes such as data capture, storage, analysis, and visualisation. This research provides practical guidance for professionals working in the field of BI on how to design dashboards that are more actionable and elicit effective user responses. By enhancing the capacity of dashboards to facilitate informed decision-making and prompt effective action, this study contributes to strengthening organisational performance and operational efficiency.

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A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: 3D PRINTING IN SMART FACTORIES FOR LEARNING FARMS

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ABSTRACT

This review (SLR) explores the integration and production of 3D printed assembly models in smart factories to enhance the learning capabilities of learning factories. The study delves into the characteristics of 3D printed objects that enable them to withstand repeated assembly and disassembly. Through a comprehensive review protocol, search strategies, data extraction criteria, and quality assessments, the research identifies the correlation between learning and smart factories within the Industry 4.0 landscape. The findings highlight the value of education and insights in supporting Industry 4.0 initiatives and fostering new research endeavours. Parameters are identified for the most durable parts to be made, identifying snap fit joints and PLA and ABS materials as viable options. By highlighting the potential of 3D-printing technologies in learning farm environments inside industrial settings and methods to produce quality equipment to reach the end goal, this article adds to the growing conversation around Industry 4.0 and its multifaceted sector.

Keywords: Smart factories, Learning factories, 3D printing, Interlocking parts, FDM (Fused Deposition Modelling)

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1 INTRODUCTION

Industry 4.0 technologies are driving a new manufacturing revolution, marking the dawn of the next industrial era [1]. This fresh viewpoint focuses on how manufacturing may combine technological advancements in digitalization to achieve optimum production with the least number of resources. With the rise of Industry 4.0 and all its possibilities comes challenges. As organizations move toward implementing and operating smart factories, they must equip their workforce with new and specialized skills to fully leverage the transformative potential of Industry 4.0 [2].

Personnel in this sector can be trained in learning factories, which are defined as industrial facilities created to duplicate I4.0 technology for educational gain [3]. Smart factories mimic the industry and thus have the potential to educate users more on how the industry would possibly work, leading to more well-rounded and knowledgeable students [4]. An assembly model, like a 3D puzzle, is one of the tools that will be utilized in the learning factory described in this study. The model ties into the concept of a learning farm in the sense that students will be provided with hands-on work, giving them the necessary practical experience. The part must be durable as it will be assembled and disassembled repeatedly.

We will perform an SLR to identify literature that will define and highlight the importance of learning factories and their correlation with smart factories. The study will additionally aim to explore methods for successful 3D manufacturing of a durable assembly model through printing parameters, materials used, and design concepts.

2 A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: REVIEW PROTOCOL

A variety of review methods can be used to perform an SLR; in this study, Xiao & Watson's protocol is utilized [3]. Table 3 shows the steps and the phases that they fall into.

Table 1: Xiao & Watson's protocol

Phase	Nr.	Step
(Phase 1) Planning the Review	1.	The formulation of the research questions
	2.	Develop a review protocol
(Phase 2) Conducting the review	3.	Search for literature
	4.	Screen for Inclusion
	5.	Assess quality
	6.	Extract Data
	7.	Data analysis
(Phase 3) Reporting the Review	8.	Report Findings

2.1 Research Question Formulation

Developing research questions is an essential stage in every investigation. A strong research question serves as the cornerstone of critical thinking and the problem-based approach to science. It guides the investigation's path and encourages a deeper comprehension of the topic at hand[5].

The following Research Questions were formulated.

1. *Research Question 1 (RQ1):* What defines a learning farm and what makes them valuable?
2. *Research Question 2 (RQ2):* What is the correlation between learning farms and smart factories?
3. *Research Question 3 (RQ3):* What characteristic of 3D printed models allows them to be robust and withstand repeated assembly and disassembly?

2.2 Review Protocol development

The review protocol is a predetermined approach describing the procedures used in carrying out the review. For thorough systematic reviews, the review procedure is essential. It reduces researcher bias in data analysis and selection, therefore increasing the standards of the paper. The

goal of the study, research questions, inclusion criteria, search tactics, quality evaluation standards and screening processes, and methods for data extraction, synthesis, and reporting should all be covered in the review protocol[6].

2.3 Search of Literature

To search for relevant literature in databases, key keywords were derived from the research questions [6].

2.3.1 Key words:

Set 1: smart factories, learning factories, 3D printing.

Set 2: interlocking parts, Materials.

Set 3: Printing Parameters, Mechanical Properties, Fused Deposition Modelling (FDM)

Search Phrase 1: "Smart factories" AND ("Learning farm" OR "learning Factories") AND "3D Printing".

Search Phrase 2: "Printing 3D objects" AND interlocking parts

Search Phrase 3: "Printing parameters" AND "affecting mechanical properties" AND materials AND FDM.

Databases: Scopus, ScienceDirect, IEEE Explore, Emerald Insight, Web of Science.

2.3.2 Yield of Searches

The following table shows the search phrase along with the yield in each database.

Table 2: Identified literature.

Database	Yield Search Phrase 1	Yield Search Phrase 2	Yield search phrase 3
Scopus	1	1	1
Science Direct	33	4	8
IEEE Explore	0	0	0
Emerald Insight	25	4	17
Web of Science	0	1	0
Total	59	10	26

2.4 Inclusion screening

It's crucial to use suitable literature as further limits were included to better refine the search results.

Table 3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Published Articles.	Non-English Articles.
Articles published in the years 2014-2024.	Literature that did not focus on how Smart factories and smart farms work in collaboration.
Articles containing the three search phrases	Articles that are not open source

Duplicates were removed, and abstracts were read through to identify if they suited the research questions that were asked.

2.5 Data Extraction Criteria

(Data Extraction is done separately for phrases 1 and 2). The data that were extracted from each study are: Year Published, Authors, Title, Database the article was found in, and basic principles found in the literature.

2.6 Data Analysis Criteria

(Data Analysis is done separately for phases 1 and 2). The Data from Table 5 was summarised and provides the following information: title of each study, the database in which the study was published and publication reference.

2.7 Quality Assessment Process

The prescribed Quality assessment process as per Xiao and Watson can be found in the table for along with a description and application thereof[6].

Table 4: Yield of Search Phrases with steps

Step	Description	Yield Phrase 1	Yield Phrase 2	Yield Phrase 3
Literature identification	The first stage, as stated by the article, is to search for literature using the keywords identified from the Research Questions in select Databases. Only published articles are used.	Only open Access English articles were chosen.) • Scopus=0 • Science Direct=33 • IEEE Explore=0 • Emerald Insight=24 • Web of Science=0 **Total: 57**	Only open Access English articles were chosen. • Scopus=0 • Science Direct=3 • IEEE Explore=0 • Emerald Insight=4 • Web of Science=0 **Total: 7**	Only open Access English articles were chosen. • Scopus=0 • Science Direct=8 • IEEE Explore=0 • Emerald Insight=16 • Web of Science=0 **Total: 24**
Screening for inclusion	The abstract of the included literature is then scanned to decide if the articles are fitting. Normally, two researchers perform this step, but in this case, only one will. Duplicates are merged. Articles that are not suitable are removed.	Literature with unsuitable abstracts were removed. • Science Direct=16 • Emerald Insight=13 **Total: 29**	Literature with unsuitable abstracts were removed. • Science Direct= 3 • Emerald Insight=2 **Total: 5**	Literature with unsuitable abstracts were removed. • Science Direct= 3 • Emerald Insight=7 **Total: 5**
Quality and Eligibility Assessment	In this step, the full text of the remaining articles is briefly examined to determine the relevance. Articles found to be unfit are removed.	• Science Direct=7 • Emerald Insight= 3 **Total: 10**	• Science Direct= 3 • Emerald Insight=0 **Total: 3**	• Science Direct=1 • Emerald Insight=1 **Total: 2**
Iterations	This phase involves a thorough analysis to investigate the methodology each paper uses. To gather the data	A full text review was performed on the 10 papers to acquire the needed literature	A full text review was performed on the 3 papers to acquire the needed literature	A full text review was performed on the 6 papers to acquire the needed literature

3 A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the three different search phrases are placed in tables 5-8. The title, study type, a summary, and publication reference are displayed in the tables.

3.1 Search Results for search phrase 1:

Table 5: Results keywords set 1

#	Title	Item Type	Database	Summary of Study Applicable to the Objectives of SLR	Reference
1	SEPT Approaches for Education and Training using a Learning Factory	journal Article	ScienceDirect	The document discusses the development of a modern learning factory, referred to as the School of Engineering Practice and Technology (SEPT) learning Factory, which integrates Industry 4.0 technologies and emphasizes practical learning. It focuses on educational methodologies for teaching undergraduate as well as graduate students. Learning factories are defined as specialized labs for education, training, and research in the document.	[7]
2	Integrated Product / System Design and Planning for New Product Family in a Changeable Learning Factory	journal Article	ScienceDirect	A case study on introducing belt tensioners to a learning factory is detailed, emphasizing hands-on experience. The integrated product design method involves steps like product assessment and 3D modelling. Educating engineering students on changeable manufacturing systems is advocated and highlighted. It showcases various learning factories and stresses the importance of training in manufacturing systems. In summary, the document provides insights into managing product variety challenges through changeable manufacturing, illustrated by a case study in a learning factory.	[8]
3	Learning Factory: The Path to Industry 4.0	journal Article	ScienceDirect	The document specifically focuses on the potential impacts that smart factories may have on education for Engineers and their approach to competency development. It also sets up three pillars for a successful Learning factory, which include didactic, integration, and engineering. Research conducted identified relevant aspects that developed a four-phase model to direct the shift in production engineering methods toward a learning factory. Further, characteristics for engineering and educational objectives are identified in the context of learning farms.	[9]

4	Tangible Industry 4.0: A Scenario-Based Approach to Learning for the Future of Production	journal Article	ScienceDirect	The study focuses on learning factories, which are described as educational platforms offering hands-on training in production management. It integrates smart manufacturing and Industry 4.0 concepts, providing practical experience in advanced manufacturing technologies. According to the document, learning factories use equipment that mimics real-world complexities to prepare students for the challenges of modern production.	[4]
5	Towards a proactive vision of the training for the 4.0 Industry: From the required skills diagnostic to the training of employees	journal Article	ScienceDirect	The document emphasizes the significance of training in the context of Industry 4.0. It highlights the impact of digitalization on industrial processes and the need for companies to adapt to remain competitive within the market. A potential problem identified is a lack of training in Industry 4.0, and the impact that it may have on the quality of work is discussed. Three tools developed at Strasbourg to support the training are introduced. These tools include a diagnostic tool to assess the maturity level of companies, grids to design adapted learning paths, and a Learning Factory to facilitate a learning-by-doing approach	[10]
6	"Digital literacy": Shaping industry 4.0 engineering curricula via factory pilot-demonstrators	journal Article	ScienceDirect	The document introduces what learning factories are and identifies 4 main conditions a factory must fulfil to qualify as a smart factory. It identifies the scarcity of skilled labour in the UK and India. Methods are then discussed wherein this gap of skilled labour can be filled in reference to smart factories. Overall, the paper identifies how curricula can be developed.	[3]
7	Industry 4.0: A Technologically Oriented Definition Based on Bibliometric Analysis and Literature Review	journal Article	ScienceDirect	The study discusses the concept of learning factories, which are said to be designed to transfer theoretical knowledge into practical training for employees. Learning factories are seen as a promising approach to competence development and knowledge transfer in the context of Industry 4.0. Learning farms are tied to the concept of smart factories and are intended to prepare employees for the challenges posed by Industry 4.0. Education in learning factories is expected to be complex, focusing on the latest trends in manufacturing, research, and education in various engineering areas. Complexity is necessary to ensure that employees are adequately prepared for the changes brought about by Industry 4.0.	[11]
8	Organizational learning and Industry 4.0: findings from a systematic literature review and research agenda	journal Article	Emerald Insight	The study highlights 9 dimensions to tie organisational management of I4.0, including the significance of continuous learning and skill development, particularly in the framework of a learning factory within Industry. With learning factories as a tool, operations can become more efficient in the context of an industrial setting through improving knowledge and skills regarding technologies and procedures used in Industry 4.0.	[12]

9	Essential ingredients for the implementation of Quality 4.0: A narrative review of literature and future directions for research	journal Article	Emerald Insight	This study proposes eight key ingredients for the effective implementation of I4.0, which include handling big data, improving prescriptive analytics, using I4.0 for effective integration, strategic advantage, leadership, training, organizational culture, and top management support. Learning factory's concept is discussed, which is defined as a physical or virtual environment where students, professionals, and researchers can gain practical experience in a real-world industrial setting. Learning factories are tied to smart factories as they provide a platform for education and research in the context of Industry 4.0.	[1]
10	Integration of Industry 4.0 technologies with Education 4.0: advantages for improvements in learning	journal Article	Emerald Insight	This study makes a connection and states that just like there is an Industry 4.0, education 4.0 exists. The level of education at which training should take place falls to 70 % in higher education, indicating that the methods used in learning factories should not be too simple.	[13]

3.2 Search Results for search phrase 2:

Table 6: Results keywords set 2

#	Title	Item Type	Data Base	Summary of Study Applicable to the Objectives of SLR.	Reference
1	Printing 3D objects with interlocking parts	journal Article	ScienceDirect	To create robust 3D printed models, the document discusses breaking apart large models into smaller pieces, with an emphasis on using interlocking parts instead of gluing or other types of connectors. To prove the method's effectiveness, several models, including a 22-piece interlocking ring puzzle, a 6-part Duck, a 12-part Bunny, and a 10-part vase, were made. The designs produced were determined to be acceptable.	[14]
2	Methodology for the design process of a snap-fit joint made by additive manufacturing	journal Article	ScienceDirect	To create durable 3D printed models, the article discussed snap-fit joints as a possible solution. Methodology used includes design validation stage, feature deformation analysis, ergonomics check, and retention feature evaluation. Performance conditions under which the model is designed involve additive manufacturing technology, printing material, model geometry, and snap-fit performance. A 6-piece 1-gallon plastic container was used to prove the effectiveness of the methodology. ABS (Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene) plastic was used with MultiJet technology. The container quality was found to be satisfactory.	[15]

3	Detailed design process and assembly considerations for snap-fit joints using additive manufacturing	journal Article	ScienceDirect	The paper divides the process of designing a model into five steps: • Design specifications • Conceptual design • Detailed design • Design Validation • Manufacturing Additionally, the paper contains instructions on mathematics to develop deflection and retention mechanisms for snap-fit joints. Results from the text suggest that the snap-fit system design equations now in use can forecast feature strain behaviour to some extent and that adhering to design principles can prevent deflection failure related to material overstraining.	[16]

3.3 Search Results for search phrase 3:

Table 7: Search results for phrase 3

#	Title	Item Type	Database Used	Summary of Study Applicable to the Objectives of SLR.	Reference
1	Investigating the large-strain compression properties of PLA parts manufactured by FDM using experiments and constitutive modelling	Journal Article	Emerald Insight	PLA (Polylactic Acid) parts' compression characteristics are examined in this study through investigating the effect of infill density and strain rate. Compression testing was done where different strain rates and infill densities were used to analyse the scale of deformation. It was discovered that the yield stress of PLA increased with increasing strain rate and infill density. From testing, three damage mechanisms were identified: matrix crazing, twisting, and filament breaking. Matrix crazing was found to be the main deformation mechanism at increased infill density (95%), whereas filament breaking and twisting were found to be the damage processes for higher strain rates.	[17]
2	Printing parameters and materials affecting mechanical properties of FDM-3D printed Parts: Perspective and prospects	Journal Article	ScienceDirect	In the article, FDM processes are discussed, as well as the impact that they have on the mechanical properties of the produced parts. The influence of printing parameters and materials on tensile strength, flexural strength, and Young's modulus is identified. Common materials used in FDM are discussed, such as ABS, PLA, and Nylon, and their effects on the mechanical properties of the printed objects. Important information about how variables such as infill density, infill speed, printing temperature, printing orientation and raster angle are analysed.	[18]

3.4 Evaluating Statistics of Articles

Before addressing the research questions, an assessment of the 15 recognized studies will be conducted concerning the publication years and journals in which the articles are found. The scatter plots will be used to look at each search term independently. To determine which journals the articles are published in, a pie chart will be utilized.

3.4.1 Search phrase 1:

The scatterplot in Figure 1 displays the number of articles published per year for search phrase 1.

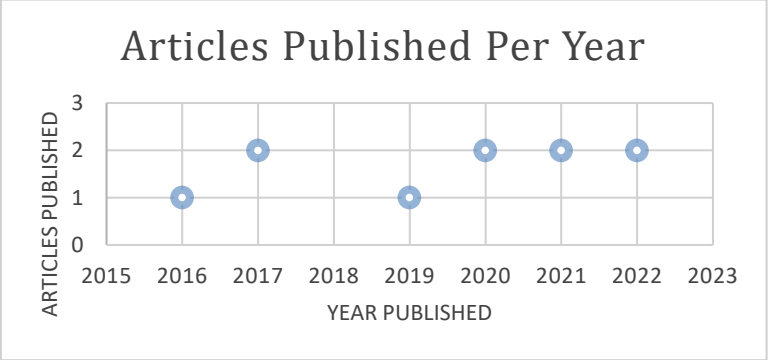

Figure 1: Articles published per year search phrase 1.

The graph in Figure 1 reaches a constant peak of 2 articles between the years 2020 and 2022. This possibly proposes that in this period, there was a growing interest in the concept of learning factories and smart factories. The fact that there were no studies relevant to the definition of learning farms and smart factories after 2022 could suggest the articles got more specialized, as it was already defined in previous years (2016-2022), and there was no need for further similar literature.

3.4.2 Search phrase 2:

The scatterplot in Figure 2 displays the number of articles published per year for search phrase 2.

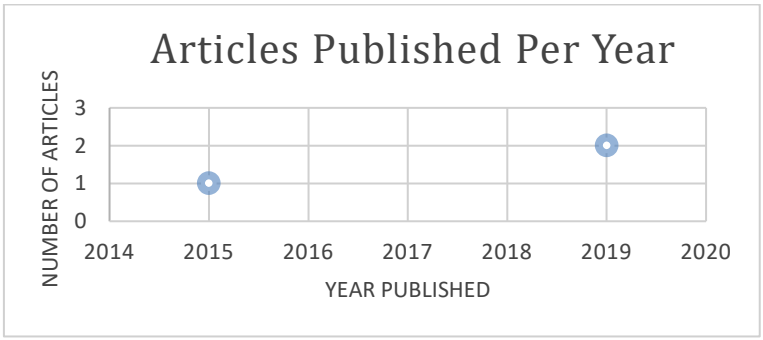

Figure 2: Articles published per year search phrase 2.

As there are only two points in the plot from figure 2, a definitive conclusion cannot be drawn, however an increase in the number of publications could be associated with the developing concept of learning and smart farms.

3.4.3 Search phrase 3:

The scatterplot in Figure 3 displays the number of articles published per year for search phrase 3.

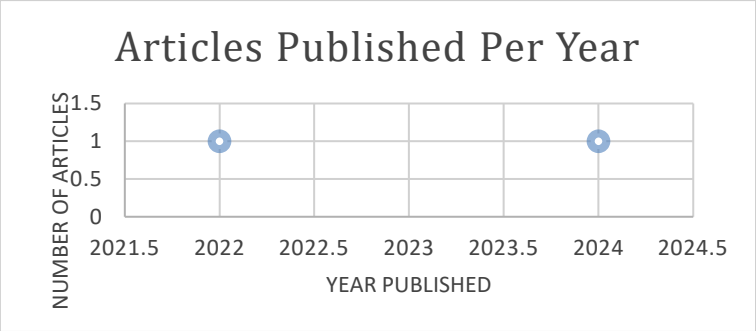

Figure 3: Articles published per year search phrase 3.

From the scatterplot in Figure 3, in both 2022 and 2024, only 1 relevant study was published per year. Since the studies are not older than 2 years, we can deduce that the theories are relatively new. We cannot make any assumptions with certainty, as there are too few points on the plot. The available data could possibly suggest that in the time period between 2022 and 2024, there was no rise in interest in the concepts of durable 3D printing parameters.

3.4.4 Overview:

The pie chart in Figure 4 displays the percentage of articles per publication title/journal:

similar issues are located. From Figure 4, the top three journals used were those of Procedia Manufacturing and Procedia CIRP at 20 %. The rest of the titles, like the Rapid Prototyping Journal, range between 6 and 7 percent. Researchers can use the pie chart to determine the primary regions where studies were published.

3.5 Research Question 1: What defines a learning farm, and what makes them valuable?

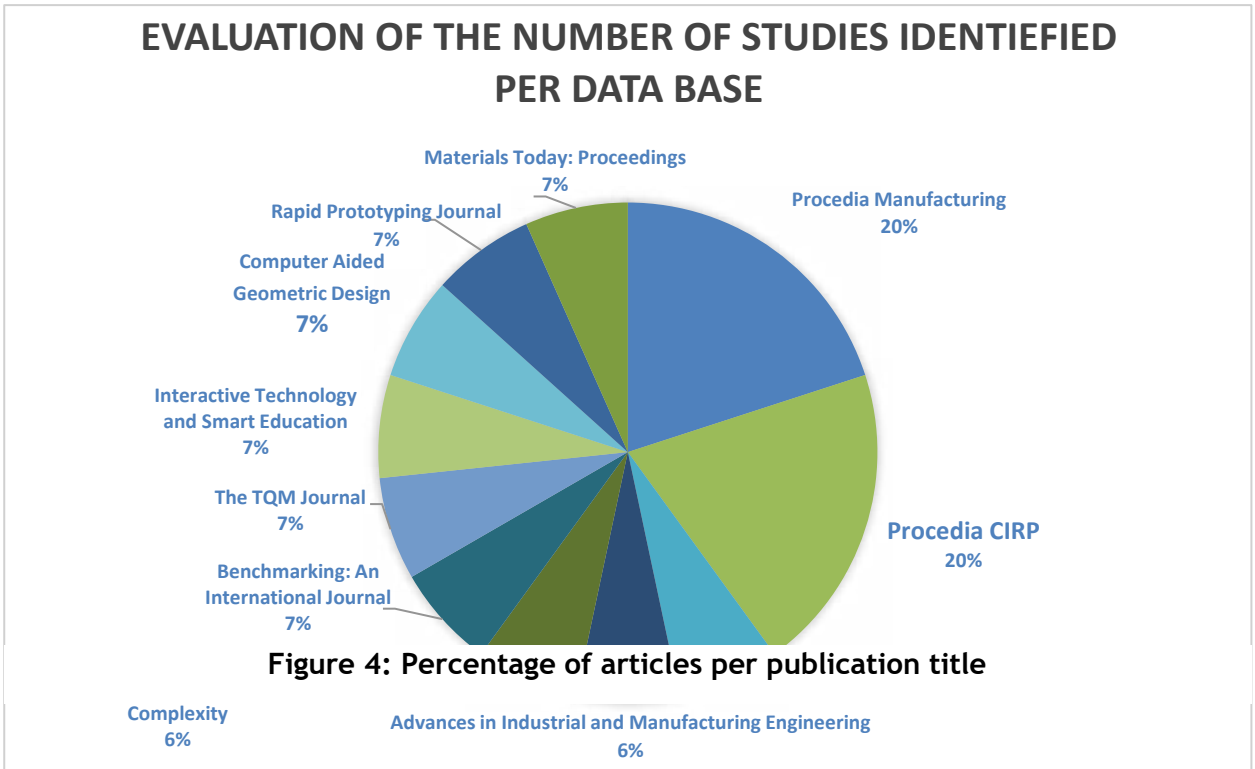

Figure 4: Percentage of articles per publication title

Learning farms, as defined by Nithyanandam et al. [3], are educational facilities within academic institutions that replicate industrial setups, specifically focusing on technologies associated with

Industry 4.0, like robotics, automation, and additive manufacturing. A learning factory, as outlined by Sony et al. [1], serves as a simulated environment, either physical or virtual, wherein professionals, researchers, and students can acquire practical knowledge applicable to the industry.

To understand the importance of learning farms, we turn to the insights provided by 10 articles in Table 6 that highlight the significance of skill development, its impact on industry 4.0, and that learning farms play a crucial role in competence development, leading to better employees/students in the industry. A consistent theme across these articles underscores the significance of Industry 4.0 as a transformative era, demanding a specialized skill set for effective engagement. Moraes et al. [13] conceptualize this shift as Education 4.0. To make the most of Industry 4.0, we need skilled people. Learning farms play a crucial role by providing the necessary training in:

- Simulation of real-world processes
- Interdisciplinary learnership
- Technology integration
- Decision making and problem solving.
- Practical application of theory
- Industry collaboration

Learning factories contribute significantly to preparing students and employees for the I4.0 environment by providing a practical understanding of manufacturing processes and skills essential for the industry.

3.6 Research Question 2: What is the correlation between learning and smart factories?

According to et al Nosalska (2019) the most important technology component of I4.0 is that of smart factories[19]. They put ideas into practice in the real world. Although they consist of a considerable amount of automation and machines, scientists agree that research indicates that human labour will remain a crucial component of the organization and the connection between physical and digital assets. Smart factories still require humans as primary operators; they are not going to become autonomous, unmanned factories [11].

When people are involved in processes, the skills and education to operate the systems need to be cultivated, and this is where Learning farms and smart factories come together. The goal of smart factories is to prepare employees and students by bringing the knowledge of theoretical studies to the factory floor. Learning factories present a promising solution for knowledge transfer and competency development in the context of Industry 4.0. Research focuses on identifying suitable learning tactics and developing training programs based on current developments in engineering education, research, and production, in this scenario, being smart factories [11].

3.7 Research Question 3: What characteristics of 3D printed objects allow them to be robust and withstand repeated assembly and disassembly?

The durability of 3D printed models and their resilience during assembly and disassembly hinge on various factors, including the design of the snap-fit system, material selection, and printing parameters [15] [18].

Careful consideration must be given to the design of the snap-fit system, ensuring proper dimensioning and orientation to distribute stresses effectively. Utilizing 3D interlocking enhances structural strength and stability, enabling repeated disassembly and reassembly without compromising integrity [14].

Material choice is critical, with Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene (ABS) and Polylactic Acid (PLA) commonly used due to accessibility and cost-effectiveness. ABS offers good impact strength and abrasion resistance, but is not suitable for high heat applications, while PLA, although

biodegradable, is brittle and has low heat distortion temperatures [18]. ABS exhibits less variation between samples and higher wear resistance compared to PLA [18].

Additionally, printing parameters such as layer thickness and building chamber dimensions affect model partitioning and snap-fit system features, necessitating careful evaluation to optimize durability [15].

Table 10 compares the influences of various printing parameters and materials to provide a comprehensive understanding [18].

Table 8: Printing Parameters and materials effect on mechanical properties

Material used	Print Orientation	Layer Thickness	Raster Angle and print temperature	Print Speed	Infill Density and Pattern
PLA	Low print speed and layer thickness lead to increased flexural and tensile strength. Flatwise-oriented objects containing maximum layer thickness had the best bond between layers. Edgewise orientation with minimum layer thickness contained the best bond between layers	A decrease in Layer thickness increases tensile strength. This lower layer thickness leads to more layers being needed, therefore leading to higher printing times. Thus, the correct combination of tensile strength and time consumption should be assessed on one's own discretion.	0 degrees raster angle proved to demonstrate the best mechanical properties for FDM printing. At a temperature of 215 C, the best tensile performance was attained.	It was recommended to keep printing speeds below 90 mm/s as polymers are poor thermal conductors and the materials will not be able to bond effectively.	To increase tensile strength, 100 % infill densities were found to be more effective for PLA along with a honeycomb structure. Additionally, under constant strain rate, increased infill density led to higher yield stress. In higher strain compression testing, matrix crazing was seen in cases with higher infill densities (95%), while fibre splitting and twisting were seen in cases with lower infill densities (55%). [17].
ABS	0 Degrees (parallel to tensile force) orientation was found to lead to maximum tensile strength.	Decrease in Layer thickness increases tensile strength. This lower layer thickness leads to more layers being needed, therefore leading to higher printing times. Thus, the correct combination of tensile strength and time consumptions should be assessed on own discretion.	0 degrees raster angle proved to demonstrate the best mechanical properties for FDM printing.	It was recommended to keep printing speeds below 90 mm/s as polymers are poor thermal conductors and the materials will not be able to bond effectively	Higher infill densities along with concentric pattern led to higher tensile strength and mechanical properties.

It is evident from the data in Table 10 and the text that ABS will be a better fit for the project. It is more durable than PLA and can tolerate the wear and tear that frequent assembly and disassembly will cause. Thus, from the reviewed literature, it is concluded that ABS demonstrates greater consistency in achieving optimal mechanical properties, as its best performance is consistently obtained at 0° print orientation, reduced layer thickness, and 0° raster angle. These parameters reliably enhance tensile strength without significant variation between orientations. Furthermore, ABS maintains its strength benefits across higher infill densities and concentric patterns, making its mechanical performance more predictable and less dependent on complex

trade-offs between layer thickness, speed, and infill design, unlike PLA which shows more variation based on print orientation and density.

4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, learning farms can be defined as real-world training grounds enabling students and employees to obtain practical experience in relevant areas of Industry 4.0, leading to more complete workers and more effective utilization of the relevant technologies. Learning farms are valuable for the industry as they replicate an industrial setting and technologies used in I4.0. In this case, learning factories serve as learning platforms; they teach employees how to effectively operate a smart factory, providing them with training in problem solving, industry correlation, practical experience, and interdisciplinary collaboration, therefore making them crucial for educational purposes.

The vital role that individuals play in the operation of smart factories, and the fact that learning farms train the involved humans to operate the systems efficiently, form a link that connects learning farms and smart factories. Automation and mechanical systems are key in smart manufacturing, but human skills are still necessary for successful operation. The development of the competence required for productive interaction of humans with technologies like additive manufacturing, robotics, and automation is significantly facilitated by learning farms, which combine theory and application, enabling workers to better operate in smart factories, solidifying the correlation between learning farms and smart factories.

Although the complexity of the model created is not explicitly discussed, we can conclude that, because smart factories are complex, containing multiple automated systems, the assembly model should be of a higher complexity level. The model should challenge a university-level student without being overwhelming.

For a durable 3D printed model, careful design, material selection, and attention to the printing process are necessary to ensure that printed models are durable, especially when it comes to their capacity to survive repeated assembly and disassembly. Interlocking snap-fit joints that can withstand repeated assembly and disassembly with ease. Therefore, it is an efficient way in which a durable assembly model is produced. As discussed throughout the document, ABS and PLA are both widely used materials, with ABS edging PLA in terms of better variation as well as possessing better resistance to wear, therefore, making ABS a better option for this scenario. Increased robustness can thus be attributed to decreased layer thickness, printing orientation parallel to tensile force, 0 degrees raster angle, printing speeds below 90 mm/s, and higher infill densities combined with concentric pattern. In conclusion, 3D printed model quality is thus a direct result of the iterative design process, the use of 3D interlocking, and careful consideration of material and printing parameters.

5 FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research done on the study, there was a lack of articles that could correlate work difficulty performed in learning farms to the level of study. In the future, research could be done on the complexity of the educational tools utilized in learning farms and how this is matched to the study level. More specifically, research can be done on the complexity of assembly models that can be used at a certain level of education.

Additionally, only 2 studies were found to be relevant for search phrase 3. More research can be done comparing different materials used for 3D printing, exploring the advantages and disadvantages. Each material should be discussed to printing parameters and correlation to mechanical properties. The attributes of the materials can also be compared.

Possible research questions that could be used for future studies are:

1. What complexity of assembly models can be used at a certain level of education?

2. How do 3D printing materials compare in printing parameters and attributes for maximum mechanical properties?

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INTEGRATING ADAPTIVE MANUFACTURING PARADIGMS IN SMART FACTORIES: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review navigates the integration of adaptive manufacturing paradigms within smart factories. Design implementations and emerging technologies are prioritized while examining diverse manufacturing system designs and the corresponding efficiency within a smart environment. This review aims to identify the most suitable key manufacturing designs for smart manufacturing regarding adaptability, space efficiency, and dynamic production capabilities. It emphasizes the shift from mass production to mass customization due to dynamic market demands and Industry 4.0 innovations. Upon comparing diverse manufacturing systems, it is evident that Matrix Structured Manufacturing Systems (MMS) and Cyber-Physical Production Systems (CPPS) offer optimal solutions for smart factories by providing scalability, adaptability, and efficient integration with emerging technology. Lastly, the review underlines the importance of ongoing research to remain competitive in the dynamic manufacturing sector and navigate the rapid evolution of technology.

Keywords: Manufacturing system, Smart Factory, Performance Evaluation, Design, Industry 4.0

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1 INTRODUCTION

In today's swiftly evolving markets, manufacturing industries are compelled to transition from their conventional, static modes of operation to more dynamic, adaptive methodologies. This shift is largely propelled by the emergence of Industry 4.0, which signifies a major transformation, introducing cutting-edge technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and robotics. These technologies are the cornerstone of smart factories, where the synergy of interconnected machines and sophisticated systems fosters a remarkable enhancement in production efficiency and flexibility.

Yet, the journey to embracing smart factories is overloaded with complexities. It demands a deep understanding of the design principles and operational mechanics of the manufacturing systems in question. Before these systems are integrated into a smart factory setting, it is important to investigate every aspect of their functionality and interaction within such an advanced environment. This strategic foresight is vital to ensure that the system aligns with the factory's objectives, exhibits resilience against rapid market fluctuations, and operates efficiently.

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) aims to explore the evolution of manufacturing systems, aligning them not only with the pace of market dynamics but also with the groundbreaking technological advancements of Industry 4.0. The complexities of these systems within the context of smart factories are unraveled, providing a detailed examination and offering significant insights. The goal is to equip industry professionals with a comprehensive understanding and effective strategies to navigate and excel in this new, transformative era of manufacturing.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study follows a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to evaluate and compare adaptive manufacturing paradigms applicable to smart factories. The objective was to identify the key design characteristics, benefits, and limitations of each paradigm within the context of Industry 4.0.

A comprehensive search was conducted across major academic databases, including IEEE Xplore, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. Keywords used in the search included: “adaptive manufacturing,” “smart factories,” “flexible manufacturing systems,” “reconfigurable manufacturing,” “cyber-physical systems,” “matrix production,” and “Industry 4.0 manufacturing.”. There are multiple combinations that can be used for the search strings to get the necessary literature used below for the SLR. Two examples of these search strings are as follows: ("Factory layout" OR "Factory design”) AND "paradigm" AND ("Reconfiguration" OR "Layout transformation") , ("Smart factories" AND "planning" AND "optimal" AND "layout") .The search focused on peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings published between 2010 and 2024 and a manual search has also been conducted.

The following inclusion criteria was followed:

1. Only published journal articles were included in the search process.
2. Journal articles containing the specified keywords within the title, abstract, or keywords. These studies may include any review study or studies that refer to other studies containing the relevant keywords.
3. Journal articles that were published between 2014 and 2024 were included, excluding backward search journal articles, to ensure only relevant paradigms regarding the present or future manufacturing trends were selected.

The following studies were excluded from the search process:

1. Non-English articles

Table 1: Quality Assessment

Phases	Description
Literature Identification	The quality assessment process starts with identifying the literature. Typically, a more broad search is conducted, followed by adjusting the keywords accordingly to narrow down the results. Keywords set one: 58 Keywords set two= 18 Total = 76
Screening for inclusion	During this phase the remaining studies are screened by reading the abstracts to ensure all studies are relevant and all inclusion and exclusion criteria is adhered. Keywords set one = 19 Keywords set two = 7 Total = 22
Quality and eligibility assessment	This phase consists of skimming through the full text of all remaining studies to ensure relevancy and discarding all duplicate studies. Keywords set one = 7 Keywords set two = 4 Total = 11 No duplicates were found
Iterations	The last stage consists of conducting a detailed and thorough evaluation of all remaining studies. This will aid in identifying all relevant information required to achieve the aim of the review. A backward search was also conducted and 4 relevant studies were included. Total = 15 A full text assessment was done on these 15 studies to collect required information regarding research questions.

The quality assessment process can be seen in Table 1 below. Each manufacturing paradigm was analyzed for its design specifications, adaptability, space efficiency, scalability, and integration potential with emerging technologies. This enabled a structured comparison to identify paradigms most suitable for smart factory implementation, particularly in dynamic production environments.

3 MANUFACTURING PARADIGMS

Henry Ford's introduction of the moving assembly line in 1913 marked the initiation of the mass production paradigm, notably facilitated by dedicated machining lines producing essential automobile components. These lines were highly efficient for large-scale production of specific parts, proving profitable until the mid-1990s [9]. However, evolving consumer demands, increased global competition, technological advancements, and environmental regulations have led to a shift from standardized to personalized products. Manufacturing systems are now challenged to transition from mass production to mass customization and personalized production [8].

This shift has resulted in a rise in product variety, shorter life cycles, uncertain demands, and cost pressures. Traditional manufacturing systems, like sequential assembly lines or cellular job shop layouts, are grappling with challenges in handling diverse product varieties, fluctuating demands, or high production volumes in the face of this evolving paradigm [15].

Assembly systems face several challenges in the contemporary manufacturing landscape. These challenges encompass integrating new processes or altering process sequences, ensuring the efficient use of assembly resources amid significant variations in processing times for different product variants, minimizing the effort required for system reconfiguration due to physical changes resulting from the addition or removal of assembly stations, and addressing fixed points—referring to equipment that cannot be relocated due to physical constraints [8].

In the contemporary global manufacturing landscape, diverse manufacturing paradigms grapple with the shared challenges outlined earlier, each addressing these concerns with unique approaches. As these paradigms navigate the integration of new processes, variable processing times, reconfiguration demands, and the presence of fixed points, they expose distinctive strategies to ensure competitiveness in today's dynamic market. Whether adopting lean manufacturing, agile production, or other innovative paradigms, each approach brings its own implications when applied to manufacturing environments. This diversity reflects the evolving nature of modern manufacturing, where flexibility and responsiveness are essential for staying competitive and meeting the demands of a rapidly changing market.

3.1 Flexible Manufacturing Systems (FMS)

The Flexible Manufacturing System (FMS) represents a rapidly evolving paradigm within the manufacturing domain, now recognized as an integral component of intelligent manufacturing systems and a cornerstone for digital manufacturing. This paradigm involves the integration of intelligent machine tools and industrial robots into flexible production systems, supported by advanced software for simulation, monitoring, and control of production processes. The strategic decision to implement an FMS is driven by the complex requirements of modern industrial environments, aiming to increase production capacity amidst product diversification, shorter product life cycles, and heightened competitiveness. Positioned as a fundamental component of Industry 4.0, the FMS connects machines, workstations, and logistics equipment in a coordinated manufacturing process driven by computer systems.

This advanced manufacturing system is designed to handle diverse tasks, accommodate high complexity, ensure timely delivery, and minimize manufacturing costs. It particularly excels in scenarios where production is unpredictable, organized in small batches, and subject to frequent changes. The key elements encompass intelligent machine tools, industrial robots, sophisticated software for simulation and control, and seamless interconnectivity of various components within the manufacturing process.

The Flexible Manufacturing System (FMS) experienced significant development in the mid-1990s, spurred by heightened globalization and intensified worldwide competition. However, it became evident that while FMS offered a partial economic solution in competitive markets, its typical serial structure, commonly used in industry (excluding job shops), had limitations. The serial structure facilitated changes in the manufactured products but resulted in a relatively slow production rate. Moreover, it lacked the volume flexibility needed to respond effectively to unexpected changes in demand arising from global competition [9]. This recognition prompted further reflections on the role and adaptability of FMS within the evolving landscape of manufacturing paradigms.

3.2 Reconfigurable Manufacturing Systems (RMS)

Reconfigurable Manufacturing Systems (RMS) emerged as a solution to overcome the constraints associated with both dedicated and flexible manufacturing systems [9]. RMS embodies six key reconfigurable characteristics:

- Convertibility: which involves designing for functionality changes, enabling the transformation of existing systems and machines to suit new production requirements.
- Scalability: focusing on designing for capacity changes, facilitating the modification of production capacity by adjusting manufacturing resources or changing system components.
- Customization: where flexibility is confined to a specific product family, ensuring customized flexibility for that family.
- Modularity: emphasizing the compartmentalization of operational functions into manipulable units for optimal arrangement between alternate production schemes.
- Integrability: showcasing interfaces for rapid integration, allowing the rapid and precise integration of modules through mechanical, informational, and control interfaces.
- Diagnosability: designed for easy diagnostics, enabling the automatic reading of the current system state to detect and diagnose the root causes of output product defects and swiftly correct operational defects.

These characteristics collectively aim to enhance system responsiveness, reduce reconfiguration time and effort, and enable continuous adaptation throughout the system's lifetime, aligning with the goal of creating a "living factory" capable of adjusting production capacity swiftly while maintaining high-quality standards. Implementing a Reconfigurable Manufacturing System (RMS) design involves several considerations [9]. Firstly, there's the significant initial investment cost, with RMS systems, like machining systems for engine blocks, requiring substantial capital. While minimizing investment is crucial, it's equally important to weigh the implications for productivity and product quality, as these factors affect operating costs.

The design and configuration of RMS play a vital role in product quality and reliability. For instance, in a two-stage RMS setup, variations and misalignment can impact the final assembled product's dimensional distribution, potentially affecting quality. Additionally, the reliability of the RMS material handling system and machine downtime can influence overall productivity. Despite scalability advantages, the complexity of material handling systems in RMS, such as cell gantries, introduces reliability and productivity trade-offs. Balancing cell-gantry reliability and machine reliability is crucial in RMS configurations. Lastly, considering market volatility and forecasting challenges is essential when planning new RMS systems. Designing systems with an adjustable structure to facilitate scalability in response to market changes becomes a critical consideration in this context

3.3 Line-less Mobile Assembly Systems (LMAS)

LMAS operates based on three key principles: the clean floor approach, mobilization of all assembly resources, and unrestricted assignment of resources and products [8]. The clean floor approach emphasizes a factory design with a spacious, obstacle- free shop floor to facilitate reconfiguration and resource movements. Mobilization involves ensuring that all assembly resources within the factory are mobile and adaptable. Unrestricted assignment pertains to the system's capacity to handle varying processing times and scale production volume without disrupting the existing setup. LMAS aims for significant automation, reacting autonomously to changes in the production program. Its design spans control at individual resource levels to overall routing and scheduling within the factory. Reconfiguration in LMAS occurs on both medium and short-term scales to optimize resource utilization. Practical implementations may adopt hybrid approaches, combining mobilized resource areas with fixed machinery zones to achieve an effective balance.

3.4 Matrix Structured Manufacturing System (MMS)

The Matrix Structured Manufacturing System (MMS) prioritizes key principles for enhanced operational flexibility and scalability in the work environment [15]. Firstly, MMS enables a dynamic material flow, allowing products to be intelligently routed through the system, leading to varied lead times and enabling real-time decisions on workstations. Individual cycle times at workstations are a feature of MMS, avoiding a constant cycle time and ensuring balanced product flow by allowing workstations to forward products as soon as related process steps are completed. MMS also provides redundancy in workstations for processing specific work packages, minimizing the risk of workstation blocking and enhancing availability.

Workstations in MMS can handle multiple work packages, reducing the total number of workstations and promoting efficiency. The primary goal of MMS is high utilization achieved by minimizing waiting times and non-productive periods at workstations, thereby enhancing efficiency and production rates. Despite its advantages, challenges include implementing physical flexible material flow between workstations and developing logistic concepts for material supply, especially for large products like cars. MMS is particularly well-suited for diverse product components, such as automotive parts or electronic devices.

Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) increases flexibility and accuracy of manufacturing systems [4]. AR allows experts to overlay virtual models of production spaces onto the actual shop floor, enabling real-time validation and simulation for different scenarios. This ensures that each facility's functions are optimal, improves material flow, and enhances ergonomics and safety in human-robot collaboration systems. On the other hand, VR technology is useful for training workers in handling complex tasks, enhancing their skills and contributing to increased precision and efficiency in manufacturing. These immersive technologies, including AR and VR, offer valuable support to workers, aiding them in challenging tasks and improving industrial processes even before implementation. This, in turn, reduces the need for costly adjustments and rework in real- time production.

3.5 Swarm Production System (SPS)

The Swarm Production System (SPS) is developed to tackle the challenges of frequently changing factory layouts and the execution plan for a fleet of autonomous robots. Its goal is to facilitate agile, reconfigurable, and flexible production by using mobile robot platforms for both workstations and material transport [1]. SPS differs from traditional production systems in keyways, including the use of Autonomous Mobile Robots (AMRs), a dense population of robots on a confined shop floor area displaying coherence and coordination, high flexibility in the shop floor layout that can adapt to current product demand in real-time, and a multi-agent framework for autonomous robots.

The system's interoperable management, known as the Swarm Manager (SM), handles task planning, allocation, and scheduling for both process and product transport robots. These features empower SPS to achieve agile, reconfigurable, and flexible production, responding quickly to market needs, adapting to new product families with efficient throughput, and producing a product family with multiple variants, capabilities not achievable with traditional production systems.

3.6 Biologicalisation

Biologicalisation in Manufacturing is emerging as a new frontier in the context of Industry 4.0 and digitalization [2]. It involves integrating principles, materials, functions, structures, and resources from biology and bio-inspired sources into manufacturing technologies and systems. This integration is anticipated to progress through advancements in computer science, information technologies, biotechnology, and manufacturing science. The

incorporation of biological processes is expected to bring about intelligent behavior and flexibility in manufacturing, aligning with the goals of Industry 4.0 for smart, automated, connected, and flexible factories. However, there are challenges to address. Natural systems may differ in life cycles or operating envelopes from artificial ones, making it complex to apply natural principles to technical systems. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches are needed for product and system design, posing difficulties with traditional factory layouts. The use of biological materials may demand new and potentially costly manufacturing techniques, and ethical and environmental concerns about the impact on ecosystems and biodiversity need consideration. Despite these challenges, Biologicalisation in Manufacturing holds promise for innovative and sustainable advancements in the manufacturing sector.

3.7 Cyber-Physical Production Systems (CPPS)

The modular system design approach for Cyber-Physical Production Systems (CPPS) involves incorporating modularity to enable the addition or removal of modules, allowing flexibility in system capabilities concerning product features and production volume [6]. However, this approach comes with certain drawbacks. Firstly, managing a modular system introduces complexities in coordinating and maintaining interactions between different modules. Additionally, integrating diverse modules and ensuring seamless operation may be challenging, especially when dealing with legacy systems or components from various vendors. Lastly, designing and implementing a modular system architecture may require additional development effort and resources compared to traditional monolithic systems. Despite these challenges, the modular approach offers adaptability and changeability in CPPS, contributing to enhanced flexibility in manufacturing systems.

3.8 Fluid Manufacturing System (FLMS)

The Fluid Manufacturing System (FLMS) is a flexible production system that prioritizes resource allocation and reconfiguration of resources to individual process modules, aiming for optimized manufacturing performance [7]. FLMS is built to be modular and mobile, allowing process modules to be assembled from single resources to create advanced manufacturing systems. Manufacturers adopting FLMS face challenges in adapting to changing market demands, navigating increased environmental complexity, and coping with heightened competitive pressures focusing on customer needs. Traditional production systems have technical limitations that hinder adaptability, leading to the development of novel approaches like FLMS. While FLMS offers promise in supporting required changeability, its implementation comes with challenges such as complex planning and control, high equipment costs, and intricate material flow dynamics. Addressing these challenges calls for innovative solutions to successfully implement fluid manufacturing systems.

Table 2: Manufacturing System Characteristics

Manufacturing System	Design Specifications	Benefits	Drawbacks
FMS	Integrates intelligent machine tools and industrial robots, advanced software for monitoring and control	High adaptability to product changes, suitable for small batch sizes	Limited volume flexibility, relatively slow production rate
RMS	Six key characteristics: Convertibility, Scalability, Customization, Modularity, Integrability, Diagnosability	Rapid adaptation to changes, enhances system responsiveness	High initial investment, complexity in balancing reliability and productivity
LMAS	Principles: Clean floor approach, mobilization of resources, unrestricted resource and product assignment	Facilitates significant automation and reconfiguration, adaptable to varying production volumes	Requires spacious, obstacle-free shop floor, complex balance between fixed machinery and mobilized resources
MMS	Dynamic material flow, individual cycle times at workstations, redundancy in workstations	Enables real-time decision-making, minimizes waiting times, enhances efficiency and production rates	Complexity in implementing flexible material flow, logistic challenges for large products
SPS	Fleet of AMRs for workstations and material transport, agile and reconfigurable production	High flexibility in shop floor layout, quick adaptation to market needs, efficient throughput	Management complexity, ensuring coordination among dense robot population
Biologicalisation	Integration of principles, materials, functions, structures from biology into manufacturing	Promotes intelligent behaviour and flexibility, innovative and sustainable advancements	Complexity in applying natural principles, ethical and environmental concerns
CPPS (Modular)	Incorporates modularity, allowing flexibility in system capabilities concerning product features and volume	Adaptability and changeability, allows for scalability in response to demands	Complexities in coordinating modules, additional development effort required
FLMS	Focuses on resource allocation and reconfiguration to individual process modules, modular and mobile design	Optimized manufacturing performance, supports required changeability	Complex planning and control, high equipment costs, intricate material flow dynamics

4 A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MATRIX STRUCTURED AND CYBER-PHYSICAL PRODUCTION SYSTEMS

In the fast-paced and ever-evolving arena of smart manufacturing, the architectural foundation of a smart factory must be rooted in systems that are not just technologically advanced but also inherently adaptable, scalable, and efficient. The pursuit of these ideals brings to the forefront two contemporary manufacturing systems: the Matrix Structured Manufacturing System (MMS) and Cyber-Physical Production Systems (CPPS).

The MMS stands out as an exemplary model for dynamic smart factories, characterized by its adaptability and scalability. It adopts a matrix layout that introduces redundancy in work cells, ensuring robustness and resilience in the manufacturing process. Automated Guided Vehicles (AGVs) are integral to this layout, providing a flexible material handling mechanism that facilitates an uninterrupted flow of materials and components. This configuration proves especially beneficial in mass customization scenarios where the production line must swiftly adapt to varied product specifications without compromising efficiency.

Emphasizing scalability, the MMS allows a smart factory to pivot and grow according to market demands and technological developments. It ensures that a smart factory based on this system is not just equipped to handle the manufacturing needs of today but is also primed for the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.

On the other hand, CPPS heralds a modular approach to smart factory design. Its modular nature is the cornerstone of a system that is not only flexible but also capable of integrating a myriad of components and technologies. This versatility is crucial in environments where product features and production volumes are not static but prone to change. The CPPS's ability to integrate seamlessly across various technological platforms makes it an ideal candidate for smart factories aiming to maintain a cutting-edge position in a competitive marketplace.

Both MMS and CPPS systems underscore the importance of dynamic production capabilities. Thus, a critical element for smart factories that must respond with agility to the ebb and flow of industrial demands. By incorporating these systems, a smart factory positions itself to not just respond to current manufacturing challenges but also to anticipate and adapt to future trends.

Following this discussion, it becomes apparent that the decision to implement either MMS or CPPS should be made with a strategic foresight that aligns with the core objectives of the smart factory. The detailed comparison of these systems is elucidated in the table below, which encapsulates their respective strengths and potential limitations within the context of smart factory design.

Table 3: Manufacturing System in Smart Factory Context

Manufacturing system:	Adaptability	Space Efficiency	Dynamic Production Capabilities	Maturity
FMS	High	Moderate	High	Mature (Widely Used)
RMS	Very High	High	Very High	Mature
LMAS	High	Low (requires spacious area)	High	Emerging
MMS	High	Moderate	High	Mature

SPS	Very High	Moderate (complexity in dense robot population)	Very High	Emerging to Mature
Biologicalisation	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate (depends on implementation)	Early Stage
CPPS (modular)	High	High	High	Mature
FLMS	High	Moderate	High	Emerging to Mature

The information provided in the table serves as a critical guidepost for decision-makers in the manufacturing sector. By considering adaptability, space efficiency, dynamic production capabilities, and the maturity of each system, industry leaders can make informed choices that resonate with their vision of industrial innovation and sustainability.

5 CONCLUSION

The evolving landscape of modern manufacturing demands diverse designs of manufacturing systems to ensure competitiveness. The transition from mass production to mass customization and personalized production necessitates innovative approaches to address challenges such as diverse product varieties, fluctuating demands, and cost pressures. Various manufacturing paradigms have emerged, each with its unique strategies to ensure competitiveness in today's dynamic market. Ultimately the choice of a manufacturing paradigm depends on the specific operational needs of the smart factory. MMS and CPPS emerge as strong contenders, offering optimal solutions in terms of adaptability, space efficiency, and dynamic production capabilities. MMS excels in scenarios requiring efficient material flow and scalability, while CPPS provides modularity and integration for rapidly changing production needs. The adoption of these paradigms will play a crucial role in shaping the future of smart factories, ensuring they remain competitive and responsive to evolving market demands and technological advancements.

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MOBADS: A MOBILE AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL DEFENCE FORCE

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ABSTRACT

The Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS), developed by Denel for the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), is a short-range, mobile system designed to counter UAVs, cruise missiles, and helicopters. It integrates the Local Warning Radar System (120 km range, <10 min deployment), the 35 mm Mk 5A/7 Integrated Gun Firing Unit, the ADA HQ Mobile Vehicle, and the Air Defence Operations Centre for decentralised command and rapid response. This desktop-based, qualitative study offers the first open-source, system-level analysis of MobADS within SANDF's mobility doctrine. It includes subsystem evaluation, benchmarking against Türkiye's Steel Dome, and global trends in air defence, with a focus on AI, EW resilience, and interoperability. Key findings highlight MobADS's strong mobility and autonomy but note limitations in long-range interception, allied interoperability, and AI capability. The study also identifies priorities for future upgrades, including layered missile integration, EW resilience, and automation, especially in the African operational context.

Keywords: The Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS), Air Defence Operations Centre (ADOC), Tactical Command and Control System (TCCS).

1 INTRODUCTION

The evolving nature of modern aerial threats, including unmanned aerial systems, low-observable cruise missiles, and precision-guided munitions, demands agile, layered, and modular air defence solutions, particularly for countries with vast and varied operational terrains such as South Africa. To meet this requirement, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), in collaboration with Denel, developed the Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS): a highly mobile, decentralised platform designed to protect critical assets. MobADS aligns with the SANDF's mobility doctrine, integrating the Local Warning Radar System (LWRS), Integrated Gun Firing Unit (IGFU), ADA Mobile Headquarters Vehicle, and Air Defence Operations Centre (ADOC), networked through the Tactical Command and Control System (TCCS) to enable coordinated target acquisition, engagement, and real-time situational awareness under combat conditions [1]. Its containerised configuration ensures survivability and consistent performance in challenging terrains and infrastructure-limited environments, although only the HQ vehicle provides limited armour protection.

This paper assesses MobADS from a combined technical-operational perspective, defining the research question in Section II and outlining objectives and methodology, which include subsystem analysis and international benchmarking. Section III reviews literature on Ground-Based Air Defence Systems (GBADS), Integrated Air Defence Systems (IADS), and mobile tactical air defence technologies, drawing on comparative studies by Matejček, Bansal, Dodge, and Youvan [2], [3], [4].Section IV details system architecture and integration, while Section V evaluates operational performance in varied deployment scenarios. Section VI addresses key limitations such as the absence of long-range missile intercept capability, constrained artificial intelligence integration, and limited resilience against electronic warfare. Section VII presents a comparative analysis with Türkiye's Steel Dome, highlighting both convergences and divergences in design and doctrine. Finally, Section VIII synthesises findings and offers recommendations to ensure MobADS' continued relevance within national and regional defence frameworks.

2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) faces a growing spectrum of low- and medium-altitude aerial threats, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), cruise missiles, rotary-wing aircraft, and precision-guided munitions. The Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS), developed by Denel, provides a mobile, short-range defensive capability aligned with the SANDF's mobility doctrine. However, its current configuration is constrained by limited long-range interception capacity, minimal artificial intelligence (AI) integration, modest interoperability, and vulnerability to advanced electronic warfare tactics. These limitations reduce its operational flexibility, especially in multi-domain threat environments and joint regional operations. Without targeted capability enhancements such as layered missile defence, AI-enabled command-and-control, and hardened electronic warfare resilience, MobADS risks diminished effectiveness in safeguarding South Africa's strategic assets and fulfilling its regional defence commitments.

3 RESEARCH QUESTION

How does the MobADS system deliver mobile air defence capability, and what opportunities exist to enhance its role in supporting the SANDF's operational requirements?

4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are to:

- **Describe the architecture and operational subsystems** of the Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS), including the Local Warning Radar System (LWRS), Integrated Gun

Firing Unit (IGFU), ADA HQ Mobile Vehicle, and Air Defence Operations Centre (ADOC), within the context of the SANDF's mobility doctrine.

- **Evaluate the performance of MobADS** against the operational requirements of the South African National Defence Force, using metrics such as detection range, deployment time, integration capacity, survivability, and mobility.
- **Benchmark MobADS against comparable international mobile air defence systems**, with a focus on Türkiye's Steel Dome, across key parameters including threat engagement envelope, artificial intelligence integration, command-and-control architecture, interoperability, and electronic warfare resilience

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study followed a desktop-based qualitative research approach to evaluate the Mobile Air Defence Systems (MobADS) operational effectiveness and strategic potential within the South African and regional defence environment. The combination of methods was chosen to ensure triangulation: the systematic literature review (SLR) establishes the state of the art in mobile air defence; the technical subsystem analysis assesses current capability; and the comparative benchmarking identifies performance gaps and potential enhancements. This approach ensures technical insights are contextualised within both global trends and SANDF operational realities.

Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

The SLR was conducted on 3 March 2025 using an adapted PRISMA-style screening process to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Searches were performed in academic and defence-focused databases, including Google Scholar, IEEE Xplore, and Scopus. Boolean search strings included:

- "Mobile Air Defence System" AND "South African National Defence Force"
- "MobADS" AND "short-range air defence" OR "SHORAD"
- "Mobile air defence" AND "comparative analysis" AND "Türkiye"
- "Ground-Based Air Defence Systems" AND "command-and-control" AND "integration"

The review was limited to English-language publications from 2022 to 2025 to maintain relevance to contemporary trends, technological developments, and doctrinal shifts. In addition to automated searches, manual screening of technical reports, defence white papers, and operational case documentation was conducted from sources including the Armaments Corporation of South Africa (Armscor), Denel, the African Defence Review, NATO, and UN peacekeeping reports. Reference mining identified additional grey literature and industry technical papers.

Technical Subsystem Analysis

The technical analysis focused on four primary MobADS subsystems: the Local Warning Radar System (LWRS), the Integrated Gun Firing Unit (IGFU), the ADA HQ Mobile Vehicle, and the Air Defence Operations Centre (ADOC). Subsystem performance was evaluated against five criteria: detection range, deployment time, integration capability, survivability, and mobility rating. Metrics were derived from open-source technical specifications, manufacturer data, SANDF documentation, and corroborated field reports.

Comparative Benchmarking

A structured matrix comparison was applied to benchmark MobADS against Türkiye's Steel Dome system. Seven attributes, derived from NATO air defence capability guidelines and

emerging technology benchmarks, were used: threat engagement range, AI integration, command-and-control (C2) architecture, interoperability, mobility, electronic warfare (EW) resilience, and export readiness. Each attribute was scored using available open-source data, supplemented by the researcher's operational experience and case studies of mobile air defence deployment.

Limitations and Assumptions

Due to national defence classification protocols, detailed operational performance data could not be disclosed. The analysis, therefore, relied on declassified reports, open-source defence publications, and manufacturer technical briefs. This may limit insights into classified C2 resilience, software vulnerabilities, and live-fire performance under operational conditions. These constraints were mitigated through data triangulation and the use of multiple corroborating sources for incomplete specifications.

Replicability

To facilitate replicability, the methodological steps are summarised in Table 1 below, while Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram for literature selection.

Table 1: Methodological Overview

Step	Method	Purpose	Key Outputs
1	Subsystem Selection	Identify core MobADS components	LWRS, IGFU, ADA HQ, ADOC
2	Technical Analysis	Assess Performance against five criteria	Subsystem Capability Scores
3	Comparative Benchmarking	Matrix Scoring vs Steel Dome	Capability Gaps and Upgrade Opportunities
4	Literature Review	Contextualise within Global trends	Doctrinal and Technological Insights

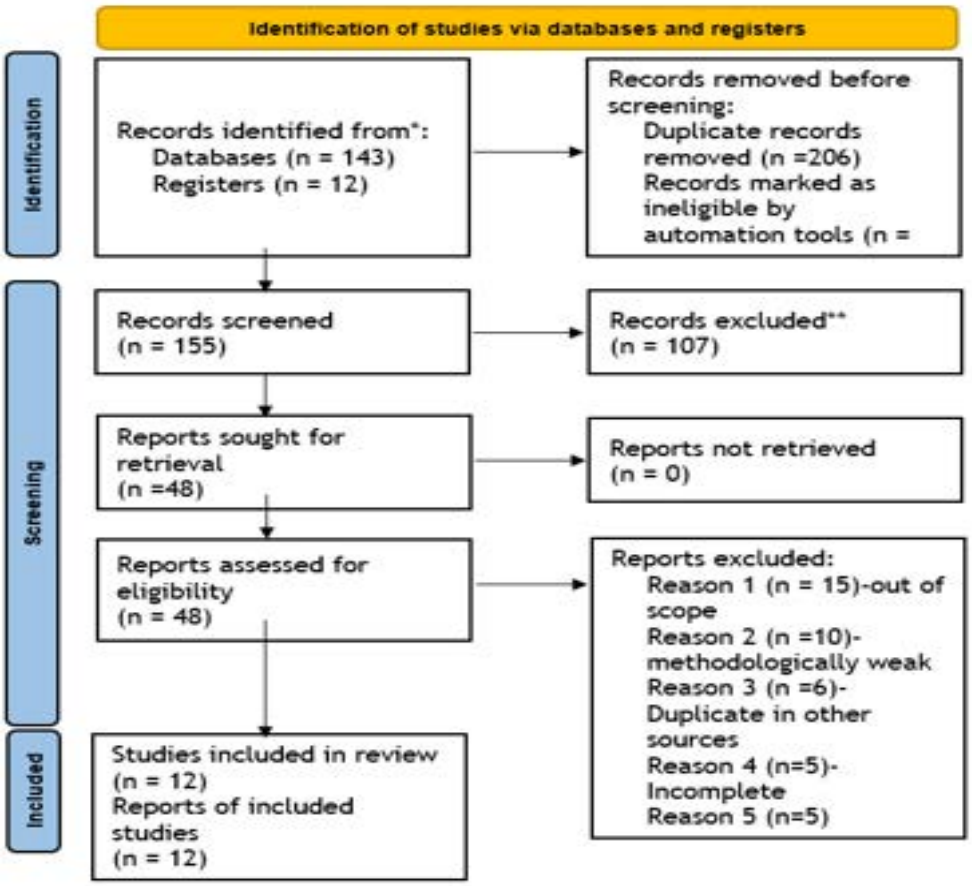

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process

6 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature presents a comprehensive examination of global developments in modern air defence systems, with a particular focus on Ground-Based Air Defence Systems (GBADS), Integrated Air Defence Systems (IADS), and Mobile Air Defence Systems (MobADS). It explores the evolving operational, technological, and doctrinal imperatives driven by increasingly complex aerial threats, including drones, stealth aircraft, cruise missiles, and hypersonic weapons. By analysing studies from diverse geopolitical contexts, the literature highlights key advancements in radar technology, missile guidance, interoperability, mobility, and command-and-control integration, offering a global perspective on the transformation of air defence capabilities in the 21st century.

6.1 Ground-Based Air Defence Systems (GBADS)

In their 2023 study, Matejček and Šostronek provide a comprehensive technical assessment of Ground-Based Air Defence Systems (GBADS), urging the modernisation of existing capabilities in response to the increasing complexity of aerial threats. They classify GBADS into four tiers: Very Short Range (VSHORAD), Short Range (SHORAD), Medium Range (MRAD), and Long Range (LRAD) based on engagement envelopes ranging from 5 km to over 120 km, each contributing to a layered air defence architecture that enhances redundancy and coverage. The study identifies critical limitations in legacy systems, particularly Soviet-era GBADS, citing their vulnerability to modern threats such as high-speed precision-guided munitions, low-observable cruise missiles, and loitering drones. Modern GBADS, the authors argue, must integrate advanced radar technologies (e.g., AESA, Doppler, frequency-hopping), multimodal guidance

systems (RF, IR, laser), and diagnostic tools like Built-In Test Equipment (BITE). They model radar acquisition zones using variables such as radar range, missile flight time, and target velocity, and employ probabilistic models reflecting saturation engagement doctrines. Case studies of systems such as the RBS-70 NG, NASAMS II, IRIS-T SL, and BARAK 8 illustrate the operational diversity of modern GBADS across tiers.

The study emphasises the importance of interoperability within command structures like NATO's NATINAMDS, highlighting command nodes from the Joint Force Air Component to national Fire Units, interconnected through data protocols like LINK-16 and JREAP. Complementing this analysis, Bansal's 2019 work expands on Integrated Air Defence Systems (IADS) as multi-layered, network-centric architectures designed to neutralise diverse threats ranging from fifth-generation aircraft to ballistic missiles. His model includes long-range surveillance platforms (e.g., AEW&C, UAV-based radars), strategic SAMs (S-300, S-400), medium-range interceptors (Barak-8), and inner-layer defences such as MANPADS and CIWS. A key feature of IADS is its kill chain integration from detection to destruction, facilitated by C4ISR frameworks, EMCON protocols, and multi-backbone communications, including satellite and fibre links. Both studies converge on the necessity for modular, scalable, and digitally networked air defence systems capable of withstanding electronic warfare and cyber-attacks while remaining interoperable with allied assets. They conclude that modern GBADS and IADS form the backbone of future Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD), ensuring survivability and operational resilience in contemporary and future combat theatres [5].

6.2 Mobile Air Defence Systems (MobADS)

In a 2024 assessment compiled by the Heritage Foundation, Dodge articulates a systematic overview of the operational functionality and strategic posture of mobile air defence systems (MobADS) within the broader framework of U.S. missile defence capabilities. The assessment identifies MobADS as a critical component in countering evolving aerial threats, including cruise missiles, drones, and hypersonic systems, particularly in dispersed and contested operational environments. Dodge's report underscores the integral role of mobility and modularity in enhancing battlefield resilience. These systems are not confined to fixed installations but are instead deployed on tactical ground platforms such as trucks or armoured vehicles capable of repositioning in response to shifting threat dynamics. The operational construct revolves around a triad of interconnected subsystems: surveillance radars, command-and-control (C2) nodes, and interceptor launch platforms. Each component is designed to function autonomously when required, but is more effective when networked into an integrated battle management architecture.

The author further details that the radar systems used in MobADS are optimised for rapid detection and target acquisition, while the C2 infrastructure manages threat classification and prioritisation, enabling a dynamic and timely engagement decision. Interceptor systems, whether missile or gun-based, are guided through real-time data relays between radar and C2 nodes, a synergy that enhances both precision and operational tempo. Notably, the study critiques legacy missile defence doctrines for their over-reliance on static, theatre-based platforms ill-suited to modern asymmetric threats. MobADS, in contrast, is depicted as adaptable and capable of functioning within multi-domain operations, often in coordination with air, naval, and cyber elements. Dodge's analysis also highlights future imperatives, including increased integration of AI-assisted target recognition and autonomous kill-chain execution, which are already emerging as technological trends within next-generation MobADS frameworks. In conclusion, Dodge’s 2024 military strength index provides not just a technical dissection of mobile air defence mechanisms, but also a strategic rationale for their prioritisation within modern force structure planning. His findings affirm MobADS as indispensable to contemporary deterrence and defence postures, especially under conditions of contested logistics, decentralised command, and high-threat proliferation [3].

While international IADS literature provides valuable benchmarks, much of it is grounded in NATO, Israeli, or Asia-Pacific operational frameworks. These models often assume access to high-budget, networked infrastructure, which may not align with the SANDF's logistical and doctrinal environment. The absence of peer-reviewed studies on African air defence systems poses a challenge for region-specific benchmarking and underlines the need for frameworks tailored to the strategic and budgetary realities of African states.

6.3 Global Trends

In a 2024 study by Youvan titled *Global Missile Defence Systems: Comparative Analysis and Strategic Implications*, the author undertakes a comprehensive comparative analysis of contemporary missile defence architectures, exploring the interplay between technical capabilities, geopolitical dynamics, and emerging technologies. The research systematically evaluates global systems such as the S-400 Triumf, Iron Dome, THAAD, Patriot PAC-3, HQ-9, Aster 30, David's Sling, and Arrow 3, examining their operational range, engagement strategies, and regional deployment patterns. Through a layered analytical approach, Youvan underscores the dual role of missile defence systems as both protective mechanisms and strategic instruments influencing deterrence postures, alliance politics, and regional security balances. The study highlights technological trends like artificial intelligence and directed energy weapons (e.g., lasers) as transformative forces poised to enhance interception efficiency, automate threat response, and reshape battlefield doctrines. Furthermore, it delves into critical vulnerabilities, including cyber threats, system integration challenges, and the limitations of kinetic kill vehicles, while also evaluating strategic implications such as arms races, crisis instability, and the erosion of arms control frameworks. Ultimately, the research advocates for integrated, multi-layered, and ethically governed missile defence strategies as indispensable tools for safeguarding national security while maintaining international stability amidst rapidly evolving threat landscapes [4].

The literature review explores global advancements in air defence, focusing on Ground-Based Air Defence Systems (GBADS), Integrated Air Defence Systems (IADS), and Mobile Air Defence Systems (MobADS). Key studies highlight the increasing threat posed by UAVs, stealth aircraft, cruise missiles, and hypersonic weapons, which necessitate modular, layered, and network-centric responses. Matejček and Šostronek [2] emphasise the modernisation of GBADS through advanced radar and missile guidance technologies. Bansal [5] presents IADS as a digitally integrated framework for comprehensive threat detection and engagement. Dodge [3] examines the strategic role of MobADS in dispersed, high-threat environments, identifying artificial intelligence as a key enabler for future capabilities. Youvan [4] provides a comparative evaluation of global missile defence architectures, noting their strategic and technological implications. Collectively, the literature underscores a shift towards interoperable, AI-assisted, and mobile air defence systems suited to complex and evolving operational theatres.

7 SYSTEM OVERVIEW

7.1 Description of MobADS components

This section offers a focused overview of selected subsystems within the Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS), chosen by the authors for their direct relevance to the study's objectives. Due to space limitations set by the conference, only a few key functional elements are discussed, namely the Local Warning Radar System (LWRS), Integrated Gun Firing Unit (IGFU), ADA HQ Mobile Vehicle, and Air Defence Operations Centre (ADOC). While MobADS comprises additional components and capabilities, the authors have limited the scope to these subsystems for the purpose of this paper, examining their structure, roles, and contributions to the system's mobile and integrated air defence functionality.

7.1.1 A Local Warning Radar System (LWRS)

The ESR 220 Thutlwa forms a vital node within the South African Army's Ground-Based Air Defence System (GBADS), delivering a highly mobile, autonomous, and resilient solution for tactical air surveillance and fire control. Engineered around a solid-state, L-band 2D radar, the Thutlwa is capable of tracking up to 100 airborne targets within a 120-kilometre range, providing early warning and real-time air picture generation for low to medium-altitude threats. Mounted on a Kynos Aljaba 8×8 armoured chassis, the system is self-contained with its power generation, enabling rapid deployment and operational readiness within ten minutes of arrival, regardless of external support infrastructure. It integrates Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) capabilities, enhancing situational awareness and mitigating the risk of fratricide through the fusion of primary radar and IFF data into a consolidated Recognised Air Picture (RAP). Its command and control architecture is interoperable with broader GBADS elements, enabling seamless coordination with weapon systems like the GDF 05 L90 twin 35 mm cannons for integrated local warning, engagement planning, and fire control. The vehicle platform affords high cross-country mobility and protection for the crew and mission-critical systems, ensuring survivability and sustained operations within high-threat or rapidly changing operational theatres [6], [7]. Figure 1 below shows the LWRS mounted on its mobile platform.

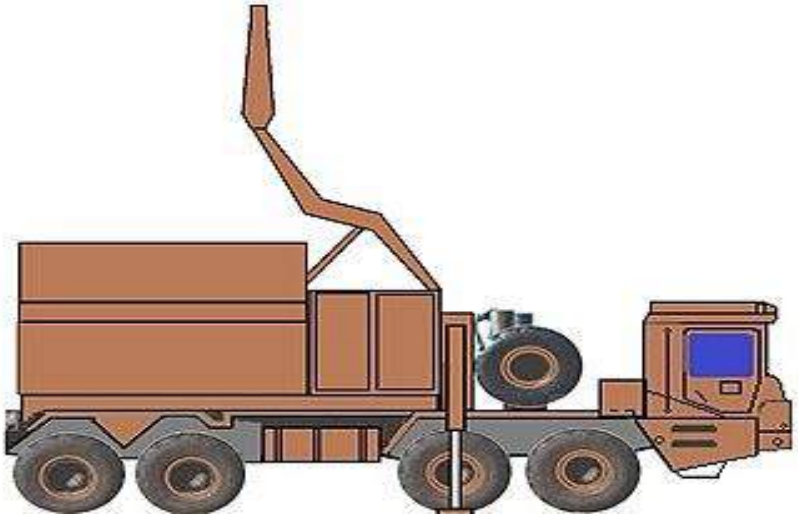

Figure 2: Local Warning Radar System (LWRS)

7.1.2 Integrated Gun Firing Unit

The Gun Fire Unit (FU) is engineered to deliver protection for stationary, high-value assets such as airfields, bridges, command-and-control centres, and key industrial installations. It is capable of defending against conventional airborne threats through the deployment of gun systems situated within the inner defensive layer. Central to this capability is the Integrated Gun Fire Unit (IGFU), which, in conjunction with its Sensor Unit (SU), provides uninterrupted air surveillance across the designated protection zone. The gun systems, specifically the 35 mm Mk 5A or Mk 7 variants, are employed to neutralise close-range aerial threats. The IGFU comprises several critical system components, including a containerised shelter that houses both the Gun Air Defence Control System Interface (GAI) and the Control Unit (CU). The CU is responsible for managing both the sensor and gun systems, enabling seamless target acquisition and engagement.

The shelter further includes the Power Supply Unit (PSU) and the human-machine interface (HMI) operator consoles. These consoles facilitate a range of core functions: selecting primary modes for the sensor system; displaying search radar and Track-While-Scan (TWS) data; selecting and prioritising targets for engagement; managing setup tasks; detecting and

localising system faults; visualising outputs from electro-optical sensors; monitoring gun status and ammunition levels; and issuing fire commands to the gun systems. The Sensor System, which encompasses the SU and CU, provides essential air surveillance, target acquisition, and tracking capabilities, while also controlling the guns in real-time. The GAI extends air defence control functions and provides a data interface between the CU and the broader system architecture. Together, these components form a cohesive, highly responsive air defence platform capable of operating in high-threat environments [8], [9]. Figure 2 below shows an Integrated Gun Firing Unit for the MobADS.

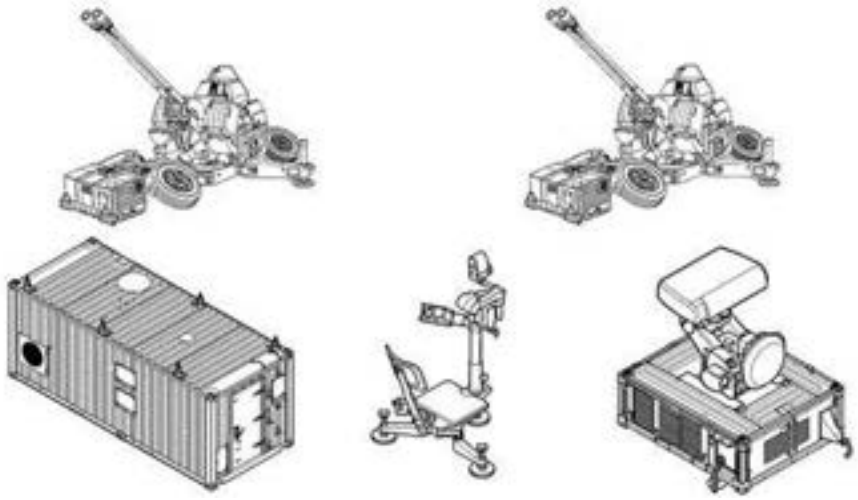

Figure 3: Integrated Gun Firing Unit

7.1.3 ADA HQ Mobile Vehicle

The Headquarters (HQ) Vehicle System is defined as the HQ platform that integrates the essential command and communications systems. It is equipped with the required interfaces and supporting subsystems, including power supply, internal lighting, and auxiliary components, enabling it to perform various command functions within the Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS) Regiment and Batteries. The ADA Mobile HQ Vehicle serves as a high-mobility, tactical command-and-control centre, purpose-built for both on-road and off-road operational environments. Built on the combat-proven chassis of the Ratel 60 mm Mortar ICV and 12.7 mm Command Vehicle variants, the ADA Mobile HQ incorporates a range of modifications tailored to meet Air Defence Artillery (ADA) operational requirements. The configuration consists of the standard vehicle hull coupled with a rotating turret, armed with either a 60 mm mortar or a 12.7 mm machine gun. The vehicle variant is not specifically selected on mission needs, but on what is available as CFE for allocation to the project for modification. Designed with crew survivability as a priority, the ADA Mobile HQ is capable of accommodating a team of four personnel. The vehicle offers ballistic protection against small arms fire at close quarters and against projectile threats up to 12.7 mm calibre at medium-range engagements [1]. Figure 3 below depicts the ADA HQ MOBILE VEHICLE used by the South African National Defence Force.

Figure 4: ADA HQ MOBILE VEHICLE

7.1.4 Air Defence Control System

The Air Defence Control System (ADCS) serves as a Functional Element (FE) within the broader Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS), with the primary objective of supporting and enabling the Air Defence (AD) Control function. As a product system, the ADCS is classified as a Computer Software Configuration Item (CSCI), comprising multiple distinct modules and functional components. These modules are deployed across various levels of control within the system architecture, tailored to their specific operational roles. The ADCS software is installed on operator terminals situated at different command levels, including the Regiment Air Defence Operations Centre (RADOC), Battery Air Defence Operations Centre (BADOC), Local Warning Radar System (LWRS), Integrated Gun Fire Unit (IGFU), and future developments such as the Short-Range Local Warning System (SRLWS) and Short-Range Air Defence Fire Units (SHORAD FUs). The system is fully scalable according to the operational role and level of employment, ensuring adaptability and mission-specific performance. At the core of its functionality, the ADCS software governs the flow, processing, and presentation of critical information. This includes the detection and tracking of airborne targets, accurate classification of these tracks, threat evaluation, and the assignment of appropriate weapon systems, ultimately facilitating the successful engagement and neutralisation of hostile aerial threats.

The ADCS is seamlessly integrated with the MobADS Tactical Command and Control System (TCCS) and the associated communications infrastructure, enabling real-time situational awareness and coordinated response. An essential feature of the ADCS is its capacity to coordinate MobADS firepower with precision, thereby reducing the risk of fratricide (unintended engagement of neutral or friendly forces) while enhancing the cost-effectiveness and operational efficiency of threat responses. Furthermore, the ADCS interfaces with the Sector Command Centre (SCC) within the Joint Air Defence (JAD) organisational structure, reinforcing interoperability across defence layers. The Central Air Defence Authority (CAD) is implemented at the Battery level, enabling direct control over Fire Units (FUs) to streamline command pathways and significantly reduce system reaction times. ADCS control is realised via dedicated ADCS nodes at both Battery and FU levels. In support of system resilience, a fallback mechanism has been integrated, allowing for graceful degradation of the CAA's functions in the event of equipment failure, ensuring continued operational capability under degraded conditions [1], [10]. Figure 4 shows the inside of the Air Defence Operation Centre.

Figure 5: Air Defence Operation Centre

7.1.5 Subsystem Integration Summary

The Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS) comprises several key subsystems that operate in an integrated manner to deliver layered, mobile, and responsive air defence capabilities across tactical environments. These components include the Local Warning Radar System (LWRS), Integrated Gun Firing Unit (IGFU), ADA Mobile Headquarters Vehicle, and the Air Defence Operations Centre (ADOC).

- The LWRS, based on the ESR 220 Thutlwa radar, provides rapid-deployment, L-band 2D air surveillance from a mobile 8×8 platform. It supports early warning, real-time tracking of up to 100 aerial targets, and seamless integration with Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) and command-and-control systems. Its robust mobility and autonomous operation make it ideal for expeditionary and high-threat environments [6], [7].
- The IGFU delivers close-range defence for critical fixed infrastructure using either 35 mm Mk 5A or Mk 7 gun systems. It is equipped with a comprehensive sensor suite, Gun Air Defence Control System Interface (GAI), and operator consoles within a containerised shelter. The system allows for real-time air surveillance, threat engagement, and full command over gun operations through the Control Unit (CU), ensuring precision and responsiveness under combat conditions [8], [9].
- The ADA Mobile HQ Vehicle serves as a mobile command-and-control centre tailored for on- and off-road deployment. Based on the Ratel 60 mm Mortar and 12.7 mm Command Infantry Combat Vehicle platforms, the vehicle integrates communications systems, mission support electronics, and modular subsystems. It provides command roles at the Regiment and Battery level and offers protection for a crew against small arms and medium-calibre threats [1].
- Lastly, the Air Defence Control System (ADCS) acts as the centralised software backbone of MobADS, classified as a Computer Software Configuration Item (CSCI). It is deployed across various control nodes such as RADOC, BADOC, LWRS, and IGFU and is adaptable for future SHORAD and surveillance developments. The ADCS manages critical data processing, target classification, threat evaluation, and firepower coordination. Fully integrated with MobADS TCCS and communications systems, it ensures accurate engagement, minimised fratricide, and operational continuity. It also

interfaces with the Joint Air Defence (JAD) command architecture through the Sector Command Centre (SCC), with resilience supported by a fallback mechanism for degraded operation [1], [10].

8 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SANDF MOBADS AND TÜRKİYE'S STEEL DOME SYSTEMS

The modernisation of air defence capabilities is a pressing imperative for middle powers seeking to respond to evolving aerial threats in complex operational environments. Both South Africa's Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS) and Türkiye's Steel Dome (Çelik Kubbe**)** represent sovereign attempts to craft adaptable, layered, and responsive air defence architectures. While each system is grounded in different threat perceptions, geopolitical realities, and industrial capacities, they converge around the principles of mobility, modularity, and digital integration. A comparative analysis highlights both shared strengths and divergent trajectories in the design and deployment of these two systems.

8.1 Contrasting Doctrinal Foundations: South Africa's MobADS vs. Türkiye's Steel Dome

MobADS emerges from South Africa's need for a tactical, expeditionary air defence solution suitable for both domestic protection and regional peacekeeping missions. It is structured around the SANDF's mobility doctrine, protecting against low and medium-altitude threats in complex terrain with high levels of autonomy. In contrast, Türkiye's Steel Dome is conceived within a national strategic deterrence paradigm, designed to establish a sovereign, integrated air and missile defence shield over a vast and geopolitically sensitive airspace. It reflects Ankara's post-Cold War doctrinal shift from fighter-centric offensive power to indigenous, layered defensive autonomy [6], [8].

8.2 System Architecture and Network Integration

MobADS is composed of a collection of subsystems such as the Local Warning Radar System (LWRS), Integrated Gun Firing Unit (IGFU), ADA Mobile HQ Vehicle, and Air Defence Operations Centre (ADOC), all networked through the Tactical Command and Control System (TCCS). The design facilitates decentralised command and real-time engagement, particularly against close-range threats. While robust, MobADS still largely operates within a conventional command hierarchy and is optimised for short-range and inner-layer defence. Steel Dome, however, features a more complex and vertically integrated architecture, with Artificial Intelligence-assisted (AI) C5ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Combat Systems, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) at its core. It's HAKİM Command and Control system, together with RADNET and HERİKKS, enables full-spectrum integration from radar surveillance to interceptor launch, including space-based sensors and electronic warfare modules. This **deep integration** allows Türkiye to execute multi-domain, multi-layered operations and anticipate emerging hypersonic and stealth threats [1].

8.3 Layered Defence and Threat Engagement Envelopes

MobADS' future development plans are expected to include the integration and enhancement of its VSHORAD and SHORAD capabilities, aimed at improving adaptability and providing a more robust, layered air defence posture against evolving aerial threats. It excels in protecting stationary assets and responding to low-altitude, fast-moving threats such as UAVs and rotary aircraft. Steel Dome employs a multi-layered missile defence framework, with intercept ranges of 4 km (Korkut), 10 km (Gürz), 40 km (Hisar-O), and up to 200 km in its forthcoming Super variant. This configuration provides Türkiye with low-, medium-, and high-altitude coverage and positions it closer to integrated air and missile defence (IAMD) capabilities seen in NATO and Israeli doctrines. It also enables simultaneous engagement of multiple aerial threats at varying altitudes and ranges [11].

8.4 Technological Sophistication and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Integration

MobADS features containerised sensor suites, fault detection systems, electro-optical tracking, and centralised fire control, providing a high level of situational awareness and engagement efficiency. However, it lacks deep artificial intelligence integration and relies primarily on operator inputs and semi-automated systems. Conversely, Steel Dome incorporates AI for threat detection, trajectory prediction, and kill-chain optimisation, drastically reducing response time. The AI component ensures a dynamic adaptation to evolving tactics such as swarm drones and loitering munitions. It also supports integration with **space-based early warning systems** and offers autonomous kill-chain execution, reflecting next-generation AD system evolution [11].

8.5 Mobility and Deployment Flexibility

Both systems are mobile, but in different contexts. MobADS, built on rugged 8×8 and Ratel combat platforms, is suited for high mobility in regional terrains, enabling agile deployment in both national and peacekeeping missions. It prioritises tactical mobility and autonomous operation. Steel Dome, while including mobile launchers and gun systems, is designed for strategic mobility, capable of being repositioned across Türkiye's vast geography depending on threat concentration. It is more static at the higher layers but provides operational reach through long-range radar and missile platforms [1], [11].

8.6 Interoperability and Alliance Integration

MobADS is interoperable within the SANDF and African regional frameworks but does not support NATO-standard communication protocols or joint operational doctrines. Its integration with the Joint Air Defence (JAD) architecture reflects a limited regional scope. Steel Dome, however, is being engineered for NATO interoperability, with future integration into the European Sky Shield Initiative and command interoperability through the HERİKKS system. This enhances Türkiye's role in collective defence while retaining full sovereignty over system deployment and control [1], [11].

8.7 Exportability and Industrial Base

MobADS represents a niche domestic capability developed by Denel and related SANDF stakeholders. While technically proficient, its export potential is currently limited due to budgetary constraints, geopolitical alignment, and production scale. Steel Dome is positioned as a flagship export platform, particularly attractive to Gulf countries seeking holistic air defence solutions. Türkiye's vertically integrated defence sector, supported by the Presidency of Defence Industries (SSB), underpins its ambition to become a global supplier of advanced AD systems, building on the success of TB2 and Akıncı drone exports [1], [11].

8.8 Limitations and Development Challenges

MobADS' main limitations include its lack of long-range intercept capability, limited integration with emerging AI technologies, and constraints in countering saturation attacks involving multiple aerial vectors. Upgrades are needed in areas such as electronic warfare resilience, command redundancy, and expanded engagement envelopes. The absence of long-range intercept capability has been recognised and is included in the system's planned future developments. Steel Dome's challenges lie in integration complexity, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and cost overruns. Unlike Israel's Iron Dome, it is not yet battle-tested, and its anti-ballistic missile (ABM) capability remains underdeveloped. Ensuring resilience under contested electronic and cyber environments will be critical to its long-term viability [1], [11]. Below is Table 2, a comparative table summarising MobADS vs **the Türkiye** Steel dome.

Table 2: A comparison table summarising MobADS vs Steel Dome

Attribute	MobADS (South Africa)	Steel Dome (Türkiye)
Primary Role	Tactical, short-range mobile air defence	Integrated national air & missile defence
Threat Engagement Range	Up to 120 km detection (radar), gun intercept within 4 km	4–200 km layered missile & gun coverage
Core Subsystems	LWRS, IGFU, ADA HQ Vehicle, ADOC	Korkut, Gürz, Hisar-O, Super variant missiles
AI Integration	Limited, operator-driven with semi-automation	AI-assisted detection, trajectory prediction, and autonomous kill-chain
Command Architecture	Decentralised via TCCS, regional scope	AI-enabled C5ISR, NATO interoperability
Mobility	High tactical mobility (8×8 and Ratel platforms)	Strategic mobility across national theatre
EW Resilience	Moderate improvements planned	Integrated EW modules & cyber resilience features
Export Readiness	Limited	High-marketed to Gulf and NATO-aligned states
Deployment Time	<10 min (LWRS)	Variable – dependent on the asset layer
Interoperability	SANDF/JAD framework	NATO-standard, multi-domain capable

9 DISCUSSION

The MobADS represents a critical advancement in the SANDF's pursuit of tactical, modular, and mobile air defence capabilities tailored for sub-Saharan operational conditions. By integrating the Local Warning Radar System (LWRS), Integrated Gun Firing Unit (IGFU), ADA HQ Vehicle, and Air Defence Operations Centre (ADOC) into a decentralised Tactical Command and Control System (TCCS), MobADS delivers high mobility, rapid deployment (<10 minutes), and situational awareness suitable for both domestic and regional deployments [1]. However, limitations persist. The absence of a missile-based intercept capability constrains its layered defence posture, especially against medium- and high-altitude threats. Additionally, while MobADS supports semi-automated operations, it lacks advanced artificial intelligence for autonomous target recognition or kill-chain execution, a shortfall given the global trend toward AI-assisted systems [11]. Electronic warfare resilience remains moderate, with future upgrades needed to improve performance under contested conditions. Compared to Türkiye's Steel Dome, which offers integrated AI, multi-layered intercept ranges (4–200 km), and NATO interoperability, MobADS remains focused on short-range defence within SANDF's regional framework. Still, its modularity, rugged mobility, and integration of legacy platforms offer a sovereign, adaptable solution in resource-constrained environments [11]. For MobADS to remain operationally competitive, enhancements should include long-range missile integration, AI-enabled command automation, improved EW defences, and expanded interoperability with regional and allied forces.

10 CONCLUSION

The Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS) is a key part of the SANDF's short-range air defence, designed to counter UAVs, cruise missiles, and helicopters. This study used subsystem analysis, benchmarking against Türkiye's Steel Dome, and a global literature review to assess MobADS' strengths, gaps, and upgrade needs. It confirms strong mobility, fast deployment, and effective autonomous function. However, weaknesses remain in long-range interception, AI-driven decision support, and joint-force interoperability. Upgrades in layered missiles, EW resilience, and AI-enabled C2 would boost its strategic value. This is the first open-source,

system-level review of MobADS in Africa, offering a clear roadmap for future planning and operational relevance.

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A FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSITIONING ORGANISATIONS TO QUALITY 4.0: APPLICATION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN MANUFACTURING SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Quality 4.0 (Q4.0) provides a solution by eliminating process inefficiencies and boosting quality, which promotes organisational and economic growth. However, transitioning to Q4.0 in developing nations such as South Africa (SA) remains challenging since generic frameworks frequently overlook adoption challenges specific to developing countries. Poorly managed migrations might result in adverse outcomes from which businesses may struggle to recover. This study integrates the technology-task-fit, fit-viable and people-process-technology models to create a framework for addressing Quality 4.0 adoption challenges in SA. Using an online survey of 44 manufacturing stakeholders identified through snowballing, the framework provides guidance for successful Q4.0 transitions. The outcome of this paper aligns with the national strategy to leverage technological innovation by 2030 to combat unemployment, poverty, and inequality in South Africa.

Keywords: Quality 4.0, South African manufacturing, Industry 4.0, Technology Migration

1 INTRODUCTION

In global economies, manufacturing serves as a fundamental driver of growth and development. In the African continent, the South African manufacturing sector is known to be the most industrialised economy, ranked among the top third global manufacturing economies based on its capacity to produce and export goods, it's technological innovations and global influence in manufacturing activities [1]. Moreover, this sector has played a pivotal role in job creation, offering employment opportunities to a substantial portion of the population and driving economic growth [2], [3].

Nevertheless, the manufacturing industry in South Africa has faced various challenges, including job losses due to factors like automation, global competition, economic instability, and quality issues [3]. Product recalls have also been a recurring concern, arising when products are deemed unsafe, defective, or non-compliant with regulatory standards [3], [4]. The impact of these challenges is seen in numerous factors including the decline of its total revenue by 2.53% and net profit by 145.66% in 2024 [1].

Maharaj [5] found that adopting digital technologies and reshaping production processes has potential to enhance efficiency, reduce costs and improve product quality thereby redefining the sector to be great again. Other researchers corroborated this and suggested the use of Industry 4.0 technologies to improve manufacturing processes, and subsequently improve quality [3], [6].

As a reinforcement, the president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa presented the national strategy which underscores the goal of fully tapping into technological innovation by 2030 [2], [7], he further urged that South Africa adopt the Fourth Industrial Revolution to address the persistent socio-economic issues such as inequality, unemployment, and poverty in the nation. This also supports the goal set out by the United Nations to fully adopt resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation to realise global economic growth, particularly in developing nations by 2030 [8], [9].

The fourth industrial revolution occurred because of the integration of several devices into a wireless communication system for more efficient data collecting and analysis through Cyber-Physical Systems [10]. Big data and analytics, internet of things, artificial intelligence, autonomous robotics and mixed realities are some of the technologies that enable this revolution [4], [11], [12]. As a result, companies began to alter their business processes digitally [13]. As a subset of Industry 4.0, Quality 4.0 focuses on the digitization of quality processes and the effects of digital tools on people, processes, and technology [14], [15]. As organisational changes brought on by digitalization occur, additional attention must be paid to quality work to investigate new data sources for analysis and improve the performance of employees, suppliers, and clients. Adopting Quality 4.0 could enable firms to improve resource allocation and cost management.

The need for a comprehensive understanding of Quality 4.0 has ignited interest among corporations, yet a knowledge gap persists, particularly on the best transition strategies [16], [17]. This gap is more pronounced in developing states with limited resources and understanding. Without a tailored transitioning plan, the risk of challenges oversight arises, leading to potential delays, increased costs, or even project failure, to which organisations in emerging economies may not recover from.

This research closes a gap that exist in literature, with an aim to develop a Quality 4.0 transitioning framework for manufacturing organisations in South Africa. This framework is designed to address adoption challenges that are unique to firms in developing countries, often overlooked by generic frameworks. A smooth transitioning plan ensures a successful implementation and reaps full benefits of an initiative. This will ensure firms produce defect

free products, ensuring they maximize profits, remain competitive in the global scale, and boost the nation's economy.

The main aim of this study is supported by the following objectives:

a) To examine the level of preparedness among manufacturers in South Africa for Quality 4.0.
b) To propose a Quality 4.0 transitioning framework.

The developed framework serves as a strategic guide for organisations embarking on their Quality 4.0 journey, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the essential components for a successful transition, key motivators driving the change, and the capability for organisations to assess their readiness prior to migration. This approach guarantees a smooth, efficient, sustainable and socially responsible transition to Quality 4.0.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Quality 4.0

The Fourth Industrial Revolution and technology advancements have changed the emphasis on quality management, giving rise to the concept of "Quality 4.0." Although it is still in its early stages and lacks established criteria, several academics have begun examining its effects in the context of manufacturing and service sectors [3], [12]. Quality 4.0 is based on Total Quality Management, but it goes beyond TQM by embracing all stakeholders and the crucial technologies for efficient data flow, as it can be seen on Figure 1.

The term "quality" has a broader definition in the context of Industry 4.0, which places an emphasis on value creation, organisational learning, innovation, sustainability, and the use of data to produce fresh insights [16], [17]. To support this perspective, Javaid *et al.* [18] suggest that Quality 4.0 involves crucial elements such as the swift and accurate collection of data from multiple sources, enabling prompt and well-informed decision-making.

Figure 1 Quality 4.0 conceptual framework [14], [15]

According to Sader *et al.* [19], Quality 4.0 is an expanded way of quality management that seamlessly combines contemporary technology with tried-and-true quality techniques like Total Quality Management, Quality Control, and Quality Assurance. This integration results in a broader range of quality management practices and enhances overall quality operations. To achieve previously unheard-of levels of performance, efficiency, and innovation, [16], [19], [20], as referenced by Santos *et al.* [21], emphasises further that Quality 4.0 entails the seamless fusion of cutting-edge technologies with conventional quality methods. This innovative concept aims to include established quality management principles. Maganga *et al.* [17] then conceptualised Quality 4.0 as an integration of modern and cutting-edge technologies into traditional quality management approaches to realise real-time quality management and big data management as illustrated on Figure 2.

Figure 2 Conceptual Framework as adapted from Maganga et al. [17]

By involving suppliers, customers, and society as active co-creators of goods and services, organisations can more quickly gather crucial data and extract meaningful insights. Empirical learning, knowledge discovery through real-time data collection, gathering, and analysis are some of the core tenets of Quality 4.0, all of which promote sensible operational decision-making [14], [17], [19]. As it can be seen on presented literature- as seen on Figure 1 and Figure 2, scholars have conceptualised Quality 4.0 [14], [19], however this study did not find a transitioning framework that shows a step-by-step approach of how firms in South Africa, a developing country need to migrate to this conceptualised quality management regime.

2.2. Frameworks

An outline or conceptual structure known as a framework serves as a foundation for organizing, comprehending, and approaching a certain problem, endeavour, or field of study [16], [22]. Frameworks act as models or guides that people or organisations can use to think systematically and coherently about difficult problems. They often include crucial elements, guiding principles, ideas, and connections that are pertinent to the topic.

2.2.1. Critiquing existing frameworks

Although authors have developed Quality 4.0 frameworks, these frameworks possess limitations and cannot be applied directly to the South African manufacturing setting due to the manufacturing sector's level of complexity and the challenges unique to it and other developing countries due to unique economic, socioeconomic and infrastructure settings.

Organisations in developed counterparts adopt Quality 4.0 for competitive advantage against each other, while those in South Africa, an emphasis is placed on strengthening the sector and the economy by ensuring that organisations learn from each other and are competitive against global counterparts [23], seeing that the sector's output has been declining, with consumers choosing international alternatives [3]. A framework for transitioning firms to Quality 4.0, or any Industry 4.0 initiative, in South Africa should reflect this.

The economic and socioeconomic problems in developing nations are not met by generic transitioning frameworks such as those created by Armani et al. [24], Carvalho et al. [14], Jacob [20], and Zulqarnain et al. [25]. They highlight the adoption of technology in developing economies, but they don't offer guidance to firms on how to rank the technologies that would help them with their present quality management problems. This is a disadvantage since businesses in underdeveloped nations, like South Africa, are strapped for cash and cannot afford to implement all the industry 4.0 technology. Instead, they must determine which will be most effective for them. This strategy should be emphasised in developing country transitioning frameworks.

These frameworks also disregarded collaborating among the organisations, which highlights their pursuit for competitiveness against each other first, which is not the case yet in the South African context as the main aim is still to grow the sector by sharing lessons learnt during migration to be competitive against international rivals [4], [11].

Stakeholder integration in the migration process is mentioned in models by Armani et al. [24], Carvalho et al. [14], Jacob [20], Zulqarnain et al. [25], and the American Society for Quality (ASQ) [26]. A thorough examination of these stakeholders, however, indicates that these models solely consider consumers, the government, and trade associations. This does not include community leaders and workers' unions, which are required to consult in the South African context [2], [27]. Despite being created to serve underdeveloped countries, the frameworks of Maganga et al. [16] and Olaitan et al. [23] did not address the ways in which social ills that impede the adoption of technology could be addressed. Additionally, the government's role in speeding up the adoption of technology in nations where the economy is in survival mode was not discussed.

Frameworks like Gonzalez Santacruz et al. [28] and the American Society for Quality's Quality 4.0 model, which Watson [26] explains in detail, were established for more developed states. Their disregard for budgetary restraints, governmental actions, and economic inclusion is indicative of this. Furthermore, they do not account for testing readiness before fully migrating which may lead to hasty migrations. All these frameworks assumed that local schools and universities were prepared to provide the skills necessary to quickly incorporate individuals into Quality 4.0. As discussed in the introduction, where scholars like Alexander [29] and Maisiri et al. [7] critiqued the South African educational system, this isn't always the case in developing countries.

The models critiqued above omit addressing a lot of the challenges that are found in developing countries like South Africa, which makes them unsuitable for direct application. Technological developments should prioritize enhancing people's lives rather than just increasing competitiveness, and transitioning frameworks should not ignore the local socioeconomic and cultural settings of the nations in which they will be implemented. These models, though they have shortcomings, provide a foundation on which to build models for developing countries.

3 METHODOLOGY

The framework is built using a top-down approach, developed on an integration of People-Process-Technology and Fit-Viable theorems as seen on Figure 3. The People-Process-technology theory stipulates that a technology initiative needs to ensure that all the aspects of an organisation are catered for, including the people and the processes, not just the technology aspect [4], [16], [30]. The Fit-Viable theorem ensures that before the initiative is adopted by an organisation it is fit to resolve their unique issues, and that the organisation has the necessary resources to prepare for a smooth transition to the initiative [23]. An organisation should only transition or implement a new technology once all the factors are met.

Framework Development Process

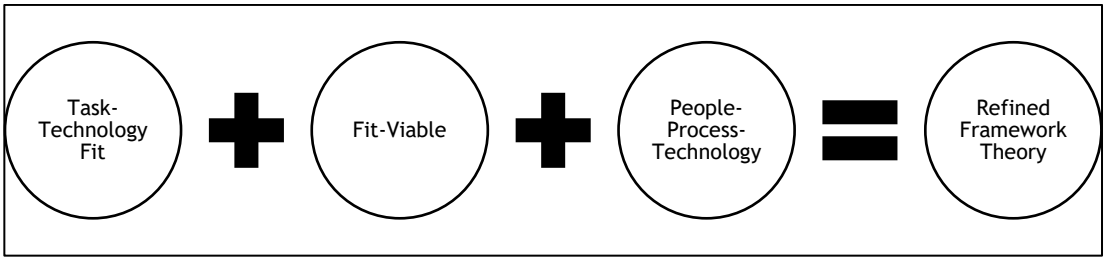

Figure 3 Refined framework theory

To gather the framework components, the study collects opinions from the employees in the manufacturing sector who are involved in quality management activities using an online survey tool.

a. Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was developed based on themes identified through thematic clustering, incorporating questions designed to assess readiness and maturity for new technologies. These questions were informed and refined by insights from experienced researchers in Quality 4.0 and Industry 4.0. For example, Antony et al. [31] and Dias et al. [15] proposed that adopting new technologies and ensuring that they can interface with legacy systems is critical to a smooth transition. Saihi et al. [32] proposed that top managers should embrace Quality 4.0 and provide resources to guarantee a successful transition. Sony et al. [33] and Watson [26] claimed that essential ingredients for Quality 4.0 include skilled and aware human resources, as well as a clear vision and scope, whereas Olaitan et al. [23] and Maisiri et al. [2] discovered that in developing countries, general infrastructure, local government support and data governance, and socioeconomic ills may impede successful adoption of new technologies.

Therefore, the survey had questions based on awareness, management support, infrastructure, technology, skills and resources, education and government support factors.

The main aim of the survey was to gather evidence regarding the status of quality 4.0 readiness in South African manufacturing organisations based on the latent readiness factors identified. From this survey, the challenges of these organisations in respect to Quality 4.0 readiness will be gathered in preparation for the transitioning framework, to ensure that the developed framework is evidence driven.

b. Population and Sampling

The questionnaire was sent to 8 personnel in the manufacturing sector who were known to the researchers as they are also involved in manufacturing and quality activities in different manufacturing clusters. These people were then asked to distribute the survey to their colleagues in the manufacturing sector who had knowledge of quality processes in manufacturing (Snowballing approach) so it can reach a wider audience. Moreover, the snowballing approach can foster a sense of confidentiality and trust, as individuals are more likely to share information with someone in their social circles [34], [35]. The survey ended up with 44 respondents.

Although the survey was anonymous, participants had to meet this criterion:

a) Work for the manufacturing sector.

b) Have knowledge of quality management regimes and industry 4.0.

c) Be willing to participate in the study.

d) Be involved in quality management planning and/or research activities.

c. Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was sent electronically via Microsoft Forms, with clear instructions on how to complete it. The survey questions followed a 5-point Likert scale (1 indicating 'extremely poorly prepared' and 5 indicating 'extremely well prepared') and data collected from the survey was analysed quantitatively using mode to aggregate each item in the themes on Excel packages. This study chose this as the mode is not influenced by extremely high values. Outliers can greatly distort the mean, and the standard deviation is sensitive to them and may give them greater weight, as well as assuming a normal distribution, which may not always be the case in real-world data [36]. The framework was then developed based to combat the weaknesses identified in the survey and ensure a smooth and sustainable transition to Quality 4.0.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The section below presents the study findings in preparation to developing the transitioning framework for Quality 4.0.

4.1. Survey Results

This section presents the survey findings. The survey received a total of 44 participants. It is crucial to ascertain the items' Cronbach's alpha before analysing the questionnaire results to guarantee internal consistency [4]. The computed Cronbach's alpha for the survey in the current study was 0.83, demonstrating excellent correlation and enabling further analysis of the gathered data.

4.1.1. Demographics

Figure 4 shows the level of education of the respondents. This item was to test if the respondents had some formal training and thus were fit to participate in the study and perform their duties.

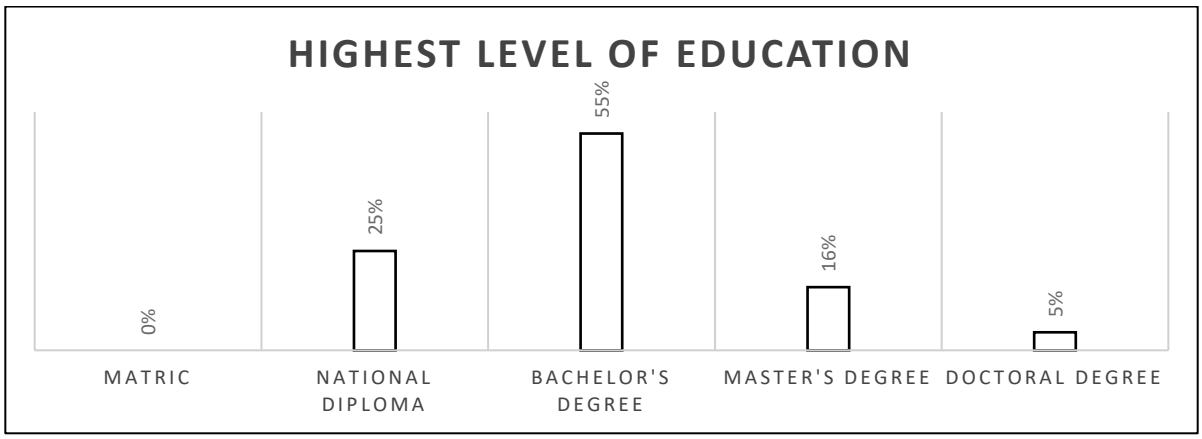

Figure 4 Level of Education

Majority (55%) respondents indicated that they had a bachelor's degree. The next highest number of respondents (25%) had a National Diploma. 16% of the respondents had a master's degree and only 5% hold a Doctoral degree.

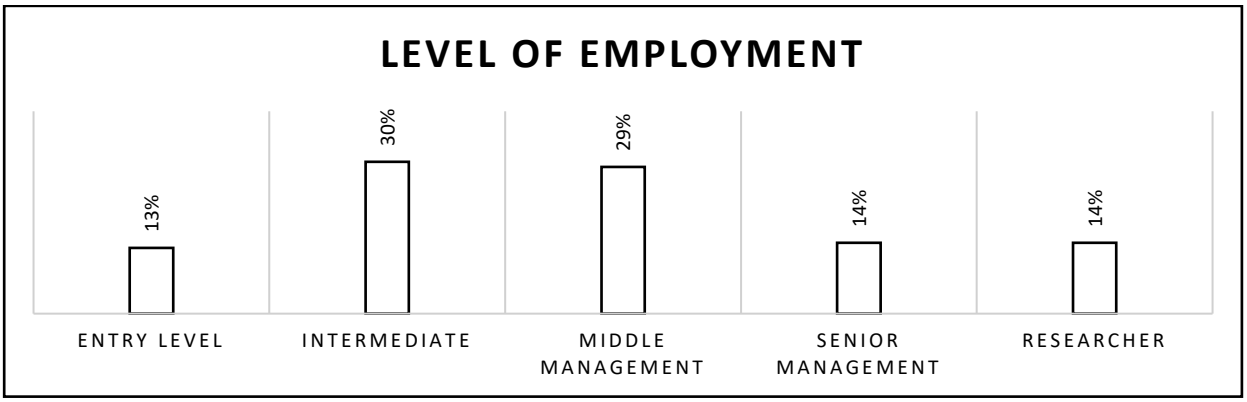

Figure 5 Level of employment

Figure 5 shows the level of employment of the respondents. The figure shows that majority of respondents (30%) were in intermediate positions, followed closely by 29% being in middle management positions. Respondents in senior positions and those in research each accounted for 14% of the respondents, while only 13% of the respondents were in entry level positions.

4.1.2. South African manufacturing readiness for Quality 4.0

The survey analysed the preparedness perception according to industry expects to draw a conclusion on challenges, strengths and weakness of the South African Manufacturing sector leading to Quality 4.0.

Figure 6 presents the aggregate results of current Quality 4.0 readiness in manufacturing sectors in South Africa. This aggregated histogram is skewed to the 'poorly prepared' measure for themes such as the technology adoption, the availability of a clear quality 4.0 vision and strategy, reliable infrastructure, adequate skills and quality 4.0 awareness, collaboration between industry bodies, firms, and institutions of higher learning, change management processes and government support.

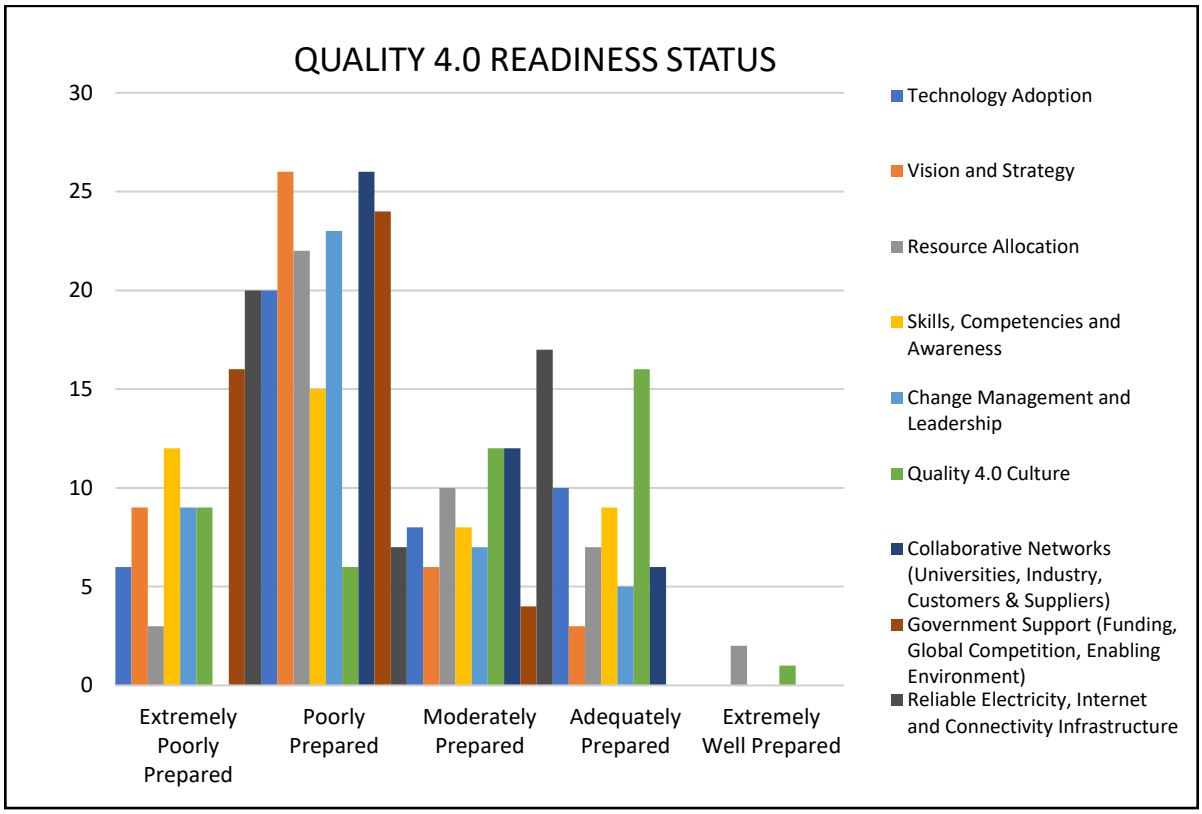

Figure 6 Overall Readiness Status

The findings reveal that while the South African industry possesses certain strengths, it is predominantly affected by several systemic challenges and weaknesses. These barriers highlight the urgent need for a robust, context-specific framework to facilitate a responsible and seamless transition to Quality 4.0. As illustrated in the Pareto diagram on Figure 7, the most significant obstacles to readiness for Quality 4.0 adoption include inadequate technology integration, unreliable electricity and connectivity infrastructure, education and skills mismatches, lack of government support, absence of a clear Quality 4.0 vision and strategy, and constrained financial resources.

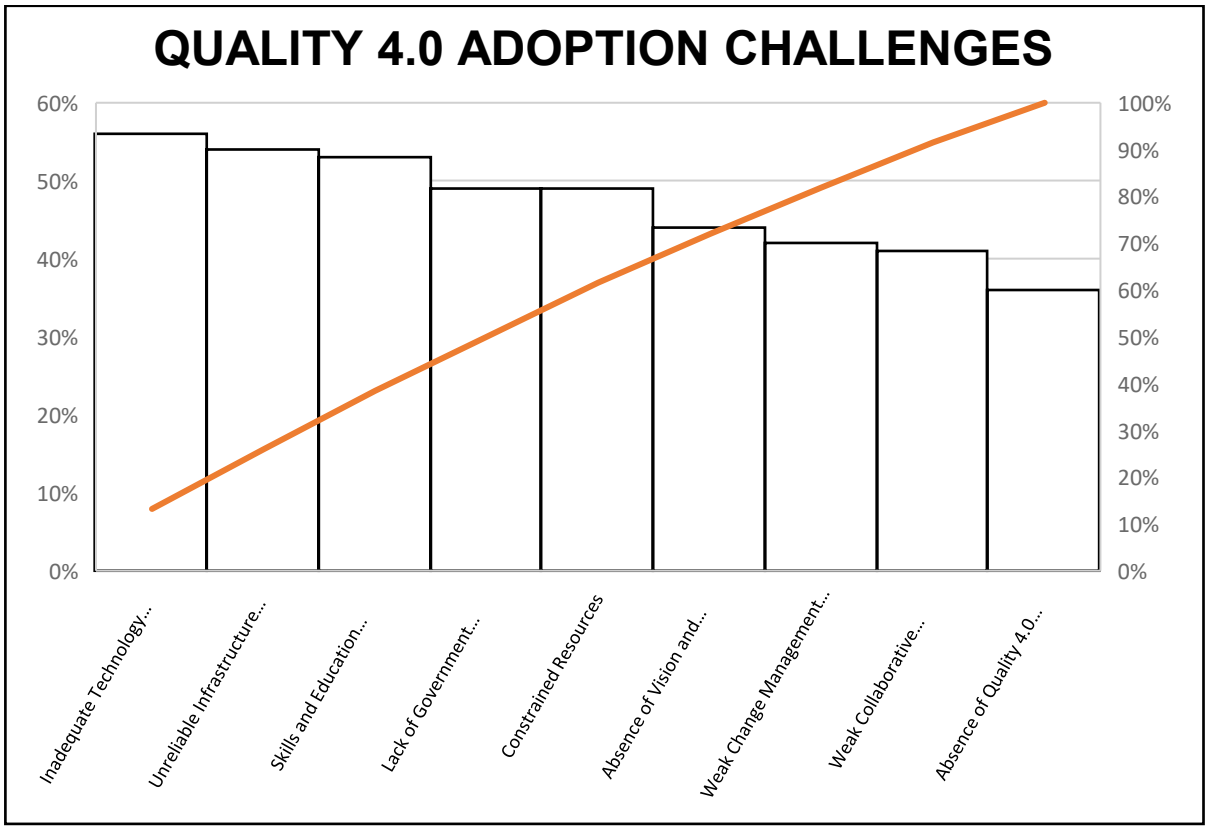

Figure 7 Adoption Challenges

These findings are consistent with literature. For instance, a study by Maisiri et al. [2] emphasised that mismatches in local education and skills required by the industry represent a critical barrier to technological adoption and must be addressed to enable effective transition. Similarly, Alexander [29] and Olaitan et al. [23] identify crime-induced loadshedding as a significant impediment to Industry 4.0 implementation in the country.

The current study reinforces these claims, revealing how energy insecurity and social instability affect organisational readiness. The role of crime and weak local government support was also evident in the study, aligning with findings by Maisiri et al. [2] and Alexander [29], who warned that poor infrastructure and the lack of protective policy frameworks render firms vulnerable to global competition and environmental instability. Compared to other nations, South Africa appears to lack the necessary policy structures and incentives that support sustainable technology adoption—an issue highlighted by Serumaga-Zake et al.[37], who found that countries with such support systems have experienced more successful digital transitions and economic growth. Ropes and Gray [38] also identified operational inefficiencies in South African ports (critical infrastructure) as a critical issue that causes supply chain delays, hindering the timely adoption of modern technologies.

Furthermore, resistance to technology adoption, as reported in this study, supports observations by Maharaj [5] and Maisiri et al. [2], who found that both employees and broader communities often lack understanding of technological initiatives and fear job losses due to automation. This contributes to widespread resistance. Ropes and Gray [38] further noted that misinformation and lack of awareness frequently fuel community-led civil unrest, which in turn disrupts the progress of technology-driven projects.

Additionally, to corroborate findings about resource constraints, a study by Mhlongo and Nyembwe [11] indicated that many firms in South Africa continue to experience financial

constraints—an issue compounded by the economic aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing recession.

These results strengthen the justification for this research that a transitioning framework tailored to South African specific challenges is required, as generic framework will not address certain challenges that are peculiar to developing countries. This will ensure a successful implementation and the full benefits of Quality 4.0 for South African manufacturing sectors.

4.2. Quality 4.0 transitioning framework

To address the challenges revealed by the survey results and ensure that manufacturing firms are ready to reap the rewards of Quality 4.0, the transitioning framework is developed and presented in Figure 8. The developed framework for Quality 4.0 adopts a top-down approach, integrating three key models: Technology-Task-Fit, Viability, and People-Process-Technology. These theorems form the basis for an 11-step process designed to guide organisations through the transition to Quality 4.0.

The People-Process-Technology theorem underscores the importance of having factors related to people, processes, and technology ready for transition. Technology-Task-Fit emphasises that the new technology must align with anticipated tasks, ensuring a seamless adoption process. Viability focuses on organisational capabilities, including technology, infrastructure, and financial indicators, to determine if the organisation is ready for the transition.

The research that informed the framework identified Industry 4.0 features such as big data and analytics, cyber-physical systems, additive manufacturing, and the Internet of Things as driving technologies for Quality 4.0. These technologies form the core of the framework's Technology associated with Quality 4.0.

The impact of Industry 4.0 on quality management was identified as rapid process adjustments, reduced downtime, advanced maintenance prognostication, and enhanced connectivity between shop floors, business units, and customers, and a growing economy. These factors form the core Tasks associated with Quality 4.0.

Essential ingredients for preparing to adopt Quality 4.0 were identified, including top management support, infrastructure availability, quality 4.0 leadership, and workforce development. Testing against South African firms revealed room for improvement, with challenges such as unreliable infrastructure, unskilled personnel, lack of government support, socio economic ills and a lack of awareness hindering progress. These challenges were integrated into the framework under building capabilities.

During this stage, South African organisations must address local, social, and cultural concerns that may impede successful Quality 4.0 implementation. Collaboration among industry experts, policymakers, the government, and institutions of higher learning is critical at this point. This ensures that everyone understands their part in making the transition a success. The government and policymakers can also help organisations adopt Quality 4.0 with the goal of boosting the economy by providing incentives or tax breaks as they transition to Quality 4.0, protecting them from global competition, and putting in place structures to combat crime and strengthen national ports to support supply chains.

Higher education institutions must re-engineer education solutions to align with industrial skills requirements. During this stage, organisations must identify the steps of their processes where Quality 4.0 will be most effective and allocate resources accordingly. Organisations must hire, train, and reskill their human resources to be Quality 4.0 ready. This includes involving and elevating community members to ensure they benefit from the transition and promote technological adoption. This not only creates job prospects but also ensures sustainable and socially responsible technology adoption.

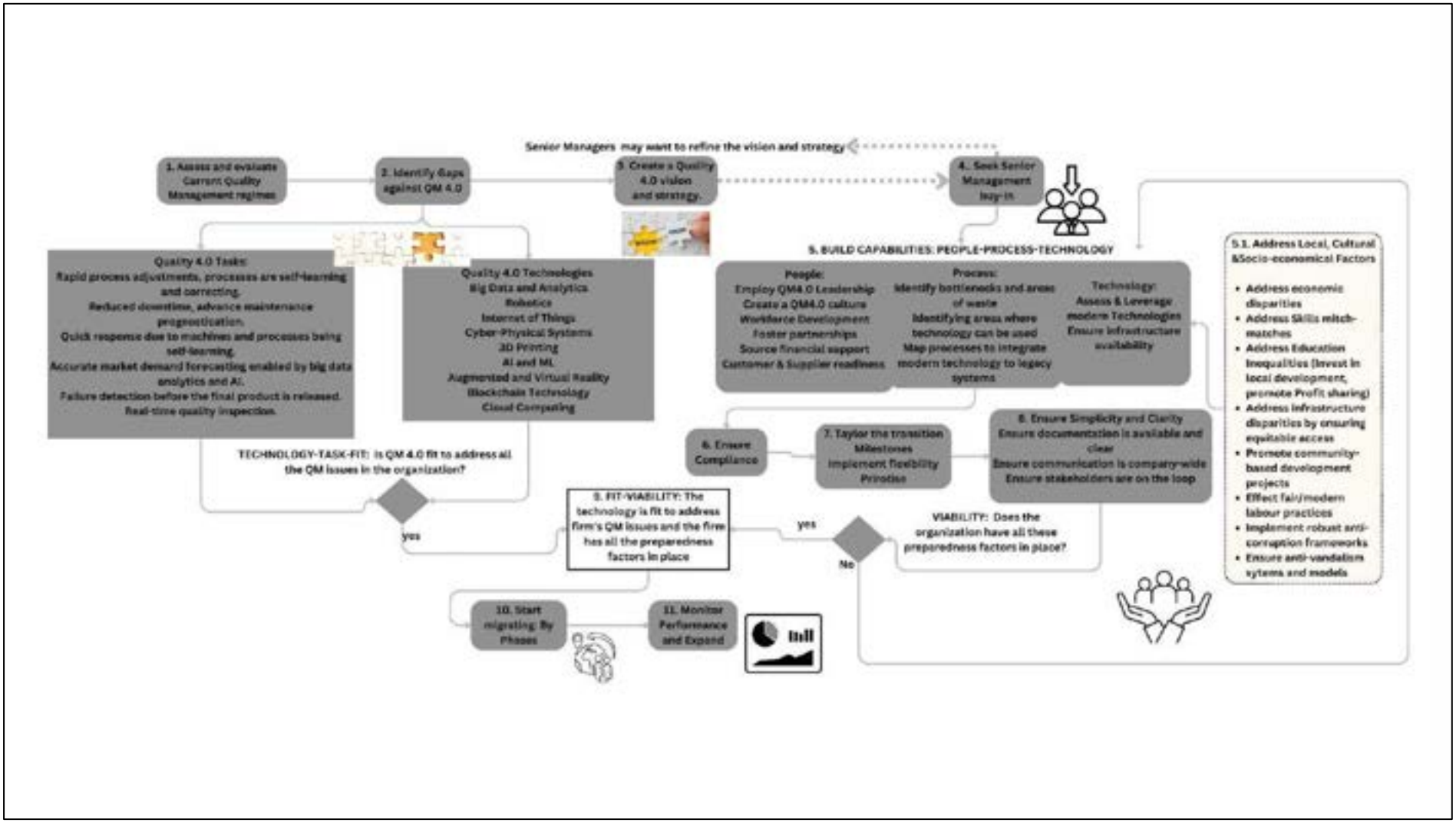

Figure 8 Final Transitioning Framework.

Table 1 provides a summary of the drawbacks of existing frameworks, as stated in section 2.2.1, and how the created framework addresses them. This represents that the framework has bridged the literature gap by building a context-specific Quality 4.0 framework that addresses transitional challenges unique to a developing country like South Africa.

Table 1 Summary of limitations addressed by developed framework

Existing Frameworks	General limitations of existing frameworks	Remedial actions by the developed framework
Sader et al. [19] and Fonseca et al. [39]	These frameworks offer building blocks and benefits of Quality 4.0 but do not offer implementation/migration steps.	The developed framework addressed the limitation by providing 11 transitioning steps that expressly support organisations as they transition to Quality 4.0, ensuring that they do not make rapid migrations.
Jacob [20]	This framework offers capability building blocks but not steps to transition or to test readiness before implementation/migration. Even in capability building, the framework does not cater for issues peculiar to developing economies with social ills that impede technology adoption.	The developed framework caters for socio-economic issues and economic constraints seen in developing countries such as South Africa. Step 5.1 guarantees that capability building is fair and inclusive, ensuring that Quality 4.0 initiatives do not benefit a select few while displacing the majority of the workforce.
Maganga et al. [16]	This model offers steps for building capabilities but does not offer steps to test readiness and assumes capability building in a perfect or developed economy. It does not have measures in place to tackle issues unique to the South African operating context.	In the developed framework, step 9 tests for fit and viability. This step ensures that organisations have assessed the need for Quality 4.0 in their processes and have built the capacity to transition successfully looking at the people, process and plant aspects.
Armani et al. [24], Olaitan et al. [23] and Zulqarnain et al. [25]	These frameworks focus solely on assessing maturity when implementing Quality 4.0, they do not prepare organisations that have not started transitioning nor do they offer steps to deal with organisations in developing countries with social ills that tend to disturb successful adoption of technologies.	This framework was developed with the understanding that many organisations in South Africa do not have the capacity to adopt current technology, as driven by the data in Figures 6 and 7. As a result, before fully transitioning, they must take extra precautions to ensure that they understand the required ingredients, how to prepare them, and how to assess their own preparedness.
Carvalho et al. [14]	This model offers steps for building capabilities but does not offer steps to test readiness and assumes capability building in a perfect economy. It does not have measures in place to tackle issues unique to the South African operating context.	Step 5.1 of the developed framework provides context-specific recommendations, ensuring that capacity building promotes inclusivity and equality. Furthermore, step 9 tests for fit and viability addressing the limitations of the frameworks cited.
Gonzalez Santacruz et al. [28]	This model offers steps for building capabilities but does not offer steps to test readiness and assumes capability building in a perfect economy where adopting advanced technologies is a norm. This model also does not have measures in place to tackle issues unique to the South African operating context.	Step 5.1 of the developed framework provides recommendations on context-specific elements to consider when building capacity in a developing country. Step 9 guarantees that organisations are prepared based on critical readiness aspects to ensure that the transition is smooth and required.

During the framework development process, continuous feedback was solicited from industry experts to ensure its relevance and applicability within the South African context. This

feedback, obtained through a consensus-based approach, informed iterative refinements to the framework until its finalisation. The panel of experts affirmed that the framework was both appropriate and reliable for the current South African manufacturing environment and expressed confidence that it would gain acceptance among industry bodies and deliver the intended benefits for which it was designed.

5 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to develop a framework facilitating the smooth transition of South African manufacturing firms to Quality 4.0 by addressing local technology adoption challenges. The research identified key prerequisites for readiness, including a Quality 4.0 culture, technology integration, skills and competencies, government support, resource allocation, and top management support from research previously conducted by quality and Industry 4.0 researchers. The study revealed that the South African manufacturing industry lacks preparedness for Quality 4.0, motivating the framework's creation. The study used a Pareto analysis to identify challenges hampering a smooth transition to Quality 4.0 and found the top 80% to be: unreliable infrastructure, inadequate technology integration, lack of government support, inadequate education and skills mismatches, constrained financial resources, absence of government support and absence of a clear Quality 4.0 vision and strategy.

This validated the motivation for a transitioning framework tailored for the South African setting. The proposed transitioning framework addresses the challenges and provides a strategic plan, fostering continuous improvement in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This research's strength is in advocating the implementation of measures to address challenges faced by South Africa, a developing country with unique government structures and policies, socioeconomic challenges and major economic constraints, which existing Quality 4.0 models do not; so that this initiative does not worsen our current economic issues. Applying this framework in the manufacturing sector will enhance competitiveness against international rivals and aligns with national strategies ensuring that the sector's growth combats poverty, unemployment, and inequality.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study aimed to assess the preparedness for Quality 4.0 adoption in South Africa, focusing on awareness, financial resources, skills, managerial support, technology, infrastructure, and socio-economic aspects. This was done with the intention of using the findings to develop a transitional framework customized to these challenges and ensuring that South African organisations effectively transition to Quality 4.0 in a sustainable and socially responsible manner.

This study emphasised that, unlike in developed countries, adopting Quality 4.0 in South Africa is important not only for competitiveness, but also for inclusive economic growth, and that any framework for Quality 4.0 in SA must include measures to promote education and awareness, equality, inclusive employment, and poverty alleviation.

As the quest for sustainable technology adoption continues, this study contributes to the body of knowledge. Future work could include integrating the framework in South African organisations and increasing its application globally to promote economic growth and sector sustainability. Furthermore, future research could also focus on cost-benefit analyses for Quality 4.0 in developing countries.

Lastly, the study utilised the snowballing sampling approach, which, while recognized to have advantages such as reaching a larger audience because people are often open and secure in sharing their expertise and information with someone in their social networks, also has disadvantages due to potential biases. The authors then recommend that future research should look into larger sampling techniques to improve and validate the findings of this study.

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APPENDIX

Table 2 List of Questions

Theme	Item ID	5-Point Likert Scale Questions
Technology	Item 1	To what extent does the organisation's current technological infrastructure support the implementation of Quality 4.0?
	Item 2	How well-integrated are the existing software and hardware systems to support Quality 4.0 practices?
	Item 3	How prepared is the organisation to invest in upgrading the technological infrastructure to align with Quality 4.0 requirements?
Vision and Strategy	Item 4	How articulated is the organisation's digital transformation strategy that includes quality management?
	Item 5	Are the goals and objectives of the organisation's digital transformation strategy related to quality management?
	Item 6	To what extent does the strategy align with industry best practices and emerging trends in Quality 4.0?
	Item 7	How well-communicated is the strategy to employees and stakeholders?

Resource Allocation	Item 8	To what extent has the organisation allocated financial resources for implementing Quality 4.0 initiatives?
	Item 9	How well does the organisation prioritize and allocate resources for employee training and development in the context of Quality 4.0?
	Item 10	How proactive is the organisation in seeking external funding or grants to support the implementation of Quality 4.0 initiatives?
	Item 11	How are employees of the key concepts and benefits of Quality 4.0?
Skills and Competencies	Item 12	To what extent does the organisation provide training programs or initiatives to develop digital skills and competencies required for Quality 4.0?
	Item 13	How open are employees to embracing new technologies and learning new skills related to Quality 4.0?
	Item 14	How fair and inclusive are the recruitment processes in your organisation?
Change Management and Leadership	Item 15	To what extent does the organisation have effective change management processes and strong leadership support for the transition to Quality 4.0?
	Item 16	To what extent are employees involved and engaged in the decision-making and implementation processes related to Quality 4.0?
	Item 17	How well does the organisation support employees in adapting to and embracing changes associated with Quality 4.0?
Data Governance and Security	Item 18	How well-prepared is the organisation to handle data governance and security concerns associated with Quality 4.0?
	Item 19	How well-defined are the data governance policies and protocols in place to ensure data integrity, privacy, and security within the organisation?
	Item 20	To what extent does the organisation have mechanisms to identify and address potential cybersecurity risks related to Quality 4.0?
	Item 21	How prepared is the organisation to comply with relevant data protection regulations and standards in the context of Quality 4.0?
Collaborative Networks	Item 22	To what extent does the organisation engage in collaborations and partnerships with industry associations, research institutions, or government bodies to support the implementation?
	Item 23	How actively does the organisation participate in industry associations or networks that promote knowledge sharing and best practices related to Quality 4.0?
	Item 24	How well does the industry collaborate with institutions of higher learning to help re-engineer the curriculum to meet industry requirements?
Government Support	Item 25	To what extent does the government ensure an enabling environment for organisations?
	Item 26	How would you describe the government's effort to protect organisations from global competition?
	Item 27	How well does the government support technological initiatives and their efforts to alleviate the triple threat in South Africa?
Connectivity Infrastructure (Reliable Electricity & Internet)	Item 28	Do you have reliable and high-speed internet connectivity?
	Item 29	Is the infrastructure capable of supporting the integration of digital technologies and data analytics for quality management?
	Item 30	Do you have reliable electricity supply?

PREFERRED TECHNIQUES FOR NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Organisations must prioritise innovation to meet evolving customer needs and remain competitive. Successful new product development (NPD) relies on effective NPD techniques to drive innovation. This study explores various NPD techniques and identifies the most favoured ones in the NPD process within an information technology department. Using a qualitative approach, the research collects and analyses non-numerical data through questionnaires. Findings show that techniques like Focus Groups, Concept Testing, and Limited Roll-Out (LRO) are widely used across multiple stages, while Morphological Analysis and Synectics are the least used. The most favoured techniques include Concept Testing, Brainstorming, LRO, and Focus Groups, while Metaphorical Analysis and Synectics are the least favoured. The study highlights a subtle link between usage and preference, which could overlook the value or purpose of NPD techniques. The study offers valuable insights for organisations to refine their NPD strategies.

Keywords: New product development; NPD; Information technology

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1 INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The evolving expectations of new-age customers within South Africa's financial services sector, driven by global exposure, social media, and changing mindsets, have led to a growing emphasis on Corporate Entrepreneurship (CE) to drive innovation, business growth, and the development of new products and services. CE is seen as a remedy for organisational stagnation and lack of innovation, fostering transformation and strategic renewal within large companies [1]. New Product Development (NPD) plays a central role in this process, improving customer value and enhancing competitive advantage.

As organisations increasingly recognise the limitations of traditional NPD approaches, they rely on effective NPD techniques to maintain their competitive edge [2]. Consequently, successful NPD has become a crucial competency for businesses aiming to remain relevant in today's marketplace. Implementing effective NPD techniques is essential for improving NPD outcomes, facilitating better decision-making, fostering collaboration, and ensuring a clearer understanding of requirements at various stages of the NPD process, all of which contribute to higher success rates [3].

This study aims to investigate the use of NPD techniques throughout each step of the NPD process and identify the most favoured NPD techniques. The insights gained from this research will provide a vital foundation for businesses seeking to benchmark the use of NPD techniques within their IT departments and develop strategies to enhance outcomes from the NPD process.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

NPD is a pivotal process in modern business strategy, critical for organisations striving to maintain competitiveness in dynamic markets [4]. The NPD process, along with the various techniques employed, serves as the foundation for this study. Consequently, the NPD process and the range of NPD techniques will be unpacked in detail.

2.1 NPD Process

In 2024, the NPD process is still evolving in response to technological breakthroughs, changes in customer behaviour, and adjustments in market dynamics [3]. The NPD process comprises several stages and gates used to create, improve, and introduce new products into the market. A stage is a phase in which the product is matured, while a gate is a checkpoint at which the product's readiness is assessed [5]. The decision taken at the gate either sends the product back to the existing stage for further improvement or provides the go-ahead to proceed to the next stage of the process. The steps in the NPD process below (Figure 1) were presented by [6] and used in a similar study conducted by [7].

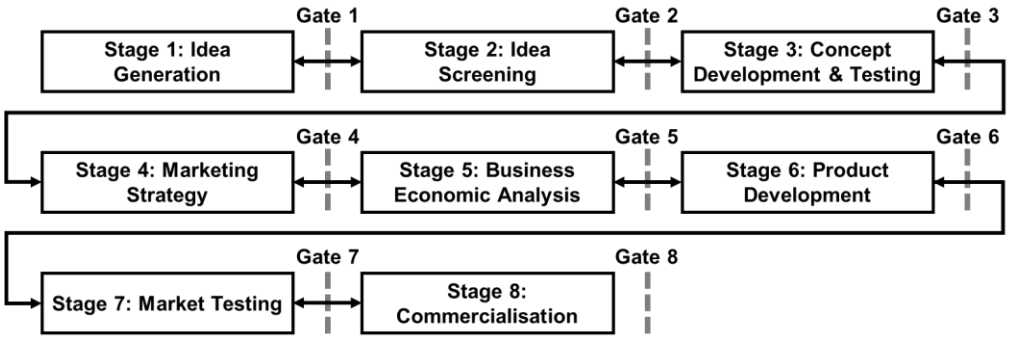

Figure 1: NPD process by [6], [8]

The NPD process outlined above comprises several stages and gates, each crucial for the successful development of new products. A high-level overview of the stages is discussed below:

1. Idea Generation: The stage involves the creation of new ideas for products or services to meet the organisation's strategic objectives [9].
2. Idea Screening: The stage involves assessing the ideas generated and filtering them based on key priorities to identify the ones with the highest levels of product development success [10].
3. Concept Development and Testing: The stage involves unpacking the selected idea by identifying customer needs and translating this into technical terms, which feed into the concept development [11].
4. Marketing Strategy: This stage involves identifying the target market, product positioning, and creating clear communication for going to market [12].
5. Business Economic Analysis: This stage involves the analysis of the financial feasibility of the new product or service [13].
6. Product Development: This stage involves the creation of the product that ensures the customer requirements are met, perceived technical superiority is achieved, development is within budget, and launch timelines are on track [14].
7. Market Testing: This stage involves analysing market information and testing a new product or service in a real-world setting [15].
8. Commercialisation: This stage involves launching the new product to market as per a commercialisation strategy to generate sales [16].

2.2 NPD Techniques

NPD techniques are employed within each stage to achieve efficient and effective outcomes across the NPD process. The NPD techniques discussed in this study were selected for a similar survey conducted by [8].

A high-level overview of the eleven NPD techniques is discussed below:

- Brainstorming: The technique fosters collective creativity by encouraging team members to share diverse ideas, regardless of their expertise [17]. This inclusive approach enhances the likelihood of generating innovative solutions, leading to products and services that better meet evolving customer needs.
- Concept Testing: The technique assesses the viability of a new idea by presenting it to potential customers for feedback [5]. This process helps refine the concept and significantly increases the likelihood of a successful product launch while minimising the risk of failure.
- Conjoint Analysis: The technique is widely used in marketing and social sciences, and helps researchers understand consumer preferences by presenting them with product profiles consisting of different attribute combinations. By analysing respondents' rankings or ratings of these profiles, researchers can estimate the relative importance of each attribute [18], making it an essential tool for effective market research.
- Delphi Method: The technique collects and analyses expert opinions through anonymous questionnaires or surveys. This iterative process continues until a consensus is reached among participants [19].
- Focus Group: This technique involves gathering a small, targeted group of individuals to discuss and provide feedback on specific topics, offering valuable qualitative data [20].

Its key advantage lies in encouraging active engagement and participation among group members.

- In-home Use Test (IHUT): The technique assesses consumer products in their natural home environment, enhancing the validity of product evaluations by observing real-world usage [21]. This technique is particularly effective for products like household appliances and personal care items, as it offers insights into product performance and consumer satisfaction in a realistic setting.
- Limited Roll Out (LRO): The technique involves introducing a new product or service to a select group of customers or markets before a full-scale launch, helping to reduce risks and improve chances of success [7]. By gathering feedback from early adopters in a controlled environment, businesses can identify opportunities for refinement before expanding to a broader audience.
- Morphological Analysis: The technique involves breaking a problem into its parts and analysing different combinations to generate innovative solutions [4]. This technique enables the exploration of diverse solution options by combining problem dimensions in ways that might not have been previously considered [22].
- Product Life Cycle (PLC): The technique outlines a product's various stages from its market introduction to its decline and eventual discontinuation. This concept illustrates the S-shaped curve representing sales over time, offering valuable insights into product evolution and informing decisions regarding modifying existing products or developing new ones [7].
- Quality Function Deployment (QFD): The technique is a structured methodology for designing and developing new products by translating customer requirements into technical specifications [23]. This process involves creating a matrix that connects customer needs to engineering characteristics, facilitating a customer-centric approach throughout product development.
- Synectics: The technique leverages the combination of seemingly unrelated elements through analogy, metaphor, and fantasy to inspire innovative ideas [24]. By applying this approach in the NPD process, organisations can enhance problem-solving capabilities, improve decision-making, and foster greater creativity, ultimately developing innovative and feasible products and solutions.

The review of NPD techniques highlights key methods that enhance creativity, align products with customer needs, and support informed decision-making. These techniques are fundamental to achieving the desired outcomes from each stage of the NPD process and reducing the risk of product failure. This literature provides a solid foundation of the techniques included in the study, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their application. Additionally, it offers valuable context for conceptualising the use of the most favoured NPD techniques.

3 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The conceptual model proposed for this study is designed to realise the use of NPD techniques throughout the NPD process and identify the most favoured NPD techniques within the department.

NPD process encompasses activities aimed at identifying opportunities, generating ideas, assessing market feasibility, designing, testing, and launching new products or services. It is essential to acknowledge that different techniques are employed in each step of the NPD process, starting from idea generation to commercialisation.

[25] highlighted that the effective utilisation of NPD techniques contributes significantly towards the efficiency and effectiveness of the NPD process, resulting in improved innovation

performance and competitive advantage. The eleven selected NPD techniques serve a distinct purpose at the various stages of the NPD process.

This study identifies the NPD techniques employed at each stage of the NPD process. Additionally, it aims to determine which techniques participants most favour. A questionnaire, distributed as an Excel document, is sent to all participants to gather these insights. The overarching framework for this study is depicted in Figure 2 below.

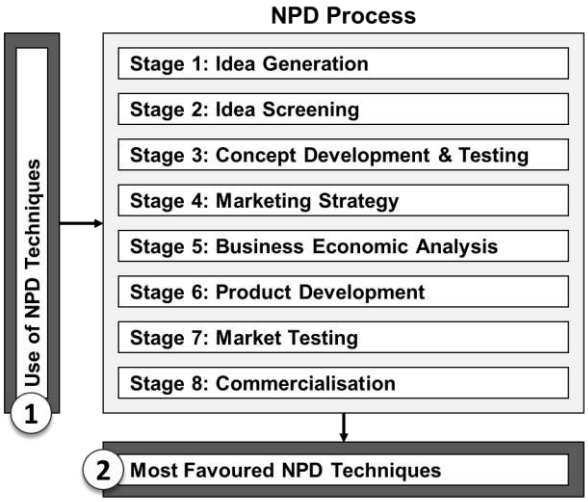

Figure 2: High-level framework (authors' compilation)

The high-level framework in Figure 3.1 illustrates the relationship between the NPD process, the use of various NPD techniques, and the most favoured techniques.

This study uses an efficient NPD model aligned with established literature and field domain investigation, but the process could be non-linear in practice. Modern NPD frameworks often include feedback loops between stages, allowing teams to revise earlier steps when it is necessary, for example market tests, cost analyses, or technical evaluations. Thus, Agile methods nowadays are commonly used in IT, addressing short iterative cycles, rapid prototyping, and continuous customer feedback. Many organizations now use hybrid frameworks, combining waterfall milestone control, and the Agile Manifesto. Incorporating these elements (loops, feedback, agile) into the traditional model improves adaptability and flexibility.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based on an empirical study that follows a qualitative approach. The process leverages the use of research instruments such as questionnaires, resulting in the collection of non-numerical data. The data is interpreted and reasoned to gain a clear understanding of the use of NPD techniques as well as the most favoured NPD techniques. Of all the methods available to gather data, questionnaires will assist the most in reaching more participants across the organisation.

4.1 Sample Setting

A sample is a subset of specific individuals or groups from a large population [26]. The sample size has been chosen based on the scope of the study and the depth required for meaningful analysis.

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, organisations must innovate using artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things to remain competitive [27]. Hence, an IT

department catalyses innovation and improvement, making it critical to improve the outcomes of the NPD process continuously.

Therefore, participants selected for this research are part of an IT department within a large insurance company based in South Africa, leading innovation, and new product (software) development. This includes lower management, middle management, senior management, and executives.

4.2 Data Collection & Analysis

A questionnaire was prepared to conduct the research. Questionnaires are structured to facilitate the collection of information about people's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour [28]. The questionnaire was sent to the participants via email, and they were followed up with calls as required. A total of 41 participants were contacted, of whom 27 responded, resulting in a response rate of 66%. The engagement after analysing responses from the twenty participants revealed new themes infrequently and progressively [29].

The questionnaire responses are compiled into an Excel document, providing a comprehensive view of all the collected data. Rigorous analysis is applied to both data sets, leading to the discovery of meaningful insights and conclusions that enhance the research. Where applicable, data is visualised through graphs presented in the paper.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis centres on two key areas: the use of NPD techniques and the most favoured NPD techniques. These focus areas are essential for comprehending the study's results and are visually depicted in Figure 3 below.

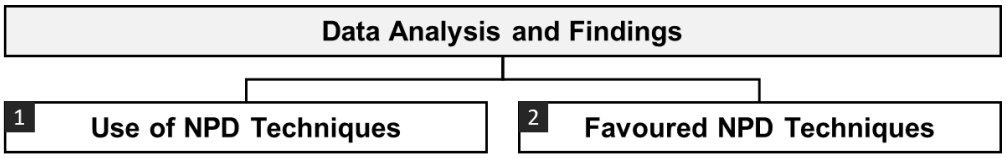

Figure 3: Focus areas (authors' compilation)

The following sections delves into these areas in detail, providing a comprehensive view of the insights gathered and the outcomes from the analysis.

5.1 Use of NPD Techniques

The research indicates a clear hierarchy in the utilisation of NPD techniques. The data reveals that the four most frequently employed NPD techniques account for 53% of the total usage. These predominant techniques include Focus Group, Concept Testing, LRO, and PLC. Figure 4 below depicts the use of NPD techniques.

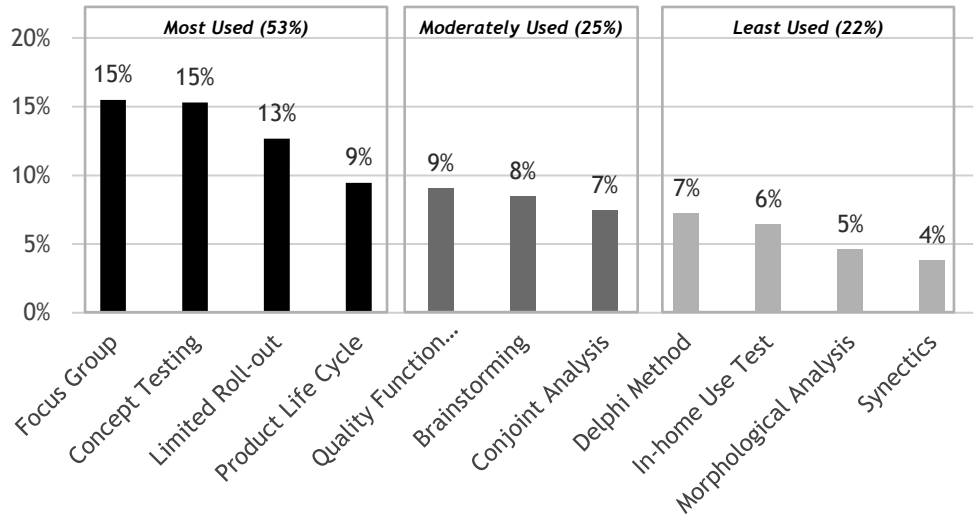

Figure 4: Total Use of NPD Techniques

In contrast, the next tier of techniques, categorised as moderately used, comprises 25% of the total usage. This category includes QFD, Brainstorming, and Conjoint Analysis. While not as widely used as the top four, these techniques still hold significant value in the NPD process, particularly in refining product features and aligning them with customer needs.

The least used techniques, making up 22% of the total, are the Delphi Method, IHUT, Morphological Analysis, and Synectics. This distribution of NPD technique usage highlights the varying levels of preference and perceived effectiveness among different techniques. Table 1 illustrates the use of various techniques across the different stages of the NPD process.

Table 1: NPD techniques used across the NPD process

NPD Technique	Idea Generation	Idea Screening	Concept Dev. and Testing	Marketing Strategy	Business Econ. Analysis	Product Development	Market Testing	Commerc-ialisation
Brainstorming	38%	4%	3%	11%	5%	2%	0%	2%
Concept Testing	12%	31%	25%	12%	9%	8%	14%	8%
Conjoint Analysis	3%	10%	4%	23%	13%	0%	3%	6%
Delphi Method	4%	15%	4%	11%	14%	2%	5%	4%
Focus Group	19%	25%	12%	19%	9%	14%	19%	4%
IHUT	0%	3%	12%	2%	4%	11%	14%	6%
LRO	1%	3%	18%	7%	14%	17%	29%	14%
Morphological Analysis	10%	4%	1%	0%	7%	5%	2%	8%
PLC	1%	3%	7%	5%	11%	17%	8%	28%
QFD	0%	1%	10%	2%	13%	26%	6%	16%
Synectics	12%	0%	3%	9%	2%	2%	0%	4%

The data presented in the table above has been utilised to create a graph (Figure 5), facilitating a straightforward analysis of the use of NPD techniques throughout the NPD process.

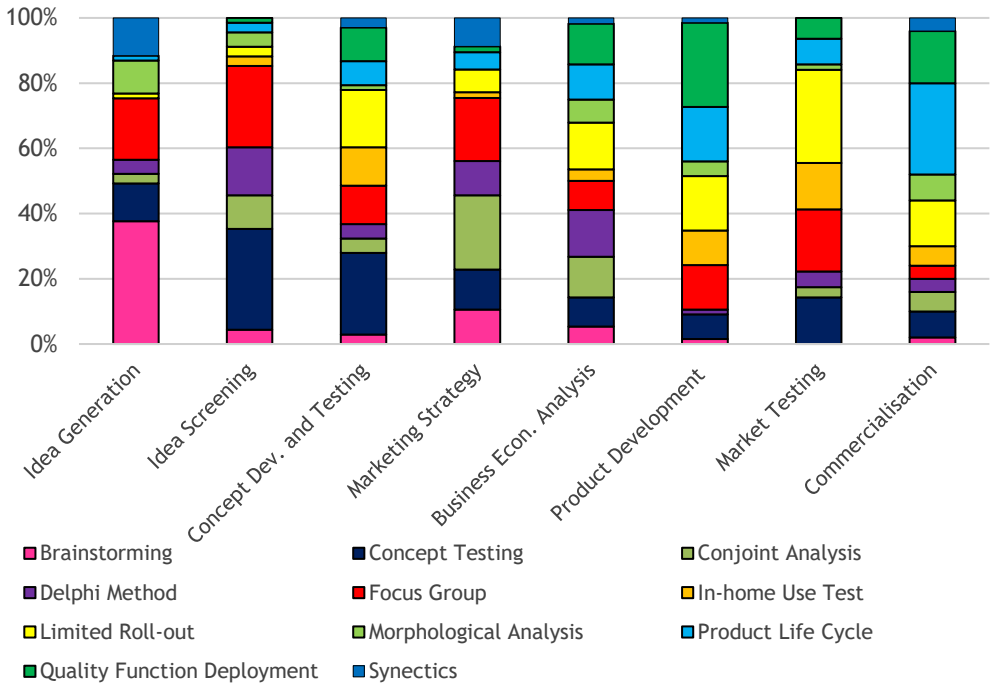

Figure 5: Visual representation of NPD techniques used in the NPD process

Each technique's usage is expressed as a percentage in Table 1 and Figure 5, indicating its relative importance or frequency at each stage. An in-depth analysis based on the data gathered is provided below.

- Brainstorming: The technique is mainly used in the Idea Generation stage, making up 38% of its application, which shows its importance for initial idea creation. However, its usage drops to only 8% later, indicating it is less relevant as the NPD process progresses.
- Concept Testing: The technique is mainly used in the Idea Screening (31%) and Concept Development and Testing (25%) stages, highlighting its role in idea evaluation. It also has moderate usage in the Marketing Strategy (12%) and Market Testing (14%), making it the second most used technique in the NPD process at 15%.
- Conjoint Analysis: The technique is mainly used in the Marketing Strategy stage (23%) to understand consumer preferences and optimise product features. It also has moderate application in Business Economic Analysis (13%) and a total usage of 7% across other stages, indicating its effectiveness in specific phases of the NPD process.
- Delphi Method: The technique is moderately used in Idea Screening (15%) and Business Economic Analysis (14%), demonstrating its value in gathering expert opinions and achieving consensus. However, its overall usage of 7% suggests it may not be as widely applicable or recognised as other techniques.
- Focus Group: The technique is heavily used in Idea Generation (19%), Idea Screening (25%), Marketing Strategy (19%), and Market Testing (19%), with key roles in Concept Development (12%) and Product Development (14%). Overall, at 15% total usage, this is the department's most widely used technique.

- IHUT: The technique is mainly used in Concept Development and Testing (12%) and Market Testing (14%) for real-world customer feedback. Its moderate use in Product Development (11%) underscores its value, though with a total usage of 6%, it is less common across other NPD stages.
- LRO: The technique is mainly used in Market Testing (29%) and Concept Development (18%) for small-scale performance checks. It also plays a role in Product Development (17%), Business Economic Analysis (14%), and Commercialisation (14%), ranking as the third most used technique with 13% total usage.
- Morphological Analysis: The technique is moderately used in the Idea Generation stage (10%) to explore complex problems. Its minimal use in later stages results in a total of 5%, indicating its primary role is in the early phase of the NPD process.
- PLC: The technique is primarily used in the commercialisation stage (28%) and is also applied in business economic analysis (11%) and product development (17%). With a total usage of 9%, it plays a key role in managing a product's journey to market.
- QFD: The technique is primarily used in Product Development (26%) and Commercialisation (16%) to convert customer needs into product specs. With 9% total usage, it ensures quality and customer satisfaction throughout the NPD process.
- Synectics: The technique has limited overall usage, with applications in Idea Generation (12%) and Marketing Strategy (9%) that support creative problem-solving. Its total usage of 4% indicates that, while it has niche applications, it is not widely adopted across all NPD stages.

The distribution of NPD technique usage highlights varying preferences and effectiveness among different methods. Techniques like Focus Group and Concept Testing are versatile and applicable across multiple stages of the NPD process. At the same time, methods like Brainstorming and IHUT are more specialised, with concentrated usage in specific stages.

5.2 Favoured NPD Techniques

The next component discussed is the favoured NPD techniques. Participants identified their most favoured techniques based on their proven effectiveness in navigating the complexities of the NPD process. These techniques are consistently relied upon for their success in addressing challenges and driving results. Figure 6 illustrates the most favoured NPD techniques by percentage.

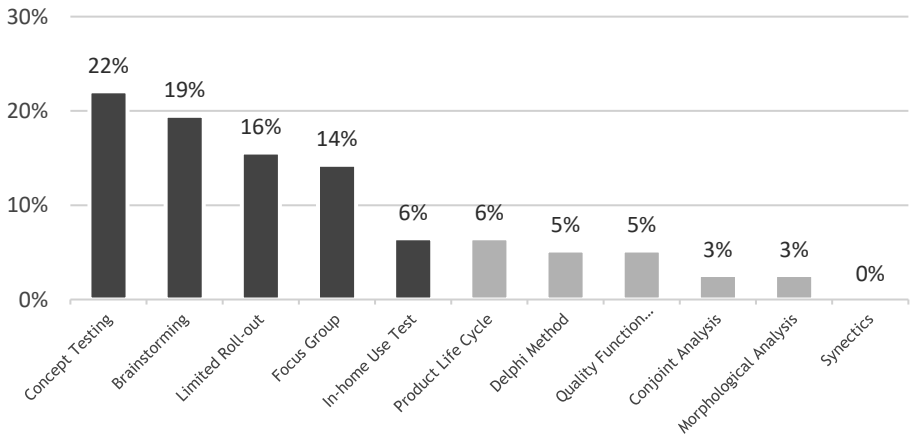

Figure 6: Favoured NPD techniques

The top five most favoured NPD techniques are Concept Testing (22%), Brainstorming (19%), LRO (16%), Focus Group (14%) and IHUT (6%) that collectively received 78% of the total votes. This significant support by the participants highlights the reliance and bias towards the use of these techniques.

The remaining six NPD techniques, which are PLC (6%), Delphi Method (5%), QFD (5%), Conjoint Analysis (3%), and Morphological Analysis (3%), collectively received 29% of the total votes. Synectics received no (0%) votes. Although these techniques are less favoured than the top five, they still play a significant role in the NPD process.

5.2.1 Most Favoured Technique: Concept Testing

Concept Testing is regarded as a crucial technique in the product development process, allowing valuable feedback from potential customers to assess the viability and success of new product ideas (Participant G, 2024). It ensures that customer requirements are translated into technical specifications, aligning development with market needs (Participant M, 2024). Participants emphasised their role in product augmentation and understanding consumer behaviour before costly development phases (Participant I, 2024; Participant A, 2024).

This technique helps inform decisions on whether to proceed, modify, or discard a concept, ultimately reducing the risk of product failure and ensuring alignment with consumer preferences (Participant A, 2024; Participant C, 2024). The iterative feedback process enhances the likelihood of successful product launches that meet customer demands (Participant W, 2024).

In conclusion, Concept Testing is ranked as the most favoured technique because it plays a pivotal role in bridging customer expectations with technical development, providing a structured approach to refining product ideas and mitigating risks before significant investments are made.

5.2.2 Second Most Favoured Technique: Brainstorming

Participant G (2024) highlights Brainstorming as an effective technique for generating new ideas and solutions, fostering creative thinking and collaboration that leads to diverse perspectives. Participant J (2024) notes its suitability for closed group research, aligning with company strategy while focusing on market trends without external input.

Brainstorming thrives in diverse groups, where different expertise enhances idea generation (Participant B, 2024). It promotes a free flow of ideas, allowing team members to build on each other's thoughts and encouraging inclusivity (Participant S, 2024; Participant I, 2024). Participants emphasise its value in constructive discussions and ensuring that all ideas are considered in the early stages of ideation (Participant A, 2024; Participant C, 2024).

In conclusion, Brainstorming is ranked as the second most favoured technique due to its ability to harness team collaboration and diverse viewpoints, making it a valuable tool for driving creativity and innovation.

5.2.3 Third Most Favoured Technique: Limited Roll-out

LRO has become a crucial technique in product development, enabling rapid market entry while adhering to design thinking principles through continuous iteration and feedback (Participant B, 2024). It is invaluable for testing products in real-world settings, allowing teams to gather tangible input from a small audience and refine products before broader launches (Participant Q, 2024; Participant P, 2024).

Participant D (2024) highlights the significance of direct user insights in assessing product functionality and usability, while Participants R (2024) and W (2024) note the scalability of ideas and the importance of diverse customer feedback in managing risks effectively.

In conclusion, LRO is ranked as the third most favoured technique because it mitigates risk and enhances product agility through iterative refinements based on user feedback, ultimately improving overall product quality (Participant M, 2024).

5.2.4 Fourth Most Favoured Technique: Focus Group

Focus Group method is effective for faster idea generation and shorter product testing cycles, enabling quicker market readiness through immediate feedback (Participant Z, 2024). Participants L (2024) and T (2024) highlight the value of feedback loops, noting that Focus Groups facilitate rapid ideation and iterative development, avoiding the overengineering that can occur in larger groups.

Participants' diverse perspectives enhance the development process, leading to more innovative products (Participant U, 2024). Focus Groups provide detailed insights into customer requirements, allowing for in-depth exploration of preferences and immediate feedback (Participant Q, 2024). Participant X (2024) underscores the importance of direct customer experience testing and competitor analysis in aligning product development with market demands (Participant F, 2024).

In conclusion, Focus Group is ranked as the fourth most favoured technique because it can leverage detailed feedback and diverse insights to refine products and ensure alignment with market needs.

5.2.5 Fifth Most Favoured Technique: In-home Use Test

IHUT is a vital product development strategy assessing market responses and refining products before full-scale launches. It allows product performance evaluation in real-world settings, helping to identify technical challenges early in the process (Participant K, 2024).

Participants appreciate its controlled deployment, enabling detailed feedback and adjustments based on user experiences (Participant T, 2024). Additionally, testing with internal staff before broader releases provides valuable insights and a preliminary filter for potential issues (Participant AA, 2024).

In conclusion, IHUT is ranked as the fifth most favoured technique for its effectiveness in minimising risks and enhancing market readiness.

5.3 Findings and contributions

After running an in-depth analysis of the results, the following findings and contributions are given:

Although NPD models and methodologies have been frequently discussed in the literature, such as NPD in production and operations management, NPD models applicable to IT-based firms have been rarely considered.

Considering loops and feedback within the conventional NPD framework, the Agile Manifesto or hybrid framework are suggested to be incorporated.

Based on field investigations and literature review, to analyse NPD in IT-based organizations, the focus area has been broken down into two categories: the use of NPD techniques and the most favoured NPD techniques, including both types of areas individually.

Focusing on “employed NPD techniques”, the data reveals that Focus Group, Concept Testing, LRO, and PLC employed NPD techniques account for 53% of the total usage.

According to data analysis, the top three “most favoured NPD techniques” are Concept Testing (22%), Brainstorming (19%), and LRO (16%), which account for 57% of total usage.

Among all techniques, concept testing and Brainstorming are the most efficient methodologies to develop new products.

6 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The study offers valuable insights for organisations seeking to enhance the use of NPD techniques. This use of NPD techniques represents an important method to improve NPD outcomes, including management's decision-making quality, higher levels of collaboration, and a clear understanding of requirements at different stages of the NPD process to improve the overall success rate [3]. Other organisations can use the insights derived from the study to improve the effectiveness of their NPD process.

A structured approach was used to collect qualitative data from participants through questionnaires, focusing on their perspectives regarding eleven NPD techniques. Out of 41 participants contacted, 27 responded with a 66% response rate. As responses from 20 participants were analysed, new themes emerged less frequently [29]. The data was then organised to generate insights on the use of NPD techniques and the most favoured NPD techniques.

The findings reveal a distribution of NPD techniques used across the NPD process, highlighting varying levels of preference and perceived effectiveness. Techniques like Focus Group and Concept Testing are highly valued for their versatility, while more techniques, such as Brainstorming and IHUT, are concentrated in specific process stages.

The four most used NPD techniques account for 53% of the total usage. These techniques include Focus Group, Concept Testing, LRO, and PLC. The moderately used techniques account for 25% of the total usage, comprising QFD, Brainstorming, and Conjoint Analysis. The least used techniques account for 22% of the total usage, comprising the Delphi Method, IHUT, Morphological Analysis, and Synectics. Despite being less used, these techniques still play an essential role in refining product features and aligning them with customer needs within the NPD process.

The top five most favoured NPD techniques are Concept Testing, Brainstorming, LRO, Focus Group and IHUT, which collectively received 78% of the total votes. The remaining six techniques are PLC, Delphi Method, QFD, Conjoint Analysis, and Morphological Analysis, collectively receiving 29% of the total votes. Synectics received no (0%) votes. Although these techniques are less favoured than the top five, they still play a significant role in the NPD process.

There is a subtle correlation between the NPD techniques and those favoured. Concept Testing and Focus Group are among the most used and favoured techniques, while Morphological Analysis and Synectics are among the least used and favoured techniques. This implies that individual preferences of the technique derive the use of these NPD techniques. This could overlook the value or purpose of NPD techniques, resulting in the misapplication of the techniques. By extension, it negatively impacts the overall success of the NPD process and innovation.

The study's limitations include the small sample size, with only 27 participants involved. Additionally, the study was conducted within a single department of one organisation, limiting its scope. This restricted context makes it insufficient to generalise the findings or apply them universally to other industries, organisations, or teams.

A key recommendation to comprehensively understand these factors is to conduct similar research with a broader sample. This would validate the results, conclude the findings on the correlation between the use of NPD techniques and most favoured techniques, and provide a holistic view on the general use of NPD techniques within the NPD process. The results from

such research will provide organisations with the insights required to ultimately enhance the application and effectiveness of NPD practices in various organisational settings.

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THE INTEGRATION OF LEAN SIX SIGMA WITH INDUSTRY 4.0 ON ENHANCING OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The food industry is the cornerstone of global economic activity, and it faces significant challenges. Unlike many other manufacturing sectors, food producers must contend with the inherent perishability of raw materials and finished goods, which compresses production timelines and elevates the financial risk of delays or errors. This is compounded by some of the most stringent quality and safety regulations of any industry, where non-compliance can lead to costly recalls, reputational damage, and significant public health risks. This paper explores the integration of Lean Six Sigma (LSS) methodologies and Industry 4.0 technologies within the food industry. The research focuses on understanding how these tools can collectively enhance operational efficiency and product quality in food manufacturing facilities. Examining the potential benefits and challenges associated with implementing these strategies, the study emphasizes the importance of training staff on Six Sigma and Industry 4.0 tools. It also highlights the need for standardized data formats and processes to facilitate data-driven decision-making. The research findings suggest that adopting these technologies can lead to improved product quality, reduced waste, cost savings, a reduction in defect rate by 25% and enhanced operational efficiency. The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with managerial staff and quantitative surveys among production employees, to explore the practical application of LSS.

Keywords: Lean Six Sigma, Industry 4.0, Food Manufacturing, Operational Excellence

1 INTRODUCTION

The food industry is critical to global economic stability and human sustenance; however, it contends with unique challenges, such as stringent quality standards, perishable products, and high operational costs. Continuous improvement methodologies Lean Six Sigma (LSS) have been instrumental in enhancing efficiency and quality in various industries [1][2]. The advent of Industry 4.0 technologies offers a paradigm shift, enabling manufacturers to achieve unprecedented levels of automation, data-driven decision-making, and process optimization [3] These challenges are compounded by the growing consumer demand for transparency, traceability, and sustainability in food production [4] . The integration of LSS methodologies with Industry 4.0 tools provides an opportunity to address these issues. For instance, IoT sensors and big data analytics enable real-time monitoring and predictive maintenance, while blockchain enhances supply chain traceability [5][6].

This study investigates the integration of LSS with Industry 4.0 tools in the food manufacturing sector to enhance operational excellence. Specifically, it examines how this synergy can address persistent inefficiencies, improve product quality, and enhance overall operational performance. The paper focuses on a South African meat processing company, leveraging both qualitative and quantitative data to provide practical insights and recommendations [7][8]. The food industry is critical to global economic stability and human sustenance, however it grapples with unique challenges, such as stringent quality standards, perishable products, and high operational costs. Continuous improvement methodologies like Lean Six Sigma (LSS) have been instrumental in enhancing efficiency and quality in various industries [1]. However, the advent of Industry 4.0 technologies offers a paradigm shift, enabling manufacturers to achieve unprecedented levels of automation, data-driven decision-making, and process optimisation [3]

1.1 Aim of the study

This study aims to utilize Six Sigma methodologies to enhance quality and efficiency in a South African meat processing organization through Industry 4.0 tools.

1.2 Objectives of the study

- To analyse and comprehend the Six Sigma methodology utilization in the context of the food sector and improvement thereof on efficiency and quality.
- To explore the potential benefits and impact of executing Six Sigma within the food sector.
- To examine how Industry 4.0 technologies can enhance and complement the utilisation of Six Sigma in terms of eradicating waste in the food sector.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Lean Six Sigma

Lean Six Sigma (LSS) combines the waste-reduction principles of Lean Manufacturing with the defect-reduction strategies of Six Sigma. The DMAIC framework is central to LSS, guiding organizations through a structured process of problem identification, analysis, and resolution [1][2]. LSS enhances efficiency, reduces costs, and improves customer satisfaction [8]. The application of LSS in industries such as healthcare and automotive demonstrates its adaptability and effectiveness.

2.2 Industry 4.0

Industry 4.0, also known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, encompasses technologies like IoT, AI, big data, robotics, and automation. These tools enable real-time data collection and analysis, predictive maintenance, and enhanced process control [3][6]. Industry 4.0 has revolutionized traditional manufacturing by fostering greater flexibility, scalability, and

precision [9]. Studies on Industry 4.0 adoption in sectors such as logistics and aerospace highlight its potential for operational excellence [4][13].

2.3 Synergy Between LSS and Industry 4.0

The integration of LSS and Industry 4.0 creates a synergistic approach to operational improvement. IoT sensors and big data analytics enhance the DMAIC process by providing real-time insights and predictive capabilities, while automation reduces human error and variability [1][6]. For example, the use of predictive analytics in quality control has significantly reduced defects in automotive manufacturing [5]. Lean Six Sigma (LSS) is a synergistic methodology that combines Lean's focus on waste elimination and value stream optimization with Six Sigma's data-driven approach to reducing process variation and defects. At its core is the Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control (DMAIC) framework, a structured problem-solving cycle that guides organizations toward sustainable process improvements. Within the food industry, LSS has proven effective in addressing key operational challenges. For example, studies in dairy processing have demonstrated its utility in optimizing resource utilization, reducing milk consumption, increasing production capacity, and minimizing process variability, leading to significant cost savings and improved product yield. Despite these successes, traditional LSS implementation in the food sector faces barriers, including the high variability of biological raw materials and human factors such as resistance to change [10][11][12].

The emergence of Industry 4.0 (4IR) presents both a challenge and a profound opportunity for traditional continuous improvement paradigms. 4IR encompasses a set of digital technologies—such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data analytics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), and robotics—that enable the creation of "smart factories" where physical and digital processes are deeply intertwined [5]. This technological revolution is not merely an addition to existing processes; it transforms the very foundation upon which LSS operates. The integration of 4IR technologies with LSS principles gives rise to what is increasingly termed LSS 4.0 or Quality 4.0, a new paradigm for achieving operational excellence.

2.4 An Integrated Conceptual Framework for LSS 4.0 Adoption

Based on the synthesis of existing literature, a conceptual framework is proposed to guide the investigation of LSS 4.0 adoption in Figure 1. This framework moves beyond a simple input-output model to represent a socio-technical system where technological enablers and methodological principles are mediated by organizational factors.

The framework posits that 4IR technologies (e.g., IoT, Big Data, AI) act as the primary enablers, providing the data and automation capabilities necessary for advanced process control. These technologies are applied through the structured methodology of LSS Principles (e.g., DMAIC, waste reduction). However, the successful translation of these inputs into desired outcomes is not direct. It is moderated by a set of Implementation Challenges, which the literature consistently identifies as critical barriers. These include high financial costs, a lack of requisite digital and analytical skills, employee resistance to change, and data security concerns. The effective management of these challenges determines the extent to which an organization can realize the goal of operational excellence, which is measured through key performance indicators such as improved quality, increased productivity, reduced costs, and enhanced customer satisfaction. This framework suggests that a failure to address the moderating challenges will severely limit the potential benefits of LSS 4.0, resulting in a disconnect between strategic investment and operational outcomes.

Figure 1: Conceptual research framework based on literature review

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research approach

To address the research objectives, this study employed a mixed-methods, single case study design. This approach was deliberately chosen as the most suitable for capturing a holistic and multi-layered understanding of the LSS 4.0 integration phenomenon. A purely quantitative approach might have identified trends in perceptions but would have failed to uncover the underlying strategic reasoning and contextual nuances behind them. Conversely, a purely qualitative approach would have lacked the broader, operational-level data needed to validate the themes emerging from managerial interviews. The mixed-methods design allows for triangulation, where quantitative findings on operational realities (from surveys) can be explained and enriched by qualitative insights into strategic decision-making (from interviews), providing a more robust and credible analysis. The single case study design is appropriate for an exploratory investigation into a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not evident.

3.2 Data Collection

- **Interviews**: Conducted with five managerial staff to understand strategic perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five senior managers, including the Operations Manager, Quality Manager, and Lead Engineer. An interview protocol was developed to guide the conversations, focusing on themes such as the strategic drivers for technology adoption, the perceived benefits and challenges of integrating LSS and 4IR, the decision-making process for investments, and the organizational culture surrounding change and innovation. This method was chosen to elicit rich, detailed narratives and expert opinions on the strategic dimensions of the research problem.
- **Surveys**: Distributed to 40 employees involved in production, achieving a response rate of 80%. A structured survey was administered to a target population of 50 production-level employees, including engineers, data analysts, and quality controllers. A final sample of 40 completed responses was obtained, achieving a strong response rate of 80%, surpassing the targeted rate of over 70%. The survey instrument was designed to gather data on: (1) demographic and professional roles; (2) familiarity with LSS and specific 4IR technologies (e.g., IoT, Big Data Analytics, Robotics); (3) perceived benefits of LSS implementation; and (4) perceived challenges in adopting new technologies. The survey used a combination of multiple-choice questions and Likert scales to quantify operational-level perspectives.

3.3 Case Study selection and context

The case study was conducted at "Company X," a large, established meat processing company located in South Africa. The company was selected for its representativeness of the sector, as it operates multiple production lines, deals with high-volume throughput, and faces the typical industry pressures of quality control, cost management, and regulatory compliance. The company has expressed strategic interest in continuous improvement and has made initial, albeit fragmented, investments in 4IR technologies, making it an ideal setting to study the nascent stages of LSS 4.0 integration.

3.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative Data: The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis. This process involved an initial phase of open coding to identify salient concepts, followed by a process of axial coding to group these concepts into broader categories. Finally, these categories were refined into overarching themes that directly corresponded to the research objectives, such as "Perceived Strategic Benefits," "Operational Barriers," and "Cultural Resistance."

Quantitative Data: The survey data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were calculated to summarize the respondent profile and their perceptions. To ensure the reliability of the survey instrument, a reliability analysis was conducted. The survey contained 15-item Likert scale measuring perceptions of LSS and 4IR. Cronbach's alpha was calculated on these items to assess the internal consistency of the scale. The resulting alpha value was 0.78, which is above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7, indicating acceptable reliability for the measurement scale.

4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Descriptive analysis of the study

Most of the responses from the survey were from the Quality Controllers who hold permanent positions in the company and in most cases that means that it is people that are experienced in the food manufacturing field. From the results, it is evident that 59% of the participants are somewhat familiar with the concept of Six Sigma with 32% of them very familiar with it. About 45% of the respondents are somewhat familiar with Industry 4.0 with 36% of them very familiar with it.

Table 1: Respondents based on job position

Position	No. of participants	Percentage
Engineer	1	5%
Quality Control	19	86%
Data Analyst	2	9%
Total	**22**	**100%**

The highest number of respondents is the Quality Controllers. These employees, who mostly work directly with the products are the ones that see firsthand how efficient the company's productivity is and how effective the utilization of Industry 4.0 tools is; therefore, the responses enhance the strength of the responses.

One of the main reasons for the company to utilise the 4IR tools was to enhance operational efficiency and after implementing the tools, the goal was achieved. The biggest benefit of Six Sigma that the company gained is improved quality products, which goes together with operational efficiency.

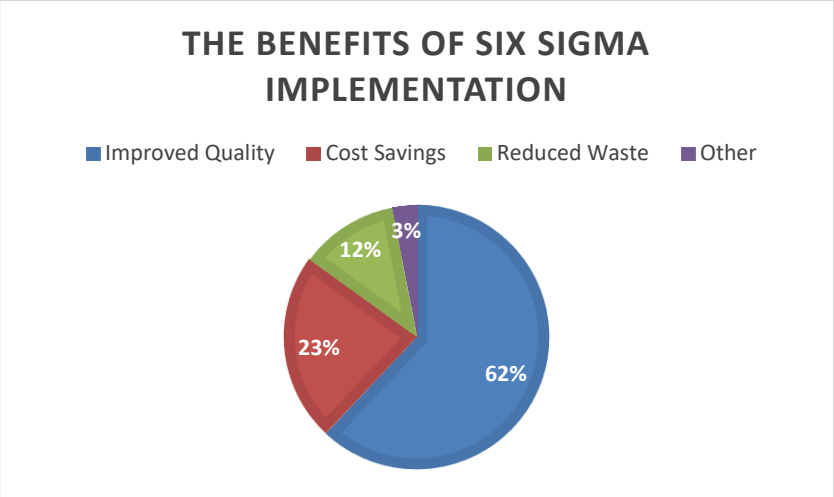

Figure 2: Benefits obtained from implementing Six Sigma in Company X.

The main need to implement 4IR tools is to improve the operational efficiency of the company. Company X has not implemented the 4IR tools to full potential due to various reasons.

These quantitative findings were strongly corroborated by the qualitative data from managerial interviews. One manager emphasized the direct link between technology-enabled LSS and quality, stating, "Applying Six Sigma's DMAIC procedure using Industry 4.0 tools can significantly reduce defects in production lines by leveraging data, automation, and real-time insights". The interviews also revealed that the primary motivation for investing in 4IR tools like IoT and Big Data Analytics was to "enhance operational efficiency," a goal the management believes was achieved post-implementation. For example, the use of IoT sensors for real-time temperature monitoring during storage and transportation was highlighted as a key technological intervention that improved product integrity and traceability.

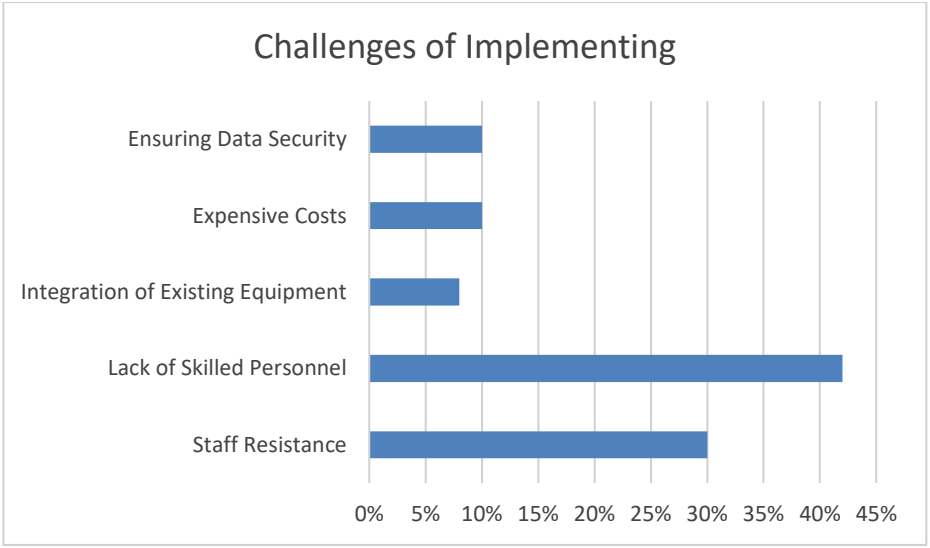

Figure 3: Challenges faced by the company in implementing 4IR

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The thematic analysis of managerial interviews provided a deeper context to these challenges. Managers acknowledged the significant upfront capital investment required for advanced technologies, a hurdle that could be prohibitive for many firms, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The "skill gap" was also a recurring theme in interviews. Managers highlighted the difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff with the expertise to manage and maintain advanced analytical and automation systems, underscoring the need for specialized training programs. Furthermore, employee concerns about job security in the face of increasing automation were identified as a key driver of resistance to change. Survey data indicated that over 45% of employees expressed apprehension about the potential for automated systems to replace manual jobs, confirming the cultural challenges that must be navigated during implementation.

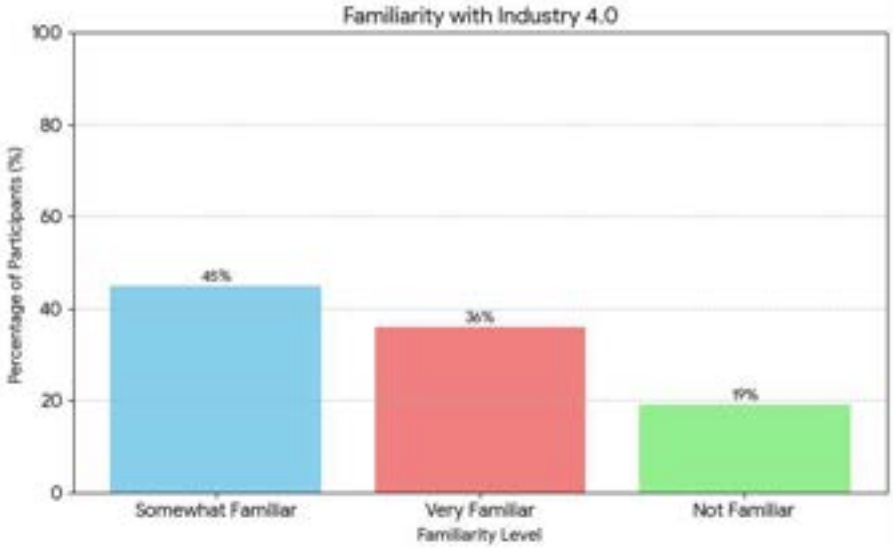

Figure 4: Familiarity with 4.0

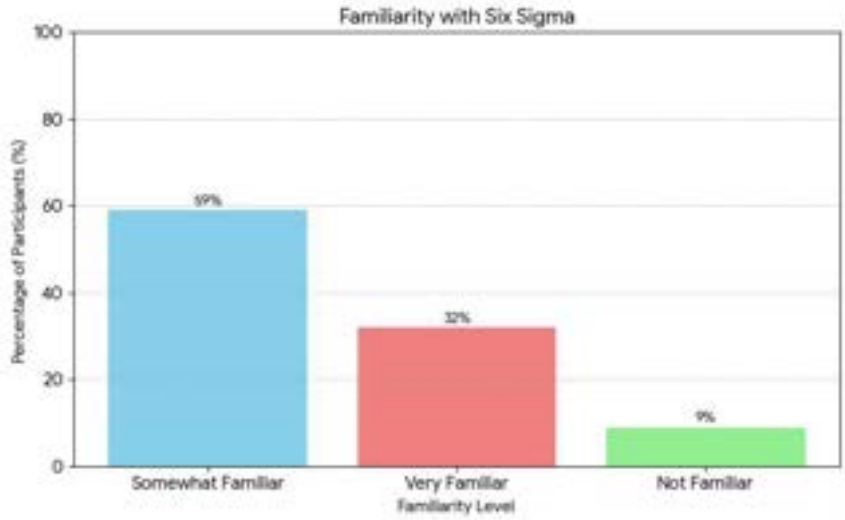

Figure 5: Familiarity with LSS

The study revealed a notable level of conceptual awareness among employees regarding both LSS and 4IR. Figure 5 illustrates the employees' self-reported familiarity with Six Sigma. A significant majority of participants reported being either "somewhat familiar" (59%) or "very familiar" (32%) with the methodology. Only a small fraction (9%) were "not familiar."

A significant number of participants, predominantly experienced Quality Control (QC) personnel holding permanent positions, demonstrated awareness of these methodologies.

A similar pattern was observed for 4IR, as shown in Figure 4. The data indicates that 45% of respondents were "somewhat familiar" and 36% were "very familiar" with 4IR concepts. This suggests that information about these modern paradigms is being disseminated within the organization, though the level of deep understanding varies.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's alpha (α) is defined as a statistic that measures the correlation of the set of answers as a collective. The reliability values range from 0 to 1 where values above 0.7 indicate a good reliability. In this study, the Cronbach alpha value of this study is 0.78 which makes it acceptable and reliable.

4.3 Interviews

From the interview, the participant provided sufficient information to show that Six Sigma coordinates with 4IR tools such as IoT for the greater good of the company. Company X is a large company of over 500 employees. It has multiple production lines for different products, and this results in a lot of data to capture into the system, including the raw materials used and batch numbers. Such data can be analysed using Big Data Analytics to ensure that everything is on record and can be easily traced. This tool also helped in monitoring the temperature fluctuations during the storage and transportation of products.

4.3.1 Thematical analysis

Six Sigma is a data-driven methodology used to improve business processes by identifying and eliminating the causes of defects and minimizing variability in manufacturing and business processes. This approach enhances efficiency and quality by focusing on process improvement and waste reduction. For Company X, a food sector company already using Lean manufacturing, integrating Six Sigma principles, specifically the DMAIC procedure, can significantly improve product quality and reduce costs.

Six Sigma DMAIC in the Food Sector

The **DMAIC** (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, Control) procedure is the core of Six Sigma and provides a structured approach to process improvement.

- **Define**: Clearly define the project goals and customer deliverables. For Company X, this could involve defining a specific quality issue, like inconsistent product weight or texture, that negatively impacts customer satisfaction and operational costs.
- **Measure**: Collect data to establish the current performance of the process. This involves quantifying the defect rate, waste levels, or process cycle time. For example, Company X might measure the percentage of products that fall outside the specified weight range.
- **Analyse**: Analyse the collected data to identify the root causes of the defects. This step uses statistical tools to understand why the process isn't meeting the defined standards. The analysis might reveal that a specific piece of equipment or a variation in raw material quality is the primary cause of the issue.

- **Improve**: Develop and implement solutions to eliminate the root causes of the defects. This could involve adjusting machine settings, updating standard operating procedures, or improving supplier quality control.
- **Control**: Implement systems to monitor and sustain the improved process. This ensures that the gains made during the "Improve" phase are not lost over time. Tools like statistical process control (SPC) charts can be used to continuously monitor the process and alert operators to potential issues before they cause defects.

Benefits of Six Sigma for Company X

Implementing Six Sigma offers several key benefits for Company X, aligning with the company's goals of improving quality and efficiency.

- **Improved Product Quality**: This is the most significant benefit, as it directly impacts customer satisfaction and brand reputation. By reducing defects and variability, the company can ensure that every product meets high standards, fostering customer loyalty and trust.
- **Reduced Waste**: Six Sigma's focus on identifying and eliminating the root causes of defects naturally leads to a reduction in waste. This includes raw materials, energy, and time, which contribute to lower production costs and a more sustainable operation.
- **Cost Savings**: The reduction in waste, defects, and reworks directly translates into significant cost savings. Less waste means lower material costs, while fewer defects mean reduced labour costs associated with re-processing or discarding products.

Six Sigma and Industry 4.0

Industry 4.0 technologies can significantly enhance the effectiveness of Six Sigma, particularly the DMAIC procedure, by providing better data and more control.

- **Enhanced Data Collection**: Internet of Things (IoT) sensors on the production line can automatically collect real-time data on temperature, pressure, fill levels, and other critical parameters. This eliminates manual data collection, which can be prone to human error, and provides a continuous stream of accurate data for the **Measure** and **Analyse** phases.
- **Real-time Insights and Analysis**: Automated systems and AI-powered analytics tools can instantly analyse the data from IoT sensors, providing real-time insights into process performance. This allows for quicker identification of potential issues and root causes, accelerating the **Analyse** phase.
- **Automated Control and Improvement**: Industry 4.0 tools enable automated process adjustments based on real-time data and analysis. For example, a system can automatically adjust a machine's settings to maintain consistent product weight, effectively implementing the **Improve** and **Control** phases of DMAIC with minimal human intervention.
- **Predictive Maintenance**: By analysing data from sensors, Industry 4.0 systems can predict equipment failures before they occur. This reduces unplanned downtime and prevents defects caused by malfunctioning machinery, further supporting the **Control** phase of Six Sigma.

4.4 Adoption of LSS and Industry 4.0

The case study revealed that the company has partially implemented Lean Six Sigma (LSS) and Industry 4.0 tools. IoT sensors are predominantly used to monitor production line conditions

and identify potential bottlenecks, while big data analytics are employed to enhance quality control processes. Automation technologies are limited to the packaging segment, which has resulted in a measurable increase in operational efficiency.

4.4.1 Benefits

- **Improved Quality**: Since implementing LSS and Industry 4.0 tools, defect rates have decreased by 25%. The incorporation of IoT sensors allows real-time quality monitoring, reducing production errors.
- **Enhanced Efficiency**: Cycle times across production lines have reduced by an average of 18%, leading to an increase in throughput. Big data analytics have enabled predictive maintenance, significantly reducing equipment downtime.
- **Traceability**: The integration of blockchain technology within the supply chain has improved traceability, ensuring compliance with food safety regulations and boosting consumer trust.

4.4.2 Challenges

- **Resistance to Change**: Employee concerns about job security due to automation were significant. Over 45% of surveyed employees expressed apprehension about the potential replacement of manual jobs by automated systems.
- **Skill Gaps**: A lack of skilled personnel to manage and maintain advanced Industry 4.0 tools was identified as a barrier. The need for specialized training programs was highlighted by managerial staff during interviews.
- **High Costs**: Initial investment in IoT, automation, and analytics technologies was a significant hurdle. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) may find these costs prohibitive without external funding or phased adoption strategies.

4.5 Proposed framework for the meat processing industry

To bridge the identified strategy-practice gap and provide an actionable path forward for Company X and similar organizations, this study proposes a phased LSS 4.0 integration framework tailored for the meat processing industry (Table 2). This framework is designed to be a practical, low-risk roadmap that builds organizational capability incrementally, directly addressing the primary challenges of high cost and skill gaps. It structures the integration journey into three manageable phases, each with a clear focus, specific technological and methodological tools, and defined outcomes.

Table 2: Proposed framework for the meat processing industry

Phase	Focus	LSS Tools	4IRTechnologies	Key Challenge Addressed	Expected Outcome
Phase 1: Foundational	Stabilize and Standardize (DMA)	Value Stream Mapping (VSM), 5S, Standard Work, Statistical Process Control (SPC)	Basic IoT Sensors (e.g., temperature, line speed), Digital Data Capture	Overcoming poor data quality and non-standardized processes.	A stable, predictable process baseline with reliable data streams.
Phase 2: Analytical	Analyze and Optimize (MAI)	Root Cause Analysis (Fishbone, 5 Whys), Regression Analysis	Big Data Analytics Platforms, Data Visualization Dashboards	Bridging the analytical skill gap through focused training and hiring.	Data-driven insights into root causes of waste and variability; initial ROI demonstrated.
Phase 3: Predictive and Automated	Predict and Control (IC)	Design of Experiments (DOE), Advanced Process Control (APC)	AI/ML for Predictive Maintenance, Robotics (e.g., in packaging), Digital Twins	Justifying high costs through proven ROI from earlier phases; managing change.	Autonomous process optimization, reduced downtime, and a culture of continuous, data-driven improvement.

Phase 1: Foundational. The journey begins not with expensive technology, but with LSS fundamentals. The focus is on stabilizing processes and establishing a reliable data foundation. Using tools like VSM and 5S, the organization first eliminates obvious waste and standardizes work. Basic, low-cost IoT sensors are introduced to automate the collection of critical data, moving away from manual logs. This phase directly tackles the problem of poor data quality and provides a solid baseline for all future analysis.

Phase 2: Analytical. With reliable data streams established, the focus shifts to building analytical capability. The organization invests in a data analytics platform and trains or hires personnel (like the data analysts in the survey sample) to use it. LSS tools like root cause analysis are now supercharged with large datasets, allowing for deeper insights. This phase directly addresses the "skill gap" in a targeted manner and is designed to generate a clear return on investment (e.g., through targeted waste reduction), which helps build the business case for further investment.

Phase 3: Predictive and Automated. Having proven the value of data analytics, the organization can now justify the higher costs of advanced 4IRtechnologies. AI and ML models can be developed for applications like predictive maintenance on critical machinery (e.g., grinders, mixers), and robotics can be implemented in high-repetition areas like packaging to improve consistency and reduce ergonomic strain. This final phase leverages the capabilities built in the preceding stages to move toward a truly "smart" and self-optimizing production system.

5 CONCLUSION

The integration of Six Sigma methodologies and Industry 4.0 technologies holds significant potential for enhancing operational efficiency and product quality within the food industry. The research findings indicate that adopting these strategies can lead to improved product quality, reduced waste, cost savings, and enhanced operational efficiency. However, successful implementation requires addressing challenges related to staff training, data security, and integration with existing systems. The integration of Lean Six Sigma with Industry 4.0 represents a transformative approach to addressing inefficiencies in the food manufacturing sector. This study highlights the tangible benefits and challenges associated

with this integration, offering a conceptual framework for its implementation. Future research should explore cross-sector applications and strategies for scaling these methodologies in small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The findings confirm that integrating LSS with Industry 4.0 enhances operational performance in the food industry. However, successful implementation requires addressing cultural and technical challenges. Employee training, stakeholder engagement, and phased deployment are crucial for overcoming resistance and maximizing ROI.

This research investigated the integration of Lean Six Sigma and Industry 4.0 within the South African meat processing sector. The study found that while there is a strong strategic desire and high conceptual awareness for LSS 4.0 adoption, a significant "strategy-practice gap" exists. This gap is primarily driven by substantial operational barriers, most notably a lack of skilled personnel to manage advanced systems and the high financial costs associated with implementation. Despite these hurdles, the benefits of integration are recognized, with tangible improvements in product quality and waste reduction. The findings underscore that the journey toward LSS 4.0 is a complex socio-technical endeavour where organizational readiness is as critical as technological sophistication

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by highlighting the practical implications of integrating Six Sigma and Industry 4.0 in a food manufacturing context. The findings provide insights for food manufacturers looking to adopt these strategies to improve their operational performance and competitiveness. Further research exploring specific applications of these technologies within different segments of the food industry would be beneficial in expanding our understanding of their potential and limitations.

5.1 Theoretical and Managerial Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes a valuable empirical case to the nascent LSS 4.0 literature, specifically within the under-researched food processing industry. It validates existing conceptual models of Quality 4.0 and highlights the critical mediating role of organizational factors (skills, cost, culture) in the technology adoption process.

For managers and practitioners in the food industry, the implications are highly practical. The research cautions against a purely technology-centric approach to modernization. Instead, it advocates for a balanced strategy that aligns investments in technology with investments in people and processes. The proposed phased integration framework in Table 2 offers a concrete, actionable roadmap for industry leaders. This framework allows for a gradual, de-risked approach to digital transformation, enabling organizations to build internal capabilities, demonstrate value at each stage, and foster a sustainable culture of data-driven continuous improvement.

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PLATFORM ARCHITECTURE IN THE FINANCIAL SECTOR: A CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The financial industry has witnessed widespread adoption of digital banking services and platform enterprise architectures. The literature highlighted gaps in linking enterprise architecture and platforms and facilitated the synthesis of a conceptual framework. A mixed methods study validated enterprise architectural elements and characteristics critical to the success of banking platforms in South Africa from a customer perspective. Two data collection methodologies were applied to five anonymized South African banks: banking application content analysis and observation, and quantitative analysis of social media customer reviews of customer's perceptions towards the banking platforms. Vital enterprise architectural elements are strategies, products, services, technical design, privacy, security, governance, communication and trust. Social media review analysis found that the predominant complaints were inefficient services and long service times. While banks invest in their digital platforms, high operational costs and operational inefficiencies within current processes must be resolved to reduce customer complaints.

Keywords: Enterprise architecture, platforms, platform architecture, digital banking platform, South African banks

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1 INTRODUCTION

With the rapid advancement of technology induced by the digital age, organizations find it imperative to re-evaluate their business strategy to remain competitive. Furthermore, organizations encounter escalating complexity of information systems [1]. The use of complex legacy systems creates inflexible organizations which are unable to adapt to the rapidly changing environment [1].

Financial services have encountered a great degree of disruption due to advancements in information technology realising significant improvements in data, computing, the Internet and social networks [2]. This has prompted many financial institutions to undergo digital transformation that has changed the financial services industry [3]. Digital transformation involves business and IT strategies and incorporates digital technology in products and services [4]. Traditional banking institutions in South Africa are thus investing in re-engineering their organizational structure, adopting new technologies, and directing greater focus on customer centricity [3]. Traditional banking methods of using cheques or physical money for transactions are being replaced progressively by digital banking services [5]. A prevailing business decision amongst the South African financial institutions is the adoption of the digital platform to provide banking services to their customers.

For many years, platforms have existed physically in various forms such as malls, which facilitate the interaction of merchants and customers [2]. However, in the digital age, the progression of information technology eliminates the necessity of physical platforms. The digital platform can be described as “technology architecture” that facilitates the integration of information, networking and computing, and allowing for the progression of computing performance [6]. The global banking industry has implemented digital platforms to reduce service times and operational costs, and to provide digital financial services [7]. These banking platforms are in the form of banking apps, online banking interfaces, cell phone banking and other software.

South Africa has encountered socio-economic issues such as poverty, crime and corruption, which may need to be accounted for when analysing the adoption of digital banking platforms [8]. Therefore, the availability and usage of international studies of banking platforms may not generalize to South Africa. Louw and Nieuwenhuizen’s comparative analysis of banking platforms highlights the gaps in the literature relating to digital banking from a South African perspective and the importance of further research on banking platforms [9]. In a recent study, it was found that 79% of banking executives believed that the adoption of platforms would assist in attaining organizational goals and enhance competitiveness [10]. However, the integration of platforms and sophisticated technological tools is associated with the revamping of business strategies, through enterprise engineering methodologies such as enterprise architecture.

Enterprise architecture (EA), and enterprise engineering were developed as methodologies for designing and redesigning businesses and incorporate an organization’s mission, vision, strategy, goals, actions and operations [11]. Enterprise architecture is regarded as a tool to map out interconnections between IT systems and business strategy [12]. The role of enterprise architecture for business-IT alignment is applicable in this research, since the focus of this research is centred on the relationship between enterprise architecture and platforms. The existence of gaps in the literature pertaining to the adoption of enterprise architecture in different sectors emphasizes the necessity of performing research on enterprise architectures in the financial sector [4]. Furthermore, there is a lack of literature highlighting the link between platforms and enterprise architecture [13].

This research is driven by the following question: *"From a customer perspective, what are the critical enterprise architectural elements and associated characteristics of banks implementing a digital banking platform in South Africa?"* Within this research, elements refer to the enterprise architectural components being investigated, while characteristics refer to the descriptions of how the banks have implemented these elements. A comparative analysis of selected South African banking platforms will be executed, pertaining to five traditional banks.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Conventional banking services encompass the acceptance of monetary deposits, provision of loans, and execution of transactions [14, 15]. Banking may be characterized according to the services offered, such as services targeting many customer groups (personal (retail) and commercial customers), multiple products (deposit accounts, insurance, credit accounts and so on), or multiple channels to provide financial services (branch, mobile app, online banking, ATMs and cell phone banking) [14, 15, 8]. Banking services may be traditional or digital (e-services). Traditional banking refers to the provision of in-person conventional banking services, such as offering financial services at physical branches [14]. Digital banking or e-banking allows customers to access financial services electronically [14].

The South African banking industry has an immense impact on the South African economy due to the ownership of a large percentage of the country's financial assets and a substantial customer base [15]. Ifeacho and Ngalawa report that South African banks are estimated to contribute approximately 20% to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) [15]. Available literature on the banking industry is extensive, spanning from bank efficiency and performance to digital banking [15]. However, Louw and Nieuwenhuizen (2020) mention that gaps in literature exist, relating to South African digital banking [9].

The field of enterprise engineering was formulated to address the gaps in coherency between enterprise aspects including enterprise ontology and enterprise architecture [16]. Enterprise architecture is defined as the principles that integrate the people, processes, data, technology, and organizational structure [11] and assists with mitigating complexity of organizations. To answer the research question, a digital banking platform framework was synthesized using literature and two other frameworks, namely the Integrated Enterprise Architecture Framework (IEAF) [17], and the "Conceptual framework for theorizing digital platforms" [18]. This framework contains the elements which were investigated in this study and displayed in Figure 1 below.

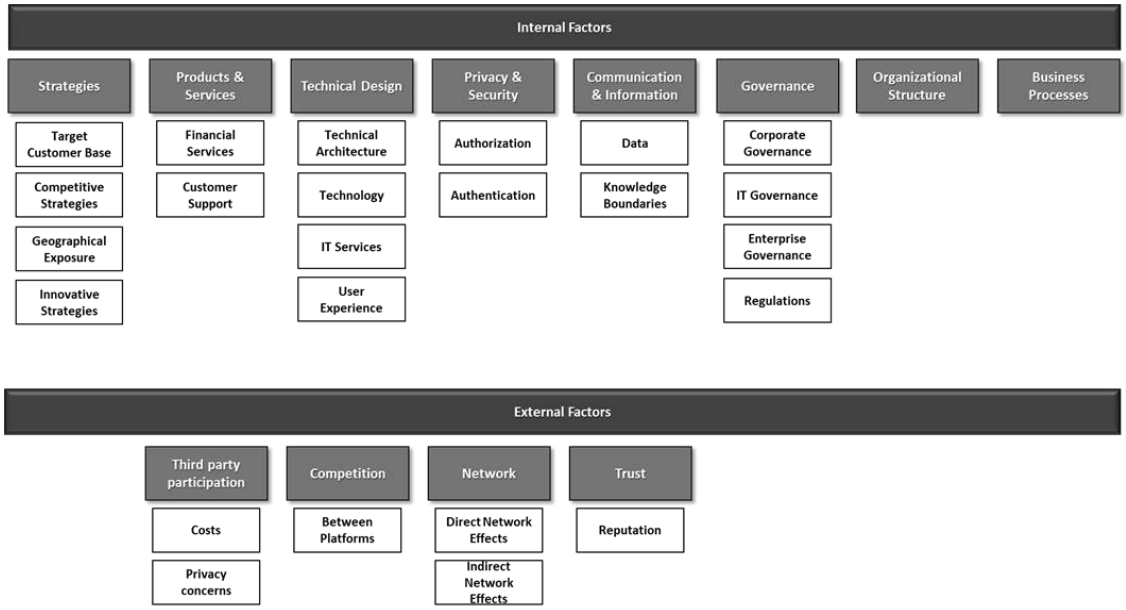

Figure 1: Enterprise Architectural Framework for Banking Platforms

The objective of this synthesized framework is to communicate factors that should be considered when developing or investigating banking platforms, while also addressing the deficiencies of the preceding frameworks, including the absence of governance and platform components in the IEAF. This Enterprise Architectural Framework for Banking Platforms was structured similarly to that of the "Conceptual framework for theorizing digital platforms", in that factors were distinguished in terms of two classes, namely Internal and External Factors. Table **1** indicates the operational definitions of the elements in the enterprise architectural framework for banking platforms depicted in Figure 1.

Table 1: Operational definitions of elements in the Enterprise Architectural Framework for Banking Platforms

EA Element	Operational Definitions
Strategies	Strategies refer to the plan or direction of an organization over a long-term period to meet organizational goals [19].
Products and Services	Banks offer a range of financial products and services to customers, inclusive of deposits, lending, investment and insurance products [14].
Technical Design	Technical Design comprises elements of technology, architecture, information technology (IT) services and user experience related to digital banking services [19].
Privacy and Security	Privacy relates to the protection and confidentiality of sensitive data. Security refers to the level of protection or confrontation against destruction, precious assets, individuals, nations, institutions, and so on [19].
Governance	Governance concerns the coordination and control of activities and interactions within a platform [20, 18].
Communication and Information	Communication and information concepts pertain to a comprehensive set of both financial and non-financial information [16].
Third-Party Participation	Third parties' involvement pertains to various external actors interacting on a platform [18].
Network	Network effects refer to the users that facilitate the introduction of both direct and indirect network effects [21].
Trust	Trust is the level of confidence users have in a platform's ability to sufficiently satisfy their needs effectively [19].

3 METHODOLOGY

A deductive approach was employed for the study based on the enterprise architectural framework for banking platforms established from the literature in the previous section. Due to the sensitivity and risk associated with obtaining the necessary internal information, certain enterprise architecture factors such as organizational structure, business processes and competition were excluded from data collection and analysis in this research. A mixed methods study investigated the frameworks' validity via two avenues of data collection, including content analysis of the banking platforms and the collection of social media reviews relating to each bank included in the study.

Since the researcher acted as a solo user (customer) and observer, participant sampling was not required. However, a sample of banks to be included in the study was selected. The sample was based on exhaustive sampling usually applicable for research in which a limited population or group is available to be studied and institutions that meet pre-determined criteria were to be included [22]. The criteria adopted to determine the banks' eligibility for analysis included the bank's customer base, reputation, ability to provide both traditional and digital services, and the significance of the bank's presence on the market. Thus, five banks were selected accordingly. The banks included were traditional banks with a mobile banking application as the digital platform. The banks were anonymized to prevent any reputational impact to the institution from the results obtained in this study and will be designated as Bank A to E. Content analysis of banking platforms was performed from September to December 2024.

Social media reviews were extracted for the sample of banks included in the study, with a data collection method adapted from Greene, et al. [23]. Reviews from social media were extracted manually from X (Twitter) and HelloPeter, omitting sensitive personal details of the customer. Due to time constraints, only the first 50 reviews (per bank) which appeared when searching for the banks on X (Twitter), and the first 20 reviews which were displayed on each bank's HelloPeter website were extracted. Consequently, 250 postings between January 2022 and December 2024 were analysed.

Table 2 illustrates the analysis methods that were executed in both parts of this investigation. Miles, Huberman and Saldana provide three stages of a concurrent process of data analysis, including data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing, which was used for the analysis [24]. This is aligned to the final step of the content analysis process outlined by Krippendorf [25].

Table 2: Method of data analyses

Data Source	Method of Analysis
Banking platforms	Qualitative analysis via coding of observation notes – The researcher recorded notes during the interaction with banking platforms, thereafter codes were applied to these notes. The elements observed using this methodology are indicated in Figure 1.
Social Media Reviews	Quantitative & qualitative analysis of social media reviews – The results were compiled into a graphical format.

As part of data condensation, notes were transcribed during the interaction with banking platforms; these notes, along with the social media reviews were thereafter coded in two consecutive cycles [24]. The deductive coding approach was selected since the enterprise architectural framework was synthesized from literature, which formed the list of codes for the initial cycle of coding. The coding method of data analysis involves distinct steps, which include separating data into "codable units" and thereafter assigning codes to these units [24], which was then applied to the qualitative data obtained. This research incorporated two cycles of deductive coding to investigate consistency between the two cycles of coding. The first cycle of coding involved assigning the codes to portions of data to investigate patterns.

The second cycle of coding condensed the coded portions of data from the first cycle into reduced categories [24]. These coding cycles were also applied to the social media reviews.

The stability component of reliability was measured for the qualitative content analysis of banking platforms, via the "test-retest" design for intra-coder reliability [25]. Cohen's Kappa (κ) was then calculated as an estimate of the agreement level between the first and second coding cycles, which was computed as $\kappa = 0.94$. This is strong or near perfect agreement [25]. The discrepancies identified between the two cycles of coding were due to overlap between the different elements investigated.

The study ensured external validity through the triangulation of multiple sources. This encompassed the qualitative content analysis of banking platforms and the quantitative analysis of social media reviews. The enterprise architecture features derived during the research were subsequently compared with the existing literature.

Additional information pertaining to this research may be obtained from Singh and Goncalves[†] [26].

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study results are presented, starting with an analysis of social media reviews on X (Twitter) and HelloPeter pertaining to each bank, thereafter observation and content analysis of banking platforms. *Figure 2* illustrates the proportion of positive and negative customer posts per bank encountered on Twitter. Bank B exhibited the highest proportion of negative customer posts (46%), alongside the greatest discrepancy between negative and positive posts, with merely 6% of the search results reflecting positive customer experiences. Results for all banks indicated a disparity between positive and negative posts, with a greater percentage of complaints obtained compared to compliments.

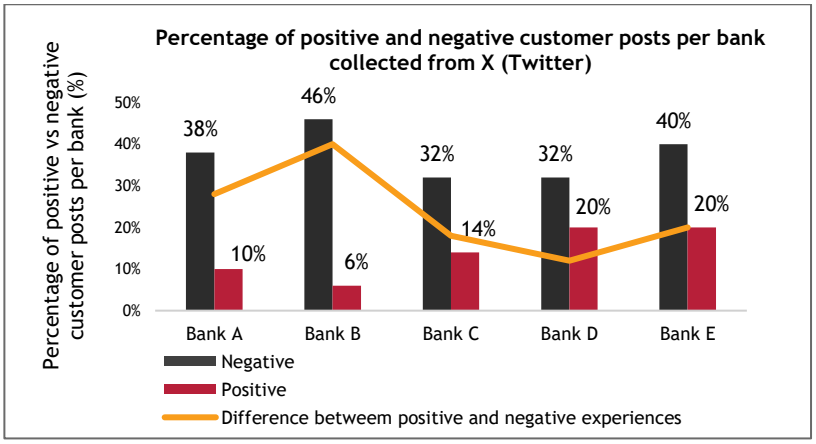

Figure 2: Positive and negative customer posts per bank collected from X (Twitter)

Figure 3 below depicts the categories of customer complaints extracted from X (Twitter) and HelloPeter. The "Other" category pertains to customer complaint causes that were not

[†] This article is based on a dissertation for the degree of Master of Science in Engineering submitted to the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, University of the Witwatersrand.

evident from the post. The substantial proportion of unfavourable evaluations may highlight gaps within the South African banking sector, indicating a need for appropriate measures to be undertaken to enhance customer experience.

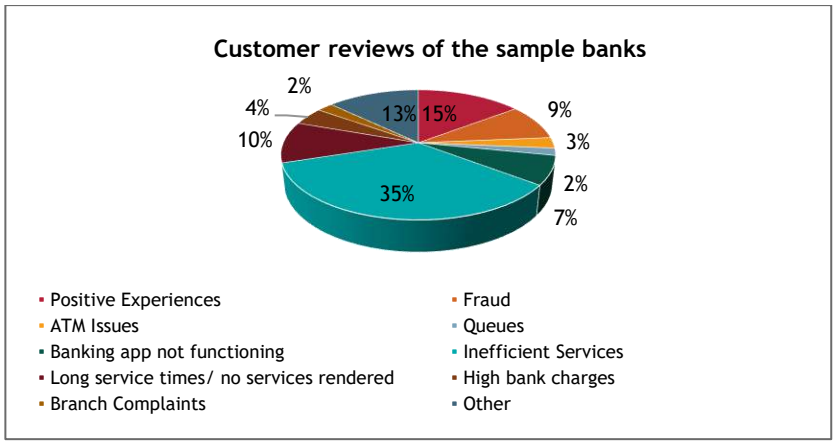

Figure 3:Complaint categories obtained from X (Twitter) and HelloPeter customer posts

The reviews collected from X (Twitter) and HelloPeter revealed similar customer sentiments across positive and negative experiences (fraud, queues and so on). The following sections discuss the results of the various architecture elements based on the observation and content analysis of banking platforms, and the analysis of social media reviews.

4.1. Strategies

4.1.1. Target customer base

It was noted that Bank B predominantly serviced retail (personal) customers and recently expanded their services to include business banking. The other 4 banks provided services to retail, commercial and private customers. It was therefore intriguing to observe that at the time of the study Bank B also acquired the highest share price. A higher share price is indicative of flourishing company performance, which may be attributed to the bank's strategy of prioritizing simplicity, as evidenced by its banking platform [27].

Unemployed and lower-income citizens in underprivileged neighbourhoods who may not have access to physical or digital financial services, must be considered during the development of South African banking strategies and architectures [28]. Additionally, Bank B's simplicity strategy and recent venture into business banking may appeal to small-to-medium enterprises. Therefore, Bank B has adopted a strategy which appeals to a large portion of the South African population, thus acquiring a substantial customer base and remarkable company performance (as indicated by the share price).

As depicted in Figure 2, approximately 46% of the negative posts obtained for Bank B indicated customer dissatisfaction due to fraud, long queue times, frequent banking app downtime, inefficient services and high bank charges (as displayed in Figure 3). It is possible that while this bank prioritizes a straightforward banking app, this may lead to greater demand for customers to be serviced at ATMs and branches, either due to an absence of sufficient technology literacy of the target customer, or for accessing certain activities which are not available via the banking app.

Based on the evaluation of banking platforms, it can be deduced that two main target customer strategies have been adopted by the banks. These two strategies involve directing focus on a targeted market and providing specialized financial services or facilitating a wider customer base and investing accordingly to satisfy each customer segment. However, servicing multiple customer segments may induce a higher degree of complexity in the design of banking

platforms. Additionally, a Kenyan commercial bank study found that by focusing on a specific target customer base, market segment or geographical location, banks may gain a competitive advantage [29].

4.1.2. Geographical Exposure

The five banks examined in the study are categorized as conventional banks with a significant branch presence throughout South Africa. Users may leverage the branch or ATM location feature to locate the nearest branch or ATM. Moreover, four of the five banks operate in many African nations, excluding Bank B which operates only in South Africa. As previously noted, Bank B exhibited a higher share price relative to the other banks, underscoring its exceptional market success despite its restricted geographical presence compared to its counterparts. This was consistent with previous literature where it was deduced beneficial strategies for banks include specialization of services according to a niche segment or location [29].

Although banks are evidently promoting heightened platform utilization, the presence of branches suggests that certain South African clients prefer in-person help over smartphone usage. This correlates with a study performed on the South African banking landscape which stipulated certain generations of users, such as elderly users, prefer to access physical banking services [9]. The authors recommended that South African banks adopt a blended digital and traditional banking model [9]. However, bank branches may also provide services which cannot be addressed with the banking app, because of business rules or governance.

4.1.3. Competitive Strategies

Digitalisation is evident in several strategies adopted by the banks, including investing in their digital banking platforms [2]. To further encourage customers to utilize digital banking services, the banks have adopted strategies such as a “digital bonus” or providing rewards for transacting using virtual cards. All banks have customized offers and rewards schemes to appeal to customers. Research conducted on customers of South African banks revealed that users depicted positive sentiments towards the allocation and utilization of rewards on the banking applications, which were often associated with South African retailers [30].

4.1.4. Innovative Strategies

Banks A, C, D and E have expanded into other sectors, with Banks C and D offering the sales of automobiles and electronics on their platforms. This is indicative of "Beyond Banking," a strategy by which banks attract consumers by offering a wide variety of products and services [31]. With increased focus on climate change, and the complex electricity landscape in South Africa [32], many banks are now offering sustainability products catered to customers who want to reduce dependency on South Africa’s electricity grid. Banks C and E offer sustainability finance, initiatives and education and assist customers to select a green solutions supplier. These products include loans to purchase solar power systems. These innovative strategies utilize existing technologies to provide innovative services to customers.

4.2. Products and Services

New customers are required to register on banking platforms. Personal information was required by all five banks including the following categories: personal information, contact details, address information, education and employment information. All banks required the customer to complete facial scanning, which is then verified using information from the Department of Home Affairs (DHA). Customers are prompted to provide consent for sharing of their biometric information with pertinent third parties, such as DHA, to enable the bank to conduct verification. The consumer is also required to accept banking agreements and establish their profile credentials. Upon completion of this process, the consumer can access their profile on the banking application. Confirmation of the successful verification of the account opening procedure was delivered within seven days via the app or email.

The five banks provide a diverse array of products, including current accounts, savings and investment options and insurance offerings which was found to be consistent with the literature [14].The five banking applications also provide a variety of basic functions such as the ability to access multiple banking profiles, view banking accounts, and perform general money management activities such as withdrawals, transfers or deposits. Customers may transact on these accounts using physical or virtual cards. Virtual cards enable users to utilize the tap-to-pay capability on mobile devices. Personal, home and vehicle loans or insurance are also accessible on all five applications. Additionally, Banks A, C and D facilitate the ability to purchase the property or vehicle itself on the actual application. The platforms offer various payment options, including general payment options on the banking app, PayShap, Quick Response (QR) code payments, contactless card payments, location-based payments, cellular number payments and digital tap-to-pay methods. This is consistent with the literature as basic services offered by banks [14, 33].

The banks offer tailored products to customers in lower income segments, middle-income segments and higher-income segments. For lower income segments, the banks offer reduced monthly fees and free ATM cash deposits or withdrawals. Bank C also offers the ability for customers to purchase white or brown bread from shops for 99 cents. Banks A, C, D and E provide higher-income customers with private banking services, including the allocation of a dedicated advisor to assist the customer with financial services. The middle-income segment monthly service rates range between the cost of private banking and low-income banking. Banking institutions refrain from charging fees for using their platforms; nonetheless, charges apply based on the customer's accounts or for executing certain operations, such as transferring funds to accounts at other banks.

The banking applications also offer customers connectivity products, including airtime, data bundles or SMS. Gertze and Petersen report that general banking applications often offer connectivity products, with users displaying positive sentiments towards this since a variety of services are accessible via one application [30]. All five banks have also implemented financial management education in their applications through courses or quizzes. This promotes greater financial literacy among customers. Khera, Ogawa and Sahay stipulate that improved financial literacy allows customers to improve their money management and boosts their trust in the financial system, thereby also benefitting the banks [34].

International banking services are accessible on platforms, enabling consumers to conduct transactions or invest in foreign currencies. The banks have also developed products for younger individuals, enabling minors to hold a banking account often linked with a parent or guardian's account. Thus, this study corroborates previous literature reporting that South African banks customise platforms and products to appeal to younger generations [30, 9]. Moreover, the banks have developed solutions tailored for the Islamic community in South Africa requiring certain regulations for financial management [35].

From Figure 3, 35% of overall customer complaint types were due to service inefficiency, which was significant compared to the other complaint types. From the posts analysed, customers portrayed frustration due to prolonged wait times, high product or service fees, fraud, banking app downtime, or inadequate servicing at branches. A user criticized the insurance services of Bank A, deeming the service "appalling" owing to insufficient support after two days of phone inquiries. These issues highlight inefficiencies in banking processes and must be resolved through investments in their banking platforms and enterprise architectures.

4.3. Technical Design

The banks have four methods to access financial services: mobile banking applications, online banking, cell phone banking, and ATMs. Cell phone banking, utilising Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD), enables users to access financial services by dialling a

number that begins with an asterisk or hash. It was observed that updates made on one platform reflected when users logged into another platform.

From the results obtained, certain features were similar across the banking platforms. Lewis and Davis mention that banks globally may tend to follow similar patterns of functionality and services offered [36]. An example noted was the tab at the bottom of the screen on the banking applications, after the customer had successfully logged into their banking application. The tab usually displays “Home”, “Payments”, “Notifications” and “Menu”, which are standard banking functions that the user can access swiftly. When a user selects a particular account on the app, the transaction history and amount are displayed. All five banking apps send push notifications via the app, email, or SMS for transactions processed.

Certain mobile banking applications also facilitate the ability to search for functionality on the app. Only Bank C provided the ability for users to search for functionality across the entire app, while Bank E incorporated search functionality on screens which featured extensive product or application catalogues to customers.

4.3.1. Technology and User Experience

A relationship exists between the technology and user experience decisions made by banks [37]. The banks have implemented similar account dashboard layouts, with viewable account balances and transaction history. Banks leverage clients’ transactional history data to assess their financial status and provide customized products, as stated in the privacy notices of all five banks. The screen design of mobile banking platforms corresponds with the bank's branding. Users personalize the banking application by choosing backgrounds and selecting their most utilized or preferred features for immediate display on the “Home” or “Overview” panels.

4.3.2. IT Services

During the evaluation of two mobile banking applications where errors were encountered, a message was displayed to inform the user of the error. Furthermore, Bank C displayed a screen informing the user of the app’s restricted functionality during application downtime. It is essential to acknowledge that the researcher may not have encountered all the possibilities of errors that may occur on the banking platforms.

4.4. Privacy and Security

All five banking platforms displayed a privacy agreement and terms and conditions detailing their methodologies for processing personal information. This is in accordance with the South African Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) [38], which regulates the acquisition and transfer of personal information involving consumers and third parties. All five banks inform the customer of their right to provide or withdraw consent to the processing of their personal information at any time. The banking apps prompt the customer for consent when requiring the use of their personal information, as stipulated by POPIA [38].

The banks have implemented several security verification mechanisms for user login, including biometric authentication, passwords, and application PIN numbers. It was observed that when accessing online banking, the user was prompted to complete two-factor authentication. These security methods are consistent with the security features of banking applications mentioned in literature [39]. When a user engages in a phone call while logged into a banking platform on the same device, three banking platforms issued a notification regarding fraudulent phone calls, which cautioned against disclosing any sensitive information during the call. Users are able to report fraud on the app or by contacting an advisor. These fraud reporting features are consistent with those in literature [39]. Banks A and C incorporated activity tracking which enables users to examine prior activities conducted on the banking application.

Users on X (Twitter) and HelloPeter raised fraud concerns due to unknown transactions on their banking apps. Several posts also conveyed frustration regarding the inadequacy of fraud reporting and feedback processes at banks. This highlights a gap where the banks might improve banking app security and mitigate cybercrime. Analysis of X (Twitter) postings revealed that the banks' social media accounts raised awareness about fraud mitigation.

4.5. Governance

The five banks implemented processes to ensure their customers remain compliant according to the Financial Intelligence Centre Act (FICA). Thus, customers are requested to provide identification and proof of address when registering and opening an account. For customers who are acting or transacting on behalf of another party such as a family member, the customer is also required to provide proof of authority. In addition to this, the five banks' existing customers are required to confirm their personal information periodically. This forms part of the banks' "KYC" (Know Your Customer) or ongoing due diligence processes, which ensure that banks have verified their customers' identity [40]. If the customer fails to satisfy these requirements, their accounts may be frozen, preventing them from accessing their funds. These processes were found to align to the processes stipulated by the South African Reserve Bank [40]. From the analysis of social media reviews, complaints were obtained regarding banks' KYC processes, including incorrect freezing of accounts or prolonged service times for KYC queries.

4.6. Communication and information

The banks have an array of methods to facilitate communication between customers and banking advisors including app notifications, banners or offers on the app, calls, emails, chat messaging functionality on banking applications, and social media platforms such as X (Twitter), LinkedIn, and HelloPeter. Banks A, D and E have developed a virtual assistant to assist customers with frequently asked queries. Banks C, D and E have incorporated call and chat functions into their banking applications, which customers may use to contact support teams directly via the app. If customers do not favour digital communication methods, they may also visit a branch.

All banks maintained active social media profiles to communicate important information and respond to consumer inquiries. Gertze and Petersen concluded that to improve the adoption of e-banking, institutions must guarantee that consumers receive assistance within reasonable response times [28]. Thus, it is beneficial for banks to implement multiple methods of contact with adequate resources to handle customer requests.

4.7. Third-Party Participation

A variety of businesses have established partnerships with the five banks included in the study, which benefits users through the rewards schemes offered by the bank. Clients of a specific bank receive rewards when they conduct transactions with affiliated retailers, restaurant chains or fuel companies. For instance, shoppers may be eligible for rewards in the form of cash-back or the rewards currency of their financial institution when they purchase supplies from Checkers. These rewards become credit for subsequent purchases. The third-party services employed by the banks, such as Pay-as-a-Service (PaaS) providers, were excluded from this study as this information was not available on the platforms investigated.

4.8. Trust and Network Effects

It is evident that customers place their trust in the bank and its facilities to secure their funds and provide efficient financial assistance. However, customers' trust in their bank is impacted by fraud, adverse news concerning the bank and poor service, among other issues. One user on X (Twitter) conveyed dissatisfaction regarding the frequent downtime of Bank E's application. Another user commented that their bank is "corrupt" and involved in "rand

fixing". This post was seen by 2400 people, with 125 comments and 1700 reposts. Thus, social media posts and reviews regarding banks are far reaching and may influence the opinion of other customers, thereby impacting banking platforms. It is therefore imperative that banks focus on customer pain points to improve customer experience.

5 CONCLUSION

This study identified enterprise architectural elements and characteristics that are essential to the success of digital banking platforms. The enterprise architectural framework and elements synthesised from the literature review for a digital banking platform was subsequently validated using the study's methodology. The study determined that the elements essential for organizations to develop a successful, functional digital platform are strategies, technical design, privacy and security, products and services, governance, communication, third-party participation and trust and network effects. The enterprise architecture framework for banking platforms is aligned with literature results with two gaps or shortcomings identified: organizational flexibility and customer demand.

Customer preferences cause variations in the customer experience as evidenced with the social media reviews [37]. Therefore, banks should integrate principles of customer experience and demand into their enterprise architectures. This is further necessitated by the evolving demands of customers and the advancement of technology. Consequently, the digital banking design processes must be customer-centric to address customer needs, improve customer experience and company performance. Based on the findings of banking platforms, banks have implemented strategies that extend beyond the banking sector in recent years. This suggests that banks must integrate a certain degree of flexibility into their operations to facilitate the rapid and efficient advancement of technological trends. These two factors are regarded as fundamental considerations for modern banking enterprise architectures, to ensure responsiveness given technological trends. The comparison of the results obtained from the two methodologies revealed that while banks offer secure and accessible digital services, customers highlight issues pertaining to long queues, app downtime, and high fees. Figure 4 illustrates how the results acquired have altered the enterprise architectural framework for banking platforms.

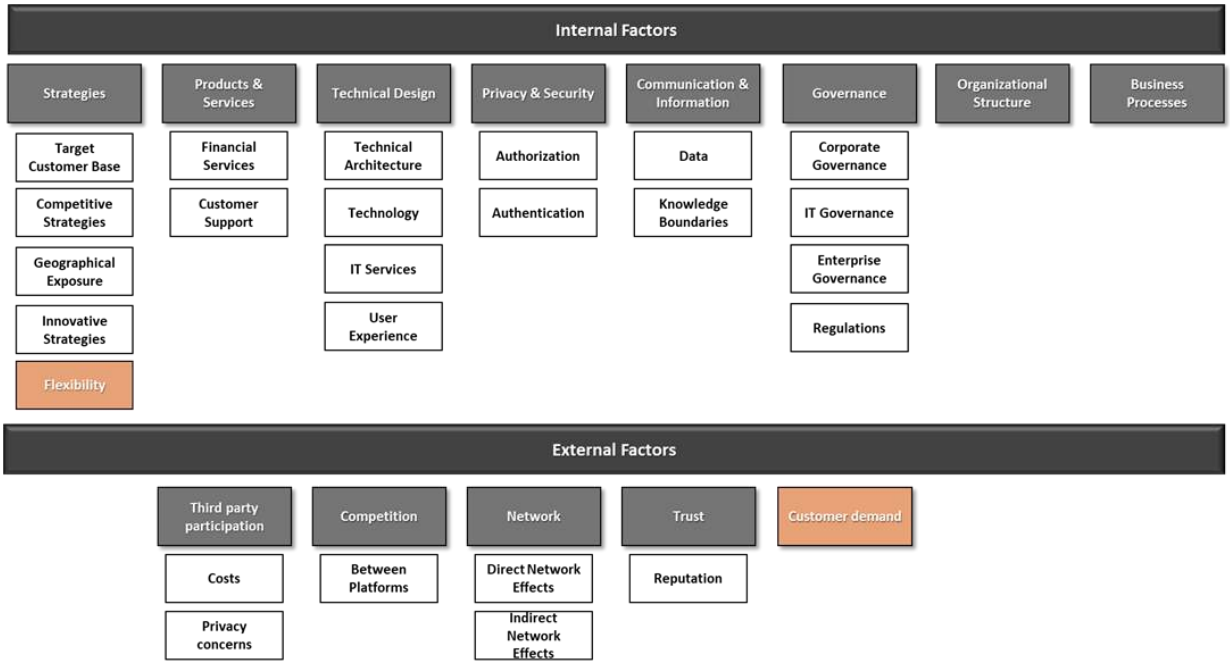

Figure 4: Modified Enterprise Architectural Framework for Banking Platforms

Post these modifications, the Enterprise Architecture for banking platforms is believed to provide an accurate depiction of considerations for designing and maintaining a robust banking platform. This research also highlighted the need for the banking industry to invest in research and resources to maintain the provision of efficient and effective services. Additionally, while banks expand into other sectors with "Beyond Banking" features, they must ensure that operational inefficiencies within current processes are resolved to reduce customer complaints.

While this research revealed significant insights, the study was limited to the five traditional South African banks. Future work could include the expanding this analysis to other banks and other countries. It would be interesting to compare the results in this research and that of digital-only banks (such as those with no branches or ATMs). Moreover, an in-depth organizational analysis may be required to gain an accurate depiction of how enterprise architecture influences performance metrics and other platform characteristics.

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THE IMPACT OF E-COMMERCE ON ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN MANUFACTURING SMMES WITHIN GAUTENG

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ABSTRACT

Electronic commerce has provided significant global competitive advantages to large enterprises. This research project aims to examine the impact the e-commerce applications of electronic marketing (EM), electronic advertising (EA), electronic customer support services (ECSS), electronic order and delivery (EOD), and electronic payment systems (EPS) have on the organisational performance (OP) of small, micro, and medium enterprises (SMMEs) in the clothing manufacturing sector within Gauteng. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to indicate the extent of knowledge that stakeholders have, regarding the influence of e-commerce on the OP of SMMEs. The mixed-method data for this study was obtained through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data analysis involved descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and a comparative t-test. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. The study's results revealed a strong positive correlation between e-commerce applications and OP.

Keywords: e-commerce, organizational performance, service delivery

1 INTRODUCTION

Internet innovation has enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, and ergonomic well-being in production and service sectors, profoundly impacting organisational performance. The First Industrial Revolution (1IR) introduced steam-powered machines and mechanised manufacturing. The Second Industrial Revolution (2IR) brought electricity, mass production, and division of labour. The Third Industrial Revolution (3IR) introduced electronics, computers, and automated manufacturing. The current Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) embodies technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, Robotics, e-commerce (e-com), and Cyber-Physical systems, driven by the demand for flexibility and speed to meet changing customer needs. 4IR technologies are believed to provide a competitive advantage [24][25].

Globalisation has interconnected national markets through trade and technology. Post-apartheid, South Africa rejoined the global economy, leading to economic growth, albeit unevenly distributed. The manufacturing sector struggled to compete globally, particularly against countries like China and India. SMMEs are seen to address economic inequality. Previously, businesses focused locally, leading to unnoticed inefficiencies and inhibiting export growth. Competition from South-East Asia and reduced demand for local products are attributed to poor OP. The clothing and textile (C&T) industry, being labour-intensive, has seen a decline in performance due to global competition and poor operating conditions, resulting in job losses and a decreased GDP contribution. Retrenchments led to the emergence of SMMEs. The definitions for SMMEs in the manufacturing sector are based on employee numbers and annual turnover.

1.1 The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the COVID-19 Catalyst for E-commerce

While the 4IR laid the technological groundwork for the digital transformation of business, the COVID-19 pandemic served as an unprecedented and powerful catalyst for e-commerce adoption among South African SMMEs [25] The imposition of national lockdowns and social distancing protocols made online operations a matter of survival, forcing a rapid shift from traditional face-to-face business models to digital platforms [23] This accelerated transition highlighted both the opportunities and the significant hurdles associated with e-commerce in a developing economy.

The pandemic-driven surge in e-commerce, which saw a 66% rise in South Africa in 2020, was predominantly capitalized upon by large enterprises with existing infrastructure, budgets, and skills. In contrast, many SMMEs, despite recognising the necessity of going online, struggled to adapt. They faced a confluence of challenges, including a lack of agility in altering their operating models and significant deficits in digital infrastructure. Key barriers included access to reliable and affordable broadband, the development of effective e-shop platforms, the integration of secure digital payment systems, and the management of complex logistics. Furthermore, this forced digitalisation occurred amidst a spike in cybercrime, making it difficult for resource-constrained SMMEs to guarantee the safety and security of online transactions. This context of a rapid, necessity-driven, and challenging transition is essential for understanding the specific ways in which e-commerce applications have impacted the performance of SMMEs in the post-pandemic landscape [23][24][25].

1.2 Problem Statement

Innovation holds immense potential for enhancing organisational performance. E-commerce offers advantages like eradicating poor OP, inadequate supply chain management, and subpar customer satisfaction, while fostering employee motivation, flexibility, and high-quality product/service delivery. However, SMMEs in Gauteng lack essential knowledge of e-commerce benefits and resources for effective implementation, impeding their ability to harness its advantages.

1.3 Aim of the Study

This study aims to investigate the impact of e-commerce applications on the OP of SMMEs in the clothing manufacturing sector in Gauteng.

1.3.1 Objectives of the study

- To explore the level of knowledge that relevant interested parties (owners & employees of SMMEs and potential investors) have on the role of e-commerce applications in SMMEs.
- To study the relationship between e-commerce applications and OP of SMMEs in the clothing manufacturing sector in the Gauteng province.

1.3.2 Research Questions

- What is the level of knowledge regarding the role of e-commerce applications among owners, employees of Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), and potential investors?
- What is the relationship between the use of e-commerce applications and the operational performance (OP) of SMMEs in the clothing manufacturing sector within the Gauteng province?

1.4 Hypotheses The following hypotheses guide the study:

- H_1: The e-commerce application of EM has a significant impact on OP in SMMEs.
- H_2: The e-commerce application of EA has a significant impact on OP in SMMEs.
- H_3: The e-commerce application of ECSS have a significant impact on OP in SMMEs.
- H_4: The e-commerce application of EOD has a significant impact on OP in SMMEs.
- H_5: The e-commerce application of EPS has a significant impact on OP in SMMEs.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Electronic Commerce (E-commerce) E-commerce, originating about 40 years ago, has improved OP for many businesses due to innovations like faster internet, product review gateways, secure online payments, and new technologies. E-commerce is a business model for selling and purchasing goods online via smart devices [1].

2.1.1 Background of E-commerce: Industrial revolutions shifted from manual labour to automated operations. Technological innovation introduced speed, flexibility, and simplicity, enhancing OP and stimulating economic development. The 4IR, driven by technologies like AI, Big Data, Robotics, and e-commerce, aims to enhance OP, efficiency, and productivity. This evolving landscape requires organisations to be agile, prioritize customer relationships, shorten lead times, and provide personalized, quality goods and services. E-commerce offers ultimate convenience for customers, defined as buying and selling products/services over the internet. The evolution includes [2][3][4][5][6]:

- **1960s: Electronic Data Interchange (EDI):** Exchanging information (orders, invoices) computer-to-computer to minimize human intervention.
- **1970s-1980s: Teleshopping:** Established by Michael Aldrich for B2B transactions, forming the basis for online shopping. Boston Computer Exchange emerged in 1982 as an online market for used computers.
- **1990s: World Wide Web (WWW):** Created by Tim Berners Lee and Robert Cailliau, making services available on the internet. Amazon and eBay launched in 1995.

- **1990s-2000s: Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT):** PayPal, established in 1998, facilitated online payments, leading to exponential growth in e-commerce sales.

2.1.2 E-commerce Transaction Models: Various models exist, including Business-to-Business (B2B), Business-to-Consumer (B2C), Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C), Consumer-to-Business (C2B), Business-to-Administration (B2A), and Consumer-to-Administration (C2A). E-commerce can be viewed from service, online, communication, and business process perspectives.

2.1.3 E-commerce Applications: These extend the perspectives and include:

- **Electronic Marketing (EM):** Marketing products/services via the internet using smart devices, offering a cost-effective global reach. Channels include email, social media, video, SMS, and website marketing (leveraging SEO). EM involves customers, competitors, and suppliers. Benefits include targeted reach, cost-effectiveness, measurable results, personalization, and global reach [3].
- **Electronic Advertising (EA):** Online advertising using internet devices to generate sales. Types include wallpaper, pop-up, and floating advertising. 'Cookies' help target relevant ads. Benefits include targeted reach, real-time tracking, global reach, and interactive content [7].
- **Electronic Customer Support Service (ECSS):** Online assistance contributing to brand loyalty. Channels include chat (including chatbots), email, social media, and AI/automation for FAQs. Benefits include improved service quality, faster response times, cost-effectiveness, and personalization. Best practices involve being organized, 'me-commerce' (personalized approach), customer reviews, and prompt responses [3].
- **Electronic Order and Delivery (EOD):** The entire online purchase transaction process. It reduces lead times through departmental integration. EDI systems automate online orders and invoicing. Efficient delivery includes electronic proof of delivery (e-POD). EOD also includes product tracking [1].
- **Electronic Payment Systems (EPS):** Eliminates cash/check payments, involving capital transactions via electronic devices. Includes electronic cash and credit systems (credit cards, e-wallets, direct debit, e-check). EPS can increase financial inclusion and economic growth but faces challenges like privacy concerns and cryptocurrency stability. It represents a shift towards a cashless economy [8].

2.2 Organisational Performance (OP) OP is the comparison of actual outputs to planned outputs, goals, or objectives. Initially focused on financial measures, recent studies include non-financial measures linked to long-term operational goals. OP can be seen as how people with a common goal efficiently perform a function, or as dependent on design quality and relationships within the organisation. Key sub-constructs for this study include:

- **Quality of Leadership:** A process where a leader motivates a team towards a goal. Future leadership skills involve embracing transformation, fostering collaboration, encouraging creativity, capacity building, and empowering team members [9].
- **Employee Satisfaction:** Employees being happy and fulfilled at work is a prerequisite for productivity and quality. It correlates positively with job performance. Compensation, rewards, education, and training influence satisfaction and SMME success [10].
- **Customer Satisfaction:** The outcome felt when an organisation's performance meets or exceeds expectations, linked to loyalty and retention (e.g., ACSI model). It applies to both internal and external customers. Strategies include complaint resolution (compensation, contrition, complaint-recovery process), feedback, guarantees

(unconditional, meaningful, understandable, communicable, painless to invoke), and corrective action [11].

- **Product/Service Quality:** Ability of a product to meet/exceed customer expectations. Garvin's eight dimensions of product quality are performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aesthetics, and perceived quality. PZB's service quality dimensions are tangibles, service reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (measured by SERVQUAL). Employee training is crucial for service quality [12].
- **Supplier Performance:** Integrated supply chains allow real-time information sharing. Local suppliers can offer smaller batches and shorter lead times. Advantages of local suppliers include shorter lead times, face-to-face interaction, inventory efficiency, and no import tax. Disadvantages include potential quality issues, limited capacity, biased selection, and higher costs. Supplier development (identifying essential products/suppliers, forming teams, meeting management, identifying projects, defining agreements, and monitoring) improves performance [13].
- **Quality Improvement (QI):** A systematic approach to evaluate performance and establish improvements, focusing on process failures. Key variables identified by quality gurus include leadership, employee improvement, quality assurance, customer role, and philosophy. Juran emphasizes reducing customer-related problems [14].
- **Technology Orientation:** An organisation's capability to embrace and integrate new technologies. It promotes effective learning and innovation. ICT supports business activities and connects functional areas, increasing output, productivity, and profits. It can lead to increased market responsiveness and supply chain flexibility [15].

2.3 The Relationship Between E-commerce Applications and OP

The literature suggests distinct relationships between specific e-commerce applications and dimensions of organisational performance, as detailed below. E-commerce positively influences OP by enhancing information flow regarding customers, markets, suppliers, and competitors. Studies show e-commerce applications boost operational efficiency, financial results, and market competitiveness in SMMEs. E-commerce applications cover trading aspects from marketing to after-sales support, using ICT to facilitate operations and connect functional areas. Big Data Analytics (BDA) in e-commerce catalyses performance improvement. Organisational commitment mediates this relationship; a strong dedication to e-commerce enhances performance. Technological readiness and management characteristics are important. Employee engagement and well-being are pivotal. E-commerce adoption allows SMMEs access to wider markets and operational flexibility. However, challenges like low computerization, high technology costs, and internet security concerns persist, especially in developing countries [16][17] [18].

- *EM and OP:* Adoption of EM helps reach global markets and larger customer groups. It improves engagement and reduces costs compared to traditional marketing. Internet usage for daily operations increases EM performance. Social media influences online purchases [1].
- *EA and OP:* Effective marketing strategies, including EA, positively impact OP by improving business capabilities and customer engagement. EA can indirectly boost performance by elevating employee morale and dedication. Training in EA enhances productivity and efficiency. Effectiveness depends on technology orientation [19].
- *ECSS and OP:* Benefits include automated routine procedures and easily updated technical information. Customers prefer cost-effective, personalized, convenient, fun, prompt, and self-serviceable shopping. Personalization increases customer satisfaction and sales. Online complaint resolution saves time and costs [1].

- *EOD and OP:* EOD improves efficiency, service quality, and customer satisfaction. It can be used as an inventory cost and availability strategy, keeping customers informed. E-commerce reduces inventory levels (JIT approach). Advanced order processing improves delivery speed and accuracy. EOD streamlines delivery by automating order management and optimizing routes, enhancing service quality and customer satisfaction [20][21].
- *EPS and OP:* EPS quality directly impacts customer satisfaction and OP. EPS enhances customer experience, boosts operational efficiency, improves cash flow, and reduces transaction times. They simplify financial transactions, increasing productivity and reducing errors. Digital e-payment services positively impact business performance. Transitioning to EPS improves service delivery and financial sustainability for SMMEs. EPS empowers SMMEs to compete effectively. Challenges like system downtimes and trust issues can impact performance [21][22].

2.4 The Implementation of E-commerce in SMMEs: In the Clothing and Textile Manufacturing Sector

Post-apartheid, South Africa's manufacturing sector struggled globally. 4IR technologies offer a competitive advantage. Many SMMEs in eThekwini are internet-connected, but technology orientation is key. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated e-commerce adoption, providing an entry point for SMMEs in the C&T sector [24].

Factors limiting adoption: Many customers and suppliers do not use e-commerce. Unreliable telecommunications and cybersecurity are major concerns. Lack of consumer trust due to parcel theft, high data costs, fraud, and last-mile delivery challenges hinders adoption in SA. SMMEs often lack knowledge of or access to government funding and possess insufficient innovation, skills, and expertise. Minimal education and training contribute to C&T SMME failure. Online stores can be unprofitable and expensive to maintain if resources are not allocated to user-friendly digital interactions [1][2].

3 METHODOLOGY

This study utilises a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, and quantitative data was collected through questionnaires. The interviews helped to understand employees' perspectives and comprehension of e-commerce applications. The questionnaires were used to define the relationship between e-commerce applications and OP, as well as to explore the level of implementation of e-com applications in SMMEs.

The questionnaires were pre-tested using a pilot study to determine their reliability and validity. The reliability of the questionnaires was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient.

The hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis. A t-test was used to determine the differences in the application of e-commerce solutions between online and traditional SMME clothing manufacturing organisations.

3.1 Population and Sampling

The target population was 2500 clothing manufacturing SMMEs in Gauteng. A sample size of 150 participants (75 from online stores, 75 from traditional stores) was deemed feasible and sufficient for robust comparative analysis. 15 managers/owners were interviewed.

- *Sampling Methods:* A non-random, voluntary response method was used for questionnaires (participants clicked a Google Form link on social media). Simple

random sampling was used to select 15 interviewees from questionnaire respondents who volunteered their contact details (owners/managers).

- *Quantitative Data Analysis:* Analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (charts, tables, graphs) summarized characteristics from questionnaires and interviews. Correlation analysis tested hypotheses and determined relationships between variables. Regression analysis described relationships by fitting a line to experimental data.
- *Comparative Analysis using T-test:* Used to identify differences in e-commerce application between online and traditional SMMEs.

3.2 Justification of sample size

Quantitative Sample (N=150): A total of 150 participants successfully completed the questionnaire. This sample size is considered robust for the intended statistical analyses. According to guidelines for quantitative research, a sample size of N=82 is sufficient to detect a moderate effect size in a correlational design with 80% statistical power at a 5% significance level. Therefore, the achieved sample of 150 provides more than adequate power for the multiple regression analysis performed in this study, strengthening the reliability of the quantitative findings.

Qualitative Sample (N=15): The qualitative sample consisted of 15 owners or managers who participated in semi-structured interviews. This sample size was deemed appropriate based on the principle of **thematic saturation**. Thematic saturation is the point in data collection when new interviews no longer generate new insights or themes, indicating that the data set is sufficiently rich to address the research questions. Peer-reviewed studies suggest that for research involving a relatively homogenous population—in this case, owners/managers of C&T SMMEs within a specific geographic and industrial context—saturation is often achieved with a sample size of 9 to 17 participants. Therefore, a sample of 15 was determined to be sufficient to achieve the necessary depth and informational redundancy for a rigorous qualitative analysis without being so large as to impede a deep, case-oriented analysis.

3.3 Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data collected via the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis involved several stages:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated to summarise the sample characteristics and responses.
- **Reliability Analysis:** Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated for each construct to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement scales.
- **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between the e-commerce applications and OP.
- **Multiple Regression Analysis:** A multiple regression model was developed to test the hypotheses and determine the extent to which the e-commerce applications could predict OP.
- **Independent Samples T-test:** A t-test was conducted to compare the mean usage of e-commerce applications and the mean OP scores between online-based and traditional clothing stores.

3.4 Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data from the 15 semi-structured interview transcripts were analysed using **qualitative content analysis**. This method was selected for its systematic and rigorous approach to condensing large volumes of text into meaningful categories or themes based on

valid interpretation. The analysis followed an inductive process, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data. The specific steps were as follows:

1. **Data Familiarisation:** All 15 interview transcripts were read and re-read multiple times to gain a deep and holistic understanding of the content.
2. **Inductive Coding:** The transcripts were systematically coded. Key concepts, ideas, and experiences related to e-commerce adoption and its impact were identified and labelled with descriptive codes.
3. **Theme Development:** Related codes were grouped to form broader, overarching themes. This involved a process of constant comparison, where codes and developing themes were compared across all transcripts to ensure consistency and coherence.
4. **Interpretation:** The final themes were analysed to understand the relationships between them and to develop explanations for the phenomena observed in the study. This interpretive step focused on uncovering the underlying meanings and patterns in the participants' experiences.

4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Description of the Study Sample

- *Education Level:* 29.3% held postgraduate degrees, 24.7% undergraduate degrees, 22% certificates/diplomas, 14% matric, and 10% had not acquired matric. This indicates a highly educated sample (54% with higher education) but also a 10% gap in secondary education completion.
- *Size of Organisation:* 69.3% micro-sized (0-10 employees), 22.7% small-sized (11-50), and 8% medium-sized (51-250). Majority are micro-enterprises, suggesting new or non-growing businesses.
- *Age of Respondent:* Majority aged 28 (20%), followed by 40 (7.3%). This suggests clothing manufacturing SMMEs comprise young adults, potentially impacted by high unemployment.
- *Years Working in Enterprise:* Majority had not been in the industry for more than two years (18% for two years, 13.33% for one year). 12% for 3-4 years, 10% for five years. Few worked beyond five years, possibly indicating low survival rates for SMMEs past this mark.
- *Respondent's Position:* 60.7% owners, 16% production (seamstress), 15.3% managers, and 7.9% in other roles (sales, student, designer, intern, marketing, quality supervisor). Few positions directly support efficient e-commerce use.
- *How Organisation is Based:* 43% online, 38% traditional stores, 18.7% hybrid.

4.2 Descriptive Measures – Constructs

- *Electronic Marketing (EM):*
    - 49.4% disagreed they don't send marketing emails; 40.7% agreed.
    - 80% agreed to using social media for product awareness/brand loyalty.
    - 42.7% disagreed with using video marketing; 40.6% agreed.
    - 38.6% disagreed with online information sharing with competitors; 34% agreed.
    - 78% agreed customers/suppliers communicate via contact sales offices.

- *Electronic Advertising (EA):*
    - 64% agreed websites are used for advertising.
    - 63.3% disagreed with using pop-up advertising.
    - 57.3% disagreed with using floating advertising.
    - 76% agreed majority of advertising is via internet devices.
    - 82% agreed products on sale are posted on social media.
- *Electronic Customer Support Service (ECSS):*
    - 74% agreed online assistance is seamless/easy.
    - 45.3% disagreed that FAQ responses are kept uniform; 42% agreed.
    - 84% agreed a personalized approach to customer communication is offered.
    - 48.7% disagreed a reviews page is offered; 43.3% agreed.
    - 68% agreed the organisation is active online for prompt responses.
- *Electronic Order and Delivery (EOD):*
    - 72.7% agreed an online catalogue is available.
    - 80% agreed customers place orders via online platforms.
    - 77.4% agreed delivery services are available at checkout.
    - 50% agreed orders can be tracked online; 46.7% disagreed.
    - 44.6% agreed deliveries are recorded using ePOD; 41.3% disagreed.
- *Electronic Payment System (EPS):*
    - 49.3% disagreed with using mobile payment apps (PayPal, etc.); 42.6% agreed.
    - 62% agreed to using cash send or e-wallets.
    - 88% agreed to using direct bank deposits.
    - 75.3% agreed to using cash on delivery.
    - 83.3% agreed to using ATM deposits.
- *Organisational Performance (OP):*
    - 58.7% agreed the organisation has set clear long-term performance goals.
    - 52.6% agreed outputs are measured against planned outputs.
    - 68% agreed a CRM strategy is used.
    - 60.6% agreed quality improvement strategies are in place.
    - 86.7% agreed the organisation ensures on-time delivery.

4.3 Reliability Analysis Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all e-commerce applications and OP were > 0.60, indicating favourably good reliability for the study in Table 1.

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha Coefficient

E-Commerce Application	Cronbach's Alpha
EM	0.768
EA	0,725
ECSS	0,744
EOD	0,753
EPS	0,642
Organisational Performance	**Cronbach's Alpha**
OP	0,827

4.4 Correlation Analysis Pearson's correlation (Table 2) indicated moderately positive impacts on OP for four e-commerce applications and a moderately negative effect for one. Significant correlations with OP:

- EM: r = 0.618, p = 0.00 (stronger moderate)
- EA: r = 0.401, p = 0.00 (moderate)
- ECSS: r = 0.463, p = 0.00 (moderate)
- EOD: r = 0.492, p = 0.00 (moderate)
- EPS: r = -0.434, p = 0.00 (moderately negative).
- Significant correlations also existed between e-commerce applications (e.g., EA and EM: r = 0.602; ECSS and EOD: r = 0.728).

Table 2: Correlation matrix

		Organisational Performance	E-Marketing	E-Advertising	E-Customer Support Service	E-Order and Delivery	E-Payment System
Organisational Performance	r	1.000	0.618	0.401	0.463	0.492	-0.434
	p	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00
E-Marketing	r	0.618	1.000	0.602	0.610	0.660	-0.387
	p	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00
E-Advertising	r	0.401	0.602	1.000	0.559	0.676	-0.298
	p	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00
E-Customer Support Service	r	0.463	0.610	0.559	1.000	0.728	-0.281
	p	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00
E-Order and Delivery	r	0.492	0.660	0.676	0.728	1.000	-0.309
	p	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00
E-Payment System	r	-0.434	-0.387	-0.298	-0.281	-0.309	1.000
	p	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00	*0.00

4.5 Regression Analysis

This method estimated how changes in OP are associated with e-commerce applications.

4.5.1 Regression Model Summary

The correlation coefficient (R) was 0.633, indicating a relatively high positive correlation between variables. The R-squared (R^2) value was 0.440, meaning the model explains 44% of the variance in OP.

Table 3: Regression model

Model Summary[b]				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.633[a]	0.440	0.421	0.68948
a. Predictors: (Constant), EPS, ECSS, EA, EM, EOD				
b. Dependent Variable: OP				

4.5.2 ANOVA Test

The regression model significantly predicted OP (Sig. = 0.00, which is < 0.05). This indicates the model is a suitable fit for the dataset.

Table 4: ANOVA results

ANOVA[a]						
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	**Regression**	53.812	5	10.762	22.640	0.00[b]
	Residual	68.455	144	0.475		
	Total	122.267	149			
a. Dependent Variable: OP						
b. Predictors: (Constant), EPS, ECSS, EA, EM, EOD						

4.5.3 Coefficients

Table 5: Regression coefficients and equation

Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
		B (β)	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	**(Constant)**	2.709	0.469		5.774	0.00
	E-Marketing	0.423	0.087	0.443	4.859	0.00
	E-Advertising	-0.047	0.085	-0.048	-0.548	0.585
	E-Customer Support Service	0.081	0.094	0.081	0.857	0.393
	E-Order and Delivery	0.103	0.105	0.106	0.988	0.325
	E-Payment System	-0.254	0.078	-0.222	-3.267	0.001

EA (t = -0.548) and EPS (t = -3.267) did not significantly contribute to OP variation and were excluded from the final model equation. The estimated regression model:

$$y\ (OP) = 2.709 + 0.423(x_1) + 0.081(x_3) + 0.103(x_4)$$

Where:

OP = Organisational Performance

x_i = Relates to each element

i = 1, 2,3,4,5

x_1 = E-Marketing

x_2 = E-Advertising

x_3 = E-Customer Support Service

x_4 = E-Order and Delivery

x_5 = E-Payment System

Therefore,

a) For each unit increase in the EM variable, an increase of (0.423) units in OP are anticipated, assuming all other independent variables remain constant.
b) For each unit increase in the ECSS variable, an increase of (0.081) units in OP are anticipated, assuming all other independent variables remain constant.
c) For each unit increase in the EOD variable, an increase of (0.103) units in Organisational Performance are anticipated, assuming all other independent variables remain constant.

The beta (ß) coefficient presented in Table 23 outlines the values utilized in the regression equation that predicts the dependent variable from the independent variable. EM (independent variable) exhibits the highest beta (ß) coefficient of 0.423, indicating that a one standard deviation increase in EM is associated with a 0.423 standard deviation increase in Organisational Performance. Likewise, the other positive beta (ß) coefficients concerning ECSS (0.081) and EOD (0.103) suggest that a one standard deviation increase in any of these beta (ß) coefficients would result in a standard deviation increase in OP. It is evident that EM (4.859) significantly affects OP, as focusing on online marketing of products and services, is crucial in reaching global markets by attracting and engaging with customers or clients.

4.5.4 Hypothesis Testing

All five hypotheses were accepted based on p-values < 0.05, though the interpretation should consider the coefficient signs from the regression output.

Table 6: Hypothesis

Hypothesis	R	R-Squared	p-value	Decision
H_1	0.618	0.382	0.000	Accepted H_1
H_2	0.401	0.161	0.000	Accepted H_2
H_3	0.463	0.214	0.000	Accepted H_3
H_4	0.492	0.243	0.000	Accepted H_4
H_5	0.434	0.189	0.000	Accepted H_5

4.6 Comparative Analysis of Online and Traditional Stores

Table 7: T-TEST analysis

	Online store		Traditional Store		
	N = 65		N = 57		
Electronic commerce Applications	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean differences
E-Marketing	3.5385	0.71320	2.6351	0.88085	0.9034
E-Advertising	3.7415	0.73716	2.6386	0.86968	1.1029
E-Customer Support Services	3.9015	0.52455	2.8526	0.99249	1.0489
E-Order and Delivery	3.8585	0.58280	2.7684	0.98908	1.0901
E-Payment System	3.8962	0.74594	4.0132	0.75211	-0.117
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean differences
Organisational Performance	3.6246	0.93575	3.4737	0.90288	0.1509

Both online and traditional stores use e-commerce applications. Largest mean differences (online > traditional) were in EA (1.1029), EOD (1.0901), and ECSS (1.0489), suggesting greater commitment in online-based organisations. EPS was used more in traditional stores (mean difference -0.117), aligning with findings of limited trust in online payment systems. OP in online organisations differed from traditional stores (mean difference 0.1509), suggesting e-commerce use impacts OP.

4.7 Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with 15 owners/managers explored e-commerce knowledge and use. Data was analysed using content analysis.

- 35% of organisations did not know what e-commerce applications were or their purpose.
- 65% were aware of individual functions rather than umbrella terms (EM, EA, etc.).
- Traditional stores often viewed competitors as colleagues and didn't see information sharing as a threat, unlike online organisations.
- Most were familiar with EM, EOD, ECSS, and some EPS (cash payments preferred for safety). This shows fair awareness but a lack of confidence in full e-commerce benefits and security.
- A key reason traditional stores lacked interest in order/delivery was past issues with online material colour discrepancies leading to returns; they prefer in-store material viewing.
- Online organisations preferred immediate payment methods (e.g., deposits before manufacturing) over cash on delivery due to risks of refusal or payment issues upon delivery.
- Both store types found online marketing brought new business.
- However, the labour-intensive nature of clothing manufacturing meant daily EA, ECSS, and EOD tasks became overwhelming for small staff numbers, discouraging reaching large audiences they couldn't manage efficiently.

4.7.1 Thematical analysis

Theme 1: Social Media as the Primary Gateway to E-commerce

A dominant theme was the overwhelming reliance on social media platforms (primarily Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp) as the main tool for electronic marketing. For most SMMEs, particularly the micro-enterprises, social media was not just a marketing channel but their entire e-commerce ecosystem. It was perceived as a low-cost, accessible entry point to reach new customers. One participant stated, *"Everything happens on Instagram. That's where we post new designs, talk to customers, and even take orders. We don't have a proper website... it's too expensive to maintain"*. This explains the strong positive impact of EM on OP, as it represents the most widely adopted and central e-commerce activity for these businesses.

Theme 2: Deep-Seated Distrust in Electronic Payment Systems

This theme directly addresses the counter-intuitive negative correlation between EPS and OP. Participants expressed significant apprehension regarding online payment systems, citing issues of security, fraud, and high transaction fees. Many customers were also described as being wary of paying online. As a result, many SMMEs, including those operating primarily online, still rely heavily on traditional payment methods. A common practice was to take orders online but arrange payment via direct bank deposit (EFT) or even cash on delivery. An owner of an online store explained, *"We tried a payment gateway, but the fees were killing our margins. Additionally, customers fear putting their card details online. They prefer to do an EFT. It's safer for everyone"*. This preference for methods outside of integrated EPS creates administrative burdens and cash flow challenges, turning what should be an efficiency driver into a point of friction, thus explaining its negative impact on performance.

Theme 3: Operational Overload as a Barrier to Scale

While SMMEs embraced social media for marketing, they often felt overwhelmed by the operational demands that came with increased online visibility. The tasks of managing daily electronic advertising, providing constant electronic customer support, and processing electronic orders and deliveries were described as immensely time-consuming for small teams or sole proprietors. One manager noted, *"You post something nice, and suddenly you have 50 DMs [direct messages] asking for prices, sizes, colours... You spend the whole day just replying to messages instead of making the clothes. We can't handle a huge audience"*. This operational strain explains why applications like EA, ECSS, and EOD, while positively correlated with OP, did not emerge as significant predictors in the regression model. Their benefits are often offset by the capacity constraints of the micro-enterprises, preventing them from being leveraged strategically for growth.

4.8 Summary of Findings

- *Descriptive Analysis:* The SMME landscape in this sector is characterized by highly educated individuals, often owners in their late twenties/early forties, managing micro-sized enterprises with limited industry experience (often <2 years). This reflects South Africa's unemployment challenges and the rise of youth entrepreneurship. Business survival appears challenging beyond five years. Mean scores for e-commerce application usage and OP dimensions were above the midpoint of the Likert scale, suggesting accurate representation by the constructs.
- *Impact of E-commerce on OP:* Correlation and regression analyses revealed that EM, ECSS, and EOD have a significant positive impact on OP. EA showed a positive correlation but not a significant independent impact in the regression. EPS demonstrated a significant negative correlation with OP, likely due to customer trust issues with online payments in South Africa.
- *Knowledge and Adoption:* Interviews showed varied knowledge levels; many understand specific functions but not broader strategic applications. Awareness existed, but confidence in the benefits and security of full e-commerce suites was lacking. Operational burdens and specific industry concerns (e.g., product returns) also limit adoption.

5 CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of five e-commerce applications on the organisational performance of clothing manufacturing SMMEs in Gauteng. The findings confirm that e-commerce has a significant, albeit complex, influence. The quantitative analysis established that Electronic Marketing (EM) is a strong positive predictor of OP, while Electronic Payment Systems (EPS) are a significant negative predictor. The other applications—EA, ECSS, and EOD—were positively correlated with OP but did not emerge as significant independent predictors in the regression model, suggesting their impact is constrained.

The study's primary contribution lies in its use of a mixed-methods approach to explain these results. The qualitative findings revealed that the positive impact of EM is driven by the widespread, low-cost use of social media, whereas the negative impact of EPS is a direct result of a lack of trust, security concerns, and high costs, which force SMMEs into inefficient manual workarounds. The limited impact of other applications is attributed to the operational overload experienced by resource-constrained micro-enterprises. Ultimately, the research demonstrates that e-commerce adoption in this context is largely tactical and fragmented, preventing the full realisation of its strategic benefits.

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THE ROLE OF BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE AS AN ENABLER FOR BUSINESS PROCESS RE-ENGINEERING IN PHARMACEUTICAL TRANSPORT LOGISTICS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Efficient transport logistics are crucial in the pharmaceutical industry to ensure the timely and secure delivery of vital products. This paper presents an exploratory case study on the application of Power BI, a business intelligence (BI) tool, as a technological enabler for Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) within the transport logistics of a leading South African pharmaceutical company. The study identifies key logistical challenges, including route inefficiencies, delivery delays, and the absence of supply chain transparency. Using a qualitative methodology, this research draws on semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders who use the company's Power BI dashboard. The findings indicate that the BI dashboard provides significant perceived benefits in performance monitoring, operational visibility, and compliance tracking. However, its full potential is constrained by challenges related to data scalability, user adoption, and the need for more advanced predictive capabilities. The study concludes that while Power BI is a powerful tool, its successful implementation as a cornerstone of BPR requires a strategic approach that integrates technology with process redesign, addresses human factors through change management, and establishes robust data governance.

Keywords: Power BI, transport logistics, Business Intelligence, Business Process Re-engineering

1 INTRODUCTION

The pharmaceutical industry is facing mounting pressure to optimize operations and decision-making processes in transportation logistics [1]. The cold chain presents unique challenges, including the need for precise temperature control and the ability to identify potential disruptive events. These challenges were magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to issues such as loss of vaccinations and damaged inventory [2]. The integration of advanced technologies like Power BI shows promise in addressing these challenges [3]. A pharmaceutical Company has implemented a Power BI dashboard to enhance logistics operations.

1.1. Aim of study

This study aims to explore how Power BI can transform and improve transport logistics within the pharmaceutical industry by integrating all the systems that are used in logistics.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To analyse the current challenges and inefficiencies in transport logistics within the industry.
- Investigate the technical and architectural aspects of integrating systems with Power BI.
- To streamline operations, reduce costs, and ensure the safe and timely delivery of pharmaceutical products.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Business Process Re-engineering in Supply Chain Logistics

Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) offers a framework for achieving radical, rather than incremental, improvements. BPR advocates for redesigning processes from a cross-functional perspective to increase efficiency and effectiveness. In logistics, this can involve re-engineering processes like order fulfilment, route planning, and inventory management. The successful application of BPR in logistics has been shown to lead to significant reductions in cycle times, improved delivery accuracy, and lower operational costs. Information Technology (IT) is widely recognized as a critical enabler of BPR, as it allows companies to break old rules and create new ways of organizing work [13][20].

2.2 4IR and Power BI

4IR refers to the current era of digital transformation in manufacturing and business [4].The 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) is driving digital transformation in manufacturing and business, fuelled by trends like data growth and robotics advancement [5]. Power BI dashboard aligns with 4IR's focus on data-driven automation, AI, Internet of Things, and innovation, with the potential to completely transform the logistics and transportation industry [6]. It provides access to logistical data, optimizing transport operations effectively. Power BI enhances transportation planning through improved visibility, high-quality data, and analytics [6][13].

2.3 Supply Chain

A supply chain encompasses all stages involved in delivering a finished product to a customer [7]. It begins with raw material producers and ends with the delivery of finished products. An optimized supply chain leads to a more efficient production cycle and reduced costs, making supply chain management essential [8]. Businesses must streamline their supply chain to save expenses and maintain competitiveness [8]. While logistics is often used interchangeably with supply chain management, it is just one link in the chain. Logistics involves the planning, management, and transportation of products and services from their origin to their destination, ensuring timely and undamaged delivery at every stage, thus reducing costs for the business [9].

2.4 The Role of Business Intelligence as a BPR Enabler

Business Intelligence (BI) refers to the technologies, applications, and practices for the collection, integration, analysis, and presentation of business information. The purpose of BI is to support better business decision-making. Power BI is a prominent analytics tool that enables organizations to visualize data and share insights [13][21][22].

In a BPR context, BI systems serve as a powerful enabler by:

- **Providing Process Visibility:** BI dashboards can consolidate data from disparate systems (e.g., ERP, CRM, fleet management) to provide a holistic, real-time view of logistics operations. This visibility is the first step toward identifying bottlenecks and areas for redesign.
- **Facilitating Performance Measurement:** BPR is a results-driven methodology. BI dashboards are instrumental in tracking Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) before, during, and after a re-engineering project, allowing for data-driven evaluation of the impact of changes. Common logistics KPIs include on-time delivery rates, fuel costs, fleet utilization, and order accuracy.
- **Supporting Data-Driven Decision-Making:** By transforming raw data into actionable insights through visualizations and analytics, BI empowers managers to move from intuition-based to evidence-based decision-making, a cornerstone of successful BPR. The AI and machine learning capabilities within modern BI tools can further enhance this by enabling predictive analytics for demand forecasting and route optimization.

The integration of data is achieved through an Extract, Transform, Load (ETL) process [16][17], as shown in Figure 1. Data is extracted from various sources, transformed (cleansed and standardized), and loaded into a data warehouse, which serves as a central repository for analysis and reporting through BI systems.

2.5 Power BI

The transportation aspect of distribution and logistics is essential in maintaining cost-effectiveness and performance standards [10]. Fluctuations in fuel prices have a significant impact on the transportation industry. To stay competitive, organisations must track and understand their data and performance indicators [10]. Business Intelligence technology aids in data analysis and decision-making. Power BI reports offer insights into profit and loss, fleet performance and help address common challenges in transport logistics such as fuel costs, fleet maintenance and driver shortages [11].The system has features like slicers, graphs and filters, enabling specific data access based on time and geographic [12]. Power BI reports also help identify common challenges like fuel costs, cost of fleet maintenance and labour shortages [11].

In the pharmaceutical sector, big data and digitization drive industry evolution, with successful businesses adopting advanced and AI-driven solutions [13]. Power BI's AI capabilities facilitate machine learning models for improved traffic and weather predictions, offering practical KPIs and supply chain optimization [11]. The system's versatility allows for mobile integration, data sharing, and visibility improvements across teams [14].Power BI dashboard plays a crucial role in ensuring temperature-controlled transport of pharmaceutical products and contributes to environmental sustainability through the adoption of green technologies and IoT in supply chain management [14]. The IoT is being utilised in supply chain management, enhancing decision-making transparency and operational effectiveness [15]. It allows real-time tracking and monitoring, ensuring all products are traceable and allowing for on-the-go adaptation to keep customers satisfied ([15].

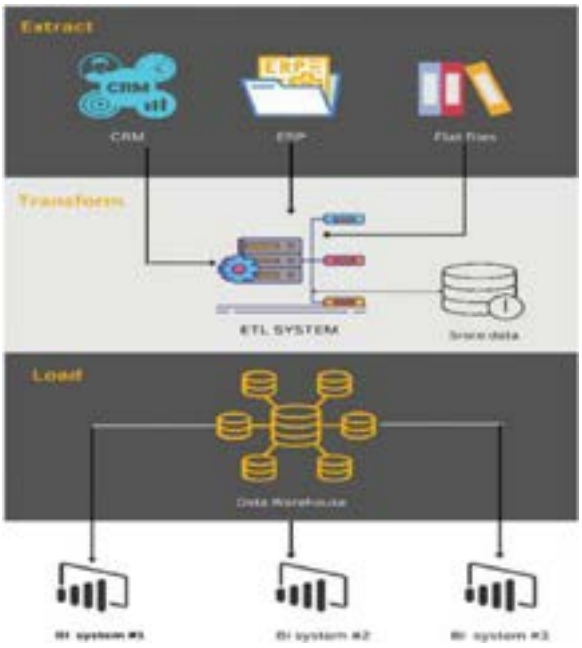

Figure 1: ETL process [13]

The ETL (Extract, Transform, Load) process, as shown in Figure 1, encompasses the data source, data warehouse and end user. Internal data source involves information obtained from operational systems like ERP and CRM, covering customers, products and sales data [13].Data extraction involves retrieving data from multiple sources, which may be incomplete or duplicated, requiring cleansing and transformation before staging [16]. The data warehouse serves as a repository for collecting and storing information that is utilized for strategic planning, querying and analysis [17]. It stores both aggregated and historical data for long-term analysis [17].

The dashboard uses ETL to integrate data from multiple sources, allowing for easy data visualization and analysis. However, Pharmaceutical Company X faces risks such as reliance on external consultants, cultural and procedural changes, and data security and privacy concerns. Recommendations for Pharmaceutical Company X BI stakeholders include real-time automated alarms and notifications, predictive analysis and machine learning for demand forecasting and risk management, mobile access for real-time data monitoring, a clear data visualization layout, and automatic notifications for non-users.

3 METHODOLOGY

The researcher employs research union methodology which is a multi-layered approach designed that help researchers understand the complexity of various research methods and their interrelationships [18]. It consists of different layers, each representing a different aspect of the research process. The layers include philosophy, approach, strategy, choice, time horizon and techniques [19]. The research employs a qualitative methodology. The study population consisted of sixty-one stakeholders within Pharmaceutical Company X who were identified as having access to and being users of the Power BI logistics dashboard.

3.1 Collection of data

Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This method allows for flexibility while ensuring that key topics are covered, enabling the researcher to probe for deeper insights into the participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to the BI dashboard. Due to limitations including staff availability and recent resignations, fourteen

of the targeted sixty-one stakeholders participated in the study, resulting in a response rate of 23%. The responses were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis.

3.2 Sampling method

The study population consisted of sixty-one stakeholders within Pharmaceutical Company X who were identified as having access to and being users of the Power BI logistics dashboard. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who were best positioned to provide rich information on the research topic based on their roles and experience with the system.

3.3 Analysis of data

The transcribed interview data was analysed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. The analysis followed a systematic process of data familiarization, generation of initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This approach allowed for a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data.

4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The research design had limitations, such as unavailable coworkers, resigned coworkers and as a result, only fourteen managed to respond to the study and their responses were recorded on form@app. The demographic profile of respondents is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Total
Male	7	14
Female	7	
Race		14
Black Africans	12	
Coloureds	1	
Khoisan	1	
Age		14
18-35	9	
36-52	5	
Work experience		14
1-5	9	
6-10	3	
11-15	2	

4.1 Summary of the results derived from the interviews

Figure 3 below shows the main themes identified in the study. The second branches on the diagram represents the main themes. The reviews for these themes are discussed as follows.

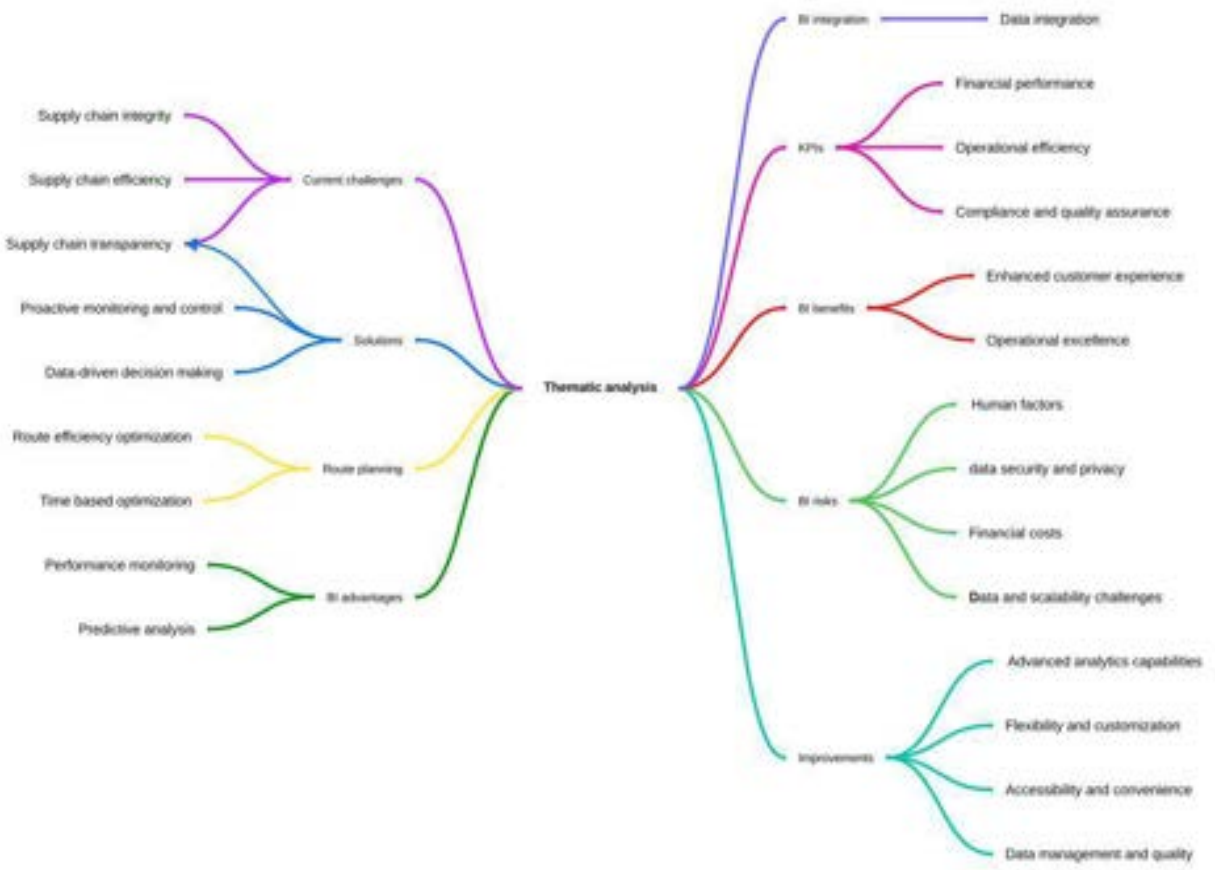

Figure 2: Main themes derived from the study

4.1.1 Current challenges

Three main themes are highlighted in Figure 3, supply chain integrity, supply chain efficiency and supply chain transparency. These challenges harm patient safety, real-time visibility and profitability. Based on Figure 3, the key themes revolve around the multifaceted challenges and solutions in modern logistics and supply chain management. The list highlights a number of critical issues, including a lack of **real-time visibility** into shipments, inefficient processes, and specific industry-related problems like **temperature control** for pharmaceuticals. These challenges can lead to tangible negative outcomes such as **damaged stock**, delivery delays, and security risks like theft. To mitigate these issues, Figure 3 implicitly suggests solutions centered on improving **supply chain visibility**, implementing robust inventory and route management, and ensuring strict **regulatory compliance**. Overall, the summary illustrates a comprehensive view of the operational difficulties faced in logistics and the key areas where process improvement and technology are necessary to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

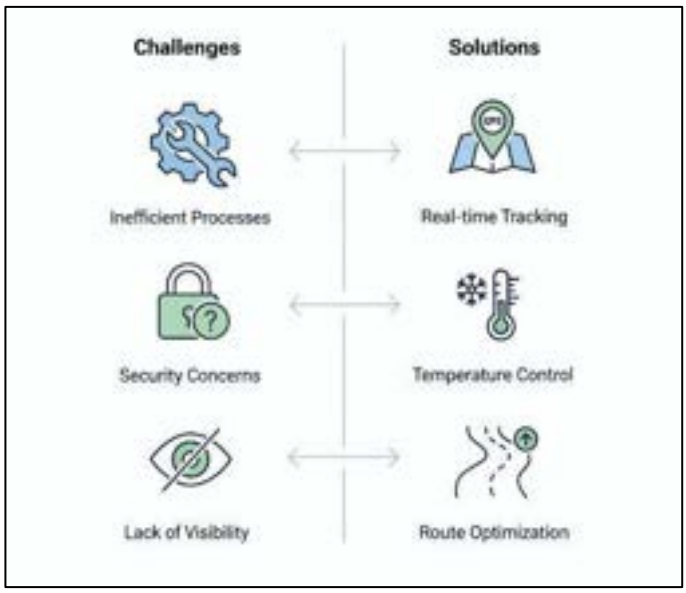

Figure 3: Current challenges and inefficiencies in transport logistics

4.1.2 Solutions

Pharmaceutical logistics can be improved by employing supply chain transparency, proactive and control and data-driven decisions. These themes allow for better monitoring, risk prediction and control which empowers responses to potential disruptions. The key finding in Figure 3 is the critical importance of implementing end-to-end visibility of the supply chain. This overarching concept addresses numerous challenges prevalent in logistics, such as delays, disruptions, and a lack of information regarding the location and condition of goods. Achieving this visibility necessitates the integration of various technologies and processes to provide a comprehensive view from the initial stages of production to the final delivery. By knowing where goods are and under what conditions, organizations can proactively manage risks, optimize routes, improve communication with stakeholders, and ultimately enhance overall efficiency and customer satisfaction. This proactive approach, enabled by complete supply chain visibility, is fundamental for building resilient and responsive logistics operations.

4.1.3 Route planning

Optimal route planning covers two main themes which is route efficiency optimisation and time-based optimisation. Route efficiency optimisation reduces logistics costs and improves supply chain efficiency by minimizing distance, less fuel consumption and increasing load capacity. Time-based optimisation uses time window management and predictive analysis to adjust routes based on delivery time window, traffic patterns and road conditions.

Route planning in Figure 4 is a critical component of logistics, and the provided information highlights several key strategies to optimize this process. The core focus is on leveraging **technology** and data-driven approaches to move from static to **dynamic routing**. Key strategies include using **route optimization software** and algorithms like the Vehicle Routing Problem (VRP) to create efficient, multi-stop routes. This software integrates **real-time data**, such as traffic updates and weather conditions, to allow for on-the-fly adjustments and avoid delays. The ultimate goal is to improve efficiency by maximizing cargo load, reducing the number of delivery attempts, and ensuring on-time delivery, all while managing costs and ensuring vehicle safety. This dynamic approach ensures that logistics operations are not only efficient but also adaptable to unforeseen challenges.

Figure 4: Optimal route planning strategies

4.1.4 BI advantages

BI dashboard offers essential advantages in logistics operations namely, performance monitoring and predictive analysis. BI is used to check and track KPIs in logistics; it stores historical data which is analysed and used to predict future demand or issues.

4.1.5 BI integration

The integration of systems into BI dashboard includes two processes which are data extraction and data transformation. This theme focuses on the ETL process, where data is extracted from different sources such as oracle and excel. The data is cleaned and converted into a usable format for analysis such as bar chart, donut charts and control charts.

4.1.6 Key Performance Indicators

BI measures key performance indicators of logistics operations which are centred around the following themes, operational efficiency, financial performance, compliance and quality assurance. KPIs under operational efficiency includes defect rate, delivery rate and cost per shipments. Financial performance is assessed through profit margin, fuel cost, providing insights into financial health and profitability of supply chain. adherence to regulations and quality control KPIs, such as temperature control compliance, make sure that quality standards and legal requirements are followed, which is especially important in products that are sensitive to temperature changes.

Maintaining **temperature control compliance** is a crucial key performance indicator (KPI) in logistics, directly impacting both **product integrity** and operational **efficiency**. Failure to adhere to required temperature ranges, especially for sensitive goods like pharmaceuticals or certain food products, can lead to spoilage, loss of efficacy, and regulatory penalties. Conversely, consistent and accurate temperature management throughout the supply chain ensures that products reach the end consumer in optimal condition, safeguarding their quality and value. Efficient temperature control also contributes to streamlined operations by minimizing waste and reducing the likelihood of returns or recalls, ultimately enhancing customer trust and business profitability. This KPI serves as a direct measure of a company's ability to maintain quality standards and operational excellence within its supply chain.

4.1.7 BI benefits

The BI benefits are summarised into two main themes, operational excellence and enhanced customer experience. Operational excellence involves streamlining operations, increasing efficiency and reducing costs. Enhanced customer satisfaction is achieved through customer satisfaction, faster delivery and on time delivery.

4.1.8 BI risks

The implementation of BI dashboard has potential risks, four main risks are covered as categorised, human factors, data security, financial cost and data scalability. Risks associated with technical proficiency and change management are considered human factors. Risks associated with protecting sensitive logistics data and ensuring the security and privacy of the logistics data. Certain cost is required to implement the system and for user license fee. The BI dashboard has a lot of different data which needs more storage, the Company must pay for data storage.

4.1.9 BI improvements

Four themes are covered: advanced analytics capabilities, flexibility and customisation, accessibility and convenience, and data management and quality. Enhanced analytics capabilities use real-time data and machine learning which can be used to make forecasts, obtain deeper insights and make well-informed decisions. Users may create customised reports and remove unnecessary data by adjusting the dashboard to meet their unique needs. Users can monitor the operations through mobile applications.

4.2 Thematical Analysis

4.2.1 Theme 1: Current Logistical Challenges

Respondents identified three interrelated challenges that instigated the need for a better solution:

Supply chain integrity – concerns included the risk of product diversion and the critical need to maintain product quality and authenticity, particularly adhering to temperature control regulations.

Supply chain efficiency – issues such as inefficient route planning, delivery delays and suboptimal inventory management were highlighted as key drivers of increased costs and reduced performance.

Supply chain transparency – a significant challenge was the lack of real-time, end-to-end visibility of shipments which hindered proactive problem solving.

Figure 5: Cause and effect diagram of the transportation challenges

Figure 5, a cause-and-effect diagram developed based on participant input, illustrates how various factors across materials, methods, machines, measurement, environment, and people contribute to these transportation issues.

4.2.2 Theme 2: The BI dashboard as a solution

The Power BI dashboard was implemented to address the challenges above by integrating data from various logistics systems. Figure 6 shows the home page of the dashboard used by Pharmaceutical Company X, which provides a high-level overview of key operational areas.

Figure 6: Pharmaceutical Company X's BI Dashboard Home Page

Participants reported that the dashboard provides solutions centered around **performance monitoring** and **data-driven decision-making**. The system enables the monitoring of a wide range of KPIs across different facets of the logistics operation.

Compliance and Equipment: The dashboard tracks employee training and the compliance status of equipment. As shown in Figure 7, users can monitor which equipment is in use, non-compliant, or in need of repair, ensuring adherence to safety and operational standards.

Figure 7: BI dashboard equipment summary

Fleet and Fuel Management: This provides real-time visibility of vehicle status (on-site vs. in-trip) and type. The dashboard also tracks fuel consumption and costs, enabling managers to identify opportunities for cost reduction. It further monitors on-time versus late departures, offering insights into route efficiency and driver performance.

Figure 8: BI dashboard fleet summary

Staff Management: The dashboard provides a comprehensive overview of personnel, including total employees, attendance, overtime, and late arrivals. This allows for better workforce management and productivity tracking.

Figure 9: BI staff management summary

Delivery and Inventory Status: The dashboard tracks key delivery metrics, including the number of delivered vs. undelivered parcels, returns, and total value. This information is crucial for optimizing delivery times, managing inventory levels, and improving customer satisfaction.

Figure 10: BI dashboard delivery details

4.2.3 Theme 3: Perceived benefits of the BI implementation

Respondents highlighted two primary benefits stemming from the dashboard's use:

Operational Excellence: This was achieved by streamlining operations, increasing visibility, and reducing costs. The ability to monitor KPIs in real-time allows for quicker responses to disruptions like temperature deviations or vehicle breakdowns.

Enhanced Customer Experience: This was a result of improved on-time delivery performance and greater transparency, which builds customer trust and satisfaction.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Risks and challenges of BI implementation

Despite the benefits, participants also identified significant risks, categorized into four areas:

Human Factors: A key challenge is ensuring users have the technical proficiency to utilize the dashboard effectively. Change management was also cited as a hurdle, with some resistance to adopting the new system.

Data Security and Privacy: Protecting sensitive logistics and commercial data on the dashboard is a major concern that requires robust security measures. **Financial Costs:** The implementation involves significant costs for software licenses, development, and data storage, requiring a clear return on investment.

Data and Scalability: As the volume of data grows, ensuring the dashboard remains fast and reliable is a critical technical challenge. Maintaining high data quality and integrity is also essential, as poor data leads to inaccurate insights.

5 CONCLUSION

The study explores the potential of Power BI in transforming logistics in the pharmaceutical industry. It focuses on Pharmaceutical Company X, a pharmaceutical organization facing challenges in managing complex supply chains, such as delays and temperature control issues. To address these, Pharmaceutical Company X implemented a BI dashboard that provides visibility, analytics, and insights into supply chain operations. The dashboard tracks employee training compliance, equipment status, temperature system alerts, and risk factors. It also offers insights into fleet operations, facilitating efficient monitoring and cost reduction.

Installing a BI dashboard in a pharmaceutical organisation can result in a variety of benefits, including improved supply chain operations, demand forecasting, and decision making. However, it does provide certain hazards and problems that must be rigorously evaluated. Technical skills, change management, data security and privacy, financial costs, data, and scalability as well as maintaining data quality and integrity, are all significant considerations for enterprises when establishing a BI dashboard. Understanding and minimizing these risks can help to achieve a successful implementation that increases business value and overall performance. A well-designed and implemented BI dashboard can be a valuable tool for pharmaceutical companies, allowing them to produce business value and maintain a competitive edge.

This exploratory case study examined the implementation of a Power BI dashboard to revolutionize transport logistics at a leading South African pharmaceutical company. Framed within the context of Business Process Re-engineering, the research found that the BI tool serves as a significant technological enabler by providing unprecedented visibility into operations, facilitating data-driven decision-making, and allowing for the real-time monitoring of critical KPIs. It has the potential to help re-engineer core logistics processes, shifting them from a reactive to a proactive paradigm.

However, the study also revealed that realizing the full benefits of this technology is contingent upon overcoming substantial risks related to human factors, data governance, financial investment, and scalability. The success of such an initiative is not guaranteed by the technology alone but depends on a holistic strategy that integrates the tool into a broader program of process and organizational change.

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ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ISO 9001:2015 IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN METAL INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

ISO 9001:2015 establishes comprehensive standards for a Quality Management System (QMS), widely adopted across various sectors, including the metal and automotive industries. This study aims to evaluate how ISO 9001:2015 influences organizational performance, identify key success factors for its implementation, and analyse the benefits of adopting a QMS. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants, comprising professionals from the metal industry and consulting firms. A quantitative approach was employed, utilizing structured questionnaires to gather primary data, complemented by secondary data sources. Seventy-five questionnaires were distributed. The findings suggest that implementing ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industry results in cost savings, increased customer loyalty, improved employee performance, higher productivity, enhanced production processes, and market expansion. Key performance indicators (KPIs) for successful implementation include customer satisfaction, feedback and complaint management systems, leadership involvement, continuous improvement, and on-time delivery.

Keywords: ISO 9001:2015, QMS, Metal industry, Organisational performance

1 INTRODUCTION

The metal industry is a cornerstone of many economies, providing essential materials for various sectors, including construction, automotive, and manufacturing. In this context, the implementation of ISO 9001 has become increasingly vital to ensure competitiveness and sustainable operations. The adoption of this quality management system (QMS) framework enables organisations to establish robust practices, such as systematic audits, performance reviews, and continual improvement processes, which are critical for achieving and maintaining operational excellence. According to [1] Stanojeska, Minovski, and Jovanoski, ISO 9001 nurtures a culture of continuous improvement, ensuring compliance and certification sustainability. In a globalised market, adherence to ISO 9001 equips metal industry organisations with a competitive edge, allowing them to meet growing customer expectations, enhance operational efficiency, and attain strategic objectives [2].

Despite its benefits, the practical implementation of ISO 9001 in the South African metal industry faces numerous challenges. Research by Chiarini et al. [3] identifies significant knowledge gaps related to technical and managerial competencies within the sector, as well as an underdeveloped understanding of technological advancements, such as those introduced by Industry 4.0. Addressing these gaps is crucial to ensure the successful integration of ISO 9001 and to harness its full potential in improving productivity, reducing errors, and elevating customer satisfaction [4]. This study is motivated by the need to explore these obstacles and identify critical success factors for the effective implementation of ISO 9001. It aims to provide valuable insights into overcoming the unique challenges faced by the South African metal industry, fostering a culture of quality excellence and supporting long-term competitiveness in a rapidly evolving market.

Recognising these challenges, senior management and board members are committed to identifying the root causes of non-compliance and developing effective solutions to address these issues. Key factors contributing to non-compliance include defective materials, insufficient employee training, equipment failures, product changeovers, delayed shipments, and outdated quality control procedures [5].

1.1 Objectives of the study

- To identify factors/challenges that affect the implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industry.
- To determine critical success factors of ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industries.
- To investigate the benefits of ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industry.
- To identify key performance indicators for the successful implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industry.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the Metal Industry: Factors and Challenges

Implementing ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industry involves navigating unique challenges and sector-specific complexities. Key issues include managing intricate supply chains with multiple suppliers and subcontractors, maintaining consistent QMS compliance, and standardising processes across diverse operations [6][7]. Establishing effective QMS practices aids in streamlining supply chain operations and enhancing communication among stakeholders, ensuring long-term efficiency and customer satisfaction [4].

Other challenges include high initial investments in training and equipment, which are essential for consistent quality across varied projects [8]. Compliance with safety, environmental, and product standards poses additional difficulties, especially in addressing workplace hazards, material quality, and equipment reliability [9]. Resistance to change from

employees or management further complicates adoption, requiring effective change management strategies [10].

The focus on documentation and ongoing improvement can overwhelm organisations new to ISO practices. Resource-heavy tasks like monitoring performance indicators and aligning culture with ISO principles can slow progress [11]. Internal barriers, such as limited resources, inadequate technical infrastructure, and a misaligned organisational culture, are worsened by bureaucratic procedures and a lack of management commitment [12].

Despite these hurdles, strong leadership, structured implementation plans, and fostering a quality-focused culture are critical to overcoming obstacles. This approach ensures ISO 9001:2015 transitions from being a compliance measure to a transformative framework, driving improved processes, product quality, and customer satisfaction [13].

2.2 Critical Success Factors for ISO 9001:2015 in the Metal Industry

This study examines the critical success factors (CSFs) essential for effectively implementing ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industry, emphasising their role in achieving organisational goals. Key factors include strong leadership commitment, employee engagement, and alignment with strategic objectives, all of which contribute to fostering a culture of quality and continuous improvement. Schmeleva [14] notes that QMS evaluations help standardise processes, leverage the Deming cycle for ongoing enhancement, and address challenges linked to global competition. By implementing a QMS, organisations can boost operational performance, adopt process-oriented practices, and comply with regulatory and customer requirements, ensuring the production of consistently high-quality products [15].

ISO 9001, particularly its 2015 iteration, is a globally recognised standard that adapts to diverse organisational contexts and supports maintaining customer relationships [16]. The metal industry benefits significantly from ensuring product conformity, which provides a competitive advantage [17]. Tannady [18] highlights the critical role of employee involvement, with engaged teams driving better performance and motivation. Additionally, customer satisfaction is prioritised through the delivery of high-quality products [19].

Brand image, encompassing functional and emotional attributes, adds symbolic value, helping organisations strengthen customer loyalty and exceed expectations [20]. Leadership aligned with organisational vision promotes a cohesive environment that supports compliance with ISO standards and unified strategic direction. Streamlined production processes enable early error detection, ensuring consistent quality and customer satisfaction [21]. Collaboration with suppliers is also pivotal in achieving successful ISO implementation [22].

Performance evaluations align individual and organisational goals, boosting employee engagement, reducing turnover, and improving outcomes [10]. Employee participation in decision-making fosters accountability, adherence to processes, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Prioritizing employee well-being enhances satisfaction and productivity, improving the likelihood of successful implementation [23].

Customer feedback is central to ISO 9001, allowing organisations to refine operations and proactively address needs. Islami, Mulolli, and Mustafa [24] emphasize that meeting customer expectations strengthens reputation and relationships. Leadership commitment to embedding ISO 9001 within strategic frameworks further ensures structured improvements and customer satisfaction [18].

2.3 Benefits of ISO 9001:2015 in the Metal Industry

The successful implementation of ISO 9001 allows organisations to maximize its benefits, especially when the decision to adopt the standard is driven primarily by internal motivations rather than external pressures [25]. ISO 9001 adoption has become a widespread management

practice, increasingly embraced in competitive markets. This standard establishes a foundation for cultivating a quality-oriented organisational culture, often developing into a comprehensive Quality Management System (QMS).

QMS facilitates consistent quality outcomes, process optimization, and sustainable development [26], fostering a culture of continuous improvement essential for long-term success [2]. It enhances productivity [27], improves employee performance, and protects an organisation's reputation by bolstering its brand image [26]. The implementation of quality management practices leads to better operational performance across industries, including the metals sector, and ensures high-quality products and services [28].

In today's competitive market, maintaining quality is critical for organisational survival [29]. As a result, many organisations adopt QMS to consistently meet customer expectations, access new markets, and expand their market presence. QMS also helps organisations address industry-specific challenges and continuously enhance production processes

External drivers, such as the need to meet high customer expectations and deliver superior quality products and services, as well as the desire to enter new markets, further motivate organisations to pursue ISO certification. Moreover, implementing a QMS fosters sustainable development and social responsibility within the metal industry, improving both product quality and operational standards [26].

2.4 Key Performance Indicators for Successful Implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the Metal Industry

Implementing ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industry requires a strategic focus on key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate the Quality Management System's (QMS) effectiveness and overall organisational performance. These KPIs ensure alignment with customer expectations and compliance with industry standards.

Customer satisfaction is a primary KPI, emphasizing the need for metal industry organisations to meet or exceed customer expectations. According to Ali et al. [30], this can be measured using customer surveys, feedback mechanisms, and complaint tracking systems. Monitoring these metrics provides valuable insights into client perceptions, enabling companies to refine their offerings and enhance satisfaction levels. The systematic tracking of complaints and their resolution times also helps identify recurring issues and supports continuous service quality improvement.

Process efficiency is another critical KPI, involves regularly reviewing and optimizing processes to reduce waste and enhance productivity. Metrics such as cycle time and scrap rate serve as benchmarks for assessing process performance and driving improvements.

Employee training and competency are essential for successful ISO 9001:2015 implementation. Vlok [31] emphasizes the importance of ensuring employees are adequately trained and possess the necessary skills for their roles. This can be tracked through training records, skill assessments, and job performance evaluations, ensuring a competent and informed workforce.

Leadership commitment is vital for sustaining quality initiatives. Smith [32] emphasises that leaders in the metal industry must actively engage in the implementation and ongoing maintenance of the QMS. Leadership involvement can be assessed through feedback mechanisms, observation, and performance reviews, fostering a culture of quality and continuous improvement.

Supplier management is also a crucial aspect [33]. KPIs in this area include evaluating suppliers' on-time delivery performance, material quality, and adherence to contractual

terms. Additionally, tracking non-conformances identified during audits and the effectiveness of corrective actions reflects the QMS's robustness.

Finally, **audit results and non-conformance trends** serve as key indicators of QMS effectiveness. A declining rate of non-conformities, whether identified in internal or external audits, demonstrates the system's ability to proactively address issues and maintain high-quality standards, as noted by Njunguna and Bett [34].

In conclusion, these KPIs collectively provide a comprehensive framework for assessing and enhancing the implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industry, ensuring both operational excellence and customer satisfaction.

3 METHODOLOGY

The study employs a quantitative research approach, deemed most effective for gathering new information in this context. Quantitative research includes hypothesis testing, validation, and data analysis [35]. It focuses on statistical analysis and hypothesis testing, allowing researchers to examine relationships between variables. Setyoko et al. [36] highlight its usefulness in identifying correlations and variations at specific points in time. The research aims to identify obstacles to ISO 9001:2015 adoption in South Africa's metal industry, critical success factors, and benefits post-implementation, including improvements in quality, efficiency, and customer satisfaction. Quantitative methods allow the analysis of large data sets, offering insights into the factors influencing successful implementation and the establishment of measurable criteria for assessing QMS performance. This approach is effective in evaluating ISO 9001:2015's impact across various sectors, including the metal industry [27].

Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant knowledge and experience in ISO 9001:2015. This non-probability method was ideal for gathering in-depth insights from key employees in ISO-accredited businesses, such as directors of quality, quality systems managers, and QA/QC officers. The sample included 75 participants, with 53 completed questionnaires returned, yielding a 71% response rate. The study focused on primary data collected via questionnaires on ISO 9001:2015 advantages and accreditation significance.

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Perceived barriers of the implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the South African Metal Industry

Table 1 shows that "lack of training" and "failure to understand the quality process" are the top barriers, indicating that the human element and intellectual capital in organizations are more significant obstacles than purely structural or financial issues. This suggests that effective ISO 9001 implementation requires substantial investment in human resource development and knowledge transfer. The lower ranking of "resistance to change" (Rank 9) is noteworthy; it implies that the ability to implement changes, due to a lack of training or understanding, might be a bigger problem than outright opposition to change among employees. These results agree with existing research emphasising the importance of top management support in guiding staff efforts and creating reward programs to boost employee motivation and morale. Additionally, the alignment with literature points out that team commitment is a vital factor in successful implementation, noting that external consultants making changes with limited internal involvement can cause disengagement.

Table 1: Perceived barriers of the implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the South African Metal Industry

BARRIERS (CHALLENGES) THAT IMPEDE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ISO 9001:2015	*(x̄)*	*(σX)*	*R*
Lack of training	3.95	0.306	1
Failure to comprehend the quality process	3.93	0.339	2
Lack of satisfactory planning	3.93	0.339	2
Lack of staff motivation by top management	3.92	0.299	3
Lack of Communication	3.91	0.420	4
Lack of cooperation between customers and suppliers	3.87	0.496	5
Lack of Resources	3.85	0.552	6
Insufficient materials	3.83	0.469	7
Financial and economic challenges	3.83	0.475	7
Failure to participate as a member of the Organisation	3.80	0.506	8
Resistance to change	3.79	0.584	9
Where: ***(x̄):*** *Sample Mean* ***(σX):*** *Standard Deviation* ***R:*** *Rank*			

4.2 Perceptions of critical success factors for ISO 9001:2015 in the Metal Industry

The shared top ranking of "Continuous Improvement" and "Meeting or exceeding customer expectations" highlights a crucial dual focus necessary for sustainable success: internal operational excellence combined with external market responsiveness. This indicates that ISO 9001 is most effective when it is not merely a compliance checklist but a strategic tool for market differentiation and customer value creation. The high ranking of "employee involvement" further reinforces the human element, which was also identified as a significant challenge. These findings are consistent with existing literature that emphasises enhanced customer satisfaction as a key focus of quality management and the critical role of employee involvement in decision-making for implementation efficiency.

Table 2: Perceptions of critical success factors of ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industry

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF ISO 9001:2015 IN THE METAL INDUSTRIES	*(x̄)*	*(σX)*	*R*
Continuous Improvement	3.90	0.453	1
Meet or exceed customer expectations by providing high-quality goods	3.90	0.470	1
Understand production process	3.85	0.491	2
Comprehends an Organisation's vision	3.83	0.50	3
Employee Involvement in decision making	3.83	0.56	3
Cooperative attitude of suppliers	3.82	0.543	4
Online reviews, suggestion boxes, and surveys	3.82	0.496	4
Maintaining customer relationship	3.81	0.547	5

Measuring employee performance through training	3.77	0.563	6
Assigning employees, the responsibility of operating the system	3.76	0.599	7
Productivity facilities are a crucial factor	3.75	0.619	8
Understand production process	3.63	0.676	9
Where: ***(x̄):*** *Sample Mean* ***(σX):*** *Standard Deviation* ***R:*** *Rank*			

4.3 Perception of the benefits of ISO 9001:2015 in the Metal Industry

The strong correlation between ISO 9001 implementation and improved *employee performance* (tied for Rank 1 benefit) represents a crucial feedback loop. This suggests that directly addressing the "lack of training" barrier (which was identified as the Rank 1 challenge) contributes significantly to a major organizational benefit. This highlights a virtuous cycle where strategic investment in human capital, through training and ensuring comprehension, directly yields improved operational and individual performance. The "remove obstacles" aspect further implies a streamlining of internal processes that directly benefits the workforce. These findings align well with existing literature, which notes that metal firms adopting ISO 9001 often implement staff training to enhance competency and understanding of quality requirements, and that learning and development processes are essential for QMS efficacy.

Table 3: Perception of the benefits for successful implementation of ISO 9001:2015

THE BENEFITS OF ISO 9001:2015 IN THE METAL INDUSTRY	(x̄)	(σX)	R
Positive Impact on company performance	3.90	0.397	1
Improve employee performance and remove obstacles	3.90	0.416	1
Meet customer expectations	3.88	0.412	2
Increase Productivity	3.87	0.473	3
Safeguard brand image	3.86	0.433	4
Improve product quality	3.83	0.538	5
Positive Impact on company performance	3.82	0.496	6
Increase Customer Loyalty	3.81	0.485	7
Improve production Processes	3.76	0.650	8
Enhance employee competency	3.71	0.591	9
Where: ***(x̄):*** *Sample Mean* ***(σX):*** *Standard Deviation* ***R:*** *Rank*			

4.4 Perception on KPIs for successful implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the Metal Industry

The participants were required to state their perceptions on KPI for successful implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the metal firms. Table 4 shows participant's ranking of the KPI they believe results in a successful implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the metal firms. Findings reveal that measuring customer satisfaction through tracking customer feedback was ranked first with a mean of 3.93 and a standard deviation of 0.314, continuous Improvement and leadership

Involvement were both ranked second with a mean of 3.90 and a standard deviation of 0.408 and 0.367, customer satisfaction was ranked third with a mean of 3.89 and a standard deviation 0.442, process efficiency and on time delivery were both ranked fourth with a mean of 3.87 and a standard deviation of 0.445 and 0.407, Surveys, Feedback, and compliant management systems was ranked fifth with a mean of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 0.474, supplier management process was ranked sixth with a mean 3.83 and standard deviation of 0.518.

Table 4: KPIs for successful implementation of ISO 9001:2015 in the metal industry

KPIs FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF ISO 9001:2015 IN THE METAL INDUSTRY	**($\bar{x}$)**	**(σX)**	**R**
Measure customer satisfaction through tracking customer feedback.	3.93	0.314	1
Continuous Improvement	3.90	0.408	2
Leadership Involvement	3.90	0.367	2
Customer Satisfaction	3.89	0.442	3
Process efficiency	3.87	0.445	4
On-time delivery	3.87	0.407	4
Surveys, Feedback, and compliant management systems	3.85	0.474	5
Supplier management process	3.83	0.518	6
Where: ***(x)****: Sample Mean* ***(σX)****: Standard Deviation* ***R****: Rank*			

5 CONCLUSIONS

The findings collectively underscore the transformative potential of ISO 9001:2015 as a strategic tool for fostering sustainable growth and competitive advantage in the metal industry. The study emphasises that successful implementation extends beyond mere certification; it necessitates continuous commitment, strategic investment in human capital, and a deeply ingrained customer-centric approach. The continuous nature of improvement, feedback loops, and leadership involvement implies that organizations must adopt a long-term, adaptive mindset to fully leverage the standard's benefits. This means that ISO 9001 is not a static achievement but a dynamic process. Therefore, organizations are advised against a "one-and-done" approach to certification. Instead, they should cultivate a pervasive culture of continuous quality management, recognizing that ongoing effort and adaptation are essential for maximizing the standard's impact on operational excellence and market competitiveness. The study successfully addressed each of the objectives by offering an in-depth exploration of how ISO 9001:2015 is currently adopted in the metal sector and by proposing actionable recommendations to enhance quality management systems. The findings highlighted significant benefits such as improved operational efficiency, enhanced customer satisfaction, and better compliance with international standards. Additionally, it identified measurable KPIs, key challenges, and success factors, providing a robust framework for organisations seeking to improve or sustain their ISO 9001:2015 certification.

This research makes a unique contribution to the body of knowledge by presenting a localized perspective on ISO 9001:2015 implementation within South Africa's metal industry. By addressing both the theoretical and practical aspects of quality management systems, the study provides valuable insights for industry practitioners, policymakers, and scholars. It bridges the gap between global standards and local industry practices, equipping stakeholders with tailored strategies to overcome implementation challenges and achieve sustainable quality excellence.

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CHANGE-OVER TIME REDUCTION AND IMPLICATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN PACKAGING PROCESSES FOR BEVERAGES

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ABSTRACT

The packaging sector for the beverage industry is characterised by productivity and efficiency challenges due to high change-over times on product lines which are necessary to meet market demands. Minimising change-over time is critical to reducing downtime, enhancing equipment utilisation, and maintaining lean operations. This paper investigates the root causes of high change-over times through time studies, Pareto analysis, use of Ishikawa diagrams and 5 Why analysis. Proposed implementable solutions and action plans were actioned after preparation work and availing resources required to perform the change-over. Key challenges, such as data integration, workforce adaptation, and technology scalability, are also discussed. Through empirical analysis, the study furthermore evaluates the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to reduce change-over times, improve operational flexibility, and support just-in-time manufacturing. The findings highlight how AI-driven solutions can revolutionize change-over management, providing a roadmap for the beverage industry to achieve greater efficiency and competitiveness in dynamic markets.

Keywords: change-over time, artificial intelligence, packaging

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1 INTRODUCTION

Beer production involves malting, milling, mashing, extract separation, hop addition and boiling, removal of hops and precipitates, cooling and aeration, fermentation, separation of yeast from young beer, aging, maturing, and packaging [1]. The entire process is aimed to convert grain starches to sugar, extract the sugar with water, and then ferment it with yeast to produce the alcoholic, lightly carbonated beverage. Subsequent to beer production is the packaging process that has six essential functions: containment, protection, apportionment, unitization, convenience, and communication [2]. The brewer packagers several product varieties, and changing over from one brand to another becomes more important, as doing so quickly will increase actual production time.

Beer is packaged in bottles, aluminium cans and kegs and Figure 1 shows a flow diagram for beer packaging operations. The packaging process for beer in crates commences with de-palletising the palletised crates from warehouse, removal of any crowns by the de-crowner and separation of the bottles from the crates. Empty crates would undergo washing before being sent for packing of filled, crowned and labelled bottles. Empty bottles are washed, inspected for dirty and thereafter undergo filling, pasteurisation and labelling before packing [3]. During filling, the staff should pay attention to the pressure of the feeding pump and carry out relevant adjustment settings to ensure reasonable and correct operation and meet the filling specification.

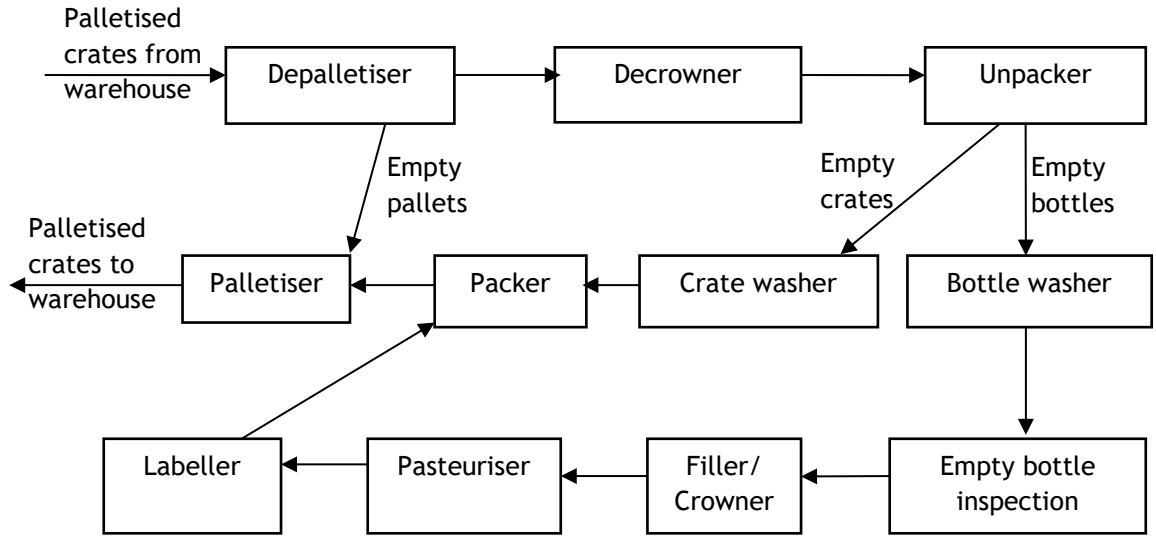

Figure 1: Flow diagram for beer packaging operations [4]

The change-overs for the brewer include pack change, bottle change and brand change and it was noted that the change-over time for beer packaging product lines was excessively high, leading to reduced production efficiency, increased downtime, and higher operational costs. The extended change-overs had a significant impact on the brewery, affecting production time and overall operational efficiency due to the average of 8 hours lost per week. This study is aimed to investigate the root causes of high change-over times and institute corrective measures to reduce the change-over times.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to Change-over Time in Packaging Processes

The concept of changeover time was coined by Shigeo Shingo, a Japanese industrial engineer who developed the SMED (Single-Minute Exchange of Die) methodology for identifying, calculating and reducing process or machine change time to reduce configuration time while

increasing flexibility and efficiency [5]. The terms change-over time and setup time can be used interchangeably, referring to the time from the last acceptable product produced to when the next good product or part comes off the same production line. When switching from producing one product to another, adjustments have to be made to the process or machine to accommodate diverse products that need to be packaged. Lengthy change-over times in packaging processes result in production inefficiencies, production delays, and higher operational costs [6, 7]. Hence, it is imperative that the changeover process is accomplished timeously in order to reduce downtime of the packaging line, and depending on the type of equipment, this process might be completed automatically by more sophisticated case-packing equipment or manually by the operators. Change-over in beer packaging is characterised by cleaning tasks, equipment reconfiguration, adjustment of machine or process settings, and implementing quality checks [8].

Historically, companies have focused on methodologies such as SMED to optimise change-over time in order to cope with high variability in customer requirements while concurrently maintaining better utilisation of the production resources, particularly in batch production systems. Eldardiry [9] proposed a framework that deployed DMAIC (Define-Measure-Analyse-Improve-Control) and DMADV (Define-Measure-Analyse-Design-Verify) six sigma methodologies as an integrated approach to provide the essential roadmap for changeover time reduction. The essence of the SMED system is to convert as many changeover steps as possible to “external” (performed while the equipment is running), and to simplify and streamline the remaining steps. The name Single-Minute Exchange of Die comes from the goal of reducing changeover times to the “single” digits of less than 10 minutes. A successful SMED program yields lower manufacturing cost, improved responsiveness to customer demand, lower Inventory Levels and standardized changeover processes improve consistency and quality [10].

2.2 Role of Artificial Intelligence in Packaging Process Optimisation

Studies have demonstrated that the implementation of automated solutions has the potential to reduce change-over times in packaging processes for beverages [6, 11]. Automated change-over systems utilise programmable logic controllers, robotics, and vision-based sensors to accelerate transitions, minimise human error and significantly improve efficiency by reducing labour-intensive interventions. Real-time analytics can aid organisations to adapt to fluctuating consumer demands and supply chain disruptions. The packaging processes for beverages has been revolutionised by recent advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) through predictive analytics, real-time decision-making, and adaptive learning [12].

Concerning process optimisation, AI algorithms such as process simulation models and reinforcement learning can be deployed to optimise beer packaging operations by enhancing line balancing solutions and managing bottlenecks to increase throughput [13]. The deployment of robotic arms for palletizing and automated guided vehicles for material handling within AI-integrated robotic systems can improve efficiency and reduced labour costs in packaging facilities [14]. By ensuring that packaged beer is stored and dispatched efficiently, warehouse management systems can be enhanced by artificial intelligence through improvement in inventory tracking and slotting strategies. Demand forecasting and inventory management are critical in beer packaging operations, AI-powered demand forecasting models can be used to leverage market trends, historical sales data, and external organisational factors such as promotions and de-seasonalising demand components to optimise beer production and scheduling packaging timelines to abate stockouts and reduce excess inventory [15].

Research has also demonstrated a reduction in packaging errors using AI-enhanced quality control systems where AI-driven sensors in packaging processes were used to monitor factors such as fill levels, cap sealing, and label accuracy, thereby ensuring compliance with the

prevailing industry standards [16]. AI-powered machine vision systems ensure quality control which is critical in beer packaging by enabling product safety and brand reputation. Process analytics through AI can aid to reduce beer losses during packaging through optimisation of filling precision and detection of any leaks in real time, which is also aligned with regulatory compliance and sustainable manufacturing practices. Additionally, when integrated with deep learning algorithms, AI solutions can detect defects in cans, bottles, and labels, with image recognition systems that can also outperform traditional manual inspections in detecting small defects [17].

Case studies indicate that AI-driven predictive maintenance strategies that utilise Internet of Things (IoT) sensors and machine learning models to anticipate equipment failures before they occur can yield substantial reduction maintenance costs [18-20]. AI models can be used for predictive analytics in beer packaging to detect anomalies in filling machines, conveyor belts and capping stations, by analysing real-time sensor data, and thereby reduce unplanned downtime, optimise maintenance schedules, and extend machine lifespan [21].

3 RESEARCH METHODS

An in-depth examination was conducted regarding various processes on packaging line 1 over a span of 13 weeks, with a consistent one-shift-per-day schedule. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research to analyse change-over time reduction and the role of AI in beer packaging processes. Academic papers were reviewed as secondary data to identify successful case studies on AI-driven packaging solutions.

Primary data were collected through direct observations and time-motion studies for operators and tracking the time taken for each change-over process over multiple runs in beer packaging process. Process flow analysis was conducted and flow diagrams were used to depict the beer packaging operations. All instances of downtime, which includes machine downtime, external downtime, and planned downtime were documented and categorised these into four areas: Machine, Man, Materials, and Methods. Pareto analysis was used for identification and prioritisation of the largest contributors to change-over time in beer packaging, thereby enabling focused improvement efforts that would positively and effectively impact productivity.

Within the root cause analysis technique, a 5 Why technique was used to drill down to the root causes through repeatedly asking the question "why?", generally 5 times, although the number was not fixed. An action plan was developed with a definitive checklist of tasks and resources that were required to implement improvement initiatives for the reduction of high change-over times on beer packaging operations. A comparative analysis was further conducted on the actual number of hours lost due to change-over time per week versus target loss to track the performance after implementation of action plans. Typical applications of IoT on beer packaging processes were identified and an AI-driven framework was developed for improvement of change-over time in packaging. It was also crucial to identify recommended IoT devices and software solutions for implementation by the brewery.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Cause and Effect analysis

Changeover activities characterise the packaging process which entails rinsing of bottles to remove any residue or other elements that could affect beer taste and quality. Bottles can be sealed with crown or pressure caps depending on the bottle and cap type. An Ishikawa (Fishbone) diagram was used to investigate and portray the potential causes for high change-over time in beer packaging operations as illustrated in Figure 2. It was noted that with regards to people, inconsistent SOPs, lack of skilled operators, resistance to process improvement and standard procedures and insufficient training were potential causes for high change-over time

in beer packaging operations. Possible machinery causes for high change-over time include frequent breakdowns during changeover, maintenance delays, inefficient tooling and lack of automated change-over mechanisms.

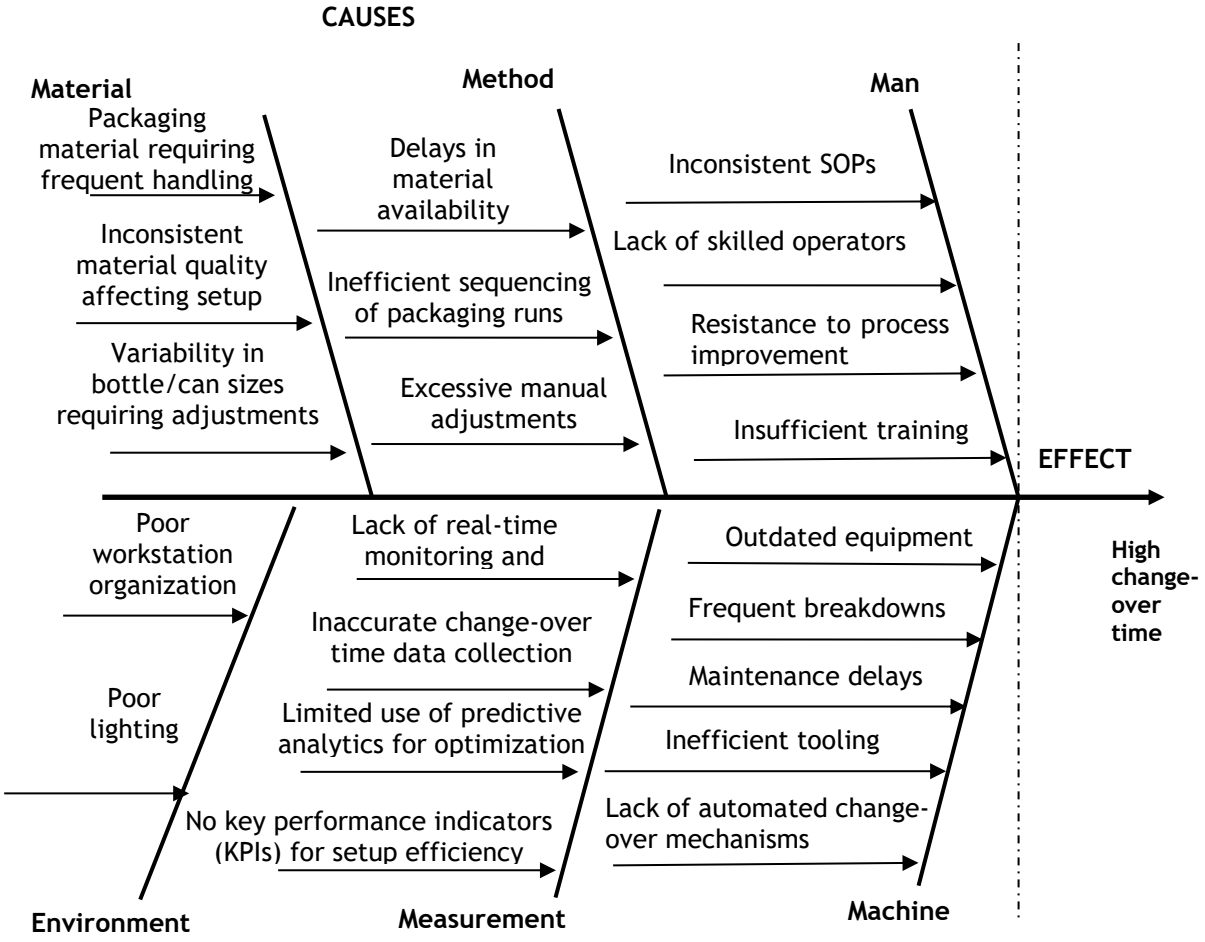

Figure 2: Ishikawa diagram for potential causes for high change-over time

Possible causes for high change-over time due to the method used include delays in material availability, excessive manual adjustments, inefficient sequencing of packaging runs, lack of SMED principles and no standardized change-over process. Concerning materials, it was noted that inconsistent material quality affecting setup, variability in bottle/can sizes requiring adjustments and packaging material requiring frequent handling adjustments were potential causes for high change-over time.

Concerning measurement or performance tracking of the system, it was noted that lack of real-time monitoring and feedback systems, lack of key performance indicators (KPIs) for setup efficiency, inaccurate change-over time data collection and lack of predictive analytics for Optimisation, were potential causes for high change-over time. Regarding environment or workplace factors, it was noted that poor 5S or workstation organization, inefficient workspace layout and inconsistent lighting, were potential causes for high change-over time.

4.2 Pareto Analysis

Pareto Analysis was used as a tool for identifying and prioritising the biggest contributors to change-over time in beer packaging, enabling focused efforts for the brewer to derive significant improvements. Figure 3 shows the Pareto chart for change-over time for the

packaging process. The results show that pack change contributed the highest change-over time.

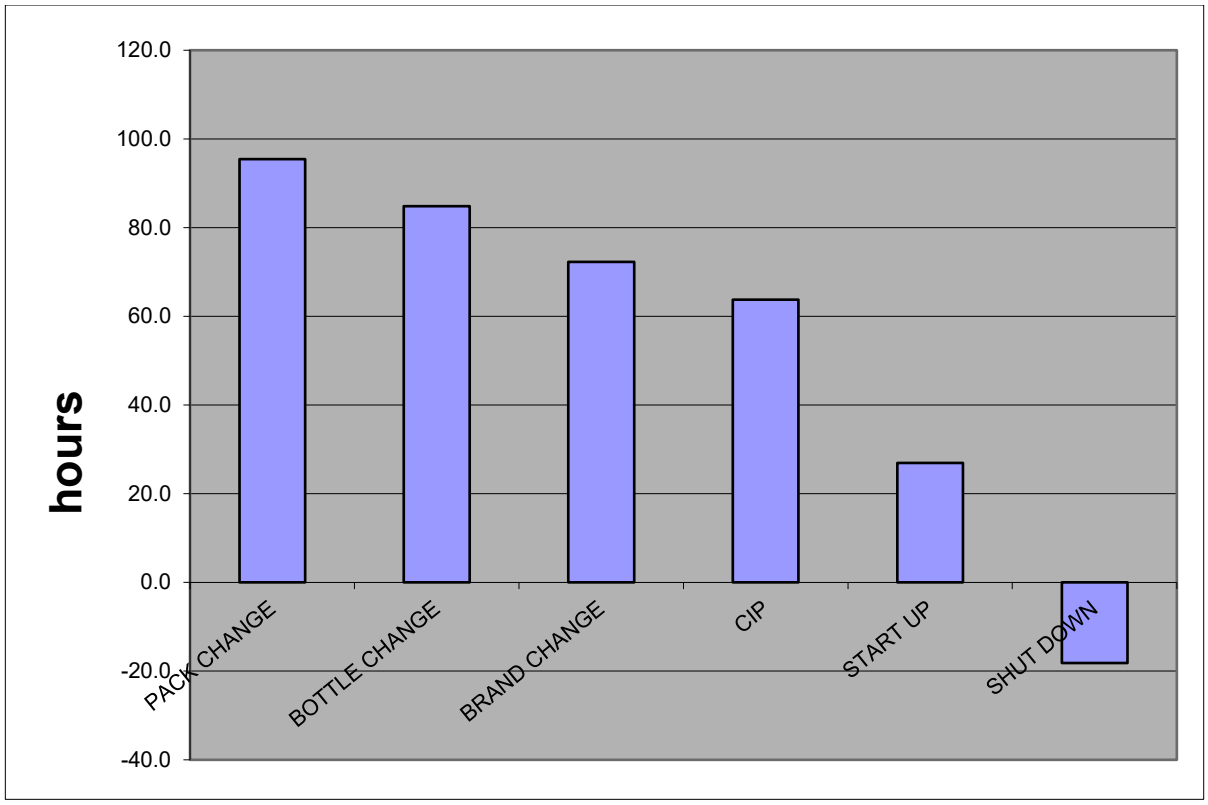

Figure 3: Pareto chart for change-over time in packaging operations

Clean-In-Place (CIP) is a standardized method of cleaning and disinfecting the interior surfaces of tanks, pipes, and process equipment, all without disassembly. The CIP system will run water, product or cleaning liquid through the product pathway of a machine, using spray balls or other methods to clean tanks without disassembling. It is worth noting that CIP systems have become a cornerstone of modern beverage production, helping to minimise downtime for change-over. A core principle of SMED is to make it easier to visually communicate where external setup tasks can be moved outside of downtime. By plotting shutdown tasks as negative, it visually distinguishes the preparatory or pre-stop tasks from post-stop activities.

Figure 4 shows the interactions between the change-over types, pack change is characterised by change in outer packaging, tray or case, and that would affect the packers, shrink wrappers and conveyors. The plant currently packages the smaller beer bottle and all beer-can sizes in 6 packs that are combined into a case of 12 or 24 units. On the other hand, bottle change is characterised by change in size or shape of bottle, and that would affect the filler, capper, labeller and conveyors. The plant currently packages 750ml, 660ml, and 340ml of bottles and for cans, uses 500ml, 440ml and 330ml of beer cans. Conversely, brand change is characterised by change in the brand of beer and that would affect the cleaning systems, labellers and printers. The plant currently packages 10 different brands of beer.

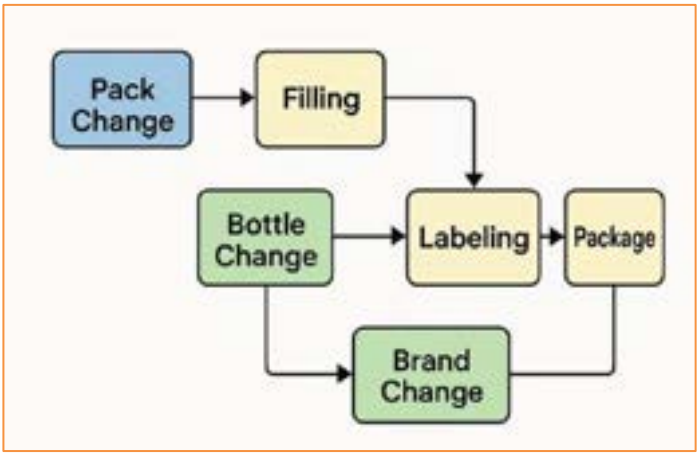

Figure 4: Interactions between the change-over types

4.3 5 Why Analysis

Through 5 Why analysis shown in Figure 5, it was discovered that lack of standard tools, ineffective data collection system, and lack of spare parts were key barriers to effective change-over time. It was found that bottles remained in the washer during bottle change, change parts were not colour coded, and change parts were found to be far from machine. In addition, gripper cylinder had not been serviced, magazines were not maintained to acceptable standard, the filler was characterised by poor timing of infeed and intermediate starwheels, and label prongs would require frequent adjustment.

	why	why	why	Why	Why	ROOT CAUSE
1 Change over parts far from machine	1.1 Lack of space					Man
2 Change parts not colour coded	2.1 Paints not available					Man
3 Labeler Gripper cylinder	3.1 No SOP					Man/Method
4 Magazine userviced	No SOP					Man/Method
5 Timing of infeed worm	5.1 Machine out of timing	5.1.1 Setting not right after aggregate service				Machine
		5.1.2 Oil pumps on Aggregates not functioning				Machine
6 Lack of Tools	6.1 Improper storage					Method
7 Lack of People	7.1 Insufficient resources	Poor allocation				Man/Method

Figure 5: 5 Why analysis

4.4 Action plan and implementation

An action plan was developed with a definitive checklist of tasks and resources that were required to implement improvement initiatives for the reduction of high change-over times on

beer packaging operations. Table 1 shows a listing of actions that were implemented to improve the process.

Table 1: Listing of actions for process improvement

Action	Description
1	Create space for change parts close to machine
2	Colour code all change parts
3	Create an SOP
4	Retime infeed worm
5	Order new oil pump for the labeller aggregates
6	Order tools for operators
7	Retime infeed and intermediate starwheels
8	Service gripper cylinder
9	Service label magazine
10	Provide trolley to carry change parts to machines
11	Order two extra tools for changing vent tubes
12	Provide three manual tools for changing vent tubes
13	Automate the CIP system
14	Connect permanent pipe connections to replace hoses

4.5 Tracking Performance after Implementation of Action Plans

Figure 5 shows comparison of actual number of hours lost due to change-over time per week versus target loss over a 32-week period, benchmarked against a 7-hour historical average loss.

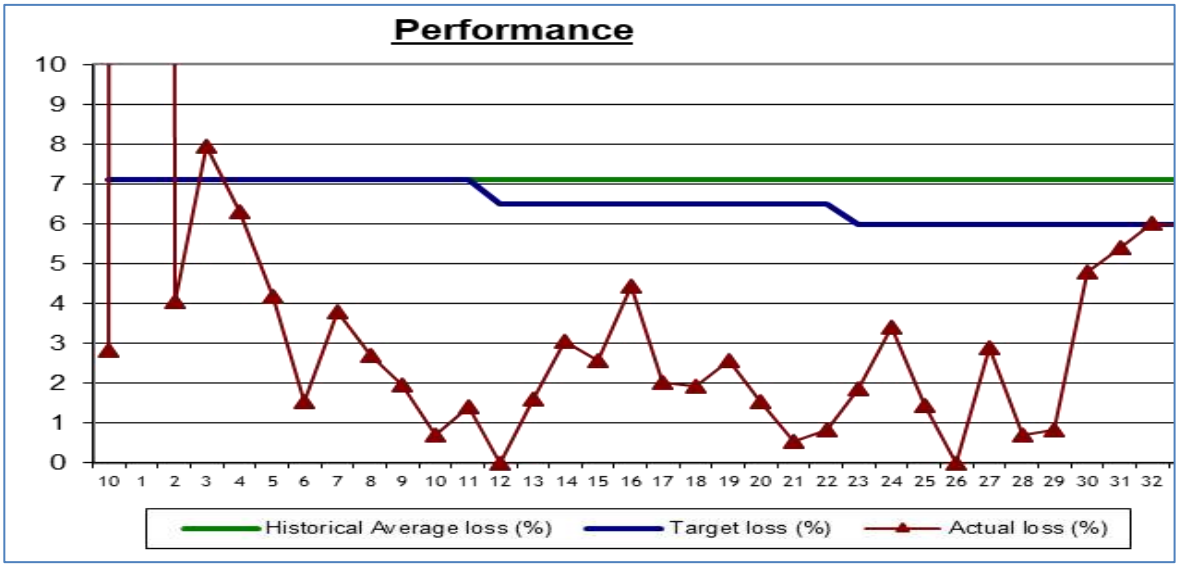

Figure 6: Comparison of actual loss vs target loss

These results demonstrate improvement in performance, showing a marked reduction in the number of hours lost due to change-over time per week. Table 2 also shows that regarding tracking performance improvement, the average change-over time and change-over errors per month were reduced while Overall Equipment Effectiveness (OEE) was improved for the plant.

Table 2: Tracking Performance Improvement

Metric	Before	After	Change
Average change-over time on bottle change	82 min	55 min	33% reduction
Change-over errors per month	8	2	75% reduction
OEE	52%	65%	+12 pts

5 IMPLICATIONS OF AI AND FRAMEWORK TO IMPROVE CHANGE-OVER TIME ON PACKAGING PROCESSES

5.1 Applications of IoT on Beer Packaging Processes

It was noted from the root cause analysis that lack of automated change-over mechanisms was a cause for high change-over time in beer packaging operations. The application of artificial intelligence has led to enhanced operational efficiency by optimizing resource allocation and reducing waste the FMCG supply chains (fast-moving consumer goods) [22]. There is much room for AI to revolutionise packaging processes in breweries, AI-driven scheduling algorithms can optimise sequencing production runs to minimise unnecessary changes while digital twin technology enables brewers to minimise trial-and-error adjustments by simulating change-over processes before execution. On the other hand, IoT can meaningfully enhance the performance of a beer packaging processes by providing real-time data, process optimisation and predictive maintenance [23]. IoT can be applied on beer packaging processes, with focus on the following:

- Equipment Monitoring & Predictive Maintenance - Predictive analytics can be deployed to detect wear and tear, reduce unanticipated breakdowns and downtime. Additionally, IoT sensors can be installed on fillers, decrowners, cappers, and conveyors to track performance in real time, while parameters such as temperature, vibration, and pressure can be monitored to detect anomalies before they cause machine failure.
- Automated Quality Control & Inspection – parameters such as cap tightness, bottle weight, and pressure can be tracked using smart sensor technology to ensure consistency in quality. Additionally, vision systems with IoT cameras can be used to detect defects such as fill levels, incorrect labels, or cap misalignment in real-time while automated rejection systems can be deployed to remove defective beer cans and bottles before they reach packaging.
- Energy Efficiency & Utility Management - Smart meters can be deployed to monitor water, energy, and compressed air usage across different areas of the packaging process. Additionally, leaks in compressed air systems used for bottle filling can be identified, while idle or underperforming machines can be detected to optimise power consumption.
- Workforce Efficiency & Safety - Real-time alerts can be deployed on hazardous situations such as machine failure or extreme noise levels. Additionally, remote monitoring and control for supervisors can be implemented to track production progress while wearable IoT devices for workers are used to monitor safety compliance and employee fatigue.
- Production Line Optimisation - Real-time production tracking can be deployed to identify production line bottlenecks and ensure optimal production scheduling. Furthermore, automatic adjustments can be made to machine speeds based on production demand and line conditions. AI-driven analytics can be implemented to reducing downtime, improve line balancing and maximising throughput.

- Smart Packaging & Traceability - Smart labels with QR codes can be deployed to track packaged beer products throughout the supply chain. Additionally, real-time tracking of beer batches can be done to ensure compliance with quality standards or expiration dates. There is also room for integrating blockchain with IoT for tamper-proof tracking of beer production from brewery to outlets as well as ensuring transparency.
- Real-Time Data & Decision Making - IoT dashboards can be deployed to visualize key performance indicators such as machine efficiency, quality and production rates, and downtime.

5.2 Recommended IoT Devices & Software Solutions

Table 3shows a summary of areas where recommended IoT devices and software solutions for reduction of high change-over time in beer packaging operations.

Table 3: Recommended IoT Devices and Software Solutions

Area	Recommended IoT Devices	Software Solutions
Equipment Monitoring & Predictive Maintenance	Vibration sensors (Fluke 3561), Smart pressure sensors (Honeywell DPS)	Predictive maintenance platforms (Siemens MindSphere, IBM Maximo, AWS IoT SiteWise)
Energy Efficiency & Utility Management	Smart meters (Schneider Electric PowerLogic), IoT-enabled flow meters (Endress+Hauser Proline)	Energy management systems (Siemens Desigo CC, Schneider EcoStruxure)
Automated Quality Control & Inspection	AI-powered vision systems (Keyence IV series, Cognex In-Sight), Fill-level sensors (SICK LL3).	AI-based quality control software (Cognex VisionPro, MATLAB Image Processing Toolbox).
Production Line Optimisation	IoT-enabled PLCs (Siemens SIMATIC S7, Rockwell Automation Logix), Smart conveyors (Dorner SmartMove)	Manufacturing Execution Systems (SAP MES, Siemens Opcenter, AVEVA MES)
Workforce Efficiency & Safety	Wearable IoT sensors (Kinetic Reflex, Modjoul SmartBelt), Noise level monitoring sensors (3M Edge 4)	Safety monitoring platforms (EHS Insight, EcoOnline)
Smart Packaging & Traceability	NFC/QR-code tags (Zebra ZD621R RFID printer), Smart label printers (SATO CL4NX)	Blockchain & traceability platforms (IBM Food Trust, VeChainThor Blockchain)
Real-Time Data & Decision Making	IoT gateways (Advantech WISE-6610, Dell Edge Gateway 3000), Industrial sensors (Bosch Connected Devices)	IoT cloud dashboards (Microsoft Azure IoT Hub, Siemens Mindsphere)

5.3 AI-Driven Framework to Improve Change-Over Time in Beer Packaging

An AI-Driven Framework was then developed to improve change-over time in beer packaging. Figure 6 shows the framework, characterised by four layers which include Data Acquisition, AI & Machine Learning, Digital Twin & Simulation, and Feedback & Continuous Improvement, with include Enterprise Resource Planning/Manufacturing Execution Systems (ERP/MES), Maintenance Systems and Workforce Management as integration points.

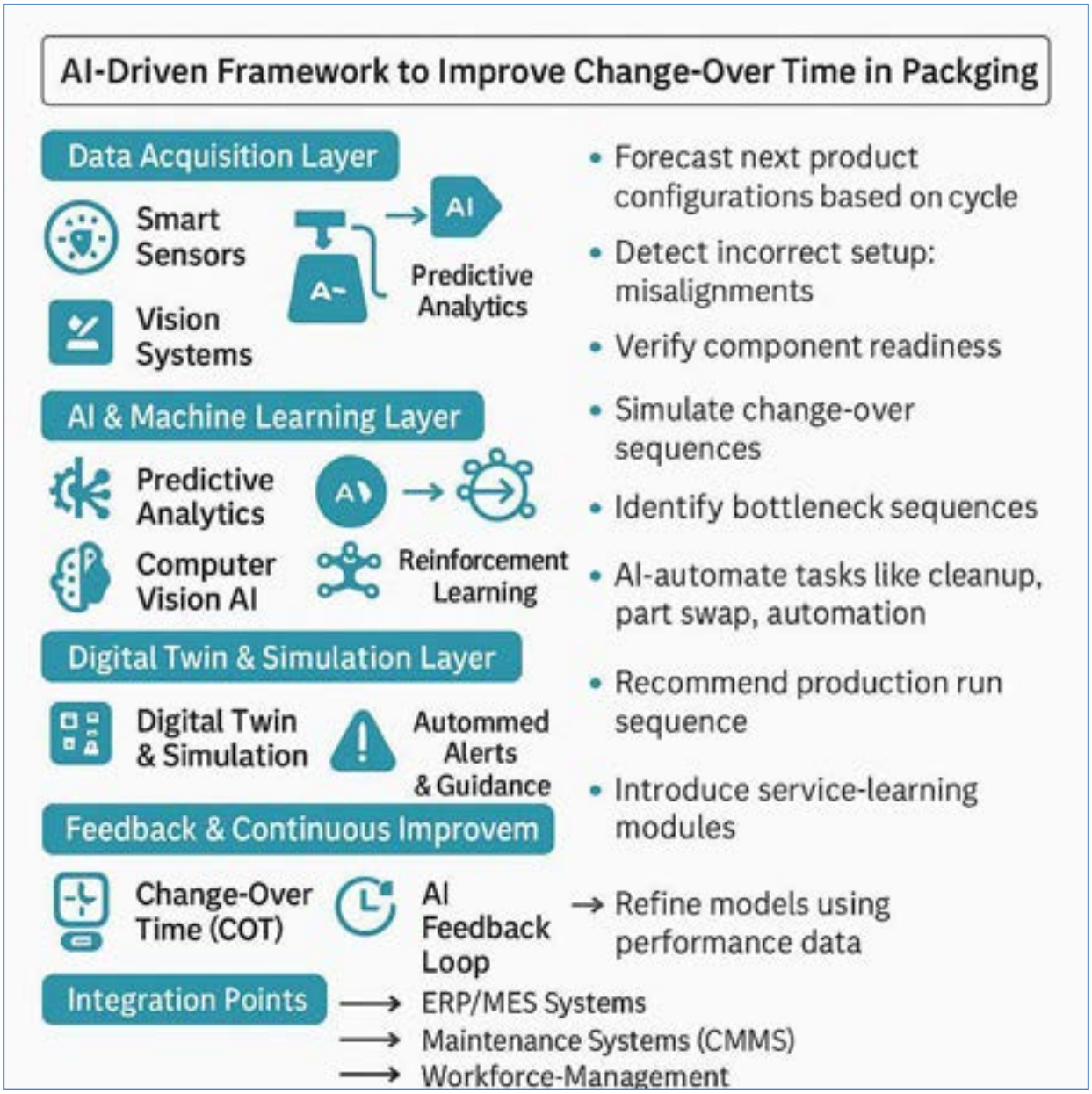

Figure 7: AI-Driven Framework to Improve Change-Over Time in Beer Packaging

- Data Acquisition Layer - Particularly during change-over events, this layer is responsible for collection, pre-processing, and transmission of accurate, real-time data from various sources of the packaging line. The key components of the data acquisition layer include smart sensor integration, programmable logic controller interfaces, machine vision systems and data synchronisation and time stamping. Data on machine states, operator activities, beer brands and specifications, downtime and delays, environmental factors and sensor readings from the line are captured and processed in real time. The data acquisition layer is crucial for the AI Framework, providing data for training machine learning models to predict optimal change-over sequences, benchmark operator performance, identify bottlenecks, support digital twin creation of the packaging line, and enable real-time decision support.
- AI & Machine Learning Layer - This layer is responsible for cleaning and configuring raw data from the data acquisition layer and synchronising time-stamped events across the

systems. The data collected during change-over processes is analysed in this layer to identify process inefficiencies, extract insights, predict delays, and provide recommended solutions for optimisations, striving to reduce change-over time and improving operational efficiency.

- Digital Twin & Simulation Layer - Encompasses digital twin and simulation, automated alerts & guidance. Digital twin technology has huge potential to streamline design, optimise manufacturing processes, and enhance supply chain management for the beer packaging industry. With digital twin technology, breweries are able to simulate packaging designs, virtually test them, and optimise packaging lines, eventually improving efficiency and reducing costs. When certain thresholds, conditions, or anomalies such as machine failure or likelihood of equipment failure, are detected within the digital twin, automated alerts or notifications are generated automatically. Automated guidance is characterised by prescribed actions or recommendations that are based on simulation and data analysis to aid in making optimised decisions regarding production lot quantities, rescheduling of jobs, actioning preventive maintenance suggestions and energy-saving recommendations to improve energy performance.
- Feedback & Continuous Improvement Layer - This layer is responsible for closing the loop by guaranteeing that the practical insights that are derived from AI models yield realistic improvements and that new data continuously boosts system performance to improve change-over time in beer packaging. Figure 7 shows the continuous improvement learning cycle, commencing from capturing the results of implemented changes, use of operator feedback interface to support human-in-the-loop AI approach, validating AI-driven recommendations and using new data to update models and SOPs.

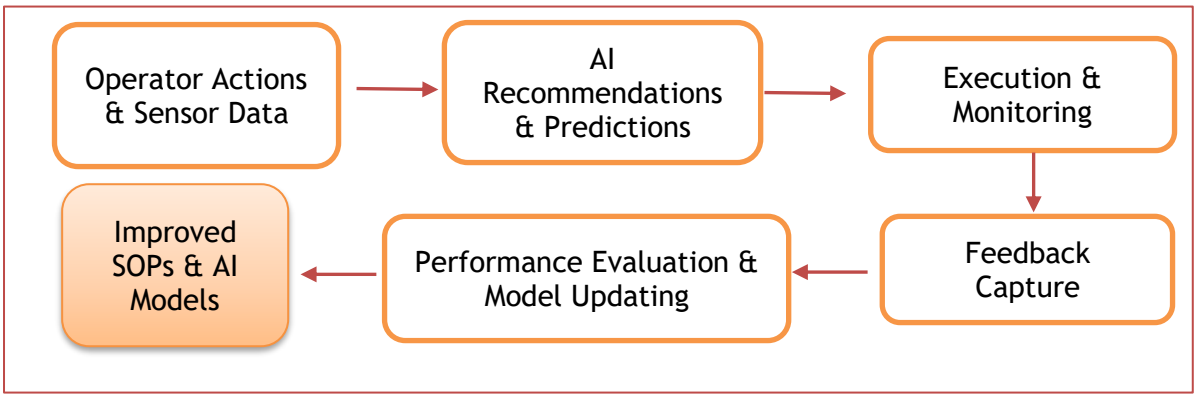

Figure 8: Continuous Improvement Learning Cycle

Integration Points are criucial for connecting physical systems, software platforms, human inputs, and AI models and the effectiveness of the AI framework depends on ERP, maintenance systems and workforce Management to functioning smoothly in real-time.

6 CONCLUSION

Reducing change-over time in beer packaging product lines remains a critical goal for improving productivity and cost efficiency. Traditional methods such as SMED, automation, and lean practices have proven effective, but AI introduces a new frontier in optimisation. By leveraging predictive analytics, real-time monitoring, and intelligent automation, breweries can significantly enhance their packaging processes. However, despite the benefits of AI in beer packaging, challenges remain, including high implementation costs, data integration complexities, and the need for skilled personnel. Future research should explore AI's long-term impact on packaging sustainability, cybersecurity in smart factories, and the ethical implications of automation in the workforce. As AI technologies continue to advance,

breweries that adopt AI-driven solutions can achieve higher efficiency, lower costs, and improved product quality. Future research should focus on overcoming implementation barriers and maximizing the potential of AI in beer packaging.

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SYSTEMS THINKING, SYSTEMS ENGINEERING AND COGNITIVE WORK ANALYSIS APPLICATION TO MANAGE COMPLEX SOCIOTECHNICAL SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Organisations add new technology to improve system performance. Still, implementing technology suffers from integration challenges of an operational, technical, social, structural, or policy nature, which would interrupt successful implementation. This paper aims to enhance integration by conceptualising a method employing Systems Thinking, Systems Engineering, and Cognitive Work Analysis to analyse complex sociotechnical systems. Through Design Science Research, an artefact was designed to identify and resolve integration issues. The artefact was applied to a Smart Metering System, which was demonstrated to designers, engineers, and managers. An abstraction hierarchy was created to capture the functional purpose of the systems and the interactions. These components interact to produce system behaviour, whereas an unconvincing specification of interaction requirements may lead to negative consequences. Proper specification of requirements, along with appropriate policies and regulations, is essential to resolving the issues around technology integration to yield outcomes relevant to performance.

Keywords: Systems Thinking, Systems Engineering, Cognitive Work Analysis, Complex Sociotechnical Systems, Design Science Research.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Systems may require, from time to time, the integration of new technologies to enhance performance levels. However, these systems face system integration challenges, operational capability challenges, social challenges, structural and policy challenges, and decision-making and strategy challenges that may result in stakeholders rejecting the new technology [1], [2]. Introducing new technology into the currently functioning system requires realising that the systems might become complex. Complex systems require whole-system analysis when introducing new technology. It requires Systems Thinking, Systems Engineering (SE), Cognitive Work Analysis (CWA) and associated processes to assist in managing system interactions as they become more complex when integrated with the new technology [3], [4], [5].

The challenges in complex systems include social and technical aspects requiring a sociotechnical systems development approach [6], [7]. The sociotechnical system approach and analysis is concerned with improving work performance and the well-being, experience and values of the people performing the work in the system with the technology [1]. Therefore, a sociotechnical systems approach is consistent with the whole system thinking approach as part of SE [8].

Applying Systems Thinking, SE, CWA, and Systems Thinking theories to manage complex sociotechnical system performance contributes to resolving organisational challenges during system designs and system implementation, ensuring successful integration of new technologies. The research study contributes to helping designers, engineers, and managers understand why systems fail, how to improve system designs in organisations, and how to implement new technologies successfully.

The first objective of this research is to investigate how Systems Thinking, SE, CWA, and System Dynamics theories resolve complex sociotechnical system problems to successfully integrate new technologies with existing systems. The second objective is to develop and test a framework model for resolving complex sociotechnical system transition problems to ensure that organisations can successfully integrate new technologies to increase performance.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Technology Implementation Problems

Innovation and new technology implementations can improve existing organisations' systems, contributing to sustainable development. The fourth industrial revolution innovations and technologies can transform societies, satisfy emerging social needs, revolutionise infrastructure, and significantly impact the economy and businesses [9], [10], [11]. The new technologies can improve the weaknesses of current systems by producing reliable materials and being more intelligent [10]. The integrated technologies will enhance the system's capabilities and ensure that the system can perform more efficiently [10], [12]. Integrating new technologies with the current system may also cause system failure due to emerging system complexities. The system complexities include technical and social system challenges experienced when using systems to complete work tasks [7], [13].

Failed system implementation results because the designers and engineers designed the complex system with incomplete requirements, including missing cognitive and other technical and social requirements, wrong perceptions of the stakeholders' expectations and lack of user influence during system development, resulting in ineffective and inefficient user interfaces [2], [14].

2.2 Sociotechnical Systems

The sociotechnical system theory introduces a systems view that includes both the social and technical systems to ensure that both the social and technical system requirements are

captured with their interaction requirements during the system design process. The environmental complexities and limitations that the system operates within are also analysed and made part of the system design to ensure complete system requirements, leading to better decisions when choosing alternative new technologies and system designs [2], [7], [13].

The social system consists of the structure of the organisation subsystem, organisational policies, people's social needs, attitudes, values, required knowledge and skills to operate the designed system, etc. The technical system consists of the physically designed system, including software, hardware, and work areas, as well as the work tasks that the physical system and people must perform to achieve system objectives [2], [14]. The interactions of the subsystems with themselves and the new technology may cause the system to be complex. A sociotechnical system approach ensures that all the complex system objectives and requirements are captured fully during system analysis and design [1], [7], [13]. The organisational structure influences work tasks, technical systems, and how the sociotechnical system is constrained by the environments, as shown in Figure 1.

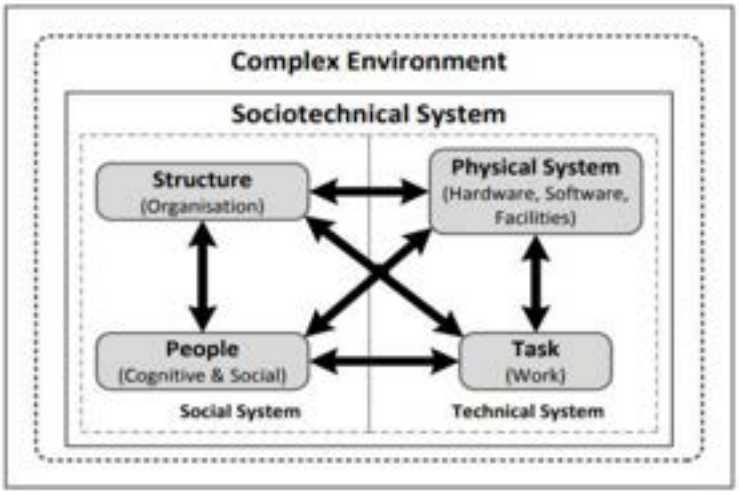

Figure 1: Sociotechnical System in a Complex Environment [13]

Implementing a sociotechnical systems approach aims to ensure that the introduced new technologies fit the organisation and workers by assisting the designers and engineers in designing new technologies acceptable to all the stakeholders. Workers need to find the technology satisfying to work with, thereby increasing work performance [2], [7].

2.3 Complex Systems

Complex system behaviour is non-linear; when one of the subsystems' behaviour changes and integrates with other subsystems, the changed behaviour may cause other subsystems to behave differently than intended, changing the whole system's behaviour. The complex problems that arise during system transitions when the system technology changes can result in undesirable system behaviours that can cause the system to fail to meet its objectives. These emerging dynamic behaviours of the system are difficult to perceive and to know during the planning phase [3], [12], [15].

When the system behaviour cannot be reduced to the sum of the behaviours of its subsystems, then that system has emergent behaviour. It requires a Systems Thinking approach to analyse all the non-linear subsystem interactions. Systems Thinking analyses complex system issues by studying how the subsystems change during the system integration, how the changes affect the other subsystems, and how the interactions of subsystems, elements or functions affect the whole system behaviour [3], [5], [16].

The challenge is to foresee and understand the undesired emerging behaviours that can destroy the system while the system is in the development phase, so that the system can be designed to defeat such challenges when they occur once the system is functional [13], [17]. The CWA framework can analyse the system's possible emergent behaviours and model such behaviour. The modelling can assist the designers and engineers in designing the system, even for behaviours the subsystems may not possess. However, that could emerge when the subsystems are integrated to perform the system objectives [17], [18], [19].

System models clarify requirements, help predict system complexities that might cause problems. Modelling of complex sociotechnical systems foresees the emergent behaviours of complex systems by describing them further or framing the system problems so that the system designers, engineers, managers and other stakeholders can understand them. A model is an abstraction of reality and helps make decisions about the designed system. Understanding the patterns and structure of the emerging behaviours of the system will reduce the system's complexities. CWA and modelling can help to evaluate the effectiveness of the designed system elements and their interactions [13], [20], [21], [22], [23], [24].

2.4 Systems Thinking

Systems Thinking studies the interactions and relationships of system elements with each other and analyses the system's behaviour that emerges because of the elements' interactions [13], [18], [25]. The system structure and data collected during the system modelling will ensure that the designers design the system with complete requirements during the development phase, enabling a close-to-perfect view of the system and integrated perceptions and expectations of all the stakeholders involved. CWA is based on Systems Thinking to ensure the system is resilient and adaptive when emergent behaviours occur [3], [4].

Systems Thinking assumes that the whole complex system is more than just its separate components or elements added together due to components interacting [26]. By adopting a holistic perspective, organisations can understand where and how to change complex systems to improve performance without emerging unwanted system behaviours. Organisations can, therefore, avoid policy conflicts, learn more quickly and efficiently, and make decisions that are best for the organisation in the long run due to the holistic view [27].

Implemented decisions and environmental conditions affect one another when they are changed, and the side effects from the changed decisions affect the environmental situations [27]. Organisational and stakeholder goals can change as the environment changes. This changes the stakeholders' actions, further changing the environmental conditions and problems looping until they meet the desired organisational objectives and goals. Hence, it is essential to model system behaviours of these complex systems because they are interconnected and have feedback [26].

The Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) is a Systems Thinking tool that assists in understanding and demonstrating the connections between several elements that affect a system's behaviour for a specific period. It is a schematic illustration that utilises feedback loops with arrows to explain the cause-and-effect interactions between various system elements [26]. It helps analysing and elaborating on complex sociotechnical systems and communicating the dynamic behaviour of systems to stakeholders [27], [28].

2.5 Systems Engineering

SE is a systematic and iterative application that assists in managing and resolving problems in a sociotechnical system with Systems Thinking theory [3], [15]. SE is the practical realisation, utilisation, and decommissioning of developed systems and increases the chances of developing successful systems through systems concepts, theories, and managerial techniques [15]. It ensures that customers' and stakeholders' needs are identified, defined, analysed, and

captured. The required system's functional requirements and specifications are defined, understood and captured to assist in designing the system's architectural design alternatives. Capturing complete requirements early during the conceptual stage of the new technology will ensure that there are fewer modified requirements at the subsequent stages of the system's life cycle [3]. System modelling ensures that the designers and engineers design the system with improved requirements during the development phase, enabling a close-to-perfect view of the system and integrated perceptions and expectations of all the stakeholders involved [25], [29], [30].

Systems architecting can be helpful during complex sociotechnical system transitions. When the social subsystem elements interact with the technical subsystem elements, the systems architecting tool can help demonstrate how the subsystems integrate to generate the required system behaviour through SE processes. The system's architecture model ensures a better view and understanding of the system. System requirements must be fully captured to ensure the correct system is designed. The system requirements define the system objectives, and the system architecture design interprets the system requirements [25], [29], [31].

Model-based systems engineering (MBSE) includes modelling methods, tools, and procedures used to model the SE framework structurally and practically to communicate and understand complex problems. The MBSE supports SE processes, including requirement analysis, functional analysis and the system's architectural design. It improves the design and quality of SE efforts, including requirements-capturing processes, system design processes, and system verification and validation processes. These improvements contribute to better analysis and management of complex systems [3], [15], [32].

2.6 Cognitive Work Analysis

CWA is a framework based on Systems Thinking that models a system's social and technical components to understand how systems work, intending to improve the system design and performance [1], [33]. It analyses cognitive work and models and structures the work demands and problems to improve understanding of technological and social systems interactions. The outputs assist in better understanding the system's cognitive work demands, enabling them to improve the system requirements and designs [8], [34]. CWA also considers the environmental constraints that constrain workers ' and workers' ability to perform [12], [35].

The CWA framework has five phases: Work domain analysis (WDA), control task analysis, strategies analysis, social organisation and cooperation analysis and worker competency analysis. Most system analyses use the first CWA phase, the work domain analysis [3], [34], [36]. It analyses the work environment and its constraints to determine the sociotechnical system's purpose and the capabilities of the interactions of the subsystems. The WDA analysis is independent of the workers performing the work and tasks. WDA uses the Abstraction Hierarchy (AH) to capture the system's functional purpose by capturing the system's interactions with physical objects. Analysing the interactions also contributes to understanding what the system can and cannot achieve, clearly understanding the purpose of the sociotechnical system [12], [34].

The AH has five stages or levels that capture the system environment, as shown in Figure 2. The lowest level of the AH shows the system's physical objects and all the equipment used to achieve the system's purpose. The next stage shows the purposes and uses of the physical objects. These are all functions that the objects can perform, even those not related to the current system's purpose. The third level represents the system functions performed by the objects driven by the system's purpose. The next level below the top level represents the system's values and priorities delivered by the objects. The top level of the WDA AH represents the system's purpose. The AH model shows which system purpose each physical object enables, why the object performs the system purpose, and how it performs it. The levels connect

through the relationships between the objects, their functions, the system's purpose they perform, and the value they bring to achieve the overall system purpose [12], [33], [37].

When new technology integrates with an existing sociotechnical system, it creates a complex sociotechnical system if the interactions of the system elements are non-linear [38]. The links between the different levels of the AH of the newly introduced physical objects integrate into the old system's AH structure and are analysed to understand the system problems that can emerge or have emerged because of the new technology links on the updated AH structure [12]. With this, CWA can assist in improving the system requirements; integrated system analysis through the AH diagram shows the missing functions the system needs to integrate new technology successfully. Capturing the missing requirements analysed using the AH diagram helps constrain the unwanted emerging system behaviour [3].

The purpose-related functions and the object-related functions of the WDA Abstraction Hierarchy are mapped onto the MBSE tool and help generate user requirements and functionality requirements; purpose-related functions are mapped onto use-case diagrams, and the object-related functions are mapped onto the functional activity diagrams. MBSE and CWA modelling assist in capturing complete, verifiable system requirements [3].

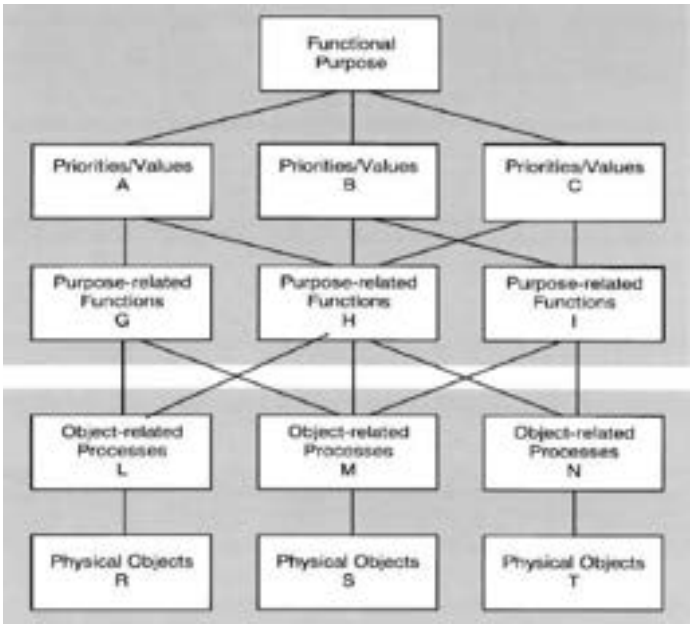

Figure 2: WDA Abstraction Hierarchy [37]

3 CONCEPTUAL METHOD

The conceptual framework model elements in Figure 3 explain how the theories and models will be applied to resolve the complex sociotechnical system problems experienced when new technology integrates with the existing system. The framework includes the following steps:

- **Problem Definition (STEP 1)**. Understanding stakeholders' requirements for improving the old system's performance is a critical SE process. SE processes analyse the existing sociotechnical system's gaps and shortfalls, which is part of the identifying and defining the problem stage. The system stakeholders and users are defined, and their needs are captured using a Use Case Diagram.
- **Requirement Analysis (STEP 2)**. The requirements and constraints of the system and the new stakeholder needs are elicited and analysed. The objectives are set to evaluate if the designed integrated system resolves the defined problems and meets the stakeholder needs.

- **Conceptual Modelling (STEP 3)**. MBSE assists the designers and engineers in capturing complete, traceable requirements and communicating with stakeholders using diagrams and models. Functional and system performance requirements analysis will be performed and demonstrated through Functional and Activity diagrams. The system components are iteratively analysed, and the system structure is determined.
- **Cognitive Work Analysis (STEP 4)**. The CWA determines the system requirements, constraints, and behaviour when the new technology integrates with the existing system. It also analyses environmental constraints to understand the system's capabilities and limits. CWA assists in uncovering the system's complexities, understanding the interactions between the elements, and predicting the emerging system behaviour from the interactions of the system elements.
- **Integrated Project Team and Design (STEP 5)**. Demonstrating the conceptually modelled framework to the Integrated Project Team and Design shows that the designed artefact integrates successfully and that the system behaves as expected. The team analyses and improves the defined problem, stakeholder needs, conceptual design and CWA AH structure.
- **Plan and Perform System Evaluation (STEP 6)**. Planning of the artefact's processes and designing artefact evaluation to determine how well it meets the stakeholders' needs.
- **Communicate Results (STEP 7)**. All the relevant information and models are communicated to the stakeholders.

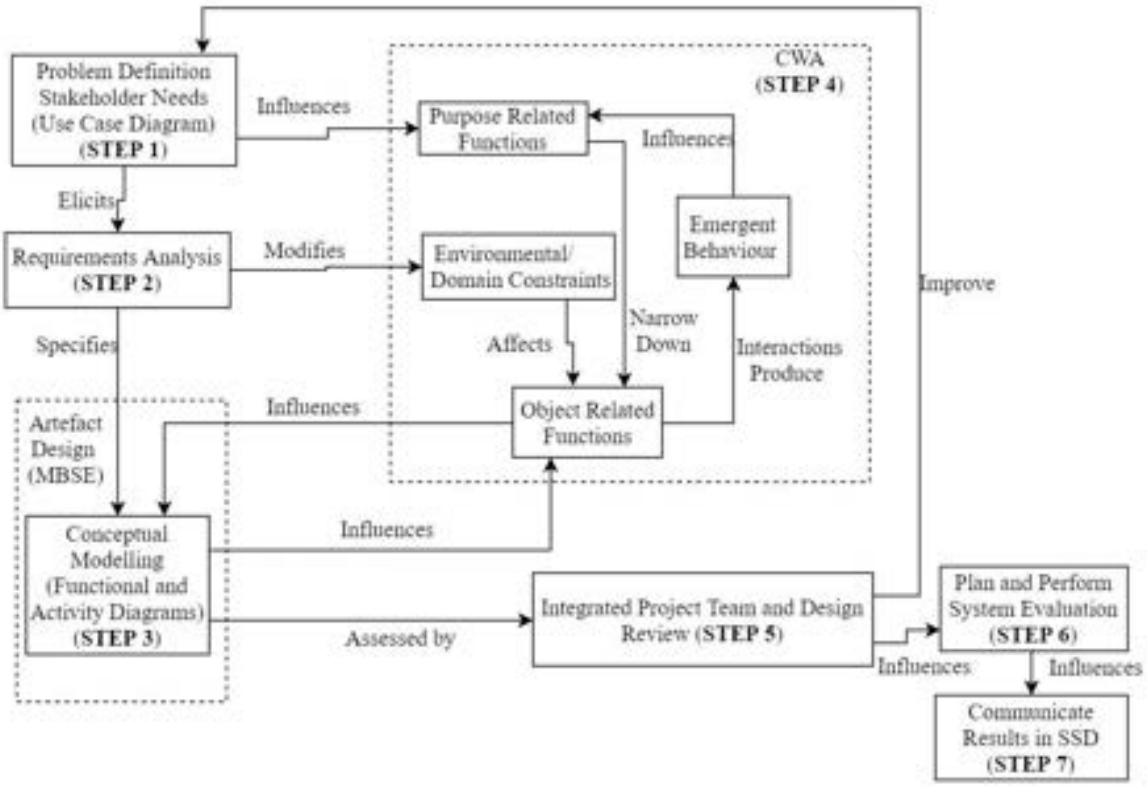

Figure 3: The Proposed Framework Model

4 RESEARCH APPROACH

4.1 Research Method

Applied research aims to produce further knowledge that policymakers and practitioners can use to improve organisations. The inductive methodology focuses on creating new theories, while the deductive methodology tests generally established theories on an identified problem or situation. This research applies the proposed framework model in Figure 3 to a complex sociotechnical system development project and uses deductive methodology. The qualitative methods captured constructive inputs and evaluations from the subjects involved in the studied environments. The positivist deductive qualitative research study employs a Design Science Research framework and processes [39].

This research implements a Design Science Research paradigm for solving problems to advance human understanding by producing creative artefacts. An artefact is an object created to solve issues and problems experienced by humans. Artefacts can be tangible or intangible objects. They are models, structures, constructs, methods, and instantiations. It seeks to improve the knowledge of science and technology theories by developing artefacts and design knowledge that solve complex sociotechnical system problems and enhance systems and working environments [40]. The approach intends to address the business needs by creating artefacts designed using the base knowledge. Researchers investigate how current systems should improve, design artefacts, and develop knowledge of why the artefacts work [41]. The artefacts were evaluated in a focus group of the Integrated Project Team members. A thematic analysis was performed on the meeting transcripts.

The methodology is applied to the case of integrating a smart metering system (SMS) with existing systems in municipalities to demonstrate the proposed framework model in Figure 3 (the designed artefact).

4.2 Advanced Metering Infrastructure or Smart Metering Infrastructure

Municipalities and other organisations are slowly implementing smart meters because of the following benefits and advantages of smart meters [42]:

- Upgraded outage services and expanded supply network monitoring, load management and forecasting.
- Smart meters integrate all the energy sources connected to the grid and assist organisations in effectively managing all linked energy sources.
- The remote meter readings, software updates, disconnection, and connection services contribute to operational budget savings.
- Reduced theft of electricity brings the organisation financial savings.
- Correct billing and Time of Use tariff implementation.
- Enhanced customer service is achieved by customers being able to monitor their energy consumption data and manage bills.

The effective deployment of smart meters depends heavily on the type of communications system employed. Many technologies can be used for communications systems for smart metering. In some cases, multiple communication technologies are utilised together in one operation to ensure efficient two-way communication and exchange of data or signals between the meter and data collector, as shown in Figure 4. Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) aims to gather data from meters and transmit it to the municipality's control centre. Municipalities must address each customer's needs and issues, such as power outages, billing, load management, supply quality, and other customer needs at any time [42].

Managing data from several smart meters necessitates a data management subsystem. It is considered a crucial component in enhancing the grid and facilitating the integration of energy

generation sources. It aims to detect and accurately measure power usage and other parameters remotely [42].

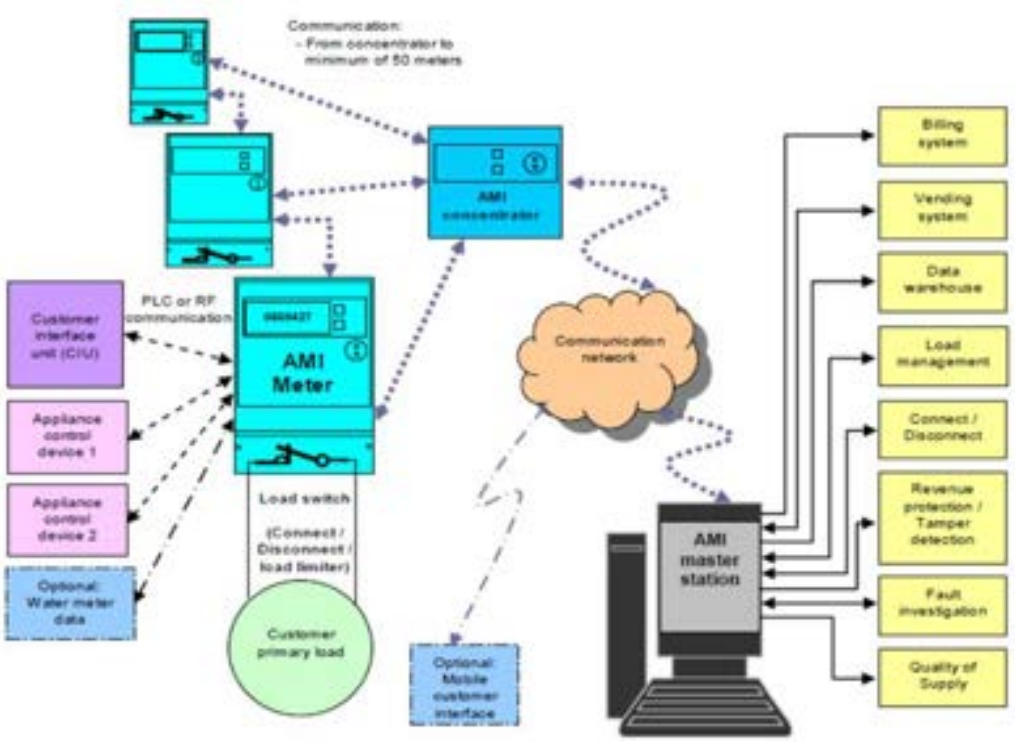

Figure 4: Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) System [42]

4.3 Smart Meters as Complex Sociotechnical Systems

Smart metering systems (SMS) are complex because they exhibit emergent properties when their technical and social system elements interact, and their behaviour can only be comprehended by studying the whole system, the components and their interactions. Therefore, the transition requirements of the SMS must focus on both the technical and the social system and their interactions with each other in a constrained environment [3], [7], [43].

5 RESULTS

5.1 Problems Definition and Environment Needs (STEP 1)

Due to the early stage of smart meter installations in South Africa, many municipalities struggle to adopt and operate smart meters. There are many documented instances of inaccurate invoicing, faulty meters, and inadequate skills and services given to customers due to technical, policy, political, social, and organisational challenges [44], [45]. This indicates that there is still a need to improve knowledge, skills, services and policies when implementing smart meters in municipalities and other organisations.

Customer challenges with the new technology include unfulfilled perceptions and expectations, including user-friendly purchasing and loading of electricity credits, easy electricity usage monitoring, etc. Summary points of the problems still experienced when implementing smart meter projects in municipalities include [44], [45]:

- Skill deficiency across all aspects of their organisational systems.
- Difficulties in establishing the precise scope of work required for tenders.

- Deficiency in national regulations on smart meters.
- Projects require the development of policies and legislation to support them.
- A lack of a customer-centred approach is needed when implementing these projects.
- Infrastructure cannot manage the large volume of data that smart meters generate.

The SMS stakeholders include the Municipality and government, Employees, Regulators (NERSA, Treasury, IEC, etc.), Communities or Customers, Policy makers, Smart Meter Infrastructure Manufacturers and Software Suppliers, Contractors and Service providers.

The MBSE methods support SE processes, including requirement analysis, functional analysis, and the system's architectural design, which help analyse the SMS. Use Case Diagrams are used to uncover and analyse user needs; they elicit the stakeholders' requirements. Figure 5 shows the Use Case Diagram for an intelligent metering system. It shows the stakeholders' needs that the SMS must satisfy to realise the value of all stakeholders [15], [30].

5.2 Requirements Analysis (STEP 2)

From the problem definition and the Use Case Diagram, designers, engineers, and project managers can compile detailed stakeholder requirements that are measurable and verifiable to understand what is required. For the SMS, the Use Case diagram functions will be broken down further into measurable requirements that can assist in designing the required system.

5.3 Functional and Activity Diagram (STEP 3)

Functional requirements activity diagrams elaborate on the use cases and stakeholder requirements diagram to design the required SMS. The functional elements often do not consider the social system constraints and their interactions with the technical system. They need further analysis to capture the system requirements while compiling the scope of work and specifications for the SMS. Cognitive Work Analysis is utilised to analyse the whole system. The SMS components and functional elements are mapped on the CWA AH structure to further examine the system requirements, as shown in Figure 6 [3].

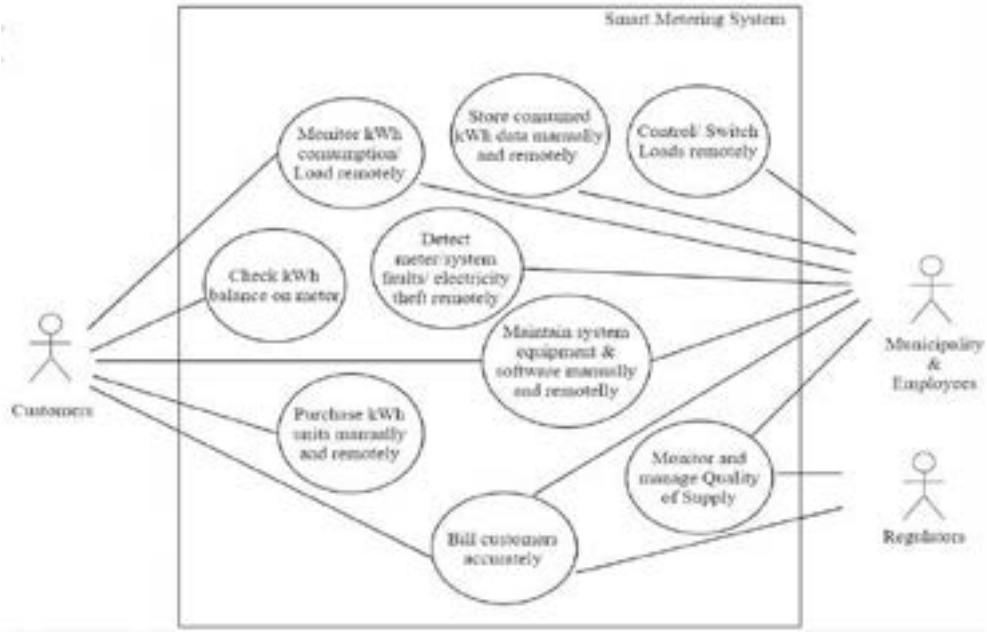

Figure 5: MBSE Use Case Diagram of a Smart Meter System

5.4 Cognitive Work Analysis AH Diagram (STEP 4)

The environmental complexities and limitations that the system operates within are also analysed using the CWA AH diagram shown in Figure 6 and made part of the system design to ensure complete system requirements, leading to better decisions when choosing alternative new technologies and system designs. The top row shows that municipalities' existence is structured according to governmental legislation and regulatory bodies, with requirements that municipalities must comply with to avoid penalties and continue supplying electricity to their customers. The policies drive municipalities to prioritise and value all the elements demonstrated in row two of the CWA AH diagram. The policies are the environmental constraints existing within municipalities that the SMS needs to function within, and they constrain the system's performance. Suitable policies will ensure the system performs well and emerge with the required purpose-related functions that stakeholders need [3].

The object-related functions and the priorities/values elements interact through the links, resulting in the purpose-related functions on the CWA AH diagram. The technical functions of the SMS need to interact well with the priorities and values of the municipalities to ensure a high-performing system. All the emergent behaviours of the system are complex, and the challenge is to foresee and understand the undesired emerging behaviours that can cause the system to fail. The subsystems' interactions must be analysed, and each behaviour must be modelled to assist the designers in making better design decisions. System Engineers are required in organisations to apply the SE practices that ensure that all stakeholders and SMS requirements are captured for all the system lifecycle stages and the risks are managed through system life cycle stages [4], [18], [46].

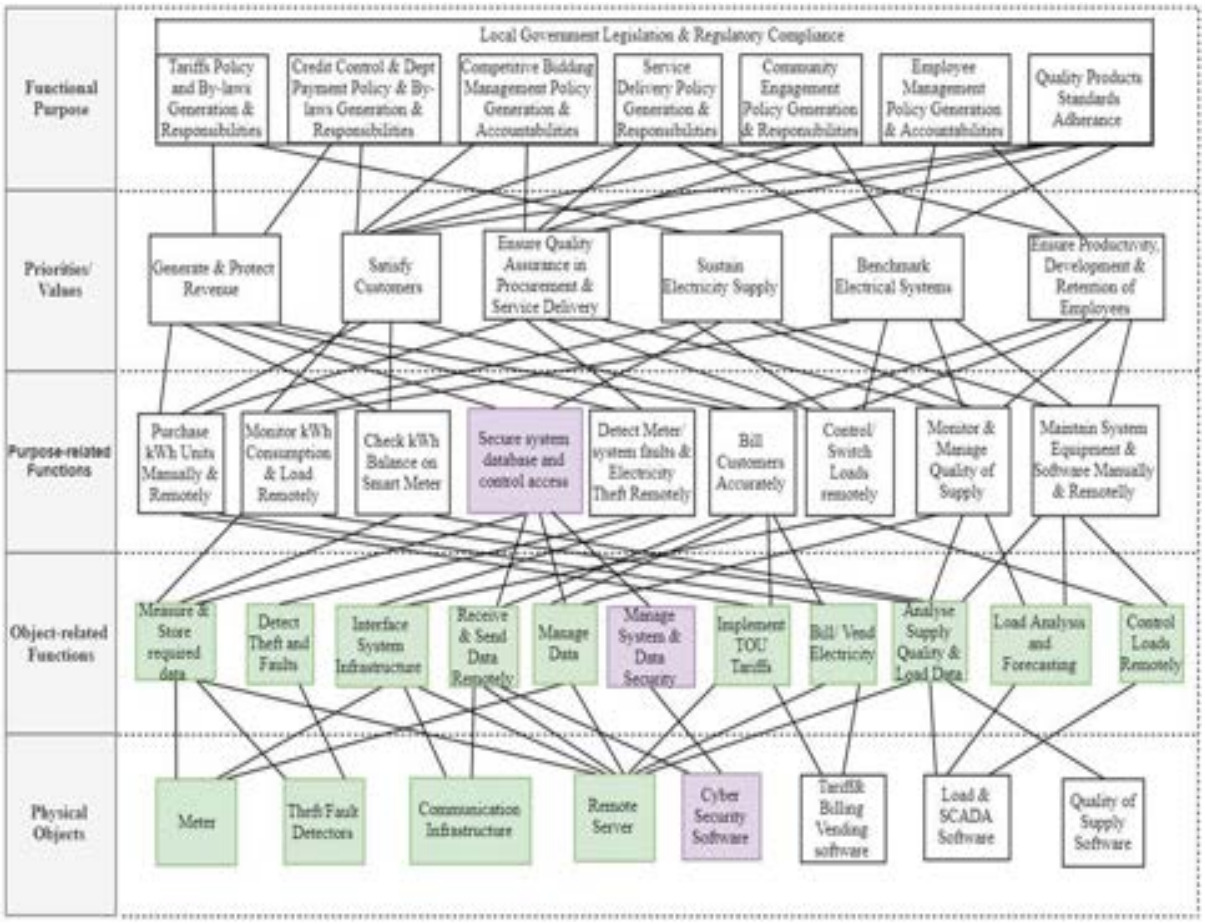

Figure 6: Updated CWA AH Structure with Participants' Inputs

Figure 7 shows how SMS integration problems can be resolved to improve system performance by shifting the burden of the generic system archetype structure. As the intelligent metering integration problems increase, most municipalities contract work to service providers due to skill deficiency. The part of the work is then handled by service providers, a symptomatic solution that causes side effects. The side effect is the reliance on service providers, which decreases opportunities for municipalities to gain system experience and learn how to manage and improve their systems. The fundamental solution is the municipalities' efforts to support and enable their employees. They should implement policies to ensure organisational leadership, enhance employee incentives and rewards systems, and encourage self-development. Also, it can focus on improving stakeholder value, standardising products and services, and ensuring procurement processes meet the needs of the SMS. This will improve system performance and ensure the integration of new technology with the current system [47].

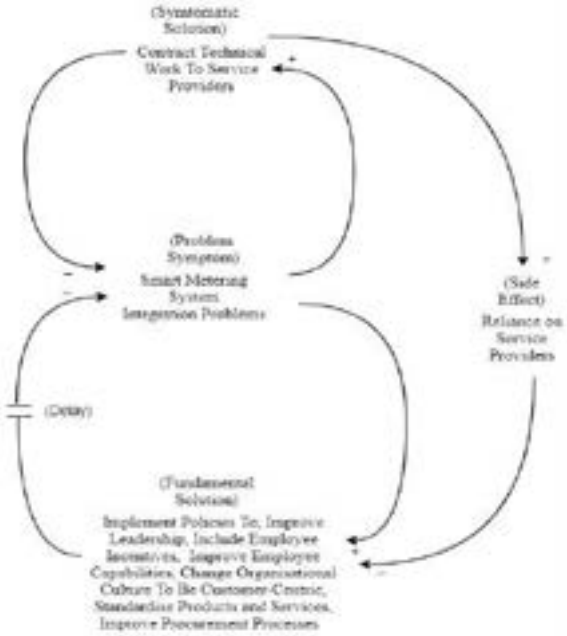

Figure 7: Smart Metering System Shifting the Burden CLD diagram

5.5 Integrated Project Team and Design Review (STEP 5)

A focus group was held with the Integrated Project Team to analyse and improve the designed artefact and framework model. The team included one power protection chief engineer, metering inspector, substation design engineer, supervisory control and data acquisition engineer, power system project manager, deputy director, and director. Every participant commented to help analyse and improve the CWA AH structure for the SMS. All the discussions and inputs from the Integrated Project Team were recorded and captured in Microsoft Teams transcripts. The sentiment analysis outputs are shown in Table 1.

Participants agreed that the framework model and CWA AH structure are helpful, and they are a perfect start when drafting specifications to ensure the new technology integrates well with the existing system. Participants commented that the CWA AH diagram assists in highlighting all the system questions that need to be answered when compiling system specifications, and that the CWA AH structure can be improved as specifications improve to better analyse the interactions. Participants agreed that the CWA AH structure, elements and links analysis assisted in analysing the system needs and uncovered further requirements that must be included in the system design to ensure that the new technology integrates well with the current system.

The participants commented that the designed artefact and framework model should be utilised for every new technology that each section or department tries to implement to improve system performance. Participants realised that some environmental constraints also limit the performance of the system elements and their interactions, and must be adjusted by introducing or changing the organisational policies. They also realised that the CWA AH structure can be presented to management, departments and other stakeholders to help them understand how the functions are interconnected and affect each other's performance and how systems can be improved by analysing the elements and their interactions.

Table 1: Summary of the Participant Comments and Sentiments

Participant	Opinion	Sentiment
1	Believes the approach is beneficial, especially for municipalities. Refers to it as an "incremental innovation" that requires continuous improvement	**Positive**: Sees it as a good technology that can be widely applied
2	Supports the approach but emphasises the need for better operational feedback loops to improve system acceptance and long-term success	**Constructively critical**: Appreciates the value but highlights concern about feedback
3	Suggests the approach could help integrate different factors in load forecasting, but notes a lack of current integration across the relevant section	**Cautiously optimistic**: Believes in the potential but questions how well the approach integrates
4	Acknowledges the value but highlights resistance to new technology from older personnel and issues like vandalism that hinder implementation	**Mixed**: Sees potential but expresses frustration with practical obstacles
5	Advocates for a holistic approach, considering all social and technical elements for successful implementation	**Positive**: Views it as flexible and applicable across various contexts
6	Strongly supports the approach, acknowledging its integration with existing systems and its potential for ongoing improvement	**Very positive**: Confident that the system is well-researched and promising

5.6 Evaluate Designed Artefact, Framework Model and Research Objectives (STEP 6)

The first objective of the research study was to investigate how systems thinking, SE, and CWA can resolve complex sociotechnical system problems and successfully integrate new technologies with existing systems. This objective has been met by the artefact and framework model, designed by applying the base theories mentioned to resolve complex sociotechnical system integration problems.

The second objective was to develop a framework model for resolving complex sociotechnical system transition problems to ensure that organisations can successfully integrate new technologies to increase performance in organisations. The designed artefact and framework model has been applied to integrate the SMS's new technology with the existing system in municipalities. The demonstrated artefact and framework model showed that the new technology integration problems arose because the systems are designed and implemented with incomplete requirements, are constrained by their environment, and cannot perform optimally.

When applied, the framework model could show where the incomplete requirements were missing by using the CWA AH structure most of the time. The missing requirements were at points where elements interacted with each other through the links. To capture complete requirements, designers, engineers and managers must apply Systems Thinking when implementing systems to ensure that the scope of the specification is designed for the system elements and their interactions. The CWA AH structure demonstrated that the constrained environment required top management to re-evaluate or introduce better policies, enabling

systems to perform optimally. Completely designed system requirements and better or new policies and regulations will resolve the latest technology integration problems.

5.7 Validity and Reliability Considerations

To strengthen the study's internal validity, the research design incorporated several measures. Firstly, the framework was applied according to a clear sequence of steps (Figure 3) to ensure consistent execution amongst the analyses of case studies. Secondly, stakeholder requirements, identified gaps, and emergent behaviours were derived from artefact outputs (Use Case Diagrams, Functional and Activity Diagrams, and the CWA Abstraction Hierarchy) and triangulated against Integrated Project Team feedback. Thirdly, the structured focus group questions were developed so that they directly tested whether or not the framework could handle the particular integration issues identified in Step 1. In other words, the research goals, methods used, and criteria for evaluating the results were all aligned; therefore, extraneous factors are unlikely to have caused the observed improvements.

The framework concerning the SMS was elucidated, providing for a complex sociotechnical integration challenge, a hallmark of many infrastructure projects. Contextual factors such as regulatory environments, organisational structures, and straightforward skill availability all influence outcomes, and one should consider other settings. The framework essentially lends itself to scenarios where: (a) some new technology needs to be integrated within an extant sociotechnical system, (b) both technical and social subsystems are to operate under some environmental constraints; and (c) stakeholder interaction is possible in the early design phases. The study in other industries (for example, transport, health care, and defence) is encouraged as future work investigates the framework's generalisability further.

Constant processes and documented data collection and analysis protocols were ensured to address reliability. All focus group sessions were recorded with exact verbal transcription. Artefacts (models, diagrams, and analysis notes) generated during the study have all been archived along with the question protocols and coding scheme to allow replication by other researchers. The findings can be repeated because of the consistent application of the steps in the framework, coupled with the documented procedure.

6 CONCLUSION

To achieve the research objectives, the Systems Thinking, SE, CWA and Complex Socio-technical Systems base theory were surveyed and analysed, and their core elements were structured into a framework. The designed artefact and framework model ensures that the new technology system design requirements are complete by exposing the social and technical interactions impacting the system's purpose. The element's interactions, once exposed by the framework, can be analysed and scoped better to ensure complete system requirements are met. The framework also assists in analysing system capabilities and exposes environmental constraints that limit new technologies' performance in organisations.

The research study provides an approach that may improve how municipalities and other organisations can better integrate new technologies with existing systems and how to analyse and resolve new technology integration problems to enhance system performance. The designed artefact and framework model has demonstrated that significant effort should be made when designing the system specifications and capturing system requirements. The complete requirements ensure minimum scope changes and project risks.

The demonstrated CWA AH structure analysis exposed that the system elements can be in different departments. Some elements are social, and some are technical, interacting to form the whole system's behaviour. Therefore, all stakeholders and departments involved should analyse the CWA AH structure to ensure that all the requirements for the links and interactions are analysed and specified completely to provide complete system requirements. The CWA AH

structure also demonstrated that environmental constraints must be investigated, and policies must be improved or changed to maximise system performance. Further research can assist in better understanding how policy can be modelled to maximise system performance.

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STATISTICAL RELIABILITY MODELING FOR HEAVY-DUTY ROTARY TIPPLERS IN BULK MATERIAL HANDLING OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Rotary wagon tipplers are crucial to South Africa's pit-to-port rail logistics, enabling efficient offloading of bulk commodities at export terminals. However, reliability issues and equipment downtime disrupt operations, hampering volume throughput across the iron ore export value chain. Reliability, defined as a system's ability to consistently perform its intended function, is influenced by complex factors across the equipment life cycle, making root causes difficult to isolate. This study analyses operational data from a bulk material offloading terminal, applying two-parameter Weibull and Lognormal statistical models to predict offloading equipment reliability and assess the performance of electrical and mechanical components over time. Results reveal that the Lognormal Maximum Likelihood Estimator (MLE) model best fits electrical failures, while the Weibull MLE model is optimal for mechanical failures. These insights underscore the value of shifting from reactive to proactive maintenance, enabling data-driven planning and improved tippler reliability.

Keywords: reliability prediction, statistical modeling, rotary wagon tipplers

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

South Africa was ranked as the fourth-largest exporter of iron ore in 2023, accounting for approximately 4.1% of global market share [30]. Central to this performance is the Sishen–Saldanha Iron Ore Export Line, an 861-kilometre heavy-haul railway that connects the mineral-rich Northern Cape to the Port of Saldanha. This strategic corridor is essential to South Africa's mineral-driven economy, facilitating the efficient movement of bulk commodities to international markets. Within this logistics value chain, the reliability of rotary wagon tipplers at the downstream port plays a critical role. These machines are responsible for the rapid and continuous offloading of iron ore from rail wagons to stockpiles and conveyors for ship loading. Any downtime or performance degradation in these systems can disrupt value chains, affecting volume throughput.

The concept of seamless "pit-to-port" logistics is vital in mining economies, where consistent and efficient flows of mineral cargo underpin economic performance [9], [18] as illustrated in Figure 1. Recent studies and technological advancements highlight the importance of enhancing bulk handling equipment reliability through predictive maintenance, digital monitoring systems, and robust mechanical designs [27]. Despite the critical role of rotary tipplers on downstream offloading performance, rotary tipplers face persistent reliability challenges, with frequent operational downtime causing significant disruptions and cascading delays throughout the export value chain upstream processes. Statistical data analysis such as the Pareto principle shows that failures related to mechanical and electrical components are among the leading contributors to overall reliability issues.

Predicting tippler reliability and optimising offloading performance requires robust statistical modeling that integrates failure analysis and predictive maintenance strategies. This includes the application of reliability modeling statistical methods such as the Weibull and Lognormal statistical distributions capable of capturing component-level failure patterns to make rotary tippler reliability and Mean Time Between Failure (MTBF) more predictable [16]; [32]. Weibull and Lognormal analysis serve as critical modes in reliability engineering for assessing product lifetime performance by modeling failure-time data. These statistical methods enable engineers to address key reliability concerns, such as identifying failure patterns, forecasting future failures, and optimizing maintenance strategies [32].

1.2 Problem Statement

Industrial systems are generally subject to degradation due to continuous use and exposure to environmental factors. This degradation ultimately leads to system failure, which in turn can result in safety issues, equipment damage, quality problems, and unexpected machine unavailability. In the past, maintenance was largely viewed as a reactive task performed only after failures had occurred, and it was often considered difficult to manage. Today, however, maintenance is widely recognized as an essential business function and a critical aspect of asset management [2]. Organisations now increasingly understand that they can enhance their efficiency and reliability by planning maintenance interventions more effectively. As a result, there is greater emphasis on preventive maintenance actions, which are better coordinated with other business functions, such as operations and spare parts management.

Rotary tipplers at a port terminal, which are essential for the rapid offloading of iron ore from rail wagons, experience frequent operational downtime caused mainly by mechanical and electrical component failures. These reliability issues lead to significant disruptions and cascading delays throughout the iron ore export value chain, negatively impacting throughput performance. The rotary tippler is designed to offload an entire 116-wagon iron ore loaded train (rake) in approximately two hours as shown in Figure 1. Any unplanned equipment

downtime increases production losses and can have substantial revenue implications. Current maintenance strategies are insufficiently predictive, lacking robust statistical modeling to effectively forecast failures and optimize maintenance interventions. There is a need to develop and apply advanced statistical models that can accurately predict equipment reliability and Mean Time Between Failures to reduce downtime and enhance operational performance.

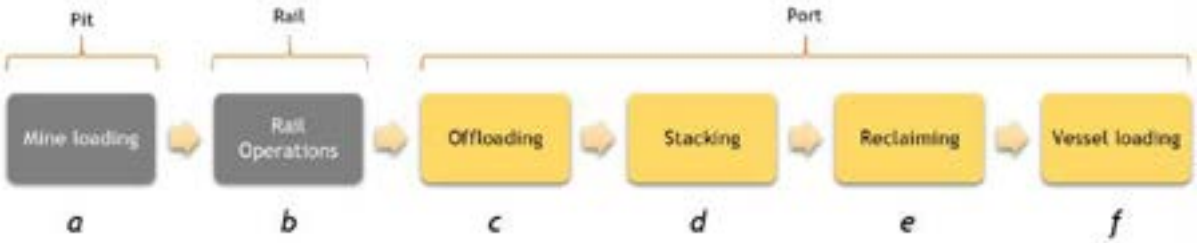


Figure 1. Illustration of the Pit-to-Port Value Chain, with the study focusing specifically on element **(c).**

By linking empirical data to predictive insights, advanced statistical analysis bridges theoretical reliability models with practical operational outcomes. Predicting equipment reliability and MTBF for electrical and mechanical components in rotary tipplers, which is the focus of this paper, is essential. Building on recent studies, this paper proposes the application of two-parameter Weibull and Lognormal statistical models to effectively assess and predict equipment reliability and MTBF for these critical components. The framework presented in this study represents a preliminary step forward in implementing and emphasizing the use of statistical modeling in reliability analysis.

2 RELATED WORK

In this section, the foundational literature on equipment reliability and predictive maintenance is reviewed, with a focus on bulk material handling equipment. It highlights the evolution from reactive to data-driven maintenance strategies and underscores the role of both Weibull and Lognormal statistical modeling in predicting equipment failure behaviour. Key insights are drawn from studies demonstrating the impact of reliability improvements on operational performance. Challenges related to data quality and model limitations are also discussed to contextualize the study's focus.

2.1 Equipment Reliability and Maintenance Strategies

Reliability engineering is concerned with quantifying a system's ability to perform its intended function without failure over a defined period, under stated operational conditions [34]. In high-throughput environments such as iron ore offloading in export terminals, equipment reliability directly affects operational continuity and throughput performance. Traditional maintenance strategies such as reactive maintenance (run-to-failure) and calendar-based preventive maintenance are increasingly being replaced by data-driven predictive maintenance approaches [11], [23]. These predictive strategies leverage historical failure data, statistical modeling and machine learning algorithms to anticipate failures and schedule timely interventions [15].

Recent research further highlights that predictive maintenance now incorporates advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital twins, enabling real-time monitoring and proactive decision-making to optimize maintenance schedules, enable effective condition-based maintenance and reduce unplanned downtime [24]. The shift from reactive to proactive maintenance has been widely validated in the literature. Dhillon [5] argues that the integration of quantitative reliability models enables improved asset utilization and optimized maintenance schedules. Moreover, predictive maintenance strategies have been shown to

reduce unplanned downtime by up to 30% and extend component life in various industrial case studies [3], [23].

2.2 Statistical Methods in Reliability Prediction

Among the statistical methods widely used in reliability analysis, the Weibull and lognormal distributions stand out as two of the most robust and versatile techniques. Both excel in modeling right-skewed time-to-failure data, which is common in industrial systems, and provide the flexibility to capture diverse failure patterns across different equipment life stages [1].

The Weibull distribution is defined by two key parameters: shape and scale. Its major strength lies in its ability to model various hazard rate behaviours, constant, increasing, or decreasing, making it suitable for a broad range of reliability scenarios, from early-life failures to wear-out phases. This adaptability has been validated across multiple industries such as manufacturing, mining, and transportation. For example, Meeker & Escobar [20] demonstrated Weibull's superiority over normal and exponential distributions, especially in handling censored and skewed failure data. In addition, Elsayed [7] emphasized the Weibull shape parameter's role in identifying dominant failure modes, which supports condition-based maintenance and design optimisation.

Complementing the Weibull model, the lognormal distribution is particularly effective in reliability contexts dominated by degradation, fatigue, or cumulative wear [7], [16]. It assumes that the logarithm of time-to-failure follows a normal distribution, aligning well with degradation mechanisms observed in rotating machinery, electrical motors, and structural components [16]. The lognormal hazard function typically starts low, increases gradually, and then accelerates, reflecting common mechanical system failure patterns after initial operation. Like Weibull, lognormal parameters are often estimated using MLE, an estimation method well-suited for censored or incomplete data [17], [20]. MLE maximizes the likelihood of observing the data under specified parameters, reliably estimating the log-mean (μ) and log-standard deviation (σ), making it preferred in complex industrial applications [10].

Alternatively, the Least Squares Estimation (LSE) method, a simple yet efficient approach, is often used to estimate model parameters. LSE works by minimizing the sum of squared residuals between observed data and corresponding predicted values from a model [10]. Combining these distributions with robust estimation methods has significantly advanced predictive maintenance and system reliability in asset-intensive industries.

In mining and bulk material handling, the application of Weibull and lognormal models has led to notable reliability improvements. Rao et al. [28] reported a 23% increase in MTBF for haul truck components using Weibull analysis. Similarly, Murthy et al. [25] achieved a 28% reduction in failures in mechanical conveyor systems through Weibull modeling. Lognormal models, especially when paired with MLE, have proven effective in analyzing gearboxes and motors, where wear and fatigue are predominant failure mechanisms [13]. Despite their widespread use, the application of Weibull and lognormal distributions to the reliability analysis of iron ore offloading equipment remains relatively underexplored, presenting an opportunity for further research.

2.3 Reliability in Bulk Material Handling Equipment

In bulk material handling systems, equipment such as conveyors, stackers, reclaimers, and rotary wagon tipplers represent critical links in iron ore logistics value chains. The operational reliability of these assets is frequently undermined by high-load cycles, abrasive environments, and a complex interaction between mechanical and electrical subsystems. Studies have consistently found that mechanical failures dominate unplanned downtime in high-duty bulk handling systems [8], [14]

In the context of iron ore terminals, Marais and Saleh [19] conducted a South African case study that identified mechanical degradation in rotary tipplers and wagon movers as the primary contributors to operational delays and reduced throughput. Their findings support the use of component-level reliability modeling using Weibull and lognormal distributions to diagnose root causes and inform maintenance strategies. Such modeling enables targeted interventions, such as identifying whether failure behaviour is governed by wear-out mechanisms (lognormal) or random failures (Weibull).

Studies in mining demonstrated that 3-parameter Weibull models significantly improve the reliability of Load-Haul-Dump (LHD) subsystems. In a detailed study of underground coal mines in India, Bala et al. [3] applied a 3-parameter Weibull distribution to analyze failure and repair data from multiple LHD machines. By classifying LHD subsystems and fitting Weibull models to time-between-failure data, the study enabled the estimation of optimal preventive maintenance intervals for each subsystem. The results showed that this approach allowed for more accurate prediction of subsystem reliability and failure rates, supporting the scheduling of preventive maintenance to improve equipment uptime and operational efficiency.

2.4 Reliability Data Characteristics and Challenges

Despite their benefits, reliability modeling efforts face persistent data challenges. Industrial datasets often contain censored observations, where failures are not observed within the monitoring period, and class imbalance, where rare failure types are underrepresented. Moreover, failure data typically exhibit skewed, non-normal distributions, making traditional normal-based methods such as the normal distribution less suitable. To address these challenges, parametric models such as Weibull and lognormal distributions paired with MLE estimation methods are favoured for their robustness in modeling censored and skewed data [16]. Non-parametric techniques such as Kaplan-Meier are also employed when the failure distribution is unknown, although they lack the predictive capacity of parametric methods [17]. Another challenge is the integration of human judgment and operator interventions into maintenance decisions. Such subjective factors introduce uncertainties not easily captured by traditional models. Methods such as Bayesian inference and Human Reliability Assessment (HRA) have been proposed to account for these complexities [4], but their application in terminals remain constrained by data availability and implementation complexities. The following section presents a detailed methodological framework.

3 METHODOLOGY FOR RELIABILITY MODELING

This section outlines the study's analytical framework, which is structured around three core components. The first step involves data collection and preprocessing, including the extraction of operational records, detailed logs of tippler failure events, and subsequent data cleaning. The second step focuses on model fitting, employing the two-parameter Weibull and lognormal distributions to statistically model failure behaviour and derive predictive insights. The final step centers around the assessment of tippler reliability, failure rate and MTBF, providing a data-driven basis for proactive maintenance planning.

3.1 Data Source

The data used for this study was sourced from a South African export iron ore offloading operator. The operator operates two rotary tipplers offloading iron ore which each tippler comprising the barrel or drum, the wagon clamping system and a controls system unit which is operated by designated operators. The rotary type wagon tippler is used to offload iron ore from loaded wagons into tippler hoppers or bins. Loaded wagons are positioned inside the tippler barrel by a rail shunting locomotive and a tippler arm positioner, then securely held in place by wagon clamps also referred to as car clamps. Once secured, the barrel rotates 140 - 160 degrees, causing the wagons to tip and offload the cargo [12]. The dataset used in this

study comprised logs of tippler failure events for a wagon tippler, along with the recorded duration between each failure. A total of 344 event logs were studied, spanning a 12-month period from March 2024 to March 2025. This period provided an adequate dataset, sufficient to support the objective of the study.

3.2 Problem Definition

Predicting MTBF and equipment reliability is inherently complex due to several key factors:

3.2.1 Right-skewed time between failure distributions

Failure times data typically exhibits a right-skewed distribution, often characterized by a long tail of high values, as illustrated in Figure 2 (a). This skewness signals a significant departure from normality, complicating the use of parametric models that assume normal distribution. Traditional statistical models like normal distributions and linear regression become inadequate, potentially leading to biased estimations. In such cases, generalized distributions such as Weibull, Gamma, and Lognormal are better suited due to their flexibility in modeling skewed data [7], [34]. For instance, the Weibull distribution accommodates varying hazard rates which is increasing, decreasing, or constant rates, making it particularly effective in modeling failure behaviour in complex systems.

3.2.2 Failure modes data class imbalance

The time between failures dataset exhibits a notable imbalance between mechanical and electrical failure records, with 63% attributed to mechanical failures and only 37% to electrical failures [21], as depicted in Figure 2(b). This imbalance risks model overfitting to the mechanical failures dominant class, thereby reducing the predictive performance and sensitivity to electrical failures minority class events. To mitigate this, research recommends applying resampling techniques such as stratified sampling, or using flexible distributions such as Weibull, Lognormal, Gamma or non-parametric models that can better accommodate skewed and imbalanced data distributions. These methods improve the generalization ability of predictive models and reduce potential class-based bias [32].

3.2.3 Censored failure data and analytical challenges

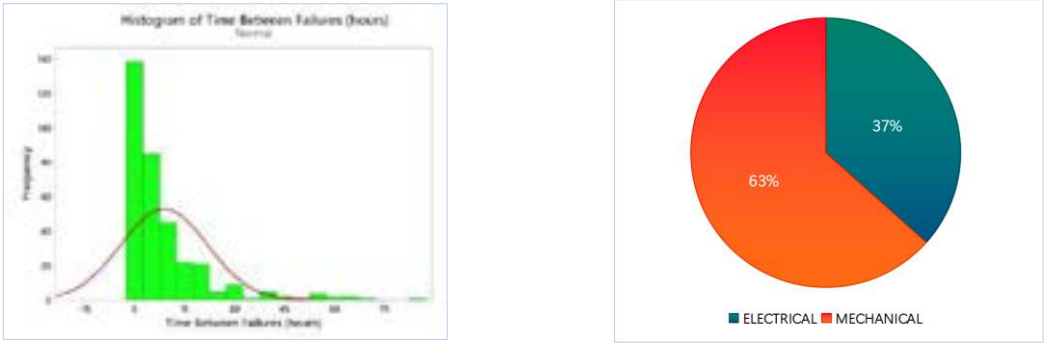
Reliability datasets often contain censored observations, particularly right-censored data, where certain equipment remains functional beyond the study period. This censorship leads to incomplete failure time data, which introduces bias and underestimation of failure probabilities when using traditional reliability analysis. As a result, non-parametric methods like the Kaplan-Meier estimator and parametric approaches using Weibull or Lognormal distributions using MLE are preferred for accurate MTBF estimation under censoring [13]. These techniques account for both complete and censored data, enabling more robust modeling of failure time distributions [17], [20].

3.2.4 Human decision-making and behavioural factors

Maintenance strategies and planning are significantly shaped by human judgment and contextual decision-making. These human factors, including technical staff experience, prioritization of tasks, cognitive biases, and levels of compliance with standard procedures introduce variability that is difficult to capture using conventional statistical model [4]. Traditional reliability models often assume objective, consistent behaviour, overlooking this critical layer of influence. As a result, there is a notable gap in integrating qualitative human factors into quantitative reliability prediction models [21]. This limitation is recognised in the literature and methodology but is not addressed within the scope of this study.

At a systemic level, time between failures and reliability improvements often follow the Pareto principle, which implies that approximately 20% of failure modes (i.e., mechanical and electrical failures) drive over 80% of equipment failures. Identifying these high-impact

factors through structured root cause analysis and failure mode prioritization is critical to improving reliability.



(a) *(b)*

Figure 2. The right-skewed histogram in subfigure **(a)** illustrates the distribution of time intervals between successive failure events for the rotary wagon tippler system while the pie chart in subfigure **(b)** presents the relative distribution of failure times for mechanical and electrical failure modes.

3.3 Statistical reliability modeling approach

The Weibull distribution was applied alongside the lognormal distribution to model tippler reliability and predict MTBF. While the Weibull distribution is ideal for capturing increasing, decreasing, or constant hazard functions due to its flexibility in representing diverse failure patterns, the lognormal distribution excels in modeling skewed datasets with all-positive values, particularly when the natural logarithm of the failure times follows a normal distribution [10], [13]. This dual approach ensures robustness across varying data characteristics, as the lognormal distribution often provides a superior fit for scenarios involving wear-out mechanisms or multiplicative degradation processes. Both distributions efficiently handle small sample sizes and accommodate diverse failure modes. Together, these methods support data-driven decisions in maintenance planning and life-cycle management by balancing Weibull's adaptability and lognormal's specificity [16]. Figure 3 illustrates this integrated methodological analytical framework, illustrating the comparative analysis approach employed in this study.

Figure 3. Methodological Analytical Framework

3.3.1 Data extraction and pre-processing

The tippler failure records were sourced from a system that captures real-time equipment failure events. The raw data underwent comprehensive preprocessing including data cleaning, validation, and formatting to ensure accuracy and suitability for subsequent reliability analysis. This preparation was vital for preserving data integrity and supporting robust statistical modeling. Key preprocessing steps involved transforming failure time log events into time-between-failure metrics and incorporating electrical and mechanical failure modes,

which account for more than 80% of rotary tippler downtime. In addition, converting failure time formats into integer values was essential to enable efficient and precise data analysis.

3.3.2 Weibull and Lognormal Statistical Model Fitting

The Weibull and lognormal distributions were applied to predict tippler reliability and MTBF using Minitab Statistical Software Reliability/Survival Analysis toolkit [23]. Mean Time Between Failures is a fundamental metric in reliability engineering, representing the average operational time between consecutive failures of a system. It is calculated by dividing the total operating time by the number of failures observed. As a reciprocal of the failure rate, MTBF offers a practical measure of system longevity. Higher MTBF values indicate more reliable systems, while lower values reflect frequent breakdowns and reduced operational uptime. Notably, MTBF tends to decline as cumulative failure rates increase, signifying that systems experiencing frequent failures will demonstrate lower average times between breakdowns [15].

Table 1. Weibull and lognormal Distribution Equations and Interpretation [7], [10], [16]

Parameter	Weibull Distribution	Interpretation	Lognormal Distribution	Interpretation
(1) Probability Density Function	$f(t) = \frac{\beta}{\lambda}\left(\frac{t}{\lambda}\right)e^{\left(-\frac{t}{\lambda}\right)}, \quad t \geq 0$	Shape parameter (ß) controls failure trends: ß < 1: Decreasing failure rate (infant mortality) ß = 1: Exponential distribution ß > 1: Increasing failure rate (wear-out)	$f(t) = \frac{1}{t\sigma\sqrt{2\pi}}\, e^{\left(-\frac{(lnt-\mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}\right)}, \quad t > 0$	Models multiplicative degradation processes Positively skewed, with long right tail
(2) Mean Time Between Failures	$MTBF = \lambda \times \Gamma\left(1 + \frac{1}{\beta}\right)$	Γ: Gamma function MTBF ≠ λ unless ß = 1	$MTBF = e^{\left(\mu + \frac{\sigma^2}{2}\right)}$	Sensitive to σ (variance of log-transformed data) Higher σ increases MTBF
(3) Reliability Function	$R(t) = e^{-\left(\frac{t}{\lambda}\right)\beta}$	Probability of survival beyond time "t" Directly linked to the hazard rate/failure rate	$R(t) = 1 - F(t) = \varphi\left(\frac{lnt-\mu}{\sigma}\right)$	φ: Standard normal CDF Reliability decreases as σ increases
(4) Cumulative Distribution Function	$F(t) = 1 - e^{-\left(\frac{t}{\lambda}\right)\beta}, \quad t \geq 0$	Inverse of the Reliability Function, R(t)	$F(t) = \varphi\left(\frac{lnt-\mu}{\sigma}\right), \quad t > 0$	φ: Standard normal CDF, t > 0
(5) Hazard Function (Failure Rate)	$h(t) = \frac{f(t)}{R(t)} = \left(\frac{\beta}{\lambda}\right)\left(\frac{t}{\lambda}\right)^{\beta-1}$	Monotonic: Increasing (ß > 1) Constant (ß = 1) Decreasing (ß < 1)	$h(t) = \frac{f(t)}{R(t)} = \frac{\frac{1}{t\sigma\sqrt{2\pi}}\, e^{\left(-\frac{(lnt-\mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}\right)}}{\varphi\left(\frac{lnt-\mu}{\sigma}\right)}$	Non-monotonic: peaks then declines Suitable for wear-in followed by aging

As shown in Table 1, the Weibull and Lognormal distributions were used to fit the failure data into the statistical models, offering distinct yet complementary perspectives on system failure behaviour. The Weibull distribution is highly versatile, shaped by its scale and shape parameters, enabling it to model decreasing, constant, or increasing failure rates which correspond to the classic three phases of a system's life-cycle, namely, infant mortality, useful life, and wear-out. This adaptability makes Weibull ideal for engineering applications across various asset lifespans. In contrast, the lognormal distribution is more appropriate for systems

that degrade through multiplicative processes, featuring a positively skewed profile and a non-monotonic hazard function where failure risk rises, peaks, and then declines [10],[16], [26].

Both distributions utilize a reliability function to represent the probability of survival up to a given time, with Weibull's reliability closely tied to the shape of its hazard function, while the hazard function for the lognormal distribution tends to display a long tail of surviving components, highlighting durability in a portion of the population. Similarly, the cumulative distribution functions (CDFs) reflect these behaviours. Weibull's CDF aligns with its failure rate phase, while lognormal's gradual slope and long right tail signify extended failure timelines. The hazard function offers the most striking contrast. Weibull's monotonic behaviour produces the well-known "bathtub curve," as shown in Figure 4, capturing distinct failure stages, whereas lognormal's peak-and-decline pattern reflects more nuanced degradation dynamics. Furthermore, while MTBF in Weibull models depends on the shape parameter and only equals the reciprocal of the failure rate when the shape parameter is one, the Lognormal MTBF is more sensitive to the variance of log-transformed data, with higher variance leading to greater MTBF values [32].

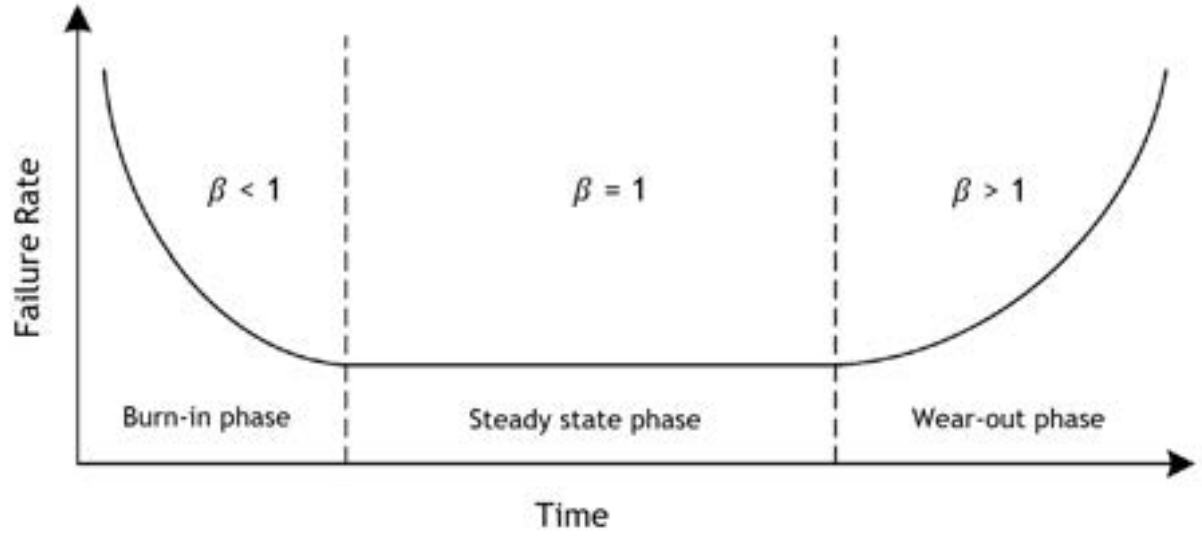


Figure 4. A typical "bathtub" curve showing failure stages, modified from [3], [32]

3.3.3 Statistical Model Validation

The Weibull and Lognormal models were validated using three statistical validation methods combining Pearson correlation coefficient, probability plots and the Anderson-Darling test. Probability plots provided visual verification of alignment between failure data and the Weibull and Lognormal distributions, while the Anderson-Darling (AD) test quantified goodness-of-fit, prioritizing accuracy in distribution tails. Correlation coefficients further assessed linearity between transformed observed and predicted failure times. Table 2 presents the AD test results and correlation coefficients for both models. The low AD values, combined with correlation coefficients close to 1, indicate a strong goodness-of-fit and demonstrate that both models accurately represent the observed failure data.

Table 2. Goodness-of-fit test Validation

Distribution	Failure Mode	Anderson-Darling	Correlation Coefficient
Weibull	Electrical	5.516	0.936
	Mechanical	6.214	0.949
Lognormal	Electrical	1.186	0.985
	Mechanical	0.614	0.993

3.3.4 Model Evaluation and Parameter Estimation

The performance of the two statistical models, the Weibull and Lognormal, was evaluated using the Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) and Least Squares Estimation (LSE) methods. For the Weibull distribution, these methods iteratively optimized the scale parameter (λ) and shape parameter (ß) to maximize the likelihood function or minimize residual errors between observed and predicted failure times [10]. For the Lognormal distribution, analogous parameters were estimated, which are the location parameter (μ), representing the mean of the natural logarithm of failure times, and the scale parameter (σ), corresponding to the standard deviation of the log-transformed data. Table 3 below presents the specific computational frameworks used for parameter estimation in both distributions, highlighting the mathematical distinctions between their optimization criteria [10],[32].

Table 3. Model Validation Parameter Estimation Methods [10]

Model	Estimation Method	Equation
Weibull	Maximum Likelihood	$\ln(\bar{\beta}) = \frac{\sum \ln(t_i).t_i^{\bar{\beta}}}{\sum t_i^{\bar{\beta}}} - \frac{1}{n}\sum \ln(t_i)$
Weibull	Least Squares	Linearised form: $\ln(-\ln(1-F(t))) = \bar{\beta}\ln(t) - \bar{\beta}\ln(\lambda)$
Lognormal	Maximum Likelihood	$\mu = \frac{1}{n}\sum \ln(t_i),\ \ \sigma^2 = \frac{1}{n-1}\sum(\ln(t_i) - \mu)^2$
Lognormal	Least Squares	Linearised form: $\ln(t) = \mu + \sigma.z$

3.3.5 Reliability and MTBF Values Derived to Inform Maintenance Planning

Reliability and MTBF were estimated using Weibull and lognormal models, yielding critical insights that informed the development of targeted and effective maintenance strategies and planning. The detailed analysis and discussion of results are presented in the following section.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study assessed the reliability of tippler components, with a focus on electrical and mechanical failure modes. Model evaluation using MLE and LSE methods helped identify the most suitable estimation method, which informed optimal parameter estimation. The analysis revealed key failure characteristics, including MTBF and reliability trends. Comparative reliability and failure rate analysis highlighted distinct failure behaviour between electrical and mechanical failure modes. Notably, MLE outperformed LSE method across both failure modes for Weibull and lognormal models as shown in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4. Weibull and Lognormal models comparison parameter estimation

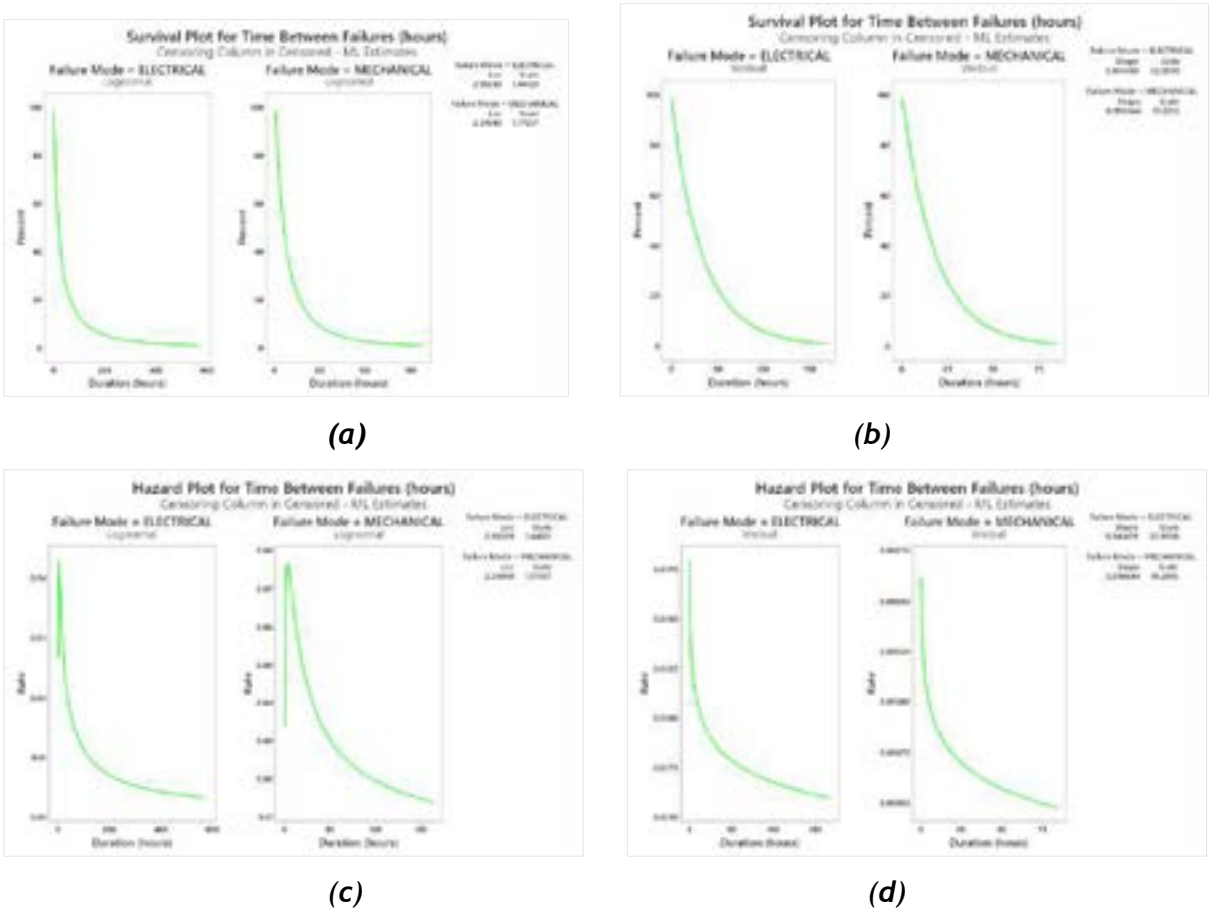
Estimator	Weibull				Lognormal			
	Electrical		Mechanical		Electrical		Mechanical	
	Scale	*Shape*	*Scale*	*Shape*	*Location*	*Scale*	*Location*	*Scale*
LSE	21.81	1.25	15.16	1.25	2.93	1.40	2.34	1.19
MLE	32.99	0.94	18.20	1.00	2.99	1.44	2.35	1.18
Variation(%)	34%	33%	17%	25%	2%	3%	0%	1%

4.1 Parameter Accuracy

Table 4 shows the LSE and MLE parameter estimations for both the Weibull and lognormal distributions. The Weibull Distribution shows substantial variation between LSE and MLE estimates for both electrical (up to 34%) and mechanical (up to 25%) data for the scale and shape parameters. The lognormal distribution on the other hand shows minimal variation between LSE and MLE ranging from 0 to 3% for both electrical and mechanical data. This indicates that, for lognormal data, both methods yield similar parameter estimates, likely because the data better fit the assumptions underlying both estimation techniques. This suggests that the two estimation methods can yield notably different results for Weibull models, possibly due to the distribution's sensitivity to estimation technique and the nature of the data. MLE method generally outperforms the LSE method in parameter accuracy and prediction quality for both models [10].

Table 5. Model Evaluation: Weibull and Lognormal models performance comparative summary

Model	Parameter Estimation Method	Failure Mode	Parameter Accuracy	Prediction Accuracy	Time Scale Coverage	Reliability at 80%	Failure Rate
Weibull	**MLE**	Electrical	High	Good	0-160 hours	~8 hours	Decreasing
		Mechanical	High	Very good (for random failures)	0-80 hours	~4 hours	Nearly constant
Weibull	**LSE**	Electrical	Medium	Moderate	0-80 hours	~5.5 hours	Increasing
		Mechanical	Medium	Good	0-48 hours	~3.5 hours	Increasing
Lognormal	**MLE**	Electrical	High	Excellent	0-600 hours	~6.5 hours	Non-monotonic
		Mechanical	High	Very good	0-160 hours	~4 hours	Non-monotonic
Lognormal	**LSE**	Electrical	Medium-High	Good	0-480 hours	~6 hours	Non-monotonic
		Mechanical	Medium-High	Good	0-160 hours	~4 hours	Non-monotonic



(a) *(b)*

(c) *(d)*

Figure 5. Comparable reliability and hazard plots for Lognormal (MLE) and Weibull (MLE) models: (**a**) Lognormal reliability (survival) plot, (**b**) Weibull reliability (survival) plot, (**c**) Lognormal hazard (failure rate) plot, and (**d**) Weibull hazard (failure rate) plot. The comparison illustrates distinct behaviours between the two models in characterising failure and survival patterns. Further analytical details are provided in Table 5.

4.2 Prediction Accuracy, Reliability and Failure Rate

Based on Table 5, the Weibull model with MLE shows high parameter accuracy but behaves differently across failure modes. For electrical failures, the Weibull exhibits a decreasing failure rate as shown in Figure 5(d), while for mechanical failures, it maintains a nearly constant failure rate, consistent with a shape parameter near 1.00. The Weibull MLE model reliably predicts mechanical component failures with high accuracy and time coverage up to 80 hours, though the model tends to give more conservative reliability estimates. In contrast, the Lognormal model excels in modeling electrical failures, offering excellent prediction accuracy with MLE and a broader time scale coverage from 0 to 600 hours, making it effective for long-tailed failure distributions. The Lognormal model maintains consistently high prediction performance between MLE and LSE, while the Weibull model's accuracy varies from moderate to very good, reinforcing the Lognormal model's higher precision.

The reliability analysis in Table 5, and in Figure 5(b) further reveals that the Weibull MLE model maintains about 80% reliability for electrical failures over roughly 8 hours within a 0-to-160-hour range coverage, benefiting systems affected by wear-out or aging due to its decreasing failure rate. For mechanical failures, the Weibull model's 80% reliability horizon shortens to about 4 hours, reflecting a constant failure rate suited for random failures. Using LSE reduces the Weibull model's parameter accuracy and prediction quality, especially for

electrical failures. The Lognormal model with MLE depicted in Figure 5(a) provides exceptional prediction accuracy and extensive time coverage for electrical failures, though its 80% reliability threshold is slightly lower at 6.5 hours. Its adaptability to non-monotonic failure rates across both failure modes offers greater flexibility for complex behaviour modeling. Even with LSE, the Lognormal model maintains strong accuracy and coverage, making it a more versatile choice for nuanced reliability prediction in rotary tipplers.

4.3 Model Selection and Practical Implications

For electrical failures, the Lognormal MLE model emerges as the superior choice, providing a conservative MTBF estimate of 37.3 hours while effectively capturing the extended tail of the failure distribution. This model's exceptional time scale coverage surpasses all alternatives and offers excellent prediction accuracy for electrical failures. The higher location and scale parameters inherent in this model appropriately reflect the longer potential lifetimes typically observed in electrical components, making it ideally suited for comprehensive reliability planning of electrical components. Mechanical failures, conversely, are best represented by the Weibull MLE model, whose shape parameter of 1.00 perfectly characterizes the pure random failure behaviour predominant in mechanical systems. This model yields a realistic MTBF estimate of 18.2 hours and demonstrates remarkable fidelity to observed failure data. Its relatively simpler mathematical structure aligns naturally with the physical mechanisms of mechanical wear, providing enhanced prediction accuracy that directly benefits preventive maintenance scheduling and resource allocation decisions.

Implementing this dual-model approach, Lognormal MLE for electrical components and Weibull MLE for mechanical components creates a comprehensive reliability framework that maximizes prediction accuracy for rotary wagon tipplers. This differentiated modeling approach acknowledges the differences in failure mechanisms between electrical and mechanical components, ensuring more precise reliability predictions and optimised maintenance intervals.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study applied Weibull and Lognormal statistical models to predict reliability for rotary wagon tipplers, focusing on distinct electrical and mechanical failure modes. The results demonstrate that statistical modeling is a viable technique for forecasting reliability in offloading terminal equipment, with each failure mode requiring a tailored model approach. The findings suggest that the selection of the appropriate model for each failure mode should be guided by the accuracy of the parameter estimation method as well as the precision of the estimated parameters for each model.

The reliability analysis of electrical and mechanical failures reveals distinct optimal modeling approaches for each failure mode. The study establishes that Weibull MLE and Lognormal MLE models are optimal for distinct failure modes in rotary wagon tipplers. Weibull excels for mechanical failures with shape parameter equals 1.00 and MTBF of 18.2 hours, capturing random failure behaviour, while Lognormal dominates for electrical failures at a MTBF of 37.3 hours, accommodating non-monotonic failure rates and extended time coverage ranging from 0 to 600 hours. This integrated dual approach ensures precise reliability predictions tailored to component specific degradation patterns. Mechanical components exhibit significantly lower reliability at 80% reliability at approximately 4 hours and shorter MTBF compared to electrical systems with 80% reliability at approximately 6.5 to 8 hours time intervals. This divergence stems from mechanical wear-out dynamics and random failure modes, necessitating prioritized maintenance for mechanical subsystems to mitigate cascading operational delays.

Future research should focus on integrating complementary statistical methods, such as the Kaplan-Meier non-parametric survival analysis alongside parametric models such as 3-parameter Weibull and 3-parameter lognormal models to develop a robust hybrid framework for equipment reliability assessment and to further substantiate the findings of this study. Moreover, expanding investigations to other critical offloading equipment such as stacker-reclaimers and conveyor belts, with a focus on both electrical and mechanical failure modes may reveal universal reliability patterns or unique operational risks that warrant critical attention. Future research directions should also emphasize the integration of statistical modeling frameworks with real-time monitoring systems, machine learning approaches, and automated maintenance scheduling systems to enhance predictive capabilities and operational efficiency.

in summary, enhancing wagon tippler performance and reducing downtime is crucial for optimizing overall system efficiency. Utilizing advanced statistical analysis can significantly improve tippler reliability and increase MTBF. Adopting a hybrid maintenance approach that integrates the Weibull MLE distribution for mechanical systems and the Lognormal MLE distribution for electrical systems is recommended. The methodology and insights presented in this paper not only advance the understanding of tippler reliability but also provide a foundation for further research and practical implementation of predictive maintenance in bulk material handling systems.

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BARRIERS AND ENABLERS OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study develops a conceptual framework for understanding technology and innovation adoption in the South African construction industry. Using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as a foundation, the study synthesises empirical literature to identify core drivers and context-specific barriers. While Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, and Facilitating Conditions remain central, three emergent constructs – Perceived Risk, Cost, and Resistance to Change – are introduced to capture the sector's distinct challenges. The conceptual framework was informed by framework and thematic analysis, as well as construct clustering reported in the original studies. The resulting model provides a context-sensitive explanation of adoption behaviour and highlights areas for practical intervention. The study contributes to theory by extending UTAUT and to practice by offering grounded recommendations for improving adoption outcomes. It also identifies directions for future research.

Keywords: technology adoption, innovation barriers, construction industry, UTAUT, South Africa

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1 INTRODUCTION

The South African construction industry (SACI) is facing a long-term decline in output. According to Statistics South Africa, the body charged with planning, producing, documenting and storing official statistics for South Africa [1], when accounting for inflation, the construction industry has steadily declined, shrinking by 30% from R147.1 billion in 2017 to R103.5 billion in 2024. On an annual basis, the industry declined by 5.1% between 2023 and 2024, continuing a downward trajectory [2]. The industry currently represents approximately 2% of the gross domestic product (GDP), a decrease from its previous contribution of 4%, making it one of the smallest industries by GDP [3]. The reduction in construction projects – especially building projects – has been blamed for this decline [2], driven by key issues, including uncertainty in the sector and high logistics costs, as well as context-specific challenges such as the "construction mafia" and load-shedding in South Africa [3].

Other industries are effectively harnessing technological innovations to address inefficiencies, reduce costs, and bolster resilience. For instance, technology and innovation capabilities have been linked with increased growth and employment in the manufacturing industry [4], [5], and the logistics sector [6]. The construction industry, on the other hand, is widely regarded as hostile to innovation and technology adoption [7], [8], [9]. For industrial engineers and engineering managers, the construction industry presents a high-potential, yet underutilised domain for applying industrial engineering (IE) principles. Although traditionally treated as separate, distinct fields, evidence is growing on how IE can influence construction [10], [11], [12]. Forbes [13] outlined several core IE principles that can be applied to enhance outcomes in the construction industry. In the SACI, several studies have already explored the application of IE methodologies. The use of lean methods [14], [15], radio frequency and identification (RFID) [16], robotics and automation [17], [18] and total quality management [19] are just a selection of IE methodologies whose adoption and application have been investigated.

While several studies have explored adoption factors in the SACI, these investigations have largely been fragmented, focusing on isolated innovations. As a result, there is limited understanding of how these factors compare across different technologies and whether common underlying threads exist. This study addresses this gap by synthesising existing research under a common framework, allowing for a comparative analysis of factors impacting technology and innovation adoption in the SACI. This study makes three key contributions to innovation and technology adoption studies. First, it provides a synthesis of current empirical evidence on the adoption of technologies from the South African context. Secondly, it extends the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) by identifying and integrating emerging constructs not covered by the original framework. Finally, it develops a conceptual framework to explain adoption in the SACI.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The concepts of technology and innovation

The varied ways in which technology and innovation are described pose a challenge for researchers working in technology and innovation management. These terms are often used broadly and inconsistently across different disciplines, making it difficult to draw clear boundaries around what qualifies as a technology or an innovation [20]. However, for this study, it is important to settle on a working definition that is clear enough to guide the identification and classification of technologies or innovations relevant to the construction industry context. In this study, technology is described as the practical use of knowledge and skills to solve problems or generate change. It includes physical tools, machines, and systems, as well as the less visible processes and techniques we use to make things work [21]. Similarly, innovation is defined as any idea, method, or product that individuals or groups consider to be new, regardless of whether it is objectively new or not [22]. These definitions allow for the

inclusion of both digital systems, as is the contemporary view of technology, and physical materials, which are commonplace in the construction industry. Furthermore, the subjective perception of innovation from the adopter's perspective allows this study to consider the adoption of technologies that might be commonplace in other contexts but still new to the South African context.

2.2 Theories of technology adoption

The adoption of technology and innovation has been studied extensively, and several frameworks have been proposed to explain the science of adoption. One of these frameworks is the diffusion of innovations theory (DOI). DOI explains that for a new technology to be widely adopted, certain qualities of the technology – its relative advantage compared to the incumbent option, compatibility with existing norms, minimal complexity, the extent to which the new technology can be tested and the extent to which it can be observed in action – are essential decision-making factors that potential adopters take into account [22], [23]. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is another framework that states that an individual's intention to perform a behaviour is based on their beliefs about that behaviour and the perceived societal norms about the behaviour. Specifically, TRA suggests that behavioural intentions are formed through two main factors: attitude and subjective norms [24]. TRA was further expanded by conceptualising perceived behavioural control – a person's perception of their ability to perform a behaviour – as a critical factor in shaping the intention and, ultimately, behaviour. This extension of TRA is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) [25].

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) hypothesised that the perceived ease of use and usefulness of a technology are the primary determinants influencing users' acceptance of that technology [26]. The underlying idea behind TAM is that in the adoption of information technology, the intention to adopt the technology revolves around beliefs about the benefit of the technology and the effort required to learn how to use the technology [27]. While initially developed for the information systems space, TAM has been used to explain the adoption of technology and innovations across various industries. TAM has also been extended with different constructs by several authors [28]. Beyond the above-listed theories, the Theory of Task-Technology Fit, the Decomposed Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Combined TAM and TPB (C-TAM-TPB), TAM2 and TAM3 are just some examples of frameworks that have been proposed to explain adoption behaviour among individuals [28], [29], [30], [31]. Several of these theories were driven by the potential of information technology to provide benefits and the need for organisations to investigate users' responses and intentions to adopt these systems [26], [27], [29], [32]. However, several challenges and limitations to using these frameworks arose. Since these models came from various fields, their relevance in other fields was debated [33]. For instance, TAM was developed in part to adapt TRA and TPB for better applicability in the information systems space [26]. Additionally, the models differed in their perspectives, incorporating various constructs [33]. Moreover, in recent times, researchers have faced the challenge of choosing appropriate constructs from an array of models [32].

2.3 Unified theory of acceptance and use of technology

Viswanath Venkatesh and colleagues developed the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) by incorporating constructs from different frameworks to form a streamlined approach that could be applied in several contexts [33], [34]. UTAUT was created by comparing eight existing models of technology adoption: TRA, TAM, the Motivational Model (MM), TPB, C-TAM-TPB, the Model of Personal Computers Utilisation (MPCU), Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), and the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) [33]. Venkatesh [32] identified common patterns across these frameworks and unified these constructs into a singular theory. UTAUT specifies four key constructs that directly influence behavioural intention and, by extension, technology use: performance expectancy (PE) – how useful people think the

technology is; effort expectancy (EE) – how easy it is to use; social influence (SI) – whether others encourage them to use it; and facilitating conditions (FC) – whether they have the right support to use it. UTAUT also predicts that age, gender, voluntariness of use and experience can affect how strongly PE, EE, SI, and FC influence technology adoption [32].

Given the various frameworks available for studying technology adoption, this study adopts UTAUT as its guiding lens for several reasons. First, UTAUT integrates key elements from earlier models, making it a comprehensive model for understanding adoption behaviour [33]. Moreover, the framework's testing explains technology adoption better than previous models [32], [35]. In addition, UTAUT is particularly useful as it helps managers understand the factors influencing the adoption of complex technologies [32]. Beyond the established benefits of UTAUT, however, a gap exists that this study attempts to bridge. Established bibliometric and systematic analyses of existing literature by [36], [37], [38] spanning published studies from 2003 to 2014 have revealed that UTAUT has been widely applied in various industries, including education, medical services and healthcare. Only one paper across these studies mentioned UTAUT in the context of the construction industry. A systematic literature review of technology adoption theories used in the construction industry revealed that since 2015, there has been a slight uptick in the construction industry's technology adoption literature [39]. Of the 35 relevant studies identified in [39], however, only seven studies used UTAUT, in whole or in part, as a framework. Available evidence suggests that the use of UTAUT in the construction industry appears to be limited; this study will, therefore, contribute to the literature by applying UTAUT as a framework to provide insights into the factors influencing technology adoption in this sector.

3 METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review (SLR) of existing studies investigating the adoption of innovations and technologies in the SACI was conducted to achieve the study's aim. Linnenluecke's framework for conducting SLRs [40] was adopted for this study. It involves identifying literature, data cleaning, analysing and synthesising the data and finally, presenting the results. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework [41] was also used to model the process. A comprehensive search strategy to locate relevant studies on the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases was first developed. Both databases are established repositories for journal indexing [42]. The search terms included several combinations of words and phrases describing the adoption of innovation and technology in the SACI. The search was conducted in April 2025, and terms, results and links have been documented to ensure potential repeatability by other authors.

3.1 Data screening

A total of 1,012 articles, from Scopus and WoS, were sourced and recorded. Relevant data, from the sourced studies, including titles, author names, and abstracts, were uploaded into the EndNote reference management software for further screening. The first step of this process was to identify duplicate records. EndNote's "Find duplicates" function was used to identify 200 duplicate records automatically. An additional 58 duplicate articles were manually identified for removal. After the initial screening process, 754 articles remained. A secondary screening was performed on the remaining articles, focused on reviewing each article's title, abstract, and in some instances, content, against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Records were selected for analysis if they: dealt with the adoption of a specific technology or innovation within the SACI and in line with the definitions in *2.1*, followed a defined methodology and used empirical or case study data, and explicitly identified barriers, enablers or factors that impact adoption. Studies that merely described the benefits or applications of technologies in the industry were excluded; so too were literature reviews and studies with methodological limitations. For instance, multiple studies with no defined sample

sizes were identified and were, thus, excluded. No restrictions were placed on the dates of publication.

Following the two screening processes, 84 articles met the inclusion criteria. However, only 76 were retrieved. The retrieved articles were then uploaded to ATLAS.ti software programme for further screening. Following the first round of analysis, 15 studies were rejected – 11 for not identifying or exploring specific factors impacting the adoption of technology, and the remaining four for not specifying study sample sizes. After the first ATLAS.ti screening, 61 articles remained. To align with PRISMA recommendations, the reference lists of the remaining 61 articles were also reviewed for possible identification of articles that could be included in the study. Through this process, an additional 79 articles were identified. From the 79 sourced articles, 46 duplicate articles were manually removed, and a further seven were removed due to their unavailability. The full-text articles of the remaining 26 records were retrieved using Google Scholar. Of these, 14 studies met the inclusion criteria. They were added to the initial 61 selected articles for data analysis, while the remaining were rejected for not identifying factors impacting technology adoption in South Africa. A final number of 75 articles was considered for analysis. The PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1, based on the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram guideline by [41], outlines the study screening process applied.

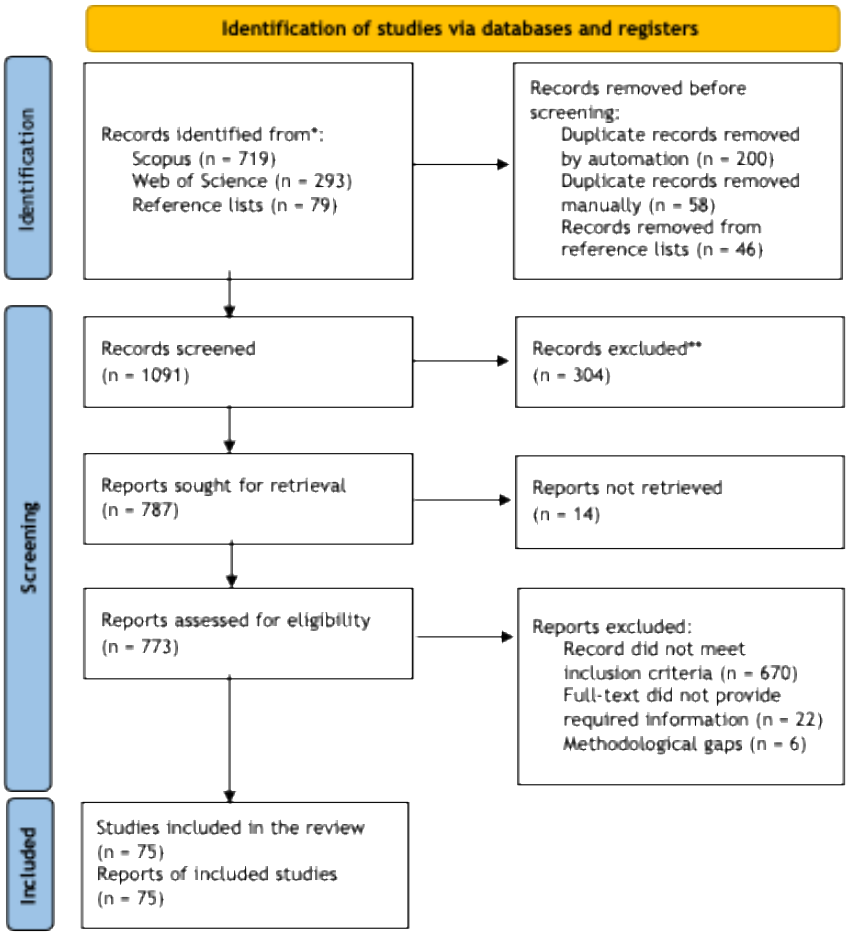

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the screening process.

3.2 Data analysis

Data analysis was performed on the 75 articles from *3.1*, using the framework analysis approach. An initial round of coding, thematic categorisation, and cross-study comparisons was conducted using the ATLAS.ti programme, and followed an iterative process. First, the framework codes were established, following the UTAUT framework's core constructs – PE, EE, SI and FC. Secondly, relevant barriers, enablers or factors from the selected studies were coded against the UTAUT constructs with the best fit. Factors that did not align with the predefined UTAUT framework were assigned a provisional construct labelled: Emergent themes (EM). To determine the significant factors from quantitative studies, only factors with a mean score above 3.0 (on a 5-point Likert scale) were considered. This scoring method was based on previous studies, which adopted a 3.0 mean score as a benchmark for a factor to be considered significant [43], [44], [45], [46]. For qualitative studies, all factors deemed relevant by their authors were included and coded. A second coding round was conducted to promote consistency, address potential misclassifications and incorporate insights gained from the first coding round. The identified factors were reviewed and evaluated to ensure they were mapped into the appropriate construct. A final coding round was conducted to extract themes from the data. For the UTAUT constructs, themes were organised according to the respective core constructs based on observed patterns and similarities. For the emergent themes, thematic synthesis was performed to inductively develop new constructs based on how related factors clustered or conceptually aligned. These new constructs captured recurring factor types that were not adequately addressed by the original UTAUT framework.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Study overview

In total, 75 articles were reviewed and analysed for this study. Each article investigated the adoption of a type of technology or innovation. Table 1 shows the number of articles per technology or innovation adoption study type in the SACI. The most common topics were the adoption of Building Information Modelling (BIM), digital technology/Information and Communication Technology (ICT)/Information Technology Systems (ITS), and Green Building (GB), with seven studies each. The adoption of sustainable construction was investigated by six studies, Sandbag building technology by four studies and Blockchain technologies by three studies. Technologies that were investigated by two studies are the Fourth Industrial Revolution/Construction 4.0 technologies (4IR), Alternative Building Materials (ABM), Circular Economy (CE), Lean Construction (LC), prefabrication, robotics and automation, and timber technologies.

Table 1: Number of articles per technology or innovation adoption study in the SACI.

Number of articles per technology	Technology or innovation type	Study references per technology/innovation type
7	BIM Digital technologies / ICT / IT Green building	[47], [48], [49], [50], [51], [52], [46]; [53], [54], [55], [56], [57], [58], [59]; [60], [61], [62], [63], [64], [65], [66].
6	Sustainable construction	[67], [68], [69], [70], [71], [72].
4	Sandbag building technology	[73], [74], [75], [76].
3	Blockchain technology	[77], [78], [79].
2	4IR ABM CE Lean construction Prefabrication Robotics and automation Timber.	[80], [81]; [82], [83]; [84], [85]; [14], [15]; [86], [87]; [17], [18]; [88], [89].
1	3D printing, artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, safety measures for the coronavirus, data management systems, data sharing, e-procurement, e-tendering, eco-friendly building, green retrofitting, immersive technology, intelligent wearable devices, laser scanners, lifecycle analysis, machine learning, metaverse, modular construction, prevention through design, private finance initiatives, RFID, safety leading indicators, sensing technology, sustainability assessment tools, sustainable project management, unmanned aerial vehicles, value management, virtual teams.	[90], [91], [92], [93], [94], [95], [96], [97], [98], [99], [100], [101], [102], [103], [104], [105], [106], [44], [107], [16], [43], [45], [108], [109], [110], [111], [112].

The majority of the studies under review (56) utilised a quantitative approach for their empirical investigations, while another 17 used qualitative methods. Only two studies used mixed methods approaches. Similarly, the most common research instrument was through a questionnaire, which was used by all quantitative and mixed-method studies and two qualitative studies. Interviews were the preferred choice for the remaining 15 qualitative studies. Respondent sizes for each study were also reviewed, and it was discovered that most studies used a respondent size that was less than 100. Most qualitative studies used respondent sizes in the 1-to-50 range, while sample sizes for most quantitative studies were in the 51-to-100 range.

Most studies did not use a theoretical or conceptual framework, with only six framing their investigations using established frameworks. The frameworks identified in these studies were the UTAUT [63], an extended UTAUT [92], TOE [101], the Theoretical Domains Framework [70], TPB [64], and Institutional Theory [71]. Architects were the most frequently surveyed group of professionals across 48 studies. Engineers – including civil, electrical, mechanical, and structural engineers – were next with 47 studies. They were closely followed by quantity surveyors in 44 studies. Construction managers (34), project officers (23), construction project managers (16) and technical professionals for specific technologies (12) were also involved. Contractors (11), health and safety professionals (8), academics (7), site supervisors (6), developers (6), clients (4), regulators (3), and urban planners (3) were the least surveyed construction industry stakeholders.

4.2 Factors that influence the adoption of innovation and technology in the SACI – core UTAUT constructs

4.2.1 Performance expectancy (PE) factors

Performance expectancy refers to the degree to which individuals believe that using a particular technology will help them achieve gains in job performance [32]. The first theme grouped under PE was named productivity, efficiency and operational gains, referring to factors related to improved performance outcomes such as time savings, faster delivery and efficiency improvement. It also includes instances where performance is perceived through external outcomes. Some of the factors that were grouped under this theme include the ability of big data analytics (BDA) to improve the speed of task delivery, productivity and overall performance [92], the perceived benefits of wearable technologies in improving safety outcomes for construction workers [101], positive outcomes from using BIM [48], speedy completion of transactions when using e-procurement technology [96], faster project completion and improved service delivery when using private finance initiatives [107], and the improved performance derived from the use of AI in the industry [91].

The next two themes encompass expected benefits to the organisation. Strategic and organisational alignment consists of factors that describe how technology or systems align with an organisation's broader objectives, strategy, or competitive positioning. They include the use of digital technologies because they align with an organisation's objectives and strategy [56], improved competitive advantage when an organisation adopts sustainable building construction practices [72], and enhanced brand recognition for companies that adopt eco-friendly building construction [98]. This was a common factor for studies examining sustainable construction, green building and similar environmentally friendly practices, as the adoption of these practices was deemed as aligning with organisations' intent to be perceived as environmentally conscious or to influence environmental consciousness [63], [65], [72]. The other theme describing organisational benefits was named economic value and cost competitiveness and describes factors reflecting financial benefits, including cost savings, profitability and return on investment. They include the lower operating costs, increased property values and higher return on investment in green buildings [61], the opportunity to expand into secondary markets by adopting circular economy principles [84], and the lower cost of transactions using e-procurement tools [96]. Concerns about the potential for prefabricated buildings to command a lower value due to having the same appearance [86], low profit margins when using alternative building materials [82], and uncertainty about the gains to be made when using drones in construction project delivery are some other factors included in this theme.

4.2.2 Effort expectancy (EE) factors

Effort expectancy describes the degree of ease associated with the use of a system or technology [32]. Within the reviewed studies, this construct captured a range of factors related to ease of use and learnability, technical complexity and the lack of required skill levels. The first main theme identified was named ease of use and learnability, and it describes factors that relate to how easy or difficult a system or technology is to use, learn and operate. Positive effort expectancies were expressed for several technologies, including the use of big data analytics [92], wearable technologies [101], and e-procurement tools [96]. Negative effort expectancies were identified for immersive technology adoption [100], proactive prevention strategies [44], COVID-19 safety measures [93], 3D printing as a construction methodology [90], and the use of RFID technologies in construction [16], among others. The next theme describes the resources and time required to learn or adapt to a new system. It includes factors such as the time required to develop a suitable machine learning model for construction [104], the learning curve needed to navigate in adapting to the use of ICT in

construction site management [55], the difficulty in developing procedures for using several different construction 4.0 technologies [81], and the learning curve that must be navigated when inexperienced builders try to adopt sustainable construction practices [62]. Another theme that emerged is the inherent complexity of the systems or technology to be adopted. These include the diverse and complex nature of digital systems as a barrier to digital collaboration within the construction industry [59], the complex outputs derived from machine learning systems [104], and the complexity of building codes and regulations on green building and sustainable construction [109].

4.2.3 Facilitating conditions (FC) factors

Facilitating Conditions refer to the degree to which an individual believes that an organisational and technical infrastructure exists to support the use of the system [32]. In the context of this review, this construct was the most categorised and encompasses a broad group of factors. FC had the most data points coded across the reviewed studies. The theme with the highest number of factors was technological infrastructure and resources, describing the availability and compatibility of the innovation or technology necessary for implementation. Several factors for this theme operate at the organisational level, including the availability of BIM detection software [47], safety tools [43], sustainable and green building construction materials [60], [67], [69], data analytics software [92], wearable devices [101], and modular construction materials [106], among others. Challenges with the integration of newer technologies with existing technologies and practices [58], [59], [79], [95], [110] were also classified under this theme. Other factors relate to the responsibility of the national government including, the availability of required infrastructure for some technologies, such as power supply [16], [45], [58], transport infrastructure [86], internet infrastructure [96], [97], and material manufacturing facilities and supply chains [82], [85], [98], [106].

Another national-level theme identified was the existence of legal and regulatory frameworks. This theme describes the availability and clarity of regulations, policies, codes, standards and enforcement mechanisms supporting adoption. Factors under this theme include a lack of building codes and regulations for sandbag building material [73], [75], [76], modular construction practices [106], green building construction [60], and sustainable construction practices [108]. Other factors include government policy [63], [84], [97], legal support [49], [51], [77] and industry guidelines [65], [102], [103]. Similarly, the presence of financial resources and incentives was revealed as another common national and industry-level theme. Factors under this theme include tax breaks, reliefs and fines [47], [69], [109], and access to loans, investments and other financial resources [46], [49], [53], [59], [61], [75], [101], [109]. At the organisational level, one key facilitating condition identified was organisational readiness. This theme described the commitment of the organisation's leadership to provide the structure and systems to support innovation adoption. Factors under this theme include organisational size and capabilities and business model [43], [80], [101], company culture [14], [72], [91], [101], leadership commitment [14], [110], [112], and provision of resources [43], [44], [68], [81], [91].

Across many of the technologies and innovations identified in this review, the lack of awareness, knowledge and information was constantly identified as a barrier to adoption [17], [64], [78], [88], [93], [111]. This lack of awareness and knowledge was attributed to major stakeholders in building projects, including the public [51], [73], [87], clients [109], government [98], and construction professionals [18], [54], [61], [111]. A related theme to the lack of knowledge, awareness and information is the availability, or lack thereof, of qualified individuals to implement and manage new technologies. Specific factors include the lack of trained or skilled personnel [49], [85], [105], the scarcity of experts in some fields [75], [83], [106], and the highly unskilled labour that typically works on construction projects in South Africa [49], [74], [80], [82]. Conceptually, access and provision of training and skill

development to individuals should assist in combating the lack of knowledge and skilled personnel. Many factors under this theme addressed the need for structured training programs [46], [56], [59], [109], continuing professional development (CPD) training [63], [71], for construction workers, and curriculum development and ongoing research [51], [63], [73] at higher educational levels. Initiatives to provide real-world data and validation of construction innovations were also included in this theme. The use of pilot projects is a common recommendation to improve the adoption of innovations in the construction industry [51], [63], [73].

4.2.4 Social influence (SI) factors

Social influence refers to the degree to which individuals perceive that people who are important to them believe they should use a particular technology [32]. In the context of this review, SI was shaped by various groups. The first theme was client expectations and demands, referring to the presence or absence of pressure from clients to adopt specific technologies [60], [67], [88], [101]. The presence of market demand is particularly influential as an enabler for the adoption of sustainable and green construction practices [64], [71], [109], while the lack of client interest has been observed as a barrier to the adoption of technologies such as data sharing [95], sandbag as a building material [74], metaverse technologies in construction [105], and BIM utilisation by quantity surveyors [52]. Market orientation was also classified under this theme as competitive pressure plays a role in the decision-making at the organisational level on whether to adopt a new technology [56], [71], [72], [92]. Another organisation-level theme identified was the influence of top management. When top management approves the use of a technology such as BIM [47] or is supportive of innovation [59], [73], employees are encouraged to adopt the technology. On the other hand, the lack of top management support disincentivises workers from considering new technology [43], [78], [102]. Public opinion and social acceptance also influence adoption in the SACI [70], [77], [82]. The adoption of innovative building processes such as prefabrication [86] and sustainable construction practices such as green building and timber construction [88], [89] is especially limited by public perception of their inferiority, driven in part by a long tradition of brick construction in South Africa [75].

At the individual level, the influence of professional peers [64], [70], expert opinions [67], [109], professional bodies and groups [49], [64], [71], and even research institutions [71], also influence the considerations of new technologies by industry professionals. The project-based nature of the industry, often regarded as a negative influence for adoption, has the potential to act as a positive influence. When some members of a project team adopt a technology, others may also be influenced to adopt it, although resistance could also have the opposite effect [109]. A related theme identified was the frequent reference to the influence of "stakeholder" participation and collaboration for the adoption of technologies [46], [60], [69], [72], [82]. One critical stakeholder that was frequently named was the government. The construction industry in South Africa seems to view the government as critical for the adoption of new technologies. Several studies highlighted the lack of government support, interest and promotion as major barriers to the adoption of different technologies [45], [50], [74], [88], [103]. Others believed that mandatory edicts or pressure from the government would accelerate adoption [46], [47], [86], [91]. While the government has served as a positive change agent in the adoption of some innovative construction processes, especially sustainable construction efforts [113], proponents for government influence must be aware that government influence to promote the adoption of certain technologies may be regarded by some as overreach and may further entrench resistance [114].

4.3 Factors that influence the adoption of innovation and technology in the SACI – Emergent constructs

4.3.1 Perceived risk

Perceived risk in this study refers to the uncertainties and consequences that individuals anticipate from adopting a new technology. Perceived risk emerged as a recurring factor expressed as concerns in relation to the safety of workers or clients [17], [100], fear of data breaches and misuse, specifically for internet-based technologies [16], [59], [95], legal liability and accountability [45], [49], [111], and job security in some instances [18], [80], [81]. Perceived risks also included a lack of trust, whether in suppliers [93], [101], other team members [93], or the technology [86], [88]. Concerns about the technology were mostly related to the need for more evidence or guarantees, rather than scepticism in its efficacy. In this sense, hesitation about adoption was not about ease of use, but about broader implications of adopting something unfamiliar and uncertainty about possible unintended consequences [45], [85], [88], [91], [104]. While some aspects of perceived risk may seem similar to cost or effort-related concerns, such as in the example about technology concerns, the key difference lies in how risk is experienced. In this context, risk is more about anticipation and hesitation. It reflects a fear of potential downsides or unknowns that could hold people back from adopting, rather than a straightforward comparison of options or an assessment of how much effort is involved.

4.3.2 Perceived cost

Another of the most frequently referenced barriers to the adoption of technologies in this review was perceived cost. The high upfront cost of implementing new technologies was frequently flagged as a barrier [61], [106], [111]; so too, operational costs [18], [83], [95], and maintenance costs [45], [102]. Other cost elements include the financial demands of training staff, not just in terms of effort, but as a tangible budget line item that requires funding for workshops, training, seminars and continuous development programs [81]. In some cases, doubts about the return on investment or uncertainty around long-term profitability added another layer of hesitation [78], [102], [105]. And at times, costs were not clearly defined at all. Instead, they reflected general assumptions, such as the idea that modular construction is expensive [106], or perceptions that certain technologies are expensive, even when those perceptions were not backed by data [44], [55], [67]. There were also mentions of costs that may not always be explicitly factored in during planning stages, including deconstruction costs or salvaging reusable materials [85]. It is expedient at this point to delineate between cost as an emerging construct and similar themes, such as financial incentives, as discussed under the Facilitating conditions sub-section. Although both cost and financial incentives relate to economic considerations, they play distinct roles in the adoption process. Cost is understood as a perceived or actual burden, and anxiety experienced internally about the financial burden and investment needed to adopt a technology, thereby shaping or influencing the perceived feasibility of a technology. On the other hand, the financial incentives theme under FC often consisted of external enablers or systemic supports, often from the government, that were expected to cajole or further incentivise companies already adopting certain technologies to scale. While financial incentives may mitigate high cost, they do not necessarily change perceptions of cost uncertainty and value through which cost is experienced.

4.3.3 Resistance to change

Resistance to change describes the tendency to oppose, delay or avoid the adoption of new technologies, often in favour of retaining familiar and long-established ways of working. Within the SACI, this resistance was widespread, with evidence spanning over 30 studies, and across multiple technologies, including information systems technologies like data analysis

[92], e-procurement tools [96], [97], and digital technology [111], safety measures such as proactive design [44] and the deployment of robotics [17], processes such as modular construction [106] and lean construction [15], and sustainable construction efforts such as green building [60] and timber construction [88]. Resistance to change also showed evidence of being a multi-level construct with factors at the individual [15], [44], [95], organisational [62], [92], and sectoral [88], [95], [106] levels. Conceptually, this construct is related to the effect of habit in UTAUT2, which refers to the extent to which behaviours are performed automatically due to years of repetition. However, while habit serves as a positive reinforcement of continued use of technology, resistance to change acts as a barrier. Furthermore, while the construct was identified as a barrier to the adoption of several technologies, it was not technology-specific. Instead, it presented as a general quality of the construction industry, like an inertia that must be overcome, even when enabling conditions are present and performance advantages have been demonstrated.

4.3.4 Others – Attitude and Industry Fragmentation

In this review, several factors provided the foundation for two themes that were classified as attitude and industry fragmentation. Attitude covered preference for and pleasure from green construction [64], while industry fragmentation was often described in those words and the project-based nature of work in the industry [15], [17], [106]. However, these elements were mentioned in passing without extensive elaboration or detailed empirical exploration. Acknowledgement of these factors is a recognition of their potential contextual relevance, but further evidence is required to describe them as full emergent constructs.

4.4 Synthesis of Constructs

The review of the factors that impact the adoption of technology in the SACI against the UTAUT framework has revealed clear distinctions in how the factors align with the framework to influence adoption. However, some cross-cutting patterns were also observed. The strongest pattern was the relationship between factors assigned to the FC construct and the emerging constructs. Similarly, a strong relationship was observed between FC and SI factors. These relationships were primarily identified through a combination of construct clustering reported in the original articles, typically based on factor analysis or similar statistical techniques, and thematic analysis of narrative descriptions in qualitative studies. For instance, [111] identified a factor component that grouped the high cost of digital technologies with a lack of awareness. In another study, lack of education and fear of job losses were grouped under the same component, highlighting how weak facilitating conditions may reinforce perceived risk attached to the adoption of a technology [80].

One instance of the FC-SI association is how leadership influence, classified as SI, is evidenced in the provision of resources, training, budget, and equipment [43], which is classified as FC. Additionally, expert opinions, competitive pressures and the influence of industry organisations could influence top management to commit to organisational adoption of a technology [77], [91]. Similarly, it is important for top management to establish a company culture of innovation to influence workers to seek and adopt technologies that will improve work output [91]. Another instance of the FC-SI relationship is how the active support of the government could not just influence the development of legislation and regulations but also encourage the provision of investment by financial institutions that many organisations need to be able to afford new technologies [101]. Moreover, a lack of knowledge and insight about new technologies has been blamed for the poor acceptance levels among the public [87].

The analysis also showed that some constructs carried more weight than others. FC was the most coded construct among the factors and covered a lot of depth, including factors like the presence (or absence) of infrastructure, funding, training, policies and technical support. On the other hand, EE was cited the least often and was often associated with the lack of

facilitating conditions as a reason. Penfield [115] has noted the tendency of construction professionals to blame other stakeholders for slow technology adoption rather than confess to a lack of expertise. Another insight relates to the bidirectionality of the constructs. Rather than functioning solely as drivers or barriers, many factors could act in both ways. A good example is how members of a project team could be influenced to adopt a technology by other members [109]. However, resistance can have a similar ripple effect, as others are discouraged from using the technology. Finally, across the constructs, adoption was shaped by a mix of individual, organisational, industry and wider social factors. This multi-level nature of adoption factors creates dependencies in the adoption process; an individual may find a technology to be useful to complete their work, but might still be influenced against using the technology by the lack of institutional support or enabling legislation.

4.5 A conceptual framework for the adoption of innovation and technology in the SACI

Following the detailed synthesis of core and emergent constructs in the preceding sections, this review proposes a conceptual framework to explain the adoption of innovation and technology in the SACI. The framework treats technology and innovation adoption as the dependent variable, influenced by a set of independent variables including core UTAUT constructs, and the emergent constructs identified in this study. For the purposes of this framework, adoption is treated as a composite dependent variable, representing the intention to use and actual use. This is because, although behavioural intention plays a central role in UTAUT as a predictor of actual adoption, the studies in this review do not distinguish between intention to adopt and actual adoption.

The core UTAUT constructs – EE, FC, PE and SI – remain as key predictors of this combined adoption variable. PE and EE exert positive effects on adoption; the easier and more useful a technology is perceived to be, the greater the likelihood of its adoption. SI plays a dual role; individuals, organisational culture, industry pressures, and governmental support may positively and negatively affect the uptake of a technology. FC also has a direct effect on adoption, with the presence of facilitating conditions easing the implementation and uptake of new technologies. Perceived risk, perceived cost and resistance to change are conceptualised as barrier constructs that exert negative effects on adoption. These emergent constructs may suppress adoption even when a technology is perceived as useful. Further insights may be gained from the interaction of constructs with each other. Specifically, FC and SI may interact as the influence of authority figures may ensure the availability of resources needed to enable smoother adoption. Similarly, FC may influence the emergent constructs, and perceived cost and perceived risk may likely be correlated. The framework is modelled in Figure 2.

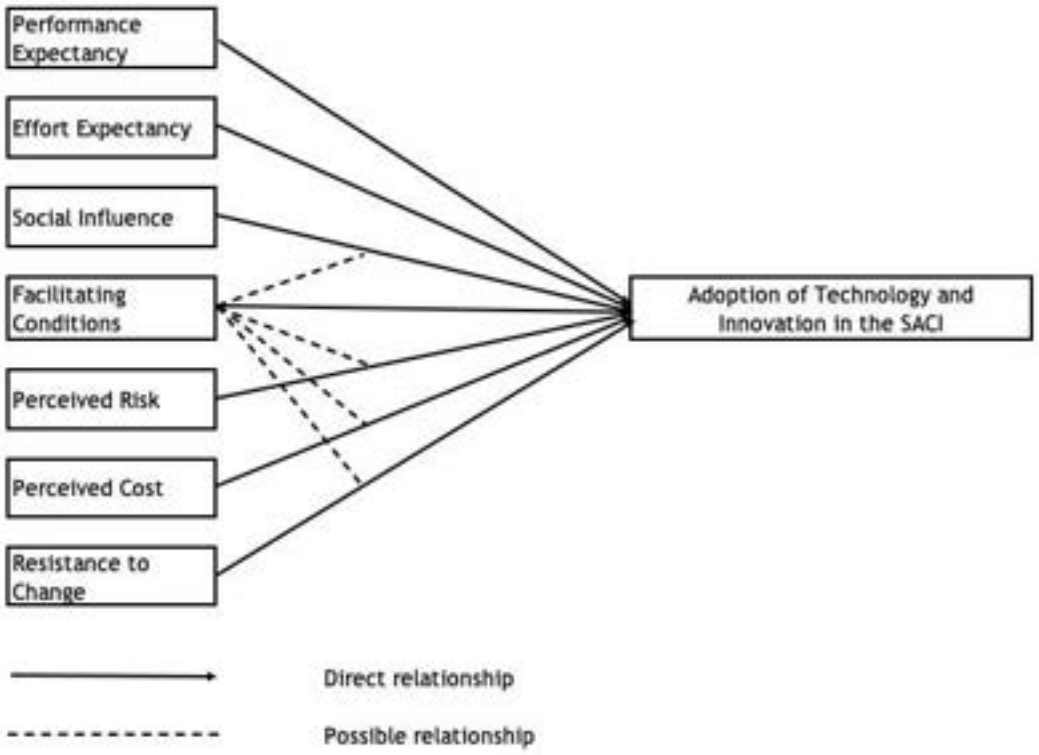

Figure 2: A conceptual framework for technology and innovation adoption in the South African construction industry

This framework positions adoption as a complex outcome shaped by the interplay of established and emerging constructions at individual, organisational and systemic levels. While some factors can encourage adoption, others, such as cost, risk and resistance to change, can inhibit adoption, even when the technology seems beneficial. The framework offers comprehensive and contextually grounded explanations for understanding why some innovations are embraced while others are not, and may serve as a practical tool for engineering managers and industrial engineers seeking to design interventions to promote the adoption of technologies in the SACI.

4.6 Recommendations for promoting technology and innovation adoption in the SACI

Drawing on the findings and the proposed conceptual framework, this study provides several recommendations to support the adoption of technology and innovation in the SACI. Central to these is the need to strengthen facilitating conditions through improved access to training, alongside targeted investments in infrastructural development and financial support mechanisms such as grants and tax incentives. Regulatory frameworks must also be updated to accommodate innovation more effectively, with flexible but robust standards and codes.

Reducing perceived risk is another priority, as uncertainty about performance, safety, and liability often limits uptake. Pilot projects and demonstration sites can serve as proof of concept, while expert validations should promote user confidence. Addressing cost barriers requires interventions at multiple levels, including subsidising initial investments, encouraging low-cost or open-source tools, and promoting lifecycle costing to shift focus from upfront expense to long-term value. Resistance to change remains a deeply rooted challenge that must be addressed. Highlighting the success of early adopters and framing innovation as a pathway to familiar goals such as efficiency, safety, and client satisfaction may help ease this resistance.

5 CONCLUSION

This study explored and synthesised the factors influencing the adoption of technology and innovation in the South African construction industry, using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as its foundational lens. Through a review of empirical literature, it not only confirmed the relevance of UTAUT's core constructs – Performance Expectancy (PE), Effort Expectancy (EE), Social Influence (SI), and Facilitating Conditions (FC) – but also identified a series of emergent barriers that could not be sufficiently explained within the original or extended UTAUT models. Three emergent constructs – Perceived Risk, Perceived Cost, and Resistance to Change – were identified through thematic analysis and supported by co-occurrence patterns and factor groupings across multiple reviewed studies. These constructs reflect the complex realities of innovation adoption in the construction sector. The proposed conceptual framework integrates both sets of constructs to present a more comprehensive, context-sensitive understanding of innovation adoption in the SACI.

A key insight from the analysis is the interconnectedness between constructs. Notably, the relationship between FC and SI was shown to be particularly strong, as leadership, clients, and institutional actors often create or withhold the enabling conditions necessary for adoption. Furthermore, FC was shown to be strongly linked with the emergent constructs. Where enabling structures were lacking, perceptions of risk, cost burden, and resistance to change became significantly more pronounced. However, the study is not without limitations. It is based entirely on secondary data and literature drawn from previously published studies, meaning that no new primary data were collected to empirically test the framework. Additionally, while the review was thorough and grounded in a clearly articulated methodology, some constructs, particularly those classified as emergent, may still evolve as more empirical data become available. Relatedly, constructs like industry fragmentation were observed but not elevated due to insufficient depth or frequency in the data; future research may be able to revisit and validate their influence more explicitly.

Despite these limitations, the study's strength lies in its breadth and contextual relevance. The framework developed is not an abstract theoretical contribution; it is grounded in real-world evidence from the SACI. Future research on technology and innovation adoption in the SACI would benefit from a varied mix of research methods and drawing more clearly on established theoretical frameworks. There is considerable value in conducting methodological and bibliometric reviews to map trends, identify research gaps, and assess the evolution of studies in this field. In addition, researchers should consider exploring alternative theoretical frameworks beyond UTAUT to capture themes that may be underemphasised in this study. More importantly, there is a need for greater use of established theoretical foundations in empirical studies, as many investigations to date have relied on descriptive or exploratory approaches without clearly linking their findings to any theoretical models. Researchers should also be more deliberate and precise in data collection, particularly by encouraging respondents to specify key actors or stakeholder groups, rather than relying on vague references to "stakeholders." Doing so will enable more targeted analyses and practical recommendations that reflect the realities of the adoption of innovation and technology in the South African construction industry.

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MACHINE LEARNING TO PREDICT CAPITAL STRUCTURE: A PERFORMANCE-BASED COMPARISON ACROSS JSE INDUSTRIAL, RESOURCES, AND TECHNOLOGY SECTORS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of machine learning to model capital structure dynamics, a key factor in company valuation and solvency. Debt financing enables firms to leverage future earnings for immediate capital, directly shaping shareholder value. Traditional linear regression has long dominated predictive modelling in this space; however, recent research demonstrates the superior performance of machine learning techniques.

In a comparative evaluation across JSE industrial, resources, and technology sectors, various models including: artificial neural networks, support vector machine models, random forest decision trees and linear regression models were compared. The random forest decision tree model proved to be the best-fit model. The model had the lowest mean absolute error (MAE) of 0.15 and the mean absolute percentage error (MAPE) of 20%, outperforming: linear regression (0.6 and 55%), artificial neural networks (0.7 and 65%), and support vector machines (0.65 and 60%). Furthermore, the ROC-AUC curve on a binarized version of the Debt-to-Equity target yielded an AUC value of 0.891.

Keywords: Capital structure, Random Forest, Artificial Neural Networks, Support Vector Machines

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1 INTRODUCTION

Decades of corporate practice and academic debate have yet to yield a consensus on whether an optimal capital structure exists or on the best method for estimating it [1][2]. Some researchers propose a straightforward, linear relationship between financial ratios and leverage levels, while others highlight complex, non-linear dynamics that resist simple modelling.

The allocation of debt versus equity—and the active pursuit of a clearly defined target leverage ratio—remains foundational to corporate finance strategy [3]. Misjudging this balance can precipitate financial distress or even bankruptcy [4], and without universally accepted benchmarks, firms must tailor their capital structures to their unique leverage objectives and their current standing relative to those targets [5].

Studying the determinants of capital structure and understanding the optimal leverage level is essential for a company's long-term solvency and viability [6]. Companies with high leverage may be compelled to implement drastic cost-cutting measures if faced with insolvency.

Additionally, this paper introduces a benchmark model for estimating capital structure using linear regression, incorporating new variables such as enterprise value, operating margins, asset and sales growth measures, and return on equity as predictive factors. This research contributes to the ongoing debate and literature regarding the superiority of machine learning methods over traditional approaches [7][8].

Titman and Wessels [9] advanced empirical analyses of capital structure theories by employing factor-analytic methods to address measurement challenges. Maksimovic and Titman [6] examined the effects of leverage on stakeholder perceptions, particularly in relation to employee and supplier relationships.

Recent innovations in capital structure analysis have incorporated machine learning techniques, which present promising opportunities for understanding complex dynamics. Goeletsis et al. [10] emphasise the ability of machine learning to overcome the limitations associated with traditional statistical methods.

This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on capital structure determination by leveraging machine learning to uncover nuanced insights. By integrating new variables and employing sophisticated analytical techniques, we aim to enhance understanding and refine existing theories.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 THE THEORIES OF CAPITAL STRUCTURE

Capital structure is a key element of corporate finance, explaining how companies acquire funds to drive growth and operational activities [11]. Senior managers and shareholders frequently face challenges in determining the ideal debt-to-equity ratio and understanding its effects on company value [12].

Harris and Raviv [13] provided a comprehensive overview of the capital structure literature, emphasising the factors that influence leverage ratios. They noted that while numerous theories contribute valuable insights, many empirical nuances remain inadequately addressed. Frank and Goyal [14] identified key variables that impact capital structure decisions among publicly listed American companies, utilising advanced model selection techniques.

2.2 THE USE OF MACHINE LEARNING APPROACHES IN CAPITAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The determination of capital structure and the active pursuit of a target leverage ratio are pivotal concerns in corporate finance. Despite extensive debate and research spanning decades [14 - 19], the factors driving cross-sectional and time-series variations in capital

structure remain unclear. This research seeks not to reinvent the wheel but to expand on existing knowledge by exploring alternative methods for analysing capital structure dynamics through techniques such as artificial neural networks, support vector machines, and decision trees.

The choice to focus on these three machine learning models is motivated by their growing prominence in addressing financial challenges, particularly due to their capabilities in data classification and adaptive learning [20]. This research contributes to the ongoing discussion regarding the advantages of machine learning methods over traditional statistical approaches, as evidenced by previous studies [7],[8],[20]. While the hypothesis concerning the determinants of a company's capital structure has received mixed support, we aim to enhance this discourse by employing machine learning techniques to demonstrate their ability to capture capital structure dynamics more effectively than conventional literature suggests.

Additionally, this paper introduces new variables, including enterprise value, operating margins, asset and sales growth measures, and return on equity, among others. Machine learning methods like deep learning, support vector machines, and decision trees have shown an ability to address several limitations of traditional techniques such as regression analysis [18]. Their capacity to learn from data and adapt to improve predictive accuracy makes them particularly well-suited for analysing complex datasets and identifying non-linear relationships.

2.2.1 Artificial Neural Network

An artificial neural network (ANN) scheme consists of simple processing units called neurons. These neurons are connected using weights, where the strength of a connection between two neurons i and j is referred to as $w_{(i,j)}$ [21]. An ANN is defined as a sorted triple (*N, V, w*) with two sets *N*, *V*, and a function *w*, where:

- N is the set of neurons,
- $V \subseteq \{(i, j) \mid i, j \in N\}$ whose elements are called connections between neuron i and neuron j, and the function
- $w : V \rightarrow R$ is a function assigning real-valued weight the weight w(i,j) from neuron i and neuron j

Since the ANN models discussed in this work are trained using supervised learning, a multi-layer feedforward propagation model was selected [22]. Each neuron has a propagation function $s(x)$, which is the weighted sum of the inputs and weights associated with the input connections to the neuron. The propagation function is followed by an activation function, which determines the output of the neuron. The propagation function is sometimes referred to as the network input function [23].

Let $V = \{i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n\}$ be the set of neurons, let o_i represent the output of the neuron $i \in V$.

For each neuron j in the current layer, there exist a weight $w_{i,j} \in R$ denote the weight associated with the connection from neuron i in the previous layer z in the current layer

Then the network input of j, called net_j, is calculated by the propagation function $s(\circ)$ as follows:

$$net_j = s(o_{i1}, \dots, o_{in}, w_i1, \dots, w_{inj}) \quad \textbf{(1)}$$

This equation represents a weighted sum, where the output of each neuron iii is multiplied by the corresponding connection weight $w_{i,j}$.

2.2.2 Support Vector Machine Models

Support Vector Machine (SVM) models are based on mapping data from the original input dimension feature space to a lower-dimensional feature space using a kernel function. The SVM algorithm aims to find the hyperplane that best separates the classes in the feature space. Given a set of training data $\{(x_i, y_i)\}$, the goal of SVM is to find the hyperplane that best separates the classes in the feature space. So, given a set of training data $\{(x_i, y_i)\}$, the objective is to find the optimal hyperplane that maximises the margin between the classes.

The SVM requires a solution for the following optimisation problem:

$$min_{w,b,\zeta} = \left(\frac{1}{2}W^T W + C\sum_{i=1}^{m} \zeta_i\right), \quad \textbf{(2)}$$

subject to

$$y_i\left(\boldsymbol{W}^T \phi(x_i) + b \geq 1 - \zeta_i, \zeta_i \geq 0\right) \quad for \quad all \quad y_i, \quad \textbf{(3)}$$

where:

- W is a vector perpendicular to the hyperplane,
- b represents the bias term.
- ζ are slack variables allowing classification errors.
- C>0 is the penalty parameter controlling the trade-off between margin width and misclassification, and
- $\phi(x_i)$ represents the mapping of the original input xix_ixi into the higher-dimensional feature space.

2.2.3 Random Forest Decision Trees

Decision tree models constitute a widely utilised class of machine learning algorithms, applied extensively in both regression and classification tasks. In the decision tree model, data is partitioned based on a sequence of questions, thereby establishing a tree-like structure. A random forest (RF) model comprises an ensemble of decision trees employed to identify the optimal features for forecasting [24]. Each decision tree within the ensemble encompasses only a random subset of the dataset's features, and the ensemble collectively selects the best predictive features through a process known as "majority voting". This approach is commonly referred to as ensemble modelling.

The primary objective of each decision tree is to determine the most effective method for dividing the data. In the literature, three prevalent criteria for data partitioning are identified: Gini impurity, entropy, and classification error. The predominant criterion involves selecting the split that maximises information gain, quantified by the reduction of uncertainty following each split, also known as entropy [25]. Formally, the entropy of a state s, denoted as E(s), is expressed as:

$$E(s) = -\sum_{i=1}^{m} p(i) log\,(p(i)), \quad \textbf{(4)}$$

where m is the number of branches and $p(i)$ the probability of each branch i.

3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The dataset is divided into a training set (Xtrain, ytrain) and a test set (Xtest, ytest), with Xtrain containing r × m samples and Xtest containing (1 − r) × m samples, where r is the chosen ratio. The dataset utilised in this study encompasses financial information from companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) for the period spanning from 1997 to 2022.

The data was extracted from the IRESS database, a recognised source for financial data [27]. A comprehensive array of 72 financial indicators was compiled, focusing particularly on the target variable: the Debt/Equity ratio.

The investigation primarily aimed to analyse capital structure, defined as the ratio of total debt to total equity. To uncover the key determinants of capital structure, a range of independent variables was examined and categorised into four principal groups: profitability, liquidity, solvency, and turnover ratios. It is hypothesised that these financial ratios are significant factors influencing the capital structure decisions of companies. This data-driven approach seeks to clarify the intricate relationship between the selected financial indicators and the capital structure of companies listed on the JSE. Through rigorous analysis and modelling, the study aspires to provide valuable insights into the elements that shape capital structure decisions, thus contributing to the existing literature in corporate finance.

Following the partitioning of the dataset into training and testing sets, three distinct machine learning models were created and assessed to determine the most effective model for forecasting the dependent variable capital structure of non-financial companies listed on the JSE. The primary machine learning techniques employed in this study include ANNs, Random Forests, and SVMs [18]. The initial model implemented is ANNs, which draw inspiration from the human nervous system, aiming to mimic the brain's learning process through sophisticated algorithms. ANNs consist of interconnected neurons organised into layers, with each connection assigned a weight that can be either positive or negative. Positive weights stimulate neuron activation, while negative weights inhibit it. Typically, the network comprises an input layer, an output layer, and one or more hidden layers.

A separate portion of the dataset, called the unseen dataset, was kept apart for final comparisons. The rest of the dataset was split into 70% for training and 30% for testing, followed by normalisation. After training the models (as described in the modelling methodology below), the remaining 30% were utilised for model evaluation. Various error metrics discussed below were employed to compare the performance across models. The estimations were conducted using Python version 3.9.

3.1 Modelling Methodology

This section outlines the methodology employed in the research, focusing on the predictive modelling of the Debt/Equity ratio using three machine learning algorithms: ANN, SVM and RF models. The three machine learning models were compared to the benchmark model using linear regression. Code to utilise automated batch machine learning modelling, designed to streamline the modelling process by comparing various machine learning models, was also tested. However, we found that issues arose when utilising this code, specifically concerning hyperparameter tuning, model interpretability, and the efficient handling of larger datasets. Consequently, the decision was made to proceed with the three selected machine learning models, which offered a more straightforward approach to addressing the research objectives.

3.1.1 Linear Regression Model

The use of statistical methods in capital structure analysis was employed to create a linear regression (LR) model. This model was used as the benchmark to compare the machine learning models' performance. The methodology involved in constructing an LR model was as follows:

a. Initialisation of Parameters
   The regression parameters were initialised uniformly to 0.1 for all factors. This led to a total of 14 parameters after selecting predictive factors; this was achieved through the mean decrease impurity (MDI) index utilised in the random forest technique. The 14 variables resulted in 13 coefficients for each variable and one intercept coefficient.

b. Calculation of Linear Combination
The predicted values were generated by calculating the linear combination of the independent variables and their respective coefficients. Mathematically, this is represented as:

$$\hat{y} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \ldots + \beta_n x_n \quad \textbf{(5)}$$

where:

- $\hat{y}$ is the predicted value,
- β_0 is the intercept coefficient,
- $\beta_1, \beta_2, \ldots, \beta_n$ are the coefficients for the independent variables $x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n$ respectively.

c. Parameter Optimisation
The parameters were fine-tuned to minimise the loss function, commonly represented by the Mean Squared Error (MSE) or Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE), utilising optimisation algorithms such as Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) or Gradient Descent. This optimisation process focused on reducing the difference between predicted and actual values in the training dataset.

d. Model Fit Evaluation
The effectiveness of the LR model was evaluated using key metrics like R^2 (Coefficient of Determination) and adjusted R^2. These metrics indicate the extent to which the independent variables explain the variance in the dependent variable.

e. Model Validation and Testing
To ensure the model's generalisation capability, validation techniques such as cross validation were employed. Furthermore, the model's predictive accuracy was assessed using a separate set of unseen data. To ensure the generalisation capability of the models, a K-fold cross-validation strategy ($k = 5$) was employed. In this approach, the dataset was divided into five equal folds; each fold was used once as a validation set while the remaining folds were used for training. Performance metrics were calculated for each iteration and then averaged to provide a robust estimate of model accuracy. Additionally, the models' predictive performance was evaluated on a separate unseen test set to confirm their ability to generalise to new data.

3.1.1.1 Model Performance

The performance of the model was evaluated through standard metrics, including MSE and RMSE. MSE serves as a measure of the average squared differences between predicted values and actual outcomes. These metrics enable a quantitative assessment of the model's predictive performance, with lower values indicating better model fit and predictive accuracy.

3.1.2 Model Development and Hyperparameter Optimisation

The three distinct machine learning models were developed, each optimised through a randomised search approach to identify the best hyperparameters. The optimisation procedures for each model were as follows:

a. ANN model
A multi-layer perceptron (MLP) regressor model was chosen to create the ANN model. The hyperparameters, such as hidden layer sizes, activation functions, and regularisation parameters were defined for optimisation. The learning rate and maximum iterations were also set to facilitate rapid convergence.

b. SVM model
A support vector regressor model was implemented with hyperparameters, including the regularisation parameter C, kernel type, and epsilon values for optimisation. For

each model, predictions were generated on the test dataset using the best estimators obtained from the hyperparameter tuning.

c. RF model
A random forest regressor model was utilised, and a set of hyperparameters, including the number of estimators, maximum depth, minimum samples for splitting, and bootstrapping options, was defined. The randomised search CV function was employed to explore combinations of these parameters through cross-validation.

The study explored an automated batch machine learning modelling approach designed to compare various models in parallel. While this method offered speed and broad coverage, it posed challenges in terms of flexibility for hyperparameter optimisation, interpretability of results, and efficient handling of the dataset's size. Consequently, the decision was made to proceed with three targeted models—Random Forest (RF), Artificial Neural Network (ANN), and Support Vector Machine (SVM)—which aligned more closely with the research objectives.

Hyperparameter tuning for each selected model was conducted manually using a grid search approach, allowing systematic evaluation of defined parameter ranges and iteration limits. For the RF model, the tuning process involved varying the number of estimators (100–500), maximum tree depth (5–20), and minimum samples per leaf (1–5). The ANN model's optimisation considered the number of hidden layers (1–3), neurons per layer (10–100), learning rate (0.001–0.01), and activation functions (ReLU, tanh, sigmoid). For the SVM model, parameters such as the regularisation parameter C (0.1–10), kernel type (linear, RBF, polynomial), and kernel coefficient gamma (0.001–1) were tested.

3.2 Dataset

The dataset used in this study comprises financial information of companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), covering the period from 1997 to 2022. The target variable for modelling is the Debt/Equity ratio, while the independent variables consist of various financial indicators. Financial institutions were excluded due to regulatory influences on their capital structures, such as minimum capital requirements under the Basel framework.

Prior to modelling, the data underwent a series of preprocessing steps to ensure quality and consistency. Missing values were identified and appropriately imputed, outliers were detected using statistical thresholds and treated to reduce distortion, and all features were scaled or normalized to improve model convergence and stability. This preprocessing pipeline ensured that the Random Forest, ANN, and SVM models could effectively learn from the financial data while mitigating the risks of bias or instability caused by irregularities in the dataset.

3.2.1 Data Splitting

The dataset used in this study comprises publicly available financial information of companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), covering the period from 1997 to 2022. The data were sourced from Iress Market Data, which provides market and financial information for publicly listed companies in South Africa (https://www.iress.com/za/market-data/). The target variable for modelling is the Debt/Equity ratio, and the independent variables include various financial ratios and indicators relevant to capital structure analysis. Financial institutions were excluded due to regulatory influences on their capital structures, such as minimum capital requirements under the Basel framework.

For modelling purposes, the dataset was divided into a training set (X_train, y_train) and a test set (X_test, y_test). X_train contains r×mr \times mr×m samples and X_test contains (1−r)×m(1 - r) \times m(1−r)×m samples, where rrr is the chosen training ratio (here, 70%) and mmm is the total number of samples.

3.3 Performance Evaluation

The models, together with the benchmark LR model, were evaluated based on the following performance metrics:

1. R-squared (R^2): Measures the proportion of variance explained by the model. Higher percentages therefore present better-performing models.
2. Mean Absolute Error (MAE): This represents the average magnitude of errors in predictions without considering their direction. The lower this value is, the better the model performs.
3. Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE): Provides a percentage representation of prediction accuracy, computed as the average absolute percentage difference between actual and predicted values. Higher percentages are considered better performance.

The methodology above outlined a comprehensive framework for analysing the capital structure of companies using various machine learning techniques. By employing rigorous data preprocessing, model optimisation, and performance evaluation, the study aims to uncover insights into the factors influencing the Debt/Equity ratio, contributing to the broader field of corporate finance.

4 RESULTS

Table 1 and Figure 1 provides the performance metrics of the various machine learning models. The best-performing machine learning model after hyperparameter tuning and grid search is the RF model, with an R^2 of 65%, compared to ANN and SVM, having an R^2 of 25% and 33%, respectively. The benchmark linear regression model was the second-best performer with an R^2 of 34%.

The Random Forest (RF) model emerged as the best-performing predictive model among all the approaches considered. Based on the test set, RF achieved the lowest Mean Absolute Error (MAE) of 0.15, substantially outperforming the Artificial Neural Network (ANN) and Support Vector Machine (SVM) models, which recorded MAE scores of 0.70 and 0.65, respectively. The benchmark Linear Regression (LR) model exhibited moderate performance, with an MAE of 0.60.

Similarly, in terms of Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE), RF demonstrated superior predictive accuracy, achieving a MAPE of 25%, while ANN and SVM models scored 65% and 60%, respectively. The LR model again performed moderately with a MAPE of 55%.

Table 1. Performance Metrics of Various Machine Learning Models

Machine Learning Algorithm	R-square (R^2)	MAE	MAPE
ANN (MLP) model	25%	0.70	65%
SVM model	33%	0.65	60%
RF model	65%	0.15	25%
Linear regression model	34%	0.60	55%

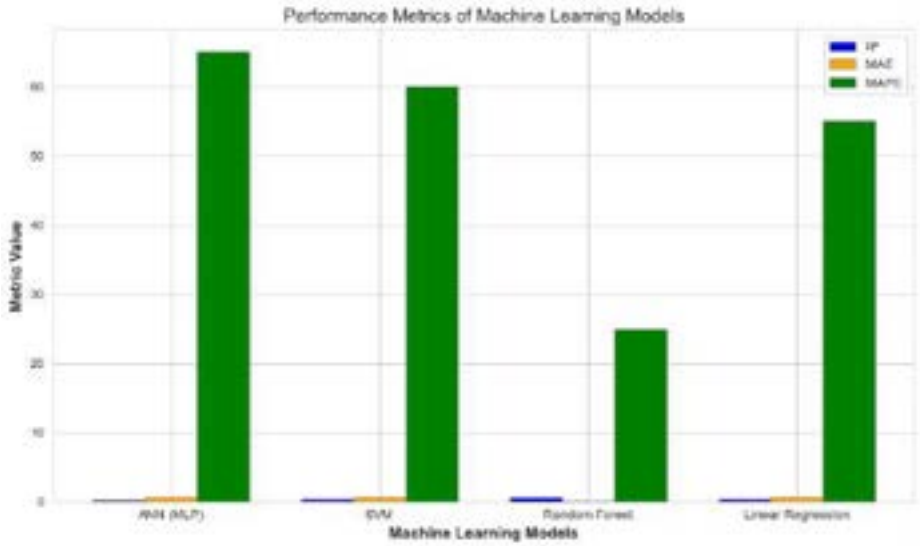

Figure 1. Graphical Performance Metrics of Various Machine Learning Models

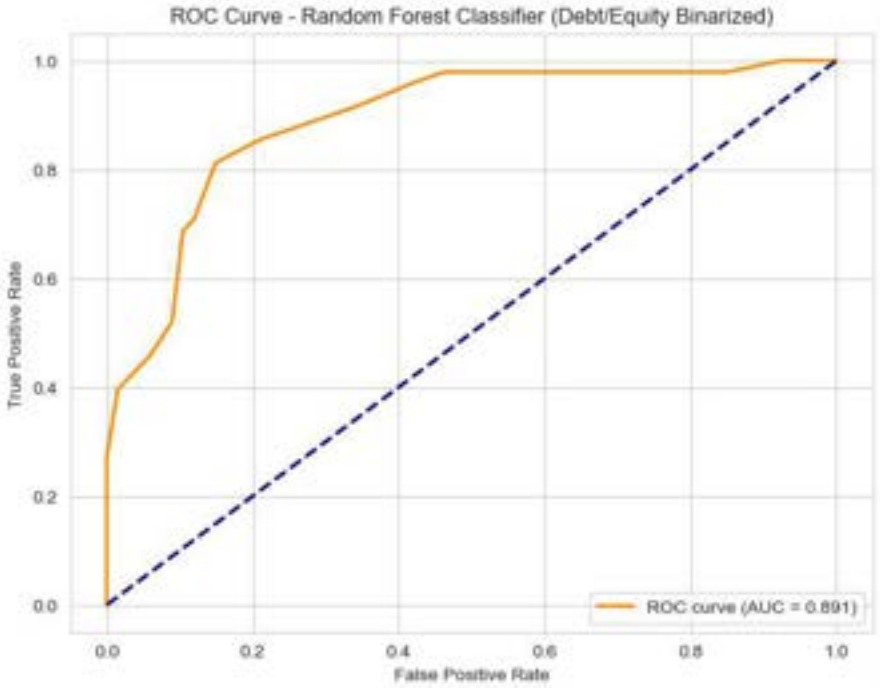

Figure 2: ROC Curve for the Random Forest Model

The RF model's strong performance is further corroborated by the ROC-AUC analysis performed on a binarized version of the Debt-to-Equity target, which yielded an AUC of 0.891. This is illustrated in Figure 2. The ROC curve indicates that RF is highly capable of discriminating between companies with higher versus lower leverage levels.

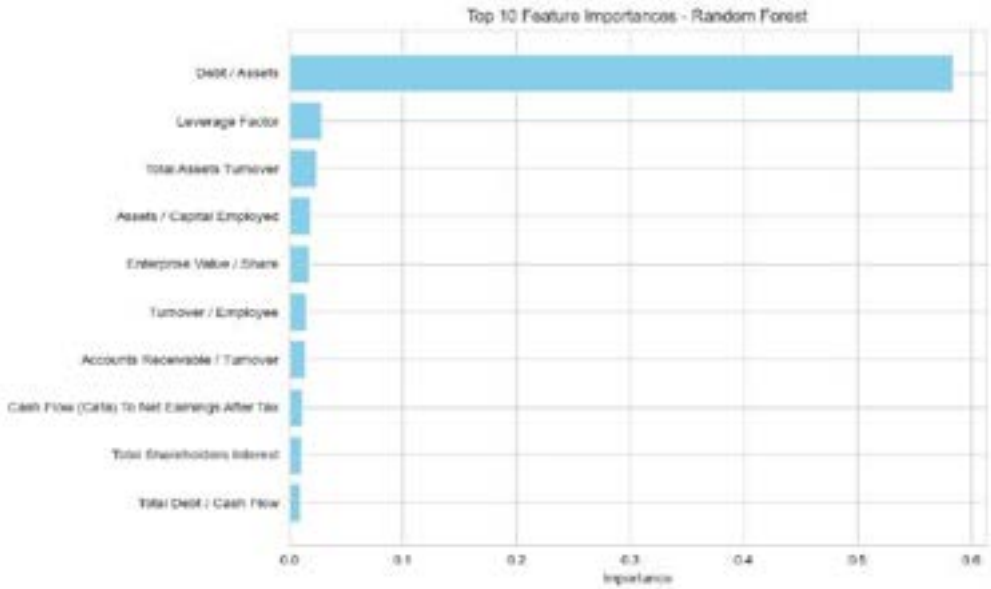

Figure 3: Top ten features of the Random Forest Model

The feature importance analysis from the RF model is shown in Figure 3. It revealed that the most predictive variables include Debt-to-Assets, Leverage Factor, and Total Assets, highlighting the critical role of leverage and firm size in explaining capital structure dynamics. Overall, RF's superior performance relative to ANN, SVM, and benchmark LR models reinforces the importance of capturing nonlinear interactions and complex relationships when modelling corporate capital structure.

5 CONCLUSION

The study confirmed that the Random Forest (RF) model outperforms traditional statistical methods like Linear Regression (LR) in predicting capital structure, particularly for listed South African companies on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). RF achieved higher R^2, lower Mean Absolute Error (MAE), and lower Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE), indicating a stronger predictive capacity and an ability to capture the intricate, nonlinear relationships inherent in capital structure dynamics. This superior performance can be attributed to RF's ensemble architecture, which reduces variance through averaging multiple decision trees, handles multicollinearity effectively, and is inherently robust to noise and overfitting — qualities particularly advantageous in financial datasets characterised by high dimensionality and complex variable interactions.

These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasising the utility of machine learning, particularly ensemble methods, in financial predictions. Notably, Adya and Collopy (1998) explored the effectiveness of neural networks in forecasting, aligning with our observation that machine learning approaches can outperform traditional models in contexts involving complex, nonlinear relationships [29]. Similarly, Atiya (2001) highlighted the advantages of neural networks in bankruptcy prediction, a related domain where AI models excel in recognising patterns within multifaceted financial datasets [30].

When comparing RF to LR, the limitations of traditional statistical models become clear. While LR provides interpretable coefficients and basic trend insights, it assumes linearity and struggles to model the nonlinear dependencies and interaction effects prevalent in corporate finance data. This conclusion is supported by Biau (2012), who demonstrated RF's robustness in capturing complex data patterns, and by Biau et al. (2008), who noted the consistency of RF and other averaging classifiers in high-dimensional settings [31][32].

Although Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) and Support Vector Machines (SVM) demonstrated some predictive merit, they underperformed relative to RF in this study. This is likely due to the relatively limited dataset size and the high variability in feature scales, which made ANN more prone to overfitting without extensive hyperparameter tuning and regularisation. SVM, on the other hand, faced challenges in kernel selection and parameter optimisation, as noted by Cortes and Vapnik (1995), particularly when dealing with heterogeneous financial data containing both continuous and categorical predictors [35].

From a managerial and industry perspective, these results have important implications. The ability of RF to accurately forecast capital structure provides corporate finance teams and strategic decision-makers with a reliable tool for assessing optimal leverage, planning debt issuance, and evaluating financing strategies in dynamic market conditions. Industry stakeholders, including investors and regulators, can leverage such predictive insights to better understand firm-level risk exposures, identify sector-specific financing trends, and design policies or interventions that improve capital allocation efficiency. Furthermore, the model's interpretability through feature importance rankings enables managers to pinpoint the key financial drivers influencing capital structure decisions, supporting evidence-based financial planning and risk management.

In conclusion, RF's ability to combine predictive accuracy with resilience to overfitting makes it particularly well-suited to capital structure prediction in emerging market contexts. Future research should explore hybrid modelling strategies that integrate the strengths of various algorithms — including deep learning approaches — and incorporate multifactor and temporal analyses to gain deeper insights into the drivers of corporate financing decisions [36].

6 RECOMMENDED FUTURE WORK

The following fields have been identified as recommended areas for future work:

- **Incorporating Unlisted Companies:** Future studies can extend the analysis to include unlisted companies, providing a comprehensive understanding of capital structure dynamics across a broader spectrum of companies. This expansion can enhance the generalisability of the findings and offer insights into the financing behaviour of both listed and unlisted entities. The inclusion of qualitative sustainable factors, such as environmental, social, and governance factors, can influence the financing decisions of companies and, ultimately, their capital structure.
- **Integration of Qualitative Factors:** Incorporating qualitative factors such as environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria into the predictive models can enrich the analysis. By considering non-financial aspects alongside traditional financial metrics, researchers can gain deeper insights into the holistic drivers of capital structure decisions.
- **Dynamic Modelling Approach:** Adopting a dynamic modelling approach that accounts for temporal changes and evolving market conditions can enhance the predictive capabilities of the models. By incorporating time series data and employing dynamic forecasting techniques, future studies can capture the evolving nature of capital structure dynamics and adapt predictive models accordingly.
- **Exploring Alternative Machine Learning Algorithms:** While RF models exhibit strong predictive performance in this study, exploring alternative machine learning algorithms and ensemble methods can offer valuable insights. Techniques such as Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM), XGBoost, and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks warrant investigation to assess their suitability for modelling capital structure dynamics.
- **Cross-Industry Analysis:** Extending the analysis beyond the Industrial sector to other industries can provide valuable comparative insights. By examining how capital

structure decisions vary across different sectors, researchers can identify industry-specific drivers and trends, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of financing behaviour.

- **Model Interpretability and Explainable AI:** Future studies should incorporate interpretability tools such as SHAP (Shapley Additive Explanations) and LIME (Local Interpretable Model-agnostic Explanations) to increase transparency of machine learning predictions. By understanding which features drive model outputs, researchers and managers can gain actionable insights and improve decision-making in financial planning and capital structure management.

In conclusion, while the present study highlights the efficacy of RF models in predicting capital structure dynamics, there exists ample opportunity for future research to investigate deeper into this complex phenomenon. By embracing interdisciplinary approaches, leveraging advanced modelling techniques, and expanding the scope of analysis, researchers can further advance our understanding of capital structure dynamics and its implications for company performance and financial decision-making.

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SAIIE35 Proceedings, 20–22 October 2025, Cape Town, South Africa © 2025 SAIIE

IMPACTS OF URBANIZATION AND PASSENGER VEHICLES ON CARBON EMISSIONS: SYSTEM ECONOMETRICS SOLUTIONS FOR GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of automobile sector in South Africa has significantly increased fossil fuel consumption and carbon emissions. This study investigates dynamic interdependencies between urbanization, passenger vehicle proliferation, fuel consumption, and CO_2-equivalent emissions in Gauteng, South Africa, using advanced system econometrics techniques. Panel Quantile Regression, Generalized Additive Models, and Arellano-Bond Generalized Method of Moments quantify nonlinear relationships, while LSTM-Attention forecasting projects emissions trends (2024–2040). Mixed Integer Nonlinear Programming with CPLEX optimization identifies optimal mitigation pathways. Validation by heteroskedasticity diagnostics for p-values of 0.038 and 0.042 confirm the system econometrics robustness to reveal dynamic interdependencies between urbanization, passenger vehicle growth, fuel consumption, and carbon emissions. This projects 22.6% emissions reduction beyond 2040 down to 8.57 $MTCO_2$-eq, driven by efficient energy use (241.33×10^6 MJ), urbanization by 94.7%, economic growth to ZAR 2.422 trillion, with concurrent decline in on-road passenger vehicles. This reinforces the necessity for low-carbon policies, clean mobility investments, and strategic transportation systems.

Keywords: Urbanization, Carbon Emissions, Transportation, Econometrics, Machine Learning, Sustainability.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The transportation industry is a major contributor to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, accounting for approximately 25% of total CO_2-equivalent (CO_2-*eq*) emissions [1]-[2]. The rapid expansion of urban areas, driven by population growth, infrastructure development, and economic activity, has intensified transport-related energy consumption and emissions. In emerging economies such as South Africa, increasing motorisation has further exacerbated the carbon footprint of the industry. According to the United Nations (2022), 56% of the global population resides in urban areas, with projections indicating an increase to 68% by 2050 [3]-[4], reinforcing the urgency of implementing sustainable mobility solutions. As urban areas expand, rising mobility demand, increasing passenger vehicle ownership, and continued reliance on fossil fuel-powered transportation have amplified environmental concerns. The carbon footprint of the industry is further exacerbated by urban sprawl, inadequate public transit infrastructure, and escalating congestion in major metropolitan areas [5]-[6]. Empirical evidence indicates that low-density urban development correlates with higher per capita vehicle emissions, as residents become increasingly dependent on private automobiles for daily commuting. These trends accentuate the critical need for sustainable urban planning and low-carbon mobility systems to mitigate transportation-induced emissions. Globally, passenger road transport accounts for approximately 45% of total transportation-related CO_2-*eq* emissions, with an annual growth rate of 1.5% in developing economies [7]-[8]. The combustion of fossil fuels which are primarily gasoline and diesel being utilized in internal combustion engine vehicles (ICEVs) emits not only carbon dioxide (CO_2) but also methane (CH_4), carbon oxide and nitrous oxide (N_2O), these among others are collectively classified as CO_2-*eq* emissions [9]-[10]. These emissions exacerbate global warming while also deteriorating urban air quality, reinforcing the urgency for sustainable transportation policies and cleaner energy alternatives. The affordability of private vehicles, increasing disposable incomes, and deficiencies in public transportation infrastructure have accelerated vehicle ownership rates in Gauteng, being the main economic hub of South Africa. This rapid urbanization has led to significant expansion of the passenger vehicle fleet, driving higher fuel consumption and per capita emissions [11]. Moreover, low fuel efficiency standards, an aging vehicle fleet, and persistent congestion further contribute to inefficient fuel combustion and rising CO_2-*eq* emissions. Addressing these concerns necessitates targeted interventions, which include improved fuel efficiency regulations, enhanced public transit systems, and the promotion of non-motorized transport alternatives. Urban development immensely contribute to shaping transportation patterns by influencing land use distribution, commuting behaviours, and modal choices. Empirical evidences indicate that higher urban densities are generally associated with lower per capita transportation emissions due to the presence of compact, transit-oriented infrastructure that encourages public transport use and reduces reliance on private vehicles [12]-[13]. Well-integrated transportation systems that prioritise mixed land use, pedestrian-friendly environments, and efficient public transit networks are essential for reducing transport-related emissions and enhancing overall sustainability. In Gauteng, rapid urbanization has significantly increased the demand for motorized transport, leading to a substantial rise in carbon emissions from passenger vehicles. As South Africa's economic powerhouse, Gauteng contributes approximately 35% of the nation's GDP and continues to experience accelerated urban population growth, further intensifying transportation-related energy consumption [1],[14]-[15]. Despite government initiatives aimed at promoting public transit and non-motorized transport, the province remains heavily reliant on private passenger vehicles due to persistent challenges such as unreliable public transport services, socioeconomic inequalities, and infrastructure deficits. Given these complexities, a system econometrics framework is essential for quantitatively assessing the interdependencies between urbanization, passenger vehicle growth, fossil fuel consumption, and GHG emissions in Gauteng's transportation industry.

To this context and application, system econometrics within industrial, systems, and engineering management is a unified analytical approach that resolves the dynamic interdependencies among energy, economic, environmental, and social variables to enable optimal resource allocation, robust causal inference, and policy-oriented forecasting for complex real-world systems. System econometrics essentially involves engineering, econometrics, machine learning, and optimization techniques. This study employs panel data analytics, incorporating advanced econometric regression techniques, model optimization, and machine learning with CPLEX Solver to deduce empirical information into the key drivers of transport-related emissions. The findings will provide data-driven recommendations for further design of sustainable urban transport policies, aligning with the unique economic and environmental landscape of Gauteng to support long-term carbon mitigation strategies.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The accelerated expansion of urban areas has fundamentally altered patterns of mobility, energy consumption, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Urbanization drives a complex interplay between population density, infrastructure development, and transport demand, with passenger vehicle ownership emerging as a primary determinant of transportation-related emissions [16]-[18]. This phenomenon is particularly critical in emerging economies, where transportation infrastructure often struggles to keep pace with rapid urban growth, leading to congestion, increased fuel consumption, and elevated emissions. Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic relationship between urban expansion and transport-sector emissions, integrating both theoretical frameworks and empirical analyses to inform sustainable mobility strategies [19]-[21]. Urbanization exerts significant influence on transportation systems, shaping mobility patterns, energy consumption, and GHG emissions. Theoretical perspectives have been employed to examine the mechanisms underlying this relationship. The compact city hypothesis postulates that high-density urban development enhances public transportation utilization, thereby reducing per capita emissions through improved efficiency, shorter travel distances, and minimized reliance on private vehicles [22]-[23]. Conversely, the urban sprawl hypothesis contends that low-density suburban expansion exacerbates private vehicle dependency, leading to increased emissions due to extended commuting distances, traffic congestion, and inefficient land-use patterns [24]-[26]. A broader macroeconomic perspective is provided by the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) hypothesis, which indicates that CO_2-*eq* emissions initially rise during the early stages of urbanization but subsequently decline as economies develop, incorporating cleaner technologies and transitioning toward more sustainable transportation systems [1],[27]. Empirical research presents mixed findings regarding the relationship between urbanization and transport emissions, with evidence both supporting and challenging the prevailing theoretical perspectives. Several studies indicate that unplanned urban expansion exacerbates transport-sector emissions by fostering inefficient land-use patterns and increasing vehicle kilometres travelled (VKT) [28]-[29]. This is consistent with the findings of Cavoli [30] and Canitez [31], whose cross-country analysis demonstrates that in developing economies, rapid urbanization often accelerates private vehicle ownership due to the inadequate provision of public transportation infrastructure. In the African context, South Africa's urban centres, particularly Gauteng province which exhibit some phenomenal transportation inefficiencies, largely attributed to low-density spatial development and heavy dependence on fossil-fuel-based mobility [9],[33]. Empirical data further indicate that urban congestion in Johannesburg and Pretoria significantly amplifies GHG emissions, as frequent stop-and-go traffic conditions increase fuel consumption and exacerbate environmental impacts [11]. These findings augment the critical demand for strategic urban transportation planning and sustainable mobility interventions to mitigate transport-related emissions in rapidly urbanizing regions. By synthesizing theoretical perspectives with empirical findings, the literature deepens the necessity for targeted policy interventions and advanced

analytical techniques, such as system econometrics within engineering management, to analyse and mitigate urban transport emissions in provincial regions like Gauteng, South Africa. The country's transportation sector remains heavily reliant on fossil fuels, with gasoline and diesel accounting for over 95% of total road transport energy consumption [9], [34]. This dependency is further exacerbated by an aging vehicle fleet, which significantly contributes to carbon emissions due to higher fuel intensities and elevated emission factors associated with older vehicles [35]-[36]. These findings reinforce the urgent need for robust system econometrics modeling to quantitatively assess the impact of urbanization-driven vehicle proliferation on GHG emissions within Gauteng's transportation industry, providing a data-driven foundation for sustainable mobility policies. Recent advancements in energy economics, econometric modeling, and machine learning (ML) methodologies have substantially enhanced the precision and analytical depth of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions forecasting. The integration of econometric estimation techniques with ML-based predictive frameworks enables more robust modeling of complex, nonlinear relationships within transportation emissions data, thereby improving forecasting accuracy and policy relevance [37]-[42]. These developments accentuate the potential of data-driven approaches in refining emission mitigation strategies and optimizing energy-efficient transport systems.

Panel Quantile Regression (QR) econometric analysis extends beyond conventional mean regression techniques by capturing distributional heterogeneity in the relationship between urbanization, transport activity, fuel consumption, and carbon emissions [43]-[46]. Unlike Ordinary Least Squares (OLS), which estimates only the average effects, QR provides conditional quantile estimates, enabling the identification of heterogeneous policy impacts across different levels of emissions intensity. This approach is particularly relevant in emissions modeling, where extreme values such as high-emitting urban clusters which can exhibit distinct behavioural patterns compared to low-emission zones. Empirical studies of Kazemzadeh et al. [47] and that of Belaid & Massie, [48] have demonstrated QR's effectiveness in disentangling the asymmetric effects of urban expansion and vehicle density on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, reinstate that emissions in the upper quantiles are more sensitive to changes in transport policy. In the context of Gauteng, QR is instrumental in identifying how emissions respond differentially to varying degrees of urbanization and vehicle proliferation, thus guiding targeted policy interventions.

Conventional econometric techniques often impose rigid functional forms, failing to capture the complex, nonlinear interactions between urbanization and emissions. Generalized Additive Models (GAMs) overcome this limitation by incorporating smooth, nonparametric functions that flexibly model relationships without assuming predefined structures [49]-[51]. The recent applications in environmental econometrics demonstrate that GAMs effectively capture threshold effects in transport emissions, where urban expansion initially accelerates emissions growth before stabilizing due to infrastructure improvements and clean energy transitions [52]-[54]. In this study, GAMs facilitate a rigorous assessment of the nonlinear dynamics between passenger vehicle growth, urbanization rates, and GHG emissions, providing policy-relevant insights into strategies for decoupling economic expansion from environmental degradation in Gauteng, South Africa.

Urbanization, economic growth, and passenger vehicle proliferation exhibit strong interdependencies, often leading to endogeneity concerns in empirical models. The Arellano-Bond Generalized Method of Moments (GMM) estimator effectively addresses autocorrelation, simultaneity bias, and omitted variable bias by leveraging lagged instruments to produce unbiased estimates [55]-[56]. In transportation emissions modeling, GMM has been systematically deployed to analyse the long-term impacts of policy interventions on fuel consumption and emissions efficiency [57]-[59]. By employing GMM in this research, the study ensures that estimated relationships between urbanization, transport demand, fossil fuel

consumption, and GHG emissions remain robust against reverse causality and omitted structural factors, thereby strengthening the causal inferences necessary for decision in policymaking.

Individually, QR, GAMs, and GMM provide distinct analytical merits; nevertheless, their combined applications in system econometrics significantly enhances predictive accuracy and policy relevance. The simultaneous use of QR (distributional heterogeneity), GAMs (nonlinear interactions), and GMM (endogeneity control) facilitates a multidimensional assessment of urbanization-driven GHG emissions dynamics in the transportation industry. These integrated methodological techniques enable the identification of high-risk carbon emission phases over time, informs threshold-based urban planning policies, and enhances the precision of emissions mitigation strategies.

Machine learning (ML) techniques have gained prominence in transportation emissions modeling, offering superior predictive accuracy, adaptive learning capabilities, and improved handling of nonlinearities compared to traditional econometric methods [60]-[62]. The integration of ML into emissions modeling has further improved predictive accuracy and model robustness. Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs), for instance, have demonstrated exceptional capabilities in capturing intricate nonlinear relationships between urbanization, vehicle expansion, and emissions patterns [63]-[65]. Similarly, Support Vector Regression (SVR) and ensemble-based techniques such as Random Forest and XGBoost of ML techniques have proven effective in analysing high-dimensional transportation emissions datasets, offering deeper insights into complex interactions and forecasting trends with greater precision [66]-[68]. Among ML techniques, deep learning approaches such as Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks have demonstrated exceptional performance in capturing long-range temporal dependencies in time-series forecasting [69]-[71]. LSTM models, a specialized class of recurrent neural networks (RNNs), are designed to learn from sequential data while mitigating the vanishing gradient problem. The integration of an attention mechanism further enhances forecasting precision by prioritizing significant time-series dependencies [72]-[73]. Studies by Xiong et al. [74] and Pan et al. [75] indicate that LSTM-Attention models outperform traditional and recent autoregressive models (e.g., ARIMA) and the conventional econometric techniques in GHG emissions forecasting by capturing dynamic interactions between transport demand, urbanization, and emissions. In this study, the LSTM-Attention technique facilitates a moderately high-fidelity CO_2-eq emissions projections for 2024, through 2040 and beyond, providing a robust empirical basis for long-term environmental policy planning.

In spite advancements in econometric and ML-based modeling, limited research has been conducted on transportation sector emissions and South Africa is in no way an exemption, particularly using an incorporated system econometric-ML approach. This study addresses this critical gap by employing a hybrid system econometrics framework augmented with ML-driven forecasts to generate robust, data-driven insights into the emissions dynamics of Gauteng's urban transport sector. By leveraging the strengths of these methodologies, the study enhances proper grasp of how urbanization and transport trends influence CO_2-*eq* emissions, enabling informed decision-making for sustainable mobility solutions.

While forecasting models identify trends, optimization techniques such as Mixed Integer Nonlinear Programming (MINLP) provide actionable strategies for GHG emissions reduction and fuel efficiency improvements. MINLP, implemented in this study using the CPLEX optimization solver, is particularly suited for problems involving discrete policy decisions and nonlinear interactions [76]-[77]. Prior research of Homayouni et al. [78] and Yuvarai et al. [79], have demonstrated MINLP's efficacy in optimizing transportation systems, ensuring that emissions reductions align with economic feasibility and infrastructure constraints.

The integration of QR, GAMs, GMM, LSTM-Attention, and MINLP forms an efficient analytical tool that capture heterogeneous, nonlinear, and dynamic effects influencing transportation-related GHG emissions.

Based on use and thorough assessments, QR is at advantage to uncover heterogenous impacts of urbanization and passenger vehicles on emissions that main-based estimators forfeit. GAMs are applicable to flexibly capture non-linear relationships without imposing restrictive functional forms required by conventional econometric regressions. GMM is to be employed to address endogeneity and dynamic feedback effects that are hardly possible to correct by OLS and ordinary FE models. The LSTM-Attention is adopted for its superiority to learn temporal dependencies and to reinstate the key drivers in long-term emissions forecasting, outperforming conventional time-series models such as ARIMA, standard RNNs, and more.

This methodological approach not only provides high-precision long-term emissions forecasts (2024–2050) but also optimizes strategic policy decisions to align with emissions reduction targets under the Paris Agreement (2030, 2050) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. By bridging predictive analytics with decision optimization, this study significantly advances the field, offering scalable applications for sustainable transport policies in Gauteng and beyond.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Gauteng research profile

Gauteng is the smallest of the nine provinces in South Africa, spans approximately 18,176 km^2 (1.4% of the national land mass area), and yet serves as the economic nucleus, contributing 35% to the economic growth of the nation [80]-[81]. It comprises three metropolitan municipalities which include Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Ekurhuleni with two other district municipalities, significantly impacting to the national urbanization and transportation dynamics. With a population of 15.1 million [81] and an urbanization rate exceeding 97% [82], Gauteng exhibits a high dependency on private passenger vehicle ownership due to inadequate public transit infrastructure. The province accommodates 38% of South Africa's total vehicle fleet, with over 4.5 million registered vehicles [80], [83]. Passenger vehicle reliance is exacerbated by expanding road networks, such as the Gauteng Freeway Improvement Project (GFIP), yet severe congestion persists along minor, and critical corridors (for instance, M1, N1, N4, and R21). In 2022, fuel consumption in Gauteng's transport sector exceeded 5.0 billion litres, growing at 3.1% annually [9], [82]. This dependence on gasoline and diesel intensifies carbon-intensive energy demand, with passenger vehicles emitting over 17.8 $MTCO_2$-eq annually [11], [82]. The utilization of internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles generates harmful CO_2, methane (CH_4), and nitrous oxide (N_2O), exacerbating climate impacts [84]-[86]. The absence of stringent emission controls and limited modal shifts to sustainable transport necessitate urgent interventions, including clean energy adoption and public transit enhancement, to mitigate transportation-induced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Gauteng.

3.2 Descriptive data sources

This study utilizes a 12-year panel dataset (2012–2023) to analyse transportation-related GHG emissions in Gauteng, South Africa's economic hub. The dataset integrates multiple authoritative sources to ensure accuracy and consistency, given the absence of a consolidated data repository. Key sources include Statistics South Africa [81] (urbanization trends), the Department of Transport (vehicle fleet units, fuel consumption) [80], [82], and the Gauteng Department of Roads and Transport (fleet composition, infrastructure investments) [80]. Additional data were obtained from SANEDI and the Department of Energy (fuel efficiency, alternative energy adoption) [82], as well as international benchmarks from the IEA, ITF,

World Bank, and UN-Habitat. The study examines four core variables: urbanization (%), passenger vehicle fleet (total registered vehicles), fuel consumption (by type), and CO_2-*eq* emissions [84]-[86]. All these profiled panel datasets informative background are properly assimilated in the works of Oladunni et al. [1], Oladunni and Olanrewaju, [9] and Oladunni et al [11]. System econometrics of advanced techniques are employed to assess their interdependencies. Extensive pre-processing ensures data integrity, including validation for inconsistencies, missing values, and outliers. Descriptive statistics are summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Descriptive panel dataset statistics

Variable [**2012-2023**]	Measurement units	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min. value	Max. value	Skew	Kurtosis
Nominal GDP	SA Billion Rand	250	1710441	386845.44	998095.00	2,329820	-0.155	-0.702
Urbanisation	% in development	250	0.931	0.0980	0.720	0.991	-1.657	0.943
Passenger vehicles	vehicle fleet in units	250	4090292	797899	2694931	4997033	-0.601	-0.900
Fuel consumption	Billion (petroleum) **litres**	250	5.753E9	453.86E6	5.11E9	6.48E9	0.149	-1.228
CO_2-*eq* emissions	Metric tons per capita	250	14.891	2.177	11.471	17.532	-0.202	-1.334

3.3 Systems modeling

A system-based econometric model is developed to quantify the direct and indirect effects of urbanization (URB), economic growth (GDP), passenger vehicles (PV), and fuel consumption (FC) on GHG (CO_2-*eq*) emissions in Gauteng. The model is structured as a system of structural equations, capturing both direct parametric impacts and interdependencies among variables. This approach ensures a comprehensive assessment of emissions dynamics by integrating economic, infrastructural, and energy-related factors. The fundamental structural equations governing the model are defined as follows:

$$\mathbf{GHG_t} = \mathbb{f}(\mathbf{URB_t}, \mathbf{GDP_t}, \mathbf{PV_t}\ \mathbf{FC_t}) + \boldsymbol{\varepsilon_t} \quad (1)$$

Where as here stated:

- $\mathrm{GHG_t}$ represents GHG emissions at time t ,
- $\mathrm{URB_t}$ connotes the urbanization development rate,
- $\mathrm{GDP_t}$ indicates economic growth of Gauteng in period t,
- $\mathrm{PV_t}$ is the number of on-road passenger vehicles in period t,
- $\mathrm{FC_t}$ connotes fuel consumption at considered period t,
- ε_t is the error term capturing unobserved factors.

The interdependence of CO_2-eq emissions and their determinants is modeled system econometric estimations, where urbanization (URB) drives economic growth (GDP), vehicle ownership (PV), and fuel consumption (FC), all of which collectively impacts emissions in the transportation industry. This systematic interaction necessitates the structural econometric applications to quantify both direct and indirect effects. The mathematical formulation of these relationships is specified through a set of structural equations, capturing the causal dependencies among key parametric variables. The following equations define the model technicalities for analysing CO_2-eq emission determinants:

$$\mathbf{In}(\boldsymbol{CO_{2-eq}}) = \propto_{\mathbf{0}} + \propto_{\mathbf{1}} \mathbf{In}(\mathbf{URB}_t) + \propto_{\mathbf{2}} \mathbf{In}(\mathbf{GDP_t}) + \propto_{\mathbf{3}} \mathbf{In}(\mathbf{PV_t}) + \propto_{\mathbf{4}} \mathbf{In}(\mathbf{FC_t}) + \boldsymbol{\varepsilon_{1t}} \quad (2)$$

Here, $\mathrm{In}(CO_{2-eq})$ is the natural log of carbon emissions, $\propto_0$ represent the constant term, while $\propto_1$ represents the elasticity of economic growth, $\propto_3$ is the elasticity of passenger vahicles, as $\propto_4$ denotes the elasticity for fuel consumption. The ε_{1t} is the error term for the emissions determinant. This is directly deployed for URB and GDP interaction:

$$\mathbf{In(GDP_t) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 In(URB_t) + \beta_2 In(PV_t) + \beta_3 In(FC_t) + \varepsilon_{2t}} \quad (3)$$

At current development stage of South Africa, fuel consumption in Gauteng is primarily driven by economic growth, urban expansion, and the increasing number of on-road vehicles. Accordingly, the econometric system is structured to capture these relationships mathematically. The system is expressed in matrix form such that $Y_t = \left[\mathrm{InCO}_{2-eq}, \mathrm{In(GDP_t)}, \mathrm{In(PV_t)}, \mathrm{(FC_t)}\right]^T$ is the vector of the endogenous variables. To ensure that all endogenous parametric variables are sequential to the exogenous of the right side, such as $\mathrm{BY_t} = \mathrm{CX_t} + \varepsilon_t$. The coefficient matrix B accounts for the interdependencies as follows:

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & -\alpha_2 & -\alpha_3 & -\alpha_4 \\ -\beta_1 & 1 & -\beta_2 & -\beta_3 \\ -\gamma_1 & -\gamma_2 & 1 & 0 \\ -\delta_1 & -\delta_2 & -\delta_3 & 1 \end{bmatrix} \quad (4)$$

The right-hand side comprises exogenous variables, as parametric sample, specifically urbanization. The system incorporates error terms as follows:

$$CX_t = \begin{bmatrix} \propto_1 \\ \beta_4 \\ \gamma_3 \\ \delta_4 \end{bmatrix} \mathrm{In(URB_t)} + \varepsilon_t \quad ; \quad \varepsilon_t = \begin{bmatrix} \varepsilon_{1t} \\ \varepsilon_{2t} \\ \varepsilon_{3t} \\ \varepsilon_{4t} \end{bmatrix} \quad (5)$$

In the application of the system, log-linear specifications are employed to improve both the interpretability and robustness of the model. In this formulation, the estimated coefficients ($\boldsymbol{\beta_i}$) across the versions represent elasticities, quantifying the percentage change in CO_2-*eq* emissions corresponding to a 1% change in the explanatory variables. Furthermore, the logarithmic transformation addresses heteroscedasticity by stabilizing the variance, ensuring more consistent error terms. This approach also enhances the model fit by promoting linearity in the relationships among the variables, effectively responding to the characteristics of the sectoral time-series data.

4 RESULTS

4.1 System algorithm interpretation

Table 2 outlines the integrated system econometrics algorithms, combining econometric modeling, deep learning, and optimization techniques to assess and mitigate transportation energy emissions, with a focus on urbanization and on-road passenger vehicles. The 12-year panel dataset (2012–2023) was subjected to Min-Max normalization for numerical stability, followed by stationarity tests (ADF, PP, KPSS, ZA) to ensure robustness. A 1D Convolutional Neural Network (Conv1D) extracted critical features of urbanization, GDP, passenger vehicle count, and fossil fuel consumption to further preserve patterns via skip connections. ReLU activation and linear transformations improved predictive accuracy. Econometric regression analysis is employed using Panel Quantile Regression (QR) to assess heterogeneity, Generalized Additive Models (GAMs) applied to capture non-linear relationships, and Arellano-Bond GMM to address endogeneity. An LSTM-Attention model projected CO_2-eq emissions, showing a 4.3% annual increase without mitigation. The Mixed Integer Nonlinear Programming (MINLP) optimization, solved with CPLEX Solver at a high significant level achieved a 7.8% reduction in CO_2-*eq* emissions and a 5.5% decrease in fossil fuel consumption

from 2023 through 2035 alone. The recalling solutions based on the algorithmic interpretation of **Table 2** connote that energy-efficient public transport, stricter emission standards, with the required infrastructure investments can be achieved**.**

Table 2: Algorithmic system econometrics for transport energy emissions.

	Input:	System econometrics for transport energy emission parameters Historical panel data sets $[\mathbf{2012-2023}]$
	Features and Labels:	$\{\mathrm{GDP_t}, \mathrm{URB_t}, \mathrm{PV_t}, \mathrm{FC_t}, \mathrm{CO_{2eqt}}\} \therefore X_t \in \mathbb{R}^{B\times4\times N\times T}, Y_t \in \mathbb{R}^{B\times H}$
Parameters setting:		Econometrics; ML with DL model parameters; Systems optimisation
	Output:	Carbon emissions and fuel consumption for policy recommendation
1	Construct adjacency matrix: $\mathbf{A_t} = \mathbf{Self-Attention}(\mathbf{X_t}, \mathbf{W^K}, \mathbf{W^\varphi})$	
2	Normalise features using $\min-\max$ scaling: $\mathrm{X_t'} = \frac{\mathrm{X_t}-\min(\mathrm{X_t})}{\max(\mathrm{X_t})-\min(\mathrm{X_t})}$	
3	Check stationarity using **Augmented Dicky** $-$ **Fuller** (**ADF**) test	
	Check stationarity using **Phillips** $-$ **Perron** (**PP**) test **;** check stationarity using **Zivot** $-$ **Andrews** (**ZA**) test	
	Check staionarity using **Kwiatkowski** $-$ **Phillips** $-$ **Schmidt** $-$ **Shin** (**KPSS**) test	
4	Execute linear convolution on $\mathbf{X_t}$: $\mathbf{X_t} = \mathrm{Conv1d}(\mathrm{X_t}, \mathrm{F}, \mathrm{F_r}, (1,1)) \in \mathbb{R}^{B\times4\times N\times H}$	
5	Initialize skip connections: $\mathbf{Skip} = \mathbf{0}$	
6	**for** k in $\mathbf{K'}$ **do**	
7	Compute residual: residual $= \boldsymbol{X_t}$	
8	Apply activation functions: $\boldsymbol{X_t} = \mathrm{ReLU(skip)}$	
9	Perform final linear transformation: $\boldsymbol{X_t} = \mathrm{ReLU}\left(\mathrm{Conc1d}(\mathrm{X_t}, \mathrm{F_t}, \mathrm{F_r}, (1,1))\right)$	
10	Predict future values: $\boldsymbol{X_t} = \mathrm{Conv1d}(X_t, F_t, H, (1,1))$	
11	Solve econometric regression models:	
	Panel Quantile Regression (**QR**) for conditional distribution analysis: $\boldsymbol{Q_\tau(Y_t \parallel X_t)}$	
	Generalised Additive Models (**GAMS**) for non $-$ linear relationships: $Y_t = \propto + S_1(X_{1t}) + s_2(X_{2t}) + \ldots + s_n(X_{nt}) + \epsilon_t$	
	Dynamic Panel Data Models (**Arellano** $-$ **Bond GMM**) for endogeneity correction: $Y_t - Y_{t-1} = \beta(X_t - X_{t-1}) + \eta_t$	
12	Apply **LSTM** $-$ Attention for sequential CO_2 forecasting: $\widehat{CO}_{2eqt+1} = \mathbf{LSTM-Attn}(\boldsymbol{X_t})$	
	Formulate optimisation concern:	
	Objective Function: $\mathbf{min}\, \boldsymbol{X_t}\ \boldsymbol{\lambda_1 CO_{2eqt} + \lambda_2 FC_t}$	
	Constraints:	
	Urbanisation threshold: $\mathbf{0.72} \leq \boldsymbol{URB_t} \leq \mathbf{0.991}$	
	Passenger vehicle limit: $\mathbf{2.69M} \leq \mathbf{PV_t} \leq \mathbf{4.99M}$	
	Fuel consumption cap: $\mathbf{5.11B} \leq \mathbf{FC_t} \leq \mathbf{6.48B}$	
	Economic growth, GDP: $\mathbf{998,095}\boldsymbol{B} \leq \boldsymbol{GDP_t} \leq \mathbf{2,329,820}$	
14	Solve using **Mixed Integer Nonlinear Programming** (**MINLP**) with **CPLEX**	
15	**Return** $\boldsymbol{X_t}$ as optimised values for sustainable transportation policy	

4.2 Stationarity test outcomes

Ensuring stationarity in economic time series data is critical in this system econometrics in order to prevent spurious regression and ensure valid inference. The Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF), Phillips-Perron (PP), Kwiatkowski-Phillips-Schmidt-Shin (KPSS), and Zivot-Andrews (ZA) tests are applied to assess the stationarity of key parametric variables (from 2012 through 2023) in the transportation industry of Gauteng, South Africa. As illustrated in **Table 3**. CO_2-*eq* emissions exhibit weak stationarity, with ADF (-3.451, p = 0.0452) and PP (-3.322, p = 0.0516) marginally rejecting the null of a unit root, while KPSS (0.184, p = 0.0210) rejects stationarity. ZA (-4.932, p = 0.0398) confirms stationarity with structural breaks, necessitating trend adjustments. Nominal GDP is non-stationary, as ADF (-1.982, p = 0.6781) and PP (-2.021, p = 0.6400) fail to reject the unit root hypothesis, KPSS (0.422, p = 0.0031) rejects stationarity, and ZA (-3.509, p = 0.0741) indicates a structural break without sufficient stationarity evidence, necessitating first differencing as being performed in the background. Urbanization

also exhibits non-stationary, confirmed by ADF (-2.792, p = 0.2113), PP (-2.856, p = 0.1902), KPSS (0.612, p = 0.0009), and ZA (-4.018, p = 0.0495), requiring differencing. The parameter of passenger vehicle indicates non-stationarity, with ADF (-2.345, p = 0.4120), PP (-2.508, p = 0.3820), and ZA (-3.912, p = 0.0613) confirming a unit root, necessitating logarithmic transformation. Fuel consumption exhibits trend stationarity with structural breaks, as ADF (-3.092, p = 0.0871), PP (-3.218, p = 0.0748), and ZA (-4.698, p = 0.0412) confirm, requiring structural adjustments. The mixed stationarity necessitates Johansen cointegration and Vector Error Correction Models (VECM) for long-run equilibrium analysis, ran as scripted in the background as indicated in the algorithm. These findings reinstate the impact of regulatory shocks, policy interventions, and energy transitions, which further accentuate the need for structural modeling in transportation system.

Table 3: Econometrics stationarity diagnostic outcomes.

Variable	ADF	ADF	PP	PP	KPSS	KPSS	ZA	ZA
	Stat	*p*-value	Stat	*p*-value	Stat	*p*-value	Stat	*p*-value
CO_{2-eq} emissions	-3.451	0.0452	-3.322	0.0516	0.184	0.0210	-4.932	0.0398
Nominal GDP	-1.982	0.6781	-2.021	0.6400	0.422	0.0031	-3.509	0.0741
Urbanisation	-2.792	0.2113	-2.856	0.1902	0.612	0.0009	-4.018	0.0495
Passenger vehicle	-2.345	0.4120	-2.508	0.3820	0.271	0.0194	-3.912	0.0613
Fuel consumption	-3.092	0.0871	-3.218	0.0748	0.341	0.0135	-4.698	0.0412

4.3 Econometrics regression diagnostics

The econometric regression diagnostics as properly presented in **Table 4** indicate critical information into the correlation between urbanization, passenger vehicles, fuel consumption, and the nominal GDP in relation to GHG emissions in Gauteng, South Africa. The outcomes are deduced from three robust econometric techniques of Panel Quantile Regression (QR), Generalized Additive Models (GAMs), and Dynamic Panel Data Models (Arellano-Bond GMM) which ensure qualitative assessment of the interactions among these parametric variables. The results indicate that urbanization negatively impacts CO_2-*eq* emissions across different quantiles, with coefficients of -0.150, -0.100, and -0.050 at the 10th, 50th, and 90th quantiles, respectively. This indicates that as urbanization increases, emissions tend to decline, albeit at a diminishing rate. The Arellano-Bond GMM estimate (-0.080, $p < 0.05$) confirms this negative nexus, reinstating that urbanization fosters improved transportation efficiency and emission reductions.

Table 4: Systems econometrics regression diagnostics.

Variable	QR-0.1	QR - 0.5	QR-0.9	GAM	A-B GMM	*p*-value	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)	R-*Squared*
Nominal GDP	-0.450	-0.500	-0.550	-0.480	-0.520	0.045	-0.480	-0.420	0.88
Urbanization	-0.150	-0.100	-0.050	0.120	-0.080	0.032	-0.180	-0.120	0.87
Passenger Vehicles	0.003	0.004	0.005	0.0025	0.0035	0.015	0.002	0.005	0.91
Fuel Consumption	1.250	1.350	1.400	1.300	1.280	0.001	1.200	1.450	0.89

In **Table 4**, the 95% confidence interval for urbanization (-0.180 to -0.120) supports the statistical robustness of this research findings. The passenger vehicle (PV) expansion as illustrated exhibits positive and significant effect on GHG emissions, with quantile regression coefficients of 0.003, 0.004, and 0.005 across the econometrics conditional distributions. The GAM estimate (0.0025) aligns with these findings, confirming that the rise in vehicle numbers contributes to higher emissions. The Arellano-Bond GMM estimation outcomes (0.0035, $p < 0.05$) further validates the strong statistical correlations. The confidence interval (0.002 to 0.005) ensures that this impact remains consistent within the systems. All these with limited but profound information are as only elaborated as here required.

4.4 Systems econometric visualization results

The econometric results visualizations provide critical interpretations into the correlations between GHG emissions and key explanatory variables (Nominal GDP, Urbanization, Passenger Vehicles, and Fuel Consumption) across different econometric models. The graphical representations illustrate coefficient estimates, statistical significance, confidence intervals, and model fit, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of the robustness and reliability of the system econometric results. **Figure 1** presents the coefficient estimates of the key variables across the Panel Quantile Regression (QR-0.1, QR-0.5, QR-0.9), Generalized Additive Model (GAM), and Arellano-Bond GMM methodologies. Nominal GDP exhibits consistently negative coefficient estimates across all models, ranging from -0.450 (QR-0.1) to -0.550 (QR-0.9), confirming a significant inverse relationship between GDP growth and CO_2-*eq* emissions.

Figure 1: Coefficient estimates from system econometric models.

This indicates that as economic growth increases, improved energy efficiency and structural transformations in the province of Gauteng's economy contribute to emission reductions. Urbanization presents mixed effects. The QR estimates show negative coefficients at lower quantiles (-0.150 at QR-0.1 and -0.100 at QR-0.5), indicating urban expansion initially reduces emissions due to improved public transport and infrastructure. However, GAM indicates a positive association (0.120), implying that beyond a certain threshold, urbanization intensifies emissions due to increasing vehicular demand and energy use. Passenger Vehicles positively correlate with emissions across all models, with coefficients varying from 0.0025 (GAM) to 0.005 (QR-0.9), which further confirms fuel consumption as dominant driver to carbon emissions in the transportation industry.

Figure 2 illustrates the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) of the coefficient estimates, reinstating the precision and reliability of the econometric regression results.

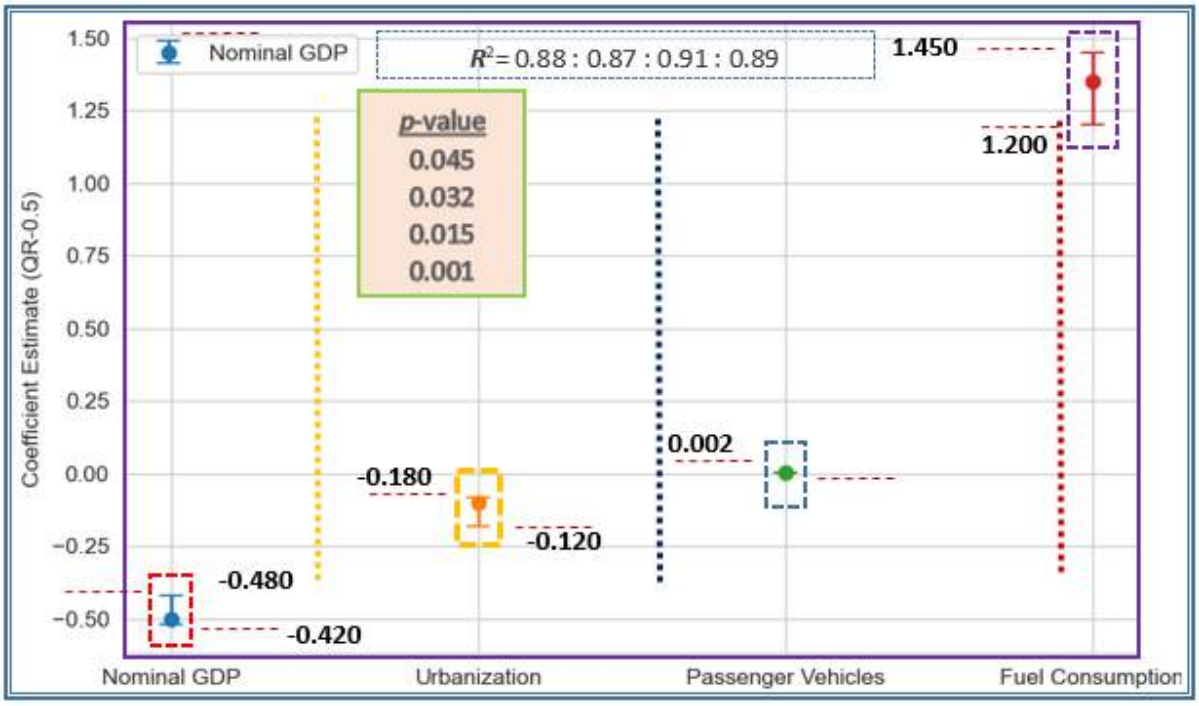

Figure 2: Confidence interval of parameter co-efficients estimations.

The coefficient for nominal GDP exhibits a narrow CI (-0.480 to -0.420) also indicating their *p*-value (0.045), reflecting high estimation precision and reinforcing confidence in its reflection of the negative correlation with GHG emissions. In contrast, urbanization presents wider CI (-0.180 to -0.120) with ***p***-value (0.032), this indicates greater uncertainty of a probable subjection, likely stemming from the complex and evolving interactions between urban expansion and transportation systems in the transportation industry of the province of Gauteng, South Africa. Passenger vehicles demonstrate highly precise estimates, with the lower bound of 0.002, confirming a small but statistically significant contribution to carbon emissions growth. Fuel consumption as illustrted in **Figure 2**, with a CI range of (1.200 to 1.450) also indicating their ***p***-value (0.001), further substantiates its dominant impacts on carbon emissions, exhibiting minimal estimation uncertainty. Collectively, these confidence intervals affirm the robustness of the system econometrics estimations, essentially for the nominal GDP and fuel consumption, while reinstating potential variability in the impact of urbanization on carbon emissions in the transportation industry. The robustness checks for the system econometric model confirm the reliability of the results. The multicollinearity assessment using the Variance Inflation Factor (**VIF**) indicates no severe collinearity concerns, as all independent variables exhibit VIF values below 5. Heteroskedasticity diagnostics, based on the Breusch-Pagan and White tests, yield ***p***-values of 0.038 and 0.042, respectively, indicating mild heteroskedasticity, which is effectively addressed using robust standard errors. The Durbin-Watson test statistic of 1.89 confirms the absence of strong serial correlation in the residuals. Furthermore, the Hausman test, with a ***p***-value of 0.029, establishes the fixed-effects model as the preferred specification over the random-effects model, ensuring robustness in addressing potential endogeneity concerns.

4.6 Optimization with modeled solver forecast outcomes

The optimization solver-driven forecast of GHG emissions and fossil fuel consumption in Gauteng's transportation industry from 2024 to 2040, as presented in **Table 5**, reveals the interdependent linkages among the parametric variables. These linkages indicate the energy requirements necessary for ensuring the efficient operation of the transportation industry

through 2050, while also demonstrating the potential for transitioning to cleaner energy sources.The model establishes strong positive correlation between fuel consumption and CO_2 *eq* emissions reflecting combustion dependent pattern of transportation fuels as depicted in **Figure 3** illustrating their interrelationship. In the absence of significant technological advan cements or regulatory interventions, increased fuel consumption proportionally drives higher transportation carbon emissions.

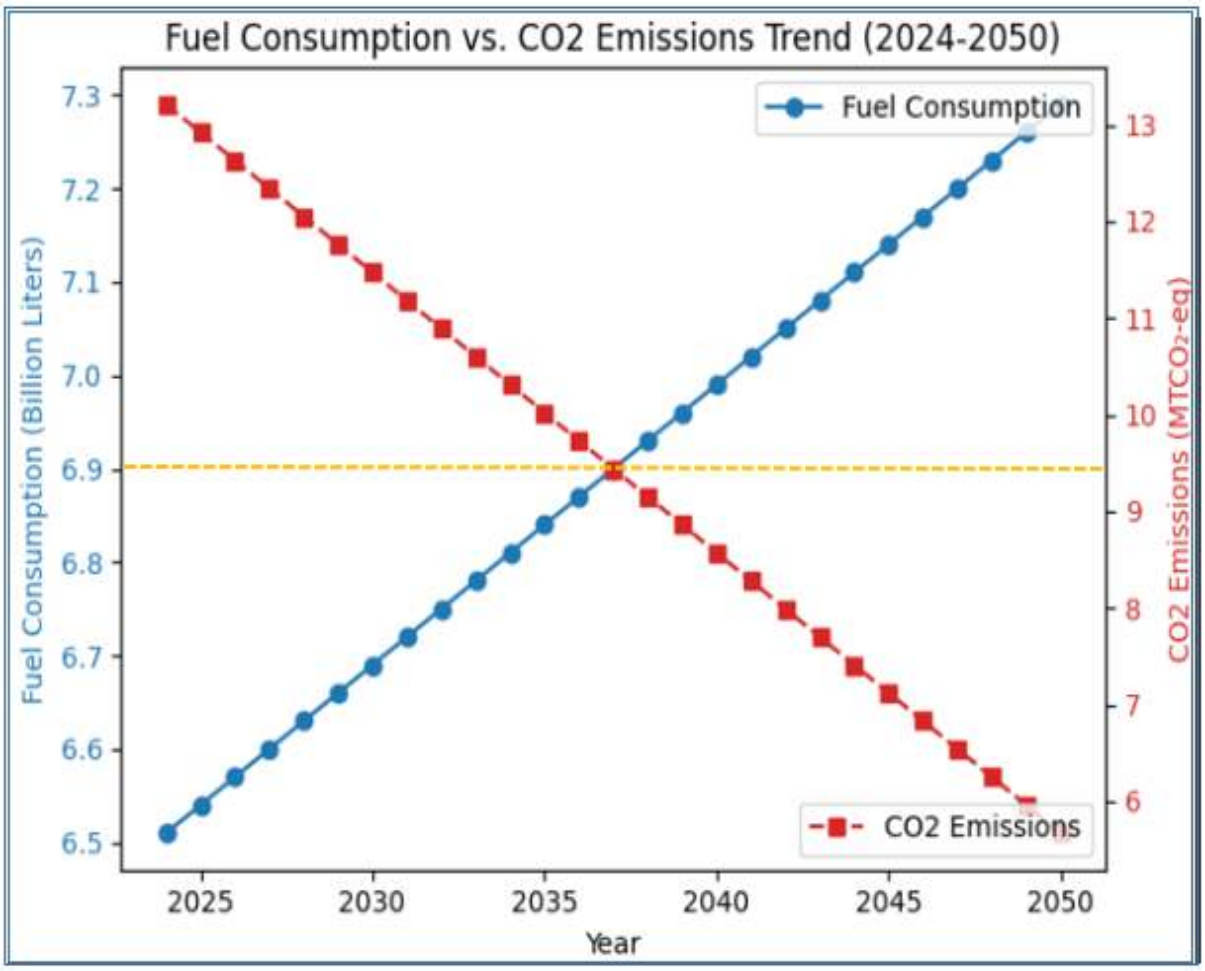

Figure 3: Forecasted fossil energy and emissions trend in Gauteng, South Africa transport.

However, the projected trajectory as impacted by advancements in fuel efficiency, the adoption of alternative fuels, and the implementation of transport electrification policies, collectively determine the extent to which emissions can be decoupled from fossil fuel consumption. Between 2024 and 2035, fuel consumption with shocks adjusments is projected to increase at moderate pace, driven by population growth, rising passenger vehicle ownership, and expanding transport activity. While carbon emission-reduction strategy are designed to be implemented during this period as indicated in **Table 6**, the overall growth in demand can offsets the initial decarbonisation efforts. However, beyond 20 35, distinct divergence emerges, with GHG emissions declining at steeper rate than fuel cons umption. This trend can reflect the increasing adoption of energy efficient transport technol ogies, the enforcement of stringent fuel economy regulations, and sustained investments in green transport mobility solutions. The optimzed parametric variable of urbanization, with

the descriptive mean statistics range between 0.72% and 0.991%, serves as dual-factor driver of transportation emissions.

Table 6: Optimized forecast for energy use and carbon emission mitigation 2024 to 2040.

Year	Nominal GDP (Billion ZAR)	Urbanization (%)	Passenger vehicles (million unit fleet)	Energy use (Required) (Mega Joule)	GHG emissions ($MTCO_2$-*eq*)
2024	2.350 ↑	0.930 ↑	4.997 ↓	236,964E6 ↑	13.21 ↓
2025	2.368 ↑	0.931 ↑	4.995 ↓	238,056E6 ↑	12.92 ↓
2026	2.386 ↑	0.932 ↑	4.993 ↓	239,148E6 ↑	12.63 ↓
2027	2.404 ↑	0.934 ↑	4.990 ↓	240,240E6 ↑	12.34 ↓
2028	2.422 ↑	0.935 ↑	4.987 ↓	241,332E6 ↑	12.05↓
2029	2.440 ↑	0.936 ↑	4.984 ↓	242,242E6 ↑	11.76 ↓
2030	2.458 ↑	0.937 ↑	4.981 ↓	243,516E6 ↑	11.47 ↓
2031	2.476 ↑	0.938 ↑	4.978 ↓	244,608E6 ↑	11.18 ↓
2032	2.494 ↑	0.939 ↑	4.975 ↓	245,700E6 ↑	10.89 ↓
2033	2.512 ↑	0.940 ↑	4.972 ↓	246,792E6 ↑	10.60 ↓
2034	2.530 ↑	0.941 ↑	4.969 ↓	247,884E6 ↑	10.31 ↓
2035	2.548 ↑	0.942 ↑	4.966 ↓	248,976E6 ↑	10.02 ↓
2036	2.566 ↑	0.943 ↑	4.963 ↓	250,068E6 ↑	9.73 ↓
2037	2.584 ↑	0.944 ↑	4.960 ↓	251,160E6 ↑	9.44 ↓
2038	2.602 ↑	0.945 ↑	4.957 ↓	252,252E6 ↑	9.15 ↓
2039	2.620 ↑	0.946 ↑	4.954 ↓	253,344E6 ↑	8.86 ↓
2040	2.638 ↑	0.947 ↑	4.951 ↓	254,436E6 ↑	8.57 ↓

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

The research presents system-based assessments on the interplay between urbanization, passenger vehicle growth, fuel consumption, economic expansion, and CO_2-*eq* emissions in the province of Gauteng, South Africa's transportation industry. By leveraging system econometrics, machine learning-based forecasting, and optimization modeling, the research offers data-driven deployments to carbon emissions mitigation pathways and sustainable mobility solutions. The findings confirm that while economic growth and urbanization facilitate smooth mobility and economic development, they can also contribute to increased transportation related GHG emissions. However, strategic interventions can effectively decouple GHG emissions growth from economic expansion, reinforcing the feasibility of sustainable transport policies. The result outcomes indicate strong positive correlation among fuel consumption and CO_2-*eq* emissions, confirming that combustion-intensive energy sources remain the dominant driver of transportation emissions. However, long-term projections from 2024 and beyond 2040 indicate that GHG emissions can be reduced by 22.6% as here illustrated if sophisticated mitigation strategies are implemented. These include the adoption of hybrid and electric vehicles (HEVs), improvements in fuel efficiency, expansion of mass transit systems, and stringent carbon emissions regulations. The investigation further reinstates the dual impact of urbanization, where unregulated expansion exacerbates carbon emissions, while well-planned urban density can enhance fuel efficiency and reduce transportation's environmental footprint.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the deduced findings, the research presents salient policy and strategic recommendations to facilitate a sustainable transition in the Gauteng, South Africa's transportation industry. Among others, the following recommendations from industrial and engineering management perspectives are designed for broader applicability to other rapidly urbanizing regions confronting peculiar GHG emissions concerns:

1. Transport Electrification for Sustainable Mobility: Electrical energy is essential for reducing carbon emissions and fossil fuel reliance in urban transportation. Policymakers can expand EV infrastructure, advance battery technology, and implement financial incentives to accelerate adoption. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) initiatives can be in line to develop fast-charging networks, enhance grid integration, and ensure renewable energy compatibility. Targeted policies, which include tax credits and subsidies, are essential for market expansion, technological innovation, and long-term sustainability.
2. Mass Transit Systems with Smart Mobility: Enhancing urban transport sustainability requires reducing car dependency by investments in high capacity public transit, thes e include Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), rail networks, and multimodal integration. Smart mobility solutions such as real-time transit analytics, adaptive traffic control, and dynamic ride-sharing can optimize efficiency and reduce congestion. Automated fare collection, demand-responsive transit, and intelligent transportation systems (ITS) further improve operational performance, facilitating the transition to low-emission, high-efficiency urban mobility systems aligned with global sustainability targets.
3. Data-Driven Policy Formulation and Technology-Based Emissions Monitoring: Real-time GHG tracking, technology-driven emission simulations, and geospatial transport data analytics can be integrated into policy frameworks to ensure evidence-based decision-making. Governments can establish open data platforms to facilitate cross-sector information sharing and optimize mobility planning.
4. Fostering Cross-Sector Collaboration and Policy Integration: Achieving long-term emission reductions requires synergized policies across energy, transport, and urban planning sectors. Policymakers can engage with industry stakeholders, academic researchers, and environmental organizations to design adaptive policies that respond to evolving transportation demands and global climate commitments.
5. Developing Green Logistics and Freight Optimization Policies: The freight and logistics industry can transition toward alternative fuel adoption, last-mile delivery efficiency, and intermodal transport systems. Policies should support eco-friendly freight corridors, improved rail freight integration, and low-emission transport hubs.

By aligning with international best practices and South Africa’s Paris Agreement commitments toward that of 2030, and the Net-Zero 2050 carbon neutrality for sustainability, these recommendations provide a scalable framework for GHG emissions mitigation in transportation sectors and industries globally. As urbanization intensifies in emerging economies, this study offers a policy blueprint for achieving low-carbon mobility, sustainable economic growth, and climate resilience. Future research can focus on real-time emissions monitoring, cross-border mobility policies, and adaptive transport resilience to enhance global climate action and long-term sustainability.

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A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING A DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR AGRO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION

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ABSTRACT

Agroecology presents a promising approach to agriculture, with the potential to restore soil health and sequester carbon, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation. However, farmers face considerable uncertainty when transitioning from conventional practices and selecting appropriate agro-ecological methods. This study develops a conceptual framework that synthesises the critical factors and their interdependencies required for a decision support system (DSS) to facilitate this transition. The framework consists of a data flow diagram and an adjacency matrix to guide the design of practical, farmer-centric DSS tools. A systematic literature review identifies relevant factors and considerations for DSS development, with the data analysed through an iterative thematic coding process. The resulting codes and their relationships inform the construction of the conceptual framework. Future research should focus on validating this framework in real-world settings to support the development of effective DSS solutions for agro-ecological transition.

Keywords: Agroecology, Decision Support Systems, Transition

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1 INTRODUCTION

Climate change is projected to bring a tide of challenges in global agriculture: lower crop yields, higher food prices and declining household incomes. [1], accompanied by more frequent and intense extreme weather events [2]. Rising temperatures are expected to severely impact the cultivation of key food crops that supply much of the world's dietary energy [3]. Even a slight increase of 1°C could result in yield declines of about 6% for wheat, 7.4% for maize, 3% for rice, and 3.1% for soybeans, posing a serious threat to global food security [3]. A drop in food production is likely to drive prices even higher, worsening existing food security challenges [4]. In urban areas, high food costs remain one of the leading causes of food insecurity, as many households cannot afford enough nutritious food [5]. Concurrently, intensive farming practices are resulting in the unsustainable degradation of soils, decreasing its long-term food production capabilities [6]. Soil health is deteriorating due to multiple processes, including loss of organic content, increased greenhouse gas emissions, excessive fertiliser use, soil erosion, pollution, rising acidity, salinisation, and a reduction in genetic variation within soil ecosystems [6] It is, therefore, clear that a change in the agricultural industry is essential to secure food production, but the direction of this change remains uncertain.

Agroecology offers a holistic remedy that enhances the resilience of farming systems, safeguards the environment and sustains food production[7], yet farmers attempting this transition confront a flood of information and a steep knowledge barrier, leading to difficulties in determining which agro-ecological practices best fit their unique priorities and contexts. The inherent complexity of biological interactions and environmental variability magnifies this challenge.

Decision Support Systems (DSS) can help stem that tide by distilling complex data into guidance that is tailored for practical use. Tools like Decision Support System for Agrotechnology Transfer (crop simulation), Hydrologic (water management tool), Agricultural Production Systems Simulator (nutrient management) and InfoCrop (pest management) [8] illustrate DSS potential. Adoption has, however, been limited, which has been attributed to the lack of farmer involvement in DSS development [8]. The existing models lack comprehensive integration [8], as is demanded by agroecology, which highlights the research need. However, before an agroecology transition, DSS can be developed; the elements of such a model need to be determined.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a conceptual framework that synthesises the factors and interdependencies required for a DSS that can navigate agro-ecological transition. Such a framework will consist of a data flow diagram and an adjacency framework to guide the design of practical, farmer-focused DSS tools.

1.1 Terminology

This section defines two key terms: agroecology and decision support systems, as they are used in this paper, and provides the rationale for these definitions.

1.1.1 Agroecology

The definition of agroecology has changed significantly over time. Initially, in the 1980s, it was primarily defined as "the application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agroecosystems, or the science of sustainable agriculture", focusing on the farm level [9], [10]. Since then, its scope has expanded to include the broader food system, framing agroecology as a "way of building relationship- based market systems that are equitable, just and accessible for all" [10], and as a means of "confronting the economic and political power structures of the current industrial food system" [10], [11].

These shifts reflect agroecology's three core dimensions as described by [10], [11]:

1. Scientific: applying ecological principles in sustainable agroecosystem design
2. Practical: incorporating local, empirical, and indigenous farming knowledge
3. Social change: challenging, advocating for alternative social structures and influencing policy change.

Each dimension has received varying levels of emphasis across agroecology's history, as shown in [11]. Table 1 was synthesised by combining the periods and historical focuses, as presented in [11], with the corresponding aspect of agroecology from [10], to illustrate how the focus has shifted over time.

Table 1: Aspects of agroecology that were focused on during different historical periods in the term's existence [10], [11]

Period	Historical focus	Corresponding aspects
1980's	Farm-level sustainability	Scientific & practical
1900's	Relationship-based market systems	Social change
2010's	Economic and political power structures	Social change

While the importance of integrating all three dimensions is widely acknowledged [10], [12], this study retains the original farm-level emphasis. It therefore centres on the scientific and practical aspects of agroecology. Broader sociopolitical factors, such as policy, governance and structural power dynamics, are only considered to the extent that they directly affect the farmer's decision-making. These external factors, which often fall beyond a farmer's control, lie beyond the scope of this research.

Agro-ecological transition, as used in [13], refers to the process of moving from conventional industrial agriculture towards more sustainable, biodiversity-based farming systems. This definition will be applied to this study.

1.1.2 DSS

A DSS (Decision Support System) is a computerised system for assisting decision-making processes, which integrates databases, modelling tools and multicriteria analysis methodologies to analyse and rank a set of alternatives, thereby enabling decision-makers to consider complex and interacting factors [14]. According to [14], DSS applications in agriculture have been increasing in the last decades, and the advantages of using a DSS are improved understanding of the process, identifying unexpected situations, improving communication, decisions and use of data and resources, as well as cost savings.

1.2 Paper structure

This paper is organised as follows: Section 2 outlines the research methodology. In particular, Section 2.1 describes the data gathering process, Section 2.2 details the data analysis procedures, and Section 2.3 explains how the validation for this study was performed. Section 3 presents the findings of the research, followed by the synthesised conceptual framework presented in Section 4. The paper concludes with Section 5, which summarises the key conclusions and Section 6, which offers recommendations for further research.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data gathering

For data gathering, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was applied since it uses

> *"…explicit, systematic methods to collate and synthesise findings of studies that address a clearly formulated question " [15].*

This method has been chosen for its comprehensiveness, to ensure all possible rigour and completeness in the resulting data. The aim of this SLR is to synthesise a conceptual framework integrating factors and interdependencies. The conceptual framework could be used in the

future to develop DSS models for agro-ecological transition, addressing the complexity of the problem and a gap in the literature.

The literature search was conducted between January and May 2025, and the following steps were used in this study [16].

1. Protocol: Define research question, scope, protocol and criteria for inclusion and exclusion (Section 2.1.1).
2. Search: Develop search string, select databases, conduct systematic searches (Section 2.1.2).
3. Appraisal: Select studies using inclusion/exclusion criteria and assess quality (Section 2.1.3).
4. Synthesis: extract and classify relevant data (Section 3).
5. Analysis: Evaluate synthesised data to extract a meaningful answer to the research question (Section 2.2) and Validation (Section 2.3).
6. Reporting: Reporting the study's findings in a transparent and detailed manner, and discussing the implications, limitations and suggestions for future research (Sections 4 and 5).

2.1.1 Protocol

The research protocol that was followed during this study is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Research protocol followed in the SLR.

Purpose of the study	To identify the factors and their interdependencies involved in developing DSS models for agro-ecological transition, addressing a gap in the literature by integrating these elements into a conceptual framework, whether standalone or embedded in existing models or frameworks.
Keywords/search string	(DSS OR "decision support system*") AND (Agroecolog*) AND (transition* OR transformation*) AND (model* OR framework* OR factor*)
Search databases	ScienceDirect, Scopus, Springer, IEEE Xplore and Web of Science
Inclusion criteria	• Peer-reviewed, English-language studies on DSS in agriculture • Focus on agroecology practices involving the transition/transformation process • Present or discuss models/frameworks or defined factors for decision support • Full text available with transparent, reproducible methodology. • Articles published after 2005
Exclusion criteria	• Duplicates • Narrow Focus • Land-related topics • Climate change and sustainability (Broad) • Publication Type Issues • Tangential or brief keyword references • Full text unavailable
Quality assessment criteria	Studies should be published in English, and repeatable and reputable scientific research methods should have been followed, with adequate methodological transparency.

The inclusion criteria align closely with the objective of the study, and the reasoning behind the exclusion criteria is given below.

- Narrow focus: studies focused on isolated practices or technologies without a holistic or systems perspective, as required for agroecology.
- Land-related topics: studies related to land topics that are tangentially relevant but not of direct interest to the SLR's core focus.
- Climate change and sustainability: Broad sustainability or climate topics lacking a direct connection to agroecology.

- Publication type issues: non-peer-reviewed or insufficiently analytical formats (e.g. opinion pieces, data-only papers).
- Tangential or brief keyword references: studies that mention relevant terms superficially without addressing core research questions.

2.1.2 Search

To ensure that the SLR is conducted comprehensively and rigorously, multiple databases were selected based on their relevance, coverage and disciplinary scope. IEEE Xplore's comprehensive database of peer-reviewed literature in electrical engineering and computer science [17] makes it a promising resource for information on decision support systems and technological applications relevant to agroecology transitions. Scopus and Web of Science are widely acknowledged as authoritative multidisciplinary databases with high-quality resources, enabling broad coverage [18], while ScienceDirect and Springer provide extensive access to peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters in environmental science, agriculture, and systems design [19], [20]- central to agroecology and DSS domains.

The search string was carefully designed to capture core concepts relevant to the design of DSS for the transition to agroecology, and consists of 4 key components, which are combined by Boolean operators, for clarity, and asterisk truncation, to allow variations:

- (DSS OR "decision support system*")- to capture all relevant literature referring to decision support systems.
- (Agroecolog*)- The term "agroecology" has been chosen for the search string, as it encompasses a wide range of other terminology that prioritise management of biodiversity [21].
- (transition* OR transformation*)- to capture shifts, changes or transformations in agricultural systems, addressing the dynamic process of change towards agro-ecological practices.
- (model* OR framework* OR factor*)- to focus on studies that identify standalone factors, as well as factors embedded in frameworks or models.

As the search was conducted, filters were applied to exclude all articles published before 2005, given the technological developments over the last 20 years, as well as a filter to limit the results to articles in English.

2.1.3 Appraising the literature

The literature was screened using the inclusion and exclusion criteria as discussed in Section 2.1.2. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA literature selection and reduction process, providing a detailed view of the number of articles that were excluded during the screening process, as per the reasons defined in section 2.1.1.

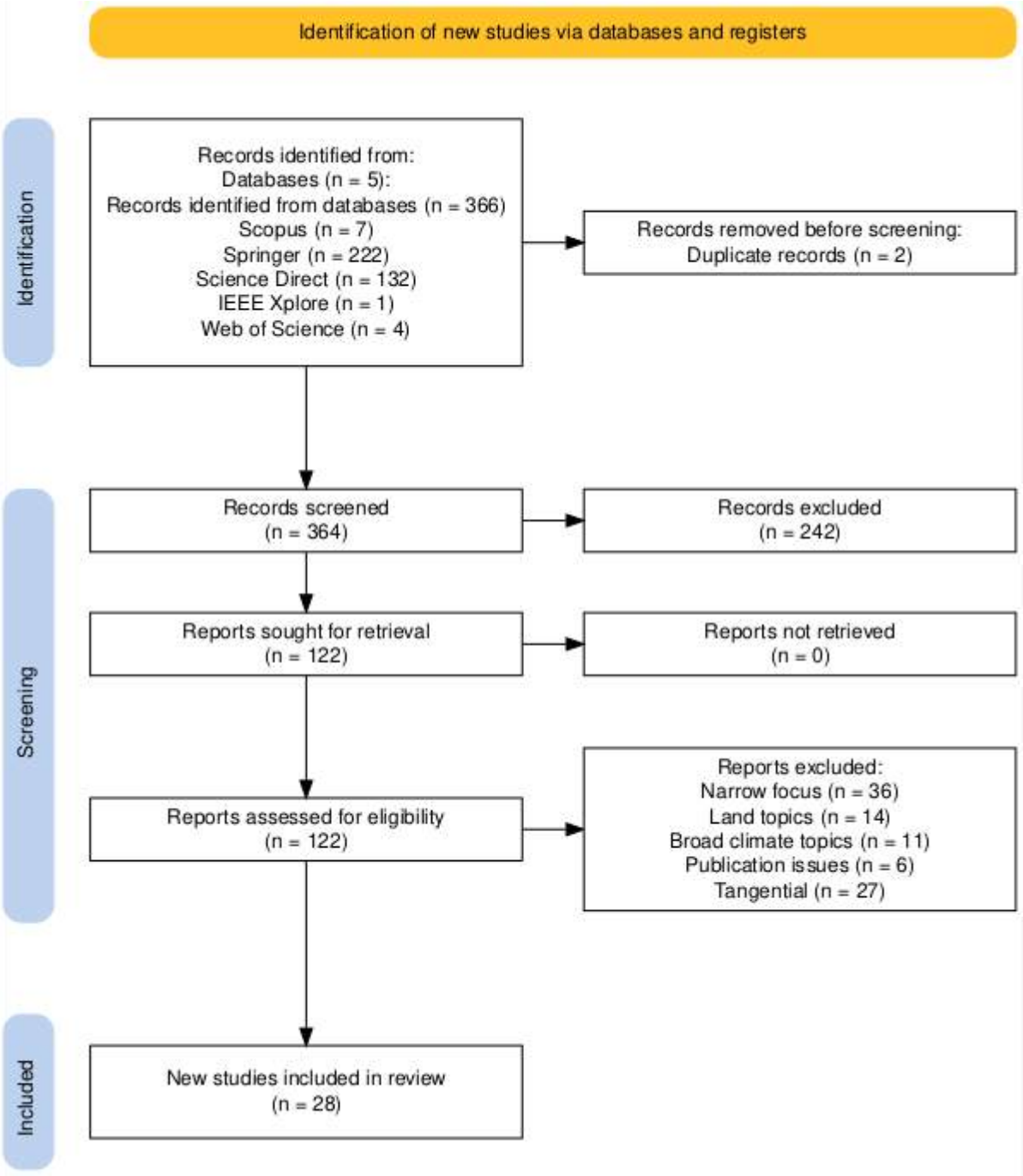

Figure 1: PRISMA literature selection and reduction process followed.

2.2 Data Analysis

The factors involved in designing a DSS to facilitate the transition to different agro-ecological systems were identified through an iterative process of qualitative coding and thematic refinement using Atlas.TI software (version 23), thereby following the qualitative synthesis methodology as established by [22], to protect the nuance and contextual understanding of the data, relevant quotations were revisited within their original source document, and the entire section was reviewed to minimise the risk of loss or data misinterpretation. A thematic iterative coding analysis methodology was chosen to systematically identify, code and

interpret patterns and relationships relevant to the adoption of agro-ecological practices at the farm level, as explained in

> *"Coding is an iterative, systematic, and meticulous process. Researchers often rely on both manual methods and qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo, ATLAS.ti, or MAXQDA. Each data extract is reviewed systematically, with relevant segments assigned concise codes" [23].*

The software enabled efficient management of the diverse data collected, particularly in terms of segmenting, coding and organising text across multiple sources. The process began by importing all references identified in Section 2.1.3. A bottom-up, inductive coding approach was initially applied, whereby relevant quotations were manually highlighted and assigned descriptive codes, which were either newly assigned or added to an existing code, allowing for the development of a comprehensive and growing codebook. To ensure rigour, coding decisions were documented throughout the process and incorporated into the code definitions, as each code represents an identified factor. The codes have been organised into code groups during the analysis phase, which is described in Section 2.3.

Relationships among factors were identified within quotations containing multiple factors (codes) and subsequently into three relationship types (detailed in Table 4). Each relationship type was assigned a specific code. A code co-occurrence table generated in ATLAS.ti was then validated by cross-referencing it with the relationship codes associated with each quotation, during which adjustments were made as necessary to ensure that the co-occurrence table accurately portrays relationships instead of simple code overlap.

2.3 Validation

The PRISMA framework validates the SLR conducted in this study, as it adheres to the following requirements:

1. Complete, transparent reporting that is in adherence to the PRISMA checklist [15].
2. This study has included a PRISMA flow diagram (Refer to Figure 1).
3. Measures have been taken to prevent bias and ensure that a pre-planned methodology was followed (Section **Error! Reference source not found.**).
4. The rationale and methodology in conducting the review, as well as the synthesised results (Sections 2 and 4, respectively), have been reported.

3 FINDINGS

The factors that were identified from the literature are presented in this section, and have been organised into four code groups, each reflecting their role within a future DSS:

- **Design requirements (Purple):** Functional and operational specifications that define how a DSS processes inputs to generate outputs.
- **Inputs (Orange):** Information required from the user to tailor the model's response.
- **Dual role factors (Yellow):** Factors that serve as both inputs and outputs, where the current state serves as an input, and the system returns improvement recommendations as output.
- **Outputs (Blue):** The resulting outputs or outcomes generated by the model.

Table 3 presents the factors involved in designing a DSS to facilitate the transition to a different agro-ecological system, their definitions, as used and developed during the iterative coding process, the desired DSS response, and the sources from where these factors have been found.

Table 3: Factors identified from the literature

Identified factor	Definition	How a DSS Should Respond	Sources
Adaptability	Adaptability & vulnerability of farming systems towards: •Environmental changes •Extreme weather •Flexible cropping •Early warning systems (improved response time) •Resilience •Wetland management	Support iterative reconfiguration and scenario adjustment in response to environmental or systemic change.	[8], [24], [25], [26]
Biodiversity	Diverse species & ecological interaction, to achieve polyculture and integration through multi-species management.	Identify opportunities and strategies to enhance on-farm biodiversity.	[24], [26], [27], [28]
Forecasting	Predictions & estimates for weather, climate & disaster (primary use), agronomy, pest & disease, weed population, socioeconomic & ecological scenarios.	Integrate external forecasts (e.g., weather, pest pressure) and simulate decision outcomes accordingly.	[24], [26], [29], [30], [31]
Information flow	Sharing agricultural data to improve response times, communication & record-keeping.	Allow data sharing and updates from multiple sources to ensure responsiveness and traceability.	[7], [8], [24], [25], [27], [28]
Outcome Measurement	Methods to quantify agricultural outcomes, as well as challenges experienced with measurements, which prominently feature challenges with measuring environmental impact.	Accept observed outcomes to support ongoing calibration and iterative improvement.	[7], [24], [25], [28], [29], [32], [33], [34], [35], [36], [37]
Participatory research	To co-design solutions with farmers, integrate local knowledge, farmer awareness, preferences, and tradition, and use on-farm experimentation.	Incorporate farmer input and validation loops to ensure contextual accuracy and trust.	[21], [24], [26], [27], [29], [33], [34], [38]
Priority	Priorities from literature and the incorporation of stakeholder opinions for agricultural decision-making and strategy.	Accept farmer-stated priorities and internally rank practices based on contextual fit and scientific evidence.	[24], [26]
Resource conservation	Practices to sustain resources.	Recommend context-specific opportunities to conserve natural resources.	[21], [24], [26], [31]
Species Interactions and Dependencies	Interactions and dependencies between species and systems.	Account for ecological synergies and interdependencies in the recommendation engine.	[24], [26], [28]
Disease resistance	Genetic traits enhancing resistance to diseases.	Capture species-level resistance traits to improve recommendation accuracy.	[7], [24]
Farmer capacity	Factors that are of importance to the individual farmer, like their ability to perform tasks, access capital, achieve self-sufficiency & make independent decisions	Tailor recommendations to the farmer's labour, financial, and operational capacity.	[8], [24], [26], [28], [39]
GIS	Geographic Information Systems for spatial analysis in agriculture.	Geolocate inputs and link them to relevant spatial datasets and constraints.	[8], [24], [28], [29], [30], [31], [37]
Social & Governance Structures	Relevant structures, at centralised (government) level, decentralised (community) level, and other sustainability-incentivising structures.	Incorporate regulatory and policy constraints that directly affect decisions.	[7], [24], [25], [26], [27], [28], [37], [40]

Identified factor	Definition	How a DSS Should Respond	Sources
Tools & Technology	Tools, including equipment, technology & infrastructure used to support agricultural activities- this includes information and decision-making tools.	Assess existing tools and technologies in use and adapt outputs accordingly.	[7], [24], [25], [26], [30], [31], [35], [38], [40], [41]
Topography	Physical features and land characteristics of a site, e.g. slope, altitude, field lengths, drainage, boundary management, terracing, alley cropping, contour bunds, raised beds, tied ridges, hillside farming, etc.	Incorporate topographical constraints into practical recommendations.	[7], [8], [24]
Trade opportunities	Prospects and market opportunities for trading & selling agricultural products.	Assess market access and opportunity levels to guide viable crop or product selection.	[24], [28], [39]
Animal Healthcare	Practices to maintain & improve animal health.	Identify improvement opportunities based on current practices.	[24]
Animal integration	Strategies for integrating & managing livestock.	Assess integration levels and suggest context-appropriate improvements.	[7], [24], [28], [31], [39]
Animal selection	Selection of animals based on morphology, body condition, and suitability.	Evaluate selection criteria and propose refinements.	[24]
Breeding	Processes to improve livestock or crop genetics, including advanced techniques and outcomes like high survival rates.	Analyse breeding strategies and suggest improvements or alternatives.	[7], [24], [25]
Chemical usage	Pesticides, insecticides, inorganic fertiliser, etc.	Evaluate chemical dependency and suggest safer or more sustainable alternatives.	[7], [24], [28], [30], [40]
Cover plants & Legumes	Used to improve soil health and nitrogen fixation.	Evaluate incorporation levels and recommend soil-enhancing strategies.	[24]
Crop diversification	Strategies like intercropping to enhance resilience and productivity.	Assess current species mix and suggest diversification strategies.	[7], [24]
Crop health	Monitoring and managing crop vitality.	Recommend targeted practices to improve or maintain crop vitality.	[7], [24]
Crop timing	Crop cycles, including life cycles, growing seasons, rotation, succession, flowering periods, pruning, etc.	Align crop cycles with climate, variety, and market demands for optimal outcomes.	[24], [28], [29]
Disease management	Strategies to prevent and control diseases in general.	Suggest context-specific disease prevention and control strategies.	[7], [24]
Diversify income	Its aim is to buffer agricultural systems.	Assess income streams and propose feasible on-farm diversification options.	[24]
Hygiene	Hygienic practices to maintain animal health, including proper disposal of dead animals.	Evaluate hygiene practices and recommend improvements.	[24]
INM	Integrated Nutrient Management to optimise nutrient use and soil fertility.	Evaluate nutrient strategies and suggest integrated, precision-based improvements.	[8], [24]
IPM	Integrated Pest Management for sustainable pest control.	Recommend pest control approaches that balance efficacy with sustainability.	[24]

Identified factor	Definition	How a DSS Should Respond	Sources
Long-term planning	The timeframe of long-term strategies, for example, land ownership/tenure duration is highly relevant for considering perennials.	Align recommendations with the stated planning horizon and land tenure strategy.	[24]
Nutrient management	Practices to enhance soil fertility and nutrient uptake, including nitrogen fixation, organic fertilisers, precision application, and addressing uptake complexities.	Assess nutrient strategies and propose scientifically validated improvements.	[7], [24], [29], [32], [39]
Organic fertiliser	Use of natural fertilisers like earthworm castings and organic manure.	Evaluate usage and suggest natural alternatives where applicable.	[24], [28], [39]
Organic pest management	Natural pest control methods like beneficial insects, biopesticides, organic chemicals, sterile insect techniques, trapping/confusing pests, transgenic insects and vector control techniques.	Suggest sustainable biological pest control methods.	[7], [24]
Pest management	Strategies to control pests and weeds.	Recommend integrated, context-sensitive pest and weed control strategies.	[7], [24], [28], [30]
Planting patterns	Arrangements to optimise crop growth and resource use.	Optimise planting configurations based on spatial and ecological inputs.	[24]
Raised Beds, Mulch & Shelters	Mulch protects soil and enhances agricultural outcomes, structures and raised beds protect crops from soil contact & waterlogging.	Recommend protective practices based on local soil and climatic conditions.	[24]
Risk & Insurance	Uncertainties faced & mitigations taken, which includes insurance.	Evaluate risk exposure and suggest mitigation strategies, including insurance.	[7], [8], [24], [26], [28], [39]
Seed planning	Selection, treatment, distribution, and delivery of seeds.	Support seed selection, treatment, and distribution based on local suitability.	[7], [24], [25], [35]
Soil characteristics	Soil properties like pH, runoff, temperature, colloidal minerals, texture/structure & productivity.	Integrate soil data to tailor practice recommendations.	[7], [24], [28], [35]
Soil health	Overall soil condition & fertility, microorganisms that contribute to soil health, and carbon sequestration practices.	Assess soil condition and suggest biologically informed improvements.	[7], [24], [29], [35], [39]
Soil moisture management	Aims to optimise water infiltration and soil-crop water balance.	Evaluate water balance and recommend moisture optimisation practices.	[7], [8], [24], [39]
Stress	Environmental pressures on plants and animals.	Diagnose stressors and propose adaptive response strategies.	[7], [24]
Tillage	Soil preparation methods.	Assess tillage methods and recommend regenerative or conservation alternatives.	[24], [31], [35]
Tree integration	Incorporating trees into agriculture.	Evaluate agroforestry practices and recommend improvements.	[7], [24], [39]
Varietal selection	Choosing crop varieties to optimise performance.	Assess crop variety suitability and suggest better-aligned alternatives.	[7], [24], [25]
Water management	Water optimisation strategies for delivery systems & scheduling, storage mechanisms & groundwater access.	Propose optimal water delivery and scheduling strategies.	[7], [24], [26], [31], [35], [39]
Quality Standards	Standard of agricultural products.	Estimate the quality of outputs based on current and proposed practices.	[21], [24]

Identified factor	Definition	How a DSS Should Respond	Sources
Viability	Farming venture profitability & financial sustainability.	Simulate financial outcomes to assess profitability and sustainability of the venture.	[7], [8], [21], [24], [25], [28], [31], [32], [37], [39]
Yield	Quantity of agricultural output	Simulate yield outcomes to support comparison of alternative practices.	[7], [8], [24], [29], [35], [39], [42]

4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the factors, as well as the relationships between them, as obtained from the thematic iterative coding analysis performed on the data obtained through the SLR.

Together, the data flow diagram (Section 4.1) and the adjacency matrix (Section 4.2) form a conceptual framework, as they illustrate the relationships between the factors or concepts under investigation, in accordance with the requirements for a conceptual framework outlined in [43]. This framework can inform the development of a decision support system (DSS) to facilitate the transition to agroecology.

4.1 Data Flow Diagram

Data flow diagrams are used to simplify designing DSSs, as they provide a view that simultaneously presents a high-level, while mapping the detailed factors [44]. Each factor in Table 3 was assigned to one of the four categories required for a data flow diagram: Input, Output, Design Requirements and Dual Role (factors that function as both inputs and outputs). The data flow diagram was then constructed by grouping the factors according to these categories and depicting the movement and processing of data through the model with directional arrows. Figure 2 presents the data flow diagram for a DSS model facilitating the transition to agroecology.

This data flow diagram can be used in the design of a future DSS. There is a clear emphasis on the need for collaborative research and stakeholder participation, as reflected in design requirements (top centre of the figure) such as "Participatory research". Important model inputs (positioned on the left side of the figure) include "Priority," where users specify their goals or areas of concern; "Farmer capacity"; and "GIS" data, which requires the farm's geo-location. Additionally, "Topography" (capturing site-specific features such as erosion, historical chemical use, and other relevant conditions) and "Trade opportunities" are critical components. Together, these elements significantly enhance the ability to tailor model outputs to the unique context of each user.

In addition to providing recommendations on agricultural practices for factors in the "Dual role" category (bottom centre), the model's output (top right) should also forecast the quality standards of the agricultural products, the financial viability of the venture- both short- and long- term-and the expected yield, presented in a format that allows users to compare projected future states with the current baseline.

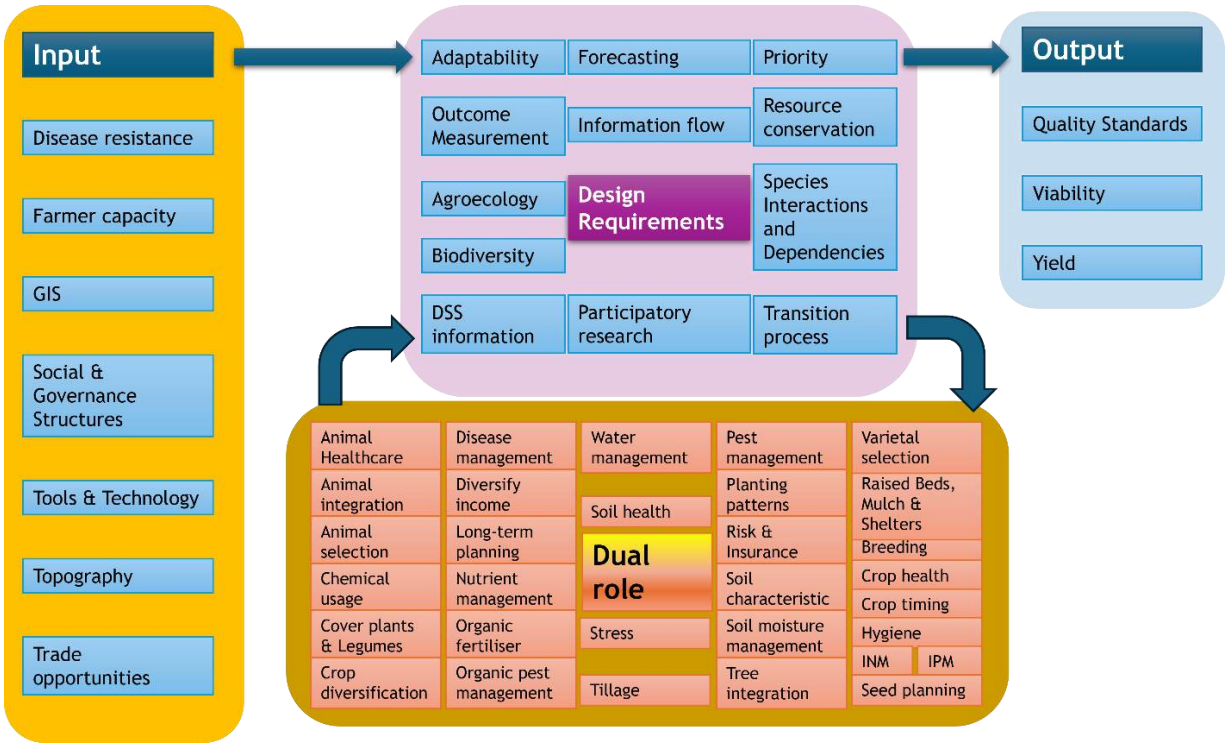

Figure 2: Data flow diagram for a future DSS model facilitating the transition to agroecology.

4.2 Adjacency matrix- Interdependencies and relationships between factors

Semantic relationships were observed from the identified factors and quotations, as found in the sources in the last column of Table 3. The key used in the adjacency matrix is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Definitions and symbols for factor relationships or interdependencies

Relationship type	Symbol used	Colour used	Definition
Influences	I	Green	Both factors exert an influence on each other in a bidirectional relationship.
Is associated with	A	Blue	Factors are generally associated with each other, no directionality specified.
Opposing effect	O	Light red	One factor has an opposing or negative effect on the other, directionality specified on the table.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 shows the resulting adjacency matrix, which displays the relationships between factors. Blank rows and columns have been removed from the table in the interest of simplification. The colour key, displayed to the right of the table, includes two sub-categories:

1. The "Data flow role" corresponds to the established code groups, applied to the first row and column, and retains the same colour scheme as in Table 3.
2. The "Relationship" sub-category indicates the colour and symbol assigned within the matrix, excluding the first row and column, to represent each relationship type. The relationship definitions are presented in Table 4.

The directionality is indicated in the table, which should be interpreted by first considering the row variable, followed by the column variable. For example, adaptability, located in the first row, has an opposing effect on risk, indicating that as adaptability increases, risk decreases.

Figure 3: Adjacency matrix part 1

Factor Relationships	Animal Healthcare	Animal integration	Animal selection	Breeding	Chemical usage	Crop diversification	Crop health	Crop timing	Disease management	Diversify income	INM	Nutrient management	Organic fertiliser	Organic pest management	Pest management	Planting patterns	Risk & Insurance	Seed planning	Soil characteristics	Soil health	Soil moisture management	Stress	Tillage	Tree integration	Varietal selection	Water management	Colour code
Adaptability			I			I							A	O				I			A					Data flow role
Biodiversity							A	A					A					I								Design requirement
Forecasting													A		A											Input
Information flow		A											I	I	I											Dual Role
Outcome Measurement																										Relationship Type
Participatory research							I						A		O					O						Influences (I)
Priority																A										Is associated with (A)
Resource conservation																										Opposing effect (O)
Species Interactions and Dependencies					I								I								A					
Disease resistance							A																A			
Farmer capacity						I									O											
GIS	I												A											I		
Social & Governance Structures				A																						
Tools & Technology	I	I	I		I	I		A		A	A		A	I				I					A	I		
Topography					I							I								I		I		I		Total number of links:
Trade opportunities																										
Viability											I									I		I	I			
Yield																I										
Animal Healthcare		A						A																		190
Animal integration															O		I									
Breeding		I	I																				A			
Chemical usage							A						A			A								A		
Cover plants & Legumes										I			A	I						O						
Crop diversification							I													I			A			
Crop health				A			I																			
Crop timing		A								I				I												
Disease management															O					O	A		A			
Diversify income															O											
Hygiene	A	A																								
INM										A						I				I						
IPM													A													
Long-term planning																					A					
Nutrient management		A		A					I																	
Organic fertiliser										A																
Organic pest management	A												A													
Pest management															O					O	A		A			
Planting patterns										I																
Raised Beds, Mulch & Shelters																	I	I	O							
Risk & Insurance														I												
Seed planning							A																			
Soil characteristics										I						I									I	
Soil health					I														I							
Soil moisture management																									A	
Stress			I																I							
Tillage				A											O	I	A	I	A	A						
Tree integration										I				I	O	I	I									
Varietal selection	I	A				I				I					O	I				O						
Water management			A							I								I		I		I				

The matrix is not symmetrical because some relationships are unidirectional, while others lack specified directionality due to the absence of that information in the literature that has been reviewed for this study. As seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4, there is a total of 190 relationships and interdependencies between the identified factors. There is a total of 105 "Influence" relationships, 69 "Association" relationships and 16 relationships that have opposing effects on each other. The adjacency matrix is a crucial component to incorporate into a future DSS, as the fundamental philosophy of agroecology depends on the relationships and interactions between different biological and non-biological parts of a farming ecosystem, encompassing both mutually beneficial exchanges and trade-offs within the ecosystem.

Figure 4: Adjacency matrix part 2

Factor Relationships	Biodiversity	Forecasting	Information flow	Outcome Measurement	Participatory research	Priority	Resource conservation	Disease resistance	GIS	Social & Governance	Structures	Tools & Technology	Topography	Trade opportunities	Quality Standards	Viability	Yield	Colour code
Adaptability									I									Data flow role
Biodiversity							I											Design requirement
Forecasting																		Input
Information flow									A									Dual Role
Outcome Measurement																		Relationship Type
Participatory research			A	I					I			I					I	Influences (I)
Priority																		Is associated with (A)
Resource conservation															I			Opposing effect (O)
Species Interactions and Dependencies	A																	
Disease resistance																		
Farmer capacity															I			
GIS		I																
Social & Governance Structures										I								
Tools & Technology			I	I			I		I		I						I	
Topography							I											Total number of links:
Trade opportunities															I			
Viability																		
Yield		A																
Animal Healthcare																		190
Animal integration	A																	
Breeding								I										
Chemical usage										A							A	
Cover plants & Legumes																		
Crop diversification																		
Crop health																		
Crop timing														I			I	
Disease management																		
Diversify income															A			
Hygiene																		
INM					A													
IPM															I		I	
Long-term planning						A												
Nutrient management														I	I		I	
Organic fertiliser																		
Organic pest management	A																	
Pest management																		
Planting patterns																		
Raised Beds, Mulch & Shelters														I				
Risk & Insurance															A			
Seed planning																		
Soil characteristics																		
Soil health				I													I	
Soil moisture management																		
Stress																		
Tillage										A	I							
Tree integration	A					I						I			A		I	
Varietal selection																	I	
Water management							A							I			I	

5 CONCLUSION

An SLR was performed to gather data on factors to consider during the transition to an agro-ecological approach to agriculture. Multiple factors have been identified from interdisciplinary sources. The following groups were used to classify these factors: Input (e.g., Farmer Capacity and Disease Resistance), Design Requirements (E.g., Adaptability and Biodiversity), Output (E.g., Quality Standards, Yield), and Dual Role (E.g., Animal Healthcare and Tillage). All factors have been brought together in the conceptual framework, which can be seen as a star

chart, guiding navigation through these waves of change amidst the storms of complexity and serving as a starting point for developing a future DSS.

6 FUTURE RESEARCH

The following limitations were identified during this study: Firstly, the conceptual framework is grounded on a synthesis of existing literature. The limited scope of only five databases may have excluded grey literature and studies indexed in other important regional or specialised databases. Future research should consider expanding the range of databases to improve the breadth of coverage.

Second, the interdisciplinary nature of agroecology and decision support system (DSS) design introduces a high degree of heterogeneity in study methods, contexts, and findings. This complexity is reflected in the large volume and diversity of the 190 identified relationships within the framework, which pose significant challenges for effective visualisation and generalisation.

Third, the conceptual framework remains unvalidated in real-world farming contexts. Future work should focus on empirical testing of the conceptual framework across diverse agro-ecological settings to assess its practical applicability, usability, and effectiveness. Additionally, co-design approaches that actively involve farmers and end-users in the development and refinement of the conceptual framework could enhance relevance and adoption.

In summary, this conceptual framework provides a foundational anchor for the emerging field of agro-ecological DSS design, derived exclusively from literature findings. The next critical step is to translate the conceptual framework into operational DSS models and validate them through participatory and applied research.

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STREAMLINING MAINTENANCE PLANNING TO IMPROVE SCHEDULE ATTAINMENT AND MACHINE AVAILABILITY IN AN AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY: A DMAIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The execution of planned maintenance is one of the fundamental pillars of sound and progressive maintenance operating systems in automotive industries. An automotive industry was faced with an obstacle of bearing the inability to adhere to targeted planned maintenance schedule attainment which impacted parallelly on machine availability and the organization's cost drivers. Recurring schedule backlog, overtime cost of backlog recovery, and machine breakdowns on equipment that were not serviced within required mean time before failure, were the predominant phenomena impacting adversely on the efficient flow of operations. The paramountcy of the problem prompted the study to undertake to the utilization of the DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control) methodology with the aim of circumventing the challenge and establish an improved streamlined maintenance planning process. The results of the study saw planned maintenance schedules being executed at targeted level, improved machine availability from 68.5% to 96.33%, and a significant cost reduction of backlog recovery.

Keywords: Maintenance planning, Machine availability, Schedule attainment.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Maintenance planning is one of the fundamental strategic roles in automotive industries. With the industry characterized by various machinery and ever-shifting technological advancements, the upkeep of machinery holds core to the attainment of high efficiencies. Such upkeep of equipment requires a robust maintenance planning approach that is focused, chronological, and resource oriented. The plight of failing to plan maintenance effectively has seen maintenance departments in manufacturing organizations falling into the trap of reactive maintenance vicious cycles [1]. At the heart of the problem, is a failed maintenance strategic approach which impacts significantly on machine availability, preventive maintenance schedule attainment, and other departmental key performance indicators that are dependent on machine availability. The constituency of the magnitude of ineffective maintenance planning stems from excessive generation of preventive procedures, inconsideration to manpower and work content requirements, a scattered approach towards maintenance execution, and a lack of a streamlined approach to cement maintenance windows. Weeks *et al*.[2] added to this narrative by outlining that lack of planning expertise to integrate planning thought into computer maintenance management software (CMMS) is an integral part of planned maintenance failure. With resources overwhelmed by the number of schedules generated, and planned maintenance schedules lacking direction whereby procedures require machine downtime while at peak production targets, a phenomenon of planned maintenance schedules not being completed occurs. This does not only affect schedule attainment, but also the much-needed reverse equipment deterioration requirements to eliminate equipment breakdowns, quality defects as a result of failed equipment and inability to attain production targets. All these consequential phenomena are the bases to which overall equipment efficiency is measured in automotive industries. Substandard maintenance planning that is not aligned to the realities of the automotive operational sphere leads to the detriment of cost implications such as excessive overtime to catch up on missed production due to machine unavailability, excessive overtime for maintenance personnel to catch up on backlog schedules, and the cost of missed opportunity due to downtime. Given the gravity of this phenomenon, the DMAIC methodology is one such strategic approach to effect improvement in maintenance planning to enhance schedule attainment that uplifts equipment availability [25].

1.1 Objectives of the study

- To identify constraints that prevent the identified organization from meeting its intended planned maintenance schedule attainment.
- To analyze the current maintenance planning process and schedule generation through the organization’s computer maintenance management software.
- To utilize the DMAIC methodology to streamline and improve the maintenance planning process to attain targeted schedule attainment.
- To articulate the impact results of a structured maintenance planning process on equipment availability and subsequent cost reduction.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control) methodology is a strategic process improvement approach that is concerned with the drill-down of problems to develop solutions and the establishment of sustaining controls [3]. This methodology stems from the Six-Sigma philosophy and is predominantly utilized in automotive industries to drive identification of process abnormalities, elimination of waste, and productivity improvement. This is cemented by da Silver *et al*. [4] by outlining that the methodology is at the core of driving operational stability by ensuring that process abnormalities are addressed. This narrative bears significance in ensuring that the definition, measurement and analysis of maintenance

planning shortcomings that significantly impact on equipment availability capture the current problem faced by automotive industries, while simultaneously devising improvement solutions with controlled measures for sustainability.

Automotive industries are one of the major contributors of economic participation in various countries globally. With the sector expanding rapidly and new entrants to competitive participation emanating expeditiously, Javaid *et al*. [5] warned that high equipment efficiency has become the competitive baseline of these organizations. The propelling factor behind this narrative basis itself on the huge equipment investments to provide flexibility, ease of manufacturing, and a demand-based flow of operations. According to Sarvanka and Yawele [6] the success on the return of investment in these industries relies heavily on the outright performance of the equipment. This brings the paradigm of equipment availability to be a beacon of significance to hold firm competitive advantage. Arena *et al*. [7] asserts in this regard that maintaining high equipment availability extricates automotive industries from significant losses that come in the form of downtime, labor and overheads idle time, and revenue. These are critical elements of circumvention for any manufacturing industry to enhance overall profitability and operational continuity. Various strategies around the attainment of high equipment availability have been explored, and effective maintenance planning and execution is at the heart of driving the upkeep of such availability [8]. Available literature on various maintenance operating systems indicates limited pragmatic guidelines on effective maintenance planning at a functional level.

According to Pinto *et al*. [9] maintenance planning bears paramount significance in organizational maintenance departments through driving proactive actions that ensure the preservation of equipment health. The attainment of such preservation emanates from the development of equipment reverse deterioration procedures that are executed periodically. These periodic procedures are summarized by Yang *et al*. [10] as being periodic inspections, time-based maintenance, and condition-based maintenance. These are core procedural strategies that are facilitated to subdue forced equipment deterioration [11], unplanned equipment stoppages [12], and operation of unsafe equipment [13]. The ground development of planned maintenance procedures is primarily guided by original equipment manufacturers [14], equipment health assessments, available historical equipment failure data [15], root-cause analysis, and failure mode effect analysis. The benefits of an effective and thriving maintenance planning strategy warrants the attainment of reliable equipment, certainty of planning in the organization's supply chain, delivery to customer demands, and an overall safe manufacturing sphere. Wang [16] emphasizes that it is imperative for manufacturing organizations, particularly automotive industries, to safeguard the performance of their machines to ascertain generational handover and future investment.

One of the competitive strategies in the field of equipment maintenance is the need to drive preventive maintenance. This is a prevailing asset care approach that is measured through the attainment of an acceptable percentage of scheduled maintenance [17]. At a strategic and systemic level, maintenance managers and coordinators measure schedule adherence as a key performance indicator. The line of thought around this performance indicator is that of high or targeted schedule attainment must translate into targeted equipment availability. The are several factors that hinder schedule attainment which are given a synapsis by Shafiee and Sørensen [18] as being inaccurate scheduling, poor resource allocation, ineffective methods of communication, and lack of acclimatization of maintenance personnel to CMMS interactions. These hinderances are further recognized by Pasipatorwa *et al*. [19] as being the primary contributors to reactive maintenance as they negatively affect the execution of maintenance work on equipment within the require mean time before failure. The occurrence of the phenomenon of reactive maintenance brings a cycle of frustration and lack of direction in maintenance operating systems [20]. Spiraling equipment failures bring grave instability to

organizations and ultimately require great investment through consultation, training, and resource stabilization to revert to a preventive maintenance environment.

Planned maintenance is one of the most important pillars of efficient production flow in automotive industries. It is a critical approach to the establishment of proactive ways to enhance equipment availability [21]. As a baseline key performance indicator, equipment availability feeds directly into the performance indicator of other departments in any manufacturing supply chain. The dominance of equipment availability in this regard asserts that production output measures get affected when machines are not available, product quality gets affected when machine malfunction, safety score cards get affected when machines are not safe to operate, and supply chain planning experiences uncertainty when machines are not available. On the contrary, a shortcoming on each of the key performance indicators mentioned does not affect the availability score of equipment [22]. It is of paramount importance for manufacturing organizations to invest in preventive maintenance through extensive support to the role of maintenance planning to cement stability and productivity in the core pillars of their organizations.

3 METHODOLOGY

The process of streamlining maintenance planning for this study led to the employment of a mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative results. The results were structured and presented utilizing the confines of the DEMAIC abbreviation. Primary data was extracted from the organization's CMMS and production monitoring system and manipulated in the various stages of the DMAIC approach to yield results. The development of project charter, histograms, root-cause analysis, schedule levelling and flow charts were some of the qualitative and quantitative techniques that were encompassed in the constructs of the DMAIC approach. The study outlined the approach accordingly as per the following narration:

3.1 DEMAIC approach

3.1.1 Defining the problem

This step was undertaken to develop and articulate an understanding of the wholistic problem that is faced by the industry. To attain this, a project charter was developed and the elements required to satisfy the charter were fulfilled. The first element of the charter was to clearly outline the problem that was being addressed. This was followed by stating the purpose of the study. The purpose is signifying in ensuring that the magnitude of the problem is cemented and the impact of the problem on the organization is outlined. On completion of stating the purpose, the business case was clearly outlined on the charter. This gave a wholistic synapsis of the need to undertake the project. The specific goal of the project, together with specific timelines and measurable results, was outlined. The charter was then concluded with an outline of the scope that is covered and what lies outside of the scope.

3.1.2 Measurements involved

The measurement phase was concerned with capturing theoretical and statistical attributes of the magnitude of the problem. This phase is primarily significant in outlining the critical factors that perpetuate the existence of the problem [23]. To fulfill this step, the study measured the current state of planned maintenance schedule attainment, the current equipment availability and outlined possible root-causes that could potentially lead to the problem. The current schedule attainment was captured for a period of seven months with a graphical articulation of the company's target. The equipment availability followed the same graphical depiction process. Through a process of verification, the real root-causes to the problem were identified utilizing an Ishikawa diagram.

3.1.3 Analysis of the problem

This phase of the methodology is concerned with establishing an in-depth understanding of the critical elements that contributed to the problem. This corresponds with Rana and Kaushik's [24] narrative that this step establishes the baseline to which opportunities for improvement can be identified. For this study, this step took a swipe into the analysis of the root-causes that have been identified in the measurement phase. Each of the root causes were supported with data extracts of the true state of abnormality. An in-depth outline of the contributory elements to the occurrence of the depicted analysis was then undertaken for each of the root-causes.

3.1.4 Improvement phase

The improvement phase of this study was concerned with the implementation of resolutions to the abnormalities that were identified and analyzed in the preceding phase. To accomplish this, the study explored different maintenance planning techniques relative to the abnormalities to subdue the current state. These techniques were focused on ensuring that resource allocation is carried out accordingly, planned maintenance procedures were allocated fairly amongst maintenance personnel, procedures were reviewed and accurate frequencies for the preventive maintenance procedures ware updated accordingly. A further plan to mitigate deadline constraints and to recover from scheduled maintenance backlog without compromising schedule adherence was outlined. The overall results on schedule attainment, equipment availability and cost reduction were outlined for a defined period.

3.1.5 Establish control

This phase of the DMAIC methodology bears immense significance in ensuring that improvements that have been implemented are sustained. In order to achieve this, the study drew the entire process of planned maintenance schedules using a flowchart. A procedure was then cemented from the flowchart. This procedure was to be followed to sustain and control activities that are centered around maintenance schedule attainment and ensure that executed plans translate into corrective action that enhanced equipment availability. This procedure was then followed by a training phase through a One-Point-Lesson that was given to all maintenance personnel in the maintenance department.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Define phase

The results and descriptive articulation of the define phase were outlined in the project charter as per Table 1:

Table 1: Project overview and scope

Project overview	
Problem description	Incompletion of planned maintenance schedules timeously.
Project purpose	The maintenance department aims to achieve a schedule attainment of 95% from a low of 66% in line with the company objectives. Missed schedules have spiralled out of control, rendering the organization to invest in exorbitant overtime cost to recover from the backlog. This has had a negative impact on the attainment of plant equipment availability targeted at 95%.
Business case	Schedule attainment is currently below the required standard to enable the plant to attaint its equipment availability. Such has resulted in missed schedules for preventable equipment failures which is hindering delivery targets due to machines not being available. There is a strong need to drive effective maintenance planning to attain required schedule adherance and meet the service needs of equipment within their mean time to failure.
Project goal	By the 31st of January 2024, planned maintenance schedule attainment needs to be at 95% and above.
Scope of the project	
Scope covered	Maintenance planning process and schedule attainment.
Outside of the scope	Daily corrective maintenance.

4.2 Measurement phase

The study commenced with measuring historical data of the attainment of planned maintenance (PM) schedules. Data collected over a period of seven months (February 2024 to August 2024) as depicted by Figure 1 indicated that the plant was unable to meet its monthly target of 95%. Further to that, the results indicated that the plant had an allowable percentage loss of 5% which was exceeded over the period of seven months. On average, the plant had a schedule attainment of 66%. This entailed an exposure of 34%, which meant 34% of the equipment in the plant was not serviced according to their service intervals and functionality needs. This also entailed exposure to equipment failures that could have been prevented by the planned maintenance schedules. The plant had an average of 1800 planned maintenance schedules monthly across the seven months, 612 schedules were completed late.

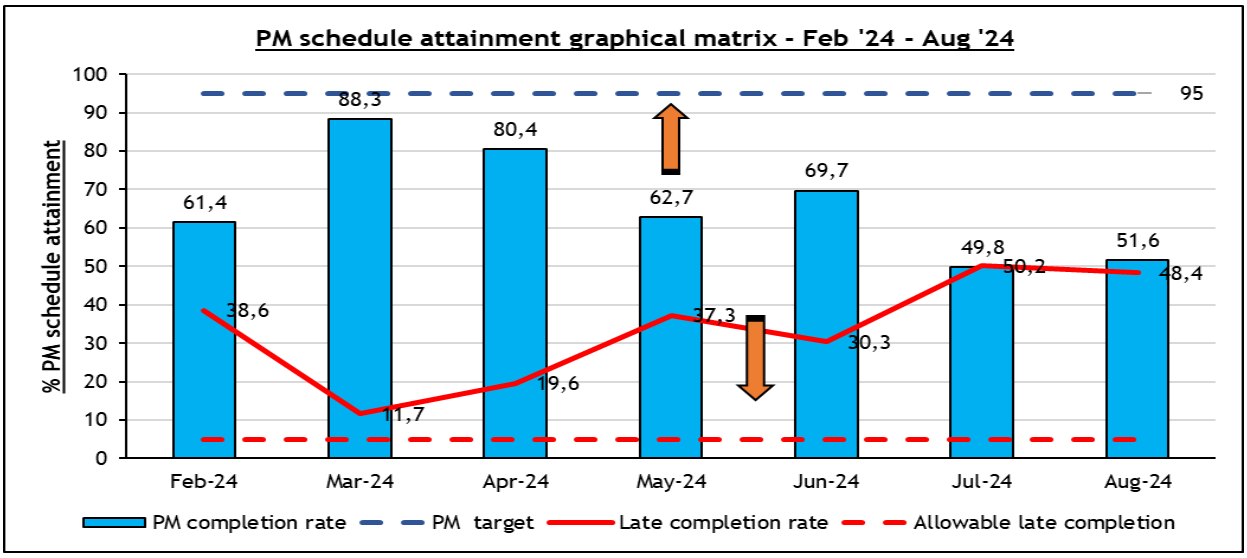

Figure 1: PM schedule attainment graphical matrix

The study went further to extract the correlation between the incompletion of planned maintenance schedules and machine availability. Figure 2 indicates a direct correlation between the two phenomena. On average across the seven months, the plant attained a

machine availability of 68,5%. This entailed all the schedules that were missed pulled down machine availability by 31,5%.

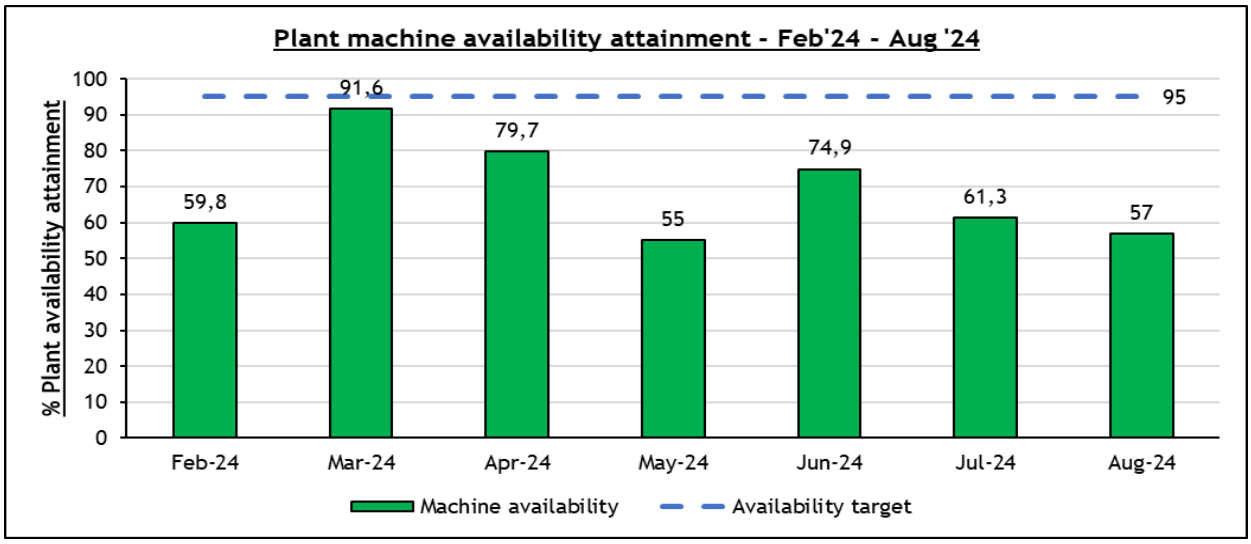

Figure 2: Plant machine availability attainment

Given the dynamics presented by Figures 1 and 2, the study embarked on determining the root-causes that contributed to the incompletion of planned maintenance schedules timeously. The root-causes were derived utilizing the Ishikawa diagram technique as depicted by Figure 3. Upon verification, the results of the techniques indicated that there were four root-causes that contributed immensely to the incompletion of schedules timeously. The root-causes are indicated by the red highlight in line with the legend in Figure 3. This root-causes became the base for an analysis scrutiny in line with the proceeding step of the DMAIC methodology.

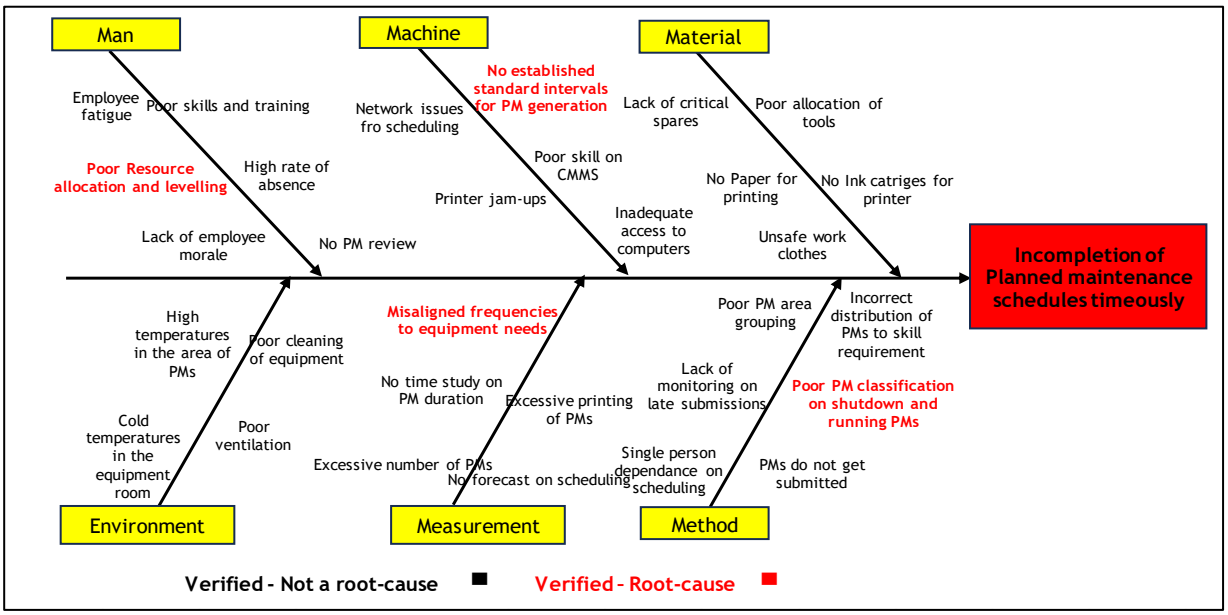

Figure 3: Ishikawa diagram - PM incompletion

4.3 Analysis phase

4.3.1 Misaligned PM frequency to equipment needs

Stemming from the historical data of equipment breakdowns and verification with the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) of the equipment, the study found that some of the equipment were set on a default one week schedule generation as opposed original equipment manufacturer recommendations. The default setting entailed an excessive number of schedules was generated when it was not required. The planned maintenance schedules warranted an over service of the equipment, when the default computer maintenance management system (CMMS) one-week schedule interval should have been altered. As per the depiction on the red highlight on Figure 4, the planned maintenance procedure for engine carriers was the default one-week as opposed to an OEM recommendation of four weeks.

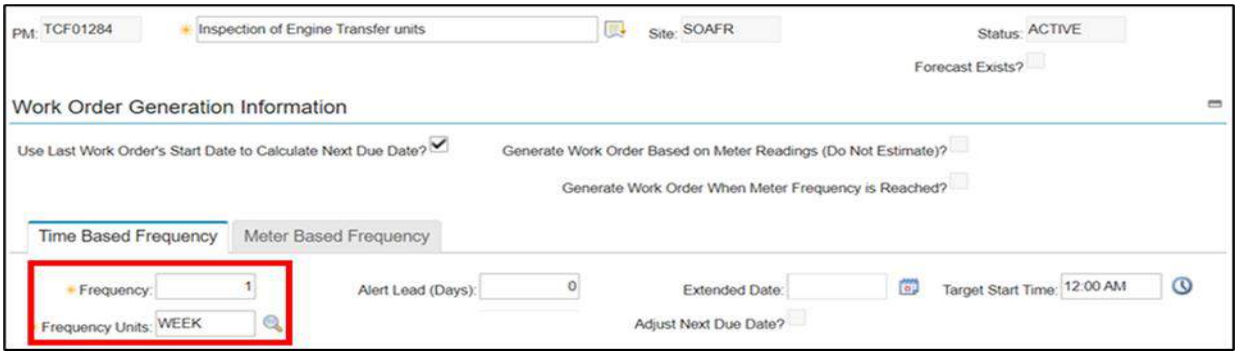

Figure 4: CMMS planned maintenance default setting

4.3.2 Poor resource allocation and levelling

The results of poor resource allocation and leveling indicated that there were maintenance technicians that were loaded excessively and those that were underloaded. Figure 4 is a depiction of the planned maintenance resource loading for one shift across a three-shift pattern. This presented the need to re-distribute planned maintenance workload accordingly and in line with technical skill and ability. This was attained through re-distributing the millwright PMs to electrical and fitter technicians in an endeavor to bring a polarized trend. The main reasons the millwright technicians were overloaded was due to their technical ability to carry out both electrical and mechanical fitter maintenance schedules. The total number of PMs in this shift was 575, with a manpower skill of 16 technicians. This entailed that on average, each technician needed to be allocated an average of 36 planned maintenance schedules.

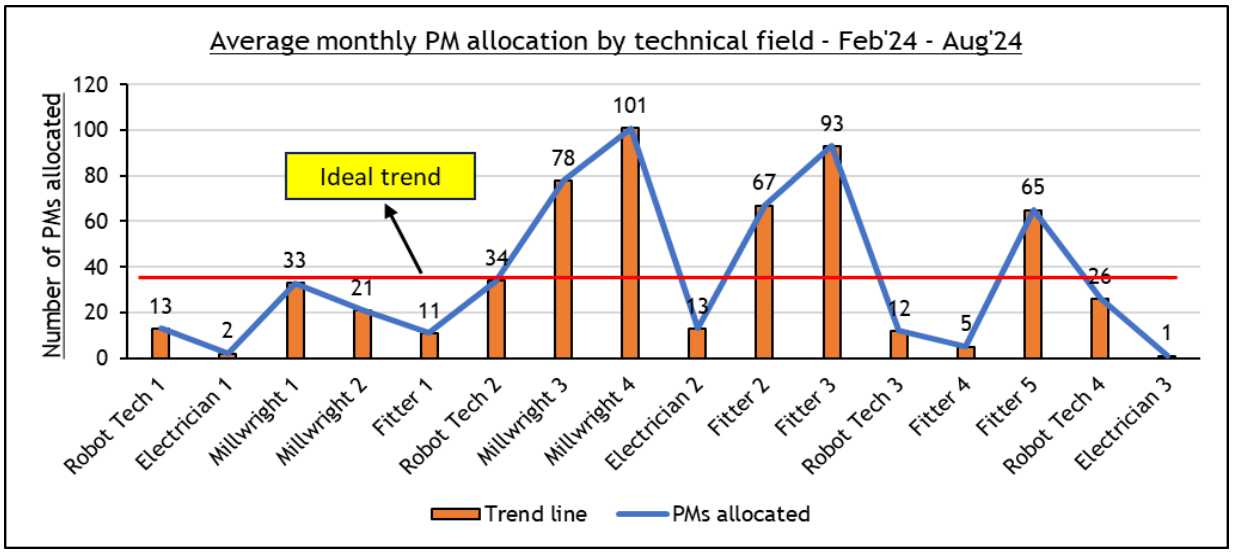

Figure 5: PM resource allocation

4.3.3 No established standard intervals of PM generation

This root-cause based itself on the generation of planned maintenance schedules not being fixed, thus hindering predictability and forecasting the exact number of schedules to be generated. Figure 5 on the red highlight indicates that there were planned maintenance schedules that were set to come out monthly. The number of days in a month varies, and this entailed schedules could come out randomly in any day. For example, a schedule that comes out on a Monday in a month could come out on a Saturday the following month. This presented a lack of control in establishing the exact number of planned maintenance schedules that were to be received daily. There was a need to change the 'monthly' generation of schedules to a more fixed period in the company's computer maintenance management system (CMMS).

Work Order No.	Date Created	22 - 06 - 2024	Type of work	
	Time Created	07 h 33	Time Based Maintenance	
PM056775	Frequency	Monthly	Inspect & Repair Maintenance	
	Duration	3hrs	Condition Based Maintenance	
Plant	Plant 1		Legal/Statutory Maintenance	
Equipment	Robot			
Raised by:	Maintenance Planner		Issued to:	Menzi Mkhatshwa
Work Instruction:	Change or Service or Inspect the machine/equipment as per the instructions below.			
Isolations:	FOLLOWED MACHINE LOCK OUT TAG OUT PROCEDURE		Maint. Category:	Mechanical/Electrical

Figure 6: CMMS interval scheduling snapshot

4.3.4 Poor classification of shutdown and running PMs

This was the major constraint and source of loss of direction towards planned maintenance schedule attainment. The highlighted lines on Figure 7 indicate equipment that required production downtime for their service. These types of planned maintenance schedules did not have a unique identifier and were generated randomly like schedules that could be executed while the equipment was running. The detriment of this phenomenon was that 38% of the planned schedules in the CMMS required downtime. With no fixed intervals as per subtitle 4.4.3, these schedules came out during machine running periods and could not be executed as the machines ran 24 hours a day, 5 days a week. This made them automatically late when they came out during the week as opposed to the weekend.

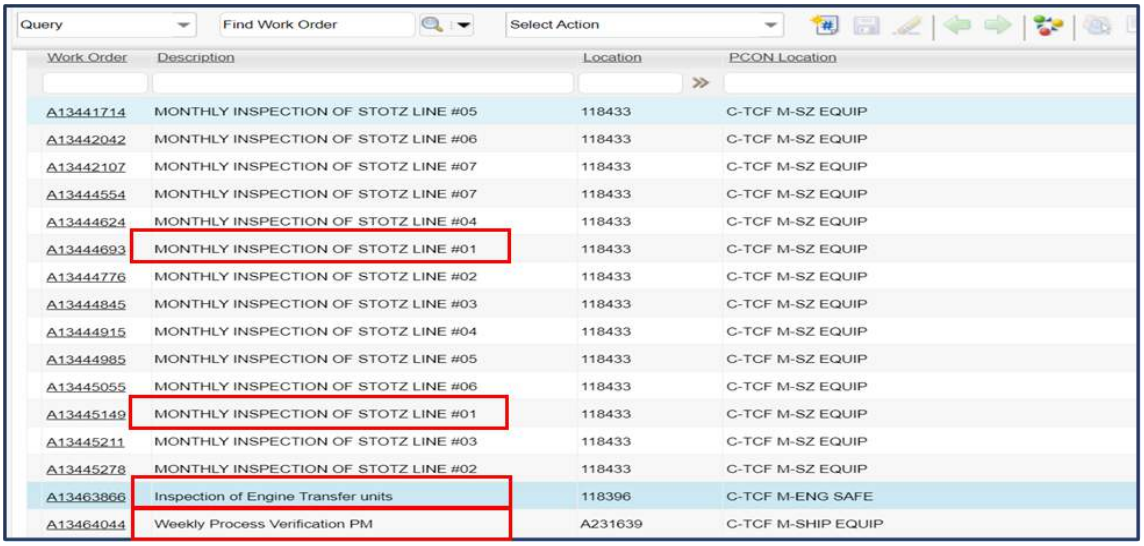

Figure 7: Shutdown maintenance segregation

4.4 Improvement phase

4.4.1 Frequency alignment of equipment needs

The improvement results of aligning the schedule frequencies to OEM recommendations reduced the number of schedules generated monthly from an average of 1800 to an average of 1200. There were 20 engine carriers which generated 80 schedules monthly. Shifting the frequency to 4 weeks as depicted by the green highlight on figure 8 reduced the number of schedules generated by 60 on average monthly. This process was replicated to other simile carriers across the plant and ultimately yielded a reduction of 600 schedules.

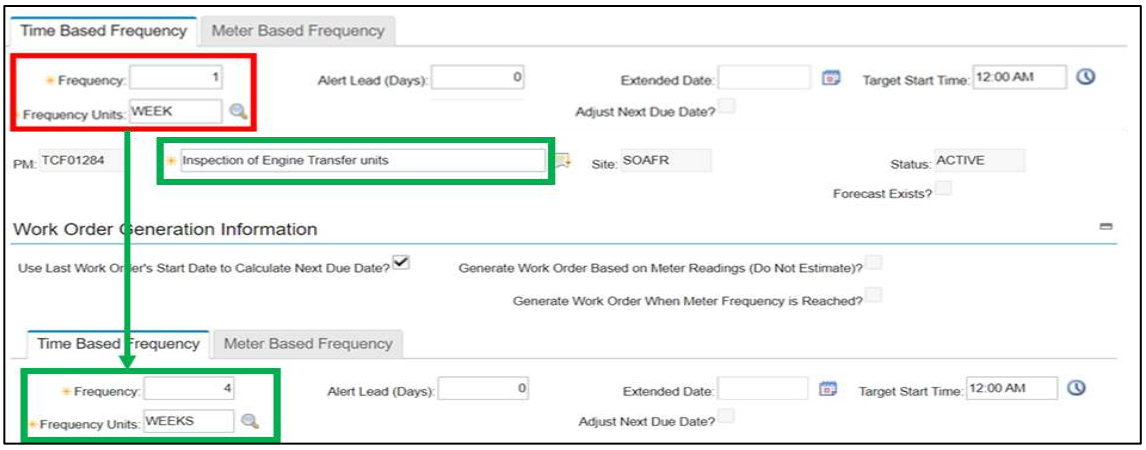

Figure 8: PM frequency alignment changes

4.4.2 Reallocation of PMs and levelling

Figure 9 indicates the results of the re-distribution of the average monthly planned maintenance schedules. The process saw a more balanced distribution with the highest allocation being 45 and the lowest being 28 planned maintenance schedules. This was in contrast with the previous allocation where the highest was 101 schedules and the lowest was 1 schedule. The trend line improved, indicating a more polarized distribution of schedules with no major spikes in allocation.

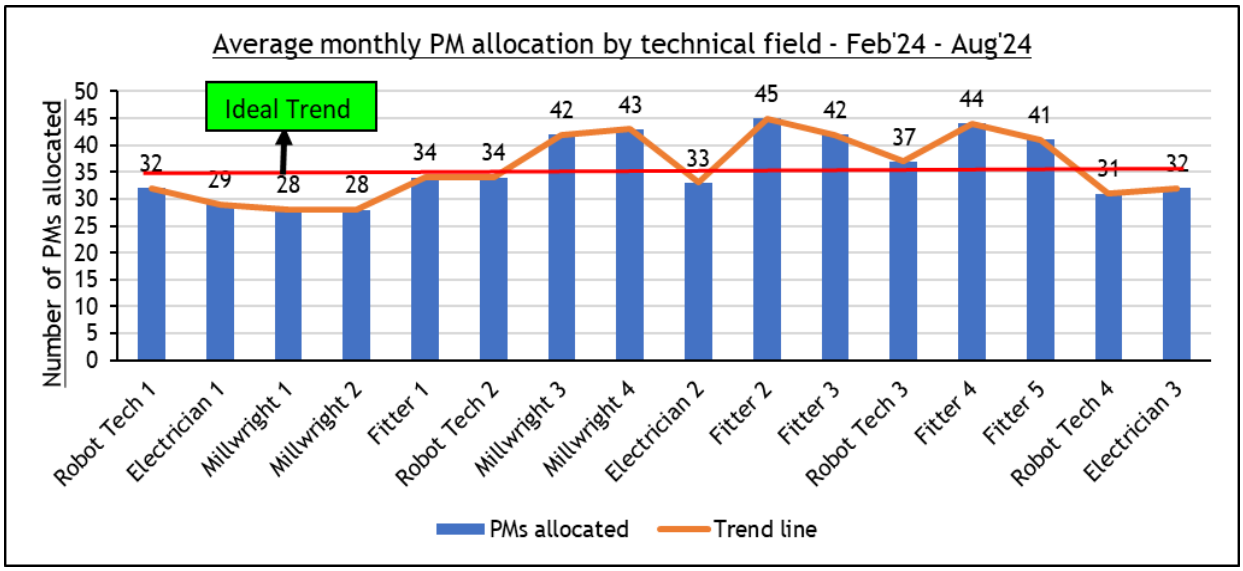

Figure 9: Improved PM reallocation and levelling trend

4.4.3 Standard fixed intervals with no generation overlap

The intervals were changed from using 'months' to utilizing 'weeks' as depicted by Figure 10. This ensured that there were no planned maintenance schedules that overlapped. Fixing the intervals through weeks entailed that when a planned maintenance schedule is set to come out on a Monday, it will not change as a week has a fixed number of days. This presented better control of allocation in that the exact number of planned maintenance schedules could be known and forecasted for each of the days of the week. This also provided simplicity of resource allocation for planned maintenance schedules and for line operation monitoring for each day of the week.

Work Order No.	Date Created	22 - 06 - 2024	Type of work
	Time Created	07 h 33	Time Based Maintenance
PM056775	Frequency	Monthly	Inspect & Repair Maintenance
	Duration	3hrs	Condition Based Maintenance
Work Order No.	Date Created	23 - 08 - 2024	Type of work
	Time Created	06 h 51	Time Based Maintenance
PM057893	Frequency	4 WEEKS	Inspect & Repair Maintenance
	Duration	3hrs	Condition Based Maintenance
Plant	Plant 1		Legal/Statutory Maintenance
Equipment	Robot		
Raised by:	Maintenance Planner	Issued to:	Menzi Mkhatshwa
Work Instruction:	Change or Service or Inspect the machine/equipment as per the instructions below.		

Figure 10: Interval category change

4.4.4 Shutdown planned maintenance segregation

The segregation of shutdown planned maintenance schedules from running schedules presented a phenomenon where the schedules could not be filtered with simplicity from the CMMS system. Unique identifiers for non-running (NR) schedules were added to all procedures that required machine downtime as depicted by Figure 11. This provided ease of filtering in the CMMS and the ability to plan the maintenance schedules on production down days. This

eliminated the inability for maintenance personnel to complete the schedules due to machines running. Further to this, improved control over labor requirements to complete the schedules on overtime down days was attained. A standard requirement of 18 technicians to complete non-running schedules was established for each day of the weekend.

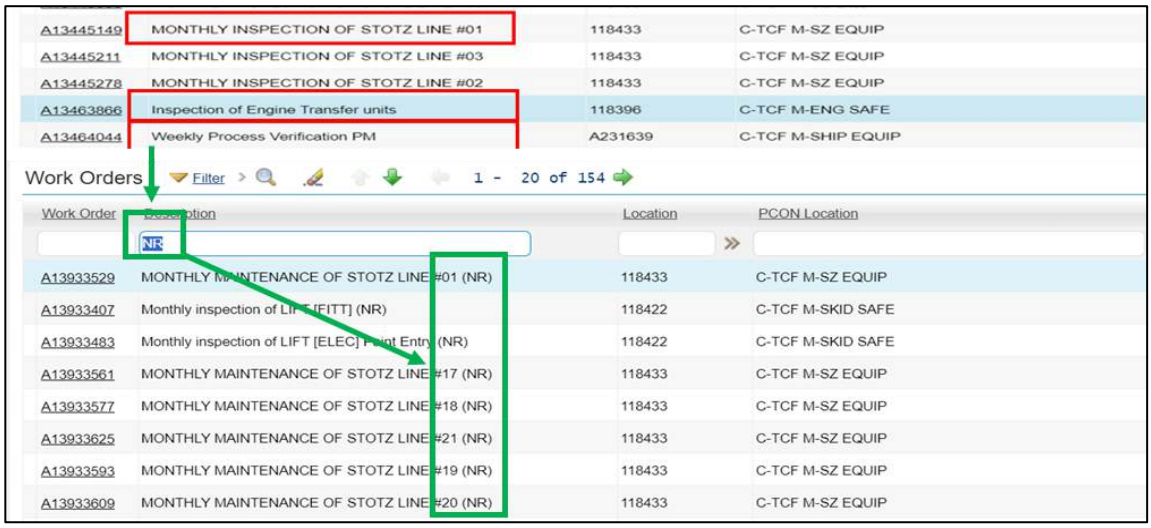

Figure 11: Segregation of downtime and running PMs

4.4.5 Overall improvement results

The interventions in this improvement phase yielded a positive result depicted by the breakpoint on Figure 12. The results indicate an attainment of 89% schedule completion and 93,1% machine availability attainment from the first month of implementation. The target for both planned maintenance schedule attainment and machine availability of 95% was achieved and was exceeded by an average of 2,25% and 1,33% respectively. This also indicated a positive correlation between the execution of planned maintenance procedures and machine availability.

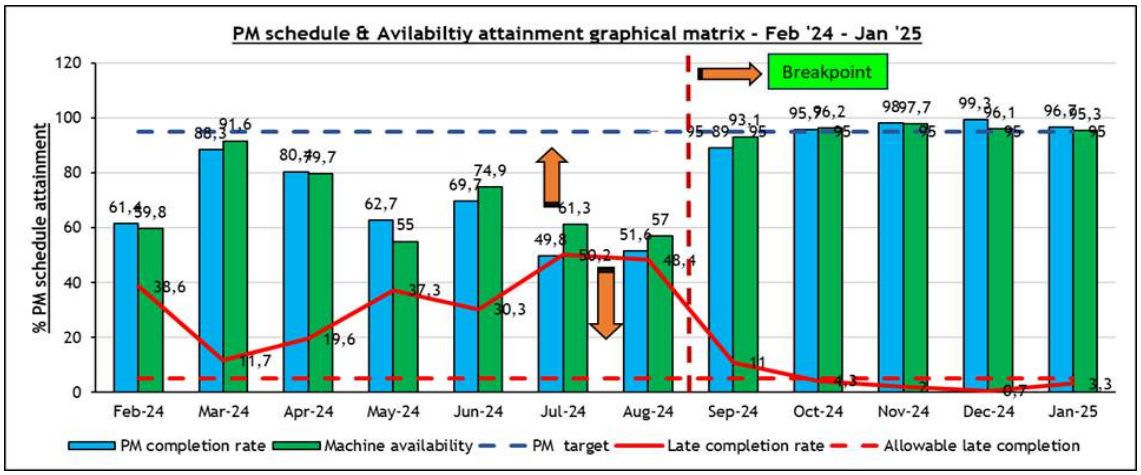

Figure 12: Improvement results - PM schedules and machine availability

Further to the attainment of the targeted planned maintenance schedule and machine availability of 95%, a significant reduction in the amount of overtime cost worked to recover from backlog was realized. Calculated at an average of R270.00 hourly renumeration rate, the average cost of overtime from February 2024 to August 2024 was R967 680.00 monthly. The calculation was based on 32 technicians working 8 hours at a Saturday and Sunday rate of 1.5 and 2 respectively for a monthly period of 4 weeks. With the establishment of control over

the planned maintenance schedules, the number of technicians required over weekends reduced to 18, which brought the overall monthly standard overtime cost to R544 320.00. This yieled to an average monthly cost saving of R423 360.00. This is depicted by Figure 13.

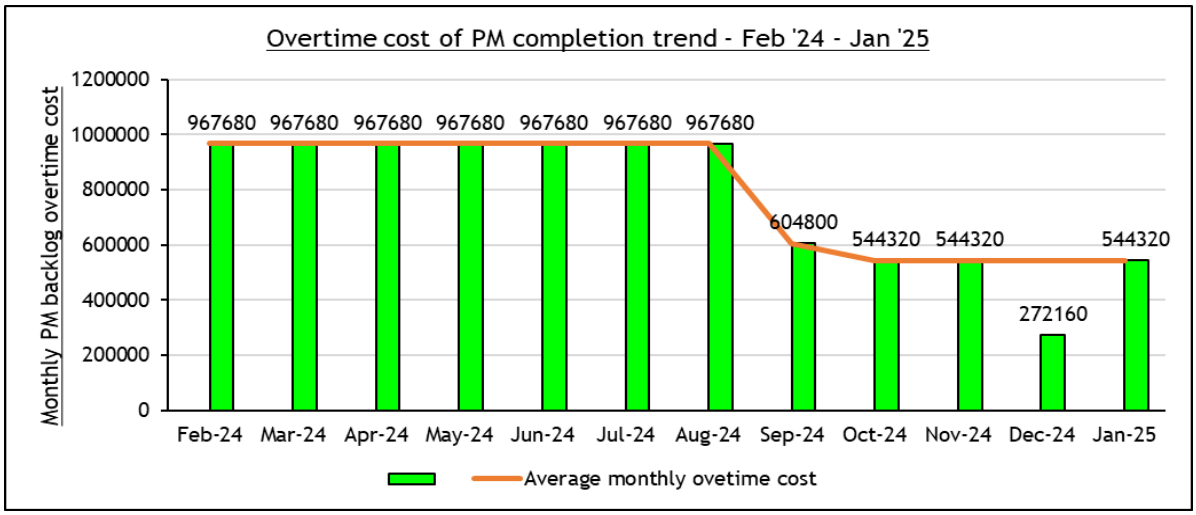

Figure 13: Improvement results – Overtime cost reduction

4.5 Control phase

The establishment of control on the interventions that were undertaken to bring about improvement remedies was attained through the development of a process flow. The process flow depicted the maintenance planning steps that were to be followed to ensure that sustainable results were maintained. The control measure detailed a responsibility flow and a review process to ensure that the integrity of the interventions is upheld. Figure 14 is a process flow chart that guides and summarizes the streamlined approach towards maintenance planning in this automotive industry. The process flow chart was issued to relevant maintenance personnel, training conducted and signed off as a one-point-lesson.

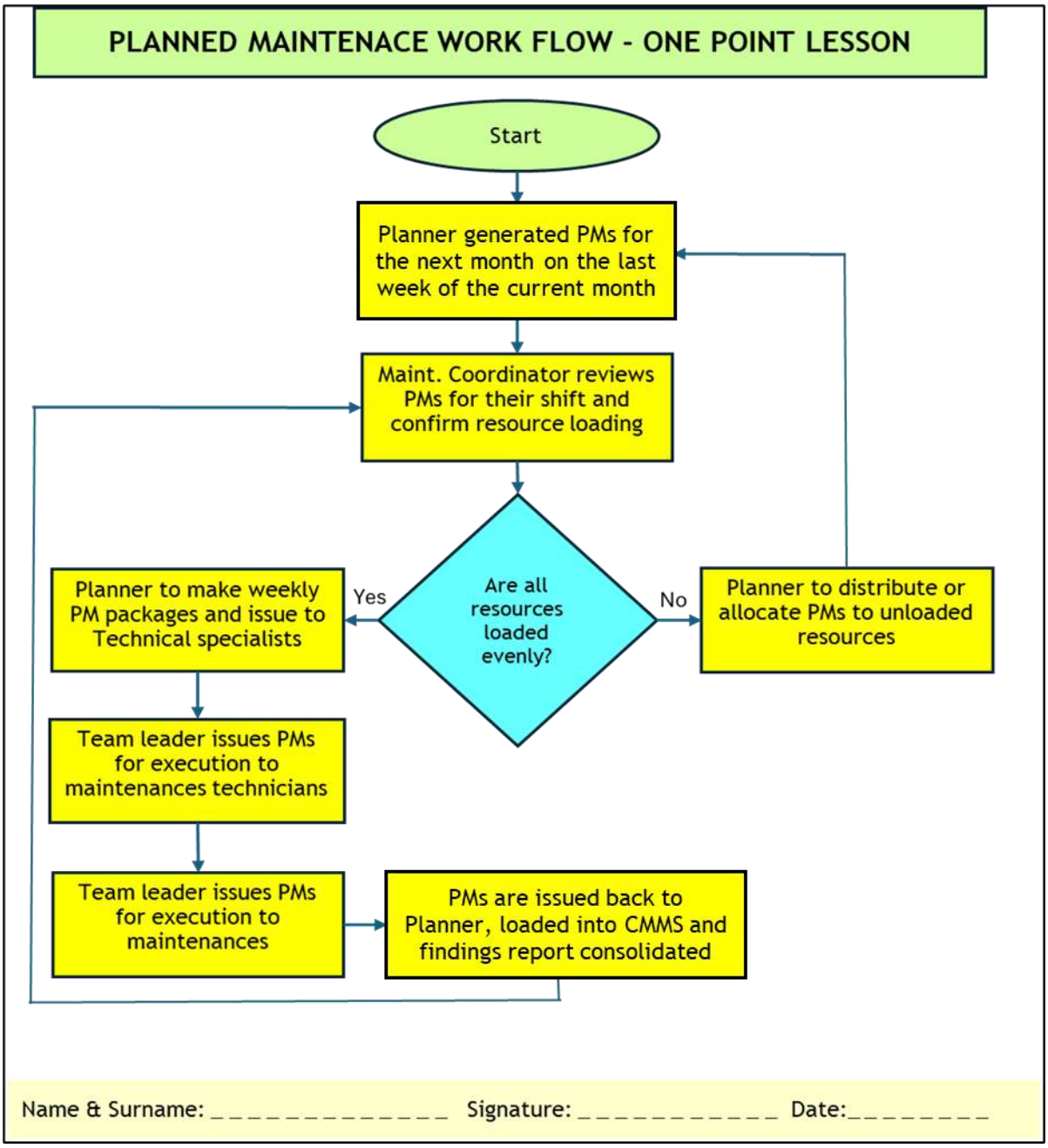

Figure 14: One-Point-Lesson – Planned maintenance

5 CONCLUSION

The study followed the DMAIC methodology which has proven to be a conquering tool in the implementation of a streamlined process towards planning for maintenance. The different phases of the methodology provided simplicity and ease of outrooting both the problems and resolutions that were contributing to a significantly low attainment of planned maintenance schedule execution, which ultimately impacted on machine availability. The first objective of the study was achieved through a detailed outline of the possible root causes through the Ishikawa diagram and the actual root-caused were identified through a verification process. This was followed by an extensive analysis of the root-causes through graphical and CMMS pictorial representations for each of the root-causes identified. This addressed the second objective of the study. The third objective of the study was encompassed by the entire

methodology of the study whereby the DMAIC approach was the core principle towards subduing the problem, through following and adhering to the details required in each step of the DMAIC approach. The fourth and final objective of the study was attained through a graphical outline of the impact of the improvement interventions. Such depicted the schedule attainment and availability to be above target, while significant cost reduction was also attained through the streamlined approach. There is vast literature that is centered around planned maintenance to attain zero machine breakdowns. What is lacking with the literature is pragmatic elements such scrutinizing CMMS interfaces and an overall on-the-ground practical guidelines on maintenance planning through a step-by-step pragmatic approach. The study paves a stream of further research towards shifting the paradigm of high-level maintenance principles to more pragmatic studies at an execution level.

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DEVELOPING SYSTEMS ENGINEERING LEADERSHIP IN COMPLEX PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

Systems engineering can assist in successfully managing complex projects through technical expertise and interdisciplinary collaboration. Both of these require effective leadership. Therefore, this study probes critical leadership attributes like communication, strategic thinking, and adaptability, vital to managing complex projects. It also found that robust communication shows the strongest positive correlation with project success, followed by strategic thinking and adaptability. The research also reveals apparent gaps in many current programs for developing leaders because they often overlook the specific needs of systems engineers. This paper proposes a tailored leadership development framework to respond to this in the context of systems engineering. It pushes structured training to equip the leaders with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of multidisciplinary projects. The framework aims to enhance project outcomes and ensure long-term success by aligning leadership development with systems engineering demands.

Keywords: Systems Engineering, Leadership Development, Strategic Thinking, Communication, Adaptability

* Corresponding Author

1 INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership is indeed critical within Systems Engineering (SE), which requires the management of technical aspects and cross-functional teams in a complex project scenario. Projects like these would always be multidisciplinary and likely involve subsystems and disparate technologies, which require bringing them together to reach the overall goals. The efforts of engineers, project managers, and other stakeholders must be aligned so that every component contributes to attaining success for the system to some extent. As Beasley et al. [1] state, experienced leadership is required to balance technical, budgetary, and timetable constraints. This intricate balancing act would depend on understanding technical and soft skills to manage teams and stakeholder expectations [2], [3].

Systems engineers must go deep into complicated technicalities yet present clarity and strategic alignment across all project layers. They have to transform the technical language for diverse audiences, some so that their buy-in is maintained, while others may see a person's potential upside or realise a commitment to cohesive teamwork. Communication failures have been associated with huge costs from delays and/or system failures, especially in cross-disciplinary contexts. Thus, leadership in SE includes the facilitation of alignment between the specialised knowledge and the shared objectives of the project. Effective communications are more than the transfer of information; they have a collaborative, clarifying, and engaging effect [1], [4].

Strategic thinking amplifies the potential of leadership effectiveness that extends to foreseeing risks, aligning with long-term goals, and making complex decisions. According to Alessandro and Jiju [5], SE leaders should be aware of the long-term implications of their choices of technology, risk trade-offs, and the footprint of their actions within the organisational strategy. Those equipped with strategic foresight deliver projects that are resilient, adaptive, and technically sound [6].

Leaders need to be flexible in their approach to changes in the scope of projects, changes in regulations, and new unaccounted costs. Adaptive leadership is required in the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) environment, which most SE environments are characterised by, as pointed out by Abukalusa and Oosthuizen [7]. The speed at which leaders can react to new information or changes can be used to prepare individuals to steer their teams through challenges and uncertainties [8]. However, not recognising leadership as necessary enough is the primary nemesis for development programs tackling the disturbing challenges in SE. General management training tends to forget the fusion of technical skills and leadership in managing multidisciplinary teams [5]. This gap limits leaders' prowess in directing complex engineering projects.

There is a rising acknowledgement of and demand for the need for leadership development specific to SE [7]. Programs should emphasise appropriate competencies within the following categories: communication, strategic thinking, and adaptability. These are crucial skills to keep up with the field's extreme technical and organisational complexities. Such programs will create better-prepared leaders who lead multidisciplinary teams to successful results [7].

This paper investigates the leadership competencies required for successful SE in projects. It aims to examine the extent to which these competencies influence project outcomes and to identify gaps in current leadership development programs that often overlook the unique demands of SE. Furthermore, the study proposes a tailored leadership development framework that integrates conventional leadership theories with the specific technical and organisational complexities of systems engineering.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Bass [9] describes leadership as inspiring and motivating followers toward improved performance. This emphasises its role in shaping vision, fostering collaboration, and guiding collective effort. Therefore, leadership is how an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. Bass [9] continues to describe transformational leadership as the capacity of the leaders to inspire and encourage teams to achieve better performance and innovation, which is the lifeblood for tackling the multidisciplinary nature of challenges in SE. Such leaders create collaborative environments, focusing all team members on the project's vision while stimulating creativity and motivating them to engage in creative problem-solving.

Transformational leadership can be particularly pertinent to SE in its individualised attention and intellectual stimulation. SE projects require not only technical competency but also the ability of leaders to enthuse teams toward critical thinking concerning the integration of the various subsystems in overcoming project obstacles [1]. These leaders must aspire to create a shared vision while supporting their team members' individual development needs.

Adaptive leadership becomes indispensable in SE, especially when managing VUCA environments [7]. Often, SE projects will be subject to changes in requirements, fast technological development, and unforeseen disruption. Environmental changes, rapid technological advancement, and even direct shocks frequently represent cases of SE's challenges. Adaptive leadership eventually provides the much-needed capability to change strategies or processes, thus ensuring effective responsiveness without losing sight of objectives. Adapting and changing direction in response to evolving knowledge or unforeseen challenges is a fundamental leadership competency, corresponding with the ever-changing character of SE [7].

Systems thinking is emerging as a holistic skill for leaders to understanding complex systems, enabling leaders to recognise interconnections among subsystems and anticipate how changes in one component may affect the whole [3], [10]. This perspective helps leaders manage technical and organisational complexities, ensuring cohesive and adaptive decision-making [2]. With systems thinking, a leader can see the network of influences from a project perspective. Hence, the judgment is consistent for what has been done and what should be done for both technical and organisational objectives [11]. This comprehensive view becomes crucial in SE since several subsystems must function together to achieve the project goal. It advances a leader's capacity to anticipate and proactively address potential problems [10].

Also, sustainable leadership has emerged as an excellent underpinning for SE, particularly in long-term projects, where environmental, social, and economic sustainability must be considered. Malik [12] recognises that sustainable leadership will increase the potential for engineering projects' immediate and prolonged effectiveness by including ethical, social, and environmental considerations as integral to leadership decision-making. Engineering Change Management is very relevant to SE, according to Serapelo et al. [13]. Here, the role of leadership becomes consequential in effectively handling project changes. SE executives must manage these processes effectively to minimise disruptions and achieve project timelines and goals.

Ultimately, transformational, adaptive, and systems-thinking leadership, grounded in sustainable leadership and engineering change management, creates a comprehensive system engineering leadership structure. Nonetheless, current research has indicated a severe lack of leadership development programs tailored to these needs. Urgent calls are made for more tailored training programs encompassing this leadership skill set, which is imperative to making leaders in SE more effective [8].

3 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

3.1 Overview

The conceptual framework aims to aid an SE leader in leading complex projects. The framework feeds into the larger discourse of leadership by suggesting actionable insights tailored to specific contexts and applicable to a wide range of engineering environments. Due to the dynamic nature of SE, traditional leadership models are often inadequate. This section delves into the junction of leadership and SE and stresses the need for leadership that can derive solutions from interdisciplinary, technologically challenging environments. Past research identifies leadership as an important critical success factor in this context [14], [15], [16]. However, implementing generic leadership theories without contextualization has been shown to mitigate the unique problems in SE [17], [18], [19].

This research addresses this gap by blending conventional approaches to leadership with the particular demands of SE. The value lies in solving the theory-practice gap by producing a framework that is theoretically sound and practically applicable. It will help to provide insights into how various leadership styles can be most effective in SE environments, thus advancing the understanding of what is considered effective leadership in this unique context [20].

3.2 Integration of Leadership and Systems Engineering Models

Integrating leadership models and SE concepts shows advancement in managing and executing complex projects [17]. The kind of leadership expected in SE is flexible and responsive since it is an interdisciplinary and integrative area. Though competent in conventional settings, conventional leadership styles are not comprehensive in addressing the specific problems posed by systems-engineering projects, such as the coordination of cross-disciplinary teams, high technical complexity, and the continuous demand for innovation [18]. Literature provides the following main leadership models relevant to SE and project management:

- **Situational Leadership**. Situational leadership emphasises the ability of leaders to adapt their style based on the situation, determined by the competence and commitment of their team members and the task demands [21]. This model assumes there is no best way to lead, and leaders must adjust their approach depending on the context. Within SE, this is applicable during project initiation phases, when teams are still forming and the project scope is being defined. White [18] highlights the importance of adaptability in complex environments, underscoring that leaders who adjust their style to dynamic project needs are better equipped to guide multidisciplinary teams effectively.
- **Servant Leadership**. Servant leadership prioritises the needs of team members and emphasises collaboration, empowerment, and shared responsibility [22]. Leaders must serve their teams by fostering trust, supporting professional growth, and encouraging creativity. Servant leadership is particularly relevant in SE contexts during the design phase, where innovation, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and inclusive problem-solving are essential. Servant leaders create an environment where individuals feel valued and motivated to contribute to complex technical solutions. Serapelo et al. [13] stress that such an approach to leadership enhances engineering change management and minimises project disruptions, making servant leadership a critical asset in maintaining cohesion and innovation throughout the project lifecycle.
- **Adaptive Leadership**. Adaptive leadership is designed for environments characterised by VUCA, which is typical of systems engineering projects [7]. This model emphasises flexibility, resilience, and continuous learning, allowing leaders to respond effectively to unforeseen changes in project scope, technology, or external regulations. Adaptive leaders guide their teams through uncertainty by encouraging experimentation, learning from setbacks, and reframing challenges as opportunities. When combined

with systems thinking, adaptive leadership equips leaders to adjust strategies dynamically without losing sight of long-term objectives [7]. This makes it a critical competency for managing evolving SE projects where unexpected disruptions occur.

- **Transformational Leadership**. Transformational leadership emphasises inspiring and motivating followers to achieve beyond expectations by fostering a shared vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualised support. Bass [9] describes transformational leaders as creating environments that encourage creativity, innovation, and long-term commitment from team members. In SE, transformational leadership is significant during testing and evaluation phases, where leaders must rally teams to maintain quality standards, embrace continuous improvement, and ensure integration of diverse subsystems [15]. Such leaders do not simply manage technical tasks; they inspire their teams to see beyond immediate challenges and contribute toward broader organisational and project goals.

This paper integrates these models within the SE framework. Integration enhances an efficient and successful project climate for work through cooperation, adaptation, and strategic decision-making. In particular, leaders in SE will have to investigate and implement this integration to manoeuvre the complexities of modern engineering projects effectively [19]. Figure 1 presents the concept framework integrating leadership models into SE project phases.

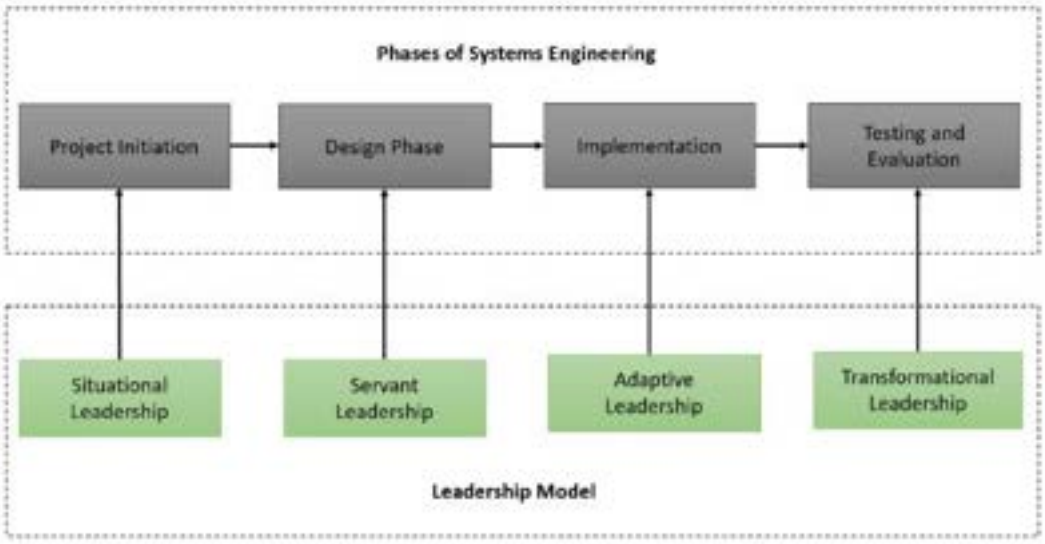

Figure 1: Integrating Leadership Models with Systems Engineering Project Phases.

Figure 1 contextualises several leadership models within phases of SE projects, each corresponding to the particular demands and challenges in the literature. Starting with situational leadership at project initiation, this model allows leaders to change styles according to the needs of the team and the situation; this is important for setting the direction and scope of a project. The adaptability and openness of this leadership model make it most effective in this early phase. The leader can establish a shared understanding and alignment, which are key to a successful project. Servant leadership will be envisaged for the design phases, emphasising the importance of attending to team needs and cooperation. As each stage of an SE project encompasses unique challenges with distinct demands from the leadership styles, the proposed framework links the set of leadership styles to any SE project phase. To be engaged at any of these stages, the dynamics in leadership must act as continuously required adaptive responses to ensure project success. The integration is achieved as follows:

- **Project Initiation – Situational Leadership**. Leaders must assess the team's competence and circumstances to adapt their leadership style accordingly and establish the course and extent of the project. This supports laying the project base for flexibility and responsiveness to early-stage planning and stakeholder alignment.
- **Design Phase – Servant Leadership**. Leaders can prioritise team collaboration and create an environment to develop teamwork and generate innovative solutions. Servant leadership is about serving the team while getting everyone involved, ensuring every voice is heard.
- **Implementation – Adaptive Leadership**. Leaders now must manage uncertainty and changing circumstances during the conduct of the project. This enables agile and robust conditions by amending plans and rerouting resources depending on prevailing constraints.
- **Testing and Evaluation – Transformational Leadership**. Transformational leaders encourage teams to surpass expectations by nurturing a shared vision and commitment to quality. They must foster a culture of continuous improvement and quality so the final deliverables meet and exceed intended objectives.

The leadership style has to adapt as the project traverses through its lifecycle. Each project stage presents unique challenges and demands specific leadership attributes. Therefore, effective SE leadership requires mobility between different types to complete each stage, guaranteeing the project's success from its inception to its conclusion. Based on the framework, the hypothesis developed is:

- **H1**: Leaders with elevated degrees of [leadership competency] demonstrate greater effectiveness in overseeing systems engineering projects.

3.3 Leadership Competencies in Systems Engineering

In discussing leadership competencies in SE, it is paramount to emphasise these in a contrastingly complex and diverse environment [23]. SE projects cut across multiple teams, complex technology integration, and constant change in requirements. Therefore, it becomes vital to design a distinct set of leadership competencies pertinent to SE [24]. These include, but are not limited to, the abilities of strategic thinking, technical knowledge, and communication. The steering of SE projects becomes constrained by favourable and detrimental components that fall within the aforementioned areas of potential [25]. Figure 2 presents a Conceptual Framework of Leadership Competencies in SE.

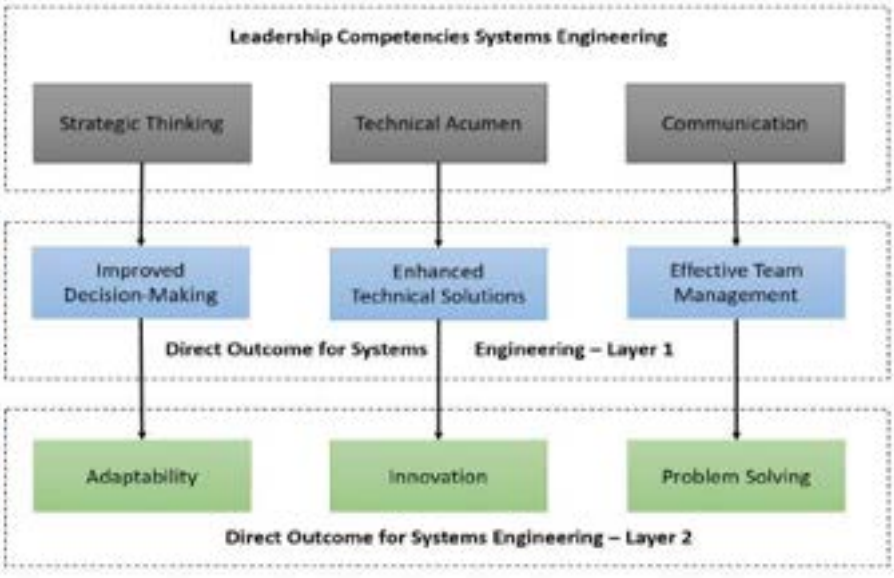

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Leadership Competencies in Systems Engineering.

The flow adheres to a conventional project management cycle, from planning and passing to technical execution and maintaining effective communication throughout the project. Each block represents an individual competence and resultant output within the SE environment. The arrows show the progress of these competencies and their interrelationship and influence on other characteristics of SE projects. Accordingly, the following hypothesis has been formed based on the framework mentioned above:

- **H2**: Systems engineering projects led by individuals with solid systems thinking skills have higher success rates.

3.3.1 Competency 1: Strategic Thinking

This is a technique that makes decisions through the effective management of projects. This skill improves an individual's decision-making capability, especially when faced with trying systems-engineering occasions [5]. This phase is critical to creating a project's vision, objectives, and strategies. Early project stages require strategic thinking to form the scope, goals, and approach. It demonstrates further the capacity to respond and adapt to changing situations and unanticipated difficulties. It ensures that the leadership plan remains flexible during projects and deals with unpredictable trials effectively [6].

3.3.2 Competency 2: Technical Acumen

Technical skills and technology are ever crucial in SE. The skills in question create better technological solutions for the complicated problems of engineering projects. Technical knowledge becomes important after strategy formulation. Interpreting the project's technical requirements, challenges, and limitations is needed [1]. The genius is in operationalising the strategic plan into concrete technical activities. Innovation means creating a culture of cleverness and continuous improvement within the team. It fosters the identification of new solutions and improvements in processes towards better project results [3].

3.3.3 Competency 3: Communication

Such communication is significant for the entire project, but becomes essential once it is up and running. Effective project management consists of collaborating with members of the team and stakeholders, co-managing issues, and ensuring that the project aligns with the vision and technical specifications [4]. This quality guarantees that the interaction between

such members is productive and sufficient and that communication is at all levels of the project. It will further pivot toward solving an identified problem, which is critical in identifying, understanding, evaluating, and addressing complex issues that may arise while the project is ongoing. Efficient problem-solving brings the smoothest implementation of projects [15].

3.4 Adaptive Leadership Model

The Adaptive Leadership Model is a contemporary leadership approach that acknowledges the rapidly altering environment of SE [7]. It embodies the real essence of leadership: empowering leaders to engage in challenging technical projects skillfully. The crux of this model lies in flexibility, whereby one believes that SE projects are often subject to unexpected changes and a dynamic environment [16]. The leader has to be able to adjust plans and approaches to meet the project's needs at any given time. Hence, continuing learning is threatened by the possible flux of technology and processes in SE. The leaders should continually update themselves with the current trends, innovations, and new avenues for making informed decisions and leading their teams productively [26]. Resilience is essential to recognising failure and obstacles in engineering projects. Leaders should be role models for staff to be resilient enough to overcome issues. These traits encompass all the abilities that enable leaders to navigate teams and projects within the changing environment and excel [27].

These will finally improve the success of projects, especially within the highly complex arena of SE. It indicates that the qualities of the Adaptive Leadership Model influence such factors associated with SE projects, eventually creating adaptive, resilient, and prosperous project results, as shown in Figure 3. The graphic depicts how the Adaptive Leadership Model incorporates adaptability, ongoing education, and a capacity to recover from setbacks. These characteristics impact several SE projects, enhancing team dynamics, well-informed decision-making, efficient problem-solving, and adaptability to swift technological advancements. It visually highlights the changeable nature of adaptive leadership and its positive effect on the success of projects in SE. Under the framework, the hypothesis deduced is:

- **H3**: Adaptive leadership practices positively correlate with completing complex systems engineering projects.

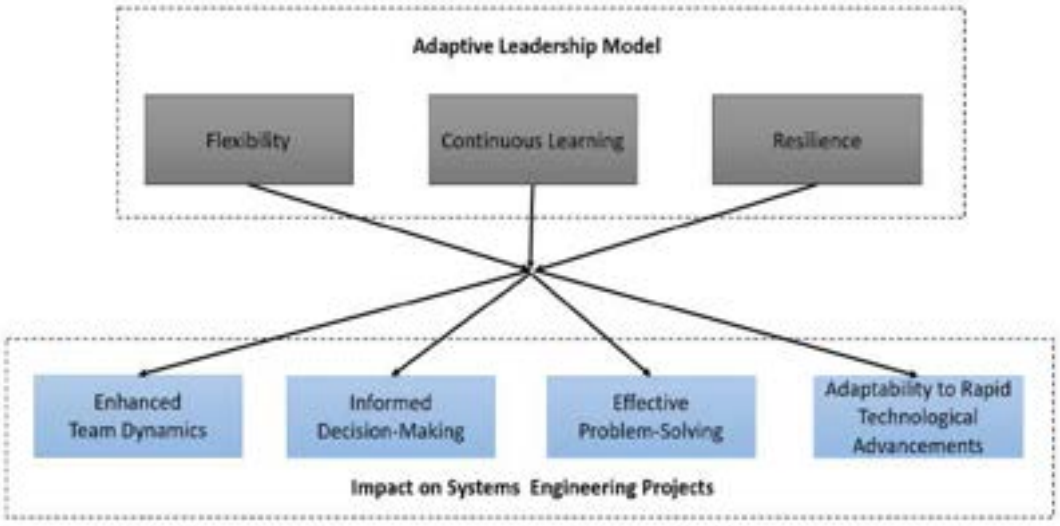

Figure 3: Adaptive Leadership Model Influence on Aspects of Systems Engineering Projects.

3.5 Adaptive Leadership Model Summary

The Integration of Leadership and SE Models integrates leadership theories with SE concepts to make a complete leadership approach for the specific leadership challenges in this arena. It acts as a conduit that connects leadership with technical capabilities. The program for Leadership Competencies in SE's competency framework delineates some essential constructs: strategic thinking, communicative abilities, and technical knowledge, which are vital for effective team and project management to achieve appropriate results in the SE profession. Adaptability, constant learning, and resilience were emphasised in the Adaptive Leadership Model for a systems engineer leader. It points out the dynamic nature of the projects and the demand for a leader to adapt and flourish amid change.

These conceptual models thus provide a backbone for good leadership. Their objective is to equip leaders with the required knowledge, abilities, and attitudes to traverse the complex, compelling, and ever-changing arena of SE. Throughout this research, these frameworks will act as guiding beacons, shedding light on achieving effective leadership in this dynamic and demanding sector. The whole integrated model of these three models is depicted in Figure 4.

4 RESEARCH METHOD

The study used quantitative and qualitative research to understand SE leadership competencies better. Implementing statistical validation and contextual understanding would account for effectively using a leadership model in SE projects. The mixed-method approach allows for a triangulated understanding of how leadership styles affect SE project success [28]. The quantitative side was suited to test specific hypotheses about the effectiveness of the various leadership styles. At the same time, the qualitative aspect would provide depth, context, and insight from practitioners that quantitative data could not reveal.

A structured questionnaire with open-ended and Likert scale questions was formulated and administered to professionals in SE working in project management and technical leadership positions in different areas of engineering. It assessed the perceived importance and application of selected leadership competencies in the conceptual framework and how they relate to project outcomes [29]. Respondents rated emphasis on leadership competencies, frequency of involvement in leadership development, and success of projects in which they were involved. They also rated the effectiveness of leadership models used (for example, adaptive or transformational) in different phases of projects.

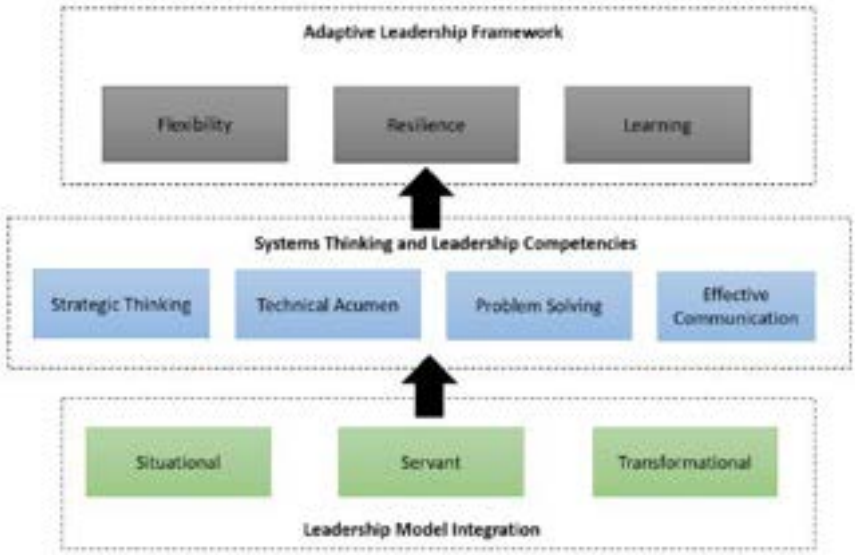

Figure 4: Holistic Integrated Conceptual Model for Leadership in SE.

In total, 30 respondents from different industries, including team leaders, systems engineers, and engineering managers, completed the questionnaire. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests to identify significant relationships (statistical significance) between leadership competencies and project success rates. Each hypothesis was analysed using observed and expected frequency tables to assess correlated statistical significance [30].

Semi-structured interviews were performed with a randomly selected subset of participants (n = 8) to investigate issues related to the practical application of leadership theories and models. Open-ended questions directed them to discuss issues surrounding adaptive leadership, giving their leadership practices and development needs, reasons for success in some areas, and adaptive uses of leadership styles in project phases. The interview transcripts were analysed thematically utilising a coding scheme ruled by the study's leadership constructs. During these analyses, exercises were synthesised, identifying patterns and recurring themes to yield insight into how leadership competencies interface with team dynamics, innovation, and project results [29]. The mixed-method approach yielded some insight; however, the small sample size in the quantitative phase (n=30) limits generalizability. Future research could increase the sample size and contemplate subgroup analyses (e.g., by industry, project type, and organisational maturity) for advanced insights.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Importance of Leadership Integration in Systems Engineering Projects

The study collected replies from 30 participants from May to July 2024, classified according to their positions in SE leadership. Table 1 presents the essential descriptive statistics in a summary format for roles, effectiveness and importance of leadership models. The role distribution is balanced across different leadership levels within SE projects. Most respondents (74%) rated leadership models as moderately or very effective, indicating strong buy-in for leadership integration in this field.

Table 1: Summary of Descriptive Statistics from Survey Responses – Part A

Category	Count	Percentage
Role Distribution		
Team Leader	10	33%
Manager	12	40%
Systems Engineer	8	27%
Effectiveness Leadership Models		
Very Effective	8	27%
Moderately Effective	14	47%
Not Very Effective	5	17%
Not Effective	3	10%
Importance of Leadership Models		
Adaptive Leadership	18	60%
Transformational Leadership	16	53%
Servant Leadership	12	40%
Situational Leadership	10	33%

The data suggests that leadership integration, defined as combining leadership principles with SE practices, is deemed critical for the success of projects. The consensus that leadership integration is important emphasises the need for a robust leadership approach in SE. As a result, adaptive leadership was identified as the most important model, with 60% of

respondents finding it adequate, followed closely by transformational leadership at 53%. Many respondents (40%) still consider servant and situational leadership important. These suggest that different leadership models may be helpful in different project environments or team dynamics. The relatively lower emphasis on situational leadership may indicate that respondents prefer a more dynamic and change-driven leadership style.

5.2 Impact of Leadership Adaptability on Systems Engineering Project Success

As part of the study, participants were asked to rate the extent to which leadership adaptability significantly impacts SE project outcomes. Figure 5 below illustrates the distributions of responses, highlighting how respondents view the importance of adaptability in leadership. The results reveal that a significant majority recognise adaptability as a crucial leadership quality for the success of SE projects. These results emphasise that 70% of the respondents believe adaptability significantly influences project outcomes. This finding aligns with the discussions of the importance of adaptive leadership, as highlighted in Table 1, where 60% of respondents rated adaptive leadership as the most essential leadership model for SE.

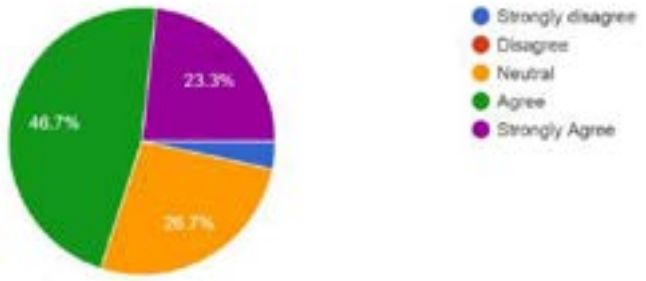

Figure 5: Impact of Adaptability in Leadership on Systems Engineering Project Outcomes.

5.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of Leadership Development Programs

Table 2 shows the respondents' perceived strengths and weaknesses of enhancing leadership development programs, particularly by incorporating soft skills and expanding their scope.

Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Statistics from Survey Responses – Part B

Category	Count	Percentage
Strengths and Weaknesses of Leadership Development Programs		
Perceived Strengths		
Technical Proficiency Emphasis	8	27%
Alignment with Industry Changes	6	20%
Tracking Progress and Updates	4	13%
Perceived Weaknesses		
Limited Scope and Availability	12	40%
Lack of Soft Skills Training	10	33%
Need for Research and Development	7	23%

Respondents identified technical proficiency, alignment with industry changes and tracking progress and updates as key strengths of leadership development programs. This suggests that the programs are well-designed to meet the technical and strategic demands of SE. Furthermore, the most significant weaknesses noted were limited scope and availability (40%) and a lack of soft skills training (33%). This highlights a gap in the focus of leadership programs on developing interpersonal and communication skills, which are critical for effective leadership, especially in managing cross-functional teams. The need for research and

development (23%) suggests that leadership programs may not be sufficiently forward-thinking or innovative in adapting to emerging trends in SE leadership.

5.4 Hypothesis Testing

The Chi-Square test assessed the association between leadership qualities (competencies, systems thinking, adaptive leadership) and project outcomes (success, completion). This test evaluates whether the observed frequencies in each category differ significantly from the expected frequencies under the assumption of no relationship (null hypothesis).

5.4.1 Hypothesis 1

- **H1**: Leaders with elevated degrees of [leadership competency] demonstrate greater effectiveness in overseeing systems engineering projects.

Table 3: H1 Observed Frequency Table

Leadership Competency	Successful	Unsuccessful
High Competency	10	2
Medium Competency	8	4
Low Competency	3	6

Table 4: H1 Expected Frequency Table

Leadership Competency	Successful	Unsuccessful
High Competency	7.64	4.36
Medium Competency	7.64	4.36
Low Competency	5.73	3.27

Chi-Square Calculations Statistic:

- Chi-Square statistic (X^2): 5.63
- p-value: 0.060
- Degrees of Freedom: 2

The Chi-Square test for Hypothesis 1 reveals that the relationship between leadership competency and project success is not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level ($p > 0.05$). While the observed and expected frequencies show some differences in Tables 3 and 4, the p-value of 0.060 is slightly above the 0.05 threshold, meaning the results do not provide strong evidence to confirm a significant association.

5.4.2 Hypothesis 2

- **H2**: Systems engineering projects led by individuals with solid systems thinking skills have higher success rates.

For Hypothesis 2, the relationship between systems thinking and project success is not statistically significant ($p = 0.173$). The observed and expected frequencies (Tables 5 and 6) do not differ significantly, and the p-value is above the 0.05 threshold. The available data suggest that systems thinking has no statistically confirmed impact on project success.

Table 5: H2 Observed Frequency Table

Systems Thinking	Successful	Unsuccessful
High Competency	9	3
Medium Competency	7	5
Low Competency	4	7

Table 6: H2 Expected Frequency Table

Systems Thinking	Successful	Unsuccessful
High Competency	6.86	5.14
Medium Competency	6.86	5.14
Low Competency	6.29	4.71

Chi-Square Calculations Statistic:

- Chi-Square statistic (X^2): 3.51
- p-value: 0.173
- Degrees of Freedom: 2

5.4.3 Hypothesis 3

- **H3**: Adaptive leadership practices positively correlate with completing complex systems engineering projects.

Table 7: H3 Observed Frequency Table

Adaptive Leadership	Successful	Unsuccessful
High Competency	12	3
Medium Competency	8	5
Low Competency	4	7

Table 8: H3 Expected Frequency Table

Adaptive Leadership	Successful	Unsuccessful
High Competency	9.23	5.77
Medium Competency	8.00	5.00
Low Competency	6.77	4.23

Chi-Square Calculations Statistic:

- Chi-Square statistic (X^2): 5.11
- p-value: 0.078
- Degrees of Freedom: 2

For Hypothesis 3, the relationship between adaptive leadership and project completion is also not statistically significant (p =0.078). Although a trend (Tables 6 and 7) shows some association between adaptive leadership and successful project completion, the p-value is slightly above the 0.05 threshold, meaning the results are inconclusive in confirming a significant relationship. However, the qualitative responses (Figure 11) strongly support the idea that adaptive.

5.5 Leadership Competencies in Systems Engineering

Effective communication emerged as the most critical competency, underscoring its significance in managing complex projects, as seen in Table 9. The survey highlighted the essential leadership competencies required in SE:

- **Effective Communication**: This was identified as the most crucial competency, acting as the linchpin for aligning interdisciplinary teams, exchanging technical information, and clarifying project objectives.
- **Strategic Thinking**: Second, most respondents emphasised the importance of strategic thinking in providing guidance and direction, particularly in complex project environments.

- **Technical Acumen**: While necessary, technical acumen was considered less critical than communication and strategic thinking, as effective communication can often bridge technical gaps.

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics – Leadership Competencies in Systems Engineering

Competence Importance	Count	Percentage
Effective Communication	14	47%
Strategic Thinking	10	33%
Technical Acumen	6	20%

5.6 Discussion

The findings demonstrated the importance of leadership integration in improving the success of an SE project. According to the respondents, complex project management is more successful for leaders who embrace systems thinking and can successfully combine managerial and technical elements. As technical leaders, systems engineers are strategic integrators who ensure that every aspect of a project aligns with the larger goals. This identified leadership roles and duties, especially when managing interdisciplinary teams. The findings show that systems engineers' integrative responsibilities go beyond simple technical supervision; they also need to control stakeholder expectations and ensure that various subsystems function as a cohesive unit.

It was discovered that one of the main factors influencing project success was the leaders' flexibility. The volatility and complexity that come with SE projects were considerably better handled by leaders who could modify their management approach according to the stage of the project. This was especially true for those who used transformational and adaptive leadership styles. This responds to research question two, which aimed to identify the abilities and proficiencies that distinguish successful leaders in SE. Leaders who exhibited adaptive leadership were better able to handle uncertainty and transition between technical problem-solving and team management. This outcome also supports research objective two, which states that technical knowledge and flexibility are essential leadership qualities in SE.

The data also identified significant shortcomings in the current leadership development programs, especially their incapacity to equip leaders for the particular difficulties presented by SE. Most respondents believed that current programs do not sufficiently address the technical integration and systems-thinking competencies needed in this profession and place an undue emphasis on general management skills. This result responds to research question three, which focused on the shortcomings and difficulties in systems engineers' leadership growth. Respondents emphasised that managing complex, interdisciplinary teams and navigating the ever-evolving technology landscape that systems engineers must contend with are rarely covered in leadership schools. This supports the idea that project managers with greater systems thinking skills are more successful. The results support a more specialised approach to leadership development in SE and validate research objective three to identify gaps in present leadership training.

The quantitative analysis's capacity to extrapolate the results to a larger population was somewhat constrained by the small sample size of 30 respondents. The respondents' detailed experiences and difficulties gave context and an explanation for the quantitative tendencies, which is where the qualitative analysis came in handy. Future research has a clear chance of expanding the sample size to support the quantitative analysis and enable more reliable statistical testing. Exploring subgroup analyses, such as variations in leadership effectiveness by industry or project type, might also be feasible with a larger sample.

In this study, the application of a mixed-method approach proved crucial. The qualitative data enhanced the comprehension of these findings by providing in-depth descriptions of how leadership issues manifest in real-world situations, and the quantitative data offered a glimpse of leadership competencies and project success. Given the limited sample size, this method made it possible to analyse the data more nuancedly than feasible with only quantitative data. By combining the two approaches, the study fully captured the range and complexity of SE leadership experiences.

6 CONCLUSION

The study's findings highlighted the role of leadership in SE, highlighting some key skills such as effective communication, strategic thinking, and flexible leadership. These attributes are strongly linked to project success, confirming leadership's critical and helpful function in guaranteeing project efficacy. Addressing the ever-changing issues that SE projects frequently face requires adaptive leadership. This approach enables leaders to effectively lead their teams through uncertainty and handle shifting circumstances. At the same time, systems thinking has given leaders a thorough framework for handling the intricacies of SE projects, allowing them to maintain a close eye on interconnected components.

According to the study's evidence, successful SE directors must combine technical expertise with advanced leadership characteristics to effectively manage their projects' interdisciplinary and frequently unpredictable nature. SE leaders can accomplish project objectives while adapting to limitations and changing demands by incorporating adaptive leadership styles and encouraging systems thinking.

For future research, the long-term impacts of leadership abilities on project outcomes over lengthy periods should be investigated further. Future research will be more credible and applicable if the sample size is increased and a greater variety of project scenarios are included.

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PROJECT COMPLEXITY, PROJECT MANAGEMENT MATURITY AND PROJECT SUCCESS IN MINING ORGANISATIONS

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ABSTRACT

There is a common belief that higher levels of project management maturity lead to successful projects. This study focused on the mining industry. It examined the relationships between project complexity, project management maturity (PMM), and perceived project success. Based on survey responses from 40 project professionals, the results showed that PMM does not significantly moderate the effect of project complexity on perceived success. Three hypotheses were tested, and all three were rejected. A weak positive correlation between PMM and perceived success was found, but it was not statistically significant. The findings suggest that other factors may have a stronger influence on perceived project success and should be explored in future research.

Keywords: project management, project complexity, project management maturity, project success, mining industry

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1 INTRODUCTION

Project Management Maturity (PMM) has been investigated across different industries because of its perceived potential to enhance project success rates [1]. Project management maturity models (PMMMs) provide a structured approach for measuring an organisation's PMM [2]. In emerging economies, where the mining industry significantly supports economic development, effective project management is necessary to manage challenges such as geological complexity, regulatory requirements, and sociopolitical influences [3]. This study investigates the relationship between project complexity, PMM, and project success in mining organisations, where successful project execution is crucial for organisational growth and sustainability [4].

In the mining sector, project complexity involves technical challenges, safety risks, environmental concerns, and market volatility [5], [6], whereas PMM reflects an organisation's capability to manage and execute projects efficiently and effectively [1]. PMM can influence project success by promoting best practices and standardised procedures, which are particularly important in the mining sector, where projects form the core of business operations [7]. Successful mining projects should achieve strategic goals, ensure environmental sustainability, and uphold social responsibility [8].

This study aims to address a gap in the literature by examining whether PMM helps manage project complexity to improve perceived project success in the mining industry. Given the mining sector's complexity, inherent unpredictability and the increasing focus on sustainable project delivery, understanding the role of PMM remains important [8], [9], [10].

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Project complexity

Project complexity is an important and developing concept in project management, highlighting how traditional models often struggle to deal with the challenges and uncertainties of modern projects [11]). Some scholars argue that the focus on complexity is driven by trends in project management [12]. In contrast, others emphasise the need for a more practical understanding of complexity in dynamic and uncertain situations [13].

Another significant aspect in comprehending project complexity is the distinction between "complex" and "difficult", with "complex" often referring to something with numerous interconnected elements and intrinsic complexity [14], [15]. However, despite much debate, a unified definition of "project complexity" remains elusive [16] [17]. Complex projects are commonly acknowledged to be more than merely large or complicated ones, while there is no universal understanding of what defines them [18].

2.2 Project management maturity (PMM)

PMM refers to the incremental improvement of an organisation's project management skills. It reflects the current level of an organisation's ability to apply project management practices to achieve more successful outcomes consistently [19]. PMM is measured by PMMMs, and most PMMMs originated from the Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) framework, which consists of five maturity levels (See figure 1). Level 1 is the lowest level of PMM, characterised by unstructured and inconsistent practices, while Level 5 is the highest level, defined by well-established and consistently applied methodologies. The five levels are [19], [20]:

- *Level 1:* Initial (Processes are spontaneous, *ad hoc* and strongly reliant on individual effort)
- *Level 2:* Managed: (Adds fundamental but inconsistent project management methods)

- *Level 3:* Defined (Standardises these procedures throughout the organisation, resulting in more predictable outcomes)
- *Level 4:* Quantitatively managed (Uses quantitative indicators to assess performance, integrated project management processes)
- *Level 5:* Optimising: (prioritise continuous optimisation, flexible, incorporating innovation and best practices to achieve project management excellence)

This organised progression emphasises the necessity of PMM in managing the rising complexity of modern projects, providing organisations with a deliberate roadmap for developing their PMM [19].

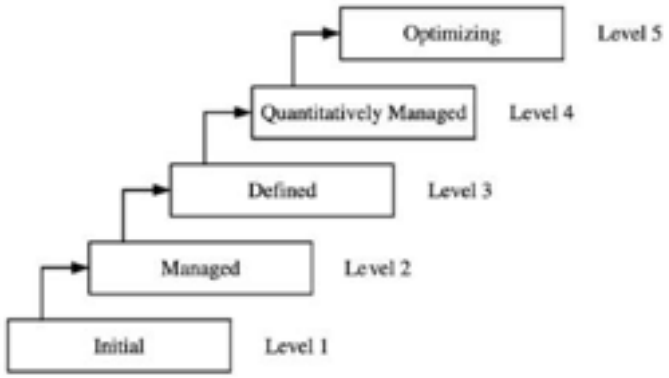

Figure 1: Five Organisational PMM levels [19]

2.3 Linking PMM to project complexity

Project complexity makes it difficult to understand, anticipate, and regulate project dynamics, which is caused by variables such as project scale and the interconnections of different project elements [17]. Several studies have found that higher levels of PMM can improve the management of complex projects [2], [17], [20], [21].

PMMMs are increasingly being used as a strategic tool to measure PMM. They offer a systematic framework for enhancing organisational project management capabilities [2]. The adoption of standardised processes is an essential aspect of PMM since it improves the management of complex projects by providing teams with clear approaches [22]. Additionally, a higher level of PMM implies better risk management, which allows organisations to identify and reduce risks associated with project interdependencies [21]. Higher levels of PMM could improve knowledge management and continuous learning, helping to reduce uncertainty and support informed decision-making in complex projects [23]. Maturity in project management enhances resource allocation, scheduling, and stakeholder communication, providing greater control over project processes [24]. It can also support a culture of ongoing improvement, allowing organisations to respond effectively to shifting project conditions [25]. These capabilities reflect the drivers of project complexity identified by Moza *et al*. [26], showing how higher PMM levels could contribute to more effective management of complex projects.

2.4 Project success

Traditional measures of organisational performance, which primarily rely on financial indicators, are increasingly seen as inadequate for evaluating long-term effectiveness in today's complex and rapidly evolving markets [27], [28]. In response, contemporary frameworks that offer a holistic picture of performance have been established, such as

Intellectual Capital and The Balanced Scorecard [29], [40]. However, there is no clear agreement on how to consistently measure project performance in project management, leading to scattered and incomplete indicators [31]. Operational success, which includes fulfilling deadlines, budgets, and specifications, is frequently given top priority by project managers [32]. However, this strategy might overlook important long-term effects, customer satisfaction, and larger corporate goals [33].

Recent studies recommend a multidimensional approach to project success that includes operational performance, customer satisfaction, and business outcomes [21], [34]. Measuring project success is difficult because different stakeholders, such as clients, developers, and end-users, often use other criteria to define success [35]. In addition, projects that are managed to support long-term company goals can improve overall performance, but these are less common because many projects focus on short-term results [35].

Scholars like Ingle *et al*. [32] suggest multidimensional success criteria, such as project efficiency, customer impact, business success, and future preparedness, to provide a more comprehensive evaluation technique. Technological uncertainty affects success assessment, with different project types (low-tech to ultra-high tech) requiring specialised methodologies [36], [37]. Recent studies support these ideas and encourage project managers to become strategic leaders who create value for the company beyond just meeting operational goals [1], [38].

This study evaluated the project's results as successful, challenged, or failed based on how interviewees perceived them. A successful project was completed on time and within budget while meeting all agreed-upon scope and quality requirements. A challenged project was one that was completed, but delivered late or over budget, or in which not all scope and quality objectives were met. Finally, the project was considered a failure if it was never completed or did not meet the project scope or quality requirements agreed upon by the customer and project manager [21].

2.5 Linking perceived project success with project complexity

Project success is a multidimensional concept that is closely related to project complexity, which can range from simple activities to very complex, innovative projects [33]. Understanding this link is important because project complexity has a significant impact on planning, execution, and outcomes [39]. Project complexity includes technological, organisational, and environmental elements that change over the project's lifecycle, making it difficult to manage and measure successfully [40]. The increase in the number of complex construction projects has resulted in more budget overruns and delays [41]. The classic "iron triangle" of time, cost, and quality is frequently prioritised, but the measure of the success of a project should also include stakeholder satisfaction and larger organisational goals [42], [43].

Several studies have shown a negative correlation between project complexity and construction project success [9]. Given the dynamic nature of complexity, particularly in mining projects, it is important to understand how project complexity develops and affects project success over time [9]. The demand for advanced project management approaches to handle complex projects continues to grow as organisations operate in increasingly dynamic business contexts [44].

2.6 The Influence of PMM on perceived project success

There is a lack of agreement among scholars on whether PMM significantly influences project success. Numerous studies have found no evident correlation between PMM and project success [45], [46], [47], [48], [49]. However, certain researchers argue that there is a relationship between PMM and project success [51], [52], [53]. They say that organisations

operating at the lowest level of PMM are more likely to experience project failure. In contrast, higher maturity levels are associated with a greater likelihood of project success [50], [54], [55], [56].

The relationship between PMM and perceived project success remains unclear. Some studies suggest a positive link, while others find no connection. Findings continue to differ, and no shared conclusion has been reached.

3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

This study tested the following hypotheses, each supported by the literature cited beneath the respective hypothesis:

H1: PMM positively moderates the relationship between project complexity and perceived project success.

Prior research indicates that increased project management maturity is associated with more effective management of complex projects [2], [17], [20], [21].

H2: Project complexity significantly negatively impacts perceived project success.

A study by Hartono et al [9] showed a negative correlation between project complexity and construction project success.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between PMM and perceived project success.

Several authors agree that higher levels of maturity are linked to an increased probability of achieving project success [50], [54], [55], [56].

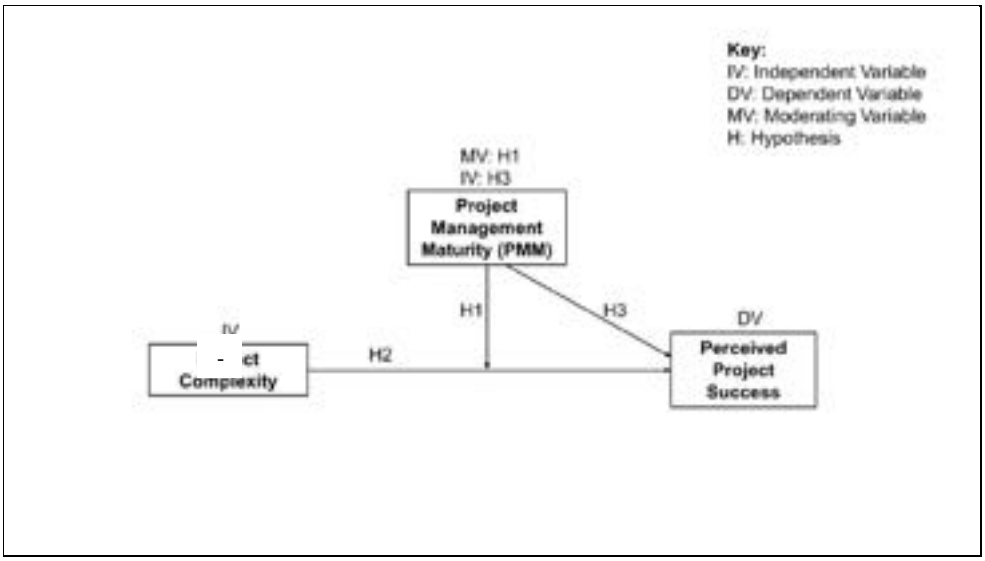

Figure 2: Conceptual Model

The three hypotheses informed the development of the conceptual model shown in Figure 2.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was used to examine the relationship between project complexity, PMM, and perceived project success in the mining industry. A structured questionnaire was developed based on the study's research questions and hypotheses, informed by the theoretical foundations and empirical findings discussed in Section 2. Project success was self-defined by respondents to capture context-specific interpretations, however, definitions of project success and PMM levels were provided within the questionnaire to ensure a shared understanding of the constructs.

The questionnaire was distributed through the Qualtrics XM Platform™ using purposive sampling. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure that respondents with specific expertise and experience relevant to the research objectives were chosen, thereby enhancing the relevance and quality of the collected data.

Responses were obtained from 40 project professionals in the South African mining industry. It included project managers, team leaders, and executives, based on their involvement in projects. Each respondent was requested to report on the projects that they were working on or had worked on in the recent past, as relevant to the study's scope. This approach enabled the collection of data on multiple projects from a single respondent where applicable, thereby providing a broader dataset while maintaining respondent-level context. In total, the respondents reported on 161 projects. Allowing respondents to report on more than one project did not introduce bias, as each project was treated as a separate observational unit in the analysis.

The Qualtrics XM Platform™ was used to collect and process survey responses, reducing the need for human intervention and minimising potential bias. Data preparation included cleaning and coding in SPSS, followed by descriptive statistics to summarise central tendencies and variability in the three variables. Hypothesis testing assessed the statistical significance of the observed relationships.

A regression analysis was conducted using Andrew and Hayes' PROCESS macro to determine how PMM moderates the association between project complexity and perceived success. This study investigated both direct and interaction effects to see whether PMM influences the link between complexity and perceived success [57], [58]. Moderation analysis emphasised PMM's importance in improving project outcomes under increased complexity.

Implementing metrics such as Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency, component analysis for construct validity, and cross-validation techniques ensured the reliability and validity of the survey results. These methods were vital for obtaining reliable and dependable findings. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Engineering, the Built Environment and Information Technology at the University of Pretoria.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Qualtrics survey results examine how PMM moderates the relationship between project complexity and perceived project success in the mining sector. This section analyses the responses from 40 participants, all experienced project professionals within the mining industry. Respondents represent a range of operations, including hard rock and soft rock mining, as well as mining consultancy. Each participant has at least two years' experience managing mining-related projects, offering substantial domain expertise and practical insight into project management dynamics in this context.

5.1 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha is a statistical measure that evaluates the internal consistency of a survey or test items, commonly used to determine its reliability. It assesses the degree of correlation between items in a questionnaire, thereby indicating the reliability or consistency of the instrument used for collecting data. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the survey items measuring the constructs of Project Complexity, Project Management Maturity, and Project Success.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

*Sr.	Variable name	Cronbach's Alpha	**N of Items
1	Project Complexity	0.770	3
2	Project Management Maturity	0.755	3
3	Project Success	0.791	2

** Sr. – Serial number of the variables listed*

*** N – The number of observations*

Overall, the Cronbach's alpha values for all three variables (refer to Table 1), project complexity (0.770), PMM (0.755), and project success (0.791), show good to very strong internal consistency. These results confirm that the survey items employed in the study are reliable and effectively measure their respective constructs. The data produced from these items can be regarded as dependable, providing a firm platform for subsequent statistical analysis and interpretation in the study.

5.2 Descriptive analysis

This section investigates the descriptive statistics for the critical variables in the study. Descriptive statistics describe the key properties of the data, including measures of central tendency (mean), variability (standard deviation), and the shape of the distribution (skewness and kurtosis). By evaluating these statistics, a better grasp of the overall patterns and distributions of the variables is critical for interpreting the data and sets the basis for more sophisticated analysis. Tables 2 and 3 below present the findings from examining the data.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Project Complexity	3.29	0.59527	-0.627	-0.601
PMM	3.65	1.02657	-0.278	-0.994
Project Success %	58.47	27.310	-0.351	-0.111

N=40

5.2.1 Project complexity

The average project complexity score is 3.29 on a scale of 1 to 4, indicating that the sampled mining projects are generally complex. The standard deviation of 0.60 indicates that complexity scores are rated similarly across the sample. A skewness of -0.627 indicates a slight negative skew, suggesting that some projects are viewed as less complex. A kurtosis of -0.601 implies a flatter distribution with fewer outliers (See Table 2). These findings indicate that mining companies operate on rather challenging projects, with some variation in complexity levels.

5.2.2 Project management maturity (PMM)

The mean PMM score on a scale of 1 to 5 is 3.65, indicating that the participating organisations have a relatively high level of PMM. The larger standard deviation of 1.03 implies significant diversity in PMM levels among organisations, emphasising inequalities in project management approaches. The skewness of -0.278 reveals that most organisations cluster around higher maturity levels, whilst the kurtosis of -0.994 indicates a diversified distribution with fewer outliers (See Table 2). These findings show that, while many mining companies have well-established project management techniques, there is still significant room for standardisation and development.

Table 3: Project complexity, PMM and perceived project success

Project Complexity				
Level	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
1. 1-2	2	5.0	5.0	5.0
2. 1-3	12	30.0	30.0	35.0
3. 1-4	26	65.0	65.0	100
Total	**40**	**100**	**100**	
PMM				
PMM Level	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
1	0	0	0	0
2	7	17.5	17.5	17.5
3	9	22.5	22.5	40.0
4	15	37.5	37.5	77.5
5	9	22.5	22.5	100
Total	**40**	**100**	**100**	
Perceived project success				
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
0 - 20%	4	10.0	10.0	10.0
21 - 40%	5	12.5	12.5	22.5
41 - 60%	13	32.5	32.5	55.0
61 - 80%	12	30.5	30.0	85.0
81 - 100%	6	15.0	15.0	100
Total	**40**	**100**	**100**	

5.2.3 Perceived project success

The average project success rate is 58.47%, with a standard deviation of 27.31%, demonstrating significant diversity in project results. The skewness of -0.351 and kurtosis of -0.111 indicate a roughly symmetric distribution of perceived success rates, with no substantial skewness or severe outliers (See Table 2). Of the 161 projects sampled from 40 survey respondents, 29% were challenging, 13% failed, and 58% were considered successful (Table 4). This distribution highlights the mining sector's different outcomes, with more than half of projects meeting their objectives and a significant minority facing major obstacles or failing to meet expectations.

Table 4: Sampled projects

	Number of Projects	Percentage
Successful Projects	94	58%
Challenged Projects	46	29%
Failed Projects	21	13%
Total Sampled Projects	161	

5.2.4 Overall interpretation

The descriptive statistics show that mining projects are generally difficult, yet well-managed. However, the difference in PMM and perceived project success rates indicates discrepancies in how organisations manage complexity and fulfil project objectives. The balanced distribution of project complexity and the high average PMM levels show that mining organisations are well-equipped to manage moderately difficult projects. Yet, variations in maturity levels highlight areas for future improvement. Furthermore, the success rate dispersion emphasises the need for better project management methods to improve overall project outcomes.

These descriptive insights are important for understanding the operational dynamics of the mining industry and serve as the foundation for more advanced analyses, such as correlation and regression, to investigate the relationships between project complexity, PMM, and perceived project success.

5.3 Regression analysis

5.3.1 Linear regression analysis

This study used linear regression analysis to investigate the links between project complexity, PMM, and perceived project success in the mining industry. The study found a slight positive correlation ($R^2 = 0.035$, $p = 0.246$) between project complexity and perceived project success. However, complexity only explains 3.5% of the variance and is not a meaningful predictor [58]. PMM had a moderate positive link with perceived project success ($R^2 = 0.074$, $p = 0.089$), indicating that higher PMM levels may improve project outcomes. The relationship did not achieve statistical significance. The unstandardised beta coefficients showed that higher project complexity and PMM are linked to slight increases in perceived project success, with a weak effect from complexity and a stronger impact from PMM [58]. These findings suggest that while PMM can improve perceived project performance, project complexity alone does not substantially impact perceived success. This shows the importance of considering other factors, like team dynamics and resource use, to better understand what affects project success in the mining industry. The nearly significant p-value for PMM suggests that the link might become statistically significant with more data or more complete information.

5.3.2 Regression analysis (Andrew and Hayes)

This analysis used the Andrew and Hayes PROCESS macro model to investigate the moderating effect of PMM on the relationship between project complexity and perceived project success [58]. The interaction term's coefficient (-0.1451) suggests that as PMM increases, the relationship between project complexity and perceived project success weakens slightly. However, with a p-value of 0.6399 and a t-value of -0.4718, the interaction effect was found to be statistically insignificant. The confidence interval (-0.7688 to 0.4786) includes zero,

indicating that PMM does not have a meaningful moderating effect on the relationship. These findings suggest that, contrary to expectations, PMM does not significantly strengthen the link between project complexity and perceived project success. This challenges the idea that PMM acts as a moderator in managing complexity to improve outcomes. Other variables may play a more important role in influencing perceived success.

5.3.3 Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis testing is a basic statistical method used to make conclusions about a population based on sample data [58]. The process usually involves creating an alternative hypothesis (H1), which shows what the researcher expects, and a null hypothesis (H0), which assumes no effect or difference. Researchers can use statistical tests such as regression analysis, F-tests, and t-tests to evaluate the likelihood that the observed data will occur under the null hypothesis [58]. This approach allows for objective decision-making on whether to accept or reject hypotheses, ultimately contributing to the validation or creation of theoretical models in various study areas [58].

The following are the proposed research hypotheses and their related null hypotheses:

H1: PMM positively moderates the relationship between project complexity and perceived project success.

- **$H0_1$ (Null):** PMM does not positively moderate the relationship between project complexity and perceived project success.

H2: Project complexity has a significant negative impact on perceived project success.

- **$H0_2$ (Null):** Project complexity has no significant impact on perceived project success.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between PMM and perceived project success.

- **$H0_3$ (Null):** There is no significant relationship between PMM and perceived project success.

By considering important statistical statistics such as the Coefficient of Determination (R^2), F-statistic (F), beta coefficient, t-test, and p-value, inferences regarding the validity of the proposed hypothesis can be drawn (See Table 5).

Table 5: Hypothesis testing

	R^2	F	B (Coeff)	t test	p	Status
H1	0.0985	1.3112	-0.1451	-0.4718	0.6399	Rejected
H2	0.035	1.387	0.371	1.178	0.246	Rejected
H3	0.074	3.056	0.313	1.748	0.089	Rejected

The study found no statistically significant results for the three tested hypotheses. The R^2 values less than 0.7 suggest that other factors might influence the dependent variable that the model is not capturing (See Table 5).

The interaction between project complexity and PMM on perceived project success was not significant, indicated by a high p-value (>0.05). H1 was rejected, and the null hypothesis ($H0_1$) was accepted. PMM did not show a meaningful moderating effect on the relationship. Higher PMM levels did not lead to better perceived outcomes in complex projects within this sample.

The regression analysis showed that project complexity did not significantly affect perceived project success. The p-value was not significant (>0.05). The null hypothesis ($H0_2$) was accepted, and H2 was rejected. A positive beta coefficient was found, suggesting a weak positive link, though not statistically meaningful. This goes against the view that more complex projects usually face more problems, which leads to lower success rates. The

difference between this result and earlier studies suggests that other factors may influence the link between complexity and perceived success in mining projects.

The study showed a positive link between PMM and perceived project success, but the p-value was slightly above the standard level for statistical significance (0.05). H3 was rejected, and the null hypothesis ($H0_3$) was accepted. This means the results suggest a possible link, but the data is not strong enough to confirm it in this study.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The rejection of all three hypotheses shows that the tested factors may not fully explain perceived project success. The results were unexpected, but still show that more research is needed. Other factors, not included in this study, may have a more substantial effect, or the links between them may be more complex. The findings show the need to better understand what leads to project success in mining. The results challenge some common ideas about complexity and maturity. They also suggest that well-known models may not work the same in a complex and fast-changing industry like mining.

Limitations of the study include a sample size that may have been too small to detect subtle relationships among the tested variables. Data was based on perceptions, which may not fully reflect actual project performance or outcomes. Limiting the scope to a specific sector reduced the generalisability of the results to other industries or contexts. The complexity and dynamic nature of the mining sector may have resulted in some relevant industry-specific influences not being captured.

Recommendations for future research are:

Broader Research Scope: Future studies should include larger and more varied samples to improve the strength and relevance of the results. A bigger sample can help show clearer patterns and give a better understanding of how project complexity and PMM affect project success.

Explore More Variables: Project complexity and PMM alone may not fully explain project success. Other factors like team dynamics, resource use, company culture, and external conditions could also play an important role. How these factors interact with complexity and PMM might help explain project outcomes more clearly.

Context-Specific Factors: Future studies should consider the unique nature of the mining industry. Challenges in mining may affect project outcomes in ways that differ from other sectors. These specific factors can lead to more valuable insights and practical advice.

Longitudinal Studies: Future research could track projects over time to better understand how project complexity and PMM influence success at different stages of the project lifecycle. This may reveal time-based patterns that are not visible in cross-sectional data.

In conclusion, although the study did not find significant results on how project complexity and PMM affect perceived project success, it highlights important questions that deserve further attention. The limited sample size may have impacted the findings. These results offer a starting point for rethinking common assumptions about the role of complexity and maturity in project performance.

The limitations of the study are:

- The sample size may have been too small to detect subtle or complex relationships among the tested variables.
- The data was based on perceptions, which may not fully reflect actual project performance or outcomes.

- The study was limited to a specific sector, reducing the generalisability of the results to other industries or contexts.
- The mining sector is complex and dynamic, and the study may not have accounted for all relevant industry-specific influences.

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8 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors acknowledge the use of AI tools solely for the purposes of grammar correction and language refinement. The literature review, development of research propositions, and all substantive content, including conceptual framing, data analysis, and interpretation, were generated and critically edited by the authors.

CHARACTERISATION OF THE PARTS PRODUCED FROM BINDER JETTING-SAND CASTING MOULDS

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ABSTRACT

The advancement of conventional metal casting has given Rapid Sand Casting (RSC) increasing recognition. RSC involves rapidly prototyping sand moulds and cores through binder jetting for metal casting. This process has successfully minimized many challenges encountered in traditional methods of producing sand moulds and cores. However, RSC has not yet been widely adopted for manufacturing high-tech products in industries such as biomedical or aerospace. Therefore, assessing the capacity, feasibility, consistency, efficiency, and reliability of RSC products for high-tech applications is essential. Statistical analyses, including descriptive methods (mean, standard deviation) and inferential methods (ANOVA), are employed to examine the variability of the mechanical properties of the parts, including strength, dimensional accuracy, and hardness. Understanding the variability of Additive Manufacturing sand moulds can lead to improved process control, enhanced product quality, and broader adoption in high-tech industries.

Keywords: Binder Jetting, Rapid Sand Casting, and Statistical Analyses

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1 INTRODUCTION

Additive manufacturing (AM) has emerged as a monumental development in modern industry, transforming how parts are designed and manufactured. As a foundation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, AM builds three-dimensional objects layer by layer, providing incomparable design freedom and flexibility [1, 2]. Firstly, in the early 1990s, this technique was regarded as Rapid Prototyping (RP); this technology allowed manufacturers to create prototypes directly from CAD data, consequently minimizing the production routes and speeding product development [3]. Presently, AM is hugely applied across diverse areas, such as aerospace, construction, automotive, and biomedical engineering [2, 4].

One AM technique that has received recognition is Binder Jetting, which develops sand moulds and cores by selectively depositing a binder onto a sand bed, layer by layer. This technique has opened the route for Rapid Sand Casting (RSC), a modernized method to traditional sand casting [2-4]. RSC minimizes some of the inadequacies related to conventional methods, like time-intensive pattern-making, extensive material usage, lengthy mould preparation times, and high labour costs, making it an attractive option for industries prioritizing speed and cost-effectiveness [5]. In spite of these advantages, RSC is yet to attain widespread adoption in high-tech industries, including biomedical and aerospace sectors [3]. Since, these sectors require exceptionally high standards in aspect of dimensional accuracy, mechanical strength, and overall reliability, factors that remain difficult for RSC to consistently meet [6, 7]. One of the vital challenges surrounding RSC is the lack of qualification of the mechanical properties of the produced parts, such as strength, hardness, and geometric precision, in order to determine their consistency, dependability, reliability, and variability [8]. In high-performance applications, even slight inconsistencies can immensely affect product safety and reliability [2, 8].

Previous works on binder jetting have looked closely at how printing parameters and post-processing steps can be fine-tuned to improve the quality of the final parts. For example, Lores et al. (2019) thoroughly review the materials and process aspects of binder jetting, underscoring its strong potential for metal additive manufacturing [5]. Building on this, Huber et al. (2021) studied how changes in sintering temperature and hold time influence the densification, mechanical strength, and microstructure of binder jet 3D printed 17–4 PH stainless steel, offering practical insights that help optimize the process for better performance [9]. Also, several studies have delved into the optimization and performance of binder jetting to ensure quality and high performance across different materials and applications [2, 10].

Despite these innovative works, there remains a gap in this field to completely harness the RSC potential, where a thorough examination of its efficiency to offer consistent, high-quality parts is paramount. An important part of this evaluation involves statistical analysis of data obtained from RSC-manufactured parts, which gives insights into the variability of mechanical properties and their overall performance. Descriptive statistical methods, including mean and standard deviation, would help establish a foundational understanding of property distribution and consistency. Also, inferential statistical methods, like Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), ensure a deep study of variations across production batches. These analytical tools are vital in recognizing critical process parameters that impact mechanical performance, allowing for refinements that improve product quality and process stability [11].

Furthermore, managing and understanding variability in AM-based sand moulds is integral to ensuring reproducibility and reliability. By methodically addressing these complications, RSC has the capability as one of the techniques to emerge into a viable and hugely accepted solution for manufacturing high-precision components. As industries search to enhance production efficiency without compromising quality, refining RSC procedures becomes

increasingly important. Therefore, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the feasibility, efficiency, and reliability of RSC, offering a pathway toward broader adoption in advanced manufacturing sectors. To the best of my knowledge, no prior work has been carried out to determine the qualification of the parts produced from binder jetting. Moreover, there remains a lack of sufficient data on how mold orientation in binder jetting affects the integrity and final properties of cast components. Hence, the findings of this research will play a crucial role in leapfrogging the knowledge base surrounding RSC and its application in high-tech industries. By identifying key factors influencing mechanical performance and establishing effective process control measures, this study seeks to bridge the gap between RSC's efficiency and its practical implementation in demanding environments. Through incessant research and optimization, RSC could eventually redefine how precision parts are produced, leading to more effective, sustainable, and scalable production solutions.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Mould and Core Production

Fifteen sand moulds were manufactured using Binder Jetting Additive Manufacturing technology by the Voxeljet VX1000 system. Each mould comprises a core and a drag, making a total of 15 cores and 15 drags. The moulds have a design with dimensions specified in Figure 1. With silica sand combined with a furan-based binder, the core and drag designs were digitally designed and printed. This procedure ensured precise, smooth surfaces and shapes, ensuring the moulds are well-designed for casting aluminium alloy components. Table 1 shows the processing parameters consistently applied to produce moulds across various orientations. Furthermore, the workflow from the fabrication process to data interpretation and analysis is depicted in Figure 2.

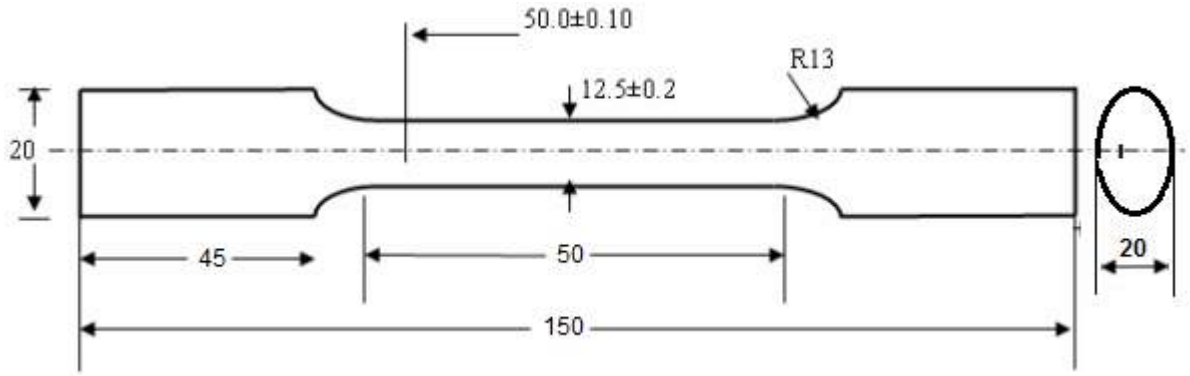

Figure 1: The dimensions of the specimen cast from the moulds

Table 1: Printing parameters for the mould printing

Parameter	Typical Value
Layer Thickness	0.30 mm
Binder Saturation	70%
Printhead Speed	0.72 mm/s
Curing Time / Temperature	Air cool for 12 hours

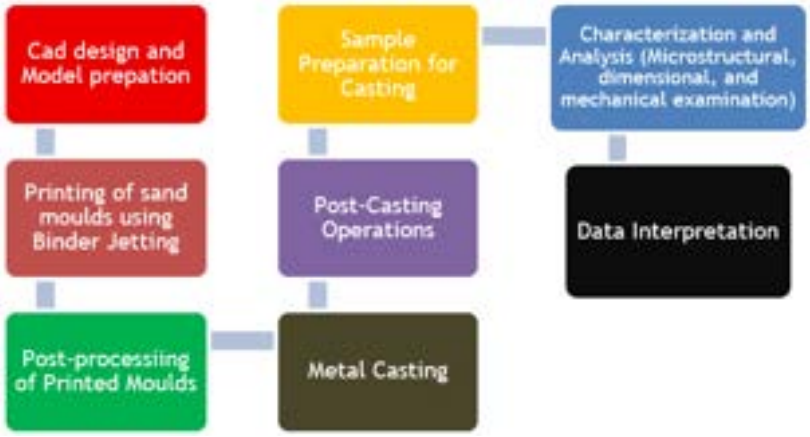

Figure 2: Step-by-step workflow illustrating the fabrication process through to data interpretation and analysis

2.1.1 Mould Orientation Strategy

In evaluating the impact of mould orientation on casting performance and quality, the moulds were classified based on their build orientation during printing:

- M1–M5: Horizontally arranged moulds
- M6–M10: Vertically arranged moulds
- M11–M15: Mixed-orientation moulds (combination of horizontal and vertical features)

A schematic diagram of the above is depicted in Figure 3. The categorization was designed to examine how orientation from a Voxeljet VX1000 system influences dimensional accuracy, mechanical properties, and entire casting integrity. The moulds were fabricated in batches, arranged sequentially across the build platform during the printing process.

A sample size of 5 per orientation group was selected in line with standard practice for pilot or exploratory experimental designs, where sample sizes typically range between 5 and 20 [12]. This choice also reflects the balance between obtaining preliminary, reproducible insights and managing practical limitations in fabrication, material usage, and testing resources [13, 14].

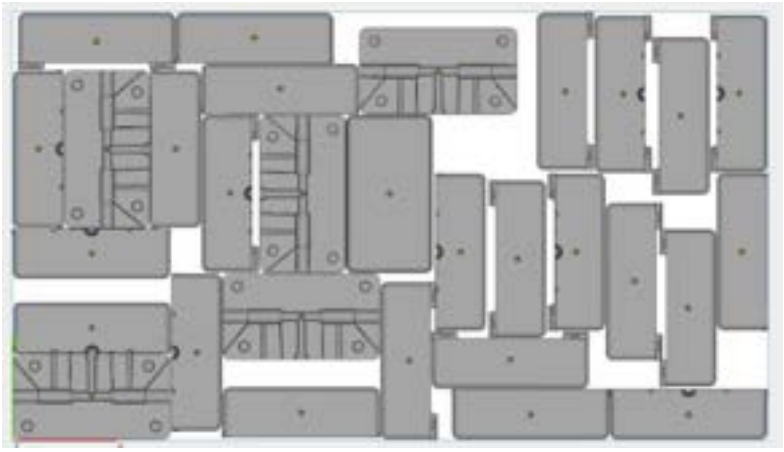

Figure 3: Schematic illustration of the Build Orientation of the Tensile Specimen Mould in the build platform

2.2 Metal Casting Process

The moulds were applied to cast LM25 aluminium alloy, a commonly used casting alloy with excellent mechanical features and corrosion resistance. The chemical composition of LM25 is presented in Table 2. The alloy was melted in an induction furnace and poured into the moulds under regulated conditions to ensure uniform filling and solidification. After solidification, the castings were cleaned and prepared for testing. The following examinations were carried out:

- Optical microscopy: The samples were sectioned, ground, polished, and examined under an optical microscope to determine their surface morphology and microstructural features based on mould orientation
- Dimensional Accuracy Evaluation: A digital vernier calliper was employed to measure the manufactured samples precisely. This tool ensured high-resolution and precise readings, determining dimensional deviations from the intended CAD geometry. This thus aids in validating the consistency and fidelity of the manufacturing process.
- Hardness Testing: Vicker's hardness assessments (HV 0.5) were introduced on representative surfaces of the cast specimen for 15 seconds.
- Tensile Testing: Standard tensile specimens were cut from each casting, and tensile tests were performed according to ASTM E8/E8M to evaluate the maximum load the sample can sustain before breaking or fracturing. This restriction was aimed at determining the comparative assessment of fracture load response among the samples printed from a variety of mould orientations

2.3 Data Analysis

To show the interrelationship between printing orientation, casting quality, and mechanical behaviour, giving a good understanding of RSC for high-tech applications. The data from the dimensional and mechanical tests were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Methods including mean and standard deviation calculations, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) performed using Microsoft Excel (Microsoft 365, version 2307) were applied to evaluate:

- The consistency of properties across mould orientations
- The statistical significance of orientation effects
- The reliability and repeatability of the Binder Jetting–Casting process

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) successfully summarized data trends and variability within and between orientations; however, they do not indicate statistical significance. ANOVA offered a thorough inferential context to establish whether observed differences were unlikely due to chance, thus providing statistical confidence in the effects of mould orientation. The combined use of these methods enabled clear data interpretation and reliable conclusions regarding process performance.

Table 2: Composition of LM25 aluminium alloy

Elements	Fe	Si	Ti	Mg	Cu	Mn	Al
percentages	0.387	7.46	0.038	0.326	0.071	0.047	Remaining

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Microstructure examination

The microstructural evaluation of the samples was carried out to show how the sand-printed moulds' orientation could influence the shape, distribution, and size of grains within the aluminium alloy samples. In all samples examined, the anticipated microstructure of cast LM25 Al alloy was detected, consisting a primary dendritic α-Al (aluminium) matrix intermingled with eutectic silicon particles. This structure is typical for this category of aluminium-silicon

alloy (hypoeutectic) and is influenced by the solidification parameters. While this entire structure remained stable, there were observable variations in how the features appeared from one sample to another. The differences, particularly in the size and distribution of the silicon particles, appeared to rely on how the sand moulds were oriented during the 3D printing process, signifying that the build direction and orientation can impact how the metal (tensile specimen) solidifies and takes shape. Figure 4 depicts the morphology of the samples according to their positional arrangement. In the horizontally arranged moulds (M1-M5), the samples cast from them depicted a uniform grain structure with moderate dendritic growth. Their surfaces were smoother and more stable due to the even layering of sand during the printing process. The silicon phases were more evenly dispersed throughout the aluminium matrix, indicating that solidification happened under steady and favourable conditions [15]. While the vertically oriented moulds (M6-M10), the samples cast from them exhibited slightly coarser microstructure with glaring directional solidification patterns running along the build direction. In some areas, non-uniform grain and micro-porosity were detected, which is likely a possible challenge related to vertical printing, namely inconsistent binder infiltration and layer compaction in vertical builds [16, 17]. These variations may have led to localized differences in heat transfer during casting, affecting the mechanical and morphological properties of the final parts. Lastly, the samples cast from mixed-orientation moulds (M11-M15) exhibited an interesting blend of features from both vertical and horizontal orientations, signifying transitional features. In some regions, the metal had bonded smoothly, depicting strong cohesive bonds. Although other regions showed weaknesses in bonding and irregular silicon segregation, implying inconsistent thermal gradients during the metal flow and solidification [15].

In general, the surface of the aluminium castings differed with mould orientation. Horizontally built moulds gave a better microstructural uniformity and more consistent as-cast surface texture, making them more applicable in areas necessitating consistent mechanical performance. In contrast, vertical and mixed type orientations brought different microstructures and surface features that may influence fatigue and strength life. These discoveries pinpoint the important role of mould orientation procedure in binder jetting-based rapid sand casting.

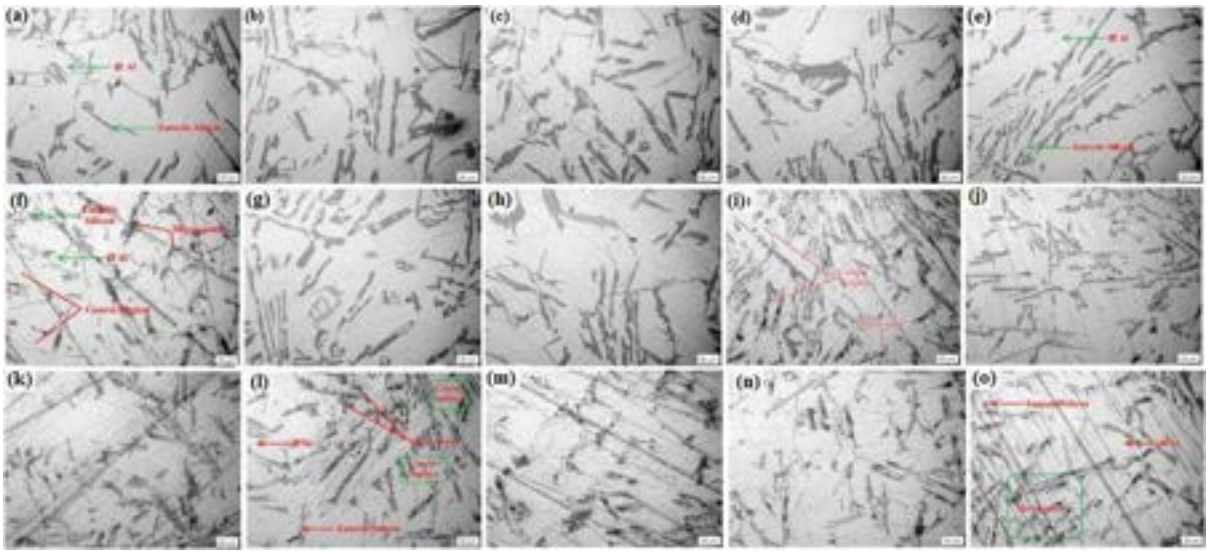

Figure 4: Microstructures of the aluminium samples cast from moulds arranged in (a-e) horizontal, (f-j) vertical, and (k-o) mixed build orientations.

3.2 Dimensional Accuracy – Length of Tensile Specimen

The dimensional accuracy of the tensile specimens was assessed by measuring their actual lengths and comparing them with the nominal design length of 150 mm. Across all specimens, a general trend of undersizing was observed, indicative of shrinkage during metal solidification and cooling. However, the extent of deviation varied noticeably depending on the orientation of the 3D-printed sand moulds used during casting, highlighting the influence of build direction on dimensional precision in rapid sand casting (RSC).

Figure 5 reveals the diagrammatic representation of the sample's length from different moulds. Specimens cast from horizontally built moulds exhibited the most accurate dimensions, with measured lengths ranging from 148.39 mm to 149.07 mm. The average length across the horizontal group was 148.73 mm, translating to an average deviation of −1.27 mm or approximately −0.85% from the nominal length. This relatively high-dimensional fidelity can be attributed to the more uniform layer deposition and compaction achievable in the horizontal printing orientation, which promotes even heat dissipation and consistent binder distribution during the mould printing process [18].

In contrast, specimens from vertically oriented moulds showed the largest deviations from the nominal value. Their lengths ranged from 147.99 mm to 148.43 mm, with an average of 148.18 mm, corresponding to an average dimensional error of −1.82 mm or −1.21%. The greater variability in vertical builds may be linked to factors such as gravity-induced compaction inconsistencies, directional solidification effects, and less uniform binder infiltration, all of which can impact the dimensional outcome of the cast parts [19, 20].

Specimens from moulds with a mixed orientation (vertical and horizontal features) exhibited intermediate results. Their measured lengths ranged from 148.17 mm to 148.70 mm, with an average of 148.51 mm. This equates to an average deviation of −1.49 mm or −0.99% from the nominal. The observed variability within this group likely reflects the combination of favourable and unfavourable characteristics from both vertical and horizontal builds, resulting in transitional dimensional performance [21].

Overall, the results demonstrate that mould orientation has a tangible effect on the dimensional accuracy of cast components produced via binder jetting-based RSC. Horizontally oriented moulds yielded the most consistent and accurate results, suggesting their suitability for applications requiring higher geometric precision. Conversely, vertical and mixed orientations introduced more dimensional variation and may require compensation strategies or post-casting adjustments to meet strict tolerance requirements.

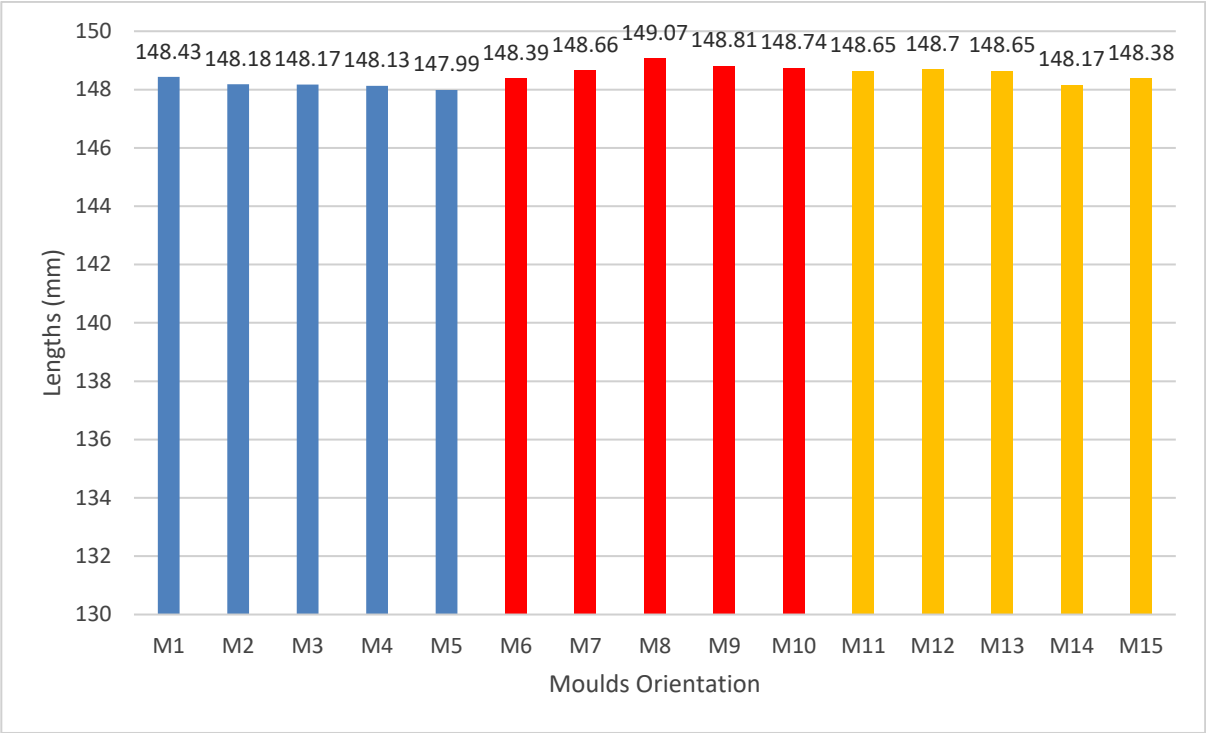

Figure 5: Dimension accuracy of the tensile samples length casted from the moulds arranged in vertical (M1-M5), horizontal (M6-M10), and mixed build orientations (M11-M15).

Table 3: Sum, average, and variance of the cast specimen lengths from different orientations

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Vertical	5	740.90	148.180	0.0253
Horizontal	5	743.67	148.734	0.0606
V & H	5	742.55	148.510	0.0520

Table 4: ANOVA outcome of the tensile specimen length

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	0.777	2	0.3883	8.4492	0.005127	3.885
Within Groups	0.552	12	0.0460			
Total	1.328	14				

Where, SS – Sum of Squares, df – Degrees of Freedom, MS – Mean Square, F – F-statistic, P-value – Probability Value, F crit – Critical Value of F.

Furthermore, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate whether the orientation of sand-printed moulds (Horizontal, Vertical, and Vertical & Horizontal) had a statistically significant effect on the length dimension of the cast tensile specimens. The results stated in Tables 3 and 4 depicted observable differences in variance across the different mould orientations. The Horizontal group has the highest variance (0.06063), followed by the Vertical & Horizontal group (0.05195), and lastly in the Vertical group (0.02530), indicating that dimensional consistency varied slightly across orientations.

The ANOVA analysis from Table 4 yielded an F-statistic of 8.45 and a p-value of 0.0051. Since the p-value is less than the standard significance level of 0.05, the differences in mean lengths among the three groups are statistically significant. This means that the mould orientation had a measurable impact on the dimensional accuracy of the specimens.

3.3 Hardness of the Tensile Specimens

Figure 6 reveals the hardness results of the tensile specimens cast using different sand mould orientations, Horizontal, Vertical, and Mixed (V & H), depicting a measurable impact of build orientation on the mechanical response (hardness) of the aluminium alloy, particularly in relation to the underlying microstructure developed during solidification.

The horizontal mould orientation developed samples with the most consistent and generally higher hardness values, ranging narrowly between 74.2 and 74.9 HV 0.5. This performance is closely linked to the relatively uniform grain structure and well-dispersed silicon particles observed in the microstructure of horizontally cast samples [5, 22].

The smoother and more stable sand layering associated with horizontal 3D printing likely facilitated more uniform heat flow during casting, supporting steady solidification conditions. This contributed to the consistent hardness values observed and a reduced presence of casting defects. Such reliability makes horizontally built moulds better suited for applications demanding mechanical uniformity. In contrast, specimens produced from vertically oriented moulds showed a wider variation in hardness, with values ranging from 72.6 to 74.8 HV 0.5. This spread reflects the influence of vertical build orientation on thermal gradients and compaction, which may introduce microstructural inconsistencies and localized porosity [19, 23].

These defects possibly compromised the local resistance to plastic deformation, leading to the observed variability and reduced hardness values. In particular, the uneven compaction and inconsistent binder distribution characteristic of vertically printed moulds may have introduced areas of localized weakening. The mixed-orientation (V & H) samples demonstrated moderate hardness values, ranging from 73 to 75 HV 0.5, which reflects the hybrid influence of horizontal and vertical build directions. These specimens demonstrated a combination of well-fused and less uniform regions, consistent with their transitional microstructures. Variations in thermal gradients during solidification likely caused uneven silicon particle dispersion and matrix heterogeneity, resulting in a more fluctuating yet intermediate hardness profile [20].

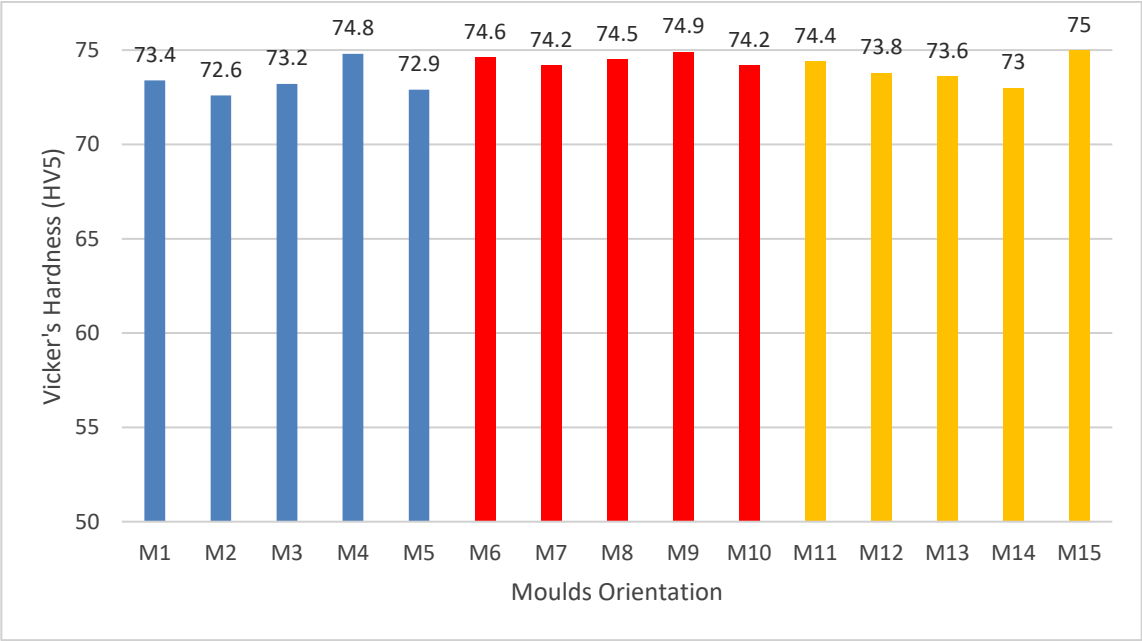

Figure 6: Hardness of the tensile samples cast from the moulds arranged vertically (M1-M5), horizontally (M6-M10), and in mixed build orientations (M11-M15).

Table 5: Depicting the sum, average, and variance of the cast specimen hardness from different orientations

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Vertical	5	372.4	74.48	0.087
Horizontal	5	366.9	73.38	0.722
V & H	5	369.8	73.96	0.588

Table 6: ANOVA Table of the specimen hardness tests

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	3.028	2	1.514	3.251	0.0744	0.0515
Within Groups	5.588	12	0.466			
Total	8.616	14				

Based on the ANOVA results (Tables 5 and 6) for the hardness values of the tensile specimens produced using different mould orientations (Vertical, Horizontal, and V&H), there is no statistically significant difference at the 95% confidence level (p-value = 0.0744) standard. Although the Vertical orientation showed slightly higher hardness on average than the others, the observed differences in hardness values across the groups were not sufficient to be considered statistically meaningful. This suggests that while mould orientation may influence hardness to some extent, likely due to differences in cooling rates and resulting microstructures, the variation observed in this case remains within a range that can be attributed to normal process variability.

Therefore, the mould orientation influences the hardness of cast aluminium by affecting microstructural features like grain uniformity and porosity. Horizontally built moulds produced the most consistent and higher hardness values due to uniform sand layering and better heat distribution. Vertical and mixed orientations introduced variability from inconsistent compaction and directional solidification. While ANOVA showed the differences were not

statistically significant, the trend highlights the importance of mould orientation in achieving reliable mechanical properties in rapid sand casting.

3.4 Tensile Performance and Orientation Effects

The tensile performance of the cast aluminium specimens was noticeably influenced by the orientation of the sand moulds during 3D printing. Specimens produced using horizontally printed moulds consistently showed the highest and most uniform maximum load values, ranging from 17.38 to 21.77 kN (as depicted in Figure 7 and Table 7). This enhanced performance appears to be linked not just to microstructural refinement, but also to more favourable thermal parameters and better binder saturation attains through horizontal layering. These combined factors possibly added to the enhanced mechanical consistency observed in the horizontally cast samples [24].

On the other hand, moulds built in a vertical orientation showed greater variation and generally lower tensile strengths, ranging from 14.61 to 21.78 kN. This reduced performance may be ascribed to layer-wise anisotropy affecting binder distribution and compaction density. Vertical layering can also limit gas permeability and modify how entrapped air or decomposition gases escape, which increases the chances of internal defects or porosity that compromise strength. Also, the vertical direction of heat flow during solidification may lead to uneven cooling, resulting in localized stresses, potential solidification cracks, or zones of segregation that further weaken the material [22, 23].

The mixed-orientation (vertical and horizontal) samples showed a huge range of tensile strengths, from 16.26 to 22.83 kN, including the highest individual value recorded across all groups. However, their average strength was still comparable to that of the horizontal group. This suggests that blending orientations leads to varied solidification behaviour; some regions benefit from the stability of horizontal layering, while others are impacted by the weaknesses associated with vertical layering. The inconsistent heat extraction and non-uniform layer bonding likely contributed to the more varied mechanical performance observed in these samples [24, 25].

Therefore, these outcomes indicate that the orientation used during sand mould 3D printing impacts more than just the grain structure; it plays a crucial role in shaping the thermal and mechanical conditions during casting. Factors such as gas entrapment, cooling rates, and shrinkage behaviour are all influenced by how the layers are oriented. This highlights mould orientation as a practical and effective lever for enhancing the mechanical reliability of cast aluminium components, particularly in rapid manufacturing settings where performance consistency is essential.

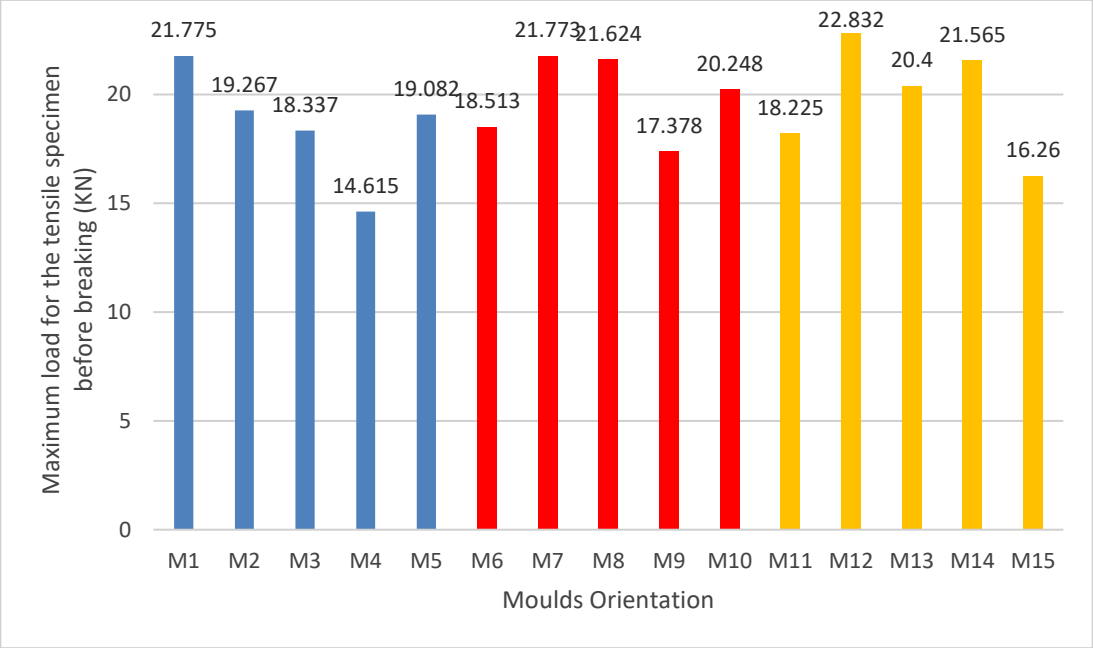

Figure 7: Maximum load for the tensile specimen before breaking, from the moulds arranged in vertical (M1-M5), horizontal (M6-M10), and mixed build orientations (M11-M15)

Table 7: Sum, average, and variance for the maximum load of the tensile specimen before breaking

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Vertical	5	93.076	18.6152	6.916
Horizontal	5	99.536	19.9072	3.721
V & H	5	99.282	19.8564	6.677

Table 8: ANOVA Table for the maximum load of the tensile specimen before breaking

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	5.354	2	2.677	0.464	0.640	3.885
Within Groups	69.256	12	5.771			
Total	74.610	14				

To further determine the consistency of the cast specimen in the different mould' orientations, a one-way ANOVA was carried out. Table 7 depicts that the horizontal group exhibited the highest average tensile strength (19.91 kN), followed closely by the mixed group (19.86 kN), while the vertical group showed the lowest mean value (18.62 kN). In terms of variability, the horizontal group also demonstrated the lowest variance (3.72), indicating more consistent performance, whereas the vertical and mixed groups showed higher variances (6.92 and 6.68, respectively).

The ANOVA results are shown in Table 8. The calculated F-value was 0.464 with an equivalent p-value of 0.640, immensely greater than the standard alpha level of 0.05. These results indicate no statistically significant difference in tensile strength between the three mould orientation groups. Although the horizontal orientation yields slightly higher and more uniform tensile strength, the statistical analysis reveals that these differences are insignificant at the 95% confidence level. This suggests that while mould orientation may influence tensile

strength trends, it does not exert a strong enough effect to be considered statistically reliable within the scope of this experimental dataset.

4 CONCLUSION

This investigation clearly pinpoints that mould orientation during 3D sand printing significantly influences the structural and mechanical behaviour of cast aluminium components.

- Horizontally oriented moulds produce samples with refined microstructures, more uniform dimensions, higher hardness, and greater load capacity, reflecting enhanced thermal management and binder distribution during casting.
- Vertically oriented moulds show greater variability in geometry and performance, likely due to layer-wise anisotropy, reduced gas permeability, and uneven heat extraction.
- Mixed orientation samples exhibit the highest individual load but inconsistent overall performance due to the complexity of heat flow and bonding behaviour in non-uniform orientations.

Generally, optimizing mould orientation stands out as a practical and cost-effective strategy for improving the mechanical reliability and dimensional consistency of components produced through rapid sand casting methods. This technique holds potential for manufacturing parts that provide competitive and comparative advantages in the high-tech industries, including biomedical, automotive, and aerospace. Future research should explore how mould orientation impacts fatigue life, internal stresses, and hidden flaws in cast parts, specifically parts produced from horizontal moulds, because they have the best outcomes from this research and can be optimally optimized to minimize their variations. Applying tools like CT scanning and thermal simulations could give a deeper understanding and assist in optimizing the mould design and casting quality across different alloys.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors acknowledge the support from the Collaborative Programme in Additive Manufacturing (CPAM) scheme and with the assistance of the Centre for Nanoengineering and Advanced Materials (CeNAM), University of Johannesburg.

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THE ROLE OF THE PROJECT TECHNICAL MANAGER WITHIN THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

For a project to be delivered on time, within budget and meeting the technical requirements, the project and technical management processes must dovetail into one another on many levels, like a precision clock. In a previous paper, a new Project Management Framework was presented, along with an initial examination of the various roles and responsibilities. One crucial role that was defined but not described in detail was that of the Project Technical Manager within the integrated project management framework. This paper will explore this role of the Project Technical Manager in more detail by examining its various dimensions, including the roles and responsibilities.

Keywords: Project Management, System Engineering, PM-SE Integration

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

A combined project management framework aimed at the successful delivery of complex projects was presented in a previous paper [1]. The paper focused on identifying the central elements required for successful project delivery and how to integrate them into a single framework that combines the management requirements from the project management discipline with those of the systems engineering discipline [1]. The paper also described a generic project team setup, as shown in Figure 1, that can be used to implement the new project management framework. Within this generic project team, two core management responsibilities have been identified. These are the project management function, which has overall responsibility for project delivery, and the technical management function, which reports to the project manager function and is responsible for the successful delivery of the project's technical aspects.

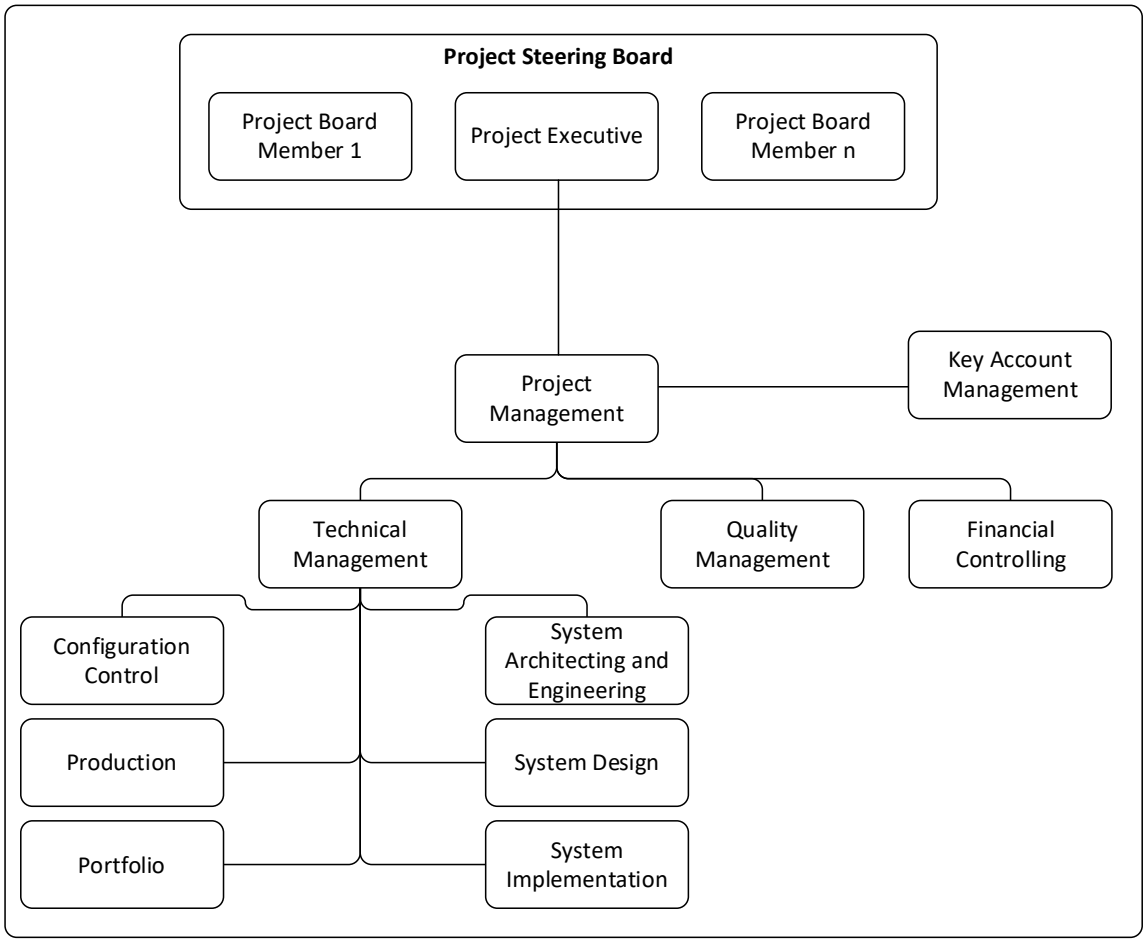

Figure 1: Generic Project Team Setup [1]

The project management framework within which the project team operates is shown in Figure 2.

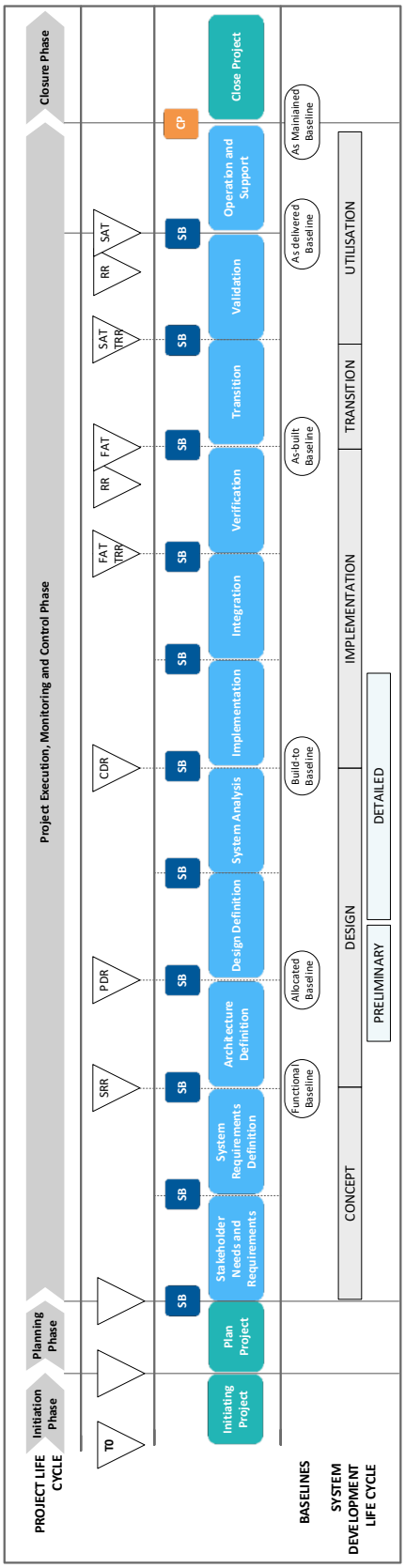

Figure 2: Combined Project and System Development Life Cycle [1]

The project management function is responsible for managing the project through its various phases, including project initiation, planning, execution, monitoring, and control, as well as project closure. The technical management function, on the other hand, is responsible for managing the technical delivery of the project throughout the complete system development lifecycle.

1.2 Research approach

This paper presents the second part of a case study that focuses on the pragmatic integration of project management and systems engineering environments for use in the delivery of complex projects. The primary research approach employed is a mixed-methods research approach. This research approach integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to address complex research questions. The research process followed builds on the work presented in the previous paper by refining the problem statement and reviewing and analysing the literature for new insights. This paper also includes insights from the author's 35 years of experience in the field of Systems Engineering and the delivery of complex problems.

The layout of the paper follows a typical case study approach. [2]:

- Section 1 - Introduction (This section)
- Section 2 – The need for a technical management function
- Section 3 – Roles and responsibilities of the technical management function
- Section 4 – Project Technical Manager versus Technical Project Manager
- Section 5 – Conclusion and recommendations

During the implementation phase, the actual outcome will be compared with the desired outcome, and corrective actions will be identified and implemented to move closer to the desired outcome. The intention is to capture the results of the overall exercise report in future papers.

2 THE NEED FOR A TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

For any project to succeed, it must achieve its cost, time, and technical performance targets. In a complex or high-technology environment, the management and achievement of the technical performance targets is the responsibility of the technical management function [3].

In practice, the cost, schedule, and technical performance targets are tightly interconnected and interrelated. The net result of this interconnectedness is that the project management function has a direct influence on the technical performance or technology aspects of the project. Conversely, the technical management function has a direct impact on the time and cost aspects.

The project manager is responsible for the project management function. The role and responsibilities of the project manager are well-defined and form the topic of numerous publications, such as the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) [4], training courses, and professional certifications, including the PMP* Certification, among others.

* https://www.pmi.org/certifications/project-management-pmp

Similarly, the technical management function can be executed by the systems engineer assigned to the project. The role and function of the Systems Engineer are also well understood and described in various publications, such as the Systems Engineering Handbook [5] or the Guide to the Systems Engineering Body of Knowledge (SEBoK) [6]. Different training courses are available, and INCOSE offers certification through its SEP† program.

The role of the systems engineer is not a simple one to define since this person can fulfil different roles within the project environment. Sheard [7] identified the various roles that the systems engineer can potentially fulfil during the project lifecycle, as summarised in Table 1. These roles may be assigned to one or more individuals, depending on the project's size and complexity. Overall, the systems engineer is considered the technical leader within the project organisation and has the authority to speak for and commit the systems engineering team [3].

Table 1: Various Systems Engineering Roles [7]

Nr	Role
1	Requirements owner
2	System Designer
3	System Analyst
4	Verification and Validation Engineer
5	Logistics or Operations Engineer
6	Interface Engineer
7	Customer Interface Engineer
8	Technical Manager
9	Information Manager
10	Process Engineer
11	Coordinator

One challenge encountered in real-life projects is that the project management function and the technical management function can easily devolve into two operational silos, where interaction is limited to progress meetings and similar events. The risk this poses is that the project may fail since the tight interconnections between cost, schedule, and technical elements are broken and thus no longer kept in balance.

A bridging function is thus required to link the project management function and the systems engineering function. The need for this bridging function stems from the continuously increasing complexity and interdependence experienced in projects, particularly those that can be classified as complex, socio-technical projects. This bridging function can be identified as the technical management function identified in Table 1. The roles and responsibilities of this technical management function will be explored in the following sections of this paper.

3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

One possible way to visualise the Project Technical Manager and the associated technical management function is to view it as the bridge between the Project Manager and the Systems Engineer. This is conceptually shown in Figure 3.

† https://www.incose.org/certification

Figure 3: Project Technical Manager as the bridge between the Project Manager and the Systems Engineer

Forsberg et al. [8] identify this bridge as being required to manage the business, budget, and technical baselines, with the primary objective of aligning these baselines. The function within this overlapping region is identified as belonging to the systems engineering management or technical management functions [9], [10].

3.1 Split between Technical Management Functions and Systems Engineering Functions

The identification of activities allocated to the technical management function versus the systems engineering functions is vital to ensure that there is no overlap and that nothing is missed. The INCOSE Systems Engineering Handbook identifies the Technical Management process versus the Technical Process, as shown in Figure 4 and described in more detail in Sections 2.3.4 and 2.3.5 of the INCOSE Systems Engineering Handbook [5].

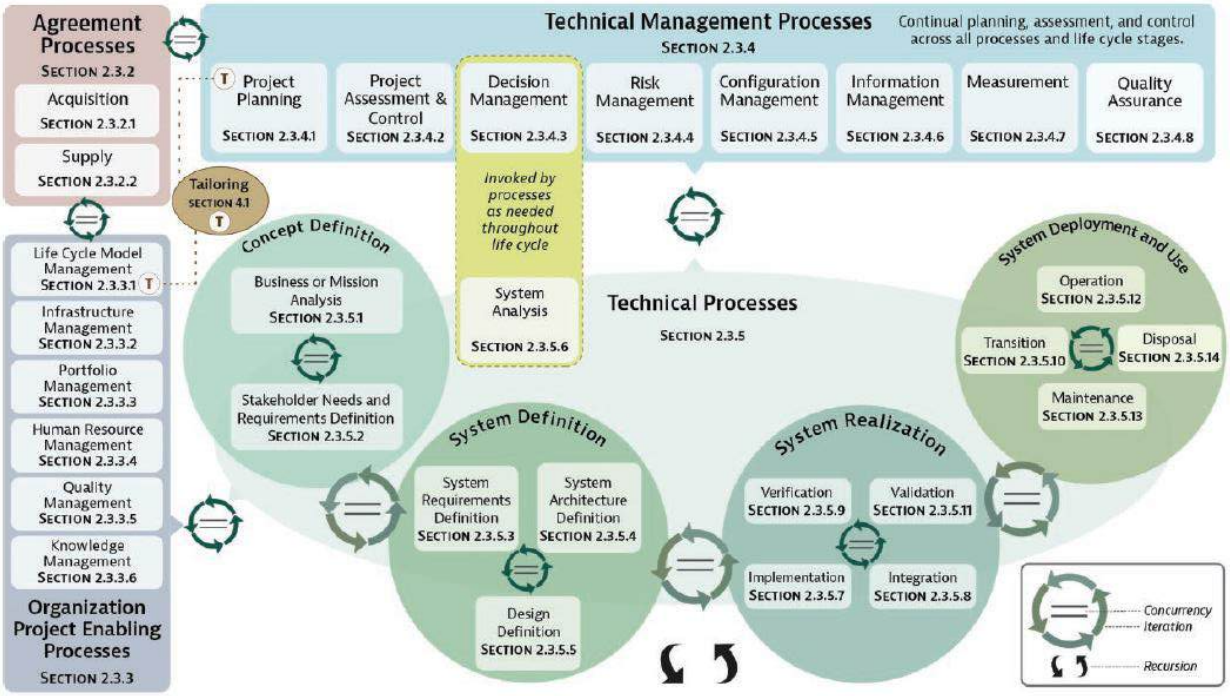

Figure 4: Technical Management Processes vs Technical Processes [5]

An alternative way of visualising the functions that form part of the technical management bridge versus the systems engineering pillar is to consider which activities are executed sequentially, i.e., the next activity depends on the previous activity, versus parallel activities, i.e., they occur concurrently throughout the project.

3.1.1 Sequential activities

The systems engineering activities tend to be more sequential – i.e. there is a logical progression from one step to the next. The progression from one step to the next is controlled by gated events, such as the Systems Requirements Review (SRR) and Preliminary Design Review (PDR), among others. These gated events are a powerful aspect of the systems engineering process, as they ensure a smooth transition from one phase to the next.

The sequential activities identified in the Systems Engineering Handbook [5] are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sequential Activities

Nr	Activity
1	Business or mission analysis
2	Stakeholder needs and requirements definition
3	System requirements definition
4	System architecture definition
5	Design definition
6	System analysis
7	Implementation
8	Integration
9	Verification
10	Transition
11	Validation
12	Operation
13	Maintenance
14	Disposal

3.1.2 Parallel activities

The technical management activities, on the other hand, are more parallel in the sense that they can occur concurrently and, in certain instances, last the entire period of the project.

The parallel activities identified in the Systems Engineering Handbook [5] are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Parallel Activities

Nr	Activity
1	Project planning
2	Project assessment and control
3	Decision management
4	Risk management
5	Configuration management
6	Information management
7	Measurement
8	Quality Assurance

3.2 Alternative Viewpoint

Van Gemert [10] described an alternative viewpoint on the sequential and parallel activities. This viewpoint is shown in Figure 5. While there are common activities between this view and the activities identified by the INCOSE Systems Engineering Handbook [5], certain activities are absent from this view. These activities include project planning, project assessment and control, and information management, among others.

3.3 Consolidated view of the technical management processes

Although the activities identified by the INCOSE Systems Engineering Handbook [5] appear to be complete, the author's opinion is that certain activities are missing from that definition. These activities are shown in Table 4.

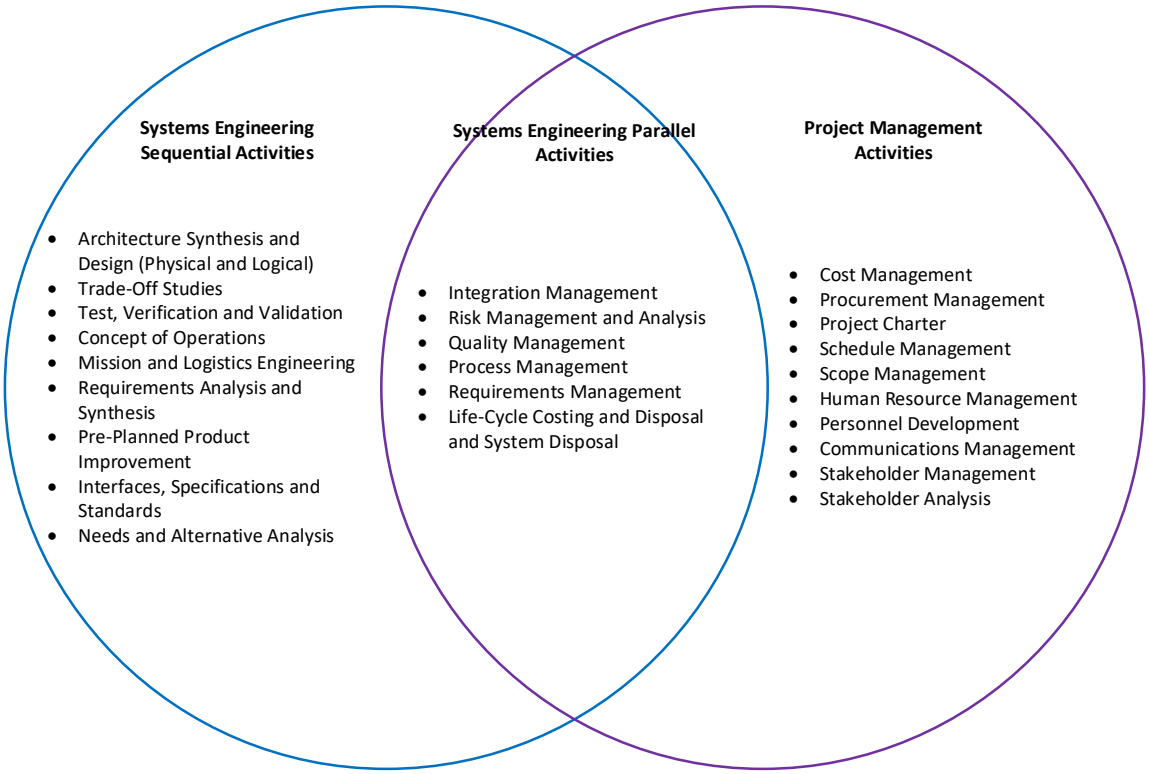

Figure 5: Sequential and Parallel Activities (Adapted from [10])

Table 4: Missing Activities and Description

Nr	Activity	Description
1	Technical process tailoring	1. Tailoring can be defined as the modification, addition, or deletion of outcomes, activities, tasks, typical inputs, or typical outputs.[6] 2. Tailoring can also be defined as the process of designing the processes for the Creating System, where the Creating System is the organisation that develops the Created System [11].
2	Managing the technical process	This is seen as the effort whereby the projects are advanced through the System Development Lifecycle in an orderly and controlled manner. This stands in contrast to the management of project processes, including planning, execution, monitoring, control, and finally, project closure.
3	Leading the technical team	It is assumed that the line managed function of the technical team is separate from the project execution activities. This activity involves leading and guiding the technical team within the project context, encompassing aspects such as coaching and mentoring.
4	Identification of the applicable systems engineering toolset	This can be seen to form a subsystem of the process tailoring activity, whereby the applicable systems engineering toolset is selected to match the project size and complexity. This can include tools such as the specific requirements management tools that will be used, or whether model-based systems engineering principles will be used.

4 PROJECT TECHNICAL MANAGER VS TECHNICAL PROJECT MANAGER

Terminology and definitions are fundamental in any field to ensure that all stakeholders understand the same concept. This raises one question that still needs clarification regarding the job title assigned to the person performing the technical management function. There

seem to be two options: the first is “Technical Project Manager,” and the second is “Project Technical Manager.” While both titles imply technical expertise within project management, there are subtle but important distinctions between a Project Technical Manager and a Technical Project Manager. While the final selection of the name remains the responsibility of the organisation implementing the project, it will still be essential to decide on an appropriate name and define the responsibilities clearly.

4.1 Project Technical Manager

The focus of the title is on the technical aspects of the management within the confines of the project. This indicates a primary concern with the technical execution of the project, focusing on aspects such as overseeing technical execution, managing risks associated with technology implementation, and guiding team members toward successful deliverables.

4.2 Technical Project Manager:

The focus of this title is on project management skills, combined with in-depth technical knowledge. The role oversees the entire project lifecycle from initiation to closure, leveraging their understanding of technology to manage scope, budget, timelines, and resources effectively [4]. They are the "technical leader" who drives both execution and delivery.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the context of the project organisation, the need for the technical management function was identified. This technical management function aims to bridge the divide between the project management function and the systems engineering function. The typical activities associated with this technical management function were identified, along with some activities that are considered significant from an industry viewpoint but have not been explicitly identified in the literature yet.

A final aspect that was touched on was the job title that will be assigned to the incumbent of this technical management function. While no specific title was identified, the importance of selecting and communicating the expectations within the project environment was highlighted.

The following steps in this research journey will involve implementing this generic process within the organisation and evaluating its effectiveness in projects that involve complex, high-technology solutions. The results of this evaluation process and optimisation activities will be reported in a future paper.

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MULTIDISCIPLINARY BURN CARE MAPPED USING SYSTEMS THINKING

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effectiveness of a multidisciplinary team approach in managing burn injuries, with emphasis on improving outcomes and streamlining care. In South Africa, 1.6 million burn injuries occur annually, with 3,200 patients requiring specialised services. Severe burns are among the most devastating forms of trauma survivable, and their complexity makes multidisciplinary treatment crucial for functional survival. Systems thinking, widely applied to complex problems, offers a holistic lens to understand interconnected components and dynamic interactions. Advanced burns care encompasses resuscitation, pain management, wound care, surgery, infection control, nutrition, rehabilitation, and psychological support. Using systems thinking and a grounded theory approach, this article develops a conceptual causal loop diagram to model the impact of multidisciplinary care. The model and systems archetype demonstrate how interdisciplinary management reduces intervention delays, improves wound healing, and lowers secondary complications compared to conventional care, supporting MDT protocols as essential for effective burns management.

Keywords: systems thinking, burns care, multidisciplinary team, casual loop diagram, system archetype

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1 INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organisation (WHO) regards Burn injuries as one of the most severe types of trauma that a patient can experience while still maintaining the possibility of survival [1]. In 2018, the WHO also declared burn injuries a serious public health problem, with an estimated 180,000 people succumbing to their burn injuries annually. Also, most of these injuries occur in low- and middle-income countries [2]. Burns constitute a significant public health issue in South Africa, leading to considerable morbidity and long-lasting physical disabilities [3]. It is estimated that annually, 1.6 million people suffer burn injuries, and as many as 3200 patients require specialised burn care in South Africa.

Severe burns represent one of the most catastrophic types of trauma. It is widely acknowledged that well-equipped specialised burn centres provide the best care for these patients. In these facilities, contemporary burn treatment has evolved into a complex, meticulously coordinated and targeted approach that encompasses resuscitation, infection management, critical care, surgical wound treatment, pain management, nutritional support, and both psychosocial and physical rehabilitation [4]. Specialised burn units have proven crucial in enhancing survival rates in high-income nations [5]. Improving safety and quality of care for burn injury patients is most needed in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where mortality rates of burn injuries can be seven times higher than in high-income countries [6].

The patient's response to a burn injury can be characterised as complex, as is how to provide care for it [7]. Managing burns necessitates a joint effort from a multidisciplinary team (MDT), as no individual discipline alone can sufficiently handle the complexities of caring for a patient with severe burns [5]. Since multidisciplinary burns care is a complex problem, systems thinking may provide a perspective, language and a set of tools to understand the influences of the various elements of multidisciplinary burns care on functional patient outcomes and each other.

Systems thinking is an approach to help model complex health challenges by providing a holistic lens emphasising healthcare systems' interconnectedness and dynamic interaction [8], [9]. This promotes stakeholders' understanding of how multiple components, such as clinical care, policy, and community engagement, play into health outcomes. Systems thinking is thus well suited to handle something so complex as burn injuries and health systems in general, for it looks at relationships, feedback loops, and dynamic behaviour over time [8]. Other linear approaches may fail to capture the nonlinear relationships and delays characterising complex clinical environments [10]. In contrast, systems thinking enables a holistic understanding of how interventions in one part of the system may produce consequences (intended or unintended) elsewhere, which contribute to developing better policy and operational decisions [11].

Specifically, in burn care, one could argue that since clinical pathways overlap with various psychosocial, logistical, infrastructural, and other variables, systems thinking could facilitate scenario analysis, identify leverage points for improvement, and create cross-cutting silos between disciplines [12]. Its application can help design more resilient and adaptive care models, particularly in resource-constrained settings where optimising care delivery is crucial.

This paper applies systems thinking to model the workings of an MDT in burns care to support the development of more effective clinical processes, policies, and operating procedures. Mapping the dynamic interactions between various professional roles, systemic constraints, and treatment phases should uncover the underlying structures influencing care quality and patient outcomes. The systems thinking lens allows a deeper understanding of interdependent and feedback processes defining performance by MDTs, offering insightful leverage points toward improved coordination, resource allocation, and decision-making. The output models

can support understanding how best to design interventions that would integrate and tailor into the available systems possible components of resilience, efficiency, and patient-centeredness in burns care delivery, even in resource-constrained settings.

2 METHOD

Systems thinking is a transdisciplinary approach that offers frameworks and tools to understand the structure and behaviour of complex systems, which are often found in healthcare [13]. It provides a holistic perspective on multifaceted challenges by integrating across the traditional boundaries of social, health, and natural sciences [14]. In the context of this research, systems thinking addresses the MDT as a system comprising tangible (clinical roles, procedures, etc.) and intangible (communication patterns, institutional culture, etc.) components working towards a common goal [15], [16]. Instead of analysing components in isolation, systems thinking focuses on how relationships and interactions within the team and between the team and its external environment cause behaviours and outcomes that can be emergent or unexpected [10], [17], [18].

Burns care also exemplifies a "wicked" or "messy" problem, a complex situation shaped by social, political, infrastructural, and regulatory contexts. Solving these kinds of problems requires multiple perspectives and a framework to connect seemingly unrelated events or processes into conceivable high-impact interventions [19]. Adopting a systems approach in health service delivery generates dialogue and discussion, encouraging health professionals to question prejudices and mental models that may inhibit innovation or service improvement [20].

By focusing on whole systems, systems thinking enables problem solvers to uncover the structural causes behind the observed and recurring behavioural patterns [19], [21]. It applies stakeholder mental models, which are their implicit assumptions, beliefs, and values, to derive the causal structures driving system behaviour [17]. Such modelling of structures helps simplify complexity through feedback loops and cause-and-effect relationships by clarifying leverage points for change [22]. Viewing burn care as a system can help articulate a shared understanding, guide strategic decision-making, and develop sustainable policies and processes to improve patient outcomes [23].

This study models the complex and interconnected nature of a multidisciplinary burns care system, using a Systemigram to construct a high-level narrative representation. The systemigram is illustrative of a storyline that captures the system's essential elements, actors, and objectives that come into interrelation across various domains, such as clinical care, communication, logistics, and infrastructure [24]. Through a holistic yet interpretable view of the system, all stakeholders can develop a shared understanding of and leverage points, feedback loops, and bottlenecks along the patient care pathways. This enables mapping socio-technical systems in healthcare, where the tangible (e.g., the personnel, resources) and the intangible (e.g., flows of decision, culture) factors influence outcomes [16].

A Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) was developed from the systemigram to capture the dynamic interdependencies, feedback loops, and cause-and-effect relationships between critical variables within the burn care system. CLDs are valuable systems thinking tools for modelling nonlinear behaviour and reinforcing or balancing feedback mechanisms that can lead to improving or degrading care quality. In this context, variables such as communication efficiency, pain management, rehabilitation engagement, staffing levels, and complication rates will be linked to identifying reinforcing loops (e.g., early rehabilitation improves recovery, which enhances team morale) and balancing loops (e.g., resource limits reduce service delivery). The CLD will be informed by the insights from the systemigram and supported by literature and expert input to ensure its relevance and accuracy. This dual

modelling approach enables the development of actionable strategies for system improvement and highlights points where small interventions could yield [16], [25]

Another output of the systems thinking process is identifying the primary system archetypes present in the situation, as shown in Figure 1. These are commonly recurring behaviour patterns in complex systems rooted in the underlying structure of feedback loops. Senge and Wolstenholme describe high-level models that help explain why systems often behave in predictable but counterintuitive ways [25], [26]. In multidisciplinary burn care, these archetypes can help identify dysfunctional patterns—such as coordination breakdowns or unintended consequences of well-meaning interventions—that emerge from systemic structures rather than individual errors [27].

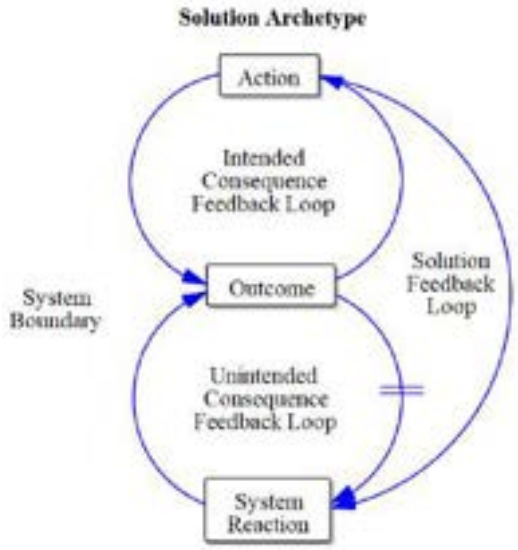

Figure 1: Generic Systems Thinking Archetype

Rather than big and thorough models, simple archetypal models capture system behaviour and lead to improvement quite well [28]. These often include unintended consequences alongside supposed benefits to give stakeholders some understanding of how actions in one part of the system can trigger adverse outcomes elsewhere, sometimes after a delay in visibility or outside the perceived system boundary [29]. By diagnosing such patterns, archetypes help identify leverage points in the system where small changes can yield substantial impact. Although not consistently rigorous in a theoretical sense, system archetypes offer a practical and communicable tool for understanding systemic issues, supporting strategic decision-making, and informing the development of more effective processes and policies in burns care delivery [30].

Figure 2 shows an elementary system thinking process that implements modelling with the help of system archetypes [31]. As applied in this paper, the first step is to capture information about the system through a thematic literature survey. The literature study used the thematic synthesis [32]. Data regarding burn pain management were extracted from the available literature and analysed by a transdisciplinary team. Factors influencing an MDT's operation to rehabilitate a burn patient were extracted. These factors were combined into themes: advanced clinical care, optimal conditions for wound healing, hospital-acquired complications (HACs), functional survival, MDT vigilance and communication, rehabilitation, nutritional support, pharmacovigilance, surgical intervention, and PC.

The retrieved literature was analysed to identify and describe the system and extract issues that cause unexpected or unwanted system behaviour. This paper uses a systemigram as a rich picture to graphically determine the critical variables in the problem situation or system.

System archetypes provide a template or guideline to identify the underlying problematic aspects [31]. Using the identified system archetype, the variables from the systemigram are used to develop a CLD to model the causal relationships and feedback loops. The CLD should include the impact of various interventions and their unintended consequences. The system archetype helps identify the basic system structure (variables and interconnectivity), behaviour and possible leverage point(s) to develop a dynamic hypothesis.

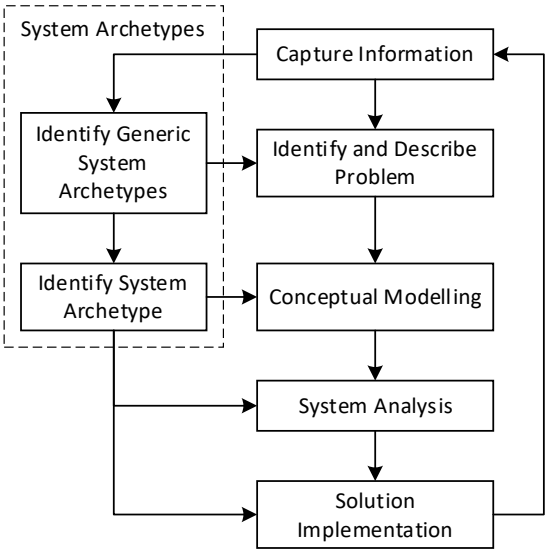

Figure 2: System Thinking Modelling Process using System Archetypes

3 MULTIDISCIPLINARY BURNS CARE

Burn care is a complex and comprehensive process involving multiple factors and approaches, requiring the collaboration of an MDT to enhance patient outcomes [33]. The complexity of advanced burns care, which involves resuscitation, pain management, infection control, and nutritional and psychosocial support, necessitates coordinated multidisciplinary interventions [34]. Multidisciplinary care for burn injury patients involves a coordinated team of healthcare professionals from various specialities, such as nurses, surgeons, dietitians, physiotherapists, pharmacists, psychologists, occupational therapists and social workers, working collaboratively to address the comprehensive psychological, physical, and social needs of burn patients throughout their recovery journey, from acute treatment to rehabilitation and reintegration into the community [34].

There have been remarkable improvements in burn care outcomes since World War II. It results from deliberate efforts to develop and sustain high-performing MDTs. These teams include clinical experts who address burn patients' complex physical and emotional needs and researchers who drive progress through basic and applied science. Continued collaboration of this kind is essential for future advancements in burn treatment and offers a valuable model for addressing other complex medical challenges [35].

The treatment of burn injuries likely exemplifies the surgical speciality that incorporates the highest degree of collaboration among healthcare professionals, benefiting significantly from genuinely multidisciplinary care. This integration has arisen due to the intricate nature of burn injuries, which demands a wide array of skills for optimal contemporary treatment. It is unreasonable to expect any specialist to have the comprehensive knowledge, skills, and stamina needed for the quality care of a burn patient. Instead, a team of specialists has been relied upon to deliver coordinated care through creative organisational strategies [36]. The burns unit manages burn injury patients in a team of nurses, physiotherapists, dietitians, and

general surgeons. A clinical pharmacist is involved in antimicrobial stewardship and pharmacological and nutritional support. 'The response to a burn injury is very complex, and so is the approach to its care' [7].

3.1 Advanced Clinical Care

In the past, patients with burn injuries were often grouped together in a section of a surgical ward. Due to the unpleasant appearance of their wounds, associated odours, and the difficulties of pain management, many healthcare providers were hesitant to treat this complex group of patients [34]. Extensive burns demand more significant resuscitation efforts because of their widespread systemic impact, highlighting the need for an accurate and efficient assessment of burn size. Additionally, outcomes are better for burn patients when they receive care in specialised facilities equipped to deliver advanced burn treatment [34].

Significant progress in burn care encompasses several key areas, including prompt excision, fluid resuscitation protocols, closure of burn wounds using grafts or skin substitutes, management of sepsis, the use of topical antimicrobials, nutritional support strategies, infection control measures, pharmacological management of the hypermetabolic response, and maintenance of thermally neutral environments. These advancements have led to better wound healing, decreased inflammation and energy requirements, reduced hypermetabolism and muscle breakdown, and ultimately, lower rates of morbidity and mortality in patients with severe burns [36].

As in other areas of healthcare, having appropriate infrastructure, a committed interdisciplinary team, and strong family support is crucial for helping burn survivors return to functional, well-adjusted, and meaningful lives. Consequently, it is widely acknowledged that patients who meet specific clinical criteria achieve the best outcomes when treated in a specialised burn centre. Ideally, such a centre offers a comprehensive, self-contained setting with dedicated, isolated beds staffed by plastic and general surgeons with sub-speciality expertise. A MDT delivers care focused solely on burn patients, including nurses skilled in wound and intensive care, specialised dietitians, social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and consultants from various medical disciplines [4].

3.2 Optimal Conditions for Wound Healing

Every aspect of burns care should aim to create optimal conditions for wound healing while preventing typical HACs [7]. Enhancing wound healing involves providing hemodynamic support during the initial stages—such as fluid resuscitation and, when necessary, vasopressor therapy, ensuring adequate nutritional support. Using pharmacological agents can also reduce the effects of hypermetabolism and encourage tissue repair [7].

3.3 Hospital Acquired Complications

Care should aim to prevent common HACs, such as stress ulcers, venous thromboembolism, ventilator-associated and hospital-acquired pneumonia, and infections related to urinary or bloodstream catheters [7]. The link between HACs and long-term, patient-reported quality-of-life measures shows that these complications have a lasting negative impact on the well-being of adult burn survivors. Conditions such as kidney failure, urinary tract infections, pulmonary embolism, and venous thrombosis are particularly associated with lower physical health scores.

Individuals who experience HACs may face ongoing challenges related to treatment side effects, frequent medical monitoring, and additional interventions—all of which can detract from their physical health and overall quality of life. HACs are linked to long-term patient-reported quality of life declines. This underscores the importance of preventing these complications. Additionally, the results suggest that burn survivors face challenges with

functional recovery for up to two years following their injury. When a patient is admitted with severe burns, minimising the risk of HACs is crucial [7].

3.4 Functional Survival

In high-income countries, reduced mortality rates from burns are no longer the primary quality improvement measure. Instead, the focus has shifted to successful reintegration into family and society as a key indicator of progress. There is still potential to reduce mortality rates in resource-limited settings, but a more progressive approach would simultaneously prioritise reintegration through enhanced rehabilitation efforts [34]. Being admitted to a specialised burn critical care unit is linked to a notable improvement in survival outcomes. This benefit is partly attributed to the comprehensive care delivered by a well-coordinated MDT [37]. Incorrect management at any stage can negatively influence the progression of the injury and hinder the recovery of bodily functions and reintegration into daily life [38].

3.5 Multidisciplinary Team Vigilance

MDTs are involved early upon hospitalisation to ensure a focus on 'functional survival' [7]. Caring for critically ill burn patients is highly complex and involves multiple interconnected aspects, including advanced wound care, sedation, respiratory support, pain control, nutritional management, and skilled nursing. In specialised burn critical care units, closely coordinated teams of experts from various disciplines work together on-site, conducting daily multidisciplinary ward rounds and delivering continuous, around-the-clock critical care as a unified MDT [37].

A MDT should support burn care management, which includes surgical, medical, nursing, intensive care, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, social work, dietetics, psychiatry, psychology, pharmacy, speech therapy, and technicians. All burn team members interact throughout the patient's management, from admission to discharge, to support the patient and family in reintegration [39]. Effective communication is critical to ensuring the team functions successfully, in interactions among team members and engagements with patients and their families [36].

3.6 Rehabilitation

Primary burn survivors often face long and difficult recoveries, with the potential for chronic impairments that keep them below their baseline levels of function. Factors that cannot be changed, such as age and gender, along with disease characteristics like burn size and associated physical, physiological, and psychosocial consequences, play a role [40].

Rehabilitation is a crucial component of burn treatment. "Burns Rehabilitation" encompasses physical, psychological, and social aspects. Burn patients often experience difficulties in one or all of these areas following a burn injury. Burns can result in severely debilitating and deforming contractures, which can lead to significant disability if left untreated. The goals of burn rehabilitation include minimising the adverse effects caused by the injury, maintaining the range of movement, reducing contracture development and the impact of scarring, maximising functional ability, enhancing psychological well-being, and promoting social integration [41].

The multidisciplinary physical rehabilitation of burn patients is an ongoing process of active therapy. No distinction should be noticeable between an "acute phase" and a "rehabilitation phase", as therapy needs to start from the day of admission. It is essential to begin physical rehabilitation from day one of admission, whether the patient is on bed rest and immobile or ambulant and well. Maintaining a consistent approach from all MDT members is crucial to ensure ongoing education and rehabilitation [7].

Physiological factors impacting physical rehabilitation outcomes in burn patients include burn severity (total body surface area burned), age, gender, location of burns, presence of complications like infection, fluid loss, hypothermia, respiratory issues, impaired mobility due to contractures, pain levels, nutritional status, and the body's healing response. All these factors can positively or negatively influence the patient's ability to participate in rehabilitation exercises and achieve functional independence [42].

3.7 Nutritional support

Proper nutrition plays a vital role in burn care. Although weight loss following burn injury is mainly unavoidable, a key objective of comprehensive burn care is to limit the extent of this loss during recovery. Achieving this requires detailed initial and ongoing evaluations of nutritional status and estimating daily caloric needs. It is widely anticipated that early initiation of tube feeding enhances clinical outcomes by mitigating post-burn hypermetabolism and modulating the immune response, thereby minimising weight loss and reducing the incidence of infections [34].

While many patients can eat by mouth, those with burns covering more than 20% of their body surface area often need additional support through tube feeding due to their elevated calorie requirements. Early initiation of tube feeds is advised, along with consultation from a dietitian to ensure appropriate nutritional management [43]. Patients with severe burns often experience acute malnutrition due to extreme hypermetabolism and increased protein breakdown. Accurately evaluating their nutritional needs and adjusting energy and protein intake according to their condition's stage has proven outcomes [44].

Nutritional status is crucial in affecting multiple organ systems, though these effects may be subtle or confused with physiological alterations secondary to burn injury. However, the price of not addressing nutritional care is dire, with inordinate susceptibility to infections, unfettered catabolism, and death from malnutrition [34].

3.8 Pharmacovigilance

Pharmacovigilance, which is the science of monitoring, assessing, and preventing adverse drug reactions, is essential in burn care, where patients often undergo complex, multi-drug treatments [45]. Burn injuries can significantly alter drug pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics, affecting absorption, distribution, metabolism, and elimination. These changes necessitate vigilant monitoring to prevent therapeutic failures or toxicities [46]. Pharmacists play a critical role in achieving pharmacovigilance during burn treatment. Their responsibilities include dispensing medications, monitoring therapy, detecting adverse drug reactions, and advising the MDT on safe medication use. Proactive involvement should enhance patient safety and support adherence to evidence-based protocols [47].

Electronic health records with automated adverse reactions or drug interaction alerts enable real-time surveillance and improve clinical decision-making. Therefore, pharmacovigilance is indispensable in burn care to minimise harm and enhance therapeutic outcomes. It ensures that drug use remains effective, appropriate, and tailored to the physiological changes in burn patients [48].

3.9 Surgical Intervention

A well-trained, well-prepared, and adequately equipped burn care team is crucial for a facility managing severe burn injuries requiring excisional surgery. Surgical debridement and skin grafting are key components in effectively treating patients with a substantial percentage of deep burns (%TBSA). Even when skin grafting is not performed, patients can still experience notable improvements in their recovery and overall outcomes. However, grafting full-thickness burns significantly accelerates wound healing, promotes quicker recovery, and helps prevent or lessen contractures [49].

The gold standard in burn treatment highlights early excision to eliminate the source of potential infection, reduce the hypermetabolic response, and lower the risk of burn wound sepsis. Following this, early autografting by closing the wound with healthy skin from another area of the patient's body enhances these benefits. This further minimises the risk of infection, reduces pain, and supports quicker mobilisation [7].

Gentle washing is also a crucial part of burn wound cleansing. Exposed areas should be covered using a closed dressing method. Biologic dressings generally offer better outcomes compared to non-biologic options. The choice between temporary or semi-permanent dressings and how often they change depends on the wound condition and dressing material availability [49].

3.10 Infection Prevention and Control

Maintaining a clean hospital environment and upholding strict hygiene standards are essential to preventing healthcare-associated infections, particularly in burn units where patients are uniquely vulnerable due to the loss of skin integrity [49]. Fundamental yet straightforward infection control measures, such as hand hygiene, remain highly effective. Improved hand hygiene protocol compliance has consistently been associated with lower infection rates in burn care [50]. Continuous staff education, monitoring, and behavioural audits ensure these interventions are sustainable and effective [39].

Given the heightened risk of infection in burn patients, especially from multidrug-resistant organisms, implementing an antimicrobial stewardship program is essential. These programs guide antibiotic selection, dosing, and duration to optimise outcomes while minimising resistance [51]. Pharmacovigilance also plays a vital role in antimicrobial stewardship to support the rational use of antibiotics based on local resistance patterns and microbiological surveillance. Integrating antibiograms and culture results assists clinicians in tailoring therapies, avoiding unnecessary use of broad-spectrum agents that drive resistance [50]. Beyond antibiotic optimisation, pharmacovigilance ensures medication safety through the early detection of adverse drug reactions. By combining stewardship with active pharmacovigilance, pharmacists and clinicians can deliver safer, more personalised therapy in burn care, reducing antimicrobial resistance and improving patient outcomes [39].

4 SYSTEMS THINKING MODELS OF MDT BURNS CARE

4.1 Systemigram

Systems thinking focuses on the active interplay, coordination, and unification of individuals, processes, and technology [20]. In resource-limited settings, it is essential to prioritise investment in key burn care personnel and the facilities they work in. At the very least, essential burn care team members, such as burn nurses, surgeons, occupational therapists and physical therapists, are vital for delivering a basic standard of effective burn treatment [34].

As seen in Figure 3, the systemigram provides a high-level visual representation of the interdependent components within multidisciplinary burn care and reveals several critical insights into how various functions and interventions interact to influence patient outcomes. Advanced Clinical Care is at the model's core, which acts as the central node influenced by multiple upstream factors, including pharmacovigilance, surgical intervention, infection prevention and control (IPC), nutritional support, and rehabilitation. The systemigram demonstrates that improvements in these areas do not operate in isolation; they converge synergistically to enhance clinical outcomes, ultimately improving functional survival and reducing HACs. The key supporting elements are:

- MDT Vigilance: Central to the system; improves all other functions. It directly enhances Advanced Clinical Care.

- Surgical Intervention, IPC, Nutritional Support, Rehabilitation, and Pharmacovigilance: These elements are tightly interconnected. All directly or indirectly improve Advanced Clinical Care.
- Rehabilitation: Depends on nutritional support. Enhances functional survival and wound healing.
- Functional Survival and Optimal Conditions for Wound Healing: Advanced clinical care, rehabilitation, and nutritional support improved outcomes. Functional survival is a significant success metric.
- Hospital-acquired Complications: This is the primary undesirable outcome. Reduced by enhanced clinical care and other system elements.

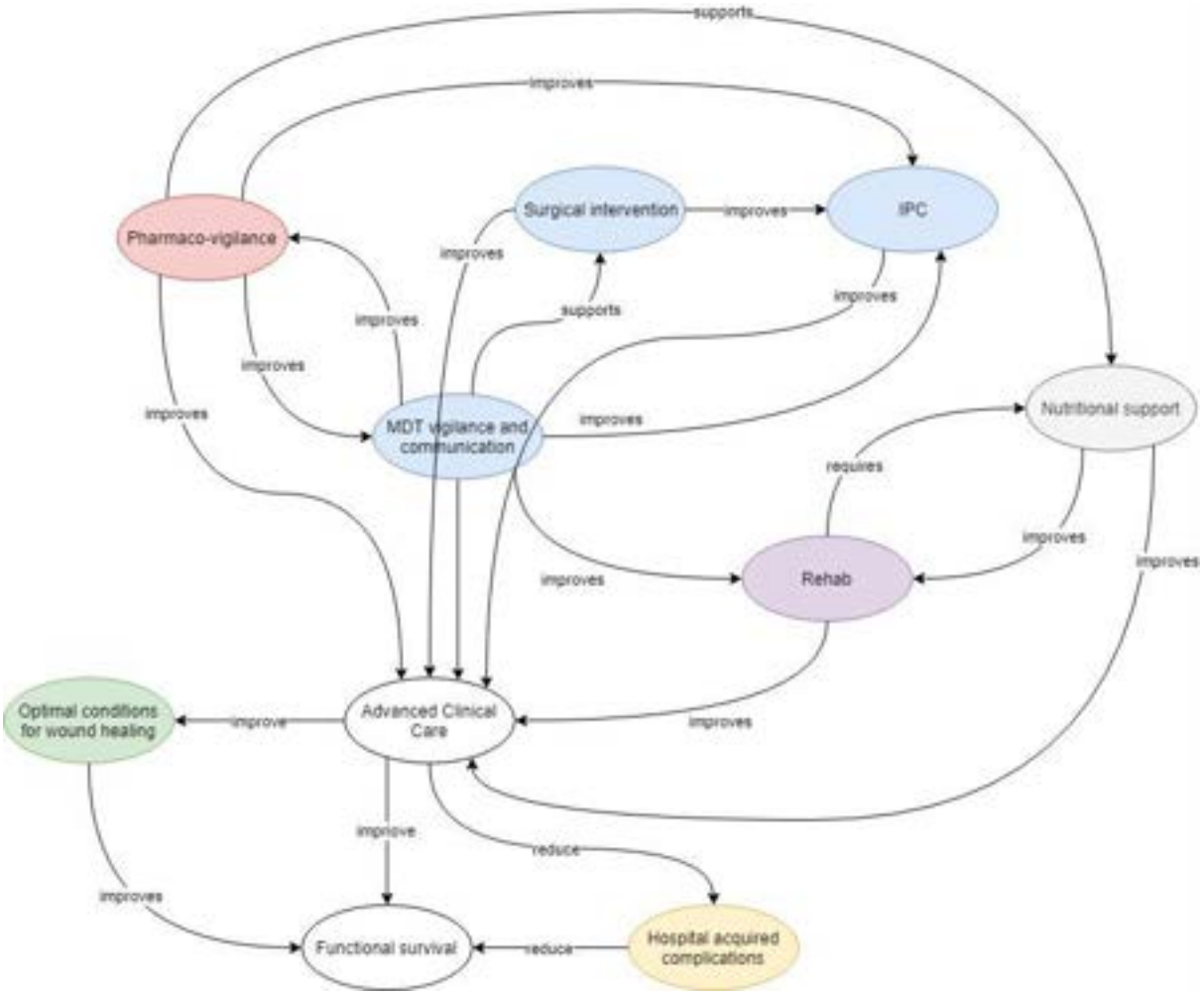

Figure 3: Systemigram of the Functions of a MDT in Burns Care

One of the most critical insights from this systemigram is the centrality of MDT vigilance and communication, which is pivotal in reinforcing the effectiveness of almost every domain in the system. It directly enhances pharmacovigilance, surgical decision-making, and IPC practices while indirectly supporting optimal wound healing and rehabilitation. This highlights the need for tightly integrated teamwork, shared decision-making, and real-time information flow among the multidisciplinary team. Without such coordination, the effectiveness of individual interventions may be compromised, leading to fragmented care and suboptimal outcomes.

The systemigram also reveals valuable feedback pathways, such as how rehabilitation is improved by nutritional support and clinical care and loops back to enhance overall clinical outcomes and reduce complications. Similarly, optimal conditions for wound healing and functional survival are outcomes of multiple reinforcing factors, illustrating that successful burn care depends on addressing physical, procedural, and systemic variables in tandem. These insights underscore the value of systems thinking. By visualising dynamic interactions, leverage points such as nutritional support and MDT communication can be prioritised for targeted interventions that yield widespread improvements across the system.

4.2 Systems Archetype

The systems archetype proposed for the situation in the Systemigram of Figure 3 is named "Shifting the Burden." This archetype describes a situation where a problem is addressed by its symptomatic solution rather than a fundamental one. This can lead to dependency on the symptomatic solution and neglect of the root cause. In this case, the symptomatic solutions include surgical interventions, and IPC responds to immediate threats but does not address the root causes of poor clinical outcomes alone. Pharmacovigilance deals with medication safety issues after the fact.

The fundamental solution can be MDT vigilance and communication, which are foundational as they coordinate care, anticipate risks, and enhance decision-making across all areas. This strengthens all systemic responses (e.g., rehabilitation, nutritional support, and surgical decision-making). The risk of falling into the Shifting the Burden archetype is that without robust MDT engagement, the system may rely on reactive interventions (e.g., more surgeries, antibiotics and pain medication). This can increase complications, creating a dependency loop on corrective measures instead of proactive care planning. Recommendations to break out of the “Shifting the Burden” archetype include the following:

- Prioritise strengthening MDT vigilance.
- Invest in proactive, integrative care approaches (e.g., rehabilitation and nutritional support).
- Reduce dependency on symptomatic interventions by enabling early detection and prevention through team-based vigilance.

Identifying the systems archetype forces you to ask different questions about the system, adding other elements and interactions to the system's model. This will be seen when developing the CLD below.

4.3 Causal Loop Diagram

The CLD in Figure 4 developed for multidisciplinary burn care clearly reflects the dynamics of the “Shifting the Burden” systems archetype. This archetype describes a common systemic pitfall where an organisation or system relies heavily on symptomatic solutions that offer immediate relief while neglecting fundamental solutions that address underlying structural causes. In the case of burn care, the recurring problem symptoms are poor functional survival and the prevalence of HACs, both of which significantly diminish long-term outcomes for burn patients.

The symptomatic solutions in this system include surgical intervention, IPC, rehabilitation, nutritional support, and pharmacovigilance. These essential clinical responses often mitigate acute threats or support patients in crisis. For example, surgical debridement and grafting can quickly reduce infection risks, and IPC protocols help control the spread of healthcare-associated pathogens. Likewise, nutritional support addresses hypermetabolic responses, and rehabilitation tackles mobility and scarring. While these interventions are medically necessary, they operate primarily downstream—they respond to problems once they have emerged rather than preventing them at their root.

In contrast, the fundamental solution is found in MDT vigilance and the broader development of optimal conditions for wound healing and advanced clinical care. These systemic practices enhance coordination, promote early detection of complications, and enable a proactive rather than reactive approach. MDT vigilance fosters shared situational awareness across clinical disciplines, streamlines decision-making, and ensures that each specialist's efforts are synergistic rather than siloed. As a result, patient care is more cohesive and responsive, ultimately reducing the likelihood of complications and improving long-term functional survival. This balancing loop—where enhanced team communication improves care, reducing complications—represents a more sustainable and preventive approach to complex clinical challenges.

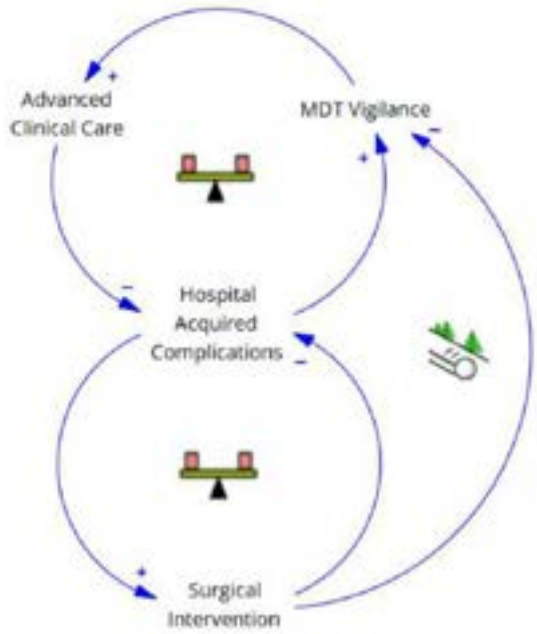

Figure 4: Causal Loop Diagram of MDT in Burns Care

However, the diagram also reveals a reinforcing loop of unintended consequences—an essential characteristic of the Shifting the Burden archetype. As pressure mounts to deliver quick results, symptomatic interventions such as surgery and intensive IPC measures become increasingly prioritised. Over time, this can divert attention, funding, and institutional focus from MDT development and systemic prevention. The health system, therefore, becomes more reliant on reactive measures, such as escalated pharmacological responses or repeated surgical procedures, to address recurring complications. This dependency not only undermines the effectiveness of the fundamental solution but also contributes to systemic fatigue, increased costs, and potential burnout among care providers. It becomes a cycle of "fix and repeat," where the root causes of poor outcomes remain unaddressed.

Breaking out of this archetype requires deliberate and strategic action. The paper identifies several key recommendations: First, MDT vigilance must be prioritised. This includes structured multidisciplinary rounds, investment in team-based training, and real-time data sharing to enhance situational awareness. Second, proactive and integrative care approaches must be emphasised, particularly those focusing on patient-centred outcomes like rehabilitation, nutritional support, and psychosocial care. When implemented as part of a coordinated system rather than isolated disciplines, these interventions help shift the focus upstream. Lastly, the system must actively reduce dependency on symptomatic interventions by building capacity for early risk detection, anticipating complications, and embedding team-based problem-solving.

The CLD encapsulates a critical tension within burn care delivery: the balance between treating symptoms and addressing causes. By mapping the system's feedback loops, it becomes evident that sustainable improvement hinges on technical excellence and the structural integrity of care coordination. Investing in the foundational capacities of MDTs and creating conditions for optimal healing are not just operational choices—they are strategic imperatives for breaking the cycle of dependency and shifting the burden toward long-term resilience in burn care systems.

5 CONCLUSION

This study highlights that a MDT approach is fundamental to achieving optimal functional survival in burn patients. The analysis demonstrates that coordinated care across disciplines significantly reduces intervention delays, enhances wound healing, and lowers the incidence of secondary complications. By integrating expertise in resuscitation, surgical intervention, infection control, nutritional support, physical rehabilitation, and psychological care, MDT protocols address burn patients' complex and multifaceted needs more effectively than conventional care models.

The models suggest that the success of MDT care lies in its ability to combine diverse perspectives, structured communication, and shared decision-making. These elements enable the team to respond more holistically to patient needs, improving clinical outcomes and patient and family support throughout recovery. However, while the results provide compelling evidence, they remain context-specific. Variations in healthcare resources, staffing, and system capacity may influence how similar outcomes can be replicated elsewhere.

Limitations of this study include reliance on retrospective data and a conceptual systems model that requires validation across multiple care settings. Future work should therefore focus on prospective, multi-site studies that test the causal relationships proposed in the model and measure long-term patient outcomes. Further research could refine the systems-thinking framework, ensuring its adaptability across healthcare environments. Expanding this evidence base will help strengthen the argument for embedding MDT frameworks as a global standard in advanced burns management.

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ENHANCING DUST CONTROL IN CEMENT PACKAGING: OPTIMIZATION OF BAGHOUSE SYSTEMS VIA PRESSURE MANAGEMENT AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Cement is essential in construction, yet dust emissions from packaging plants present serious environmental issues. This study examines the factors behind excessive dust, particularly the shortcomings of dust suction and filtration systems. Employing a case study approach, experimental and historical data was analyzed to evaluate how operational parameters pressure, temperature, cement particle size, and gas flow rate affect dust filtration efficiency. A multivariable regression model was employed, with the concentration of dust at the plant outlet as the primary performance indicator. Findings revealed that pressure was the only variable significantly affecting outlet dust emissions. The Taguchi optimization process revealed the optimal suction pressure to be 7.16 mbar, with specific damper settings. The model demonstrated a high R^2 value of 92.42% and a P-value of 0.000, indicating robust statistical significance. Ultimately, these optimizations led to a substantial reduction in dust concentration to 14.292 mg/m^3, highlighting the critical role of pressure management in improving environmental performance and achieving regulatory compliance in cement packaging operations.

Keywords: bag house, cement dust, dust emission, environmental pollution, optimization,

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1 INTRODUCTION

Dust control involves a range of techniques aimed at minimizing airborne particles and reducing their impact on air quality. Cement packaging plants are specialized facilities where cement is processed and packaged for distribution. However, cement production is notorious for generating significant amounts of dust and other pollutants, which pose serious risks to both environmental health and human well-being. Within these plants, baghouse systems are essential dust-extraction mechanisms that effectively filter particulates from the air. Furthermore, pressure management is crucial for optimizing the performance of these systems by regulating airflow, ensuring efficient dust capture, and maintaining compliance with environmental standards. The primary airborne pollutants associated with cement production include both dust and fumes emitted during the manufacturing processes of cement and clinker.

Dust consists of solid particles that become airborne as a result of being entrained by process gases, often directly from the materials being handled or processed. These dust particles vary significantly in size, ranging from 0.1 microns to 10 mm in diameter, with some being relatively large [19]. Fumes, on the other hand, are solid particles formed by the condensation of vapours through processes such as sublimation, distillation, calcination, or other chemical reactions. Common fume constituents include sulfur and silicon oxides, which are produced during the high-temperature calcination process of clinkerization. The diameter of fume particles typically ranges from 0.03 to 0.3 µm [19]. Together, these pollutants pose significant risks to air quality, public health, and the surrounding ecosystems, underscoring the need for effective control measures in the cement industry.

Emissions of cement dust are rigorously managed through the implementation of dust-extraction systems in loading areas, cement silo filter systems, and stringent controls on powder-blowing pressures. Additionally, high-level silo alarm systems are in place to enhance safety [9]. The cement factory selected for this study operates two identical packing lines, each fitted with baghouses that feature multiple suction ducts strategically located at critical points, including the tops of the bucket elevators, vibrating screens, packer bins, rotary packers, packer discharge points, and bag cleaners.

The primary function of the filtration system is to capture dust particles and divert them into downstream hoppers while allowing clean air to be released into the atmosphere. However, despite these measures, the plant continues to face challenges with discharging air that has a high dust concentration ($\geq$15 mg/m^3). This persistent issue necessitates further investigation to identify the underlying cause, as it remains unclear why contaminated gas is still being emitted.

The inadequacy of the current filtration system to maintain dust concentrations within permissible limits presents a significant operational and environmental concern. Despite implementing advanced filtration technologies and adhering to regulatory standards, the facility is unable to consistently achieve acceptable air quality parameters due to an unidentified failure in the filtration process. This discrepancy indicates a critical gap in understanding how various operational parameters—such as airflow rates, particle size distributions, and filter maintenance protocols—affect filtration efficiency and dust emissions. Moreover, the high levels of dust released into the atmosphere not only jeopardize compliance with regulatory standards but also pose health risks to workers and surrounding communities, thereby undermining the sustainable operational objectives of the facility. Therefore, addressing the inefficacies of the dust filtration system is essential for improving air quality and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations.

The objective of this study is to assess the impact of operational parameters on the quality of the process gas released into the atmosphere. The findings will contribute to the development of a comprehensive model designed to establish operational guidelines aimed at minimizing dust emissions. While the study will indirectly enhance the overall packaging process, the primary focus is on optimizing dust suction and filtration. This targeted approach will facilitate the effective treatment of dust emissions, ensuring compliance with air quality standards.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Dust emissions in cement manufacturing plants arise from diverse sources, including mining, raw material handling, grinding mills, clinker coolers, storage silos, and packaging operations. Research indicates that the primary contributors to dust emissions are the movement and transfer of cementitious materials, particularly during loading, unloading, and packaging [20] [4], [16]. A study by [25] determined that total dust concentrations ranged from 4.20 mg/m^3 in crushers to 15.20 mg/m^{3}in packaging areas, surpassing exposure limits in the latter and raw mill areas. Contrary to the common belief that raw mills, kilns, and cement mills generate the most dust, [17] found higher geometric means of total dust exposure in cranes (38.64 mg/m^3), packing plants (21.30 mg/m^3), and crushers (13.48 mg/m^3) compared to the cement mill (3.23 mg/m^3), kiln (2.87 mg/m^3), raw mill (1.85 mg/m^3), maintenance (1.16 mg/m^3), and administration block (0.29 mg/m^3). Such disparities underscore the need for detailed analysis to identify areas for improving dust emission control. Additionally, [16] highlighted that dust emissions in cement packing plants primarily originate from transfer points along the packaging line, conveyor belts, and rotary packers.

Airborne dust particles from cement plants contribute to significant environmental pollution and health hazards. Exposure to cement dust can result in various respiratory problems, including bronchitis and asthma, as noted by [4], and other health complications affecting workers and local communities [15]. Moreover, dust deposition poses ecological risks, leading to soil degradation and water contamination [6]. Environmental protection agencies mandate that all cement plants implement effective dust control measures. Various techniques exist for dust removal, such as bag filters, electrostatic precipitators (ESPs), wet scrubbers, and dust collectors. Bag filters, particularly effective for capturing particles sized between 0.1 and 1 µm, use impaction, direct interception, and diffusion to remove dust when gas stream passes through filter fabric [24].

The baghouse, a crucial component of dust filtration, comprises a metal vessel containing fabric bags designed to capture dust. Bag selections depend on operating conditions such as temperature and pressure. Typically, the bags measure between 2 to 10 meters in length and can have diameters of up to 0.4 meters. Baghouses can house between 100 to over 1000 bags depending on the specific process gas being treated [2].

The filtration process begins as dusty gas enters the dust collector, where coarse particles are separated due to inertia, falling into a hopper. The gas then passes through fabric bags, where dust accumulates on their surfaces. With a filtration velocity of approximately 0.3-2 m/min and a pressure loss of 1-2 kPa, clean gas travels upward until it exits through the outlet tube, while dust is cleaned by mechanical shaking, reverse pressure, or pulse jet methods. A pulse valve activates when a specified dust layer thickness is reached, releasing compressed air to dislodge collected dust. Standard fabric filters exhibit dust collection efficiencies above 99%, necessitating regular cleaning and maintenance for optimal performance [22].

A standard baghouse dust filtration system consists of ductwork, the baghouse unit, and a suction fan. Effective design and operation hinge on four key parameters: inlet temperature, system pressure, gas flow rate, and filtration wind speed. High temperatures can compromise filter bags' longevity, while pressure fluctuations can indicate leaks or fan issues, ultimately affecting system performance [11], [10].

Monitoring gas flow rates is essential, as variations impact dust loads and overall filtration capacity. Efficiency can be optimized by adjusting wind speeds according to specific conditions such as particle size and humidity levels. Reducing leakage and maintaining appropriate cleaning intervals are critical for enhancing dust collection efficiency and prolonging equipment lifespan [13]. For example, [7] explains that when the dust accumulates on the fabric bag, the filter drag is described by the following basic filtration equation.

$$\frac{\Delta P_f}{v_f} = S_f = S_E + K_2(W - W_R) \quad \textbf{(1)}$$

Where ΔP_f is the pressure drop across the filter bag, v_f is the filtration velocity, S_f is the filter drag, S_E is the effective drag of residual dust, K_2 is the specific resistance coefficient of the dust cake, W is the mass per unit area of the dust cake and W_R is the residual dust mass per unit area.

While substantial research has been conducted on dust generation during loading and packaging, a significant gap remains in studies focused on optimizing baghouse systems through systematic performance evaluations. Recent investigations have primarily concentrated on health impacts, dust generation, and the design and initial setup of fabric filter systems in baghouse installations, rather than on operational improvements aimed at reducing emissions.

For instance, [35] highlight the health effects of cement dust exposure and the necessity for effective mitigation measures. Similarly, [36] discuss preventative strategies that have proven limited in effectiveness due to regulatory and technical challenges. Although these studies emphasize existing filtration systems, they do not delve into comprehensive optimization methods for enhancing baghouse performance.

Research has identified various dust emission sources, such as transfer points and conveyor systems, underscoring the need for systematic analyses to improve baghouse functionality. Current findings indicate high dust levels in packing areas, emphasizing the urgency for optimization, yet specific data often remain scarce. Many studies focus on initial setups without addressing troubleshooting for ineffective systems, highlighting the need for targeted optimization efforts.

Furthermore, while diverse dust extraction technologies exist, the optimization of these systems through pressure management remains underexplored. Operational parameters, such as pressure fluctuations and airflow velocity, are critical for enhancing dust capture efficiency but require further investigation. Understanding the impact of pressure drops across filters is essential for improving overall baghouse performance.

In summary, existing literature highlights health implications and dust generation in cement production but lacks a dedicated focus on optimizing baghouse systems. Future research should aim to fill this gap by prioritizing operational assessments and performance enhancements to meet air quality standards and improve system efficacy. Given the pressing environmental and occupational health concerns related to excessive dust emissions from cement plants, thorough assessments of operational and design deficiencies affecting dust filtration efficiency are crucial. This study seeks to address these gaps by enhancing the performance of existing fabric filter systems, ultimately aiming to reduce the environmental and health risks associated with cement dust emissions and contribute to improved air quality and safer working conditions.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the performance of baghouses at a cement packing plant. The methodology encompassed a two-pronged approach: an analysis of historical operational data and a series of on-site assessments to determine the current efficiency of the baghouse

system. Initial evaluations were conducted using historical performance data of the baghouse to understand trends and identify any past operational issues. This data included past records of pressure variations, temperature readings, and dust concentration levels. Following the historical analysis, comprehensive on-site assessments were performed to evaluate the current operational state of the baghouse. These assessments focused on the physical design and functionality of the baghouse, closely resembling the layout depicted in Figure 1, which features bags with a length of 4.2 meters. The baghouse was assessed under specific operating conditions, where the recommended temperature range was maintained between 45°C and 65°C, with an associated pressure range of 0.2 mbar to 8 mbar. To facilitate measurement and data collection, the ductwork was labelled sequentially from 1 to 9, with dampers designated as D1 to D3 and measurement points indicated as IP1 to IP6, as shown in Figure 2. Multiple strategically located measuring points were established throughout the system to accurately capture pressure variations. This strategic placement ensures a comprehensive understanding of airflow dynamics and performance across the baghouse.

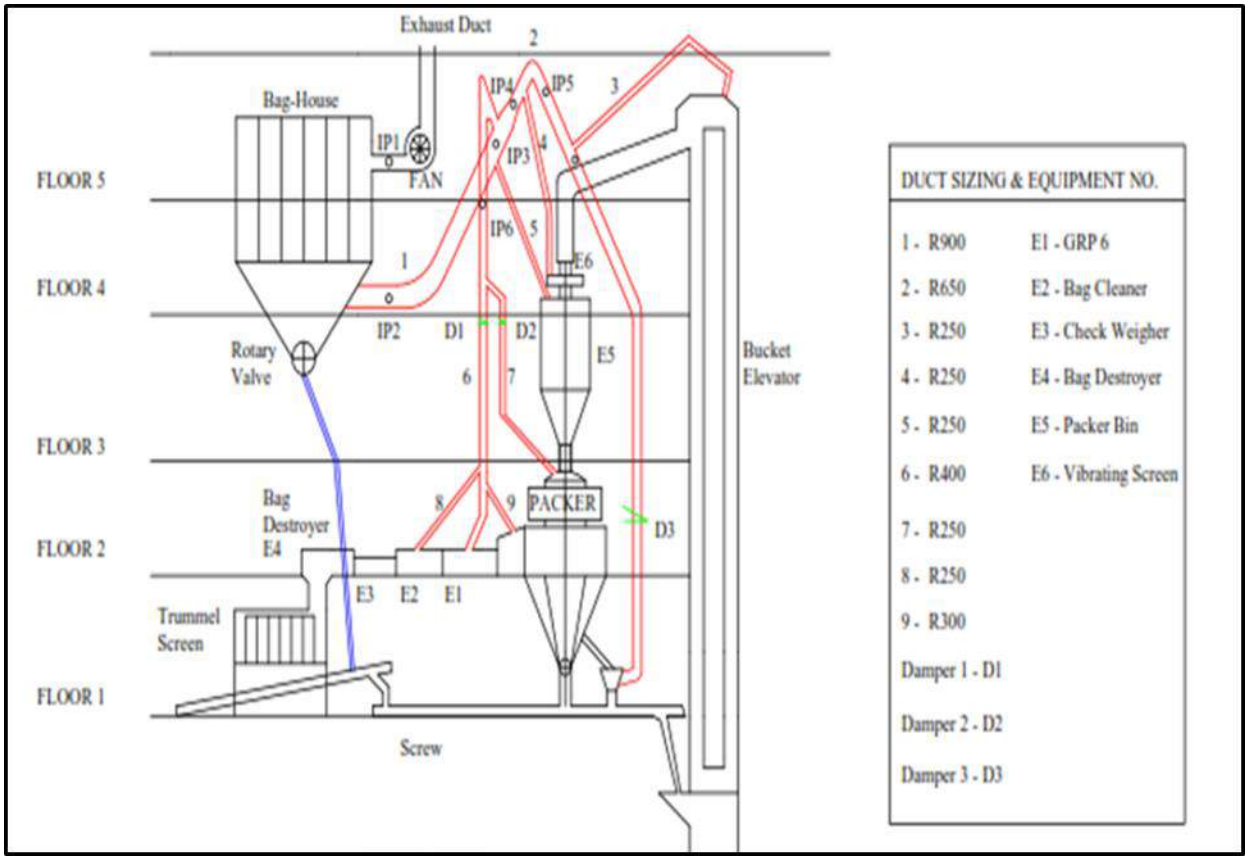


Figure 1: Diagram of baghouse filter system and sampling points

3.1 Data Collection

The study monitored several key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate the baghouse's operational efficiency, including static and dynamic pressure measurements were used to assess the resistance within the system and identify any potential inefficiencies. Continuous temperature monitoring was conducted to ensure that the baghouse operated within the optimal range, as temperature significantly influences filtration performance. Both inlet and outlet dust concentration levels were measured to evaluate filtration efficiency. Changes in dust concentration were vital for understanding the effectiveness of the baghouse in capturing particulate matter.

To assess airflow efficiency, the study calculated the differential pressure, defined as the difference between fan suction pressure and duct static resistance, following the methodology presented by [2]. Using temperature and dynamic pressure data, airflow rates into the baghouse were determined. These calculations facilitated an understanding of the relationship between airflow and the operational efficiency of the baghouse. The effectiveness of the baghouse in filtering dust was evaluated through the analysis of inlet and outlet dust concentration changes. A decrease in outlet concentration compared to inlet concentration indicated effective filtration performance.

3.1.1 Static and dynamic pressure measurements

To ensure accurate measurements of dynamic and static pressure in the filtration network, a systematic approach was employed involving meticulous preparation and procedural execution. The pitot tube was thoroughly cleaned using a blower to eliminate any dust blockages that could affect readings. Following this, the digital manometer was calibrated to ensure measurement accuracy. Then, the L-type pitot tube was connected to the digital manometer via connecting pipes, ensuring that the positive (+) port of the manometer was linked to the total pressure port of the pitot tube and the negative (−) port to the static pressure port. Furthermore, the digital manometer was tared to establish a baseline reading of 0, ensuring precise measurements when the pitot tube is inserted. After the pitot tube was inserted into the duct through the static pressure port, oriented to face the direction of airflow. To obtain representative measurements, the area around the pitot tube was sealed with mutton cloth to minimize airflow disturbances. The digital manometer was allowed to stabilize for 30 seconds, followed by the collection of dynamic pressure readings at 30-second intervals over 5 minutes [11]. This process was repeated to account for any temporal variations in pressure. In total, 10 readings were captured from each of the 6 measuring points, with the average recorded as the dynamic pressure in mbar.

After completing the dynamic pressure assessment, the connection on the total pressure port (+) was detached, leaving only the static pressure port (-) connected to the digital manometer. The digital manometer was tared again, and the Pitot tube was cleaned to remove any internal dust residue before it was inserted into the duct to measure static pressure. Similarly, the Pitot tube was allowed to stabilize for 30 seconds before taking static pressure readings at 30-second intervals for 5 minutes [11], A total of 10 static pressure readings were recorded from each of the 6 measuring points, with the average noted as static pressure in mbar

3.1.2 Temperature measurements

The temperature measurement process involved the careful use of a thermocouple probe to ensure accurate readings within the duct system. The thermocouple probe was inserted into the duct to obtain the temperature reading. Prior to insertion, the thermocouple thermometer was checked to confirm that it was accurately displaying the ambient temperature. Following the recommendations from [11], the thermocouple thermometer was allowed a stabilization period of 30 seconds after insertion into the duct. This step was crucial for ensuring that the temperature reading reflects the true conditions within the duct environment. After the stabilization period, temperature readings were recorded at 30-second intervals over a duration of 5 minutes. This method provides a consistent approach to capturing temperature fluctuations and ensures comprehensive data capture. To account for temporal variations, the measurement process was repeated multiple times. A total of 10 temperature readings were taken from each of the 6 measuring points for each sampling session. The average temperature from the 10 readings at each measuring point was calculated and recorded as the duct temperature in degrees Celsius (°C)

3.1.3 Dust Concentration Measurements

The study employed a hand-held dust monitor to assess dust concentration levels within the baghouse system's inlet and outlet ducts. The dust monitor was securely positioned at IP2, the inlet duct of the baghouse, ensuring it was properly oriented to capture the incoming dust-laden air. After activation, the monitor was allowed a 30-second stabilization period to adjust to the ambient conditions. Once stabilized, dust concentration readings were recorded at 30-second intervals for a total duration of 5 minutes, following the method outlined by [11] This process was repeated to account for any temporal variations in dust levels. A total of 10 readings were taken at IP2, and the average concentration was calculated and documented in mg/m^3. The dust monitor was then relocated to IP1, the outlet duct of the baghouse. Similar to the inlet measurement, it was securely mounted and oriented to capture the purified air stream. After a 30-second stabilization period, dust concentration readings were again recorded at 30-second intervals over 5 minutes. This process was repeated for consistency, resulting in 10 readings from IP1, which were averaged and recorded as the outlet dust concentration in mg/m^3. The same methodology was applied to the remaining measuring points (IP3, IP4, IP5, and IP6) to assess dust concentrations throughout the system. In conjunction with dust measurements, visual inspections were conducted at each sampling point to identify primary sources of dust generation and potential leaks within the ductwork.

3.2 Data Analysis

To evaluate the performance trends of the baghouse, a thorough analysis of historical data from previous years was conducted. This historical context is essential for identifying trends, detecting anomalies, and assessing the long-term effects of operational changes on the baghouse system. By integrating this historical data with the measurements collected during the current study, a comprehensive understanding of the system's behaviour and overall performance was achieved.

Dust filtration efficiency was specifically analysed using weekly operational data from the plant. The detailed equation derived from the multivariable regression analysis is provided in Equation 1. To refine the regression model, the P-value was employed to eliminate insignificant variables, utilizing a threshold of 5% at a 95% confidence level, in accordance with the methodology proposed by [12]. Variables with P-values exceeding 0.05 were excluded from the model, and the analysis was iteratively re-evaluated, retaining only those variables that demonstrated statistical significance (P-value < 0.05) in the final regression equation. The multivariable linear regression analysis was conducted using Minitab Statistical Software ©2022, ensuring robust statistical evaluation.

$$Y = X_0 + \alpha X_1 + \beta X_2 + \delta X_3 + \varepsilon X_4 \quad \textbf{(2)}$$

Where: $\alpha, , \delta, \varepsilon$ represent coefficients
Y - dust emission concentration in mg/m^3
X_0 - constant
X_1- baghouse inlet gas flow rate in m^3/h
X_2 - baghouse inlet temperature in ℃
X_3 - baghouse inlet pressure in mbar
X_4- cement residue in wt%

Mathematical modelling was applied to optimize critical variables impacting dust emission concentrations. Using the Taguchi method and Minitab software, suction fan damper settings were systematically adjusted to maximize suction pressure in the dust filtration system. The experimental design utilized a comprehensive L25 orthogonal array, testing three fan dampers across five levels, resulting in 25 experimental runs as shown in Table 1. Measurements of suction pressure were recorded and analysed for robustness using signal-to-noise (S/N) ratios.

This approach identified the optimal damper settings, yielding the highest suction pressure for effective dust filtration. Confirmation tests were conducted to validate the reliability of the results, reinforcing the effectiveness of the optimization process in enhancing cement dust filtration systems.

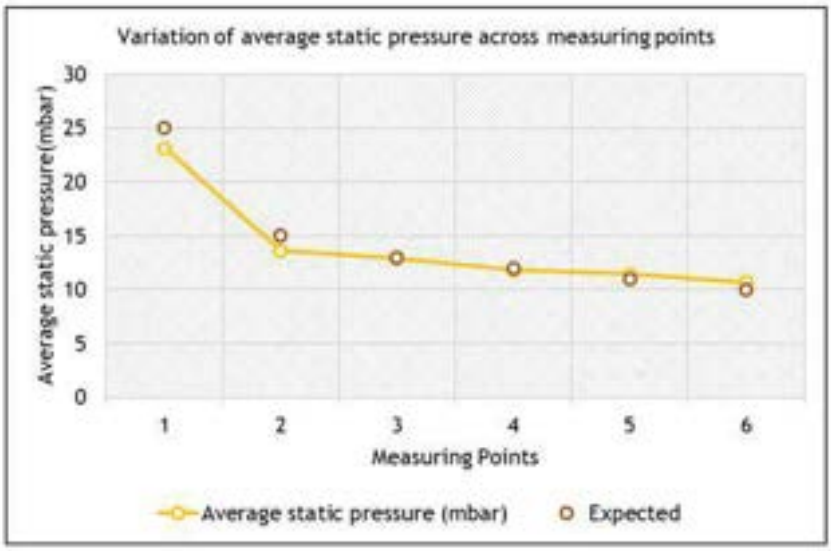
Table 1: Factors for the L25 orthogonal array in Minitab

	Factors (Damper Opening Setting)			Response
Levels	Damper 1	Damper 2	Damper 3	Suction Pressure
1	0	0	0	
2	25	25	25	
3	50	50	50	
4	75	75	75	
5	100	100	100	

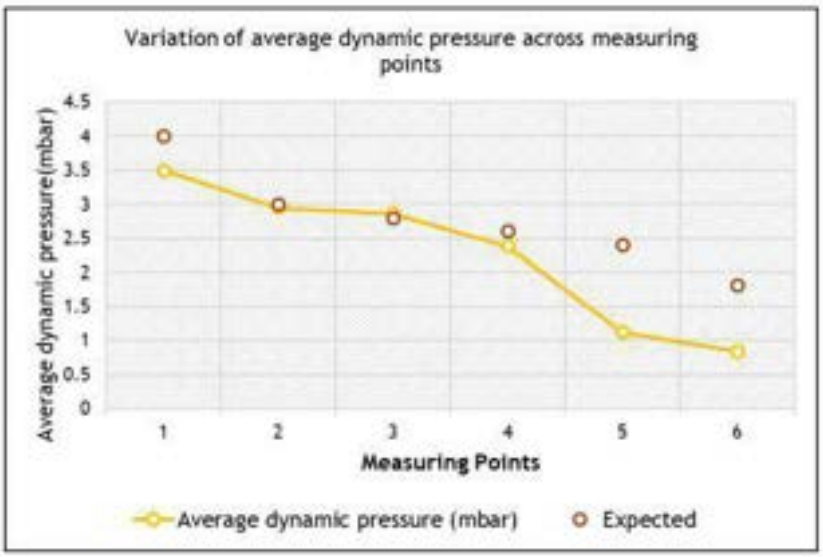
4 RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the study, structured into three key sections. The first part details the evaluation of the unit processes within the dust filtration system, assessing their performance based on various operational metrics. The second section examines the influence of packing plant operating parameters on the concentration of dust at the outlet. Finally, statistical analysis software was used to optimize these operating parameters, aiming to achieve the desired outlet dust concentration as informed by experimental observations.

The performance of the unit processes in the dust filtration system was analysed through variations in both measured operating parameters—such as static pressure, dynamic pressure, temperature, and dust concentration—and calculated parameters like gas flow rate. The experimental values were then compared against established industry standards and equipment manufacturer recommendations [3]. The results of this analysis are illustrated in the graphs Figures 2-4



(a)



(b)

Figure 2: Measurements of static and dynamic pressure

4.1 Variation of average static and dynamic pressure

The average static pressure starts at 23 mbar at the first measuring point and gradually decreases to 11 mbar at the sixth measuring point, as shown in Figure 2(a). The expected static pressure values, also depicted in Figure 2(a), follow a similar decreasing trend. A significant drop in static resistance is anticipated from point 1 to point 2, where the baghouse is located. The gradual decrease from point 2 to point 6 indicates resistance in the duct system, which is typical for airflow in filtration systems [1]. The small difference between average and expected static pressure suggests a strong correlation, indicating that the system is performing as designed.

In contrast, the average dynamic pressure begins at 3.5 mbar at the first measuring point and decreases through subsequent points. This pressure is generally lower than expected and

notably below industry standards [14]. A steep decline in average dynamic pressure is observed between points 4 and 5, indicating significant changes in system characteristics. From points 5 to 6, the dynamic pressure continues to decrease, albeit at a more gradual rate. This trend suggests that the dust filtration system operates effectively, with pressure dropping as air flows through filters and components. However, the measured dynamic pressures do not align with findings from other studies [10], [8], [16], which reported dynamic pressures ranging from 3 to 6 mbar.

4.2 Variation of average temperature

The average temperature starts at 59°C at the first measuring point and steadily decreases from point 1 to point 6, as illustrated in Figure 3. A significant drop occurs between points 1 and 2, where the baghouse is located. Beyond this point, duct temperatures gradually decrease as the distance from the suction fan increases. This trend indicates effective heat dissipation from the suction fan as air flows through the duct.

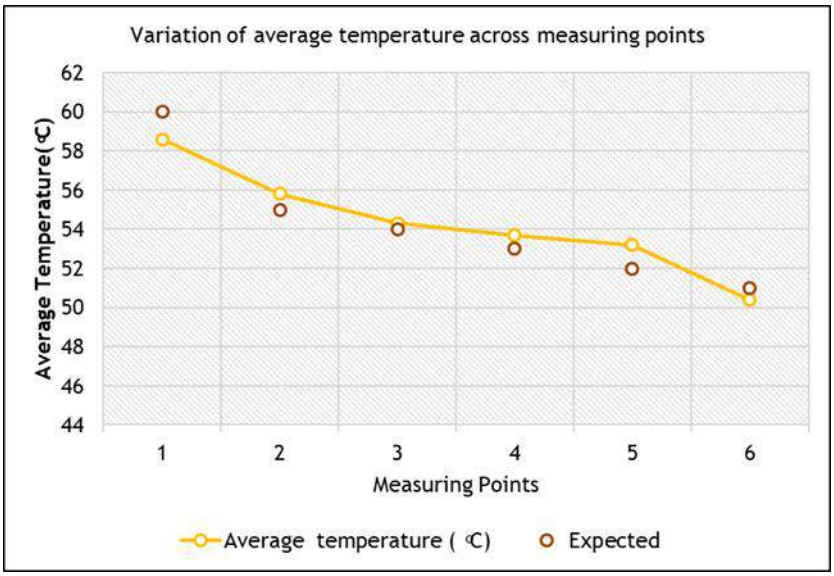


Figure 3: Measurements of temperature across sampling points

This temperature behaviour aligns with findings by [18], suggesting proper functioning of the dust filtration system, where the temperature drop correlates with energy dissipation and heat transfer during filtration. The pronounced decrease in temperature between points 1 and 3 indicates that the initial stages are where most heat removal occurs due to the filtering process. The measured temperatures generally align with expected values, confirming the system's effectiveness.

The gas flow rate through each duct was calculated using various duct characteristics, including duct configuration, gas properties, gas density, thermodynamic properties, barometric pressure, and energy above ambient. These data were provided by duct manufacturers and plant operators. The measured static and dynamic pressures and temperatures were integrated with these characteristics to derive the gas flow rates, as shown in Figure 4.

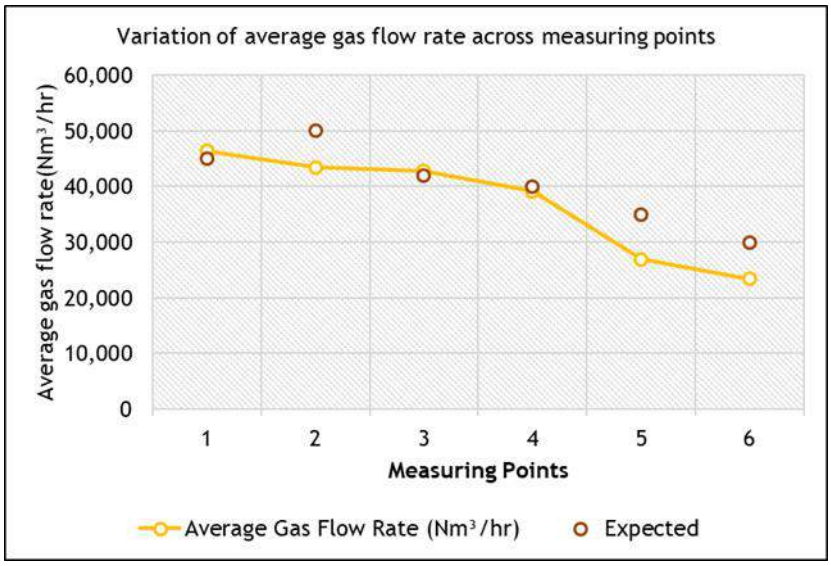


Figure 4: Measurements of temperature across sampling points

5 DISCUSSION

The analysis of static and dynamic pressures measured at various points within the filtration system reveals significant insights into operational efficiency and airflow performance. The average static pressure recorded at 23 mbar at the initial measuring point and decreasing to 11 mbar by the sixth point demonstrates an expected trend that aligns closely with predicted static pressure profiles. This close correlation suggests that the filtration system operates effectively and within acceptable limits, as indicated by the minimal disparity between measured and expected values [27]. The noticeable drop in static pressure from point 1 to point 2 corresponds with the presence of the baghouse, where an initial significant resistive force is anticipated due to the filtration media itself. Subsequent measurements from point 2 to point 6 indicate resistance contributed by the duct system, a behaviour consistent with established airflow dynamics in filtration systems, where resistance occurs as air travels through ductwork and filter media [31].

In contrast, the analysis of dynamic pressure indicates more complex behaviour. The initial average dynamic pressure at 3.5 mbar shows a consistent decline through the measuring points, reaching levels notably lower than expected values, particularly when considering industry standards that typically range from 3 to 6 mbar. The steep decline between points 4 and 5 displays an abrupt change in the dynamic characteristics of the system, reflecting either a sudden increase in resistance or a modification in airflow patterns as air continues to traverse through the filters and ducts. This observation is critical, as it validates the hypothesis that conditions within the system may fluctuate due to factors such as filter saturation or turbulence induced by airflow speed [33].

Furthermore, the gradual decrease from points 5 to 6 reinforces the notion that the filtration mechanisms are intact, allowing the system to function as designed with effective dust capture and pollutant removal. However, the lower than expected dynamic pressures compared to findings from other studies indicates an area for further investigation, particularly concerning how specific design parameters of the filtration system influence performance metrics. The disparity suggests that while the system operates effectively under current configurations, optimization efforts could further enhance performance by aligning with and possibly exceeding standards established by previous research [30]. These differences highlight the importance of contextualizing operational metrics within the broader landscape

of filtration research to comprehensively assess effectiveness and identify potential improvements.

The results of the temperature measurements taken at various points in the duct system showcase a clear pattern of thermal dynamics, indicating operational mechanics in the dust filtration system. The average temperature drops from an initial 59°C at the first measuring point to lower values as the distance from the suction fan increases, with a significant decline observed between points 1 and 2, where the baghouse is situated. This observation aligns with the finding of [26], who noted that the geometry and configuration of ducts can influence heat transfer and airflow characteristics.

The notable temperature reduction at the initial measuring points suggests that primary heat dissipation occurs early in the airflow process, which is likely correlated with the nature of particulate filtration. As noted by [34] flow characteristics alongside thermal dynamics significantly influence the performance of filtration systems. This trend is promising, as it indicates that the system efficiently removes heat from the air, which is essential in preventing overheating that can lead to diminished filter performance and unplanned operational disruptions.

As the air progresses through the ductwork, a gradual cooling trend is evident, commonly attributed to laminar flow and convective heat transfer mechanisms within the duct system [29]. The calculated gas flow rates further substantiate the relationship between duct characteristics and thermal performance, derived from accurate metrics such as duct configuration, gas properties, and energy above ambient pressure, all of which are crucial in understanding dynamic thermal behaviour [32]. The systematic integration of static and dynamic pressures with temperature data enhances insights gained from the temperature profiles and predictions about system efficiency.

While the measured temperatures show a good alignment with expected values, the reliability of the filtration system's design is reinforced by this consistency. The expected values closely matching the recorded temperatures suggest that the system operates effectively within its intended parameters, as supported by the observations made by [28] regarding thermodynamic efficiency within forced convection systems.

In summary, the observed temperature profiles within the ductwork provide evidence of the effective heat management characteristics of the filtration system, demonstrating its capability to sustain operational efficiency under prescribed conditions.

6 CONCLUSION

This paper provides a thorough exploration of the interrelated dynamics of static pressure, dynamic pressure, temperature, gas flow rate, and dust concentration within a dust filtration system. The findings demonstrate the intricate relationships among these parameters and their critical influence on effective dust management. Through comprehensive graphical analysis and multivariable regression, we quantitatively assessed the impact of each variable on dust concentration, revealing that static and dynamic pressures play pivotal roles, with static pressure emerging as the most significant factor.

To leverage these insights for practical optimization, the study utilized the Taguchi method, employing Minitab software to methodically minimize dust concentration at the plant outlet by fine-tuning the operational settings of the suction fan dampers. The results confirmed that duct temperature and static pressure levels remained consistent with expected performance benchmarks; however, dynamic pressure, gas flow rate, and dust concentration displayed notable inconsistencies, particularly at measurement points 5 and 6. Observations indicated that dust build-up could obstruct dust movement towards the baghouse, a problem stemming

from design limitations within the ductwork and insufficient suction pressure, exacerbated by fully closed dampers during the experiments.

The regression analysis provided a robust mathematical model for the dust filtration process, reinforced through analysis of variance (ANOVA), which demonstrated the appropriateness of the model with a significant P-value (less than 0.05) at a 95% confidence level. The derived predictive equation specifies the relationship between various operational parameters and dust concentration, allowing us to optimize damper settings effectively. Our empirical analysis identified optimal damper configurations—100% for dampers 1 and 2 and 50% for damper 3—yielding a suction pressure of 7 mbar at point 6, closely aligning with industry standards and maintaining a minimal error margin of 3.8% between predicted and measured values.

Further complications arose from the presence of sharp edges within the ductwork, contributing to turbulent airflow and subsequent pressure loss, thus highlighting the necessity for design improvements. This study recommends implementing smoother transitions or filleted edges to enhance airflow efficiency and dust suction, particularly in high concentration zones such as the packer area. Ongoing monitoring and analysis of operational parameters are imperative to compare actual performance against established industry best practices—ensuring timely identification of inefficiencies and adaptive modifications.

Although the study focused on key factors such as pressure, temperature, particle size, and gas flow rate, it did not explore additional elements like filter maintenance and aging, which could significantly influence system performance. The optimization methods used, such as the Taguchi method, might not capture the full complexity of the filtration process. As a result, the effectiveness of the suggested solutions may differ across various operational settings.

In conclusion, an adaptive control strategy that dynamically adjusts damper settings based on real-time operational data can be integrated into the process, thereby ensuring consistent airflow regulation and significantly enhancing dust separation performance. By integrating cutting-edge technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and advanced data analytics into cement dust filtration research, we can achieve remarkable improvements in operational efficiencies, predictive capabilities, and adherence to stringent environmental standards. The implementation of these technologies not only serves to optimize dust filtration systems but also plays a crucial role in promoting a more sustainable cement production process.

Moreover, further research should investigate the impact of cement particle size on baghouse efficiency, which could refine filter media selection and bolster overall dust collection effectiveness. While static pressure readings currently meet satisfactory levels, the insights gained from examining dynamic pressures reveal substantial opportunities for performance enhancement within the filtration system. Future studies focused on duct geometry, airflow rates, and dynamic thermal behaviours are essential for optimizing heat management and ensuring that operational effectiveness is sustained in line with recognized industry standards.

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TOWARDS A DATA VALUATION FRAMEWORK IN THE CONTEXT OF INDUSTRY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION

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ABSTRACT

Industry-University Collaboration (IUC) is a way to leapfrog innovation, and benefits both sectors, with industry partners contributing resources like equipment, expertise and data in exchange for intellectual property (IP) access. However, establishing IP agreements in the context of the South African IPR Act is complex and challenging regarding data valuation in the context of hard-to-value tangibles. Without a proper framework, both parties risk legal and financial challenges. This research aimed to develop a data valuation framework that ensures compliance with the IPR Act. The 7-Step Soft Systems Methodology is used, incorporating semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders. Preliminary findings highlight strengths and shortcomings of current data valuation methodologies and propose a more effective approach to a framework artefact as a solution, which could encourage investment in university research by providing clear valuation mechanisms and drive innovation by facilitating knowledge transfer through fair agreements, ultimately strengthening collaborations between universities and industry.

Keywords: data valuation, intellectual property, innovation

1 INTRODUCTION

Industry-University Collaborations (IUC) refer to joint efforts between universities and industry aimed at exchanging knowledge, resources, and expertise for mutual benefit. IUC is essential for integrating theoretical research with industrial applications, and promoting entrepreneurship and commercialisation of innovations [1]. With a growing emphasis on data science at universities, opportunities for collaboration with industry are increasing. Industry is keen to engage in research projects, offering in-kind contributions such as mentorship, access to equipment, and data, which are sought after by universities. In return, they seek access and rights to use the intellectual property (IP) generated by the university. Establishing contractual agreements on IP access rights involves several considerations, including relevant IP laws and the monetary and in-kind contributions by the parties, which often require the valuation of data, the latter posing a significant challenge. Without an appropriate data valuation methodology in the context of IUC, universities and industry are exposed to risks of non-compliance with the South African Intellectual Property Rights from Publicly Financed Research and Development Act ("IPR Act") [2].

This study is positioned within the field of Industrial Engineering, which is inherently concerned with the optimisation of complex systems and decision-making at the intersection of people, processes, and technology. As data becomes a critical asset in modern engineering systems, Industrial Engineers are uniquely placed to contribute to the development of systematic, stakeholder-aligned valuation frameworks. This is also highly relevant to Research and Development (R&D) management, where the ability to fairly and accurately value data supports better resource allocation, IP planning, and innovation commercialisation strategies.

Data is at the heart of data valuation and has a different outlook depending on its use case. Data is a new asset class [3] that is intangible, which companies can exploit to gain more value from it [4]. In the context of finance, data is defined as digitised information, which can have various use cases, including forecasting. The data is generated from economic transactions that give a picture of the consumers' behaviour and other digital footprints that companies can use for a competitive edge [3]. In the context of R&D conducted by institutions such as universities, data can be the result of R&D activities and can hold considerable value.

Data typically does not hold significant value on its own; instead, it serves as an input for analytics, often integrated into software programs to derive insights that can be translated into content-based information products like scientific reports or business intelligence. Data primarily functions as intermediate goods, intended for integration and transformation to generate various information goods [5]. The transformation of data into information and subsequently into knowledge closely mirrors the principles of data valuation. In its raw state, data consists merely of unstructured signals or symbols. However, when contextualised, this data acquires meaning and becomes valuable information. Further integration of information into organisational processes facilitates the development of actionable knowledge, enhancing decision-making and operational clarity [6].

Figure 1: Value creation from progressive utility of processed data [6]

Figure 1, indicates that as data progresses from raw input to insight, its utility and economic value increase. Therefore, effective data valuation must account for the data's current use and its latent potential to generate knowledge and drive enterprise value [6]. But what if the latent potential is not yet fully conceivable at the time that the data valuation transaction must be finalised? And what if there is IP creation linked to the increased value of data as it progresses from raw input to insight? This leads us to considering data as a hard-to-value intangible, defined as "intangibles or rights in intangibles for which, at the time of the transaction, no reliable comparables existed and projections of future cash flows expected to be derived from the transferred intangible or assumptions used in valuing the intangibles were highly uncertain" [7, p. 1]. In the context of concluding a research contract governing a research project, it is essential to understand the complexity of valuing data as well as IP and the rights linked to data and IP, to ensure fair contract negotiations and compliance with IPR Act [2].

1.1 Problem statement

This leads to the **Problem Statement**: *The lack of a standardised data valuation methodology in IUC poses significant risks for both sectors in terms of non-compliance with the IPR Act and equitable IP access rights.*

1.2 Research objectives

The **Key Research Objective** is creating a Data Valuation Framework artefact as a solution for use in IUCs that comply with legislative frameworks.

Through providing a Framework for data valuation, industry and universities will be guided towards making informed decisions on which existing data valuation methodologies (if any) are appropriate for a specific situation. Where no suitable methodology is available, the Framework will assist in providing shared principles and understanding and alignment across various methodologies, to achieve a suitable solution in an agile manner [8].

To achieve the Key Research Objective, several Sub-Objectives are defined:

1. Explore and evaluate the existing data valuation methodologies and their use cases.
2. Identify the key challenges and merits of these methodologies.
3. Determine key requirements by stakeholders for the proposed Data Valuation Framework through the conduct of interviews with universities and industry.

4. Determine the key legislative requirements for data valuation to ensure compliance with the IPR Act and the Exchange Control Regulations.
5. Evaluate the existing data valuation methodologies for suitability in the IUC context by considering the key requirements from stakeholders (Sub-Objective 3) and legislation (Sub-Objective 4).
6. Design a suitable Data Valuation Framework for IUCs which would give guidance for informed decisions on the most appropriate existing data valuation methodologies (if any) for a specific situation, or provide shared principles, understanding and alignment across various methodologies, to achieve a suitable solution.
7. Verify the suitability of the proposed Framework (Sub-Objectives 6) through interviews with stakeholders (industry and universities) and legislative regulators (National Intellectual Property Management Office (NIPMO)). A case demonstration will be used as part of the verification step.
8. Validate that the Framework has fulfilled the requirements through expert interviews.

A systems thinking approach is used for the creation of a Data Valuation Framework, satisfying the requirements of industry, universities and legislators (NIPMO). All these requirements will be compiled, verified, and validated within the Data Valuation Framework artefact, which makes it unique for IUC, where valuation of data is required before access to IP rights in a research agreement can be concluded. For the scope of this paper, sub-objectives 1, 2, and 4 are completed, and 3 and 5 are in process.

2 TOWARDS AN INDUSTRY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION DATA VALUATION FRAMEWORK

Data is increasingly recognised as a critical intangible asset that significantly influences enterprise value in the digital economy [6], therefore, a tendency to measure its value in monetary terms. As an intangible asset, data can be valued in ways beyond its financial impact; however, with significant difficulty [9].

2.1 Importance of data valuation in the context of IUC

Data valuation is important for regulatory compliance, especially with data protection and IP laws, and industry-specific regulations.

In the context of IUCs, the IPR Act (See Section 2.5) by default assigns IP rights to the university where public funding is used to create IP because of a research contract between industry and the university, and certain IP transactions will be subject to NIPMO approval. However, Section 15(4)(a) of the IPR Act states that "any research and development undertaken at an institution and funded by a private entity or organisation on a **full cost basis** shall not be deemed to be publicly financed research and development and the provisions of this Act shall not apply thereto". [2] To determine whether the contribution by the industry complies with the full cost basis, especially where the contribution is partially in-kind (in this scenario, through providing access to valuable data to the university for R&D), it is critical to determine the value of the data, which this study aims to achieve.

2.2 Data Valuation as part of good practice and governance

Valuing data helps organisations demonstrate accountability, transparency, and responsible data stewardship practices required by regulatory authorities [9].

Data valuation is crucial in risk management by assessing the potential risks and liabilities associated with data assets, such as data breaches, privacy violations, regulatory non-compliance, and data quality issues [3]. Valuing data helps organisations prioritise data security measures, implement data governance frameworks, and mitigate risks effectively [4].

Organisations that effectively value and leverage their data assets gain a competitive advantage in the market. Valuable data enables better decision-making, innovation, customer insights, operational efficiency and agility, which positions organisations for success and differentiation in a data-driven economy [4].

In the context of mergers, acquisitions, or partnerships, data valuation becomes critical for assessing the value of data assets owned by potential partners. Data valuation helps in due diligence processes, negotiations, and determining the overall value and synergy potential of combining data assets from different entities [4].

Venture capital (VC) represents a type of private equity funding and involves providing equity capital to companies not publicly traded on stock markets. This is particularly relevant for young companies that have innovative ideas and growth potential but lack established business models and a track record. Venture capitalists take on the risk of investing in these new or growing businesses with the expectation that some of them will become successful in the long term. Therefore, when VC investors put money into big data companies, it reflects their assessment of the future revenues generated by these companies' data assets. In this way, VC investment serves as an indicator of the value of their data [9].

Assigning monetary value to data is important for financial reporting, accounting, and valuation purposes, especially for organisations that consider data as a valuable intangible asset on their balance sheets [3]. Data valuation methodologies can help organisations comply with accounting standards and accurately reflect the value of data in financial statements [9].

Valuable data assets can be monetised through various means, such as selling data to third parties, licensing data for analytics or research purposes, creating data products or services, and leveraging data for targeted marketing or personalised experiences. Data valuation helps organisations identify monetisation opportunities and optimise revenue generation from data assets [4].

2.3 Data characteristics and challenges

Although benefits of data valuation are recognised, implementation of effective valuation practices is hindered by the inherent characteristics of data. A systematic examination of these characteristics is essential, as it may provide critical insights into the development of an appropriate and robust methodology for data valuation.

2.3.1 Data are (in general) non-rival

The concept of rivalry is used to describe whether the consumption of a good by one individual/entity diminishes its availability or quality for others. Data are non-rivalrous by nature because they can be accessed by multiple parties simultaneously [10]. For example, an online article can be viewed by multiple users without any degradation in the content. However, data can become rival because of legal contracts around the infrastructure, technologies and resources used to process, store and transmit data that restrict access to data [3, 9]. This is known as excludability.

2.3.2 Data has spillovers

This refers to the unintended or indirect effects of data that benefit or disadvantage other companies. Spillovers can be positive or negative. Positive spillovers from data-driven industries such as research sectors can contribute to job creation and foster a conducive environment for innovation and entrepreneurship. Knowledge sharing can also enhance problem-solving capabilities across industries. Negative spillovers can pose privacy risks if sensitive information is leaked to unauthorised parties. Market distortions are also possible when certain parties gain access to valuable data resources that are not equally accessible to others, leading to monopolistic practices [9, 10].

2.3.3 Data has low specificity

Data can be used for unforeseen purposes other than intended. That unpredictable change in context makes it difficult to value data [9], but can provide possible monetisation opportunities and alternative use cases [4].

2.3.4 Data has network effects

The value of data increases as more users access, contribute to, or interact with it. Social media platforms, for example, derive value from network effects as more users join and engage with the platform, creating a larger network of interconnected data and interactions. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) describes this as synergies [9].

2.3.5 Data has increasing returns to scale

This refers to a concept in economics and business that describes a situation where increasing the scale of production leads to a more than proportional increase in output or efficiency. Increasing returns to scale imply that larger firms or organisations can produce goods or services more efficiently and cost-effectively than smaller entities. This can lead to competitive advantages, higher profit margins, and market dominance for firms that achieve economies of scale in their operations. Veldkamp refers to this as the data feedback loop [3]. It is often associated with economies of scale, occurring when the average cost of production decreases as the level of output or scale of operations increases. This can be due to various factors such as specialisation, better utilisation of resources, efficient production processes, bulk purchasing discounts, and spreading fixed costs over a larger output, all made possible through the effective use of data [9].

2.3.6 Data can depreciate

Data about the previous day's conditions is less pertinent to the current situation due to the rapid pace of change in the environment. Additionally, it is observed that extensive reservoirs of knowledge tend to lose value more rapidly compared to smaller reservoirs. To calculate the depreciation of data accurately, it is essential to understand its intended purpose. It is also important to understand how volatile and persistent the environment is [3]. This is supported by the views of Deloitte in stating that: “Data is perishable, but not depletable” [4].

2.3.7 Data are an experience and credence good

An experience good is a type of product/service whose quality or value can only be fully assessed by the consumer after they have used or experienced it. A credence good is a type of product/service whose quality or characteristics are difficult for consumers to evaluate even after purchase and use. Unlike experience goods, where quality can be assessed through consumption, credence goods require trust in the seller's expertise or third-party certification to determine their true value or effectiveness [5]. Examples include medical services, legal advice, and certain types of dietary supplements, where consumers may not be able to verify the quality or outcomes directly. In the context of data, it may be difficult to assess their usefulness or accuracy until they are compared to similar data sets [5].

2.4 Data as a “hard-to-value” intangible

As mentioned in Section 1, data can be considered as a “hard-to-value” intangible, as it shares one or more of the typical characteristics [7], namely:

- It is partially developed at the time of transfer
- Commercial exploitation might only take place several years after the transaction
- It could be an integral part of the development of other hard-to-value intangibles

- Due to the expectation of novel exploitation, it is difficult to compare it with reliable past projections of similar transactions
- Transfer of the hard-to-value intangible to another enterprise is done under a lump-sum agreement
- It is used or developed under a cost contribution or similar arrangements.

From the described IUC context, many of these mentioned characteristics can be assigned to data.

2.5 Legislation impacting data valuation and IUC

To come up with a reasonable Data Valuation Framework in the context of IUC, it is important to consider the legislation that could govern data within the context of the use case of the data. Assessing the importance of data's value within the economy is crucial for informing discussions on understanding the potential hazards linked to personal data usage and managing cross-border data exchanges [9]. Compliance with these laws will shape organisations' data strategies, risk management practices, and approaches to data monetisation, affecting how they assess and assign value to data assets. As a result, companies must adopt more expensive measures to handle personal and sensitive data, which can increase its value [10].

The most prevalent laws and regulations considered in this research for South African universities are mentioned below. However, there are other legislations which would be considered on a case-by-case basis. As an example, if the industry is from the European Union (EU) and shares personal data from EU citizens with a South African university, then the General Data Protection Regulation **(GDPR**) of 2018 [11] must be considered in addition to the relevant South African laws described below. As it is an offshore company, not only the Intellectual Property Rights from Publicly Financed Research and Development (IPR Act) (No.51 of 2008) [2], but also the South African Exchange Control Regulations (1961, with their Amendments 2012) [12], must also be considered. This paper only focuses on the most relevant legislation within the IUC in South Africa, but considers other legislations as per Sub-Objective 4, which are not mentioned here.

In South Africa, the main legislations governing IP rights and data having a bearing on this study include:

The Intellectual Property Rights from Publicly Financed Research and Development (IPR Act) (No.51 of 2008) addresses the ownership and management of IP rights arising from publicly financed R&D activities. The Act aims to promote innovation, technology transfer, and the commercialisation of research outcomes while ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all stakeholders involved, including researchers, institutions, and the public. The IPR Act is particularly of interest as it governs all IP rights created through public universities and science councils in South Africa. It is critical to be able to value data where it forms part of the industry partner's contribution towards a research project governed under the IPR Act, to ensure that fair IP access agreements can be negotiated [2].

The South African Exchange Control Regulations (1961, with their Amendments 2012), are designed to control the flow of foreign exchange into and out of the country. These regulations aim to manage the country's foreign currency reserves, stabilise the economy, and prevent illicit financial flows. They are governed by the South African Reserve Bank (SARB). In the context of this study, for any IP or other forms of assets (such as data) to be transferred to offshore entities, the SARB's approval is required in terms of the Exchange Control Regulations. One of the considerations for approval is whether the South African entity charged a market-related fee for the transfer of the IP, hence, the valuation of IP (and data in this study's context) becomes critical to the transaction [12].

The Protection of Personal Information Act (No. 4 of 2013), POPIA, is a comprehensive data protection law that aims to safeguard the privacy and personal information of individuals in South Africa. The Act applies to the processing of personal information by public and private entities, outlining principles and requirements for the lawful and responsible handling of such data [13].

2.6 Data valuation methodologies

There are insufficient tools available to adequately study the modern data economy [3]. Determining a structured approach or set of procedures to determine the worth of data assets is still a challenging task. According to Fleckstein et al., data valuation approaches can be grouped into three models: market-based, economic and dimensional models [10].

2.6.1 Market-Based Models

Market-based models are an expansion of valuing physical assets. Much like tangible assets, data can be evaluated based on its cost, its market value for sale, or its potential to generate income [10]. The value is derived from the principle of supply and demand.

To further establish the idea of market-based models, Deloitte highlighted a method called **the market approach**. As companies keep using their data and creating models to trade it, these trades can help show their market value. Like other assets, comparing values will be tricky at first, but as the market grows and trading methods improve, Deloitte expects data trades to become a common way to value data [4].

The **cost approach** uses the replacement cost as an indicator of value and considers the cost of acquiring a new asset or factor of production, including any associated expenses such as transportation, installation, and training. This approach is used to gauge the economic value of an asset by considering the cost of replacing it rather than its original purchase price or historical cost [4]. Veldkamp further explains this cost approach as a **barter trade system**. If a company wants to increase the number of entries in its dataset, it needs to lure more client transactions. It can do so by introducing loyalty programs or offering discounts where clients trade their transactional behaviour for this benefit. If financially feasible, the ideal strategy for the company might entail initially setting prices below cost during its early stages, as this acts as an expensive yet beneficial investment in data and transactions that will yield valuable data. If one can quantify what it costs the company to attract these additional client transactions, the cost-based approach could be used to assess the value of data [3]. According to the OECD report, the **sum-of-cost approach** 'consists of measuring the value of output by summing the costs of production: intermediate consumption, compensation of employees, consumption of fixed capital used in production, a net return to fixed capital used in production (also known as "mark-up") and taxes (minus subsidies) on production' [9, p. 29].

2.6.2 Economic Models

The economic model values data by looking at the financial estimates of economic benefits, assessing the value of making data public and its impact on policy legislation [10].

Deloitte explores the **multi-period excess earnings method (MPEEM)** as a valuation approach under economic models. It is commonly applied to valuing intangible assets where there is significant future income expected from these assets. Future earnings are typically estimated multiple periods into the future, and then the excess earnings are calculated by subtracting a reasonable return on tangible assets (such as physical assets or working capital) from the total earnings. The excess earnings are attributed to the intangible asset being valued. The estimated excess earnings are discounted back to their present value using an appropriate discount rate. This discount rate accounts for the time value of money and the risk associated

with receiving future earnings. The present values of the excess earnings for each forecasted period are summed up to arrive at the total value of the intangible asset [4].

Another approach that can be considered under the economic model is the **Relief from Royalty method,** which is commonly used to value IP and intangible assets. The royalties are calculated by estimating what would be paid if the owner did not own the asset but instead licensed it from a third party. These royalties represent the cost savings or relief that the owner gains by not having to pay for the use of the asset. The estimated royalty payments are discounted back to their present value using an appropriate discount rate. The present value of the estimated royalty savings represents the value of the intangible asset [4].

2.6.3 Dimensional Models

Dimensional models value data by looking at other dimensions of data that are not market-based or economic. It focuses on the intrinsic characteristics of the dataset and the context within which the data is used [10].

Deloitte proposes the **With and Without method**. The value of the business, with all its data assets, is estimated. This is to assess how data will change cash flows. The business is then valued without the data assets to account for the absence of data benefits. The difference between the two scenarios is calculated and represents the incremental value attributable to the data assets [4].

Fleckstein et al. [10] developed a model that is straightforward, efficient, and accessible to a variety of stakeholders. The serves as a preliminary assessment tool to identify areas for further exploration depending on the use case of the data. It can reveal the relative value of a dataset, identify potential risks, and support informed decision-making. For this study, it will be called the **Data Dimension method** and Table 1 shows the set of dimensions used.

Table 1: Data valuation dimensions [10]

Dimensions used to value data	Description
Ownership	Addresses outright data set ownership plus licensing restrictions and service agreements
Cost	Addresses the cost of data set acquisition, maintenance, and replacement
Usage	Addresses dataset mission criticality, ability to integrate, usage scope, usage frequency, metadata, additional resources, expected increase in demand, and diminishing value
Age	Addresses refresh rate and available history
Privacy	Addresses whether the dataset contains sensitive data such as Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and Protected Health Information, and meets privacy standards
Data Quality	Addresses completeness, accuracy, currency, consistency, duplication, trustworthiness, and timeliness
Volume & Variety	Addresses the number of records, scope of information for each record, and ability to answer needed questions

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) will be the main methodology used in this study. It is a seven-step method for addressing complex, disordered situations of all types. It is an action-focused process of investigating problematic scenarios, enabling users to progressively learn and move from comprehending the situation to implementing actions for improvement [14].

Figure 2 illustrates the seven-step SSM.

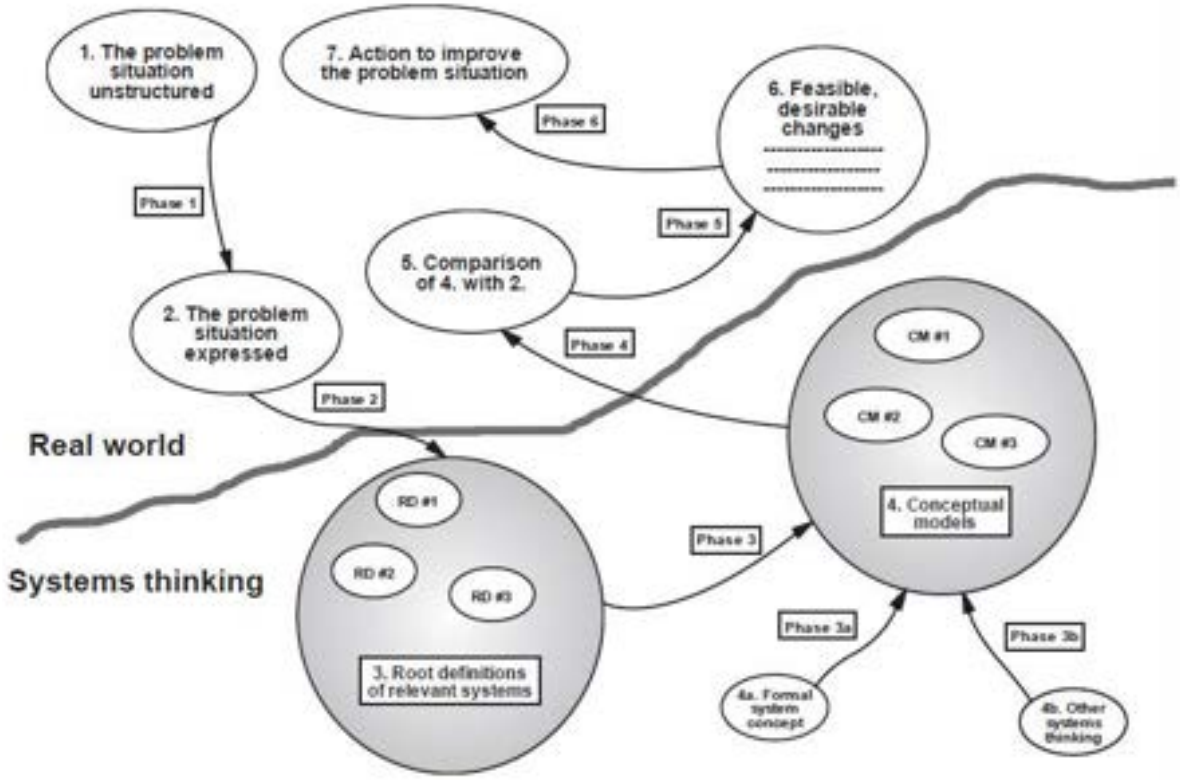

Figure 2: Checkland's soft system methodology [15]

***Step 1**: The problem situation unstructured*: In this step comprehensive information about the problem situation is gathered without imposing any structure [14]. For this study, there will be semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders, such as industry partners, universities, and the legislative body (NIPMO) and a review of the existing literature, including an evaluation of existing data valuation methodologies. Different interview questions are aimed at industry, universities and NIPMO, and for each of these, pilot interviews were conducted to test the suitability of the interview questions.

***Step 2**: The problem situation expressed:* In this step, the objective is to visually and descriptively represent the problem situation to capture its complexity. Drawings, symbols, text, and diagrams that capture elements, interactions, and perspectives to facilitate understanding and communication among stakeholders are used. A Rich Picture is one such collaborative tool that gives a shared understanding of the problem [16]. This will be based on the outputs from Step 1. The problem statement aims to express the core of the problem situation, as already captured in Section 1.

***Step 3**: Root Definitions of relevant systems*: In this step, concise descriptions of the relevant systems are developed within the problem situation. A root definition is used to capture the essential purpose of the relevant system and is always described as a transformation process, where the input is changed into a new form, resulting in the output. The CATWOE analysis is used for this, and it stands for:

- Customers: These are the beneficiaries of this transformation process e.g. universities in the context of this research
- Actors: These are the individuals who do the transformative work
- Transformation: The process that changes the input to an output
- Worldview: A broader view that makes the system meaningful

- Owners: The individuals with the power to control the system
- Environmental Constraints: External factors that are beyond the control of the system [14].

For this study, the root definitions will give the key requirements of the proposed Data Valuation Framework.

Step 4: *Conceptual Models:* In this step, models are created that represent the ideal operation of the systems defined in the root definitions [14]. These models represent the activities that need to occur within the system to achieve the defined purposes. The Data Valuation Framework design will be the output of this step.

Step 5: *Compare models with the real world:* In this step, gaps and discrepancies between the conceptual models and the actual situation are identified. To ensure that the designed model aligns with the real-world experiences and needs of the stakeholders, a verification and validation process is undertaken. This process involves comparing the model against the actual situation and the stakeholders' perspectives to confirm that it meets the intended objectives and is suitable for its purpose. Verification checks if the model is correctly constructed, while validation ensures that it accurately represents reality and addresses the stakeholders' requirements [14]. Verification and validation for the proposed Data Valuation Framework will be done using expert interviews and an IUC case study.

Step 6: *Feasible and desirable changes*: In this step, changes that are realistic, acceptable to stakeholders, and beneficial for the system are proposed. Changes can be to any of the objects of the process or to the process itself. There are three types of change: in structure, in procedures, and attitude [15].

Step 7: *Action to improve the problem situation:* An action plan is developed and implemented based on the proposed changes. Planning, examining, and evaluation occur. Communication is deemed very important to have stakeholder buy-in [14].

4 ARTEFACT DESIGN OPTIONS

Currently, there are two approaches identified towards building Conceptual Models, which will be further investigated during the interviews with industry, universities and NIPMO.

Approach #1:

The Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom (DIKW) pyramid [17] can serve as a useful foundation for a Data Valuation Framework, because it offers a conceptual lens to understand how data gains value as it is contextualised and applied [6]. In this study, the pyramid can provide a shared language between industries and universities. Universities may bring in technical expertise by focusing on data and information layers with the goal of building foundational understanding and providing theoretical models. Whilst industries may bring strategic priorities by focusing on the knowledge and wisdom layers, with the goal of solving practical problems and driving innovation and competitiveness. The DIKW provides a layered view of responsibilities, enabling each side to understand how their work contributes to the broader outcome [17].

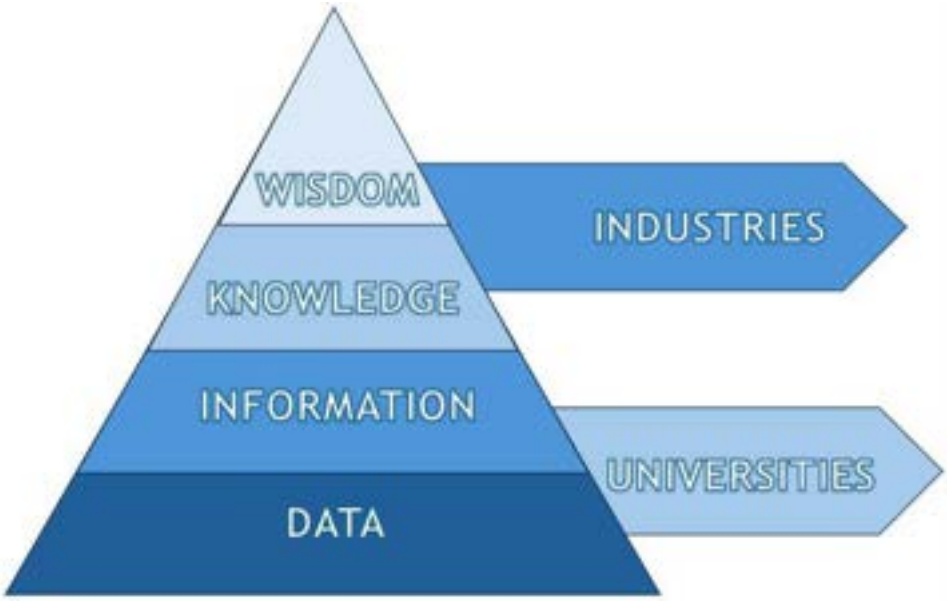

Figure 3: Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom pyramid in the IUC context

Approach #2:

Another approach would be to lean on enterprise architecture to conform to already existing industry standards. Hafner et al. [18] proposed the Data Valuation Business Capability (DVBC) Taxonomy, structured into four layers, namely Information, Resources, Roles and Processes, as illustrated in Figure 4. These layers align with enterprise architecture principles from The Open Group Architecture Framework (TOGAF). Each layer contains key dimensions, which are further broken down into characteristics that represent specific aspects of data valuation [18].

The information layer focuses on what data is being valued and why. In IUCs, the motivation could be for compliance or product innovation. The resource layer focuses on tools, models, and theories used for valuation. This aligns expectations on how data will be assessed, secured, and leveraged. The role layer looks at who is involved in data valuation and decision-making, and would also include a neutral body (e.g. NIPMO) to ensure fairness and transparency. The process layer focuses on how valuation is done, tracked, and used [18]. This approach transforms data from a point of contention into a shared strategic asset.

Layer	Dimension	Characteristics							E/N*
Information	Purpose	Qualitative Data Valuation			Quantitative Data Valuation			Combination	E
	Data Valuation Object	Bundled Data				Non-Bundled Data			E
	Data Value Driver	Business Utility	Cost	Data Durability and Lifetime	Data Quality	Data Security and Privacy	Sentiment and Perception	Others	N
Resources	Data Valuation Theory	Economic	Cooperative Game Theory	Non-Cooperative Game Theory	Decision Theory	Query-Based	Index-Based	Proprietary	N
	Data Valuation Tooling	Interpersonal Elaboration			Model and Application			Combination	E
Roles	Value Determination Stakeholder	Internal		Internal and External (with Intermediary)		Internal and External (without Intermediary)		External	E
	Value Auditing Stakeholder	Internal Data Value Auditor			3rd Party Data Value Auditor			Not Existing	E
Processes	Component	Data Value Assessment		Data Value Allocation		Data Value Prediction		Data Value Monitoring	N
	Result	Specific Absolute Data Value			Approximate Absolute Data Value			Relative Data Value	E

* E = Exclusive *N = Non-Exclusive

Figure 4: Data Valuation Business Capability (DVBC) taxonomy [18]

5 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

Data valuation is core to complex contractual negotiations, especially in the context of IUCs, where compliance with legislation as well as a fair and beneficial value proposition to all parties is critical. This study contributes to addressing this challenge by proposing some options towards the development of a stakeholder-informed Data Valuation Framework, grounded in systems thinking. For Industrial Engineers, the implications are significant. By applying structured, context-sensitive valuation methodologies, Industrial Engineers can facilitate more effective technology transfer processes, ensuring that innovation derived from public–private collaboration is equitably recognised and rewarded.

Preliminary requirements for developing the framework need to be elicited, e.g. the framework should support more transparent and compliant intellectual property (IP) management, particularly under South Africa's IPR Act. It should position Industrial Engineers to play a strategic role in shaping institutional data strategy policies by embedding valuation principles into research management, governance, and contract development processes. Ultimately, this study indicates that Industrial Engineers should also manage intangible assets, negotiate complex stakeholder environments, and enable data-driven innovation ecosystems.

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EXPLORING CAPITAL STRUCTURE DETERMINANTS IN JSE-LISTED FIRMS: A SHAP-BASED CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF INDUSTRIAL, RESOURCES, AND TECHNOLOGY SECTORS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the causal factors influencing capital structure decisions in JSE-listed industrial, resources, and technology firms. While traditional theories like the trade-off and pecking order offer some guidance, they fall short on causal clarity. Using a model-agnostic framework with SHAP analysis, the study identifies key drivers, showing that the debt ratio has the strongest influence, supporting the trade-off theory. Asset turnover and enterprise value also show importance, aligning with the pecking-order view. To test time-based influence, Granger causality was applied and confirmed that changes in Debt-to-Assets Ratio and Cashflow Interest Cover precede shifts in the Debt-to-Equity ratio. This supports the idea that firms respond to past leverage levels and internal cashflow signals when adjusting capital structure. Together, machine learning and statistical tools provide a clearer, data-driven view of how firms manage financing decisions.

Keywords: Causal Inference, SHAP Analysis, Granger Causality, Explainable Machine learning

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1 INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of an optimal capital structure remains a central challenge in corporate finance, drawing significant interest from scholars and practitioners worldwide. Despite decades of extensive research and debate, a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing firms' financing decisions remains elusive [1]. Traditional statistical models have predominantly been used to analyze variations in debt ratios across firms, focusing on identifying key determinants of capital structure. However, limited research has explored the use of non-linear models as alternative predictive tools for capturing the dynamic nature of capital structure decisions [2].

Understanding the determinants of capital structure and identifying the optimal leverage level is vital for firms aiming to maintain solvency and long-term sustainability. Highly leveraged firms, for example, may be compelled to reduce employee-related costs when facing financial distress [3]. Although various theories attempt to explain the composition of debt and equity in firms, cross-sectional and time-series variations in capital structure remain challenging to interpret [1]. The Trade-off Theory, Pecking Order Theory, and Market Timing Theory are the most prominent frameworks guiding discussions on capital structure decisions. Yet, empirical studies have struggled to clearly differentiate the strengths and limitations of these theories, leaving the determinants of capital structure an ongoing subject of inquiry [4]. Furthermore, there is no universally accepted method for determining a firm's target leverage [5].

This study addresses this gap by employing causal inference methods to uncover the relationships between capital structure and financial variables. The foundational work of [6] initiated the exploration of capital structure's impact on firm value, emphasizing the trade-off between debt and equity financing [6]. Their theorem highlighted the appeal of debt financing due to tax advantages [7]. Building on this foundation, the Trade-off Theory suggests that firms balance the tax benefits of debt with the risk of bankruptcy costs [8]. However, this theory has been criticized for its assumptions about debt discipline and agency problems.

In contrast, the Pecking Order Theory focuses on firms' financing preferences, driven by information asymmetries between firms and investors [9]. This theory suggests that firms prioritize internal financing over external debt to mitigate risks associated with asymmetric information. Additionally, the Market Timing Theory posits that firms strategically time their financing decisions based on market conditions, opting for equity issuance when stock prices are high and debt issuance when equity is undervalued to minimize the cost of capital [10].

Despite these theoretical models, empirical evidence remains inconclusive in identifying dominant drivers of capital structure across different markets. Recent studies emphasise the importance of exploring non-linear models and machine learning techniques to capture the complex and dynamic factors influencing capital structure. Techniques such as artificial neural networks and support vector machines offer promising alternatives for uncovering hidden patterns and nonlinear relationships within financial data [11].

While several studies have examined capital structure determinants, most rely on linear modelling techniques and often fail to establish causal relationships. This research addresses that gap by integrating causal inference methods with explainable machine learning techniques. Specifically, it employs the Granger Causality Test to identify features with statistically significant causal relationships to the debt-to-equity ratio and applies Shapley Additive Explanations (SHAP) to interpret feature importance in model predictions. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of both association and causality in the factors influencing capital structure.

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in Modigliani–Miller, Trade-Off, and Pecking Order theories. While Agency Theory and Signalling Theory are acknowledged as

important extensions—highlighting agency conflicts and information asymmetry issues, respectively—they are not explicitly incorporated. The research focuses intentionally on the primary causal mechanisms of financing decisions rather than managerial incentive problems or market signalling dynamics.

The contributions of this study are threefold: First, it applies advanced machine learning algorithms to identify a broader and non-linear set of capital structure determinants. Second, it integrates causal inference (Granger causality) and explainable machine learning (SHAP) to assess both causal relationships and feature contributions. Third, it explores the potential influence of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors on capital structure decisions, offering new insights within an emerging market.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

2.1 BACKGROUND OF CAPITAL STRUCTURE THEORIES

Capital structure theory examines the principles and frameworks that guide how firms determine the proportion of debt and equity in their financing mix. Foundational perspectives—such as the Modigliani and Miller irrelevance proposition, the trade-off theory, the pecking order theory, and market timing theory—have shaped decades of empirical and theoretical inquiry into financing decisions [5]. These frameworks offer contrasting explanations of how capital structure choices influence firm value, cost of capital, and risk exposure. Subsequent research has extended these theories to account for firm-specific characteristics, market conditions, and institutional environments, revealing that no single theory fully explains observed financing patterns across industries or time periods. This diversity of perspectives underscores the complexity of capital structure decision-making and provides the basis for examining more recent methodological developments, such as machine learning approaches, in capturing its dynamic and non-linear determinants.

Three principal theories attempt to explain the factors influencing a firm's capital structure: The Trade-off Theory, the Pecking Order Theory, and the Market Timing Theory. Despite extensive empirical studies, a consensus on the dominant theory remains elusive [1], with findings often varying across different global markets.

Modigliani and Miller's ground-breaking research in 1958 revolutionized the understanding of capital structure's impact on firm value. Initially suggesting that capital structure is irrelevant in perfect capital markets, their subsequent work incorporated tax considerations, advocating for the increased use of debt financing [6].

The Trade-off Theory posits that a company's capital structure strikes a balance between the benefits of debt, such as tax advantages, and the costs of potential bankruptcy. Although it has faced criticism, this theory remains a widely accepted framework for understanding corporate decisions regarding capital structure [8].

In contrast, the Pecking Order Theory suggests that firms follow a financing hierarchy, prioritizing internal funds over external debt. This theory highlights the role of information asymmetry between firms and investors in shaping financing choices [9].

The Market Timing Theory, introduced by Baker and Wurgler in 2002, argues that firms strategically time their financing decisions based on market valuations. According to this theory, companies issue debt when stock prices are high and equity when undervalued, thereby minimizing their cost of capital [10].

Empirical studies conducted by [13] have explored the complex determinants of capital structure, identifying key variables like firm size, assets, and growth prospects [13]. Similarly, [1] emphasised factors such as industry leverage, asset tangibility, and expected inflation as critical drivers of capital structure decisions.

Machine learning techniques including artificial neural networks and support vector machines offer alternative methodologies for analysing capital structure dynamics, their ability to uncover nonlinear relationships within datasets presents exciting opportunities for future research [11].

2.2 THE EXPLAINABLE AI: ENHANCING TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND FAIRNESS IN MACHINE LEARNING SYSTEMS

Explainable AI (XAI) is a branch of machine learning focused on leveraging transparent models or generating post-hoc explanations for opaque predictions to improve interpretability [14]. Recent advancements in artificial intelligence have led to widespread adoption across various industries, with machine learning systems demonstrating exceptional performance in a wide range of tasks. However, this increased performance often results in heightened model complexity, transforming these systems into "black boxes" [15]. As a result, understanding the decision-making processes of such systems has become increasingly challenging.

XAI addresses this challenge by providing users with transparent explanations of system decisions [16]. These explanations are vital for ensuring algorithmic fairness, identifying biases in training data, and validating the performance of algorithms. Regulatory frameworks, such as the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), have further intensified the demand for transparent decision-making in AI systems [15]. The GDPR mandates the auditability of decisions made by intelligent autonomous systems, significantly impacting businesses worldwide [17].

The rise of AI has also sparked concerns regarding accountability and the potential biases embedded in decision-making processes. For instance, questions arise about holding AI system owners accountable for automated decisions, particularly when these decisions may be based on unethical grounds [18]. Discriminatory biases, such as gender and racial biases in credit scoring algorithms, have garnered considerable attention, highlighting the importance of addressing fairness in AI systems [19]. These concerns underscore the critical role of interpretability and explainability in AI, ensuring that systems operate ethically and justly.

Interpretability refers to the ability to extract relevant information from machine learning models regarding the relationships between data or the patterns learned by the model, while explainability translates this information into human-understandable language [20]. Both interpretability and explainability are foundational components of XAI, enabling a deeper understanding of AI decision-making processes and ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness in their application [21].

In conclusion, XAI plays a pivotal role in enhancing the transparency, accountability, and fairness of machine learning models. As AI continues to advance and become integrated into diverse industries, the demand for interpretable and explainable systems will increase, driving further innovation and development in the field of XAI.

2.3 CAUSAL INFERENCE AND ITS APPLICATION TO CAPITAL STRUCTURE DYNAMICS NETWORK

Causality plays a fundamental role in our understanding of the world and its phenomena. It is essential for establishing cause-and-effect relationships, which are central to many scientific inquiries and decision-making processes [14]. In the context of model interpretation, it is critical that a model not only provides accurate predictions but also offers explanations that are meaningful to decision-makers. These explanations must clearly outline the reasons behind the model's decisions and offer a coherent understanding of the causal relationships at play [17].

Currently, XAI models, particularly those designed to interpret complex, pre-trained models (often referred to as "black boxes"), focus on offering local explanations. These post-hoc,

model-agnostic approaches attempt to approximate the behaviour of these black box models by providing insights into the specific features influencing individual predictions [17].

Identifying causal relationships in observational data is a complex and vital task in understanding the underlying factors influencing predictions. In observational studies, the counterfactual framework is often employed, assuming the existence of well-defined causal states that can transparently explain the outcomes for individuals in the population being studied [22]. Causal effects are typically elucidated by comparing outcomes based on exposure to alternative causal conditions.

For instance, when investigating the capital structure of firms, the target variable (Y) represents the financial structure in question. The goal is to establish clearly defined causal situations that allow for an in-depth understanding of how different factors influence the outcomes. In this framework, potential outcomes are identified for each individual in the population, where these outcomes are defined under different causal conditions.

For binary causal variables, the potential outcomes can be represented as Y_ (0) and Y_1 corresponding to the treatment and control states, respectively, for individual i. These notations capture the individual-level causal effect of the treatment. To assess counterfactuals accurately, a causal model must include all relevant information regarding the antecedents that lead to changes in the outcomes. The individual-level causal effect can be understood as the difference between the potential outcomes, which allows for a deeper analysis of the impact of causal factors on specific individuals.

The reviewed literature highlights the evolution of capital structure theory from foundational models, such as Modigliani–Miller, to more nuanced frameworks like the trade-off, pecking order, and market timing theories, each offering partial explanations for observed financing behaviours [6,7,10]. Empirical studies demonstrate that capital structure decisions are influenced by a complex interplay of firm-specific factors, market dynamics, and broader macroeconomic conditions, with no single theory providing a universally applicable model. This gap underscores the need for approaches capable of capturing non-linear relationships and sector-specific dynamics, particularly within engineering-based industries where long-term solvency and project feasibility are critical. By integrating advanced AI techniques, such as SHAP-based causal analysis, this study addresses the identified limitations in prior research and provides a novel lens for understanding and optimising the funding structures of firms operating in industrial, resources, and technology sectors.

2.3.1 SHAP method

The SHAP method, introduced by [29], leverages concepts from game theory to provide explanations for individual predictions. Rooted in the Shapley values from economics and game theory, SHAP enables equitable distribution of a prediction’s "payoff" among the features that contribute to it. Essentially, each feature in a prediction task acts as a "player" in a collaborative game, working together to achieve a final prediction. The outcome of this "game" represents the difference between the Shapley value of a prediction and the average Shapley values of all the features in that instance.

One of the key aspects of SHAP is its ability to assign importance values to each feature for a specific prediction. These importance values offer insights into how much each feature influences the final prediction. SHAP also introduces an additive feature importance measure, providing a mathematical framework that guarantees a unique solution with desirable properties for interpreting model predictions [17].

In simple terms, SHAP explains a prediction by decomposing it into the individual contributions of each feature. For example, consider a prediction $\hat{y}$ where each feature contributes incrementally to the final prediction. The overall prediction can be expressed as:

$$\hat{y} = \phi_0 + \sum_{j=1}^{n} \phi_j \quad \textbf{(1)}$$

Where ϕ_0 represents the average prediction and ϕ_j is the Shapley value for feature for j. The Shapley value quantifies how much each feature contributes to the difference between the actual prediction and the average prediction across all instances.

SHAP relies on four core fairness principles to ensure the equitable assignment of feature contributions:

1. **Additivity**: The sum of all individual feature contributions equals the total prediction. This ensures that the explanation is consistent with the overall outcome.
2. **Symmetry**: If two features contribute equally to a prediction, they should receive the same Shapley value.
3. **Efficiency**: The total contribution of all features should match the final prediction, ensuring that the model is fully accounted for in the explanation.
4. **Dummy**: Features that do not influence the prediction should be assigned a Shapley value of zero, ensuring that only meaningful features are attributed to the model's output.

In conclusion, SHAP offers a powerful method for interpreting machine learning models by attributing contributions to individual features, offering transparency in decision-making processes while adhering to core fairness principles.

2.3.2 Granger Causality and SHAP-based Engineering for Causal Interpretation

To complement the counterfactual framework discussed previously, this study incorporates two methodological approaches for uncovering causal signals in capital structure dynamics: Granger causality and SHAP engineering [29, 33]. Each method offers a unique lens for exploring cause-and-effect relationships within complex firm-level financial systems.

Granger causality, a statistical concept rooted in time series analysis, tests whether lagged values of one variable provide predictive information about another. A variable $\boldsymbol{X}$ is said to Granger-cause variable $\boldsymbol{Y}$ if past values of $\boldsymbol{X}$ improve the prediction of $\boldsymbol{Y}$ beyond what is possible using only past values of $\boldsymbol{X}$. This is formally tested through the following comparison of predictive models:

$$Y_t = \alpha_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \alpha_i Y_{t-i} + \varepsilon_t \quad \textbf{(2)}$$

$$Y_t = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \beta_i Y_{t-i} + \sum_{j=1}^{q} \beta\gamma_i X_{t-j} + \nu_t \quad \textbf{(3)}$$

Where ε_t and ν_t are error terms. If model (2) significantly reduces the prediction error compared to model (1), then of $\boldsymbol{X}$ Granger-causes $\boldsymbol{Y}$. In this study, Granger tests are applied to macro-financial time series (e.g., tax rates, profitability ratios) to reveal temporal causal influences on capital structure metrics.

While Granger causality captures temporal precedence, it lacks sensitivity to nonlinear dependencies and individual-level variation. To bridge this, we utilize SHAP engineering, a technique that decomposes machine learning model outputs into additive feature contributions. Given a model prediction $f(x)$ the SHAP explanation assigns a value $\phi_i$to each feature $x_i$such that:

$$f(x) = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \phi_i \quad \textbf{(4)}$$

Where $\phi_i$is the expected value of the model output over the training data. These $\phi_i$values approximate the marginal contribution of each feature to the final prediction. SHAP values

are computed locally (per instance) but can be aggregated across observations to derive global importance rankings and visualize how factors like firm size, earnings volatility, or market-to-book ratio contribute to the capital structure outcome $\boldsymbol{Y}$.

By integrating both techniques, this work constructs a causal inference network where Granger causality informs *temporal directionality*, and SHAP engineering captures *structural attribution*. This hybrid approach enhances the interpretability of machine learning models and provides actionable insights into how financial and operational factors causally shape firm capital structures.

3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY:

3.1 DATA

The study utilised secondary market data obtained from IRESS [34], a financial data provider, covering listed companies in the industrial, resources, and technology sectors. The dataset includes firm-level financial metrics, market performance indicators, and capital structure variables. As this is publicly available listed market data, it does not involve primary data collection. The dataset was randomly split into training and testing sets with a 70-30 ratio. The training set was used to train the models, while the testing set was kept aside for model evaluation. This split was performed using the train_test_split function from the sklearn.model_selection library, with a random seed set to ensure reproducibility of the results.

The dataset is divided into a training set (X_{train}, y_{train}) and a test set (X_{test}, y_{test}), with X_{train} containing $r \times m$ samples and X_{test} containing (1 − r) × m samples, where r is the chosen ratio. The unseen data set X_{unseen} is kept aside and used later to evaluate the model's generalizability on new, unseen data.

in practice, a common split ratio might be $r = 0.7$, meaning 70% of the data is used for training, 15% for testing, and 15% for unseen evaluation. The splitting of the data can be done using a random shuffling approach, ensuring a representative distribution of features in each subset.

3.2 TRAINING MODEL CONSTRUCTION

The model is trained using the Random Forest algorithm, which is an ensemble method that constructs multiple decision trees and aggregates their predictions. The process begins by configuring the model with key hyperparameters, such as the number of trees in the forest $n$estimators and the maximum depth of each tree Max$depth$.

A Random Forest Regressor model was employed, with key hyperparameters such as the number of estimators, maximum tree depth, minimum samples required for splitting, and bootstrapping settings being defined. To optimize these parameters, a randomized search cross-validation (CV) approach was used, enabling the exploration of various hyperparameter combinations through the cross-validation process.

3.2.1 SHAP Analysis: Proxy for Causal Attribution

To interpret model predictions, SHAP values were computed. SHAP assigns each feature an importance value based on its marginal contribution to the model's output. While not causal in the temporal sense, SHAP serves as a proxy for causality within the model framework, identifying variables that meaningfully influence predicted capital structure outcomes. This interpretability aligns with economic intuition and enhances the transparency of the machine learning process.

Although SHAP does not imply temporal or structural causality, it serves as a proxy for causal influence within the model's learned relationships. Features with higher SHAP values are

interpreted as being more impactful in explaining the variance in the dependent variable, under the assumption that the model has captured meaningful economic relationships.

3.2.2 Granger Causality Tests

To complement the SHAP analysis and formally assess temporal causality, we conducted Granger causality tests [33]. This time series method tests whether lagged values of an independent variable can significantly predict the current values of the dependent variable, conditional on past values of the dependent variable itself.

Each explanatory variable was tested against the Debt/Equity ratio using a maximum lag of 3. A feature was classified as Granger-causal if the test returned a p-value < 0.05, suggesting statistically significant predictive power over the capital structure dynamics.

By integrating SHAP values and Granger causality results, we constructed a combined view of variable influence:

- SHAP values quantify each feature's average marginal impact on model predictions.
- Granger causality identifies whether features temporally cause changes in capital structure.

The overlay analysis helps distinguish features that are not only influential in the model but also exhibit statistically significant predictive causality. These features are visually represented through bar plots (SHAP) and heatmaps (Granger) and further explored through scatter plots for deeper diagnostic insight.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Causal Inference on Capital Structure: SHAP-Based Explanatory Attribution

The SHAP-based approach is highly effective for exploring the determinants of capital structure because it quantifies the influence of different factors on a model's predictions, allowing for a clearer understanding of how specific variables contribute to a firm's financing decisions. In the context of capital structure, relevant features might include financial ratios, profitability metrics, market conditions, and industry-specific factors. SHAP values help assess the impact of each feature on the overall decision-making process.

For example, if the debt ratio feature has a high SHAP value, it indicates that this factor plays a significant role in determining the model's prediction of a firm's capital structure. Similarly, SHAP analysis can identify how industry-specific factors, such as asset turnover or market value, influence capital structure decisions in various sectors like industrial, resources, and technology.

This method helps reveal proxy causal relationships by showing which features contribute the most to a firm's financing choices. It offers an interpretable approach to understanding the complex interplay of factors that shape capital structure decisions, making it a valuable tool for understanding the key drivers behind financing strategies.

Figure 1. Summary of the predictive variables extracted using Shap Feature importance.

The results shown in Figure 1 highlight the key factors that influence a firm's capital structure, distinguishing between actionable and non-actionable variables. The debt ratio emerges as the most influential determinant, accounting for 39 percent of the feature importance. This ratio, which represents the proportion of a company's assets financed through debt, is an actionable variable, offering management the opportunity to adjust the firm's debt-to-asset ratio strategically.

Next in importance are asset turnover and enterprise value (EV), which rank second and third, respectively. EV, a holistic measure of a company's total worth, incorporates market capitalization, debt, and cash holdings. While it reflects the overall financial health of a firm, EV's impact is largely non-actionable, influenced by market conditions rather than direct managerial decisions.

The prominence of debt as the leading factor in determining corporate leverage aligns with the trade-off theory of capital structure, which suggests that companies increase debt when tax incentives, such as favourable interest rate tax deductions, encourage borrowing. This finding is consistent with previous research by [8], [23], [24], and [17]. Furthermore, the significance of asset turnover and EV supports the pecking order theory, which posits that profitable firms with strong growth prospects rely less on debt financing. This theory is echoed in the studies of [25], [26], and [27].

Other factors show a limited influence on capital structure decisions, with the focus primarily on actionable variables to assess their effect on the dependent variable, capital structure.

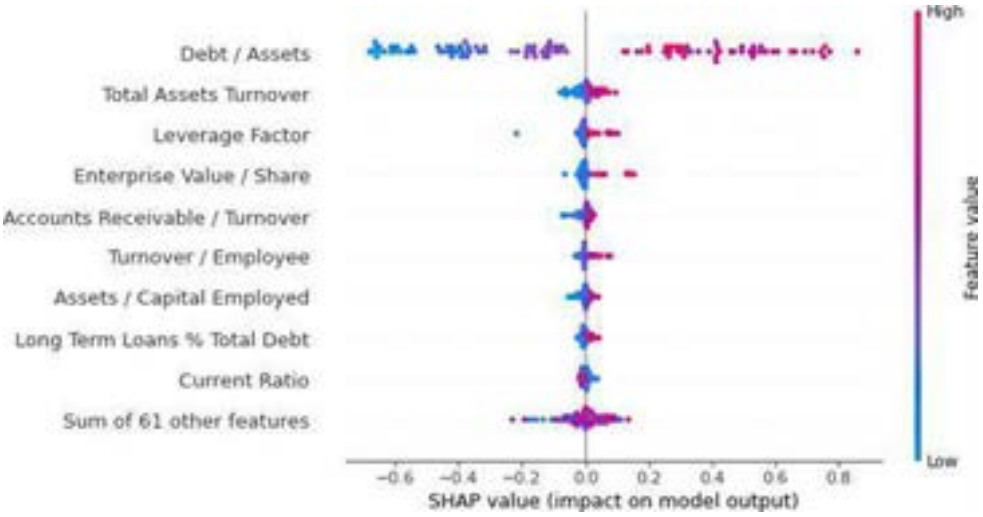

Figure 2. SHAP beeswarm plot summary.

SHAP feature engineering in Python was utilized to examine the influence of both actionable and non-actionable variables on capital structure levels, focusing on the impact of both low and high feature values. Figure 2 offers valuable insights into the relationship between feature values and capital structure predictions, visualized through a SHAP beeswarm plot. The plot highlights the relative importance of each feature, with the Debt-to-Asset ratio emerging as the most significant predictor, followed by Total Asset Turnover and Enterprise Value per share [23].

It is essential to note that the default feature ordering, based on mean absolute SHAP values, may not entirely capture the influence of extreme feature values on capital structure predictions. For instance, the Debt-to-Asset ratio analysis shows that lower or negative values correspond to lower capital structure levels, indicating a low-leverage company. In contrast, higher values are associated with higher capital structure levels, suggesting a highly leveraged company. While high leverage may present growth opportunities, it also increases financial risk, especially in terms of the challenges involved in servicing debt and meeting capital commitments [25].

Similarly, the asset turnover ratio, which reflects a company's efficiency in generating revenue from its assets, demonstrated a significant effect on capital structure decisions. Higher asset turnover ratios were linked to higher capital structure levels, suggesting effective asset utilization. Conversely, low asset turnover ratios indicated internal challenges, leading to greater reliance on debt financing, in line with the trade-off theory [26].

Enterprise Value (EV) per share, which reflects the market's valuation of a firm, also emerged as a key determinant of capital structure. Higher values of EV per share were associated with higher capital structure levels, indicating that positive market sentiment regarding the company's growth prospects influences its capital structure decisions. This observation is consistent with the pecking order theory, which underscores the preference for equity financing over debt financing to support sustainable growth [27].

Furthermore, the leverage factor, which measures the proportion of capital provided through debt, exhibited a direct relationship with capital structure levels. Low leverage factors were associated with lower capital structure levels, aligning with the pecking order theory's emphasis on internal funding and equity over debt. Conversely, a leverage ratio above 1 indicated increased risk for investors, highlighting the need for careful and strategic financing decisions [28].

In conclusion, the SHAP beeswarm importance plot provided critical insights into the impact of various financial metrics on capital structure decisions. By analysing both low and high values of actionable and non-actionable variables, firms can make more informed decisions about their financing strategies, carefully balancing growth opportunities with the associated financial risks.

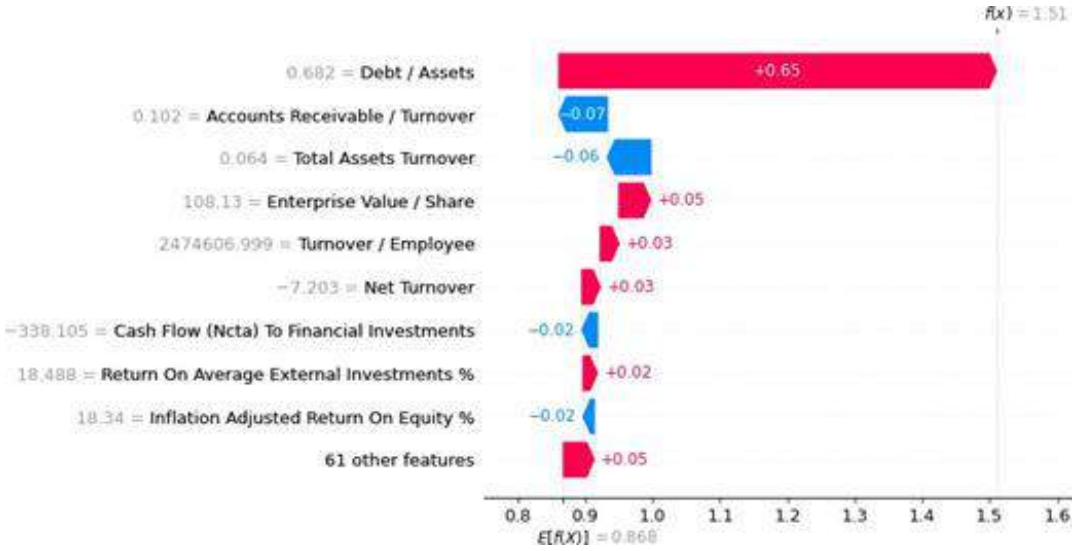

Figure 3. SHAP waterfall plot.

The results were further visualized using a waterfall plot in Figure 3. This illustrates how the SHAP values of each feature, or independent financial variable, influence the model's output in relation to prior expectations based on the background data distribution. Features are ranked by the magnitude of their SHAP values, with smaller values grouped together at the bottom of the plot when the number of features exceeds the maximum display parameter [29].

The waterfall plot offers an additional perspective to the SHAP beeswarm plot by demonstrating that the sum of all SHAP values corresponds to the difference between the predicted value $(f(X))$ and the expected value $(E(X))$. In alignment with the beeswarm plot findings, the Debt to Asset ratio remains the most significant predictor, followed by Total Assets Turnover. Interestingly, Accounts Receivable Turnover emerges as the third most important variable, surpassing Enterprise Value in terms of influence.

The prominence of Accounts Receivable Turnover aligns with its crucial role in evaluating a company's profitability, supporting the pecking order theory. This ratio indicates the frequency with which a business collects its average accounts receivable within a year, reflecting its ability to efficiently extend credit to customers and collect payments promptly. Companies with a higher accounts receivable turnover are better positioned to reduce debt levels and enhance their capital structure.

4.2 Causal Inference on Capital Structure: Granger Causality

This section presents a comparative causal analysis to investigate the determinants of the capital structure, particularly the Debt-to-Equity (D/E) ratio, in JSE-listed firms across the industrial, resources, and technology sectors. The analytical approach combines traditional time-series econometric techniques with contemporary interpretable machine learning frameworks to uncover both lagged (temporal) and contemporaneous influences.

4.2.1 Granger Causality Findings

The first method employed is the Granger causality test, illustrated in Figure 4. This method is an established econometric tool for identifying whether the historical values of an independent variable significantly improve the prediction of a dependent variable, over and above its own history. The analysis was conducted using a lag structure of up to three periods. Prior to testing, stationarity of all-time series was verified using the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test to ensure methodological validity.

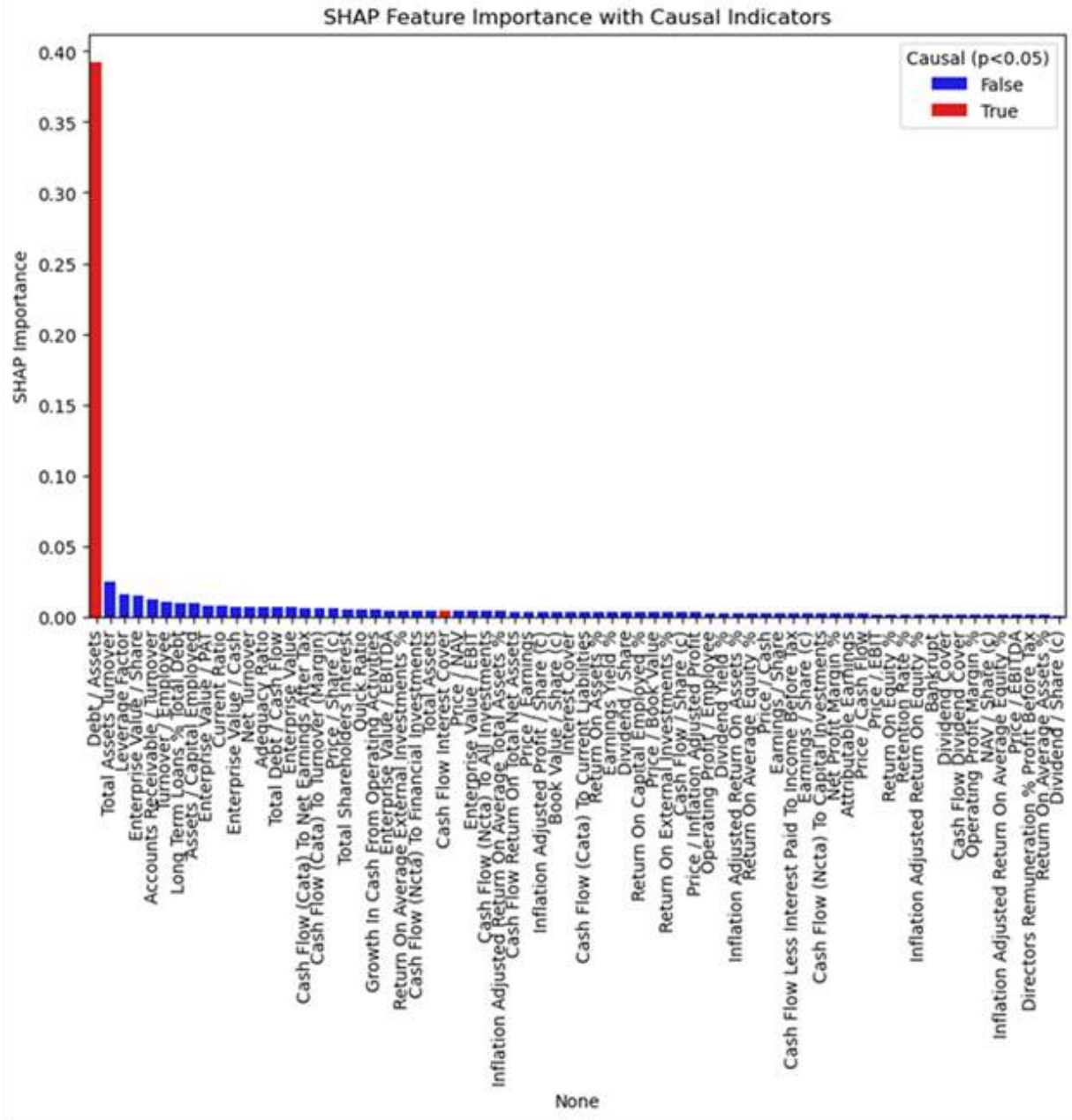

Figure 4. Granger Causality plot.

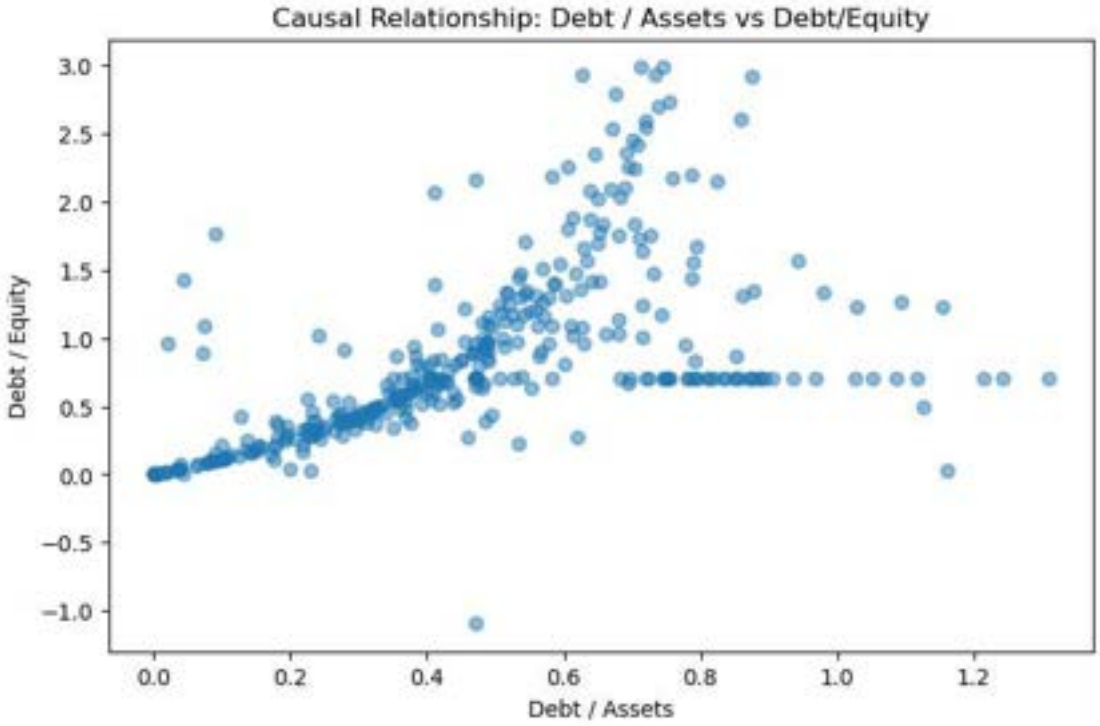

Figure 5. Granger Causality plot: Debt/Assets vs Debt/Equity.

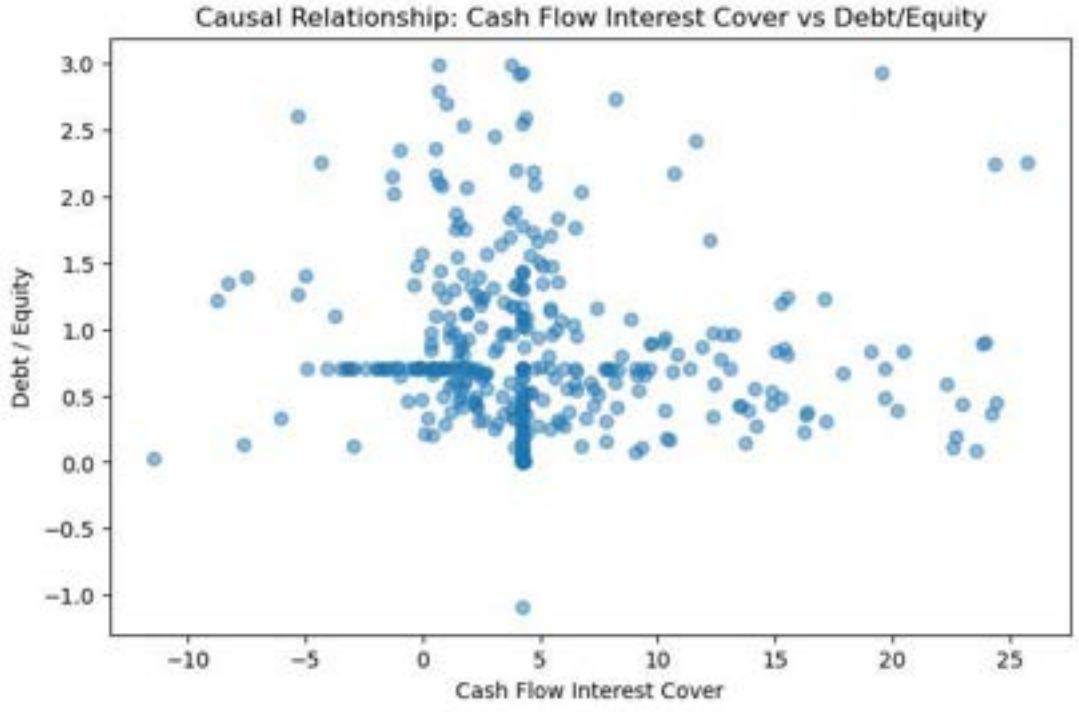

Figure 6. Granger Causality plot: Cash Flow Interest Cover vs Debt/Equity.

Among all the candidate explanatory variables, only two variables emerged as statistically significant Granger causes of the Debt-to-Equity ratio at the 5% significance level. These are:

- Debt to Assets Ratio and
- Cashflow Interest Cover

Past changes in the Debt to Assets Ratio and Cashflow Interest Cover significantly predict shifts in a firm's Debt-to-Equity (D/E) ratio, indicating that firms adjust their leverage decisions based on prior changes in their leverage structure and internal debt-servicing capacity, illustrated in Figures 5. and 6. respectively. These results support dynamic trade-off theory, where firms actively monitor their leverage to maintain an optimal capital structure aligned with their risk thresholds.

The Cashflow Interest Cover also influences D/E decisions, reflecting how firms adjust leverage based on internal liquidity. When debt-servicing capacity weakens, firms may increase equity financing, and when cash flows improve, they may take on more debt. These findings show that firms manage capital structure dynamically, responding to shifts in balance sheet risk and liquidity metrics.

4.3 Reconciling the divergence between SHAP analysis and Granger Causality test results.

This divergence in results between Granger causality and SHAP analysis can be attributed to fundamental differences in methodological scope and causal assumptions:

- Granger causality is restricted to identifying lag-based temporal causation under the assumption of linear dynamics and strict stationarity. It tests whether one variable preceding another in time improves forecasting accuracy.
- SHAP, on the other hand, captures predictive relevance within the model at a point in time, and can identify non-linear and contemporaneous influences, including interactions between variables. However, SHAP does not infer temporal or policy-relevant causality in the strict econometric sense.

In this context, SHAP can be viewed as revealing “proxy causality” or structural relevance—where variables may not have a lagged effect, but still materially shape the model’s decision boundary due to underlying correlations, economic structure, or immediate firm-level signals. Such variables may reflect real-time decision-making criteria used by managers or lenders, even if they do not satisfy formal temporal causality.

5 CONCLUSION

This study explored the causal determinants of capital structure decisions in JSE-listed firms across the industrial, resources, and technology sectors. By integrating Shapley Additive Explanation (SHAP) analysis within a model-agnostic framework, the study provided a deeper understanding of how key financial variables influence firms' capital structure decisions, bridging the gap left by traditional capital structure theories.

The research aimed to (i) evaluate the relevance of capital structure theories—specifically the trade-off and pecking order theories—in the context of JSE-listed engineering firms, and (ii) uncover the behavioural financing dynamics and determinants that shape firms' capital structure decisions.

The findings identified the debt-to-asset ratio as the most significant predictor of capital structure, reinforcing the trade-off theory, which emphasises balancing the benefits of debt financing (such as tax shields) against the risk of financial distress [8], [23], [24]. Additionally, asset turnover and enterprise value per share emerged as influential factors, aligning with the pecking order theory that suggests firms prioritize internal financing over external debt [25], [26], [27].

Further analysis revealed that declines in revenue and profitability increase a firm's reliance on debt, raising the capital structure ratio. This behaviour supports both the pecking order theory—highlighting limited internal funding—and the trade-off theory—where higher leverage introduces greater financial risk [24], [26], [27]. Notably, accounts receivable turnover also

demonstrated a significant impact, suggesting that firms with efficient cash flow management are better positioned to manage debt levels [28].

To strengthen the causal interpretation beyond static associations, the study employed Granger causality tests to assess temporal precedence between financial indicators and changes in capital structure. The results revealed that only the Debt to Assets Ratio and Cashflow Interest Cover Granger-cause the Debt-to-Equity ratio at the 5% significance level, indicating that firms systematically adjust their leverage in response to prior shifts in overall balance sheet risk and internal debt-servicing capacity. This integration of SHAP and Granger causality strengthens the validity of the explanatory model by demonstrating both feature importance (via SHAP) and temporal predictive influence (via Granger), thereby offering a more robust and time-aware causal interpretation of capital structure dynamics.

The study concludes that the capital structure decisions of JSE-listed firms in the industrial, resources, and technology sectors are best understood through the combined lens of the trade-off and pecking order theories [30]. SHAP-based causal analysis effectively captured the complex relationships between financial predictors and capital structure dynamics, offering actionable insights for firms seeking to balance growth opportunities with financial risk [31].

These findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of financing behaviour in key economic sectors, providing valuable guidance for corporate managers, investors, and policymakers in making informed capital structure decisions [32].

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TOWARDS A SOUTH AFRICAN KELP FARMING INDUSTRY: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

An interest in kelp has grown in the Western world for its ability to sequester carbon, high regeneration rates, and its low nutrient requirements. In the wave of new and sustainable technologies for the future, opportunities exist to create bio-based plastics. However, globally, kelp is not being sustainably harvested in sufficient quantities for this use. South Africa is no exception to this with fragmented private harvesting facilities. This paper uses a systematic literature review to enable a future functional analysis of the kelp farming value chain in South Africa. The review identified three main themes in the literature about geospatial analyses, farming techniques and social and environmental impact. The results will aid companies in selecting an ideal location to set up operations for commercial kelp farming, navigating the turbulent waters of sustainability and economic viability within a business context.

Keywords: kelp farming, geospatial analysis, farming techniques, social impact, environmental impact, industrial engineering, South Africa

1 INTRODUCTION

An interest in seaweed has swelled in the Western world over the last few years due to its ability to sequester carbon and its application in bio-based plastic production among other products [1], [2], [3]. Its appeal has grown because of its fast regeneration, use of no cultivated land area, and its natural polymers that allow for easy manufacture of plastic films for packaging. Seaweed is a marine macroalga, with red, green, and brown groups, with kelp falling under the brown macroalgae [4]. With the South African coastline that boasts large natural kelp forests, this points to the possibility of commercial-scale kelp farming to create jobs and contribute to the global drive of plastic alternatives [5]. Seaweed farming has a complicated supply chain that consists of many interconnected activities and so the lack of commercial kelp farms in South Africa can be seen as a systems engineering problem. Effective facility planning must be undertaken to ensure the best placement of kelp farming operations, and best farming practices relevant to the species being cultivated.

1.1 Research statement

Against this background, there is little research on kelp farming in South Africa, or on how to begin farming operations with the local kelp species. This study investigates on a global scale how other countries are finding suitable farming areas and cultivating different seaweed types. The first step to establishing the industry is to analyse and synthesise the literature which is the main theme of this article.

1.2 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to analyse and then synthesise available literature on kelp farming site selection and operations for the creation of South African commercial kelp farming. This includes the various socio-economic and environmental effects that farming poses.

1.3 Research Questions

The following specific research questions are addressed:

1. How are researchers performing geospatial analyses for seaweed farms, if any?
2. What are the farming and harvesting methods used all around the world for seaweed and kelp?
3. What are the socioeconomic effects that kelp farms have on the nearby coastal communities?

1.4 Methodology

The chosen methodology is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The aim of an SLR is to answer specific research questions by including all related research in such a way that it can be reproducible and unbiased [6]. As the knowledge frontier is pushed, it is based on past research, and so SLRs have gained popularity in academic research for their structured and rigorous approach to exploring literature [7]. Literature reviews can be one of two types: either 1) a background review to justify design decisions or give the research context, or 2) embody a freestanding review to synthesise and clarify existing literature by summarising and aggregating literature. This SLR follows that of the latter.

The SLR methodology was chosen to specifically map out the research on the current state of the kelp farming industry's farming methods and how geospatial analyses are done to plan for aquaculture, such as seaweed and kelp farming. Furthermore, efforts are made to understand the current impact of these farms on nearby communities, socioeconomically and environmentally, to assess the feasibility of farming.

2 SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section begins with the application of the chosen methodology, followed by a thematic examination of geospatial analyses, farming techniques and socioeconomic impact of seaweed farming. Following the aforementioned method in section 2.2 of [5], the first step was to formulate the review question to decide on the utility of the SLR and which questions needed to be addressed. Once formulated, a search protocol table was set up to define inclusion and exclusion criteria as well as the search string to be used in the databases that align with the research question. This can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Search protocol table used for SLR

Research Elelment	Details	Justification
Keywords:	Kelp farming, seaweed farming, South Africa, geospatial, location, planning, mariculture, aquaculture, marine.	These keywords were chosen as they cover the primary Research Aim.
Search Strategy:	("kelp farming" OR "seaweed farming") AND (location OR planning OR spatial OR geo*) AND (aquaculture OR mari*).	Chosen to include all keywords to account for variation in wording.
Timeframe:	2015 - 2025	Chosen to avoid potentially outdated research.
Databases:	Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCOhost (GreenFILE, Africa-Wide Info).	Chosen for the popularity and prominence of each database.
Inclusion Criteria:	Explicit mention of Must be about seaweed farming operations, or identifying locations (how to do so), and the impact on coastal communities.	Chosen to align with, or avoid straying from the research questions. Chosen to avoid straying from research questions
Exclusion Criteria:	Not relevant if it does not include seaweed or kelp farming, focuses on the biology of seaweed and comparison of different species' growth, focus entirely on carbon sequestration, or specific to the cosmetic industry.	Chosen to align with, or avoid straying from the research questions.

The search string used in each database was slightly modified from the search strategy in Table 1 and the search included, title, abstract, authors for each database. The strings are as follows:

- Scopus: ("kelp farming" OR "seaweed farming") AND (location OR planning OR spatial OR geo*) AND (aquaculture OR mari*))
- Web of Science: ALL=("kelp farming" OR "seaweed farming") AND ALL=(location OR geo* OR spatial OR planning OR facility) AND ALL=(aquaculture OR mari*)
- EBSCOhost: (kelp farming) OR (seaweed farming) AND (location OR facility OR spatial OR geo*) AND (aquaculture OR mari*)

A PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) diagram is a flowchart used in systematic reviews and meta-analyses to visually represent the process of identifying, screening, and including studies [8]. This framework was used for this literature study and Figure 1 shows the PRISMA diagram for this SLR following the criteria set out in Table 1. By consistently applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria to the set of literature, selection bias was minimised as the screening process was more objective [8].

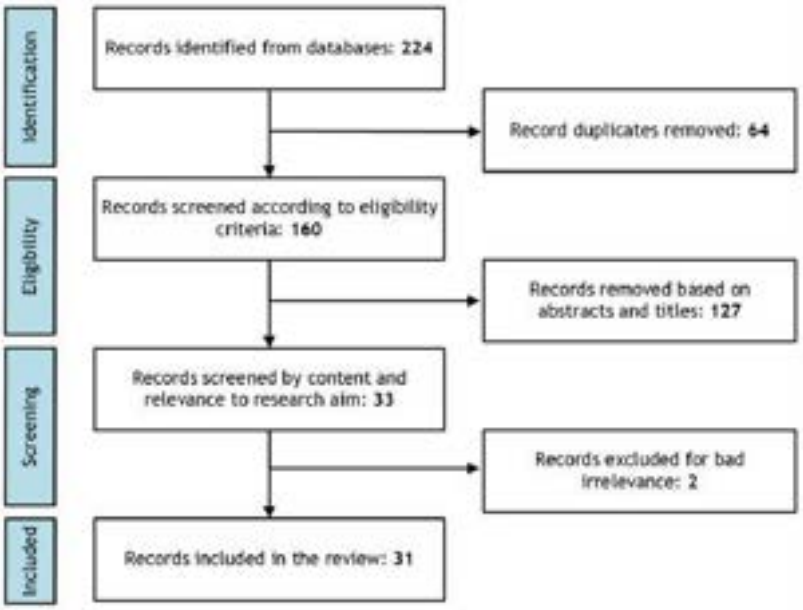

Figure 1: PRISMA diagram of included literature

Once selected, the 31 included records were grouped into 3 themes of geospatial analysis, kelp farming methods and socioeconomic effects of kelp farms through a thematic analysis. A thematic analysis is a method used to interpret and organise the textual data from an SLR into predefined themes [9]. Figure 2 visually depicts where the included papers come from across the globe, and shows the fragmented nature of the publications. South Asia had the most publications, with Indonesia totalling 6, 2 from the Philippines and 1 from China.

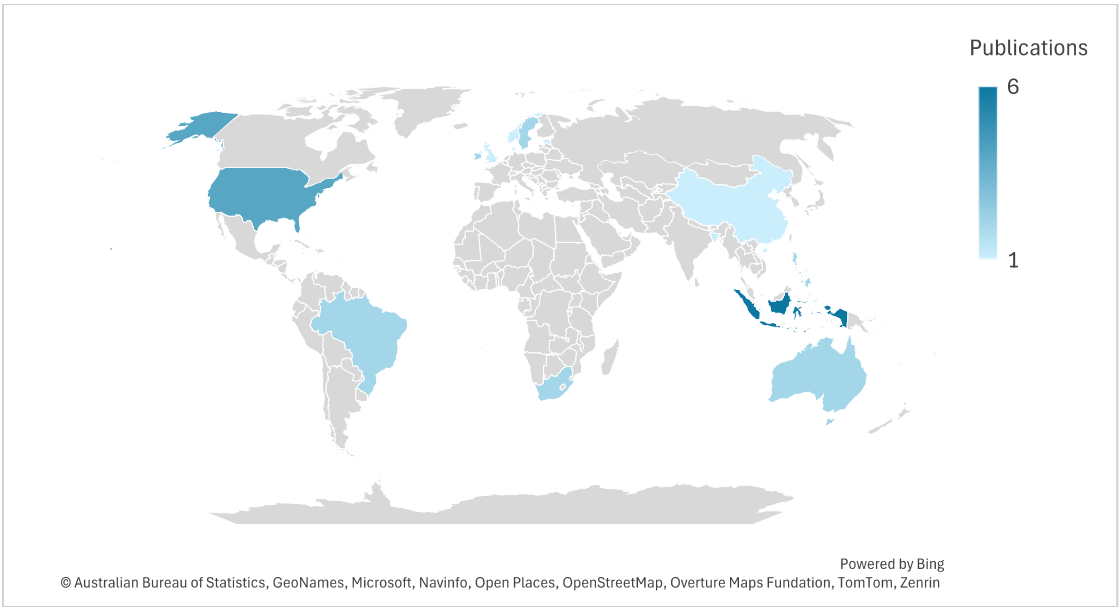

Figure 2: Global distribution of publications

Figure 3 shows the number of publications which appears to have a cyclical trend. However, the drop in publications in 2021 is most likely due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, and only 2 publications in 2025 as the records were only collected in March.

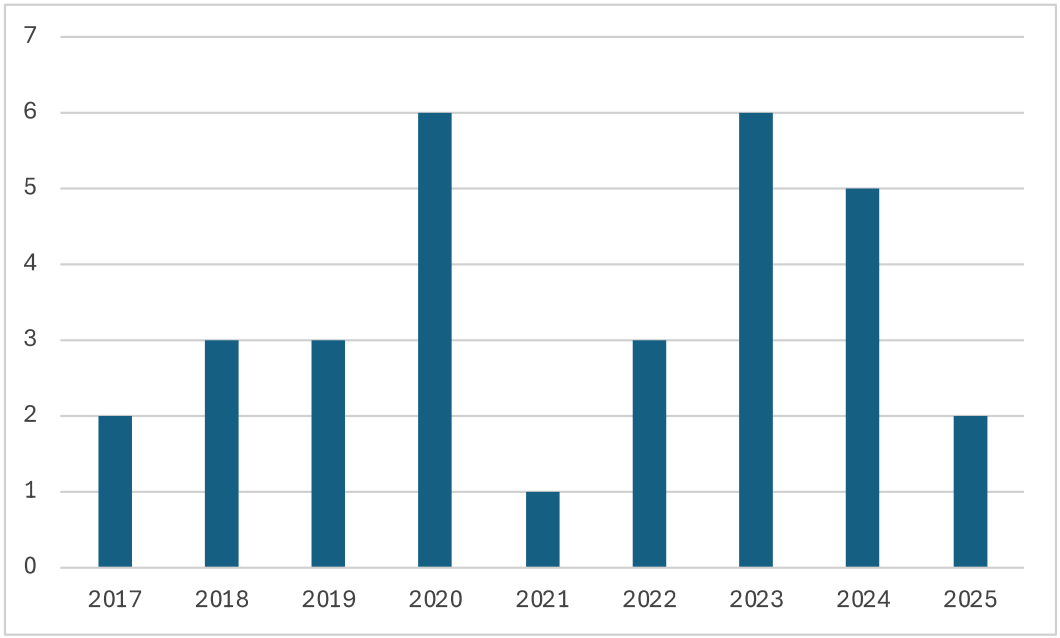

Figure 3: Yearly distribution of publications

Table 2 sorts all included records from the SLR by year published and indicate which of the three themes they explore. The number of citations each paper received along with their publication type have also been included.

Table 2: Records used in SLR and themes discussed, ordered by publication year

Number	Year	Title	Citation	Publication type	Number of citations	Geospatial analysis	Farming Process	Impact
1	2017	Production Efficiency of Seaweed Farming in Tarakan North Borneo	[10]	Journal	3		x	
2	2017	Spatial Analysis to Evaluate the Suitability of Seaweed Farming Site in Lampung Bay, Indonesia	[11]	Journal	18	x		x
3	2018	Marine spatial planning makes room for offshore aquaculture in crowded coastal waters	[12]	Journal	192	x		
4	2018	Socio economic assessment of seaweed farming in Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan	[13]	Conference paper	2			x
5	2018	Socioeconomic analysis of the seaweed Kappaphycus alvarezii and mollusks (Crassostrea gigas and perna perna) farming in Santa Catarina state, southern Brazil	[14]	Journal	8	x		x
6	2019	Development of seaweed cultivation in Latin America: current trends and future prospects	[15]	Journal	100		x	x
7	2019	Identifying Suitable Sites for Macroalgae Cultivation on the Swedish West Coast	[16]	Journal	41	x		x
8	2019	The considerable environmental benefits of seaweed aquaculture in China	[17]	Journal	126	x	x	x
9	2020	Environmental impacts and implications of tropical carrageenophyte seaweed farming	[18]	Journal	61		x	x
10	2020	Growth and biofouling in kelp aquaculture (Saccharina latissima): the effect of location and wave exposure	[19]	Journal	77		x	
11	2020	Latitudinal, seasonal and depth-dependent variation in growth, chemical composition and biofouling of cultivated Saccharina latissima (Phaeophyceae) along the Norwegian coast	[20]	Journal	93		x	
12	2020	Spatial water quality and plastic buoy of seaweed culture in coastal area, Indonesia	[21]	Conference paper	5		x	
13	2020	Technical challenges for offshore cultivation of kelp species: lessons learned and future directions	[22]	Journal	74		x	
14	2020	Trends in seaweed resource use and aquaculture in South Africa and Namibia over the last 30 years	[23]	Journal	25			x
15	2021	Effects of depth-cycling on nutrient uptake and biomass production in the giant kelp Macrocystis pyrifera	[24]	Journal	38		x	
16	2022	Assessing the potential for sea-based macroalgae cultivation and its application for nutrient removal in the Baltic Sea	[25]	Journal	38	x		

Number	Year	Title	Citation	Publication type	Number of citations	Geospatial analysis	Farming Process	Impact
17	2022	Sustainable growth of non-fed aquaculture can generate valuable ecosystem benefits	[26]	Journal	117		x	
18	2022	Women and adaptive capacity to climate change in East African seascapes - Zanzibar as an example	[27]	Journal	17			x
19	2023	An MCASS tool for enhanced offshore aquaculture site selection and successful licencing acquisition	[28]	Conference paper	3	x		
20	2023	Analyzing factors affecting the technical efficiency of small-scale seaweed farms using a two-stage double bootstrap DEA approach	[29]	Journal	4		x	
21	2023	Cultural values of ecosystem services from coastal marine areas: Case of Taytay Bay, Palawan, Philippines	[30]	Journal	31	x		
22	2023	Environmental and socio-economic constraints to marine seaweed farming	[31]	Book section	4		x	
23	2023	The empirical evidence for the social-ecological impacts of seaweed farming	[32]	Journal	32		x	x
24	2023	The IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™ as a tool for enhancing the sustainable development of marine aquaculture	[33]	Journal	37			x
25	2024	A Systematic Review of the Scientific Literature to Identify Challenges for the Sustainable Development of Seaweed Farming in Indonesia	[2]	Journal	4	x	x	x
26	2024	Considerations for kelp aquaculture on South Africa's west coast: geospatial analysis and research implications	[5]	Journal	2	x		
27	2024	Dynamic livelihoods, gender and poverty in marine protected areas: Case study from Zanzibar, Tanzania	[34]	Journal	2			x
28	2024	Site suitability mapping for different seaweed cultivation systems along the coastal and marine waters of Bangladesh: A Generalized Additive Modelling approach for prediction	[35]	Journal	10	x	x	x
29	2024	Small-scale low-tropic ocean farming and coastal rural landscapes: Why the logistics of seaweed matter? Insights from Ireland for collaborative planning	[36]	Journal	9	x		x
30	2025	Beyond the Win-Win Discourse: Designing Seaweed Farming for Long-Term Success	[37]	Journal	33			x
31	2025	Evaluating the spatial suitability for seaweed aquaculture through ocean color remote sensing in Lombok, Indonesia	[38]	Conference paper	0	x		

2.1 Geospatial Analysis

A geospatial analysis is a method that most often uses Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to process, analyse and visualise data with geographical components [2], [5], [16], [30], [36]. The aim of this type of analysis is to find areas well suited for seaweed farming based on chosen characteristics related to the surrounding environment through data from empirical maps, numerical models and remote sensing data [5], [11], [35], [38]. Tasks involved in such an analysis are data aggregation, overlaying, conversion and finally map generation. This is an essential first step, especially in the case of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), as it provides a tool to aid in spatial decisions to find near-optimal locations for seaweed farms [16].

From the 13 papers of the 31 from the SLR that performed geospatial analyses, a variety of methods were used. GIS was the most common tool, with software such as ESRI ArcGIS [36], [16], ESRI ArcMap [5], the free Quantum Geographical Information System (QGIS) [30], and Idrisi [16] to layer and analyse spatial data.

Another popular tool was Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA), which was often used in conjunction with GIS to determine site suitability. Two methods were used in [16], namely a Weighted Linear Combination (WLC) and a Boolean Overlay. The first method assigned weights to different criteria layers based on the importance and linearly combines them to create a suitability score for each criterion before combining each layer to form a suitability map. The second method uses a binary approach whereby a location is suitable or not based on it meeting all criteria or avoiding all constraints. A hybrid approach was used in [28] whereby a WLC was used for the primary criteria and a Boolean overlay for the secondary criteria to produce a result that is easily readable, allowing for quick site selection. This hybrid approach was called a Multi-Criteria Analysis Site Selection (MCASS). As mentioned by [2], geospatial and environmental suitability analyses are important to optimise seaweed farming and mention suitability matrices can be created using Analytical Hierarchical Process (AHP) or models like TOPSIS and Multi-Criteria Evaluation (MCE). A Generalised Additive Model (GAM) was used by [35]. GAMs are an effective method for conducting non-linear regression analyses and are commonly used in environmental science research to assess the non-linear relationships between covariates. It involves two main steps: data fitting and spatial prediction, which fitted in-situ seaweed biomass data with environmental variables to generate highly accurate spatial predictions and habitat suitability maps [35].

Remote sensing involves data that is acquired indirectly from the area being studied, either by satellite or by an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV). Several papers used remote sensing data to aid in their geospatial analyses. A dataset of kelp forests along the South African coastline was used by [5], and [38] used multiple satellite sources to evaluate site suitability from multiple environmental parameters. These parameters were chlorophyll-a, sea surface temperature and sea surface salinity, total suspended matter, dissolved oxygen, pH, and bathymetry.

Despite the differing approaches to finding suitable areas for seaweed and kelp farming, there were a few common environmental parameters used. The most common parameters across the 13 geospatial focused papers are summarised in Table 3. Some variation in parameters was found, namely in nitrate levels where some papers stated the parameter as nitrates, others as mean nitrates, or nitrogen concentration.

Table 3: Common geospatial analysis parameters

Parameter	Citation
Salinity	[5], [11], [21], [25], [38]
Temperature	[5], [11], [21], [25], [38]
Bathymetry	[5], [11], [16], [21], [28], [38]
Nitrate levels	[5], [11], [16], [21], [25]
Phosphate levels	[5], [11], [16], [21], [25]
Current speed	[5], [11], [16], [21], [25], [28]
Wave energy and height	[5], [16], [25], [28]
Turbidity	[5], [11], [21], [38]
pH	[11], [21], [38]
Dissolved Oxygen (DO)	[5], [11], [38]

2.2 Kelp Farming Methods

The majority of the papers used in the SLR pertain to seaweed farming, rather than kelp farming found in [5], [19],[22]. Kelp is a type of macroalgae much like seaweed and so growth and harvesting techniques can be similar. Indonesia was the country with the most publications found in the SLR, as seen in Figure 2, and was the largest producer of seaweed species like *Eucheuma cottonii* and *Gracilaria* in 2011. In 2014, Indonesia and China together accounted for 81% of global production, and in 2020 where worldwide seaweed production reached almost 30 million tonnes China and Indonesia were still the major contributors [20], with kelp accounting for 45.16% of total global production [22]. The predominant farming methods used are longline systems, floating rafts and off-bottom systems. Longline systems involve long ropes in parallel attached to buoys and anchored to the seabed with seaweed attached to the ropes at regular intervals, and can be positioned at different depths [35],[21]. Net cultivation is similar to longline, in that there are long lines of nets with the seaweed propulgates attached to the nets and can be anchored and placed at different depths. Most often the buoys used are empty plastic bottles, and these lines can be placed in deeper waters [31]. The longline method is also a viable option for offshore kelp farming as mentioned in [5] which noted successful trials of large-scale cultivation of *Saccharina latissima* offshore and near-shore in the Faroe Islands.

Floating rafts commonly have seaweed attached to nets or lines that are connected to a raft [35]. A variant was explained in [14] which uses a 3x100m raft made from PVC pipes with 18 5.5m sections with tubular netting across which the seaweed is planted. This method was employed in a seaweed farm in Brazil that made use of a seaweed monoculture system, a biculture systems with oysters and another with mussels, which used a spacing of 0.4m between lines [14]. The outputs of the monoculture system was 24,192 t/ha/year and 13,506 t/ha/year for the biculture systems combined compared to 12.65 t/ha/year for a monoculture equivalent and 7.15 t/ha/year for a biculture equivalent in Indonesia, where spacings of 1m between lines were used. Another technique known as depth-cycling was experimented with in [24].

Other popular methods are off-bottom longline and off-bottom nets that are also deemed ‘semi-floating systems’ as at low tide they lay exposed on the seabed [35]. These two techniques were used in the GAM model in [35] for the geospatial analysis along the Bangladesh coastline. Off-bottom techniques are also implemented in intertidal seaweed farms in Zanzibar, although in [34] no specific techniques were mentioned. A drawback with these off-bottom techniques is that intertidal zones tend to be muddy which can be a hindrance to expansion of such farms, and so methods like floating raft longlines were tested [35].

Technical Efficiency (TE) of seaweed farms was looked at in [29] and [10], primarily using quantitative methods to assess how efficiently inputs were converted into outputs, and what factors affected this. An advanced statistical technique called double bootstrap Data

Envelopment Analysis (DEA) was employed in [29] to assess the TE, sampling 63 small-scale farms in the Philippines, and revealed that bias-corrected TE scores showed inputs could be reduced by 55% to achieve the same output level.

Excluding more obvious factors such as whether the farmers' primary occupation is farming or whether they have access to finances, key factors were found to be the number of farms owned or managed, the farm location, and whether a particular type of seaweed was sold. More farms managed were found to have an inverse relationship to TE, and farms that were located in deeper waters were more technically efficient as the crops were more protected from diseases because of stronger currents. It was also found that it is more efficient to sell both wet and dry seaweed. Another technique known as Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) was used in [10], which sampled 100 farmers in Indonesia. The average TE of these farms was 92%, and found that inputs such as farm area, seed, and labour positively and significantly impacted the seaweed production. It was also noted that TE varied depending on whether the farm was located in a secure or insecure location, as set out by local government criteria, but was not explicitly described. Farming experience was also found to be an important factor regarding TE, as the more experienced the farmer, the more efficient their farms [10].

2.3 Social and Environmental Impact

With East Asia and Southeast Asia being the predominant producers of seaweed, a large portion of this section has a focus on these areas. While seaweed farming has many benefits, such as supporting coastal livelihoods and global food security [15], it also has many negative impacts, with a large amount of research on the environment and marine biodiversity [32].

2.3.1 Environment and Ecosystems

First, looking at the environmental effects, seaweed farming has a positive effect on water quality by reducing the levels of nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus and increasing DO, which mitigates eutrophication [32][17], hence its importance in geospatial analysis criteria. Another reason which has become more popular as the world looks to find ways of reducing carbon is that farming can sequester it [1], and the expansion of seaweed farming will allow for the capture of large quantities of carbon dioxide (CO_2) [32]. The CO_2 is absorbed and accumulated in living and decaying biomass during photosynthesis before sinking to the sea floor [35].

Three main ecosystems emerged in the research, those being seagrass bed, benthic communities and coral reefs. Seagrass bed impact was negative, as most research showed that farms placed directly on beds, due to ideal water quality, caused shading and trampling, leading to a reduction in biomass [18]. It was noted then that seagrass beds should be removed before establishing a seaweed farm to avoid the seagrass and seaweed competing for nutrients. Benthic communities are an assemblage of organisms that live on, in, or near the seabed [26]. A negative impact would be on these communities from large-scale farming operations, especially near estuaries, noted by [18]. Coral reefs can be negatively affected by seaweed farming operations, as fragments of seaweed from overgrowth can cause smothering of nearby coral reefs and lead to a decline in coral cover [18]. A positive impact however can be found in the sediment resettlement due to changing water flows that can protect the coral [32].

2.3.2 Fish and Megafauna

Fish in surrounding environments are affected in various ways. Seaweed farms largely have a negative effect on fish communities and can change fish community composition [18], [27], [32]. Fish abundance can increase if the seaweed farm offers a more complex habitat than originally, and lower fish abundance if the farm offers a less complex habitat. In a study noted in [18], it was hypothesised that seaweed farms can enhance fish populations more than areas

that had been blast fished, but found that instead fish biomass was less in seaweed farms in comparison with Marine Protected Areas (MPA). Farms tended to favour small invertivores, such as fish that consume crustaceans and insects, and had lower diversity, whereas MPAs tended to favour large herbivores. Little research has been done on the impacts of other megafauna. However, issues have been found with dugongs in the Philippines being killed by getting entangled in farming lines [18]. Issues between green turtles and seaweed farmers have also arose as turtles graze on seaweed. In the Marshall Islands, an effort was made to reduce shark grazing on experimentally cultivated seaweed, but had an unfavourable effect, but was not specified in [18].

2.3.3 Livelihood and Job Opportunity

Another major research area involving seaweed farming is the livelihood impact on coastal communities and the income opportunities that arise. The industry is described as supporting poverty alleviation, improving quality of life in coastal communities and improving gender equality [15],[33],[34],[32], but it can be highly context-dependent [37]. It was noted in [2] that the industry has a transformative effect on rural communities and has the potential to lift them out of poverty as it is a significant source of livelihood in the context of Indonesia, provided there are supportive policies. It provides income for workers involved in various business stages of the farming process such as preparation, cultivation, harvest distribution and marketing of seaweed [13], and often uses simple technologies that are suitable for household businesses. The industry also contributes to global food security [2], [15]. While it has many benefits, there have been cases where other activities had higher income, such as fishing [27]. A dependence on seaweed farming may also leave coastal communities vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks [32], which can lead to increased vulnerability. Large exits from the industry have been noted in certain areas such as Zanzibar, most likely due to climate change [27].

The industry has been particularly highlighted for its ability to bring about large benefits for women [27]. Zanzibar is the largest producer of seaweed in East Africa, producing 103,200 t in 2018 [33] and is mainly farmed by women in the intertidal zone [27]. Farming has helped raise the economic status of rural women, with it becoming a key livelihood for them, and in turn leading to an improvement to the quality of life [33]. It has also enabled many women in patriarchal cultures to independently secure access to funds and contribute to their empowerment [32]. However as noted by both [27] and [33], these benefits have been disputed, as they report findings of negative impacts on women's health as it is a highly demanding activity. The large exit from the seaweed industry in Zanzibar has seen women moving to small-scale businesses and fisheries for higher income [34]. Initiatives such as deep water farming have been suggested to overcome challenges faced by off-bottom techniques such as low yield from temperature variation, although deep water methods are still constrained by gender norms which prevent women from learning boat handling and how to swim [34].

3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings reflects on potential geospatial parameters in SA, kelp farming techniques, and social impact on coastal communities. South Africa is home to three dominant kelp species, namely Laminaria pallida, Ecklonia maxima and Macrocystis Pyrifera which are brown macroalga [23]. While most of the literature focused on red algaes farmed in South and Southeast Asia, geospatial analysis techniques used, and various farming methods can still be utilised in a South African context. As a country that struggles with unemployment, the benefits to coastal communities that comes with seaweed farming would also be beneficial. Reviewing the literature that mention how to perform geospatial analyses and the different farming techniques used, the role of industrial engineering is visible in this industry. There is

a need to optimise the farming process across the supply chain for the benefit of all stakeholders, from farmer to customers and the environment.

A broad definition of Industrial and Systems Engineering (ISE) is about designing and improving integrated systems of people, materials, information, and equipment by using mathematical, scientific, and engineering tools to predict and evaluate results from such systems [39]. This paper focuses mainly on the Management Systems domain of ISE definition, as seen in Figure 4 which is relevant for the facilitation and creation of a seaweed farming industry in South Africa.

Figure 4: The major domains under the definition of ISE [39]

The following sections show the relevance of each theme and its findings to South Africa, and their ties to ISE.

3.1 Geospatial Analysis Parameters for South Africa

Various locations have already been identified that would be suitable for kelp farming operations in South Africa which were found through a geospatial analysis in [5]. The parameters used in the paper include all that are mentioned in Table 3, except for pH and current speed, and also included human settlements as another input parameter using the ESRI ArcMap 10.6.1 software. The areas identified are situated along the West Coast and coincide with designated Aquaculture Development Zones (ADZ) and naturally occurring kelp forests.

While various water quality parameters have been considered in past site identifications, a step further can be taken to consider the facility layout to account for multiple farming techniques like nearshore and offshore. As mentioned above, taking human settlements and existing infrastructure into account are another imperative step to develop a supply chain network for the selling of the kelp.

3.2 Kelp Farming Techniques for South Africa

Historically, kelp was primarily farmed by collecting washed-up kelp before drying and milling it and sending it abroad for alginate extraction in Asia, but this practice has reduced because of declining yields and higher profit from other kelp uses [23]. Abalone aquaculture has been a major use of kelp resources in South Africa since the mid-19902, whereby kelp is harvested

from boats and then brought back to land-based farms for the abalone, and this is done from wild kelp forests, not formal farms.

From the farming methods mentioned in section 2.2, some are not feasible for kelp such as off-bottom techniques. The South African Kelp Farming Project setup by the Bivalve Shellfish Association of South Africa in a recent report has showed successful trials using vertical droppers to be a viable choice of cultivating kelp [40]. This project is ongoing and shows great potential in the feasibility of an industry in South Africa, however the project and further research needs to be completed on the best methods to farm kelp.

From an industrial engineering perspective, TE as previously discussed can go further to include Inventory management and production scheduling. Production scheduling can be implemented to coordinate seeding, cultivating and harvesting to keep a steady supply in accordance with the kelp's growth cycles. Inventory management can follow on from production scheduling, as this will be important considering kelp is perishable. Possible processing options, such as drying and milling, may also be possible to increase revenue [5]. These processing techniques can require little infrastructure which makes them possible to perform in coastal communities without the need for specialised equipment.

3.3 Potential Impact for South Africa

Proximity to human settlements was an important factor in the geospatial analysis completed in [5], and towns such as Port Nolloth and Kleinzee were highlighted because they have existing aquaculture facilities. The Saldanha Bay area was another area identified, also by [23] and [40], as a good area for kelp farming, for existing aquaculture facilities relating to mussel farming but also an existing workforce.

The job opportunities that come with the kelp farming industry would be beneficial to the coastal communities in South Africa. Of the existing literature, emphasis is on farming along the West Coast only and not the South and East Coast, so further research can be done for these areas regarding the social impact of aquaculture.

While the impacts this industry can have on communities, farmers can implement tools from organisational behaviour to upskill and motivate farm workers to increase productivity and TE of the farms. While the findings can be generalised for South Africa, a more detailed assessment would need to be done to understand the economic feasibility of the industry and the labour demand of coastal communities.

3.4 Industrial engineering contextualisation

The ISE Body of Knowledge (ISEBoK) from the Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers is a taxonomy of knowledge areas essential to ISE [41]. Figure 5 depicts these areas.

Figure 5: Taxonomy of ISE knowledge area extracted from ISSE [41]

Noted in [12], the roadblocks faced by the industry's expansion present a significant opportunity for better planning, which is where industrial engineering principles can be applied. Sustainable development and efficiency are key elements of industrial engineering. The commercial kelp industry is in its infancy, and in order the help it grow to a globally competitive level, effective planning is required.

With the ISEBoK, the areas such as 2, 3, and 4 are all useful concepts in the design and implementation of geospatial analyses. For farming methods, areas 3 and 7 are important in guiding how best to farm kelp in a South African context. For socioeconomic impact areas 3, 6, and 7 are also useful in assessing the impact that this industry could have on the South African economy and its people. This strengthens the link between ISE and the themes explored in this paper when considering the viability and design of a kelp farming industry. Within each of these areas, it is vital that sustainability remains a key focus. With pressure from global warming, the literature review showed in section 2.3.1 that seaweed has potential for carbon sequestration, which can help mitigate climate change [15], and it can bring livelihoods to coastal communities. While the literature had a focus on the seaweed itself and more qualitative components, it shows room for systems engineering to help establish farms and their operations, to maximise outputs with the least inputs.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The systematic literature review revealed that geospatial analyses for seaweed farming commonly used GIS tools, remote sensing, and multi-criteria decision-making methods to identify optimal farming sites. Future site selection projects in South Africa should make use of these tools, but can also collaborate with marine scientists to refine the site suitability model to include data more relevant to *E. maxima* and *L. pallida*. Farming and harvesting techniques are shown to vary globally, with the use of longline systems, floating rafts and depth cycling. Each of these techniques can be recommended to be piloted to test their viability with the local kelp species and to evaluate their TE. Socioeconomic impacts include job creation and poverty alleviation, especially in coastal communities, though challenges such as gender inequality and environmental degradation persist. Inclusive training programs are recommended that can be designed to address gender barriers, such as boat handling skills for women, and rotational farming techniques could be implemented to avoid habitat stress and allow for ecosystem recovery.

The link between industrial engineering and the seaweed farming industry is clear due to the focus on optimising complex systems. ISE principles can be applied to the facility layout and site selection using geospatial data, process optimisation for farming operations and harvesting methods, supply chain design to ensure efficient distribution and minimal waste, and sustainability assessment to balance economic viability with environmental stewardship. It is recommended that systems modelling be applied to design scalable kelp farming operations and production scheduling in conjunction with inventory management to align harvesting cycles with market demand. Lastly, sustainability metrics should be integrated into operational planning to balance ecological and economic goals.

South Africa has great potential for a commercial seaweed farming industry. However, this research can continue as future work to further explore the current South African seaweed and kelp farming industry with an emphasis on empirical evidence. This includes assessing technology readiness and sustainable harvesting yields from the local kelp species with a specific focus on bio-based plastic production. Larger search horizons and more databases can be consulted to find more information relevant to a South African context.

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WATER PUMPING SYSTEM FOR RURAL AREAS OF SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The problems of water supply services are experienced globally. These include difficulties in the efficient operation of systems and lack of competence in the technical skills of personnel, among others. A review of water pumping systems technologies currently used to supply potable water across South Africa shows that townships, cities, and urban and rural areas will remain under water strains because of ineffective water supply technologies. Different water pumping system technologies and water pumping system infrastructure have been reviewed. Water pumping system infrastructure consists of pipes, pumps, valves, storage tanks, reservoirs, meters, fittings, and other hydraulic appurtenances that connect treatment plants or well supplies to consumers' taps. These are main components that affect the water supply system. The strategy to ensure that potable water is supplied continuously during climate change and the increase in population is to develop frameworks to evaluate water pumping system infrastructure of potable water supply systems.

Keywords: Infrastructure, South Africa, Potable Water, Water Quality, Rural, Water Recycle System, Water Demand, Systemic Approach.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The existing infrastructures in South Africa are not well maintained and managed to meet the demand of water to the consumers hence there is still shortage of water. These is because, in the process of water supply, the design, installation, operation and maintenance of the pumping systems and pumps is a challenge to the municipalities. Large amount of population (70%) access water from boreholes which are heavily contaminated due to back pit toilets used in rural areas and mine activities [1]. Other communities buy untreated water from the households with boreholes. Provision of alternative water sources such as purified groundwater and rainwater harvesting system have been investigated for rural areas in Limpopo province of South Africa, although these are not in wide use [2]. This system has not been used in rural areas of Limpopo province. The common way of accessing water is only through boreholes and rivers nearby. The Kgopaneng village area of study does not have water treatment plants and the water from individual boreholes is pumped straight to the households for consumption and domestic use which poses a high risk to the health of consumers.

A suitable household in the village of Kgopaneng is selected for development, installation and testing of the new water supply model. The purpose of this research study is to develop an empirical model of water supply system for rural areas of Limpopo province. The primary aim of this empirical model was to provide a suitable solution to the challenges of water shortages in rural communities. Given lack of funds available to municipalities to supply bulk purified water to rural communicates and the fact rural dweller do not have financial means to afford these services, there is a near absence of any bulk water supplied to the study areas of rural Limpopo province. Thus, a centralized water supply system for rural areas of these two study provinces is not suitable at this stage. An alternative system needs to be proposed and implemented for rural communicates in this province that provides water to homes at an affordable cost. In this paper, development of a model to supply water to a selected rural home of Kgopaneng village in Limpopo province is proposed as an alternative solution to water supply to rural areas of South Africa. The proposed solution, although implemented at only one home, can be easily replicated and even scaled up to supply more homes or entire villages, given resources and commitment of the municipalities of these two provinces. It is notable that demand far outweighs supply thereby leading to stressed capacity in the water sector of the provinces. This study focuses on the development of appropriate water pumping systems and capacity building tools that may result in operational and maintenance efficiencies in rural area.

2 CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

Limpopo province is largely rural areas. Subsistence farming is the core of many people's livelihoods. Frequent droughts have hampered crop production and people in the communities now keep small home gardens to try and make up for lost crops in larger fields. High temperatures, droughts and erratic rainfall contribute to crop failure and food insecurity. The bulk of household wastewater is greywater which is being produced on a daily basis. Up to 60% of household water consumption is discharged as greywater. A typical household consumes 150-200 litres of water per person per day, this can amount to 400-600 litres per day per household. Ideally it should not be discharged to the sewer where it contributes to overloading sewer systems and wastewater treatment plants and ultimately consuming more energy and resources to treat. However, in rural areas, other areas do not have electricity, so there is a need for a reliable source of water that will not only supply fresh water but also improve food security. A solar system is introduced to generate electricity to operate the entire system and provide an alternative power supply to the household.

3 SYSTEM CONSTRUCTION – GREYWATER, BOREHOLE WATER AND RAINWATER HARVEST (RWH)

The raw water for the system is abstracted from the greywater, rainwater harvesting boreholes. The water is purified until meeting quality standards according to WHO [2]. Water is defined in its Guidance for Drinking-Water Quality by the World Health Organization (WHO) as being water used for domestic purposes like consumption, bathing, and food preparation. These mean that the requirements of water to meet quality standard must be guided by World Health Organization (WHO) [2]. Water supply is evaluated on a set of different variables; the location of the water sources, how they are accessed, their quality and supply systems. The development of water infrastructure in the provinces should be done based on improving the existing infrastructures used to access water. The infrastructures are not well maintained and managed to meet the demand for water to the communities, as a result, they don't last. Figure 1 shows the detailed system construction of water purifications and greywater systems. The size of the system is limited to a single home. Figure 2 illustrates the diagrammatic representation of potable water systems and greywater systems developed for household in Kgopaneng village.

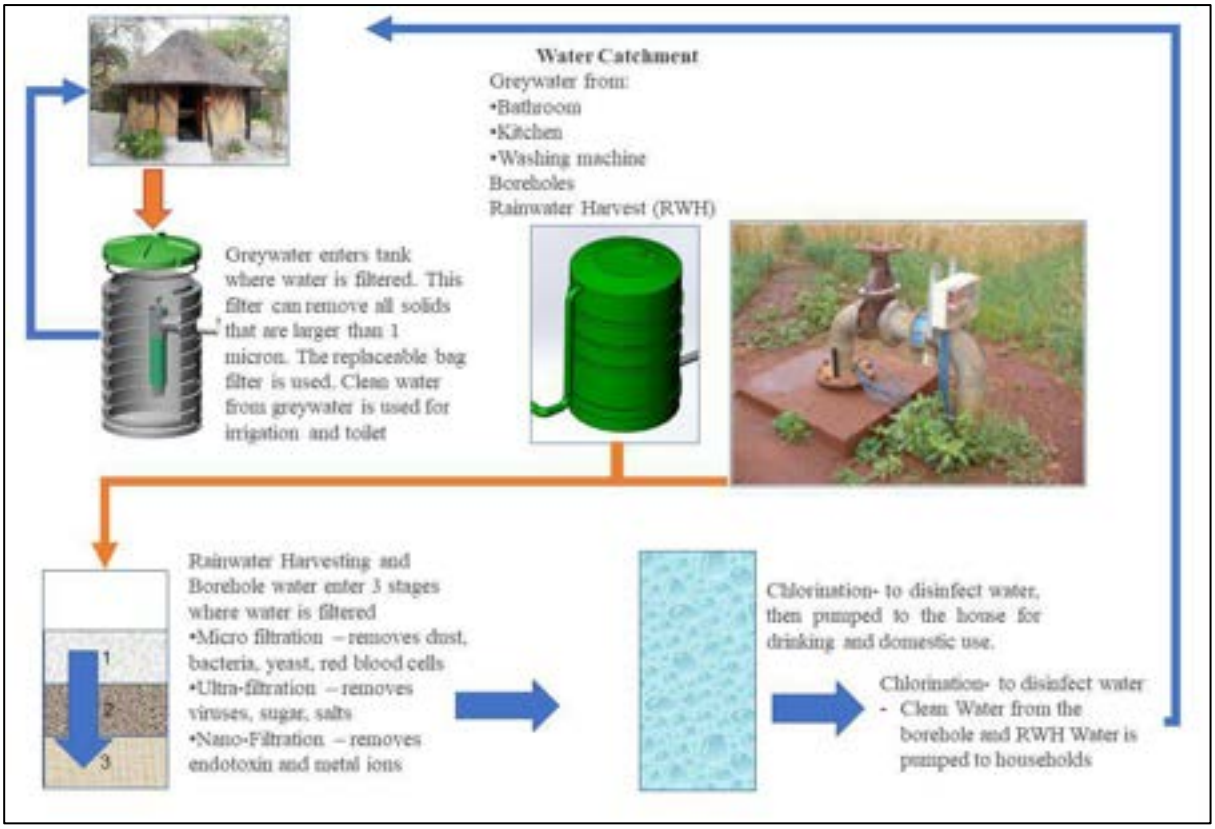

Figure 1: System Construction of Water Recycling and Purification.

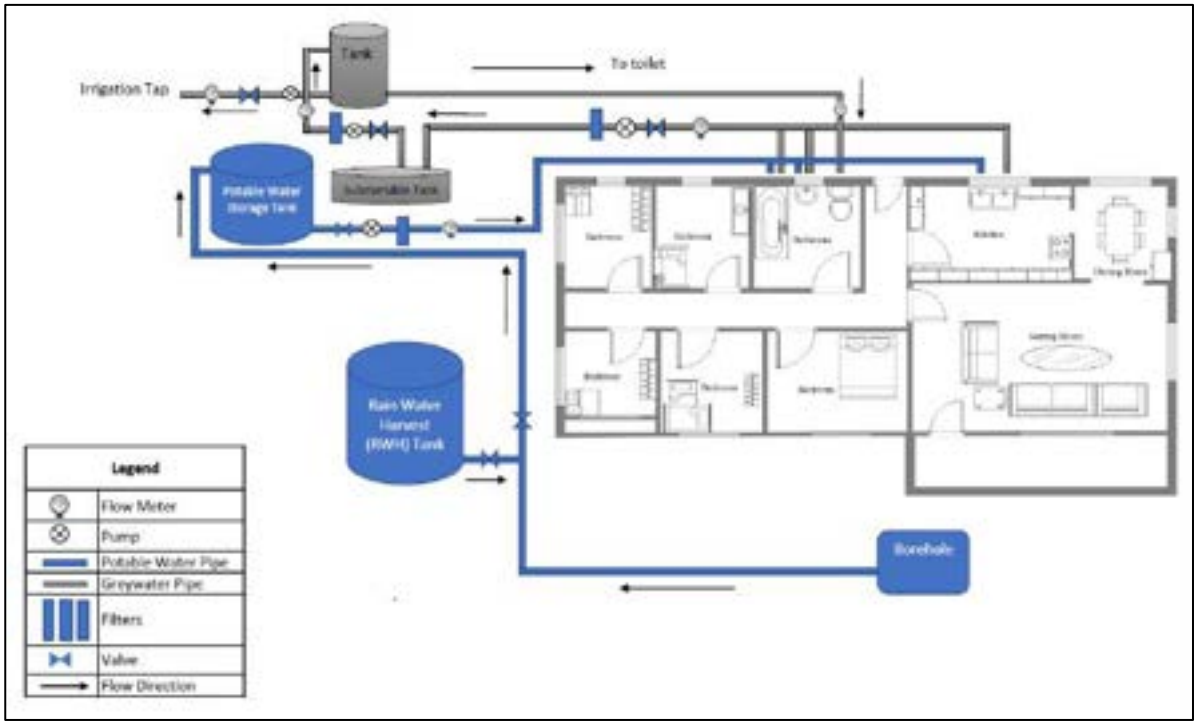

Figure 2: Diagrammatic Representation of Potable Water System and Greywater System.

4 DESIGN SPECIFICATION OF PUMPING WATER PUMPING SYSTEM

The design of water pumping system was done based on the length and diameter of the pipes to analyze the flowrate and head of water of the system and choosing the correct pump for freshwater and greywater systems. At the home where the model was installed a borehole fitted with pumps is used as the main source of drinkable water. Therefore, the same borehole system is used as a source of water instilled model water pumping system developed to supply water in the study area. Small scale was used to design a system to supply only one household for the purpose of demonstrating the new model that can be easily scaled up to supply communities. To select the pump that meet the requirement of the pumping system, the total dynamic head (TDH) was calculated using equations 1 – 3. Dynamic head means there is a change of pressures, velocities, elevations, and friction losses when the system and the pump are in operation [4, 5]. The Total Dynamic Head (TDH) is the total head of the following elements:

- The pipe friction losses (H_f),
- The static head (H_s),
- The velocity head (H_v).

The sum of these three elements of the Total Dynamic Head are as follows [4, 5]:

$$\text{Total Dynamic Head (TDH)} = H_s + H_f + H_v \quad (1)$$

whereby: H_f and H_v are given as follow:

$$H_f = \frac{f\,L\,v^2}{2gD} \quad (2)$$

$$H_v = \frac{v^2}{2g} \quad (3)$$

Parameters in equations 2 and 3 are described as follow:

- f – friction factor
- L – length of water pipe of the system
- D – diameter of water pipe of the system
- v – velocity of water inside the pipe
- g – constant gravitational acceleration of 9.8m/s^2

The pumping framework was planned based on framework determination and presumptions that the stream rate shifts from 0.011 to 0.04 m^3/s, due to the slight elevation of the landscape at the installation home. The calculations are carried out at 0.011 m^3/s and the same method is utilized to calculate the pumping framework at the stream rate of 0.04 m^3/s. The roughness of the pipe is constant depending on the pipe material used, see Table 1.

Table 1: Absolute Roughness of Pipe Material

Pipe Material	Absolute Roughness, ε	
	Mm	Microns
Drawn brass or copper		1.5
PVC Pipe	0,0025	2,5
Commercial steel	0.045	45
Wrought iron	0.045	45
Asphalted cast iron	0.122	150
Galvanized iron	0.259	150
Cast iron	0.259	260
Wood stave	0.183 – 0.914	200 – 900

4.1 Borehole System

The borehole used in this study is installed with a borehole pump. Water is pumped from the ground to the households without filtration. Water is supplied from the borehole into a water tower located 25m above the well. Required pump capacity was thus estimated at 0.0011 m^3/s. Height from the ground level to the top of the water level in the water tower tank is 15 m. Water tower is located 25 m away from the well. Static water level in the well is 20 m. Figure 3 shows water pumping system, pump curve and system curve of the borehole determined for this household.

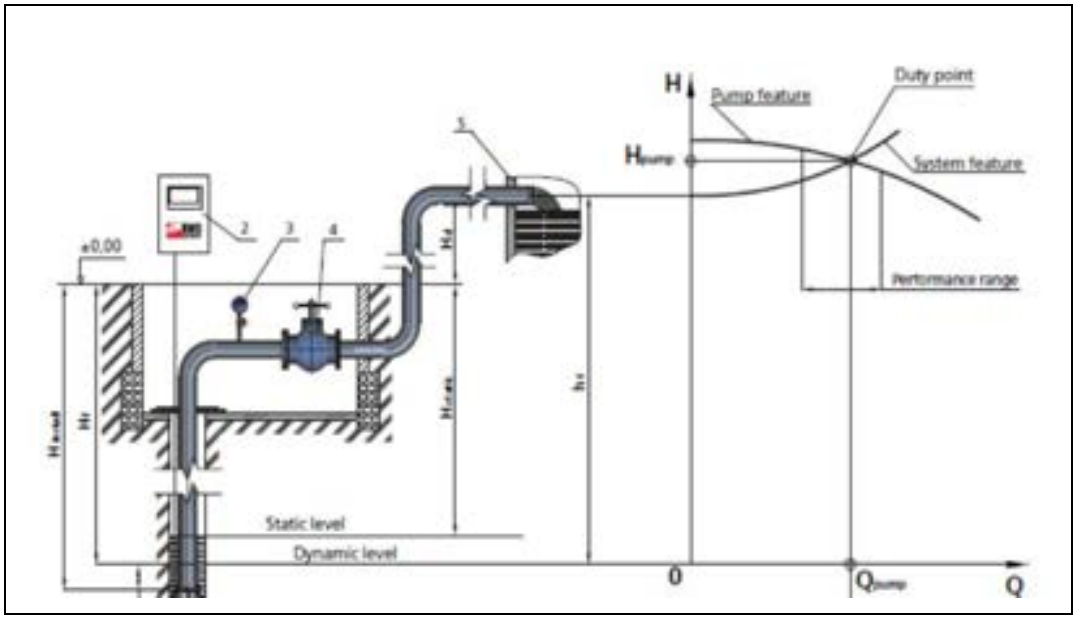

Figure 3: Water pumping system and borehole pump illustration. Duty point is determined by intersection of the system and pump curves. The intersection point is called the duty point. One of the main conditions in a pump selection is to provide the preferred operating range of 70-120% of nominal capacity [6].

4.2 Potable Water System Design and Selection of Water Pump

To design the pumping system for the potable water, the pipe material used is PVC plastic; therefore, pipe roughness is, ε = 0.0025mm, refer from Table 1. The calculations are carried out at $0.0011\ m^3/s = 66\ l/min$. The specifications are based on the diagrammatic representation of potable water system in Figure 4.

Pipe Diameter, D = 50mm = 0.05m,

Length of the pipe of the system = 45m,

The static head (H_s) = 20m,

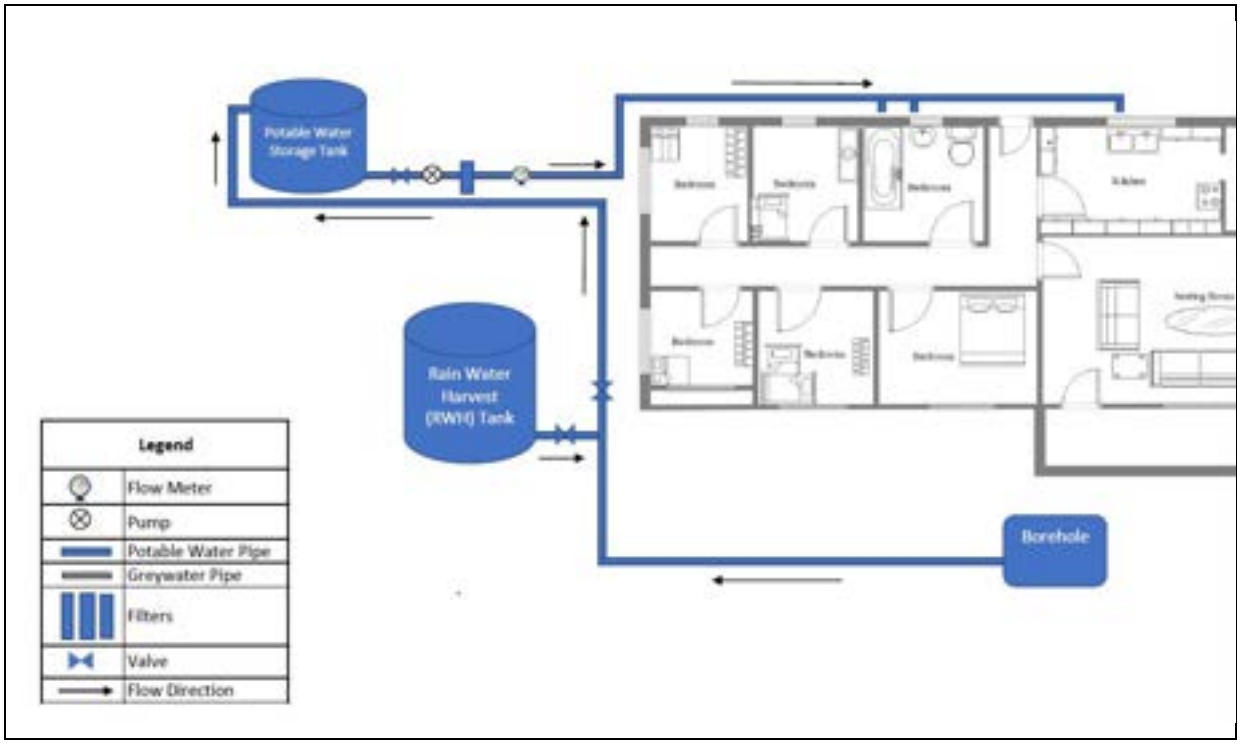

Figure 4: Diagrammatic Representation of Potable Water System.

Equations 4 –11 are used to determine the water pumping system. The friction head is the friction loss in the system that the pump must overcome. The friction occurs between the fluid and the internal surface of the pipe, valves, connections, and accessories in the suction and discharge of the pump. Equation 4 is used to calculate friction head of the pipe as follows [4, 7, 8];

$$H_f = \frac{f\,L\,v^2}{2gD} \tag{4}$$

$$Area\ of\ the\ Pipe = \frac{\pi D^2}{4} \tag{5}$$

$$= \frac{\pi \times 0.05^2}{4} = 0.00196m^2$$

$$Velocity = \frac{Flow\ Rate}{Area} \tag{6}$$

$$= \frac{0.00011}{0.00196} = 0.5612m/s$$

$$Reynold's\ Numbe = \frac{Velocity \times Diameter}{Kinematic\ Viscosity\ of\ Water} \tag{7}$$

Kinematic Viscosity of water $= 1.787 \times 10^{-6}\, m^2/s^{-2}$

$$Reynold's\ Number = \frac{0.5612 \times 0.05}{1.787 \times 10^{-6}} = 15702.294$$

To calculate the friction factor (Equation 8), Reynold's number is used [9]. Reynold's number is greater than 4000, therefore the flow is Turbulent. For Turbulent flow, the following formula for friction factor is used [10].

$$f = \frac{0.25}{\left[log\left(\frac{\varepsilon}{3.7d} + \frac{5.74}{R_e{}^{0.9}}\right)\right]^2} \tag{8}$$

$$f = \frac{0.25}{\left[log\left(\frac{0.0000025}{3.7 \times 0.05} + \frac{5.74}{(15702{,}294)^{0.9}}\right)\right]^2} = 0.02757$$

The friction losses within the system at the flow rate of 0.011 m^3/s is found to be 0.01639.

$$\mathrm{H_f} = \frac{\mathrm{f\,L\,v^2}}{\mathrm{2gD}} \tag{9}$$

$$\mathrm{H_f} = \frac{0.02757 \times\ 45 \times\ (0.5612)^2}{2 \times 9.81 \times 0.05} = 0{,}3983\ m$$

The velocity head (Hv) is given in Equation 10 as:

$$\mathrm{H_v} = \frac{\mathrm{v^2}}{\mathrm{2g}} \tag{10}$$

$$\mathrm{H_v} = \frac{0{,}5612^2}{2 \times 9.81} = 0.01605m$$

$$\mathrm{Total\ Head} = \mathrm{H_s} + \mathrm{H_f} + \mathrm{H_v} \tag{11}$$

$$= 20 + 0.3983 + 0.01605$$

$$= 20.414m.$$

Thus, the potable water system for the selected home in the study village requires a pump that can deliver total head of 20,414m and total flowrate of 66L/h. For this purpose the model was fitted with two pumps, one located before the freshwater tank, and another located after freshwater tank to boast water supplied to the households, see Figure 4. From Jojo Booster Pump, the best pump that can deliver according to this operation point is CPM158 which requires power supply of 0.78kW, refer from Figure 5. The booster pump can deliver flowrates of 40 to 80L/min and pressure heads of 19m to 28m [11]. The booster pump can reach maximum head of 32m and maximum flowrate of 100L/min.

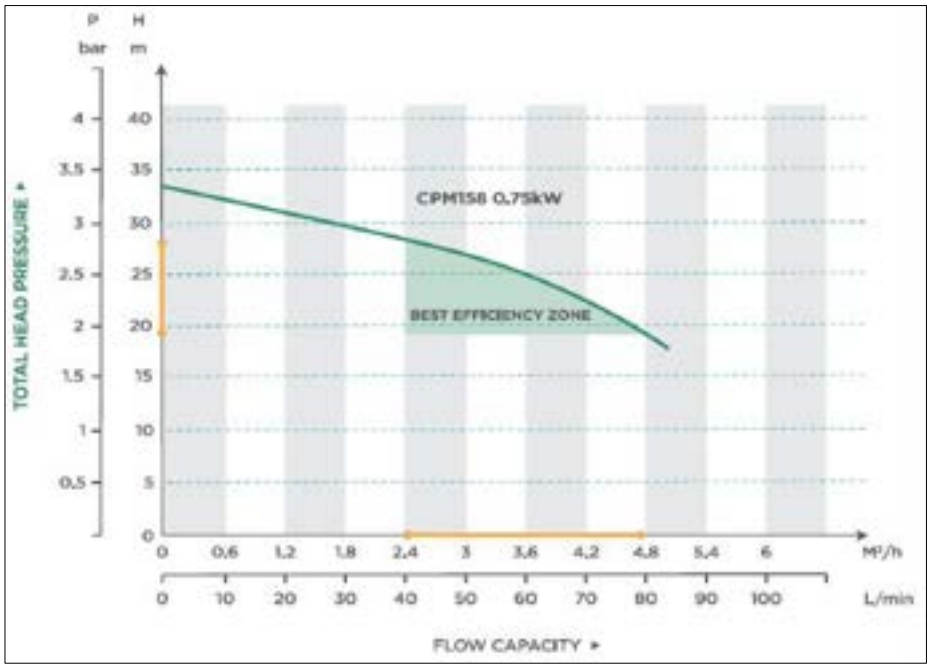

Figure 5: CPM158 0,75kW Pump Curve [11].

4.3 Greywater System Design

Greywater recycling systems have been introduced in townships, however, there is little or no progress in the rural areas like Limpopo. This system will be beneficial more in rural areas as it is where agricultural activities are mostly practised. This greywater can be very economically and easily recycled, for example treating it for reuse in toilet flushing and irrigation. The greywater from showers, bathtubs and hand washing from the selected home in the study area is pumped to a submerge storage tank and pre-filtered through the highly efficient particle filter before entering the second tank fitted with a membrane filters. Afterwards, the particle filter removes all solids that are larger than 1 micron, such as sand, hair, coal particles and pollen, see Figure 6.

This 3D filter is manufactured from synthetic polymer. Another pump provides water flow and pressure to the second tank with the membrane filtering system. The contaminants are removed in each filtration stage, the water from the bottom to the top, so that backwash can be easily done when cleaning the filters. The first filter from the bottom is called micro filter where it removes atmospheric dust, red blood cells, bacteria, yeast, and asbestos. The micro filter is also manufactured from synthetic polymer.

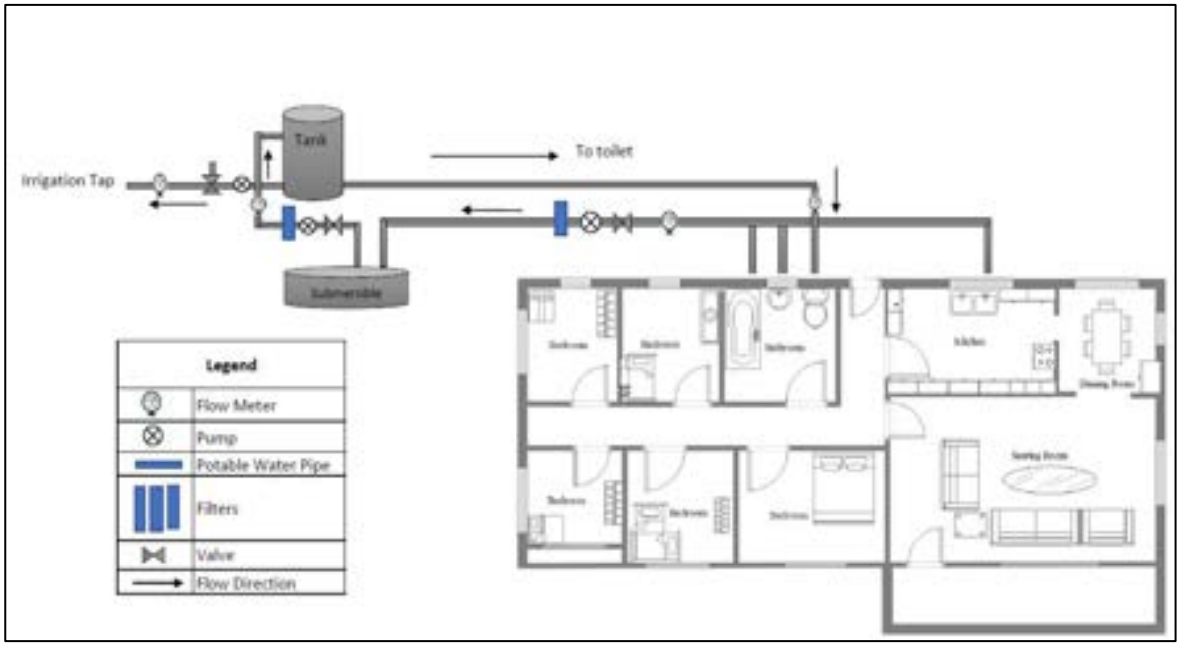

Figure 6: Diagrammatic Representation of Greywater System.

As the applied pressure on water passes through the membrane leaving pollutants trapped on the impermeable side, the water passes through the Ultra filtration process. In this stage all the contaminants that ranges from 0.1 to 0.01 micron such as pyrogen and viruses are trapped in this stage. Ultra-filtration process split up finer particles. With the assistance of pressure, the water continues to pass through the nano filtration filter. This filter is also made by the synthetic polymer. The nano-filtration process removes organic particles. It is mostly used in food processing. It has pore sizes from 1-10 nanometres, smaller than ultrafiltration and microfiltration pores but larger than Reverse Osmosis. The water is then pumped to the chlorination tank, The chlorination method is used to disinfect water. Chlorine is a highly efficient chemical liquid that destroys bacteria and is added to public water supplies to kill disease-causing pathogens, such as bacteria, viruses that commonly grow in water supply reservoirs and in storage tanks. It acts as a disinfectant. Water chlorination is the process of adding chlorine or chlorine compounds such as sodium hypochlorite to water.

Thus, the potable water system for the selected home in the study village requires a pump that can deliver a total head of 25,547m and a total flow rate of 66L/h. The system has three (3) pumps, one located after the submerged tank, 2nd supplies clean greywater into the house for toilet flushing use only. Lastly, another pump is used to pump water for irrigation, see Figure 68. From JoJo Booster Pump, the best pump that can deliver according to this operation point is CPM158 which requires a power supply of 0.78kW, refer to Figure 5. The booster pump can deliver flowrates of 40 to 80L/min and a pressure heads of 19m to 28m. The booster pump can reach a maximum head of 32m and a maximum flow rate of 100L/min.

4.4 Rainwater Harvesting

Amount of rainwater harvesting depends on the amount of rainfall. Rainwater harvesting is not always available in the system due to scarcity of rain in the study areas. As a results, rainwater is not contributing consistently to the water system hence an amount of water contributing to the system is not being specified. The base of rainwater tank is raised off the ground at about 500mm to allow the rainwater to flow to the main line by force of gravity. Using force of gravity to supply rainwater to water system reduced costs because no pump and power supply is required.

5 CONCEPT GENERATION

This study establishes that there is water available onsite at every location on the globe with the only challenge being the technological availability and technical ability to access this water, purify and supply, recycle and reuse. It is for this reason that there is a need to develop, design, install and monitor the new design of an alternative water supply strategy built on the circular economy concept and using the case of water management in Limpopo province of South Africa. Rural communities of these provinces experience water access and supply shortages due to lack of water services and difficulties associated with building stakeholder support for resource management strategies.

5.1 Water Model Concept Development

In this study, a water pumping system is designed for household use. The water pumping system is divided in two (2) sections, potable water system and grey water system. Borehole water and Rainwater Harvesting (RWH) are used for drinkable water, and they are the main sources of water in this system. The borehole pump (Figure 7) is designed to operate at the power input of 2.4kW at an efficiency of 76%. This is based on the pumping system setup of this study. One of the main conditions in a pump selection is to provide the preferred operating range of 70-120% of nominal capacity.

Figure 7: Design Model of the Borehole Pump.

Water from the borehole is pumped and mixed with the rainwater before going through filtration stage. Rainwater Harvesting (RWH) is stored in 5000liter storage tank (Figure 8) to allow unwanted particles to settle down before the water undergoes filtration process. The 5000-liter tank is also used to store potable water before is distributed into the house.

Figure 8: 5000 Liter of Storage Tank.

The filter (Figure 9) is designed to purify RWH, and borehole water to ensure that the water is drinkable and meets SANS standards. Similarly, the filter is designed to clean greywater so be reused for flushing toilets which will result in saving enough drinkable water. Different membranes of the filter are used based on the level of water contamination. Borehole water and RWH use the same filter because the water is mixed before the filtration process, whereas the greywater system uses a different filter because of the large particles inside the wastewater. The filter is designed in a way that is easy to maintain.

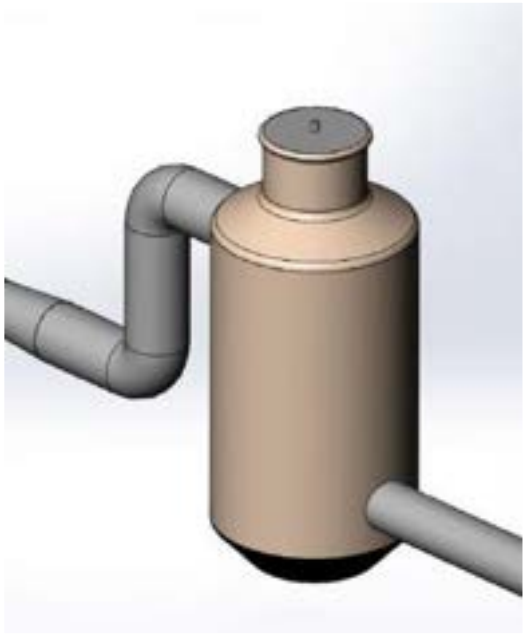

Figure 9: 3D Model of Filter.

Booster pumps (Figure 10) in the system are designed to deliver a flow rate of 40 to 80L/min and a pressure head of 19m to 28m. The booster pump can reach a maximum head of 32m and a maximum flow rate of 100L/min. The system will only need two (2) booster pumps to deliver potable water to the house. Greywater system only needs one (1) booster pump to pump water from the submerging tank (Figure 11) into the greywater storage tank through a filter. Recycled greywater is used for toilet flushing.

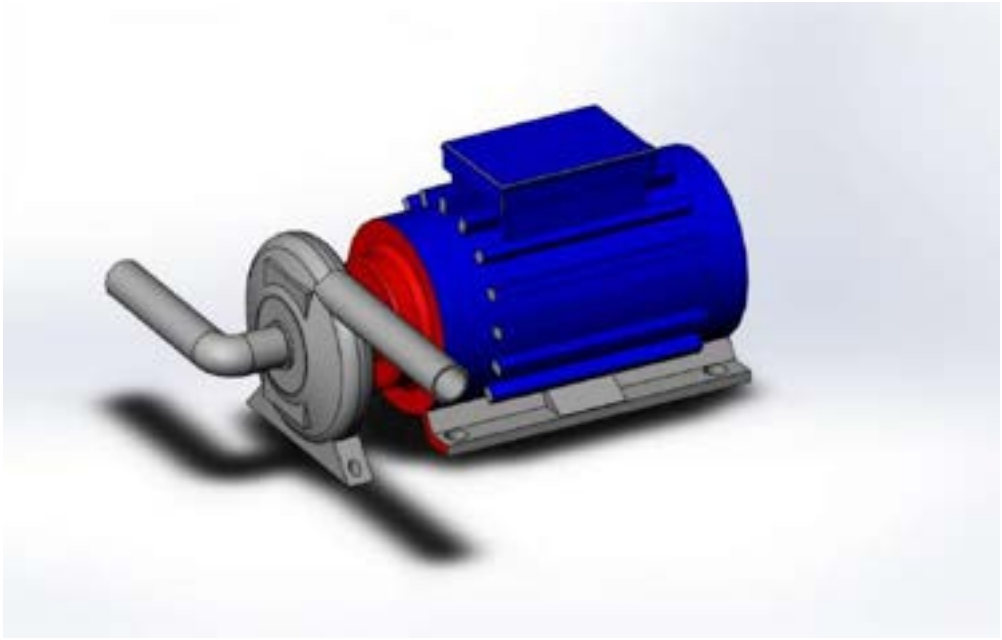

Figure 10: Boaster Pump

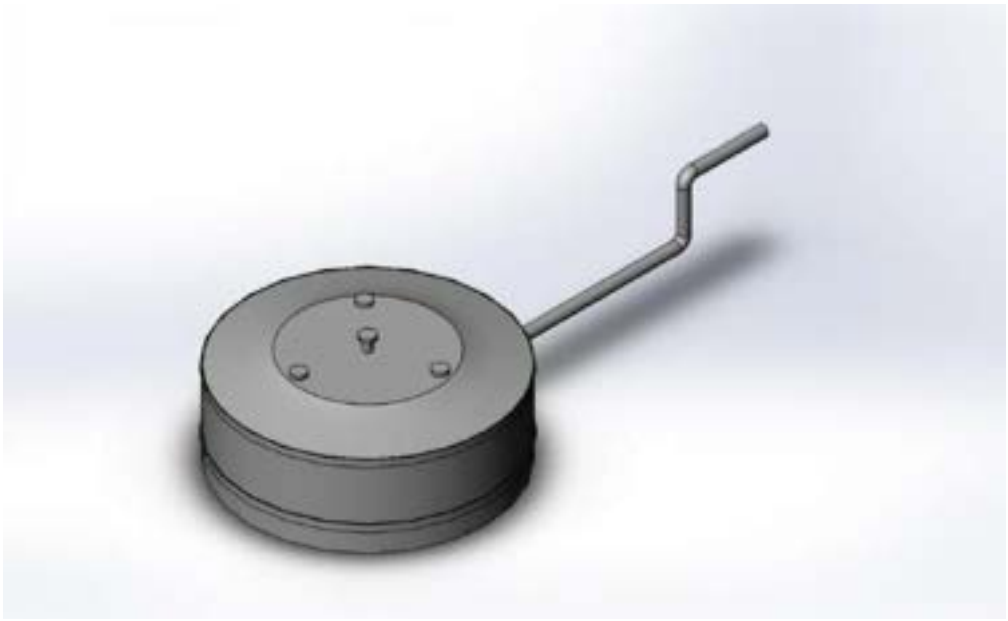

Figure 11: Submerge Tank

Figure 12 represents the completed 3D concept development of on-site water supply model for potable water and greywater systems. The model demonstrates a new concept development for a household in Kgopaneng village in Limpopo Province of South Africa and

can be suggested for wider applications. The model is developed for an area with enough water in its three forms of grey, blue and green but without technologies to make the water accessible for consumption and recycling used water. In this drawing, green represents potable water and grey color represents greywater recycling system. Figure 13 shows full details of the design and direction of water flow.

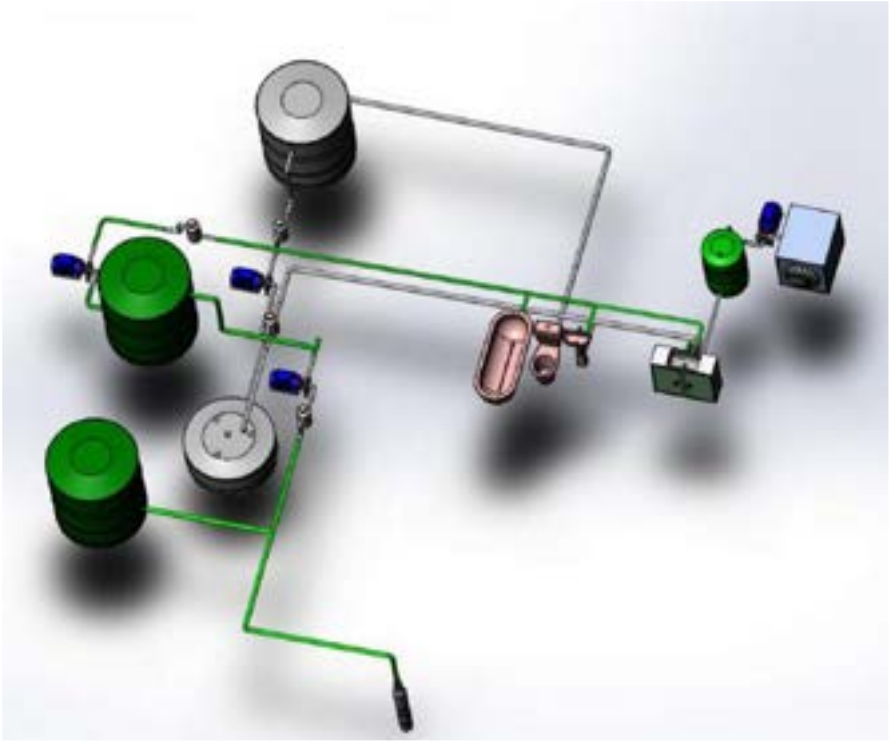

Figure 12: Empirical Design Model of Potable Water System and Greywater System for household in Kgopaneng village situated in Limpopo Province of South Africa.

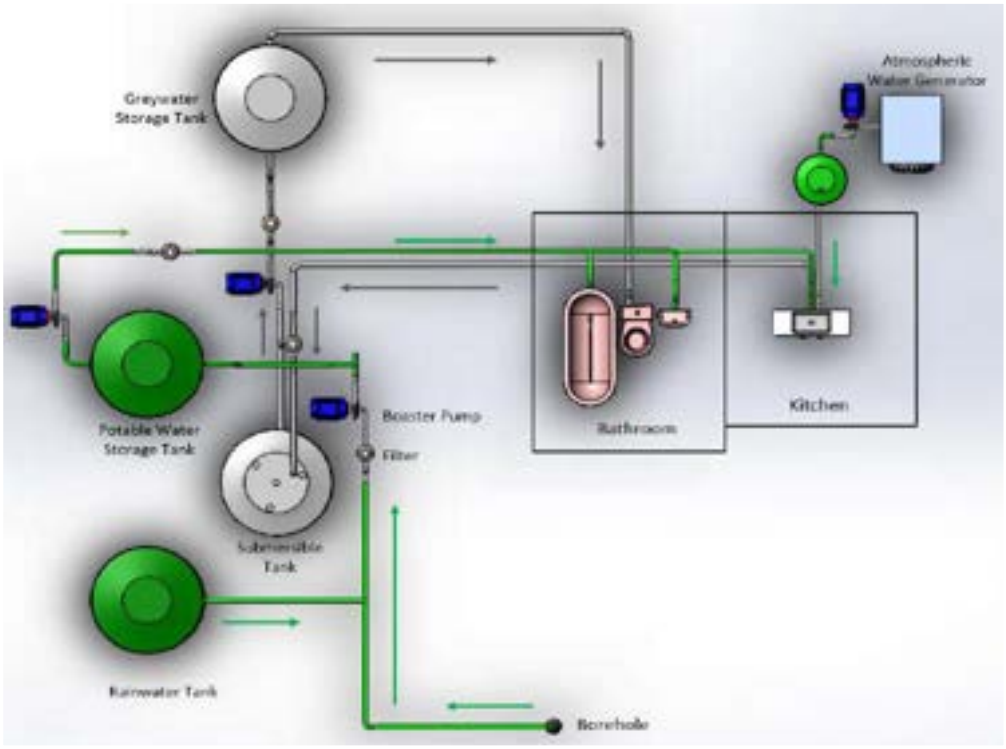

Figure 13: Detail Design Model of Potable Water System and Greywater System.

5.2 Cost Analysis

The design of a water pumping system is complex and is made in two stages. The first stage is the design and selection of different concepts based on desired technical specifications. After this stage, economic evaluation of the chosen concept from budget quotations and firm bid quotations gathered from different suppliers takes place. In this study, Life Cycle Cost (LCC) was used to develop an economic model of the water pumping system [12]. This involves its total “lifetime” cost to purchase, install, operate and maintain of the system equipment [13, 14].

The life cycle cost of a product, process or activity is the entire cost accumulated from beginning to end of life [15, 16]. The life cycle costing is a process of conducting an economic study to calculate the cost of an item over a section or entirety of its life which allows decisions to be made that will reduce the cost of the items which results in a lower ownership cost while still meeting the stakeholder requirements [15, 16]. This is done to recommend the short and long-term financial implications of the water pumping system. The life cycle costing is done to properly analyse the cost of the entire system and find ways where costs can be saved and other costs can be accounted for such as maintenance, operation, disposal and inflation. Table 2 shows all estimated costs of the water pumping system. Parts without costs were already available on-site and the house owner offered them to be used for water system.

Table 2: Estimation Cost of the Water Pumping System

Parts Description	**Dimensions**	**Unit Cost**	**Quantity**	**Total Cost**
2500 Litre Potable Water Storage Tank	2500 litres		1	R6000.00
5000 Litres RWH Storage Tank	5000 litres		1	R7500.00
Submerge Tank	250 litres	R1645.00	1	R1645.00
PVC Pipe	50mm diameter and 6m length	R275.00	6	R1650.00
Flow Meter		R379.00	9	R3411.00
Water Tank Sensors		R 663.81	6	R3982.86
Non-Returnable Valve		R 319.98	8	R2559.84
Booster Pump	0.38Kw	R 1495.00	4	R8970.00
	Sub Total			**R23023.70**
	Vat 15%			**R3453.56**
	Total Cost			**R39477.26**

6 DISCUSSION

The model equipment was delivered on site in Kgopaneng village on the 1st of May 2024. An installation at the rural home took place on the 25 May 2024. Installation of water pumping system was not complicated task because it was for one rural home. Water pump combined with electricity; the utmost care was taken to ensure that installation is done safely. Water tanks to store raw water was installed first and it depended on the availability of the space. The tank was installed on a strong, smooth and perfectly level surface that won't collapse under the weight of the water. Borehole pump was already installed and pipe network was installed from the borehole to the raw water tank. The base of the tank was lifted little beat off the ground and pump was installed slightly lower than the tank outlet to help to keep pump primed to avoid it drying and possibly breaking [3]. At the outlet of water pump, flow meter was installed to measure the amount of water used per day. Filter was also added in series to flow meter to clean the water from tank before is supplied to the house. After all installed, the system was commissioned, and 30 minutes test was conducted to check the leaks, pressure and flow rate. Water system was installed, commissioned and tested successfully.

7 CONCLUSION

Rural communities often rely on water sources that lack purification systems, making the water potentially unsafe for consumption. The current water pumping infrastructure is poorly designed, resulting in unequal access to municipal water across different areas. The study highlights that the core issue lies in the development of efficient water distribution systems. To ensure adequate access to clean water, it is essential to either design a new distribution network or expand the existing one. The research suggests that implementing small-scale household water systems could serve as prototypes for larger community-wide solutions. To date the use of purification water system for a household in the rural area of the study has not been implemented. It is therefore recommended to other researchers, engineers, or municipalities to study system models that can be used to supply potable water in remote areas across South Africa. Further improvements can be done on the water system developed for a household.

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APPLICATION OF SYSTEM DYNAMICS IN EVALUATING WATER SUPPLY SYSTEMS IN RURAL AREAS OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Due to South Africa's water crises and rising demand for these resources, alternate method is required to ensure that people can access power and water even during load shedding and water outages. To obtain a sustainable solution to the water problems the use of the System Dynamics model is considered. This is because it is an effective decision-support tool that helps to achieve sustainable water management in local municipalities. The model is applicable to be used in other local municipalities to manage water systems. The model was applied as a decision-support tool to assist in achieving sustainable water management. It was observed that System dynamics is a suitable approach for comprehending feedback, policy choices, and cause-and-effect interactions. It has been particularly effective in resolving water management issues. A System dynamic model was developed in the Vensim PLE 8.0.9 and prospects for enhancing water supply, management, and access are identified.

Keywords: Water Pumping System, Water Filtration, System Dynamics, Water Supply, Limpopo Province, Schools Areas

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1 INTRODUCTION

The availability of potable water supply is the major challenging factor to South Africa's development. This study focuses on schools around Limpopo province of South Africa. Limpopo province is the smallest province out of the 9 provinces in South Africa. The province occupies 1,5% of the South African country's land and is the most populated province with 26% of the national population [1]. It is the most developed province with high urbanised and contains the largest city in South Africa. With all the developments, the province still experiencing the challenges of water. South Africa has been experiencing the issue of potable water supply has been ongoing, especially in schools areas [2]. This issue directly affects schools, households and businesses in their day-to-day operations, slowing the nation's economic progress [3].

The availability of clean and drinking water is another challenge faced by many in today's world [4]. Indeed, more than two billion people on the planet don't have access to clean drinking water although it was acknowledged by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on July 28, 2010, that the right to clean and safe drinking water is a fundamental human right [4]. This issue is part of those addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) but as signified in the 2022 SDG report, this goal is yet unfulfilled [4]. Hence countries like South Africa still suffer from the water issue.

South Africa is considered to be a water-stressed country [5]. This is because, according to Rand Water, each person living in the country has less than 1700m3 of water per year [5]. One of the consequences of this situation is that South African schools receive inconsistent water supplies. [6]. The South African Human Rights Commission's 2021 report on water and sanitation in schools can help highlight the effects of the water crisis [7]. It was reported by the South African Human Rights Commission in 2021 that 366 schools still do not have access to water in the country and this affects 5 429 teachers and 144 255 learners [7]. These numbers are quite big and concerning. Hence, sustainable solutions should be put in place to alleviate these problems. To the author's knowledge, the system dynamics approach has not been used to evaluate water supply systems in schools around Limpopo province of South Africa. This study aims to model the water pumping systems in Boipelo Intermediary school based in Limpopo province of South Africa. According to bench marking water usage report prepared by Water Research Commission (WRC), in 2002, the school had 787 learners and 22 educators [8]. According to the South African school net, in 2022 till 2024, the number of learners and teachers were recorded as follow, see Table 1 [9].

Table 1: Learners and Teachers information (2022-2024) [9]

	2022	2023	2024
Learners	455	699	468
Teachers	20	21	20
Total	475	720	488

System dynamics is established to determine the nature and causes of water delivery challenges in schools of Limpopo province of South Africa. System dynamics is a useful approach for comprehending feedback, policy choices, and cause-and-effect interactions. It has been particularly effective in resolving issues with water supply management.

2 METHODS

The concept of the water system was developed, and it was used to generate a System Dynamics model. The System Dynamics simulation methodology is developed based on water system theory. The model was developed using data from surveys conducted in secondary schools in Limpopo province. Schools in Limpopo were selected randomly for this study. The data on the number of students, teachers and other employees from the school was used to

develop a System Dynamics model. Characteristics of systemic approaches adopted based on the outcomes of the data collected.

The system dynamics model in this study is being built to monitor the factors that can sustain the availability of drinkable water in schools. These factors include cost, consumer, and period effects. The model was created to improve strategic management of the water supply and allocation of resources to ensure uninterrupted water supply. Water demand, water costs, water catchment, water purification process, number of learners and water demand are some crucial elements incorporated into the model. Over an accurate prediction, the water supply are simulated over 50 days, from June 2024 to September 2024 from the data obtained in Table 1. Data in Table 1 was used to develop the system dynamics model. In this research study, two techniques are used to illustrate systems dynamics models: stock and flow diagram and causal loop diagram. The causal loop diagram in Figure 1 shows the positive and negative interactions between population increase and the demand for potable water which was developed using Venism.

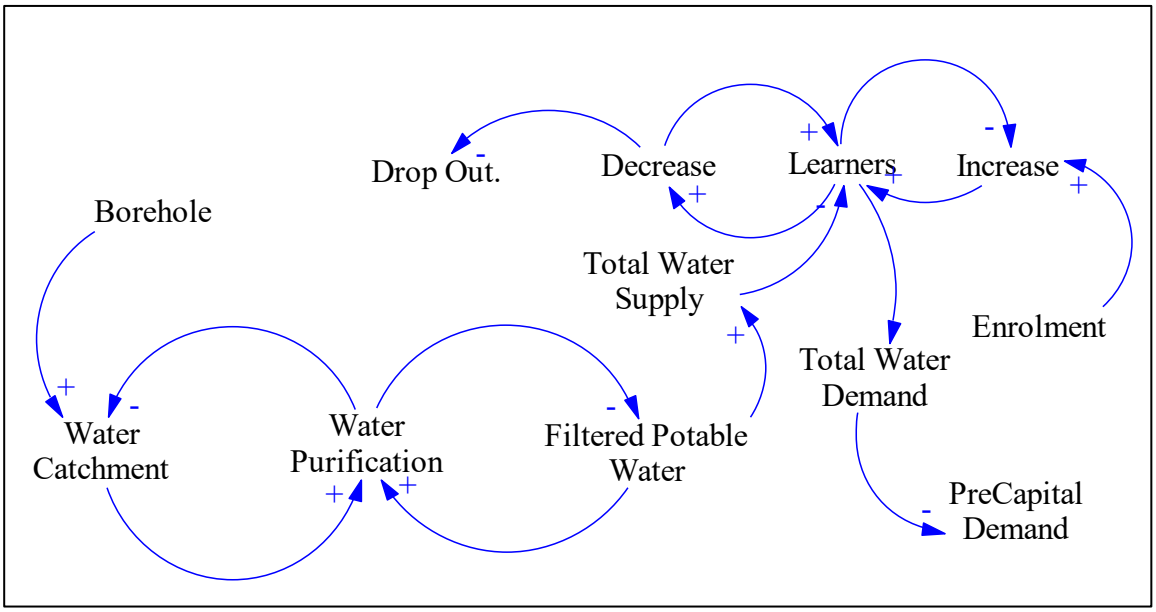

Figure 1: Causal loop diagram of water supply for Intermediary School in Limpopo province.

Causal loop diagram is used to illustrate the relationships between learners growth, the demand for potable water, and other factors influencing its supply like borehole water, filtration process and total water being supplied [10]. Casual loop diagram helps with defining the relationship between elements that contribute to water supply. It also helps with sub-models that contribute to stock and flow diagrams. Borehole, water catchment, purification and filtration systems contribute to the system dynamics model developed in this study.

- Borehole

The source of water for schools in rural communities is borehole. Borehole systems are harnessed under grey water type and supplied to the schools. The water from boreholes contribute largely to the water catchment of the system dynamics module. In this research it was assumed that 85% of water catchment is from the borehole.

- Water Catchment, Purification and Filtered Water

Water from borehole is stored in tanks already available onside before purification process takes place. Filters used were selected after the test of the water from borehole was done.

This helped to with selection of filters that will purify the water to meet WHO stands. Filtered water is then pumped to the school.

2.1. The Developed System Dynamics Model

The system dynamics model is a method that makes use of flow, internal feedback loops, table functions, and time delays to solve complex systems over an extended period. Approaches that take into consideration the dynamic relationships between water sources, water treatment facilities, water storage, potable water transportation, commercial, and potable water distribution, and end users' roles are necessary for the sustainable management of water resources [11, 12, 13]. Delivering adequate water resources to meet human requirements is a concern of the water resources management strategy hence a system dynamics model is needed. It is possible to model the population analysis in water supply using systems dynamics. Water resource management and supply complex challenges are addressed and dynamically solved through the application of system dynamics methodology. Determining the system structure between variables, feedback loops, system archetypes, and latency is the initial stage in any system dynamics modelling. Stakeholder involvement facilitates effective approaches to the problem of water management [13]. To optimize the water system's capacity, a model representing the evolution of water resources over time will be created. The model is applied to test ideas and in a complex real-world scenario. Given the complexity of the studied issues, dynamic simulation models have a long history of application in water management. In an artificial environment, the model also aids in testing real-world behaviour [14, 15].

Dynamic simulation helps to observe the performance of a modelled system and response to interventions over time. The basic elements that can be found in all systems dynamics models are arrows, auxiliary variables, rate and stock/ level Models [11].

2.1.1. System Dynamics Model

The increase in population and mismanagement of existing water systems contribute significantly to the shortage of water and power supply. Schools in Limpopo depend on the municipalities to provide access to potable water. Alternative sources of water will provide stability in the case of a shortage of water supply from the local municipality.

The systems dynamic models are developed in this study to capture the interaction between water sources and supply for Boipelo Intermediary school as shown in Figures 2. Water demand, water costs, water catchment, water purification process, number of learners and water demand are some crucial elements incorporated into the model. These are the main aspects that are affected due to the shortage of water included in the module. The model was developed using Vensim PLE 8.0.9 (Double Precision). The assumptions of water used per day were made as follows:

Boreholes = 0.85% per day

Enrolment = 0.02% per annum

PreCapital Demand = 0,35/Total Water Demand

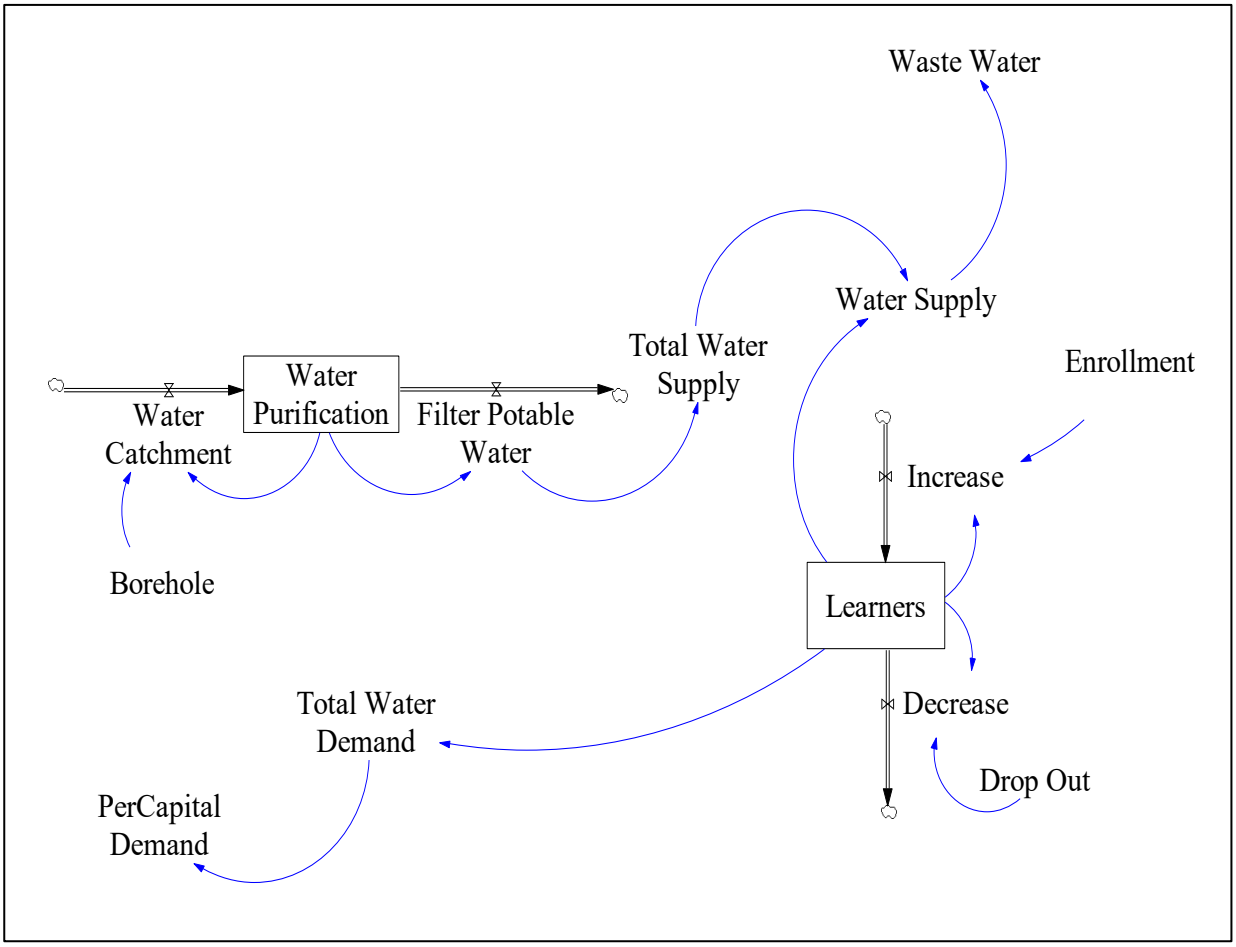

Figure 2: Stock and flow diagram of water supply for Boipelo Intermediary School.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A technique to support long-term water management helps with ensuring that the supply of water is not interrupted, and water quality is not compromised. In this research study, the system dynamics model provides an accurate estimation to predict the positive or negative output should water supply systems not be managed as supposed. The simulation results were obtained from the stock flow diagrams in Figures 1 and 2. The models were tested through two scenarios; a comparison was made between the summer and winter seasons. In Figures 3-6, the blue trend represents the behaviour of a water system in winter while the red trend represents the behaviour of the water system in summer. The results are based on the winter and summer seasons. The number of learners enrolling and dropping (Figure 3) out also affects the performance of the system.

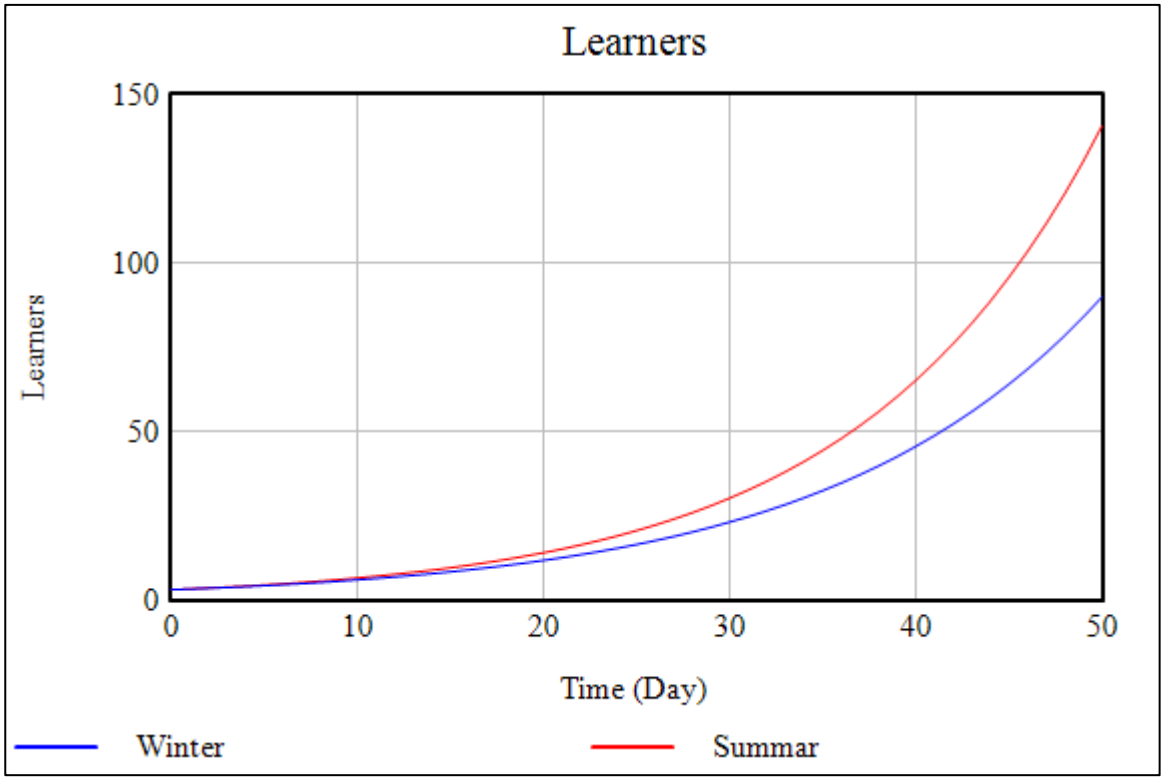

Figure 3: Simulation results of learners

Figure 4 shows the decrease in the trend of water supply which is due to the increase in the number of learners and the summer season. It was also observed that an increase in learners (including staff members) increases water consumption.

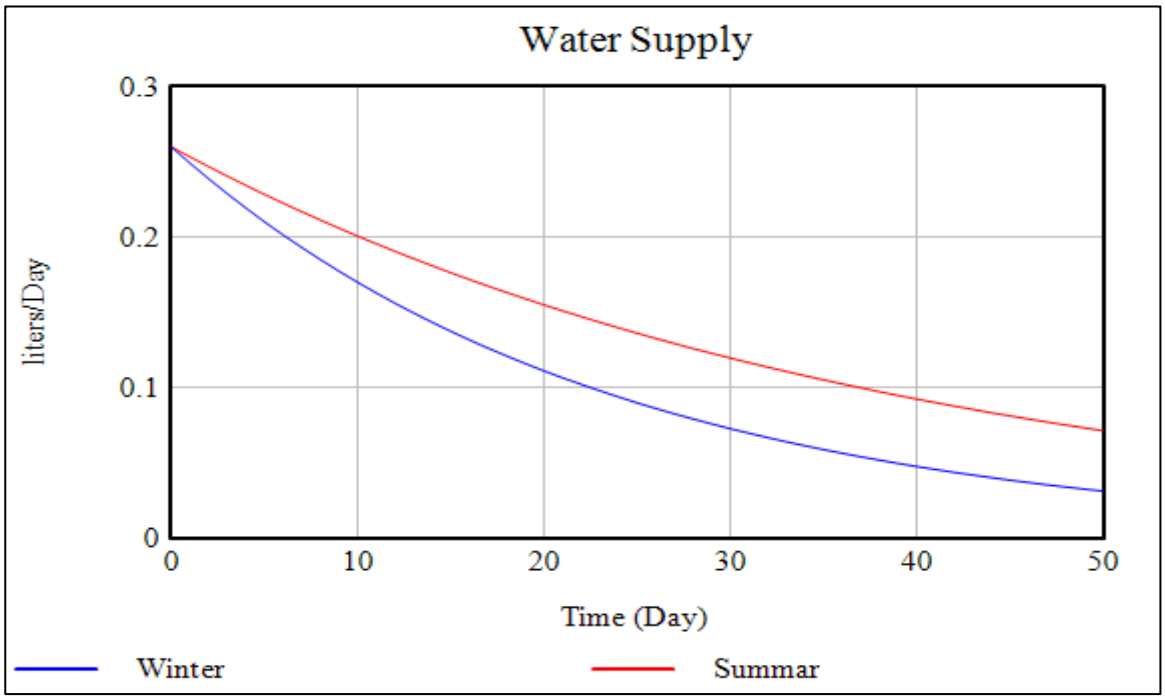

Figure 4: Simulation results showing the amount of water supply during the winter and summer seasons

The amount of water being utilized and cleansed determines the overall amount available; Figures 5 and 6 illustrate this. Furthermore, poor water management has an impact on the available water supply. Figure 5 illustrates how the new development of the alternative water supply model will increase the overall volume of water delivery. The overall amount of water supply will eventually decrease due to systemic mismanagement (Blue trend). The water supply won't be disrupted by the system's management (Red trend), according to the system dynamics research. This aids in the system's resource distribution as well, guaranteeing a steady flow of water.

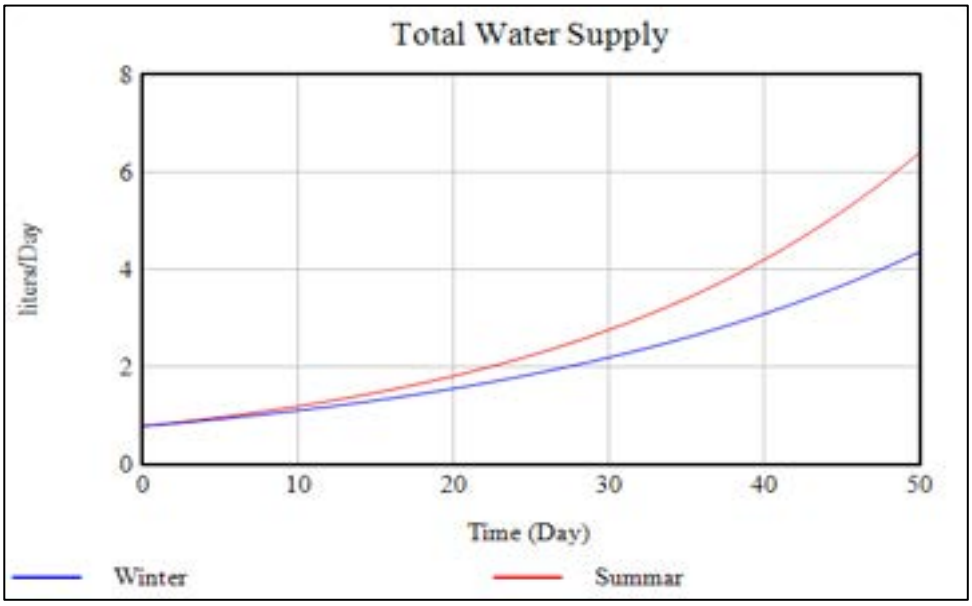

Figure 5: Simulation results showing the total amount of water during the summer and winter seasons.

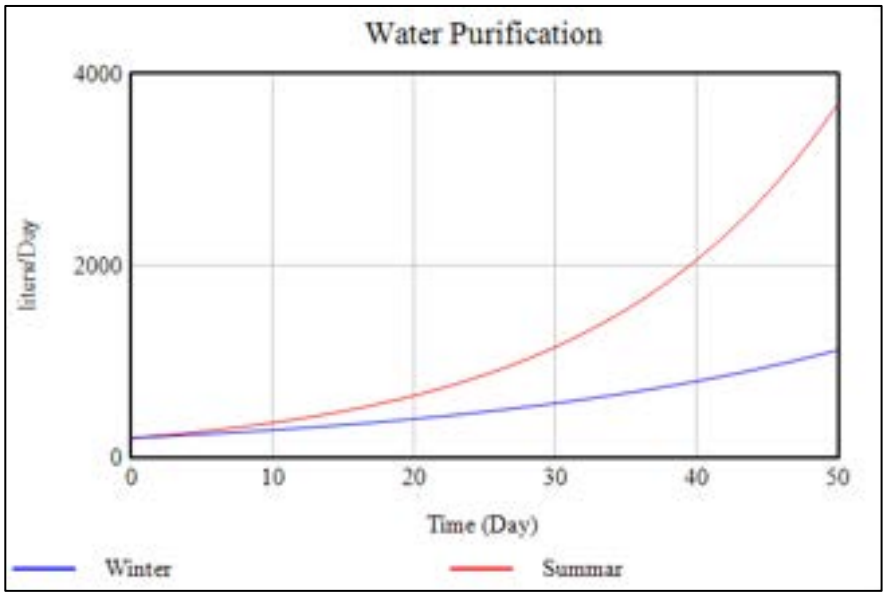

Figure 6: Simulation results showing the amount of water purification during the summer and winter seasons.

In order to forecast the long-term effects of installing different water pumping system dynamics were constructed. The findings indicate that over 50 days, the management of the water system will enhance the overall water supply. The water system's problem areas were determined using the SD model. The model's output indicates that every school must manage their water resources and systems to maintain a constant water supply. These will guarantee the schools with continuous access to water.

4 CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was to create a water supply chain simulation model and utilize it to identify the types and reasons behind problems with water delivery. Summer season increases water demand for schools, commercial, and agricultural. The study demonstrated that local school in Limpopo province can benefit from the use of system dynamics techniques to precisely estimate the amount of water needed based on the pace of demand in the schools by doing this, resource allocation will be aided, preventing interruptions in the water supply. For upcoming research, the simulation model could be a starting point for developing water system to a school.

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INTEGRATING DISTRIBUTED ACOUSTIC SENSING INTO PIPELINE MONITORING SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the efficacy of Distributed Acoustic Sensing (DAS) using fibre optic cables to secure underground pipelines against fuel theft. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research integrates both quantitative and qualitative DAS data collected from stakeholders specialising in geophysics, geothermal energy, mining, and the oil and gas sector, including applications in high-resolution seismic and microseismic monitoring. Results indicate that the system's seismic reliability and performance are critically dependent on precise depth calibration, acoustic directivity, and optimal signal to noise ratio control. These parameters are essential for distinguishing illicit activities from background noise. Our findings underscore DAS's potential as a real time, scalable defence for safeguarding critical pipeline infrastructure worldwide.

Keywords: Depth Calibration, Directivity, Signal to Noise Ratio

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1 INTRODUCTION

Fuel theft remains a global issue, with approximately R2.34 trillion (US$133 billion) worth of crude oil and refined products stolen or tampered with annually. According to [1] oil theft accounts for 5–7 % of the global market for crude oil and petroleum fuels. This illicit activity poses significant economic, environmental, and security risks particularly to long distance pipeline networks. Traditional monitoring methods often fall short in providing real time, comprehensive surveillance over extensive pipeline infrastructures, leaving them vulnerable to unauthorised access and damage.

Distributed Acoustic Sensing (DAS) technology has emerged as a promising solution to address these challenges. By utilising fibre optic cables to detect acoustic signals along the entire length of a pipeline, DAS systems can identify and locate disturbances with high precision. This capability enables continuous, real time monitoring, facilitating the early detection of potential threats such as unauthorised digging, tapping, or vehicular activity near the pipeline.

Despite its promising capabilities, the application of DAS in pipeline monitoring remains in a developmental phase, facing several technical, environmental, and operational challenges.

Notably, Distributed Acoustic Sensing (DAS) has been applied in various fields, including vertical seismic profiling [2], earthquake monitoring and traffic detection [3], hydraulic fracture geometry characterisation [4], and microseismic monitoring [5], its deployment in real world pipeline scenarios is limited.

Recent studies have begun to explore DAS for field applications, including damage state monitoring of buried pipelines and leak detection in gas pipelines. However, comprehensive research integrating both quantitative and qualitative data from diverse stakeholders is scarce, hindering the development of effective strategies for implementing DAS in pipeline security. Addressing these gaps requires interdisciplinary collaboration and extensive field trials to validate DAS technologies under varying operational conditions.

This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the application of DAS technology in safeguarding long distance pipelines against fuel theft. Through the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data from various stakeholders including pipeline operators, security personnel, and technology providers this research seeks to identify consistent and effective strategies for implementing DAS in pipeline security. By providing empirical evidence and practical insights, this paper contributes to the existing literature by offering a comprehensive understanding of the capabilities, challenges, and best practice associated with deploying DAS systems in real world pipeline monitoring scenarios.

2 FIBRE-OPTIC SENSOR IN DISTRIBUTED ACOUSTIC SENSING

In this section, we explore how fibre optic technology is adapted for DAS, covering the fundamental sensing principles, fibre types, deployment methods, and handling considerations. Conventional telecommunications fibres are repurposed in DAS to act as continuous acoustic sensors: light pulses injected into the fibre undergo Rayleigh backscattering, and the resulting time varying phase or intensity changes along the fibre are precisely measured to detect acoustic, seismic, or thermal disturbances.

According to [8], the optical interrogation system detects minute variations in the backscattered light and converts them into strain signals that reveal disturbances along the fibre path.

According to [9], single mode fibre with its small core (approximately 9 µm) is the preferred choice for DAS, as it supports only one propagation mode of light. This minimises modal dispersion and enhances the signal to noise ratio, in contrast to multimode fibre, whose larger core (around 50 µm) permits multiple interfering light paths that degrade measurement fidelity.

Moreover, single mode fibre exhibits lower attenuation, enabling longer sensing ranges typically up to 40–50 km depending on system design and pulse length.

Effective deployment of fibre optic cables critically influences measurement quality. In well based applications such as Vertical Seismic Profiling (VSP), embedding fibre within the cement sheath of casing provides the best coupling to the formation, yielding high quality seismic measurements. Alternative approaches such as clamping to production tubing, securing behind an inflatable liner, or using wireline tools offer ease of deployment but often suffer from poorer coupling, increased noise (e.g. tubing waves), and reduced signal to noise ratio.

In linear infrastructure scenarios such as buried pipelines, achieving adequate deformation coupling with the surrounding medium is similarly essential, with deployment proximity and mechanical constraints significantly affecting data fidelity.

Handling of fibre optic cables also demands meticulous attention: minimising sharp bends is essential to prevent light leakage and maintain sensitivity, while ensuring clean optical connections is crucial dust and oils can introduce significant losses and degrade overall system performance.

Overall, DAS repurposes standard single mode, telecommunications grade optical fibre as a continuous, distributed sensing medium using Rayleigh backscatter and coherent detection. Thanks to its high spatial and temporal resolution, long-distance coverage, and ability to operate in harsh environments, DAS is particularly well suited for real world pipeline monitoring. However, its successful deployment hinges on selecting appropriate fibre types, ensuring strong mechanical coupling, and implementing careful handling protocols.

3 INTERROGATOR UNIT AND SINGLE-MODE FIBRE OPTIC DEPLOYMENT

This section examines the pivotal role of the Interrogator Unit within Distributed Acoustic Sensing (DAS) systems, underscores the advantages of deploying single mode fibre, and emphasises the significance of depth calibration methods for dependable pipeline monitoring.

3.1 The Interrogator Unit: Core of DAS Systems

The Interrogator Unit functions as the analytical nucleus of a DAS system. It emits coherent laser pulses into single mode fibre optic cables and analyses the backscattered light using interferometric techniques. Photodetectors convert this backscattered signal into digitised electrical data, revealing phase shifts that correspond to dynamic strain events along the fibre. These shifts are crucial for detecting and locating acoustic disturbances in applications such as pipeline surveillance and seismic monitoring.

3.2 Advantages of integration of Single Mode Fibre and Interrogator Unit

Single mode fibre, with its approximately 9 µm core diameter, is preferred due to its low attenuation and excellent spatial resolution, enabling precise strain measurements over extensive distances. For instance, standard single mode fibre typically exhibits an attenuation of 0.2 dB/km at 1550 nm wavelength. To preserve signal integrity, careful handling is imperative; fibres must be protected from excessive bending, tension, and harsh environmental conditions.

4 IMPORTANCE OF DEPTH CALIBRATION IN PIPELINE MONITORING

Depth calibration is essential for accurate localisation of disturbances along the pipeline. Implementing precise calibration methods ensures that the DAS system can accurately determine the depth at which acoustic events occur, thereby enhancing the reliability of pipeline monitoring.

4.1 Depth Calibration Analysis in Distributed Acoustic Sensing Pipeline Monitoring

Depth calibration is vital to ensure that recorded channel indices accurately correspond to the physical fibre locations along the pipeline, which is essential for precise event localisation and effective operational response. One approach involves aligning DAS channel depths with known reference points tied to geospatial markers such as pipeline valves or calibration markers, as illustrated in Table 1.

At these control points, deliberate acoustic events like hammer strikes or vibroseis sweeps are generated, enabling clear mapping between the recorded data and the fibre's true position. Further refinement is achieved through regression models to correct for nonlinear paths, thermal drift, and uncertainty quantification, consistently attaining ±2 m localisation accuracy.

According to [10], this methodology aligns with established practices in DAS calibration, where depths are matched using reference features or amplitude-based correlations to well logs and geophone data

Table 1: Calibration Mapping

Description: This table presents a mapping of calibration points along the pipeline, detailing the locus index, optical path distance, and the calibration type. The data illustrates the alignment of DAS channel depths with known reference points, facilitating accurate localisation of acoustic events.

Channel Index	Distance from Reference Point (m)	Calibration Coefficient	Signal Delay (ms)	Notes
0	0	1	0	Start of fiber
100	100.5	1.002	0.5	Valve A
200	201.2	1.005	1	Borehole Geophone
300	302	1.007	1.5	Buried Calibration Marker
400	403.1	1.01	2	End of calibration zone

Table 1: Calibration Mapping

In this section, we've explored the critical role of depth calibration in DAS systems for pipeline monitoring. The Interrogator Unit's function in emitting pulses and capturing backscatter to measure strain events along single mode fibre was discussed. The preference for single mode fibre due to its high spatial fidelity and low signal loss was highlighted. Furthermore, the importance of rigorous depth calibration using geospatial markers, controlled signal injection, and modelling corrections was emphasised to ensure DAS readings are accurately mapped to physical pipeline locations. Collectively, these components support effective, high precision DAS for real world pipeline monitoring and security applications.

4.2 Depth Calibration: Channel Spacing and Gauge Length Tuning

This section elucidates how calibrating channel spacing and gauge length directly influences the spatial resolution and signal fidelity of DAS systems, particularly in underground pipeline monitoring. Refer to Table 2 for detailed calibration parameters.

According to [11], both channel spacing the physical distance between consecutive sensing channels and gauge length the length of fibre over which strain is averaged play pivotal roles in DAS performance. Channel spacing governs spatial sampling density: tighter spacing (for example, around 1 metre) enhances detection of localised events but increases data load, while broader spacing reduces processing demand at the expense of detection granularity. Likewise, gauge length involves a trade off between spatial resolution and sensitivity: shorter lengths (for instance, 5–10 metres) improve spatial resolution enabling the system to distinguish closely spaced disturbances whereas longer lengths (for example, 15–20 metres) increase sensitivity to low frequency signals and enhance signal to noise ratio (SNR), albeit at the cost of spatial precision.

To optimise these parameters, the calibration process must consider the anticipated signal characteristics such as the amplitude and frequency of intrusion events the geometry of deployment (skin depth, soil type, pipeline structure), and security coverage goals. In practice, gauge lengths ranging from 5 to 20 metres are often tested. Our study conducted calibration tests using controlled acoustic signals, such as mechanical impacts at known intervals, to evaluate how different configurations affected detection precision and SNR. A configuration with a 10 metre gauge length and 1 metre channel spacing offered a balanced compromise between signal clarity and spatial accuracy. Overlapping gauge windows helped improve detectability without significantly degrading localisation. Calibration accuracy was confirmed by matching DAS detected signal locations against geospatial control points, minimising localisation error while preserving sensitivity to low-amplitude disturbances.

Table 2: DAS Calibration Parameters: Channel Spacing vs. Gauge Length

Description: This table presents a comparative analysis of different channel spacing and gauge length configurations tested during the study. It outlines the impact of each configuration on detection precision, signal to noise ratio, and localisation accuracy, providing a comprehensive overview of the calibration process.

Gauge Length (m)	Channel Spacing (m)	Spatial Resolution	Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR)	Detection Accuracy	Data Volume & Processing Load	Recommended Use Cases
5	1	Very High	Moderate	Excellent	High	High-resolution intrusion detection
10	1	High	High	Excellent	High	Balanced monitoring of localized events
15	1	Moderate	Very High	Good	High	Detection of low-frequency disturbances
20	1	Moderate	Very High	Moderate	High	Broad area monitoring with enhanced SNR
10	2	Moderate	High	Good	Moderate	General-purpose monitoring
10	5	Low	High	Fair	Low	Long-range monitoring with reduced detail
10	10	Very Low	High	Poor	Very Low	Basic monitoring where high resolution is not critical

Table 2: Distributed Acoustic Sensing calibration parameters: channel spacing vs. gauge length

In summary, tuning channel spacing and gauge length is critical for optimising DAS system performance in pipeline monitoring. The deliberate balance between fine spatial resolution and robust signal quality ensures that DAS can precisely localise disturbances while maintaining sufficient detection sensitivity thus enhancing the system's effectiveness in identifying threats such as fuel theft or tampering.

5 DIRECTIVITY CALIBRATION IN DISTRIBUTED ACOUSTIC SENSING - BASED PIPELINE MONITORING

This section examines how the intrinsic directional sensitivity of DAS systems affects signal detection and how calibration for directivity can enhance event localisation, particularly in complex pipeline monitoring environments.

5.1 Directional Sensitivity and Its Implications

According to [12], DAS systems measure axial strain or vibration along the optical fibre's length. Consequently, signals aligned with the fibre (axial direction) are detected with higher sensitivity, while transverse or oblique signals may be attenuated or misinterpreted. The DAS response to incident wave orientation follows a cosine-squared dependence on the angle between the signal and the fibre axis, causing sensitivity to diminish sharply as alignment decreases. In pipeline deployments where the fibre may bend or change direction this directional bias can hinder accurate detection and localisation of events such as tampering or leaks.

5.2 Calibration for Directivity

Calibration for directivity aims to first quantify how DAS sensitivity varies with incident signal angle, then to compensate for this bias. This involves controlled acoustic events applied at known orientations relative to the fibre axis such as axial, 45°, or transverse impacts and recording the resulting responses. By analysing amplitude and signal to noise ratio variations across these orientations, one can establish a directional sensitivity profile. These profiles, in turn, guide adjustments to signal processing algorithms, thresholds, and classification models, ensuring more consistent detection across varied geometries, including curved or looped fibre segments an approach supported by signal processing frameworks that compensate for cable directivity.

Table 3: DAS Sensitivity vs. Signal Angle

Description: This table presents a comparative analysis of DAS sensitivity at various incident angles, illustrating how detection strength diminishes as the angle increases from the fibre axis.

Signal Angle Relative to Fibre Axis	Relative Sensitivity	Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR)	Localization Accuracy	Typical Use Cases
0° (Axial)	High	High	Excellent	Leak detection, inline vibration monitoring
45° (Oblique)	Moderate	Moderate	Good	Ground movement, nearby construction activity
90° (Transverse)	Low	Low	Fair to Poor	Lateral impacts, surface disturbances

Table 3: Distributed Acoustic Sensing sensitivity vs. signal angle

In this section, we clarified that DAS systems are inherently more sensitive along the fibre axis, potentially compromising detection of signals originating from other angles. By calibrating directivity with controlled multi angle acoustic tests, processing algorithms can be tuned to mitigate this bias, ensuring reliable and accurate detection across the fibre's deployment geometry. This calibration is essential for maintaining consistent event identification in dynamic, real world pipeline monitoring scenarios.

6 SIGNAL TO NOISE RATIO OPTIMISATION IN DISTRIBUTED ACOUSTIC SENSING PIPELINE MONITORING

This section delves into how optimising the Signal to Noise Ratio (SNR) is crucial for effective threat detection within DAS systems applied to underground pipelines.

6.1 Understanding SNR Challenges in Pipeline Monitoring

In pipeline monitoring, distinguishing meaningful acoustic signatures from environmental and electronic interference is vital. Key noise contributors include:

- External Factors: Wind, traffic, seismic microtremors, and hydrological effects.
- Systemic Noise: Detector thermal fluctuations, interrogator jitter, laser phase noise, and electromagnetic interference.

6.2 Strategies for SNR Optimisation

Effective optimisation involves a combination of field based and signal processing strategies:

- Field Assessments: Identify dominant noise sources, guiding countermeasures such as burying fibre at optimal depths or installing shielding near high noise areas.
- Signal Processing Techniques: Employ band-pass filtering (targeting intrusion-relevant frequencies, e.g., 10–200 Hz), adaptive noise reduction using reference channels, and ensemble averaging to boost detection clarity.
- System Tuning: Adjust interrogator and laser system parameters such as power output for stronger backscatter without distortion, matching coherence length to fibre characteristics, and employing backscatter enhancement techniques like phase-sensitive reflectors to maximise SNR.

Recent studies have demonstrated that simple yet effective algorithms, such as moving differential and windowed averaging, achieved SNR improvements of up to 13.1 dB, even when using cost-effective hardware configurations.

6.3 Performance Evaluation

Post-optimisation, average SNR gains ranged between 6–12 dB. Detection thresholds for acoustic events lowered by around 30%, enhancing system sensitivity to low-amplitude disturbances while significantly reducing false positive rates.

Table 4: Sources of Noise in DAS Systems

Description: This table categorises and quantifies various noise sources affecting DAS systems, providing a comprehensive overview of factors influencing SNR.

Category	Noise Source	Description
Environmental Noise	Wind-induced ground motion	Vibrations caused by wind interacting with the ground surface.
	Surface or subsurface vehicular traffic	Vibrations from vehicles moving near or above the pipeline.
	Seismic microtremors	Low-frequency ground vibrations from natural or anthropogenic sources.
	Hydrological or meteorological effects	Vibrations due to rain, flowing water, or other weather-related phenomena.
Electronic/Instrumental Noise	Detector thermal noise	Random fluctuations in the detector due to temperature variations.
	Interrogator system jitter	Timing variations in the interrogator system affecting signal consistency.
	Laser phase noise	Fluctuations in the laser's phase leading to signal instability.
	Electromagnetic interference (EMI)	External electromagnetic fields causing disturbances in the signal.

Table 4: Source of noise in the Distributed Acoustic Sensing system

Table 5: SNR Optimisation Strategies

Description: This table outlines field based and signal processing strategies employed to optimise SNR in DAS systems, detailing their implementation and effectiveness.

Strategy	Implementation	Expected SNR Improvement
Noise Source Identification and Suppression	Conduct site surveys to identify dominant noise sources. - Implement physical mitigation measures like optimized fiber burial depths and shielding near high-noise zones.	Variable, depending on site conditions
Advanced Signal Processing Techniques	Apply band-pass filtering to isolate frequencies typical of intrusion events (e.g., 10–200 Hz). - Utilize adaptive noise cancellation algorithms using real-time reference channels. - Employ ensemble averaging and stacking to enhance weak signals.	6–12 dB
Interrogator and Laser System Tuning	Optimize laser source power to increase backscattered signal intensity without inducing non-linear effects. - Match laser coherence length and stability to fiber characteristics. - Use higher-scattering fibers or apply phase-sensitive reflectors to boost SNR in low-signal regions.	Up to 20 dB

Table 5: 4.4 Signal-to-Noise Ratio optimisation strategies

Table 6: Performance Evaluation Metrics

Description: This table presents metrics assessing the effectiveness of SNR optimisation strategies, including SNR gains and changes in detection thresholds.

Metric	Pre-Optimization	Post-Optimization	Improvement
SNR Gain (dB)	Baseline	+6 to +12 dB	Enhanced signal clarity
Event Detectability Threshold	Higher amplitude required	~30% reduction in required amplitude	Improved sensitivity to low-amplitude disturbances
False Positive Rate	Higher	Significantly reduced	Increased detection accuracy

Table 6: Performance evaluation metrics

Optimising SNR in DAS pipeline monitoring demands a holistic approach that blends environmental mitigation, signal processing, and system tuning. By integrating these methods including filtering, adaptive noise suppression, hardware calibration, and smart algorithms the system's ability to detect and locate subtle threats like fuel theft or tampering significantly improves, ensuring reliable, actionable surveillance in challenging buried environments.

7 EVENT SIGNATURE LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT FOR DISTRIBUTED ACOUSTIC SENSING BASED THREAT DETECTION

This section delves into the development of an Event Signature Library, a critical advancement in enhancing the performance of Distributed Acoustic Sensing (DAS) systems used for pipeline monitoring. This library functions as a comprehensive repository of acoustic patterns corresponding to real world activities, supporting accurate detection and classification along the monitored infrastructure.

7.1 Functionality and Importance

According to [14], by cataloguing and organising signature events such as walking, vehicle motion, digging, tapping and mechanical failures the signature library empowers DAS systems, via machine-learning and pattern recognition algorithms, to enhance accuracy and reduce false alarms. Such precision is vital for timely and targeted responses. A well curated signature library thus strengthens the system's ability to distinguish between routine operational noise and genuine threats, significantly improving both reliability and effectiveness in pipeline surveillance.

7.2 Methodology for Library Construction

The methodology for constructing the Event Signature Library begins with event recording under controlled conditions. Conducting representative actions such as manual digging, repetitive tapping, pedestrian movement, or heavy machinery operation near pipeline segments provides labelled data anchored to precise GPS coordinates and timestamps. Subsequent signal processing extracts both time-domain and frequency-domain features, including:

- Duration
- Peak amplitude
- Temporal envelope
- Spectral content
- Dominant frequencies
- Statistical descriptors like RMS amplitude, kurtosis, and entropy

These features form a structured dataset that can be leveraged by rule-based approaches or learned directly through machine learning models.

7.3 Classification Models and Technique

Supervised classification models, including Support Vector Machines, Random Forests, and Convolutional Neural Networks, are trained on this labelled data to distinguish event types. Additionally, unsupervised clustering techniques, such as K-means or DBSCAN, can be deployed on unlabelled DAS data to discover natural groupings and identify anomalies.

To maintain classification accuracy over time and across varying environmental conditions, periodic ground truth calibration and validation are essential. This involves incorporating known events either manually generated or independently confirmed ensuring that classifiers remain resilient against drift due to seasonal changes or operational shifts.

7.4 Empirical Observations

Empirical observations from the library development stage are insightful:

- Digging: Produces broadband, high-amplitude signals with irregular temporal patterns.
- Walking: Yields low frequency, rhythmic patterns with moderate signal to noise ratio.
- Tapping: Creates impulsive, narrow band signatures that stand out clearly from ambient noise.
- Vehicle Motion: Signals tend to exhibit strong low frequency content and may include Doppler shifts, with variations influenced by distance, speed, and terrain.

Supervised models trained on this library have achieved classification accuracies exceeding 90% for common activity types. Furthermore, recalibrating with ground truth events has improved model stability and long-term reliability.

Table 7: Event Signature Characteristics

Description: This table presents a comparative analysis of various event types, detailing their acoustic characteristics such as frequency range, amplitude, and temporal patterns. It serves as a reference for understanding the distinctive features of each event type within the DAS system.

Event Type	Time-Domain Features	Frequency-Domain Features	Statistical Descriptors	Classification Accuracy
Manual Digging	Irregular temporal profiles with high amplitude	Broadband spectrum	High RMS amplitude, elevated kurtosis	>90%
Walking/Running	Periodic patterns with consistent spacing	Low-frequency components	Moderate RMS amplitude, low entropy	>90%
Tapping	Short-duration impulses	Narrow-band frequencies	High peak amplitude, low kurtosis	>90%
Vehicle Movement	Variable amplitude and frequency depending on speed and terrain	Strong low-frequency content with Doppler shifts	High RMS amplitude, variable entropy	>90%

Table 7: Event signature characteristics

Table 8: Machine Learning Classifier Performance

Description: This table summarises the performance metrics of different machine learning classifiers applied to the DAS dataset. It includes accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score for each classifier, providing insights into their effectiveness in event classification tasks.

Classifier	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1-Score	AUC
k-Nearest Neighbors (k=1)	99.96%	99.91%	99.98%	0.99	0.99
Decision Tree	99.53%	99.38%	99.32%	0.99	0.99
Random Forest	99.95%	100%	99.86%	0.99	0.99
Multi-Layer Perceptron (MLP)	99.88%	99.87%	99.80%	0.99	0.99
Support Vector Machine (SVM)	99.79%	99.91%	99.52%	0.99	0.99

Table 8: Machine Leaning Classifier Performance

The Event Signature Library serves as the foundation for optimised DAS-based pipeline surveillance. By systematically capturing, characterising, and classifying acoustic signatures, the library empowers automated detection systems to operate adaptively and accurately in dynamic environments. This structured approach not only enhances threat detection precision but also reinforces the overall efficiency and dependability of pipeline monitoring systems.

8 TEMPERATURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMPENSATION IN DISTRIBUTED ACOUSTIC SENSING SYSTEMS

According to [13], this section examines how temperature fluctuations and environmental factors can substantially affect the accuracy of Distributed Acoustic Sensing (DAS) systems employed in pipeline monitoring. Temperature variations may induce fibre expansion, changes in refractive index, and phase shifts in backscattered signals, potentially causing false positives. Environmental factors such as soil moisture, wind and rainfall introduce additional noise and influence signal coupling. To mitigate these challenges, DAS systems employ several techniques: real time temperature monitoring through distributed sensing corrects thermal artefacts; baseline signal modelling differentiates normal fluctuations from genuine events; adaptive filtering dynamically compensates for phase drift; and periodic recalibration ensures consistent system response. Moreover, environmentally hardened installations such as deeper burial or the use of thermally stable substrates reduce exposure to variable conditions. Collectively, these strategies ensure that DAS systems maintain reliability and accuracy in dynamic field environments, enhancing their effectiveness in detecting genuine threats to pipeline infrastructure.

8.1 Performance Outcomes

The application of temperature and environmental compensation has led to significant improvements in DAS system performance. False positive event detections were reduced by over 40%, particularly during high thermal variability periods such as sunrise and sunset transitions. Signal drift caused by seasonal temperature shifts was normalised to less than 1% phase deviation, preserving accurate localisation over time. Enhanced fibre ground coupling

in stable environmental zones significantly improved event clarity and reduced misclassification due to noise.

Table 9: Environmental Influences on Distributed Acoustic Sensing Signal Integrity

Description: This table outlines various environmental factors such as temperature fluctuations, soil moisture, wind, and rainfall and their respective impacts on DAS signal integrity. It serves as a reference for understanding the challenges posed by environmental conditions on DAS performance.

Actor	Impact on DAS Signals	Mitigation Strategies
Ambient/Subsurface Temperature Variations	Thermal expansion/contraction alters fiber length and refractive index, leading to phase shifts misinterpreted as acoustic events.	Implement real-time temperature tracking using Distributed Temperature Sensing (DTS) to correct for temperature-induced artifacts.
Diurnal and Seasonal Temperature Cycles	Introduce slow-varying strain noise, especially in surface-laid or shallow-buried fibers.	Employ baseline signal modeling to distinguish between genuine events and temperature-induced fluctuations.
Soil Moisture and Groundwater Level Changes	Affect coupling between the fiber and surrounding medium, impacting acoustic signal transmission.	Optimize fiber burial depth and routing to maintain consistent coupling conditions.
Rainfall, Frost Heave, and Wind-Driven Vegetation Movement	Introduce non-acoustic noise, degrading Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR) and event localization accuracy.	Utilize adaptive filtering and calibration techniques to dynamically compensate for environmental noise.

Table 9: Environmental influences on the Distributed Acoustic Sensing signal integrity

Table 10: Compensation Techniques and Performance Outcomes

Description: This table summarises the compensation techniques employed to mitigate environmental influences on DAS systems, including real time temperature tracking, baseline signal modelling, adaptive filtering, and periodic recalibration. It also presents the performance outcomes achieved through the implementation of these techniques, highlighting improvements in false positive reduction and signal accuracy.

Technique	Description	Performance Outcome
Real-Time Temperature Tracking	Utilize DTS to measure temperature along the fiber, allowing subtraction of temperature-induced strain artifacts from acoustic signals.	Reduced false positive detections by over 40%, particularly during periods of high thermal variability.
Baseline Signal Modeling	Establish background noise profiles under varying environmental conditions to characterize "normal" fluctuations.	Improved accuracy in distinguishing genuine events from environmental noise.
Adaptive Filtering and Calibration	Apply adaptive signal processing algorithms to dynamically compensate for temperature-related phase drifts. Periodic re-calibration using known test signals.	Normalized signal drift caused by seasonal temperature shifts to less than 1% phase deviation, preserving accurate localization over time.
Environmental Hardening of Installation	Optimize fiber burial depth and routing to reduce exposure to surface temperature swings and environmental noise. Install fibers in thermally stable substrates or encase them to shield against hydrological variation.	Enhanced fiber-ground coupling in stable environmental zones significantly improved event clarity and reduced misclassification due to noise.

Table 10: Compensation techniques and performance outcomes

Environmental and thermal variations present persistent challenges in long-term DAS deployments. Implementing compensation techniques such as temperature sensing, adaptive filtering, and baseline calibration effectively mitigates these influences. Incorporating these mechanisms enhances DAS data robustness, reliability, and interpretability, ensuring accurate pipeline monitoring across diverse environmental conditions.

9 VALIDATION WITH GROUND TRUTH EVENTS IN DISTRIBUTED ACOUSTIC SENSING PIPELINE MONITORING

According to [15], this section underscores the critical importance of validating Distributed Acoustic Sensing (DAS) systems using ground truth events to ensure the accuracy and reliability of pipeline monitoring. Ground-truth events real world activities with well defined characteristics serve as benchmarks that aid in calibrating detection thresholds, enhancing localisation accuracy, and reducing false alarms, thereby strengthening pipeline safety surveillance.

9.1 Validation Methodology

The validation process commences with controlled simulations of representative events along the pipeline corridor, such as manual digging, foot traffic (walking and running), mechanical tapping on the pipeline surface, and the operation of heavy equipment like backhoes or compactors. Each event is recorded with precise geospatial coordinates, timestamps, and environmental context, including local temperature and soil type, to build a robust dataset for system tuning.

During these simulations, the DAS system continuously captures acoustic signals generated by the events. These recordings are then analysed in terms of signal amplitude, frequency content, temporal signatures, localisation accuracy relative to known positions, and signal to noise ratio. This analysis permits fine-tuning of system parameters: detection thresholds are adjusted to better discriminate genuine threats from background noise; system sensitivity is modified to accommodate different soil conditions and burial depths; and alarm criteria are refined to ensure the system remains both responsive and reliable.

9.2 Validation Outcomes

The validation results demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach. The DAS system successfully detected more than 95% of simulated events when configured with validated threshold settings, and localisation errors were typically reduced to within ±3 metres after calibration. Walking and tapping events yielded highly repeatable signal patterns, which were then incorporated into the event signature library to enhance future pattern recognition. Moreover, careful threshold tuning effectively minimised false alarms caused by benign environmental sources like animal movement or wind-induced vibrations.

Table 11: Summary of Ground-Truth Validation in Distributed Acoustic Sensing Pipeline Monitoring

Description: This table encapsulates the validation process, performance metrics, and observed results, providing a clear overview of the system's efficacy. It includes columns detailing the type of ground-truth event, the detection rate achieved, localisation accuracy, and the reduction in false alarms post-validation.

Validation Component	Details
Simulated Events	Manual digging (shovels, picks) - Foot traffic (walking, running) - Mechanical tapping on pipeline - Heavy equipment movement (e.g., backhoes, compactors)
Data Logging Parameters	Geospatial coordinates - Timestamps - Environmental conditions (e.g., temperature, soil type)
Signal Analysis Metrics	Signal amplitude - Frequency content - Time-domain signatures - Signal-to-noise ratio (SNR)
Parameter Tuning	Detection thresholds - Sensitivity levels - Alarm criteria
Detection Accuracy	Over 95% of simulated events detected post-calibration
Localization Accuracy	Localization errors reduced to within ±3 meters after alignment with ground truth
Repeatability	Events like walking and tapping produced consistent signatures, enhancing pattern recognition
False Alarm Reduction	Significant decrease in false alarms from benign sources (e.g., animal movement, wind) due to threshold tuning

Table 11: Summary of ground truth validation in Distributed Acoustic Sensing pipeline monitoring

10 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, validating DAS systems with ground truth events is an indispensable step in optimising pipeline monitoring solutions. Through systematic calibration using realistically simulated conditions and iterative tuning of detection parameters, the system achieves high detection rates, refined localisation, and improved resilience against false alarms, culminating in a more accurate and trustworthy monitoring solution.

11 KEY INSIGHTS

This study underscores the transformative potential of Distributed Acoustic Sensing (DAS) in pipeline monitoring, particularly in the context of fuel theft prevention. Key findings include:

- **Enhanced Threat Detection:** DAS systems demonstrated a high detection rate for various threats, including unauthorised digging and vehicular activity, with localisation accuracy within ±3 metres.
- **Signal Optimisation:** Strategies such as Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR) optimisation and temperature/environmental compensation significantly improved system sensitivity and reduced false positives.
- **Event Signature Library Development:** The creation of a comprehensive event signature library enabled precise classification of activities, enhancing the system's ability to distinguish between genuine threats and benign events.

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the efficacy of DAS systems in pipeline monitoring:

- **Integration with Complementary Technologies:** Combine DAS with other monitoring technologies, such as Distributed Temperature Sensing (DTS) and Distributed Strain Sensing (DSS), to provide a multi-faceted approach to pipeline surveillance.
- **Continuous Calibration and Maintenance:** Implement regular calibration procedures and maintenance schedules to ensure the sustained accuracy and reliability of DAS systems over time.
- **Stakeholder Training and Awareness:** Conduct training programmes for personnel to effectively interpret DAS data and respond promptly to detected anomalies.

13 LIMITATIONS

While the study provides valuable insights into the application of DAS in pipeline monitoring, several limitations should be acknowledged:

- **Environmental Variability:** Factors such as soil composition, moisture levels, and ambient temperature can affect the propagation of acoustic signals, potentially influencing detection accuracy.
- **Infrastructure Constraints:** The installation of DAS systems may be challenging in areas with limited access or where existing infrastructure is incompatible with fibre optic cables.
- **Data Interpretation Complexity:** The vast amount of data generated by DAS systems requires sophisticated data processing and analysis tools, which may necessitate specialised expertise.

In conclusion, validating DAS systems with ground-truth events is an indispensable step in optimising pipeline monitoring solutions. Through systematic calibration using realistically simulated conditions and iterative tuning of detection parameters, the system achieves high detection rates, refined localisation, and improved resilience against false alarms, culminating in a more accurate and trustworthy monitoring solution.

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A HEURISTICS-BASED DECISION SUPPORT TOOL FOR ATMOSPHERIC WATER HARVESTING FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

With its ability to produce water at the point of need and reduced resource waste, atmospheric water harvesting (AWH) is an attractive alternative source for bottled water. This study aims to understand what the main factors affecting the successful implementation of an AWH bottling concept are and to model these factors in a heuristics-based decision support tool. Using Porter's value chain and five forces, the common activities experienced by bottled water retailers are investigated, and the most important factors affecting these activities are identified. The common themes are heuristically modelled with readily accessible data. A case study application is conducted using an example from the tropical hotel industry to evaluate the tool's usefulness. By using this decision support tool, enterprises can rapidly appraise the feasibility of an AWH bottling concept, facilitating comparison and accelerating the refinement of AWH bottling concepts

Keywords: atmospheric water harvesting, decision support tool, feasibility, modelling

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1 INTRODUCTION

Described by Leonardo Da Vinci as "*the driving force of all nature*" [1], water is one of the foundational elements for life. Freshwater is essential for any sustainable civilisation, enabling not only basic needs such as drinking and hygiene but also supporting commerce, travel, and agriculture throughout history [2]. Ensuring long-term water security remains a global priority, with institutions such as the United Nations and the World Bank advocating for sustained investment to secure reliable access to freshwater for future generations [3-4].

A prominent feature of the global drinking water market is bottled water, an industry projected to grow by 10% annually until 2026 [5]. The industry has been described as a great mystery of capitalism, with Queiroz [6] noting the curious practice of "*packaging and selling something already available to us for free*". Regardless of its perceived rationality, bottled water remains a dominant mode of consumption, with global sales reaching $270 billion in 2023 [7].

However, the bottled water industry faces sustained criticism for its environmental impact and questionable resource use. Hall [8] reports that bottled water producers may consume over three litres of water to produce a single litre of bottled product. The sector is further criticised for its reliance on single-use plastics, which contribute significantly to environmental pollution and waste accumulation [5]. Furthermore, concerns persist regarding water quality and sourcing, as approximately 60% of bottled water is derived from purified tap water, which may contain the same contaminants found in municipal supplies [5], [9].

In light of these challenges, atmospheric water harvesting (AWH) has emerged as a potential alternative capable of addressing several pressing issues in bottled water production [10]. AWH refers to the extraction of freshwater from atmospheric moisture using technologies such as fog harvesting, desiccant-based harvesting, and condensation-based harvesting [11]. By enabling decentralised water production at the point of consumption [12], AWH can reduce the logistical and resource demands associated with distribution. Furthermore, when integrated with renewable energy systems, AWH offers a closed-loop production cycle with minimal environmental impact [13].

A similar closed-loop approach is possible within the bottling supply chain, particularly in the hotel, restaurant, and café (HoReCa) sector [14]. By producing water on-site using AWH, HoReCa businesses can refill bottles directly, reducing the need for single-use packaging and the associated waste. The quality of atmospherically harvested water is generally high; even in regions with elevated air pollution, it can meet the standards of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the European Union [15].

Despite these advantages, the application of AWH in bottled water production remains largely theoretical due to unresolved feasibility constraints [16]. AWH system yield, operating efficiency, and energy consumption are highly dependent on local atmospheric conditions, with warm and humid climates offering the most favourable results [17]. Moreover, the relative novelty of the technology contributes to high installation and operational costs, which negatively affect the levelized cost of water (LCOW), or the lifetime cost of producing water divided by the total volume produced [18]. These factors make it difficult to accurately quantify project feasibility, leading to uncertainty and delays in decision-making, and increasing the risk of implementation failure [15].

This study addresses a central problem: while AWH offers substantial potential for decentralised, sustainable bottled water production, its adoption is hindered by poorly quantified feasibility parameters. These uncertainties limit the effectiveness of decision-making and deter investment in AWH bottling ventures. To respond to this challenge, the research aims to develop a heuristics-based decision support tool (DST) to aid early-stage

feasibility assessment of AWH bottling projects. The DST is intended to provide a structured and rapid evaluation framework that relies on readily available data, enabling informed decisions under conditions of uncertainty.

The research is guided by the following objectives:

1. Identify and evaluate the key factors influencing the feasibility of implementing an AWH bottling concept.
2. Develop a method to heuristically model these factors using accessible data sources.
3. Design and test the DST through mathematical modelling and a structured walkthrough.

The upcoming section presents a literature review that first contextualises the use of AWH in the bottled water industry, then examines existing feasibility-focused DSTs, and finally considers tools developed specifically to assess AWH concepts. Insights from this review inform the adoption of the DMADV methodology [19] to guide the development of a heuristics-based DST. This tool is designed around three core feasibility dimensions that define the essential scope for assessing an AWH bottling concept. The paper then demonstrates the tool's practical application through a case study in the tropical hotel industry.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Atmospheric Water Harvesting Applied to Water Bottling

AWH applied to water bottling concepts is a relatively novel concept with the only active competitors in the space being Aqua Sky and Air Water, both operating out of South Africa [29-30], and Beyond Water based out of Dubai [22]. Beyond Water and Air Water both offer bottling as a supplementary service within their broader value proposition, whereas Aqua Sky focuses on the installation of turnkey AWH bottling plants and the production of bottled water under its own brand.

All three companies utilise condensation-based AWH machines to produce potable water [29-31] as opposed to fog harvesting or desiccant based AWH machines. The condensation-based AWH machines operate by directing moist air into the evaporator unit of a vapour compression refrigeration (VCR) system, where a circulating liquid refrigerant reduces the air's temperature below dew point. This induces condensation, which is subsequently collected, filtered, and stored for later use [23]. VCR-based AWH is an active process that requires external energy to power the compressor in the VCR system [24].

Energy is therefore a critical factor in the AWH process, and numerous barriers to broader implementation are linked to energy constraints [25]. Particularly with regard to the reliable availability of energy [26] as well as the relationship between an AWH system's energy efficiency and LCOW [27]. Gayoso *et al*. [18] conducted a techno-economic analysis of AWH systems across different climates and energy sources, finding that significant cost savings can be achieved when efficient AWH systems are paired with solar energy. The analysis further indicated that tropical climates yield the lowest LCOW.

From this, it can be deduced that climate plays a central role in determining AWH feasibility, as the volume of extractable water depends on both atmospheric moisture content and the ease of condensation. Bagheri [17] demonstrates that AWH yield increases with higher atmospheric water content and elevated dew point temperatures. Atmospheric water content is primarily a function of the relative humidity (RH) at the deployment site, while the dew point temperature is largely determined by ambient air temperature [28]. Elevation also influences atmospheric moisture availability, with Lou *et al*. [29] reporting that water vapour content increases between elevations of 600 m and 1200 m, decreases gradually between 1200

m and 1700 m, and declines sharply above 1700 m. These findings indicate that geographic and climatic conditions impose feasibility constraints on AWH deployment.

2.2 Decision Support Tools

Wong-Parodi *et al*. [30] define decision support tools (DSTs) as "computer-based tools developed to assist sound decision-making." As this research focuses on developing a DST for AWH bottling concepts, it requires knowledge of existing tools to inform design decisions. DSTs differ in both complexity and the volume of data they require [31] and as Adrienne *et al*. [32] notes; decision-makers often prefer straightforward and accessible tools. Such tools may however not be sufficient for complex problems with multiple interdependent factors influencing project success [30].

An example of a more complex DST is the Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis tool developed by Lozano *et al*. [33], which integrates geographic information systems and soft computing to evaluate optimal locations for renewable energy plants. Tools such as these provide insight into the use of climate data for decision making. Another example is the "OPTIMUS" package of DSTs, created by Doukas *et al*. [34] to assist in making cities more energy-efficient. Kumar [35] highlights that decision-makers can use feasibility studies as DSTs to evaluate technical, financial, operational, legal, and scheduling factors when assessing projects involving cutting-edge technologies.These cutting-edge technologies can also be utilised as a DST for other innovative technologies, exemplified by Liu [36] proposing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) driven DSTs to evaluate multiple project scenarios.

2.3 Atmospheric Water Harvesting Specific Tools

By understanding the general purpose of DSTs, specific tools for AWH can be investigated. Due to the large variety of AWH methods, numerous tools have been developed for different systems. For example, Zhang *et al*. [37] developed a machine-learning-based tool to predict the water-absorbing properties of various desiccant materials, while Gandhidasan *et al*. [38] employed physically based impaction and aerodynamic models to predict the yield of fog-harvesting nets in Saudi Arabia. However, as previously established, all AWH bottled water companies currently utilise VCR technology to produce potable water; therefore, only tools developed specifically for VCR-based AWH are considered relevant for this study.

Given the close relationship between VCR AWH systems and the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) industry, many underlying principles are shared between the two fields. This overlap has led Cattani *et al*. [24] to develop the Advanced Global Evaluation Index (AGEI), designed to assess hybrid configurations between HVAC and AWH systems.

Focusing more directly on VCR AWH-specific tools, Gido *et al*. [28] introduced the moisture humidity index (MHI), a metric ranging from 0 to 1 that evaluates the climatic suitability for AWH deployment. Complementing this, Gayoso *et al*. [39] in their techno-economic study of VCR AWH, employed several tools to assess both the technical and economic viability of different AWH concepts. Among these, a notable method involves deriving a concept's water harvesting rate using thermodynamic equations and hourly climate data.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The literature review establishes that while AWH offers promising opportunities for decentralised bottled water production, its adoption is constrained by climatic dependencies, energy requirements, and cost-related feasibility challenges. Existing DSTs from other sectors demonstrate potential adaptability for assessing such projects, yet few tools address the specific characteristics of condensation-based AWH systems used in the bottled water industry. This gap highlights the need for a structured, rapid-assessment tool that can evaluate feasibility using readily available data. Given the presence of unknown variables and the innovative nature of the proposed tool, the DMADV (Define, Measure, Analyse, Design, Verify)

methodology is employed for the development of the DST [19]. Figure 1 illustrates the different methods utilised in the respective phases of this research.

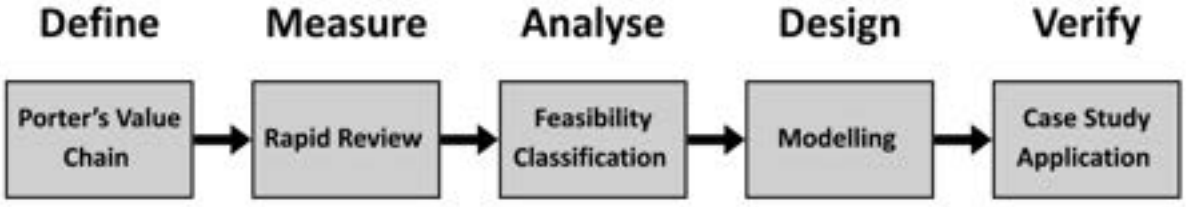

Figure 1: Research Design adapted from Mangaroo-Pillay *et al*. [40]

3.1 Define – Porter's value chain

Porter's value chain framework [41] is used to identify activities that generate value from the perspective of a bottled water retailer. Within this set, activities directly affected by the installation of an AWH bottling plant are isolated for further examination. These targeted activities form the basis for the subsequent rapid review of the literature.

3.2 Measure – Rapid Review

A rapid literature review [42] is conducted to develop a focused understanding of the selected value chain activities. The review examines these activities through the lens of Porter's Five Forces (P5F) framework [43], aligning each activity with its most relevant competitive force(s). These forces include the bargaining power of buyers and sellers, the threat of new entrants, the threat of substitutes and the intensity of industry rivalry.

3.3 Analyse – Feasibility Classification

Insights from the value chain and P5F analyses are synthesised to identify key feasibility factors that influence the viability of an AWH bottling concept within its competitive environment. Each factor is categorised into a specific feasibility dimension.

3.4 Design – Factor Modelling

Each feasibility dimension is mathematically modelled to produce a measurable score. Existing tools and methods are adapted to ensure compatibility with the DST's intended reliance on readily available, low-complexity data. The tool is implemented in quantitative modelling software to support usability and provide clear visual outputs.

3.5 Verify – Case Study Application

To validate the tool's practical applicability, it is tested using a case study from the HoReCa sector. This application demonstrates the DST's step-by-step use in real-world decision-making, including the visualisation of results and the potential for collaborative recalibration of the model.

4 APPLICATION OF DMADV

4.1 Define – Porter's Value Chain

Figure 2 illustrates the bottled water industry value chain from the perspective of a direct-to-consumer retailer, with activities selected for further analysis highlighted in green. For this study, the specific operational context of individual retailers is considered beyond the study scope to keep the tool broadly applicable. Therefore, primary activities such as *Marketing* and *Sales*, *Outbound Logistics*, and *Service*, along with secondary activities like *Firm Infrastructure* and *Human Resource Management*, are excluded from detailed examination. Concentrating on the shared value chain activities among bottled water retailers allows for a more focused analysis of key determinants of competitive advantage.

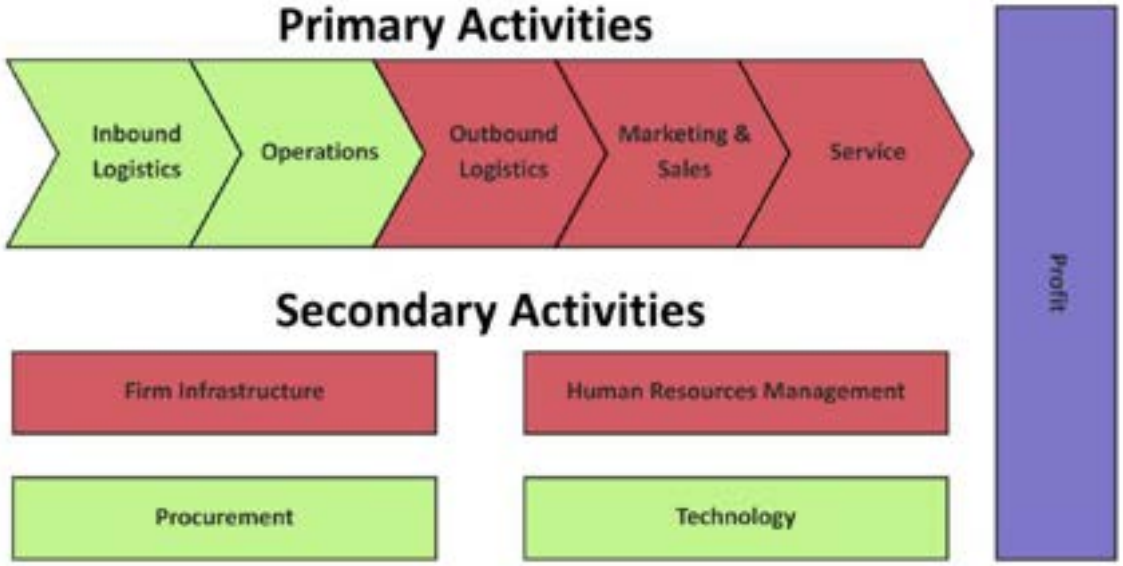

Figure 2: Porter's value chain activities included in analysis adapted from Abbasi [44]

Since bottled water retailers must source products to serve end consumers [45], *Inbound Logistics* and *Procurement* are included as primary and secondary activities in this analysis. Additionally, given the DST's purpose of evaluating an AWH technology's competitiveness, both the secondary activity of *Technology* and the primary activity of *Operations* are also deemed critical. Finally, *Profitability*, serving as a direct indicator of competitiveness within organisations [46], constitutes a vital component for evaluation by the tool.

4.2 Measure – Rapid Review of Porter's Value Chain and Five Forces applied to Bottled water Retailers

The *Inbound Logistics* process plays an important role in shaping the LCOW, and by extension the profitability of bottled water retailers, a measurement closely linked with P5Fs framework [47]. The bargaining power of suppliers is particularly evident when considering the cost implications of sourcing and transporting water from distant locations. Carlucci *et al*. [48], using a hedonic pricing model, demonstrated that bottled water prices increase significantly with the distance between the source and point of sale, highlighting the cost pressures suppliers can exert.

Additionally, upstream decisions related to packaging, such as opting for glass over plastic bottles, or premium cap designs [48] influence buyer perceptions and price sensitivity. Higher perceived quality can justify premium pricing, offering differentiation in a crowded market [49]. Therefore, optimising inbound logistics not only reduces cost but also strengthens a retailer's position against competitors, mitigating external pressures from both suppliers and substitutes.

Procurement is another pivotal activity within the bottled water supply chain that intersects with multiple dimensions of the P5F framework. Beaumais and Crastes Dit Sourd [49] note that adopting environmentally sustainable procurement practices may become a strategic necessity in response to rising consumer and regulatory pressures, which influence both the threat of substitutes and competitive rivalry.

Moreover, Niccolucci *et al*. [50] raise sustainability concerns of existing procurement practises, reporting that approximately 1.93 litres of water are required to produce just 1.5 litres of bottled water when accounting for water usage in supporting activities and materials. These inefficiencies intensify the bargaining power of suppliers in water-scarce regions,

placing further stress on already constrained resources. Furthermore, as Fhelboom and Brika [9] observe, lack of transparency regarding water sources can erode consumer trust and brand differentiation, amplifying competitive rivalry and making companies more vulnerable to substitution by brands with clearer sourcing practises.

Technology and its influence on an organisation's *Operations* constitute another area of interest. Parag *et al*. [5] identify technological innovation as a promising avenue for enhancing the sustainability of the bottled water industry, advocating targeted investments to scale existing innovative approaches. Beyond sustainability, advanced technologies can act as significant barriers to entry by requiring substantial capital investment and specialised expertise, thereby reducing the threat of new entrants. Enhanced technological capabilities can also mitigate the threat of substitutes by improving both the quality and environmental sustainability of bottled water products.

Leveraging the transformative potential of emerging technologies enables organisations to generate unique value propositions, streamline operations, and create new revenue streams [51]. These advancements not only help firms defend against substitutes by enhancing product differentiation and sustainability but also reduce the bargaining power of buyers by limiting the availability of comparable alternatives in the market.

4.3 Analyse – Feasibility Classification

Mapping the selected value chain activities to the P5F framework allows the identification of key factors influencing the feasibility of an AWH bottling concept. These include: (1) the viability of atmospheric conditions, which relates to the threat of new entrants, as optimal locations create natural barriers to entry; (2) the ability to satisfy demand, which influences the bargaining power of buyers and the threat of substitutes by fostering customer loyalty and; (3) cost competitiveness, which affects the bargaining power of suppliers and rivalry among existing firms by reducing dependency on shared supply chains and improving operational efficiency. Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between these value chain activities and feasibility factors.

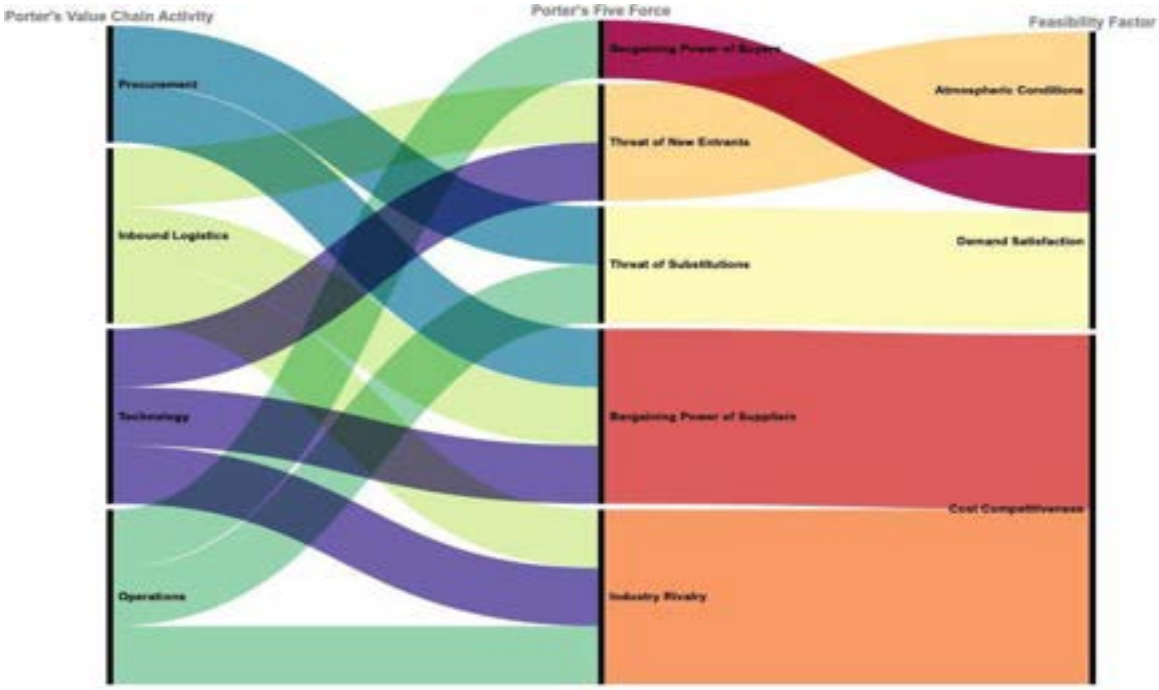

Figure 3: Relationships between Porter's Value Chain, Porter's Five Forces and Feasibility Factors

Cost competitiveness is included as it captures both the total cost of the AWH concept and its position relative to industry benchmarks, supporting market positioning and value proposition assessment [52]. It can be evaluated through methods such as cost breakdown analysis [53], value chain analysis [44], or through unit cost comparison [54]. This study compares the LCOW of the AWH concept to that of a conventional bottled water supply chain. The LCOW of a competitor is estimated while a cost breakdown analysis informs the AWH model, enabling a flexible and direct economic comparison between the two systems.

Demand satisfaction assesses the capacity of the proposed AWH bottling concept to generate sufficient fresh water to meet existing consumer needs. Meeting demand is a critical determinant of feasibility, as unmet customer needs can quickly result in loss of market share to competitors [55], justifying its inclusion as a feasibility parameter. Demand is assessed by estimating the expected water yield based on the supply capacity of the AWH system and its projected performance under the specified atmospheric conditions. This yield is then compared to existing or forecasted demand to evaluate adequacy.

The performance of an AWH system is predominantly influenced by the atmospheric conditions in which it operates, with ambient temperature and RH being key determinants [17]. Several studies have developed models to predict system yield based on these environmental parameters [33-36]. By modelling the production capacity under specific atmospheric conditions, it becomes possible to estimate the available water supply, thereby enabling the calculation of both demand satisfaction and the LCOW.

4.4 Design – Heuristic Decision Support Tool Modelling

4.4.1 Atmospheric Score Modelling

To model the atmospheric score the *MHI*, presented by Gido *et al*. [28] will be used to score the atmospheric conditions. This method is chosen due to the limited number of input variables required to form the score, aligning with the overarching goal of keeping the model dependent on readily available data, as well as its specific focus on VCR-based machines.

The *MHI* method operates as a measure of the thermodynamic efficiency of AWH via direct air cooling. In this process, ambient air is cooled below its dew point, leading to condensation. The total heat exchange (q_{tot}) includes both sensible heat, arising from temperature changes, and latent heat from vapour compression, all expressed in a per kilogram of dry air basis. Since AWH seeks to maximise heat transfer (i.e. water yield) while minimising sensible heat loss, it makes the latent to total heat ratio a relevant performance metric.

To generalise this efficiency across different conditions, the authors first assume steady-state operations. They then shift from a per-dry-air basis to a per-kilogram-of-water-produced basis, adapting q_{tot} to the total heat removed per kilogram of water condensed (q^*_{tot}). The *MHI* is then defined as the ratio of latent heat of condensation (h_{fg}) to the total heat removed, shown in Equation 1.

$$MHI = \frac{h_{fg}}{q^*_{tot}} = h_{fg}\left(\frac{h_i - h_o}{r_i - r_o}\right) \quad \textbf{(1)}$$

A constant h_{fg} value at 4°C (2492 kJ/kg) is used for simplicity, and q^*_{tot} is expanded to depend on the mixing ratio (r) and the enthalpy of moist air (h) at the inlet and outlet of the AWH machine. Thus, the *MHI* depends primarily on the ambient inlet temperature and *RH,* as well as the system's chosen condensation temperature. For simplicity the outlet mixing ratio is set to 4 grams of water per kilogram air and the outlet temperature is set to 4°C. A high *MHI* corresponds to warm, humid climates where less sensible heat is required, improving water production efficiency. Conversely, low *MHI* values reflect cooler conditions with poor harvesting potential. The authors elaborate that an *MHI* less than 0.3 is representative of unfavourable conditions for AWH, both economically and operationally.

4.4.2 Demand Satisfaction Score Modelling

To determine if supply meets demand, both must beknown or calculated as accurately as possible. This tool assumes the user already knows the water demand (in litres) over a specific period. The supply is modelled using a method adapted from Gayoso *et al*. [18] in their techno-economic analysis of AWH systems across different climates. This model is built to focus on the atmospheric conditions at the coldest month of a year in a chosen location to see if demand can be met under the worst-case scenario.

The original method requires hourly data points for *RH* and dry-bulb temperature, however the input parameters were adapted to only consist of easily accessible data points. These include the maximum daily temperature, (T_{max}) and minimum daily temperature (T_{min}), used to model the hourly temperature distribution by way of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) hourly factor method [59]. This informed the modelling of the hourly *RH* distribution, where the highest *RH* value of a chosen day is taken to determine the vapour pressure. The vapour pressure can be assumed constant for a clear day [60] and the hourly *RH* distribution can thus be calculated.

The hourly temperature and RH distributions can be used to obtain the hourly dew point temperature (T_{DP}) and the machines are assumed to operate whenever the T_{DP} is larger than 0 °C. This informs the calculation of the hourly saturated water pressure (e_{sat}) through the Clausius–Clapeyron equation [61]. By rearranging the ideal gas law to solve for the hourly vapour density (ρ_{vap}), the ideal volume of water passing through the AWH machine, (V_{ideal}) can be calculated using Equation 2. V_{ideal} is also dependent on the air flow rate, (Q_{air}) and yields the mass flux of water vapour over time. This is converted to volume flow using the density of water as 1 kilogram per litre.

$$V_{ideal} = \rho_{vap} \times Q_{air} \quad \textbf{(2)}$$

The actual quantity of liquid water produced per hour is dependent on the recovery efficiency, (η) to account for system limitations [62] and V_{ideal}, shown in Equation 3. Gayoso *et al*. [18] uses a 30% recovery efficiency for climate conditions close to the benchmark climate scenario of the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (26.7°C/60% *RH*) and a 12% recovery efficiency for more arid climate scenarios (26.7°C/20% *RH*).

$$hourly\ water\ production = V_{ideal} \times \eta \quad \textbf{(3)}$$

Calculating the sum of water produced every hour over a given day is then compared with the daily expected demand and a demand score can be calculated using Equation 4. A demand score higher than 1 indicates the system has surplus capacity to fulfil the expected demand.

$$Demand\ Score = \frac{Daily\ Water\ Production}{Expected\ daily\ demand} \quad \textbf{(4)}$$

4.4.3 Cost Competitiveness Score Modelling

To facilitate the unit cost comparison between an AWH bottling concept and a competitor's supply chain, the LCOW must be calculated for both. The cost breakdown analysis of the AWH concept relies on input costs associated with producing a specified volume of water within a given time frame. By mapping the primary activities that directly impact the cost per unit in a typical supply chain, the most relevant cost drivers can be identified. These factors are selected to balance result accuracy with the practicality of data availability.

Since the expected hourly yield has already been calculated in Equation 3, only the cost of production must be calculated further. The total lifetime cost of the AWH concept is dependent firstly on an intended payback period (t_{pay}), as well as the capital expenditure (*CAPEX*) and operational expenditure (*OPEX*), shown in Equation 5. The *CAPEX* is estimated by multiplying the capital cost of the AWH machine(s) by a Lang factor, f, of 3 to account for

installation and transport costs [63]. The *OPEX* is calculated by estimating the total cost of electricity (*TCOE*), the total cost of maintenance (*TCOM*) and the total cost of labour (*TCOL*) and accounting for inflation (*r*). The *TCOE* is dependent on the local electricity rate, (R_e) in cost per kilowatt hour, the AWH machine's energy usage, ($E_{machine}$) in kilowatt, and the expected daily usage time (t_{use}) where T_{DP} is greater than 0°C. Equation 5 shows the calculation of the total cost over the intended payback period.

$$Cost_{total} = CAPEX + \left(1 + \frac{r}{12}\right)^{t_{pay}} (OPEX) = f \times Cost_{machine} + \left(1 + \frac{r}{12}\right)^{t_{pay}} (TCOE + TCOM + TCOL) \quad \textbf{(5)}$$

Equation 6 shows the calculation to obtain the LCOW for the AWH bottling concept ($LCOW_{AWH}$), where the total costs incurred over the payback period needs to be divided by the total quantity of water produced over the intended time frame, informed by Equation 3.

$$LCOW_{AWH} = \frac{Cost_{total}}{Water\ Produced\ over\ time\ t_{pay}} \quad \textbf{(6)}$$

The LCOW from a retailer's perspective can be estimated by removing the retailer margin from the price of a bottle of water—estimated at 2.33 for soft drinks [64]—and then calculating the LCOW of a competing supply chain ($LCOW_{CSC}$). Equation 7 now shows the Cost competitiveness score by comparing the $LCOW_{AWH}$ and the $LCOW_{CSC}$. A value lower than 1 indicate a cost competitive AWH bottling venture.

$$Cost\ Comeptitivenss\ Score = \frac{LCOW_{AWH}}{LCOW_{CSC}} \quad \textbf{(7)}$$

4.4.4 DST System Design

The DST is built in an R *Shiny* model, where *Shiny* was selected due to its seamless integration with R, which supports advanced computation through extensive package libraries. Its interactive dashboard capabilities make it well-suited for scenario analysis and sensitivity testing. Additionally, as a web-based platform, it enables easy dissemination of the decision support tool via a shareable URL.

Owing to the dimensionless nature of the scores, radar plots serve as an effective visualisation tool for representing and comparing the performance of different AWH bottling concepts. The radar plot within the Shiny application is generated using the R package *fmsb* [65], while all psychrometric calculations are conducted using the *psychrolib* R package [66], which has been unit-tested against reference tables from ASHRAE.

5 MODEL VALIDATION THROUGH CASE STUDY APPLICATION

5.1 Case study description

Many hotels continue to opt for bottled water as the primary source of drinking water for guests due to a variety of factors, including convenience, perceived health and safety, brand recognition, cost considerations, and consumer preferences [67]. The inbound logistics of bottled water supply to hotels can generally be categorised into three main approaches. First, a hotel may choose to produce bottled water on-site, within its own facilities [68]. Secondly, hotels may procure bottled water from local suppliers or, thirdly rely on international brands such as Fiji Water.

To demonstrate the practical utility of the tool, it will be applied to a case study from the tropical hospitality sector, specifically focused on a beachfront hotel located on the south-eastern coast of Mauritius. The study is conducted in July, the coldest month of the year, to evaluate the feasibility of implementing an AWH bottling initiative under the least favourable climatic conditions.

5.2 Atmospheric score modelling

According to the World Bank Group's Climate Change Knowledge Portal, the mean surface air temperature in Mauritius during the month of July is approximately 21.9°C, with an average *RH* of 75.23% [69]. Given the proximity of the hotel facilities to the shoreline, it is reasonable to assume that the AWH system would be installed at or near sea level. For the purposes of this analysis, an elevation of 20 meters above sea level is assumed for engineering practicality. Based on these climatic parameters and the assumptions outlined in the derivation of the MHI, the *MHI* is calculated to be 0.499.

5.3 Demand satisfaction score modelling

According to the World Bank Group's Climate Change Knowledge Portal, the mean maximum and minimum surface air temperatures for Mauritius during the month of July are 23.32°C and 20.41°C, respectively [69]. The maximum daily *RH* is estimated at 95%, based on data provided by the Mauritius Meteorological Services [70]. The AWH system selected for this analysis is the Cumulus C5000, manufactured by GENAQ [71], which features an inlet fan with a nominal airflow rate of 22,000 m^3/h. The hotel's daily potable water requirement is 2,000 litres. Under the given climatic conditions, the system is projected to generate approximately 2,812.67 litres of water per day, resulting in a demand satisfaction score of 1.41.

5.4 Cost competitiveness score modelling

Taking the contextual information of an intended payback period of 3 years, yearly inflation of 5% and an electricity rate of 3 R/kWh into account, the total cost incurred over the payback period can be estimated as R19,643,937.79. This amount is informed by assuming the Cumulus C5000 operates according to the nominal values listed in its specification sheet, as well as a maintenance cost of R400, incurred every two months. The minimum wage in Mauritius is around R45 per hour and a single worker, working an 8-hour shift is assumed.

Using weather data from the Mauritius Meteorological Services [70] and the airflow of the Cumulus C5000 machine, the estimated total water yield over the payback period is 2,948,779.34 litres. By applying Equation 6, a $LCOW_{AWH}$ of R6.66 per litre is found. Comparing this with a R50 cost for a 1 litre bottle at the hotel, the $LCOW_{CSC}$ is calculated as R21.36 per litre. Utilising Equation 7 the cost competitiveness score is calculated as 0,31, indicating that the water produced by AWH is substantially more affordable than that of competitors.

5.5 DST Case Study Application Results

The case study yielded a *MHI* of 0.499, indicating that local conditions are suitable for AWH [28], and a demand satisfaction score of 1.41, translating to a daily production surplus of 812.67 litres. The cost competitiveness score is calculated to be 0.31, indicating water production through AWH is significantly cheaper than through traditional supply channels. Figure 4 shows a radar plot to visualise the respective scores.

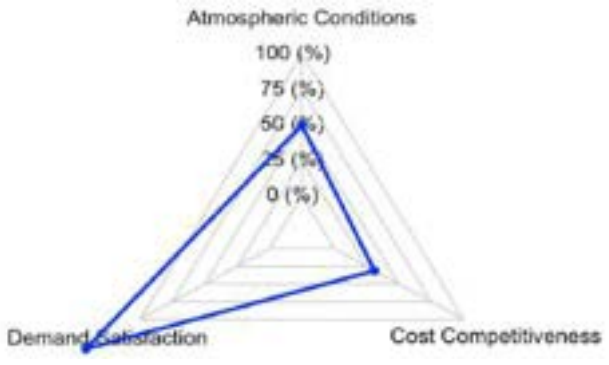

Figure 4: Decision Support Tool Results Visualisation

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A heuristics-based DST was developed by synthesising techniques from existing literature to support the early scoping of AWH bottling projects. The tool provides a novel approach for evaluating early-stage ventures in contexts where data availability is limited. Although useful for preliminary assessments, the DST is subject to several generic assumptions that limits its use for precise decision-making.

Future research should focus on integrating empirically validated methods for estimating critical parameters, such as competitor cost structures and the water recovery efficiencies of different AWH technologies. Incorporating advanced approaches, such as AI-driven DSTs integrated with Industry 4.0 data collection techniques, may further enhance predictive accuracy and decision-making utility.

Key feasibility dimensions, including environmental impact, system reliability, and scalability were excluded due to their complexity and data intensity. Expanding the model to address these factors would increase its comprehensiveness and real-world applicability. In addition, future efforts should consider improved validation methods, including sensitivity analysis, systems dynamics modelling, a comparison with observed project data, and expert evaluation to strengthen the tool's credibility.

The development of similar DSTs for other emerging technologies deployed in novel contexts is also recommended. Such tools can offer valuable guidance to public agencies, policymakers, investors, and other stakeholders during early-stage decision-making when reliable data is scarce.

This research serves as a stepping stone towards more reliable and decentralised potable water solutions. By developing a heuristics-based decision support tool tailored to AWH's unique challenges, this work initiates a ripple effect—creating waves of innovation in how freshwater resources are assessed, produced, and delivered. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for future advancements that merge sustainability, technology, and strategic decision-making to address growing global water challenges.

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SCHEDULING CRICKET COMMENTATORS IN THE SA20 LEAGUE USING INTEGER LINEAR PROGRAMMING

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ABSTRACT

Cricket embodies a bat-and-ball game, characterised as a multi-billion-dollar enterprise. The success of cricket predominantly stems from global league competitions concerning a high volume of Twenty20 matches played across a short period of time. These league competitions place significant strain on players, management, and organisers alike owing to the extensive travel distances involved. Ample literature exists on the scheduling of cricket players, teams, and matches using numeric methods. However, minimal research has been completed on the scheduling of cricket commentators for global league competitions. Therefore, this paper proposes an integer linear programming model for optimising the scheduling of cricket commentators using the SA20 league as case study. The formulated mathematical model minimises the difference in travel distance between the commentators subject to various tournament constraints. Consequently, this study contributes to academia and industry by offering an objective approach towards scheduling cricket commentators while identifying prospective research opportunities.

Keywords: commentators, cricket, integer linear programming, optimisation, SA20

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1 INTRODUCTION

Cricket is characterised as a field sport played between two opposing teams [1]. Each player in a cricket team assumes a specialist role, with performance governed by numerous internal and external factors [2]. The sport of cricket has a documented history dating back to the 16th century [3], [4]. Ryan [5] mentioned that cricket was the most recognised sport of the British Empire. However, cricket has transitioned from traditional origins into a multi-billion-dollar enterprise [6]. The multinational success of cricket is primarily attributed to the popularity of Twenty20 (T20) league competitions. T20 league competitions ultimately transformed cricket into a commercially lucrative and globally accessible sport.

The T20 format was first introduced in 2003 by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) as a creative approach to combat the continuous decline in interest in the sport [7], [8]. The T20 format transformed cricket [7] by presenting a faster and more exciting playing structure. The substantial initial popularity of the format eventually led to the first T20 World Cup in 2007, where India emerged as the winner [7]. Following the success of India in the first T20 World Cup, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) founded the Indian Premier League (IPL) [7]. The IPL is recognised as the most viewed T20 league competition globally [9]. Alternative countries pursued the same initiative, resulting in several high-profile T20 league competitions globally. Among the numerous T20 league competitions, the SA20 is one of the most recent, with the inaugural season taking place in 2023.

The SA20 represents the foremost T20 league competition in South Africa. Global T20 league competitions, such as the SA20, involve a high volume of games played over a short period. To promote spectator engagement, games are frequently conducted across various host cities, resulting in extensive travelling throughout the contest. The demanding schedule underpinning the extensive travelling required in a T20 league competition places tremendous strain on players, management, and organisers alike. Substantial research has been performed on match scheduling for T20 league competitions using various numerical methods.

However, minimal research has been conducted on the scheduling of cricket commentators within a T20 league competition. Therefore, this study proposes a contemporary integer linear programming model for optimising the scheduling of commentators using the SA20 league as the chosen case study. The proposed solution aims to balance the assignment of commentators by minimising the difference in total travel distances. This study presents an objective approach to fairly scheduling commentators, ensuring equal exposure and division of responsibilities. The proposed mathematical model fosters fairness by ensuring that all commentators comment on the same number of games. The mathematical model accommodates viewing experience by ensuring that no single commentator predominantly commentates on a specific team or venue. The relationships between the commentators are considered to further guarantee that no two commentators predominantly work together.

This study contributes towards the existing work by pursuing research yet to be extensively investigated. The mathematical model presented in this study extends beyond academia, with numerous practical applications supported by the use of contemporary data. Moreover, the solution proposed in this study is not limited to cricket but also proves appropriate for other sporting events, requiring the suitable scheduling of commentators. Subsequently, this study contributes to both industry and research by introducing a numerical approach for objectively scheduling commentators in T20 league competitions, using the SA20 as the chosen case study.

The study comprises five sections, each of which complements the other. Section 1 introduces the study by providing the necessary background. Section 2 offers a literature review covering cricket and mathematical optimisation. Section 3 specifies the considerations, notation, and formulation of the mathematical model. Section 4 verifies and validates the mathematical

model, illustrating the model's correctness and effectiveness, respectively. Finally, Section 5 concludes the study, providing recommendations for prospective research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Section 2 provides a brief review of cricket and mathematical optimisation, characterising the foundation of the study.

2.1 Review of cricket

Section 2.1 describes cricket, the global enterprise, and the SA20 league competition.

2.1.1 Introduction to cricket

Cricket is often characterised by the complexity of the gameplay and laws [10]. Malcolm [10] discussed that cricket embodies honour and fairness, with few sports as widely recognised for equality. Fundamentally, cricket is described as a bat-and-ball game involving two opposing teams having 11 players each [11]. The objective of the game is to accumulate more runs than the competing team, subject to the limitations imposed by the applicable playing format [12]. Cricket is unique in that it accommodates various spectator audiences through distinct playing formats [10]. Internationally, the sport is divided into three playing formats, distinguished by the number of overs, with limited and unlimited overs [13]. Unlimited overs cricket refers to test cricket, where no limit exists for the number of overs played per innings [14]. Conversely, limited overs cricket refers to One Day Internationals (ODIs) and Twenty20s (T20s), where a prearranged number of overs per innings exists [15]. The main difference between ODIs and T20s lies in the number of overs permitted per innings [15]. ODIs embody the longest limited overs cricket format, where each team is bound to an innings of a maximum of 50 overs [16]. Inversely, T20s represent the shortest limited overs cricket format, restricting each team to an innings of a maximum of 20 overs [17].

2.1.2 Enterprise of cricket

The inception of different formats has led to cricket evolving into a multifaceted and multi-billion-dollar international enterprise [18]. The sport of cricket is frequently recognised as a once-premodern pastime that prioritised the spirit of the game above commercial needs [19]. However, while century-old traditions previously dominated the game, profitability now drives cricketing conventions, regulations, strategies, and scheduling [19]. McMillan [19] noted that despite the exalted cultural claims of cricket, the modern form of the game was shaped by industrial capitalism. This transformation is primarily attributed to the inception of global T20 league competitions, which, alas, take precedence over international assignments for most players [19]. The apparent influence of capitalism in cricket is depicted in the Indian Premier League (IPL) [19]. The IPL represents the foremost T20 league competition [20] and is often described as the most successful product of the cricketing industry [19]. The Economic Times currently values the IPL at an estimated $12.00 billion [21], internationally regarded as one of the foremost viewed sporting events [22]. The IPL offered the foundation for other global T20 league competitions, including the SA20.

2.1.3 SA20 league competition

The SA20 is the leading T20 league competition in South Africa [23]. The contest is among the most recent global league competitions, with the inaugural season being 2023. The SA20 marks the third attempt at promoting a T20 league competition in South Africa [24]. The T20 Global League was scheduled to commence in 2017 before Cricket South Africa (CSA) unsuccessfully launched the contest [24]. In 2018, the T20 Global League was replaced by the Mzansi Super League, which featured six locally owned teams [25]. The Mzansi Super League completed two seasons before the COVID-19 pandemic led to the discontinuation of the contest [26]. Unlike these predecessors, the SA20 has demonstrated considerable promise since inception. In 2024,

the SA20 experienced a 21% increase in global viewership, followed by a 37% increase for its most recent edition in 2025 [23].

The SA20 is a month-long affair, annually contested between January and February [23]. The contest involves 34 games, played between six teams across various regions of South Africa [23]. Each team characterises a popular city in South Africa and is owned by a franchise representing a privately held corporation. Table 1 defines the various franchises, along with the associated abbreviations, first participation seasons, and home stadiums [23].

Table 1: SA20 franchises [23]

Number	Franchise	Abbreviation	First season	Stadium
1	MI Cape Town	MICT	2023	Newlands
2	Durban's Super Giants	DSG	2023	Kingsmead
3	Joburg Super Kings	JSK	2023	Wanderers
4	Paarl Royals	PR	2023	Boland Park
5	Sunrisers Eastern Cape	SEC	2023	St George's Park
6	Pretoria Capitals	PC	2023	SuperSport Park

The playing structure of the SA20 follows a double round-robin approach, where each franchise competes against each other franchise twice in the pool stage of the tournament [23]. During these two games, each of the participating franchises receives an opportunity to play a match at the home stadium [23]. As such, each franchise plays a total of five home games and five away matches in the pool stage of the tournament. After all franchises have competed against each other twice, the top four qualify for the playoffs, involving one eliminator, two qualifiers, and a final [23]. The winner of Qualifier 1 progresses to the final, while the loser plays against the winner of Eliminator 1 in Qualifier 2 [23]. The losers concerning Eliminator 1 and Qualifier 2 are eliminated from the tournament, whereas the winner of the latter proceeds to the final [23]. Appendix A specifies the complete schedule of the 2025 SA20 [23], while Figure 1 depicts the approximate locations of the six cities corresponding to the stadiums specified in Table 1.

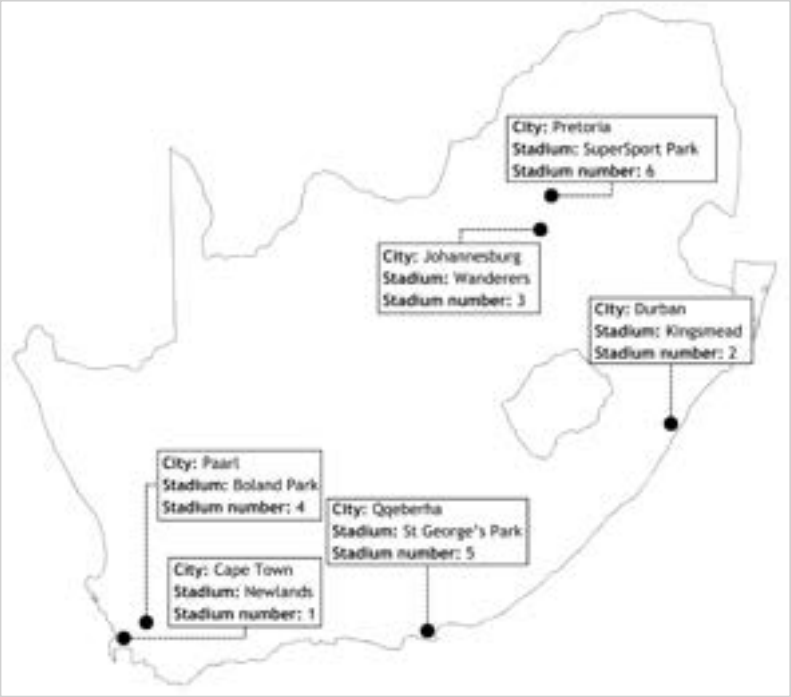

Figure 1: SA20 playing locations [23]

Table 2 provides a matrix defining the rounded travel distances between each of the stadiums based on the labelling assignment specified in Figure 1.

The travel distances, between the venues are determined using the Haversine equation, where (ϕ_j, λ_j) specifies the coordinates of the jth stadium. Noteworthy, the radius r of the Earth was assumed to be 6371 kilometres. Equation (1) gives the expression of the Haversine equation.

$$d = 2r\, arcsin\left(\sqrt{sin^2\left(\frac{\phi_1 - \phi_2}{2}\right) + cos(\phi_1)\, cos(\phi_2)\, sin^2\left(\frac{\lambda_1 - \lambda_2}{2}\right)}\right) \quad \textbf{(1)}$$

Finally, the scale of the distances denotes kilometres, with the decimal values of the locations of the venues omitted for simplicity.

Table 2: Travel distances (km) between stadiums, represented by η_{jg}

Stadium	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	0	1270	1268	55	658	1300
2	1270	0	506	1215	686	524
3	1268	506	0	1215	902	33
4	55	1215	1215	0	611	1246
5	658	686	902	611	0	935
6	1300	524	33	1246	935	0

Table 2 exhibits the substantial travel distances involved in the SA20. Although the necessary infrastructure remains fixed for each game, selected officials and personnel travel across the country during the contest to guarantee the successful facilitation of each game. Among these personnel are the commentators responsible for reporting the events occurring at each match. Commentators promote the overall experience of audiences [28] by adding excitement and context to games [29]. Furthermore, commentators provide real-time analyses of occurrences [29] by explaining the different tactical incentives employed by competing teams. During the most recent edition of the SA20, a minimum of one game was played each day during the pool stage of the tournament [23], resulting in significant travel obligations for commentators. The 2025 SA20 utilised a total of 17 commentators for English commentary. The schedule governing the allocation of these commentators is determined internally. Therefore, the schedule for commentators in the SA20 is not publicly known, further underpinning the significance of the mathematical model presented in this study.

2.2 Review of mathematical optimisation

Section 2.2 defines mathematical optimisation, focusing on linear and integer programming.

2.2.1 Introduction to mathematical optimisation

Mathematical optimisation concerns finding the best solution in a feasible set of alternatives subject to a collection of available resources [30]. Padamwar and Pandey [30] mentioned that mathematical optimisation pillars the field of operations research by enabling decision-makers to derive optimal solutions to intricate problems. Operations research draws on analytical and mathematical techniques to improve processes underpinning complicated systems [30]. As a subset of operations research, Sinha [31] specified mathematical optimisation as a method for achieving some objective through the satisfactory use of resources. Figure 2 shows the general procedure characterising mathematical optimisation, adapted from Andréasson *et al*. [32].

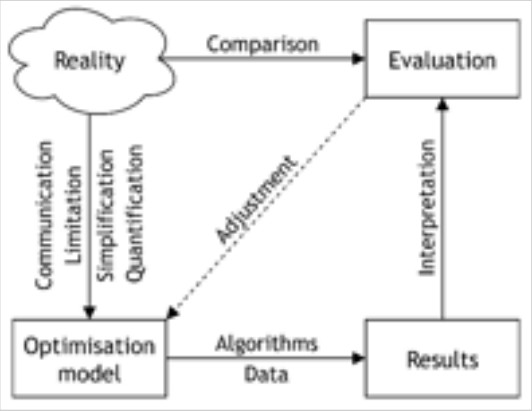

Figure 2: Mathematical optimisation procedure [32]

From Figure 2, Andréasson *et al.* [32] discussed that the problem faced in reality is converted into a mathematical equivalent, expressed as an optimisation model. This conversion involves communicating with all applicable entities, limiting and simplifying the problem to ensure the model's traceability, and quantifying all qualitative statements [32]. The optimisation model describing the practical problem is then solved using applicable algorithms supplied with data [32]. The results are evaluated using interpretation, with necessary adjustments made to the optimisation model [32]. The conclusions obtained from the evaluation are assessed based on practical applicability, with the selected solution finally translated back into reality [32].

2.2.2 Linear programming

Linear programming denotes a mathematical optimisation technique [33], proposed by Dantzig in 1947 [34]. Linear programming optimises a linear function subject to a combination of linear equalities and inequalities described as constraints [35]. Adedipupo *et al.* [35] noted that the simplex method is the most widely applied technique for solving linear programming problems. Equations (2), (3), and (4) provide the standard formulation for a linear programming problem of type minimisation.

$$\text{Minimise} \quad Z = \sum_{j=1}^{n} c_j x_j \tag{2}$$

$$\text{Subject to} \quad \sum_{j=1}^{n} a_{ij} x_j \geq b_i, \quad \forall i = 1, 2, \dots, m \tag{3}$$

$$x_j \in \mathbb{R}_+, \quad \forall j = 1, 2, \dots, n \tag{4}$$

From the standard formulation in Equations (2), (3), and (4), c_j is the cost coefficient assigned to the non-negative decision variable x_j, with a_{ij} presenting the related constraint coefficient and b_i the constraint requirement, for $i = 1, 2, \dots, m$ and $j = 1, 2, \dots, n$.

2.2.3 Integer linear programming

Integer linear programming represents an expansion of linear programming that restricts some or all of the decision variables to discrete values [36]. Integer linear programming originated from the cutting plane method founded by Gomory in 1958 [37]. Bingfeng *et al.* [38] mentioned that the branch-and-bound method represents the most popular technique for solving integer linear programming problems. Hossain and Hasan [39] characterise integer linear programming problems as either pure, mixed, or binary. Pure integer linear programming problems denote those for which all decision variables are integer [37]. Equations (5), (6), and (7) showcase the standard formulation for a pure integer linear programming problem of type minimisation.

$$\text{Minimise} \quad Z = \sum_{j=1}^{n} c_j x_j \tag{5}$$

$$\text{Subject to} \quad \sum_{j=1}^{n} a_{ij} x_j \geq b_i, \quad \forall i = 1, 2, \dots, m \tag{6}$$

$$x_j \in \mathbb{Z}_+, \quad \forall j = 1, 2, \dots, n \tag{7}$$

As previously, considering the standard formulation in Equations (5), (6), and (7), c_j is the cost coefficient involving the integer-valued decision variable x_j, with a_{ij} the affiliated constraint coefficient and b_i the constraint requirement, for $i = 1, 2, \dots, m$ and $j = 1, 2, \dots, n$.

3 MATHEMATICAL MODEL

Section 3 presents the considerations, notation and affiliated formulation of the mathematical model developed for scheduling cricket commentators in the SA20.

3.1 Mathematical model considerations

The mathematical model facilitates fairness in travelling among the commentators while also ensuring equal distribution of the games commented on. Since limited prior research exists on the scheduling of commentators in T20 league competitions, this study implements numerous considerations dictating performance. The mathematical model ensures that commentators are not scheduled to comment on games occurring on the same day. Moreover, commentators may not commentate on consecutive games to ensure sufficient time for travel and recovery. The 2025 SA20 schedule encompasses 34 games, as outlined in Appendix A. Six commentators are required per game, resulting in a total of 12 games per commentator as a collection of 17 commentators were used in the tournament. This leads to each commentator working with five other at each match, therefore Equation (8) presents the total pairing combinations among the different commentators.

$$12 \times 5 = 60 \tag{8}$$

Considering Equation (8), and each commentator commentates on 12 games accompanied by five other commentators. Dividing the 60 commentating pairs among the remaining 16 commentators yields the number of times each commentator should commentate with another for an equal distribution of commentators amongst each other, provided in Equation (9).

$$\frac{60}{17-1} = 3.75 \tag{9}$$

From Equation (9), for an equivalent allocation of commentators across the tournament, each commentator should commentate 3.75 times with another. Accordingly, a limitation of at most four times is assumed. Balancing the commentators evenly between the different participating teams proves challenging. Therefore, an upper limit of six is proposed as the maximum number of times a commentator may commentate on a specific team.

3.2 Mathematical model notation

The notation describes the various sets, set functions, variables, and constants used to develop the mathematical model. Table 3 explains the unique sets applied in the mathematical model.

Table 3: Sets relating to the mathematical model

Set	Indexing	Explanation
I	$i \in I$	Set describing the commentators applicable to the tournament.
J	$j \in J$	Set describing the stadiums applicable to the tournament.
K	$k \in K$	Set describing the games applicable to the tournament.

Set functions describe a collection of subsets relating to a given set under consideration. Table 4 explains the various set functions used in the mathematical model.

Table 4: Set functions relating to the mathematical model

Function	Indexing	Explanation
$\alpha(k)$	$k \in K$	Set function describing the teams played in the game.
$\zeta(k)$	$k \in K$	Set function describing all the previous games per match, $\{f = \zeta(k):\ f\ < k, \forall k \in\ K, f \in K\}$.

Variables characterise the adjustable parameters for minimising or maximising the objective function. Table 5 explains the different variables utilised in the mathematical model.

Table 5: Variables relating to the mathematical model

Variable	Index sets	Domain	Explanation
d_{ih}	$i \in I,\ h \in I$	$\{0,1\}$	Variable for determining which commentator travel further.
q_{ikg}	$i \in I,\ k \in K, g \in J$	$\{0,1\}$	Variable for the commentator per team selection of each game.
t_{ihk}	$i \in I,\ h \in I,\ k \in K$	$\{0,1\}$	Variable for collective commentator selection per game.
x_{ijk}	$i \in I,\ j \in J,\ k \in K$	$\{0,1\}$	Variable for commentator selection per game.
y_{ijk}	$i \in I,\ j \in J,\ k \in K$	$\{0,1\}$	Variable for commentator position per game.
z_{ijgk}	$i \in I, j \in J, g \in J, k \in K$	$\{0,1\}$	Variable for travel selection of commentators per game.
r_{ig}	$i \in I, g \in J$	$\mathbb{N}_0$	Variable for the commentator per team similarity score.
s_{ih}	$i \in I,\ h \in I$	$\mathbb{N}_0$	Variable for individual commentator similarity score.
v_{ih}	$i \in I,\ h \in I$	$\mathbb{N}_0$	Variable for the difference in total travel distance of commentators.
w_i	$i \in I$	$\mathbb{N}_0$	Variable for the total distance between stadiums of each commentator.

Constants denote the numeric values that remain fixed during the optimisation process. Table 6 explains the various constants used in the mathematical model.

Table 6: Constants relating to the mathematical model

Constant	Index sets	Explanation
χ	$k \in K, f \in K$	Binary matrix restricting selection of a commentator to games occurring on the same days.
ϵ_g	$g \in J$	Constant for the number of commentators involving each team.
η_{jg}	$j \in J, g \in J$	Constant for travel distances between stadiums.
μ	-	Constant for the number of games required per commentator.
ω	-	Constant for the number of commentators required per game.
σ_{jk}	$j \in J, k \in K$	Constant for venue selection per game.
M	-	Constant for conditional equality constraints.

3.3 Mathematical model formulation

The objective function in Equation (10) minimises the summation of the differences in travel distances between the different commentators.

$$\text{Minimise} \quad \sum_{i \in I} \sum_{h \in I} v_{ih} \qquad \textbf{(10)}$$

From Equation (10), the variable v_{ih} characterises the positive unit of difference between the commentators. Accordingly, if commentator i travels more than commentator h, the variable v_{ih} captures the corresponding difference, leading to v_{hi} assuming a value of zero. Equations (11) to (13) implement the aforementioned logic.

$$v_{ih} \leq w_i - w_h + M[1 - d_{ih}],\ \forall i \in I, h \in I \qquad \textbf{(11)}$$

$$v_{ih} \geq w_i - w_h + M[d_{ih} - 1],\ \forall i \in I, h \in I \quad \textbf{(12)}$$

$$v_{ih} \leq M d_{ih},\ \forall i \in I, h \in I \quad \textbf{(13)}$$

Equations (11) and (12) serve as conditional equality constraints limiting v_{ih} to the difference between the total travel distance of the commentators. Equation (13) guarantees that v_{ih} is forced to zero in the case where Equations (11) and (12) fail to limit its value to the difference in total travel distances. Subsequently, Equations (14) to (18) define the constraints dictating the behavioural characteristics of the commentators.

$$w_i \leq w_h + M d_{ih},\ \forall i \in I, h \in I \quad \textbf{(14)}$$

$$w_i \geq w_h - M d_{ih},\ \forall i \in I, h \in I \quad \textbf{(15)}$$

$$d_{ih} + d_{hi} \leq 1,\ \forall i \in I, h \in I \quad \textbf{(16)}$$

$$d_{ii} = 0,\ \forall i \in I \quad \textbf{(17)}$$

$$w_i = \sum_{k \in K} \sum_{j \in J} \sum_{g \in J} \eta_{jg} z_{ijgk},\ \forall i \in I \quad \textbf{(18)}$$

Equations (14) and (15) ensure d_{ih} assumes a value of one in the instance where commentator i travelled further than commentator h. Equation (16) ensures that the preceding constraints hold for all commentators. Equation (17) prevents the occurrence of commentators travelling further than themselves. Equation (18) associates the variable w_i with the sum of the travelled distances between the games involving each commentator for the duration of the tournament. Equations (19) to (22) define the travelling constraints for the commentators.

$$z_{ijgk} + 1 \geq y_{ij(k-1)} + y_{igk},\ \forall i \in I, j \in J, g \in J, k \in K \setminus \{1\} \quad \textbf{(19)}$$

$$\sum_{j \in J} \sum_{g \in J} z_{ijgk} = 1,\ \forall i \in I, k \in K \quad \textbf{(20)}$$

$$z_{ijj1} \geq y_{ij1},\ \forall i \in I, j \in J \quad \textbf{(21)}$$

$$\sum_{j \in J} y_{ijk} = 1,\ \forall i \in I, k \in K \quad \textbf{(22)}$$

Equation (19) links the travel variable z_{ijgk} to the location variable y_{ijk} so as to measure the movement of commentators between venues. The movement of each commentator is limited to one per game per Equation (20). Subsequently, Equation (21) ensures that the initial move for each commentator is from and to the venue pertaining to the first game. Constraint (22) ensures that all commentators are restricted to one venue per game. Next, Equations (23) to (27) focus on accurately capturing the positioning of the commentators for the games.

$$y_{ijk} \geq x_{ijk},\ \forall i \in I, j \in J, k \in K \quad \textbf{(23)}$$

$$u_{ik} + 1 \geq y_{ijk} + y_{ig(k-1)},\ \forall i \in I, j \in J, g \in J \setminus \{j\}, k \in K \setminus \{1\} \quad \textbf{(24)}$$

$$c_{ik} \geq u_{if},\ \forall i \in I, k \in K \setminus \{1\}, f \in \zeta(k) \quad \textbf{(25)}$$

$$c_{ik} \leq \sum_{f \in \zeta(k)} u_{if},\ \forall i \in I, k \in K \setminus \{1\} \quad \textbf{(26)}$$

$$y_{ijk} + y_{igf} \leq 1 + c_{ik},\ \forall i \in I, j \in J, g \in J \setminus \{j\}, k \in K \setminus \{1\}, f \in \zeta(k) \quad \textbf{(27)}$$

Equation (23) ensures that each commentator is situated at the respective venue according to the predetermined schedule in Appendix A. Equation (24) constrains the movement of the commentators between various venues to the scheduled games. Equations (25) to (27) ensure that each commentator may not travel between different venues after the completion of the first game. Accordingly, Equations (28) to (31) govern the selection of the commentators.

$$\sum_{k \in K} u_{ik} = \mu,\ \forall i \in I \quad \textbf{(28)}$$

$$u_{ik} = \sum_{j \in J} x_{ijk},\ \forall i \in I, k \in K \quad \textbf{(29)}$$

$$\sum_{i\in I} x_{ijk} = \omega\sigma_{jk},\ \forall k \in K, j \in J \quad \textbf{(30)}$$

$$\sum_{i\in I} u_{ik} = \omega,\ \forall k \in K \quad \textbf{(31)}$$

Equation (28) enforces equal selection of all commentators in the schedule. Equation (29) links the selection variable per venue x_{ijk} to the commentator selection variable μ_{ik}. Subsequently, Equations (30) and (31) collectively guarantee that the required number of commentators is selected per game for the related venue. Next, Equations (32) and (33) regulate the workload of the commentators by managing the selection for specific games.

$$u_{ik} + u_{i(k-1)} \leq 1,\ \forall i \in I, k \in K \setminus \{1\} \quad \textbf{(32)}$$

$$u_{ik} + u_{if} \leq 2 - \chi_{kf},\ \forall i \in I, k \in K, f \in K \setminus \{k\} \quad \textbf{(33)}$$

Equation (32) ensures that commentators cannot commentate on two consecutive games. Also, Equation (33) prevents the selection of a commentator for games occurring on the same day. Noteworthy, the vector constant χ_{kf} consists of a binary matrix capturing games occurring on the same day. Equations (34) to (38) regulate the relationship between the commentators.

$$u_{ik} + u_{hk} \leq 1 + t_{ihk}, \forall i \in I, h \in I \setminus \{i\}, k \in K \quad \textbf{(34)}$$

$$u_{ik} + u_{hk} \geq 2t_{ihk}, \forall i \in I, h \in I \setminus \{i\}, k \in K \quad \textbf{(35)}$$

$$t_{iik} = 0, \forall i \in I, k \in K \quad \textbf{(36)}$$

$$s_{ih} = \sum_{k\in K} t_{ihk}, \forall i \in I, h \in I \quad \textbf{(37)}$$

$$s_{ih} \leq 6, \forall i \in I, h \in I \quad \textbf{(38)}$$

Equations (34) and (35) capture the number of times commentators work together across the different games. Equation (36) guarantees that the number of times commentators work with themselves is set to zero. Equation (37) derives the number of times a commentator worked with another across the entire tournament. Accordingly, Equation (38) defines the upper limit for the number of times commentators may work together throughout the tournament. Finally, Equations (39) to (42) govern the relationship between the commentators and teams.

$$u_{ik} = q_{ikg}, \forall i \in I, k \in K, g \in \alpha(k) \quad \textbf{(39)}$$

$$r_{ig} = \sum_{k\in K} q_{ikg}, \forall i \in I, g \in J \quad \textbf{(40)}$$

$$\sum_{i\in I} r_{ig} = \epsilon_g, \forall g \in J \quad \textbf{(41)}$$

$$r_{ig} \leq 6, \forall i \in I, g \in J \quad \textbf{(42)}$$

Equation (39) relates the commentator selection variable μ_{ik} to the variable q_{ikg} defining the specific teams playing, $g \in \alpha(k)$, during the game. Equation (40) derives the number of times a commentator commentated on a game played by a specific team. Accordingly, Equation (41) prevents the mathematical model from selecting more similarities between commentators and teams. In conclusion, Equation (42) limits the number of times a commentator may comment on a game in which a given team plays.

4 VERIFICATION AND VALIDATION

Section 4 demonstrates the verification and validation of the mathematical model, showcasing the model's correctness and effectiveness, respectively. The results were computed using a licenced CPLEX optimisation solver.

4.1 Mathematical model verification

The verification of the mathematical model involves systematically adding the constraints to investigate the influence on the objective function value. As a baseline for comparison, the

investigation is initiated by evaluating the objective function in Equation (10). Considering Equation (10), the unbounded mathematical model is restricted by the domain of the variable v_{ih}. Consequently, the resulting objective function value equals zero. Equations (11) to (18) are added to the mathematical model for further inspection.From Equations (11) to (18), the variable z_{ijgk} remains constrained by the variable y_{ijk}, which specifies the positioning of each commentator per game. Therefore, the variable v_{ih} is linked to the prevalent difference in total distances travelled by the commentators. The objective function again results in a value of zero. Equations (19) to (31) are applied to the mathematical model.

Incorporating Equations (19) to (31) in the mathematical model yielded the objective function value of 278 648 km. The mathematical model assigned each commentator to 12 games in the schedule, with each match comprising a maximum of six commentators. Noteworthy, for the purpose of brevity, only the findings involving the first four commentators and first five games are subsequently discussed. Table 7 specifies the jth venue relating to the kth game to which the ith commentator is assigned.

Table 7: Verification of stadium selection per commentator

	$i = 1$	$i = 2$	$i = 3$	$i = 4$
$k = 1$	-	-	$j = 5$	-
$k = 2$	$j = 2$	$j = 2$	-	-
$k = 3$	-	-	-	$j = 4$
$k = 4$	$j = 3$	-	-	-
$k = 5$	-	-	-	$j = 6$

Table 8 specifies the starting position for each commentator across the five games. Evidently, Table 8 confirms that the initial positions of said commentators represent the first assigned venue. Further, Table 8 sustains the considerations of the mathematical model and the desired outcome of the preceding constraints.

Table 8: Location of the commentators

	$i = 1$	$i = 2$	$i = 3$	$i = 4$
$k = 1$	$j = 2$	$j = 2$	$j = 5$	$j = 4$
$k = 2$	$j = 2$	$j = 2$	$j = 5$	$j = 4$
$k = 3$	$j = 2$	$j = 2$	$j = 5$	$j = 4$
$k = 4$	$j = 3$	$j = 2$	$j = 5$	$j = 4$
$k = 5$	$j = 3$	$j = 2$	$j = 5$	$j = 6$

Table 9 defines the values used in the computation of the positive difference in total distance travelled between the commentators. The values calculated in Table 9 result from the sum of the related Haversine distances obtained using the expression in Equation (9)

Table 9: Distances travelled by the commentators

Variable	Total distance travelled (km)
w_1	7 657
w_2	9 486
w_3	8 719
w_4	5 316

Applying the values in Table 9, the difference in total travel distances between the different commentators is expressed in Table 10. The difference between the travel distances is only computed in the case where the first commentator has a higher total travel distance.

Table 10: Difference in travel distances of the commentators

	$h = 1$	$h = 2$	$h = 3$	$h = 4$
$i = 1$	0	0	0	2 341
$i = 2$	1 829	0	767	4 170
$i = 3$	1 062	0	0	3 403
$i = 4$	0	0	0	0

Considering Table 10, all entries involving the column of the second commentator and row of the fourth commentator are zeros since they travelled the furthest and shortest, respectively. Finally, Equations (32) to (42) are applied to the mathematical model. Incorporating Equations (32) to (42) in the mathematical model decreased the objective function value to 192 146 km. As previously mentioned, the mathematical model assigned each commentator to 12 games, with each match comprising six commentators. Table 11 presents the venues of the games to which the commentators were assigned.

Table 11: Verification of stadium selection per commentator

	$i = 1$	$i = 2$	$i = 3$	$i = 4$
$k = 1$	-	-	$j = 5$	$j = 5$
$k = 2$	-	$j = 2$	-	-
$k = 3$	-	-	$j = 4$	$j = 4$
$k = 4$	$j = 3$	$j = 3$	-	-
$k = 5$	-	-	-	$j = 6$

Table 11 indicates that the first commentator commented only on one game, while the fourth commentator commented on three. Table 12 specifies the number of times each commentator worked with another.

Table 12: Similarity scores among commentators

	$h = 1$	$h = 2$	$h = 3$	$h = 4$
$i = 1$	0	1	0	0
$i = 2$	1	0	0	0
$i = 3$	0	0	0	2
$i = 4$	0	0	2	0

The results in Table 12 correspond with the selection of commentators exhibited in Table 11. Similar to Table 12, Table 13 expresses the number of times each commentator commented on the different teams.

Table 13: Similarity scores among the commentators and teams

	$i = 1$	$i = 2$	$i = 3$	$i = 4$
$g = 1$	1	1	1	2
$g = 2$	0	1	0	0
$g = 3$	1	1	0	0
$g = 4$	0	0	1	2
$g = 5$	0	0	2	2
$g = 6$	0	1	0	0

The findings in Table 13 correspond with the selection of commentators provided in Table 11. In conclusion, the suitable functioning of all constraints is confirmed, ultimately verifying the model's correctness in coding and formulation.

4.2 Mathematical model validation

The validation concerns investigating the model's effectiveness in scheduling commentators accurately. Two schedules were created based on the round-robin approach of the tournament that randomly assigns commentators to games. These two schedules are based on two distinct validation datasets, where the first presents an unbalanced selection of commentators, and the second provides a balanced selection. Both schedules were investigated to ensure that no commentator commentated on games occurring on the same day.

Equations (28), (32), (38), and (42) are excluded from the mathematical model for generating the first validation schedule. Further, Equation (43) is included to link the predefined schedule to the commentator selection of the mathematical model.

$$u_{ik} = \phi_{ik}, \forall i \in I, k \in K \quad \textbf{(43)}$$

From Equation (43), ϕ_{ik} represents a binary matrix, where 1 defines the assignment of the ith commentator to the kth game, and 0 otherwise. Employing the mathematical model for the validation calculations ensures that the same travel computations and measures of difference in travel distances are used. Subsequently, the number of times a commentator was selected in the first validation schedule varied between 8 and 17, leading to an objective function value of 411 854 km. Accordingly, the first validation schedule provided an unbalanced selection of commentators, with each individual assigned to a distinct number of games.

The second validation schedule satisfies the requirements associated with Equation (28) of the mathematical model. Consequently, each commentator was equally allocated to 12 games, resulting in an objective function value of 327 830 km. Appendix B defines the number of times each commentator was selected during the two validation schedules, with the corresponding travel distances. The first validation schedule demonstrated a clear imbalance between the commentators who were scheduled eight times and the one who was scheduled 17 times. Also, the maximum difference in travel distance for the first validation schedule is 12 427 km. Only a single commentator contains a travel distance further than the maximum difference in total distance for the first validation schedule. The second validation schedule comprises a smaller maximum difference in travel distance, being 7 251 km. For the second validation schedule, 14 commentators travelled further than the maximum difference in total distance. Evidently, the balanced selection of the second validation schedule presents a significant improvement over the unbalanced selection of the first validation schedule, resulting in a 41.65% reduction in the maximum difference and an 11.80% reduction in the objective function value.

Applying the complete mathematical model formulated in Equations (10) to (42) produced an objective function value of 183 250 km. Accordingly, the summation of the difference in travel distances between the commentators for the schedule yielded by the complete mathematical model is significantly lower than those of the validation schedules. Appendix C demonstrates the schedule of the commentators obtained using the complete mathematical model.

Appendix C includes the venues of the 12 games each commentator attended, and the distance travelled between each according to the travel sequence. Further, Appendix C shows the total travel distance of each commentator between the 12 games. Figure 3 compares the schedule obtained using the complete mathematical model to the second validation schedule in which a balanced allocation of commentators transpired. Noteworthy, the average travel distances for both schedules are included in Figure 3 as a reference for analysing the performance.

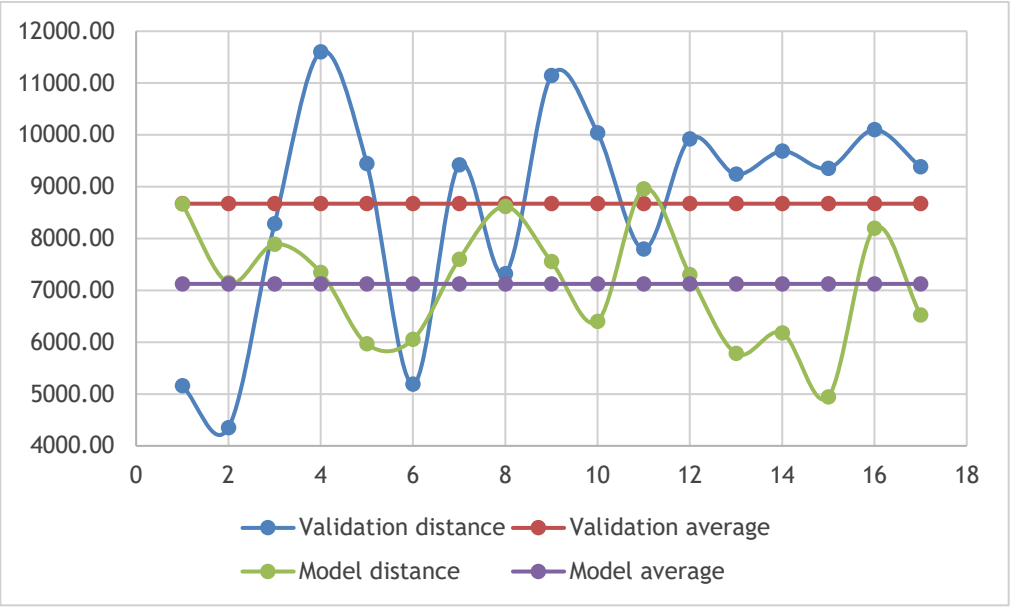

Figure 3: Comparison of individual and average distances

Considering Figure 3, the schedule obtained from the complete mathematical model contains a standard deviation of 1 146 km, whereas the second validation schedule contains a standard deviation of 2 085 km. As such, the schedule obtained from the complete mathematical model notably outperforms the second validation schedule. The second validation schedule consists of only three commentators who travelled a total distance less than the average distance of the mathematical model. Contrary hereto, the schedule for the complete mathematical model consists of just one commentator exceeding the validation average distance.

Figure 4 shows the standard deviation for each commentator, describing the relationship with the teams. The average standard deviation for the schedule of the complete mathematical model is lower than that of the second validation schedule, being 1.39 and 1.49, respectively. Figure 4 illustrates that the standard deviation for the schedule of the complete mathematical model varies between the minimum and maximum standard deviations relating to the second validation schedule. This occurrence results from the addition of Equation (42), which restricts the similarity scores defining the number of times a commentator may comment on a specific team to a maximum of six. The ideal combination would be to assign each commentator to a total of four games based on the underlying logic of Equation (8). However, such an assignment is not feasible as some teams participated in more games, resulting in higher similarity scores.

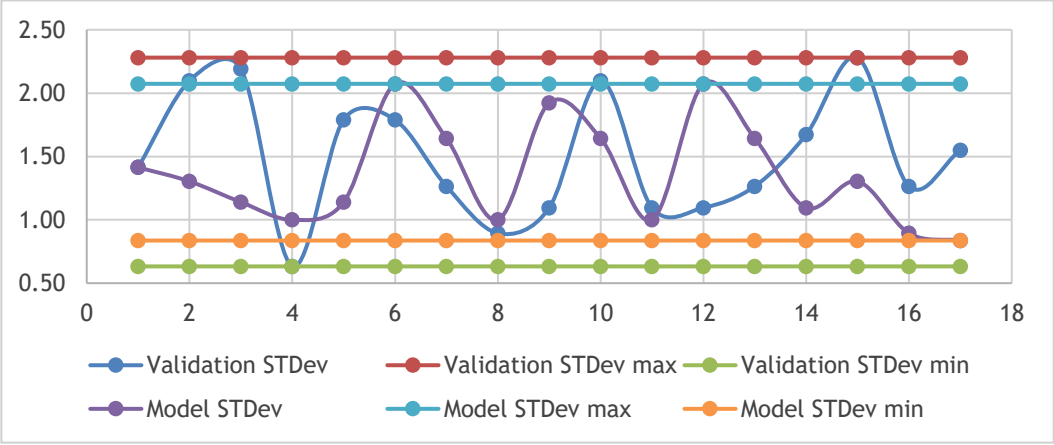

Figure 4: Standard deviation of commentators for teams

In conclusion, the practicality of the mathematical model is confirmed, thereby validating the model's effectiveness in scheduling commentators appropriately.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this study concerned minimising the difference in total distance travelled by commentators subject to a predefined playing schedule of the 2025 SA20. The combination of commentators and games gained by the mathematical model promotes a balanced distribution of work among commentators. The computational complexity of balancing the scheduling of commentators caused difficulties in solving the mathematical model in a feasible time. Hence, the selected limits for Equations (38) and (42) ensure a suitable trade-off between balancing commentator assignment and computational time. The mathematical model proposed in this study helps to bridge the gap in research involving the equivalent distribution of commentators among themselves, the participating teams, and the playing venues. Thus, the mathematical model introduces a framework for managing different T20 league competitions that mitigates the travel strain placed on commentators. The mathematical model provides at least one rest day for each commentator between distinct games for ease of travel arrangements during the demanding schedule of the contest. Therefore, the proposed solution addresses a multifaceted balancing problem, which serves as a potential basis for parallel research. The mathematical model assists organisers in executing data-driven decisions regarding a balanced allocation of fixed resources (commentators), ensuring a streamlined process (tournament). Therefore, the mathematical model exhibits the importance of industrial engineers in scientifically enhancing procedural operations across various industries.

Future research can consider exploring the application of team scheduling in the mathematical model to provide a collectively balanced schedule for players and commentators. The current approach can be redefined to address the length of travel while developing a schedule that minimises the distance covered by teams and commentators. Future work could also consider extending the mathematical model to alternative T20 league competitions to investigate the suitability for related environments. Finally, prospective research can extend the solution to alternative sporting events that require extensive travelling for commentators.

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APPENDIX A

Table 14 outlines the complete schedule of the 2025 SA20, detailing the date of each game, the stadium where play took place, the two participating teams, and the winner of the specific fixture [23].

Table 14: SA20 franchises [23]

Number	Date	Stadium	Home team	Away team	Winner
1	09/01/2025	St George's Park	SEC	MICT	MICT
2	10/01/2025	Kingsmead	DSG	PC	DSG
3	11/01/2025	Boland Park	PR	SEC	PR
4	11/01/2025	Wanderers	JSK	MICT	JSK
5	12/01/2025	SuperSport Park	PC	DSG	No result
6	13/01/2025	Newlands	MICT	PR	MICT
7	14/01/2025	SuperSport Park	PC	SEC	PC
8	14/01/2025	Kingsmead	DSG	JSK	JSK
9	15/01/2025	Boland Park	PR	MICT	PR
10	16/01/2025	Wanderers	JSK	PC	No result
11	17/01/2025	Kingsmead	DSG	SEC	SEC
12	18/01/2025	SuperSport Park	PC	PR	PR
13	18/01/2025	Newlands	MICT	JSK	MICT
14	19/01/2025	St George's Park	SEC	DSG	SEC
15	20/01/2025	Boland Park	PR	JSK	PR
16	21/01/2025	Kingsmead	DSG	MICT	No result
17	22/01/2025	St George's Park	SEC	PC	SEC
18	23/01/2025	Kingsmead	DSG	PR	PR
19	24/01/2025	St George's Park	SEC	JSK	SEC
20	25/01/2025	Boland Park	PR	PC	PR
21	25/01/2025	Newlands	MICT	DSG	MICT
22	26/01/2025	Wanderers	JSK	SEC	JSK
23	27/01/2025	Boland Park	PR	DSG	RP
24	28/01/2025	SuperSport Park	PC	JSK	PC
25	29/01/2025	Newlands	MICT	SEC	MICT
26	30/01/2025	Wanderers	JSK	PR	JSK
27	31/01/2025	SuperSport Park	PC	MICT	MICT
28	01/02/2025	St George's Park	SEC	PR	SEC
29	01/02/2025	Wanderers	JSK	DSG	DSG
30	02/02/2025	Newlands	MICT	PC	MICT
31	04/02/2025	St George's Park	MICT	PR	MICT
32	05/02/2025	SuperSport Park	SEC	JSK	SEC
33	06/02/2025	SuperSport Park	PR	SEC	SEC
34	08/02/2025	Wanderers	MICT	SEC	MICT

APPENDIX B

Table 15 presents the two validation schedules for more clarity concerning the total travelled distance of each commentator and the number of times each commentator commentated at a specific game.

Table 15: Validation schedules

Validation schedule 1			Validation schedule 2		
Commentator	Scheduled	Distance (km)	Commentator	Scheduled	Distance (km)
1	9	7 889	1	12	5 157
2	14	9 196	2	12	4 350
3	11	7 978	3	12	8 282
4	8	7 743	4	12	11 601
5	8	2 498	5	12	8 546
6	11	11 275	6	12	5 189
7	13	9 535	7	12	8 915
8	11	5 041	8	12	6 051
9	17	14 925	9	12	11 142
10	13	9 809	10	12	10 041
11	13	9 241	11	12	7 797
12	15	10 094	12	12	9 924
13	8	6 496	13	12	9 240
14	14	10 290	14	12	9 685
15	12	8 269	15	12	8 830
16	11	7 927	16	12	10 098
17	16	11 691	17	12	8 479

APPENDIX C

Figure 5 presents the schedule obtained using the mathematical model, indicating the venue where each commentator is required for the 12 games. The distance between each venue and the total travel distance of each commentator is also included in Figure 5. The starting position of each commentator corresponds to their first assigned venue.

Figure 5: Commentator schedule for the mathematical model

NATURE-INSPIRED RESILIENCE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW FOR FINTECH START-UPS

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ABSTRACT

FinTech start-ups operate in turbulent markets, facing continual waves of regulatory pressure, funding constraints, and customer uncertainty. Building resilience is vital to stay afloat and thrive amid these shifting tides. This systematic literature review explored whether nature-inspired principles from biomimicry could help FinTech start-ups navigate such volatility. Reviewing literature across FinTech challenges, biomimicry, and business resilience, the study revealed a clear gap since no existing research fully integrating all three domains. However, biological concepts such as decentralised coordination, feedback loops, and redundancy offer new strategies for withstanding disruption and adapting under pressure. These insights suggest that biomimicry may provide more than a metaphor since it can offer practical guidance for resilience. The review sets the stage for future interdisciplinary research to define how such principles could be embedded into FinTech systems, enabling start-ups not only to withstand disruption, but to harness it like a wave that propels growth.

Keywords: Resilience, Start-ups, FinTech, Biomimicry, Systematic Literature Review

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The South African banking sector, much like its global counterparts, is undergoing a profound digital transformation driven by the strategic integration of digital technologies into traditional banking operations [1]. This transformation is fundamentally reshaping how banks function, interact with customers, and deliver services, thus leading to new operational models and heightened customer expectations. Digital transformation initiatives are enabling banks to enhance client engagement, reduce operational costs, and streamline internal processes, thereby improving overall efficiency and competitiveness [2].

A major catalyst for this transformation has been the rapid rise of FinTech start-ups. These innovative, technology-driven enterprises have revolutionised the financial services landscape by offering cost-effective, personalised, and accessible financial products and services [3]. FinTech start-ups leverage cutting-edge technologies to deliver financial solutions that are not only more efficient and convenient but also more affordable than those provided by traditional financial institutions. Their disruptive influence has compelled incumbent banks to re-evaluate and adapt their business models in order to remain relevant in an increasingly digital marketplace [4].

Recent academic research defines FinTech companies as those that utilise technology to offer new financial services or to enhance the efficiency of existing financial systems [5-7]. By improving both the accessibility and delivery of financial services, FinTech start-ups are playing a pivotal role in the ongoing evolution of the banking industry.

There are five commonly referred to stages of a generic start-up as elucidated by Dorf [8]:

1. Pre-Seed Stage: Brainstorming the concept and building a prototype
2. Seed Stage: Seeking initial funding for product development, market validation and resourcing
3. Early Stage: Product development, developing a customer base and refining the business model
4. Growth Stage: Scaling the business by expanding operations, increasing market share, and enhancing revenue streams while optimising internal processes and infrastructure to support increased demand
5. Maturity and Exit Stage: The business reaches a stable and established position in the market, and may explore exit options

Research shows that startup failure rates tend to decrease with each successive funding round, indicating that early-stage startups are particularly vulnerable. For example, about 60% of pre-seed startups fail to reach seed funding, and roughly 35% of startups at the Series A stage do not advance further [4]. Overall, approximately 30% of venture-backed startups fail, and failure rates can be as high as 90% among all startups. These figures highlight the critical challenges faced by startups in their earliest phases of growth and scaling [9].

FinTech startups operate in a particularly complex and fast-moving environment defined by rapid technological change and strict, evolving regulatory frameworks. In developing economies, these challenges are even more pronounced due to infrastructural deficits, regulatory uncertainty, and limited access to capital and skilled human resources [10]. Additionally, FinTech startups are highly vulnerable to cybersecurity threats because they often lack sophisticated security infrastructures [11]. This makes them prime targets for increasingly advanced cyberattacks, including ransomware and phishing schemes. Resource constraints further challenge resilience, with limited financial capital, talent, and technological infrastructure restricting long-term strategic development[12]. Moreover, intense market uncertainties driven by technological disruption, changing consumer

behaviour, and economic volatility make sustained competitiveness and adaptability difficult to achieve [13].

Understanding these key challenges and risks, early-stage vulnerability, regulatory complexity, infrastructural and resource constraints, and escalating cybersecurity threats provides the foundation for exploring novel approaches, such as biomimicry, to enhance resilience and sustainability in FinTech startups. By framing the discourse around these documented issues, the research aims to investigate how nature-inspired strategies could offer innovative solutions to bolster the adaptive capacity and long-term viability of FinTech ventures.

In an era where disruption is the norm rather than the exception, FinTech start-ups find themselves at the frontline of volatility as they grapple with regulatory uncertainty, relentless cybersecurity threats, rapid technological evolution, and chronic resource constraints. Traditional risk management and business strategies often fall short in addressing the scale and complexity of these challenges [14]. Approaches that are bold, innovative, and inherently adaptable may hold potential for helping organisations navigate disruption and thrive amid uncertainty. Against this backdrop, Biomimicry offers a compelling and unconventional strategy—drawing inspiration from nature's 3.8 billion years of evolutionary resilience to inform the design of systems that are agile, sustainable, and resilient by nature. Nature's systems have evolved adaptive solutions to survive in changing, resource-scarce environments. For example, decentralised structures in coral reefs can inspire flexible organisational models, while immune system defences offer analogies for layered cybersecurity [15, 16]. By applying these nature-inspired strategies, FinTech start-ups can better navigate risk, adapt to uncertainty, and enhance their long-term sustainability-especially within the unique challenges of the South African market.

This study presents a systematic literature review (SLR) aimed at investigating whether nature-inspired strategies, specifically those drawn from Biomimicry, have been explored in addressing resilience challenges within South African FinTech start-ups. In a landscape where FinTechs must continually navigate waves of disruption and uncertainty, this review examines whether lessons from nature can help these ventures build the resilience needed to ride, rather than resist, the tides of change.

1.2 Research opportunity and scope

Biomimicry, the practice of emulating strategies from natural systems to solve human problems, provides a theoretical lens for examining potential resilience strategies [17]. A study published in the *Journal of Business Venturing Insights* questioned conventional entrepreneurship models by suggesting that nature's principles could redefine innovation and sustainability practices [17]. While this perspective was framed around general entrepreneurship, it offers conceptual relevance to FinTech start-ups, which—like biological systems—must adapt to volatility, resource scarcity, and high failure rates. This review seeks to determine whether such thinking has been applied specifically within the FinTech resilience literature. The purpose of this review is not to develop new resilience frameworks, but rather to assess the extent to which Biomimicry has already been considered as a strategic approach in the FinTech start-up context. In particular, it explores whether natural systems—known for their resilience, adaptability, and regenerative capacity—have been studied as sources of inspiration for tackling the resilience challenges unique to early-stage FinTech ventures. Although Biomimicry has found applications in fields such as engineering and design, its presence in FinTech literature remains uncertain and appears underexplored [18]. By mapping current research, this review will help identify conceptual gaps and, if relevant, offer suggestions for future studies that could bridge the disciplines of Biomimicry and FinTech resilience [15].

FinTech start-ups face considerable obstacles to building resilience, including regulatory burdens, cybersecurity threats, limited funding, and market volatility. Despite their capacity for innovation, many fail to survive due to inadequate strategies for navigating such challenges [19]. While existing literature addresses general resilience strategies, there is limited clarity on whether these approaches are suited to the complexities of FinTech ecosystems. Moreover, the potential of Biomimicry to inform such strategies has not been clearly established.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

This paper aims to systematically identify challenges faced by FinTech start-ups and explore potential Biomimicry-based solutions that could address these challenges.

The objectives of this study are to (1) conduct a systematic literature review to identify and synthesise the key challenges faced by FinTech start-ups, and (2) explore nature-inspired approaches that could inform practical and theoretical solutions.

1.4 Novelty

This research explores and conceptualises potential solutions to FinTech startup challenges through the lens of Biomimicry, drawing on nature-inspired strategies to enhance resilience, adaptability, and sustainability within the FinTech ecosystem. Natures time tested mechanisms for dealing with change and complexity may provide valuable models for start-ups struggling with conceptually similar challenges. By investigating these possibilities, this research seeks to conceptualize new strategies that FinTech startups might adopt to improve their resilience and long-term viability. The application of biomimicry could foster more integrated and holistic solutions, helping startups to navigate complexity not just through technology, but through systemic innovation inspired by the natural world.

2 METHODOLOGY: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of academic sources and was used to identify the key challenges and risks FinTech start-ups face as well as possible strategies in nature that can inspire resilience.

The research was based on a SLR aimed at identifying key challenges and risks encountered by FinTech start-ups, particularly those related to resilience and long-term sustainability. Sources included peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers obtained from databases such as ScienceDirect, Scopus, Emerald and Journal Storage (JSTOR).

The applied literature review will also include an exploration of biological systems that exhibit resilience, adaptability, and sustainability. The selection of sources will follow clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure quality and relevance. Table 1 below details the Search Protocol applied for the SLR.

Table 1: Search Protocol for the Systematic Literature Review

Component	Description
Review Objective	To compile and synthesise literature on the challenges faced by FinTech start-ups and the application of nature-inspired (Biomimicry-based) strategies.
Research Questions	1. What are the key challenges faced by FinTech start-ups and what themes emerge from existing literature on FinTech challenges in these stages?
	2. What systems in nature experience similar challenges and how has nature resolved these problems.
Search Strategy	Systematic search of academic databases and relevant literature sources using predefined keywords.
Databases Searched	Science Direct, Scopus, Emerald, JSTOR

Component	Description
Search String	"FinTech" AND (" nature-inspired " OR " Biomimicry ") AND (" resilience " OR " adapt- " OR "sustainabl-")
Inclusion Criteria	Studies published in English.
	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and other credible literature.
	Studies focused on FinTech start-ups resilience and using nature-inspired solutions in business.
Search time frame	2014 - 2024
Exclusion Criteria	Studies unrelated to drawing inspiration from nature or Biomimicry or articles unrelated to FinTech challenges
Screening Process	Titles and abstracts will be screened first, followed by a full-text review for relevance and eligibility.
Data Extraction	Key information such as study focus, methodology, geographic scope, identified challenges, nature-inspired solutions and conclusions will be extracted and analysed.
Synthesis Method	Thematic analysis to identify common challenges and gaps in the literature.

3 LITERATURE OVERVIEW

3.1 Fintech startups

FinTech start-ups, characterised by their integration of advanced technologies such as AI, blockchain, and digital payments into financial services, are fundamentally reshaping traditional financial systems [20]. Recent systematic literature reviews (SLRs) have mapped the evolution of FinTech research, identifying key themes and gaps [19, 21]. These studies collectively show that FinTech start-ups face multifaceted challenges that span regulatory compliance, risk management, funding, market uncertainty, and resource challenges [19].

3.1.1 Regulatory Challenges

Regulation emerges as the most extensively discussed challenge in the literature. FinTech start-ups operate within a complex and rapidly evolving regulatory landscape that differs widely across jurisdictions [5, 19]. Unlike general start-ups, FinTech companies must comply with sector-specific regulations concerning anti-money laundering (AML), know-your-customer (KYC) protocols, and data privacy laws, which require specialised compliance systems and legal expertise [19, 20]. Kashika Khanna et al. [19] also re-iterate the burden this fragmented regulatory environment places on FinTechs, which must balance the pursuit of innovation with the need to adhere to strict legal frameworks.

3.1.2 Licensing Challenges

Licensing requirements represent an interconnected but distinct challenge. These are often stringent and inconsistently applied, with some regions enforcing partial licenses or varying rules across sub-national jurisdictions, which complicates both market entry and cross-border scaling efforts [22]. The approval processes involved can be costly and time-consuming, creating significant barriers for new entrants. Delays in obtaining necessary licenses, coupled with the high administrative burden, further exacerbate operational uncertainty for start-ups in this space [7, 21].

3.1.3 Data Security

Data security is a critical concern for FinTech start-ups due to their handling of sensitive financial and personal information. Cybersecurity threats, vulnerabilities in digital infrastructure, and insufficient investment in secure systems can expose companies to data

breaches with serious legal and reputational consequences [19]. Suryono, et al. [6] emphasize that such breaches are among the most significant barriers to FinTech adoption, necessitating ongoing investment in robust, secure technology infrastructure to safeguard against evolving threats [6]. Compared to other start-ups, the consequences of a data breach in FinTech are often more immediate and severe, potentially resulting in regulatory penalties and loss of market credibility.

3.1.4 Customer Trust

Closely tied to data security is the issue of customer trust, which is essential for user adoption and retention in the FinTech space. Consumers are particularly cautious when it comes to financial platforms, and any perceived weaknesses in data protection or user interface design can quickly undermine confidence. Trust deficits are amplified by broader concerns over digital fraud and privacy, making it imperative for FinTech start-ups to build transparent, user-friendly systems that reassure users about the safety of their data [19]. As trust is a foundational element in financial services, its erosion can be particularly damaging, stalling growth and limiting the ability to scale.

3.1.5 Technological and Human Capital Challenges

Maintaining technological control and attracting skilled human capital are significant challenges. Constant innovation is necessary, but so is maintaining secure, reliable, and scalable systems [6]. Finding people with the right mix of financial and technical skills is especially difficult, as this combination is relatively rare [19]. Without access to such specialised expertise, scaling operations and remaining competitive become much more difficult in a fast-changing industry. This scarcity creates bottlenecks in recruitment and limits a start-up's ability to scale operations or pivot rapidly in response to external pressures. The socio-technical nature of FinTech systems means that deficiencies in either domain—technological capability or human expertise—can critically undermine resilience, innovation capacity, and competitive positioning in a rapidly evolving industry.

3.2 Resilience

Resilience in the business context is broadly understood as an organisation's ability to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and recover from adverse events while maintaining or regaining its core value proposition [23, 24]. A bibliometric analysis of over 700 articles indexed in SCOPUS reveals that business resilience research has surged, particularly following global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic [23]. The literature suggests that business resilience is not static but evolves as organisations and their environments change, with resilience-forming features continuously developing over time [23-25].

Conz [25] proposes a dynamic perspective, emphasizing the temporal dimension of resilience and the need for organisations to adapt their strategies and structures over time. The framework categorizes resilience capabilities into proactive (anticipation and preparation), reactive (response and recovery), and adaptive (learning and transformation) dimensions, underscoring that resilience is both a process and an outcome [25].

3.3 Biomimicry applications

A 2025 review published in the *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* highlights how Biomimicry is driving sustainable business practices across a wide range of industries, including transportation, packaging, and beyond [16]. In the transportation sector, Biomimicry has inspired the development of aerodynamic designs modelled after bird flight, particularly that of birds like kingfishers and falcons. For instance, the nose design of Japan's Shinkansen bullet train was influenced by the beak of the kingfisher, enabling it to travel faster while reducing noise pollution and energy consumption. Such

adaptations not only improve performance but also contribute to sustainability by lowering fuel use and emissions [16].

In the packaging industry, Biomimicry has led to innovations that reduce material waste and improve functionality. One notable example includes the development of self-cleaning surfaces inspired by lotus leaves, which naturally repel water and dirt due to their micro- and nano-structured surfaces. This principle has been adopted in packaging materials and coatings that require less cleaning or processing, thereby conserving water and reducing chemical use [16]. These nature-inspired solutions not only enhance technical performance but also promote circular economy principles by reducing reliance on non-renewable resources and supporting regenerative design.

Research published in *ScienceDirect* underscores the integration of Biomimicry and creative problem-solving in management education, demonstrating that teaching these principles to future business leaders fosters a mindset oriented toward sustainable innovation. By studying natural systems' adaptability and resource efficiency, practitioners, students and organisations learn to devise solutions that balance economic growth with ecological responsibility [26]. Academic literature demonstrates that Biomimicry offers a rich, interdisciplinary approach for businesses seeking to solve complex challenges and transition toward sustainability. By emulating nature's time-tested strategies, companies can innovate in ways that are both economically viable and ecologically responsible, paving the way for a new era of sustainable business [16, 17, 26].

Biomimicry research offers valuable insights from nature's adaptive systems, such as decentralisation and redundancy, that can inspire innovative resilience strategies. While business resilience literature emphasizes flexibility and proactive risk management, there is a clear gap in applying biomimetic principles specifically to FinTech resilience. This gap presents a promising opportunity for future research to develop nature-inspired models that enhance the adaptability and sustainability of FinTech start-ups amid rapid change and uncertainty.

4 SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

The SLR findings serve as a foundation for nature-inspired strategies are explored as potential solutions to strengthen the adaptability and longevity of FinTech start-ups.

4.1 Selected research papers

Figure 1 illustrates the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram used to guide the systematic literature review process in this study. It outlines the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages through which relevant studies were selected, ensuring transparency and rigor in the selection of literature related to FinTech start-up challenges and Biomimicry-based solutions.

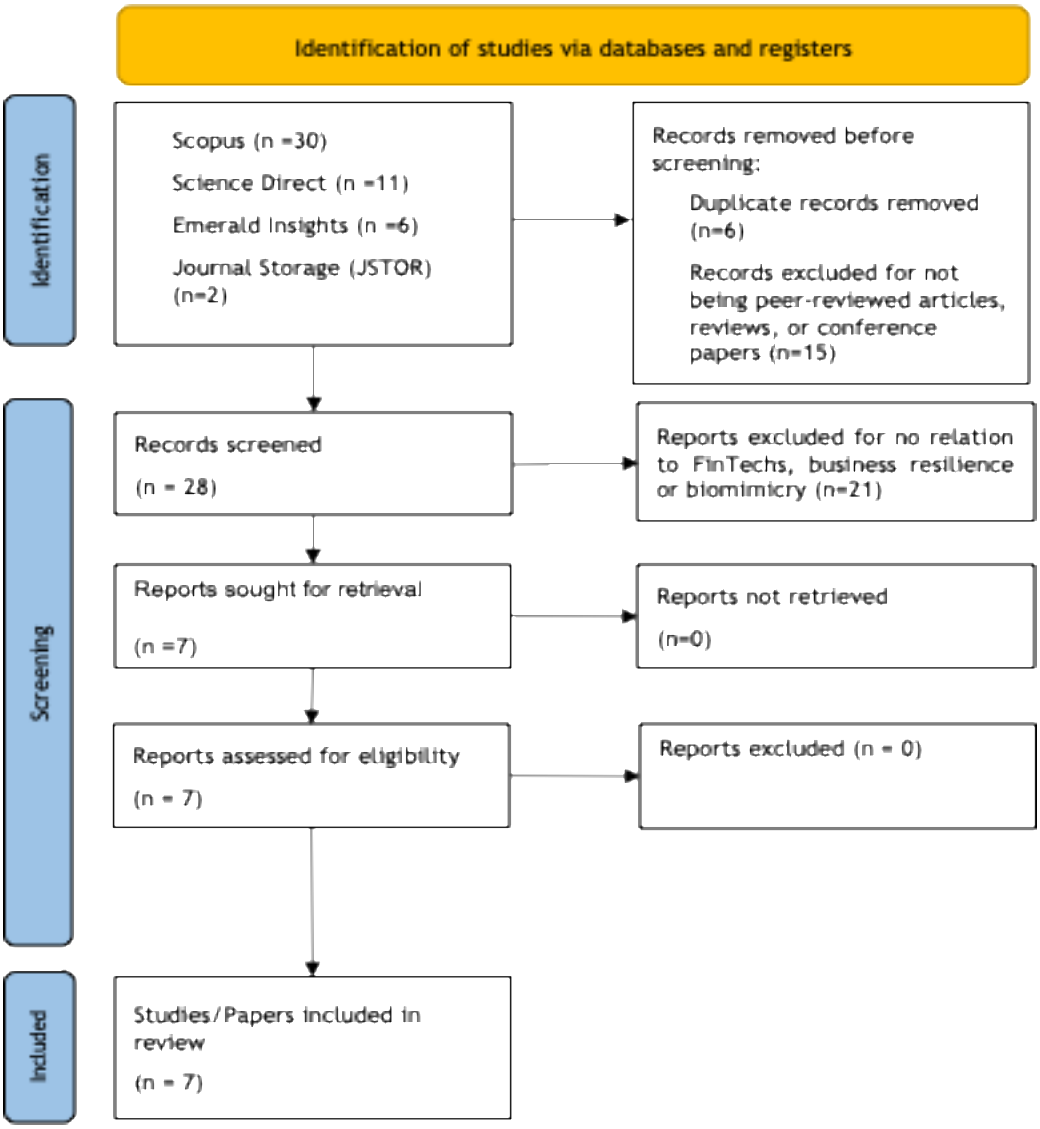

Figure 1: Prisma Flow Diagram

4.2 Findings and results

A structured literature search was conducted using the PRISMA 2020 framework across four academic databases—Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and IEEE Xplore. This process initially identified 49 records. After the removal of duplicates and books or book sections were removed 28 articles remained. Subsequently the titles and abstracts of these articles were screened for relevance. 21 articles were removed as they were not directly related to any of the three research categories of challenges of fintech start-ups, Biomimicry in business, business resilience. Ultimately only seven studies were thoroughly assessed for eligibility and included for review. The primary reasons for exclusion were:

- Lack of interdisciplinary integration - The majority of studies focused solely on either FinTech start-up challenges or Biomimicry in business, but did not combine both perspectives.
- Absence of FinTech context in resilience framing - Some Biomimicry-focused studies explored resilience principles but were not related to FinTech or FinTech start-ups. Table 2 below provides a summary of the key takeaways of the articles included in the

review as well as their relation to the topics of challenges of FinTech start-ups and nature-inspired solutions.

Table 2: Summary of SLR papers included

Paper No.	Year	Authors	Title of Study	Key Takeaways	Identifies key challenges of FinTech start-ups	Identifies possible solutions in nature	Business resilience
1	2023	Alzubaidi, et al. [27]	Towards Risk-Free Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence: Significance and Requirements	Methods for increasing data privacy i.e. deidentification, federated learning techniques, and data agreements	ü	û	û
2	2025	Borrero and Yousafzai [28],	Spinning the circle: unravelling the "why?" behind social motivations in circular economy entrepreneurship	Presents the concept of circular necessity entrepreneurship and introduces circular business model (CBM) strategies for resource constrained, smaller companies	û	ü	ü
3	2025	Mo and Zeng [29]	Analysis of technology innovation efficiency and its impact factors based on DEA-fsQCA method: Evidence from listed seed companies in China	Proposes five main ways seed companies can get better at innovating: Focusing on employees, improving talent and management, encouraging a mix of skills and company sizes, working closely with the government, combining different types of talent and ideas	ü	û	ü
4	2024	Valarmathi and Dhanalakshmi [30]	Persistent Fish School-Inspired Deep Belief Network for Object Detection in Varied Weather Traffic Surveillance	Introduces a new algorithm called PFSS-DBN, inspired by the way fish swim in schools and adapt to their environment. It uses deep learning to adjust itself to different weather conditions, improving how	û	ü	û

Paper No.	Year	Authors	Title of Study	Key Takeaways	Identifies key challenges of FinTech start-ups	Identifies possible solutions in nature	Business resilience
				well it detects objects on the road.			
5	2022	Jiang, et al. [31]	DSGWO: An improved grey wolf optimizer with diversity enhanced strategy based on group-stage competition and balance mechanisms	The DSGWO algorithm, inspired by grey wolf hunting behaviour, improves how optimisation problems are solved by enhancing diversity and balancing exploration with focus—key traits found in nature.	û	ü	û
6	2023	Jiang, et al. [32]	ATSA: An Adaptive Tree Seed Algorithm based on double-layer framework with tree migration and seed intelligent generation	An optimisation method inspired by how trees and their seeds spread and adapt in an ecosystem	û	ü	û
7	2025	Jiang, et al. [33]	KATSA: KNN Ameliorated Tree Seed Algorithm for complex optimization problems	Research that further expands on the paper above and combines it with K-Nearest Neighbour (KNN) logic — a machine learning method that mimics how organisms might make decisions based on their local environment (or "neighbours"	û	ü	û

The final selection of studies reflects the limited but emerging dialogue between these distinct fields, underscoring the need for greater interdisciplinary exploration. The next section discusses the implications of these findings for theory, practice, and future research.

4.3 Implications of the Review

4.3.1 Identified Research Gap

The small number of qualifying studies highlights a clear research gap at the intersection of FinTech start-up challenges, Biomimicry in business, and business resilience. This gap is underscored by the limited cross-disciplinary engagement, while Biomimicry has proven valuable in areas like architecture and systems engineering, its potential in financial technologies remains underexplored. Furthermore, resilience strategies in FinTech tend to be

siloed within regulatory or technological domains, missing opportunities to leverage nature's adaptive, decentralized problem-solving approaches. Figure 2 illustrates this gap and the lack of integrated research connecting these three domains. The numbers in the diagram represent the research domain of the paper IDs referenced in the previous table.

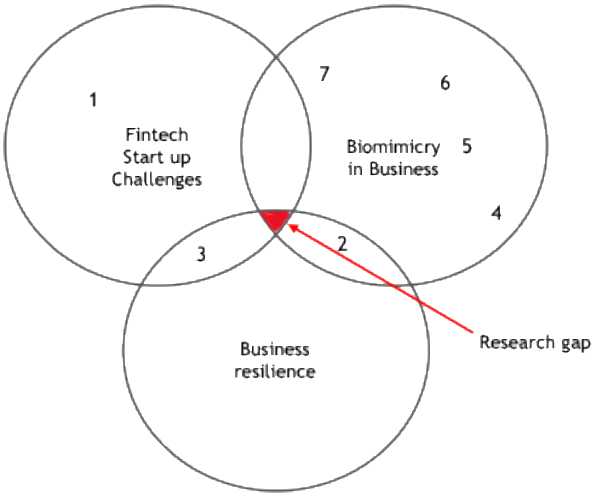

Figure 2: Venn diagram of Research Gap

A key focus of this review is to explore how existing literature addresses the convergence of FinTech start-up challenges, nature-inspired (Biomimicry-based) approaches, and strategies that support business resilience. While this intersection remains underexplored, insights drawn from a diverse range of fields—such as algorithmic development, entrepreneurship, and financial technology—offer promising avenues for future investigation.

Only one study (Alzubaidi, et al. [27]) directly identified challenges specific to FinTech start-ups, focusing on data privacy and trust in artificial intelligence. The authors propose technical methods like federated learning and data de-identification to mitigate risk, but the study does not incorporate nature-based analogies or resilience-building frameworks. By contrast, several other papers introduce biologically inspired strategies such as the fish school-inspired PFSS-DBN (Valarmathi and Dhanalakshmi [30]) and grey wolf-based DSGWO (Jiang, et al. [31]) that, while developed in non-FinTech domains like traffic surveillance and general optimisation, present valuable metaphors for adaptability and decision-making under uncertainty. These nature-based algorithms simulate biological behaviours such as schooling, hunting, and seed dispersion, offering abstract models that could potentially be adapted for FinTech applications, especially in contexts requiring agility, robustness, and decentralised control.

Borrero and Yousafzai [28] also contribute meaningfully to this discussion by introducing circular business models (CBMs) in resource-constrained settings, which overlap conceptually with FinTech environments. These models, grounded in circular economy principles, promote sustainability and business resilience by reusing resources and fostering social entrepreneurship, these are traits that can be mapped onto FinTech start-ups navigating regulatory and resource constraints. The work of Mo and Zeng [29], although not biomimetic, adds a resilience lens by outlining strategic innovation practices such as talent diversity, adaptive management, and collaboration with government. These findings parallel biological strategies like redundancy, diversity, and symbiosis, reinforcing the relevance of Biomimicry as a framework for resilient innovation in FinTech.

Overall, while direct connections between FinTech, Biomimicry, and resilience are sparse in the literature, several studies implicitly align with biomimetic principles. The reviewed papers suggest that integrating nature-inspired strategies such as decentralised adaptation,

intelligent learning, and resource circulation, could offer novel pathways to enhance the resilience and adaptability of FinTech start-ups.

4.3.2 Theoretical Contributions and Practical Opportunities

This review offers a novel theoretical contribution by bridging FinTech innovation, Biomimicry, and business resilience fields often examined in isolation. By integrating these perspectives, it introduces a new lens for understanding how FinTech start-ups can adapt and thrive under uncertainty, complexity, and resource constraints. Biomimicry, in particular, provides a foundation for reimagining resilience not just as risk mitigation, but as a dynamic capacity for adaptation and growth.

The studies reviewed highlight that nature-inspired principles such as decentralisation (fish schooling), adaptability (tree seed dispersal), and self-organisation (grey wolf hunting) can inform both technical innovations and organisational strategies in FinTech. These analogies support solutions for regulatory complexity, market volatility, and limited resources, while also guiding models for fraud detection, compliance, and customer engagement.

Moreover, the research points to the potential of antifragile design systems that strengthen through stress—as a strategic advantage. Adaptive approaches identified in works by Jiang, et al. [31] and Mo and Zeng [29] show how FinTechs can leverage intelligent, modular models to enhance innovation and resilience. Insights from Borrero and Yousafzai [28] further show how circular thinking and talent diversity contribute to organisational resilience, echoing ecological principles such as redundancy and feedback loops.

Building on these insights, the review underscores that Biomimicry offers a multi-level framework through which resilience can be embedded into FinTech systems. The natural principles identified (i.e. decentralisation, adaptability, and self-organisation) can be applied not only to isolated functions but also scaled to broader organisational and industry contexts. For instance, decentralisation observed in fish schooling supports distributed decision-making in FinTech networks, while adaptability drawn from tree seed dispersal aligns with scalable growth strategies. Grey wolf hunting behaviour, reflecting self-organisation, informs how FinTechs might dynamically reconfigure teams or operations in response to environmental shifts. These nature-inspired strategies do not operate in isolation but interact as layered systems, offering functional models that transcend specific industry boundaries and instead respond to core systemic needs.

4.4 Enablers to address the research gap

To address the research gap between FinTech start-up challenges and business resilience, key enablers include developing interdisciplinary research frameworks that align technological risk, regulatory complexity, and organisational adaptability. Academic-industry partnerships can support real-time data collection from FinTech start-ups, enabling empirical studies on how resilience traits present themselves in high-uncertainty environments.

Bridging the gap between Biomimicry and FinTech start-up challenges requires greater methodological integration. Enablers include cross-disciplinary collaboration between FinTech experts and Biomimicry scientists to translate natural systems (e.g., swarm intelligence, decentralised coordination) into practical FinTech models. Development of simulation environments or digital sandboxes could help test biomimetic principles against real-world FinTech constraints such as scalability, data privacy, and user trust.

To close the gap between Biomimicry and business resilience, enablers include advancing conceptual models that map ecological principles such as self-organisation, modularity, and regenerative capacity onto core business functions. Importantly, the application of Biomimicry can transcend industry boundaries by aligning with specific industry needs. For example, modularity may support scalability in financial technology, while regenerative capacity may

enhance sustainability in agriculture or energy sectors. Research institutions and think tanks can catalyse this integration through systems thinking workshops, curated case study repositories, and scenario-based testing. These tools can facilitate the design of adaptive business models inspired by nature's problem-solving strategies and tailored to the resilience needs of different industries.

4.5 Limitations

The SLR reveals a key limitation in the lack of studies integrating FinTech start-up challenges, business resilience, and Biomimicry within a single research framework. Most articles addressed these themes in isolation, limiting the ability to generate holistic insights. Additionally, while Biomimicry appeared in several studies, it was largely applied to optimisation rather than to organisational or strategic resilience—restricting its practical application for FinTech start-ups facing issues like regulation or customer trust.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to explore how Biomimicry principles can be integrated into strategies that enhance the resilience of FinTech start-ups. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, the systematic review examined literature across three domains: FinTech start-up challenges, Biomimicry, and business resilience. Although several papers addressed explored nature-inspired optimisation and adaptive behaviours and others FinTech issues, such as market uncertainty and limited resources, no study explicitly bridged all three domains in an integrated framework.

This lack of convergence presents a critical research gap but also an untapped opportunity. Concepts from nature such as redundancy, decentralised coordination (as seen in grey wolf and fish school-inspired algorithms), and circular models of resilience offer novel perspectives for addressing persistent FinTech challenges like market volatility, customer trust, and resource constraints. These biological principles have the potential to reframe resilience—not just as resistance to disruption, but as a dynamic, adaptive capacity for growth under pressure.

Ultimately, this review lays the groundwork for interdisciplinary exploration by proposing a new theoretical lens through which FinTech resilience can be understood and strengthened. Like a wave that adapts its shape to navigate ever-changing currents, future research should focus on identifying the functional requirements for embedding biomimetic strategies into FinTech architecture, governance, and operations. Doing so could lead to more robust, adaptable, and sustainable FinTech systems capable of thriving in complex and evolving environments. In this way, just as waves continually reshape the coastline through their persistent and dynamic energy, biomimicry-informed innovation could enable FinTech to reshape its boundaries and remain resilient amidst ongoing disruption.

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UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF THE DUAL USE REGULATION FOR UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Dual-use items, including software and technology, are designed for civilian use, but the unintended use can lead to human rights violations and terrorist attacks (such as using it as nuclear or biological weapons). The EU Regulation (EU 2021/821) aims to regulate export control of dual use items and allow universities to navigate global competitiveness and manage controls to prevent weapon proliferation. Universities and research institutions are challenged by navigating complex dual use regulatory frameworks, which hampers universities' ability to comply, to ensure that ethical practices, collaboration and academic freedom are adhered to. Without a compliance strategy in place, universities are unable to comply with EU Regulations. This study aims to explore university perspectives gathered from interviews and literature emphasising that compliance is crucial for regulations to achieve its intended outcome. Applying a systems engineering approach to analyse different solutions and propose pragmatic solutions leads to enhanced compliance strategies.

Keywords: Dual-Use Items, EU Regulation, Universities, Research Institutions, Systems Engineering Approach

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1 INTRODUCTION

The impact of international export regulation on dual-use items in universities is a topic of increasing importance, particularly in the context of research and development (R&D) and technology transfer (TT). Regulating dual use items presents a multitude of complex challenges, where research and technology intersect with stringent national and international export regulations. Understanding and adhering to dual-use compliance regulation is crucial for universities engaged in cutting-edge research. Navigating the complex regulatory landscape poses significant challenges. The League of Research Universities (LERU) reported several compliance challenges with the European Union (EU) Dual Use Regulation and related export regulations (henceforth collectively called the "Regulations") and highlighted aspects such as fragmented regulations leading to inconsistent interpretation, lack of compliance guidance and tools leading to increasing compliance risks, resource constraints within universities and government, increased barriers to international collaboration, infringement of academic freedom, the overreach of EU competencies, and research integrity and ethical dilemmas [1]. Without a comprehensive compliance strategy, universities lack the required preparedness and ability to respond to the Regulations.

The EU Regulation, specifically, the Regulation (EU) 2021/821, aims to regulate export control and control of dual use items with the main purpose of preventing the violation of human rights. The EU specifies which items are subject to export control through the **EU dual-use export control list in Annex I** updated (2024) [2].

The European Parliament defines **dual-use goods** as [3]:

"Dual-use products are goods designed for civilian use that in the wrong hands could be used to supress human rights or launch terrorist attacks. They can be anything from drones to chemicals. Although these goods can improve people's lives, they can be misused. Authoritarian regimes might use them to keep the population under control, while terrorist groups could use them to stage attacks."

It further states that Dual Use Regulation is required *"to prevent dual-use goods being repurposed in ways that violate human rights, the EU wants to make sure strict export rules prevent them being sold to people or organisations wanting to misuse them [3]."*

Export Control is defined as *"… restrictions on international trade in certain sensitive goods, software and technology"* [4]. Export control incorporates aspects of licensing requirements and prohibitions across the border and regulates tangible and intangible monitored items. The consequences of not having the correct exporting license include **revocation** of the current license, **seizure of goods**, and as this is equivalent to a **criminal offence**, the possibility of imprisonment [5].

Although this study focuses on the EU's Regulations, it should be noted that there are several other international regulations and treaties [6] governing dual use, such as the United States of America [7], United Nations [8], and South Africa [9]. There is also an increased awareness from research funders to ensure that universities understand the potential negative implications that their scientific outcomes might hold and this lead to several funders providing frameworks and require responsibile research practices from the recipients of their funding (such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)) [10][11][12].

This study brings perspectives from universities obtained during interviews and reported concerns in literature on the implications of the Regulations. Compliance regulations will ultimately only achieve what they intend if those affected by them are indeed able to comply.

The **problem statement** for this study is that *in the absence of a framework for Compliance Strategies, universities subject to the EU Regulation 2021/821 are significantly exposed to non-compliance consequences, which could otherwise have been systematically identified, assessed, and mitigated.*

The discipline of Industrial Engineering (IE) is well-positioned to address the problem statement to develop a **Compliance Strategy Framework (CSF) for Dual-Use** due to IE's inherent focus on **systematic integration, process optimisation, and risk management**. We believe Industrial Engineers are uniquely positioned to design, implement, and sustain robust compliance mechanisms that account for the complexity of modern university research environments.

This relevance is particularly critical in the context of:

- **Increasing regulatory pressure** on universities to manage the risks of misue of reearch outputs.
- The growing prevalence of **interdisciplinary research**, where technologies developed for civilian use may have unintended military applications.
- The need for **process-driven, stakeholder-informed frameworks** that align operational practices with national and international export obligations.

For this study, the Key Objective is identified and is supported by the accompanying Sub-Objectives:

Key Objective:

Developing a framework for innovative compliance strategies for universities to improve compliance with dual-use regulations: *Developing a systematic strategy to handle the difficulties and needs of managing research and technology with both civilian and military uses is necessary to increase compliance with dual-use laws.*

Sub-Objectives:

1. Investigate the current scope of the EU export control regulations affecting universities.
2. Determine what universities should implement to comply with export control regulations, including the process for identifying and classifying sensitive dual use items.
3. Explore the existing frameworks or strategies aiming to address how EU universities manage security concerns related to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which are utilised by universities to identify reoccurring themes and areas for improvement.
4. Identify gaps and challenges faced by universities to comply with the regulations.
5. Develop a CSF for Dual-Use outlining guidelines for effective implementation tailored to the needs of universities. Additionally, the effectiveness and feasibility of the proposed framework is evaluated within diverse university settings.
6. Device a validation strategy for the comprehensive framework.

At the time of this paper, Sub-Objectives 1-4 are completed, and Sub-Objective 5 has been initiated through a participatory process with stakeholders.

2 METHODOLOGY

The 7-Step Soft Systems Methodology (SSM), a systems engineering process (Figure 1), provides a pragmatic and structured approach to obtaining a solution to business, management or real-world problems [13]. The research methodology is briefly described:

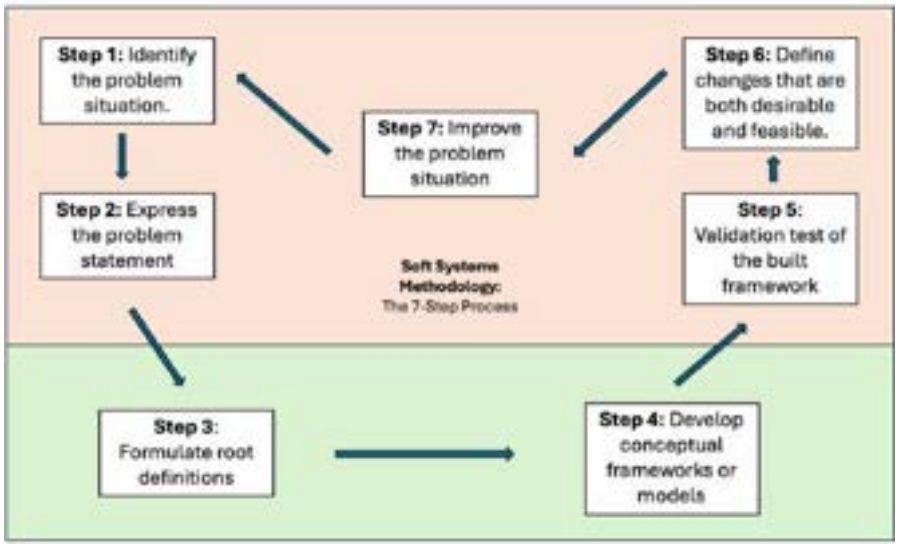

Figure 1: Soft Systems Methodology [13].

2.1 Step One: Identify the problem situation

This step comprises undertaking some preliminary research to find out more about the important prospective participants and identify any initial problems [13]. If university R&D outputs pose a security risk, or could be utilised maliciously, or involve research collaboration outside the EU region, then certain actions are subject to the Regulations. The rationale, however, is that universities are advised to use the regulatory framework as a measure of safety when exporting these dual-use items [14][15].

Through a literature review on EU Dual Use Regulation and the challenges experienced by universities, a narrative understanding of the problem was identified. From this, a comprehensive set of interview questions was developed, and two pilot interviews were conducted with dual use experts to ensure that the interview questions are fit for purpose. The required ethics clearance was obtained, and several universities were approached to participate in this study through interviews.

2.2 Step Two: Expressing the problem situation

This step comprises understanding the identified problem situation and expressing this in a problem statement which further incorporates multiple views and perspectives from various stakeholders to provide potential solutions. Universities are bound by Regulations that are ill-defined – citing the need to clarify the nuances of the Regulations' restrictions and ambiguous definitions [13].

Interviews were conducted with eight universities which follow or are subjected to the Regulations (Norway (1); United Kingdom (UK) (2); Belgium (2) and Netherlands (3)). Combining the interview results and the challenges identified from literature, the problem situation was identified and expressed.

2.3 Step Three: Formulate root definitions

This step comprises a problem statement that summarises the problem situation in a clearly defined, fundamental definition [13]. The root definition logically deduces tasks that adhere to the definition, which is supported through two systems engineering models, namely the Conceptual Model (creating fundamental definitions and establishing the foundation in a logical manner) and the CATWOE Model (an acronym that verifies the quality of knowledge within the root definition and deems it acceptable) [13]. Applying the CATWOE Model yields the following results, captured in Table 1 below.

Table 1: CATWOE Model [13]

	Definition	***Description***	***Application for this study.***
C	Customer	The end user of purposeful activities[4]	End users are academics, research compliance teams and the university as a legal entity.
A	Actors	Systems that enable transformation to occur.	Actors are ethic committees, compliance officers, legal advisors and research managers responsible for, or supporting the customer.
T	Transformation	Process of the purposeful activity.	Shifting the narrative from a reactive compliance approach towards a proactive and innovation-driven approach. A further narrative shift from bureaucratic process to that of preventing human rights violations is critical for the success of the compliance framework.
W	Weltanschauung	Considers the bigger picture and the influences thereof.	Balancing compliance with Regulations and academic freedom and collaborative innovation.
O	Owner	Catalysts or barriers within the system	Funding bodies, EU export control authorities who authorise licenses, and compliance teams within universities.
E	Environmental Constraints	Elements that exist within the environment.	The different interpretations per member state, uncertainty regarding responsibilities to ensure adherence and monitoring compliance as well as the lack of uniformed strategies for compliance.

As part of Steps Two and Three, further brainstorming sessions were held with six universities (UK (1); Belgium (2) and Netherlands (3)). The purpose of these sessions was to firstly, obtain input on potential conceptual models and secondly, address the GAP analysis to determine which areas of compliance are the most pressing for universities and researchers. This process aims to highlight areas of alignment in terms of existing compliance strategies and risk management approaches for dual-use items, which are currently available in the public domain.

2.4 Step Four & Five: Build and Compare conceptual models with the real world

These steps collectively, through validation and verification processes, evaluate whether the intended model framework, contrasts the perceptions of the real world. Discrepancies between what occurs, and the logical model raise the issues that will ultimately enforce change [13]. Through this phase, the process of developing the framework for Innovative Compliance Strategies commences. At the time of this paper, the conceptual models have not yet been fully developed. This paper report on the process leading to the potential conceptual model.

[4] Not to be confused with the definition of end-user in the EU dual use regulations.

2.5 Step Six: Define changes that are both desirable and feasible

This step comprises pragmatic techniques which require recommendations that are put into action. World views typically present themselves in such a way that improvements are made to problematic solutions. Views are required on what is considered to be the most desirable and feasible and offers a chance to reconsider various aspects of real-world activities [13].

2.6 Step Seven: Take action to improve the problem situation

During this step, an allocation of resources is made to determine the desired and feasible solutions. The broader, newer systems will be impacted; however, this poses opportunities for more development and possible improvement [13].

3 UNDERSTANNDING THE EU DUAL USE REGULATION

The Regulation 2021/821 incorporates provisions for technological adaptations to address the ever-evolving technological climate to safeguard against the possible risk without stifling innovation [16]. The core classification process within this regulation falls within its technical characteristics, as this enables the overall system to be robust but also challenging based on the objectives and specifications of the Regulations. This becomes especially important when managing emerging and/or abstract technologies and knowledge [17]. While this approach may prevent subjective approaches in the classification of dual-use items, it unfortunately places the responsibility of dual-use identification, classification and compliance in the hands of academics, universities and exporters who may have limited understanding of export control and compliance [18].

3.1 Regulatory Framework

The Regulations aimed to incorporate the evolution of emerging technology and technology governance and expanded their scope to consider not only the physical goods, but the intangible assets that have recently taken precedence in an R&D context [19]. Additionally, the Regulations consider the coordination of export controls, how licensing for the items displayed in Annex I are required as well as provisions for technical assistance [20].

The tiered approach to licensing has been cited by literature as the defining feature. Exporters and regulators are provided a coordinated approach in exporting certain items, particularly those dual use items not regulated by the regulatory framework, but items that are subjected to the ‘catch-all clauses’ based on risk assessments [21]. At most, these Regulations aim to address and mitigate the geopolitical aspect by lessening the disparities that may have otherwise been taken advantage of. Although member states have their discretion over the regulation applicable on a national level, these Regulations aim to collectively strengthen the sanctions, security and legislation placed towards potential threats such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and cyber warfare [22].

Divided into ten categories, dual use items have been categorised according to a classification metric ranging from Category 0 (nuclear materials) to Category 9 (aerospace and propulsion), whereas items such as systems, software, and technology are categorised into detailed sub-categories. Each item is assigned a custom alphanumeric identifier that aligns with international export control regime (Wassenaar Arrangement). This metric, although standard, increases in complexity when considering intangible elements that can be classed under multiple categories - a system academics struggle to navigate [22]. Universities are providers of data, knowledge or expertise and other intangible items. As a result, a level of difficulty arises when deciphering whether activities or items are controlled, particularly when items are not clearly defined in the Annex I [14].

Risk response methods are the key drivers of the expansion of the Regulations. The export control regime (Wassenaar Arrangement) includes these intangible items in the definition and lists of dual use items. However, the absence of well-defined processes for identifying or managing such transfers makes the enforcement a challenge [23].

3.2 Research and Development Challenges

The integration of dual-use compliance remains an underdeveloped concept in academic research. Academics and universities historically operated under the assumption that research, more specifically, basic research, is exempt. Challenges in academia stem from the lack of awareness and perception of these Regulations on intangible items [24]. Concerns reported regarding limited awareness relate to [20][24]:

- Researchers remain unaware that their research (collaborations, publications, data transfers or technical assistance) may require an export license.
- Researchers remain unaware that their research involved controlled items.
- Researchers often view compliance as a violation to academic freedom.
- Researchers remain unaware that the regulation includes and is applicable to universities as well.

3.2.1 Internal Compliance Programs

I Internal compliance programs are essential for dealing with dual-use items, as well as shifting the narrative from passive compliance to proactive enforcement. It is mandated that organisations incorporate a risk-based system that includes compulsory training, protocols for classification, auditing procedures and reporting (documenting strategies) [2].

The EU identified seven core elements to an effective internal compliance guideline, namely [2]:

- Top Level Management Commitment to Consequences
- Organisational Structures, Responsibilities and Resources
- Training and Awareness Raising
- Transaction Screening Process and Procedures
- Performance Reviews and Reporting
- Record-keeping and Documenting
- Physical and Information Security

These elements provide a structured framework and approach to lowering potential non-compliance and add a layer to internalising the legal obligations. Despite the importance of adoption within institutions, universities underutilise these guidelines [2]. The main reason for this originates from many universities only recently incorporating the prospect of dual use compliance within their governance structures.

3.2.2 Technology Readiness Index and its Impact on Research

In R&D, different TRLs relate to the research and how this corresponds to export licensing. Lower TRLs (TRLs 1-2), are ideally considered basic research and not subjected to export controls, however, for TRLs higher than 3 (applied research), export licensing is required before potential publication and/or collaboration. This is particularly relevant for expected research outcomes where the border between civilian and military applications become progressively blurred and there is security relevance [24][25].

Universities are subjected to further limitations because of this regulatory rationale. A prime example of this is a drone imaging prototype or artificial intelligence (AI) surveillance. Although the original intended use remained scientific, due to certain technical thresholds and export, authorisation was required [25]. This reinforces the ideology that researchers, research offices, TT-teams and ethics committees are required to be aware when a project or activity oversteps the regulatory technical thresholds [24]. Initiatives funded by the EU have provided training and awareness; however, the reception and commitment thereof have become inconsistent. As such, many institutions lack the common guidelines for utilising the index to assess dual use items - an outlet for possible non-compliance in regulation [24].

4 TOWARDS AN INNOVATIVE COMPLIANCE STRATEGY

To ultimately achieve the key objective of developing a framework for innovative compliance strategies (ICS) for universities to improve compliance with the Regulations, it is crucial to identify and understand the problematic situation (addressing Step 1 of the SSM and addressing Sub-Objective 3). From the literature and interviews conducted, several concerns were raised, which serve as requirements for designing an ICS.

4.1 Problematic Areas and Concerns Raised through the Literature

The following areas were reported as the most pressing concerns:

4.1.1 Fragmented or Misinterpreted Regulatory Framework for Dual Use Items

The legal uncertainty and inconsistent interpretation of these Regulations across Member States were classified as a significant challenge faced by universities [15][26]. The lack of unity created a fragmented compliance landscape, where institutions were left uncertain on how to carefully view and implement obligations under the export control law. Many researchers, as a result, have a growing fear of research paralysis - driven by the inability to correctly understand the Regulations [24]. This, accompanied by the ambiguous nature of definitions, increased the risk of inadvertent noncompliance [26]. Examples highlighted in literature include technical assistance and physical export of knowledge. Despite revision, the definition of what constitutes dual-use items remains vague and incomplete, leaving room for interpretive inconsistencies. LERU identified the following points of concern:

- Dual use listing in Annex I is technically dense and not easily interpreted [26].
- The catch-all clause considerations is a residual mechanism to allow authorities to exert control over items which are not specifically listed in Annex I [15].

4.1.2 Compliance Risks and Lack of Internal Compliance Guidance and Tools

LERU highlights many challenges in the current Dual Use Regulatory framework that pose a risk to academic freedom [24]. Firstly, the most notable risk is the unclear roadmap to guide researchers in assessing compliance needs. This gap is compounded by insufficient training and supporting tools, despite the need for a ‘train-the-trainer’ approach. Secondly, increased requirements pose a threat to open access publishing [26]. National authorities often lack the resources or capacity to handle matters timeously. Lastly, universities face an increased due diligence obligation, particularly with growing geopolitical tensions and legal risks [26].

4.1.3 Issues related to European Union competences

Concerns were raised that the framework may infringe upon national sovereignty in education and research sectors where EU competences remain supporting or shared rather than exclusive [15]. These sensitivities are reflected by the UK’s decision against incorporation of the recast’s technical changes in the Regulations post Brexit - asserting regulatory independence in research governance [19].

4.1.4 Barriers to International Collaboration

The high demand for security practices in R&D reshapes the culture of academic freedom. Additional security measures are required to restrict information from being exchanged within research groups [26]. As a result, researchers hesitate to engage in international collaboration or findings that might later be deemed sensitive - especially in areas of study in AI, Quantum Physics and Computing, and Biotechnology [15].

4.1.5 Impact on Research Integrity and Academic Freedom

Inherent tensions between the goals of open science and security-based export control regulations are reported [15]. The inclusion of dual-use technology research within military applications raises the potential criticisms from non-government agencies [24].

4.2 Problematic Areas and Concerns Raised through the Interviews with Universities:

The following areas were reported as the most pressing concerns through the interviews conducted:

4.2.1 Lack of Awareness and Understanding in Academic Community

A widespread concern is the lack of awareness that persists amongst academic staff regarding the Regulations. Many academics assume these Regulations apply exclusively to military or high-risk technologies. Furthermore, these researchers also mistakenly believe that openly published knowledge is exempt from export controls, failing to recognise that intangible knowledge sharing (collaboration) can be regulated as technical assistance, which causes major compliance risks.

4.2.2 Complexity and Ambiguity of Regulations

The regulatory complexity is often difficult to navigate, even for staff well-trained in compliance. Researchers frequently struggle to identify whether their work classifies or falls within the scope of the control lists, as the definitions and descriptions used are vague and written with technical language that some universities are not familiar with. This challenge becomes further complex and ambiguous due to the evolving nature of the regulations. This creates a persistent fear of unintentional non-compliance.

4.2.3 Difficulty identifying dual-use items

For interdisciplinary fields such as AI, engineering, physics and life sciences, the growing concern is the difficulty in determining whether research outputs are subject to export control. The characteristics of dual use embedded within complex research topics make it harder to distinguish which elements are controlled or not. While some employ a compliance officer to assess these risks, the expectation that the individual should possess deep technical expertise across all disciplines is unfeasible. This challenge is particularly noticeable in the context of emerging technologies.

4.2.4 Limited institutional resources and expertise

The lack of resources with specialised expertise in export control (technical dimensions required for accurate assessments) is most noticeable across many universities. In institutions that have designated such roles, the responsibilities are often shared across research contracts, legal services, technology transfer officers, or ethics offices, limiting the capacity for focused export control compliance. Institutional investment in needed systems and tools for risk management and documentation remains insufficient, leaving many underprepared to manage obligations effectively.

4.2.5 Dispersed responsibility and gaps in accountability

There is significant ambiguity with regards to who holds responsibility for identifying and reporting controlled research. In practice, some universities rely heavily on researchers to flag potential dual-use concerns as compliance teams frequently lack the technical expertise to assist complex projects. Without clearly defined processes, critical export control steps are easily ignored.

4.2.6 Insufficient training and supporting mechanisms

Training within universities is often ad hoc and limited to brief sessions with minimal guidance. Online tools provided by government agencies have a core focus on industry use only, typically catering to companies with smaller technology scopes, making them unfeasible for use in an interdisciplinary context in academic research. Universities frequently lack accessible case studies or practical examples that could enable researchers to be more familiar with the complex Regulations and apply them to their own projects.

4.2.7 Challenges in international collaboration

International collaborative research especially in high-risk countries, has the greatest risk of non-compliance when considering intangible transfers and deemed exports classified under technical assistance. Universities often struggle to navigate and monitor the access that international collaborators have to sensitive data (cloud-based platforms, remote teaching or virtual connections). Many universities do not have formal processes in place to orderly vet international collaborators or students for export control risks.

4.2.8 Rise in Emerging Technologies

The pace at which technological innovation moves often outpaces the ability to update regulatory frameworks, especially in multidisciplinary fields such as AI, computing and biotechnology. There is a concern that Regulations lag innovation significantly, which results in a rather reactive policy approach than a proactive policy. Without a deep understanding of the technologies, regulators may impose overly broad controls that could potentially stifle innovation, particularly in fundamental research stages. As highlighted by a UK university, " *technological advancements cannot happen in a policy vacuum and policy without an understanding of that technology, will always overregulate. There, consequently, is a very high risk of stifling innovation or putting an end to that emerging technology completely. It thus becomes vitally important that policymakers are actively engaged with our academic community and industry as well, to fully understand how they enable innovation without stifling it and how does innovation and emerging technology develop."*

In conclusion, sections 4.1 and 4.2 above provide an understanding of the problematic situation and identify areas for improvement which would assist with the formulations of root definitions in Step Three.

5 DATA COLLECTION RESULTS

To effectively collect data to substantiate the premise of this study, Steps Four and Five of the SSM will be applied. As this a qualitative research study, the most applicable metric or tools to obtain data, is the interview process. Prior to obtaining ethical clearance, the interview questions have been formulated and tested through pilot interviews with experts in the field, to gauge the thoughts and views of the prospective participants. The objective behind performing this interview process, is derived by the adherence academic institutions have when complying to the Regulations.

5.1 Interview Questions

The interview questions aim to identify deficiencies and challenges faced whilst complying with the Regulations. Furthermore, it aims to provide a thorough understanding of the impact of these Regulations on operational practices at the institution. The interviews were thematically analysed and assisted in achieving a better understanding of the impact of these Regulations on universities.

5.2 Thematic Analysis

From the interviews, the following themes were identified and reported:

5.2.1 Challenges regarding Identification and Classification

Several challenges are faced by universities that relate to the identification and export control of dual-use items. The core issues are defined by the ambiguity of the Regulations, as dual use is not clearly defined. Intangible items, such as knowledge or software, direct the struggles institutions face when navigating the Regulations or determining whether a project falls within them. It is further complicated by the complex, yet vague use of technical language, leading to interpretation difficulties. The classification aspect is another cause for concern. The definition and what constitutes technical assistance have left many universities in an uncertain state, particularly those universities that are regarded as non-technical, as these institutions lack familiarity with the technical language needed to understand the Regulations.

Universities overall face numerous challenges in identifying and classifying dual-use items. As literature reports, there is a notable lack of clarity on acceptable regulatory practices and how to decipher limitations accordingly. This uncertainty is exacerbated due to the following two reasons:

- Insufficient education on the EU Regulations, which, upon evaluation, is accompanied by limited number of dual-use cases that are reported. This hinders opportunities for learning and development of best practices and internal expertise.
- Limited comprehension of the concept of Trusted Research, as referred to by the UK universities, and Knowledge Security by EU Member States.

The underlying fear of loss of funding due to non-compliance or reputational risk underpins the need for clearly defined regulations, alignment with the jurisdictional context as well as accessible educational resources. In an effort to manage and mitigate these challenges, some have developed internal policy documents (that are informed by national laws and frameworks) to offer support and guidance towards their research groups. Some Dutch universities have agreed to collaboratively work together to identify shared views and build towards a more consistent approach to compliance. These measures, however, are still fragmented, calling for a more unified and practical interpretation of the legislation.

Lastly, another challenge that causes significant inconsistencies is from the principles of open science, and the maturity levels of technology (in fundamental research). While transparent knowledge sharing methods are implemented, the increased concern for possible conflicts with the nature of the regulation exists. Some development has been made whereby universities have sought to online tools (designed to assist with the identification and classification process) to navigate compliance. National authorities are simultaneously operating as a supportive measure; however, the complexity of classification remains intact.

5.2.2 Safety by Design Approach

Universities are grappling with a crucial issue of awareness about Trusted Research (the commitment to uphold principles of integrity and transparency) and Knowledge Security (safeguarding research outputs), and the boundary between what gets regulated in

fundamental or applied research. Although fundamental research is technically exempt (case-by-case process), the research and technology may transition, although not intentionally, into applied research, being subjected to export control laws. The shift usually occurs unbeknownst to academics or researchers; however, institutions have reported that the Knowledge Security team proactively tries to offer support to streamline compliance more effectively for researchers. While legal limitations are not viewed as an initial barrier or boundary, the evident lack of awareness and forward-thinking risk assessments remains a cause for concern.

Most limitations are perceived as procedural hurdles (obtaining export authorisation). The ambiguous language used causes confusion and misinterpretation, especially involving the publication of research. Universities have reported that there is a clear lack of consistent reporting mechanisms, as participants are not included or a part of export control teams. Institutions recognise this flaw and aid towards the legal obligations of compliance with these Regulations despite the broadness of the Regulations. Evidently, there is a growing need for more precise guidance and support to navigate and manage the regulatory framework.

5.2.3 Associated Risks

Academic freedom is an important principle in universities. This, however, also comes with its inherent risks, such as the potential misuse of technology and research - a prime example includes the spread of misinformation from AI systems towards harmful purposes. Institutions, particularly those from the Norwegian region, suggest shifting the narrative from the compliance risks to the exporting risks. Institutions from Belgium, Netherlands and UK shift the narrative towards prohibiting human rights violations. Geopolitical tensions are the key drivers for this shift as international cooperation may be limited. Legal conditions do not largely hinder researchers; however, a significant concern is placed on the possibility of legal and reputational risk becoming more and more prominent. Collectively, universities share the consensus that academic freedom must be cautioned with academic responsibility but only when clearer information and guidance are provided to manage these issues effectively.

5.2.4 Enhancing Awareness

The importance of collaborative networks is emphasised by universities in our current climate. The European Association of Export Control (ECARO) is an organisation that aims to facilitate meaningful exchanges with other institutions to enable a better understanding of diverse institutional practices and challenges in navigating dual use compliance - an organisation that most universities have reported to be a part of. ECARO also encourages open communication with government agencies (although many have reported that the response from these agencies varies from quick responses to months). Many of the institutions believe that a one-size-fits-all policy approach is ineffective. Rather, universities aim for autonomy to tailor their compliance practices whilst receiving pragmatic guidance and rules.

As a consensus across universities that were involved in this study, the need for better clarity and communication, institutional and government support as well as awareness raising remains the greatest needs for universities at this stage.

6 CONCLUSION

Different member states have different views on challenges and principles, but there are also definitive areas where the general challenges are agreed upon. From these findings, we might identify learnings for Southern African universities as part of potential future work. At the time of this article, Steps One and Two of the SSM are concluded, as a problem definition is identified and formally composed. By leveraging industrial engineering principles such as systems thinking, control systems design, and continuous improvement, the proposed framework not only supports legal compliance but also fosters a culture of responsible innovation. It ensures that compliance is not reactive or fragmented but becomes a strategic

capability embedded within the university's research ecosystem. Ultimately, the intersection of dual-use compliance and operations within the university underpins the need for Industrial Engineering principles that not only enhances efficiency but also integrates legal, ethical, and strategic considerations, traits vital for designing systems that are both innovative and compliant.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is based on the research supported in part by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (Ref: TTK240320210060). We extend our sincere gratitude to the universities that participated in the interviews and generously shared their knowledge and expertise.

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THE INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

To predict future opportunities and risks, knowledge management necessitates the continual strengthening of organisational frameworks. Manufacturing performance metrics monitor and control operational efficacy, display the status of manufacturing operations, inspire improvement initiatives, and assess the efficacy of manufacturing decisions. This systematic literature review, conducted in accordance with PRISMA guidelines, aims to investigate how knowledge management and operations management are integrated in the manufacturing sector. The review focuses on how knowledge management enhances processes, affects operational effectiveness, productivity, and quality, and supports the establishment of key performance indicators for the manufacturing process. Combining knowledge management and operations management can transform manufacturing processes, supporting short-term operational targets and long-term strategic objectives in a market that is becoming more competitive and dynamic. There is limited consolidated research on how knowledge management and operations management are integrated to achieve manufacturing excellence across diverse contexts; therefore, future studies should concentrate on empirical studies to study their dynamic interaction.

Keywords: Knowledge management, Operations management, Process improvement, Manufacturing performance, Operational efficiency

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1 INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management (KM) is a set of practices that enables organisations to produce, preserve, share, and use knowledge [1]. It is the method by which businesses produce and apply their institutional or organisational expertise. KM uses several iterative procedures, some of which may be integrated and executed simultaneously [1]. It requires the ongoing and continuous reinforcement of organisational frameworks to forecast future possibilities and threats [2]. Businesses with strong KM practices and transfer capabilities are more innovative, productive, better at decision making, and attest to noticing increased productivity [3]. Figure 1 illustrates the KM process.

Figure 1: Knowledge Management Process [2]

Lyons et al. [4] found that creating KM ideas, plans, and procedures implemented across their organisation transformed the organisational perspective on knowledge. Figure 2 illustrates a methodical way for gathering, modifying, sharing, and repurposing knowledge, expertise, and awareness to improve company performance significantly and provide advantages to clients, staff, and the business.

Figure 2: Organisational view of knowledge by Lyons et.al., [4]

An organisation's ultimate purpose is to provide value to its clients, but what truly makes a corporation successful is developing, producing, evaluating, and eventually providing a product or service [5]. Senaji [5] further expressed that these labour processes work together

to create the organisation's operations, which is the ultimate purpose. Using and leveraging knowledge as a crucial competitive resource requires actions that support implementing the basic KM processes (acquisition, conversion, application, and preservation) [5]. Berawi and Woodhead [6] suggested a method that integrates KM, process evaluation, vision and mission planning, and production process management (managerial and technical elements) to meet production system performance goals.

Compared to non-manufacturing firms, manufacturing organisations typically find it easier to distinguish between operational and strategic knowledge [7]. Manufacturing performance indicators are widely used to track and manage operational effectiveness, show the state of manufacturing activities, motivate improvement projects, and evaluate the effectiveness of manufacturing choices [1]. Typical production key performance indicators (KPIs) include quality, delivery, time, cost, adaptability, and customer satisfaction [1].

There are several steps in a manufacturing process, all of which are necessary to produce a particular product [8]. This systematic literature review aims to investigate the integration of KM and operations management in the manufacturing industry. The focus is on how KM helps enhance manufacturing processes, affects operational effectiveness, productivity, and quality, and how it may be applied to establish key performance indicators for manufacturing. This study is significant in understanding the manufacturing sector as it requires a methodical approach to increase productivity and enhance production procedures.

The study aims to address the following research questions.

1. How does KM contribute to process improvement in the manufacturing industry?
2. What KM practices influence operational efficiency, productivity, and quality?
3. What KM tools are used to identify and develop key performance indicators related to manufacturing processes?

2 METHODOLOGY

A rigorous methodology was used to ensure transparency, replicability, and thoroughness in identifying, selecting, and synthesising relevant publications. The review defined strategies for searching publications, which included specifying the databases, keywords, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria to limit the publication to those relevant to the study [9].

2.1 Search strategy and keywords

The search strategy was developed by identifying keywords that sought to answer the research questions, and the keywords were then used to formulate search phrases. The phrases were constructed to produce a wide yet manageable set of publications that are related to the research topic [10]. The identified keywords were *Knowledge Management, Knowledge Management Practice, Knowledge Management Tools, Operations Management, Process Improvement, Manufacturing, Manufacturing Industry, Manufacturing Performance, Quality, Operational Efficiency, Productivity, and Manufacturing Key Performance Indicators.*

The search phrases were used in the Web of Science and Scopus databases. These databases were chosen due to their comprehensiveness, as they encompass a wide variety of indexed sources, disciplines, document types, and citations, which makes them suitable for this literature review [11]. To enhance the precision of the search results, proximity operators were used. The search query described below was used in Web of Science.

Knowledge Management NEAR Operations management *(Topic) or* ***Knowledge Management NEAR process improvement*** *(Topic) or* ***Knowledge Management NEAR Manufacturing*** *(Topic) or* ***Knowledge management practice NEAR operation efficiency*** *(Topic) or* ***Knowledge management practice NEAR productivity*** *(Topic) or* ***Knowledge management practice NEAR quality*** *(Topic) or* ***Knowledge Management tool NEAR key performance indicator***

(Topic) or ***Knowledge Management tool NEAR key performance indicator*** *(Topic) or* ***Manufacturing NEAR key performance indicator*** *(Topic)*

The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to refine the search further and assess the retrieved publications for relevance.

Inclusion criteria:

- Articles and review articles.
- Publications published between 2014 and 2024.
- Studies focusing on knowledge management practices, tools, and their impact on manufacturing processes.
- Studies that discuss the integration of knowledge management and operations management in the manufacturing industry.

Exclusion Criteria

- Publications that were not written in English.
- Publications that were not accessible.
- Publications that did not address the concepts of this study in their title, abstract, and full text.

2.2 Screening and selection

The review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines. The PRISM 2020 flow diagram, shown in Figure 3**,** was used. The flow diagram includes identification, screening, and inclusion of studies via databases and registers [12]. After retrieving publications from the initial search, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were incorporated into the PRISMA diagram to screen and select eligible publications.

2.3 Methods of synthesis and analysis

To synthesise and analyse the data collected from each publication, a concept matrix was used to systematically scrutinise the data, allowing for a structured representation of the interrelationships between key themes and concepts. The publications were first categorised according to the themes, such as the influence of KM on manufacturing performance, the influence of KM on manufacturing process improvements, and the development and use of key performance indicators in manufacturing. Concepts were then created to align with the research questions and themes. A concept matrix analysing the coverage of the concepts described by each publication was developed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Concept Matrix of the reviewed articles

Author	Concept						
	Manufacturing Performance	Quality	Productivity	Operational efficiency	Process Improvement	Operations Management	KPIs
[13]	X						
[14]					X	X	
[15]	X	X				X	
[16]	X		X		X	X	X
[17]	X						
[18]	X		X	X	X	X	X
[19]	X						X
[20]					X		X
[21]				X	X		
[22]	X	X		X	X		
[23]	X					X	
[24]		X			X		
[25]					X		

Author	Concept						
	Manufacturing Performance	Quality	Productivity	Operational efficiency	Process Improvement	Operations Management	KPIs
[26]	X						
[27]	X				X		
[28]	X			X			
[29]	X			X	X	X	
[30]	X	X	X	X		X	
[31]		X					X
[32]	X	X					
[33]		X			X		
[34]	X					X	X
[35]	X	X	X				X
[36]	X	X			X	X	
[37]	X				X		X
[38]	X		X				
[39]		X	X	X	X		
[40]	X						X
[41]		X			X		
[42]	X				X		
[43]		X					X
[44]							X

3 LITERATURE REVIEW RESULTS

The literature search approach and review results are presented below. The results outline the database searches using PRISMA guidelines, the descriptive statistics of the selected articles, and insights on KM's influence on manufacturing process improvement and performance and on the development and use of key performance indicators.

3.1 Database and literature search

The initial search yielded a total of 1,250 articles. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the literature population was refined to a manageable set of 95 publications. After a full text screening, 32 publications were included for the review study. Figure 3 shows the screening and selection steps and results.

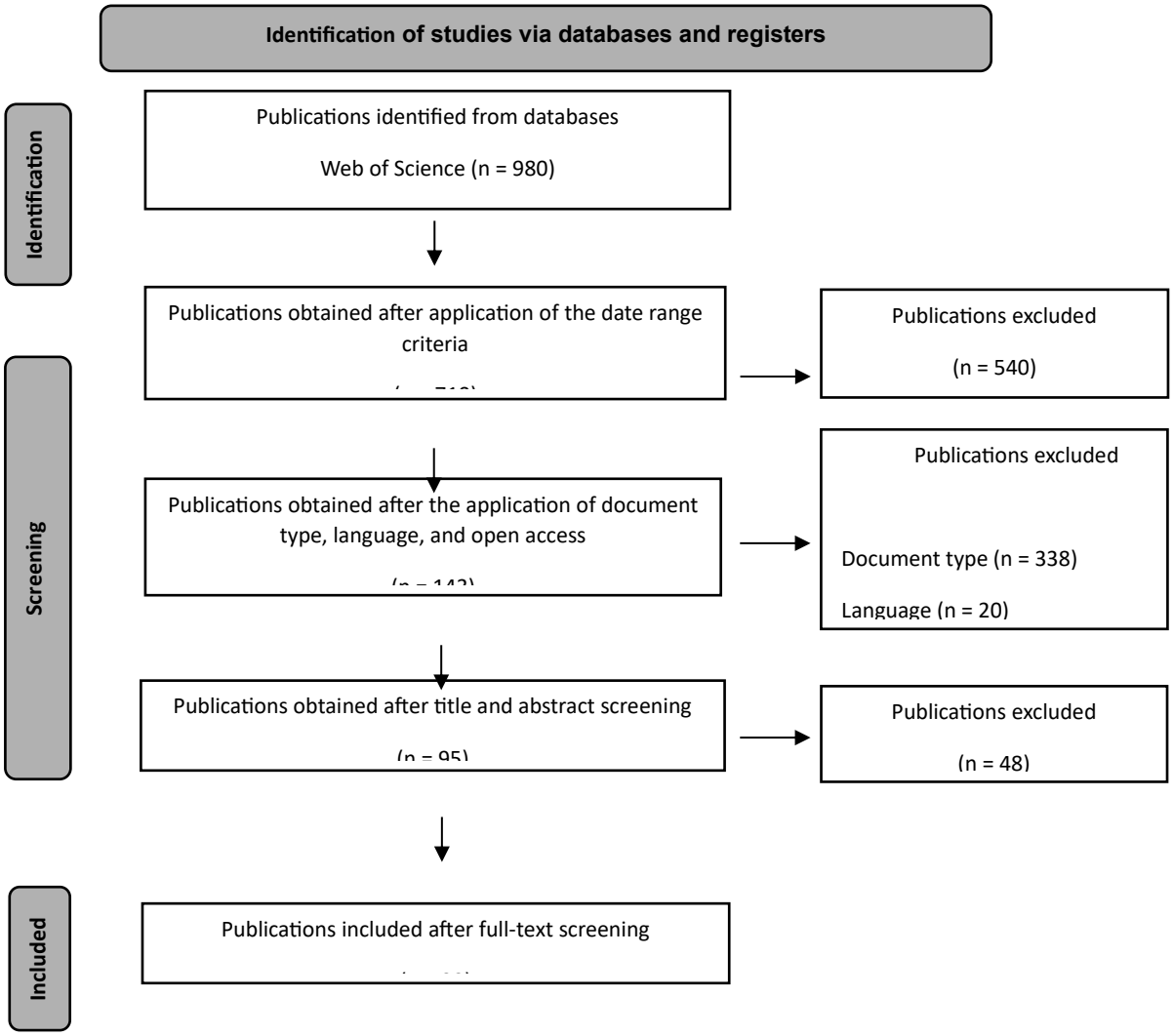

Figure 3: Screening and selection process and results

3.2 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise key study characteristics to provide a clear overview of the results. An analysis was done to determine the distribution of selected articles based on the year of publication. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the year of publication of the selected publications. The distribution indicates yearly publications on KM in the manufacturing industry between 2014 and 2024, with peaks in 2017 and 2022. The growing momentum in adopting Industry 4.0 and increased focus on digital manufacturing may have contributed to the peak seen in 2017. The 2022 peak may be attributed to the post-pandemic acceleration of digital transformation, which further drove organisations to focus on knowledge-driven operational excellence. The field of study analysis for the reviewed publications was done as shown in Figure 5. It was seen that 75% of the reviewed articles are in the Engineering, Manufacturing, and Industrial Engineering fields, which are directly related to OM and manufacturing processes. The geographic focus of the studies shown in Figure 6 shows that most of the studies were published in the United States of America and England, with four publications each. It can also be seen that countries in the Asian continent have a cumulative high occurrence.

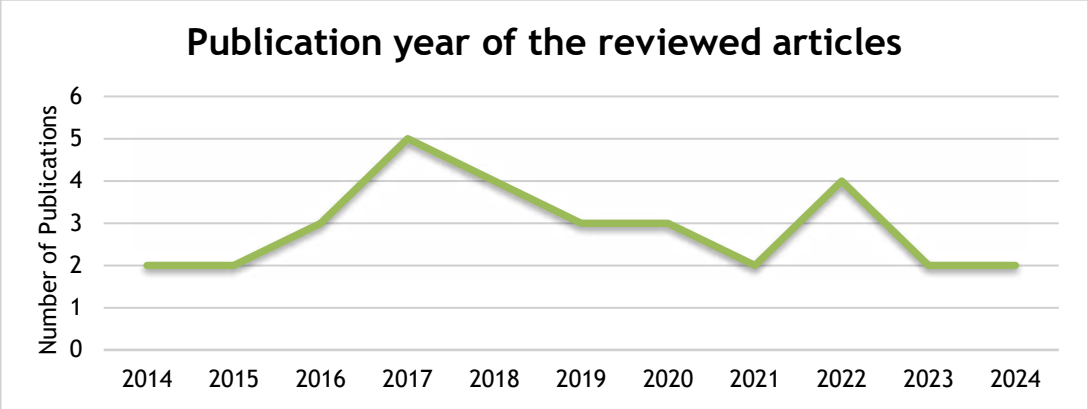

Figure 4:Year of publication of reviewed articles

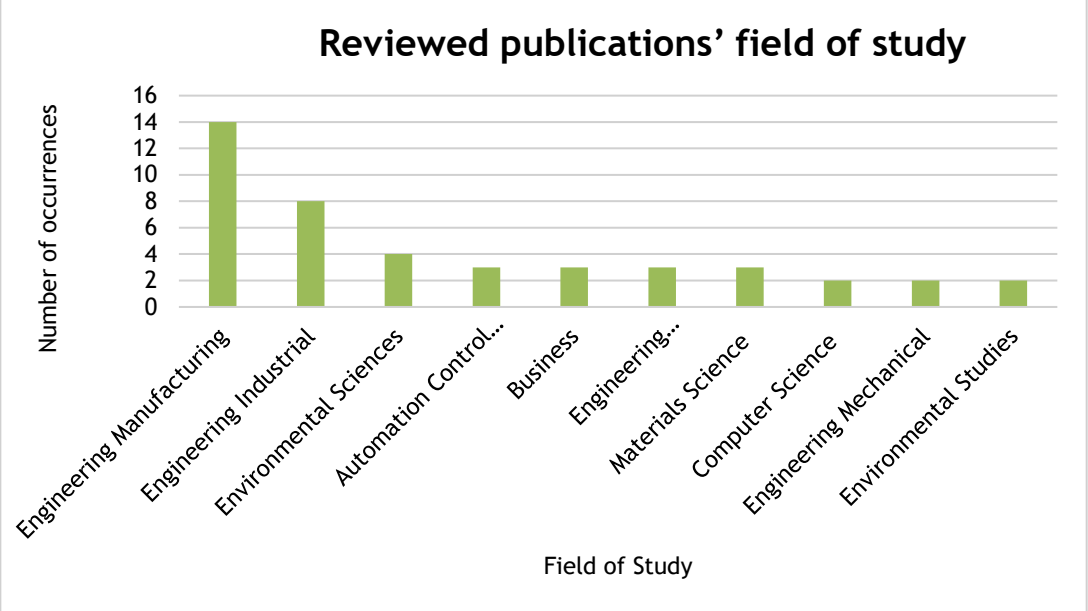

Figure 5: Reviewed publications' field of study

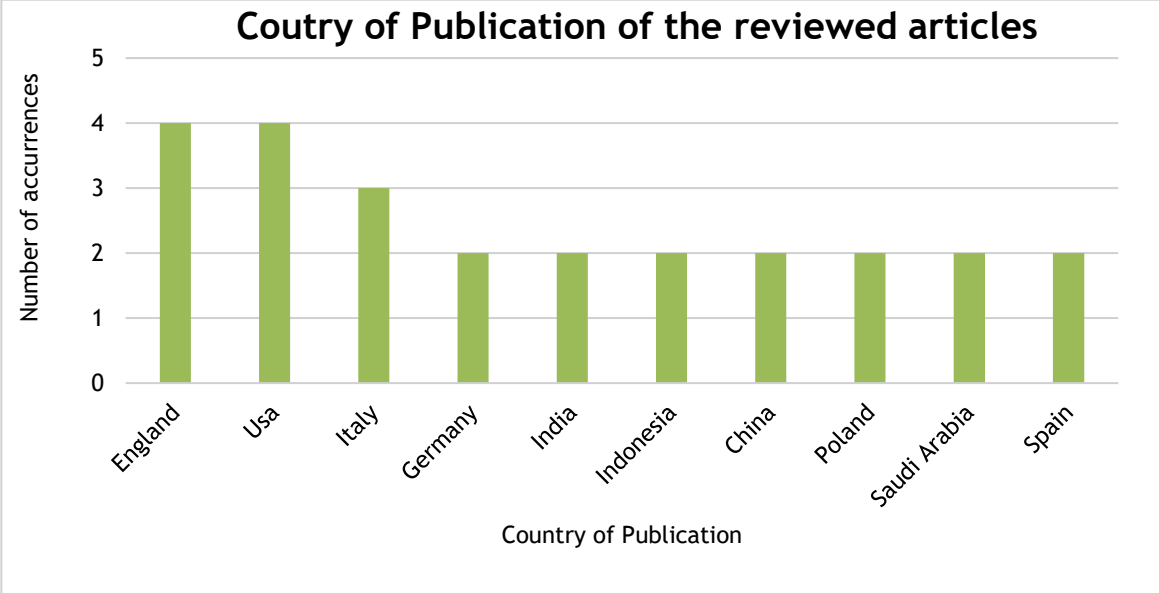

Figure 6: Geographic focus of reviewed articles

3.3 Influence of knowledge management on manufacturing process improvement

The concept matrix reveals that the successful implementation of KM initiatives often correlates with applying specific quality management tools and techniques. These tools and techniques can be directly linked to process improvement. This is supported by some of the findings shown in the author matrix presented in **Error! Reference source not found.**.

3.4 Influence of knowledge management on manufacturing performance

The concept matrix in Table 1 shows that most articles address manufacturing performance in one way or another. There is a link between manufacturing performance and productivity, operational efficiency, and quality. This is supported by how some publications use productivity, operational efficiency, and quality as performance metrics. These concepts fit into the main topic of operations management. Manufacturing performance is realised because of operations management. The author matrix in Table 2 reinforces how KM significantly impacts process improvement by showcasing recurring themes and findings across various studies, illustrating the correlation between KM practices and enhanced operational performance in manufacturing.

3.5 The development and use of key performance indicators in manufacturing

The reviewed literature indicates a strong link between specific KM practices and enhanced operational efficiency. Istrate and Herghiligiu [29] emphasise the role of key performance indicators in measuring and improving manufacturing operations. Establishing a multi-level key performance indicator structure allows organisations to identify meaningful relationships between key performance indicators, facilitating targeted interventions for operational enhancement. The comprehensive framework proposed by Istrate and Herghiligiu [29] provides a valuable tool for manufacturing managers seeking to evaluate KM performance systematically. By integrating KM with operational metrics, organisations can better understand their performance and identify areas for improvement.

Table 2: Author matrix of the reviewed articles

Author(s)	Research approach	Main Objective	Main Findings	Limitations and recommendations
[13]	Case study	Develop a KM framework specifically for manufacturing SMEs	A KM framework that emphasises low resource use, cost-effectiveness, and usability, suitable for similar regulated environments	Broader applicability to larger organisations or less regulated sectors is not discussed
[14]	Quantitative study	Investigate the link between Green Technology Implementation (GTI) and KM in reducing manufacturing risk	Validated that GTI positively correlates with KM processes, which together contribute to minimising manufacturing risks	Capture a more comprehensive view of the GTI-KM relationship in different manufacturing contexts
[15]	Structural equation modelling technique	Examine the effects of primary TQM factors (OM, measurement, analysis, and KM) and strategy on the relationship between supportive TQM factors and organisational results	Found that supportive TQM factors enhance primary factors; strategy and primary factors collectively mediate the relationship between supportive factors	Future research could further investigate the role of each primary TQM factor individually
[16]	Analytical Hierarchy Process	Propose a set of KPIs to evaluate sustainable manufacturing performance in the cement industry	KPIs aimed at guiding the cement industry toward sustainable manufacturing, enhancing performance	Recommended KPIs are tailored to cement manufacturing and may need adaptation for other industries
[17]	Quantitative analysis	Investigate how KM practices predict process innovation in FMCG companies	KM practices positively influence process innovation	Study limited to FMCG companies in specific cities
[18]	Quantitative research	Examine the combined effect of KM and marketing innovation on the performance of manufacturing companies	KM directly and positively impacts manufacturing performance	Suggests focusing more on KM strategies to enhance firm performance
[19]	Case study	Explore the challenges SMEs face in adopting Industry 4.0, focusing on MES's role in data capture and process management	KPI framework that supports operational efficiency and enhanced operator engagement	Recommends transitioning from big data to smart data
[20]	Survey	Provide insights and recommendations for evolving KPIs to align with Industry 4.0, focusing on cyber-physical systems and the human role	Need for redefined KPIs to integrate human and intelligent automation; emphasises human-centred manufacturing	Suggests revision of KPI definitions to reflect collaboration between humans and intelligent systems better
[21]	Graph-based visual representations	Explore the analytic relationships between KPIs in manufacturing processes to improve performance strategies	Highlights the importance of understanding KPI interdependencies	Recommends developing interactive tools for visualising KPI relationships
[22]	Qualitative study	Facilitate knowledge capture and reuse in manufacturing by integrating CBR and PLM	Continuous Improvement Process approach to enhance KM on the shop floor, enabling better	Limited to specific KM techniques and technologies

Author(s)	Research approach	Main Objective	Main Findings	Limitations and recommendations
		technologies to support technicians in problem resolution	problem-solving during production	
[23]	Qualitative study	To bridge the gap between knowledge sources (government, academic, etc.) and manufacturing Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India	Highlights the lack of awareness among MSMEs regarding key knowledge sources and emphasises mutual enrichment through knowledge exchange	Suggests further research to improve awareness and collaboration between MSMEs and knowledge-providing organisations
[24]	Empirical investigation	Designing a collaborative basis for KM that improves the integration of manufacturing data between design and engineering teams, including suppliers	Integrating internal and supplier-generated manufacturing data enhances design processes and improves quality through defect reduction	Discusses the need for more extensive empirical research in similar high-value, low-volume industries to validate the proposed framework
[25]	Case study	To provide a methodology for integrating, sharing, and updating domain-specific knowledge in smart manufacturing contexts	Lack of mechanisms for integrating data and knowledge as a primary barrier in manufacturing; proposes a structured methodology to improve knowledge management	Further exploration of specific mechanisms that can facilitate better integration of knowledge in various manufacturing applications
[26]	Literature review	To provide an overview of knowledge sharing in the product development process and review key concepts in manufacturing knowledge management	KM influences product development, emphasising future challenges and research directions in sharing manufacturing knowledge	The review may benefit from a more comprehensive analysis of case studies to illustrate the discussed concepts and approaches
[27]	Quantitative study	To explore the twin impacts of organisational innovation and organisational learning on the relationship between knowledge management and organisational performance	Organisational innovation and learning mediate the relationship between KM and organisational performance, with firm characteristics acting as moderators	Suggests further research to refine the framework and explore additional variables that could influence the observed relationships
[28]	Questionnaire	Investigate drivers and the role of knowledge management on manufacturing energy management maturity	Knowledge management practices are positively associated with environmental management maturity	Limited by the specific context of U.S. manufacturing, which potentially affects generalizability to other regions or industries
[29]	Bibliographical research	Improve the evaluation process of Knowledge Management Performance (KMP) in manufacturing organisations	KMP is vital in assessing goals, improvements, and competitive advantages	May require validation through empirical studies to ensure the framework's effectiveness across different manufacturing contexts
[30]	Analytical Hierarchy Process	Introduce a multi-level structure for the identification and analysis of KPIs and their	Defined and layered KPIs into basic KPIs, comprehensive KPIs, and supporting metrics; identified relationships	The complexity of manufacturing systems may limit the ability to capture all interdependencies among

Author(s)	Research approach	Main Objective	Main Findings	Limitations and recommendations
		intrinsic relationships in production systems	and dependencies between KPIs for continuous improvement	KPIs in practical applications fully
[31]	Discrete-event simulation model	Quantify the impact on productivity, quality, and material supply from implementing inspection processes in multistage production lines	The simulation model can evaluate productivity and quality in two manufacturing scenarios, and provides a method for cost-effectiveness analysis	The complexity of accurately modelling all inspection strategies and production variability may limit the model's applicability in diverse scenarios
[32]	Literature review	Propose a methodology for the integration between KM and World Class Manufacturing (WCM)	Identified a lack of theoretical interaction between KM and WCM; most literature focuses on broad conceptual aspects and basic tools without current context	Limited by the focus on theoretical and conceptual aspects, potentially lacking practical applications or empirical validation
[33]	Survey questionnaire	To identify patterns of company activities in KM and their relationship with manufacturing processes in the metal industry	Revealing a significant difference between large and medium-sized enterprises regarding the perception of KM's importance for sustainable development	Limited to the Polish metal industry, which may not reflect practices in other sectors or regions; potential biases in self-reported data
[34]	Case study	To translate five generic KPIs into a continuous real-time cost function in a batch order-based manufacturing environment	Created a dynamic financial cost model integrating operations management data with performance metrics, facilitating collective decision-making across departments	Focused on specific industries, which may limit applicability; the complexity of integrating diverse data sources can pose challenges for implementation
[35]	Modelling	To provide an overview of quality techniques and methods within the manufacturing process to enhance productivity, quality, and cost efficiency	Proposes deployment methods for standard quality techniques to improve KPIs.	The application of quality techniques may vary across different manufacturing contexts, which could affect generalizability
[36]	Survey-based methodology using Structural Equation Modelling	To explore the relationship between KM, product/process innovation, and operational performance in sports manufacturing firms in Thailand	Significant positive influence of KM on both product and process innovation; process innovation positively impacts operational efficiency, while product innovation does not significantly influence it	The focus on sports manufacturing firms in Thailand may limit the applicability of findings to other sectors or geographical contexts, and there may be potential biases in survey responses
[37]	Case study	To improve customer satisfaction by developing and testing a method to study quality management systems through key performance indicators of the balanced scorecard	Results revealed a new understanding of quality management systems, aiding in systemic and strategic decisions to enhance long-term company performance	Limited to one leading manufacturing company; findings may not be generalisable across different organisations or sectors

Author(s)	Research approach	Main Objective	Main Findings	Limitations and recommendations
[38]	Four-step	To provide guidelines for manufacturing companies to identify energy waste and improve energy productivity	The proposed approach allows companies to increase energy productivity without negatively affecting existing manufacturing structures	The study may not account for variations in manufacturing processes across different industries, which could affect the generalizability of the findings
[39]	Literature and report review	To explore cognitive technology applications in smart manufacturing and their potential benefits for manufacturers	Cognitive manufacturing merges sensor-based information and analytics to enhance KM and improve key business metrics such as productivity, reliability, quality, safety, and yield while reducing downtime and costs	The study primarily relies on existing literature and reports, which may not capture all nuances of technology adoption in diverse manufacturing settings
[40]	Four-step approach	To propose a method for implementing KPIs to assess manufacturing process effectiveness and improve productivity	Identify causes for not reaching targeted KPI values, and recommendations are made to enhance manufacturing productivity based on these insights	The focus on specific KPIs may overlook other relevant factors affecting manufacturing process effectiveness, limiting a comprehensive evaluation
[41]	Questionnaire	To understand and evaluate the knowledge sharing culture at Polman Astra to improve the product prototyping process	A culture of knowledge sharing is essential for effective KM and preventing knowledge loss in product prototyping projects	The sample size is relatively small (44 out of 80), which may affect the reliability of the findings and limit the generalizability of the results
[42]	Qualitative research	To explore KM insights specific to Indian manufacturing SMEs and provide managerial implications	Key driving factors for effective KM include market orientation, learning from consultants, attending conferences/workshops, extensive internet use, and frequent employee interactions	The study's focus on Indian SMEs may limit the applicability of findings to larger organisations or different cultural contexts
[43]	Literature review	To introduce enabling indicators that can be analysed or assessed during the early phases of product and manufacturing system development, emphasising the importance of KPIs throughout the life cycle of the manufacturing system	KPIs are critical in manufacturing operations and product development phases. It highlights the alignment of KPIs (Quality, Delivery, etc.)	Further exploration into the practical applications of these enabling indicators across different industries and their impact on operational efficiency could be beneficial
[44].	Survey	To highlight the specific operational performance evaluation needs of the process industry and	Existing KPIs may require modifications to better suit the operational	Further research into the practical implementation of the proposed KPI modifications across

Author(s)	Research approach	Main Objective	Main Findings	Limitations and recommendations
		propose modifications to the KPIs defined in ISO 22400	context of the process industry	various process industries to validate their effectiveness in enhancing performance evaluation

4 DISCUSSIONS

The integration of knowledge management and operations management has gathered significant attention in literature studies, particularly regarding its potential to enhance process improvement, operational efficiency, and overall manufacturing performance. The following discussion explores this integration in detail, focusing on how knowledge management contributes to process improvement, how it influences operational efficiency and quality and how it supports the identification of key performance indicators.

4.1 How does Knowledge Management contribute to process improvement in the manufacturing industry?

Based on the insights gathered from the studies reviewed, some knowledge management practices were identified as directly impacting process improvement in the manufacturing industry. These practices include the systematic gathering and sharing of knowledge. Camarillo et al. [22] demonstrated how knowledge management practices, such as case-based reasoning and product life cycle management, can be used to fast-track problem solving in day-to-day manufacturing processes on the shop floor. These insights show manufacturing organisations can improve decision-making and streamline operations by leveraging historical knowledge.

Integrating knowledge management in manufacturing processes is essential, as it significantly contributes to reducing defects and improving quality by fostering a culture of shared learning and innovation. Prusak et al. [33] discuss the collaborative nature of knowledge management in the aerospace manufacturing sector. They emphasise the need for continuous knowledge capturing between the design and operations teams, which also ensures process improvement by sharing operations knowledge with the design teams, enhancing innovation, and sharing design knowledge with the operations team, which improves operational performance. This is supported by Souri et al. [24], who highlighted the complexity of integrating manufacturing data within workflows, necessitating a structured knowledge management framework to enable effective team collaboration.

Feng et. al. [25] and Saengchai et al. [35] discussed various quality methods that enhance knowledge management practices in the manufacturing process. These articles suggest that the proactive use of quality techniques can significantly reduce operational inefficiencies and defects, thereby contributing to overall process improvement. Based on the insights gathered from the articles and the concept matrix, it can be said that the successful implementation of knowledge management practice, tools, and techniques often goes hand in hand with applying specific quality management tools and techniques.

4.2 What knowledge management practices influence operational efficiency, productivity, and quality?

From the general insight across most of the publications, it was found that operational efficiency, productivity, and quality are often identified as factors that influence process improvement. Alanazi [15] highlights the importance of organisational learning and innovation as mediators in the relationship between knowledge management and organisational performance. The findings from these studies indicate that companies that prioritise

knowledge management practices, such as knowledge sharing and continuous learning, often exhibit higher levels of productivity and quality. This suggests that organisations should adopt a holistic approach to knowledge management, integrating it into their strategic objectives and operational processes. Psarommatis et al. [34] highlighted that translating key performance indicators into a real-time cost function enables organisations to make informed decisions that enhance efficiency and quality.

4.3 What knowledge management tools are used to identify and develop key performance indicators related to manufacturing processes?

The reviewed literature showed a range of knowledge management tools and frameworks used to develop and monitor key performance indicators in manufacturing processes. Martinez and Ahmad [31] introduce discrete-event simulation models as a tool for quantifying the impact of inspection processes on productivity and quality. This model exemplifies how simulation can serve as a KM tool that facilitates the identification of KPIs and helps organisations visualise and analyse the interdependencies among various operational metrics.

Mendes and de Mattos [32] highlight the necessity for an integrated methodology that combines knowledge management and World Class Manufacturing (WCM) principles. This approach emphasises the importance of using knowledge management tools, such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Just-in-Time (JIT) practices, to establish effective key performance indicators that align with manufacturing objectives. The findings suggest that organisations must proactively adopt knowledge management tools that foster real-time monitoring and feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement.

5 CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This systematic review explored the integration of KM with operations management in the manufacturing industry, focusing on how KM practices contribute to process improvement, efficiency, productivity, and quality. The findings highlight that KM is a pivotal driver for manufacturing excellence, allowing organisations to harness collective knowledge, optimise production processes, and enhance competitive advantages through continuous improvement and innovation.

By synthesising research across diverse manufacturing contexts, this study affirms that effective KM practices, particularly those enabling knowledge sharing, real-time monitoring, and structured data management, positively influence operational performance. The review also identified critical tools and methodologies, such as key performance indicators (quality, delivery, time, cost, adaptability, and customer satisfaction) and collaborative knowledge-sharing platforms, essential for translating KM initiatives into tangible operational outcomes. Further, it underscores the strategic role of KM in supporting sustainable practices and quality management, aligning well with modern demands for environmental responsibility and resource optimisation.

It is concluded from the review that KM, when strategically integrated with operations management, can significantly enhance manufacturing performance, fostering a culture of learning, collaboration, and innovation. For managers, this insight emphasises the need to align KM initiatives with specific operational targets and adapt them to the unique context of their organisation. Future research should continue to explore KM's evolving role within emerging manufacturing paradigms, focusing on scalability, cross-industry applicability, and digital integration. By addressing these areas, KM can be further refined as a tool for operational excellence and sustainable and adaptive manufacturing in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

While the review process was methodologically robust, some limitations were inherent to the chosen design and approach. First, excluding non-English articles may have inadvertently

omitted relevant research from non-English-speaking regions where KM and operations management practices might differ, potentially limiting the global applicability of the findings. Additionally, while comprehensive, the review's reliance on digital databases may have missed relevant studies outside of indexed journals, such as industry reports or white papers, that could provide valuable insights into practical KM applications in operations management settings. Another limitation stems from the variability in study designs and outcome measures, which posed challenges in synthesising findings consistently.

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COULD INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING BE SOUTH AFRICA'S KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOUR?

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ABSTRACT

South Africa's economic competitiveness per capita has been decreasing in recent decades. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality. On both these fronts, South Africa has not experienced improvements. The NDP recognised the potential of South Africa but acknowledged that it was a damsel in distress. Industrial Engineering aims to improve integrated socio-technical systems using engineering and social science knowledge. The theory of constraints (TOC) forms part of the knowledge domains of Industrial Engineering. A key feature of the TOC is that it simplifies the process of continuous improvement by arguing for a clear goal, necessary conditions and relevant measurements. The TOC has been extensively applied to companies, but is it possible to apply it to a country? This study used document analysis and descriptive statistics to evaluate whether Industrial Engineering could be South Africa's hero to kickstart a wave of change.

Keywords: Economic Freedom, Theory of Constraints, Competitiveness, Prosperity

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1 INTRODUCTION

Michael Porter [1] argued that national prosperity is created and sustained by offering the most productive environment for businesses to succeed and that countries compete to develop and maintain such environments. He further explained that competitive advantage is created, not inherited. It is not achieved through access to natural resources, abundant cheap labour, plentiful land, favourable interest rates, or currency values, but rather through sustained innovation and firms' ability to continuously improve and upgrade. To enable this, a nation requires skilled labour, sophisticated and demanding local customers, internationally competitive related and supporting industries, and strong local rivalry among similar firms.

Acemoglu and Robinson [2] provide an extension of the Endogenous [3], [4] and Schumpeterian [5], [6] Growth Theories and argue that innovation, education, and entrepreneurship translate into national prosperity when embedded within inclusive economic and political institutions. These institutions uphold the rule of law, ensure secure property rights, provide a level playing field, encourage competition, and offer broad access to economic opportunities. Thus creating incentives for investment, innovation, and sustained economic growth. They explicitly reject the notion that geography, culture, or ignorance (i.e., not knowing how to make nations prosper) are the primary reasons for poverty. In this respect, they align with Porter [1] in arguing that prosperity is not determined by inherited or static factors but rather by the institutional and systemic environment that shapes how economies function. Acemoglu and Robinson also emphasise that poverty often leads to national discontent when extractive institutions concentrate power and limit access to opportunity for the majority.

The South African National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 [7] provided a promise of active participation by citizens, a capable and developmental state, and collaborative leadership across society to enable inclusive economic growth, job creation and improved living standards where opportunity is determined by ability, education and hard work. The NDP is aligned with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa [8] and specifically the objective included in the preamble: "*Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person*". However, it has been argued that South Africa fails to uphold the rule of law [9], and economic hardship and inequality promote discontent, identity-based polarisation and weakened institutions [10]. South Africa continues to grapple with systemic challenges, including ineffective service delivery, entrenched corruption, the legacy of state capture, administrative inefficiencies, and persistently high unemployment, poverty, and inequality [11]. These effects are typical of extractive institutions instead of inclusive institutions [2].

Jung [12] postulated that all humans share a collective unconscious, a deep psychological layer that contains archetypes (universal, inherited patterns of thought and behaviour). These archetypes often manifest in myths and fairy tales, enabling individuals to understand themselves, navigate moral development, and interpret complex societal realities.

A typical narrative structure features a character representing latent potential or value (the damsel in distress), a chaotic threat (the dragon), and a heroic figure (the knight in shining armour) who voluntarily confronts this chaos to restore order and meaning [13]. This paper explores whether this symbolic framework can be meaningfully applied to South Africa and whether Industrial Engineering can be conceptualised as an archetypal "hero" (a discipline capable of imposing order on disorder through systems thinking, optimisation, and innovation).

To pursue this inquiry, the study addresses three guiding research questions:

1. Can South Africa be interpreted as a symbolic "damsel" (a nation with untapped potential and latent value)?
2. Is the country facing a "dragon" (persistent social and economic chaos or dysfunction)?

3. Can Industrial Engineering be a modern "heroic" discipline capable of addressing systemic complexity and restoring order?

In the following section, the methodology for the study is briefly explained, after which each question is evaluated. Finally, the results are synthesised into conclusions and recommendations.

2 METHODOLOGY

The paper used two methods to evaluate the research questions:

1. Document analysis
2. Descriptive statistics

Including document analysis (qualitative) and descriptive statistics (empirical) improves the study's methodological validity. Document analysis offers contextual insights from reputable texts, while descriptive statistics provide measurable trends and international benchmarks. Together, they allow for an understanding of South Africa's socio-economic position.

2.1 Document analysis

Document analysis systematically reviews, interprets, and synthesises existing written materials to extract meaningful insights and evidence. This study used document analysis to extract, interpret, and integrate content from a wide range of authoritative global reports and indices.

These sources were interpreted to construct arguments about South Africa's latent value, systemic dysfunctions, and potential avenues for systemic improvement through Industrial Engineering. The metaphorical framing of South Africa as a "damsel" and its dysfunctions as a "dragon" is rooted in this interpretive synthesis.

Document analysis [14] can be a time- and cost-efficient research method, offering access to readily available data, especially from public records. It often provides precise details and broad historical coverage. However, typical limitations include a lack of depth, potential access issues, and biased selectivity, as some documents are not necessarily created for research purposes. Despite these drawbacks, the method remains valuable for qualitative studies, particularly when primary data collection is impractical.

2.2 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics involve summarising and presenting quantitative data meaningfully to identify patterns, trends, and comparisons. This work used descriptive statistics to present, compare, and benchmark quantitative data across countries and periods. The objectives were to quantify South Africa's performance across a range of development, competitiveness, and well-being indicators, providing a clear and measurable understanding of the country's status in these domains. Additionally, descriptive statistics helped to illustrate important trends over time, such as the decline in GDP per capita, offering insight into the direction and pace of socio-economic change. They also facilitated benchmarking South Africa's performance against other countries, enabling comparisons that highlight relative strengths and weaknesses within a global context.

Descriptive statistics simplifies complex data, revealing patterns and trends and enabling benchmarking [15]. In this study, South Africa's development, competitiveness, and well-being indicators were used for contextual evaluation. However, these methods also have limitations. Descriptive statistics cannot establish causality, may oversimplify complex socio-economic realities, and depend on data quality and availability [16]. They often fail to capture underlying contextual factors influencing observed outcomes [17]. Despite these constraints,

descriptive statistics remain valuable for summarising large-scale data and supporting comparative analyses.

3 DISCUSSION

3.1 A nation with untapped potential and latent value

This section explores whether South Africa can be viewed as a symbolic "damsel" (a nation rich in untapped potential). Drawing on international indices and resource assessments, it examines how natural capital, nonrenewable wealth, and demographic strength position South Africa for transformative development if its latent assets are strategically mobilised within a scarcity-aware framework.

A paradigm of scarcity assumes that resources are finite and that their availability places practical limits on growth and development. Within this framework, the value of a nation is often evaluated based on its existing natural endowments (such as minerals, arable land, forests, and water) and its demographic profile, particularly the size and structure of its population. Rather than being inherently limiting, this view can be a pragmatic tool for identifying and quantifying a country's latent value and untapped potential [18].

From this perspective, a country's developmental opportunities are evaluated based on what is presently accessible and exploitable. For example, a country with vast underutilised forests, a young workforce, or unexploited mineral reserves may be seen as possessing significant strategic potential. Meadows et al. [19] argue that this type of analysis is essential to understanding how resource constraints shape future planning scenarios. In doing so, the scarcity paradigm helps policymakers and planners identify where investments or innovations are needed to unlock undeveloped capacity.

This approach objectively assesses national assets, mapping potential routes for resource management, infrastructure development, and population engagement decisions. Although grounded in the recognition of limits, the scarcity perspective can thus be applied not only to caution against overuse but also to spotlight areas where careful mobilisation of resources can yield transformative results.

The Natural Capital Index by SolAbility [20] assesses a country's environmental foundation for sustainable development. It measures the availability and condition of key natural assets (water, biodiversity, land, and climate) across 38 indicators in six clusters. High scores indicate strong potential for long-term self-sufficiency, even in countries with limited social or institutional capacity. By considering resource availability and degradation, the index highlights nations with unexploited ecological value, particularly those in tropical regions or with low population density, offering a lens to evaluate future competitiveness based on natural endowments. The report scored 191 countries, and South Africa was ranked 139th (Natural capital: 156th, Resource Intensity: 112th, Social capital: 186th, Intellectual capital: 76th, Economic Sustainability: 160th, and Governance: 93rd).

In the Changing Wealth of Nations 2024 report [21], the World Bank defines renewable natural capital as natural resources that can regenerate over time if managed sustainably. This category includes agricultural land (such as cropland and pasture), forests (valued for both timber and ecosystem services), mangroves, marine fisheries, and renewable energy sources like hydropower. These assets are distinct in their ability to replenish naturally and are valued based on a projected 100-year lifespan. The 2020 data included 151 countries and South Africa, on a per capita basis ranked 75th in total (Agricultural Land: 69th, Agricultural Land – Cropland: 65th, Agricultural Land – Pastureland: 78th, Fisheries 85th, Forest Recreation, Hunting and Fishing Services: 97th, Forest Water Ecosystem Services: 43rd, Hydropower Energy: 99th, Mangroves: 36th, Nonwood Forest Protection Ecosystem Services: 99th, and Timber: 30th.

The Changing Wealth of Nations 2024 [21] also defines nonrenewable natural capital as finite resources like fossil fuels and minerals that cannot regenerate within human timeframes. While valuable, these assets are exhaustible and subject to price and extraction risks. The report stresses that countries must reinvest extraction revenues into other forms of capital, such as infrastructure or education, to sustain wealth. Without such reinvestment, reliance on nonrenewables can lead to long-term declines in national wealth despite short-term economic gains. This highlights the importance of managing nonrenewable resources responsibly to ensure intergenerational sustainability. The 2020 data included 151 countries, and South Africa, on a per capita basis, ranked 22nd in total (Coal: 3rd, Copper: 36th, Gold: 16th, Iron Ore: 16th, Lead: 22nd, Nickel: 11th, Phosphate: 6th, Silver: 37th; Zinc: 17th; Metals and Mineralssub-Indextotal: 22nd). Apart from this, South Africa possesses a significant portion of the world's mineral reserves [22], including approximately 91% of global platinum-group metals (PGMs), 40% of manganese, and 35% of chromite. It also accounts for 16% of vanadium reserves, 13% of fluorspar, 10% of zirconium, and around 5% each of ilmenite and gold. In addition, the country holds notable reserves of andalusite, antimony, coal, iron ore, nickel, phosphate rock, uranium, and vermiculite.

The 2024 edition of the World Population Prospects represents the 28th official release of population estimates and forecasts produced by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division [23]. According to the data from a sample of 237 countries, South Africa is the 24th most populous country, its average age is the 90th lowest, and when considering the core working age of 25 to 54, the country has the 21st most people in this age group.

Interpreting South Africa as a symbolic "damsel" is both apt and analytically grounded. Within the scarcity paradigm, the country's inherent value becomes visible through its considerable, albeit underutilised, reserves of natural capital (both renewable and nonrenewable). As highlighted by international indices, South Africa holds a wealth of ecological and mineral resources that remain only partially mobilised for sustainable development. Its position among the global leaders in mineral wealth and pockets of high-value renewable assets like timber and cropland suggests immense strategic potential.

Demographically, South Africa also holds latent value: with one of the largest core working-age populations globally and a relatively young median age, it stands at a demographic advantage. However, rankings on indices such as the Natural Capital Index suggest that institutional, environmental, or socio-economic factors constrain the full development of these assets.

The metaphor of the "damsel" thus captures South Africa's current posture, a nation rich in promise with unclaimed abundance waiting to be converted into sustainable national wealth.

3.2 Persistent social and economic chaos or dysfunction

One must assess multiple dimensions of national well-being and economic performance to determine whether South Africa faces a "dragon" (persistent social and economic chaos or dysfunction). This section draws on four authoritative global indices: the World Happiness Report, the Index of Economic Freedom, the IMD World Competitiveness Ranking, and GDP per capita data. These sources provide a multi-faceted view of South Africa's socio-economic health, institutional stability, and long-term competitiveness, enabling a holistic evaluation of systemic challenges and persistent dysfunctions.

The World Happiness Report [24] is a global study that ranks countries by how happy their citizens feel based on data from over 140 nations. Published annually by Oxford's Well-being Research Centre with global partners, it uses science to promote well-being. Launched in 2012 following Bhutan's UN initiative, the report aims to guide governments and individuals in

creating happier, healthier societies by making happiness a key measure of development. According to the report, South Africa ranked 95th overall (Social Support: 80th, GDP per capita: 79th, Freedom: 96th, Generosity: 121st, Perceptions of Corruption: 106th, Positive Emotions: 46th, Negative Emotions: 56th, Donated: 121st, Helped a stranger: 74th, Volunteered: 76th, and Inequality: 127th).

The Index of Economic Freedom [25] is an annual ranking by The Heritage Foundation that measures economic liberty in 184 countries. It evaluates 12 freedoms, including property rights and trade freedom, to assess how policies support prosperity. The Index promotes an understanding of how Economic Freedom fosters growth, individual empowerment, and opportunity, offering insight into the relationship between free markets and human prosperity globally. According to the report, South Africa ranked 103rd overall (Property Rights: 113th, Government Integrity: 75th, Judicial Effectiveness: 69th, Tax Burden: 151st, Government Spending 104th, Fiscal Health: 130th, Business Freedom 99th, Labour Freedom 10th, Monetary Freedom: 51st, Trade Freedom: 109th, Investment Freedom: 133rd, and Financial Freedom: 102nd).

The IMD World Competitiveness Ranking is an annual assessment that evaluates how well countries create conditions for long-term economic value and prosperity. Launched in 1989, it goes beyond GDP (Gross Domestic Product) by analysing political, social, and institutional factors that impact businesses. Using data and surveys, it benchmarks 67 global economies, helping governments and organisations understand and improve their competitive standing in a complex global landscape. According to the report, South Africa ranked 60th overall (Economic Performance: 61st, Government Efficiency: 61st, Business Efficiency: 48th, and Infrastructure: 60th).

GDP per capita (current US$) measures a country's average economic output or income per person by dividing total GDP by population [26]. It is expressed in current U.S. dollars and reflects the value of goods and services produced without adjusting for inflation. Used widely by policymakers and investors, it helps assess economic performance, compare countries, and guide policy decisions. Though it doesn't capture inequality, it remains a key indicator of economic well-being and national productivity. When evaluating the GDP per capita for South Africa from 1995 to 2023 (see Figure 1), one will notice that South Africa's GDP per capita has declined from a high in 2011 ($8 646 per capita) to 2023 ($6 023 per capita) and is currently sitting at a value similar to that of 2006 ($6 077 per capita). However, if one looks at South Africa's ranking (out of a sample of 214 countries), it has declined from 1995, 74th, to 2023, 112th. Thus, South Africa has not only seen a decline in GDP since 2011 but also lost competitiveness since 1995.

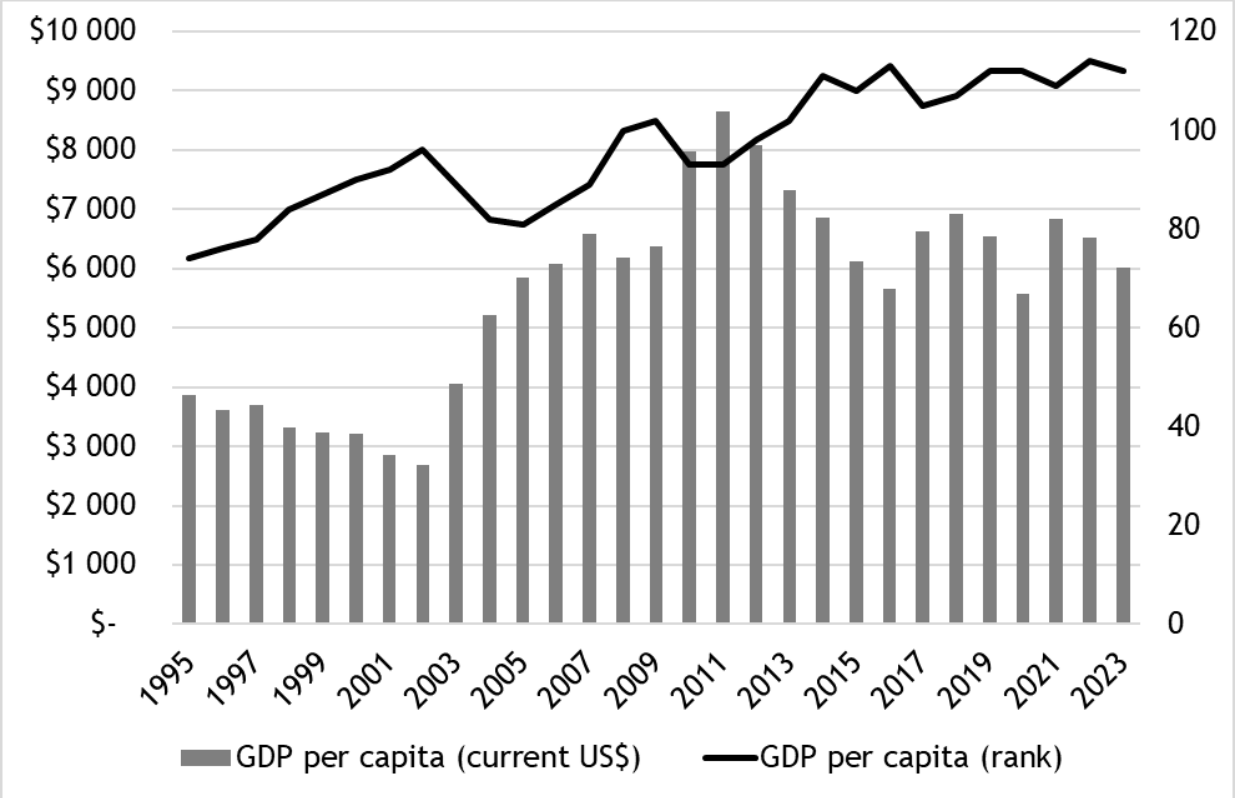

Figure 1: GDP per capita (current US$)

The data present a concerning picture of South Africa's socio-economic trajectory (declining GDP per capita, weakening competitiveness, middling Economic Freedom, and low rankings in happiness and social indicators), which points to underlying systemic issues. While the country maintains pockets of institutional and economic resilience, the cumulative evidence suggests it grapples with persistent dysfunctions marked by inequality, poor governance, and economic stagnation. These conditions align with the characteristics of a "dragon," signalling the need for structural reforms to restore long-term stability and prosperity.

3.3 Addressing systemic complexity and restoring order

This section explores how Industrial Engineering can confront systemic complexity and contribute to restoring order in socio-technical systems. Drawing on the Industrial and Systems Engineering Body of Knowledge (ISEBoK), the discipline integrates analytical, economic, operational, and design tools to manage complexity effectively. Applying principles such as the Theory of Constraints enables organisations to identify and overcome limiting factors in performance. Evidence from high-growth countries illustrates how systemic interventions, institutional reforms, and digital innovation can lead to significant national growth. These examples offer insight into how a modern, structured engineering discipline can address complex, real-world challenges at scale.

The Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers (IISE) is a global nonprofit advancing industrial and systems engineering and has developed an Industrial and Systems Engineering Body of Knowledge (ISEBoK) [27]. Since 1948, it has supported professionals designing and improving complex systems and offers resources, training, and a professional network to help members solve critical problems with a systems-based approach. The industrial and systems engineering field combines engineering principles with knowledge from the sciences to optimise integrated systems of people, materials, and technology. The body of knowledge includes fourteen (14) knowledge areas:

1. Work Design & Measurement
2. Operations Research & Analysis
3. Engineering Economic Analysis
4. Facilities Engineering & Energy Management
5. Quality & Reliability Engineering
6. Ergonomics & Human Factors
7. Operations Engineering & Management
8. Supply Chain Management
9. Engineering Management
10. Safety
11. Information Engineering
12. Design and Manufacturing Engineering
13. Product Design & Development
14. System Design & Engineering

Knowledge areas of specific note to the context of this paper are:

- **Operations Research**, as defined by the IISE, applies mathematical and computational models to improve system efficiency and support decision-making. It spans areas like linear and nonlinear programming, dynamic programming, network optimisation, simulation, queuing theory, and decision analysis under risk and uncertainty. It equips engineers to solve complex problems across various industries with analytical and data-driven approaches.
- **Engineering Economic Analysis** helps industrial engineers assess the financial viability of engineering solutions. It covers value and utility, cost types, interest and cash flow analysis, decision-making under risk and uncertainty, public project evaluation, depreciation, taxes, and replacement analysis. The goal is to support sound economic decisions across engineering alternatives and complex operations.
- **Operations Engineering and Management** focuses on designing and analysing production and service systems to optimise efficiency and resource use. It encompasses planning, forecasting, scheduling, inventory control, capacity and maintenance management, and project execution. Ensuring operations meet customer needs effectively while tracking key performance metrics such as cost, quality, delivery, and productivity.
- **Supply Chain Management** involves coordinating materials, products, and services from origin to consumption. It includes strategic planning, logistics, supplier and customer relationships, risk management, reverse logistics, and network design. Ensuring efficiency, agility, and alignment with strategic goals to enhance value, reduce complexity, and improve overall supply chain performance.
- **Engineering Management** applies engineering principles to business operations, focusing on leadership, strategy, systems, and performance. Key areas include customer focus, teamwork, process improvement, human resources, ethics, project and strategic management. It supports innovation, organisational development, and performance monitoring across technical and business functions to enhance productivity, quality, and customer satisfaction.
- **Systems Design and Engineering** integrates diverse disciplines to develop effective, cohesive systems. It spans mission definition, requirements analysis, system architecture, verification, modelling, and lifecycle cost management. Delivering robust, user-focused systems through structured, repeatable processes and ongoing refinement.

Industrial Engineering is often associated with the Theory of Constraints (TOC) by Goldratt [28]. The central argument is that the primary objective of any business is to make money,

and all efforts should align with this goal. The story follows Alex Rogo, a plant manager, as he turns around an underperforming factory by focusing on improving throughput rather than efficiency. TOC asserts that every system has at least one constraint limiting its performance. To achieve the goal, organisations must identify and manage these constraints effectively.

The process begins by defining three key performance measures: throughput (sales revenue), inventory (tied-up capital), and operational expense (costs to generate throughput). The constraint (the bottleneck) can be identified by finding the slowest or most overloaded part of the system that limits output.

Goldratt outlines five focusing steps:

1. Identify the system's constraint,
2. Exploit the constraint by maximising its use,
3. Subordinate all other processes to support the constraint,
4. Elevate the constraint by investing in improvements, and
5. If the constraint shifts, repeat the process.

Ultimately, thinking is shifted from local efficiencies to holistic system optimisation, encouraging continuous improvement focused on what truly drives performance.

To evaluate whether other countries have been able to improve their competitiveness from 1995 to 2025, a benchmarking analysis was performed on countries that had a similar GDP per capita to South Africa in 1995. Four countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania) were used for this purpose. The results are indicated in Table 1, which illustrates that all four countries significantly improved their GDP per capita in absolute and relative terms. It is also worth noting that the four countries scored much better than South Africa in the 2025 Index of Economic Freedom.

Table 1: GDP per capita (current US$)

Country	GDP per capita 1995	GDP per capita 2010	GDP per capita 2023	Rank 1995	Rank 2010	Rank 2023	Index of Economic Freedom 2025
Estonia	$3 134	$14 664	$30 133	82	66	47	8
Lithuania	$2 183	$11 829	$27 786	99	74	49	16
Latvia	$2 257	$11 188	$22 503	97	77	56	24
Romania	$1 650	$8 400	$18 404	107	88	66	51
South Africa	$3 856	$7 973	$6 023	74	93	112	103

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were part of the Soviet Union until its collapse in 1990, and they joined the European Union (EU) in 2004. Romania was not part of the Soviet Union and joined the European Union in 2007. The success of these countries against the failure of South Africa is stark, but the reasons for the difference are likely multi-faceted and complex and fall outside the scope of this study. However, the following is worth noting:

- To join the European Union, the countries were required to adopt values and norms typical of the EU states. For example, they had to manage and reduce corruption actively [29].
- Estonia's e-government strategy uses digital tools to streamline public services, cut bureaucracy, and boost competitiveness. Citizens can access nearly all services online via e-ID, saving time and public funds. E-residency and startup visas attract global

entrepreneurs. Estonia aims to deliver world-class digital services to most of its population to support a resilient and efficient society [30]. Similar initiatives in the private sector have enabled Estonia to become a digital leader [31].

- A study examining the EU's Structural, Cohesion, and Pre-accession Funds across 27 EU countries and the UK (1989–2020) shows that their impact on growth depends on institutional quality. Funds boost growth only where governance is strong (low corruption, strong rule of law, effective governments, and strong regulatory quality) [32].

The evidence suggests that South Africa's "throughput" is constrained by its relatively low level of Economic Freedom. This directly affects businesses' ability to operate, innovate, and expand, influencing job creation and productivity. From a TOC perspective, "inventory" represents latent economic capacity (capital, skills, and resources) that remain underutilised because policy and regulatory conditions inhibit deployment. Excessive regulatory requirements, inefficiencies in governance, and corruption raise the "operating expense" of doing business, reducing the net return on productive activity. By applying TOC's five focusing steps, the following overarching roadmap could likely increase South Africa's throughput:

1. Identify the system's constraint

Low Economic Freedom (weak property rights, excessive regulation, corruption, and restricted trade/investment policies).

2. Exploit the constraint by maximising its use

Maximise existing institutional capacity by streamlining current administrative processes, reducing unnecessary regulations, and enhancing transparency without large-scale reform (quick wins).

3. Subordinate all other processes to support the constraint

Align all national economic strategies, industrial policies, and public sector reforms to support improvements in Economic Freedom, ensuring that other development efforts don't bypass or ignore this constraint.

4. Elevate the constraint by investing in improvements

Strengthen judicial independence.

Ensure relentless accountability for corruption.

Affirm property rights.

Reduce barriers to trade and investment.

Simplify the tax regulations.

Digitise and automate administrative governance.

5. If the constraint shifts, repeat the process

Once Economic Freedom improves, new constraints will emerge (e.g., infrastructure, skills gaps). Reassess and address the following constraint to maintain momentum.

Through its systems-based and constraint-focused approach, Industrial Engineering offers powerful tools to address complexity and restore order. The success of countries like Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Romania demonstrates how structured reforms, digital innovation, and institutional strengthening, aligned with Industrial Engineering principles, can drive national transformation. By focusing on constraints, enabling systemic

optimisation, and fostering continuous improvement, Industrial Engineering proves itself a modern, “heroic” discipline capable of tackling real-world challenges and enabling sustained progress.

4 CONCLUSION

This paper evaluated whether South Africa can be seen as a symbolic damsel (a nation of latent potential or value) facing a dragon (entrenched dysfunctions and persistent socio-economic chaos) and whether Industrial Engineering might be a modern hero capable of confronting systemic complexity and restoring order.

Through the appraisal of global indices, benchmarking data, and comparative case studies, the evidence suggests that South Africa possesses untapped value but is constrained by structural inefficiencies and institutional weaknesses that lead to economic decline. These indicators confirm the presence of a dragon that threatens the nation’s prosperity and resilience. However, the study also illustrates how Industrial Engineering, especially through systems thinking, constraint-based logic, and operations research, can offer powerful tools to foster an environment that promotes prosperity. In this symbolic narrative, the discipline emerges as a viable hero capable of restoring coherence, performance, and long-term value.

Limitations include the narrow country comparison group and the largely conceptual application of Industrial Engineering at a national scale. Further empirical work is needed to operationalise these methods in policy and governance contexts.

Future research should focus on developing actionable frameworks that adapt Industrial Engineering principles to public sector complexity. Such frameworks could establish a clear theoretical contribution by formalising the mechanisms through which Industrial Engineering can function as a national-level change agent. This could provide both a scholarly foundation for advancing Industrial Engineering theory in socio-technical macro-systems and practical guidance for policymakers seeking structured approaches to systemic reform. Future research may also deepen the statistical analysis by applying structured thematic or coding methods, complemented with comparative and visual analytics, to uncover cause–and–effect relationships and provide stronger evidence for observed trends. Case-based learning from reforming economies and interdisciplinary collaboration can also help create effective strategies for South Africa’s renewal and bring its “damsel” potential to life.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author acknowledges the use of OpenAI’s ChatGPT as a supportive tool during the development of this paper. ChatGPT was used to gather background information, brainstorm ideas, draft and refine sentences, and summarise content. The author critically reviewed, verified and integrated all outputs to ensure academic integrity and originality.

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BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY IN SME SUPPLY CHAIN OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Blockchain technology has emerged as a transformative technique in supply chain operations, offering significant benefits for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). However, selecting and implementing blockchain solutions remains challenging. This article critically reviews existing literature to analyse blockchain's role in enhancing SME supply chains, focusing on its impact on efficiency, trust, and transparency, while addressing adoption barriers. Blockchain enables transparency, traceability, and fraud reduction, positioning SMEs for greater competitiveness in international trade. Despite these advantages, adoption is hindered by inter-organisational challenges, including cost constraints, limited technical expertise, and regulatory hurdles. This study provides actionable insights and strategies for researchers and industry stakeholders to overcome these barriers, ensuring SMEs can effectively harness the potential of blockchain technology.

Keywords: Blockchain Technology, Supply Chain, Transparency, Traceability, Adoption Barriers

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1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Blockchain Technology (BCT) research has gained significant global attention, particularly in domains such as banking and finance, supply chain and logistics, healthcare, the government sector, energy, and operations [1]. Initially conceptualised by Satoshi Nakamoto in 2008 and implemented in 2009, blockchain was introduced as the core technology underpinning Bitcoin [2]. Since then, it has evolved into a disruptive innovation with potential applications across various industries. Despite considerable attention in finance and large-scale enterprise supply chains [3], its adoption within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) remains comparatively limited [4]. Blockchain operates as a decentralised and immutable digital ledger that records transactions between parties securely, transparently, and tamper-proof [5]. It offers transformative advantages such as enhanced transparency, traceability, and accountability in supply chain operations [6], making it a compelling solution to address inefficiencies, fraud, and data integrity issues that frequently hinder traditional supply chains [7], [8]. While smart contracts, a self-executing agreement with terms written into code, enable automation and trust across distributed systems [9], SMEs often encounter substantial barriers to adoption. These include limited technical expertise, high implementation costs, regulatory concerns, and scalability challenges [10], [11], [12]. Consequently, a significant gap remains in understanding how SMEs, particularly in mining, agriculture, and manufacturing sectors, can integrate BCT into their operations. To address these gaps, this study aims to examine the application of BCT in SME supply chains, with particular emphasis on the mining sector. The research is guided by the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What are the benefits of adopting blockchain technology in SME supply chains, especially within the mining sector?

RQ2: What challenges hinder the adoption of blockchain technology in SME supply chains?

RQ3: How can SMEs implement blockchain technology to enhance their supply chain operations effectively?

By answering these questions, the study seeks to contribute to the growing discourse on digital transformation in SMEs and propose a structured framework for adopting blockchain technology in complex, resource-constrained environments. Current literature affirms blockchain's potential in enhancing cooperation transparency [13], optimising logistics through integration with the Internet of Things (IoT) [14] and improving export performance by streamlining processes and reducing intermediaries [15], [16]. Notable frameworks, such as Blockchain-Enabled and Event-Driven Tracking (BET), have been proposed for manufacturing environments [13]; however, their application to broader SME contexts remains limited. Moreover, sectors such as food, dairy, and specialised high-value industries such as jewellery and semiconductors remain underrepresented in implementation-focused studies [17], [18]. Although recent studies suggest that BCT adoption could significantly enhance SME competitiveness within global supply chains, there is still a lack of practical guidance on strategies to overcome the associated technological and organisational barriers [19], [20]. This highlights the need for a targeted approach involving stakeholder collaboration, phased implementation, and alignment with existing digital infrastructures [21], [22].

2 REVIEW METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to investigate the application of BCT in SME supply chain operations. The review process focused primarily on indexed and peer-reviewed publications relevant to the RQs, to ensure quality and reliability [25]. A structured search strategy was adopted using combinations of keywords such as *"Blockchain Technology"*, *"SME Supply Chain"*, *"Small and Medium Enterprises"*, *"Blockchain in Logistics"*, and

"Blockchain in Operations". Searches were conducted within Scopus-indexed databases such as IEEE Xplore and ScienceDirect, as well as Web of Science for indexed sources, while Google Scholar and relevant conference proceedings served as sources for non-indexed materials. The search was limited to articles published between 2017 and 2025, reflecting the period in which blockchain adoption in supply chain contexts gained notable scholarly attention. Filters were applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords to ensure alignment with the RQs. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure a transparent and replicable selection process [38] [40].

A rigorous selection process was employed to capture a broad range of perspectives on integrating blockchain technology within supply chain systems. In total, 70 publications were retrieved, 59 from indexed journals and 11 from non-indexed sources. Duplicate entries (n = 2) were removed, leaving 68 papers for initial screening. Screening was conducted based on relevance to the main theme, focus on blockchain in SME supply chain operations, and adherence to the search criteria. Ten papers were excluded, the reasons for the exclusion include: Not focusing on the main theme (n = 3); Not addressing blockchain in SME supply chain contexts (n = 3); Not meeting search criteria (n = 4). A total of 58 papers (53 indexed, 5 non-indexed) met the inclusion criteria and were critically analysed for content, methodological approaches, and key findings. The synthesis process involved thematic coding to identify trends, challenges, and research gaps within the literature. Particular attention was given to works that explicitly examined the interplay between blockchain and supply chain operations. The complete PRISMA flow in table format is presented in Table 1. The screening and selection process for the review is presented in Figure 1.

Table 1. PRISMA Summary of the Literature Selection Process

	Stage	Description	Count (n)
1	Identification	Time frame covered: 2017-2025	-
2	Identification	Records from Indexed Journals	59
3	Identification	Other Sources (Non-Indexed Journals)	11
4	Identification	Duplicates removed	2
5	Screening	Screened Journals	68
6	Screening	Excluded – Not focusing on main theme	3
7	Screening	Excluded - Not focusing on Blockchain in SMEs supply chain	3
8	Screening	Excluded – Not related to search criteria	4
9	Eligibility	Journals assessed for review (Indexed)	53
10	Eligibility	Journals assessed for review (Non-Indexed)	5
11	Included	Total Journals included	58

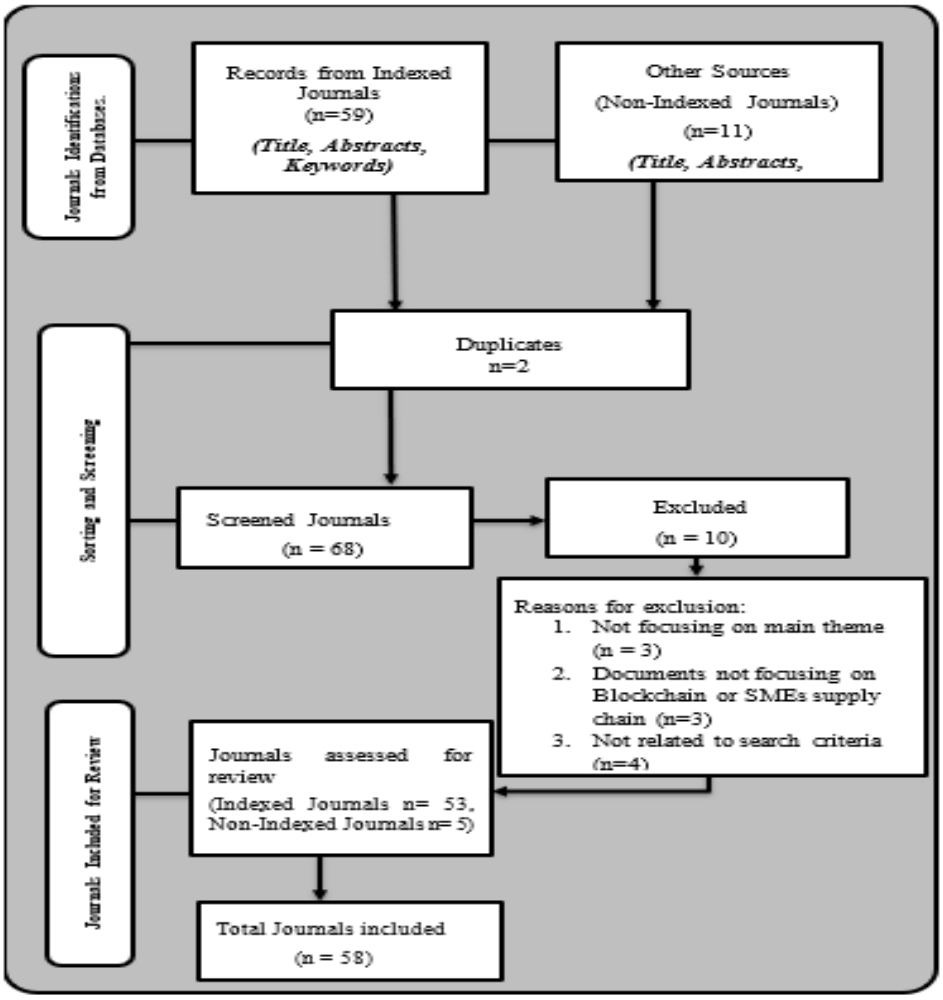

Figure 1: Screening and Selection Process for Literature Review (Authors Compilation)

To ensure the relevance and currency of the literature review, specific inclusion criteria were applied, focusing on studies published between 2017 and 2025. Figure 2 presents the distribution of the selected studies by year of publication.

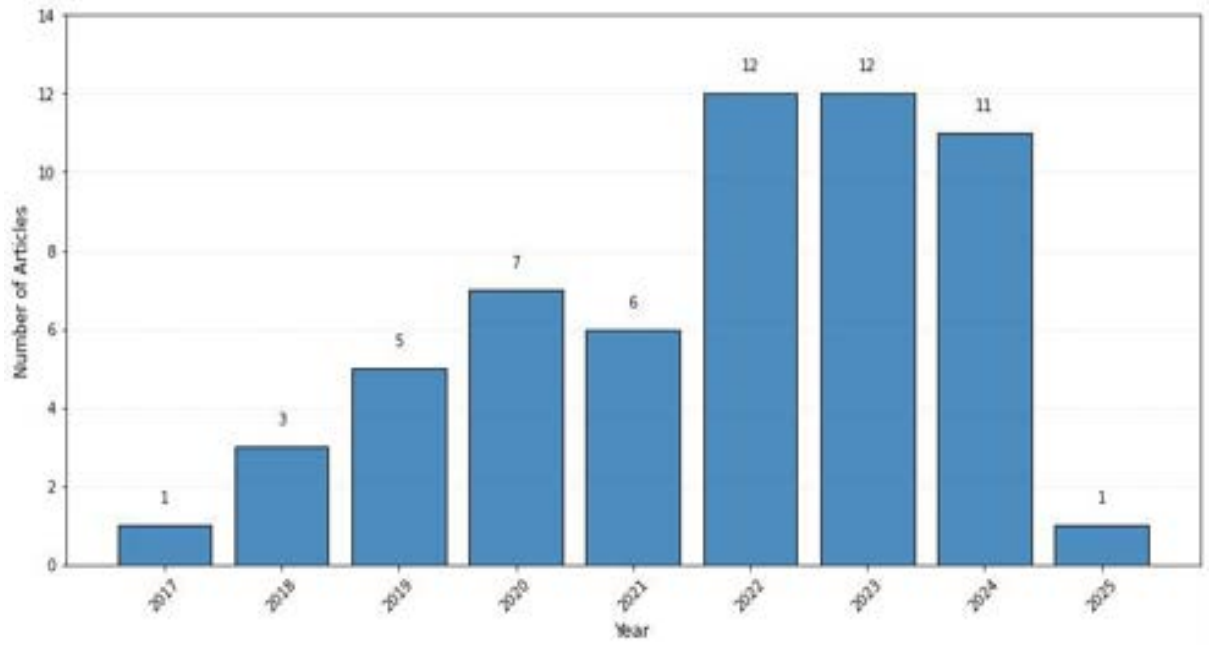

Figure 2: Number of articles and the concurrent years published

Another consideration in the journal selection process was aligning the research questions and the corresponding keywords. Table 2 presents a matrix that illustrates these relationships. RQ1 shows a broad association with multiple keywords, reflecting its comprehensive scope. RQ2 is linked to a more focused subset of keywords relevant to adoption challenges. RQ3 is aligned explicitly with keywords that target implementation strategies, addressing the core objectives of this study.

Table 2: Conceptual Matrix of Linking Keywords to Journals in BCT SMEs Supply Chain

#RQ	SMEs Supply Chain	BCT	Traceability	Transparency	Adoption Barrier & Challenges	Implementation
RQ1	X	X	X	X	x	X
RQ2	X	X	X	X	x	
RQ3	X	X			x	X
Ref.	[3], [6], [9], [10] [20]	[6], [7], [10] [11] [15], [27], [29], [31] [41]	[1], [9], [42] [43], [44], [45], [46], [47]	[3], [6], [19], [11], [21], [29], [30] [48]	[2], [14], [32], [36], [49], [50] [51], [52]	[4], [8], [19], [30], [33], [43], [53], [54]

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The SLR highlights a persistent gap in the practical implementation of BCT within SMEs. Although scholarly interest in BCT has grown, particularly within the supply chain context, real-world adoption remains limited across most industries. Transparency and traceability consistently emerge as the most promising attributes of BCT for enhancing supply chain operations. These features are widely recognised for their potential to optimise integration and improve accountability among supply chain stakeholders. However, a comprehensive and widely adopted framework for implementing BCT in SME supply chains is still absent. Notable contributions, such as those by [46] and [54], have proposed experimental frameworks, but their application in industrial practice remains constrained. Several barriers to adoption have

been identified in the literature, including high setup costs, high energy use for validating transactions, and limited technical skills in SMEs.

In addition, unclear regulations, poor system compatibility, and challenges in scaling up also limit wider use. Table 3 presents the research methods used in the reviewed studies, showing the growing academic interest in applying BCT in supply chains. A closer look at specific sectors reveals that while industries like mining have started exploring BCT, others, such as textiles, food, healthcare, automotive, and electronics, still show low levels of adoption. Although BCT is widely recognised for its potential to improve transparency and efficiency, its use remains uneven. This is mainly due to the lack of standard adoption frameworks and ongoing global and organisational challenges [14], [55].

Table 3: BCT Papers Interlinks

Focus	Methodology	References
Supply chain	Bibliometric Literature Review (BLR)	[1], [12]
	Mixed Method (incorporating a combination of any of the following research designs: SLR, Case study, Conceptual analysis, Empirical analysis, Game theory, Survey research)	[2], [3] , [7], [15], [20], [31], [51], [56]
	Systematic Literature Review (SLR)	[6], [10], [11], [18], [25], [26], [27], [30], [32], [36], [37],[38], [39], [40], [41], [43], [50]
	Game-theoretic Modeling and Analysis	[8], [28]
	Technological and performance-based approach.	[13, 55, 60]
	Theoretical analysis and mathematical modeling	[16]
	Qualitative Research Method	[22], [29]
	Quantitative Review Method	[44], [47], [48]
	Conceptual and Experimental Research (Simulation & Algorithmic Implementation)	[54]
	Case study	[35], [57]

3.1 Block Chain Integration in SMEs Supply chain

BCT is gaining increasing attention as a transformative solution for supply chain operations, particularly within SMEs [1]. [1] and [16] highlight its decentralised and tamper-proof nature, which enhances transparency and trust across supply chain networks. Furthermore, BCT supports secure collaboration among supply chain partners, which is especially valuable for resource-constrained SMEs [5]. In specific sectors such as mining, BCT plays a critical role in ensuring ethical sourcing by verifying the origin of minerals [42]. It also enables real-time tracking, fraud detection, and helps meet regulatory requirements, contributing to improved supply chain integrity [43]. Smart contracts, a self-executing agreement coded on the blockchain, further streamline operations by automating payment and order fulfilment processes, reducing errors and delays [44]. In addition, BCT improves visibility, traceability, and operational efficiency, while also helping to minimise counterfeiting and administrative burdens [45]. Despite these clear benefits, adoption among SMEs remains limited [58]. However, growing scholarly interest reflects recognition of BCT's potential to optimise supply

chain performance [59]. As shown in Table 4, blockchain-related technologies exhibit diverse capabilities that can accelerate transactions and support their application in SME supply chain operations.

Table 4: Related BCT application to SMEs Supply chain

Related Technologies in Blockchain	Key Aspect	Appli*+5cability in SMEs Supply Chain	Reference
Permissioned Blockchain	Restricted access with authorized participants; shared ledger for trusted data sharing	Enables traceability and compliance in /multi-party networks (e.g., vendor onboarding, product sourcing)	[2], [4], [33], [23]
Public Permissionless Blockchain	Open participation; decentralized validation via consensus mechanisms	Suitable for public verification of product authenticity (e.g., ethical sourcing claims).	[2], [4] , [33], [41]
Hybrid (Consortium) Blockchain	Partial decentralizati on with pre-approved nodes; balances control and trust	Facilitates collaborative platforms for SMEs in shared industries (e.g., logistics partnerships)	[33], [37] , [41]
Mining Algorithm	Secures transactions via computational work (e.g., Proof of Work)	Limited direct applicability; energy-efficient variants reduce operational costs for blockchain adoption	[15], [33], [41], [54]
Smart Contract	Self-executing code that automates workflows upon predefined conditions	Streamlines payments, compliance checks, and dispute resolution (e.g., automated invoice processing)	[16],[33], [56]
Zero-Knowledge Proof (ZKP)	Validates data authenticity without exposing sensitive details	Verifies certifications (e.g., organic/fair-trade labels) while protecting proprietary supplier data-85	[44]
Merkle Tree	Cryptographic data structure for efficient transaction verification.	Enhances auditability by enabling quick verification of supply chain records (e.g., batch integrity checks).	[44]

3.2 Blockchain Connectivity and Implementation Strategies in SME Supply Chains

Blockchain helps SMEs make better decisions by providing accurate, real-time information on inventory, shipments, demand forecasting, and transactions [32]. Partnering with technology providers or joining consortia can give SMEs access to shared systems and technical support [37]. However, for blockchain to be used effectively, it must be carefully planned and matched to specific business needs, such as improving traceability or reducing transaction costs [45].

Since blockchain improves connectivity by allowing real-time data sharing between supply chain partners [58], having a clear plan with defined steps and proper resource management is essential for successful adoption [59]. Consortium blockchain models are especially useful, as they allow multiple organisations to work together while keeping control of their own data [60].

Despite these benefits, blockchain adoption in SMEs remains limited, mainly due to high implementation costs and technical complexity. Table 5 outlines the main benefits, challenges, and strategies for successful blockchain use in SME supply chains.

Table 5: Benefits. Challenges and Implementation Strategies of BCT in SMEs' Supply Chain

Benefits of Blockchain in SMEs' Supply Chain	Challenges	Implementation Strategies
Enhanced transparency	High implementation costs	Strategic planning
Improved operational efficiency	Lack of technical expertise	Partnership development
Cost savings	Regulatory uncertainty	Employee training
Competitive advantage	Organizational resistance	Change management

3.3 Barriers and Drivers to Blockchain Adoption in SME Supply Chains

Adopting blockchain technology can yield substantial cost savings for SMEs by eliminating intermediaries and making operations more efficient. By reducing the need for third-party verification, blockchain lowers the expenses linked to traditional centralised systems [49], while real-time tracking helps reduce losses from theft or fraud, improving cost-effectiveness [5]. However, SMEs face several technological challenges in blockchain adoption. Connecting blockchain with current systems often needs advanced technical skills that many SMEs do not have [19]. Also, high implementation costs, limited technical expertise, and problems with scaling up are major obstacles [30]. Interoperability remains a major challenge, as different blockchain platforms often cannot work together smoothly. This limits data sharing and reduces the overall effectiveness of the technology [35]. Then, the high computing power and energy required by blockchain can be especially difficult for SMEs with limited resources [42]. Regulatory uncertainty also makes adoption more difficult, as differing standards across regions create compliance risks for businesses using blockchain. Resistance within organisations can also slow progress. Employees may be reluctant to accept new technologies because they fear job losses or do not understand the benefits of blockchain. To overcome this, managers should clearly explain the advantages of blockchain and involve staff in training programmes. Open communication and involving employees in the process can help build a culture of innovation and make the transition smoother.

Table 6 presents the key drivers and barriers influencing blockchain adoption in SMEs. Adoption is shaped by both internal and external drivers, while barriers can be categorised as intra-organisational, inter-organisational, and system-related challenges [32]. One major advantage of blockchain is its ability to enhance transparency, which fosters trust and customer loyalty, critical for SMEs operating in competitive markets. In sectors such as pharmaceuticals and food safety, blockchain ensures product authenticity and quality assurance across the supply chain [32], [34].

Table 6: BCT Drivers and Adoption Barriers to SMEs' Supply Chain.

DRIVERS FOR ADOPTION	ADOPTION BARRIERS	REFERENCE
Internal Drivers	**Intra-Organization Barriers**	
• Enhancement of SMEs Supply chain • Traceability • Transparency • Efficiency • Combat SMEs Fraud	• High Implementation Cost • Lack of Knowledge and expertise in BCT. • Transparency and Piracy confusion • Suitability Issues of the Technology	[17], [25], [28], [33], [41], [44]

• Reduction in Transactional & Operational cost		
External Drivers	**Intra-Organization Barriers**	
• Pressure from consumers • Pressure from buyers/suppliers and competitors • Pressure from regulators • Internet of Things.	• Lack of readiness on SMEs supply chain • Data input challenges • Lack of standards • Regulatory issues • Global adoption Issues	[3], [5], [8], [9], [34]
Systems Related Issues		
	• Scalability Issues • Enforcement, traceability and trust of smart contracts. • High cost of investment • High energy consumption • Breach in algorithm	[15], [34], [45]

3.4. Roadmap to Blockchain Implementation for Small and Medium Enterprises

As mentioned earlier, there is an increasing move towards consortium blockchains, where multiple organisations collaborate to share resources and lower costs. Drawing from the findings, a structured roadmap has been proposed to support SMEs in integrating blockchain technology into their supply chain operations. This roadmap, illustrated in Figure 3, outlines five critical stages: Assessment, Planning, Partnership and Integration, Training, and Monitoring. Successful implementation across these stages can enhance efficiency, transparency, and overall supply chain performance in SMEs.

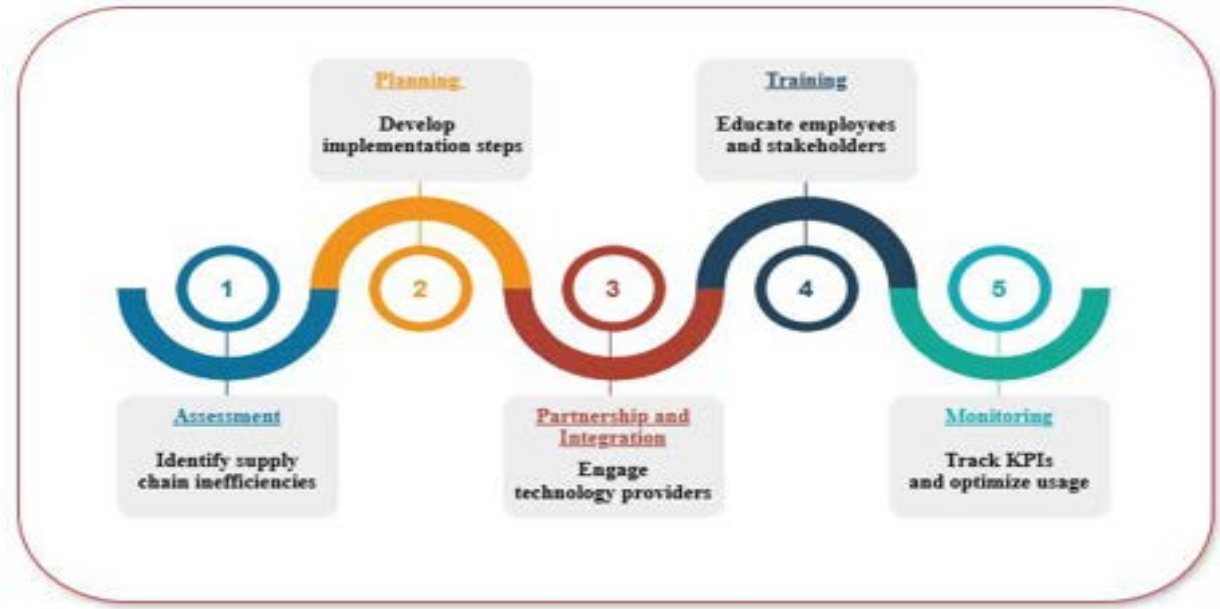

Figure 3: Recommended Roadmap for Blockchain Adoption by SMEs supply chain (Authors Compilation)

3.5 Summary of the Blockchain Integration Roadmap

The integration roadmap begins with an Assessment phase, where SMEs evaluate their current supply chain operations to identify inefficiencies and determine areas where BCT could add value. This includes analysing data flows, bottlenecks, and potential blockchain impact. Next is the Planning stage, which involves defining the project scope, identifying resource needs, and establishing a clear implementation timeline. A structured plan helps minimise disruptions during integration. The third stage, Partnership and Integration, focuses on collaborating with technology providers to ensure system compatibility, data integration, and tailored blockchain

solutions aligned with SME needs. Following integration, the Training stage equips employees and stakeholders with the skills required to operate the new system, covering technology fundamentals, system usage, and data management. Finally, the Monitoring stage involves tracking key performance indicators (KPIs), system updates, and ongoing optimisation. Continuous evaluation ensures the blockchain system remains effective and evolves with supply chain needs. Together, these five stages support a smooth and effective BCT adoption, enhancing SME supply chain transparency, efficiency, and long-term success.

4 CONCLUSION

This SLR examined the application of BCT within SME supply chain operations, synthesising findings from 58 peer-reviewed and indexed journal articles published between 2017 and 2025. Guided by structured inclusion criteria and the PRISMA framework, the study offers comprehensive insights addressing three core research questions. In RQ1, the study found that BCT is applicable to SMEs primarily through enhancing transparency, traceability, and operational efficiency. These benefits support improved decision-making and supply chain optimisation, although adoption remains limited. Addressing RQ2, the review identified key barriers to BCT adoption in SMEs, including high implementation costs, limited technical capacity, regulatory uncertainty, and interoperability issues. Nonetheless, it also highlighted critical enablers such as stakeholder collaboration, decentralised data sharing, and smart contracts as drivers of adoption. For RQ3, a five-stage implementation roadmap was proposed, covering assessment, planning, partnership and integration, training, and monitoring. This roadmap provides a structured approach for SMEs to adopt blockchain in a phased, strategic manner, minimising disruptions and maximising impact. Blockchain holds transformative potential for SMEs, offering fraud reduction, enhanced transparency, and increased competitiveness. Realising these benefits requires overcoming systemic and organisational barriers. Strategic planning, investment in capability development, and inclusive change management are essential to drive adoption. In conclusion, BCT represents a robust tool for SMEs aiming to enhance global supply chain performance. Stakeholders must act decisively to harness its benefits, fostering innovation, trust, and sustainable growth in an increasingly digital and interconnected business environment.

5 FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

To complement the findings of this study, future studies should incorporate empirical validation through surveys, interviews, and case studies of SME supply chain managers across industries and regions. Such approaches would provide grounded insights into how blockchain's opportunities and barriers manifest in practice, while also testing the effectiveness of proposed implementation roadmaps. Comparative studies between developed and emerging economies would further reveal contextual adoption dynamics. By combining systematic reviews with empirical investigations, future research efforts can generate actionable frameworks that enable SMEs to overcome barriers and fully harness blockchain for supply chain resilience, competitiveness, and sustainable growth.

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A FUZZY LOGIC-BASED MODEL FOR ADVANCING DIGITALISATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN MINING SMES

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ABSTRACT

This study introduces a fuzzy logic-based decision-making framework to evaluate digitalisation readiness among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa's mining sector. Using input from thirty (30) industry experts, the framework was implemented using MATLAB R2024a, to evaluate five key dimensions: Technological Infrastructure (TI), Human Skills and Training (HST), Operational Efficiency (OE), Organisational Culture (OC), and Financial Resources (FR). Converting qualitative survey data into quantitative readiness scores, the model provides a comprehensive view of digital maturity. Findings highlight Organisational Culture and Human Skills as key enablers of digital transformation, while moderate scores in technology, operations, and finance point to capacity and funding limitations. The framework offers strategic guidance for SMEs, policymakers, and industry leaders to drive effective and inclusive digital transformation in constrained environments.

Keywords: Digital Technology, Fuzzy Logic, Mining SMEs, MATLAB R2024a

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1 INTRODUCTION

The global shift toward digitalisation is transforming the operational environment of industries, offering pathways to increased efficiency, competitiveness, and sustainability. While sectors such as manufacturing and logistics have made notable strides in digital adoption, the mining industry, particularly its small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), continues to lag. Mining SMEs often face unique challenges, including limited financial capacity, outdated infrastructure, low digital literacy, and a workforce unaccustomed to technology-driven change [1]. These constraints hinder their ability to embrace digital transformation, despite its potential to optimise production processes, reduce operational risks, and improve environmental compliance. South Africa, endowed with rich mineral resources and a well-established mining sector, is no exception to this trend. While large mining corporations have begun integrating advanced technologies such as automation, remote sensing, and data analytics, smaller players remain constrained by structural, economic, and organisational barriers [1]. For mining SMEs to remain competitive and resilient in the face of increasing market pressures and technological disruptions, a clear, computational technique for assessing and advancing digital readiness is crucial [2]. Classical models for evaluating digital transformation tend to rely on rigid, quantitative indicators that often fail to capture the sophisticated, qualitative aspects of organisational readiness.

The primary aim of this study is to design a decision-support framework to evaluate and improve the digitalisation readiness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating within South Africa's mining industry. The specific objectives include to Identify and define key factors influencing digitalisation readiness in mining SMEs; design and implement a fuzzy logic framework using MATLAB R2024a that can effectively evaluate the digital readiness of mining SMEs under conditions of uncertainty and qualitative input; Apply the framework to real-life SME case studies in the mining sector to assess varying levels of digital readiness and identify strengths and weaknesses; Analyse the impact of human skills, financial resources, and organisational culture on the digital transformation process, highlighting common challenges and best practices. Provide insights and recommendations for SMEs, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to support strategic planning, capacity building, and investment in digital technologies.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Digital Transformation in Industries

Digital transformation is vital for improving competitiveness, efficiency, and sustainability, yet SMEs face obstacles such as limited funding, lack of technical expertise, and resistance to change [2]. These challenges are particularly pronounced in the mining sector, where operations are complex and labour-intensive. Recent research highlights the necessity for well-structured frameworks that evaluate digital readiness in ways that are sensitive to the specific demands of each sector [3]. Conventional assessment approaches frequently fall short in addressing the uncertainty and subjectivity involved in determining organisational preparedness; this challenge is evident in SMEs with varying degrees of digital maturity.

Studies have demonstrated that digitalisation significantly influences financial performance [4], business revitalization [5], and broader economic outcomes [6]. For instance, Indriastuti and Kartika [7] surveyed Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) within a region to assess the effects of digital adoption on their financial performance. It was observed in their study that digitalisation leads to notable improvements. Similarly, Gunawan and Somantri [4] explored the relationship between digital technology and financial inclusion among MSMEs, identifying technology adoption as a mediating factor. Their findings indicate that both the digital economy and the adoption of technology significantly enhance financial inclusion.

These results suggest that digitalisation is a key driver of future economic growth and development, as evidenced by the rapid evolution of business transactions.

Several recent studies have emphasised the critical role of digital transformation in revitalising and sustaining SMEs, which has direct implications for advancing digitalisation frameworks. Putri and Asyari [5] investigated the effects of digital transformation on selected MSMEs within a particular cluster, revealing a significantly positive impact on business revitalisation. Their findings signify the importance of strengthening digital capabilities and highlight the need to improve digital literacy as a foundational step toward successful transformation, an insight highly relevant for mining SMEs navigating complex technological transitions.

In another study, Nata et al. [6] explored how digitalisation contributes to economic growth through the development of adaptive business models tailored to the evolving market system. The study suggests that digitization empowers MSMEs to overcome structural limitations by embracing tools like digital marketing, which enhances market access and revenue potential. This adaptive behaviour is key for mining SMEs seeking to stay competitive in dynamic environments. In addressing the broader challenges of the recent industrial revolution, Fajria [8] advocated for the integration of MSME 4.0 principles, encouraging businesses to adopt digital technologies that align with a fast-changing ecosystem. Such digital strategies support not only operational efficiency but also market expansion, enabling SMEs, including those in the mining sector, to extend their reach beyond local boundaries.

2.2 Traditional Method of Analysis vs Computational Techniques

Classical methods of analysis often treat these factors in isolation or rely on rigid deterministic models that fail to properly represent the inherent ambiguity in real-world decision-making [9]. In a recent study conducted by Shao et al. [10], a robust contribution was significantly made to the discourse by proposing a classical hybrid Grey-DANP model to analyse the multi-dimensional factors influencing digital transformation in Chinese SMEs. The model reflects the complex interplay of resources, competencies, and institutional frameworks that drive transformation [10]. Key determinants identified include digital infrastructure, internal organisational change, employee work style, talent team development, and business model innovation. Dynamic Capabilities Theory is a notable theoretical anchor in the literature, which underscores the need for reconfiguring capabilities in stochastic environments [11].

Other traditional multi-criteria decision-making techniques, such as TOPSIS and AHP, have also been criticised for their inability to handle ambiguity and causal feedback loops simultaneously [12,13]. Furthermore, [10] pointed out the fact that successful digital transformation strategies must align with external realities where fuzzy systems can model more adaptively than rigid numerical methods. For instance, the influence of leadership mindset [14], employee adaptability [15], and socio-cultural inertia [16] may be better captured through fuzzy inference rules than binary classifications. Another advantage of Fuzzy model is the ability to accommodate feedback and reinforcement among variables [10]. For instance, economic development, government support, and technological infrastructure were found to have mutual causal relationships, a complexity well-handled by fuzzy cognitive maps. While [10] successfully integrates various factors influencing SMEs' digital transformation using Grey-DANP, the transition to fuzzy logic analysis can enhance high-level accuracy of models, particularly when applied to mining SMEs where data uncertainty and regulatory complexity are more pronounced. In summary, recent studies have shown that problems in this space rely more on classical or traditional methods for analysis with limited emphasis on advanced computational approaches. This study fills this gap by highlighting the significance of intelligent decision-making frameworks, like fuzzy logic, in navigating the challenges of digital transformation within mining SMEs.

2.3 Fuzzy Logic for Advancing Digital Transformation in Mining SMEs.

Fuzzy logic, widely regarded as a robust decision-support system, offers a sophisticated approach for assessing digitalisation readiness, particularly in environments characterised by imprecise, uncertain, or qualitative data [17]. Its inherent capacity to handle vagueness and ambiguity makes it an ideal tool for tackling complex, real-world scenarios where traditional methods fall short. Studies by Nguyen et al. [18] underscore the implementation of fuzzy logic in modelling intricate systems and relationships. By leveraging linguistic variables and fuzzy if–then rules, fuzzy logic provides a robust stochastic decision-making process that is difficult to quantify with conventional quantitative techniques [19]. The underutilisation underscores a critical gap in the existing literature and practice, highlighting the need for a specialised fuzzy logic-based framework tailored to the unique challenges of mining SMEs.

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodological steps followed in this study are detailed in this section, covering the research design, readiness factors, fuzzy logic implementation, data collection, and justification of input factors using the TOE (Technology–Organization–Environment) framework, as well as fuzzy model notation and formulation. The Fuzzy Logic Implementation Flowchart provides a structured overview of the sequential phases undertaken to operationalize the framework.

The process begins with problem identification and data collection, where primary data were obtained through a structured survey distributed via Qualtrics and analysed using MATLAB R2024a. Five critical readiness dimensions—Technological Infrastructure (TI), Human Skills and Training (HST), Organisational Culture (OC), Operational Efficiency (OE), and Financial Resources (FR), were identified and justified within the TOE framework as essential determinants of digitalisation readiness in SMEs.

Following this, the fuzzy inference system (FIS) was designed in MATLAB to model the decision-making process. The first phase of the FIS involves fuzzification, where input data are converted into fuzzy sets using membership functions to account for uncertainty and qualitative judgment. A rule-based system is then constructed, embedding expert knowledge in the form of “if–then” rules to define relationships between input variables and their influence on digital readiness. The inference mechanism, based on the Mamdani model, is employed to aggregate rules and derive intermediate fuzzy outputs. These outputs are then processed through defuzzification, where the centroid method is applied to generate crisp digital readiness scores that can be readily interpreted.

The next stage involves validation and optimisation, where the model is tested against the dataset and fine-tuned to improve accuracy, consistency, and interpretability. Membership functions and fuzzy rules are iteratively adjusted to ensure alignment with expert knowledge and empirical observations. The methodology culminates in the analysis and implementation strategy, where final readiness scores are interpreted, ranked, and translated into practical recommendations for SMEs, policymakers, and industry stakeholders.

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, decision-support approach based on fuzzy logic to evaluate digital readiness among mining SMEs in South Africa. Fuzzy logic was chosen because of its effectiveness in handling uncertainty and qualitative assessments, which are commonly encountered in organisational evaluations.

3.2 Identification of Key Readiness Factors

Key digital readiness dimensions were identified through an extensive literature review and expert consultations within the mining industry, focusing on five critical factors such as

Technological Infrastructure (TI): Availability and integration of digital tools, hardware, and connectivity; Human Skills and Training (HST): Workforce competency in digital technologies and access to training programs; Operational Efficiency (OE): Adoption of automation, data utilization, and process optimization; Organisational Culture (OC): Leadership commitment, openness to change, and innovation orientation and Financial Resources (FR): Accessibility of financial support for digital technology investment (See Table 1). Each of these dimensions were expressed using linguistic variables (very low, low, medium, high and very high) suitable for processing through fuzzy inference systems. The flowchart developed specifically for this study is presented in Figure 1.

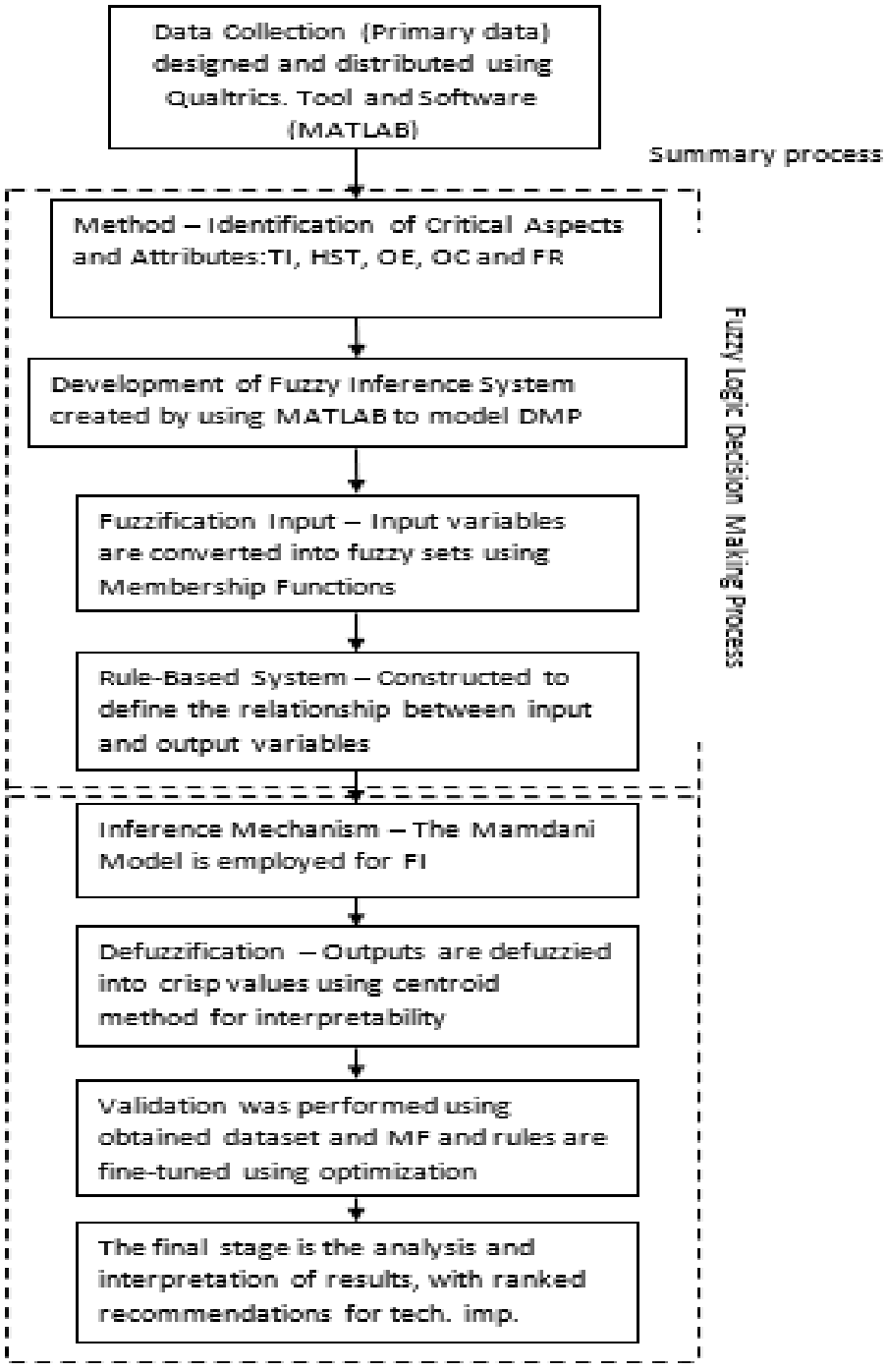


Figure 1: Fuzzy Logic Implementation Flowchart

3.3 Data Collection

Primary data was collected from selected mining SMEs using a structured survey questionnaire developed and distributed using Qualtrics. A total of thirty 30 participants from the Mining SME sector responded, including strategists and operational experts. Responses were given on a scale of 0–100 and subsequently classified into five readiness levels as presented in Table 1. The five dimensions and their associated criteria were identified to capture SMEs' readiness for digital transformation. To strengthen the conceptual basis of these dimensions, they are further mapped onto the Technology–Organisation–Environment (TOE) framework.

Table 1: SMEs Readiness for digital transformation across five critical aspects in Mining

Dimensions	Criteria
Technological Infrastructure (TI)	Availability of digital tools and systems
	Integration of advanced technologies
	Network connectivity and infrastructure
Human Skills and Training (HST)	Employee technical competency
	Training and development programs
	Management knowledge and leadership in digital transformation
Operational Efficiency (OE)	Process automation and optimization
	Data-driven decision-making
	Flexibility and adaptability of processes
Organisational Culture (OC)	Openness to innovation and change
	Collaboration and communication
	Alignment of organisational vision with digital technologies goals
Financial Resources (FR)	Strategic financial commitment to digitalisation
	Flexibility of financial resources
	Return on digital investment (ROI)

3.4 Justification of Input Factor Using the TOE Framework

The selection of the five input factors which include Technological Infrastructure (TI), Human Skills and Training (HST), Operational Efficiency (OE), Organisational Culture (OC), and Financial Resources (FR), followed a structured and rigorous process. First, the review of existing literature on digital transformation in SMEs and mining-related industries was conducted, which highlighted recurring themes such as technology availability, workforce competence, cultural orientation, and financial capacity. Second, consultations with thirty (30) mining industry experts provided practical validation, ensuring that the factors captured the real challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in the South African mining context. Third, clustering overlapping elements, such as combining employee skills, training, and leadership into the Human Skills and Training (HST) dimension, and merging system availability, integration, and connectivity under Technological Infrastructure (TI). Fourth, these consolidated factors were aligned with established theoretical models, particularly the Technology–Organisation–Environment (TOE) framework, to reinforce conceptual validity. Finally, the dimensions were iteratively refined through expert validation to ensure contextual relevance.

Within the TOE framework, these five factors map logically onto its three core domains. Technological Infrastructure (TI) and Operational Efficiency (OE) align with the *technological context*, reflecting a firm's capacity to adopt, integrate, and optimise digital tools. Organisational Culture (OC) and Human Skills and Training (HST) align with the *organisational context*, capturing leadership, workforce competence, and cultural openness to change. Financial Resources (FR) corresponds to the *environmental context*, as it reflects external resource availability, investment access, and financial flexibility that shape digital adoption.

Thus, the five chosen dimensions are well grounded in practice, supported by evidence, and fit established theory, making them suitable for assessing digital readiness in mining SMEs.

To facilitate the fuzzification process in this study, a linguistic scale was developed to translate qualitative expert judgments into quantifiable fuzzy scores. Table 2 presents the linguistic terms adopted, their corresponding percentage ranges, and assigned scores. The scale ranges from *Very Low (VL)* to *Very High (VH)*, enabling consistent interpretation of subjective assessments. This structured mapping ensures that qualitative perceptions, such as the degree of technological readiness or organisational capacity, can be represented numerically within the fuzzy inference system. The linguistic scale thus serves as a critical foundation for the subsequent analysis, where input variables are systematically evaluated to model the digitalisation readiness of South African mining SMEs.

Table 2: Linguistic Scale with Percentage Ranges and Scores for Fuzzy Analysis

S/N	Fuzzy Linguistic Term	Range (%)	Score
1	Very Low (VL)	0-25	1
2	Low (L)	26-50	2
3	Moderate (M)	51-70	3
4	High (H)	71-85	4
5	Very High (VH)	86-100	5

3.5 Fuzzy Model Notation and Formulation

To formally represent the fuzzy logic-based model, the following notations and linguistic conventions are defined. These provide a structured basis for formulating the fuzzy rules and deriving the digital readiness score (DR) for mining SMEs.

x_1= Technological Infrastructure (TI)

x_2= Human Skills and Training (HST)

x_3= Operational Efficiency (OE)

x_4= Organisational Culture (OC)

x_5= Financial Resources (FR)

L = linguistic term representing low

M = linguistic term representing medium

H = linguistic term representing high

x_i= input variables

R_j= Fuzzy rules

DR = Digital readiness score

A_{ij}= Fuzzy set applied to input x_i in rule j

B_j= Fuzzy set representing the output

y*= Defuzzified output

y: Output universe of discourse (e.g., readiness scale from 0 to 100)

DR: Digital readiness score

f = The fuzzy logic model combining fuzzification, rule inference, and defuzzification

$\mu R_j(y)$ = is the output fuzzy set for rule j and **max** operator is used for aggregation (standard in Mamdani inference)

Each x_1 is obtained from expert survey data and is typically scaled.

Each variable x_i is rated on a qualitative scale and fuzzified into linguistic terms already defined. Each term is also defined using triangular membership functions. Each input x_i is converted to a fuzzy value using its membership function as presented in system of equation 1.

$$\mu L(x), \mu M(x), \mu H(x) \in [0,1] \quad (1)$$

The degree of membership of input x in fuzzy set A is presented in equations (2) to (4).

$\mu_L x_i$: Degree to which input x_i is low (2)

$\mu_M x_i$: Degree to which input $x_i$is medium (3)

$\mu_H x_i$: Degree to which input $x_i$is high (4)

Rule Base (If-Then Rules): Based on expert defined rules:

IF TI is High AND HST is High AND OC is High THEN Digital Readiness is High; IF TI is Medium AND HST is Low THEN Digital Readiness is Low; IF FR is Low OR OE is Low THEN Digital Readiness is Medium, with Rj representing the jth rule then the system of equation 5 is established.

Rj: IF x_1 is A_{1j} AND x_2 is A_{2j}…..THEN y is B_j (5)

Using Mamdani fuzzy inference to evaluate the rules. The fuzzy output for each rule is presented:

$$\mu Rj(y) = \min [\mu A1j(x1), \mu A2j(x2), \ldots..] \quad (6)$$

The aggregated to form a combined fuzzy output is:

$$\mu Y(y) = \frac{max}{j} [\mu Rj(y)] \quad (7)$$

This score represents the overall digital readiness of an SME.

The fuzzy output is converted into a crisp digital readiness score using the centroid method:

$$y^* = \frac{\int y.\mu Y(y)dy}{\int \mu Y(y)dy} \quad (8)$$

The digital readiness score is thus presented:

$$DR = f(x1, x2, x3, x4, x5) \quad (9)$$

$$DR = Defuzzify\ [\cup_{j=1}^{n} Fuzzify(xi)\ \rightarrow Apply\ (Rj)] \quad (10)$$

3.6 Fuzzy Logic Framework Development

The fuzzy logic-based framework was developed and implemented using MATLAB R2024a. The development process include fuzzification which has to do with converting linguistic data into fuzzy values via predefined membership functions (MF); Rule Base Construction where a series of fuzzy "if-then" rules derived from expert opinions are well harmonized; Inference Engine which involve the application of Mamdani inference mechanism to process the rules and generate fuzzy outputs and Defuzzification which involves translating the fuzzy outputs into numerical scores. Figure 2 illustrates the membership function plot, while Figure 2 depicts the fuzzy structure of the input-output variables.

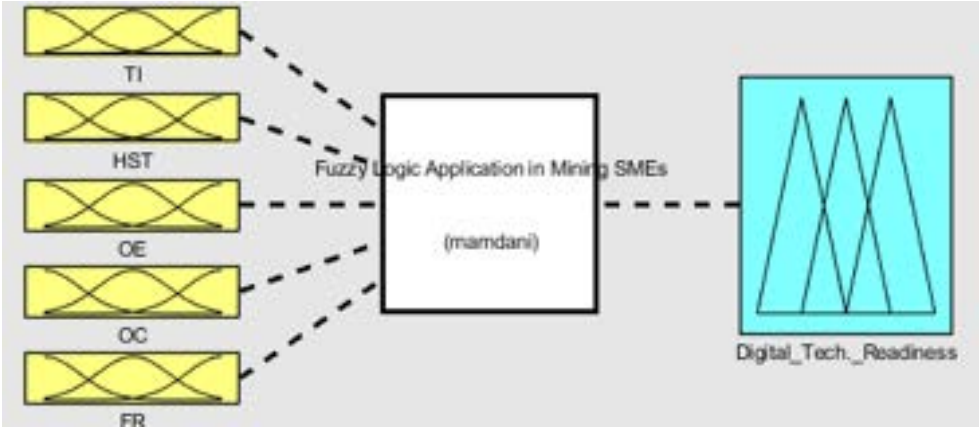
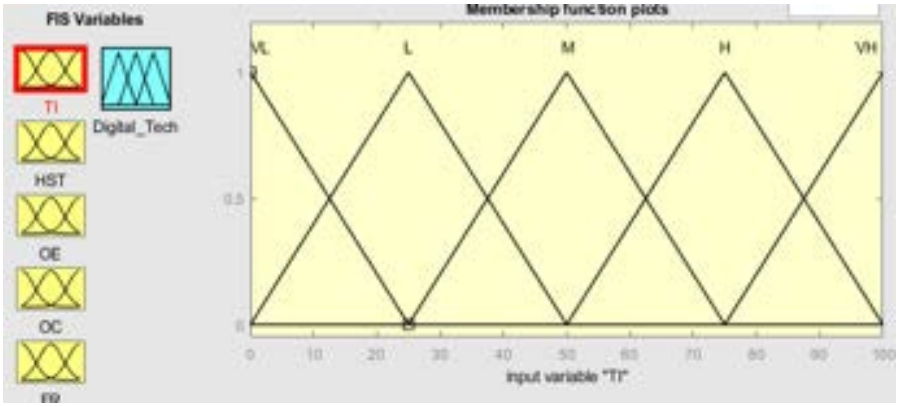


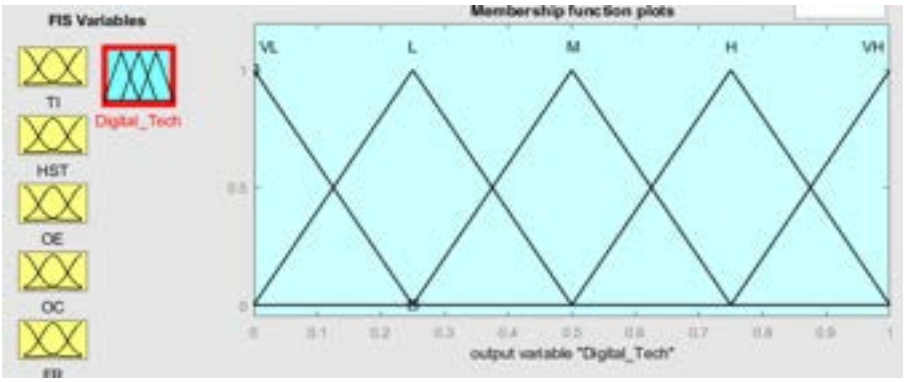
Figure 2: Structure for the Input-Output Variables

3.7 Evaluation

The data utilised in this study was sourced from the system via the Qualtrics platform, which facilitated the collection of responses. This data was subsequently entered into a fuzzy logic mechanism in order to calculate individual digital readiness scores. The qualitative responses provided by participants were converted into corresponding fuzzy numerical values through the application of predefined membership intervals as depicted in Figure 3. These intervals served as a framework for interpreting subjective inputs in a structured, quantitative manner.



(a)



(b)

Figure 3: Membership Function Plot for the System

(a) Input Variable (b) Output Variable

Following the translation of qualitative responses into fuzzy data, the information underwent further processing and analysis. This analytical stage aimed to identify organisational strengths, areas of deficiency, and key focus points essential for the advancement of digital transformation initiatives. During the evaluation process, the alpha-cut method highlighted in yellow within the documentation was applied to refine the analysis. As a result, the system autonomously produced the optimal output values, which are illustrated in blue in Figure 4. This output facilitated a clearer understanding of the digital readiness which is presented on the fuzzy rule viewer for strategic recommendations.

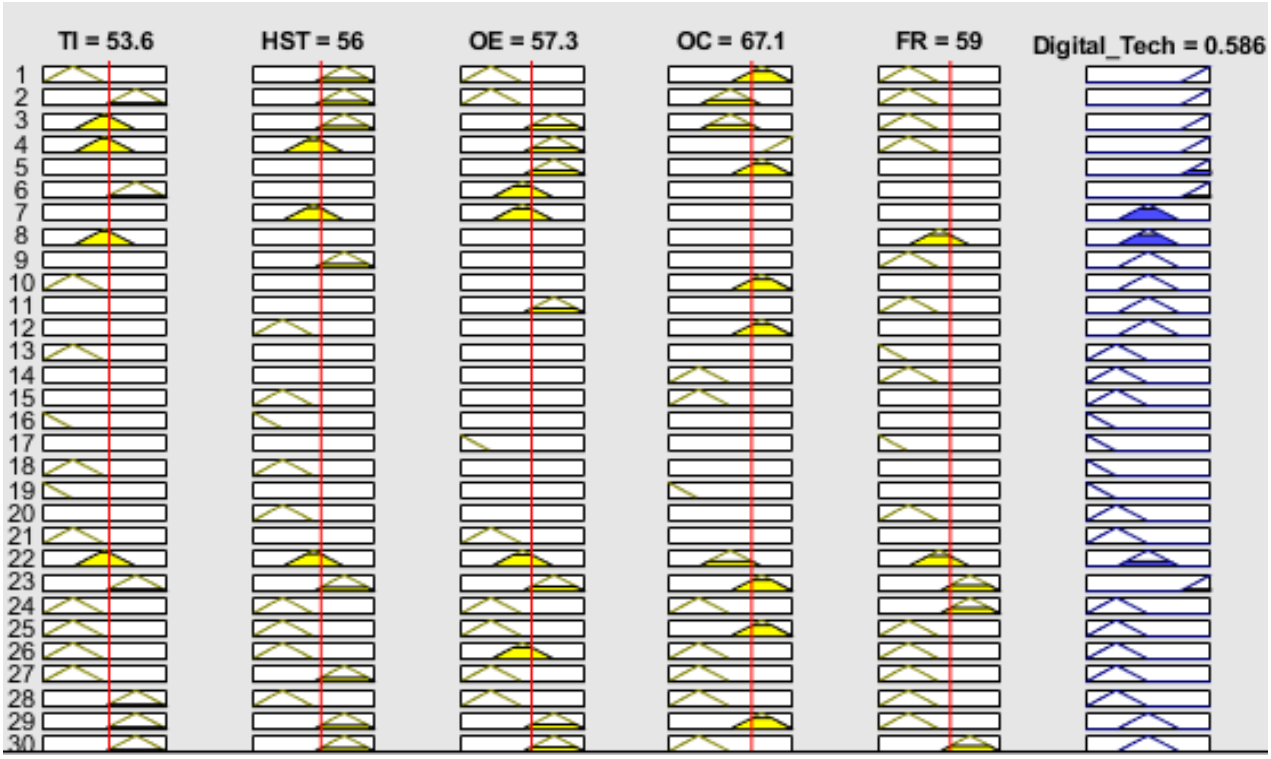


Figure 4: Fuzzy Solution Rule Viewer

The rule structure of the fuzzy model was derived through an iterative process and visualised using the rule viewer to support effective decision-making. The output values are generated by varying input values, as illustrated in Figure 4. Each rule is represented by a row of plots, while each column corresponds to an input variable. The system generates output values in real time, displayed in blue colour in the last column of Figure 4.

Red lines indicate the 5 input variables utilized in the current study. Alpha cuts applied to the linguistic terms, along with the assigned values for each variable, facilitate the prediction of optimal output results. Subsequently, average scores for each dimension were computed per participant. These individual results were then aggregated to derive sector-level averages for comparative analysis (refer to Table 3).

3.8 Three-Dimensional (3D) Surface Plot

The surface plot illustrates how the output of the Fuzzy Inference System (FIS) evolves following the alpha-cut procedure. The 3D surface plots in Figure 5 illustrate the fuzzy logic-based interactions between the five digitalisation readiness dimensions Technological Infrastructure (TI), Human Skills and Training (HST), Operational Efficiency (OE), Organisational Culture (OC), and Financial Resources (FR), and their combined impact on overall *Digital Tech Readiness*. Each surface shows how two independent variables jointly influence readiness, highlighting both synergies and constraints. For instance, the OC–TI plot

(top left) shows that while organisational culture provides a relatively stable foundation, low technological infrastructure suppresses readiness, reflecting the gap between cultural openness and practical implementation. Similarly, the HST–TI surface (top right) demonstrates that even strong skills and training cannot fully elevate readiness without adequate technological infrastructure, reinforcing the finding that people-driven initiatives require complementary technical support. The TI–OE interaction (bottom left) depicts that outdated systems and limited efficiency strongly depress readiness, even where other dimensions are favourable. In contrast, the OE–OC surface (bottom right) peaks sharply, confirming that when a strong culture aligns with operational efficiency, readiness scores improve significantly—indicating that culture acts as a catalyst but only reaches its potential when paired with process improvements. Together, these plots visually capture the study's conclusion: cultural and human factors are enablers, but without corresponding investment in technology, operations, and finance, digital transformation in mining SMEs remains constrained.

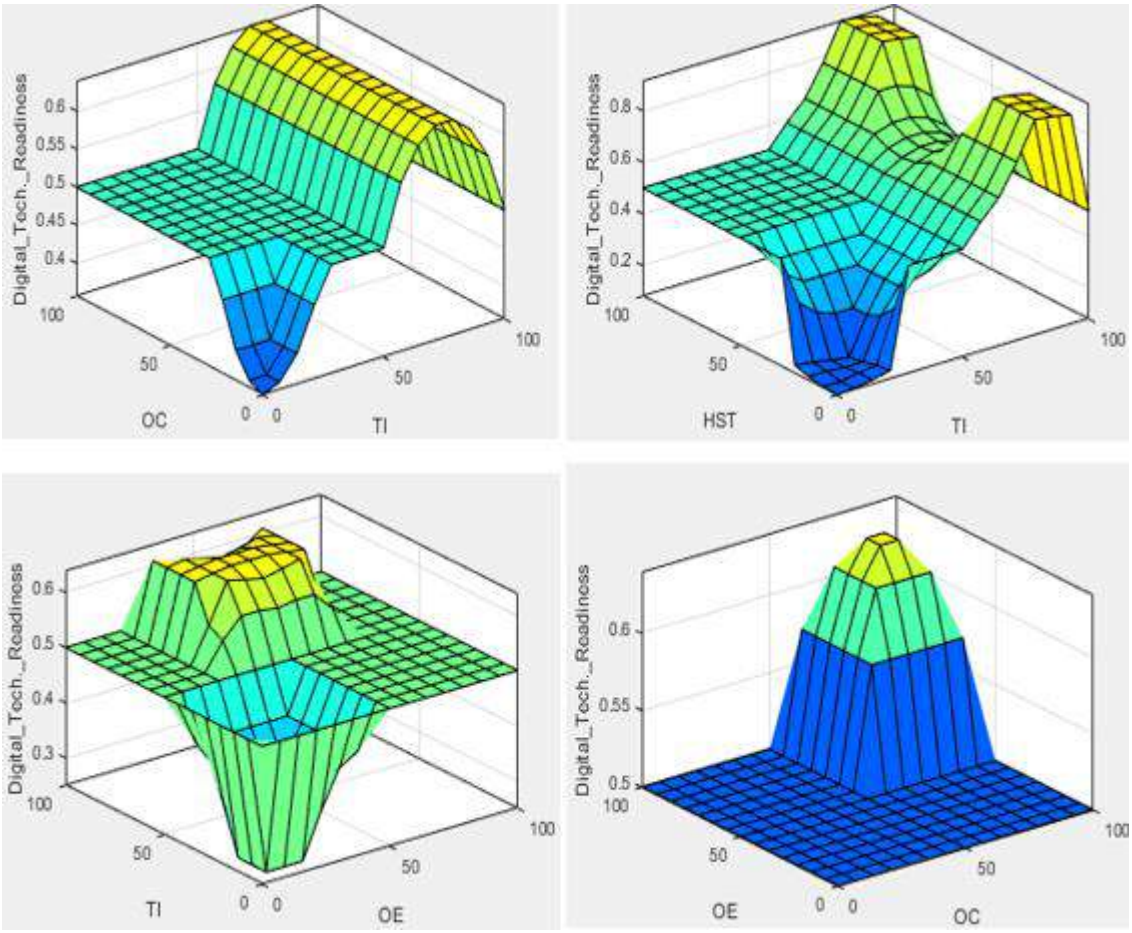


Figure 5: Three-Dimensional Surface Plot

Table 3: Fuzzy Logic-Based Analysis and Interpretation

Dimension	Avg. Fuzzy Score	Readiness Level	Key Interpretation
Technological Infrastructure (TI)	53.62	Moderate	Many SMEs have digital tools like computers, spreadsheets, or software for managing workers or equipment. But advanced tech (e.g., AI, IoT, Blockchain) is underutilized.
Human Skills and Training (HST)	55.98	Moderate	Employee technical competency and training efforts are present but not widespread.
Operational Efficiency (OE)	57.29	Moderate	Some automation exists, but integration of data-driven processes is limited.
Organisational Culture (OC)	67.12	Moderate-High	Strongest area: leadership and openness to innovation are relatively high.
Financial Resources (FR)	59.00	Moderate	Budget constraints remain a barrier, though some investment in digital is evident.

4 DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

(i) Organisational Culture is a Strength - The analysis identified Organisational Culture (OC) as the highest-scoring dimension, with an average score of 67.12. This reflects a strong cultural foundation and a notable openness among mining SMEs toward digital transformation. Qualitative responses and expert-derived weightings within the fuzzy logic model further support the presence of a pro-change mindset and a degree of transformational leadership across these firms. Such cultural alignment represents a significant enabler for digitalisation, suggesting that with the right technical infrastructure and financial support, progress could be accelerated. However, the findings also reveal a critical gap: while the mindset and leadership orientation appear ready, practical implementation remains constrained by external factors. This indicates substantial untapped potential that could be unlocked by removing these barriers.

Implication: Policymakers and support institutions should capitalise on this cultural readiness by offering targeted financial and technical assistance. By doing so, they can amplify the efforts of internal change agents and drive more effective digital transformation within the SME sector.

(ii) Human Capital is Pivotal - The fuzzy logic model highlighted *Human Skills and Training (HS)* as a pivotal factor influencing digital readiness. SMEs with active training programs, ongoing upskilling efforts, and digitally proficient leadership consistently demonstrated higher readiness scores. This finding reinforces the widely held perspective that successful digital transformation is driven by people as much as by technology. Organisations that foster a culture of continuous learning and possess leadership capable of navigating digital tools tend to exhibit greater agility and a higher propensity to adopt emerging technologies.

Implication: Investing in workforce development emerges as a non-negotiable for sustainable digital transformation. Public-private partnerships focused on vocational training and leadership development could significantly elevate digital maturity levels across the SME mining sector.

(iii) Technology and Operational Efficiency Lag Behind Culture

Despite strong cultural readiness, *Technology Infrastructure (TI)* and *Operational Efficiency (OE)* recorded only moderate scores, highlighting a clear gap between digital ambition and actual implementation. Many SMEs continue to rely on outdated legacy systems with minimal digital integration. The adoption of process automation and data analytics remains limited, constraining operational efficiency, scalability, and adaptability in an increasingly dynamic market environment.

Implication: To bridge this digitalisation gap, support like government funding could help SMEs upgrade their technology faster. Simple, practical digital solutions made for small businesses can also bring quick results and encourage further progress.

(iv) Financial Constraints Undermine Readiness

The Financial Resources (FR) dimension yielded a moderate average score, indicating that budgetary limitations are a major bottleneck. Many SMEs struggle to access affordable financing options, grants, or investment capital necessary for adopting and maintaining advanced digital technologies. As a result of limited funds, small businesses often plan only for the short term, and by using digital tools in a stochastic manner, they also lack a clear, consistent strategy for going digital.

Implication: Introducing more flexible financing instruments, such as digital innovation vouchers, tax incentives, or microcredit for technology investments, could be pivotal in empowering SMEs to plan and execute digital initiatives more sustainably and effectively.

(v) Differences in Digital Readiness Among SMEs

The study showed that SMEs are at very different stages when it comes to using digital technology. Some are clearly digital frontrunners with modern systems, agile processes, and well-trained staff, especially in areas like organisational culture and employee skills and training. Others are just starting out and scored low in most areas of digital readiness. These differences may be due to factors like company size, location, type of ownership, or whether the business focuses on exploration or processing.

(vi) Implication

A one-size-fits-all intervention is unlikely to be effective, that is, giving all SMEs the same kind of digital support or resources, even though some are advanced and others are not. This can be ineffective because not all businesses require the same kind of assistance. Instead, support should be customised based on each company's specific needs and stage of development. Using a maturity model to group businesses by their digital progress could help target the right training and resources to where they are most needed.

5 CONCLUSIONS, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study presents a fuzzy logic-based framework to assess how ready mining SMEs are for digital change. It offers a practical and flexible tool to help them manage digital transformation, especially where resources are limited. The results reveal a varied readiness profile across five key areas, with strong cultural readiness but notable gaps in technology, operations, and finance. Human capital emerges as a key driver, emphasising the importance of continuous skills development and leadership. Given the wide variation in readiness levels, tailored support strategies are essential as generic solutions will not work. The framework supports informed decision-making for SMEs, policymakers, technology providers, and researchers. Aligning support with actual readiness levels can promote more inclusive and sustainable digital transformation. Ultimately, digital progress in SMEs requires not just technology but strategic alignment, targeted investment, and collaboration across the ecosystem.

This study offers specific recommendations for key stakeholders, including government, SMEs, technology providers, and academic institutions. Government and regional support programmes should design tailored digitalisation strategies that reflect the actual readiness levels of SMEs. These strategies should combine training, targeted funding mechanisms, and advisory services to help address gaps in technology, operations, and finance. SMEs, can equally apply the fuzzy logic model as a diagnostic tool to evaluate their current state and prioritise areas requiring improvement. Technology providers are encouraged to align their

solutions with the evolving needs of SMEs, particularly by supporting strengths in organisational culture and skills development. Academic institutions can employ the model as a framework for further research, extending its application to other sectors and refining its methodological approach. Through coordinated action across these stakeholders, the mining SME sector can enhance its digital capabilities, increase competitiveness, and build greater long-term resilience.

The findings of this study are derived from survey data collected from a relatively small sample of thirty industry experts, which may limit the generalisability of the results. Future research should therefore consider expanding the sample size to ensure broader representativeness and more robust validation. Disaggregating results by factors such as SME size, geographic location, or mining subsector would also provide much more robust insights into variations in digital readiness. In addition, conducting longitudinal assessments of digital readiness could help monitor progress over time and refine both policy interventions and organisational strategies. Such studies would contribute to building a more dynamic understanding of digital transformation in the mining SME context.

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LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT (LCA) AS A TOOL FOR MARITIME DECARBONISATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The maritime sector plays a significant role in global trade and economic growth, yet it also significantly contributes to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. For South Africa, decarbonising this sector is particularly important due to its unique challenges and opportunities linked to its strategic location and dependence on maritime trade. This paper investigates how Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) can be used to evaluate and guide the South African maritime sector's decarbonisation efforts, while assessing environmental impacts of maritime activities from production to disposal. The investigation within compiles insights on LCA's applicability to identify emission hotspots, assesses alternative fuels and technologies, and aids in policymaking for sustainable maritime practices. In conclusion, the paper highlights the significance of LCA as a decision support tool for fostering a sustainable and low-carbon maritime future in South Africa, aligning with both global climate objectives and local economic needs.

Keywords: Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), maritime decarbonisation, greenhouse gas emissions, alternative fuels, sustainable shipping.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 LCA and its relevance to the maritime industry

The maritime sector is a cornerstone of global trade, responsible for transporting approximately 90% of the world's goods by volume [1], [2], and 70% by value [3]. However, it contributes significantly to environmental impacts such as greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and other marine pollution. It accounts for nearly 3% of the global anthropogenic CO_2 emission and is projected to increase [1]. As international efforts to mitigate climate change intensify, decarbonisation of maritime transport has emerged as a priority. The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has set ambitious targets to reduce GHG emissions from shipping by at least 50% by 2050, compared to the 2008 levels [4], [5].

In response to increasing regulatory and societal demands for sustainability, the maritime industry has turned to scientific tools, such as Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), to quantify and mitigate its environmental footprint [6]. LCA offers a comprehensive framework for evaluating the environmental impacts of products, processes, or services throughout their entire life cycle, from raw material extraction to end-of-life disposal [7]. Its application in maritime is particularly pertinent given the complexity and global reach of shipping operations. Applying LCA can help the maritime industry identify emission hotspots, assess the environmental performance of various maritime activities, promote sustainability, and achieve emission-reduction targets.

Despite the growing recognition of LCA significance in the sector, systematic literature synthesis by geographic region, particularly in developing economies such as South Africa, remains relatively underexplored. Previous reviews have often focused on technological advancements, methodological developments, or specific environmental impacts, but few have adopted a continental lens or addressed the contextual factors influencing LCA uptake in the Global South [8], [9], [10] [11] [12]. This gap is significant because regional disparities in regulatory frameworks, technological infrastructure, and data availability can profoundly affect the feasibility and effectiveness of LCA in maritime operations.

This paper provides answers to the following research questions, 1) what is the global landscape of LCA research in maritime contexts? 2) how does LCA literature vary by continent, revealing regional trends and disparities? and 3) what are the challenges and opportunities for applying LCA in South Africa's maritime sector? In answering these questions, the paper seeks to advance and contribute to the industry's needs by recommending and leveraging for LCA utilisation to address environmental impacts and resource constraints in South Africa's maritime sector, while supporting sustainable maritime practices that align with global decarbonisation goals. It employs the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method to ensure methodological rigor and transparency [13].

1.2 The growing importance of maritime decarbonisation

Increasing global industrialisation and over-exploitation of fossil fuels have led to an increase in GHG emissions [14], [15]. Shipping industry has a substantial environmental impact owing to the unprecedented growth of the global seaborne trade [16]. The urgent need to address these impacts has led to a growing focus on decarbonisation and the need to transition towards cleaner and more sustainable practices [17].

The global commitment to address climate change, as reflected in the Paris Agreement and other international protocols, has also created a strong impetus for the shipping industry to decarbonise [18]. However, the transition towards zero-emission shipping requires adoption of innovative technologies, alternative fuels, and operational practices that minimise GHG emissions [19]. This pathway involves not only reducing emissions from ships but also

addressing the broader life cycle impacts of the industry, including the production and transportation of fuels and the construction and decommissioning of vessels [20].

South Africa presents unique challenges and opportunities for maritime decarbonisation. Its role in facilitating international trade stems from its geographical location, developed port infrastructure, and economic influence [17]. However, South Africa's maritime sector faces unique challenges in its transition to low-carbon operations due to limited access to alternative fuels, and infrastructural constraints [21]. Given these unique considerations, there is a pressing need for decarbonisation studies tailored to South African ports. These tailored assessments provide valuable performance insights within port environments (Table 1) and inform the development of effective sustainability strategies.

Table 1: South African commercial ports and their operational variability.

Port	Main Cargo Types	Key Emissions Sources	LCA Boundary Challenges
Durban	Containers, vehicles	Cranes, trucks, ships	Multi-modal, high hinterland emissions
Port	Main Cargo Types	Key Emissions Sources	LCA Boundary Challenges
Durban	Containers, vehicles	Cranes, trucks, ships	Multi-modal, high hinterland emissions
Cape Town	Fruit, containers	Refrigeration, ships	Seasonal variability, cold storage impacts
Saldanha Bay	Bulk minerals	Rail, bulk loaders	Long-distance rail, specialised equipment
Cape Town	Fruit, containers	Refrigeration, ships	Seasonal variability, cold storage impacts
Saldanha Bay	Bulk minerals	Rail, bulk loaders	Long-distance rail, specialised equipment
Richards Bay	Coal, bulk minerals	Rail transport, bulk handling equipment	Energy-intensive operations, specialised equipment impacts

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) is a vital tool for evaluating the environmental impact of products and processes in various industries [22]. Its application in the maritime sector is gaining traction [8], [9], [23]. It offers a systematic approach for assessing environmental burden associated with a product, process, or service at all stages of its life cycle from raw material extraction to end-of-life management [24], [25]. As outlined in ISO 14040, LCA comprises four key phases: goal and scope definition, life-cycle inventory analysis, life-cycle impact assessment, and interpretation [7], [26]. Among these, inventory analysis is the most labour-intensive, requiring detailed data collection protocols to identify environmental impacts and emission hotspots [8].

In recent years, LCA has gained prominence in the maritime sector, driven by growing awareness of climate change and the need for sustainable practices [27]. It enables systematic quantification of environmental burdens and supports efforts to decarbonise maritime operations. LCA can analyse, predict, and minimise short- and long-term environmental effects [28]. Furthermore, LCA has been widely applied to evaluate the economic and environmental impacts through lifecycle cost analysis [29]. It is also instrumental in identifying opportunities to reduce environmental impacts and improve resource efficiency [25], [30], [31].

Annually, the sector consumes approximately 300 million tons of fossil fuels, predominantly heavy fuel oil (HFO), contributing substantially to GHG emissions [32], [33], [34], [35]. From 2012 to 2018, GHG emissions from shipping increased from 977 to 1076 million tons, with CO_2 increasing from 962 to 1056 million tons [4], [17], [36]. Maritime transportation now accounts for nearly 3% of the total global CO_2 emissions, comparable to the sixth largest CO_2 emitting country. Table 2 lists the CO_2 estimations from the ships [36]. Projections suggest that without mitigation strategies, CO_2 emissions from the sector could escalate by 50–250% by 2050 [32], [35], [36], [37].

Table 2: Global CO_2 emissions from ships

Year	Global CO2 Emissions (Mt)	Shipping CO2 Emissions (Mt)	Shipping as a Percentage of Global (%)	Voyage-based Shipping CO2 Emissions (Mt)	Voyage-based as a Percentage of Global (%)	Vessel-based Shipping CO2 Emissions (Mt)	Vessel-based as a Percentage of Global (%)
2012	34,793	962	2.76	701	2.01	848	2.44
2013	34,959	957	2.74	684	1.96	837	2.39
2014	35,225	964	2.74	681	1.93	846	2.37
2015	35,239	991	2.81	700	1.99	859	2.44
2016	35,380	1062	2.90	727	2.05	894	2.53
2017	35,810	1064	2.97	746	2.08	929	2.59
2018	36,573	1056	2.89	740	2.02	919	2.51
2019	36,600	1056	2.89	740	2.02	919	2.51
2020	34,500	977	2.83	684	1.98	850	2.46
2021	36,000	988	2.74	692	1.92	859	2.39
2022	36,500	997	2.73	698	1.91	867	2.38
2023	37,000	1008	2.72	706	1.91	877	2.37
2024	37,400	1019	2.72	714	1.91	887	2.37

As regulatory and environmental pressures intensify, LCA offers an essential data-driven approach to guide the maritime sector toward more sustainable practices. In response, the IMO established targets to reduce GHG emissions from ships by 50% by 2050, compared to 2008 levels [35], [36], [38]. Achieving these requires technological innovations, operational changes, and regulatory reforms, including the transition to alternative fuels like LNG, hydrogen, ammonia, and biofuels [15], [39], [40], [2], [41], [42], [43].

Historically, LCA application in maritime began in the mid-1990s where studies highlighted environmental challenges in shipbuilding and called for improved design and LCA research [8], [10]. LCA provides science-based insights for decision-making on sustainable practices and technologies, thereby supporting the development of effective policies and legislation aimed at decarbonisation [4], [17]. IMO acknowledges LCA's essential role in its efforts to decarbonise the sector [20]. This is apparent through the development of GHG strategies and subsequent LCA guidelines to provide a standardised framework, particularly for Well-to-Wake (WtW) emission analysis of marine fuels [44].

The application of LCA in the maritime industry has evolved and is seeing growing interest, reflecting the global trend towards sustainability. Before 2000, Turnock [45] recognised the environmental challenges in shipbuilding and emphasised the need for better design and quantitative research to minimise environmental damage across the lifecycle. In the early 2000s, LCA focused on emission trade-offs between traditional fuels like Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) and Marine Gas Oil (MGO) [46]. Shama, [47] further highlighted the importance of energy consumption and material rationalisation across construction, operation, and scrapping phases. By 2010, comparative assessments of conventional and alternative fuels such as LNG and biofuels gained prominence [48], [48], [49]. These was driven by emerging regulatory pressures and technologies like scrubbers and hybrid fuel blending [50]. Studies also explored links between LCA and international conventions on ship scrapping and recycling [51]. Recent studies in the 2020s have focused on lifecycle emissions of emerging fuels, such as ammonia and hydrogen, particularly in the context of global decarbonisation efforts [34], [42], [52], [53]. Recent work integrates LCA with economic analysis, policy compliance, circular economy principles, and digital tools to address data challenges, marking a shift toward holistic, future oriented maritime sustainability [8], [9], [10], [17], [36], [54],[57], [58].

The distribution of these studies reflects strategic importance of maritime transport in various national and regional economies [17]. Countries with major shipping lanes tend to have higher publication counts. This geographical proximity to key shipping corridors stimulates both academic and applied LCA research, as demonstrated by the concentration of publications in countries adjacent to these routes [8]. However, Africa is often constrained by limited access to high-quality data and regionally relevant LCA tools [12]. These disparities affect the volume and depth of research and policy relevance.

Furthermore, the IMO's guidelines provide a standardised framework for calculating Well-to-Wake (WtW) emissions for marine fuels. These guidelines propose various fuel pathways for WtT and Tank-to-Wake (TtW) emissions, expressing the results as carbon intensity (gCO2eq per MJ) [4]. The WtW, WtT, and TtW GHG emission factors (gCO2eq=MJ fuel or electricity) can be calculated using the following equations [34]:

$$(\text{WtW}): GHG_{WtW}\ [gCO_{2eq}/MJ] = GHG_{WtT} + GHG_{TtW} \quad (1)$$

Table 3: Well-to-Wake terms.

Term	Units	Explanation
GHG_{WtW}	gCO2eq/MJ	Total well-to-wake GHG emissions per energy unit from the use of the fuel or electricity in a consumer on board the ship
GHG_{WtT}	gCO2eq/MJ	Total well-to-tank GHG upstream emissions per energy unit of the fuel provided to the ship
GHG_{TtW}	gCO2eq/MJ	Total tank-to-wake GHG downstream emissions per energy unit from the use of the fuel or electricity in a consumer ship

$$(\text{WtT}): GHG_{WtT}\ [gCO_{2eq}/MJ] = e_{ec} + e_{l} + e_{p} + e_{td} - e_{c} - e_{sca} - e_{ccs} - e_{ccu} \quad (2)$$

Table 4: Well-to-Tank terms

Term	Units	Explanation
e_{ec}	gCO2eq/MJ	Emissions from the extraction or from the cultivation of raw materials
e_{l}	gCO2eq/MJ	Annualised emissions from carbon stock changes caused by land-use change (over 20 years)
e_{p}	gCO2eq/MJ	Emissions from processing, including electricity generation
e_{td}	gCO2eq/MJ	Emissions from transport and distribution
e_{c}	gCO2eq/MJ	Emissions credits generated by biomass growth
e_{sca}	gCO2eq/MJ	Emission savings from soil carbon accumulation via improved agricultural management
e_{ccs}	gCO2eq/MJ	Emission savings from CO2 capture and geological storage
e_{ccu}	gCO2eq/MJ	Emission savings from CO2 capture and utilisation

(TtW): $GHG_{TtW} = [(1 - C_{slip}) \times (S_F \times C_{fCO2} + C_{fCH4} \times GW_{PCH4} + C_{fNO2} \times GW_{PNO2}) + (C_{slip} \times GW_{PCH4}) - e_{occs}] / LCV$ (3)

Table 5: Tank-to-Wake terms

Term	Units	Explanation
S_F	0 or 1	Carbon source fuel
C_{slip}	% of fuel mass	Coefficient accounting for fuel (methane) slip (share of the total fuel in use)
C_{fCO2}	$gCO_2/_g fuel$	CO_2 emission conversion factor (g CO_2/g fuel)
C_{fCH4}	$gCH_4/_g fuel$	CH_4 emission conversion factor (g CH_4/g fuel)
C_{fNO2}	$gN_2O/_g fuel$	N_2O emission conversion factor (g N_2O/ g fuel)
GW_{PCH4}	$gCO_{2eq}/_g CH_4$	Global Warming Potential of methane over 100 set at 29.8 for fossil and at 27.5 for non-fossil methane (IPPC AR 6)
GW_{PNO2}	$gCO_{2eq}/_g N_2O$	gN_2O Global Warming Potential of N_2O over 100 set at 273 (IPCC AR 6)
e_{occs}	gCO_{2eq}/MJ	Emission savings from on-board CO_2 capture and geological storage
LCV	MJ/g_{fuel}	fuel Lower Calorific Value of the fuel (MJ/g fuel)

3 METHODOLOGY

This review employs the systematic literature review (SLR) method. The SLR is essential for synthesising a rapidly expanding and heterogeneous body of literature. The maritime sector has witnessed a significant increase in LCA-related studies, especially over the past two decades, as environmental concerns and regulatory pressures have intensified. This proliferation of research has led to a diverse array of methodologies, functional units, system boundaries, and impact assessment approaches, making it challenging to draw coherent conclusions without structured synthesis [8], [10]. The rationale for employing this method lies in its ability to provide a transparent, reproducible, and comprehensive synthesis of existing evidence.

A structured search strategy was used across multiple databases and sources like Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Search terms included "Life Cycle Assessment," "LCA," "Maritime Industry," "Shipping," "Ports," "Shipbuilding," “Decarbonisation,” and "African Maritime." These terms were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR, and NOT) to refine search results. Studies within data range between 2005 and 2025 were included if they used LCA to assess environmental impacts of maritime activities. Using the PRISMA framework, over 1200 records were identified using the search terms above, with pre-screening assessment resulting in approximately 500 records being removed because of duplications and ineligibility to be downloaded. Screening (588 articles) further led to those not relevant to maritime-related LCA and in languages other than English being excluded. Of the remaining 103 articles, 58 were eligible for review.

4 RESULTS

A systematic review of 58 articles on LCA and maritime decarbonisation provided a comprehensive overview of research trends, methodologies, and regional contributions in the maritime sector between 2005 and 2025. The key results are summarised below.

The temporal distribution of articles shows a marked increase in publications over time, particularly from 2019 to 2025 (Figure 2), reflecting growing academic interest in maritime decarbonisation and LCA. The main results revealed that alternative marine fuels and decarbonisation were the most researched focus areas, accounting for 48.3% (28 articles) of the research studies conducted. In second place are studies focusing on LCA methodologies and frameworks contributing 25.9% (15 articles), followed by shipbuilding and recycling with 8.6% (5 articles) (Table 6). Regional LCA perspectives, such as those specific to Africa, were less represented in only 5.2% or 3 articles. Other topics accounted for 12.1% of the total, indicating a broader but less focused scope in some studies [12], [57].

Table 6: Articles by focus area.

Focus Area	Number of Articles (%)
Alternative Marine Fuels and Decarbonisation	28 (48.3%)
LCA Methodologies and Frameworks	15 (25.9%)
Shipbuilding and Recycling	5 (8.6%)
Regional LCA Perspectives	3 (5.2%)
Other (e.g., port operations)	7 (12.1%)

Continentally, results further revealed that Europe and Asia are frontrunners, each contributing 50.0% (29 articles) and 24.1% (14 articles) respectively (Table 7). **Error! Reference source not found.**Africa and North America accounted for 6.8% of the articles, highlighting a regional disparity in research activities.

Table 7: Articles distribution by continent

Continent	Number of Articles (%)
Europe	29 (50.0%)
Asia	14 (24.1%)
Africa	2 (3.4%)
North America	2 (3.4%)
Unknown	11 (19.0%)

At a country level, Italy and China ranked higher (Table 8), each with five articles, followed by South Korea and Denmark, with four articles each. The results also depicted a strong alternative fuel concentration in Europe, LCA methodology concentration in Asia, and limited or variable concentrations in other regions.

Table 8: Articles distribution by county.

Country	Articles	Rank
Italy	5	1
China	5	1
South Korea	4	3
Denmark	4	3
UK	3	5
Spain	2	6
Sweden	2	6
USA	2	6
South Africa	2	6
Turkey	2	6
Japan	2	6
Others	25	12

The results further depicted variability in focus areas per region (Figure 1). A significant amount of research in Europe and Asia aligns with their strong maritime industries and policy support for decarbonisation [2], [58]. This is supported by the concentration, depth, and intensity of the studies conducted in these regions. Europe's studies are concentrated on alternative fuels and decarbonisation, while Asia concentrates on LCA methodologies. Africa, as an emerging LCA research market with limited resources, has a blended focus on regional LCA, shipbuilding, and recycling.

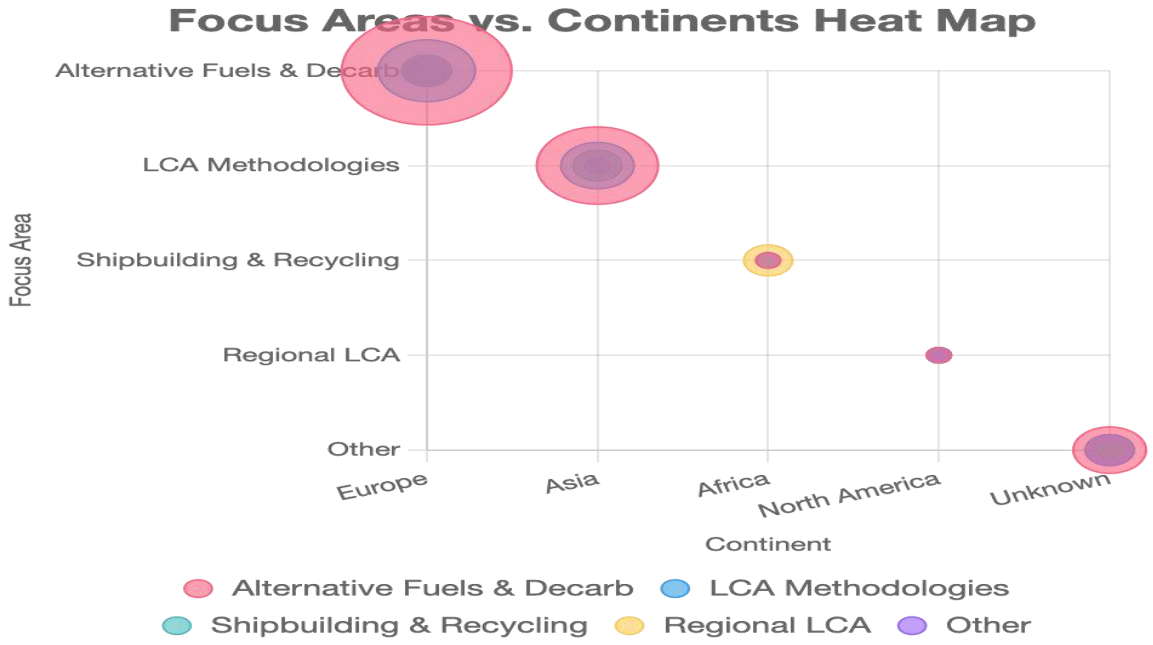

Figure 1: Focus area heatmap by continent.

The analysed studies employed diverse methodologies (Figure 2). Case studies, narrative reviews, and systematic reviews led the pack with 18 (31.0%), 15 (25.9%), and 8 (13.8%) articles, respectively, followed by comparative LCA in seven (12.1) articles. This distribution underscores the reliance on LCA-based case studies to evaluate environmental impacts in the maritime sector, particularly for alternative fuels and shipbuilding [5], [59].

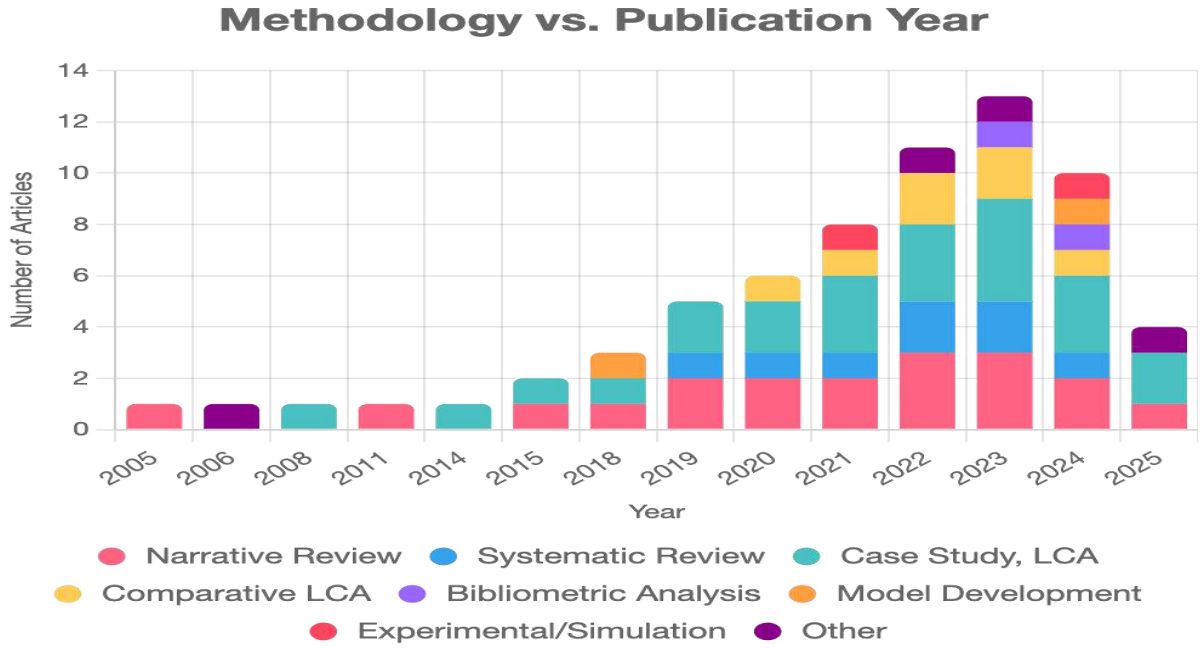

Figure 2: Articles distribution by methodology between 2005 and 2025.

5 FINDINGS

5.1 Key findings and research gaps

The findings reveal a robust academic focus on maritime decarbonisation driven by global imperatives to reduce GHG emissions, in line with the IMO 2020 and 2023 strategies [4], [34]. Interestingly, there is a dominance of alternative marine fuel research, reflecting the sector's transition toward low-carbon and zero-carbon solutions, such as hydrogen and ammonia, which offer significant emission reduction potential but face challenges in terms of infrastructure and cost [32], [52]. However, other approaches, ranging from case studies to comparative analyses, suggest the need for methodological standardisation to enhance the comparability and reliability of the findings [60].

Geographically, a significant amount of research in Europe and Asia aligns with their strong maritime industries and policy support for decarbonisation [2], [58]. This suggests strong resource investment and research infrastructure availability on these continents. On the other hand, Africa and South America depict lower outputs and focus, reflecting resource constraints or differing research priorities compared to North America, where a balanced contribution signals a broader undefined research interest.

Despite these valuable insights, several gaps in the literature have been identified, especially in African and South African maritime contexts.

1) **Limited Focus on Maritime Activities:** Most LCA studies in South Africa have focused on other sectors, such as water, energy, agriculture, and cement production, with limited attention given to maritime activities such as shipping, port operations, and shipbuilding.
2) **Lack of Comprehensive Assessments:** There is lack of comprehensive LCA studies covering the entire life cycle of maritime products and services, from raw material extraction to end-of-life disposal or recycling.

3) **Insufficient Consideration of Social Impacts:** Many LCA studies in South Africa have primarily focused on environmental aspects, with insufficient consideration given to the social impacts on local communities and stakeholders.
4) **Limited Integration with Economic Analysis:** There is need for greater integration of LCA with economic analysis to assess the cost-effectiveness of sustainable maritime practices and policies.

In addition, over-reliance on case studies and reviews suggests that, while the field is advancing, there is a gap between experimental and simulation-based research. This can provide deeper insights into the practical implementation of decarbonisation technologies [2]. Furthermore, the focus on shipbuilding and recycling underscores the importance of circular economy principles in maritime sustainability; however, this area remains underexplored compared with fuel-related studies [61], [62]. Data transparency and sharing by all key players remain vital. Uncertainties related to data inputs, such as fuel quality, system boundaries, and inherent complexity of maritime supply chains (Table 9), remain a challenge.

Table 9: Sources of uncertainty in maritime LCA applications.

Source	Example	Impact on Results
Data variability	Fuel sulfur content, vessel age	Wide GHG emission range
Methodological choice	Allocation of port emissions	Different impact distribution
System boundary	Inclusion/exclusion of hinterland	Under/overestimation of impacts

5.2 Challenges and opportunities for LCA implementation

5.2.1 Challenges

The implementation of an LCA in the South African maritime industry presents several challenges. One major obstacle is the lack of reliable and standardised data on material flows, energy use, and emissions, partly because of confidentiality concerns and insufficient data collection systems. Methodological issues such as defining system boundaries, selecting functional units, and choosing impact assessment methods complicate LCA studies, particularly for complex maritime systems. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) struggle because of the high costs, limited expertise, and lack of regulatory or market incentives to adopt LCA in South Africa [21], [11].

To overcome these barriers, a multi-stakeholder approach (

Table 10)**Error! Reference source not found.** is required. Government interventions such as subsidies, mandatory reporting, and green certification could encourage LCA adoption in the sector. Private business and industry collaboration can also improve data sharing and standardisation. Academic partnerships may also assist in developing localised LCA databases and training programs to address the shortage of skilled professionals. Furthermore, adopting international best practices and proxy data can help supplement the gaps in regional data. By addressing these challenges, South Africa can enhance sustainable maritime practices and align itself with global environmental and decarbonisation standards.

Table 10: Key institutional stakeholders and potential LCA roles.

Identified Stakeholders	LCA Role/Responsibility	Coordination Challenge
Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA)	Port operations data, infrastructure	Limited data sharing with shipping lines
Department of Transport	Policy oversight	Competing priorities with environmental goals

Shipping Companies	Vessel operation data	Varied LCA adoption, proprietary concerns
Department of Forestry, Fisheries & Environment	Emissions reporting, standards	Regulatory overlap with Transport
Logistics Providers	Supply chain emissions data	Fragmented data, lack of standardisation
SAMSA	Maritime safety, LCA promotion	Training gaps and limited technical expertise
Transnet Port Terminals (TPT)	Terminal emissions data, operations	Coordination with port authorities and logistics providers
Freight Forwarders	Cargo movement emissions data	Disparate systems, lack of comprehensive data sharing

5.2.2 Opportunities

The adoption of LCA in the South African maritime industry presents significant opportunities to enhance sustainability and competitiveness. Companies can identify environmental hotspots across their value chains, from ship design to fuel selection, port operations, and waste management. LCA enables companies to reduce emissions, improve resource efficiency, and adopt cleaner technology. For instance, comparing fuel options (e.g., heavy fuel oil vs. LNG) or optimising shipyard water use can lead to cost savings and regulatory compliance, while fostering green innovation in propulsion systems and materials. LCA further supports policy development, helping regulators incentivise sustainable practices within the sector [11], [21].

Beyond its operational benefits, LCA strengthens market positioning in the global economy, which is increasingly driven by environmental accountability. Companies leveraging LCA can differentiate themselves, meet international standards (e.g., IMO 2020 sulfur caps), and attract eco-conscious investors and customers [8]. For South Africa's maritime sector, this translates into improved competitiveness, access to green supply chains, and alignment with global sustainability trends. By integrating LCA into decision-making systems, the industry can balance economic growth with ecological stewardship, thereby ensuring long-term resilience and sustainability.

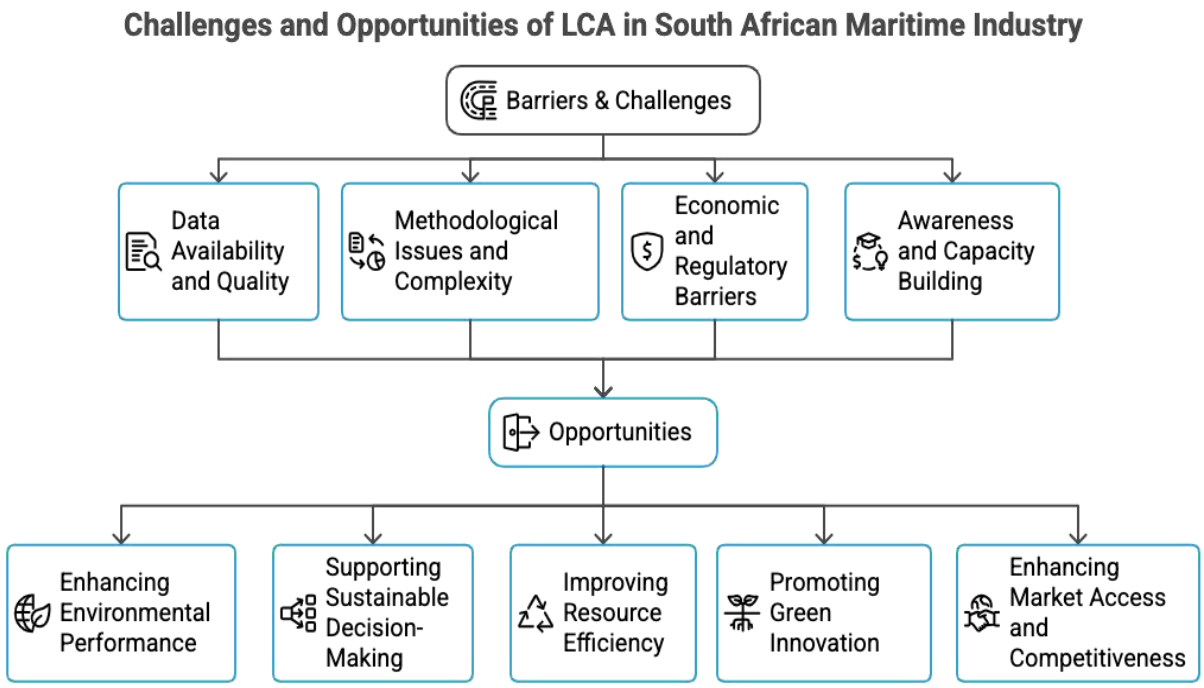

Figure 3: Key challenges and opportunities for LCA adoption in the South African maritime sector.

5.2.3 Implications and future direction

The findings of this study have several implications for maritime decarbonisation. First, the emphasis on alternative fuels calls for increased investment in infrastructure, such as port facilities for hydrogen and ammonia, to support their adoption [68]. Second, the prominence of LCA highlights its utility as a decision-making tool; however, future research should address methodological inconsistencies to improve its robustness. Third, regional disparities suggest a need for capacity building in underrepresented regions, such as Africa, to ensure globally inclusive decarbonisation strategies [12].

Future research should prioritise experimental studies to validate LCA findings and explore emerging technologies such as digitalisation for emission monitoring and sector coupling for energy efficiency [2]. Integrating cost analyses with environmental assessments could provide a more holistic understanding of decarbonisation pathways for future strategies and policy directions [69], [70].

6 DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study significantly advances and contributes to the industry by leveraging LCA to address environmental impacts and resource constraints in South Africa's maritime sector. By systematically exploring the global landscape of LCA research, the paper reveals how LCA quantifies environmental impacts from maritime activities, enabling optimised resource allocation and sustainable decision-making. In the South African context, LCA identifies emission hotspots in aging vessel fleets and port operations, addressing challenges like data scarcity and limited alternative fuel infrastructure. Furthermore, LCA provides a structured methodology to enhance operational efficiency under resource constraints, particularly for SMEs, by evaluating trade-offs between environmental performance and economic feasibility. This supports sustainable maritime practices, aligning with global decarbonisation goals while enhancing South Africa's competitiveness through resource-efficient strategies and green innovation.

South Africa faces unique challenges and opportunities for the adoption and application of lifecycle assessment within its maritime and shipping industries. These are shaped by both technological and regional factors. As part of the global industry, South Africa endures a unique economic structure that impacts data availability and competing policy priorities. A significant challenge in South Africa is the historical lack of localised LCI datasets, which are essential for accurate LCA [11]. By contrast, Europe and Asia have long benefited from established national LCA databases, which facilitate more granular and comparative analyses across many facets of the shipping industry and maritime operational scenarios [9].

The maritime sector's reliance on fossil fuels remains a global challenge, with shipping being responsible for a growing share of CO_2 emissions. This challenge is universal but is compounded in regions where access to alternative fuels and clean energy infrastructure is limited. In South Africa, the transition to renewable energy and alternative marine fuels is further complicated by economic and policy barriers as well as the need for sector coupling to integrate sustainable energy sources into maritime operations [2]. Opportunities for innovation have emerged from the exploration of green hydrogen and alternative fuels. Green hydrogen and other alternative fuels have the potential to be game changers in the quest to decarbonise the sector [71], [40], [52], [53], [72]. The integration of such technologies presents a significant opportunity for South Africa to leapfrog traditional pathways and adopt cleaner propulsion systems, thereby providing the necessary infrastructure and policy support.

Collaboration and knowledge transfer are essential drivers for advancing LCA applications in the maritime and shipping industries. Analysis of organisational collaboration networks reveals that, on a global scale, there is a notable deficiency in close partnerships among key maritime research institutions. This lack of intimate collaboration restricts the sharing of expertise, research experience, and ultimately, the dissemination and practical utilisation of research outcomes. Asia, particularly China, tops the volume of scholarly output related to sustainable maritime transport, followed by the United States and United Kingdom. This dominance is not only a function of research investment but also of the ability to attract talent and prioritise maritime-related research agendas [17]. Unsurprisingly, however; the overall number of research articles and collaborative initiatives remains limited in Africa compared with the more established networks in Asia, Europe, and North America. The limited collaboration in the South African context can be attributed to the scarcity of LCA studies focusing on maritime and shipping [73].

In charting the way forward, key recommendations are made to promote LCA applications in the maritime sector. These include:

1. **Green Finance Eligibility**: LCA-based GHG reduction metrics as a prerequisite for access to green bonds, concessional loans, and climate finance for maritime projects.
2. **Risk Assessment**: LCA is used to quantify transition and physical climate risks associated with maritime assets, informing insurance, lending, and investment decisions.
3. **Performance-Based Incentives**: Structure public subsidies, tax incentives, and port fee reductions around verified life-cycle emission reductions, as opposed to solely operational emissions.

Additionally, the government should establish a comprehensive national LCA database center with standardised data collection protocols to ensure reliable and updated information for decision-making. Tailored LCA training and capacity-building programs must be implemented in collaboration with universities and industry stakeholders, equipping participants with skills to conduct, interpret, and apply LCA studies. Economic incentives, such as tax breaks or grants, along with regulatory measures that mandate LCA adoption, reporting, and sustainable

practices, should be put in place as essential tools for motivating industry stakeholders and leveling the playing field.

Furthermore, promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing is vital for accelerating LCA adoption. Establishing industry-specific working groups can facilitate the exchange of best practices, tools and resources. Integrating LCA into the policy and planning processes is equally important. This includes requiring LCA studies for major infrastructure projects, using LCA results to shape environmental regulations, incorporating LCA indicators into national sustainability metrics, and prioritising sustainable products in public procurement. By implementing these measures, South Africa can position its maritime industry as a leader in sustainability and alignment with the global environmental goals.

7 CONCLUSION

This review contributes to the body of knowledge regarding LCA in the maritime sector, particularly in South Africa. It further provides insights into the current state of LCA application in the South African maritime industry, barriers to its adoption, and opportunities for implementation. The study not only confirms the lack of LCA application in the maritime sector in South Africa but also advances the conversation by demonstrating the significant opportunities and potential benefits of adopting and applying LCA in the maritime sector. These benefits can manifest as enhanced environmental performance, sustainable decision making, improved resource efficiency, green innovation growth, enhanced market access, and improved competitiveness. To realise this potential, it is essential that the South African government, in collaboration with industry stakeholders, take proactive steps to address the challenges and barriers to LCA implementation. These include developing a national LCA database, establishing LCA training and capacity building programs, providing economic incentives and regulatory support, fragmented institutional responsibilities, data gaps, technological and digitalisation barriers, integrating LCA into policies and planning, and balancing socioeconomic priorities with environmental objectives.

Furthermore, this review paper highlights the global state of LCA utilisation in the maritime sector using the PRISMA methodology. Europe and North America led in terms of methodological sophistication and practical application, whereas Asia emerged as a player with targeted contributions. South Africa, remains underrepresented, but possesses considerable growth potential particularly with its unique position as a maritime leader in Africa. The findings of this review not only illuminate global and regional disparities in LCA applications but also chart a forward-looking agenda for maritime and shipping stakeholders in South Africa and beyond. Future studies should address methodological gaps, expand experimental research, and integrate economic and environmental analyses to support the decarbonisation goals of the maritime industry.

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BREAKING WAVES OF INNOVATION: LEAN AND GREEN PATHWAYS FOR ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY IN ECOTOURISM

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ABSTRACT

The ecotourism industry is one of the fastest-growing tourism sectors. Yet, research on its business and operational strategies remains limited. Lean and Green, an evolution of Lean philosophy, combines operational efficiency with environmental responsibility to deliver a holistic management approach. Therefore, this study aims to examine how Lean and Green can support organisational sustainability in ecotourism. A systematic literature review (SLR) identified relevant practices and their impacts on the triple bottom line (TBL). These findings informed the development of a Lean and Green Impact Matrix, mapping contributions across economic, environmental, and social dimensions. This framework offers a theoretical pathway for achieving sustainability in ecotourism and practical guidance for its application. The study deepens a theoretical understanding of Lean and Green within the ecotourism context. It lays the groundwork for future research into its practical implementation and contribution to sustainable organisational performance.

Keywords: Organisational sustainability; Lean and Green; Lean; Sustainable business practices; Ecotourism

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1 INTRODUCTION

Organisational sustainability, also referred to as sustainable business practices (SBP), is the capacity of a business to operate in changing circumstances while simultaneously ensuring long-term success [1]. Additionally, it is the ability to meet the current needs of a business without compromising the ability to meet future needs [2]. Organisational sustainability attempts to address the triple bottom line (TBL) of sustainability—social, economic, and environmental wellbeing. This is a balance of the TBL of sustainability and how it is used to achieve a business that will not only survive but thrive and develop in the long term.

In the current economic climate, organisational sustainability has become increasingly relevant as a response to the increasing global threats of environmental degradation, socio-economic inequalities, and the climate crisis [3]. It is not purely about using less paper to save the trees, or reuse-reduce-recycle. Sustainability stands for the holistic approach to business that generates good publicity and healthy planetary habits, to ensure long-term sustainability [4]. Some of the benefits of SBP are increased customer satisfaction and increased market value, as an increasing number of consumers are showing an interest in eco-friendly products and services [4]. SBP can be approached in many different ways; however, to yield the best results, a holistic approach that addresses all three factors of a sustainable business is necessary.

Ecotourism is the combination of nature and tourism that focuses on providing the consumer with an experience of the natural environment and culture. It is focused on sustainably using the natural environment so that tourists might enjoy it. However, the sustainable environment is prioritised above economic growth. The purpose of any ecotourism organisation is to reach a state of sustainability using resource conservation, societal and cultural prosperity, and economic stability and growth [5]. With this being said, there is a growing interest in the ecotourism industry due to the change in tourist behaviour. More and more tourists are interested in sustainable travel options, making ecotourism uniquely suited.

One approach toward achieving organisational sustainability is the combination of Lean and Green (LG). Lean refers to the philosophy of continuous improvement of processes, the reduction of eight forms of ‘Lean’ waste, and the elimination of non-value adding practices in an organisation [6]. LG is an extension of this philosophy to include a focus on environmental sustainability, not only to create a “greener” operation but to use this additional focus further to improve the efficiency and economic performance of an organisation [7].

Currently, Lean and Green literature points primarily to the application of LG in a broader sense in manufacturing, service, or agricultural businesses. However, some writers recognise the need for sector-specific research regarding the implementation or approach of LG [8].

Thus, the primary focus of this paper is to identify how LG is relevant to the organisational sustainability and growth of businesses within the ecotourism industry.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Ecotourism

Ecotourism is defined as responsible travel to natural area that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education [9]. Ecotourism consists of at least five key characteristics [5, 10], which are as follows:

- It is a form of tourism.
- Attractions are primarily nature-based, but can include associated cultural resources and influences.

- Educational and learning outcomes are fostered.
- It is managed so that environmental and socio-cultural sustainability outcomes are more likely to be achieved.
- The importance of an operations financial sustainability is recognised (it must at least be financially viable). [5, 10]

The five characteristics are the requirements used to evaluate the applicability of this research to the ecotourism context.

2.2 Lean and Green

LG methodologies represent a strategic integration of Lean management principles, which prioritise waste reduction and operational efficiency, with Green practices that focus on minimising environmental impacts and fostering sustainability [11]. Lean principles, such as continuous improvement, value stream mapping, and systematic waste elimination, aim to optimise processes and enhance productivity [12]. At the same time, Green practices emphasise resource conservation, pollution mitigation, and eco-friendly operations [11]. The synergy between these approaches enables organisations to achieve operational excellence while simultaneously sustaining the environment [13]. For instance, Lean tools like Kaizen and 5S can be adapted to address environmental challenges, such as reducing energy consumption and waste generation, while green practices like water conservation and greenhouse gas reduction complement Lean's focus on process optimisation [14-16]. This integration not only enhances organizational performance but also aligns with broader sustainability goals, making LG a critical framework for modern business practices.

The TBL framework, encompassing economic, environmental, and social dimensions, is inherently connected to LG practices. Lean methodologies contribute to the economic dimension by improving profitability and operational efficiency [12], while Green practices address the environmental dimension by reducing ecological footprints and promoting sustainable resource utilisation [11]. Furthermore, social sustainability is supported through Lean's emphasis on employee engagement, workplace safety, and community wellbeing. By integrating LG practices, organisations can achieve balanced TBL performance, ensuring long-term viability and stakeholder satisfaction. Empirical evidence demonstrates that LG initiatives not only reduce costs and enhance product quality but also improve corporate reputation and address environmental and social responsibilities [2, 4, 13].

3 RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a two-phase approach. Phase one (data gathering) took the form of a systematic literature review (SLR) to identify, evaluate, and synthesise relevant academic contributions related to LG for organisational sustainability. Phase one yielded the findings depicted in the PRISMA flow diagram illustrated in Figure 1. Phase two (data analysis) used content analysis to identify and investigate themes identified in phase one.

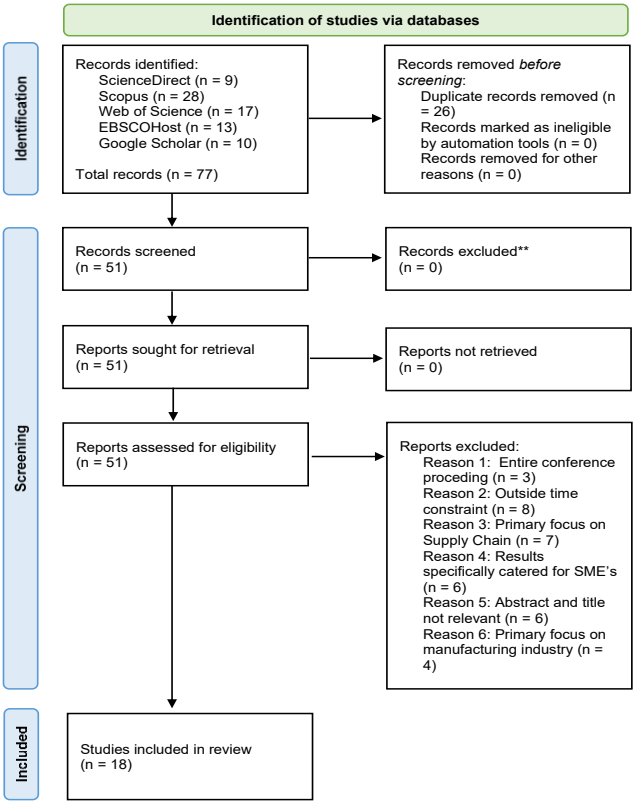

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

3.1 Phase 1: Data gathering - Systematic literature review

The systematic literature review consists of three distinct stages: 1) Planning the review, 2) Conducting the review, and 3) Reporting the review [17]. The planning stage included a search protocol which defined the parameters of the literature review. The review protocol is seen in **Error! Reference source not found.**.

Table 1: Systematic literature review protocol

Purpose of the Study	The study aimed to identify the specific tools, methods, and strategies encompassed in Lean and Green that have an impact on organisational sustainability, and to evaluate how this is suitable for the ecotourism industry by relating the findings to the fundamental ecotourism characteristics.
Inclusion Criteria	• Literature on the use of lean and green management concepts to achieve organisational sustainability. • Literature with a primary focus on sustainable business practices. • Literature based on service organisations, ideally tourism organisations.
Exclusion Criteria	• Literature with a primary focus on manufacturing organisations. • Literature with a primary focus on supply chain and supply chain management • Literature with an inaccurate understanding of Lean.
Time frame	2016 - 2025
Search Databases	• Science Direct • Scopus • Web of Science • EBSCOHost • Google Scholar (For additional sources, the first 10 results were included for relevance)

Keywords	Lean & Green	Organisational sustainability keywords
	'Lean and green'	Organisational sustainability Corporate sustainability Sustainable business practices
Search string	"Lean" AND "Green" AND ("organisational sustainability" OR "corporate sustainability" OR "sustainable business practice")	
Quality Assessment Criteria	• Literature must be peer-reviewed • An accurate scientific method should be used • Correct knowledge and understanding should be prevalent	

The systematic review protocol seen in Table 1 was used to screen publications and identify the 18 papers that were included for full-text screening. The replicability of the research demonstrates its internal validity [18]. The thorough SLR protocol followed ensured that the study could be replicated if the exact steps are followed. The search yielded 18 eligible reports that adhered to the inclusion criteria and quality assessment criteria. A list of the included literature can be found in Appendix A.

3.2 Phase 2: Data analysis – Content analysis

The text-based data collected was subjected to a content analysis. The content analysis was based on a four-step inductive qualitative content analysis [30]. The four steps are as follows:

(1) Establishing an overview of the data material [30].
(2) Identifying and extracting meaning units of relevance to the study aim [30].
(3) Combining and condensing meaning units into descriptive categories [30].
(4) Generating explanatory themes by linking categorised meaning units [30].

This analysis was guided by the research questions posed in this research and used to identify the design requirements of a conceptual matrix explaining the detailed impact of LG on organisational sustainability in terms of the TBL.

- Research Question 1: What lean tools, methods, and strategies are identified in the text, and what is their impact on organisational sustainability?
- Research Question 2: What green tools, methods, and strategies are identified in the text, and what is their impact on organisational sustainability?
- Research Question 3: What combined 'lean and green' tools, methods, and strategies are identified in the text, and what is their impact on organisational sustainability?

Each paper was read and examined to critically assess the content to answer the three research questions. The content analysis resulted in eight themes. These themes, along with their elements, are displayed in Table 2. Column 1 provides the overarching 'Lean and Green' theme that is identified, while column 2 illustrates the specific practical elements that fall under each theme.

Table 2: Identified Themes

Lean and Green theme	Practical elements	References
Waste reduction	Lean waste elimination	[2, 4, 8, 14-16, 19, 21, 23-29]
	Reducing material waste	[2, 8, 16, 24, 26-28]
	Life cycle analysis	[24, 28]
	Reduced greenhouse emissions	[16, 24, 26-28]
	Responsible resources	[4, 14-16, 24, 26, 27]
Resource efficiency	Optimised resource utilisation	[4, 14-16, 24, 26-28]
	Streamlining processes	[4, 14-16, 24, 25, 27, 28]
	Sustainable value stream mapping	[15, 16, 24, 27, 28]

Lean and Green theme	Practical elements	References
	Sustainable resource practices	[4, 13-16, 19, 24-28]
Continuous improvement	Kaizen	[13-16, 24, 25, 27, 28]
	Problem-solving innovation (spaghetti diagrams, A3, visual process)	[15, 24, 25, 28]
	Defect detection and prevention (poka yoke, jidoka)	[15, 23, 24, 27]
	5S/ 7S	[8, 13, 15, 24, 25, 27]
Operational efficiency	JIT	[8, 14, 15, 23-25, 27]
	Kanban	[8, 15, 23-25, 27]
	TPM	[8, 14, 15, 23-25, 27]
Respect for people	Training	[13-15, 23, 25, 26, 28]
	Leadership commitment	[2, 13-15, 21, 25, 28, 29]
	Improved health and safety	[13, 15, 19, 21, 23, 26]
	Lean and green culture	[13-16, 21, 23, 28]
	Alignment of organisational strategies with lean and green practices	[13-16, 19, 21, 28]
	Promoting top-down approach to drive cultural change	[13-16, 21, 23, 28]
Green supply chain	Green logistics	[4, 19, 21, 23, 24, 28]
	Sustainable resource practices	[4, 13-16, 19, 24-28]
Integrated lean and green	Simultaneous implementation	[2, 14, 15, 27, 28]
	Aligning lean practices with circular economy goals	[15, 16, 27]
	Integrated frameworks	[13-15, 24, 28]
Customer and stakeholder engagement	Involving customers in sustainability initiatives	[2, 25, 28]
	Engaging stakeholders	[13, 19, 28, 29]

The themes are discussed in section 0. The themes are seen as combined LG methods, tools, and strategies. All the tools, methods and strategies identified, whether they were lean or green, were evaluated and used to create the combined list. No direct contradictions were seen; different papers aligned in terms of the overarching themes but differed in the practical elements mentioned. The practical elements did, however, support one another and were more of an expansion than a contradiction.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study aimed to identify the specific tools, methods, and strategies encompassed in LG that have an impact on the organisational sustainability of an organisation, and to evaluate how this is suitable for the ecotourism industry and corresponds with the fundamental ecotourism characteristics. This section presents the findings in terms of the three research questions stated in Section 3.2. The research questions are closely related and are discussed collectively.

4.1 Themes and impact analysis

Columns 1 and 2 of Table 3 are an extension of the themes identified in Table 2. The impact matrix is used to illustrate the value of these themes in achieving organisational sustainability, as explained in columns 3 (social aspects), 4 (economic aspects), and 5 (environmental aspects).

Table 3: Lean and green impact matrix

Lean and Green theme	Practical elements	Social	Economic	Environmental
Waste reduction	Lean waste elimination	Improves workplace conditions by reducing clutter and hazards.	Reduces operational costs by eliminating inefficiencies.	Minimises resource consumption and waste generation.
	Reducing material waste	Reduces the strain on the local community in terms of waste removal.	Optimises material costs and improves profitability.	Decreases landfill waste and conserves natural resources.
	Life cycle analysis	Encourages sustainable product design, benefiting communities.	Improves product efficiency and reduces long-term costs.	Identifies environmental impacts across product lifecycles for mitigation.
	Reduced greenhouse emissions	Improves public health by reducing air pollution.	Reduces regulatory fines and energy costs.	Mitigates climate change and improves air quality.
	Responsible resources	Promotes ethical sourcing and community wellbeing.	Enhances brand reputation and reduces resource costs.	Ensures sustainable use of natural resources.
Resource efficiency	Optimised resource utilisation	Improves employee productivity and satisfaction.	Reduces operational costs and increases profitability.	Minimises resource depletion and environmental impact.
	Streamlining processes	Enhances teamwork and reduces workplace stress.	Improves efficiency and reduces production costs.	Reduces energy and material waste.
	Sustainable value stream mapping	Engages employees in sustainability initiatives.	Identifies cost-saving opportunities in processes.	Optimizes energy and material usage.
	Sustainable resource practices	Promotes community awareness of sustainability.	Reduces costs associated with resource inefficiencies.	Conserves resources and reduces environmental degradation.
Continuous improvement	Kaizen	Fosters a culture of collaboration and innovation.	Improves operational efficiency and reduces costs.	Reduces waste and enhances resource efficiency.
	Problem-solving innovation (spaghetti diagrams, A3, visual process)	Encourages employee engagement and skill development.	Identifies inefficiencies, reducing operational costs.	Minimises waste and improves process sustainability.
	Defect detection and prevention (poka yoke, jidoka)	Improves workplace safety and employee satisfaction.	Reduces costs associated with defects and rework.	Minimises resource wastage and environmental harm.
	5S/ 7S	Enhances workplace organisation and safety.	Improves efficiency and reduces operational costs.	Reduces waste and promotes sustainable practices.
Operational efficiency	JIT	Reduces stress on employees by aligning production with demand.	Minimises inventory costs and improves cash flow.	Reduces overproduction and associated waste.
	Kanban	Improves communication and teamwork.	Enhances workflow efficiency and reduces costs.	Minimises resource waste and energy usage.
	TPM	Improves equipment	Reduces downtime and maintenance costs.	Minimises energy consumption and emissions.

Lean and Green theme	Practical elements	Social	Economic	Environmental
		reliability and workplace safety.		
Respect for people	Training	Empowers employees and improves job satisfaction.	Enhances productivity and reduces turnover costs.	Promotes sustainable practices through education.
	Leadership commitment	Drives cultural change and employee engagement.	Aligns organisational goals with sustainability, improving profitability.	Ensures long-term environmental stewardship.
	Improved health and safety	Enhances employee wellbeing and reduces workplace accidents.	Reduces costs associated with health and safety incidents.	Promotes sustainable and safe practices.
	Lean and green culture	Fosters a collaborative and sustainability-focused workplace.	Improves operational efficiency and reduces costs.	Encourages eco-friendly practices and waste reduction.
	Alignment of organisational strategies with lean and green practices	Improves employee morale and stakeholder trust.	Enhances competitiveness and profitability.	Promotes long-term environmental sustainability.
	Promoting a top-down approach to drive cultural change	Encourages employee buy-in and collaboration.	Aligns organisational goals with sustainability, improving efficiency.	Ensures consistent implementation of eco-friendly practices.
Green supply chain	Green logistics	Improves community relations through sustainable practices.	Reduces transportation costs and improves efficiency.	Minimises emissions and environmental impact.
	Sustainable resource practices	Promotes ethical sourcing and community wellbeing.	Reduces costs associated with resource inefficiencies.	Conserves resources and reduces environmental degradation.
Integrated lean and green	Simultaneous implementation	Enhances employee engagement and collaboration.	Improves operational efficiency and reduces costs.	Optimises resource use and minimises waste.
	Aligning lean practices with circular economy goals	Promotes community awareness of sustainability.	Reduces costs associated with resource inefficiencies.	Conserves resources and reduces environmental degradation.
	Integrated frameworks	Encourages cross-functional collaboration and innovation.	Improves efficiency and reduces operational costs.	Promotes holistic sustainability practices.
Customer and stakeholder engagement	Involving customers in sustainability initiatives	Builds trust and improves customer satisfaction.	Enhances brand reputation and market competitiveness.	Encourages adoption of eco-friendly products and practices.
	Engaging stakeholders	Fosters collaboration and community support.	Improves organisational alignment with sustainability goals.	Promotes widespread adoption of sustainable practices.

Table 3 shows a summarised impression of the impact different Lean and Green elements have on the triple bottom line. Columns 3, 4 and 5 give a brief discussion of the effect each element has on each of the TBL pillars. The Lean and Green themes are discussed in more detail in the sections below.

4.1.1 Waste reduction

Literature emphasises waste reduction as a central theme and common goal of both Lean and Green efforts. Lean waste targets operational inefficiencies, such as overproduction, excess inventory, and defects, using methods like pull production, lot size reduction, and kaizen [2, 14, 15]. Material waste focuses on reducing resource consumption, emissions, and pollution through practices like energy efficiency, greenhouse gas reduction, and tools like life cycle assessment [24].

One way of interpreting the overlap between lean and green is that, instead of solely focusing on lean waste, the definition of waste can be expanded into lean waste and material waste [4]. Integrated frameworks like Green Lean Six Sigma [24] and the House of EcoLean [15] demonstrate that synergy can be achieved by addressing both types of waste for sustainable outcomes.

The research highlighted that lean management's role is in systematically reducing waste, enhancing efficiency, and achieving short-term sustainability benefits, while green practices address long-term environmental impacts [14]. It is also demonstrated how lean practices, such as continuous improvement and waste elimination, complement green initiatives like pollution prevention and resource reduction, leading to superior operational and environmental performance [4]. Similarly, lean methods such as 5S, value stream mapping, and total productive maintenance have been identified as effective tools for minimising waste and improving energy efficiency, with documented reductions in mixed waste and emissions, as well as improved overall sustainability [2, 8]. The House of EcoLean framework is introduced, which integrates lean principles like Kaizen and pull systems with ecological practices to optimise resource utilisation and eliminate waste, aligning operational efficiency with environmental sustainability [15].

Furthermore, Lean Six Sigma's use of tools like life cycle analysis and sustainable value stream mapping highlights its ability to eliminate defects and streamline processes, thereby reducing resource consumption and environmental impact [23, 24]. The LG combination highlights the alignment of lean production with circular economy goals, focusing on waste reduction through continuous improvement and resource efficiency, which advocates the use of LG for organisational sustainability [16]. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that waste reduction is not only a cornerstone of lean methodologies but also a critical enabler of environmental and operational sustainability.

4.1.2 Resource efficiency

Resource efficiency emerges as a critical theme across the included literature, underscoring its significance in achieving operational excellence and sustainability. Lean practices, such as value stream mapping (VSM) and enhanced value stream mapping (EVSM), systematically reduce waste and optimise resource utilisation [2, 4, 8, 14, 24]. Green practices complement these efforts by minimising environmental impacts through reduced water, material, and energy consumption, while promoting eco-friendly materials and sustainable production processes [2, 4, 24]. Frameworks like Green Lean Six Sigma (GLSS) and the House of EcoLean integrate lean tools with ecological principles, addressing both operational and environmental inefficiencies to enhance resource utilisation and sustainability outcomes [15, 24].

Sector-specific applications further illustrate the importance of resource efficiency in diverse contexts. In agriculture, Lean Green practices reduce chemical usage and optimise production processes, contributing to environmental sustainability and improved profitability [26]. Similarly, service industries leverage Lean tools such as continuous flow and work standardisation to enhance resource utilisation. Circular economy principles align with lean methodologies by emphasising regenerative systems and narrowing material and energy loops to minimise resource input and waste [16]. Integrated management systems (IMS) streamline processes across quality, environmental, and social dimensions, fostering resource efficiency [13]. Collectively, these approaches demonstrate how the integration of LG practices, alongside circular economy principles, can drive sustainable development by ensuring efficient resource use while mitigating environmental impacts [13, 14, 24].

4.1.3 Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is consistently identified across the literature [2, 7, 10-12, 16, 18-20, 22-25, 27] as a critical mechanism for advancing organisational sustainability and achieving alignment with the TBL. Economically, continuous improvement drives operational efficiency by systematically reducing waste, defects, and costs [2, 11, 18, 21, 23]. Lean methodologies such as Kaizen and Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) are highlighted for their ability to enhance productivity and profitability [11, 18, 21, 23]. From an environmental perspective, continuous improvement integrates green practices, including waste reduction, energy efficiency, and pollution prevention, which collectively minimise ecological impacts [11, 12, 18, 21, 23]. Tools such as Value Stream Mapping (VSM) and Sustainable Value Stream Mapping (SUS-VSM) are particularly effective in identifying and optimising ecological aspects of processes [12, 18, 22].

The social dimension of sustainability is equally supported by continuous improvement practices, which foster employee engagement, training, and involvement, thereby enhancing workplace satisfaction and morale [11, 18, 23, 27]. Furthermore, these practices promote social equity by improving working conditions and contributing to community welfare [11, 18, 23, 27]. Collectively, methodologies such as Kaizen cultivate a culture of ongoing enhancements that align operational objectives with broader sustainability goals [11, 12, 18, 23]. By addressing the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of the TBL, continuous improvement emerges as a foundational strategy for ensuring long-term organisational resilience and competitive advantage [11, 12, 18, 23, 27].

4.1.4 Operational improvement

Operational improvement is consistently highlighted across the documents as a pivotal mechanism for advancing organisational sustainability and achieving alignment with the TBL, encompassing economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Economically, operational improvement drives cost efficiency, profitability, and resource optimisation. Lean methodologies such as Just-In-Time (JIT), Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), and Value Stream Mapping (VSM) are frequently referenced for their capacity to streamline processes, minimise waste, and enhance financial performance [11, 18, 21, 23]. For instance, JIT reduces inventory costs and improves responsiveness. At the same time, TPM ensures equipment reliability and mitigates downtime, thereby contributing to economic sustainability [11, 18, 21]. Furthermore, these practices enhance product quality and customer satisfaction [11, 18, 23].

From an environmental perspective, operational improvement facilitates ecological sustainability by mitigating environmental impacts through energy efficiency, waste reduction, and pollution prevention. Green practices embedded within operational processes, such as Sustainable Value Stream Mapping (SUS-VSM) and proactive environmental management, are demonstrated to reduce emissions and conserve resources, aligning

operational objectives with environmental priorities [11, 12, 18, 23]. For example, SUS-VSM identifies opportunities for reducing resource consumption and emissions, thereby supporting environmental sustainability [12, 22]. Socially, operational improvement enhances workplace conditions, fosters employee engagement, and contributes to community welfare, thereby advancing the social pillar of sustainability. Practices such as Kaizen and employee involvement promote inclusivity and collaboration, cultivating a culture of continuous improvement and enhancing workplace satisfaction [11, 18, 23, 27]. Collectively, the integration of LG practices into operational strategies emerges as a critical enabler for achieving long-term organisational resilience, competitive advantage, and alignment with sustainability objectives [11, 12, 18, 23, 27].

4.1.5 Respect for people

The principle of Respect for People (RFP) is integral to achieving organisational sustainability, as it emphasises employee empowerment, cultivates mutual trust, and promotes a culture of ongoing improvement [31]. This holistic approach, which balances human-centric and technical elements, reinforces organisational resilience and supports sustainable long-term growth.

The reviewed documents collectively underscore the critical role of respect for people, the human element, and employee involvement in advancing organisational sustainability and achieving the TBL, encompassing economic, environmental, and social dimensions [13, 20, 24, 29]. Employee engagement is consistently identified as a foundational element for the effective implementation of LG practices, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration. In the economic dimension, employee involvement enhances labour productivity and operational efficiency, contributing to cost reduction and profitability. For instance, Wu et al. [14] highlight that integrating lean practices with human resource initiatives, such as training and recognition, systematically reduces waste and improves profitability. Similarly, it is emphasised that the role of employee engagement in driving operational efficiency and reducing costs, thereby reinforcing the economic pillar of sustainability [8]. In the environmental dimension, employee involvement is pivotal in driving innovative solutions for waste reduction, energy efficiency, and pollution prevention. It is noted that Kaizen events and quality circles empower employees to identify and address environmental inefficiencies, contributing to the ecological pillar of the TBL [8]. Lizarelli et al. [25] further elaborate on how social lean practices, such as employee involvement and training, foster a culture of environmental responsibility, enabling organisations to achieve resource efficiency and reduce emissions.

Respect for people and human resource development are integral to aligning organisational goals with sustainability objectives, particularly in the social dimension. It is highlighted that social lean practices, such as leadership support and structured problem-solving approaches, improve workplace morale and inclusivity [23]. It is emphasised that leadership and management practices that prioritise respect for people create an inclusive and supportive environment, enhancing employee satisfaction and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for sustainability goals [29]. The importance of training programs and awareness initiatives in equipping employees with the skills and knowledge necessary to implement LG practices effectively [24]. Across the reviewed literature, the human element emerges as a vital enabler for achieving organisational resilience, competitive advantage, and alignment with the TBL. Employee involvement in lean systems enhances labour productivity and operational efficiency [11]. The role of employee engagement in driving both operational and environmental improvements is of high importance [18, 23]. Foo et al. [29] underscore the importance of leadership practices in creating a culture of respect for people. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that respect for people and employee engagement are indispensable for achieving organisational sustainability.

4.1.6 Green supply chain

The integration of LG practices within supply chain management and logistics is consistently identified across the reviewed literature as a strategic approach to advancing organisational sustainability and achieving the TBL—economic, environmental, and social dimensions. These practices emphasise waste reduction, resource optimisation, and environmental stewardship, fostering synergies that enhance operational efficiency while mitigating ecological impacts. It is highlighted that the influence of lean practices, such as pull production and lot size reduction, on green practices, which subsequently improve sustainable performance measures [7]. Similarly, the role of LG practices in enhancing supply chain performance by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, optimising resource consumption, and strengthening corporate reputation is underscored [25]. This idea further develops green supply chain management (GSCM), emphasising its capacity to reduce environmental impacts while simultaneously improving operational efficiency and ensuring compliance with regulatory standards [20].

The integration of LG logistics also demonstrates its significant contribution to the TBL. LG logistics practices, such as waste elimination, standardisation, and visual management, enhance economic performance by reducing operational costs and improving service delivery [26]. Environmental benefits are further realised through reduced emissions, increased energy efficiency, and sustainable resource utilisation, which proposes a Green Lean Six Sigma framework for optimising logistics processes [22]. Social benefits are also emphasised. The role of LG logistics in fostering employee engagement and improving workplace conditions is also noted [23]. The ability to create sustainable competitive advantages by aligning operational efficiency with environmental and social objectives is also mentioned [12]. Collectively, these findings illustrate that LG supply chain and logistics practices are integral to achieving the TBL and driving long-term organisational sustainability.

4.1.7 Integrated lean and green

The integration of LG practices, their simultaneous implementation, and the development of integrated frameworks are consistently identified as pivotal strategies for advancing organisational sustainability and achieving the TBL. The "House of EcoLean" framework is introduced, which systematically combines lean methodologies, such as Kaizen and 5S, with ecological principles, including resource optimisation and waste reduction. This structured integration not only enhances operational efficiency but also minimises environmental impacts [12]. Similarly, it is proposed that the Green Lean Six Sigma (GLSS) framework, which integrates lean principles, green practices, and Six Sigma methodologies, be used to address sustainability challenges [24]. The framework demonstrates significant improvements in operational efficiency, ecological outcomes, and long-term sustainability [22].

Wu et al. (2018) highlight that the combined application of LG practices yields both immediate operational advantages and long-term sustainability outcomes, such as enhanced profitability, reduced environmental impacts, and improved corporate reputation [11]. This notion is further corroborated by the demonstration that lean practices facilitate the adoption of green practices, resulting in superior performance across the TBL [2]. The study emphasises that the integration of LG practices enhances organisational competitiveness by reducing waste [2]. These findings collectively underscore the importance of aligning LG methodologies to achieve comprehensive and multidimensional sustainability objectives. The role of such frameworks within service industries is explored, highlighting their capacity to incorporate critical factors such as leadership commitment, employee engagement, and strategic alignment [28]. These elements collectively drive improvements across the TBL, ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience [26].

4.1.8 Customer and stakeholder engagement

Customer and stakeholder engagement is consistently identified as a pivotal factor in advancing the organisation's sustainability and achieving the TBL, encompassing economic, environmental, and social dimensions. The importance of auditing tools in evaluating corporate social responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder engagement is stressed, highlighting their role in fostering trust, regulatory compliance, and community support, which are essential for sustainable practices [19]. Similarly, the influence of customer demand and stakeholder pressure in driving the adoption of green and lean practices is emphasised [22]. These practices align the organisation’s objectives with broader sustainability goals.

The significance of stakeholder engagement, which advocates sustained communication and ethical relationships as foundational elements of Green Lean Six Sigma (GLSS) frameworks, is expanded [26]. Such practices are posited to enhance customer satisfaction while ensuring strategic alignment with stakeholder expectations, thereby contributing to sustainability across the TBL. Collectively, these findings underscore the critical role of customer and stakeholder engagement as a strategic enabler of organizational sustainability.

4.2 Ecotourism application

The application of LG in the ecotourism context is discussed based on its relevance to the five characteristics of ecotourism businesses identified in section **Error! Reference source not found.**.

(1) Ecotourism is a form of tourism.

LG is a holistic management approach for various organisations, including manufacturing and service organisations [25]. Thus, LG could theoretically be applied to tourism. The LG approach considers the various aspects of business, regardless of the type of business. It can be beneficial in the tourism context since it considers client satisfaction as a primary goal and as the most significant ‘value’ in the delivery of a service or product. Additionally, it focuses on the sustainability elements of the business and how to improve them and monopolise it in such a way that the triple bottom line will be benefited.

(2) Attractions are primarily nature-based but can include associated cultural resources and influences.

The LG approach focuses on cultural elements by addressing the social responsibility of the organisation, as well as the internal social standing by looking at corporate culture and employee involvement. The LG approach pays special attention to the human element, as discussed in the Lean philosophy [4]. Respect for people considers not only the internal culture of the staff and stakeholders but is expanded to include the external culture as it pertains to the social responsibility of the business [25]. This speaks to the social element of the triple bottom line.

(3) Educational and learning outcomes are fostered.

Specialised training is highly important in the LG approach as it is key in the implementation of the LG methods [14, 16]. Thus, LG aids in the training of staff, but also in ensuring an overall understanding of the organisation and its operations throughout the business. This allows for learning internally. Additionally, it fosters deeper understanding of the conservation efforts of the business and how it is achieved and why it is important. Which allows education staff to better inform tourists of the full extent of their role in the experience and how it affects the natural environment.

(4) Ecotourism is managed so that environmental and socio-cultural sustainability outcomes are more likely to be achieved.

LG offers an approach that prioritises each of the pillars in the TBL; all elements are equally important. The TBL focus ensures a symbiotic relationship where all of the factors are interdependent[21]. It emphasises the dependence of all three elements on one another and how no one can sustainably exist without the others [11].

(5) The importance of the operation's financial sustainability

Again, there is a focus on achieving organisational sustainability throughout the organisation. However, the lean contribution uniquely focuses on the financial gain in an organisation and its importance in creating sustainable economic growth [11]. Lean and Green enables an ecotourism business to operate efficiently and sustainably, contributing positively to conservation efforts while also increasing productivity and profitability [14].

The LG approach focuses on the fundamental characteristics of an ecotourism organisation. It is focused on establishing a positive TBL while simultaneously ensuring cost reduction and efficient operations. The identification of specific LG elements and their impact on the TBL shows the relevance of LG for organisational sustainability, but also how the ecotourism philosophy of a positive TBL might be well served with the implementation of LG.

5 CONCLUSION

Prior work in this field has focused on Lean and Green in a more general sense. For example, the different approaches to Lean and Green in manufacturing or service industries. This study focuses on a more sector-specific use of Lean and Green, interpreting the various elements of Lean and Green to determine an approach specifically for the organisational sustainability and sustainable business practices of ecotourism businesses. The systematic literature review conducted allowed for the identification of the main themes or areas of focus when attempting the implementation of LG, for organisational sustainability. This revealed a list of themes and the practical elements that contribute to the triple bottom line elements, and in turn, the sustainability of an organisation.

The findings further identify the relationship between LG and organisational sustainability by creating a conceptual Lean and Green impact matrix to understand better the impact of the different practical elements on the three pillars of the triple bottom line. The incorporation of Lean and Green into the triple bottom line framework shows the versatility and range of LG for all the elements of organisational sustainability and sustainable business practices. Therefore, this study highlights how LG impacts an ecotourism business in terms of holistic sustainability. The academic implication of this study is the conceptual understanding of LG and its impact on the triple bottom line and organisational sustainability. Additionally, it provides a blueprint for practical tools and elements for implementation in an organisation.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A theoretical contribution is made by measuring the impact matrix against fundamental characteristics of ecotourism to show the applicability; however, a more in-depth understanding of LG elements in ecotourism operations and processes would be beneficial to further motivate the value. Therefore, further research might explore the specific implementation of LG in the ecotourism context.

Although the fundamental characteristic of ecotourism is considered, no detailed explanation of the workings of an ecotourism business is provided. Thus, by gaining an understanding of the specific operations and inner workings of an ecotourism business, a better practical contribution to the implementation and application of LG in such a business can be achieved.

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Appendix A

Table 4: List of included literature

	Citation	Title
1	[14]	A two-dimensional, two-level framework for achieving corporate sustainable development: Assessing the return on sustainability initiatives
2	[4]	Combining lean and green practices to achieve a superior performance: The contribution to sustainable development and competitiveness—An empirical study within the Portuguese context.
3	[19]	Compilation of Best Practices for Auditing the Sustainable Development of Organisations.
4	[20]	Drivers for the adoption of an integrated sustainable green lean six sigma agile service system (ISGLSASS) in the service organisations.
5	[8]	Exploring the role of lean thinking in sustainable business practice: A systematic literature review.
6	[21]	Green and lean sustainable development path in China: *Guanxi*, practices and performance.
7	[22]	Green and sustainability corporate initiatives: A case study of goods and services design.
8	[15]	House of EcoLean: A synergetic framework for structured integration of Lean and Green.
9	[23]	Impacts of Lean Six Sigma on organisational sustainability: A survey study.
10	[2]	Influence of lean-green practices on organisational sustainable performance.
11	[24]	Integral measures and framework for green lean six sigma implementation in a manufacturing environment.
12	[16]	Lean and Green: Aligning the Circular Economy and Kaizen through Hoshin Kanri.
13	[25]	Lean and its impact on the sustainable performance of service companies: Results from a pilot study.
14	[13]	Lean-integrated management system: A model for sustainability improvement.
15	[26]	A model of quality management applied in lean green agriculture methodology: A research in Peru.
16	[27]	The application of lean methods in corporate sustainability—a systematic literature review.
17	[28]	Toward sustainability through green, lean and six sigma integration in the service industry: Review and framework.
18	[29]	Unfolding the impact of leadership and management on sustainability performance: Green and lean practices and guanxi as the dual mediators.

OPTIMIZING MANUFACTURING MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE: A DYNAMIC TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Manufacturing companies must operate efficiently and adopt dynamic technologies to meet evolving product demands. This study, conducted at a South African filtration company, highlights how industries dependent on filtration must adapt quickly to changing needs driven by climate change regulations and ongoing growth. Qualitative research in the form of interviews, transcription, and recordings is used. The induction technique and Atlas Ti software were used for analysis. The Business Model Canvas is used to determine whether the company has dynamic capabilities. The findings indicated that the interviewees believed the filtration company has dynamic capabilities, but sufficient training is required for employees.

Keywords: Qualitative Research, Business Model Canvas, Dynamic Capabilities, Technology Management, Filtration Industry

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1 INTRODUCTION

Globalisation requires organisations to meet various customer demands in shorter time spans and greater variations. Manufacturing companies are measured by the value they deliver to the customers, and they must understand the measurements and adapt their business structure accordingly [1]. It is therefore important that companies investigate their processes and implement improvements where needed to remain competitive.

Market requirements can change at any time, and this can affect the technology and processes of a manufacturing company. There should be a strategic alignment between market requirements and operational capabilities to avoid losses to the organisation [2]. To remain competitive, companies must respond rapidly to market changes, and effectively coordinate and redeploy internal and external competencies [3].

The invested technology, supply chain, production processes, and labour skills should be flexible enough to adapt to any short-term or long-term capacity changes. Capacity constraints must be identified and improved to determine if new technologies are required on certain production lines [4].

Emerging technologies locally and abroad can become a threat to the existence of companies. Companies must therefore identify the solutions for current and future Industrial revolutions and their impact on technology requirements [5]. A technology framework can be used to ensure the selected technologies are linked to the business strategy [6].

The pace at which new technologies are adopted will be dependent on how quickly a company wants benefits. Some benefits of adopting new technologies are difficult to quantify, and therefore, manufacturing companies could take longer to adopt the innovation [7]. Due to cost implications and risks, companies might decide to extend the existing technology's life by upgrading it. A company might also decide that the risk and costs of change are low and therefore invest in completely new technology.

Manufacturing companies must have the means to create dynamically enabled technology capabilities that can enable value creation systems [3]. Digital transformation refers to the ability of companies to create value in all aspects of the business through technology, and consequently to respond swiftly to changes in the market [8]. Digital transformation cannot be ignored by manufacturing companies as it dominates industries globally, and demand for it is increasing. Challenges to digital transformation can be ignored if it is structured correctly to address the shortcomings [9]. All staff need to be trained on new technologies, and they must be informed that a company is aligning itself with a global technology demand. It is critical that gaps in skills be identified and that this is addressed as part of the strategy. To determine the required approach, the strategic goal should be measured against the technology capabilities. Key performance indicators should be used to measure success and to align people and processes [9].

Customer value creation drives a manufacturing company to analyse and improve its existing business offerings. The value can be measured by speed of service, price, design of products, or customer experience. Manufacturing companies must have dynamic capabilities to remain competitive and to improve on their value offerings to customers. This can be achieved by the collaboration of various input mechanisms between the internal and external stakeholders [10]. The internal capabilities (people, skills, and resources) are used to create the required value [11]. The contribution of the entire organisational structure (people, groups, and departments) is critical in creating value [12]. The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is a tool used to investigate the impact of various business units on value creation. It allows companies to highlight and improve on shortcomings.

Manufacturing companies should measure their internal performance to prevent customer dissatisfaction. They can measure themselves on efficiency, effectiveness, and adaptability. Efficiency can be interpreted as the resources that were expected to be consumed and those

that were consumed. Measurements can be done on the spending of resources or maintenance equipment, inventory management, or how well the space is utilized [13].
Effectiveness is a measurement of whether manufacturing companies are doing the right thing at the right time with the right quality. Effectiveness can be measured by process defects or reworks, or products that were returned to the manufacturing plant. Effectiveness can impact the quality of the Maintenance Equipment, labour productivity, and employee morale [13].
Adaptability refers to how sensitive and flexible a company can be when changes occur in the external environment. An adaptable company aims to dominate the market instead of benchmarking the processes of competitors [13].
Manufacturing companies should consider the external environment when implementing changes as external factors can influence the way the internal resources are structured, and highlight the strengths and weaknesses of a manufacturing company [14]. The type of industry, size of a manufacturing company, market share, location, and degree of competitiveness can all be influenced by the external environment [15]. The greater its interdependence, the more sensitive a company will be to activities in the external environment (Ghicajanu, 2019). Manufacturing companies should list the factors in the external environment that have the greatest influence on its internal environment. These factors should have planned responses to mitigate any potential disasters [14]. However, the attitude of the leadership towards the required changes will impact the speed of the process and it is therefore critical that the leadership are made aware of the advancements in the external environment and the impact these could have on a manufacturing company [15].

1.1 Objectives and Research Questions

The research in this paper is based on a manufacturing company in the filtration industry. The paper determines a manufacturing company's ability to respond to external changes. The concepts of dynamic capabilities is used to produce recommendations for organisational changes that will be beneficial to a company [3].
The study answers the following Research Questions:

1) What are the technological challenges experienced in the Filtration Industry?
2) How is performance defined and measured?
3) How can dynamic capabilities be applied to the current technologies?
4) What is the value versus benefits of the current technologies adopted?
5) How is the technology aligned to the market strategy?

1.2 Research Roadmap

Chapter 1 discusses the background, objectives and research questions of the study. This is followed by Chapter 2 which details the literature explaining the various concepts that was studied. This is followed by Chapter 3 which provides the proposed model followed for analysis. Chapter 4 explains the research methodology. Chapter 5 discusses the results and Chapter 6 provides the collective conclusions and recommendations. Figure 1.1 below shows the roadmap for the Article.

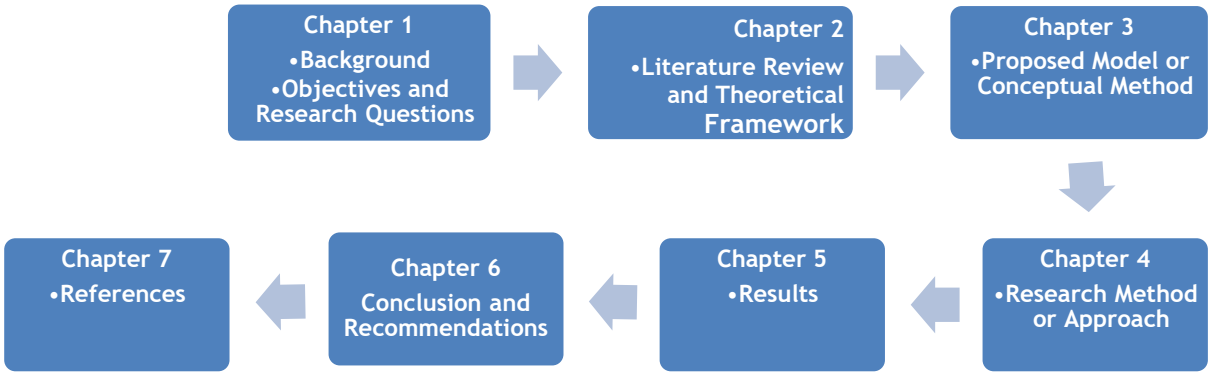

Figure 1.1 : Research Roadmap

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter assesses the tools that can be used to create value for the customer. It discusses value creation and the role of dynamic capabilities in creating value. It also discusses strategy and how this should be aligned with the technology.

2.1 Value and Value Creation in Manufacturing Companies

The existence of Manufacturing companies depends on value creation [16]. Stakeholders include everyone with an interest in the company and can affect it negatively or positively by mobilising resources to impact the productivity of the business [17]. The company must reassure its stakeholders that they will receive value creation. This will convince them to invest further time and resources into the company [16].
Customers are interested in the value that is created in the form of quality and price of the products they are purchasing. They are interested in the continued existence of the company to ensure they can purchase the desired products in the future. Suppliers are also interested in the continuity of the business and thus need value in the form of long-term orders. Employees are interested in value in the form of benefits like education, training, compensation package, and other medical and insurance-related benefits [16]. The company must therefore improve its strategies to create value for all its stakeholders.

2.2 Dynamic Capabilities perspective on Value Creation

Dynamic capabilities refer to the process whereby managers alter their resource base and integrate and reconfigure them to generate new markets or add value to existing markets [18]. Dynamic capabilities are formed when the manufacturing company exploits its internal and external competencies to address the changing environment [3]. The manufacturing company's culture, values, and their collective ability to quickly implement changes play a big role in its dynamic capabilities [19]. The steps in implementing dynamic capabilities are (1) to sense and shape opportunities and threats, (2) to seize opportunities, and (3) to maintain competitiveness through enhancing, combining, protecting and, if needed, through reconfiguring the business enterprise's intangible and tangible assets [5]. The manufacturing company must learn (1) what customers want, (2) what new technologies might allow, (3) what aspects of the business model are working, and (4) whether the current strategy is effective [19].

2.3 The Role of Capabilities in Value Creation

A company's capabilities can be defined as its ability to deploy its resources (both tangible and intangible) to perform an activity that improves performance [20].
The manufacturing company's capabilities can allow it to create new products and respond to market changes [21].

Figure 2.1:Organisational capability framework, adapted from [22].

The organisational capability framework (Figure 2.1) illustrates the various groups of capabilities that can be formed.

- Resources: These enable the desired outcome and includes facilities, infrastructure, equipment, and physical tools, finance and other assets.
- People: These are the skills, abilities, expertise, and tacit knowledge of the people who interact with the resources for a specific purpose.
- Processes: These organise the execution of the activities through decision making, they enable the interaction between the elements and the resources to realise the desired outcome. The processes are captured in routines, procedures, intellectual tools, methods, models and explicit knowledge [23].

2.4 Operational Capabilities

Operational Capabilities enable the manufacturing company to execute its main operational activities. These capabilities allow a firm to perform an activity on an on-going basis using more or less the same techniques on the same scale to support existing customers [24]. It is important to note that the purpose and outcome of dynamic and operational capabilities are different. Firstly, dynamic capabilities are the manufacturing company's ability to reconfigure its operational capabilities and thus allow the company to adapt and evolve. Secondly, dynamic capabilities are used to extend or modify the current resources in different ways, such as alter the operational capabilities [24].

2.5 Systems View on Value Creation

The International Council on Systems Engineering (INCOSE) defines a system "as an integrated set of elements, subsystems, or assemblies that accomplish a defined objective. These elements include products (hardware, software, firmware), processes, people, information, techniques, facilities, services, and other support elements. " [12]
The systems life cycle processes is illustrated in Figure 2.2. This describes the inputs-process-output (IPO) diagram which shows key inputs, process activities and the resulting outputs [12].

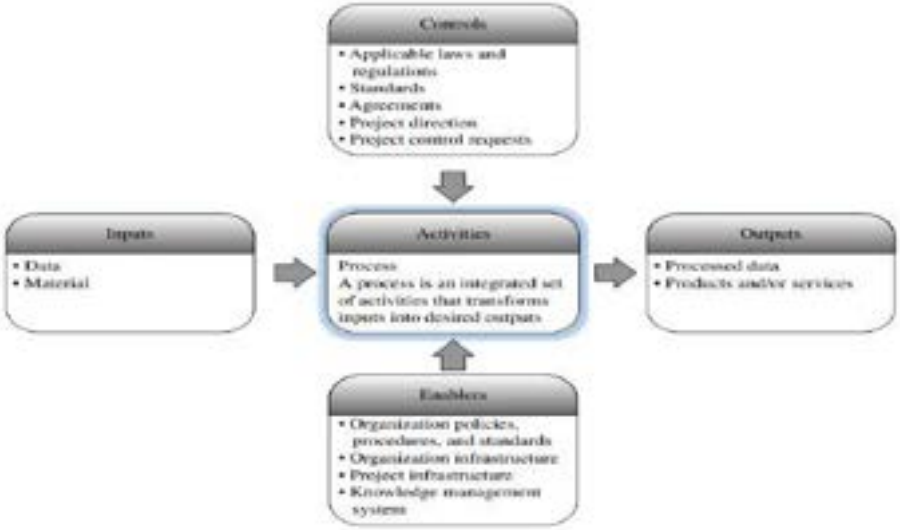

Figure 2.2: Sample of IPO Diagram for Systems Engineering Processes [12].

It is important to understand the systems view when investigating dynamic capabilities during the research. The various system processes of the manufacturing company can be complex, and the inputs will differ for the various operations. The research model takes this into account when determining a solution.

2.6 The Role of Dynamic Capable Technology in Creating Value Systems

Technology is "the knowledge, products, processes, tools, and systems used in the creation of goods or in the provision of services." [11]. Technology can therefore be seen as creating value in the manufacturing company. The use of technology in value creation plays a role in productivity and can lead to the evolution of entire industries [25]. Technology creates value when it is used optimally in a manufacturing company to increase global competitiveness. In the model below (Figure 2.3), Scenario A illustrates that there was a high investment in technology, but low economic growth. This could be due to the technology not being in line with the Business Strategy. In Scenario B, the investment is low, but the economic growth is high. This could be due to cheap labour and acquiring technology outside the country [22]. It is therefore important to ensure that technology is aligned to the business strategy and that the value of all investments is precalculated to prevent losses.

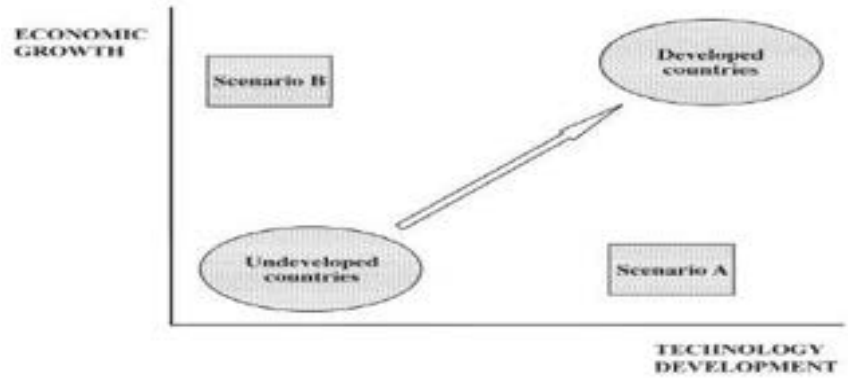

Figure 2.3: The ideal technology growth path [22].

2.7 Management Framework View on the company

The Technology Management Framework (TMF) as illustrated in Figure 2.4 is a tool that can be used by manufacturing industries to create value.

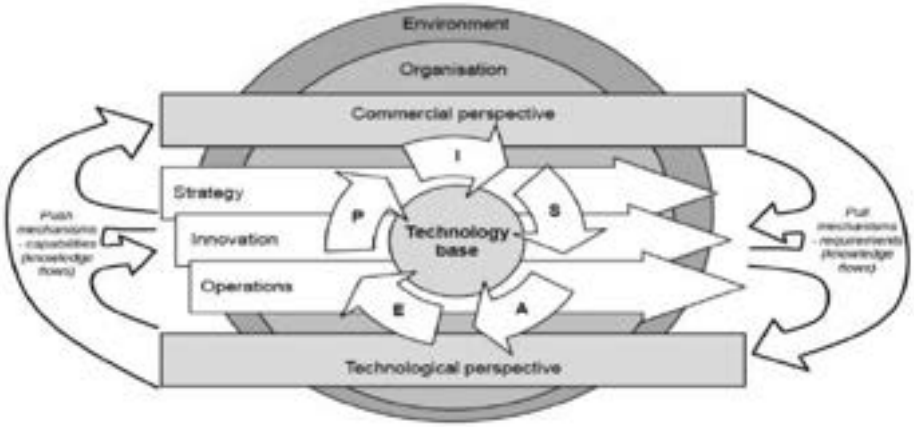

Figure 2.4 : Technology Management Framework [6]

There must be a knowledge flow between commercial and technological perspectives in the manufacturing company to achieve a balance between market pull and technology push [6].
The management of technology can be separated into five processes [26]:
Identification, Selection, Acquisition, Exploitation and Protection. The first process is to Identify the specific technologies, both present and future that may add value to the manufacturing company. The second process is the selected technologies that aligns with the strategy to create future business and is value adding [26]. The third process is the acquisition and implementation of the selected technologies in the manufacturing company and benefits are reaped. The fourth process is the exploitation of technologies by converting them into marketable products or realisation their value through sale or joint venture. The fifth process, that of protection occurs when the manufacturing companies incorporates features into their products that safeguards the product knowledge and thus ensure the company maintains ownership of the products in the long-term.
The framework focuses on three core business processes which is strategy, innovation, and operations. Strategy refers to the overall corporate and business objectives and direction. Innovation refers to the development of new products and services as well as improving strategic and operations processes. Operations is concerned with the flow of resources within the manufacturing company, as well as project management activities associated with strategy and innovation processes [6].

2.8 Aligning Strategy with Technology and Value Adding

Strategic management pertains to initiatives to create, enhance and sustain capabilities regarding the manufacturing environment, and to reach the company's objectives [27]. Strategic management can be done in line with the systems view and the technology management framework view that crosses different hierarchies.

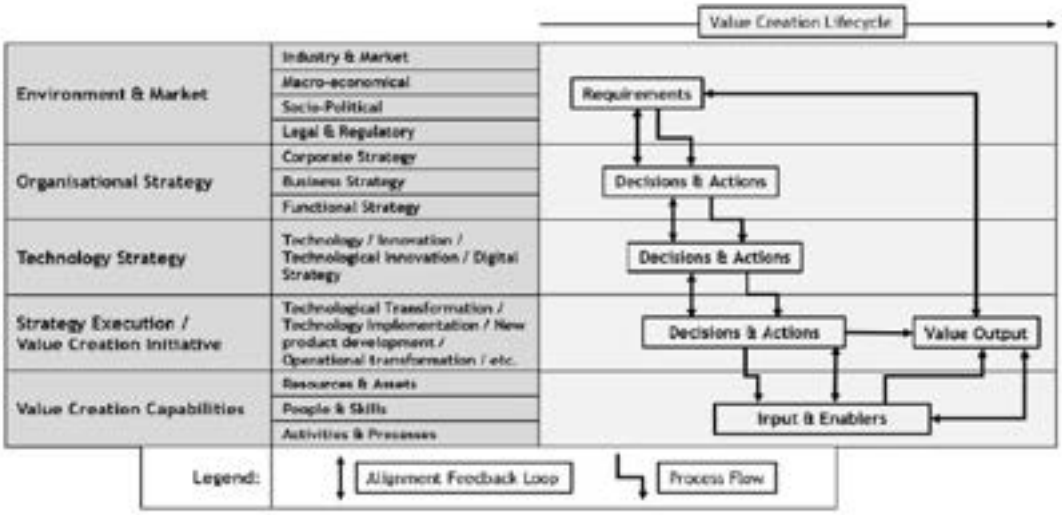

Figure 2.5 : A representation of strategic alignment in an organisation's value-creation system [23]

The technology strategy is a key factor for a manufacturing company to remain competitive as it will enable the company to remain competitive [25]. The manufacturing company needs to verify which markets it will be able to reach with its existing technologies and decide on a technology strategy that enables it to compete in desired markets. This is illustrated in Figure 2.5.

2.9 Dynamic Capabilities and the link to Strategic Management

Changes within the internal and external environment will impact the strategy [11]. Manufacturing companies can be placed in strategic groups, which means that they are competing for the same customers, product and geography. In this way, the company can determine who its rivals are and investigate strategic improvements that can be made to increase competitiveness [11]. The Technology Balance Sheet (TBS), as illustrated in Figure 2.6, highlights the processes as the value-adding activities required to produce the products. The technologies are the capabilities required to execute the process. The products fulfil various markets. The Technology Balance Sheet(TBS) answers questions on the technology and processes that are linked to the various products and whether it is viable to maintain those technologies and processes in the long-term [28]. The research will investigate the dynamic capabilities of the various technologies used during the processes.

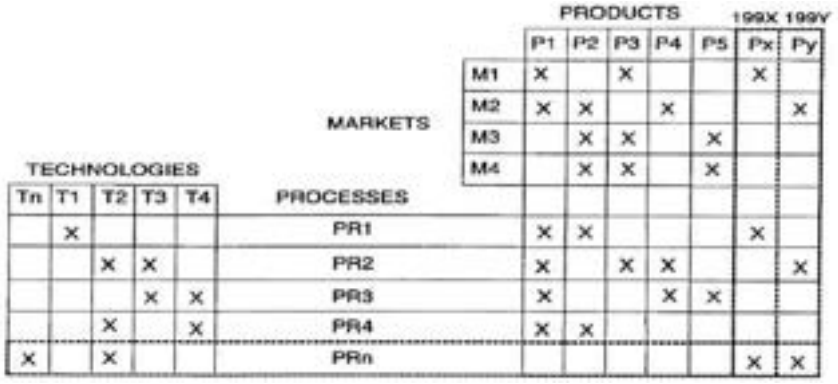

Figure 2.6: Technology Balance Sheet [28]

2.10 Poor Performance

Business performance is defined as the company's ability to satisfy customers' needs. The performance of Quality, Cost, Delivery, and Flexibility are some factors that can be used to identify business performance [13]. It is imperative that the manufacturing company performs well enough to satisfy its customers and maintain its global position. The customer desires value from the manufacturing company and only pays for the value that is generated. The concept of Lean Manufacturing and Value Stream Maps can be used to identify where the waste in the system is [29]. These are the items the customer is not paying for. There are nine wastes identified in this research, transport, defect, inventory, motion, behaviour, unutilized talent, overproduction, overprocessing and waiting [30].

3 PROPOSED MODEL OR CONCEPTUAL METHOD

3.1 Business Model Canvas

The proposed model for the research is the Business Model Canvas (BMC) as illustrated in Figure 3.1. The model helps manufacturing companies identify the interrelationships between the current internal operations and how it contributes to creating value. The model seeks to align key partners, key activities, key resources, customer relationships, customer segments, customer value proposition and costs to create value both for the internal and external stakeholders.

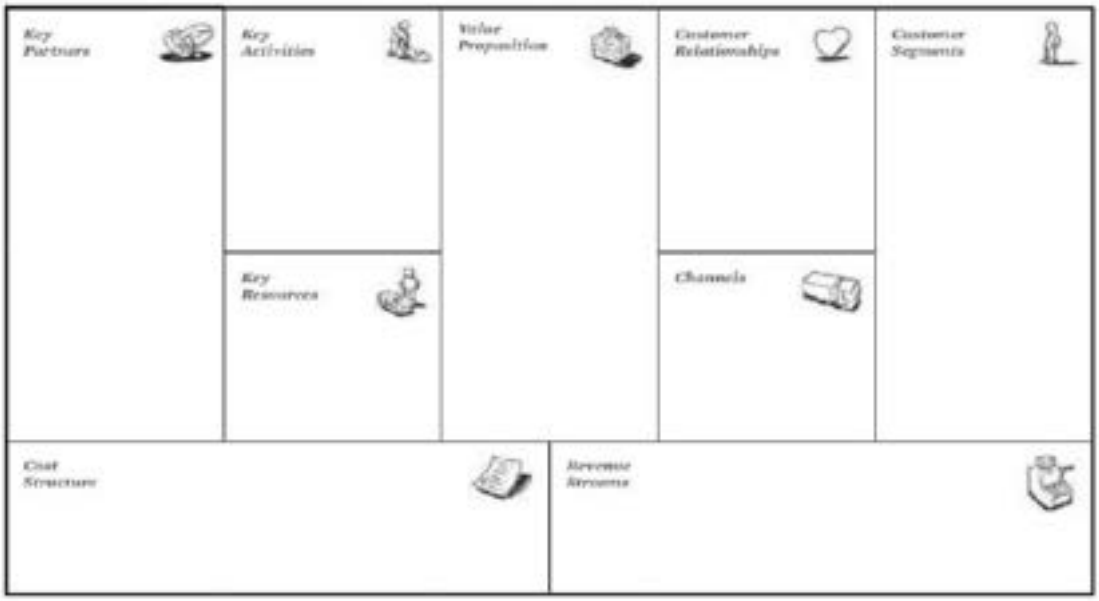

Figure 3.1 : Business Model Canvas [31].

3.2 Key Partners

Key partners are the network of suppliers and partners that make the business model work. Partnerships are formed to reduce risks by sharing infrastructure or outsourcing certain functions. Partnerships can also form to expand on capabilities that the manufacturing company does not have [31]. Types of partnerships can include strategic alliances between non-competitors, coopetition (which is strategic partnerships between competitors), joint ventures to develop new businesses, and buyer-supplier relationships to ensure reliable supplies.

3.3 Key Activities

Key activities are the fundamental activities that a manufacturing company must perform to guarantee that its business model will run successfully. These activities form part of the value proposition to the customer. In manufacturing companies, this could be the manufacturing processes, operations, consulting services to customers, or updating its ecommerce site. These will all be value-adding activities to the customer, and each must be assessed to determine whether it is optimal. The tools used during key activities should be investigated to determine possible improvements.

3.4 Key Resources

These are the resources that will be used to add value to the customer and reach new markets. These can be physical, financial, intellectual, or human centric. The paper investigates the physical assets such as manufacturing equipment, computers etc. The intellectual assets include knowledge, computer technology systems etc. Human resources are the critical employees with the high skillsets who work for the company. The financial resources can be profits generated, credits, stocks, or financial guaranties.

3.5 Value Propositions

Value proposition creates value for customer segments by presenting a unique offering to that segment. This could be related to cost, performance, newness, convenience, risk, accessibility, design, price, customisation and helping customers achieve their objectives. Performance of products or services can be improved to create value to the customer. Customisation is when products or services are tailored to the customer's needs. This can add enormous value to the customer as their immediate needs are met. Lower prices on products can be a value adding capability to customers who are price sensitive. The manufacturing company's brand can add value to the customer, and it is therefore worth protecting. It is important that value offerings are borne in mind when the manufacturing company analyses its processes and outputs, to meet the customer's demands.

3.6 Channels

Channels refer to the contact points between the manufacturing company and the customers. There are five phases that channels can go through: awareness, evaluation, purchase, delivery and after- sales. Awareness is the aspect of how the company raises awareness about its products. Evaluation is when the company helps customers to weigh up the various value propositions of the company. Purchase refers to how the company assists customers to purchase its products. Delivery refers to how the company delivers value to its customers. Afters-sales describes the support given to customers after they have purchased products. Channels can be the sales team, online web sales or stores owned by the company. Indirect sales can be partnering stores, websites or warehouses.

3.7 Customer Segments

Manufacturing companies can group customers into segments according to their common needs, behaviours, or other attributes. They may also serve a diverse customer base that contains various unrelated customer segments with differing needs and problems. The mass market refers to a large group of customers with similar needs and problems. The niche market is a specific group of customers that the manufacturing company can cater for, their needs will direct the value proposition, distribution channels and type of relationship offered.

3.8 Revenue Streams

Revenue is the profit that manufacturing companies can generate from each customer segment. There are several ways a manufacturing company can generate revenue, and these can include selling assets, leasing assets, or licensing of intellectual property.

3.9 Cost Structure

Cost structure can focus on either cost driven or value driven models. Manufacturing companies can focus being value-driven and ensure that customers receive premium value propositions and high degree of personalized services and products.

3.10 Customer Relationships

Customer relationships refer to the type of relationship that the manufacturing company establishes with specific customer segments. These relationships may be intimate, indirect or community based.

3.11 Model development

Table 3.1: Relevant Technology for Business Model Canvas

Technology Capabilities	Business Model Canvas
• Technology capabilities to serve key partners	• Key partners
• Technology capabilities in key activities • Technology capabilities in key resources • Technology capabilities to enable value • Technology capabilities in various channels • Technology capabilities in cost structure • Technology capabilities to generate a revenue stream	• Key activities • Key resources • Value proposition • Channels • Cost structure • Revenue streams
• Technology capabilities to foster customer relationships • Technology capabilities for the various customer segments	• Customer relationships • • Customer segments

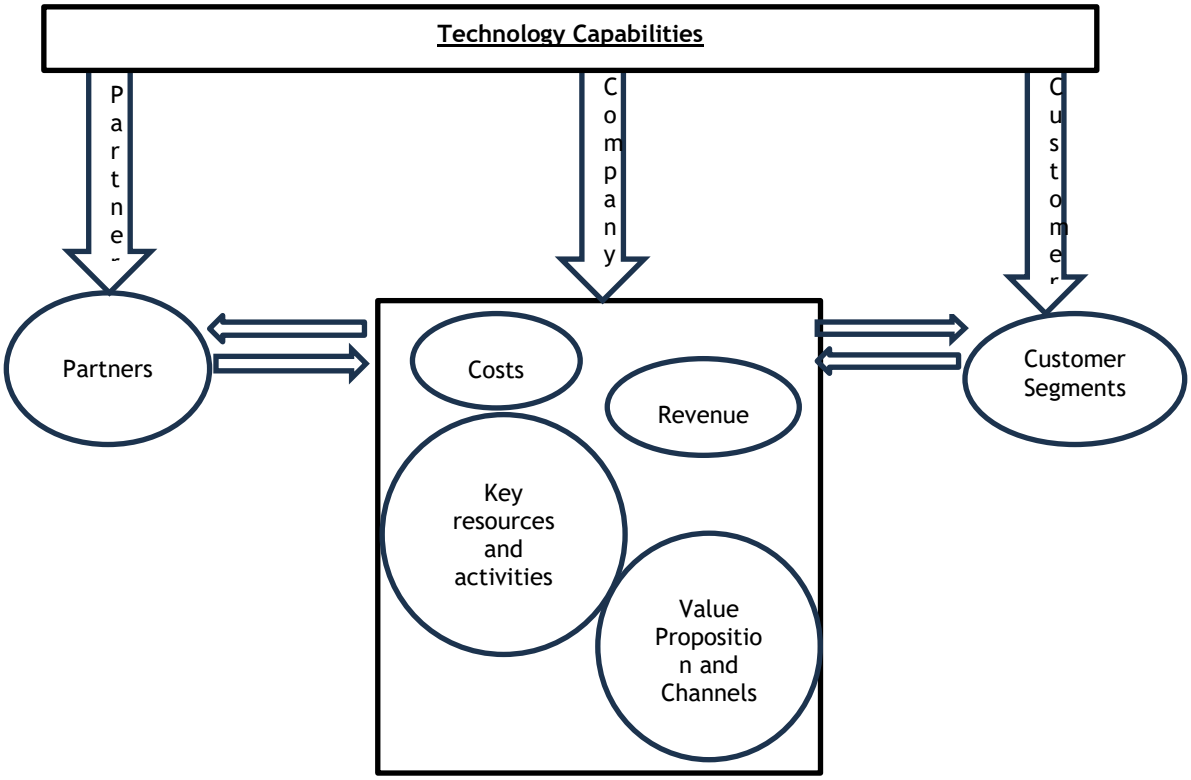

Figure 3.2 : Technology Capability for Business Model Canvas

The above model in Figure 3.2, based on the Business Model Canvas is used in the research. It is used to investigate the technology capabilities at the various interactions of the business. These are the technologies used by key partners. It will also investigate the technologies used during key activities, key resources, value propositions, channels, costs, revenue streams, customer relations, and customer segments. The dynamic capabilities of the technologies are investigated to determine where improvements can be made. Dynamic Capabilities do not view routines and business models as unchangeable; these are viewed as capable of being changed with the correct strategy and investments. Routines and business processes can be transformed to become high performance processes [19].

4 RESEARCH METHOD OR APPROACH

The research uses qualitative data techniques in the form of interviews, transcriptions and recordings. Qualitative research is a research strategy consisting of interpretive material practices that make the world visible. It seeks to interpret the meaning that a natural setting brings to people [32]. Qualitative research considers experiences, interactions, and documents of the study. A major part of qualitative research is based on text and writing from transcripts to interpret the data and then presentation of the findings and the research as a whole [33]. The research uses the analytical inductive technique. Induction approach is where a theory evolves based on empirical observations concerning the area of focus. It takes the context in which the events are taking place into account and will therefore use a small sample of each event [34]. Multiple data sources will be used to improve triangulation. Triangulation combines the theories of all the sources of the data to ensure biases are overcome. It is used to increase the credibility and validity of research findings. Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of the research and validity refers to the extent the study accurately reflects the situation [35].
It is not possible to obtain data from the entire population of a manufacturing company, hence a sample was taken. Stratification sampling of data is used to separate data into strata. This

can be based on location, plant, department, and expertise. This will ensure that the data represent the population more accurately [34].

Interviews with filtration manufacturing experts were conducted using qualitative data techniques to explore real-world challenges identified in the literature and global context. This approach allows for deeper insights through genuine feedback and real scenarios, especially given the unclear nature of top manufacturing challenges. Differences in departmental technology needs, employee skills, and emotional readiness mean that not all adapt equally to change. Investigating current technological capabilities and addressing knowledge gaps is essential, as process owners best understand their limitations and needs for improvement.

Five hypotheses had to be investigated as stated below:

1.Hypothesis1: There are technological challenges experienced in the filtration industry

2.Hypothesis 2: The technology in the company can directly influence the performance of the company by allowing faster process time and improve quality and therefore create more value for the customer.

3.Hypothesis 3: The value of the current technologies can be assessed by the benefits that can be obtained by using them. These benefits can lead to an increase in value to the customer.

4.Hypothesis 4: The current technologies must have dynamic capabilities to respond faster to the external requirements.

5.Hypothesis 5: The technology must be continuously aligned with the market strategy to create value-adding benefits.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Interviewee Information

A total of twelve Interviews were conducted in various departments.

Table 5.1: Interviewee's Years of Experience and Specialties

Interviewees	Years of Experience	Department	Specialty
1	32 years	Production	Production Manager
2	18 years	Production	Production Specialist
3	2 years	Engineering	Junior Engineer
4	14 years	Engineering	Senior Controls Engineer
5	21 years	Health and Safety	Sr Environment Safety Specialist
6	7 years	Information Technology	IT Service Specialist
7	27 years	Information Technology	Business Analyst
8	15 years	Planning and Supply Chain	Production Planner
9	22 years	Warehouse	Warehouse Manager
10	17 years	Quality	Quality Technician
11	5 years	Project Management	Project Manager
12	5 years	Procurement	Procurement Analyst

5.2 Hypothesis 1: There are technological challenges experienced in the filtration industry.

The hypothesis was confirmed through interviews, revealing several technological challenges within the organisation. These include system-related issues beyond employees' control, limitations in employees' technological capabilities, and difficulties in team collaboration due to technology. Such challenges can hinder task completion, delay operations, and pose risks

to the business, especially through interdepartmental information-sharing constraints. This emphasises the critical role of technology in delivering value to filtration industry customers and the need to monitor employee experiences to address and mitigate these issues.

Table 5.2: Number of Interviewees Experiencing Technological Challenges

Technological Challenge	Number of Interviewees
System Challenges	9
Technology Capability Challenges	6
Technology Challenges within Key Activities	8

Research question 1 was therefore answered by the challenges displayed in this table.

5.3 Hypothesis 2: The technology in the company can directly influence the performance of the company by allowing faster process time and improve quality, and therefore create more value for the customer.

The hypothesis was confirmed, with all interviewees agreeing on the need to upskill employees in technology, tailored to their preferred learning methods. Upskilling enhances employee capability, efficiency, and adaptability to current and future technologies. Most interviewees also agreed that effective technology use improves product quality, positively impacting both employee and company performance. Key risk factors identified were technology usage and product quality, emphasizing that employee comfort with technology is essential for maintaining high standards and delivering customer value. Research question 2 is answered in this hypothesis because performance is influenced and can be measured by the employee's use of the technology. The performance can decline if the employee is not comfortable with the technology.

5.4 Hypothesis 3: The value of the current technologies can be assessed by the benefits that can be obtained by using them. These benefits can lead to an increase in value to the customer.

This hypothesis was proven to be true. The data revealed that all twelve of the interviewees believed the technology has benefits for the company and its customers. A total of nine employees indicated that technology has benefits to employees. The benefits to the customers are due to the transparency of systems and the immediate communication available via modern technology. The organisation benefits from the real-time tracking of information and the increased speed of processes. The benefit to employees includes less paperwork and faster processing of information. This highlights the fact that there is value gained by using technology. The organisation can remain a leader in filtration due to a smart selection of technologies used, which adds value to its customers. However, all these benefits are high risk; customers must benefit to stay satisfied, employees must benefit to be productive, and the company must benefit to remain profitable. Research question 4 is answered in this hypothesis as both the benefits and the value of the current technology are mentioned.

5.5 Hypothesis 4: The current technologies must have dynamic capabilities to respond faster to the external requirements.

This hypothesis was proven to be true. The data indicated that the organisation is fluid and can adapt quickly to change. A total of eight interviewees were positive about changes that can occur quickly within the organisation. The data also indicated that employees view change as an opportunity and beneficial to the organisation. They will cooperate when given sufficient training during a change. It also shows that when the requirements are given beforehand, the process change will be rapid. This highlights the fact that the organisation has dynamic capabilities to respond to external requirements. There are, however, instances where internal changes involve risks. These can include the running of additional tests, government

approvals, Increased personnel to accommodate changes and international approvals that may be required. Ignoring these risks could prove to be disastrous.

Table 5.3: Department Feedback on Processes Adapting to Change

Department	Processes can change quickly.	Processes can take a long time to change.
Production	2	
Engineering		2
Health and Safety		1
IT	1	1
Planning and Supply Chain	1	
Warehouse	1	
Quality	1	
Project Management	1	
Procurement	1	
Total	8	4

Research question 3 is addressed in this hypothesis. The interviewees indicated that dynamic capabilities can be applied to internal processes and technologies, which at times might involve risk that must be considered.

5.6 Hypothesis 5: The technology must be continuously aligned with the market strategy to create value-adding benefits.

This hypothesis was proven to be true. All twelve interviewees agreed that the company can assess gaps in the market as well as assess whether it is aligned with the customer's needs. A total of nine interviewees agreed that the company is in line with market trends in society. The data shows that the technology enables the organisation to compare its value-adding offerings to those of competitor products and the future requirements of the customers. The sales team can identify the gaps in the market and address them. The technology allows transparency as customers can view processes and products related to them. The customer can warn the company of product life spans and new, planned replacement products. This highlights the fact that technology plays a crucial role in the organisation's market strategy to create value for its customers. There is a risk that the company could lose out on future business if the company's strategy does not include technology that is aligned with the customer. Research question 5 is answered in this hypothesis, which shows how the technology is aligned with the market strategy.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Conclusions

The company must know its capabilities to determine how it will deliver value to the stakeholders. Capabilities are defined as the resources, skills, facilities and equipment, processes and routines, tools and manuals that are needed to get the job done [19]. Dynamic capabilities are important to create value for the stakeholders and thus ensure that the company will continue to exist [16]. The Business Model Canvas can be used as a strategic model to determine the dynamic capabilities within a company. The company must identify its technology challenges and remove the obstacles for employees so that they can be productive. This could also have a positive influence on the quality of products. The company's technological decisions must be aligned with their market strategy and should be followed by sufficient training of employees to bring about the change. The culture of adopting and

innovating can take time but a positive attitude and support from the company can make the transition easier and quicker.

The research questions were addressed by the investigation of each of the hypotheses. The objective of the paper, to determine a filtration manufacturing company's ability to respond to external changes, was met by the results of the hypotheses.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Studies

- Project Life Management Software in the filtration industry can be investigated for faster changes to processes.
- Pursuing Digitisation in both local and international filtration industry and its effect on Dynamic capabilities.
- Map the various customer bases that are dependent on the filtration industry and determine how the value creation compares for each customer. This can be used to rate the amount of effort that is put into creating dynamic capabilities.
- Compare the requirements for dynamic capabilities in South Africa's filtration industry with those of global companies.
- Explore whether the automotive industry will continue to seek dynamic capabilities despite the move towards electric vehicles.

Compare the attitude and education of the leadership in global manufacturing companies to those in South Africa regarding dynamic capabilities and the impact it has on productivity

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LEVERAGING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE OF THINGS FOR FLEET MANAGEMENT OPTIMISATION

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ABSTRACT

The increase in fleet management has necessitated the adoption of innovative solutions to enhance efficiency, reduce costs and improve safety. However, the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) presents transformative opportunities for fleet management. Fleet operations face challenges in effectively integrating these technologies, leading to suboptimal performance and increased costs. In this context, this study aims to investigate the impact of integrating AI and IoT on operational efficiency, cost reduction, and sustainability in fleet management. Utilising a mixed-methods approach, case studies were conducted, and data were collected from fleets that have implemented AI-driven predictive maintenance and IoT-based telematics. This study used a mixed-method approach. Quantitative data were collected from telematics and predictive maintenance systems across the sampled fleets, including variables such as fuel consumption, downtime, and route efficiency. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with fleet operations coordinators to capture perceptions of AIoT integration. The two datasets were triangulated to strengthen the validity of the findings. Results indicate a 30% reduction in vehicle downtime and a 15% decrease in fuel consumption, attributed to optimised routes and proactive maintenance. These results underscore the significance of adopting AIoT solutions to achieve smarter, greener, and safer fleet operations.

Keywords: fleet management, artificial Intelligence, internet of things, predictive maintenance, vehicle downtime

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1 INTRODUCTION

AIoT integrates AI and IoT to create intelligent self-learning systems that analyse and respond to data autonomously [1]. AIoT represents the convergence of AI and IOT, enabling devices to learn from data and make autonomous decisions and context-aware systems that enhance operational efficiency and user experience [2]. AIoT spans sectors such as agriculture, health care, and smart cities, providing advanced solutions like remote patient monitoring and traffic optimisation [1, 3]. Fleet management is the administration and coordination of a company's vehicle fleet. It involves a wide range of functions that facilitate the efficient, cost-effective, and compliant operation of commercial vehicles[4]. This process is vital for businesses that rely on transportation, logistics, delivery services, or any form of mobility to conduct operations [5]. Large amounts of multi-modal data from various sources, including GPS modules, engine control units (ECUs), fuel sensors, and environmental monitors, are essential to AIoT-based fleet management systems. The diversity of data formats, sampling rates, and communication protocols is one significant issue noted in the literature that makes it more difficult to integrate data into AI models [6]. Furthermore, the dependability of predictive analytics is diminished by data redundancy, noise, and incompleteness brought on by malfunctioning sensors or network outages [7]. According to studies, inadequate pipelines for pre-processing data also lead to less-than-ideal results for route optimisation and maintenance scheduling [8].

In recent years, fleet management has shifted from ordinary to data-driven management systems through the integration of AI and IoT, particularly when dealing with complex data. AI and IoT are two of the most transformative technologies in the modern digital era [9]. Fleet management is complex, as fleet managers always face challenges in optimising routes, leading to increased fuel consumption, longer delivery times, and higher emissions. Traditional systems rely heavily on human oversight and static rules, often leading to inefficiencies. The vast amount of data generated by fleet operations can be difficult to manage and analyse, making it hard for fleet operators to make informed decisions. Analysing a lot of data, ensuring compliance with regulations and controlling costs whilst maintaining customer satisfaction is a very big challenge.

To overcome these challenges, the integration of AI and IoT has accelerated innovations across industries such as healthcare, transportation, manufacturing, and agriculture. This integration allows data collected by IoT devices to be analysed and acted upon in real time, often without human intervention [10]. The key capabilities of AIoT in fleet management include real-time vehicle tracking and diagnostics, predictive maintenance based on machine learning models, fuel efficiency monitoring and optimisation, automated driver behaviour analysis and dynamic route planning and traffic adaptation. Despite the recent success in integrating AIoT, fleet operators often face challenges in integrating innovative solutions with existing systems and managing change within the organisation, which also hinders the adoption of new technologies.

This study seeks to explore the impact of AIoT on operational efficiency, cost reduction, and enhancing fleet safety and sustainability in one of the municipalities in South Africa within the Limpopo Province. Through case studies and data analysis, the benefits of AI-driven predictive maintenance and IoT-based telematics were investigated. The research seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does the integration of AIoT improve operational efficiency in fleet management?

RQ2: How does the adoption of AI-driven predictive maintenance and IoT-based telematics influence cost reduction in fleet operations?

RQ3: What role does AIoT integration play in promoting sustainability in fleet management practices?

To address the research questions, a detailed literature review was conducted, and secondary data obtained from the fleet management company were analysed. Existing research on the fleet management industry typically revolves around understanding, improving, and innovating operational efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a review of relevant literature, Section 3 outlines the methodology, Section 4 presents the results, and Section 5 presents the findings and concludes the paper.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the existing literature on AIoT in fleet management and AIoT in other transport management services. The increasing complexity of fleet management in the Municipality has necessitated the adoption of innovative technologies to optimise operations, improve delivery of essential public services, fuel consumption monitoring and GPS-based vehicle location.

2.1 Literature Survey on AIOT in Fleet Management

Recent studies emphasise the transformative potential of these technologies, such as AI and IoT, in the realm of fleet management. Several frameworks have been proposed that leverage AI and IoT to enhance fleet efficiency, safety and sustainability. For example, one framework employs real-time data streams, predictive analytics, and automation technologies to promote fleet efficiency, improve safety protocols, and reduce environmental impact, though fuel efficiency was not considered in the study [11]. Another study monitors the key performance metrics of heavy vehicles, such as fuel consumption, route deviations, driving behaviour, breakdown incidents, and maintenance status [12-18]. In the context of Bengaluru, a straightforward framework has been developed for IoT-enabled visualisation and predictive analytics tailored to fleet management [19]. A novel approach combining AI, IoT and autonomous vehicles aims to optimise route planning, improve traffic signal coordination, and support predictive demand management delivery services[20]. Additionally, a methodology was developed to offer a structured framework for researchers aiming to implement intelligent Fleet Management Systems in mining operations to boost efficiency, safety, and productivity in mineral extraction [21]. Another IoT and AI-based Smart Fleet Management framework that enhances efficiency, safety, and sustainability [22]. It leverages real-time data and predictive analytics, incorporates ADAS to detect risky driving, and uses AI to forecast fuel use, emissions and fleet corrosion to reduce the carbon footprint. An in-depth analysis of IoT-driven solutions further suggests that smart transportation infrastructure could revolutionise contemporary roadway systems by making them into interconnected, efficient and sustainable frameworks [23]. Furthermore, a novel vehicle management system using Arduino UNO integrated with sensors was developed to enhance fleet safety and efficiency [24]. This technology monitors driving behaviour, ensures safe parking, and enables real-time tracking and maintaining cargo conditions to support compliance and quality control. The IoT-based vehicle emission monitoring system integrated with gas and dust sensors with an ESP-32 microcontroller and cloud analytics was developed to measure, analyse, and optimise vehicle carbon emissions and fuel consumption [25]. The reviewed literature highlights growing interest in the integration of AI and IoT in monitoring fuel consumption, the behaviour of the driver and the gas emissions.

2.2 The Literature Survey on AIoT

An overview of how artificial intelligence and machine learning contribute to the development of automatic incident detection aimed at reducing road accidents was explored [26]. A port

management system utilising advanced prediction and classification algorithms was developed to accurately estimate ship stay delays and durations [27]. A study explored how AI and Big Data Analytics can improve supply chain and sustainability, lower greenhouse gas emissions, logistics and transportation [28]. The Internet of Vehicles from three key perspectives: Mobile Edge Computing, AI and the benefits of integrating both was explored [29]. The research examines the architecture and implementation technologies involved and compares the applications of Mobile Edge Computing and AI in IoT with existing methods. A study examined how AI can be used to tackle traffic congestion in urban areas[30], energy management systems [31]. The literature reveals that AIoT is growing in other fields for monitoring and diagnosis of systems.

2.3 The Gaps identified in the literature

From the reviewed literature, the following key research gaps were pinpointed: Most studies focus on the modification of existing AIoT systems in fleet management. Little effort has been made in evaluating the existing AIoT systems in terms of profit or loss in the business operations. Based on the current state of fleet management in South Africa, there is a shortage of long-term studies on fleet performance, cost savings and driver behaviour. Most reports and studies focus on market share rather than performance comparisons between local and international fleet management providers. There is a need for independent studies comparing fuel consumption, route deviations, driving behaviour, breakdown incidents, and maintenance status. This paper focuses on a detailed analysis of fuel consumption in the municipality.

In summary, this review highlights the transformative potential of AIoT technologies across various sectors, including transportation. It sets the stage for understanding why AIoT is particularly promising for fleet management. The literature review makes a compelling case for why evaluating AIoT in fleet management, especially within the South African context, is timely and necessary. It aligns with the research questions by demonstrating Aiot's potential to improve operational efficiency and supports the hypothesis that AIoT can reduce costs and foster sustainability. The review also outlines several limitations of traditional fleet systems, and these challenges justify the need for intelligent, data-driven solutions, which AIoT can provide.

3 METHODOLOGY

Microsoft Excel is still a commonly used tool for data analysis, validation, and reporting, even though Artificial Intelligence of Things (AIoT) platforms for fleet management optimisation frequently make use of sophisticated analytics environments like Python, R, or cloud-based dashboards. According to published research, Excel's ease of use, familiarity, and integration potential make it an essential stage in AIoT data workflows, especially for businesses moving from manual fleet monitoring to completely automated analytics [32]. The study uses the following functions: mean and average to summarise the dataset with a single representative value and understanding around the central tendency of the data, standard deviation to quantify the amount of variation of a set of data points around its mean and the sum to determine the total value or quantity of fuel usage in litres and in rands. Using a mixed-methods approach, the purpose of this research is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the fuel expenditure, the fuel quantity, the rand per KM, the top 10 spenders and weekend fuel usage for three months. The data was obtained from a Teltonika FMC tracking device. The Teltonika FMC tracking devices are equipped with Onomondo IoT SIM cards to capture vehicle data. The tracking devices feed data into a Teltonika Fleet Management System, which is used to collect, visualise, and analyse telemetry in real time. It has software which enables: GPS-based vehicle location tracking, fuel consumption monitoring, driver behaviour analysis, engine diagnostics, and maintenance scheduling.

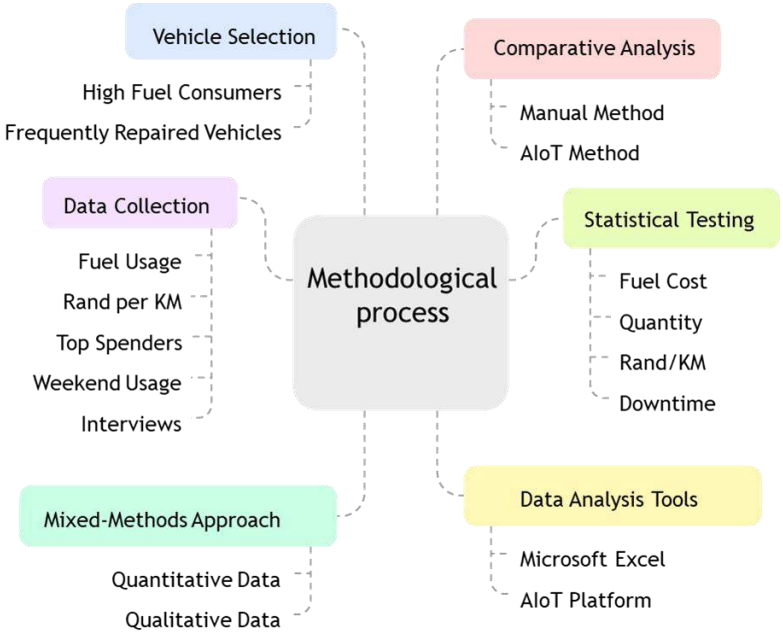

Figure 1. Methodological Process Summary

This study focuses on the fuel consumption monitoring for municipal vehicles, and the data collected includes the fuel usage and the consumption rates. The fleet consists of specialised heavy-duty and utility vehicles, including: BELL 670 Moto Graders, UD Trucks, Compactors, Mercedes-Benz (MBenz) Utility Vehicles, Komatsu Machinery, Excavators, BELL TLBs (Tractor-Loader-Backhoe. These vehicles operate on both rough (rural and undeveloped areas) and suburban roads across the rural municipality. Route allocation depends on the departmental function emergency services respond citywide, while maintenance and utility services follow scheduled or reactive service routes, covering key zones in both urban and peri-urban environments. A focused analysis was conducted on 10 high fuel-consuming vehicles per month to identify fuel inefficiencies and misuse.10 vehicles are undergoing frequent repairs and maintenance to assess wear patterns and predict failures using AIoT-based diagnostics. These 20 units were selected for their operational cost impact and are key to demonstrating the value of predictive optimisation. Each vehicle is a mobile node in a broader Smart City strategy, powered by AIoT for optimised service delivery. While fuel cost and volume remained consistent between March and May, the cost per kilometre increased significantly in April due to a marked reduction in distance covered, caused by vehicle downtime, route changes, operational restrictions, and call-outs.

4 RESULTS

By following the aforementioned research methods, data from the quarterly fuel management report were analysed. The results provide details of the fuel operations for each vehicle over 3 months. In March and April, the manual method was used, and in May, the AIOT-based system was used to analyse fuel usage and consumption for 10 vehicles

4.1 The Total Cost of Fuel

Figure 2 shows that the total cost of fuel spent for the Quarter was for May, and the lowest was for April. The difference between the 3 months was R120 634,77 (March & April) & R243 767,12 (April & May).

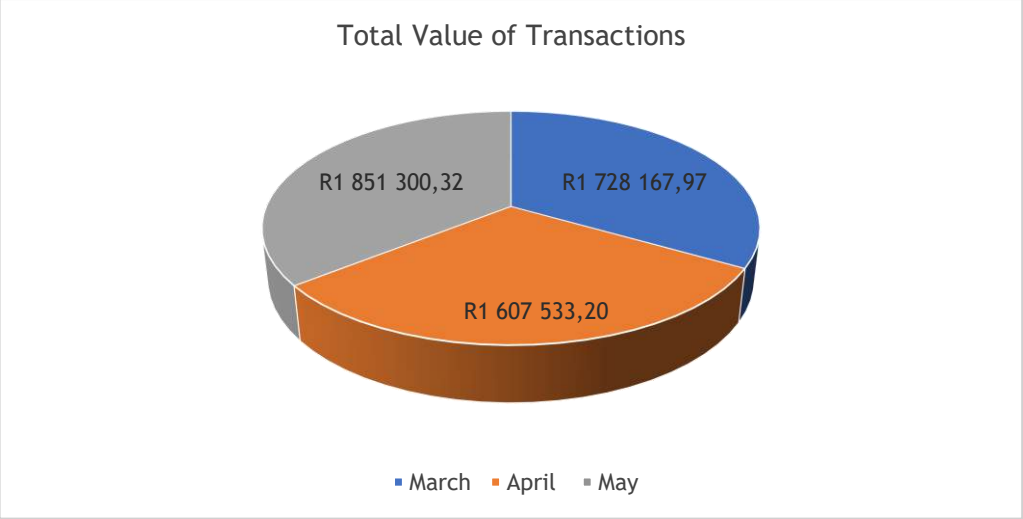

Figure 2: The total cost of fuel per month

Although May had the highest fuel expenditure, a deeper analysis shows that it was the most effective month, given that more working days were experienced in May (22 working days) in comparison to April (17 working days). The aforementioned does not include fuel utilisation on weekends.

4.1.1 Total Expenditure on Weekends

Figure 3 demonstrates that out of the total fuel expenditure for the weekends in March **64,39%** was spent on a Saturday **& 35,60%** was spent on a Sunday. For April, **R200 288,21** was spent on a Saturday, & **R109 324,03** was spent on a Sunday, & lastly for May, **58,98%** was spent on Saturday & **41,02%** was spent on a Sunday.

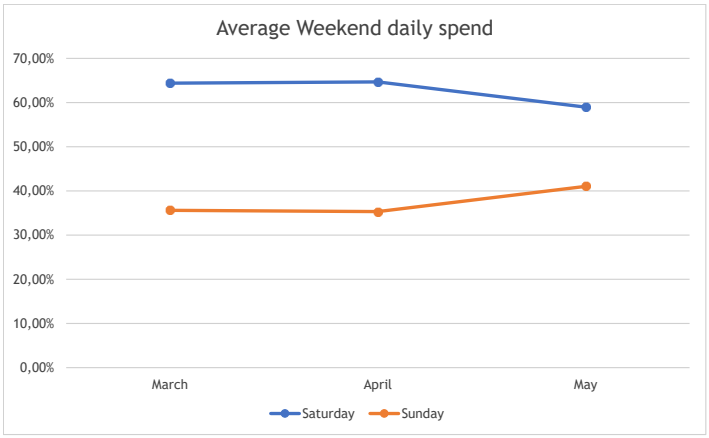

Figure 3: The total expenditure on weekends

4.2 The Total Quantity of Fuel

As presented in Figure 4, the highest total fuel quantity spent for the Quarter was for May, and the lowest was for April. The difference between March & April was 3 388,88 litres. May fuel quantity increased by 11,436.48 litres compared to April.

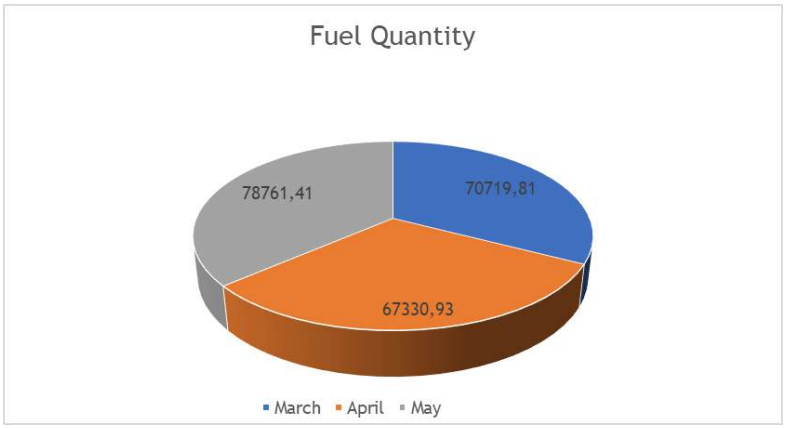

Figure 4: The total quantity of fuel consumed per month

Although April had the lowest fuel expenditure, a deeper analysis shows that it was the most ineffective month in terms of the amount of fuel used, given that fewer working days were experienced in April due to public holidays (17 working days) in comparison to May (22 working days).

4.3 The Total Rand per KM

Figure 5 indicates the Rand per KM for March, April and May, excluding vehicles with a single transaction. A higher amount of fuel was spent in May compared to March and April.

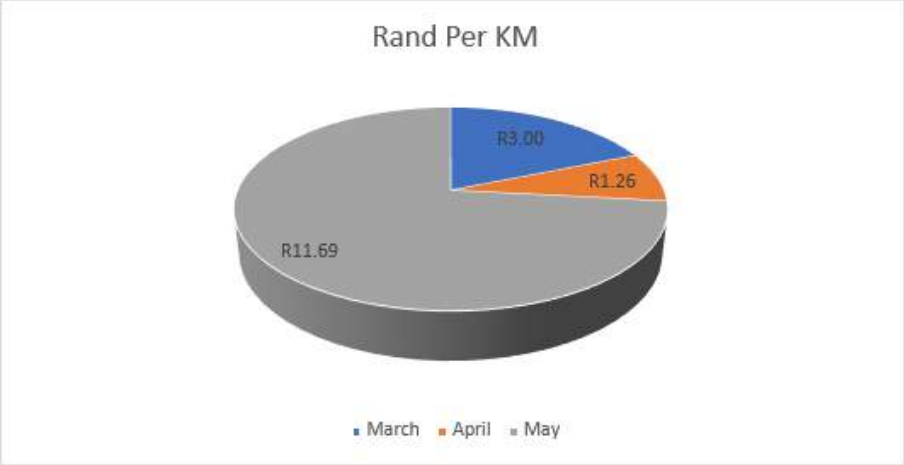

Figure 5: The total Rand per kilometre

4.4 Top Ten Spenders

The top 10 spenders for April cumulatively were 37.5% of the total fuel expenditure of April. This is a significant increase of 21.3%, which is over double the March top 10 expenditure. This should be further investigated as there is evidence of a concentrated use of fleet and not significant diversification of vehicles being used. The aforementioned could result in accelerated wear & tear of vehicles as well as increased maintenance costs. The top 10 spenders for April cumulatively were **~37.5%** of the total fuel expenditure of April. This is a significant increase of **21.3%,** which is over double the March top 10 expenditure. This should be further investigated as there is evidence of a concentrated use of fleet and not significant diversification of vehicles being used. The aforementioned could result in accelerated wear & tear of vehicles as well as increased maintenance costs. The top 10 spenders for May cumulatively were 18.6% of the total fuel expenditure of May. This is a significant reduction

of 18,9% in comparison to April, which still indicates that April had the highest consumption compared to both March and May fuel consumption.

4.5 The Actual Budget Versus the Monthly Expenditure

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the actual budget versus the monthly expenditure for fuel consumption by highlighting the key variances and trends. Figure 6 compares the planned and actual spending for March.

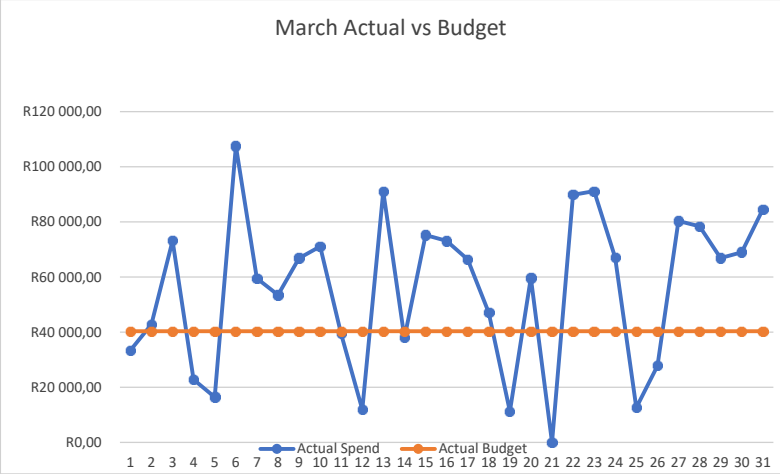

Figure 6: March Actual Cost Versus the Actual Budget

It is evident from Figure 6 that **R1 250 000** is insufficient as per the actual spend which s compared to the actual budget for March only on the 1st,4th,5th,12th,14th 19th,21st,25th & 26th (9 days out of 31 days) was there a saving & most of the days where there was a saving were weekends (4th, 5th, 12th, 19th,25th & 26th)for the rest of the days during March there was an over spend of the budget. Figure 7 compares the planned and actual spending for April. It is evident from Table 1 that R1 250 000 is insufficient as per the blue graph labelled actual spend which shows the actual spend per day compared to the actual budget for April only 13 days was there a saving & most of the days where there was a saving or breakeven were weekends & holidays (1st,2nd, 7th, 8th,9th,10th, 15th, 16th,27th, 29th & 30th)for the rest of the days during April there was an over spend of the budget.

Table 1: The Top Ten Spenders for March, April and May

Vehicle ID	Sum of fuel quantity(L)			Sum of value of transaction (Rands)			Sum of number of transactions		
	March	April	May	March	April	May	March	April	May
Vehicle 1	494,02			R12 000,00			2		
Vehicle 2	1522,53		1030,98	R36 754,45		R24 000,00	6		4
Vehicle 3	1030,39	2100,98	2351,51	R24 999,39	R50 475,81	R54 422,66	6	6	7
Vehicle 4	1276,23			R31 000,00			4		
Vehicle 5	897,15	2584,05	2068,02	R21 530,95	R61 448,14	R51 926,87	6	16	13
Vehicle 6	684,59		811,57	R16 574,15		R23 500,00	4		5
Vehicle 7	1303,12			R30 213,70			4		
Vehicle 8	1200,00			R29 160,00			6		
Vehicle 9	1588,46	2345,83	1774,42	R37 772,92	R55 253,30	R41 111,95	5	7	6
Vehicle 10	1609,04	1808,54	2255,2	R39 180,40	R43 081,55	R50 944,27	5	6	7
Vehicle 11		3682,33			R91 236,02			9	
Vehicle 12		2781,5			R65 943,78			17	
Vehicle 13		2716,41			R64 182,15			9	
Vehicle 14		2583,52			R60 803,21			10	
Vehicle 15		2494,28			R58 848,25			8	
Vehicle 16		2134,9	687,97		R51 135,39	R15 889,11		12	4
Vehicle 17			1085,9			R33 320,73			6
Vehicle 18			800,88			R17 736,15			7
Vehicle 19			1352,16			R31 390,50			8
Total	11605,53	25232,34	14218,61	R279 185,96	R602 407,6	R344 242,24	48	100	67

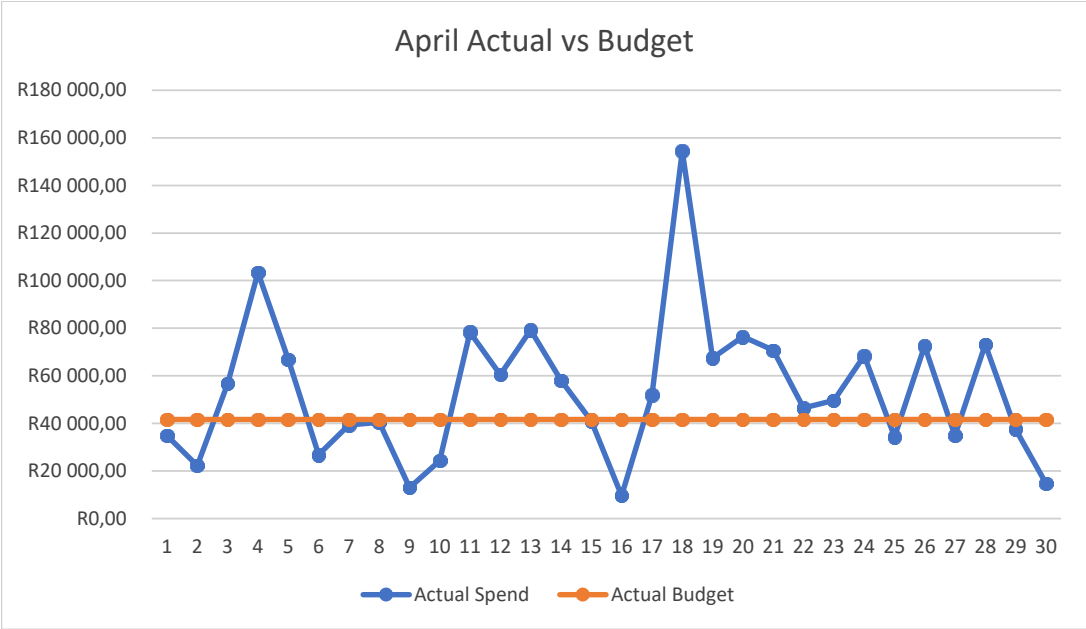

Figure 7: April Actual Cost Versus the Actual Budget

It is evident from Figure 8 that **R1 250 000** is insufficient as per the blue graph labelled actual spend which shows the actual spend per day compared to the actual budget, for May only 5 days was there a saving & most of the days where there was a saving or breakeven were weekends & holidays (1st, 7th ,14th, 27th & 28th) for the rest of the days during May there was an over spend of the budget.

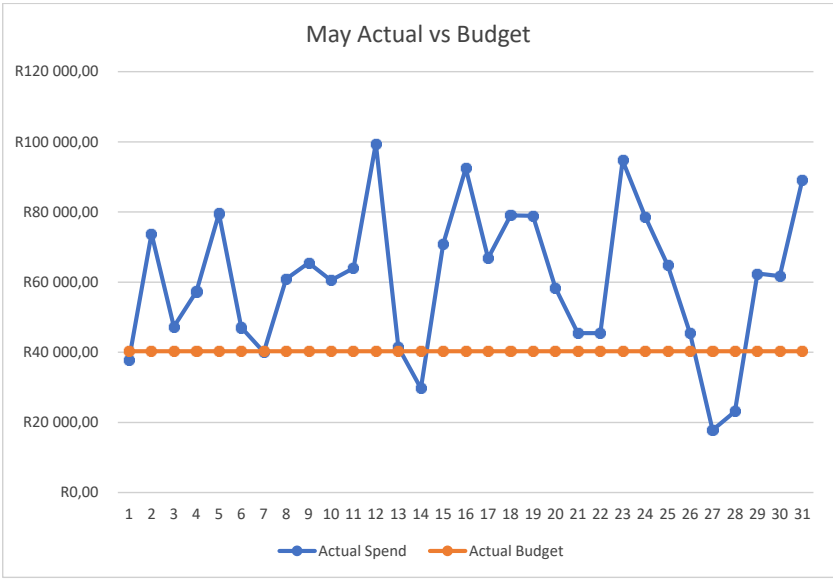

Figure 8: May Actual Cost versus the Actual Budget

The analysis of the vehicles shows that average downtime decreased from 20 hours before AIoT adoption to 14.3 hours after implementation, representing an overall reduction of approximately 30%. While individual vehicles displayed slight variations in the percentage reduction, the trend was consistent across the sample. This confirms that the introduction of predictive maintenance and IoT telematics significantly improved fleet availability. The results

provide strong evidence that AIoT integration can minimise unplanned downtime and enhance operational efficiency in fleet management.

Furthermore, the reduction in downtime is not only statistically significant but also operationally meaningful, as fewer breakdowns and service interruptions translate directly into cost savings and improved customer satisfaction. Compared with previous studies, this result exceeds the 20–28% reduction range typically reported in the literature, highlighting the competitive advantage of the strategies applied in this context. These findings strengthen the argument for greater adoption of AIoT systems in fleet management, especially for high-consumption vehicles where the potential benefits are most pronounced.

Table 2: The Vehicle Downtime (Hours) Before and After AIoT Adoption

Vehicle ID	Downtime Before(hrs)	Downtime After(hrs)
Vehicle 1	20	14.3
Vehicle 2	18	12.6
Vehicle 3	17	11.9
Vehicle 4	19	13.5
Vehicle 5	22	15.4
Vehicle 6	16	10
Vehicle 7	21	14.7
Vehicle 8	23	16.1
Vehicle 9	18	12.6
Vehicle 10	20	13
Mean	19,4	11,5
Stdv	**2,221110833**	**2,12132**
P-value	**0,048874504**	

As presented in Table 2, a paired t-test for the top 10 high consumption vehicles showed a significant reduction in downtime after AIoT implementation. Mean before is 19.4; SD is 0.048875. Then the mean after is 11.5; SD is 2.12132; p-value is 0.048875.

5 DISCUSSION

This study provides insights into the fuel management data from March to May, highlighting clear trends in both expenditure and operational efficiency. As presented in section 4, in March, there was moderate fuel usage and cost, with an indication of uneven vehicle usage, and it was limited with a relatively small fleet and low activity level. In April, while having the lowest working days (17), a disproportionately high fuel expenditure was recorded due to overutilization of select vehicles, inefficient routing, and increased weekend activity primarily related to water tankers and graders for funeral used for funeral support. In May, there was the highest fuel quality and cost, but also the highest number of working days (22). More importantly, it displayed notable operational efficiency, including the call-out fee as well, marked by better distribution of fleet use, fewer top spenders, and lower rand-per-kilometre ratios. Although May had the highest fuel spent, it also had more working days. There was a better fleet rotation with top 10 spenders accounting for only 18.6% of the total, compared to April's 37.5%. Also, considering the cost of the fuel, if a call-out job needs to be attended, and improve weekend fuel control. The fuel in May is spent more effectively, resulting in higher productivity and lower wastage. The AIoT-based tracking system and optimisation system were implemented at the start of May. This time, the company started to have more accurate tracking of vehicle usage, reduced idle time and unauthorised use and improvements in fuel allocation and route optimisation, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The Top Ten Spenders for May

Aspect	Manual Method (April)	AIoT Method (May)
Vehicle usage	Concentrated use, poor rotation	Better distribution
Tracking accuracy	Limited insights, post-use reporting	Real-time monitoring and alerts
Fuel efficiency	Low due to misuse	High due to higher usage
Total expenditure	Lower quantity but inefficient usage	Higher quantity but efficient allocation

Given the current economic issues in South Africa, inflation is at an all-time high, resulting in fuel costs increasing over time. At the start of the current quarter, Petrol 93 & 95 were at R22,65 & R22,95 respectively & Diesel 0,05%, 0,005% (wholesale) R21,63 & R21,72 respectively. At the end of the quarter, the fuel prices are Petrol 93 & 95 are R22,30 & R22,63 respectively, and Diesel 0,05%, 0,005% (wholesale) R19,31 & R19,69 respectively. In this case, it is favourable to fuel costs, but that is not always the case; this also contributed to the higher cost in May. As presented in Table 4, a 15% reduction in fuel consumption in this study aligns with the 12–18% range reported by [33] in North American freight fleets. However, the 30% downtime reduction exceeds the 20% improvement reported by[6], which aligns with proactive maintenance strategies applied in this study's context.

Table 4: Comparative Results of AIoT and Related Fleet Management Systems from Literature and Industry Sources

Study/Source	**Context**	**Technology Used**	**Fuel Savings (%)**	**Downtime Reduction (%)**
[33]	US freight fleets	IoT telematics + AI route optimisation	18	25
[34]	Manufacturing & logistics	Industry 4.0 IoT + AI predictive analytics	10	22
[35]	Global mixed fleets	AI telematics platform	15	28

Through cost reductions, accelerated return on investment, and competitive differentiation, AIoT systems generate significant operational gains in efficiency, safety, compliance, and asset utilisation. However, the size of the fleet, the operational environment, and the organisation's preparedness to incorporate AIoT into current processes all affect how much of an impact there will be. Adoption success necessitates striking a balance between technological prowess, reasonable financial expectations, and effective change management techniques.

Despite the valuable insights this study generated, the study has several limitations. The study was conducted over a three-month period(March to May), which may not capture seasonal variations in fuel consumption or vehicle usage. The analysis focused primarily on fuel consumption, cost per kilometre and top spenders. Other performance indicators, such as vehicle emissions, maintenance frequency, driver safety incidents or customer service response time, were not included. The research was limited to one municipality in South Africa. For further work, the IoT-based telematics could also be expanded to other fleets such as the ambulances, fire brigades, police vehicles and the garbage collection vehicles. The system is supposed to predict the vehicle status and the shortest routes. There is a need to expand the research to other municipalities with denser traffic patterns or different vehicle types. There is also a need to conduct a longitudinal study over 12 months or assess the sustainability of AIoT benefits across seasons and operational cycles. Compare multiple municipalities to assess scalability and contextual differences.

6 CONCLUSION

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of manual and IOT fleet management within a municipality located in one of the provinces in South Africa. In this study, the main emphasis was on fuel consumption. The research evaluated the total cost of fuel for March, April and May, including both weekdays and weekends for the three months. The fuel quantities utilised

in these three months were analysed. The top ten high users of fuel were selected and analysed. A comparison between the budgeted expenditure and the actual spending for each month. AIoT integration in fleet management led to a 30% reduction in vehicle downtime and a 15% decrease in fuel consumption. These improvements highlight the operational and economic benefits of predictive maintenance and IoT telematics. Compared to previous literature, these results align with reported fuel savings of 12–18% by [33], but exceed downtime reductions of 20-31%. Future research should investigate long-term impacts, scalability across fleet types, and the human expertise required for system sustainability. From this analysis, it has been noted that the adoption of AIOT for fleet management optimisation in the municipality has the potential to significantly increase efficiency. Fleet managers can optimise routes to reduce fuel consumption and enhance overall fleet performance.

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TOWARDS A CIRCULAR ECONOMY FRAMEWORK FOR SME BAKERIES INTEGRATED WITH FARMING OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

SME bakeries face increasing pressure to improve sustainability while remaining competitive. Integrating farming and baking operations offers a pathway to achieve this by producing key ingredients on-site and reusing waste streams to close resource loops. However, designing such integrated systems is complex, requiring alignment between farm outputs, bakery demand, and circular economy principles. This study addresses these challenges by developing a Circular Economy Framework to guide the integration of farming and bakery processes. The framework highlights the interrelationships between production, waste reuse, and by-product transformation, offering SMEs a structured approach to balance environmental, economic, and operational goals. Grounded in the research onion paradigm, the study establishes the foundation for a future Circular Economy Decision Support System. Beyond improving efficiency and profitability, the framework contributes to food security and sustainable manufacturing practices, enabling SME bakeries to transition from survival strategies toward long-term resilience and competitiveness.

Keywords: SME, bakery, circular economy, decision support system, sustainability

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1 INTRODUCTION

A substantial segment of the global food industry is represented by baked goods, which indicates the global demand for baked goods. From breads and pastries to cookies, cakes, and confectionery, they significantly contribute to global food production, although specific percentages vary by region and product type [1]. The global consumption patterns are shaped by cultural traditions, economic conditions, dietary habits, and demographics [1]. For example, rising urbanisation and lifestyle changes have driven a demand for packaged baked goods such as breads and snacks [1]. Baked goods remain essential in meeting dietary preferences worldwide by holding a significant market share in the global food industry, despite the regional variations and diversity in products [1]. This highlights the need for further investigation into the broader impact of bakeries on society.

Bakeries generally operate under two main bakery business models, namely wholesale bakeries and retail bakeries [2]. Wholesale bakeries supply other businesses such as grocery stores, restaurants, cafés, and other food establishments by focusing on producing and distributing large quantities of baked goods [2]. In contrast, retail bakeries sell directly to the customer by offering freshly baked items such as bread, pastries, cookies, cakes, etc. [2]. Retail bakeries can take a variety of forms, including online bakeries that ship products nationwide, home bakeries operating from residential kitchens, bakery cafés offering a sit-down experience, mobile bakery food trucks, counter-service bakeries with small walk-in storefronts featuring a counter or bakery display case, etc. [2]. This paper focuses specifically on retail bakeries operating as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The South African Department of Small Business Development defines a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) as an independent business entity, together with its branches or subsidiaries and including cooperative enterprises, that can be managed by one or more owners and operates predominantly in any sector or subsector of the economy [3]. In accordance with the Standard Industrial Classification the criteria for a micro, small, and medium enterprise in the manufacturing sector are stated as micro having 0 to 10 employees with a total annual turnover of less than R7 million, small having 11 to 50 employees with a total annual turnover of less than R17 million, and medium having 51 to 250 employees with a total annual turnover of less than R170 million [3]. In South Africa, the number of SME bakeries increased following the deregulation of the baking subsector, which began in 1991 and removed requirements such as bakery registration and retail price controls [4]. These changes led many wholesale (industrial) bakeries to scale down, and created space for the growth of smaller bakeries [4].

To describe South Africa's bakery sector's profile, a detailed national industry survey that recorded employment by bakery type was conducted [4]. **Error! Reference source not found.** s ummarises the data. When comparing these results to the SME definition from the South African governmental document of 2019, it is evident that most baking enterprises in South Africa can be classified as SME bakeries since the majority have fewer than 250 employees.

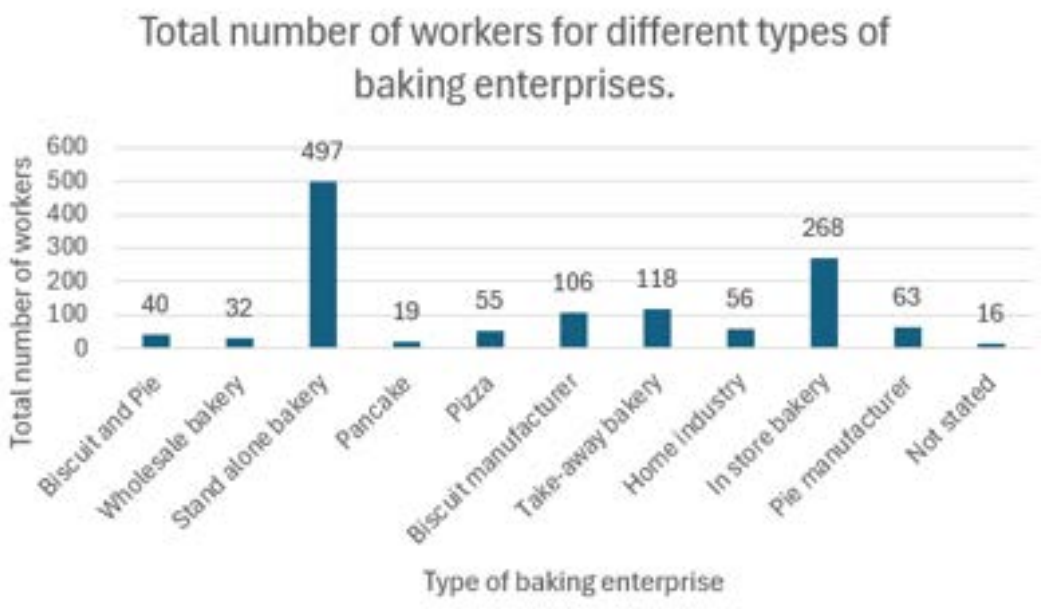

Figure 1: Total number of workers for different types of baking enterprises [4]

This shows a shift in focus from large wholesale bakeries to SME bakeries in South Africa. Furthermore, most entrepreneurs start their businesses as SMEs [5]. Thus, it is important to investigate SME bakeries, as this sector can create new opportunities for job creation and contribute to food security [4].

However, for SME bakeries to remain viable in the long term, these enterprises must not only contribute economically but should also address broader social and environmental responsibilities. This brings into focus the concept of organisational sustainability. Organisational sustainability can be understood as the organisation's contributions in supporting balanced sustainability in the economic, environmental, and social dimensions over various time periods, such as short-term and long-term periods [6]. This involves consistently embedding sustainability considerations into all the key areas of the organisation, including operations, strategic planning, internal systems, performance monitoring, etc. [6].

The concept of sustainability is commonly framed on three pillars, namely environmental, economic, and social [7]. The model typically implies a balance or trade-off between competing yet equally valued goals across these three categories [7]. The way an organisation manages these areas, as well as the pace and nature of the organisation's transformation efforts, plays a crucial role in shaping its sustainable performance [6]. Inputs, such as materials and resources that carry economic, environmental, and social implications, are converted into outputs, including products, services, and waste, all of which also hold value in those same dimensions [6]. The effectiveness of this conversion process is measured by how efficiently and responsibly the organisation uses its resources to achieve its objectives [6]. Furthermore, organisational sustainability is influenced by both tangible and intangible factors, such as infrastructure, workforce, cultural values, stakeholder relationships, and supply chain dynamics, each of which interacts to support or challenge the pursuit of long-term sustainability goals [6].

In the context of bakeries, core processes, such as mixing, baking, cooling and packaging, rely heavily on ovens, refrigeration units, and electric mixers, regardless of the variation in size and operation. These processes consume large amounts of energy, contributing to operational costs and environmental impact. Bakeries also generate various types of waste, including food waste from overproduction or unsold goods, as well as packaging materials. Food waste is seen

as a complex global problem that is increasingly drawing attention from both international and national scientific, professional, and policy-making communities [8]. Reducing food waste not only conserve valuable resources and lowers production costs, but it also serves as a meaningful way to promote responsible habits and attitudes toward waste reduction in future generations [8].

SME bakeries in South Africa face various challenges that restrict their ability to function effectively and efficiently. The 2002 study on the development of SME bakeries in South Africa used a survey to perform a SWOT analysis, determining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of this industry [4]. This study, presented in the current paper, focuses on the weaknesses and threats to identify the challenges SME bakeries face. The key weaknesses identified included high input costs, a lack of both technical baking skills and business and entrepreneurial skills, insufficient financial backup and support leading to cash flow problems, poor knowledge and understanding of market forces and product marketing, and a lack of confidence and business knowledge [4]. The key threats identified included competition that poses a significant risk to SME bakeries due to prevailing socio-economic circumstances, limited growth in the saturated South African baking industry, meaning that every new SME bakery could be taking an opportunity from another small, medium or large bakery, and the perceived high cost of ingredients compared to consumer price expectations [4].

Based on the challenges outlined above, it is evident that bakeries are struggling with both environmental and economic sustainability. Thus, the problem to be addressed is that SME bakeries struggle to achieve economic and environmental sustainability.

One potential solution lies in adopting circular economy (CE) principles. The circular economy is a regenerative economic system emphasising a fundamental paradigm shift to replace the traditional end-of-life concept with strategies focused on reducing, reusing and recycling materials throughout the supply chain [9]. The aim is to promote value maintenance and sustainable development, which creates environmental quality, economic development, and social equity to the benefit of the current and future generations [9].

Figure 2: Graphical representation of the circular economy (CE) definition [9] provides a graphical representation of this circular economy definition.

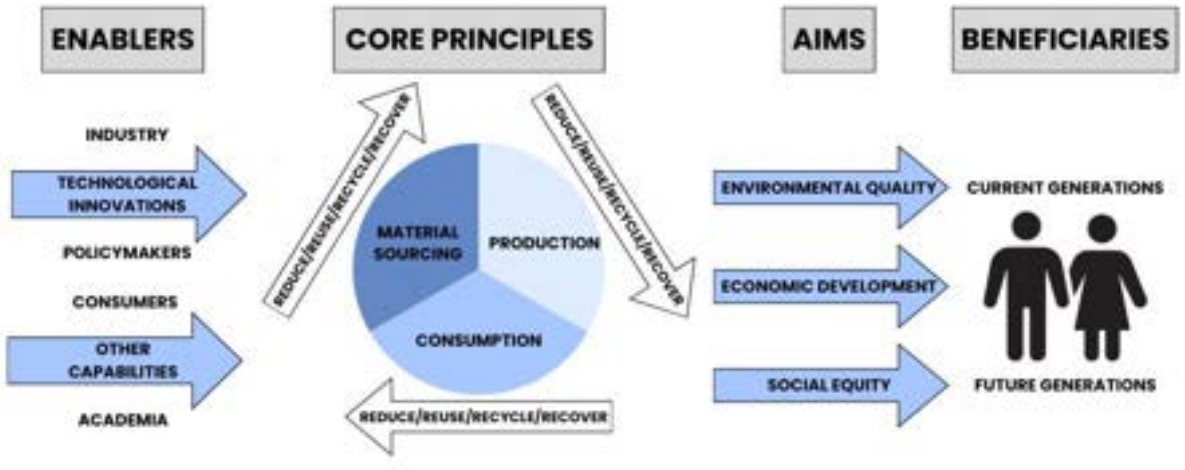

Figure 2: Graphical representation of the circular economy (CE) definition [9]

SME bakeries can greatly benefit from circular economy practices, which aim to reduce waste and pollution, keep materials in use for as long as possible, and restore natural systems. A potential solution to address the economic and environmental sustainability challenges of SME

bakeries lies in integrating a smallholding farm with an SME bakery. This could enable the development of a more sustainable bakery-food system by optimising resource use, shortening supply chains, reducing food loss and waste, and promoting sustainable practices across the production, processing, distribution, and consumption stages [10]. Globally, agricultural waste is generated daily from sources such as crop residues, agro-industries, livestock, and aquaculture [11]. Smallholding farms with livestock, crops, aquaculture, etc., also generate agricultural waste that is often underutilised. Bakery waste can be used in several valuable ways. Such as, turning it into bioethanol, a type of renewable energy, which can be used to power farm operations and reduce the use of fossil fuels [12]. Bakery by-products can also be used as animal feed, thereby lowering feed costs, maintaining animal health and performance, and reducing environmental harm ([13];[14]). In addition, the use of proper tracking systems helps ensure food safety and builds trust in circular food systems. Some studies have shown how food waste from onions and tomatoes can be added to bread without affecting its taste or quality. These ingredients improve the bread's health value and create new income opportunities for small producers ([15];[16]). These examples show that circular economy solutions are practical, low-cost, and suitable for smallholder farms. Since both bakeries and farms generate waste, this integration could be further strengthened through a circular economy whereby the bakery waste and the farm waste are repurposed for the farm and in return, the farm supplies the bakery with selected ingredients that are feasible to produce locally. Instead of relying on ingredients brought in from suppliers, baking and farming processes can be integrated to produce essential materials such as grains, dairy, eggs, and oilseeds. Waste from both farming and baking processes can then be reused within the system, helping to close the loop and reduce environmental impact as well as promote economic performance.

However, starting an SME bakery integrated with farming processes is complex. The system design must ensure that customer demands are met while effectively aligning farm outputs with bakery production, all within a framework of sustainability and profitability. This involves determining what can feasibly be produced on the farm, identifying which waste streams are suitable for reuse, and deciding how they can be transformed into valuable by-products to support a circular economy. It also requires evaluating and selecting the most beneficial uses for these by-products. Without practical decision support systems (DSS), SME bakeries often lack the knowledge and guidelines needed to implement such an integrated system successfully. However, before a DSS can be designed, a framework is required, indicating the different elements and the interrelationships between them.

Therefore, this study aims to design an SME bakeries circular economy framework (SME-CE framework) for integrating farming and baking processes.

Future research will then be able to use the CE framework to design a complete circular economy decision support system (CE-DSS) for integrating bakery and farming processes.

2 NARRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Circular economy

The circular economy is much broader than just the definition provided in Section 1 and will be further investigated in this section. Although the circular economy now encompasses more than the original 3Rs, it is still fundamentally governed by the three core principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle [17]. These 3Rs are also promoted by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, which developed the ReSOLVE framework to provide guidelines for implementing circular economy principles [18]. This framework was initially designed to target business strategies, but it consists of a versatile structure that applies to many sectors [18]. Although its application within agricultural systems remains relatively limited, it holds significant potential in the context of food system sustainability [18]. In agriculture, there is a growing emphasis

on transitioning from high-output, low-efficiency operations toward processes that prioritise nutrient recycling and closed-loop systems [18].

Error! Reference source not found. illustrates the principles of the ReSOLVE framework, a long with the objective of each of the principles [18]. These principles will serve as the design requirements to ensure that the circular economy concepts are applied to the design of the framework.

Table 1: The circular economy principles of the ReSOLVE framework [18]

ReSOLVE framework		
Symbol	**ReSOLVE principle**	**Objective**
R	Regenerate	Implement active recovery, the use of green technology, and the preservation of already-existing natural spaces to maintain and repair the health of natural ecosystems.
S	Share	Reduce the demand for individually owned products through product-sharing.
O	Optimise	Increase efficiency in production processes by cutting away unnecessary waste.
L	Loop	Valorise end-of-life waste products by reusing and upcycling.
V	Virtualise	Develop and adopt virtual technologies to replace wasteful processes, where possible.
E	Exchange	Shift towards purchasing more sustainable and longer-lasting products when replacing products at the end of their life.

2.2 Bakery product categories

Baked goods can be classified based on various factors, such as the ingredients used, texture, production methods, etc. In the book, Baking Problems Solved, the baked goods are grouped into categories, namely bread and other fermented products; cakes, sponges and muffins; biscuits, cookies, crackers and wafers; and pastries [19]. This classification helps to distinguish between the unique characteristics of each type of baked product. This classification will be used in the first phase of designing the framework.

2.3 WWF Terrestrial Ecoregions

The world can be categorised from different perspectives, such as land, aerial or aquatic. When focusing specifically on terrestrial landscapes, the most recent and widely accepted framework is the Terrestrial Ecoregions model developed by the WWF's Global 200 initiative. This model presents a globally consistent framework of 867 terrestrial ecoregions [20].

Although the intended purpose was to guide conservation efforts, these ecoregions were defined through the collaborative work of over 1000 experts, including biogeographers, taxonomists, conservation biologists, and ecologists worldwide, based on the foundation of classical biogeography [20].

Ecoregions are relatively large land areas characterised by a distinct assemblage of natural communities and species, with boundaries approximating the original extent before significant human-driven land-use change [20]. The WWF terrestrial ecoregions map provides a comprehensive global and regional coverage [20]. It builds on existing biogeographic knowledge and reflects the distribution of a range of diverse fauna and flora [20]. Ecoregions are classified within a system of biogeographic realms and biomes [20]. The combination of classifying ecoregions into 14 biomes and eight biogeographical realms allows for meaningful comparisons between regions and facilitates the identification of representative habitats and species groups [20].

Figure 3 illustrates the WWF terrestrial ecoregions map with the eight biogeographical realms as Oceania, Nearctic, Neotropic, Antarctic, Palearctic, Afrotropic, Indo-Malay, and Australasia

as well as the 14 biomes listed as tropical and subtropical moist broadleaf forests; tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf forests; tropical and suptropical coniferous forests; temperate broadleaf and mixed forests; temperate coniferous forest; boreal forests or taiga, tropical and subtropical grasslands; savannas and shrublands; temperate grasslands, savannas and shrublands; flooded grasslands and savannas; montane grasslands and shrublands; tundra; mediterranean forests, woodlands and scrubs; deserts and xeric shrublands; mangroves [20].

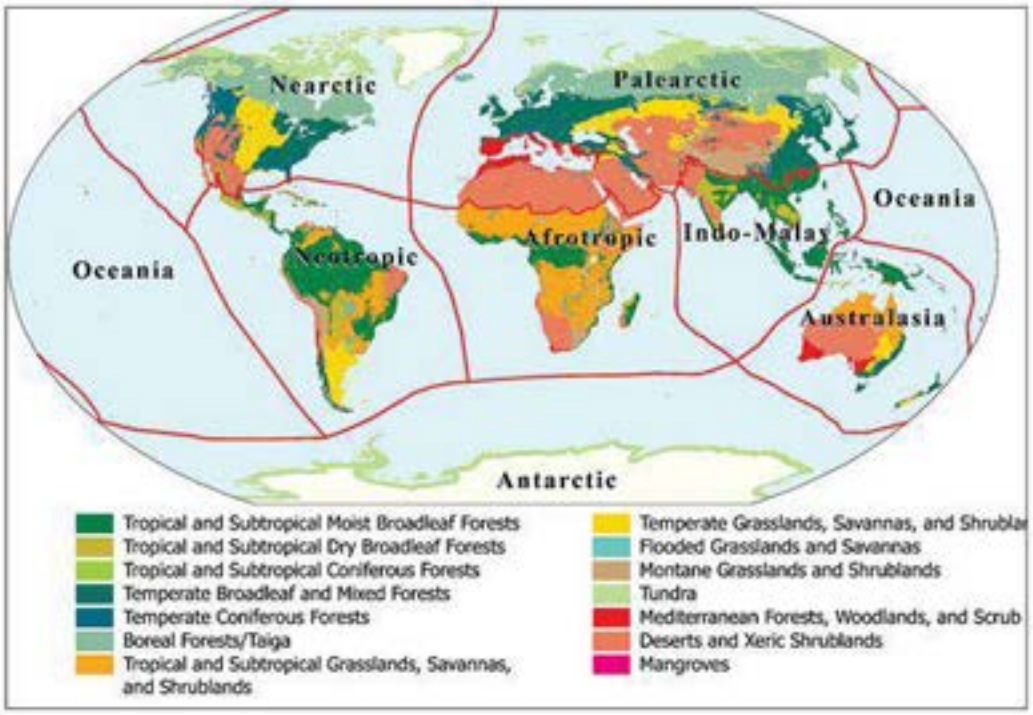

Figure 3: The WWF terrestrial ecoregions map [20]

These 14 biomes of the WWF terrestrial ecoregions will be used in the second phase of designing the CE framework.

3 METHOD

The method section of this study is divided into two subsections, namely the research paradigm, which guided the study, as well as the research method, which details the different phases the study followed.

3.1 Research paradigm

The research onion paradigm was adopted for this study and contextualises the research process through six layers, each representing a step that progresses from the outer layer inwards [21]. These layers guide researchers through a structured approach, from the initial philosophical stage to the final data collection techniques [21]. Figure 4 visually presents the research onion methodology by highlighting each of the six layers together with the possible choices for each layer.

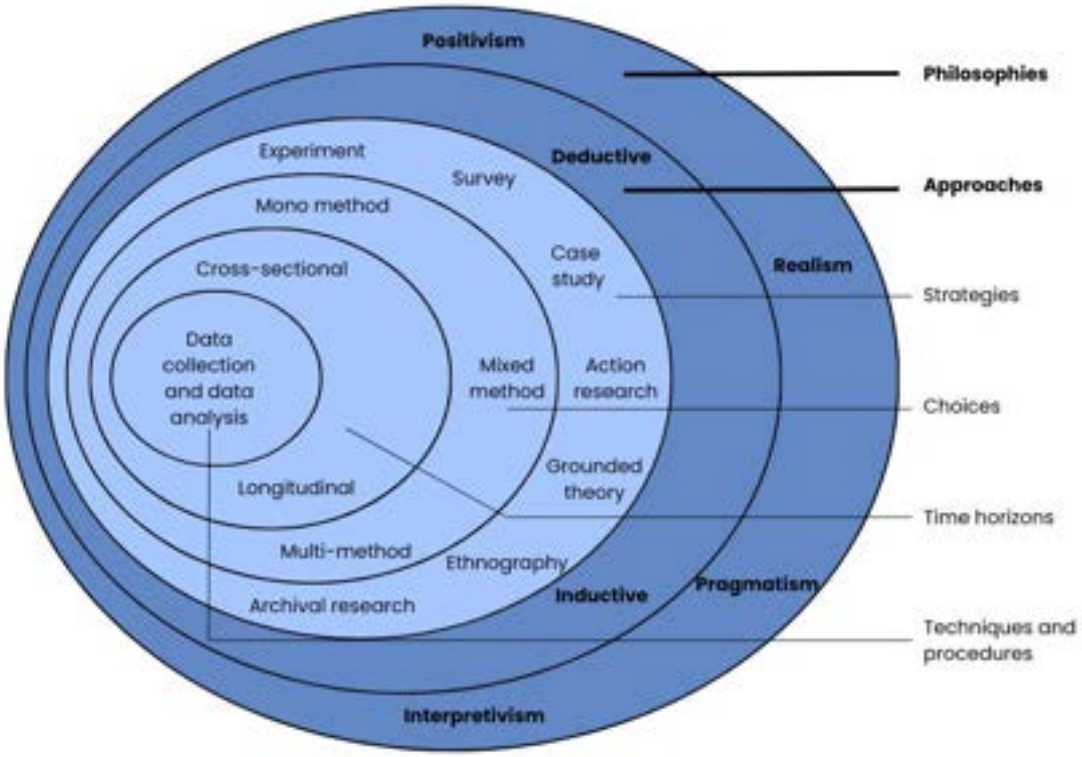

Figure 4: Illustration of the research onion methodology [22]

3.1.1 Research philosophy

This study adopted pragmatism as the research philosophy, as it aimed to design a practical CE framework for SME bakeries based on the insights gathered from literature. Pragmatism is guided by the principle of choosing methods and perspectives that best answer the research question, rather than being confined to a single philosophical stance [22].

The three elements that form the foundation of selecting a research philosophy include ontology, epistemology, and axiology, which influence how research is approached and conducted. Each of these is discussed in the context of pragmatism to justify the selection for this study. Ontology refers to the nature of reality from the researcher's perspective [22]. From a pragmatic perspective, reality is seen as external and multiple, with the view selected based on what best enables answering the research question [22]. Epistemology refers to what is seen as acceptable knowledge from the researcher's perspective [22]. Pragmatism accepts either or both observable phenomena and subjective meanings as sources of credible knowledge, dependent upon the research question [22]. It focuses on practical, applied research by integrating different perspectives to interpret the findings [22]. Axiology refers to the role of values in research from the researcher's perspective [22]. Under pragmatism, researchers values play a key role in interpreting results, where both objective and subjective viewpoints are considered valid [22].

The emphasis lies in the usefulness and applicability of the CE framework to SME bakeries, which aligns strongly with the pragmatic focus on real-world solutions. By adopting a pragmatic worldview, this study remains open to various forms of knowledge and prioritises practical outcomes. The goal is not only to understand current CE practices in theory, but to design a CE framework that can be implemented in real-world SME bakery operations, making pragmatism the most suitable philosophical approach for this study.

3.1.2 Research approach

An inductive research approach was applied to this study as it aimed to design a CE framework for SME bakeries by identifying patterns and insights from qualitative data, rather than testing an existing hypothesis [22].

An inductive research approach requires a close understanding of the research context, involves the collection of qualitative data, offers flexibility to adapt and refine the focus of the study as new insights are identified, and requires the researcher to play an active role in interpreting the data and shaping the outcome [22].

In this study, a close understanding of the challenges faced by SME bakeries and the application of the circular economy to SME bakeries was required to design the proposed CE framework successfully. Therefore, the inductive research approach aligns with the goal of this study to design a practical model based on the qualitative knowledge found in the literature.

3.1.3 Research strategy

Action research focuses on research in action to collaboratively address organisational challenges in partnership with those directly involved [22]. Thus, this study adopted an action research strategy, as it focused on research in action to address organisational challenges, specifically the economic and environmental sustainability challenges of SME bakeries, by providing a feasible solution. The process followed an iterative action research cycle by looping between reviewing literature to inform the design, progressing with the design until new information needs are identified, and then returning to the literature again to gather the required insights. This cycle was repeated as necessary. Since this study aimed to integrate available literature on circular economy applied to SME bakeries integrated with farming operations, this strategy offered flexibility and creativity to identify and establish the relationships and patterns in the literature with the design of the CE framework.

3.1.4 Methodological choice

A methodological choice was made to use a monomethod with the collection and analysis of qualitative data in this study. A mono method refers to using a single data collection technique and a corresponding analysis procedure [22]. This study only used qualitative data collected from literature, where qualitative refers to any data collection technique or data analysis procedure that generates non-numeric data [22].

3.1.5 Time horizon

The time horizon for this study was chosen as cross-sectional, as it was the study of a particular phenomenon, namely the circular economy in SME bakeries, at a particular time [22].

3.1.6 Data techniques and procedures

Data collection and analysis techniques included searching for relevant literature through the Scopus database and Google Scholar by means of an iterative narrative literature review to develop the design requirements and to inform the design phase of the CE framework.

3.2 Research phases

The research phases represent the three phases of the study. Table 2 explains the research phases by referring to the objective for each phase.

Table 2: Research phases

Research phases		
Phase	**Description**	**Objective**
1	Narrative literature review	• Identify the gap and support the problem. • Collect data on circular economy, biomes, bakery categories, etc. • Develop design requirements for the CE framework.
2	CE framework design	• Integrate the collected data. • Design a CE framework.
3	CE framework verification	• Ensure that the CE framework complies with the design requirements.

4 DESIGN

As stated previously, it is evident that bakeries place significant strain on both environmental and economic sustainability. However, starting an SME bakery integrated with farming processes to support economic and environmental sustainability is complex and without practical decision support systems, SME bakeries often lack the knowledge and guidelines needed to implement such an integrated system successfully. Thus, the CE framework was designed towards assisting bakery owners in successfully identifying and aligning potential farming and bakery processes.

4.1 Design requirements

The ReSOLVE principles were developed by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, as outlined in Table 1. These are adopted as the design requirements to guide the integration of CE principles into the framework. To ensure relevance and practicality, only those ReSOLVE principles that align with the specific phase of the CE framework will be applied during the design process.

4.2 Designing the framework

The CE framework was designed in phases to accommodate its subsystems. At this stage, it consists of three subsystems, each designed in a separate phase. For the purpose of this paper, only the first two phases are completed, while future research will address the remaining phase. Phase 1 focuses on the bakery component of the CE framework, while Phase 2 addresses the farm component. Phase 3, which will be developed in future work, aims to integrate the farm and bakery processes through a decision support system. This system will allow users to input available space and generate balanced configurations of farm and bakery operations. For example, it will provide guidance on the appropriate ratios between livestock (e.g., cows and chickens), crop production, and bakery capacity to ensure that the overall system design is feasible and aligned with spatial and operational constraints.

4.2.1 Phase 1

The first phase of designing the framework was classifying the products produced in the bakery. In Section 2.2, the different bakery product categories were listed.

4.2.2 Phase 2

The first part of the second phase of designing the framework was presenting global biomes to classify the region in which a bakery is located, considering factors such as climate and growing patterns.

The second part of phase 2 used this information in combination with the bakery product categories of the first phase. For each category, the most-used ingredients were determined through a sampling method involving five randomly selected recipes per category. An ingredient was considered frequently used if it occurred in at least three out of five recipes. For example, within the "breads" category, the sample recipes included white and brown bread (representing basic yeast-leavened bread), sourdough bread (representing artisan rustic

bread), brioche (representing enriched bread containing fat, sugar or eggs), and pita bread (representing flatbread). This approach ensured that a diverse range of sub-categories were captured when identifying the most-used ingredients within each primary category. Ingredients were then classified according to the biomes in which they can grow or thrive. The system distinguished ingredients and by-products that can feasibly be produced on a smallholding farm from those requiring external sourcing. The CE framework also provides the bakery owner with guidance on ingredient sources and potential by-products for each ingredient.

5 THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY FRAMEWORK FOR SME BAKERIES

The functionality of the CE framework will be explained separately for each phase.

5.1.1 Phase 1

Figure 5 illustrates phase 1 of the CE framework, which begins by guiding the bakery owner in classifying the products produced in their bakery into the five primary bakery product categories. A bakery owner can choose between breads, cakes, muffins, pastries, cookies, biscuits, and speciality items.

	Product					
1. Determine and classify the products to be produced in the bakery according to the bakery product categories to identify the most-used ingredients for the bakery.	**Bakery product categories**	**Breads**	**Cakes & Muffins**	**Pastries**	**Cookies & Biscuits**	**Speciality Items**
	Definition of each category	Leavened baked goods made primarily from flour, water, and yeast or sourdough. Usually savory and consumed as a staple food.	Sweet, tender, and moist baked goods made with flour, sugar, fat, and eggs, often leavened with baking powder or soda. Meant for individual or group servings and often decorated or flavored.	Baked goods made with a higher fat content dough, often flaky or tender, and may be filled or topped. This includes laminated doughs (like croissants) and shortcrust bases (used in tarts and pies).	Small, flat, often sweet baked goods made from dough or batter, portioned before baking. Usually crisp or chewy, with a long shelf life.	Dessert-style items that don't fit cleanly into cakes, cookies, or pastries. These often include no-bake items, layered desserts, or modern refrigerated treats.
	Examples	White bread, whole wheat bread, rolls, baguettes, sourdough, focaccia.	Chocolate cake, cupcakes, loaf cakes, muffins, red velvet cake.	Croissants, Danishes, éclairs, pies, quiches, tarts.	Chocolate chip cookies, shortbread, rusks, biscotti, ginger snaps.	Brownies, peppermint crisp tart, fridge tarts, mousse cups, marshmallows.

Figure 5: Phase 1 of the framework

5.1.2 Phase 2

The next step (Figure 6) is for the bakery owner to determine the region the bakery will operate in and classify the region according to a specific biome, using, for example, the ArcGIS WWF Terrestrial Ecoregion interactive map (available at: WWF Terrestrial Ecoregions Of The World (Biomes)). Users can search for their city or region and identify the biome classification by clicking on the map, which assigns the location to one of 14 global biomes.

	Biome number	Biomes	Colour
2. Determine the region the bakery falls in and classify the region according to a specific biome by using the ArcGIS WWF Terrestrial Ecoregoin Interactive Map to identify the ingredients grown in the specified region.	1	Tropical and subtropical moist broadleaf forests	
	2	Tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf forests	
	3	Tropical and suptropical coniferous forests	
	4	Temperate broadleaf and mixed forests	
	5	Temperate Coniferous Forest	
	6	Boreal forests / Taiga	
	7	Tropical and subtropical grasslands, savannas and shrublands	
	8	Temperate grasslands, savannas and shrublands	
	9	Flooded grasslands and savannas	
	10	Montane grasslands and shrublands	
	11	Tundra	
	12	Mediterranean Forests, woodlands and scrubs	
	13	Deserts and xeric shrublands	
	14	Mangroves	

Figure 6: Phase 2 Part 1 of the framework

Once the products produced in the bakery were categorised into the five primary bakery product categories and the region the bakery will operate in was classified according to a specific biome, the CE framework then guides the bakery owner to determine the most-used ingredients for each of the primary bakery product categories that can be produced in the specific biome (Figure 7). Furthermore, the CE framework then identifies potential sources and highlights potential by-products that may be incorporated into a CE strategy for each most-used ingredient. The bakery owners are advised to source the ingredients that cannot feasibly be produced on the farm (due to the biome that the farm is located in) from local suppliers. When looking at Figure 7. The input from the bakery owner will be the bakery product categories chosen in the first phase, as well as the biome determined in part 1 of the second phase. The output from the CE framework is the most-used ingredients that are marked with an X for each of the bakery product categories. The framework also provides the source of each of the most-used ingredients and the by-products produced for each of the most-used ingredients. The applicable biomes for each of the most-used ingredients are indicated by the coloured dots, which correspond to the colours used in Figure 6.

Part 3 of phase 2 of the CE framework will be addressed in future research, which will provide a comprehensive guide to the optimal uses of the possible by-products produced on the farm as well as the bakery, ensuring effective use within the SME bakery integrated with the farming operations.

Product								
Bakery product categories	**Breads**	**Cakes & Muffins**	**Pastries**	**Cookies & Biscuits**	**Speciality Items**			
Most-used ingredients per category	X	X	X	X		Cake wheat flour	Soft wheat	Bran Germ
	X		X			Bread flour	Hard wheat	Bran Germ
	X	X	X	X		Sugar	Sugar cane	Bagasse Molasses Filtercake
	X	X	X	X		Salt	Outsourced (does not make sense)	
	X		X			Water	Environment (borehole/rainwater harvesting)	
	X					Instant dry yeast	Outsourced (does not make sense)	
		X	X			Milk	Cow	Urine Manure
	X		X	X		Butter	Cow	Buttermilk Urine Manure
		X	X	X		Eggs	Chicken	Egg shells Urine Manure Feathers Waste feed bedding and material
		X		X		Baking powder	Outsourced (does not make sense)	
		X				Canola oil	Canola	Hulls Meal
		X				Sunflower oil	Sunflower	Hulls Meal
		X	X	X		Vanilla extracts	Outsourced (does not make sense)	
		X	X	X		Flavourings	Depends on the flavourings used.	
						Ingredients	**Received from**	**Applicable biomes**	**By-products**

Figure 7: Phase 2, Part 2 of the framework

6 VERIFICATION

The conceptual model will be verified by checking compliance with the circular economy principles of the ReSOLVE framework that served as the design requirements. Table 3 shows a verification checklist that justifies why the model is verified.

Table 3: Verification checklist

Verification checklist		
Symbol	**ReSOLVE principle**	**Justification**
R	Regenerate	• Part 3 of Phase 2 of the CE framework will provide a comprehensive guide to the optimal uses of the possible by-products produced on the farm and in the bakery. • Rainwater harvesting and boreholes are also advised to support sustainable water usage.
S	Share	• This CE framework helps with knowledge sharing in the community. • Excess ingredients produced will be shared with the community.
O	Optimise	• Phase 3 of the CE framework will be a tool designed to balance the bakery and farm processes to match demand and avoid overproduction.
L	Loop	• Bakery and farm by-products are worked back into the farm. • Farm products are used as the ingredients for the bakery.
V	Virtualise	• This CE framework is a virtual technology that is designed to support decision-making in integrating bakery and farming processes to support environmental and economic sustainability.
E	Exchange	• Some of the by-products can be used to generate renewable energy instead of fossil fuels. • The use of local suppliers is advised rather than long-haul distribution chains.

Thus, the CE framework is verified as complying with all the design requirements.

7 CONCLUSION

The circular economy framework (CE framework) guides the design of a circular economy decision support model.

Without practical decision support systems, SME bakeries often lack the knowledge and guidelines needed to successfully implement an integrated system by aligning farm and bakery processes to support economic and environmental sustainability. By combining circular economy principles with both farming and bakery operations, the CE framework for SME bakeries provides a strategic framework towards mitigating these challenges. This study starts to address the critical challenges faced by SME bakeries, particularly the lack of technical, entrepreneurial, and operational skills that hinder their ability to operate efficiently, as well as the environmental sustainability challenges.

The CE framework offers a practical guideline towards aligning bakery operations with on-site farming activities. The model serves as a foundation for designing future circular economy decision support systems for SME bakeries integrated with farming processes.

The CE framework not only provides support towards economic growth and food security, but also contributes towards the broader goal of developing sustainable manufacturing practices in the bakery sector.

The contribution of this study lies in establishing a foundation for aligning bakery operations with smallholder farming activities through a circular economy lens. While the CE framework is only the first step, it demonstrates how integrated bakery–farm systems can close resource loops, reduce external dependencies, and strengthen food system resilience. Importantly, it

highlights a pathway for SME bakeries to move beyond survival strategies towards long-term sustainability and competitiveness.

8 FUTURE RESEARCH

The CE framework presented here should be viewed as a stepping stone toward a CE decision support system for SME bakeries. Future research should expand the integration phase, test the framework in real-world contexts, and validate its performance through scenario modelling.

Future work should focus on applying the CE framework to design a circular economy decision support system for SME bakeries (SME-CE-DSS). This system should allow users to input available space and generate balanced configurations of farm and bakery operations. For example, it should provide guidance on the appropriate ratios between livestock (e.g., cows and chickens), crop production, and bakery capacity to ensure that the overall system design is feasible and aligned with spatial and operational constraints.

The decision support systems should also enable SME bakery owners to make informed decisions regarding ingredient sourcing and regional agricultural feasibility. This could reduce the dependency on external inputs, lowering costs and promoting environmental sustainability.

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SUBMERGED SCRAPER CONVEYOR COARSE ASH REMOVAL PLANT – A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

To explore the application of the Submerged Scraper Conveyor (SSC) so that the learnings from the publications and industry can be adopted in the local plant for an uptime enhancement using system dynamics tool in the future. Studies from 1989-2024 were identified and key themes considered included maintenance strategy adopted, type of technology that was applied, type of industry, technologies used to remove ash and its application trends. Energy sector dominated the studies. Different SSC technologies were identified and some of them were not available in the South African power plants. SSC technology application was mainly for boiler residues removal. Original Equipment Manufacturer - Magaldi© had damage tolerant SSC Superbelt© for the adverse coarse ash conditions. Maintenance strategy must incorporate operating speed, coal quality and risk-based inspection for a dynamic schedule. Research output in this sector was increasing due to the negative effect of SSC failures on the boiler uptime.

Keywords: Submerged Scraper Conveyor, Coarse Ash, Plant

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1 INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, most of the electricity is generated from the coal source and this was mainly driven by the abundance of this resource. Power generation in a coal-fired plant requires coal, oxygen and fire for combustion to take place in the boiler [1]. One of the by-products of this process is ash, the amount of ash produced hinges on the quality of coal, and this is largely driven by the calorific value (CV) of the coal [1]. Ash that is produced is classified into two categories, namely coarse ash (15%) and fly ash (85%). Coarse ash is collected at the bottom of the boiler through the Submerged Scraper Conveyor (SSC) while fly ash is collected through the Electrostatic precipitators (ESP) onto the hoppers. Below in figure 1 is high level illustration of the boiler plant process.

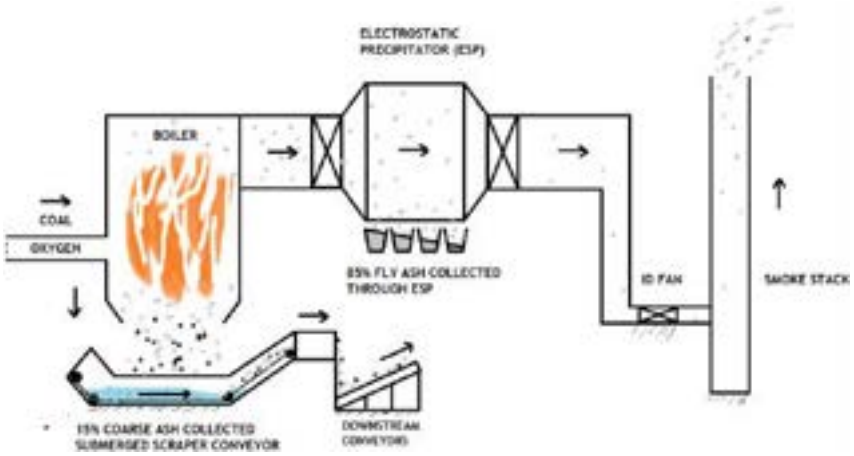


Figure 1: Coarse ash (SSC) and Fly ash (ESP) collection systems in a coal-fired power plant.

Eskom [2] produces 34 million tonnage of ash per annum, cement industry consumes about 3.4 million tonnage of fly ash per annum from the coal-fired power plants while coarse ash is disposed at the dumping sites or ash dams. Eskom [2] has recently constructed a 759 m heavy-duty road made of ash at Kusile Power station through its research, testing and development initiative to minimise CO_2 emissions by reducing reliance on conventional cement. Fly ash is collected through the electrostatic precipitators (electrical filters) or fabric filter plants whereas coarse ash is collected through the submerged scraper conveyor (SSC) and downstream conveyors. SSC is located at the bottom of the boiler as shown in figure 1 and it makes use of water to quench hot coarse ash followed by pulling out ash from the trough via the dewatering slope through the chain-fight bars conveyor system into the downstream conveyors.

During boiler operation, soot starts to settle on the boiler tubes and walls, this ultimately reduces the boiler heat transfer to the steam. To prevent decrease in the boiler efficiency, soot blowing of the boiler tubes and walls takes place after regular intervals in the boiler with the objective to retain the tubes clean so that maximum heat transfer to the steam pipeline takes place. It is normally after this process that molten slags/clinkers are dropped onto the SSC trough filled with water, at times chain-flight bars system get to be damaged during the impact thus leading to power generation interruption. Once the SSC has failed in this process, boiler continues to dump coarse ash on the damaged chain-flight bars system and if the ash is not removed fast enough, boiler operation must be reduced or shut down after maximum of about 8 hours. SSC is not allowed to be kept idling while coarse ash continues to be dumped onto its armoured conveyor as extended downtime led to overload of the chain system. Hydraulic drive system is designed to carry certain amount of coarse ash load otherwise unit must be shut down and ash on the conveyor removed manually using shovels and yellow plant.

Boiler downtime in a power plant has been reported to be the biggest contributor to the total plant downtime [3] and SSC plant had significant impact. SSC is composed of the key critical plant items such as chain-fight bars system, hydraulic drive system, hydraulic take-up, structural supports, water trough, two-way chute with grizzly screen, control and instrumentation equipment, etc. Figure 2 below shows some of these plant items that are attributable to the high boiler plant downtime and key components with their operating lifetimes.

Figure 2: Submerged Scraper Conveyor, Source: adapted from [4] and [5].

Table 1: SSC major components and its description.

SSC components	Approximate lifetime	Description
Chain, Chain links and chain guide idler wheels	6 years	Transfer of the rotational power from one sprocket to another
Sprockets and Mid-wear sprockets	3 years	To transmit power
Flight bars	12 years	To scrap coarse ash from the trough into the second conveyor
Non-drive bearing, drive-end bearing, housing and bearing supports	12 years	To provide smooth rotation of the idlers and provide protection from dust ingress
Wet idlers, dry idlers (return tray), dry idler bearing fixed/Plummer block and dry idler bearing	6 years	To guide and support the chain
Drive power pack, drive shaft, drive pump, drive hydraulic motor, hydraulic filters	2 years	To provide hydraulic power or oil flow to drive the take-up unit. Dust ingress reducing the life of plant items, etc.
Agitation pump and sump pump	3 years	To prevent ash settling at the bottom of SSC in the trough.
Control and Instrumentation	3 years	Speed control during the start, Maximum Control Rating (MCR) operation, soot blowing and long-standing time.
Two-way discharge chute with Grizzly louver system	3 years	Option to dump into the conveyor or into the skid during emergencies.
Structural supports	6 years	Alignment of gearboxes, pump, motors, etc.
Trough	3 years	To contain water, dust suppression and cool down the hot coarse ash from the boiler.

Wieczorek [6] has conducted a study on the chain and sprocket friction nodes. In this study, the identified nodes where high abrasive wear was taking place (see figure 3) was found on the actual SSC chain that was recently replaced at the power plant (see figure 4). Decreased wall thickness in this chain links represented its weakest spot hence preventive maintenance was applied to avert power generation disruption.

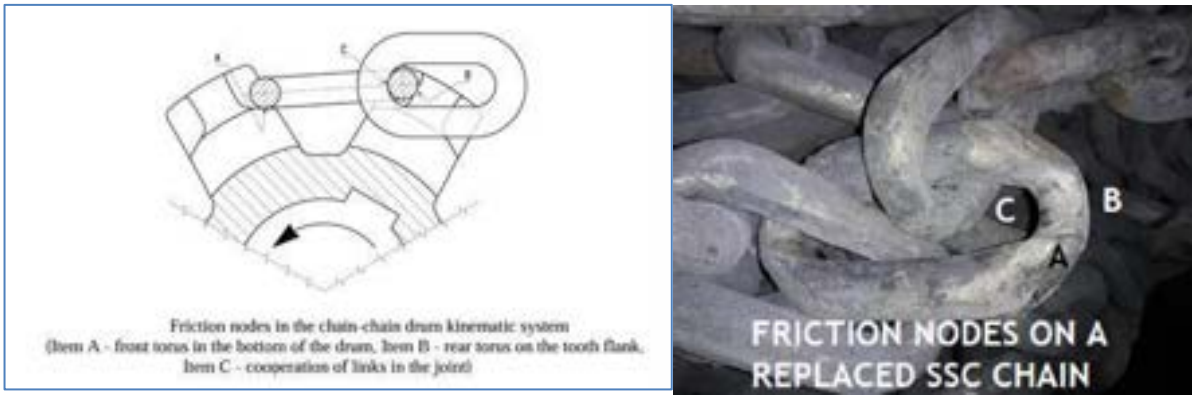


Figure 3: Abrasive wear of a chain in contact with sprocket (left), Source: Wieczorek [4] and typical abrasive wear profile in a coarse ash SSC chain (right).

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The researcher was tasked to improve the health of the dust and ash plant in a coal-fired power plant and a need was identified to learn from the work of the researchers who have travelled this route of solving submerged scraper conveyor (SSC) problems in the industry. One of the most important components needed to optimize dust and ash plant uptime and surpass customers' expectations was a healthy SSC plant amongst others. Therefore, the objective of the study was:

- To explore the application of the SSC studies in the industry so that the learnings from the publications can be adopted in the power plants for an enhanced uptime using system dynamics tool in the future.
- To present a summary of the systematic literature review findings for industry practitioners, researchers, and policymakers - offering insights into the potential benefits and challenges associated with the application of submerged scraper conveyor system.

The findings of this study will be integrated in the future study to build the dust and ash plant maintenance model (Electrostatics precipitator, mixed ash conveyors, fly ash bunkers, overland conveyors, stacker, spreader, etc.) using the system dynamics tool with the aim to identify the leverage points in the total system for an enhanced plant uptime.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the stated background, systematic research methodology has been adopted to learn from the SSC research work that had been conducted in the past. This study seeks to answer the following question:

- What are the characteristics in the published SSC plant studies that can be transferred to the South African power plants with the aim to enhance dust and ash removal system performance?

In addition to tackling this question, the study shall characterise the studies by paying attention to some of the themes in table 2.

Table 2: Relevant topics for the SSC system SLR study.

Topic of interest in the included SSC studies	Description
Industry Sector	This denotes the field in which SSC technology is applied.
Type of SSC technology	Technological enhancements that have been included in the original SSC technology with the aim to exceed customers' needs and stringent environmental laws.
Maintenance Strategy	SSC system's reliability depends on several variables. The change in these variables triggers maintenance manager to repair the plant at certain time and after it has processed certain amount of coarse ash in tons. Refer to table and figure 3 above.
Type of Residues	It refers to the type of residue that has been produced in a particular process (eg.: boiler combustion, etc.)
Type of Research Instruments	This refers to the type(s) of instruments that were applied in the SSC studies.
Type of publication	This is a measure of the included SSC studies' academic health status as they are required to be rigorous, reliable and peer reviewed.
Country and continent generated publications	This indicator offers the SSC researchers locations that are actively advancing the technology under review. This could help in cases where benchmarking must be undertaken in the future.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Through a comprehensive study of the 36 articles, systematic literature review approach was adopted in this analysis to find out the factors that contribute to the best performing submerged scraper conveyor plant. The study was based on the work conducted by various researchers dating from 1989 to 2024 and met the criteria. Google scholar databases and other sources were indexed on the 2nd of February 2025 to extract relevant scholarly journals, conference papers, reports, theses and books that were applicable for operation and maintenance of SSC plant. Data was coded and extracted from the included studies to synthesize and appraise the results, describe how the SSC was applied in practice, and highlight any gaps or discrepancies. An explicit and repeatable search approach was employed throughout the investigation process, and studies were either included or excluded, based on the criteria illustrated in figure 4 below. The advantages and disadvantages of this methodology were known; hence research controls were put in place to eliminate bias and replicability crisis.

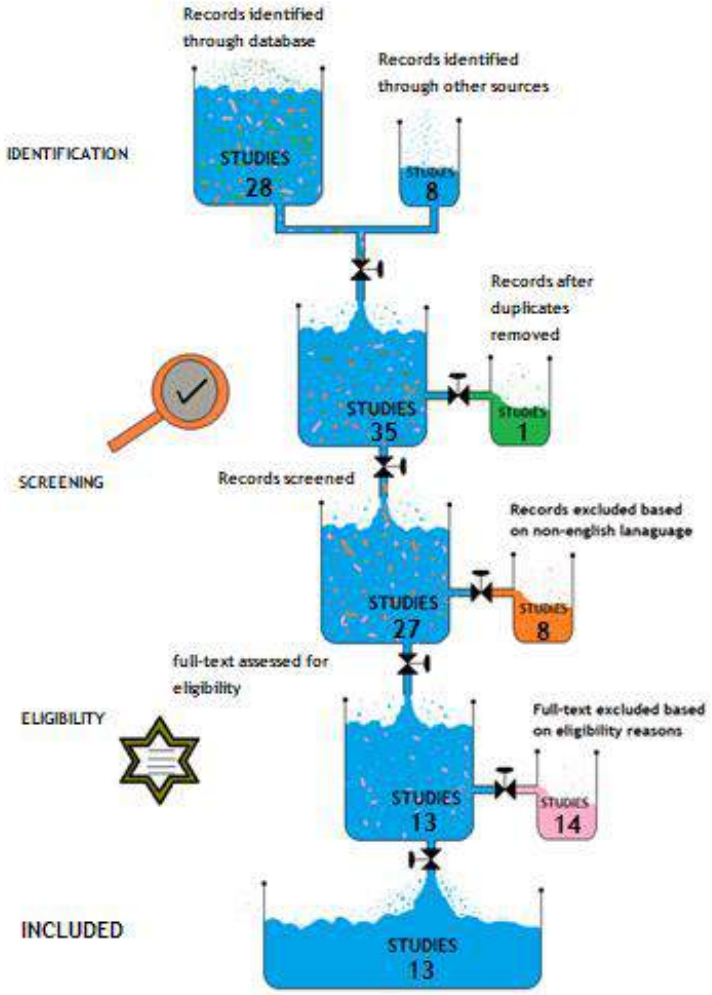


Figure 4: Systematic review flow diagram, Source: adapted from [7].

5 SEARCH STRATEGY AND SELECTION PROCEDURE

After going through a modified Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), 23 studies that didn't fit the inclusion criteria were eliminated from the study. All the articles that satisfied the requirements were examined and categorized using qualitative data analysis [7]. Thematic analysis was done according to Braun and Clarke [8] framework as shown figure 5, this involved "a method for recognizing, analysing, and presenting patterns (themes) within the data". Section 6 provides an overview of the thematic analysis' findings, while Appendix A contains the specific findings. The search term *Submerged Scraper Conveyor* was used to obtain relevant articles. The unstructured SSC studies considered prevented a meta-analysis execution as the studies' objectives were diverse, inconsistent and did not follow PRISMA guidelines.

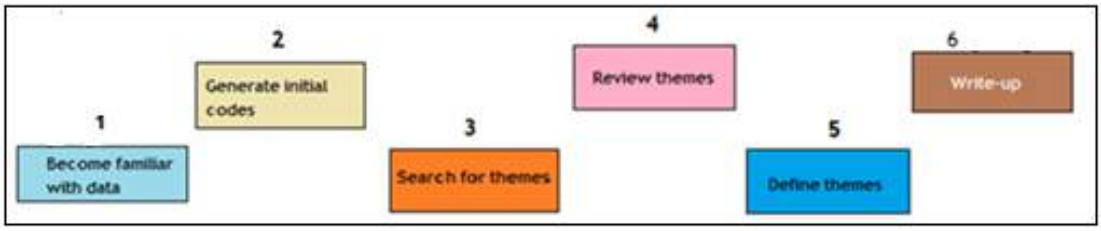


Figure 5: Framework for doing thematic analysis. Source: adapted from [8] and [9].

6 STUDY CHARACTERISTICS [25] TO [38]

To address the research question, an initial review of the 13 submerged scraper conveyor articles was conducted without applying thematic filters. Thereafter, top 6 themes that distinguished themselves as the best submerged scraper conveyor issues were characterised and analysed and the results are captured section 6.1 to 6.6 below.

6.1 Original Equipment Manufacturers and Type of technologies on SSC plant

The type of technology that was employed in the South African power plants' SSC was basic and it had reached maturity. It included some of the following: *chain and sprockets, hydraulic power package, slurry agitation system, control and instrumentation system, structural supports, etc.* The conveyed coarse ash no longer matched its original quality because tied coal mines were depleted, and new coal sources were introduced, and this was negatively affecting performance of this plant. The original equipment manufacturers (OEM) of these plant items included some of the following:

Table 2: Common OEMs of SSC components in the South African power plants.

Plant item	Original Equipment Manufacturers
Chain	RUD®, PEWAG®, HEKO®, GZ Material Handling® and EDD®
Chain Links	RUD®, PEWAG® and HEKO®
Idlers	RULA
Sprockets	RUD® and HEKO®
Flight bars	Steinmuller®, Actom® and Eskom manufactured
Hydraulic drive and pumps	Hytec/Rexroth® and Hydraulic Hagglund®
Bearings	FAG®, SKF® and TIMKEN®

The five (5) papers in this study were based on the works of OEMs across the globe and eight (8) papers were not linked to the OEMs as shown in figure 5. Power plant operators of the SSC had OEMs such as Babcock and Wilcox [4], RULA [10], Kawasaki (Babcock Borsig AG) [11], CISCA [12], HEKO [13], Martin [14] and Aumund [15]. Although the OEMs were prominent in the power generation industry, they were not represented in the academic publications sampled—a gap potentially attributable to the study's sample size and database selection.

Magaldi® emerged as the leading OEM for SSC turnkey solutions and their products were not seen during the fieldwork in the local power plants. Magaldi® had also invented Magaldi Superbelt® (see figure 6) that was described as "Damage tolerant by the OEM" as it could deal with the harsh environment that SSC was exposed to, these included clinkers or boiler parts that were falling onto the chain-flight bars thus leading to extended plant downtime. OEMs in table 2 above did not design the SSC as a package but specialized in the design and manufacturing of the individual components.

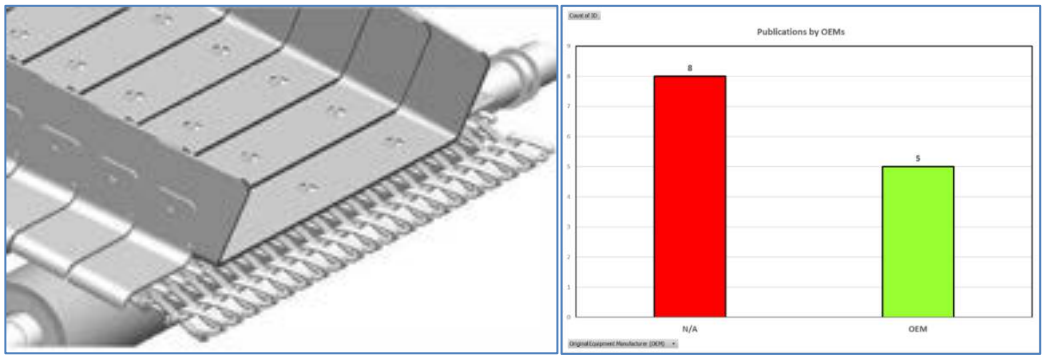


Figure 6: The Magaldi Superbelt®, Source: [16] (Left) AND Figure 7: Publications produced by the SSC OEMs in the studies (Right).

Additional technologies that were identified in the studies included: MAP Magaldi Ash combustor®: "*To comply with new requirements on co-firing of the boilers, Environmental concerns about water scarcity and reliability Wet Bottom Ash System (WBAS)*". and MAC Magaldi Ash Cooler®: "*To enhance the quality of ash through reduction of unburnt carbon content with MAR® system that ensures the "valorization" of the bottom ash. Elimination of water using to quench hot ash. Elimination of the ash ponds*". The remainder of the articles covered a common SSC, and they were based on known SSC technology that was found in the local power plants (see figure 7 and 8).

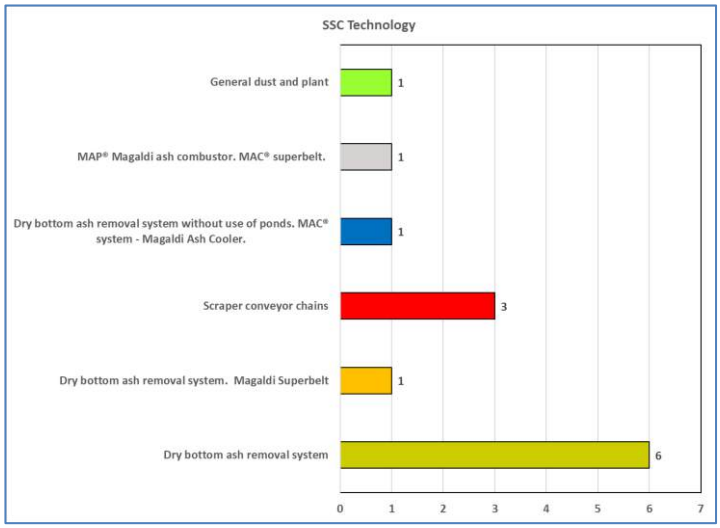


Figure 8: Technologies identified in the studies.

6.2 Maintenance strategy of SSC plant

Outage philosophy of the power plant was mainly driven by turbine plant running hours and this drove boiler plant outage philosophy. Arrival of the risk-based inspection (pressure equipment regulation) has extended boiler inspection from 36 months to once in 9 years and this has also disrupted submerged scraper conveyor maintenance strategy as some of the maintenance interventions were following the 36 monthly inspections. The second disruption to the SSC was reported by Mahlangu [17] as poor quality of coal that was unstable (figure 9). Ash with high abrasive index has negative effect on the lives of the plant items that its maintenance strategy was based on ideal coal quality. The third disruption in operation of the SSC was the high operating speed [17]. Mahlangu [17] argues that SSC plant items failed prematurely thus forcing major overhaul to be done before the authorized schedule (see figure 9).

Design	TM	IM	CV	GCV	Nett CV	Ash	Vol	Sulphur
	%	%	MJ/Kg	MJ/Kg	MJ/Kg	%	%	%
	(ar)	(ad)	(mf)	(ar)	(ar)	(mf)	(mf)	(mf)
Original	9.3	4.3	25.18	22.18	22.06	22.4	24.5	1.37
Current	8	4.1	20.98	19.3	18.46	31.48	19.29	1.45

Figure 9: Coal quality changes from the original to the current supply at Power Plant P, Source: [17].

Mahlangu [17] argues that changes in the quality of coal that is fed to the boiler is one of the maintenance schedule disruptors as shown in figure 9 and 10. One of the parameters which is not covered in this figure is called Abrasive Index (AI). Raask [18] and Meintjes [19] argue that the higher the value of this parameter the greater the wear rate of the chains, guides, sprockets, etc.

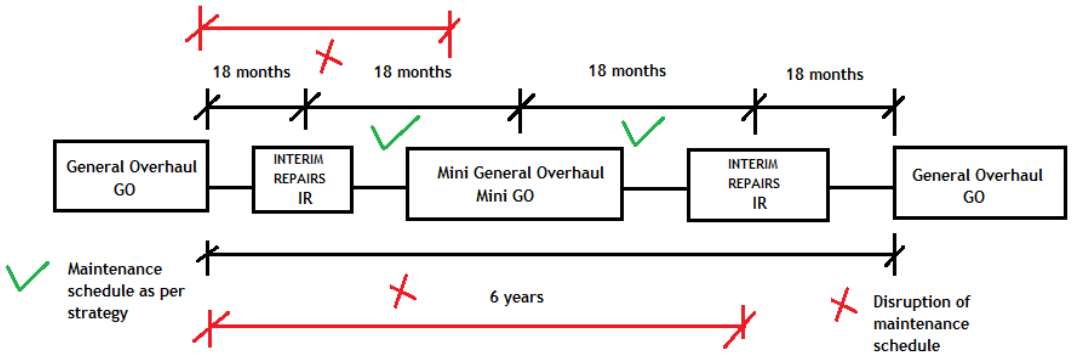


Figure 10: Boiler maintenance cycle – no outage disruption vs. disruption scenario.

Koloane, *et al*. (2025) [20] conducted an extensive systematic literature review on the railway defects and tools used to manage them. Railcar online track health monitoring tool was used to assess the irregularities in the railway tracks so that maintenance management can arrest rail/wheel defects timeously for enhanced rail system with increased uptime and this type of intervention was suitable to manage similar damage mechanisms that were at play in the SSC (see figure 11).

Figure 11: Submerged Scraper Conveyor with "online track health monitoring" tool, Source: Adapted from [21].

Twenty-three percentage of the studies that were considered in this focused on the maintenance strategy to improve SSC plant health (see figure 11-left) and higher proportion in the studies of the power plant operators did not publish their experience or sampling methodology was deficient.

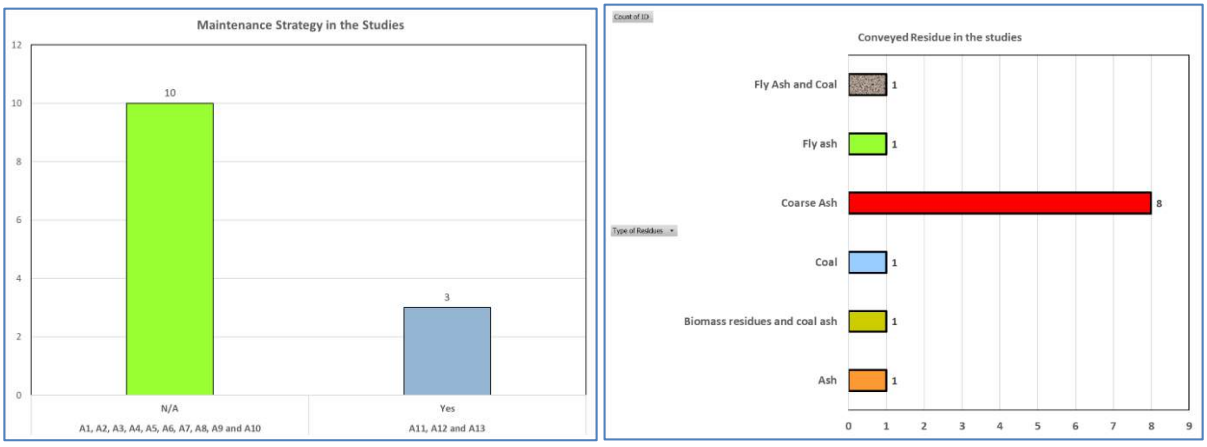
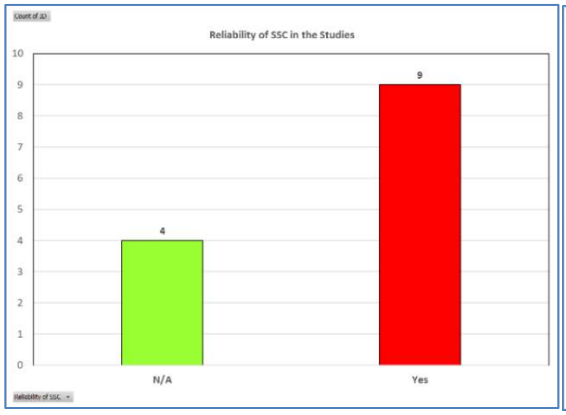


Figure 11: Included studies with maintenance strategy (Left) and Type of residue that was conveyed (right).

6.3 Reliability of SSC plant

According to Ryan [22], reliability is the "*probability of an SSC fulfilling its intended function during its life cycle*". Unreliability in this plant can be caused by several factors such as: *corrosion of the structural supports, fatigue of the load bearing members, ash ingress into the hydraulic system (grinding paste), clinkers or slag or boiler parts falling onto the chain-flight bars, master link failure, overloading of the chain due standing time (backlog), etc.* Sixty-nine percentage of the included studies were focused on the reliability of the SSC plant while eighty-five percentage of the studies were coal-fired power plant based (figure 12). This highlighted the importance of reliability of the SSC plant items. van Alphen [23] found that over a period of 5 years, 180 MWh load losses was attributed to slagging in the boiler, this took place when the slag (clinkers) was dislodged and fell onto the tubes thus causing dent and damages or when gas flue distribution is changed to such an extent that certain areas in a boiler experiences high localized erosion rate or reduction in heat transfer in steam pipelines due reduced thermal conductivity by the slag.



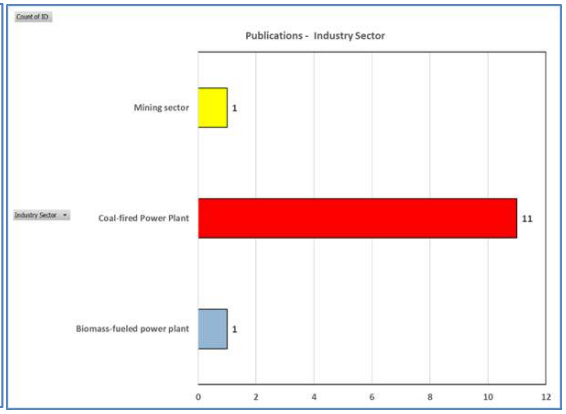


Figure 12: Studies that focused on the reliability of the SSC (Left) AND Figure 13: Industry sectors that were included in the studies (Right).

SSC downtime failure in the power generation industry sector is referred to as Unplanned Capability Loss Factor (UCLF), when SSC fails it directly translates to power generation *opportunity loss* that is called Mega-Watt Hour (MWh) load loss. This is a product of an energy sent out capacity of that unit and the amount of hours that SSC was on downtime.

$$\text{Total SSC MWh loadloss} = \sum_{i=1}^{n}(\text{MWh}_1 + \text{MWh}_2 + \cdots \text{MWh}_n) \quad \text{.....1}$$

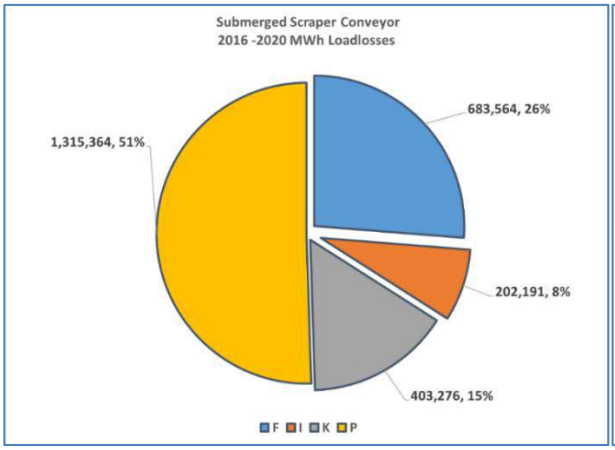
Typical example:

Power generating Unit has a maximum sent out capacity of 600 MW, during failure the loss could be ether full or partial. SSC fails due to an overloaded chain, and this leads to unit shutdown and SSC recovery time is 48 hours. Below is the MWh load loss calculation due to this incident.

$$\text{MWh}_1 = 600\ \text{MW} \times 48\ \text{hours}$$

$$= 28\,800\ \text{MWh}$$

Mahlangu [17] has reported that submerged scraper conveyors at the power plant P in 2016 (4%) and 2017 (17%) had contributed 4% and 17% of the UCLF respectively. The author found during the fieldwork, 2 604 394 MWh load losses were incurred due to the unreliability of SSC in power plants F, I, K and P between 2016-2020 (see figure 14).



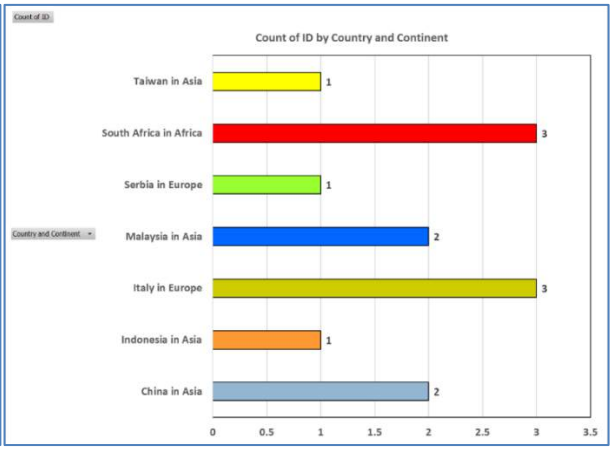


Figure 14: Submerged Scraper Conveyor MWh Load losses 2016-2020 (LEFT) AND Figure 15: Authorship by country and continent in the studies under review (RIGHT).

6.4 Authorship by country and continent in the SSC studies under review.

Most of the studies (46%) were based on the research work that was conducted by the Asian academics. This was followed by the European research studies (31%). South African researchers contributed 23% of the work based on the sample and this indicated a need for more local research that can be easily transferred to the industry (see figure 15).

6.5 Type of SSC publications in the included studies

Majority of the SSC research publications (39%) were based on the conference proceedings that was disseminated through peer-reviewed mechanism (see figure 16). Journal publications constituted 31% of the studies, this is often considered reliable and rigorous form of academic communication. Production from the academic institutions through theses provided 39%, these were mainly done to address practical problems that power plants experienced as academic literature was silent in their unique problems. One case study (7.8%) was included in the SSC studies, this was based on the Magaldi Ash Cooler technology to optimize the slag removal system and to minimize the impact of the air-cooled dry bottom ash removal system on the thermal efficiency of the Baoding Qingyuan Thermal Power Plant located in North China.

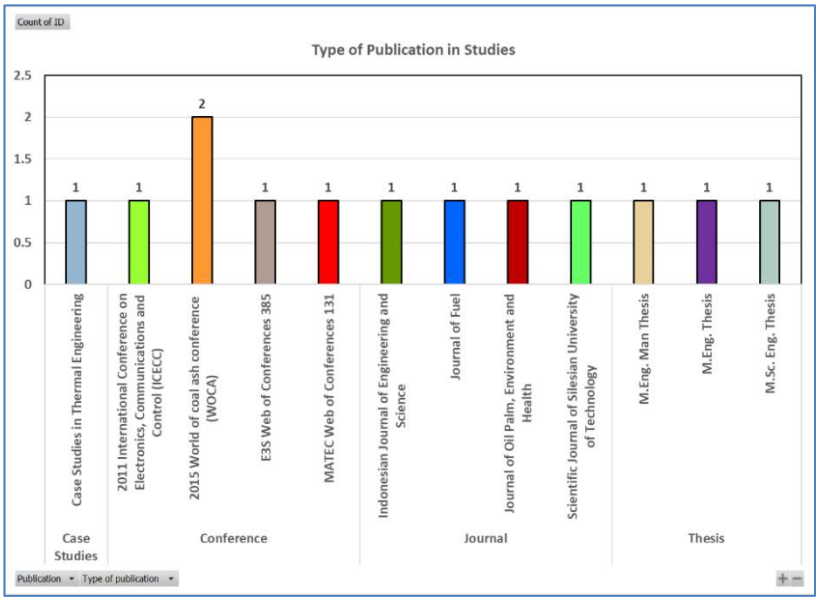


Figure 16: Number of publications in the SSC studies under review.

6.6 Publications trends of SSC

Submerged scraper conveyor publications (see figure 17) indicated a relatively upward trend (1989-2024) based on the 13 included studies and this highlight the importance of the SSC in the industry in general as more and OEMs and power plants owners realise the relationship between plant reliability and happy energy customers.

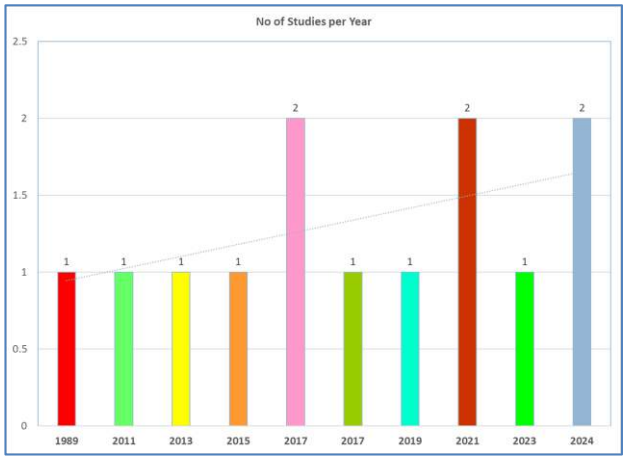


Figure 17: Publication trends in the studies under review.

7 LEARNINGS FROM THE INCLUDED SSC STUDIES

Table 3 below provides a summary of the systematic literature review and learnings that are important for the future dust and ash plant SD model and SSC industry practitioners.

Item	Study findings	Notes for SSC practitioners
Industry Sector	Power plant sector (85%) was the most dominant area where SSC technology was applied. Learnings from the other power plants with SSC could help to enhance the plant uptime and retain the environment green.	There was a need for the power plant operators, academics and designers to combine forces and intensify sharing of the operational experiences so that race could be won against low plant uptime and environmental pollution.
Type of SSC technology	SSC technology had progressed, and South African power plants were using old technology that was prone to failures and not damage tolerant. Magaldi® was identified as a proponent developer of technology that addresses production, reliability, environmental and thermal efficiency issues.	South African power plants to conduct benchmarking exercise with the Malgadi© and Asian counterparts to learn from their successes and implement learnings in their power plants.
Maintenance Strategy	The studies (77%) have put emphasis on the effective SSC maintenance strategy, operating speed of the SSC had negative effect on the items' life [17]. Maintenance schedule was disrupted by high abrasive index of the coal burnt in the boiler [18] and [19]. A need to integrate this factor on the maintenance strategy was identified. SSC plant maintenance schedule must be based on the abrasive index of coal burnt in the boiler versus the operational lifetimes of the SSC items listed in table 2 above. Introduction of the risk-based inspection has disrupted boiler maintenance schedule (SSC plant).	For an effective maintenance strategy and increased uptime of the SSC, maintenance planning must evolve with changing plant input dynamics (i.e. operating speed, abrasive index, risk-based inspection, etc.).

Item	Study findings	Notes for SSC practitioners
Type of Residues	Ash (92%) was the most common product. Industry in general made use of SSC to collect and transport coarse ash to the dumping site.	SSC can be applied to convey other products beside ash.
Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM)	The studies (39%) were based on OEM papers. Malgadi© was found to be the most active OEM on SSC plant and they offered state-of-the-art and turnkey solutions. Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) for South African power plant SSCs were dispersed, and none focused on resolving systemic issues to mitigate MWh load loss. The lack of academic publications on these influential OEMs in the sample might be explained by the study's limited databases or sample criteria.	Malgadi© was recommended for the turnkey solution with latest technology. There was a need for the various SSC OEMs to collaborate so that they can jointly develop a turnkey solution that will eliminate the load losses. Sample of the SSC studies to be increased and based on multiple databases in the future for a more representative sample of the research work that has been done in the power generation industry across the globe.
Reliability	Reliability of the SSC is vital as its failure has direct impact on power plant MWh produced. SSC plants in the included studies (100%) did not have redundancy system hence a need for highly a reliable plant. SSC chain, flights, guides, sprockets and structural supports failures were catastrophic hence a need to be subjected to an online monitoring as practiced in the rail industry [21] for an increased reliability.	To achieve zero MWh load losses, the SSC components must operate with 100% reliability.
Publications	South African researchers contributed just 23% of the analysed publications. Consequently, many domestic power generation issues have not undergone rigorous global peer scrutiny that could help enhance industry performance.	Increased scholarly publications by South African power professionals would enable knowledge-sharing with international experts (e.g., Malgadi's team) helping to optimize local plant performance.

8 LIMITATIONS

This research was based on the publications between 1989 and 2024. This study was designed with an English-centric perspective and indexed in Google's database as well as additional repositories. This provided the 36 studies, but it might have missed any other significant research that was published elsewhere or in languages other than English. Future research should therefore be aware of English-based and aim to incorporate studies from regions previously thought to be underrepresented as most of the included studies were Asian-based and this region's researchers were not English-centric. This strategy may involve seeking out SSC studies that apply different analytical methods and utilizing language translation for international research. The abstracts for some of the studies were not comprehensive to provide vital details of their studies hence a need was identified to study the entire article versus using abstracts as recommended by PRISMA. The replication difficulties may be attributable, at least in part, to methodological flaws arising from potential author bias in these studies [24].

9 CONCLUSION

Majority of the included studies (92%) were based on the power generation industry.

Original Equipment Manufacturers have advanced SSC technology to target production losses while improving reliability, environmental compliance, and thermal efficiency. The invention of Magaldi Superbelt® could have tremendous positive effect on the plant availability as falling objects will not damage the SSC and stop power generation.

Studies (77%) highlighted the importance of an effective SSC maintenance strategy. This requires a dynamic maintenance schedule that respond to the changes like operating speed, coal quality and risk-based inspection demands.

Coal procurement must stick to the quality that the boiler plant was designed for so that SSC maintenance strategy or planned maintenance schedule interruptions could be eliminated, and MWh load losses are kept at zero.

The studies (39%) were based on OEM papers. Malgadi© emerged as the most active OEM on SSC plant and they offered state-of-the-art and turnkey solutions. Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) for South African power plant SSCs were dispersed, and none focused on resolving systemic issues to mitigate MWh load loss. The lack of academic publications on the influential South African power plants OEMs in the sample might be explained by the study's limited databases or sample criteria.

SSC chain, flights, guides, sprockets and structural supports failures were catastrophic hence a need to be subjected to an online monitoring for reduced load losses.

South African researchers contributed just 23% of the analysed publications and this denied the international scientific community an opportunity to scrutinise local problems and provide solutions that could help enhance industry performance for happy energy customers. The included studies were disseminated through peer-reviewed mechanism hence considered reliable and rigorous. These indicated an upward trend in publications that proved a need to address the SSC plant problems.

10 COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they did not have competing interests.

11 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Ph.D. candidate would like to thank the University of South Africa (Unisa) for funding this research and Eskom for granting the candidate a permission to conduct research in their power plants.

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13 APPENDIX A – INCLUDED STUDIES

ID	Author(s)	Year	Country	Technology	Maintenance Strategy	Reliability of SSC	Original Equipment Manufacturer	Residues	Publication
A1	Li, Y., Fu, Z., Wang, W. and Liu, W.	2023	China in Asia	Dry bottom ash removal system	N/A	N/A	Magaldi	Coarse Ash	Case Studies in Thermal Engineering
A2	Ricci, D., Bassetti, F. and Savastano, S.	2021	Italy in Europe	Dry bottom ash removal system. Magaldi Superbelt	N/A	Highest Level	Magaldi	Ash	Journal of Fuel
A3	Lakshmanan, S., Yung, Y.L., Palanisamy, K. and Ling, H.K.	2021	Malaysia in Asia	Dry bottom ash removal system	N/A	N/A	N/A	Coarse ash	Journal of Oil Palm, Environment and Health
A4	Wieczorek, A.N., Wójcicki, M., Kalita, M., Kandzia, R.	2024	Serbia in Europe	Scraper conveyor chains	N/A	N/A	N/A	Coal	Scientific Journal of Silesian University of Technology
A5	Chuan, H., Yan-jun, W., Dan, W. and Shao-hua, L.	2011	China in Asia	Dry bottom ash removal system	N/A	N/A	N/A	Coarse Ash	2011 International Conference on Electronics, Communications and Control (ICECC)
A6	A.A., Gunawan, I., Yani, M.A. Ade Saputra, B. Oemar, Z.A. Leman., D. Adanta. and A. T. Prakoso.	2023	Indonesia in Asia	Dry bottom ash removal system	N/A	Yes	N/A	Coarse Ash	Indonesian Journal of Engineering and Science

ID	Author(s)	Year	Country	Technology	Maintenance Strategy	Reliability of SSC	Original Equipment Manufacturer	Residues	Publication
A7	F. B. Ismail, E. W. S. Kuan, M. S. Nasif.	2017	Malaysia in Asia	Dry bottom ash removal system	N/A	Yes	N/A	Coarse Ash	MATEC Web of Conferences 131
A8	A. Makhraja, T. Tsai, J. Lee, and W. Hsu,	2024	Taiwan in Asia	Dry bottom ash removal system	N/A	Yes	OEM	Coarse Ash	E3S Web of Conferences 385
A9	F. Basseti, D. Coppola and D. Ricci	2015	Italy in Europe	Dry bottom ash removal system without use of ponds. MAC® system - Magaldi Ash Cooler.	N/A	Yes	OEM	Coarse Ash	2015 World of coal ash conference (WOCA)
A10	F. Bassetti, D. Coppola, D. Ricci, O. Senneca, and A. Carrea,	2013	Italy in Europe	MAP® Magaldi ash combustor. MAC® Superbelt.	N/A	Yes	OEM	Residues of Co-fired of biomass, RDF (Refuse Derived Fuel) with Coal.	2015 World of coal ash conference (WOCA)
A11	L. Mahlangu	2017	South Africa in Africa	Submerged Scraper Conveyor	Yes	Yes	N/A	Coarse Ash	M.Eng. Man Thesis

EXPLORING THE TECHNIQUES USED FOR OUTLIER DETECTION TO ASSESS THEIR APPLICATION IN CUSTOMS TRADE MISINVOICING – A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the techniques used in detecting outliers, with specific application in trade misinvoicing. A Systematic Literature Review was conducted to identify relevant studies from 2010 to 2024. Themes considered included identifying techniques used to detect outliers in solving quality control problems, techniques used to identify and quantify customs trade misinvoicing, the industries in which these techniques are applied, and the advantages and limitations of the current techniques utilised. In the customs environment, two primary techniques were identified: the Partner Country Method and the Price Filter Method. Several quality control techniques were explored for their applicability in the customs trade context. The study highlighted similarities and differences between various techniques. Classification and learning-based methods, such as isolation forest and neural networks, were found to be effective in detecting outliers indicative of quality control issues. The identified potential techniques will be evaluated for their suitability and applied in future research.

Keywords: quality control, trade misinvoicing, outlier detection

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1 INTRODUCTION

According to Walsh [1] the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement established rules for the valuation of imported goods that must be applied by all member countries. Countries that are signatories to the WTO are required to adhere to this valuation agreement, but complying to the provisions of this agreement has often proved challenging as it includes the introduction of modern principles of tax and customs administration, such as self-assessment. Self-assessment implies that traders complete the customs declaration form which includes estimating the value and tariff classification of the goods, as well as calculating the duties and taxes owed. The customs administration only verifies the information based on risk assessment techniques which can include random sample selection. The process relies on traders' honesty and accuracy in making a proper declaration. However, this is not always the case.

Globally, customs authorities face challenges with the incorrect declaration of goods, known as *trade misinvoicing*, and South Africa is no exception to this issue. Muryawan [2] defines trade misinvoicing as the practice of knowingly submitting an invoice that misrepresents the value of goods being imported or exported. It can manifest itself as imports or exports under or over-valuation. The risks of trade misinvoicing are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Trade Misinvoicing risks, Source: Adapted from Muryawan [2].

Financial Inflows	**Import Under-Invoicing**	• To evade Customs duties or VAT taxes • To avoid regulatory requirements for imports over a certain value.
	Export Over-Invoicing	• To exploit subsidies for exports. • To exploit drawbacks (rebates) on exports.
Financial Outflows	**Import Over-Invoicing**	• To shift money abroad • To reduce income tax liability. • To avoid anti-dumping duties.
	Export Under-Invoicing	• To shift money abroad • Income tax evasion.

Theoretically, commodities that are misinvoiced will have a unit price that is different from the unit prices of other similar commodities. These can be referred to as outlier unit prices.

The reference pricing tool was introduced by the South African Revenue Services (SARS) since 2009 to detect undervaluation of customs values on imported goods [3]. This tool aims to detect goods declared at unit prices significantly lower than the norm. However, it has faced criticism for causing unnecessary delays and hindering trade, which conflicts with SARS' mandate of facilitating legitimate trade through customs and excise services.

This has necessitated the need to investigate other advanced techniques for detecting the misinvoicing of goods. This research study aims to review and document the available literature on various outlier detection techniques, identify the industries where they are most commonly applied, and determine the types of data required for their application. The findings from this systematic review will offer valuable insights into the techniques that can be explored to enhance the current methods used for estimating trade misinvoicing.

1.1 Applications of outlier detection

Historically, observations that deviated from a hypothesized distribution of a data set were often discarded as erroneous. However, this approach was problematic because not all of these observations were incorrect; some could indicate extreme or rare events [4]. This necessitated a need for more formal statistical techniques for identification of observations that might be excluded notwithstanding the fact they bear useful information. To this day, practitioners continue to formulate and define new techniques for detecting and handling outliers. However, no standard quantifiable outlier detection method is universally applicable

across all domains. Different techniques are suited to different environments, making outlier detection domain dependent [5]. In addition, the techniques used depend on the type of data under study, as the same method might not be applied to both numerical and categorical data types [6].

Outlier detection is applicable in various environments, including:

- **Manufacturing and Supply Chain**: *Investigating product deviations* [7].
- **Stock market**: *Analysis of daily stock market returns [8].*
- **Medicine**: *Identifying potential health problems* [9].
- **Sports**: *Detecting high testosterone levels in women* [10].
- **Finance / Fraud detection**: C*redit card fraud detection* [11].
- **Aviation**: *Detection of aircraft engine rotation defect* [12].

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This systematic review aimed to investigate the techniques employed in outlier detection and evaluate their applicability within the customs trade environment. Optimizing tax revenue collection hinges on maximizing tax compliance. To achieve customs tax compliance, a tax authority must ensure that all legitimately declared goods enter and leave the country through proper border control. However, it is crucial to balance border protection with the smooth movement of goods to prevent losses due to delays at ports of entry (POE). By employing advanced outlier detection techniques, a tax authority can minimize unnecessary delays at POE, that can disrupt traders' businesses, by targeting only dishonest traders while maintaining border protection and control. Thus, through modified Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) of the studies, the study's goal was to identify modern techniques and map their characteristics that contribute to the optimal tax collection. Based on the learnings gained from this study, techniques were evaluated for their applicability in the customs industry with the objective of selecting a tool that can be used by a tax authority to enhance the current methods.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Google scholar was indexed between 1 March and 8 June 2025 to extract relevant articles, conference papers, books and theses that were applicable to this topic. Google Scholar was chosen as an appropriate search engine as it collates results from across the internet and is free to use [13]. Some of the articles searched through Google Scholar were only fully accessible through Elsevier, Taylor and Francis, SAGE Journals, Sabinet, Research Gate, Springer Academic Journals, Wiley Online Library and Science Direct using the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal platform.

After that, information was coded, taken out of the manual, and studies were included to summarize and evaluate the findings. This analysis mapped around 221 articles covering the outlier detection techniques, customs trade misinvoicing detection and quality control techniques to identify outliers. Throughout the inquiry, a clear and consistent search strategy was used, and studies were either included or excluded in accordance with a specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Since this methodology's benefits and drawbacks were well understood, study controls were implemented to ensure that bias was eliminated. In addition to its strengths, there were several limitations to be mindful of. The researchers presented country-specific examples, which were open to their interpretation and might be a little subjective [14].

3.1 SEARCH STRATEGY AND SELECTION PROCEDURE

Article selection was based on the titles, abstracts and year of publication. The review considered eligible articles that contained the following criteria:

- The method of inclusion covered topics such as, outlier detection techniques, customs trade misinvoicing detection techniques and quality control techniques, to identify outliers.
- A purposive sampling technique was used for this study as follows:
    - The first 15 pages of search results containing outlier detection techniques were reviewed to ensure enough articles were analysed to determine the prevalence and industry application of outlier detection.
    - The first 5 pages of search results containing customs trade misinvoicing detection techniques were reviewed to enable a customs-specific analysis in case the initial search did not yield any relevant applications in the customs environment.
    - The first 20 articles containing quality control techniques were reviewed to determine the extent to which outlier detection techniques are used for quality control purposes.
- Additionally, the search was limited to the criteria above due to time constraints.
- Only articles that described the technique or method used were included in the selection criteria.

3.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Date of publication was restricted from January 2010 to 31 December 2024. A search string containing outlier detection techniques, customs trade misinvoicing detection techniques and quality control techniques to identify outliers was developed for no specific industry. No restrictions were placed on the language used in the article. The query search string used was:

"*outlier detection techniques*"; "*customs trade misinvoicing detection techniques*" *and*

"*quality control techniques to identify outliers*"

Research data was evaluated and reported using the adapted Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) systematic literature review criteria [15]. Figure 1 depicts the methodology that was employed. When the abstract lacked information that was necessary for this study, the authors went back and read the complete article to extract value from the chosen articles. It was rather challenging to choose the right search terms because there was a scarcity of systematic research in the studies on *outlier detection techniques, customs trade misinvoicing detection techniques, and quality control techniques*. A total of 221 articles were found for the systematic review; to choose the final articles to be included in this review, a practical screening was carried out using the criteria setting and the flow diagram in Figure 1. After eliminating articles with a cost attached to them, irrelevant articles, articles whose pages could not be found, had pending Research Gate requests or were in foreign languages, 178 articles were selected and analysed.

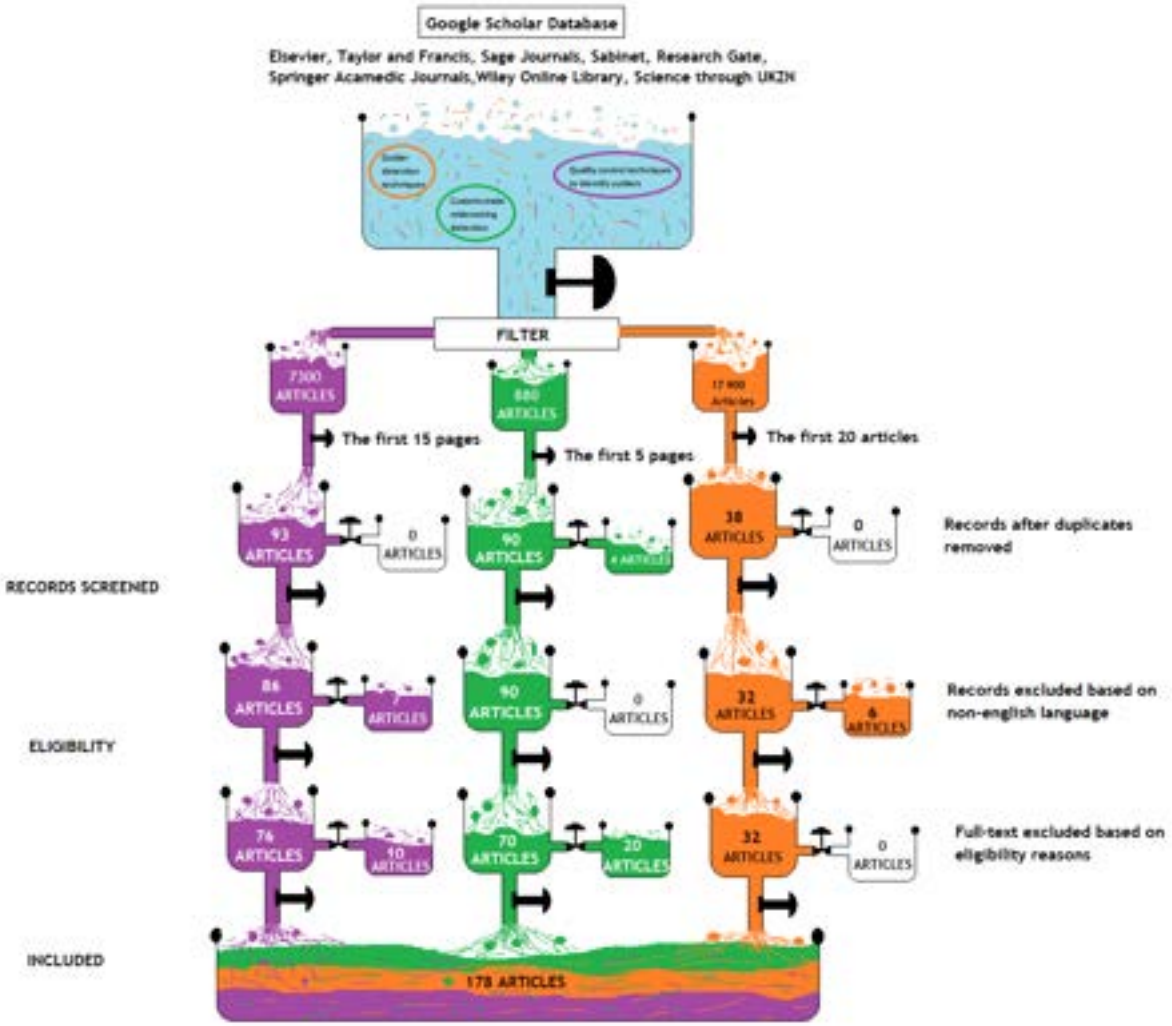

Figure 1: Flowchart illustrating the different stages of paper selection, Source: adapted from Page *et al.* [15]

4 STUDIES SELECTION

The study's articles went through a two-stage filtering process, which excluded 43 articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Qualitative data analysis was used to scrutinize and categorize all papers that met the criteria [16]. Braun and Clarke [28] define thematic analysis as "a method for recognizing, analysing, and presenting patterns (themes) within the data."

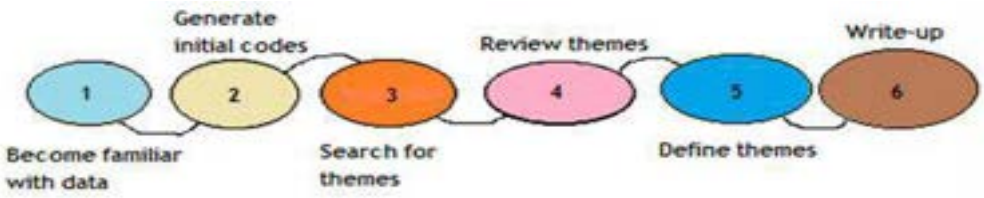

Figure 2: Framework for doing thematic analysis. Source: adapted from [15] and [17].

The results of the thematic analysis are outlined under section 5. The studies varied significantly and did not adhere to PRISMA guidelines, which made it impossible to conduct a meta-analysis as it is commonly practiced in the medicine field [18].

5 STUDY CHARACTERISTICS

5.1 Definition of variables

The variables analysed in this systematic review are:

- **Categories of Outlier Detection Techniques**: *Supervised, Unsupervised, Semi-supervised, Statistics-based, Distance-based, Density-based, Clustering-based, Classification-based, Ensemble*
- **Outlier Detection Techniques**:
  - **Supervised**:
    - **Classification-based methods**: *Decision trees, Support Vector Machines (SVM), Neural networks, Random forests, Logistic regression*
    - **Ensemble methods**: *Gradient boosting machines (GBM), AdaBoost*
    - **Deep Learning Classifiers**: *Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) for image anomalies, Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) for sequential data.*
  - **Unsupervised**
    - ***Distance-based methods*: *k-nearest neighbour(k-NN), Local Outlier Factor (LOF),* Angle-based OD algorithm (ABOD)
    - ***Density-based methods***: *Density-Based Spatial Clustering of Applications with Noise (DBSCAN), Isolation Forest*
    - ***Clustering-based methods***: *k-means, Hierarchical Clustering*
    - ***Statistical methods***: *Z-score/Modified Z-score, Gaussian Mixture Models (GMM), Minimum Covariance Determinant (MCD), Bayesian networks*
    - ***Subspace and Projection Methods***: *Candès' Robust Principal Component Analysis (RPCA), Kernel PCA*
  - **Semi-supervised**
    - *One class SVM (OCSVM), One-Class Neural Networks, Gaussian Mixture Models trained on normal data only, Isolation Forest trained mostly on normal data*
- **Data Type**: *Type of data used in each technique (categorical, numerical, images)*
- **Industry**: *The industry where the analysis was conducted.*
- **Relevance/Irrelevance**: *The relevance of the study was assessed with respect to whether any outlier detection techniques were used or discussed in the study. Articles where outlier detection techniques were not mentioned were excluded.*
- **Country**: *The country where the study was conducted or the country of origin of the author(s).*
- **Continent**: *The continent where the study was conducted or the continent of origin of the author(s).*
- **Publication date**: *The date when the article was published.*
- **Type of publication**: *Whether the publication is a journal article, conference paper, book, working paper, report, PhD dissertation, Master's thesis, discussion paper or policy paper.*

Information on the objective of the study, from whom the data was collected, study period and on whether the data used was primary, secondary, synthetic or simulated was also collected.

5.2 Industries where outlier detection techniques are applied

Table 2 illustrates the primary applications of outlier detection techniques. The highest percentage of articles (25%) discussed these techniques in a general context, without focusing on any specific industry. Given the specific search criteria of "customs trade misinvoicing detection techniques," a notable portion of the articles (23%) focused on customs trade. Articles related to the Telecommunication and Medicine industries were relatively higher, at 12% and 7%, respectively. Additionally, 4% focused on data streaming environments, 3% on Production and 2% each on Internet of Things (IoT), biology, data mining, finance, chemistry and geography. Articles focusing on agriculture, environmental engineering and traffic industries were two, respectively. Other industries that applied outlier detection techniques included construction, satellite, crime, education, oil fields, food, software measurement, universities, human mobility, video surveillance, entertainment, cybersecurity, machine learning, crowdsourcing, geology, surface measurements, geomechanics and health, with one article each.

The above-mentioned results emphasise the importance of multi-disciplinary research approach as outlier detection solutions could have been developed in the other fields.

Table 2: Industries where outlier detection techniques are applied.

Industry	N	(%)
General	45	25%
Customs Trade	41	23%
Telecommunication	21	12%
Medicine	12	7%
Data Stream	8	4%
Production	5	3%
Internet of Things	4	2%
Biology	4	2%
Data Mining	4	2%
Finance	4	2%
Chemistry	3	2%
Geography	3	2%
Agriculture	2	1%
Environmental Engineering	2	1%
Traffic	2	1%
Other	18	10%
Grand Total	**178**	**100%**

5.3 Ten (10) sampled industries with applied techniques

Table 3 present ten sampled industries from this study, highlighting the applied outlier detection techniques. Among the 41 eligible articles on customs trade, only three outlier detection techniques are covered, which is fewer compared to other industries. Additionally, statistics-based techniques, the Partner Country Method (PCM), and the Price Filter Method (PFM) are discussed in 33 of the 41 articles (80% of the customs trade articles). Machine learning algorithms are mentioned in only 3 of the 41(7%) customs trade articles. The remaining articles focus on techniques such as declared value versus assessed value, domestic factors to predict export and import misinvoicing, mismatching score index, DATE, gravity model of international trade, and any divergence between the value of imported shipments declared by firms and their value assessed by customs officials, which are mostly statistically

based techniques. There is limited application of other advanced techniques in the customs trade environment.

Table 3: Ten sampled industries with applied outlier detection techniques

Food	Medicine	Production	Cyber Security	Data Mining	Data Stream	Finance
1. Statistics	1. ABC based OD technique	1. Statistics	1. Statistics	1. Clustering	1. Clustering	1. Rule-based
2. Density	2. Linear Discriminant Analysis	2. High dimensional data approaches	2. Distance	2. Classification	2. Classification	2. Clustering
3. Distance	3. Statistics	3. OCSVM	3. Density	3. Statistics	3. Statistics	3. Classification
4. Clustering	4. Classification	5. DBOD	4. Clustering	4. Proximity	4. Distance	4. Model-based
5. Deviation	5. Clustering	6. LDBOD	5. Classification	5. Distance	5. Density	5. Statistics
6. Subspace	6. Density	7. ABOD	6. Information Theoretic	6. Density	6. Information Theoretic	6. Depth
	7. MCD	8. Isolation Forest		7. Grid-based	7. Extensive Markov model	7. Deviation
Oil Fields	8. Spectral Decomposition	9. Distance	**Education**		8. Deviation	8. Distance
1. DBSCAN	9. PLINK	10. Density	1. Statistics	**Customs Trade**	9. Sliding window	9. Nested loop
2. Isolation Forest	10. Nearest neighbour		2. Distance	1. DATE		10. Grid-based
3. OCSVM	11. Mixture models		3. Density	2. Machine Learning Algorithm		11. Density
4. LOF			4. Clustering	3. PCM and PFM		12. Unsupervised dimension reduction
5. ABOD			5. K-nearest			
			6. LOF			

NB: Distance-based OD (DBOD); Local density-based OD (LDBOD)

5.4 Data type applied in the outlier detection techniques

Table 4 lists the data types most frequently found in the literature reviewed. Numerical data (65%) is the most frequently found in literature, followed by studies where the techniques were not applied on any data at 31%. Few studies employed categorical data (2%), a combination of categorical and numerical data (1%) and only 1 study applied the techniques in images. Since customs trade data is inherently numerical, it facilitates the seamless application of many of these outlier detection techniques.

Table 4: Data Type

Data Type	N	(%)
Numerical	116	65%
No data	56	31%
Categorical	3	2%
Numerical and Categorical	2	1%
Images	1	1%
Grand Total	**178**	**100%**

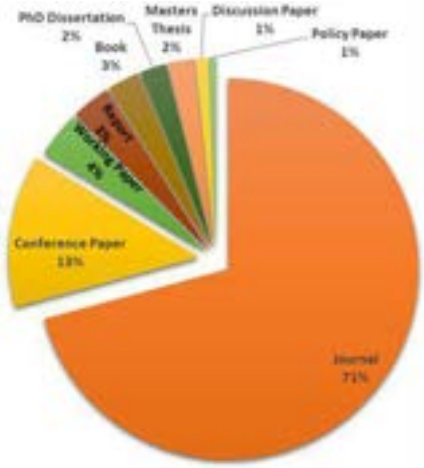

Figure 3: The proportion of papers reviewed per type.

5.5 Application of outlier detection techniques by publication type

As illustrated in Figure 3, most of the reviewed articles were from journals (71%), followed by conference papers (13%), working papers (4%), reports and books (3% each), PhD dissertations and Master's theses (2% each) and discussion papers and policy papers (1% each).

The articles considered in this study have a high percentage of journal publications (71%) that are mostly published in peer-reviewed journals. Publications in journals are frequently seen as trustworthy and exacting medium for scholarly discourse. The high number of conference papers (13%) suggests that research on outlier identification strategies is frequently shared and presented at conferences. The importance of graduate-level academic research is highlighted by the inclusion of theses (4%). In conclusion, journal papers predominate in the distribution of research on outlier identification strategies, highlighting the need of thorough peer review.

5.6 Authorship of outlier detection techniques: Country and Continent

The country with the highest percentage of authors was India (22%), followed by the USA (15%) and China (4%), as shown by Table 5. Figure 4 shows that the highest percentage of articles were from Asia (44%), Europe (22%), North America (19%) and Africa (9%).

Table 5: Authorship Country

Author Country	N	(%)
India	39	22%
USA	27	15%
China	8	4%
Netherlands	6	3%
Canada	6	3%
France	6	3%
United Kingdom	6	3%
Thailand	4	2%
Tunisia	4	2%
Malaysia	4	2%
Other	68	38%
Grand Total	**178**	**100%**

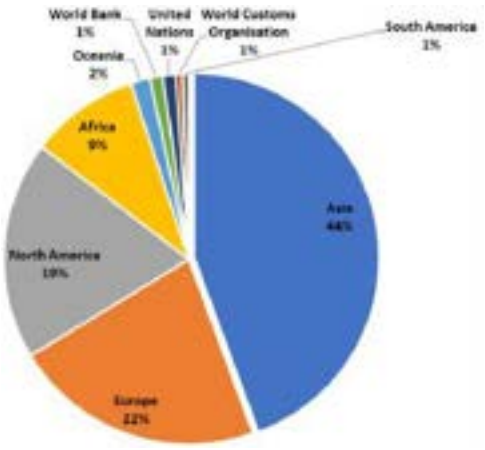

Figure 4: Continent of the authorship

NB: Other include Australia, Singapore, Pakistan, Iran, Italy, Iraq, Korea (3 respectively), World Bank, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Germany, Turkey, South Africa, Portugal, United Nations, Spain, Vietnam, Switzerland, Ghana, Morocco (2 respectively), Saudi Arabia, Nigeria , Jordan , Slovakia ,Hungary, Finland, Austria, Denmark, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, Burundi, Sweden, Russia, Malta, World Customs Organisation, Belgium, Algeria, Mexico, Poland (1 respectively).

5.7 OUTLIER DETECTION TECHNIQUES BASED ON METHODOLOGICAL REVIEW

Outlier detection techniques with referred classifications are graphically displayed in Figure 5 below. From all the listed literature, none discuss all the outlier detection techniques comprehensively. Some focus on one technique [19] while others focus on several techniques [20], [21]. There is a need for global classification of all the outlier detection techniques.

5.7.1 Statistical based outlier detection techniques

Statistical based techniques can be broadly categorised into parametric, non-parametric and hybrid approaches. Common parametric techniques include Gaussian-based techniques like the Z-score and Grubbs' test [23],[24] and non-parametric techniques include techniques such as Kernel density estimation models, box plots, interquartile ranges and histograms [23],[25],[26]. Hybrid statistical approaches are less frequently used but combine parametric and nonparametric methods [23].

5.7.2 Nearest neighbour outlier detection techniques

Nearest neighbour outlier techniques are divided into distance-based, density-based, depth-based and deviation-based methods. Distance-based techniques, such as the Mahalanobis distance, grid-based approximate average outlier detection (GAAOD), subspace outlier degree (SOD), ABOD, k-th nearest neighbour and resolution-based outlier factor are discussed by García *et al*. [27], Samara *et al*. [22], Singh and Upadhyaya [28] and Rana *et al*. [29]. Density based techniques include the LOF [27], [24], local outlier correlation integral (LOCI), relative density factor (RDF), influenced outlierness (INFLO), connectivity-based outlier factor (COF) and local outlier probabilities (LoOP) [30],[25], among others. Depth based techniques, such as Isometric Depth (ISODEPTH) based outlier detection and Frequency Domain Clustering (FDC) (fast algorithm) and deviation-based techniques are discussed by Kriegel *et al*. [31], Zhang, *et al*. [19] and Singh and Upadhyaya [28].

5.7.3 Clustering based outlier detection techniques

These techniques can be categorised into distance-based (partitioning clustering methods), hierarchical, density-based, grid-based and clustering methods for high dimensional data. Distance based techniques include k-means, CLARANS, CLARA and PAM. Hierarchical clustering methods include MST, CURE and CHAMELEON. Density based techniques feature density-based spatial clustering of applications with noise (DBSCAN), DENCLUE, clustering-based LOF and Euclidean distance. Grid-based techniques include STING, Wavecluster and Dcluster. Techniques for high dimensional data include CLIQUE and HPStream [25],[26],[21].

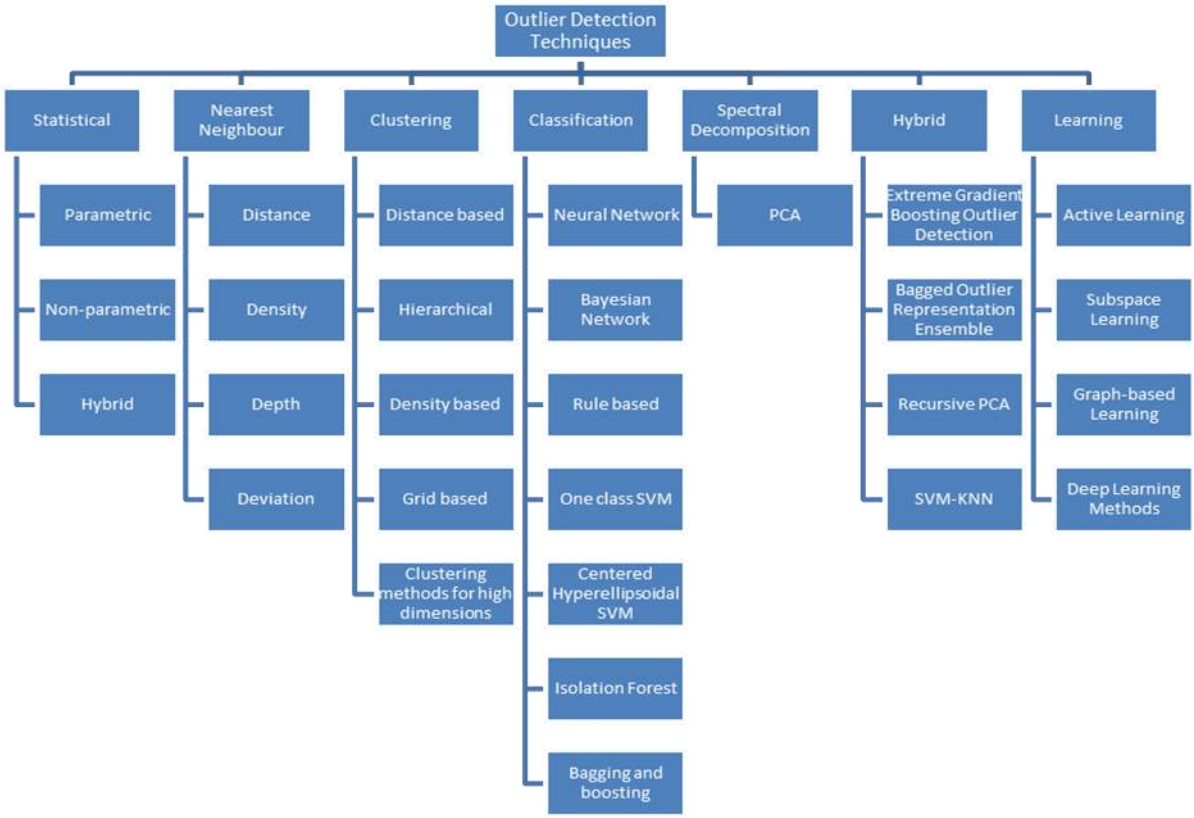

Figure 5: Taxonomy of outlier detection techniques, Source: adapted from Samara *et al*. [22]

5.7.4 Classification based outlier detection techniques

Neural networks, Bayesian network, rule-based techniques, SVM, isolation forest and bagging and boosting are some of the techniques discussed [23],[32],[33],[34]. Adaptations of the SVM including centered hyperellipsoidal SVM (CESVM), distributed hyperellipsoidal one class quarter-sphere SVM (QS-SVM), hyperellipsoidal neighbourhood outlier factor (ENOF) and spatial-temporal attribute one class quarter-sphere SVM (STA-QS-SVM) are discussed by Samara *et al*. [22] in the context of wireless networks.

5.7.5 Spectral decomposition techniques

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) as a technique for outlier detection is thoroughly discussed by García *et al*. [27], Zhang *et al*. [19], Samara *et al*. [22] and Singh and Upadhyaya [28]. Additionally, Pawar *et al*. [11] apply PCA in credit card fraud detection.

5.7.6 Hybrid techniques

These techniques are derived from two or more models. They include Extreme Gradient Boosting Outlier Detection (XGBOD), Bagged Outlier Representation Ensemble (BORE), Recursive PCA and SVM-KNN are discussed [23], [25],[8].

5.7.7 Learning based techniques

These techniques encompass active learning, subspace learning, graph-based learning, and deep learning methods. They are discussed in detail by Samara *et al*. [22], Wang *et al*. [35] and Pawar *et al*. [11], among others.

6 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DIFFERENT OUTLIER DETECTION METHODS

The advantages and disadvantages of the different outlier detection techniques are summarised in Table 5A-5E, as well as the appropriateness of the techniques in different environments.

Table 5A: Advantages and disadvantages of outlier detection techniques

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages	Suitable Industries	Unsuitable Industries
Statistical based	They are mathematically sound and can correctly identify outliers if a correct probability distribution is determined and used [22], [27], [35], [19].	Prior knowledge of data distribution is not always available or not easy to obtain, so parametric models are not helpful [22],[35].	Telecommunications (Wireless Sensor Networks [39],[40],[41])	Sensor data applications (parametric techniques) [22], [19].
	Non-parametric techniques are more flexible and autonomous as they do not make any assumptions about the data distribution [27]. They use temporal correlation to detect outliers [22].	Available data may be insufficient to estimate the true distribution of the data especially in high dimension [29],[35].	Medicine (health monitoring [42], [28], [29]); Text data [28],[29]	Multivariate data (non-parametric techniques) [22], [27],[35].
	• After construction, they do not need the actual data on which the model is based [27]. • Outputs can be used directly for forecasting [29]. Low time and computational complexity [29], [43].	Non-parametric models are unsuitable for real-time applications [22], [27]. It is no easy to determine the optimal size of the bins to construct the histogram [19], [43].	Finance [8]; Data Stream [44], [43]; IoT [38]	N/A
	• Histogram-based techniques are efficient for univariate data and easy to implement [27], [27]. • Boxplots have no strict assumptions regarding the data generating processes and the underlying probability distributions of the data making it more flexible to be used and implemented in practical settings [21].	• Histogram-based techniques cannot capture the interactions between different attributes of multivariate data [27], [35],[19]. • Non-linear regression-based techniques returns binary results and not the outlier score [29].	Production [29]; Image Processing [28],[29], [45]; Customs Trade [20]	N/A
	Non-linear regression-based techniques have the real-time ability to detect outliers in data streams [29].	Non-linear regression-based techniques are computationally time consuming [29].	N/A	N/A
	The ordinal data can be changed to an appropriate value for processing which results in improved processing time for complex data [35].	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Easier to implement even though limited to specific problems [35], [43].	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 5B: Summary of advantages and disadvantages of outlier detection techniques

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages	Suitable Industries	Unsuitable Industries
Clustering based	• Do not require prior knowledge of data distribution [22], [27], [35], [19]. • The testing phase is quick because the number of clusters is a small constant that needs to be compared with each test data value [22], [27].	• Requires thresholds for minimum size and distance [29] • The effectiveness of these techniques depends on their ability to capture the cluster structure of normal instances [27].	Data Mining [22],[26], [19]; Telecommunications (Wireless Sensor Networks) [41],[46],[47]	Multivariate data (High computational costs) [22], [27], [19].
	Suitable for incremental data, as new data can be added to clusters and tested for outliers after learning the clusters [22], [27], [35], [19],[30].	• Not effective in adapting to ongoing changes in data streams over time [27]. • Low performance in small dataset [29]. • Outliers may affect the initial formation of clusters [19].	Computer Network Intrusion, Finance, Human Behaviour [48]; Finance [48], [43], [11]; Image Processing [11],[43], [28]	Resource-constrained sensors due to the computational cost [22].
	• Can be used on several data types [29]. • Unsupervised [22].	• Suffer from the choice of an appropriate parameter of cluster width [19], [43]. • Sensitive to the number of clusters chosen [29].	IoT [49], [50], [51]; Medicine [29],[48], [52]; Data Mining [53]	Cannot handle changes in the IoT data over time [22].
	Low computational complexity [29], [43].	Some clustering algorithms force assignment to groups, which can lead to outliers being assigned to a large cluster and being considered as normal instances [27].	Data Streams [35]; Text data [28],[29]; Spacecraft [29]	N/A

Table 5C: Advantages and disadvantages of outlier detection techniques

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages	Suitable Industries	Unsuitable Industries
Nearest Neighbour based	• Straightforward and can be applied to different data types [22], [27], [29], [35],[30]. • Do not need supervised learning [22]. • Effective in detecting outliers in data with nonlinear patterns [27].	This technique has the problem of choosing suitable input parameters. Therefore, incorrect choice of the threshold will give a high false-negative rate of outlier detection [22], [29], [19].	Data Mining [22],[19]; Data Stream [54], [55], [56],[30]; Medicine [28],[43]; Text data [43] Image Processing [28], [45]	• INFLO and MDEF cannot resourcefully handle data streams [35]. • Lack of scalability in the context of IoT [22].
	Density-based techniques do not need any prior assumption about the data distribution [22], [27], [35], [19], [30].	• Density based techniques are not entirely efficient as some approaches may be sensitive to variations in the local density of data points [27], [43]. • The detection accuracy is variable and unpredictable [22].	Telecommunications (Wireless Sensor Networks) [46],[57], [28]; Machine Learning [22],[19]	• Density based techniques cannot handle high dimensional data when the outlier scores are closely related to each other [35]. • Multivariate dataset (high computational costs) [22],[27], [35], [19].
	Distance-based approaches scale better in multi-dimensional space as they have a robust theoretical foundation, and they are computationally efficient when compared to statistical methods [35].	The performance of distance-based techniques declines due to the curse of dimensionality [35].	N/A	Some distance-based techniques cannot deal with data streams because it is difficult for them to maintain the data distribution in the local neighbourhood and in finding the kNN [35].
Classification based	Unsupervised which means that they do not need prior knowledge of labelled training data [22], [27], [19].	Computation cost is greater than that of statistical and clustering techniques [22], [27], [29], [19].	Telecommunications (Wireless Sensor Networks) [19],[23], [58], [19]	Unsupervised which means that they do not need prior knowledge of labelled training data [21], [27], [19].
	• Do not have an explicit statistical model or estimated parameters [22], [27]. • Suitable for a multidimensional data set [22].	• New training is needed for new data values [22]. • High classification accuracy [22]. • Returns binary results and not the outlier score [34].	IoT [59]; Image Processing [28],[29]; Suitable for muti-dimensional dataset [22], [27].	• Do not have an explicit statistical model or estimated parameters [22], [27]. • Suitable for a multidimensional data set [22].
	• Optimal and maximum detection of outliers [22], [27]. • Multi-class approaches apply powerful algorithms that can differentiate instances of various classes [22].	SVM requires parameter selection which can limit the capacity of the solution and increase the need for human intervention [22], [19].	Machine Learning; Data Mining [19]; Finance [29], [11]; Text data; Medicine [28],[29]	• Optimal and maximum detection of outliers [22], [27]. • Multi-class approaches apply powerful algorithms that can differentiate instances of various classes [22].

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages	Suitable Industries	Unsuitable Industries
	• Quick test phase since test instances only need to be compared with the precalculated model [22]. • Higher accuracy on structured data [29].	• Bayesian network techniques have difficulties in learning an accurate classification model when there are many variables [22], [19]. • Bayesian network techniques have limited capability in handling multivariate datasets [22].	N/A	• Quick test phase since test instances only need to be compared with the precalculated model [22]. • Higher accuracy on structured data [29].

Table 5E: Advantages and disadvantages of outlier detection techniques

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages	Suitable Industries
Spectral Decomposition	• Can be used with a huge, multivariate dataset [22], [27]. • Can operate in unsupervised mode [22]. • Capture the normal pattern of the data and detect outliers optimally [22].	It is difficult to find suitable components that capture the regular data pattern and have high computational costs [22], [27], [19].	Telecommunications (Wireless Sensor Networks) [60],[61],[62], [19]; Finance [11]
Hybrid	• Can implement an optimal solution [22]. • More stable and give better predictive models [35].	• High computational costs [22]; Poorly developed. Selecting the right meta-detectors is a difficult task [35].	Telecommunications (Wireless Sensor Networks) [23], [61], [62]
	Suitable for outlier analysis in high dimensional data [35].	The outlier analysis can be very complex to evaluate due to the combination of a smaller sample space and its unsupervised nature [35].	Data Stream [24], [35]; Data Mining [35], [54]; IoT [63], [25], [32]
Learning based	Can generalize fragmented, noisy, limited data [22], [27].	Not suitable for the resource-constrained sensors [22]	IoT [22],[64],[65]; Image Processing [28],[29]
	No need for new training for the system when adding new data or rules [22], [27].	High computational costs and memory consumption e.g. subspace learning [22], [27], [35].	Telecommunications (Wireless Sensor Networks) [66],[67],[68]
	Rule-based techniques, providing a clear understanding of the detection process, flexibility to adapt to different contexts and can incorporate expert knowledge [22], [27].	Developing a model from a fuzzy system requires fine tuning and prior simulation before being operational [22].	Finance [28], [29], [11]; Medicine [28],[29]; Text data [28],[29]

7 EVALUATION TECHNIQUES FOR OUTLIER DETECTION METHODS

Over the years, numerous outlier detection techniques and variations of existing methods have been proposed. Nevertheless, in the customs environment, application has been predominantly limited to statistical-based techniques, as revealed by this study. An outlier detection technique is required to maintain a high detection rate (DR) while keeping the false alarm rate (FAR) low [22]. The detection rate represents the percentage of abnormal data that are correctly classified as outliers and the false alarm rate represents the percentage of normal data that are incorrectly classified as outliers [69]. To evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of outlier detection methods in Customs trade, the following measures can be considered [35]:

a) **Precision** – refers to the number of correct outliers m as a ratio of the whole number of outliers t.

b) **R-precision** – measures how accurately the top-ranked potential outliers identified by an algorithm correspond to the actual outliers in the dataset.

c) **Average precision** – denotes the average of the precision scores over the ranks of the outlier points. It combines recall and precision.

d) **Correlation coefficient** – denotes the statistical relationship between two variables

e) **Rank power (RP)** – ranks the true outliers at the top and the normal ones at the bottom.

f) **Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve** – a graphical plot that shows the true positive rate against the false positive rate. The true or false positive rate signifies the number of outliers ranked among the potential outliers in the top number of outliers in the ground truth. **Area Under the Curve**– this is the numerical evaluation performance of the outlier detection method. The larger the area under the ROC curve, the better the performance of the technique [19].

8 LIMITATIONS

This research was based on the publications between 2010 and 2024. It was carried out with English-speaking lenses and entered the Google database using various journal platforms. The google database provided the 178 studies, but it might have missed any other significant research that was published elsewhere or in languages other than English. Examples of studies that were overlooked due to the nature of the inclusion criteria include those that were conducted in Asian languages as majority of the articles were from Asia (44%). This might include searching for studies on outlier detection methods that utilize translation software for research in languages other than English [14]. The summaries for certain research projects lacked thoroughness. The authors needed to carefully assess these articles to identify relevant themes, as many of the research abstracts were deficient due to missing key findings. This potential author bias may lead to a flaw in the study, which could exacerbate the replication crises [40].

9 CONCLUSION

Outlier detection is fundamental to data cleansing processes, ensuring accurate data analysis for informed decision-making. In the customs environment, however, outliers may indicate deliberate misdeclaration of goods to evade taxes, exploit rebates, or facilitate capital flight. This results in billions of rands lost due to under and over-invoicing, which can negatively impact the growth of the South African economy.

This paper offers a thorough systematic literature review of current outlier detection techniques, highlighting the industries where they are predominantly utilized, the types of data most suitable for these methods and their respective advantages and disadvantages.

Furthermore, the papers were classified according to the geographical location of the author or the geographical location of the focus of the study. Finally, the evaluation methods used to determine the most efficient outlier detection techniques were discussed.

The study reveals that outlier detection techniques are extensively utilized across various industries, including telecommunications, medicine, data streaming, production, IoT, biology, data mining, and finance. It is evident from the study that in the customs environment, outlier detection methods are predominantly statistical based, such as the PFM, which is an adaptation of the interquartile range. Since customs trade data is numerical, it is well-suited for the practical application of these techniques, as they were primarily applied to numerical data (65%). Outlier detection techniques are widely applied in Asia, especially India, as well as in Europe and North America. Only 9% of the articles originated from Africa, highlighting the limited research conducted in this area within South Africa.

In future research, the identified outlier detection techniques will be evaluated using the aforementioned methods within the customs environment, considering the strengths and weaknesses of each technique.

10 COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they did not have competing interests.

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SUSTAINABLE CHEMICALS MANUFACTURING: AN APPROACH FOR ASSESSING THE FEASIBILITY OF BIO-BASED CHEMICALS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Emissions arising from fossil fuel-derived products and waste disposal in landfills have prompted the development of sustainable alternative technologies. The adoption of bio-based chemicals contributes to the growth of a bioeconomy and requires the development of viable technologies that meet the market and industry requirements. The main goal of the research was to develop a methodical approach to assess the feasibility of manufacturing bio-based technologies within South Africa. Firstly, literature and market assessments were conducted, which identified pertinent bio-based chemicals and feedstocks used during the manufacturing process. Secondly, a framework consisting of eight themes and twenty-six criteria was developed, interviews were conducted with nine key stakeholders, and the market attractiveness of bio-based chemicals adoption in South Africa was determined using thematic network analysis. Lastly, pilot scale data will be used to explore the commercial scale feasibility of producing the key product of interest, bio-lactic acid, as part of future work.

Keywords: sustainability, sustainable supply chain, bioeconomy, feasibility study, stakeholder analysis framework, bio-based chemicals industrialisation

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1 INTRODUCTION

The global chemical industry is undergoing a fundamental transformation driven by sustainability imperatives, regulatory shifts, and public demand for cleaner products. Bio-based chemicals, derived from renewable biological resources, offer an alternative route to conventional chemical manufacturing from fossil carbon thereby reducing industrial emissions. They also contribute significantly to the emerging global bioeconomy, a concept endorsed by institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission [1, 2].

In South Africa, a bioeconomy strategy was introduced in 2013 to support knowledge-based innovation in agriculture, health, and industry [3]. However, the industrial bioeconomy, particularly bio-based chemicals, remains underdeveloped. The sugar industry presents a potential opportunity to catalyse this sector. South Africa produces around 20 million tonnes of sugarcane annually, generating vast quantities of sugarcane juice, molasses, and bagasse. The waste and by-products from the industry are largely under-utilised or disposed of through low-value applications such as animal feed or combustion [4].

Simultaneously, South Africa faces several challenges: a reduction of industrial activity across key sectors, rising unemployment, and a high national carbon footprint compared to developed countries. A transition to green chemical manufacturing has the potential to contribute towards addressing these issues by localising manufacturing, creating new product value chains, reducing negative environmental impact, and reducing dependence on imported chemicals [5]. Realising this potential requires more than technical innovation, it demands an integrated approach that encompasses technical, social, economic, and governance dimensions [6].

Few studies have evaluated the feasibility of implementing bio-based technologies in South Africa, highlighting the importance of market and stakeholder needs analysis as a precursor to technology adoption, which informs drivers, barriers, and guides development [7-9]. Most research focuses on technical and sustainability performance, addressing challenges like scaling from laboratory to commercial production, feedstock selection, and end-of-life treatment [5, 10]. While there is literature on the market potential of bio-based platform chemicals, understanding the strategic dimensions of technology development is limited. Additionally, comprehensive feasibility studies that include stakeholder perceptions, technical bioconversion, and economic analysis are limited. To enhance the bioeconomy, feasibility studies on converting renewable feedstocks into valuable bio-products are essential.

The following research responds to the call for holistic feasibility assessments. It explores the viability of producing two potential bio-based chemicals, namely bioethanol and bio-lactic acid, from sugarcane derivatives in South Africa. Ultimately, through stepwise rationalisation, a full feasibility assessment is considered for lactic acid, with a techno-economic assessment premised on future work. Through an approach that links stakeholder input, pilot scale demonstration, commercial scale techno-economic modelling, and policy alignment, the paper aims to demonstrate a replicable model for sustainable chemical development in emerging economies.

2 GLOBAL MARKET FOR BIO-BASED CHEMICALS

2.1 Background

Globally, fossil-based energy sources account for most of the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, specifically CO_2, into the atmosphere [11]. Waste to landfills also contributes significantly to GHGs, with up to 19% of the global man-made emissions of methane emitted from landfills [12]. More than 30% of waste is disposed of in some form of landfill, and it is estimated that annual waste-related emissions will increase by up to 76%, or 2.7 billion tons of CO_2-

equivalent, by 2050 [13, 14]. Bio-based chemicals are increasingly positioned as substitutes for petrochemical products across industries including plastics, agriculture, textiles, and personal care [15]. Global market reports estimate the bio-based chemicals sector will exceed $120 billion by 2030, with key drivers being regulatory bans on single-use plastics, demand for low-carbon products, and bioeconomy investment policies [16, 17].

2.2 The different approaches to managing waste in developing versus emerging countries

Globally, waste management strategies differ between high-income (developed) and middle- and low-income (developing) countries. Developed nations typically have better recycling capabilities, yet their solid waste generation rates (kg/capita/day) are generally higher than those of developing countries [18]. The increasing complexity of waste poses risks to community well-being, leading to social, economic, and environmental challenges [18-20]. Developing countries face significant challenges, including poor waste management practices that harm human health and the environment [14, 21-23], inadequate infrastructure for growing waste volumes [21, 24], reliance on landfills, and issues with open dumping and burning [21, 22, 24, 25]. They also contend with problematic waste streams like organic waste and hazardous materials, and lower recycling rates, often relying on the informal sector [24-26]. Effective waste processing can mitigate socio-economic and environmental impacts, enhancing sustainability in economics, environmental protection, and social equity [18]. Waste management technologies for organic waste vary, ranging from basic composting to anaerobic digestion and high-temperature thermal destruction.

2.3 Global waste feedstock market for bio-based chemicals production

Many countries promote biomass production for industrial use to reduce reliance on petrochemical resources and reduce the negative impact on the environment. Biomass can replace petrochemicals in various bio-products, categorised into bio-energetic and non-bioenergetic materials. By 2027, it is projected that 19.2% of biomass will be used for energy, while 23.4% will be allocated for bio-based chemicals and materials [27, 28]. The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily affected biofuel demand, but it rebounded in 2021, with expectations for steady growth driven by transportation fuel needs. South America, Europe, and North America lead in renewable chemical production, with Brazil being the largest bioethanol exporter and the USA advancing in biorefining technologies [27, 28]. Major biomass feedstocks include crops, microbial sources, and waste, with crop-based biomass holding the largest market share in the USA, projected to grow significantly by 2026 [29]. Corn and sugar crops are key feedstocks for chemical manufacturing, while microbial and waste biomass markets are also expected to expand.

2.4 The South African waste sector and options for bioconversion into chemicals

The South African waste sector generates approximately 108 million tons of waste annually, with a significant reliance on landfilling, as only about 10% is recycled [30, 31]. As of 2011, 90.1% of general and hazardous waste was disposed of in landfills, often in uncontrolled dumpsites. Recent reports indicate a potential increase in waste diversion, although municipalities remain heavily dependent on landfilling [32]. The National Environmental Management: Waste Act mandates municipalities to implement alternative waste management strategies, but financial constraints hinder the adoption of new technologies [25]. The commercial and industrial sectors are responsible for their waste disposal, and it is therefore anticipated that stricter regulations on hazardous and other waste will be put into place.

Organic waste, including food waste, constitutes a significant portion of the overall waste (Figure 1), with estimates suggesting that 27% of available food is lost to waste [31]. Key by-products and wastes with potential for producing bio-based chemicals include fruit waste from

processing industries, sugarcane by-products such as bagasse and molasses, and forestry residues from timber and pulp production. These materials can be converted into valuable bio-based products, including biofuels, enzymes, biopolymers, bioactive compounds (such as antioxidants), and bioplastics. The South African waste economy is increasingly focusing on alternative waste treatment solutions, driven by public concerns over plastic pollution and the implementation of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations [32]. The waste hierarchy emphasises waste prevention, reuse, and recycling, necessitating technological innovations to improve environmental outcomes (Figure 2).

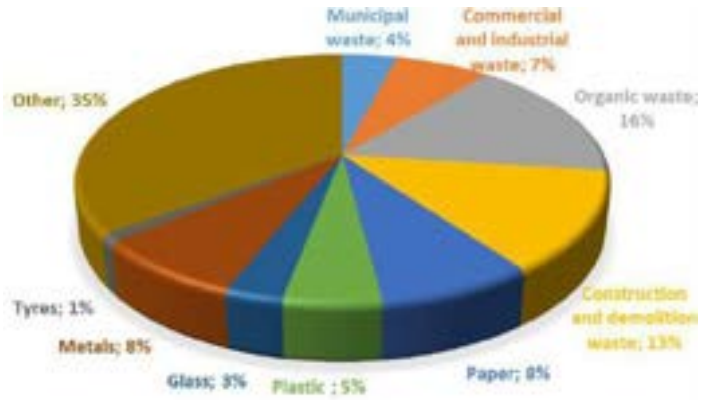

Figure 1: Breakdown of general waste generated in 2017. Source: [22]

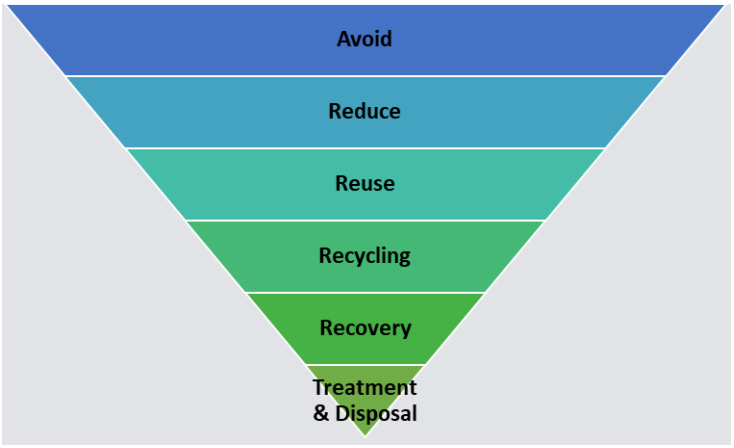

Figure 2: Waste hierarchy. Source: [22]

2.5 Potential options for bio-based chemical manufacturing in South Africa

Globally, bio-based chemical and polymer production is significant, estimated at 50 million tons per annum and valued at over $5.4 trillion [29]. Bioethanol and lactic acid are featured among the top 25 sugar platform chemicals (Table 1).

Bioethanol is widely adopted as both a transport fuel and an industrial solvent. It is produced primarily by yeast fermentation of glucose from sugarcane, corn, or lignocellulosic hydrolysates [33]. Lactic acid, a carboxylic acid produced by lactic acid bacteria, has multiple end uses: as a food preservative, pH regulator, and feedstock for polylactic acid (PLA)—a biodegradable plastic [34].

In South Africa, there is substantial potential for manufacturing bio-based chemicals from various feedstocks, particularly through fermentation processes. The role of microbes in producing bio-based chemicals is crucial, with fermentation techniques having evolved to produce a range of valuable products, including amino acids, organic acids, and industrial

enzymes. The global market for microbial products is expected to reach $346.3 billion by 2027 [35]. South Africa's biomass base is underexploited despite its diversity and volume. The sugar industry, in particular, offers ready infrastructure and logistics systems that could be adapted for biorefining. It is estimated that approximately 26 million tons of lignocellulosic biomass is available annually, which can meet a significant portion of the country's liquid fuel requirements as bioethanol equivalent [36]. However, there are limited pilot-scale demonstrations and no commercial-scale bio-based chemical facilities currently operating in the country [4]. Past techno-economic studies in sub-Saharan Africa have focused primarily on biofuels, while assessments of bio-based chemicals have been fragmented and rarely include stakeholder dimensions [37].

Target chemicals for commercialisation in South Africa include lactic acid and polylactic acid, bioethanol, acetic acid, n-butanol, succinic acid, furfural and sorbitol, which have shown promising market potential and can be derived from lignocellulosic biomass or sugar by-products such as sugarcane bagasse, molasses and agricultural residues. Of the chemicals indicated, lactic acid and bioethanol are prominent contributors to the non-energetic bio-products market [28]. The integration of synthetic biology in optimising microbial processes and expanding feedstock options further supports the growth of the bio-based chemicals sector in South Africa. Overall, the focus on bio-based chemicals presents a significant opportunity for economic development and sustainability in the region. Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) offer a framework for assessing commercialisation potential. Bioethanol and lactic acid are both classified as TRL 6–8 in international roadmaps [33], indicating readiness for scale-up beyond the laboratory. However, barriers remain in terms of downstream purification, infrastructure costs, and market readiness [28].

Table 1: Top 25 sugar platform products

Chemical
Acetic acid
Ethylene
Ethylene glycol
Ethanol
Acetone
3-HPA
Acrylic acid
Lactic acid
PDO
BDO
Isobutanol
n-butanol
Iso-butene
Succinic acid
Furfural
Isoprene
Itaconic acid
Levulinic acid
Xylitol
FDCA
5-HMF
Adipic acid

Sorbitol
p-xylene
Farnesene

Source: [16]

3 METHODS

The research employed an integrated multi-phase approach to assess the feasibility of bio-based chemicals production in South Africa (Figure 3). The approach was designed to align actual policy and market requirement with scientific experimentation and economic evaluation. The research included four phases: (1) Market and literature assessment, (2) Stakeholder needs analysis, (3) Pilot scale demonstration and process selection (pre-feasibility), (4) Process modelling and techno-economic assessment (TEA) for commercial application, premised on future work. This phased approach allows for triangulation between stakeholder needs, technical performance, and economic constraints, enabling a comprehensive feasibility evaluation.

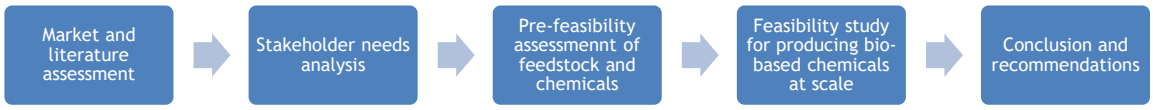

Figure 3: Research approach. (Author's own source)

3.1 Market and literature assessment

Two reviews were conducted as part of the market and literature assessment. The first review focused on the global waste market, highlighting bio-based products as potential replacements for petroleum-based products, and specifically examined the South African waste market to identify available municipal, industrial, and agricultural by-products and waste biomass for conversion into higher-value products. The second review addressed the bio-based chemicals market, detailing the global market for bio-products, the role of microbes in their production, and the introduction of renewable chemicals derived from 'green chemistry' processes. It described relevant bio-products, such as biopolymers and bio-based alcohols, along with their global market values, and introduced bio-based platform chemicals as essential building blocks for various applications. The overarching goal of these reviews was to establish a connection between industrial by-products and waste biomass, and industry-relevant bio-based chemicals.

3.2 Stakeholder needs analysis

The research method involved a qualitative assessment of the industry need for bio-based chemicals in South Africa, focusing on identifying key criteria, conducting stakeholder assessments, and analysing drivers and barriers to adoption. Following a literature review, a framework consisting of 8 factors and 26 criteria was developed to guide the assessment. The 8 market-relevant factors included business opportunity, business forces, product value chain, competitiveness, supply chain readiness, financing, governance, and policy [37-44]. The primary data was obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with nine representatives from academia, industry, and government, using a questionnaire with 26 structured and open-ended questions. In parallel, a market analysis was conducted using global and local industry data to identify platform chemicals with high commercial and technical potential (secondary data). The qualitative data analysis involved using a hybrid coding approach, starting with a deductive coding scheme based on the framework, followed by an inductive approach to identify new criteria. *Atlas.ti* software was employed for coding

and analysis, merging codes and deriving relationships within themes, with the final coding scheme established through systematic triangulation to evaluate both primary and secondary data (Figure 4). The total number of extracts from the stakeholder interviews that align to specific codes (groundedness), were summarised for each theme or sub-theme. Bioethanol and lactic acid were selected for further evaluation due to their alignment with stakeholder interest, market potential, and compatibility with South Africa's sugar industry.

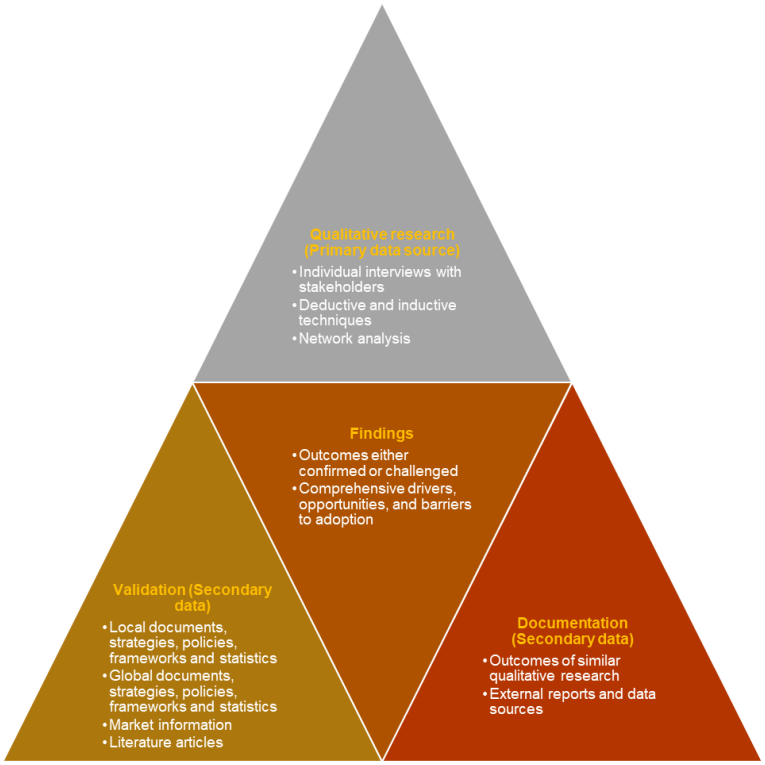

Figure 4: Systematic approach for evaluation of primary and secondary data. (Author's own source)

3.3 Pilot scale demonstration and process selection

Synthetic feedstocks, namely glucose and xylose, and industrial feedstocks, sugarcane juice and molasses were tested under laboratory conditions against various microbial strains to produce bioethanol and lactic acid. The industrial feedstocks were selected based on market assessment and feedback, their relative abundance and availability, carbohydrate content, and existing collection infrastructure. The laboratory testing was conducted from 0.2 to 30 L scale. The process performance metrics included sugar utilisation (%), ethanol or lactic acid yield (g/g), and productivity (g/L/h). The top-performing strains were scaled up to a 30 L stirred-tank bioreactor (pilot scale) operated under batch or fed-batch conditions. Parameters such as pH, temperature, and agitation were controlled to replicate near-industrial conditions. Pilot scale runs were used to assess process robustness, adaptation to variable feedstock quality, and operational control requirements. The selected lactic acid process generated the mass balance data for use in the upstream process modelling and TEA (future work), and validated the selected molasses feedstock and *Lactobacillus* strain performance in a controlled environment.

3.4 Process modelling and techno-economic assessment (TEA)

The selected 30 L pilot scale process was based on the fed-batch process to produce lactic acid using molasses feedstock. The pilot scale process will be modelled in Excel, using actual input parameters, and forms the baseline for the TEA. The annual production rate of lactic acid production facilities varies from a few thousand to about 140 000 tons per annum [45]. More recently, larger production facilities with production capacities above 75 000 tons per annum have been established [46]. The biggest producers of the lactic acid final product include NatureWorks LLC, Purac, Galactic, and Cargill. NatureWorks LLC is currently leading the lactic acid polymers market; their lactic acid plant in Blair (USA) has a production capacity of 180 000 tons per annum [47, 48]. A lactic acid production facility with annual commercial scale capacities of 92 000 tons per annum of the lactic acid intermediate, and 8000 tons per annum of the biomass by-product will be selected for techno-economic analysis.

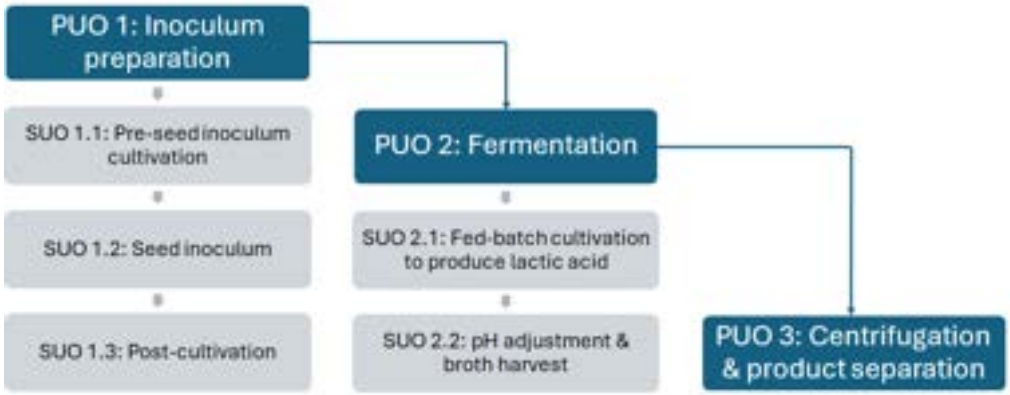

Figure 5: Simplified process flow diagram to produce the lactic acid intermediate product and biomass by-product. PUO indicates process unit operation. SUO indicates sub-unit operation. (Author's own source)

The TEA aims to evaluate commercial viability under realistic economic and operational assumptions. The model incorporates capital expenditure (CAPEX), operating costs (OPEX), product pricing, and product recovery estimates. Mass and energy balances will be estimated based on pilot scale data and existing process design literature [37, 49]. NPV, IRR, ROI and payback periods will be calculated for lactic acid under baseline and optimistic scenarios. The analysis will also include sensitivity tests for key variables: feedstock cost, product market price, debt to equity ratio etc.

This holistic approach ensures that each phase of the assessment informs the others: stakeholder feedback shaped technical selection criteria, laboratory results informed process and preliminary economic modelling, and TEA outcomes will be validated against investor and policymaker perspectives. The following methodology provides a blueprint for bio-based feasibility studies that aim to move beyond fragmented technical or economic assessments.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Stakeholder needs analysis

Using network analysis, key products such as bioethanol, lactic acid and acetic acid were identified. Following the qualitative content analysis, sixteen codes were derived deductively, and forty-four codes were derived inductively. Using the codes and level of groundedness, market drivers and barriers to adoption were then identified and discussed for each theme and supported by literature. Stakeholders identified strong alignment between bio-based production and national sustainability priorities. Bioethanol was seen as viable for fuel blending mandates and industrial solvents. Lactic acid's role in bioplastics and various

other applications made it strategically relevant. The drivers and barriers to adoption across the eight key themes are summarised (Table 2).

These insights demonstrate that stakeholder perceptions provide critical data that influence project feasibility. Embedding the eight key themes into the broader feasibility frameworks enables the development of policy and business models that supports the innovation ecosystem. The study highlights the potential for growth in South Africa's bio-based chemical industry, driven by global trends and local opportunities. However, significant barriers remain, including regulatory enforcement, market pricing, and competition from established industries. Institutional investment and supportive policies are crucial for fostering a robust bioeconomy.

Table 2: A summary of key drivers and barriers to adoption across eight key themes according to stakeholders in the field of bio-based chemicals

Theme	Drivers	Barrier
Business Opportunity for Bio-based Products	Global demand for bio-based chemicals and the presence of international companies in South Africa can stimulate local industry growth. There is a growing interest in bioethanol, lactic acid, acetic acid, and other bio-based chemicals, presenting opportunities for localisation and technology development.	Limited export potential and competition from established global producers hinder the growth of local bio-based industries. The emerging nature of the industry, lack of investment in feasible technologies, and limited awareness of bio-based products restrict market potential.
Business Forces	Local and global environmental regulations, along with pressure from stakeholders and partners, drive the adoption of bio-based chemicals.	Enforcement of local regulations is weak, and limited legislation regarding feedstock utilisation and biodegradable materials poses challenges.
Product Value Chain	The potential for high-value products from bio-based intermediates and the strengthening of markets for products like furfural and bioplastics.	Challenges in technology development to convert intermediates into higher-value products limit market opportunities.
Competitiveness	The availability of biomass in South Africa provides a competitive edge for bio-based chemicals.	Competition from global producers and imports, along with limited local production capacity, restricts market entry for new players.
Supply Chain Collaboration	Opportunities exist for utilising sugarcane by-products and establishing frameworks for bioethanol and sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) production.	Lack of reliable data on feedstock availability and supply-side constraints hinder effective supply chain management.
Finance	Interest in diversifying into bio-based chemicals is present, with potential for product diversification in bioethanol, SAF, and biopolymers.	Securing investment during the conceptual phase is challenging and limited financial feasibility studies result in low investor interest.
Policy	Existing policies and frameworks provide a foundation for bio-based technology development, with some regional collaboration noted.	Policies are often limited in scope and enforcement, particularly outside of biofuels and bioplastics, necessitating a review and expansion to support a broader range of bio-based technologies.
Governance	Access to innovation agents and existing operational tools for scaling up technologies are available, which can aid in the production of bio-based products. Some operational governance mechanisms are in place, such as protocols and equipment that can be utilised for manufacturing.	Effective regulatory frameworks for the dissemination and implementation of global strategies and comprehensive local frameworks are limited. There is limited assessment of the equipment and infrastructure needed for economies of scale. Strong industry partnerships and global technology providers are currently insufficient.

4.2 Pilot scale demonstration and process selection

Based on the initial assessment of the feedstock, molasses was considered a preferred feedstock for chemical production. No pre-treatment of the molasses is required, the only requirement is that the molasses is diluted with water prior to fermentation as described by [50]. The performance of the upstream processes using molasses feedstock to produce bioethanol and lactic acid intermediates were compared.

Both upstream processes demonstrated effective conversion (> 90%) of molasses into the intermediate products. However, the lactic acid process achieved a higher average maximum fermentation yield (0.960 ± 0.00469 g/g) and productivity (2.92 g/L/h), compared to the bioethanol process with a yield and productivity of 0.672 ± 0.0814 g/g and 0.849 ± 0.103 g/L/h, respectively. Furthermore, 99.27% of the molasses substrate used in the lactic acid process was converted to the lactic acid product. Bioprocesses with high yields, productivities and conversion efficiencies, such as the lactic acid process, have the potential to be more profitable.

While there was no significant difference in the direct cost of production between bioethanol and lactic acid, lactic acid is considered a higher value product. Based on global market trends, the selling prices for purified ethanol and lactic products were 10.78 and 22.64 Rand/kg, respectively [51, 52]. However, based on local market prices [53-57] and an assumption that 50% of the production cost can be attributed to downstream processing [58-61], the selling prices for ethanol and lactic acid intermediate products were estimated to be 28.05 and 48.10 Rand/kg, respectively. The lactic acid process demonstrated superior performance in the laboratory, illustrated by a fermentation yield greater than 0.95 g/g, and has the potential to generate higher profits based on the market price, and global and local market demand.

The findings suggest that adopting a fed-batch cultivation strategy using molasses can enhance lactic acid yields and productivity, making it a viable option for industrial-scale production.

4.3 Process modelling and techno-economic assessment (TEA)

This section presents a preliminary reflection on the techno-economic framework applied in this research, which forms the final phase of the integrated feasibility approach. The model is intended to yield financial estimates, as well as demonstrate the interdependencies between technical, market, and economic-related variables, and inform iterative development of the commercial scale system.

The approach taken integrates insights from stakeholder interviews, pilot scale data, and literature-based assumptions to construct a representative cost model for lactic acid production. The sensitivity analysis will be deliberately included as a dynamic tool to assess how variations in key input parameters impact financial performance. The principal contributors to this analysis will be:

- The fermentation equipment cost, which escalates in cost based on the scale of operation and is a key cost contributor.
- Feedstock cost, which is a critical variable due to its influence on operating costs and its volatility across harvest cycles.
- Lactic acid production rate, which directly affects raw materials utilisation and other operating costs.
- Product price assumptions, which are based on local market pricing for lactic acid products.

Incorporating stakeholder feedback into the TEA can ensure that technical thresholds, such as required yield or market price, are validated against investment expectations and policy realities. The model could also be used to explore scale-up potential by estimating performance at different production capacities. While final TEA outputs are still being refined, this approach offers a replicable methodology for early-stage techno-economic assessment that considers both process performance and the evolving commercial landscape.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research presents an integrated, multi-dimensional approach for assessing the feasibility of bio-based chemical production in South Africa. It demonstrates that bioethanol and lactic acid can be effectively produced from sugarcane derivatives, such as molasses, using locally available microbial strains and potentially existing agro-industrial infrastructure. Through pilot-scale trials, high fermentation yields, and conversion efficiencies were achieved.

Stakeholder engagement revealed that there is strong alignment between bio-based chemical production and national development priorities. However, several cross-cutting barriers must be addressed: fragmented policy mandates, inadequate financing instruments, high price point of bio-products, and infrastructural deficits. Performance data confirmed that while ethanol is close to market readiness, the performance and profitability of the lactic acid process was superior. However, further optimisation of the lactic acid process is required, particularly in downstream purification and market development. The strength of this research lies in its integrated methodology—linking stakeholder insight, technical feasibility, and economic performance into a unified framework. The research's integrated methodology offers several advantages over traditional feasibility assessments, such as:

- Triangulated insight: Based on the outcomes of the process modelling and techno-economic assessment positioned for future work, the research will combine stakeholder input, actual pilot scale data, and financial data, allowing for cross-validation of assumptions.
- Adaptability: The research approach can be applied to other bio-based chemicals or feedstocks.
- Policy relevance: Embedding governance and policy barriers into the approach creates more implementable recommendations.
- Risk reduction: It highlights technical and institutional bottlenecks early in the process, which reduces the risk of project failure.

Previous studies have either focused narrowly on process optimisation or high-level lifecycle analysis without engaging stakeholders or modelling the economic feasibility [5, 62]. This research fills that gap and demonstrates how to align pilot scale performance data, market needs, and economic viability to support decision-making.

To advance sustainable chemical manufacturing in South Africa, the following are recommended:

- Establish demonstration-scale biorefineries co-located with sugar mills.
- Define profitable product value chains for intermediate and final products as well as by-products.
- Launch a national bio-based technology and investment roadmap, and develop policy and frameworks aligned to the roadmap.
- Develop skills programmes in bioprocess engineering and green manufacturing, which will contribute toward strengthening of the bioeconomy.

- Facilitate public-private partnerships to de-risk projects at an early-stage.

This feasibility framework provides a model for other developing economies seeking to transition to low-carbon, local technologies through bio-based innovation.

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A UNIFIED CFD-DEM MULTIPHYSICS MODEL FOR MULTIFACETED GRANULAR SYSTEMS: THE WET BALL MILL SCENARIO

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ABSTRACT

Accurate numerical simulation of wet ball mill loads is challenging due to the need for integrating solid and liquid-based algorithms. We introduce a novel computer framework that combines Discrete Element Modelling (DEM) and Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) to address this issue. The grinding media is modeled using a Lagrangian approach, treating particles according to Newton's laws and Hertzian contact law, implemented via the open-source platform LIGGGTHS. The slurry phase is described by the Navier-Stokes equations and solved using finite volume method, incorporating a solid phase volume fraction. The coupling of DEM and CFD is facilitated through buoyancy and drag forces. Our simulations validate the framework against experimental data, showing a close alignment within 10% margin for load positions. While the model exhibits minimal sensitivity to slurry viscosity, it indicates that shoulder positions increase with mill speed. Continued refinement, especially in drag force modeling, is necessary to enhance grinding process optimization.

Keywords: Numerical simulation, Wet ball mill, DEM-CFD coupling, Discrete Element Modelling (DEM), Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD), Solid and liquid-based algorithms

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1 INTRODUCTION

Comminution, the process of reducing ore to finer sizes for easier beneficiation, relies heavily on ball mills in various industries [9]. These mills pulverize materials through the action of loose crushing bodies, with grinding balls cascading and cataracting within the mill [4]. The load position, described by the toe and shoulder angles, can be determined mathematically or through physical measurements [29, 28, 1, 20, 11].

Studying ball mills involves experimentation and computer-based engineering simulation. [1, 2] Experimentation provides real-world data but is costly due to the need for specialized instruments [19, 7, 30, 31, 32]. Engineering simulation offers a more affordable alternative, though it requires model calibration to ensure accuracy [10, 6]. While dry milling simulations are well-established [27, 8, 21], wet milling simulations lag in development [27, 19, 7]. Wet grinding is popular in ore processing because it helps to control the viscosity of the slurry and reduce energy consumption [5, 3]

This research aims to develop a numerical model framework using an open-source package to simulate dynamic load behavior in wet ball mills [1]. It models the interaction between balls and slurry using Discrete Element Modeling (DEM) and Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD). [4, 5] Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) refers to the use of numerical methods and algorithms to analyze and simulate fluid flow and the associated physical processes within fluids. The model is validated against experimental data from laboratory and pilot mills [19, 7, 30, 31, 32, 1, 6] The paper's structure includes an introduction, literature review of DEM and CFD, methodology, results, and conclusions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW ON COMPUTATIONAL MODELLING OF MULTIPHASE GRANULAR SYSTEMS

Recent studies [6, 35, 36] have successfully applied the Discrete Element Method (DEM) to comminution modelling, showcasing its effectiveness in simulating the behaviour of grinding media [25, 26, 36,16, 37, 6, 23, 17, 24, 18, 33]. Originally introduced by [2] for molecular dynamics, the principles of DEM were further developed by [12]. This numerical technique discretizes dynamic events into time steps, allowing for detailed analysis of particle interactions.

By utilizing Newton's second law (Equation 1) and kinematic equations, DEM calculates particle positions and orientations, while changes in angular momentum are governed by Euler's second law (Equation 2) [34]. Although DEM excels in dry milling simulations, modelling wet milling requires a deeper understanding of fluid dynamics and the spatial positioning of the slurry in relation to the media charge. To address these challenges, Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) is often integrated, enhancing the modelling of complex interactions in wet milling scenarios.

$$F = m_i \frac{d^2\vec{x}_i}{dt^2} = \sum \vec{f}_{ij}^{\,p-p} + \vec{f}_i^{\,f-p} + \vec{f}_i^{\,ext} \quad \textbf{(1)}$$

$$I_i d\overrightarrow{\omega_i} = I_i \frac{d^2\vec{\omega}_i}{dt^2} = \vec{M}_i\left(x_i, v_j, \varphi_j, \omega_j\right) = \sum_{j \in CL_i}\left(\vec{M}^t{}_{ij} + \vec{M}^r{}_{ij}\right) \; for\; j = 1, \dots, N \quad \textbf{(2)}$$

Where $\sum \vec{f}_{ij}^{\,p-p}$ is sum of particle–particle interaction forces acting on particle i

F is the sum of different forces that act on the particle i

x_i is the particle position

φ_j is the angular position.

ω_j is the rotational velocity of the particle

v_j is the translational velocity of particle

$\vec{f}_{ij}^{\,p-p}$ is particle-particle interaction forces.

$\vec{f}_i^{\,f-p}$ is fluid-particle interaction forces in multiphase systems. This term is ignored in pure DEM simulations.

$\vec{f}_i^{\,ext}$ are external forces acting on particle i due to uniform or non-uniform external fields such as gravitational and magnetic fields

$\vec{M}_i$ is sum of different torques that act on particle i

Key forces in Discrete Element Method (DEM) simulations include gravitational forces, contact forces from collisions, and solid-solid interactions like electrostatic, Van der Waals, and cohesive forces [13]. The behaviour of grinding media can be modelled using two approaches: the soft sphere and the hard sphere. The soft sphere approach more accurately reflects the practical behaviour of milling charges, making it preferable for realistic simulations compared to the hard sphere formulation.

2.1 Computational modelling of grinding media and slurry phase in wet ball milling

Multiphase granular systems can be effectively modelled by integrating the Discrete Element Method (DEM) with Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) within a unified framework. This approach typically employs DEM to represent the solid phase while utilizing CFD to analyse liquid flow patterns [23, 21]. By leveraging the strengths of both techniques, this integrated modelling enhances accuracy and reliability.

To simulate wet milling effectively, it is essential to have a thorough understanding of fluid dynamics and the slurry's positioning relative to the media charge. CFD, a sophisticated technique, is grounded in three fundamental principles: conservation of mass, Newton's second law, and conservation of energy. These principles are articulated through integral or partial differential equations, depending on the chosen flow model. CFD methods are categorized into Eulerian and Lagrangian approaches. The Eulerian method analyses fluid flow at fixed spatial locations, while the Lagrangian method tracks individual fluid particles as they move through space and time.

Recent advancements have led to hybrid CFD-Discrete Element Method (CFD-DEM) models that effectively represent multiphase granular systems. These models focus on fluid-particle interactions and their applications in wet ball milling. Accurate modelling of fluid flow in such systems typically involves solving the continuity equation (Equation 3) and the Navier-Stokes equations (Equation 4), forming a robust foundation for simulations in this domain. This integration not only improves the accuracy of simulations but also facilitates better predictions of system behaviour under various operational conditions.

$$\frac{\partial \alpha_f}{\partial t} + \nabla\left(\alpha_f u_f\right) = 0 \qquad \textbf{(3)}$$

$$\frac{\partial (\rho_f \alpha_f u_f)}{\partial t} + \nabla\left(\rho_f \alpha_f u_f\right) = \nabla\rho - f_p + \nabla.\left(\alpha_f \tau\right) + \rho_f \alpha_f g \qquad \textbf{(4)}$$

Where α_f is the volume fraction occupied by the fluid, ρ_f is the fluid density, u_f velocity of the fluid, τ is the stress tensor for the fluid phase and f_p represents the momentum exchange with the particulate phase. When both the granular and fluid phases are incompressible, [24] showed that the mass conservation equation could be written as follows:

$$\nabla.\left(\alpha_f u_f + \alpha_s u_s\right) = 0 \qquad \textbf{(5)}$$

Where α_s is the volume fraction occupied by the solid phase, u_s velocity of the solid phase.

The coupling of CFD and DEM—known as CFD-DEM coupling describes the interactions between the solid and fluid phases through the exchange of momentum and interaction forces. In this framework, the fluid phase is characterized by pressure, velocity, temperature, and species concentration distributions, while the solid phase is described by particle size, position, velocity, temperature, and concentration. This innovative approach enables the simultaneous resolution of solid particle interactions, fluid flow dynamics, and particle-fluid interactions [21, 23, 34]. Key steps in the CFD-DEM coupling process have been thoroughly outlined by [14, 15, 21]. The procedure begins with the DEM solver calculating the positions and velocities of solid particles. These results are then transmitted to the CFD solver, which identifies corresponding cells in the CFD mesh for the particles. The volume fraction and average velocity of the particles are calculated, followed by the determination of fluid forces acting on the particles based on their volume fraction. Finally, the momentum exchange between particles and fluid is computed by averaging all particle-fluid forces within each CFD cell. The resulting data is then sent back to the DEM solver, allowing it to update particle dynamics for the next time step, while the CFD solver adjusts fluid velocity according to local conditions and momentum exchanges.

This coupling approach improves the accuracy of multiphase modelling and deepens our understanding of interactions within granular systems. For instance, authors like [27] proposed a one-way coupling method to simulate the dynamics of a wet ball mill, emphasizing how slurry affects the motion of individual grinding balls. They incorporated drag and buoyancy forces into their model, detailing these forces using Equations 6 and 7.

$$F_D = C_d a \rho_s \frac{{v_r}^2}{2} \quad \textbf{(6)}$$

Where F_D is the drag force.

C_d is the drag coefficient.

a is the area of grinding media.

v_r is the relative velocity between a ball and suspension.

The buoyant force, on the other hand, was given by Equation 7

$$F_B = V_B \rho_s \quad \textbf{(1)}$$

Where F_B is the buoyant force and V_B is the volume of a ball.

2.2 Summary

The literature review on the application of the Discrete Element Method (DEM) to comminution modelling reveals several critical gaps and areas for further investigation. Despite advancements in simulating dry milling processes, comprehensive studies addressing the unique challenges associated with wet milling remain sparse. The integration of DEM with Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) has improved the accuracy of simulations; however, the complexity of interactions in wet environments necessitates further refinement, particularly concerning the dynamic behaviour of the slurry and grinding media interactions [24, 45]

One notable gap is the need for more sophisticated models that capture fluid-particle interactions and their resultant effects on milling efficiency. Existing studies primarily focus on the solid phase while neglecting intricate fluid dynamics in slurry phases, significantly affecting the grinding process [43]. Additionally, recent literature indicates that fluid dynamics modelling, including the effects of varying liquid media on particle behaviour, is often oversimplified. This leaves out crucial parameters such as the influence of temperature, pressure variations, and shear conditions [41]. Hence, future research should develop dynamic

models that incorporate detailed hydrodynamic forces acting on grinding media and their effect on particle size reduction and distribution.

Moreover, past studies often face challenges related to high computational demands when implementing CFD-DEM coupling strategies. Current methodologies may incur extensive computational costs that limit their application in industrial contexts. Therefore, addressing computational efficiency while enhancing the fidelity of the simulation models for wet milling processes represents a significant knowledge gap. Future exploration could focus on optimizing algorithms or employing more efficient numerical approaches to mitigate these computational challenges [42].

Also, the experimental validation of DEM models remains inadequate, particularly in the context of wet milling. While several studies successfully simulate the behaviour of grinding media under various conditions, there is a critical lack of empirical data to substantiate these findings [44]. Integrating experimental results with simulation data can provide verification and improve the robustness of predictive models, thus enhancing their practical applications.

In summary, while recent advances in DEM applications have significantly contributed to understanding dry milling processes, there is substantial opportunity to refine modelling approaches for wet milling scenarios. Areas requiring further research include enhanced fluid-particle interaction modelling, reducing computational demands for simulation fidelity, and linking theoretical models with experimental data to validate findings.

3 METHODOLOGY

The research methodology consisted of three main stages. First, the physical processes occurring in a typical ball mill were translated into mathematical equations. To simulate the dynamic behaviour of the grinding media, a series of computer scripts based on LIGGGHTS were developed, incorporating these equations. Next, an OpenFOAM script was created to include the liquid phase representing the slurry. Finally, the numerical model was iteratively refined and calibrated using available experimental data.

3.1 Computational modelling of grinding media and slurry phase in wet ball mill

In this paper, the Discrete Element Method (DEM), a set of numerical techniques extensively used in modelling particulate systems was applied to model the dynamic behaviour of grinding media. The behaviour of grinding media was modelled using the soft sphere approach, which closely represents the practical behaviour of the mill charge as compared to the hard-sphere formulation. Each ball was treated as a distinct particle, governed by Newton's second law of motion applied at the centre of mass of each particle (Equation 1). Euler's second law of motion is used to describe changes in angular momentum (Equation 2). This is called the Lagrangian approach [34]. In terms of describing the motion of balls in the ball milling system, the dense charge is assumed to experience long and multiple contacts between particles. Based on this, the DEM model was built around the assumptions that particles retain their original shape after a collision, collisions are inelastic, instantaneous, and repulsive and finally collisions occur between a pair of particles at any point in time. Interaction forces were assumed to obey the Hertzian contact law. Each particle interacts with nearby particles through particle-particle contacts, which are formed or broken at each time step [9]. The contact force is expressed by Equation 8.

$$F_r = (k_n \delta n_{ij} - \gamma_n v n_{ij}) + (k_t \delta t_{ij} - \gamma_t v n_{it}) \quad \textbf{(8)}$$

Simulations were run using custom virtual Linux® based, Ubuntu 20.04 LTS machine hosted on a Windows® Dell Precision M6700 personal computer, with Intel® Core (TM) i7-3740QM Quad (four-core), 8 Logical Processers, 2.4 GHz, and 16 GB RAM. The mill geometry was developed using Blender version 2.9, an open source and CAD software. The files were then exported as

.stl format into LIGGGHTS for simulation purposes. Converting the Blender files to .stl files has an advantage that this format describes the surface geometry only. Attributes common to other CAD models like colour, texture, material types are not represented in the .stl file of this mill. This feature also allows one to set suitable material properties for various scenarios under investigation in the input script.

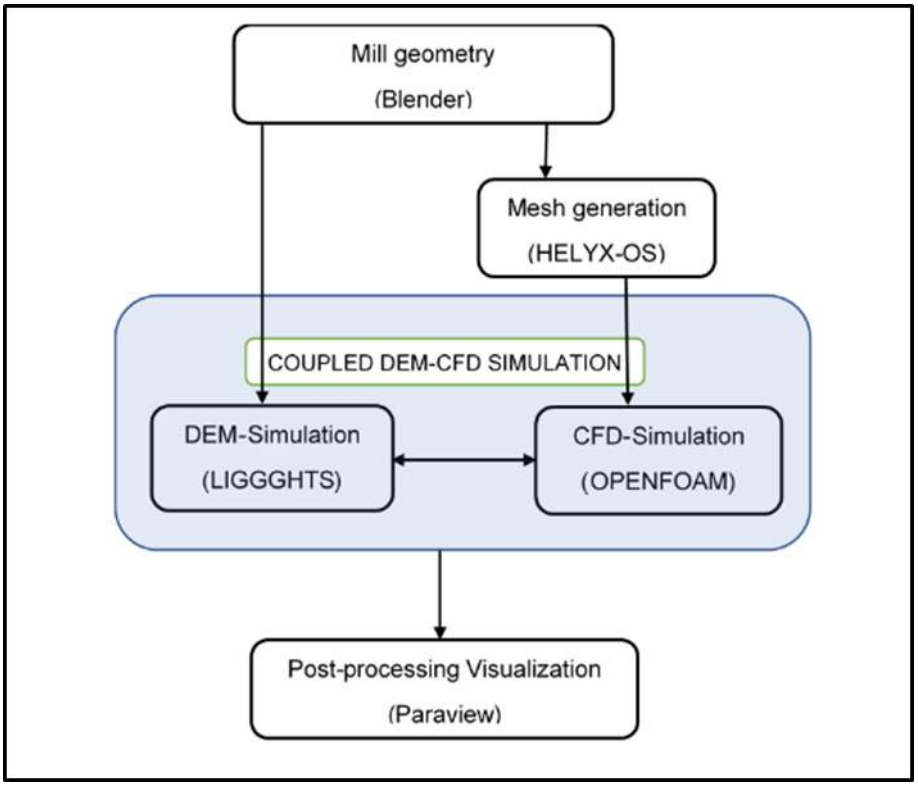


Figure 1: CFD-DEM coupled simulation workflow

The open-source DEM solver LIGGGHTS was utilized to simulate dry milling experiments, offering the advantage of no licensing requirements and the ability to modify the source code. A LIGGGHTS input script involves four main steps: initialization, defining particle variables, setting simulation parameters, and running the simulation. During initialization, essential data such as atom types, units, and boundaries are specified. Particle variables, including the computational region and grinding media properties, are defined next, with media mass calculated based on mill volume and ball filling. In the third step, the contact model, timestep, and mill rotation are set, followed by running the simulations where grinding media particles are generated and settled in the mill. Mill rotation is initiated, and output data is written to a designated directory for visualization. The challenge then was to incorporate the fluid phase using a suitable CFD platform. The fluid flow field was described by Equation 4 and solved using the finite volume method (FVM) with a coupled CFD-DEM solver called cfdemSolverPiso. The PISO algorithm was chosen for its effectiveness in facilitating data exchange between the DEM and CFD solvers.

The two-way coupling was implemented by the buoyancy force drag model given in Equations 6 and 7. In this case, the grinding media affects the fluid by adding the mass and velocity of the DEM particles to the forces in the governing fluid equations. On the other hand, the flow of fluid over the DEM particles creates a drag force on the DEM particles

The wet milling set of experiments using a pilot and laboratory mill, presented by [19] were simulated. In this case slurry filling (U_s) was varied from 0 to 3.0. Slurry dynamic viscosity (μ) was also varied between 1 and 10 mPa·s Load position as described by the shoulder, toe

as well as slurry pool angular positions were measured and recorded. Mill speed was varied from 65 to 85% of critical speed. The volume of the slurry (V_{slurry}) was determined as a function of the interstices in the grinding media charge.

4 RESULTS

In this section findings from coupled CFD-DEM simulations which seek to establish the load profile are reported. Results on the voidage and velocity profile, media shoulder, toe and slurry pool angular positions under varying simulated conditions are presented.

4.1 Void fraction and Velocity profile of mill the charge

The void fraction represents the fractions of different phases in the cell. One would expect that in the mill charge region the void fraction is very close to zero. This is because this is the region with the highest concentration of grinding media. This region is denoted by the blue colour in Figure 2 (a).

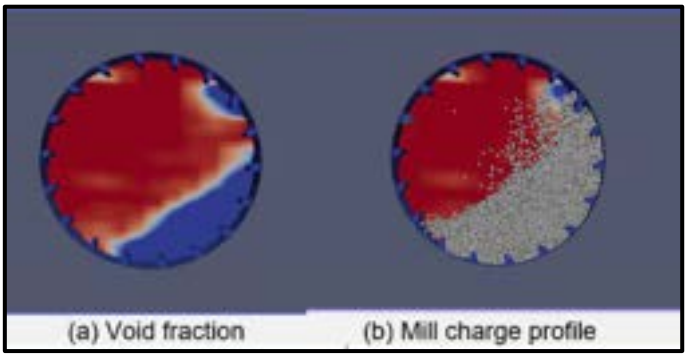


Figure 2: Depicting void fraction or amount of interstices in grinding media charge

To determine the amount of slurry in the charge, the volume of interstices within the grinding media was estimated. The void fraction data was recorded from Paraview® facility as shown in Figure 3(a).

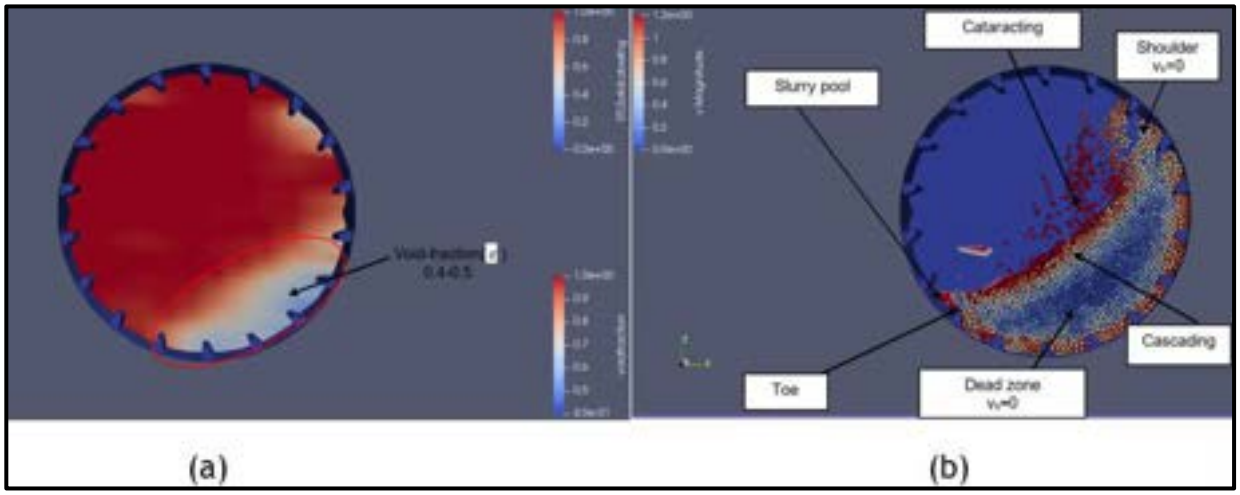


Figure 3: Estimate of void fraction in grinding media charge

It can be observed that the voidage (ε) ranges from 0.4 around the dead zone region to about 0.5 in the cascading region. Thus, a value of 0.4 voidage (ε) was used in this paper. This value of the voidage was found to be a good estimate as other researchers have recommended [19, 39].

The media velocity was profiled as shown in Figure 3 (b). This comparison was useful in assessing the capability of the coupled CFD-DEM simulation to mimic the behaviour of a wet mill charge. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows the velocity (u_S) profile of the media obtained at a mill speed of 67.4% critical speed, 20% ball filling and slurry filling (U_s) of 1.0. The velocity profile shows that the load charge experiences a high velocity in the peripheral areas of the mill charge. That is to say, higher velocity of the load is experienced by the grinding media along the mill shell and along the cataracting region of the charge. **Error! Reference source not found.** presents the velocity estimates of the different load regions as compared to the expected values (see legend in Figure 3 b).

Table 1: Velocity profile of mill charge

Region	Expected (u_S)	Actual
Cataracting	$u_S > 0$	≈1-1.2m/s
Cascading	$u_S > 0$	≈0.8-1m/s
Dead zone	$u_S \approx 0$	≈0.0m/s

The velocity profile extracted shows that grinding media in the cataracting region has the highest velocity (above 1m/s) while the media in the dead zone region has the lowest. This profile is a good fit for a dynamic mill charge [38].

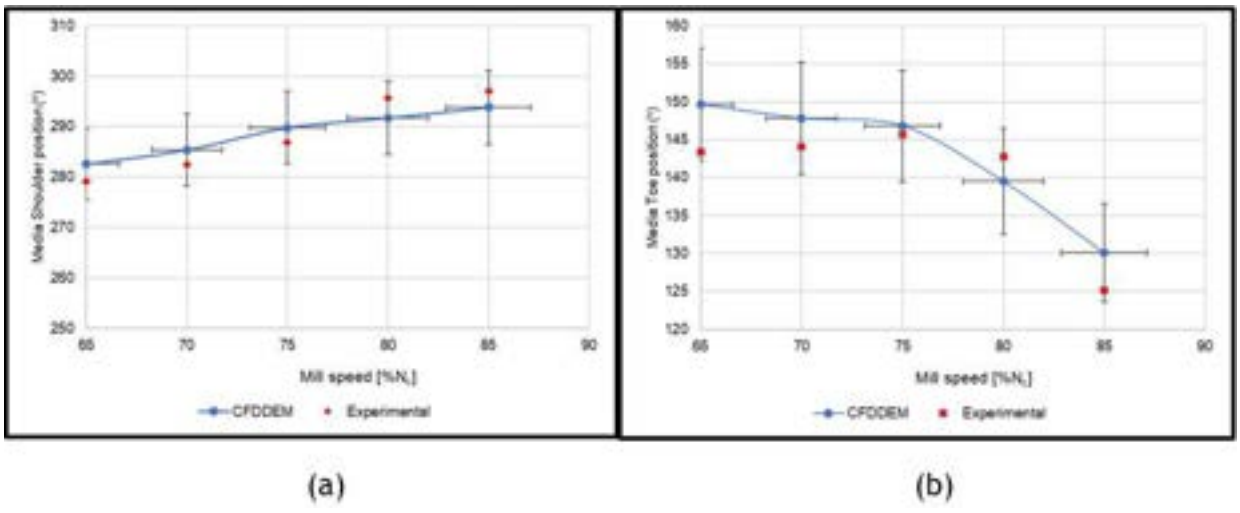
4.2 How slurry presence affects mill load dynamics

The presence of slurry affects both mill load dynamics and kinetics. Thus, it is key that a wet ball mill simulator should be able to adequately mimic the mill load behaviour under wet conditions. In this section, findings on the effects of mill speed, degree of slurry filling, and viscosity on load position are presented.

4.2.1 Effect of mill speed on the angular position of mill load

In the wet milling simulations, the mill speed was varied from 65% to 85% of critical speed. The media shoulder tends to rise steadily with increasing mill speed. When compared to the

experimental results this increase in the shoulder location is more gently. The experimental results fall within an error margin of 5% of CFD-DEM shoulder position (see Figure 4).

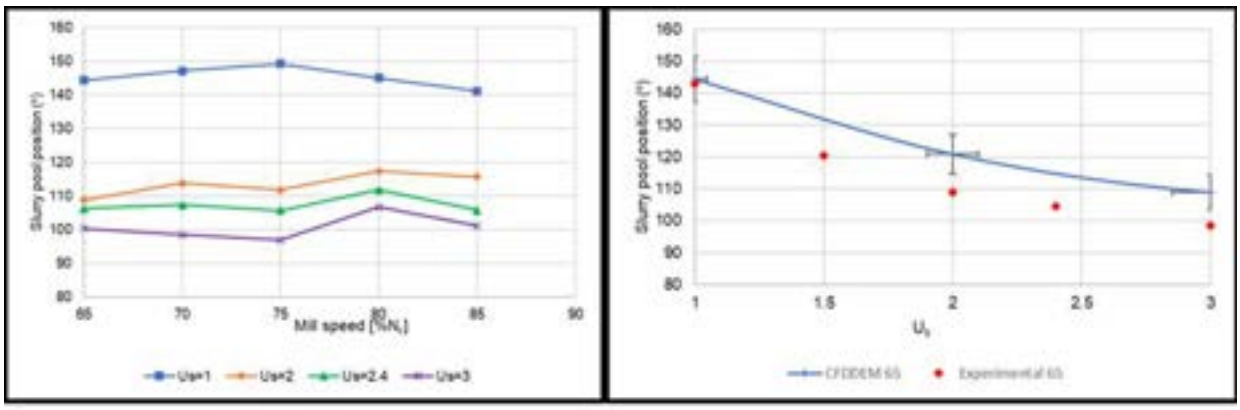


(a) (b)

Figure 4: Angular position of media shoulder with error bars compared to experimental results

At mill speeds lower than 75% of the critical speed the CFD-DEM shoulder position is higher than the experimental results and as the mill speed was increased the simulation shoulder location became lower than the experimental results. This trend is similar to dry mill

simulations and may be a consequence of centrifuging load. A similar plot was also done for the toe position as shown in Figure 4 (b). As for the CFD-DEM toe, its position is higher than the experimental toe although close to 5%. This shows that CFD-DEM produced simulations which are reasonably close to the actual experimental value.



(a) (b)

Figure 5: Angular position of slurry pool with varying mill speed and (b) Slurry pool location with varying slurry filling

The effects of mill speed on the position of the slurry pool with respect to media charge were evaluated. Six slurry fillings evenly selected from the experimental range were investigated. Figure 5 (a) shows a plot of the slurry pool location as the mill speed was varied from 65-85% of critical speed at a specified slurry filling. At slurry fillings of below 1, the slurry pool could not be observed. This is not surprising since the amount of slurry introduced could be adequately accommodated in the grinding media interstices. As slurry filling was increased beyond 1, it was then possible to observe the slurry pool. Two main observations can be made from Figure 5 (a) with regards to the slurry pool. The first one relates the location of the pool to the slurry level. An increase in the level of slurry generally resulted in a decrease in the pool position. It can be observed that for all mill speeds considered, a higher slurry filling results in a lower angular pool location. In a physical wet mill, as more slurry is introduced into the grinding media, the excess cannot be accommodated hence, it collects on the toe side of the mill charge and forms the slurry pool. It is expected that increasing the amount of the slurry present will lead to a corresponding increase in the pool level, resulting in a lower angular pool position.

The second observation relates the pool position to the mill speed. At higher slurry fillings, (i.e., above 2) a pattern of some sort can be realized from the data. An increase of 3°-10° was observed between 65% and 80% of critical speed as a consequence of an increased slurry uptake by a dilated media charge. At speeds higher than 80% of critical there is a reduction in the pool location triggered by centrifuging media. It is reasonable to presume that the slurry pool location was marginally influenced by mill speed within the range examined. The location of the slurry pool from the coupled CFD-DEM simulations was compared with that from the experimental work on a pilot mill [19]. Figure 5(b) shows a plot of the two sets of results at a mill speed of 65% of critical speed.

Except for the slurry filling of 1, the simulation pool location is generally higher than the experimental values. It is not quite clear why this trend exists, but it may be a consequence of the mesh used. Due to the limited computational ability of the computer used in this thesis a single mesh was implemented which may have resulted in a not fully developed fluid field. However, a similar trend can be observed between the two sets of results.

4.2.2 Effect of slurry filling on the angular position of mill load

The results of dry milling simulation as represented by DEM simulations were plotted. Figure 6 shows a plot of the angular position of media shoulder and toe at a constant mill speed of 75% critical speed and slurry level between 0 and 3.

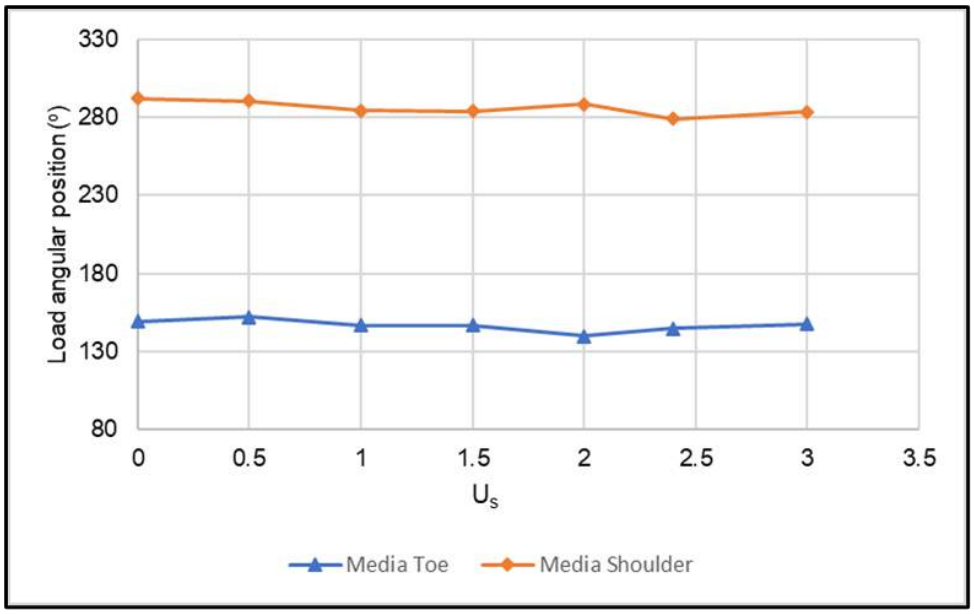


Figure 6: Angular load position with varying slurry filling

The angular position of the media shoulder varied between 279° and 293°. The shoulder position decreased from 293° to about 284° when the slurry filling was increased from 0 to 1, followed by a slight increase up to a slurry filling of 2. From Figure 6 it is not possible to establish a definite pattern of the behaviour of the shoulder position as slurry loading changes.

Regarding the toe of the media charge, the data evidence shows that the toe angle is generally constant for slurry fillings up to 2. The toe angle then gradually increases by 8° for slurry fillings of approximately between 2 – 3. This behaviour can be explained by the velocity profile of the slurry. The slurry velocity approaches the mill rotational speed near the shell but decreases as one moves farther away from the shell towards the centre of the mill. At low slurry loading a small amount of slurry flows in the direction of rotation of the mill. As a result, only a few layers are subject to the effect of the mill shell. Consequently, the media charge in the toe region tends to rise in the region where the cataracting balls fall and this translates into a decrease in the media toe angle.

With an increase in slurry loading, the number of layers affected by the shell rotation is much increased. This makes the balls less free to move and more subject to mill rotation, consequently the media toe increases. The slurry also creates some lubrication effects which prevents the media toe from going much higher. This explains the marginal increase in the toe angle similar trends can be observed in some empirical studies [19].

4.2.3 Effect of slurry viscosity on the angular position of mill load

Slurry rheology and load behaviour are crucial for mill performance, significantly impacting grinding efficiency [26, 19]. This study examined how the coupled CFD-DEM model responds to changes in slurry viscosity, focusing on its influence on load orientation in a laboratory mill. Slurry filling (U_s) was varied from 0 to 3.0, while viscosity (μ) was adjusted between 1 mPa·s and 10 mPa·s due to computational constraints. Data on pool, toe, and shoulder positions of the media were collected for comparison with an empirical model. Results indicated that

viscosity levels did not affect the shape of the media charge, as shown in the simulation snapshots Figure 7.

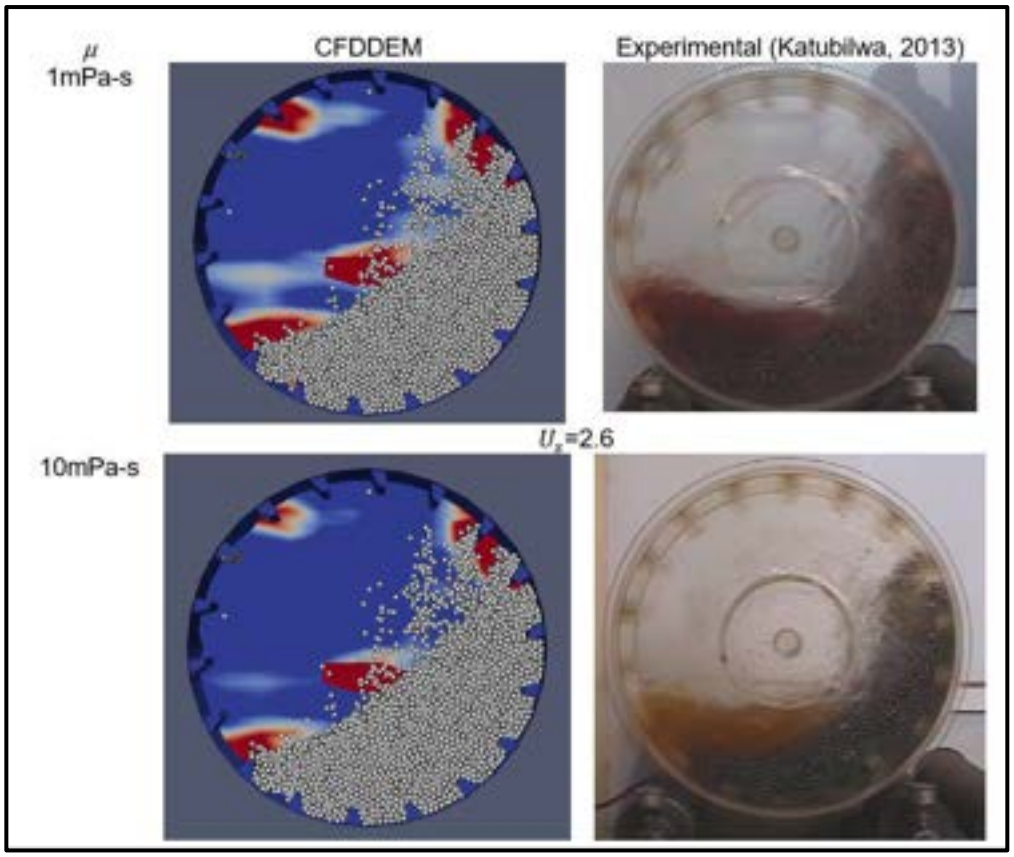


Figure 7: Comparison of coupled CFD-DEM and laboratory mill

The media shoulder had a variation of about ±10o regardless of the level of viscosity. On the other hand, the toe position is initially constant, and then consistently increases at slurry filling of 1 and beyond before steadily increasing with increasing slurry filling (see Figure 8)

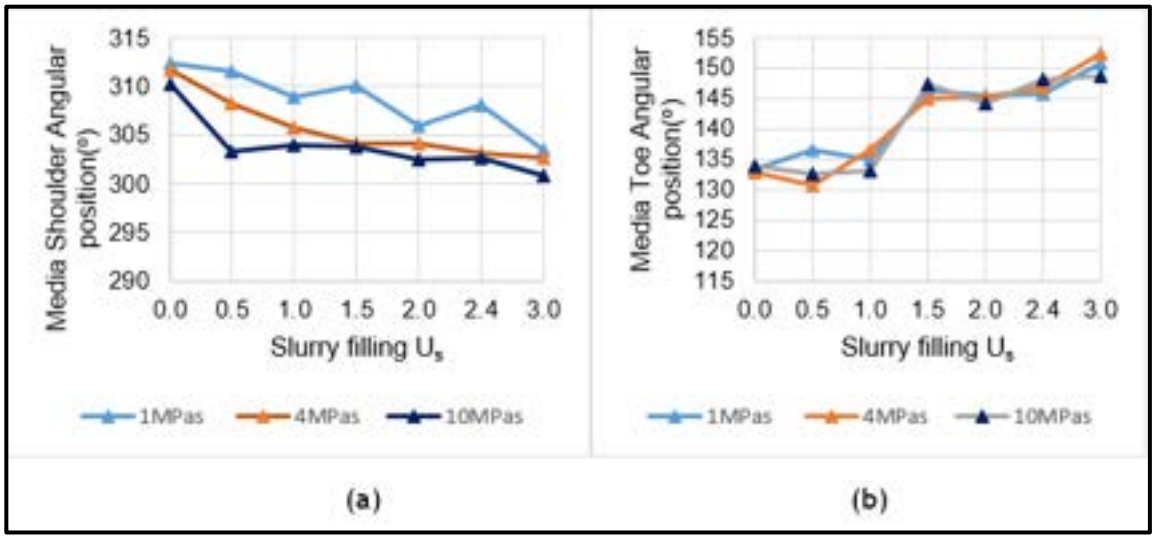


Figure 8: Angular position of media toe as a function of slurry viscosity and filling

The location of the slurry pool was plotted in Figure 9. For a specific filling degree of slurry, it seems slurry viscosity does not affect the position of the pool. However, the data pattern

suggests that the angular location of the slurry pool decreases with increasing slurry filling. In the coupled CFD-DEM simulation it seems that mill charge dynamics is not affected by the slurry rheology. Regardless of the change in pool level with slurry filling, the shape of the media charge position remained constant. And for the same filling degree of slurry, viscosity appears to have a limited effect on the position of the pool. Findings reported in this section show similar patterns to the experimental findings reported by [19 and 40]. However, it was not possible to verify that there is more cataracting for low viscosity as compared to higher viscosity.

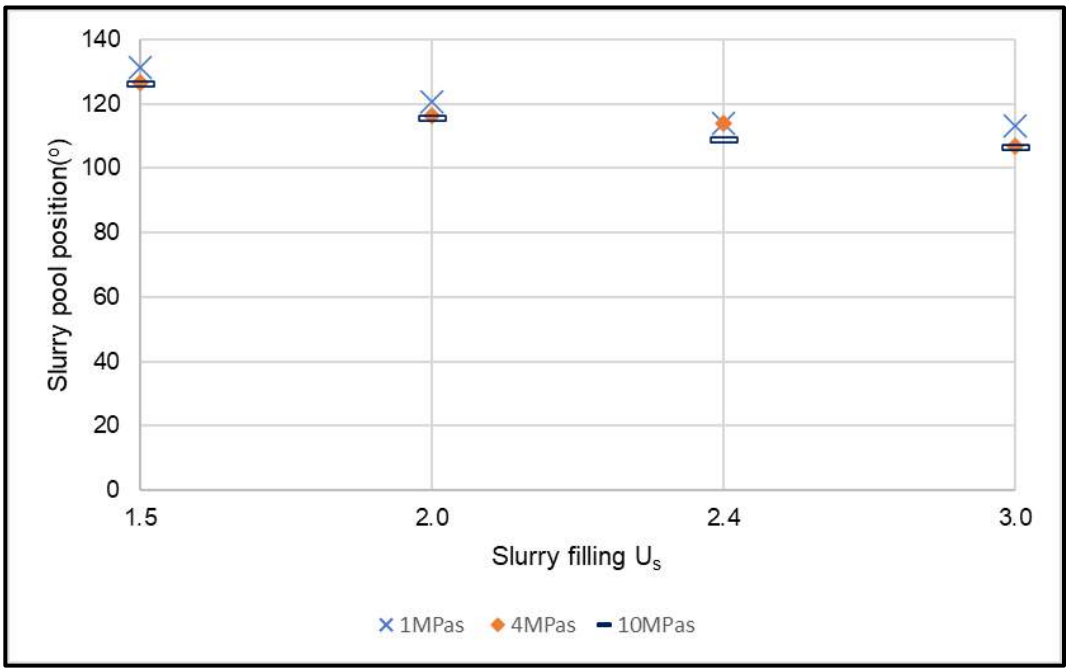


Figure 9: Angular position of slurry pool as a function of slurry viscosity and filling

4.3 Summary

This section presents comprehensive findings derived from coupled Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) and Discrete Element Method (DEM) simulations that were conducted to delineate the load profile within a wet ball mill. The key results elucidate critical metrics such as the void fraction and velocity profiles of the mill charge. Notably, our analysis shows that the void fraction varies between 0.4 in the stagnant 'dead zone' and 0.5 in the more dynamic cascading region, underscoring the heterogeneous nature of the charge distribution within the mill.

The velocity profile analysis reveals that the grinding media within the cataracting region experience peak velocities exceeding 1 m/s. This observation serves to confirm the robustness of the simulation model in replicating the dynamic behaviour characteristic of wet milling processes. Furthermore, we investigated the effects of operational parameters, including mill speed, slurry filling levels, and viscosity, on load dynamics. Our findings indicate that an increase in mill speed results in a noticeable elevation of the media shoulder position, with experimental validations showing a close alignment within a 5% margin of error—a testament to the reliability of the simulation framework employed.

Additionally, the study found that increasing slurry filling levels correspondingly lowered the position of the slurry pool, illustrating the intricate balance between these parameters. Conversely, variations in viscosity exerted a relatively minor influence on the overall dynamics of the milling environment, suggesting that other factors may play more significant roles under different operating conditions.

In summary, these findings contribute valuable insights into the interplay between grinding media and slurry interactions in wet milling environments. The data generated from this research enriches the existing body of knowledge, providing a basis for optimizing milling processes and advancing predictive modelling techniques in mineral processing applications.

5 CONCLUSION

This research has successfully demonstrated the application of coupled Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) and Discrete Element Method (DEM) simulation techniques in replicating the complex motion of the wet ball mill charge. Through a detailed examination of the velocity profiles within the mill, we have identified critical findings, particularly noting that the cataracting media achieves peak velocities during its descent from the shoulder region of the mill. This insight is invaluable not only for advancing theoretical models but also for practical evaluations relating to the wear mechanisms of grinding media, which is a crucial factor in optimizing the lifespan of milling equipment and improving operational efficiency.

The current findings have also provided a deeper understanding of the dynamics governing mill charges, facilitating a more nuanced evaluation of the forces exerted on grinding media. Furthermore, this study delves into the impacts of slurry filling and viscosity on load position, and the correlation of these parameters with results from existing pilot and laboratory experiments reinforces the validity of our computational approaches. This alignment with empirical data serves to bolster confidence in the use of CFD-DEM simulations as predictive tools in mineral processing applications.

Despite the promising results, it is essential to acknowledge the inherent limitations faced during this study. The computational power available restricted the simulation of a full spectrum of experimental conditions, potentially limiting the generalizability of our findings. Moreover, the use of a coarse mesh may have impaired the comprehensive development of the fluid flow field, which is crucial for capturing finer interactions within the slurry dynamics. These limitations highlight the necessity for enhanced computational resources and the pursuit of mesh refinement in subsequent research endeavours.

In conclusion, while this study lays a significant foundation for future research integrating CFD-DEM simulations in ball milling processes, it simultaneously charts a path forward that necessitates improvements in computational methodologies. Future investigations should focus on more sophisticated simulations that can encapsulate the full complexity of grinding environments, thus further enhancing our understanding of and ability to manipulate the factors influencing grinding efficiency and media performance. Emphasis on collaborative efforts between computational advancements and experimental validations will not only enrich the understanding of milling phenomena but will also propel innovations in mineral processing technologies.

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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF NUMBER AND VARIETY OF MULTIPLE TEAM MEMBERSHIP ON INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Multiple team membership (MTM) is common in modern organizations, with individuals working in multiple teams simultaneously. The number of teams varies, as does the variety in tasks and geographic dispersion. The number and variety of MTM influences performance, with research suggesting an inverted U-shaped relationship—low MTM underutilizes employees, while high MTM leads to overload. Task variety typically harms performance due to switching difficulties. However, this study found a U-shaped relationship between number of MTM and planning performance in the South African context. Additionally, task and geographic variety positively impact communication, counterproductive work behaviour, skills development, and innovative performance. MTM remains an emerging field with limited and inconsistent empirical data, making further research essential.

Keywords: Multiple team membership, Individual performance, Geographical dispersion variety, Task variety

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1 INTRODUCTION

In many engineering disciplines, employees contribute to various teams performing different projects and tasks [1]. This is inevitable in multi-project work settings as human resources are assigned to other teams to balance workload through scheduling [2]. Previous studies conducted in Sweden found that 77% of respondents worked on multiple projects simultaneously [3]. Individuals can be assigned to several teams as part of their job description. Within each team, variety can exist. The number and variety of an individual's MTMs influence their performance.

Being in various teams is known as multiple team membership (MTM), where an individual can simultaneously hold any number of memberships [4]. MTM is defined as "a situation in which individuals are concurrently members of two or more teams within a given period of time." [4] or as "…membership interdependencies across teams." [1]. MTM is an emerging research field that limits relevant research papers on theory and evidence despite the increased interest in the topic in recent years [1]. MTM can be conceptualised in terms of number and variety in the literature.

The relationships between MTM (in terms of number and variety) and individual performance have mixed findings, and there is limited empirical evidence in this area. To solve the problem stated, the objective of the study is to examine the relationship between MTM (number and variety) and individual performance. Furthermore, the research aims to answer the following questions:

- What is the effect of number of MTM on individual performance?
- What are the various categories of MTM variety?
- How does variety of MTM affect individual performance?

Based on the literature review in the next section, these two direct relationships and their interaction in MTM have yet to be researched extensively. The direct relationships are the number of MTM to individual performance and the variety of MTM to individual performance. Some studies might contradict or describe different ranges of the same theory based on positivism. Expanding the empirical evidence base allows a better understanding of the underlying theory to be discovered and further explored. If the relationship can be better understood, its advantages can be exploited, and its adverse effects can be reduced to promote individual and subsequent team and organisational performance.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, extent theory and research are explored to provide insights into the problem statement and to establish what is known about the relationships between MTM and individual performance. Firstly, individual performance and metrics are defined and related to the MTM context. The number and variety of effects of MTM on individual performance are explored.

2.1 Individual performance

Individual performance can be conceptualised either as a behavioural action or as an outcome [5]. Commonly used indicators and methods of measure from literature and industry are discussed in this section. Individual performance and its metrics must be defined to understand the effects that MTM will have.

Productivity is defined as working to achieve an organisation's goal [6]. This infers that the measurements for performance for firm performance are suitable for individual performance as individuals' collective performance fuels company performance. Goldratt and Cox [6] state that a firm aims to make a profit. Therefore, individuals that make up the firm should have the same goal in mind. According to Pretorius [7], three measurements should be considered when determining if and how well the firm is reaching its goal. The three measurements are

throughput, inventory, and operational expenses. By increasing throughput, profitability is increased. Likewise, the reduction in inventory and operating expenses will also increase profitability. These three measurements should be used to assess the combined effect of assets, employees, and processes.

The analogy of Goldratt and Cox [6] above relates to individuals. The individual's contribution to the firm's throughput, inventory and operational expenses can be used to measure their performance [7]. Studies measuring individual work performance (IWP) list three aspects, namely, task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) [8,9]. These three aspects are related to the three former measurements [6], [7] in Table 1.

Table 1: Task performance

Work Aspect [7]	Description [7]	Unit of Measure [7]	Relationship to Profit [7]	Relation to IWP [9]
Throughput	The revenue generated by work done over a set period.	Revenue per time	Positive	Task Performance
Inventory	The cost expended on work that has yet to be delivered.	Revenue	Negative	Contextual Performance
Operational expenses	Costs incurred to support the throughput of work.	Cost per time	Negative	CWB

2.2 Number of MTM

As researched in a previous study, the number of memberships impacts individual performance [10]. Number of MTM is defined as the "…number of team memberships held by individual members within that same time period." [4].

Based on the literature reviewed, the relationship between the number of MTM and individual performance has a curvilinear or inverted U-shape, as proposed by O'Leary et al. [4], is generally accepted but not proven extensively as described by Chan [2] and Margolis [1] as they note a lack of empirical evidence in the field. This relationship represents low performance at low numbers of MTM and is driven by a positive relationship of increasing performance as the number increases. The positive relationship is the result of a more comprehensive knowledge base [11], balancing capacity [12], and utilising idle time [4] as the number of MTM increases. Furthermore, low performance at high numbers of MTM is driven by a negative relationship where individual performance decreases as the number of MTM increases. The negative relationship is the result of switching costs [4], attention fragmentation [13] and work overload [3,4]. Between the extremes of high and low MTM is a plateau where the positive and negative effects of moderate MTM numbers result in limited changes in individual performance [4]. This plateau is the optimal number of MTM where individual performance is at its best. The location of the optimum number of MTMs is an open debate, with suggestions ranging from one to nine projects [1].

Other studies discovered contrary results, revealing that the relationship between the number of MTM and performance is not necessarily curvilinear. In the study by Fodor, Curşeu and Meslec [11], no differences were found in individual performance (individual learning in estimation tasks) between single team and MTM settings. Moreover, a longitudinal study suggests that employees perform better at higher numbers of MTM [10], thus not a curvilinear relationship.

With these varying results, the authors have proven the relationship at different parts of the same curve. The authors do not necessarily contradict each other but describe various parts of the same continuum from a positivist approach. Therefore, for this study, the literature reviewed on the number of MTMs is generalised to have an inverted U-shape relationship with individual performance.

2.3 Variety of MTM

Variety of MTM describes the general uniqueness of tasks being performed across MTM [14]. Variety can be divided into several categories, such as geographic dispersion [4], the individual's role [14], heterogeneity or task variation [15]. Geographic dispersion or proximity measures the physical distance between group members [16]. The proximity of teams can influence team and individual performance as interactions range from face-to-face to virtual communication and handover. Low proximity or highly dispersed teams can show enhanced creativity compared with their collocal counterparts [17]. Moreover, distance teams can need help effectively communicating ideas and instructions, which hinders performance, especially with a team needing more cohesion [16].

Repetitive tasks can lead to a lack of motivation, resulting in lower performance [18]. Therefore, higher variety will increase performance by increasing individual motivation. Conversely, repetitive tasks have fewer switching costs than various task types, leading to higher performance. This concept is illustrated using machine setup and breakdown as an analogy by The Goal [6]. O'Leary et al. [4] support this view of a negative relationship. For this study, the literature review on variety and MTM is generalised to have a negative relationship with individual performance cross-sectionally. The effect of variety of MTM has a negative relationship with individual performance.

2.3.1 Geographic dispersion variety

Geographic dispersion measures the physical distance between team members of different teams in MTM [16]. According to a study by Yao and Robert [17], dispersed teams need more effective communication and creative performance. However, team cohesion and effective multimedia communication reduce these negative impacts as individuals are less exposed to group pressure and social convention and more likely to share ideas in virtual team and work settings [19]. Moreover, as the number of sites or locations where an individual's team functions increases, the difficulties in communication, coordination, and switching costs also increase [4], [20]. This paper defines a site as a building [20]. Geographic dispersion can also be determined by area. For instance, a team can be spread internationally or confined to a single city [21].

2.3.2 Task variety

Task differentiation or heterogeneity is a form of variety of MTM, as Snijder [15] described. The task can vary in nature depending on the individual's job description and working environment and can include activities of design, research, administration, physical work, project management, and collaboration. Snijder used two main categories namely explorative and exploitative. Explorative tasks include design, research, development, and training. These tasks primarily concern growing, improving and expanding existing knowledge and methods. Exploitative tasks include project management, physical work, and manufacturing. These tasks focus on the effective use of existing knowledge as part of the day-to-day operations of a firm. Snijder's study revealed a negative relationship between task heterogeneity and individual performance. Bertolotti *et al.* [22] found that individuals struggle to adapt to new tasks during switching, significantly if the functions differ. Project management tasks require quick responses intermittently, whereas design and development tasks require long periods of uninterrupted concentration. A notable difference here is the duration of the task concentration effort. Increased task variety may induce overload and reduce individual performance [23].

3 HYPOTHESES

A predictor or independent-dependant model (Figure 1) is used in this study without moderator factors and is primarily based on the adapted models of O'Leary *et al.* [4] and Snijder [15].

The independent variables identified are number, geographic dispersion variety, and task variety within an individual's MTM. The dependent variable is individual performance, broken down into task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behaviour.

Hypothesis 1 arises from the literature study. The number of MTM is expected to have a curvilinear or ∩ relationship with individual performance [2], [4], [22]. At low numbers of MTM, individual performance is expected to have a positive relationship due to reduced standing time and resource balancing [4], [12]. At higher numbers of MTM, individual performance is expected to have a negative relationship due to increasing switching costs and cognitive fragmentation [4].

H1: There is a curvilinear (inverted-U shaped) relationship between the number of MTM that an individual has and individual performance.

Hypothesis 2 arises from the literature study and is a summation of its components. The variety of MTM is expected to have a negative relationship with individual performance, as depicted in **Error! Reference source not found.**. The main factor for this negative relationship is switching costs between different types of teams [4], [15], [22].

H2: The higher the variety of MTM an individual has, the lower the individual performance.

Hypothesis 2 is further broken down into its components with a hypothesis for each aspect of variety covered in the literature study. Hypothesis 2.1 is based on the study by Yao and Robert [17] and predicts a negative relationship between geographic dispersion variety and individual performance. This negative relationship results from increased switching costs, less effective communication, and lower creative performance as team dispersion variance increases [17].

H2.1: The higher the geographic dispersion variety amongst an individual's MTM, the lower the individual's performance.

Based on the studies of Bertolotti *et al.* [22] and Snijder [15], hypothesis 2.2 is created and suggests a negative relationship between task variety and individual performance. This relationship is driven by elevated switching costs between tasks that differ in nature [15], [22].

H2.2: The higher the task variety amongst the individual's MTM, the lower the individual's performance.

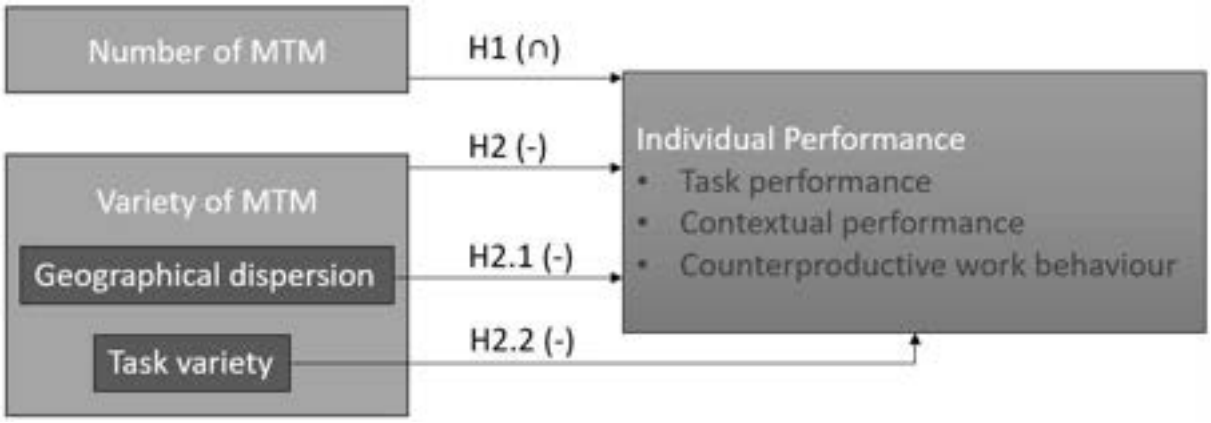


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

4 RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative approach is selected for the study based on the ability to establish relationships between independent and dependent variables [24]. An online questionnaire was used to gather data from the study respondents. Non-probability techniques of convenience and

snowball sampling are used to collect the research data [24]. A link to the questionnaire was sent out via email and WhatsApp to all the author's personal contacts deemed suitable for the study (convenience). To expand the respondents further, a request was added to forward the survey (snowball) to others who also fall within the requirements for the research [24]. Working professionals in South Africa are the target group.

A sample size of 107 is needed to test the partial correlation of individual predictors [25]. This is the target number of responses for the study. The target population for the survey is graduate professionals in South Africa. The author used personal contacts to send out invitations to the target group as described by convenience sampling [24]. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents are asked to relay it to their network of similar participants, as described by snowball sampling [24]. Research ethical clearance was obtained from University of Pretoria's EBIT Research Ethics Committee before the research commenced.

Demographic or categorical variables are included in the data set to categorise specific trends within the data [26]. The sample consists of professionals from various industriesm with average industry experience of 11.6 years from 44% females and 67% males. Ordinal and continuous scales are used for these variables. The ***number*** of MTM is determined by asking the respondents to indicate their three-month average of MTM [4]. The site index from O'Leary measures the ***geographic dispersion variety*** between an individual's teams. The site index is the number of sites per team [20]. If a team has more sites, it is more geographically dispersed. Likewise, there is no geographical dispersion if a team has a single site. Questions from Morgeson and Humphrey [23] on ***task variety*** are adapted to suit the MTM context. ***Individual performance*** is measured based on the individual work performance questionnaire developed by Koopmans *et al*. [8] which measures three aspects: task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Factor analysis of individual performance

The following factors of individual performance as proposed by Koopmans et al. [8] and Ramos-Villagrasa et al. [9]:

- Task performance: (Items 1 – 5)
- Contextual performance (Items 6 – 13)
- Counterproductive work behaviour (Items 14 – 18)

Factor analysis is conducted to test if the sample in this study shows the same factors (i.e. task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour) of individual performance as proposed by Koopmans et al. [8] and Ramos-Villagrasa et al. [9]. The extraction method used is principal component analysis with an unrestricted number of factors for Eigenvalues greater than 1. The analysis converged in six iterations using the Varimax method with Kaiser Normalization. Suitability for factor analysis is tested using the Kaiser-Meyer- Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO result indicates an average partial correlation among the individual performance variables. The Bartlett's test significance result suggests high plausibility of the underlying factors. Given the favourable outcome of the KMO and Bartlett's test, the factor analysis identified five underlying factors of individual performance in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Rotated component matrix

Item	Item description	Component					Factor group
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	I managed to plan my work so that I finished on time.	.094	**.836**	-.034	.058	-.018	2
2	I kept in mind the work result I needed to achieve.	.131	**.502**	.136	.105	-.477	2
3	I was able to set priorities.	.139	**.618**	.145	.185	-.462	2
4	I was able to carry out my work effectively.	-.031	**.770**	.074	.161	.240	2
5	I managed my time well.	-.073	**.852**	.155	.022	-.071	2
6	On my own initiative, I started new tasks when my old task was completed.	-.030	.102	**.645**	.055	-.154	3
7	I took on challenging tasks when they were available.	.018	.211	**.742**	.122	.023	3
8	I worked on keeping my job-related knowledge up to date.	.137	.137	.215	**.842**	.107	4
9	I worked on keeping my work skills up to date.	.140	.173	.231	**.856**	-.072	4
10	I came up with creative solutions for new problems.	.102	.026	**.656**	.192	-.028	3
11	I took on extra responsibilities.	-.127	-.043	**.680**	.010	.350	3
12	I continually sought new challenges in my work.	.063	.021	**.740**	.131	.179	3
13	I actively participated in meetings and consultations.	.035	.074	.285	.098	**.755**	5
14	I complained about minor work-related issues at work.	**.669**	.010	.085	.153	-.241	1
15	I made problems at work bigger than they were.	**.684**	.111	.072	.337	-.138	1
16	I focused on the negative aspects of the situation at work instead of the positive ones.	**.759**	-.005	.063	.042	.063	1
17	I talked to colleagues about the negative aspects of my work.	**.831**	.118	.036	-.115	-.024	1
18	I talked to people outside the organisation about the negative aspects of my work.	**.719**	-.100	-.257	.090	.216	1

The five underlying factors identified in Table above are described in grouped items below:

1. Counterproductive work behaviour (Items 14-18): This factor group coincidences perfectly with the same group and name of Ramos-Villagrasa et al. [9]. The items all describe negative traits that reduce individual performance. As these items are reverse coded, the higher the value, the higher the individual's performance.
2. Planning (Items 1-5): This factor group aligns with the task performance group of Ramos-Villagrasa et al. [9].
3. Innovative performance (Items 6-7, 10-12): This group consists of initiation, creativeness, and thriving in facing challenges.
4. Skills development (Items 8-9): Keeping up to date with job-related skills and knowledge describes individuals' performance in terms of skills development.
5. Communication (Item 13): Active participation in meetings and consultations entails communication performance. These five underlying factors are used to compute new dependent variables further analysed in the following correlation and regression sections.

5.2 Correlations analysis

Spearman's correlation coefficients are calculated to account for ordinal data. There is an expected correlation direction; therefore, one-tailed significance is tested. Observations concerning independent and dependent variables from Table 3 is listed below. The results shown include only the correlations between dependent and independent variables. The number of MTM is mean-centred and squared to test for U-shape correlation.

- The number of MTM positively correlates with communication. This means that the higher the number of MTM, the higher the individual's communication performance will be.
- The number of MTM mean squared positively relates to planning. Therefore, the number of teams has a U-shaped relationship with planning. At a low number of MTM, the planning performance will decrease as the number of teams increases. With a higher number of MTM, the planning performance will increase as the number of MTM increases.
- Geographic dispersion variety positively correlates with counterproductive work behaviour. Since counterproductive work behaviour is reverse coded, the higher the geographic dispersion variety, the less counterproductive work behaviour will be and the higher the individual performance.
- Task variety positively correlates with innovative performance and skill development. As task variety increases, the innovative performance and skill development increases.

Table 3: Spearman Correlation (N=111)

Variables	Number of MTM	Number of MTM ^{2}	Geographic dispersion variety	Task variety
Counterproductive work behaviour	-.062	.081	.134	-.048
Planning	-.133	**.158***	-.054	.039
Innovative performance	.106	-.032	-.112	**.175***
Skills development	-.056	-.093	.011	.046
Communication	**.179***	.004	.090	.133

*p<0.05 (one-tailed)

5.3 Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression analysis is done for each factor group of individual performance. Significant impacts between independent and dependent variables are discussed.

5.3.1 Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB)

The multiple regression analysis for counterproductive work behaviour as dependent variable showed no significant relationship between number of MTM and CWB as shown in Table 4

As for MTM variety, Geographic dispersion variety has a weak positive impact on counterproductive work behaviour ($\beta = 0.176$, $p<0.1$). With more variety in geographical dispersion, counterproductive work behaviour becomes more prevalent.

Table 4: Regression analysis: Counterproductive work behaviour to variety (N=111)

Variables	Dependent variable: CWB		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	.434	.199	.762
Age	-.010	.009	.009
Gender	-.161	-.166	-.159
Qualification level	-.061	-.066	-.076
Industry	.039	.048	.054
Level of employment	.105	.102	.128

Experience	-.074	-.083	-.099
Geographic dispersion variety		.176*	.150
Task variety			-.115
R^2	4.3%	7.4%	8.6%
ΔR^2	4.3%	3.1%	1.2%
F-value	.788	1.181	1.202
ΔF-value	.788	3.429*	1.325
VIF	1	1.007-1.052	1.112

*p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

5.3.2 Planning

At a low number of teams, the planning performance decrease as the number of teams increases (β = -0.426, p<0.05) as reported in Table 5. With a higher number of teams, the planning performance increases as the number of teams increases (β = 0.389, p<0.05). This shows a U-shaped relationship between number of MTM and planning performance.

Table 5: Regression analysis: Planning to number (N=111)

Variables	Dependent variable: Planning		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	-.324	-.305	-.300
Age	.034	-.009	-.032
Gender	.150	.164	.197*
Qualification level	-.100	-.091	-.058
Industry	.066	.058	.087
Level of employment	.064	.101	.126
Experience	-.094	-.066	-.040
Number of teams		-.092	-.426**
Number of teams mean-centred, squared			.389**
R^2	4.2%	4.9%	9.4%
ΔR^2	4.2%	0.7%	4.5%
F-value	.755	.756	1.316
ΔF-value	.755	.774	5.026
VIF	1	1.092-1.189	3.387

*p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

5.3.3 Innovative performance

No significant impacts of independent variables are observed on the dependent variables.

5.3.4 Skill development

There are no significant results for the number of MTM and skill development. On the other hand, task variety has a weak positive impact on skill development (β = 0.188, p<0.1). As task variety increases, skill development increases. The results are shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Regression analysis: Skill development to variety (N=111)

Variables	Dependent variable: Skill development		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	.383	.322	-.601
Age	-.413	-.408	-.408
Gender	.060	.058	.047
Qualification level	.002	.001	.018
Industry	.123	.125	.116
Level of employment	.028	.027	-.015
Experience	.426*	.423	.450
Geographic dispersion variety		.045	.088
Task variety			.188*
R^2	4.9%	5.1%	8.3%
ΔR^2	4.9%	0.2%	3.2%
F-value	.887	.786	1.148
ΔF-value	.887	.220	3.543*
VIF	1	1.007-1.052	1.112

*p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

5.3.5 Communication

Number of teams has a weak positive impact on communication (β = 0.236, p<0.05) and contributed to ΔR^2 of 4.7% to the variance in Commumication as the dependent variable as shown in Table 7. As the number of teams increases, respondents are more likely to improve their communication skills.

There are no significant results for the variety and communication.

Table 7: Regression analysis: Communication to number (N=111)

Variables	Dependent variable: Communication		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	-.317	-.366	-.367
Age	.137	.246	.249
Gender	-.199*	-.235**	-.238**
Qualification level	.044	.021	.017
Industry	.110	.130	.127
Level of employment	.027	-.068	-.071
Experience	.061	-.010	-.013
Number of teams		.236**	.274
Number of teams mean-centred, squared			-.044
R^2	9.3%	14.0%	14.1%
ΔR^2	9.3%	4.7%	0.1%
F-value	1.786	2.402**	2.092*
ΔF-value	1.786	5.621**	.069
VIF	1	1.092-1.189	3.387

*p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Answering the research questions

The answers to the research questions are discussed below:

- *What is the effect of number of MTM on individual performance?*

The number of teams has a U-shape relationship and correlation with the planning aspect of individual performance. The number of teams negatively correlates with planning performance at low MTM. As MTM increases, the relationship becomes positive. Although this is only for the planning aspect of individual performance, it is the direct opposite relationship as proposed in the literature study [2], [4], [22]. It appears that people are bad at planning

from the outset. People tend to perform well when there is less need for planning and prioritising (presumably at a low number of teams). The possible lack of planning skills shows as the number of teams increases, as described by switching costs [4]. At a certain point, however, individuals are faced with the absolute need to plan and prioritise to avoid even lower performance. At this point, when they presumably learn to plan and prioritise effectively, the relationship turns positive, and performance increases as the number of teams increases.

The number of teams has a positive relationship and correlation with the communication aspect of individual performance. The correlation coefficient for Pearson (0.207) and Spearman (0.179) are both significant at the $p<0.05$ level. This indicates a weak but definite correlation. As the number of teams increases, individuals respond with higher levels of communicational performance.

- *What are the various categories of MTM variety?*

Four aspects of variety of MTM are identified in the literature review, of which only the first two have been included in the research model: task variety and geographical dispersion variety. Including all the aspects of variety explored in the literature will make the research too broad and convolute the data gathering and analysis. Thus, this study focused on the effects of task variety and geographical dispersion variety to simply the data collection and analysis.

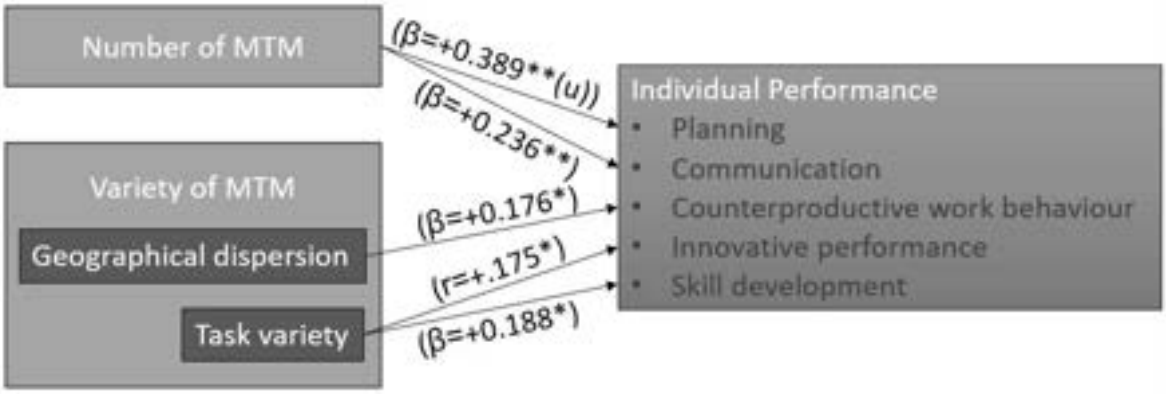
- *How does variety of MTM affect individual performance?*

Geographical dispersion variety positively affected individual performance in terms of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). The more individuals are involved in teams with various levels of geographic dispersion, the less counterproductive work behaviour is observed and the higher the individual performance becomes. The discussion in the literature study suggested that geographic dispersion variety would have the opposite effect on individual performance. According to the literature, switching costs are expected to increase as the geographical dispersion variety increases, decreasing individual performance [4], [20].

Task variety has a positive correlation with innovative performance. As individuals are exposed to a wider variety of tasks, they tend to perform more innovatively. Task variety also has a positive relationship correlation with skill development. Individuals are likelier to focus on skills development in settings with greater task variety. This result differs from the literature study that proposed a negative relationship due to added switching costs [2], [4], [22].

6.2 Updated model

An updated model based on the results is presented below as a summary of the relational research answers (Figure 1). This model shows the newly discovered correlations and relationships between the number and variety of MTM and individual performance.



Regression values significance (ß): *p<0.10; **p<0.05

Correlation value significance (r): *p<0.05 (one-tailed)

Figure 1: Updated model

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

7.1 Theoretical implications and contributions

The underlying factors of individual performance differ in this study compared to the study by Koopmans *et al*. [8]. The tool proposed by Koopmans *et al*. [8] may not be generalisable for this sample, given the volatility of its underlying factors.

The number of teams has a U-shaped relationship and correlation with planning regarding individual performance. The other underlying factors of individual performance do not have a significant relationship with the number of teams. Moreover, a weak positive relationship is found between the number of teams and communication. The number of teams also positively correlates with communication. This means that the higher the number of teams, the higher the individual's communication performance will be. Conversely, the literature suggests that individual performance has an inverted U-shaped relationship with the number of teams [2], [4], [12], [22].

Contrasting findings are found in this study for the relationship between variety and individual performance. Negative relationships were expected based on the literature [4]. The results may be explained by the notion that greater involvement in teams with varying levels of geographic dispersion exposes individuals to diverse collaboration demands and accountability structures, which in turn reduces counterproductive work behaviours and enhances individual performance.

Geographical dispersion variety has a positive relationship and correlation with individual performance regarding counterproductive work behaviour. When individuals work across different numbers of sites per team, they tend to exhibit less counterproductive work behaviour, which improves their individual performance. Conversely, a negative relationship is observed by Yao and Robert [17]; switching costs, ineffective communication, and reduced creativity reduce individual performance as geographical dispersion variety increases.

Task variety has a positive correlation with innovative performance. Moreover, task variety has a positive relationship and correlation with skill development. As the variety of tasks increases, individuals are observed to perform better innovatively and develop their skills.

Conversely, the literature suggests that a negative relationship exists between task variety and individual performance. Switching costs are expected to elevate as task variety increases, which lowers individual performance [15], [22].

Effects of switching costs and cognitive fragmentation were not observed with either number or variety increases. The contrasting result of this report suggests that the field of MTM is sample-specific, and that generalisability is not readily achievable. This stems from the novelty of the research field and necessitates caution when interpreting results.

7.2 Managerial recommendations

In practice, managers are encouraged to exploit positive relationships to enhance the individual performance of their teams. Based on the results, individuals tend to perform better at a higher variety of tasks and geographical dispersion of teams. Therefore, employees should be exposed to different work aspects and work on different sites. Moreover, individuals with more teams tend to communicate better. Few negative effects are observed apart from the U-shape relationship regarding the number of teams and planning. Managers should aim to avoid the trough by keeping the number of teams limited or exposing their employees to many teams quickly.

7.3 Recommendations for future study

The findings of this research can be further explored to determine the justifications underpinning the results found concerning the list in the result summary section. Underlying factors may differ in each research setting and should be analysed case-by-case.

The number of teams is highly dependent on the specific work environment of the individual. As Bertolotti *et al.* [22] mentioned, project management requires quick intermitted responses and frequent switching, as development environments require longer concentration spans and fewer switching. With high switching, a higher number of teams can be possible, whereas with less switching, a lower team number can be expected. These two different settings need to be researched separately to compared. Task or setting type optimums can be explored between various industries.

Future research could examine potential interaction effects among the independent variables, as such analyses may reveal more nuanced relationships that are not captured through main effects alone. Investigating these interactions would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the model's dynamics and may offer deeper theoretical and practical insights into the phenomenon under study.

People might rate themselves as good biasedly, as observed in the result. This will skew the results toward the upper limit when a Likert scale is used with a self-appraisal. Qualitative methods should be explored using key performance indicators rather than self-assessments in organisation-specific settings. Using this approach may reduce the probability of biased data. Moreover, the sample is limited to South African professionals; therefore, the results cannot be generalised to other countries. Similar research in other contexts would enhance the generalisability of the model.

This study employed linear regression and correlation analysis, with the selection of these methods determined by the research questions and the nature of the dataset. Although these techniques allowed for a straightforward examination of the hypothesised relationships, more sophisticated approaches—such as social network analysis—may yield deeper and more nuanced insights.

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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL MULTIPLE TEAM MEMBERSHIP (MTM) ON INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE AND LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

A large number of knowledge workers across industries and occupations engage in multiple team membership (MTM). Given MTM's collaborative nature, understanding how relationships affect individual performance and learning is crucial. This study examines intra-organisational MTM using a social capital perspective, focusing on degree centrality and trust. The sample included 139 individuals from a South African petrochemical company, with 110 completed online questionnaires. It was hypothesised that degree centrality has a curvilinear relationship with performance and learning, but analyses did not support this. However, trust was found to positively impact both performance and learning. These findings suggest that fostering trust is more influential than expanding an individual's network size. Project managers should prioritise building trust in MTM environments to enhance individual outcomes.

Keywords: Degree centrality, intra-organisational MTM, individual learning, individual performance, trust

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

One prevalent assumption that has characterised much of the research on team composition is the belief that, at any given point in time, individual employees are exclusively affiliated with a single team. This conventional perspective may no longer be applicable since a substantial proportion of today's workforce, spanning diverse countries, industries, and occupations, engages in more than one team concurrently. In Europe and the United States, it is estimated that approximately 65-95 percent of knowledge workers are engaged in MTM [1]. O'Leary et al. [2] define MTM as *"a situation in which individuals are concurrently members of two or more teams within a given period of time."* Previous research has largely overlooked the underlying causes and resulting impacts of MTM, leaving uncertainty regarding whether MTM constitutes an effective and efficient work practice. For instance, multi-team members must allocate their time and efforts across multiple teams, frequently necessitating transitions from one team to another to manage competing demands on their time [2], [3]. Consequently, MTM can significantly complicate an employee's work schedule and task requirements.

On a more optimistic note, MTM may also provide individual employees with opportunities for unique personal and professional development, and self-expression [2], [3]. Engaging with multiple teams exposes individuals to diverse challenges, perspectives, and tasks, leading to the acquisition of a broader range of skills, knowledge, and experiences while allowing individuals to express their unique talents and capabilities [2], [4].

As the nature of MTM necessitates that employees collaborate with a diverse range of colleagues across various teams, it is necessary to understand the role that relationships play in the performance and learning of individuals within MTM settings. Carter and De Church [5] define relationships in the MTM context as "the interpersonal connections, interactions, and dynamics" that individuals foster and sustain when these individuals concurrently work across multiple teams within an organisation. Such relationships can considerably influence team effectiveness, information sharing, coordination, and the overall functioning of teams and the organisation [5], [6].

Chan et al. [7] define individual learning "as the behavioural focus organisational actors have on improving and mastering a task." A fundamental principle supporting the adoption of employees in MTM work arrangements is the anticipation that both the employees and their teams will derive educational advantages. In the MTM context, project members acquire information that can be exchanged among teams, serving as an asset to facilitate learning [7].

O'Leary et al. [2] define individual productivity as "the ability to create products or services that meet the expectations of key stakeholders in a given time period with a given set of human and other resources." Chan [8] posits that individual productivity may be viewed as a dimension of individual performance. The same stance is adopted in this research.

Social capital theory posits that an individual's social network, characterised by their interpersonal relationships with colleagues, encompasses valuable interpersonal assets that enhance their performance and learning [9], [10], [11]. This study adopts a social capital perspective to investigate the impact of relationships within intra-organisational MTM on individual performance and learning.

1.2 Research gap and problem statement

Analysis of the existing literature reveals that there is a deficiency in empirical research on how relationships within these MTM settings influence individual performance and learning. Previous scholars have primarily investigated the conditions and factors associated with MTM, with the majority of research concentrating on how MTM impacts individuals or teams [12],

[13]. Regarding the influence of MTM on teams, the predominant research focus has been on performance and productivity [14]. Research on the effects of MTM on individuals encompasses the examination of roles, creativity, and performance [15], [16], [17], with minimal empirical exploration of the influence of relationships within MTM on individual performance [1], [17], despite the potential for these relationships to impact individual performance significantly.

Despite the widespread occurrence of MTM within organisations, and the continuous organisational challenge of adapting and learning, there is a paucity of empirical research linking these two concepts [1], [18]. Addressing this gap is critical, as such relationships hold significant potential to facilitate individual learning.

1.3 Research objective and question

The objective of this study is to evaluate the extent to which relationship dynamics in intra-organisational MTM influence individual performance and individual learning. Given the objective, the research question is: How does the relationship dynamics of intra-organisational MTM influence the performance and learning of individuals?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualising MTM

Previous research [14], [19] has primarily concentrated on examining MTM at the team level, which might seem surprising given that MTM arises when individuals participate in multiple teams concurrently [2], [3]. Employees often exhibit significant variations (e.g., in the number of teams, depth of involvement, nature of team roles, time commitment, etc.) in the multitude of teams they are concurrently engaged in. However, these individual-level discrepancies are not adequately addressed in team-level conceptualisations [20], [21].

The investigations that have delved into the repercussions of MTM at the individual level depict MTM as a “double-edged sword” capable of both impeding and enhancing an employee's overall performance and well-being in the workplace [21]. To elaborate, the existing literature highlights areas of uncertainty concerning the impact of MTM on an individual's overall job performance, mental health, and the quality of the individual’s interpersonal workplace relationships [21].

2.2 Interpersonal consequences of individual-level MTM

MTM necessitates that employees collaborate with a diverse range of colleagues across various teams, and this collaboration can be influenced by specific interpersonal dynamics [2], [3], [22]. Pluut et al. [17] argued that each team affiliation brings about its own set of demands and expectations for an employee, consequently observing a positive correlation between the number of teams an individual is concurrently a part of and the individual’s perception of interpersonal demands.

Moreover, MTM imposes time constraints on an individual's participation within each team, potentially complicating their ability to fully comprehend the interpersonal expectations and demands of each co-worker [3], [23]. Additionally, the roles an individual plays in these multiple teams could be easily compromised due to the work performed across the multiple teams and reporting to different team managers [3], [23].

In contrast, Mortensen et al. [12] proposed that MTM offers employees the opportunity to establish meaningful relationships with co-workers across different parts of the organisation. Connectedly, O’ Leary et al. [2] argued that “MTM significantly enlarges an individual’s social network, leading to a more diverse range of contributions and adequate interpersonal connections that inspire learning.” Thus, MTM has the potential to magnify an individual’s interpersonal network among various teams within the organisation, potentially enhancing their accessibility to valuable information and knowledge.

This emphasis on the correlation between MTM and learning holds significance not only in academic discourse, but also in managerial practice. Learning serves as a foundational cornerstone for various organisational outcomes, including creativity, performance enhancement, innovation, competitive advantage, and, eventually, the longevity of the organisation itself [3].

Chan et al. [7] found that individuals who engage with both external and internal project teams are more inclined to concentrate on enhancing their skill sets and achieving proficiency in their assigned responsibilities. As a result, they expand their reservoir of expertise and gain insights from various project teams with which they are affiliated. Establishing strong connections with project teams within and beyond the organisation is evidently advantageous with respect to learning for individual team members.

The literature reviewed highlights MTM as an intricate work practice that can both complicate interpersonal relationships and foster productive and meaningful connections among multiple teams. This seeming paradox underscores the necessity for further research into the interpersonal implications of individual-level MTM.

2.3 Social capital perspective on the interpersonal consequences of individual-level MTM

Social capital theory posits that an individual's social network, characterised by their interpersonal relationships with colleagues, encompasses valuable interpersonal assets, such as knowledge, information, and instrumental and social support [10], [21]. Lin [24] defines social capital as an individual's capacity to access and utilise these resources. Social capital is a pivotal factor in employee performance since those with greater social capital can more readily tap into resources that enhance their performance outcomes [10], [11], [25].

In innovative, non-routine work environments, forging connections across organisational subunits provides access to diverse information, outlooks, political linkages, and expertise [24], [26]. Given this perspective, it is reasonable to contend that MTM can foster additional productive associations spanning various teams, thus bolstering the social capital essential for improved performance. MTM, by definition, necessitates collaboration with colleagues from multiple teams with varying specialisations [2], [21]. Consequently, MTM enables individuals to collaborate with a greater quantity of previously unacquainted clients, project leaders, and colleagues, thereby accessing significant resources inherent within diverse teams, and transmitting such resources across team contexts [27], [28], [29].

MTM might, for instance, expose an individual to novel sources of knowledge, which can stimulate their creativity [21], [30], [31], acquaint them with novel practices that could prove beneficial in other team environments, e.g., through sharing best practices [21], [32], and institute prospects for forging fresh and profound relationships with co-workers situated in diverse sections of the organisation [21], [33], [34]. In summary, MTM could represent a unique source of social capital, extending beyond an individual's sheer quantity of interpersonal connections [10], [21].

2.4 Dimensions of social capital

Social capital possesses diverse attributes. Putnam [35] advocated for a heightened research focus on elucidating the different dimensions of social capital. Within the examination of the impact of social capital on intellectual capital formation, Nahapiet and Ghoshal [36], Menike [37], and Fandiño et al. [38] organised its facets into three main clusters, namely, the structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions of social capital.

Structural social capital refers to the dimension of social capital associated with the characteristics of the social structure and the network of relationships in its entirety [36], [39]. The study of structural social capital often adopts a network approach, depicting

interaction patterns by examining the intensity of interactions among actors within a specific firm or organisational field [40], [41]. Various perspectives, such as degree centrality and network stability, are employed to analyse structural social capital [42]. Structural social capital fosters conditions that enable access to assorted parties for knowledge exchange and transfer, as well as opportunities for individuals to connect with peers who possess the desired knowledge or expertise [10], [43], [44].

Relational social capital constitutes a dimension of social capital primarily concerned with the attributes and virtues of personal relationships [9], [45]. This dimension encompasses the disposition and calibre of relationships formed via a series of interactions [42], [46] and manifests in behavioural characteristics like identification, shared group norms, trustworthiness, and obligations [10], [47]. Associability, the inclination to prioritise collective goals over individual goals, stands as a central aspect of relational social capital [42], [48].

The cognitive dimension of social capital refers to resources that facilitate shared conceptions, understandings, and frameworks of meaning among involved parties [36], [37], [39], [49].

This study focuses on the influence of only one element of the structural dimension of social capital, namely degree centrality, and only one element of the relational dimension of social capital, namely trust, in investigating the impact of relationships on individual performance and learning within intra-organisational MTM. This is because evaluating all the elements of all three dimensions of social capital would notably extend the questionnaire, potentially lowering the response rate, as indicated by Roszkowski and Bean [50] and Gaur et al. [51], who concluded that in empirical studies, shorter questionnaires received approximately 28 percent higher response rates compared to longer ones.

2.5 Degree centrality of network ties

Researchers in the field of social networks have long contended that certain connections for sharing information, referred to as network ties, can have varying levels of worth for an individual's performance [21], [26]. The core tenet of social capital theory posits that network ties grant access to resources [52]. A prominent theme in the literature emphasises social capital as a valuable source of informational advantages [32], [53], [54]. As individuals are situated within social structures, they are part of intricate networks of relationships [55], [56]. [57]. Each connection in an employee's network acts as a pathway for knowledge exchange [55], [58].

Degree centrality, which refers to the degree of connectedness to others within an organisation, conceptualises the social position based on the number of ties [55], [59]. Different network positions offer varying opportunities for knowledge sharing [55], [60]. Therefore, one's degree of network centrality serves as both an opportunity and a constraint for receiving information, accessing resources, and seeking advice or social support [55], [61]. Employees in more central positions possess numerous ties, granting them greater access and control, affording them increased opportunities to not only share knowledge but also accumulate valuable insights [55], [56]. Conversely, peripheral network positions provide limited opportunities for knowledge transfer or assimilation as employees with few ties may be perceived as outsiders within the social context, minimising their engagement in knowledge-sharing activities [55], [62].

The research portrays degree centrality as a vital aspect of social capital theory as it affects the flow of resources (particularly information) within networks and significantly impacts the efficiency and effectiveness of knowledge transfer. Hence, degree centrality represents the structural element of social capital examined in this study.

2.6 Trust

Misztal [63] and Nahapiet and Ghoshal [36] define trust as the belief that the "results of somebody's intended action will be appropriate from our point of view." Substantial research exists [9], [35], [64], [65], [66], [67], [68], [69] demonstrating that high levels of trust in relationships lead to increased willingness to participate in cooperative interaction and social exchange.

Putnam [66] and Sawhill [70] describe trust as a pivotal component of social capital. Sawhill [70] and Putnam [66] posit that trust promotes cooperation and that the greater the level of trust within a community, the better the probability of cooperation. Hence, trust represents the relational element of social capital examined in this study.

3 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

3.1 Influence of degree centrality within intra-organisational MTM on individual performance

Degree centrality can influence individual performance in various ways. In a social network, for example, individuals with a higher degree centrality are considered more popular or important, as they have more connections with other individuals. This can lead to increased opportunities for information exchange, resource support, and social support from colleagues, positively affecting work engagement and job satisfaction, and thereby influencing individual performance [71], [72].

The impact of the number of MTM on individual performance is a complex issue with both potential benefits and challenges. The more teams an individual is part of, the greater the opportunities to interact with different team members, potentially increasing the individual's connections and relationships within the network. This increased interaction can lead to higher degree centrality for individuals with multiple team memberships, as these individuals are likely to have more ties within the network compared to those with fewer team memberships. Therefore, there is a positive relationship between the number of MTM and degree centrality in a social network.

However, there are also potential negative effects associated with MTM, such as increased workload, coordination challenges, and resource blocking, which can hinder individual performance [6], [73]. The research suggests that at lower levels of MTM, the positive effects, like volume flexibility, may dominate, while at higher levels of MTM, the negative effects, like overwork, may become more prominent, leading to a decline in performance [6], [74]. Hence, the relationship between the number of MTM that an individual has, and the performance of the individual is curvilinear. As degree centrality is positively related to the number of MTM, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1: The relationship between the degree centrality of an individual within intra-organisational MTM and the performance of the individual is curvilinear; the positive relationship increases at a decreasing rate and eventually turns negative.

3.2 Influence of degree centrality within intra-organisational MTM on individual learning

In a social network, individuals with higher degree centrality may have more opportunities to interact with others, leading to a greater willingness to disclose relevant information. This can positively influence their potential for information exchange and their ability to affect others in the network, thereby enhancing individual learning [75], [76].

Research suggests that MTM can positively influence individual learning by providing opportunities to engage in various tasks and projects, which leads to greater learning through exposure to diverse viewpoints and knowledge [7], [73]. As mentioned, research suggests that

at lower levels of MTM, the positive effects, like learning opportunities, may dominate, while at higher levels of MTM, the negative effects, like coordination neglect, may become more prominent, leading to a decline in learning [6], [74]. Hence, the relationship between the number of MTM that an individual has, and the learning of the individual is curvilinear. As degree centrality is positively related to the number of MTM, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H2: The relationship between the degree centrality of an individual within intra-organisational MTM and the learning of the individual is curvilinear; the positive relationship increases at a decreasing rate and eventually turns negative.

3.3 Influence of trust within intra-organisational MTM on individual performance

Studies conducted by Conlon and Mayer [77] and Morales-Sánchez [78] concluded that the readiness to trust others was positively correlated to the performance and behaviour of individuals employed in an agency simulation, suggesting that the readiness to trust others is linked to the performance and behaviour of individuals in an organisational context. Similarly, a study conducted by Ning and Jin [79] empirically supported the idea that an environment perceived as trustworthy by employees is linked to positive psychological conditions. This perception motivates individuals to invest more effort and personal resources in the organisation's work, leading to superior task performance. Based on the research above, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H3: Trust within intra-organisational MTM is positively related to individual performance.

3.4 Influence of trust within intra-organisational MTM on individual learning

Misztal [63], Nahapiet and Ghoshal [36] and Safari et al. [80] observed that trust enhances dialogue and communication, suggesting that trust may facilitate access to individuals for intellectual capital exchange, i.e., learning, and heighten expectations of value via such exchanges.

Research [68], [80], [81] indicates that high levels of trust lead to an increased willingness to take risks in interactions, potentially facilitating experimentation by integrating different types of information. Nahapiet and Ghoshal [36], Luhmann [82], and Safari et al. [80] have shown that trust enhances a system’s potential for managing diversity and complexity, factors crucial in developing new intellectual capital. Boisot [83] underscores the significance of interpersonal trust for knowledge development in environments characterised by high uncertainty and ambiguity. Based on the research above, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H4: Trust within intra-organisational MTM is positively related to individual learning.

Based on the hypotheses formulated, the following conceptual model was defined, as illustrated in Figure 1.

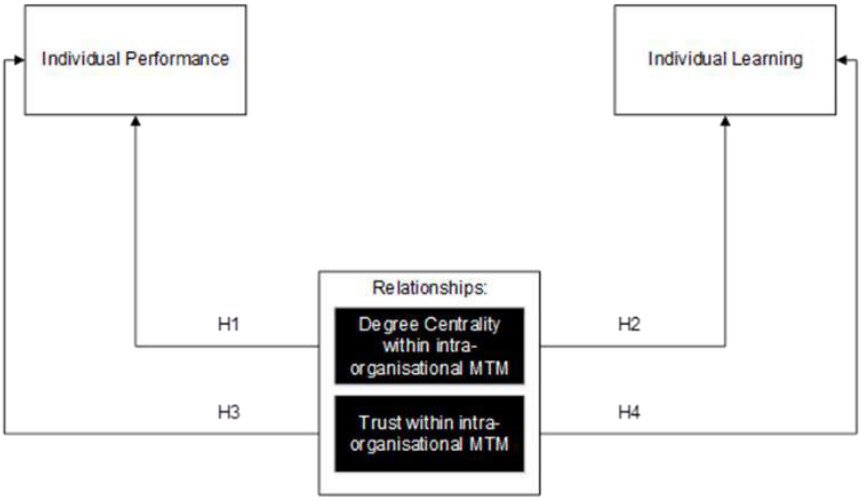

Figure 1:Conceptual Model

4 RESEARCH METHOD

4.1 Research design

This study was conducted as an empirical investigation involving the collection of primary data. Primary data was selected over the analysis of secondary data due to the limited empirical exploration of the impact of relationships within intra-organisational MTM on both individual performance and learning. Electronic questionnaires were employed to gather data on the concepts outlined in the conceptual model. Permission to collect data from the company, along with research ethics clearance from the University of Pretoria's EBIT Research Ethics Committee (reference number EBIT/121/2024), was obtained prior to the commencement of the study.

4.2 Sample and setting

The research was conducted within the Projects and Engineering department of a petrochemical company in South Africa which consists of 274 individuals. Within the Projects and Engineering department, there exists the Solutions and Delivery Hub divisions (comprised of 139 individuals) which employ MTM as a work design. The company was selected using convenience sampling, as the first author is employed there. The electronic questionnaire was completed by 110 of the 139 individuals, resulting in a response rate of 79.14%.

4.3 Data collection instruments[†]

4.3.1 Control variables

Age, education level, years of work experience and organisational tenure, were selected as control variables to account for potential confounding factors within intra-organisational MTM that could influence an individual's performance and learning. This selection was based on previous research conducted by Ng and Feldman [84], Deng et al. [85], Sturman [86], Ng and Feldman [87], Seibert et al. [88] and Cerasoli et al. [89].

[†] The comprehensive research instrument employed in this study is available from the authors upon request.

4.3.2 Degree centrality

Degree centrality within intra-organisational MTM was measured using two metrics. For the first measure of degree centrality, each respondent was asked to indicate the total number of teams within intra-organisational MTM the respondent had simultaneously been involved with in the past six months. A similar approach was adopted by Chan et al. [7], where the total number of MTM each respondent was extensively involved in was used as a measure of the number of multiple team memberships. For the second measure of degree centrality, each respondent was asked to indicate the total number of individuals the respondent had worked extensively with on a weekly basis in the intra-organisational project teams the respondent had been involved with in the past six months.

4.3.3 Trust

Trust within intra-organisational MTM was assessed using the Interpersonal Trust Scale (ITS) developed by McAllister [90] to measure trust between individuals in interpersonal relationships, particularly in the workplace. The ITS consists of eleven items, six of which assess cognition-based trust and five of which assess affect-based trust [90], [91]. The Cronbach's alpha in the original study conducted by McAllister [90] was 0.9 for the ITS [90], [91]. This research instrument was chosen as it has been used extensively in research to measure trust within organisational studies [91], [92], [93].

4.3.4 Individual performance

Individual performance was assessed using a modified version of Podsakoff and MacKenzie's [94] five-item scale for in-role job performance, as adapted by Janssen [95]. This scale specifically evaluates standard job performance, emphasising the employee's adherence to the organisationally defined role expectations [96], [97]. The Cronbach's alpha for the individual performance measures in the original study conducted by Janssen [95] was 0.85 [95], [97]. This research instrument was chosen as it has been used extensively in research to measure individual performance within organisational studies [97], [98], [99].

4.3.5 Individual learning

Individual learning was measured using the nine items developed by Sujan et al. [100]. This research instrument was chosen as it has been used extensively in research to measure individual learning within the MTM context [7], [101]. The Cronbach's alpha for the individual learning measures in the original study by Sujan et al. [100] was 0.81.

5 RESULTS[‡]

5.1 Reliability analysis

Reliability analyses were conducted on the research instruments employed to measure trust, individual performance, and individual learning, yielding Cronbach's alpha values of 0.821, 0.700 and 0.820, respectively. A study conducted by Hair et al. [102] concluded that the minimum acceptable value (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) to demonstrate sufficient internal consistency is 0.7.

[‡] The comprehensive set of results are available from the authors upon request.

5.2 Hypothesis testing

The hypotheses proposed in the conceptual model were tested using the statistical techniques of correlation and multiple regression analyses.

5.2.1 Correlation analysis

From the results of the Spearman's correlation analysis, the following was observed:

- The number of teams within intra-organisational MTM, has a negligible correlation with both individual performance (r = 0.029) and individual learning (r = -0.12).
- The number of individuals within intra-organisational MTM, has a significant weak positive relationship with individual performance (r = 0.227; $p < 0.05$) and a negligible correlation with individual learning (r = 0.083).
- Trust within intra-organisational MTM has a significant moderate positive relationship with individual performance (r = 0.324; $p < 0.01$) and a significant weak positive relationship with individual learning (r = 0.299; $p < 0.01$).

5.2.2 Multiple regression analysis

Model 1 examined the direct and linear relationships between the control variables, and the dependent variables, i.e., individual performance and individual learning.

Model 2 evaluated the additional influence of the first independent variable i.e., degree centrality, which was measured using two metrics, namely, the number of teams within intra-organisational MTM, and the number of individuals within intra-organisational MTM.

Model 3 evaluated the additional influence of the second independent variable i.e., trust within intra-organisational MTM, on the dependent variables. According to Miles [103] and Russo and Stol [104], a variance inflation factor (VIF) below ten suggests that multicollinearity is not a concern. The results of the regression analyses for both dependent variables yielded acceptable VIF values.

From the results of the multiple regression analysis, the following was observed:

- The number of teams within intra-organisational MTM has no statistically significant influence on individual performance in both Model 2 (β = 0.057) and Model 3 (β = 0.083).
- The number of individuals within intra-organisational MTM has a moderately significant weak positive influence on individual performance (β = 0.223; $p < 0.05$) in Model 2 but no statistically significant influence on individual performance in Model 3 (β = 0.149).
- The number of teams within intra-organisational MTM has no statistically significant influence on individual learning in both Model 2 (β = -0.072) and Model 3 (β = -0.044).
- The number of individuals within intra-organisational MTM, has no statistically significant influence on individual learning in both Model 2 (β = 0.154) and Model 3 (β = 0.071).
- Trust within intra-organisational MTM has a highly significant moderate positive influence on individual performance (β = 0.330; $p < 0.01$), and a highly significant moderate positive influence on individual learning (β = 0.366; $p < 0.01$).

As the number of individuals within intra-organisational MTM was observed to have a moderately significant weak positive influence on individual performance, the statistical significance of the negative slope of the hypothesised curvilinear relationship between degree centrality and individual performance was tested. However, the results from the multiple regression analysis for the negative slope of the curvilinear relationship concluded that the number of individuals within intra-organisational MTM has no statistically significant influence on individual performance (β = 0.046).

5.3 Discussion of results

Hypothesis H1 was not supported based on the results of the correlation and multiple regression analyses for both measures of degree centrality within intra-organisational MTM. This is inconsistent with previous research by Van de Brake et al. [6], Kao et al. [103], Badi et al. [104] and Lechner et al. [105]. The discrepancies in the research findings may be attributed to the specific context of the research within a petrochemical company in South Africa, where the nature of work and organisational culture might mitigate the negative impacts of high degree centrality on individual performance. This context-specific dynamic underscores the complexity of the relationship between degree centrality and individual performance, suggesting that different environments can yield varying outcomes. The significant weak positive relationship observed between the second measure of degree centrality, i.e., the number of individuals within intra-organisational MTM, and individual performance is consistent with an empirical study conducted by Ahuja et al. [106]. This consistency may stem from the shared focus on intra-organisational dynamics, where centrality facilitates access to information, resource mobilisation, and enhanced collaboration.

Based on the results of the correlation and multiple regression analyses for both measures of degree centrality within intra-organisational MTM, hypothesis H2 was also not supported. This is inconsistent with previous research by Van de Brake et al. [6], Rishani et al. [74] and Chan et al. [7]. The discrepancies in the research findings may be attributed to the unique characteristics of the study's sample. The petrochemical industry has distinct dynamics and challenges that may differ from those in other sectors, potentially affecting how team members interact and learn from one another. Furthermore, the organisational culture and external pressures (such as organisational changes taking place during the research study) might have impacted the relationship between degree centrality and learning. The aforementioned studies, which also examined individual-level MTM within the intra-organisational context, utilised larger and more diverse samples, providing a more generalised understanding of the relationship in different contexts.

Hypotheses H3 and H4 were fully supported based on the results of the correlation and multiple regression analyses for trust within intra-organisational MTM. This is consistent with previous research conducted by Conlon and Mayer [77], Morales-Sánchez [78], Ning and Jin [77], Nahapiet [81], Ring and Van de Ven [68], Safari et al. [80], and Luhmann [82] as discussed earlier.

The findings from Model 3 of the multiple regression analyses indicate that the influence of degree centrality within intra-organisational MTM on individual performance and learning becomes insignificant. This suggests that trust within intra-organisational MTM (an element of the relational dimension of social capital) has a more significant influence on individual performance and learning compared to degree centrality (an element of the structural dimension of social capital). This emphasises the importance of strong ties over mere structural connections in social networks. The distinction between strong and weak ties, as articulated by Granovetter [107] in his influential work and referenced by numerous researchers [21], [33], [108], [109], further supports the argument that relational elements of social capital, such as trust, are paramount. Strong ties, characterised by frequent interactions and emotional closeness, are crucial for providing support and fostering a sense of belonging [110].

6 CONCLUSION

6.1.1 Theoretical and practical implications

The literature reviewed suggests that despite the widespread occurrence of MTM within organisations, there exists minimal empirical exploration of the impact of relationships within

intra-organisational MTM on both individual performance and learning. This lack of empirical exploration is notable given the potential for these relationships to significantly impact both individual performance and learning. Hence, the results of this research study contribute to alleviating the scarcity of empirical exploration of the impact of relationships within intra-organisational MTM on both individual performance and learning.

Should project managers wish to enhance either individual performance or individual learning, the findings of this study suggest that the establishment of trust within intra-organisational MTM is of greater benefit than the size of an individual's network (i.e., degree centrality) within intra-organisational MTM.

6.1.2 Recommendations for future research

Despite the study's theoretical and practical implications, the study has some limitations that can guide future research. Firstly, the research was conducted within the Projects and Engineering division of a South African petrochemical company using self-reported questionnaires, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. Future research could consider extending the findings of the study to diverse professional environments in different countries and incorporate multiple data sources (e.g., interviews, observational data, or archival records) to enhance validity.

Secondly, the study concluded that only the second measure of degree centrality, i.e., the number of individuals within intra-organisational MTM, has a statistically significant weak positive influence on individual performance, while for the first measure of degree centrality, i.e., the number of teams within intra-organisational MTM, there were no statistically significant relationships observed. Additionally, no statistically significant relationships were observed between the degree centrality of an individual within intra-organisational MTM and the individual's learning for both measures of degree centrality. Existing research on the aforementioned relationships is mixed, suggesting that these relationships may be complex and influenced by various factors. Future research could therefore consider reproducing the findings of the study to better understand the nuances of these relationships. Moreover, this study employed linear regression and correlation analysis. The choice of statistical methods was guided by the research questions and the available dataset. While these techniques provided a clear test of the hypothesised relationships, complementary approaches, such as social network analysis, could offer further insights.

Lastly, due to practical constraints, only a restricted set of variables was included in this study, which examined how relationship dynamics in intra-organisational MTM influence individual learning and performance, focusing on two elements of social capital, namely degree centrality and trust. Other factors, such as temporal misalignment, context switching, and membership variety, for example, also influence individual performance and learning [2], [3], [7]. Future research could consider extending the findings of the study to include these factors, explore inter-organisational MTM, incorporate the team and organisational levels, and include other elements of social capital. Since trust emerged as the most dominant predictor, investigating its development in this industry is recommended to gain deeper insights.

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THE EVOLUTION OF DESIGN THINKING INTEGRATION IN ENGINEERING CURRICULA: A HISTORICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The study outlines a systematic literature review that examines the historical progression and integration of design thinking into engineering education curricula. It emphasizes the importance of understanding how design thinking has been adopted, adapted, and institutionalized over time to foster innovation, creativity, and human-centered problem-solving skills among engineering students. The review analyzes scholarly sources from various databases, highlighting key trends, milestones, and pedagogical shifts from the mid-20th century to the present. It pays particular attention to the evolving definitions of design thinking, teaching strategies, and alignment with learning outcomes such as interdisciplinary collaboration and empathy. The findings reveal a shift from traditional technical instruction to more integrative, student-centered approaches, though challenges like curriculum design and faculty training persist. Overall, the review offers helpful suggestions for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers to enhance the long-term viability and impact of design thinking in engineering education.

Keywords: Design thinking, Integration, Curricular development, engineering education, pedagogy

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1 INTRODUCTION

Engineering plays a crucial role in global development, underpinning economic growth, social stability, and sustainable innovation [1, 2]. As UNESCO observes, "engineering drives social, economic, and human development" and is a "major factor in innovation [2]. Consequently, high quality engineering education **is i**mperative to address worldwide challenges. Major issues facing engineering education today include outdated curricula and teaching methods, as well as the need to develop students' problem-solving abilities, lifelong learning habits, and soft skills such as teamwork and communication [1]. At the same time, engineers must be prepared to tackle 21st-century challenges (e.g. climate change, global health, and digital transformation) with interdisciplinary and human-centred approaches. In this context, UNESCO stresses that enabling future engineers to "design solutions for local and global challenges" is critical [3]. Recent engineering education frameworks therefore emphasize holistic, systems-oriented thinking and alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) [4]. For example, engineering curricula are increasingly moving toward hands-on, project-based learning (PBL) and interdisciplinary teamwork to foster innovation and address complex societal problems.

Design thinking (DT) has emerged as a prominent pedagogical strategy to meet these evolving demands. It is broadly defined as a human-centred, iterative problem-solving approach that prioritizes creativity and the use of multiple disciplines [5]. In practice, DT involves empathizing with users, rapid prototyping, and testing solutions to ensure effectiveness and innovation [5]. Leading engineering institutions have championed this approach: for instance, Stanford University adopted "design thinking" to combine creative and scientific cognition in its engineering programs [5]. This approach mirrors how designers work and is intended to equip students with flexible, designedly problem-solving skills [5].

1.1 Historical Evolution of Design Thinking in Engineering Education

A major paradigm shift has occurred with the introduction of DT into engineering education, moving away from conventional, theoretically oriented curricula and toward more hands-on, application-based learning opportunities. In the past, engineering education frequently ignored the creative and humanistic components of problem-solving in favour of a strong mathematical and scientific foundation. The emergence of DT as a formal methodology can be traced back to the mid-20th century when faculty at Stanford began introducing creative design practices into engineering courses [6]. In 1957, Professor John E. Arnold initiated a "design revolution" at Stanford, using psychology and systems thinking to teach engineers creative problem solving [7]. Soon after, Arnold and Robert McKim launched Stanford's Product Design program (circa 1958), emphasizing visual thinking, sketching, prototyping, and a human-centred approach to design [7]. By the 1970s and 1980s, the term "design thinking" appeared in the education discourse, reflecting a shift toward iterative, user-focused design processes. In the 1990s, Stanford formalized core design-thinking principles (e.g., need-finding, ambidextrous thinking, and iterative prototyping) as part of its engineering curriculum [8]. Notably, these practices extended beyond individual studios to embrace a "whole person" design mentality. In 2005, Stanford further codified this evolution by founding the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (the d.school), an interdisciplinary hub focused on creativity and innovation in problem-solving [7].

This Stanford-led tradition helped inspire other institutions worldwide. By the early 21st century, many universities began embedding DT into engineering courses and programs. Leading engineering schools introduced first-year design courses, design clinics, and project-based modules that explicitly teach designedly habits of mind [5]. Empirical studies and reports note that such integration tends to improve student engagement and broaden skill sets [5]. In short, DT has evolved from an experimental pedagogy to a mainstream element of

engineering education, reflecting a historical trajectory from individual design courses (mid-20th century) to cross-disciplinary curricula (2000s onward) across the globe.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the evident interest in DT as an educational paradigm, its historical development and curricular integration in engineering remain underexplored. Existing literature often focuses on case studies of individual courses or projects rather than providing a unified historical account. As one review notes, there is a clear "need for a systematic review of the literature" on DT in engineering education to map its current state and future directions [5]. Without such a perspective, educators and researchers lack a comprehensive understanding of how DT has been incorporated into curricula over time and what milestones have shaped its adoption.

1.3 Objectives and Significance

This paper strives to fill the gap by conducting a historical literature review of DT integration in engineering curricula. Its objectives are to identify key steps and milestones in this evolution, to synthesize how the concept has changed in engineering contexts, and to highlight current trends and future opportunities. By bringing together disparate studies and historical records, the review will provide a global perspective on the ways engineering programs have responded to calls for creativity and innovation. The significance of this work lies in informing educators and policymakers: understanding the trajectory of DT integration can guide curriculum development and teaching practices that better prepare engineers to address complex global problems [5].

1.4 Research Questions

Building on the above background and objectives, this systematic review addresses the following research questions:

1. How has the concept of DT evolved, particularly within the context of engineering?
2. What are the key stages and milestones in the integration of DT in engineering education?
3. What are the current trends and future directions of DT in engineering curricula?

These questions will guide the historical analysis and literature synthesis in the ensuing review.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

DT has emerged as a significant paradigm in innovation-oriented education and practice, with roots spanning multiple disciplines, including architecture, industrial design, and business. The concept began to formalize in the mid-20th century when scholars and practitioners sought to understand and replicate the creative problem-solving processes of professional designers.

Historically, the foundations of DT can be traced to Herbert Simon's seminal work, The Sciences of the Artificial (1969), where he emphasized design as a way of transforming existing conditions into preferred ones [9]. Around the same time, architects and industrial designers began articulating methods of creative exploration, iterative prototyping, and user-centric design. Christopher Alexander made contributions through his work on design patterns and structure in architecture [10], while Robert McKim at Stanford developed visual and ideation-based methods in engineering and product design [11].

In the 1990s, companies like IDEO helped make DT more popular in the business world. They did this by promoting it as a structured, repeatable innovation process based on empathy,

ideation, and rapid prototyping [12]. The Stanford d.school model formalized this approach by breaking DT down into five main steps: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test [7].

Scholars have provided diverse definitions of DT over time. Brown refers to it as “a discipline that employs the designer’s sensibility and methods to align people’s needs with technological possibilities” [13], whereas Cross defines it as a distinct cognitive style and process linked to creativity in design [14]. Even though they all focus on different things, they all agree that DT encourages people-centred, iterative, and solution-focused ways of dealing with difficult problems.

DT is especially useful in engineering education because it focuses on innovation and user needs. As engineering issues become more connected to social, environmental, and ethical issues, there has been a growing call for teaching methods that encourage creativity, empathy, and working together across fields [15]. DT provides a structured framework for meeting these expectations, which is in line with educational goals like ABET outcomes and the development of skills for the 21st century [16].

So, the need for engineering to be innovative, useful in the real world, and focused on people has made it easier for DT to be used and grow in curricula around the world.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Search Strategy and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

This systematic literature review (SLR) employed a comprehensive search strategy informed by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to identify significant scholarly articles regarding the incorporation of DT in engineering education. The search included peer-reviewed articles that were published between 1950 and 2025. To ensure a wide range of coverage across time and fields, only peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings were included [17]. This meant that theses, reports, and grey literature, which are not peer-reviewed, were not included. The studies were selected for their examination of the utilization, instruction, or evolution of DT in engineering education, which corresponded with the research's aim to identify methodologies or the historical progression of DT within engineering educational contexts, in alignment with the research objectives.

3.2 Databases Used

The following electronic databases were utilized to retrieve relevant literature: IEEE Xplore, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Semantic Scholar, Scopus, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected for their extensive coverage of engineering education and interdisciplinary scholarly works, ensuring a comprehensive and diverse literature base.

3.3 Keywords and Search Terms

The search employed a combination of keywords and controlled vocabulary variations to capture the multifaceted nature of DT. The primary search terms included: "Design thinking", "engineering education", "curriculum development", "pedagogy", "innovation", "human-centred design", "problem-solving", and "history of design thinking". Boolean operators and truncation were used to refine the search strings, such as "design thinking" AND "engineering education" or "curriculum development" OR "pedagogy" to encompass related concepts and methodological approaches. In the end, with the help of the Publish or Perish software version 8.0, the following search string was used: "History of design thinking" OR "design thinking" AND "engineering education" AND "curriculum development".

3.4 Screening Process and Data Extraction Procedures

Initially, we imported all retrieved articles into Rayyan online systematic review software, which facilitated efficient and blinded screening by multiple reviewers, thereby minimizing selection bias. Title and abstract screening were conducted independently by three reviewers to assess relevance based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. We included studies that explicitly discussed aspects of the evolution of the integration of DT within engineering curricula, its historical development, or pedagogical methods.

Table 1: Total number of articles from each database and the search terms used

Database	Search terms	Search string	No. of articles	Search date
Scopus	Primary search terms - title, abstract and keywords	"History of design thinking" OR "design thinking" AND "engineering education" AND "curriculum development"	24	01 June 2025
Google Scholar	Primary search items - title, abstract and keywords	"History of design thinking" OR "design thinking" AND "engineering education" AND "curriculum development"	184	01 June 2025
Symantic Scholar	Primary search terms - title, abstract and keywords	"History of design thinking" OR "design thinking" AND "engineering education" AND "curriculum development"	6	01 June 2025
Science Direct	Primary search terms - title, abstract and keywords	"History of design thinking" OR "design thinking" AND "engineering education" AND "curriculum development"	6	01 June 2025
IEEE Explore	Primary search terms - title, abstract and keywords	"History of design thinking" OR "design thinking" AND "engineering education" AND "curriculum development"	4	01 June 2025
ERIC	Primary search terms - title, abstract and keywords	"History of design thinking" OR "design thinking" AND "engineering education" AND "curriculum development"	7	01 June 2025

The search yielded a total of 224 articles. The study selection process followed a three-phase approach, as outlined below:

Phase 1: Removal of duplicates

Phase 2: Title screening

Phase 3: Abstract screening. Following this step, we selected 14 studies for full-text review and inclusion.

3.5 Prisma flow diagram

The screening process involved importing 224 articles from six databases into Rayyan online systematic review software, which facilitated efficient and blinded screening by multiple reviewers, thereby minimizing selection bias. The PRISMA flow diagram in Table 2 illustrates the stepwise approach for this review.

Table 2: Prisma flow diagram

Phase	Records Count
Records identified through database searching (IEEE, Scopus, etc.)	224
Duplicate removed	10
Records screened (titles/abstracts)	214
Records excluded (non-relevant, outside scope)	200
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	14
Full-text articles excluded (low quality, insufficient data)	10
Studies included in final synthesis	8

Following screening, full-text articles were obtained and subjected to data extraction, which involved systematically recording information on the publication year, study context, methodological approach, specific pedagogical strategies used, key findings related to the evolution of DT, and reported outcomes. Data extraction was performed using a standardized form to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness.

3.5 Quality Assessment of Included Studies

The methodological quality and relevance of the included studies were evaluated using adapted versions of established appraisal instruments, specifically the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) checklists and the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal tools [18]. Assessment criteria encompassed the clarity of the research question, suitability of the study design, validity and reliability of data collection methods, and transparency of reported findings. To ensure consistent application of inclusion criteria, three reviewers independently screened each article and classified them as “Included,” “Excluded,” or “Maybe.” Discrepancies were addressed through a consensus meeting, during which reviewers discussed their assessments and resolved disagreements. Final decisions on contested articles were resolved through discussion.

4. FINDINGS: THE EVOLUTION OF DESIGN THINKING INTEGRATION

This section shows the results of the systematic literature review, which looks at how DT integration in engineering curricula has changed from the middle of the 20th century to now. The results, which are shown in Table 3, are arranged in chronological order to show the most important steps and milestones that have shaped the development of DT in engineering education.

Table 3: Main results of the selected studies

Reference	Summary	Historical Evolution	Key Stages and Milestones	Current Trends
[19]	COVID-19's impact on education and the shift to digital learning	Traditional → Online → Systemic reform	Online shift, tech use, mental health, policy support, AI/VR integration	Hybrid models, VR tools, curriculum reform
[20]	DT enhances 21st-century skills in education	Montessori to modern empathy-based approaches	Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test	Integration in K-12 and higher ed, teacher training
[21]	Engineering education reform for global challenges	DT for innovation and leadership	Foresight, protovation, open authorship	Innovation focus, systems thinking, entrepreneurship
[22]	REEdI project uses DT for agile engineering curriculum	DT evolution from 1969 to 2018	Understand to Continuous Improvement (8 steps)	Industry-aligned, flexible, personalized learning

[23]	UK engineering education and DT integration	From 1980s design inclusion to modern standards	Empathize to Test (5 steps)	Student-centred, PBL, CDIO, discipline-specific DT
[24]	Experiential DT course for freshman engineers	Post-WWII to ethics-focused experiential learning	Empathy & Ethics to Testing	Real-world problems, early DT exposure, civic partnerships
[25]	Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS) as a model for multidisciplinary DT	Founded 2007, rapid growth, no departments	Curriculum reform, ES96/ES100, design integration	Interdisciplinary, innovation, entrepreneurial training
[26]	DT for curriculum innovation in higher ed	From 1960s design theory to business innovation	Immersion, Framing, Testing	Outcome-based, student-centred, constructive alignment

4.1 Chronological overview

Based on the information provided in the papers, here is a chronological overview of how DT has changed in engineering education. The chronological overview shows how DT has changed in engineering education over time.

4.1.1 Early Origins

DT in engineering education originated in the late 1980s, when design was recognized as a fundamental element of engineering curricula [23]. In the 1990s, there was a change from teaching engineering through hands-on experience to focusing more on scientific analysis and mathematical modelling [24].

4.1.2 2000s: Emergence of Design Thinking

In the early 2000s, DT began to gain popularity as a way to encourage innovation. Roger Martin from the Rotman School of Management was one of the first people to use it in business settings [26]. At this point, engineering education started to see DT as an important way of thinking that needed to be developed [23]. This acknowledgment resulted in the incorporation of DT principles into engineering curricula and the establishment of interdisciplinary programs.

4.1.3 Mid-2000s: Integration into Engineering Curricula

Some universities started to include DT more formally in engineering programs by the middle of the 2000s. For instance, Harvard's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS) was founded in 2007 to focus on research that crosses disciplines and classes that do the same [25]. SEAS aimed to create "T-shaped" engineers who were experts in one field but knew a lot about many others [25].

4.1.4 2010s: Expansion and Refinement

There was a lot of growth in the use of DT in engineering education in the 2010s. A lot of programs started to focus on team-based problem solving and perspectives from different fields [24]. PBL became a model for future curricula, and it often used DT principles [23]. There was a stronger push for learning by doing in engineering classes [22]. User-centred design principles began to be included in engineering programs across the board [22].

4.1.5 Recent Developments

More recently, there has been a continued evolution of DT in engineering education. Programs are exploring the integration of DT with emerging capabilities in online learning, blended learning, and technologies like AR/VR [22]. There is an increased focus on partnerships with industry to inform engineering curricula and research agendas [22]. Recent approaches emphasize the development of soft skills, transversal skills, and a more holistic view of engineering education [22]. There is a trend toward more flexible, personalized learning

environments and the transformation of learning experiences into capabilities for students [23].

This evolution reflects a growing recognition of the need to prepare engineers who can address complex, multidisciplinary challenges in an increasingly technological and interconnected world.

4.2 Key stages and milestones

This section also examines the different approaches to DT that have been adopted in engineering education, such as the Stanford d.school model, the Double Diamond model, and other variations.

Based on the findings, thematically, highlight the key stages and milestones in the development of DT in engineering education.

4.2.1 Recognition of Design in Engineering Education

The late 1980s marked the beginning of design being considered an integral component of engineering curricula [19]. This recognition laid the foundation for the future development of DT in engineering education.

4.2.2 Shift Towards Analytical Focus

In the 1990s, engineering education experienced a shift toward scientific analysis and mathematical modelling, leading to a decrease in hands-on engineering education [24]. This change created a gap that would later be addressed by DT approaches.

4.2.3 Emergence of Design Thinking Methodology

In the early 2000s, Roger Martin from the Rotman School of Management [26] and others helped make DT a separate method. This method was first used in business settings, but it soon had an effect on engineering education.

4.2.4 Integration into Engineering Curricula

The founding of Harvard's SEAS [25] in 2007 was a big step forward. SEAS focused on research that crossed disciplines and courses that did the same. The goal was to make "T-shaped" engineers who were experts in one area and had a broad range of knowledge in others [25]. SEAS also aimed to foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

4.2.5 Emphasis on Multidisciplinary Approach

In the 2010s, engineering education put more and more emphasis on working together as a team and looking at problems from different points of view [24]. This change showed that people understood that complicated problems in society need solutions from many different fields. This change has continued to affect how engineers are trained and what kinds of problems they can solve.

4.2.6 Adoption of Project-Based Learning

PBL evolved into a model for future curricula, often using DT ideas [23]. Students got to practice using DT on real-world problems with this method. Students can learn how to think critically and solve problems by using PBL, which gets them ready for the challenges of the modern job market.

4.2.7 Focus on Human-Centred Design

Engineering programs started to include user-centred design ideas in all their classes [25]. This change made it clear how important it is to have empathy and understand what users want when designing something.

4.2.8 Integration with Emerging Technologies

Recent developments include the use of DT with new technologies like AR/VR and online learning platforms [22]. The goal of this integration is to improve the learning experience and get students ready for new technologies in the field.

4.2.9 Industry Collaboration

One important step in the development of DT in engineering education has been the growing emphasis on working with businesses [25]. The purpose of these collaborations is to make sure that engineering curricula and research agendas are relevant to real-world problems.

4.2.10 Emphasis on Soft Skills and Holistic Education

Recent methods have focused more on building soft skills, transversal skills, and a more complete view of engineering education [22]. This change shows that communication, teamwork, and adaptability are just as important as technical skills.

4.2.11 Curriculum Flexibility and Personalization

The latest trend in engineering education is to make DT more flexible and tailored to each student [23]. This approach seeks to convert learning experiences into competencies, equipping students for the various challenges they may encounter in their professional lives.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Trends and Future Directions

This section presents the findings of the literature review on DT education. It identifies key trends and patterns by examining how the findings change over time in the studies, rather than using a separate analysis. The analysis further explores the advantages and disadvantages of integrating DT into engineering curricula and discusses the implications of these results for future curriculum development and pedagogical approaches

A major trend is the use of DT in many different areas of engineering. Universities are designing programs that encourage people from different engineering fields and even non-engineering fields to work together [19, 22]. The purpose of this approach is to prepare students for the complex, interdisciplinary challenges they will encounter in their future careers [25]. When students learn about DT in their engineering classes, they acquire a range of skills. This analysis emphasizes the acquisition of foundational skills, including critical thinking, effective technical communication, and problem-solving abilities. This interdisciplinary approach fosters creativity and innovation, enabling engineers to better address the evolving needs of society. These findings significantly impact curriculum development by highlighting the importance of transitioning from traditional, isolated teaching methods to more collaborative and integrated approaches. Innovative teaching methods in engineering education play a crucial role in ensuring that graduates are equipped to tackle future challenges effectively.

An increasing number of engineering programs are incorporating PBL and experiential learning methods that are based on DT principles [23, 24]. These methods give students more advanced skills, including creative thinking and the ability to apply knowledge to complex, real-world problems [25]. As a result, students are developing technical competencies along with vital interpersonal skills, including effective communication, teamwork, and critical thinking. By fostering a culture of innovation and creativity in engineering education, schools are equipping their students with the adaptive skills required to succeed in a constantly evolving and increasingly complex world. Ultimately, the transition towards more collaborative and hands-on learning in engineering programs is cultivating engineers who are versatile, creative, and adept at addressing future challenges with confidence.

Engineering programs are putting more and more focus on human-centred design principles [22]. This trend shows that people are starting to realize that engineers need to be able to put themselves in the shoes of their users and understand their needs to come up with good solutions [24]. Engineering students are better prepared to solve real-world problems and come up with solutions that are not only technically sound but also meet the needs of the end-users when they learn about human-centred design. This method helps engineers think about the moral effects of their work and how engineering projects affect society. Because of this, graduates are ready to not only be great at their technical skills, but also to use their creative thinking and problem-solving skills to make the world a better place.

Engineering programs are looking into how to combine DT with new technologies like VR, AR, and online learning platforms [22]. The goal of this integration is to improve the learning experience and get students ready for new technologies in the field [25]. It also wants to help students be more creative, solve problems, and come up with new ideas.

More and more, universities are working with businesses to help them make decisions about their curricula and give students real-world design problems to solve [25]. These partnerships make sure that engineering education stays up-to-date and meets the needs of the industry [24]. This way, students are better prepared for the job market and can use what they've learned in real-world situations.

Recent trends indicate an increased emphasis on cultivating soft skills in conjunction with technical proficiencies [22]. DT is being used to help people learn important skills for the modern workplace, like how to communicate, work as a team, and be flexible [25]. Furthermore, partnerships with businesses give students valuable chances to meet people and find jobs after they graduate. As the need for well-rounded professionals grows, the focus on soft skills in engineering education becomes more and more important. Teachers are giving students the tools they need to do well in a competitive job market by using DT and other new ways of teaching. In general, these partnerships between schools and businesses are important for getting the next generation of engineers ready for the job market.

There is a movement toward more flexible and personalized learning environments in engineering education [23]. This approach allows for customization of the learning experience to meet individual student needs and interests while incorporating DT principles [26]. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that this approach enhances student engagement and motivation.

In engineering education, there is a push for learning environments that are more flexible and tailored to each student [26]. This trend makes sure that DT is used in a way that fits with the goals of the program and the specific learning outcomes [26]. Ultimately, this results in graduates who are better prepared for the demands of the workforce.

This section also identifies emerging trends in DT education, such as the use of digital tools and technologies, the integration of DT with other disciplines, and the emphasis on social impact and sustainability. Finally, it proposes future directions for research and practice in DT education.

There is a growing emphasis on integrating sustainability and social responsibility into engineering curricula via design thinking methodologies [24]. This trend shows that more people are aware of how important engineers are in solving global problems [25]. This trend shows that more people are becoming aware of the important role engineers play in solving global problems. It also suggests that engineering education needs to be more complete.

To improve DT education, engineering programs are putting in place ongoing assessment and accreditation processes [21]. This trend ensures that curricula remain up-to-date and effective in preparing students for the evolving demands of the engineering This trend makes sure that

curricula stay current and help students get ready for the changing needs of the engineering field [21]. As a result, graduates are better prepared to do well in their careers and make a real difference in the field.

5.2 Potential Applications and Synergies of Design Thinking to Industrial Engineering domains

To further explore into the implications of the findings on the evolution of DT integration in engineering curricula, the exploration of potential applications and synergies of DT within Industrial Engineering (IE) domains like process design, systems thinking, and Lean/Agile educational practices is essential. This will allow us to bridge the gap between our findings and the specific interests of the IE community.

5.2.1 Process Design

DT's human-centered approach can revolutionize process design in IE. Instead of solely focusing on efficiency and cost reduction, incorporating DT principles can lead to more innovative and user-friendly solutions that better meet the needs of stakeholders. Additionally, applying DT to process design can enhance collaboration among cross-functional teams and improve overall project outcomes in IE domains. Focusing on efficiency metrics, DT encourages understanding the needs and pain points of the people involved in the process (workers, customers, etc.). Understanding users and creating prototypes can result in process designs that are efficient, user-friendly, and enhance overall satisfaction. DT can make sure that processes become more adaptable and responsive to changing needs.

5.2.2 Systems Thinking

DT's iterative nature complements systems thinking in IE. Design Thinking (DT) encourages looking at problems from a comprehensive perspective, which fits well with the systems approach. When IE professionals use DT principles, they can grasp the connections and dependencies in complex systems, resulting in more efficient and long-lasting solutions. The human-centered design approach encouraged by DT also emphasizes the importance of considering all stakeholders in a system.

5.2.3 Lean/Agile Educational Practices

DT can enhance Lean and Agile methodologies in IE education. DT's emphasis on iterative development and user feedback aligns with the core principles of Agile. By integrating DT into Lean and Agile courses, students can learn to develop solutions that are not only efficient and cost-effective but also highly responsive to user needs and market demands. DT can provide the "human-centered" lens that ensures Lean/Agile efforts truly deliver value.

5.2.4 Curriculum Innovation

DT can be used for curriculum innovation within IE programs themselves. The principles of immersion, framing, and testing can be applied to design more effective and engaging IE curricula that better prepare students for real-world challenges.

5.2 Limitations and Future Work

This SLR, while conducted rigorously using PRISMA guidelines and Rayyan software for blinded screening by three reviewers to minimize selection bias, is subject to certain limitations. First, the final synthesis included a relatively small sample size of eight studies. While our methodology clearly details the process of narrowing down 224 articles to this final set, this limited number may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, there is potential for publication bias, as studies with positive or significant results are more likely to be published than those with null or negative findings. Finally, as a systematic review, this study relies on

secondary data, which refers to data collected by other researchers and may inherit the limitations of the original studies.

Future research could address these limitations through a meta-analysis incorporating a larger sample size and by conducting primary research to compare the influence of DT across different engineering subfields. The Rayyan results are available upon request to further demonstrate the strength of our screening process.

6. CONCLUSION

This systematic review underscores the evolving role of DT in engineering education, marking a shift from traditional, discipline-specific instruction toward more holistic, student-centered, and interdisciplinary approaches. The integration of DT has been catalyzed by technological advancements and global disruptions, notably the COVID-19 pandemic, which have accelerated the adoption of digital tools and blended learning environments.

Established frameworks such as the Stanford d.school model, known for its focus on human-centered design thinking, and the Double Diamond, a model for the design process, have provided structured methodologies that support curriculum innovation and pedagogical reform. Notably, DT's human-centered approach can revolutionize process design in IE by understanding the needs and pain points of workers and customers, leading to more adaptable and responsive processes. DT's iterative nature also complements systems thinking in IE, promoting a holistic view and sustainable solutions. Furthermore, DT enhances Lean and Agile methodologies in IE education by providing a human-centered lens that ensures value and responsiveness to user needs. DT can also drive curriculum innovation within IE programs through immersion, framing, and testing.

Looking forward, the movement toward flexible, personalized learning environments and cross-disciplinary collaboration presents significant opportunities for further development. Future research could address these limitations through a meta-analysis incorporating a larger sample size and by conducting primary research to compare the influence of DT across different engineering subfields. Addressing existing barriers through enhanced faculty development, improved assessment strategies, and the strategic use of technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality will be essential. Continued empirical research is necessary to evaluate pedagogical outcomes and ensure that DT remains a foundational element in preparing engineers to navigate complex, real-world challenges. The Rayyan results are available upon request to further demonstrate the robustness of our screening process.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used QuillBot and Grammarly language and grammar checks. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the publication.

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FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF-ASSURANCE IN ENGINEERING STUDENTS THROUGH DESIGN THINKING: A META-SYNTHESIS OF QUALITATIVE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how design thinking (DT) practices influence the development of entrepreneurial self-assurance in engineering students. A qualitative meta-synthesis was used to highlight how DT supports confidence-building through adeptness, reflective feedback, uncertainty tolerance, and problem relevance. The findings indicate that DT supports students to reframe their identities and connect with uncertainty in meaningful ways. Lecturers are encouraged to incorporate DT as a structured yet flexible pedagogical tool that develops creative agency and self-belief. The study offers insight into how engineering education can better supported with the demands of innovation and entrepreneurial thinking in complex, real-world contexts.

Keywords: Design Thinking, Engineering, Entrepreurial mindset

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1 INTRODUCTION

Design thinking (DT), emerged as a transformative methodology that is joining creativity and technical expertise. As Leem [1] advocates, DT encourages students combine inovative ideation with technical and analytical problemsolving skills, making it an ideal framework for interdisciplinary education in engineering and design. Panikar [2] confirmed that integrating DT into engineering education promotes an entrepreneurial mindset by allowing students to innovate under constraints and recognise opportunities. DT is seen as an iterative and human-centred approach to problem-solving. As shown by Primario in [3], DT promotes opportunity recognition and innovation confidence among STEM students by enhancing their entrepreneurial self-efficacy through experience-driven pedagogy. DT is playing a relevant role in engineering education, altering the traditional pedagogical practices and opening new pathways for the development of entrepreneurial mindsets among engineering students. Areas, where economic growth and societal progress is high, it cultivates entrepreneurial self-assurance, or entrepreneurial self-efficacy, driven by innovation. This paper examines the relationship between DT experiences and the entrepreneurial self-efficacy of engineering students. This paper focus on how these relationships impact on their ability to identify opportunities, develop new solutions, and manage entrepreneurial challenges.

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy relates to an individual's belief of their capability to successfully perform entrepreneurial tasks. Key competencies underpinning this concept combine market opportunity identification, creative problem-solving, and managing uncertainties typical of entrepreneurial ventures. Individuals showing higher entrepreneurial self-efficacy are more likely to succeed in entrepreneurial activities. While engineering students have strong technical knowledge and rational problem-solving capabilities, these capabilities are not sufficient to navigate entrepreneurial contexts, which also require creativity, adaptability, and confidence. DT, with its foundations in empathy, prototyping, and iteration, proposes a pedagogical approach to develop these necessary entrepreneurial competencies. In [4] Esqueda-Merino confirm that design thinking-based models significantly enhance entrepreneurial self-efficacy in engineering students by immersing them in innovation-focused, real-world problem-solving experiences. By incorporating design thinking into the engineering curricula it can significantly increases students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy, especially in identifying opportunities and building innovation confidence[5].

1.1 Problem Statement

A critical gap in the current literature guides this research. While the benefits of DT in developing creativity and teamwork have been recognised, the specific processes through which DT affects entrepreneurial self-efficacy in engineering students remain underexplored. This paper is addressing this gap by synthesizing qualitative studies to expose how DT interventions is affecting the entrepreneurial self-assurance of engineering students.

The research is grounded by two primary questions:

1. How does engagement in DT develop students' confidence in developing innovative solutions?
2. Which pedagogical strategies amplify design thinking's impact in fostering entrepreneurial self-efficacy among engineering students?

1.2 Significance

The main goal of this research is to provide practical insights for engineering educators aiming to cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets and self-confidence in their students. By synthesizing diverse qualitative studies, the paper develops a comprehensive understanding of how design thinking can empower engineering students for innovative ventures. This work contributes to

the academic dialogue by addressing the incorporation of DT into engineering education and exploring its potential to improve entrepreneurial competencies. Structure

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 is covering the background on entrepreneurial self-assurance and the role of design thinking in adopting it. Section 3 discuss the methodology used for the meta-synthesis. In section 4 the findings, are discussed in organized key themes and patterns. Section 5 discuss what implications the findings can have on students and offers recommendations for future research. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Background: Entrepreneurial Self-Assurance and Design Thinking in Engineering Education

2.1.1 Entrepreneurial Self-Assurance

Entrepreneurial self-assurance, often referred to as entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE), is essentially a student's belief in their ability to take a business idea from concept to reality. It links back to Bandura's social cognitive theory and influences how students set goals, take risks, and make decisions[6]. In engineering education, ESE plays a fundamental role in giving students the confidence to turn novel ideas into viable business solutions.

There has been a strong drive in recent studies, showing that entrepreneurship education is key to boosting students' confidence and goals to start a business[7], and[8]. In fact, students who take part in organized entrepreneurship programmes are more likely to consider beginning their own ventures[6].

At DUT, [8]looked into how entrepreneurship education influences the career paths of final-year students. They found that many students became more inspired to follow entrepreneurship. This clearly shows how impactful curriculum design can be in helping students believe in their ability to become entrepreneurs. Looking at the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), we see that apparent behavioural control—basically how much control a student thinks they have—plays a big role in entrepreneurial intentions[6]. On the other hand, [7]connect this to Social Cognitive Theory, indicating how personal beliefs, behaviours, and environments all interact to shape entrepreneurial aspirations. [9]raises the concern that even with institutional support and updated curricula, many engineering students are still not exposed enough to entrepreneurship, and the lack of cross-disciplinary content can hold back their self-belief.

2.1.2 Design Thinking

DT is a hands-on, human-centred method to problem-solving. It promotes creativity, empathy, and continuous improvement through five key steps: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test [10], and[11]. In engineering classrooms, DT has become a game-changer, linking the gap between textbook theory and real-world problem-solving[1].

DT forces students to be more innovative and emotionally intelligent. [12]explain that it's not just about coming up with ideas — it's about truly understanding user needs and working with others to solve big, messy problems. This kind of thinking helps students see beyond their technical training.

[9]points out that DT strengthens teamwork, empathy, and leadership — all essential for entrepreneurs. [13]go a step further by showing how DT inspires students through real-world projects that cut across disciplines. With the rise of AI and immersive learning, DT also helps create the kind of future-ready learning spaces we need[14].

At DUT, the IEP department — with support from Finnish partners — hosts DT seminars that prep students with both entrepreneurial skills and a mindset geared toward innovation

(Technology, 2024). These sessions give students real-world exposure and tools for tackling societal problems in creative ways.

2.1.3 Synthesis: Design Thinking as an Incentive for Entrepreneurial Self-Assurance

The link between DT and entrepreneurial self-assurance is a strong one. [15]talk about "imaginative assurance," a type of self-belief tied to innovation, and how DT helps students develop it. Because DT is so iterative and reflective, it helps students embrace uncertainty, learn from failure, and build resilience — all vital for entrepreneurial growth.

At DUT, internal workshops led by the innobiz Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation are already using DT as the foundation for teaching entrepreneurship. These efforts show that creativity and confidence can be developed through intentional design. In fact, they're helping shift the entire learning culture toward innovation and self-belief[16].

If we want to prepare our students for today's innovation-driven world, integrating DT into engineering education is not just nice to have — it's necessary.

3 METHODOLGY : META-SYNTHESIS OF QUALITATIVE STUDIES

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study implements a qualitative meta-synthesis approach to explore how design thinking (DT) experiences foster entrepreneurial self-assurance among engineering students. Grounded in the principles of interpretive synthesis, the study systematically reviews and interprets findings from peer-reviewed qualitative studies published between 2015 and 2025. The methodology uses the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, [17] and incorporates the Enhancing Transparency in Reporting the Synthesis of Qualitative Research (ENTREQ) framework, [18] to ensure transparency and rigor in the synthesis of qualitative research.

3.1.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Research papers included in this study were:

1. **Study Type**: Only qualitative studies such as case studies, ethnographic research, phenomenological investigations, narrative inquiries, or mixed-methods studies that report qualitative data.
2. **Focus of Study**: Research examining the relationship between DT interventions and entrepreneurial self-efficacy in engineering disciplines only.
3. **Population**: Participants should be engineering students or undergraduates enrolled in engineering programs.
4. **Intervention/Exposure**: Studies must involve explicit implementation, integration, or investigation of design thinking pedagogies or activities.
5. **Outcomes**: Studies reporting qualitative data related to entrepreneurial self-efficacy, confidence, mindset, opportunities recognition, or similar constructs.
6. **Publication Language**: Studies published in English (or specify other languages if relevant).
7. **Publication Date Range**: Define a specific publication window (e.g., last 10 years) to ensure relevance.

Research papers that were excluded from this study were:

1. **Quantitative-only Studies**: Studies that exclusively employ quantitative methods without qualitative insights.

2. **Non-Engineering Contexts**: Studies focusing on non-engineering student populations unless they explicitly address engineering students.
3. **Lack of Focus on Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy**: Research not directly examining or discussing entrepreneurial self-efficacy or related constructs.
4. **Theoretical or Literature Reviews**: Studies that are conceptual or review articles without primary qualitative data.
5. **Language**: Studies published in languages other than English (unless translation is feasible and considered).
6. **Interventions Not Involving Design Thinking**: Studies that explore entrepreneurship or innovation without explicit reference or connection to design thinking methodologies.

3.1.2 Search Strategy and Databases

A comprehensive search was conducted across the following databases: Scopus, Taylor and Francis, IEEE Xplore, ERIC, Emarld, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected for their coverage of engineering education, design thinking, and entrepreneurship literature. Boolean search strings were refined iteratively and included terms such as:

"design thinking" AND "entrepreneurial mindset" AND "engineering education"

"entrepreneurship education" AND "self-efficacy" AND "design thinking"

"engineering students" AND "innovation" AND "human-centered design"

Table 1 provides a summary of the number of articles identified in each database with the search terms.

Table 1: Articles from each Data base and search terms used.

Database	Search String Used	Fields Searched	Filters Applied (e.g., Year, Language)	Records Retrieved
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY "design thinking" AND "entrepreneurial mindset" AND "engineering education" "entrepreneurship education" AND "self-efficacy" AND "design thinking" "engineering students" AND "innovation" AND "human-centered design"	Title, Abstract, Keywords	2015–2025, English	2
Taylor and Francis	TITLE-ABS-KEY "design thinking" AND "entrepreneurial mindset" AND "engineering education" "entrepreneurship education" AND "self-efficacy" AND "design thinking" "engineering students" AND "innovation" AND	Title, Abstract, Keywords	2015–2025, English	5

	"human-centered design"			
IEEE Xplore	TITLE-ABS-KEY design thinking" AND "entrepreneurial mindset" AND "engineering education" "entrepreneurship education" AND "self-efficacy" AND "design thinking" "engineering students" AND "innovation" AND "human-centered design"	Full Text	2015-2025	9
ERIC	"design thinking" AND "entrepreneurial mindset" AND "engineering education"	Abstract, Title	2015-2025, Peer-reviewed	6
Emerald	TITLE-ABS-KEY "design thinking" AND "entrepreneurial mindset" AND "engineering education" "entrepreneurship education" AND "self-efficacy" AND "design thinking" "engineering students" AND "innovation" AND "human-centered design"	Title, Abstract, Keywords		5
Google Scholar	TITLE-ABS-KEY "design thinking" AND "entrepreneurial mindset" AND "engineering education" "entrepreneurship education" AND "self-efficacy" AND "design thinking" "engineering students" AND "innovation" AND "human-centered design"	Full Text	Custom range: 2015-2025	210
Total				237

3.1.3 Screening process and Data extraction procedure:

All search results were imported into Rayyan for duplicate removal and blinded screening.

The selection process used 4 phases

1. Deletion of duplicate records = 80 initial (endnote)
2. Title screening to remove obvious irrelevant studies

3. Abstract screening based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.
4. The final phase is the full-text review to confirm suitability of the article.

3.1.4 Prisma Flow Diagram

For the screening process, all search results identified within the 6 databases were imported into Rayyan, an online systematic review software, specifically used to facilitate efficient and blinded screening by multiple reviewers, minimizing biased selection process.

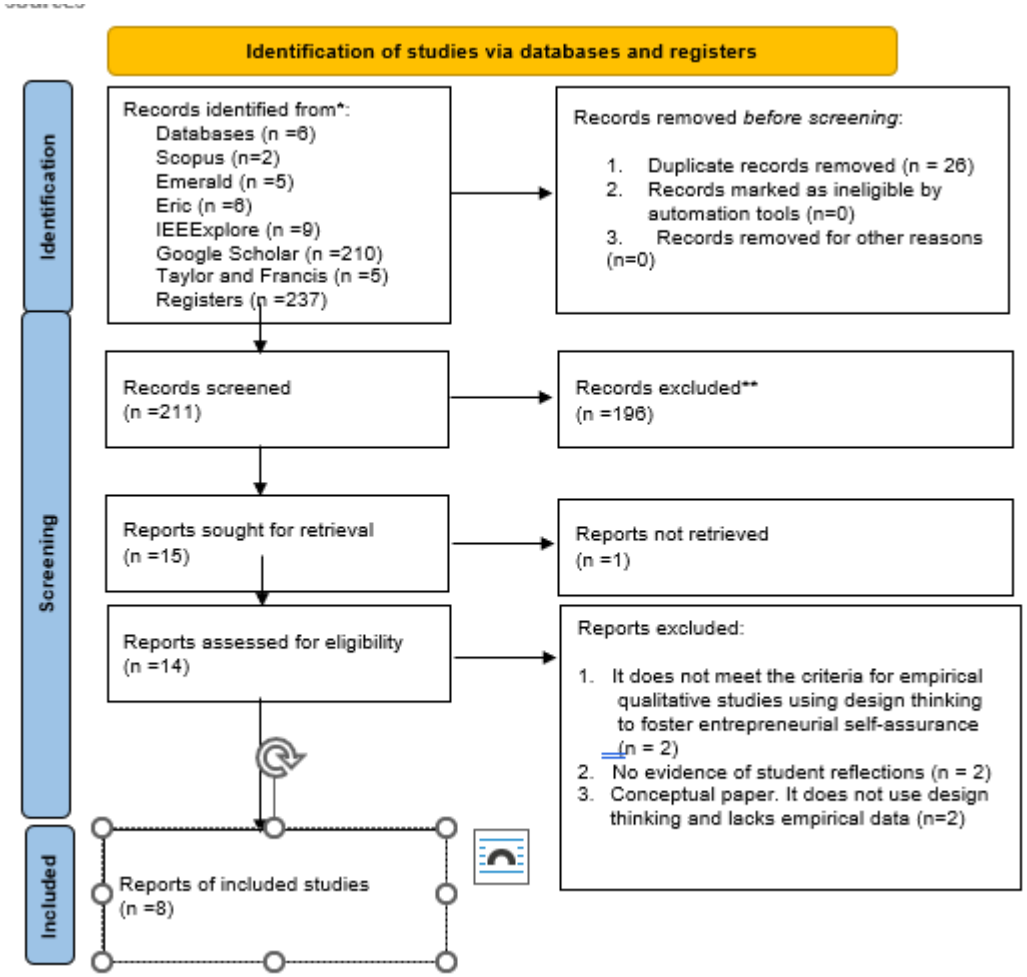

Figure 1: Prisma Flowdiagram

3.1.5 Data Extraction and Coding

Data from the included studies were extracted using a standardized extraction form capturing: Author(s), publication year, and country,

1. Research context and participants,
2. Design thinking frameworks applied
3. Reported outcomes related to entrepreneurial confidence or self-efficacy,
4. Key pedagogical strategies employed.

Themes were identified inductively using thematic analysis, with codes developed iteratively based on emerging patterns across studies.

The methodological quality of each study was evaluated using a combination of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2017) checklist. and the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) qualitative appraisal tool, (table 2). These tools evaluated each study's research clarity, methodological rigor, data credibility, ethical considerations, and transparency of findings. Only studies rated as moderate to high quality based on these criteria were included in the final synthesis to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of conclusions.

Table 2: Quality Appraisal Summary Using CASP and JBI Tools

Article Title	Clear Aims	Methodology	Design Fit	Recruitment	Data Rigor	Reflexivity	Ethics/Bias	Findings Clear	Contribution	Score (/10)	Rating
Influence of entrepreneurial mindsets on student design problem framing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Yes	High	9	High
Design thinking in engineering education: Evaluating the impact on student entrepreneurship competencies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High	10	High
Combining technology & entrepreneurial education through design thinking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Yes	Moderate	7	Medium
Empowering student entrepreneurship skills	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Yes	High	9	High
Benchmarking design thinking as a tool for education	Yes	Yes	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Limited	Moderate	Yes	Moderate	6	Medium
Entrepreneurial-minded	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Yes	High	9	High

learning in an introduction to engineering course											
Inculcating entrepreneurial abilities through design thinking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High	10	High
Using an open-ended socio-technical design challenge	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High	10	High

Findings were synthesized thematically to construct a narrative summary of how design thinking pedagogies influence entrepreneurial self-assurance among engineering students.

4 FINDINGS

This synthesis drew from the eight studies that passed the CASP quality appraisal, that meet our inclusion criteria, rated from high- to medium-quality qualitative studies. Four primary themes were identified across the studies, each contributing to deeper understanding of how design thinking (DT) interventions impact the entrepreneurial self-assurance of engineering students.

4.1 Developing Entrepreneurial Confidence Through Identity Shifts

It was evident in several studies the DT is playing a crucial role in enabling the students to see themselves differently: not only problem -solvers, but also innovators and entrepreneurs. In modules where the students are engaged in prototyping and solving real-world challenges, a consistent shift of self-perception is evident. [19]observed that students start to see themselves as “solution designers” and “change makers” and not as passive learners. Through repeated exposure to uncertainty, [20]observed that students become more confident in their creative and entrepreneurial capabilities. Gulati [21]

Notably, Gulati et al. (2021) noted that students are more comfortable to tale intellectual risks after being exposed to DT. It’s evident that students started to believe their contribution can have a meaningful impact on society – a key aspect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

4.2 Embracing Uncertainty and Ambiguity as a Growth Pathway

Many students originally described they felt anxiety or hesitation when they were faced with the uncertainty that comes with open-ended design challenges. However, as they continued through DT stages their t discomfort often changed into resourcefulness. In the work of [22], several participants expressed a “pivot moment” in which they began to see uncertainty not as a threat, but rather an opportunity to explore multiple valid directions.

This theme was reinforced in the study by[23], where engineering students, who enrolled in a DT-integrated entrepreneurship course, described how ambiguity forced them to think beyond technical feasibility and consider emotional, social, and user-based variables. Over time, this exposure seemed to increase their perceived capability to navigate complicated and uncertain entrepreneurial environments.

4.3 Feedback, Reflection, and Internal Validation

Structured reflections and continued feedback cycles emerged as a significant driver of internal belief formation, and in[21], Gulati cited student-feedback session through reflective journals and guided feedback sessions of key moments of clarity — points where the students recognised their own growth.[20]) also emphasized how visual reflection tools, such as storyboards and progress maps, helped students link their actions with developing self-perceptions.

Interestingly, responses from mentors and peers were not only used to develop design ideas — it also served as a reflection for students in understanding their own potential. The process of external confirmation (through presentations, pitches, or peer reviews) often strengthened internal belief, especially when students received unexpected praise or insight. This dual role of feedback — both developmental and encouraging — was repeatedly noted across several studies.

4.4 Grounding Confidence in Real-World Relevance

The more meaningful or socially relevant the DT project are, the student believed more in their entrepreneurial abilities. [24]and [23] found that if students worked on problems rooted in their community or their environmental requirements, their commitment increased — and so did their confidence.

In one course, students designed technology, that can assist the disabled, and the students later reported that knowing their designs could affect real lives made them feel “capable and responsible”[21]. This connection between empathy, social responsibility, and entrepreneurial assurance suggests the importance of purpose-driven learning environments when fostering mindset shifts.

5 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study stress the idea that DT, when applied meaningfully within engineering education, has the ability to go outside skills development and help model students’ entrepreneurial identities. Across the reviewed studies it is evident that entrepreneurial self-assurance is not something that grows through technical mastery alone — it is refined through emotionally and cognitively rich learning environments, where uncertainty, social connection, and feedback join.

One of the more intriguing experiences was how students began to reframe their self-image through DT practice. The work of [19] and [21] suggests that DT help students move from a narrow view of engineering as technical execution to one of innovation and intervention. What is likewise critical is how students’ acceptance for uncertainty evolved. Across multiple studies, students initially struggled with the open-endedness of DT tasks. However, as in[22], this very anxiety appeared to catalyse personal growth. Within the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), *perceived behavioural control* has been regularly identified as a critical determinant of entrepreneurial intent, [25], particularly when related to confidence in one's ability to act.

In studies like those by [21] and[20], controlled reflection served not only to strengthen learning but also to create internal validation. When students could follow their own growth — particularly in collaborative settings — their self-belief seemed to deepen.

Another important takeaway relates to the role of purpose. Several students reported feeling more positive and connected when the design problem held real-world or social relevance. This is supported in studies by[23]) and[24], where students confronted community challenges or sustainability goals, and students were more likely to demonstrate entrepreneurial persistence. Purpose-driven learning not only stimulates empathy — a known pillar of design

thinking — but anchor inspiration in personal and social meaning, which may in turn contribute to longer-term entrepreneurial orientation.

It is also worth noting that the value of mentoring and institutional platforms, while mentioned in passing, were not always investigated in detail. This signals an area for further research. While student transformation is clearly shaped by curriculum design and DT pedagogy, the relational elements — how instructors position themselves, how feedback is delivered — may also play a critical role in enabling or constraining entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

6 CONCLUSION

This meta-synthesis set out to explore how design thinking (DT) teachings support the development of entrepreneurial self-assurance among engineering students. Across the nine studies included, it became clear that DT does more than teach students how to design — it helps them develop self-confidence in their ability to act, adapt, and create value in uncertain and changing contexts.

Through recurring engagement with real-world problems, reflection, feedback, and collaborative exploration, students began to see themselves not just as learners, but as competent problem-framers and agents of change. The development of entrepreneurial self-efficacy appeared to emerge not from any single element of DT, but from the overall learning ecology it develops — one where uncertainty is welcomed, failure is normalized, and meaningful outcomes are within reach.

The findings highlight key theoretical theories from Bandura's social cognitive theory. Mastery experiences, peer feedback, and perceived control over outcomes are all featuring notably in the change students described. Just as importantly, many students placed their confidence in purpose — in the social or community relevance of the problems they tackled — suggesting that self-assurance is reinforced when students see their ideas as part of a larger human or environmental impact.

From a practical perspective, this synthesis confirms the case for embedding DT meaningfully into undergraduate engineering curricula — and not as a detached module, but rather a pedagogical philosophy that structures the learning process. Activities such as problem scoping, stakeholder engagement, visual prototyping, and reflective storytelling can all be convincing catalysts for confidence-building, provided they are scaffolded intentionally.

Future research should extend beyond immediate classroom outcomes to examine how these shifts in mindset and identity persist over time. Longitudinal studies tracking students' post-graduation, as well as deeper investigation into the role of mentor dynamics and peer networks, would help paint a fuller picture of how DT experiences translate into entrepreneurial action.

In conclusion, fostering entrepreneurial self-assurance through design thinking is not about adding more content to engineering programmes — it is about reshaping the conditions under which students learn, explore, and grow.

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TOWARDS DESIGNING A SUSTAINABILITY FUNCTION WITHIN LOGISTICS ENTERPRISES - A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations offers sustainability development goals (SDG) and guidance in the form of a compass, that companies and governments can use to address the current problems the globe is facing, also linked to global Environment, Governance, and Social (ESG) challenges. The SDGs consist of 17 goals, 169 targets, and 249 indicators that need to be addressed before 2030, saving the planet. Since research remains sparse on how industries, especially the logistics industry, address SDGs and ESG challenges, this study presents a systematic review of literature on existing methods, frameworks and methodologies that focus on bridging the gap between SDGs and the selection, prioritisation, and management of sustainability initiatives to have a notable impact within the context of the logistics industry. As a secondary contribution, we extract how-to knowledge from existing literature in developing guidelines for logistics companies when a company designs and implements a new sustainability function.

Keywords: sustainability development goals, SDG, ESG, sustainability function

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1 INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The United Nations (UN) has been documenting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for over three decades, receiving support from over 178 countries since sustainable development (SD) was first articulated in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during the Earth Summit of 1992 [1, 2]. SDGs have since evolved into a globally recognised framework influencing diverse sectors, including logistics, where sustainability has become both a strategic imperative and a competitive differentiator. In this exploratory study, we use a literature review to show that sustainability adoption in South Africa's logistics industry (SALI) remains inconsistent, with implementation challenges stemming from infrastructure limitations, cost pressures, and a heavy reliance on road freight [3-7]. These contextual realities heighten the importance of industry-specific approaches to SDG integration.

1.1 Background

In September 2000, at the UN Headquarters in New York, the UN launched the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), better known as Agenda 21 [1]. Initially only measuring seven goals, an eighth goal was added only two years later [8]. Prior to the eighth goal's addition, the UN subtly pointed out that the involvement of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) had already been identified as a critical success factor, and that governments alone would not be able to take on such an enormous task without their support [9, 10]. Agenda 21 now evolved to eight goals to achieve as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: 8 Millennium Development Goals [11]

Agenda 21 aimed to alleviate poverty, improve healthcare, and promote environmental sustainability while fostering global collaboration between governments and NGOs [2]. Although Agenda 21 presented the first attempt to unite governments and NGOs to tackle these global challenges, Agenda 21 ultimately fell short of achieving its intended goals [8]. In 2015, the UN decommissioned Agenda 21 and introduced the 2030 Agenda, also known as the SDGs. The SDGs have now expanded to address not only the MDG goals but also broadened the focus on global political and economic challenges resulting in 17 goals, 169 targets, and 249 indicators to address [1, 12, 13]. With the importance of SD increasing globally, governments and NGOs quickly adopted the SDGs [10, 14]. The seventeen SDGs are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: 17 Sustainable Development Goals [15]

The collaboration between the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the UN Global Compact (UNGC) and the World Business Council of Sustainable Development (WBCSD), the 2030 Agenda also introduced a blueprint, known as the SDG Compass [12, 13]. The SDG Compass was created to guide stakeholders to achieve the SDGs and to address the lack of guidance that led to the failure of Agenda 21. Figure 3 depicts an overview of the SDG compass that was designed.

Figure 3: The SDG Compass [16]

Despite broad support for the SDGs, the UN [17] in their 2024 annual report, "*The Sustainable Development Goals Report*", indicates that the world is significantly off track. The report shows that from 2015 to 2024, only 17% of the targets are on track, 48% shows moderate or marginal progress, 18% have stagnated, and 17% have regressed [17]. This means that around 35% of the targets are reverting to "ground zero", indicating a need for urgent investigation into the underlying causes of stagnation and regression.

This study used an exploratory approach to investigate the knowledge base for the SALI context, indicating a lag in progress that underscores the need to interpret SDG principles through the lens of the industry's operational and structural realities; ensuring that sustainability integration is not only aligned with global targets but also practical and measurable within South Africa's unique logistics environment.

1.2 Research gap, objectives and discovery questions

The UN's 2024 annual report reveals that the SDGs have significant potential but also some serious analytical and practical challenges that need to be investigated [18]. Furthermore, van Zanten and van Tulder [14] argue that fundamental flaws have been present since the SDGs inception, particularly in their conceptual degree of complexity and symptom-oriented focus, rather than addressing the root causes. Sachs [10], Bennich et al. [19] further noted that the current SDG Compass lacks guidance on its effective use, especially in operationalising goals, governing specific challenges, and managing trade-offs and synergies. Additionally, similarly to Agenda 21, Cuervo-Cazurra et al. [20] stated that there are also no consequences when goals are not met and thus only encouraging stakeholders to use them as a communication tool without contributing towards the goals. Finally, although the indicators also provide a means of measuring progress regarding the targets, Kim [21] believes that the existing indicators are mainly quantitative and inadequate to address the multifaceted aspects of diverse targets they serve, arguing for measuring less quantifiable, often subjective, context specific, indicators.

While these shortcomings apply globally, in the SALI context they are compounded by limited empirical research directly linking SDG implementation to the logistics industry's operational frameworks, supply chain networks, and governance practices. A targeted analysis of SDG Compass application within the SALI is therefore warranted to ensure sector-specific applicability and impact [3-7].

Identifying these discrepancies within the SDG Compass can help the stakeholders to focus on the right goals for their industries [22]. This study therefore defines two main objectives, linked to the discovery questions (DQs) in Table 1. Since the search is still exploratory, the questions are framed as DQs rather than definitive research questions.

Table 1: Discovery questions for the study

Objective 1: Review existing SDG and ESG literature	
DQ1	What SDG related research has already been done in the within South Africa's logistics industry (SALI)?
DQ2	What research has already been conducted on the SDG compass within the logistics industry?
DQ3	What research has already been done on the SDG compass within SALI?
DQ4	How does the ESG framework impact the SDG Compass?
Objective 2: Review knowledge to guide developing a Sustainability function design approach (SUFDA)	
DQ5	How is the SDG compass used within existing literature, to guide SDG implementations?
DQ6	What solutions/frameworks/methodologies exist to guide SDG implementations?

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter uses guidelines from literature on following a systematic process in reviewing existing knowledge to answer this study's DQs. The methodology follows an academic protocol for conducting a systematic literature review (SLR), to gain knowledge that relate to the research questions [23, 24]. According to Al-Zubidy et al. [23] an SLR is used because it is unbiased, repeatable, and comprehensive. Furthermore, Paul et al. [24] did point out that an SLR process should not only provide knowledgeable insights on a research question but also guide researchers when a new field of knowledge is identified.

For this study, a specific emphasis was placed on identifying literature that connects the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) frameworks to the South Africa Logistics Industry (SALI), thereby aligning directly with the research objectives of the study.

2.1 Research protocol

The research protocol presented in this study followed Okoli's [25] seven steps in his *"A Guide to Conducting a Standalone Systematic Literature Review"*. Following the initial steps, a

search string was developed and applied across selected digital databases for which we had access, indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Selected databases for the study

Selected Databases for study		
Academic Search Complete	Access Engineering	ACM Digital Library
EBSCO	EI Engineering Village	Emerald
Engineering Database	IEEE Xplore	ProQuest
Sabinet	SAGE	Science Direct
Scopus	Springer Link	Taylor and Francis Journals
Web of Science	Wiley Online Library	

The complete search string used in this study is presented in Appendix A. The search string created for this study indicates 4 parts, where we highlight the AND operators to ensure search specificity. The third part of the string explicitly targeted existing reviews or systematic reviews to build on the existing knowledge base, with particular emphasis on existing literature reviews on frameworks related to SDGs and ESGs within the academic body of knowledge.

Okoli's [25] guidance further requires a *practical screening* process after obtaining and compiling literature into a master data file. This process helps to determine which publications should be considered for answering the DQs by setting up certain criteria that will guide the researcher [25, 26]. For this study, the criteria, indicated in Table 3, were considered to conduct the practical screen on the publications extracted from the digital databases.

Table 3: Selected practical screening criteria for the study

Criteria	**Reason for criteria selected**
Publication year restriction	The use of publications from 2015 will be limited as it marks the start of the SDGs.
Document type	To use only journals, articles, and conference papers with Digital Object Identifiers (DOI) and in certain cases grey literature.
Language	All publications obtained needs to be in English.
Keywords	The study used keyword screening to identify any studies that contain specific terms related to the search string.
Duplication removal	All duplicated publications were removed to ensure that no duplication occurred in the final Primary Publications (PPs) list.

Furthermore, Okoli [25] suggests that a *quality appraisal* is conducted after practical screening. The purpose is to ensure the most relevant and high-quality publications are obtained, reducing the number of publications selected as Primary Publications (PPs) [27]. This study will analyse all publications obtained from the practical screening technique using Okoli's [25] technique, followed by abstract reviewing, full text reviewing, and snowballing to identify relevant publications. No additional quality appraisal techniques were used to assess the quality of the relevant publications.

Okoli [25] suggests that the researcher identifies appropriate techniques to synthesise the data. Hinawi [28] further adds the purpose of data extraction is to create precise extractions that will capture valuable information, that will answer the DQs. Therefore, the data mining technique was used to extract relevant information, used for synthesis as suggested by [25-28]. The specific data extracted to answer the DQs are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Data mining substance selection for data extraction from the PPs

Data Extraction		
Abstract	Article reference	Country of study
Database	Industry	Journal or publication
Keywords	Publication year	Themes

2.2 Protocol applied

Following the guidelines of Okoli [25] and the flow-diagram guidance of Page et al. [29], which enhance transparency and reproducibility in the search process for an SLR, a systematic and structured approach was adopted. The resulting protocol, as illustrated in Figure 4, provides a transparent overview of the steps taken to ensure methodological rigour and traceability in the review process.

2.2.1 Identification

The first phase of the SLR from Figure 4, involves identifying the search string, databases, and extracting the results to answer the DQs. After applying the search string (See Appendix A) to each database, a total of 218,292 publications were extracted (see Figure 4). These were imported into Microsoft Power Business Intelligence (BI) for further analysis. As shown in Figure 4, 46.47% of the publications were from ProQuest and 35.02% from Sabinet. ProQuest and Sabinet were less sophisticated in interpreting the complexity of the search string and hence extracted a very large result set, but with possible low relevance.

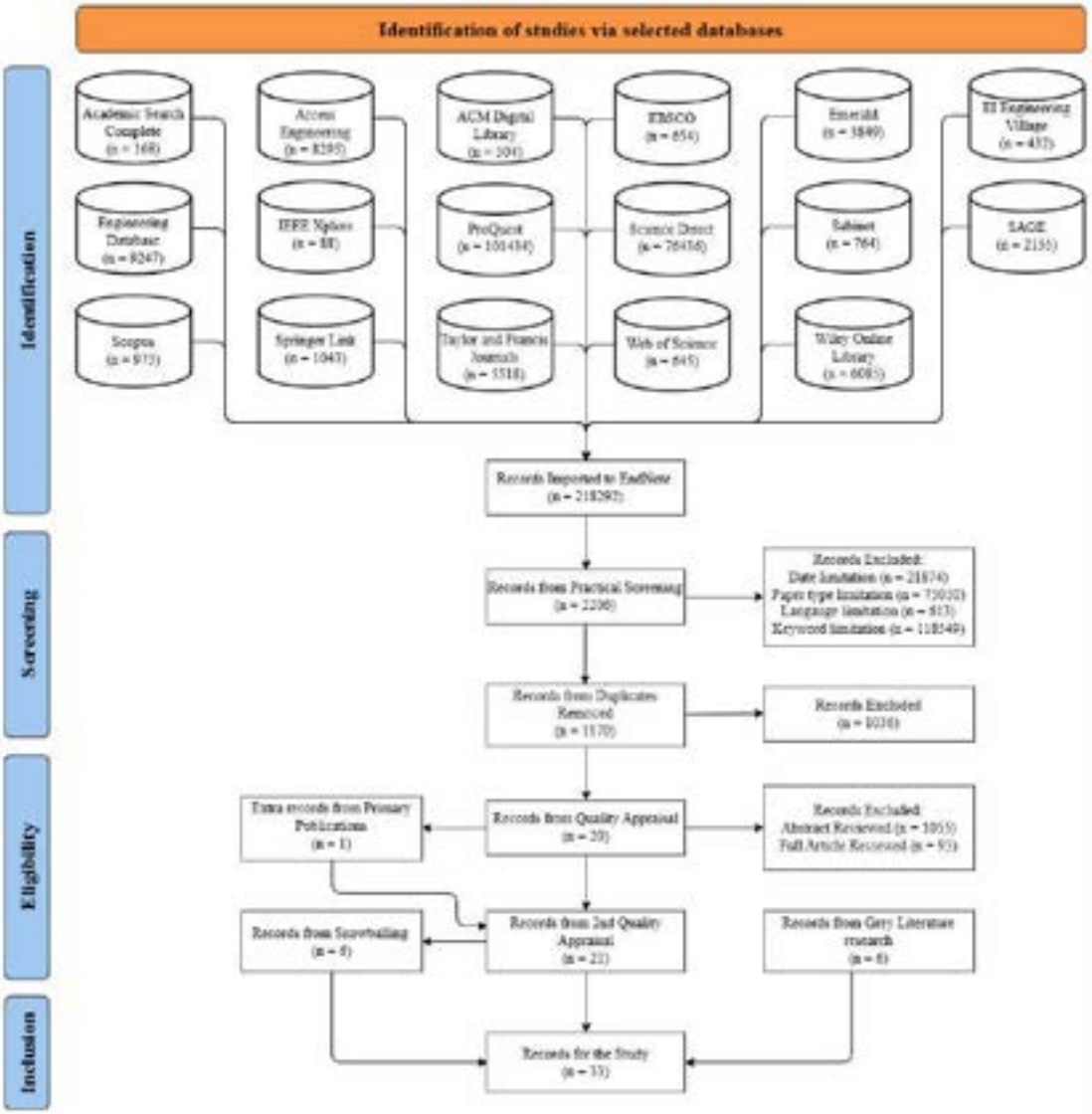

Figure 4: SLR protocol applied

2.2.2 Screening

The second phase of the process is screening (Figure 4). After applying the practical screening criteria from Section 2.1, a total of 2,206 relevant publications were identified out of an initial 218,292, meaning that 99% of the publications were excluded. This steep drop was mainly due to the high number of results from ProQuest and Sabinet. Screening also involved removing duplicates, as noted in Section 2.1. A total of 1,036 were removed, cutting the list by another 65.34% and bringing it down to 1,170 publications of interest.

2.2.3 Eligibility

In the third phase each of the 1,170 publications was subjected to abstract reviewing, full-text analysis, and snowballing to determine the final list of PPs. This process led to the exclusion of 1,150 publications. Publications were excluded primarily due to one or more of the following reasons: (1) Did not include a literature review on an SDG framework; (2) did not link the SDGs to ESGs or a specific industry; (3) Did not address the DQs. Snowballing was then applied to the remaining 20 publications, adding 6 more. To be more comprehensive, the researcher also conducted grey literature research, identifying a further 6 relevant publications.

2.2.4 Inclusion

The final phase presents the final list of PPs to be used for the analysis. These 33 publications, listed in Appendix B, form the empirical foundation for answering the DQs outlined in this study.

2.3 Data extraction and analysis methods

Okoli [25] recommend three synthesis methods namely: Meta-Analysis (MA) for quantitative analysis, Interpretation-Analysis (IA) for qualitative analysis, and Triangulation-Analysis (TA) to consolidate the MA and TA results. In this study, Atlas.ti was used for IA and Microsoft Power BI for MA. The extracted data will be visually presented through these tools and then discussed using TA to synthesise insights from qualitative and quantitative sources. Based on the knowledge embedded in the 33 publications, we present the results in three main sections, also indicating our discoveries regarding the DQs.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW RESULTS FOR MAIN CONCEPTS

Analysis of the reviewed publications in Atlas.ti revealed the most frequent keywords were Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Business, Sustainability, Development, Management, Innovation, and Research. However, a notable gap was identified with study relevant keywords (Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), framework, logistics, South Africa, and SDG Compass) *being absent*. This absence confirms two key points:

1. There is limited integration between SDG-related research and the logistics-sector application in South Africa, indicating that more sector-specific research is required, also indicated by [3-7].
2. There is insufficient academic discourse linking ESG frameworks to the SDG Compass in a South African context, reinforcing the rationale to address this research gap with future research.

While the keyword analysis revealed these gaps, the systematic literature review also identified a set of main concepts that are most pertinent to understanding how SDGs can be interpreted and operationalised in enterprise contexts; and, where possible, within the logistics sector. These are presented in Table 5 and provided conceptual description towards addressing the DQs.

Table 5: Main concepts for the study

Main concept	Description
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	A global framework aimed at eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring inclusive prosperity [30].
Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG)	A strategic framework for measuring and managing an organisation's environmental, social, and governance performance [31].
Circular Economy (CE)	A regenerative system focused on minimising resource input and environmental impact through reuse, recycling, and innovation [32].
Sustainable Supply Chain (SSC)	The integration of sustainability principles across the full supply chain, from sourcing to delivery [33].
Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (EE)	Networks of actors and enabling conditions that foster productive entrepreneurship within specific contexts [34].
Green Human Resource Management (GHRM)	HR practices aligned with environmental objectives to cultivate sustainability-oriented organisational culture [35].
Industry 4.0 (I4)	The integration of advanced digital technologies into manufacturing and supply chain operations, aimed at enhancing flexibility and efficiency [36].
Key Performance Indicators (KPI)	Quantitative metrics used to track organisational performance against predefined sustainability or strategic objectives [37].
Stakeholders and Engagement	Individuals or groups affected by or influencing an organisation's activities, with engagement referring to structured participatory practices [38].
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	A strategic approach where businesses integrate environmental and social concerns in operations and stakeholder interactions [39].

Each concept in Table 5 provides a theoretical anchor that contributes to answering one or more of the Discovery Questions (DQ). For example:

- Sustainability governance frameworks emerged as a dominant theme, but these are often generic and require contextual adaptation to the South African Logistics Industry (SALI) realities.
- Measurement and indicators were predominantly quantitative, echoing Kim's [21] critique and indicating a lack of qualitative, context-specific measures in the logistics sector.
- Innovation in sustainable operations was frequently discussed globally yet rarely grounded in South African freight or warehousing case studies.

In short, the analysis underscores both a knowledge gap and an opportunity: the SDG Compass and ESG frameworks are well-theorised in global literature, but their translation into SALI-specific practice remains underdeveloped. This reinforces the strategic importance of the present study in bridging this gap through the eventual design of the Sustainability Function Design Approach (SUFDA).

4 LITERATURE REVIEW RESULTS REGARDING SDG AND ESG

This section addresses Objective 1 by reviewing the primary themes from the Primary Publications (PPs) in relation to DQs 1 to 4. The analysis consolidates thematic insights with explicit reference to the SALI wherever possible.

4.1.1 SDG Framework in the Context of SALI (answering DQ1 to DQ3)

While all PPs highlights the importance of the SDGs and their integration into core business strategy (CBS), none provide direct evidence of completed SDG-focused research specific to the SALI. However, several insights and research opportunities emerge from the existing literature:

1. Country Relevance: Azmat et al. [40] reported that 64.05% of SDG research has been conducted on developing countries, with 31.7% focused on Africa, indicating regional interest which includes South Africa.

2. Government Role: The South African's government supports and promotes the 2030 Agenda but lacks industry specific standards and guidelines towards the adoption of an SDG Framework [41].
3. Industry Specific: While literature on SDG frameworks is growing, studies rarely focus on specific industries [42, 43]. Several studies highlight the need for industry specific research and performance measurement in SDG implementation [42, 44, 45]. Furthermore, the studies have also revealed that a call for deeper understanding of the SDG framework's challenges, opportunities, and impacts at the industry level is required [40, 46-49].
4. Sustainable Supply Chains (SSC): Although research into SSCs is growing, empirical studies linking to the SDGs remain limited [42].
5. Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (EEs): Audretsch et al. [50] highlight a gap connecting EEs to the ESGs and SDGs.
6. Circular Economics (CE): Vann Yaroson et al. [51] reveal that existing literature only offers context-specific reviews and lacks comprehensive studies exploring the CE–SDG link.
7. Interconnections and Trade-offs: Research on SDG interconnections and trade-offs remain limited, thus highlighting the need for more holistic approaches [40, 42, 43, 46].

Although the SDG Compass is widely recognised across the primary papers (PPs), it is most often referenced simply as the "SDG tool" or "SDG framework." Only Paul et al. [24] explicitly discussed the Compass and its origins within the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), and World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). This limited and fragmented use highlights the absence of a systematic approach to applying the SDG Compass within the South African logistics industry (SALI). The findings from the PPs therefore confirm a clear research gap in the development of industry-specific strategies and metrics that could operationalise the SDGs in SALI. The systematic review further verified that no academic articles directly address the intersection of SALI and the SDGs. While this absence may initially appear as a limitation, it is in fact the central discovery of this study: by revealing this gap, the research directly answers the discovery questions (DQ1–DQ4) and provides a critical foundation for the subsequent design of SUFDA.

4.1.2 Impact of the SDG Compass on the ESG Framework (answering DQ4)

Analysis from the PPs revealed a strong link between the ESG framework and the SDG Compass, suggesting shared synergies that support SDG advancement. While the SDG Compass provides a broad guidance for SDG engagement, the ESG framework offers a more structured approach for measuring and reporting progress. The following themes indicate how ESG and the SDGs are linked:

1. ESG as a measurement tool for SDGs: The ESG framework supports consistent assessment and reporting of CSR performance through scores, ratings, and evaluation system [52, 53]. Furthermore, The ESG framework also complements the SDG Compass which, focusses on goal setting, integration, and high-level reporting.
2. Mapping ESG to SDGs (selected examples): (1) Environmental: ESG emissions indicators align with SDG 13 (Climate Action), focusing on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing climate resilience [52, 53]. (2) Social: ESG metrics on workforce and human rights correspond with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), emphasising fair labour practices and inclusive employment [52, 53]. (3) Governance: ESG governance practices support SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical management [52, 53].
3. Proxy measurement: ESG also serves as a proxy for SDG performances, which allows for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on SDGs [52, 53].

4. SDG integration: According to Sarkar, et al. [53], ESG-focused companies usually also integrate the SDGs into their operations.
5. Foundational Role: The SDG Compass also reflects the ESG's influence in shaping practical, industry specific SDG implementation [52, 54].

In summary, the ESG framework not only complements the SDG Compass but also enhances its applicability through measurable indicators. A combined ESG-SDG approach offers a promising route to the creation of the SUFDA for the SALI.

5 LITERATURE REVIEW RESULTS ON SOLUTIONS THAT GUIDE DESIGN

This section addresses Objective 2 by identifying solutions, frameworks, and methodologies that can guide the development of a Sustainability Function Design Approach (SUFDA) tailored for enterprises in the South African Logistics Industry (SALI). While the reviewed approaches are not inherently logistics-specific, each offers adaptable principles and processes that can be recalibrated to suit the unique operational, infrastructural, and regulatory realities of the SALI.

5.1.1 Using the SDG compass to guide SDG implementation (answering DQ5)

While no prior studies explicitly define a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) function tailored for the SALI, multiple studies highlight the SDG Compass as a foundational tool for developing a flexible, context-sensitive sustainability function such as an SUFDA [46, 47, 55].

Although standardised guidance for sustainability function design is lacking, various tools support the mapping, implementation, reporting, assessment, alignment, and monitoring of SDG-related activities within enterprises [49]. For instance, PwC's SDG Selector and ICMA's Mapping to the SDGs provide structured approaches for integrating SDGs into Core Business Strategy (CBS) [49]. Despite their generic nature, these tools offer guiding principles to inform the design of custom SDG functions for SALI.

In developing such a function, the SDG Compass can serve as a foundational framework, with adaptations to address the specific characteristics of the logistics industry [55]. These should consider regional infrastructure limitations, industry-specific sustainability concerns, socioeconomic conditions, regulatory contexts, and potential areas of impact [41, 46, 47, 55]. The literature supports a two-stage approach: (1) Understanding and applying the SDG Compass; and (2) Designing an SDG function based on that foundation:

1. Understanding and applying the SDG compass: Organisations must first familiarise themselves with the SDG Compass and it's five-step process.
2. Developing a context-sensitive SDG function: A function aligned with the SALI's needs should include the following elements:
    a. *Industry specificity:* A successful SDG function must therefore reflect the logistics Industry's operations and contributions to the SDGs [55].
    b. *Geographic relevance:* The SDG function needs to focus on South Africa's priority SDGs, given its socio-economic and infrastructural context [43, 54].
    c. *Stakeholder engagement:* Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for the development of an SDG function. This involves the participation of diverse internal and external actors to support goal selection and function design [40, 41, 43, 48, 49, 55-57].
    d. *Continuous improvement:* The SDG function should allow for continuous iterative updates based on feedback and evolving sustainable challenges or opportunities [58].
    e. *Beyond generic approaches: The SDG function should be able to translate the SDGs into high-level measurable goals for the logistics industry* [54].

f. *Managing trade-offs:* The SDG function must be able to identify and mitigate SDG conflicts and/or trade-offs. The ESG metrics can support this process by enabling transparent reporting [14, 43].

5.1.2 Frameworks guiding SDG implementation (answering DQ6)

From the Primary Publications (PPs), three key frameworks were identified that could offer guidance for constructing the SUFDA for SALI, even if they are not logistics or regional specific.

5.1.2.1 The Gap Frame Methodology

Developed by Muff et al. [12], the Gap Frame Methodology (available at www.gapframe.org) assess regional progress across four domains: Planet, Society, Economy, and Governance (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: The Gap Frame [12]

The Gap Frame Methodology (GFM) uses 68 indicators across 24 issues to assess a region's performance against an ideal state, identifying areas requiring urgent attention to align with specific SDGs [12]. While Muff et al. [12] describe the GFM creation process, the framework is mainly designed for regional analysis, such as for South Africa, and is not directly transferable to other contexts. Although not industry specific, the GFM does offer a structured approach for evaluating SDG performance and identifying regional priorities. Nonetheless, the development of an SDG function must similarly begin with identifying a region's critical sustainability gap.

5.1.2.2 Multi-Criteria Analysis Framework

The Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) Framework by Allen et al. [46], is a structured process to prioritise SDG targets based on urgency, impact, and policy gaps. This framework enables a comprehensive assessment to identify relevant SDG targets for a specific industry [46]. Furthermore, the MCA framework also guides resource allocation and action planning to maximise the impact on the SDGs. The six-step process, illustrated in Figure 6 and detailed in Table 6, supports and shows how to prioritise high-impact SDG targets for a specific industry.

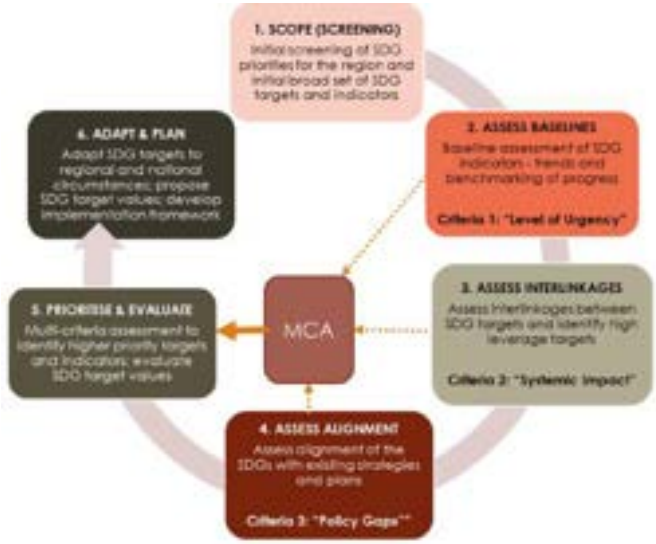

Figure 6: MCA framework [46]

Table 6: MCA framework steps

Steps	Description
Step 1 – Screening	Identify relevant SDGs at both regional and industry levels. After selecting priority SDGs, determine associated targets and indicators through iterative refinement [46].
Step 2 – Assess Baselines	Evaluate urgency by comparing selected targets and indicators against historical trends and global benchmarks to identify areas lagging in progress [46].
Step 3 – Assess Interlinkages	Analyse interconnections among targets using two methods: Cross-Impact Matrix (for direct interactions) and Network Analysis (for indirect links). Targets with the highest systemic impact are prioritised [46].
Step 4 – Assess Alignment	Examine alignment with existing policy frameworks to reveal coverage gaps. Targets with minimal alignment receive higher scores, indicating need for policy focus [46].
Step 5 – Prioritise and Evaluate	Aggregate scores using a weighted linear average informed by stakeholder input, resulting in a ranked list of high-impact targets [46].
Step 6 – Adapt and Plan	Integrate prioritised targets into a context-specific SDG framework tailored to the industry, such as for the SALI [46].

The MCA framework serves as a key tool for identifying high-priority SDGs and will significantly contribute to the development of the SUFDA for SALI.

5.1.2.3 Industry 4.0 and SCOR Model integration

Another model identified from the PPs is the integration of Industry 4.0 (I4) technologies with the Supply Chain Operations Reference (SCOR) Model, as proposed by Srhir et al. [45]. This approach incorporates I4 technologies (e.g., Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain) with Sustainable Supply Chains (SSC) to improve efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and advance the SDGs within a specific industry [45]. This approach according to Srhir et al. [45] is adaptable to the specific needs and challenges being faced within a specific industry. The approach is illustrated in Figure 7.

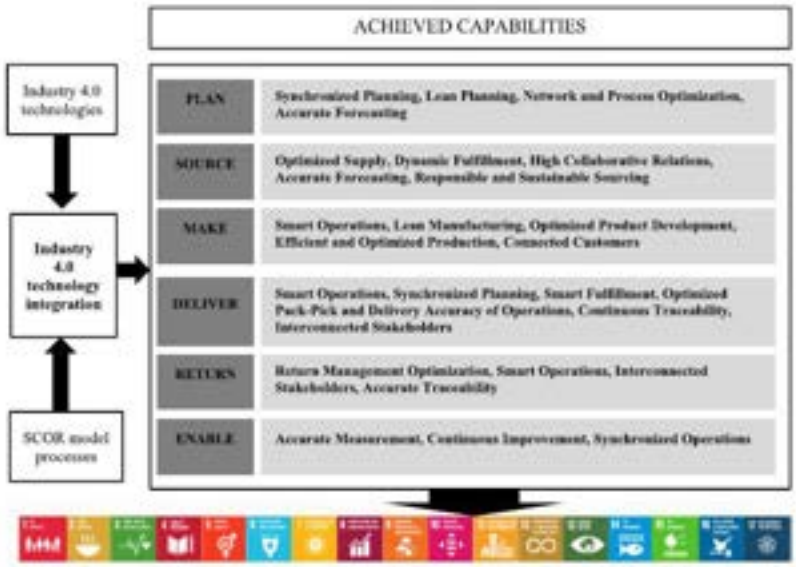

Figure 7: SSC 4.0 integration with the SCOR model impacting 17 SDGs [45]

The Industry 4.0 and SCOR Model (I4-SCOR) approach proposed by Srhir et al. [45], outlines six core processes for developing an SDG function. However, the I4-SCOR approach lacks clarity on how these technologies link to SCOR processes to support the advancement of the SDGs. Srhir et al. [45] did also acknowledge that the steps outlines in the I4-SCOR approach are vague, and they highlight its limited practical application and the absence of an innovation framework.

While none of the reviewed frameworks are fully tailored to SALI, they offer adaptable components. The SDG Compass provides a strategic foundation, the Gap Frame Methodology (GFM) and Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) framework guide diagnosis and prioritisation, and the I4-SCOR approach introduces digital transformation potential within the SDGs. Together, they can be used in the development of an SUFDA for the SALI.

6 REQUIREMENTS FOR A SUFDA

The Sustainability Function Design Approach (SUFDA) will be developed by integrating enterprise design and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation knowledge, as presented in section 5. Designing a new approach artefact requires a foundation in an established body of knowledge. Enterprise Engineering is *"an emerging discipline that takes an engineering perspective on enterprises,"* providing a theory-based methodology for coherent enterprise design [59]. The term *enterprise* includes all kinds of organised human activities, such as companies, agencies, institutions and supply chains [59].

Enterprises comprise concurrent design domains: (1) the organisation domain, consisting of enterprise operations where human beings interact in creating new products and/or services, (2) the information and communication technology (ICT) domain, consisting of hardware and software to support enterprise operations, (3) human skills and know-how domain, consisting of relevant skills to support enterprise operations, and (4) infrastructure domain, including facilities and non-ICT technologies to support enterprise operations [60]. In designing the SUFDA, the enterprise designer should distinguish between three artefacts:

1. The enterprise as an artefact, consisting of multiple design domains.
2. A sustainability function requiring essential tasks to address sustainability concerns.
3. The SUFDA as an approach artefact, guiding the enterprise designer in deploying the sustainability function.

Section 6.1 introduces enterprise design theory to support SDG function development within existing enterprises. Section 6.2 applies this theory and synthesises section 5's sustainability frameworks to derive initial SUFDA requirements tailored to the South African Logistics Industry (SALI).

6.1 Enterprise design knowledge

As demonstrated by Dietz and Mulder [59], the General System Development Process (GSDP) provides a conceptual foundation when designing new functions within an entire enterprise. The enterprise designer begins with the enterprise's environment, referred to as the using system, and proceeds to the design of multiple enterprise functions, considered object system functions [59]. The process concludes with the development of the enterprise constructs, or object system constructs [59]. When designing an SDG function within an existing enterprise, the same logic applies, though only a single enterprise function is created.

The design principles proposed by de Vries [61] are instrumental in guiding the development of a coherent *new approach* such as the SUFDA. The principles help answer three fundamental questions: (1) Why is sustainable development required (i.e. defining the paradigm of SUFDA)? (2) What are the main constructs of SUFDA? (3) How should the SUFDA be deployed?

6.2 Preliminary requirements for a SUFDA

Drawing on the principles from de Vries [61], Table 7 guides the SUFDA development for SALI. Table 8 shows how relevant knowledge from the GFM, MCA, and the I4-SCOR approach, from section 5, can be integrated into the SUFDA artefact.

Table 7: Approach design principles applied to the SUFDA

Approach design principles	Application of principles to SUFDA
1) Enterprise Conceptualisation	The SUFDA artefact must declare a clear enterprise concept, contextualising SALI through theory-based analogies, where the conceptualisation has to reflect the realities of enterprises within the logistical industry.
2) Phenomenon Description and Problem Class	The SUFDA artefact must provide a well-substantiated account of sustainability challenges in SALI, carbon emissions, governance failures, and inefficient resource loops, and show these reflect broader, under-addressed problems needing new design approaches.
3) Paradigm of Value Creation	The SUFDA artefact must include a testable value creation proposition. For instance, when applied to SALI, it should contribute towards SDG 12 and SDG 13 and once implemented, evidence should support the value proposition.
4) Scope Demarcation Methodology	The SUFDA artefact must explicitly define its design scope, domains, and concerns using established theoretical frameworks such as the Design and Engineering Methodology for Organisations (DEMO), ensuring clarity in addressing sustainability across enterprise levels [62].
5) Defend Design Scope	The SUFDA artefact must justify its scope, specifying enterprise layers and external interfaces. It should address internal and external complexities, define boundaries, identify stakeholders, and describe the validation context.
6) Representation and Notation Standardisation	The SUFDA artefact must declare its representational approach for design domains (e.g., BPMN or DEMO to represent the organisation domain). Deviations from standards should be theoretically justified.
7) Structuring and Role Allocation	The SUFDA artefact must specify its architecture, core components, roles and users, mechanisms, and internal interrelations.
8) Justificatory Knowledge Base	The SUFDA artefact must integrate relevant kernel theories to justify component effectiveness and reinforce design integrity.
9) Tailoring and Adaptability	The SUFDA artefact should support tailoring within defined bounds, such as industry-specific SDG weightings or local data. Clear guidelines must specify allowable adjustments and implementation methods.
10) Implementation Advice	Although optional, the SUFDA artefact should ideally offer practical guidance for implementation across logistics contexts, including stakeholder onboarding, system integration, and deployment recommendations.

Approach design principles	Application of principles to SUFDA
11) Real-World Instantiation	A strongly recommended optional requirement is a real-world application or pilot case. A SALI use-case would illustrate the approach and expose design gaps for future refinement.

Table 8: Extracting knowledge from existing sustainability frameworks

Requirement	Extracted from literature
1) Data-Driven Sustainability Gap Assessment	The SUFDA artefact must suggest essential *diagnostic operations*, supported by a diagnostic tool, such as the GFM, to benchmark industry or regional performance across key sustainability indicators. This forms the basis for SDG prioritisation and guides SUFDA actions in SALI. Indicators should be adaptable to global and South African contexts.
2) Depict the essential SUFDA operations	Following the MCA framework, the SUFDA artefact must define essential sustainability operations and roles, currently noted only as composite roles in [46]: • Scope Screener • Baseline Assessor • SDG Interlinkage Assessor • Strategy Alignment Assessor • Priority Assessor • Implementation Developer These roles support structured SDG alignment and efficient enterprise deployment. An operational model should be developed using guidance from [46].
3) Supply Chain Transaction Integration	The approach must map SDG objectives to supply chain phases, Plan, Source, Make, Deliver, Return, and Enable, as indicated in [45]. Each phase should describe relevant transaction types, ensuring that sustainability logic is operationally embedded in the SUFDA artefact for the SALI.

While Table 8 draws from existing theory to inform the SUFDA's structure, its development should follow a systematic design heuristic. This includes creating an integrated architecture across organisation, ICT, skills and know-how, and infrastructure domains, ensuring that the SUFDA is both theoretically sound and practically deployable in the SALI.

7 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study reviewed existing sustainability approaches to determine whether an established model could guide enterprises in the South African logistics industry (SALI) to embed sustainability into their operations. The findings confirm the absence of a comprehensive, industry-specific approach, thereby underscoring the need for a tailored Sustainability Function Design Approach (SUFDA).

At the same time, the review highlighted literature that can inform the requirements for SUFDA as a theoretically grounded artefact capable of guiding sustainability transformation in SALI. By integrating enterprise engineering principles (Dietz and Mulder [59], de Vries [61]) with sustainability frameworks such as the Gap Frame Methodology (GFM), Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA), and the Industry 4.0–SCOR model (I4-SCOR), the study directly addresses its research objective: to conceptualise a coherent approach that enables the deployment of an SDG-aligned sustainability function within existing enterprises.

Finally, this paper constitutes the first phase of a broader design science research program. By empirically demonstrating the absence of SDG-focused research on SALI, it positions this discovery as a rigorously identified research gap. This foundation provides the basis upon which the SUFDA artefact will be developed in subsequent studies, ensuring that later applied contributions are both theoretically robust and practically relevant.

7.1 Limitations of this study

While this study lays a conceptual foundation for designing an SUFDA within the SALI, several limitations warrant consideration:

1. The Search String: The study only included literature reviews, with the assumption that literature reviews would represent the existing body of knowledge. The limitation was mitigated, using snowballing and also including grey literature.
2. Conceptual Emphasis: The work is theoretical, grounded in literature and existing frameworks, without empirical validation. This constrains immediate applicability in real-world SALI contexts.
3. Contextual Generality: Though the SALI is central, integrated frameworks (e.g., SDG Compass, GFM, MCA, I4-SCOR) are not logistics- or region-specific, necessitating further localisation to address South African and industry-specific dynamics.
4. Evolving Sustainability Landscape: The dynamic nature of sustainability and SDG frameworks demands adaptability. While conceptually considered, operational mechanisms remain undeveloped.

These limitations underscore the need for empirical research, pilot studies, and iterative refinement to improve the SUFDA's practical relevance and effectiveness in SALI.

7.2 Future work

Building on the SUFDA's conceptual foundations and initial requirements, the study forms part of a larger research initiative, where design science research (DSR) will be used to develop SUFDA as an *approach* artefact. Applying the DSR cycle of Peffers et al. [63], future work is required to extend and validate the initial requirements, followed by constructing, demonstrating and evaluating the SUFDA.

Other research directions are also proposed when developing and evaluating the SUFDA:

1. Component Refinement: Detailed development of the SUFDA's roles and operational models, incorporating Industry 4.0 (I4) technologies for improved sustainability monitoring and decision-making.
2. Sector-Specific Adaptation: Tailoring the SUFDA for logistics sub-sectors (e.g. freight, warehousing, last-mile delivery) to address distinct sustainability needs and opportunities.
3. Stakeholder Engagement: Developing methods for sustained stakeholder engagement to align SDG targets dynamically and manage trade-offs.
4. Policy Integration: Aligning the SUFDA with South Africa's sustainability regulations and global logistics standards to enhance compliance and reporting.
5. Digital Infrastructure: Leveraging from the Internet of Things (IoT) and data analytics for real-time sustainability assessments and continuous improvement.
6. Empirical Validation: Pilot multiple implementations in the SALI enterprises to assess the SUFDA's practicality, adaptability, and performance.

By addressing these areas, future research will not only validate the SUFDA's conceptual robustness but also enhance its capacity for scalable, evidence-based sustainability transformation in the SALI.

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9 APPENDIX: LIST OF PRIMARY PUBLICATIONS

9.1 Appendix A: Search string

("sustainable development goal function" OR "SDG function" OR "SDG operation" OR "SDG compass" OR "Sustainable development goal compass" OR "sustainable development goal operation" OR "Global goals Function" OR "Global goals operation" OR "Global goals compass" OR "Agenda 2030" OR "SDG implementation" OR "SDG strategy" OR "Sustainable Development Goals framework" OR "SDG indicators" OR "SDG targets" OR "SDG metrics" OR "SDG performance" OR "Sustainable Development Goals" OR "SDG*" OR "Sustainable Development Objective" OR "Sustainable Development Target" OR “ESG” OR “ESG strategy” OR “ESG framework” OR “ESG function” OR “ESG operation” OR “Environmental, Social, and Governance” OR “Environmental, Social, and Governance strategy” OR “Environmental, Social, and Governance framework” OR “Environmental, Social, and Governance function” OR “Environmental, Social, and Governance operation”)
AND ("company" OR "companies" OR "corporation" OR "corporate" OR "business" OR "firm" OR "logistics" OR "Enterprise*" OR "industry" OR "organization" OR "private sector" OR "commercial" OR "SME*" OR "Small and Medium Enterprises")
AND ("SLR" OR "Systematic Literature Review" OR "Literature Review" OR "Meta-analysis" OR "Research Review" OR "Review Study" OR "Review Paper")
AND ("Blueprint" OR "Blue Print" OR "Compass" OR "Guide" OR "Steps" OR "Process" OR "Function" OR "Methodology" OR "Roadmap" OR "Framework" OR "Strategy" OR "Implementation Plan" OR "Action Plan" OR "Guidebook" OR "Procedure" OR "Protocol" OR "Best Practices")

9.2 Appendix B: Primary publications after snowballing and grey literature search

Published Date	Article	DOI	URL	Records From
2015	Analysis of the transport relevance of each of the 17 SDGs		https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/8656Analysis%20of%20transport%20relevance%20of%20SDGs.pdf	Grey Literature
2016	Integration: the key to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals	10.1007/s11625-016-0383-3	https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11625-016-0383-3	Snowballing
2016	Navigating the SDGs: a business guide to engaging with the UN global goals		https://www.pwc.es/es/publicaciones/sostenibilidad/pwc-sdg-guide.pdf	Grey Literature

Published Date	Article	DOI	URL	Records From
2017	How companies can improve their Impact on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and harness the power of digitalization		https://econsense.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/econsense_Companies-for-Change_Handbook_2017_3MB.pdf	Grey Literature
2017	Raising the bar: Rethinking the role of business in the Sustainable Development Goals		https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620187/dp-raising-the-bar-business-sdgs-130217-en.pdf?sequence=1	Grey Literature
2017	The Gap Frame - Translating the SDGs into relevant national grand challenges for strategic business opportunities	10.1016/j.ijme.2017.03.004	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1472811717300848	Snowballing
2018	Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: An enabling role for accounting research	10.1108/AAAJ-05-2017-2929	https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/18369/Final_version_revised_AAAJ_05_2017_2929_.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y	From SLR PPs
2018	Harnessing the Sustainable Development Goals for businesses: A progressive framework for action	10.1002/bsd2.33	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/bsd2.33	Primary Publication
2019	Prioritising SDG targets: assessing baselines, gaps and interlinkages	10.1007/s11625-018-0596-8	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326137160_Prioritising_SDG_targets_assessing_baselines_gaps_and_interlinkages	Snowballing
2019	SDG guide for business leaders: A practical guide for business leaders to working with the SDGs as a competitive factor		https://vl.dk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/20190612-SDG-Guide-full-version.pdf	Grey Literature
2020	Assessment of corporate social responsibility by addressing sustainable development goals	10.1002/csr.2081	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/csr.2081	Primary Publication
2020	Criteria-based approach to select relevant environmental SDG indicators for the automobile industry	10.3390/su12218811	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346250342_Criteria-Based_Approach_to_Select_Relevant_Environmental_SDG_Indicators_for_the_Automobile_Industry	Primary Publication
2020	Sustainable development goals and the strategic role of business: A systematic literature review	10.1002/bse.2568	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/bse.2568	Primary Publication
2021	Improving companies' impacts on sustainable development: A nexus approach to the SDGS	10.1002/bse.2835	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/bse.2835	Primary Publication
2021	Integrating corporate sustainability and sustainable	10.1080/23311975.2021.1985686	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/23311975.2021.198	Primary Publication

Published Date	Article	DOI	URL	Records From
	development goals: towards a multistakeholder framework		5686?scroll=top&needAccess=true	
2022	Re-imagining marketing scholarship in the era of the UN Sustainable Development Goals	10.1177/14413582221085387	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14413582221085387	Snow Balling
2022	Supply chain collaboration and sustainable development goals (SDGs). Teamwork makes achieving SDGs dream work	10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.03.044	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296322002818?via%3Dihub	Primary Publication
2022	Sustainable entrepreneurship impact and entrepreneurial venture life cycle: A systematic literature review	10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.134469	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0959652622040410?via%3Dihub	Primary Publication
2022	The role of environmental social and governance in achieving sustainable development goals: evidence from ASEAN countries	10.1080/1331677X.2022.2072357	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/1331677X.2022.2072357?needAccess=true	Snowballing
2023	A sustainable development evaluation framework for Chinese electricity enterprises based on SDG and ESG coupling	10.3390/su15118960	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371270121_A_Sustainable_Development_Evaluation_Framework_for_Chinese_Electricity_Enterprises_Based_on_SDG_and_ESG_Coupling	Primary Publication
2023	A systematic literature review exploring and linking circular economy and sustainable development goals in the past three decades (1991–2022)	10.1080/00207543.2023.2270586	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00207543.2023.2270586	Primary Publication
2023	Assessing sustainable production: A selection of indicators aligned with the SDGs	10.1002/sd.2793	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sd.2793?af=R	Primary Publication
2023	Convergence of business, innovation, and sustainability at the tipping point of the sustainable development goals	10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114170	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296323005295	Primary Publication
2023	How can research contribute to the implementation of sustainable development goals? An interpretive review of SDG literature in management	10.1111/ijmr.12331	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ijmr.12331	Primary Publication
2023	Introducing a framework toward sustainability goals in a supply chain 4.0 ecosystem	10.1016/j.jclepro.2023.138111	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0959652623022692?via%3Dihub	Snowballing
2023	Localising the Sustainable Development Goals: Evaluating its Praxis	10.53973/jopa.2023.58.3.a12	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378625578_Localising_the_Sustainable_Development_Goals_Evaluating_its_Praxis	Primary Publication
2023	Mapping enablers for SDG implementation in the private sector: a systematic literature review and research agenda	10.1007/s11301-023-00341-9	https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11301-023-00341-9	Primary Publication

Published Date	Article	DOI	URL	Records From
2023	Role of Environmental, Social, and Governance in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals: A special focus on India	10.1002/ep.14204	https://aiche.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ep.14204	Primary Publication
2023	Sustainable development activities in chemical companies in Poland: links between SDGs and ESG	10.29119/1641-3466.2023.172.37	https://managementpapers.polsl.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/172-Tutko.pdf	Primary Publication
2023	Sustainable investment – exploring the linkage between alpha, ESG, and SDGs	10.1002/sd.2628	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/sd.2628	Primary Publication
2024	Do entrepreneurial ecosystems foster sustainable development?	10.1007/s11365-023-00916-8	https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hector-Rocha-3/publication/377413730_Do_entrepreneurial_ecosystems_foster_sustainable_development/links/65c4f8001bed776ae337a034/Do-entrepreneurial-ecosystems-foster-sustainable-development.pdf	Primary Publication
2024	Linkages between the Sustainable Development Goals and health in Somalia	10.1186/s12889-024-18319-x	https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-024-18319-x	Primary Publication
2024	Sustainable development report 2024 the SDGs and the UN summit of the future includes the SDG index and dashboards	10.25546/108572	https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2024/sustainable-development-report-2024.pdf	Grey Literature

EVALUATING THE PROGRESS, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE OF ERP IMPLEMENTATION IN AFRICA: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON AI-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the evolution, problems, and future directions of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) deployment in Africa, situated within recognised theoretical models such as the Technology-Organisation-Environment (TOE) framework and Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory [1, 2]. It covers significant factors like globalisation, government regulations, and technological improvements while identifying problems such as infrastructural gaps, high costs, and organisational resistance [3, 4]. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into ERP systems is analysed using the lens of the socio-technical systems theory, proving AI's ability to optimise decision-making, automate processes, and increase data analytics [5, 6]. Industry-specific case studies illustrate how AI-enhanced ERP may overcome existing constraints and enable sustainable growth [7, 8]. This analysis offers practical insights for enterprises, governments, and researchers aiming to utilise ERP and AI for competitive advantage and sustainable economic growth in Africa, while enhancing the theoretical discussion on technology adoption in emerging economies [9, 10].

Keywords: Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Technology Adoption, Industrial Engineering, Process Automation, Supply Chain Management, Data Analytics, Systems Integration, Innovation Diffusion, Socio-Technical Systems

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context of ERP Implementation in Africa

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems have emerged as a fundamental element in organisations' digital transformation journeys. ERP systems provide integrated platforms for managing financial, human resource, procurement, and supply chain functions [11]. In Africa, the usage/adoption of ERP has increased consistently as organisations seek operational efficiency, compliance, and competitiveness. This advancement is not consistent, frequently hindered by infrastructural limitations, elevated expenses, and resistance to organisational change [4, 12]. Notwithstanding these obstacles, governments and the commercial sector increasingly regard ERP systems as essential for digital maturity.

The continent's digital landscape has been evolving. This has been seen with many parts having improved internet connectivity, cloud computing, and mobile penetration—creating new opportunities for ERP implementations [2]. With recent advancements, integrating ERPs with Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced new capabilities in the areas of predictive analytics, fraud detection, and intelligent automation [5]. These AI-enhanced systems provide more agile, data-informed decision-making, which is especially advantageous for industries like mining, agriculture, and finance that are characterised by significant operational complexity and regulatory requirements.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The strategic potential of ERP systems is highly respected; however, their adoption in African organisations is often plagued by high failure rates, poor system utilisation, and a disconnect between technology and organisational culture [12]. The challenges encountered in most adoptions are a result of vendor models that are not flexible, a low number of skilled users, and an inability to align ERP capabilities with sector-specific processes [11]. Furthermore, although AI has become a pivotal element for ERP transformation worldwide, its significance within the African context is still inadequately examined, particularly across various industries.

1.3 Significance and Rationale for the Study

This study addresses two research gaps: the under-documented contribution of artificial intelligence to improve ERP performance in Africa and the limited contextual knowledge of ERP challenges in Africa. By focusing on specific industries—mining, retail, finance, agriculture, and manufacturing—analysing AI-enhanced ERP adoption helps to provide a holistic picture of the drivers, obstacles, and effects of these technologies in Africa. It also contributes to theoretical advancement by applying socio-technical and innovation diffusion perspectives to ERP adoption in resource-constrained environments.

The findings aim to inform policymakers, technology vendors, and enterprise leaders about the enablers of successful ERP-AI integration, offering recommendations that are both scalable and context-specific.

1.4 Research Objectives and Key Questions

The main aim of this research is to assess the impact of AI integration in ERP systems on business transformation within African firms. The research intends to:

- Identify the principal challenges and determinants of success in ERP implementations within African industries.
- Examine how AI has improved ERP performance in terms of efficiency, compliance, and decision-making support.

- Investigate the influence of industry-specific characteristics on the outcome of ERP-AI integration.
- Formulate policy and practice suggestions that facilitate sustainable digital transformation.

This study is directed by the following research questions:

- What are the primary contextual obstacles impeding successful ERP implementation in Africa?
- In what ways does AI augment the capabilities and strategic significance of ERP systems?
- What sector-specific insights may be derived from the implementation of ERP-AI in African industries?
- What insights can Africa glean from global best practices to inform its ERP transformation journey?

2 METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review (SLR) approach is utilised to explore the adoption, challenges, and transformative impact of AI-enhanced ERP systems across African industries. ERP research is dynamic and multidisciplinary—an SLR was chosen to ensure methodological rigour and thematic depth.

2.1 Systematic Literature Review Approach

The SLR approach is well-suited for synthesising diverse empirical and theoretical contributions on a complex topic such as ERP implementation in Africa. Following guidelines from Tranfield, et al. [13], the review was conducted in three phases: planning, conducting, and reporting, ensuring transparency and replicability. The study aimed to identify how AI integration modifies ERP outcomes, particularly in light of the infrastructural, financial, and organisational challenges prevalent in African enterprises.

The review was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and high-quality grey literature published between 2015 and 2024. A few seminal studies before 2015 were also included for theoretical anchoring.

2.2 Specific Databases and Search Criteria

The databases examined comprise Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink, in addition to pertinent open-access journals. The keywords used were organised into various boolean combinations, as follows:

- "ERP implementation" AND Africa
- "AI in ERP systems" AND performance
- "enterprise systems" AND agriculture/finance/mining in Africa
- "ERP challenges" AND developing countries

The search also included pan-African ERP experiences, including Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, to ensure contextual relevance.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were considered if they:

- Focus on ERP implementation in Africa.
- Discuss AI-ERP integration.
- Delivered case-specific, sectoral, or theoretical insights relevant to Africa.
- Were published in English between 2015 and 2024.

Articles were excluded if they were purely technical, in non-African contexts, or repetitive reviews without original analysis.

2.4 Explanation of Thematic Analysis Technique

A preliminary selection of 54 publications was evaluated, resulting in 15 that fulfilled the final inclusion criteria for theme analysis, including contextual depth, methodological rigour, and relevance to ERP-AI adoption in African industries. The process was directed by Braun and Clarke [14] six-phase framework, which includes familiarisation with data, coding, theme development, reviewing themes, defining/naming themes, and writing up. The coding process was both deductive—guided by theoretical frameworks (TOE, DOI, STS)—and inductive, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data. This hybrid approach helped identify the dominant themes under each core research objective.

2.4.1 Application of Theoretical Frameworks in the Analysis

The coding and synthesis were explicitly guided by three frameworks: Technology–Organisation–Environment (TOE), Diffusion of Innovation (DOI), and Socio-Technical Systems (STS). We operationalised these frameworks into the code families used during Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis [14].

We used a hybrid approach: deductive codes (seeded from TOE/DOI/STS) plus inductive codes emerging from the data. Codes were grouped into themes (challenges, enablers, outcomes, AI-specific transformations), then matrix-mapped by sector (mining, retail, finance, agriculture, manufacturing) to support the case studies. A second-pass review checked that each reported theme had at least one supporting code from a framework dimension; disagreements were resolved via memoing and codebook refinement.

Themes were categorised into:

- Challenges (e.g., infrastructural, financial, organisational resistance)
- Enablers (e.g., executive support, change management, cloud flexibility)
- Outcomes (e.g., efficiency, compliance, data visibility)
- AI-specific transformations (e.g., risk prediction, fraud detection)

These were later mapped to sector-specific contexts such as mining, finance, and agriculture to deepen insights in the case study sections.

2.4.2 Thematic Saturation

Thematic saturation was reached when no new codes, sub-themes, or theoretical insights emerged from reviewing additional studies. The initial pool of 54 eligible publications was progressively reduced as coding revealed recurring patterns, with later papers contributing only confirmatory evidence. After coding the first 35 papers, the codebook had stabilised, and no new categories were generated in subsequent analyses.

A quality appraisal step was then applied, resulting in the retention of 15 high-quality articles that met all methodological and relevance criteria. These studies covered multiple African regions and sectors (mining, retail, finance, agriculture, and manufacturing) and varied in research design, ensuring both breadth and depth.

The decision to limit synthesis to these 15 articles was supported by:

1. **Content redundancy** – later studies reiterated existing themes without adding distinct perspectives.
2. **Diversity assurance** – the final set encompassed all sectors and contexts within the study's scope, offering a representative yet analytically manageable corpus.

This process aligns with SLR best practice, ensuring that the thematic framework is comprehensive, stable, and supported by sufficiently diverse evidence.

2.4.3 Critical Appraisal of Sources

Each article retained for thematic analysis was evaluated for methodological quality and risk of bias using adapted appraisal criteria for information systems research. The following factors were considered:

- **Research design robustness** – preference was given to empirical studies with clear methodological descriptions (e.g., case study protocols, survey designs, sampling strategies).
- **Data triangulation** – inclusion of multiple data sources (e.g., interviews, system usage data, archival records) to strengthen validity.
- **Sample diversity and adequacy** – representation across organisational sizes, sectors, and African regions.
- **Transparency of reporting** – clarity in data collection and analysis processes, including ethical considerations.
- **Analytical rigour** – evidence of systematic coding, theoretical framing, and clear linkage between data and conclusions.

Studies that lacked sufficient methodological detail, relied solely on anecdotal accounts, or presented findings without clear data provenance were excluded. This ensured that the final synthesis was built on evidence of acceptable empirical rigour.

While this process reduced the total number of eligible studies, it enhanced the reliability of the thematic framework by minimising the influence of low-quality or biased sources.

This process aligns with SLR best practice, ensuring that the thematic framework is comprehensive, stable, and supported by sufficiently diverse evidence.

2.4.4 Language Scope Justification

Only English-language publications were included in the review. This decision was guided by two practical considerations:

1. Resource constraints – Accurate interpretation of ERP–AI adoption literature requires not only linguistic fluency but also familiarity with technical and theoretical terminology. The research team did not have access to professional translation resources within the project timeline.
2. Consistency of conceptual analysis – Limiting the corpus to English ensured that coding and framework mapping (TOE, DOI, STS) could be applied consistently without the risk of meaning shifts introduced through translation.

This approach is common in SLR practice but introduces a limitation in the African context, where significant ERP implementation and AI adoption may be documented in French, Portuguese, Arabic, and other local languages. Such exclusion may narrow the scope of cultural and regional diversity in the findings. Future research should address this gap by incorporating multilingual search strategies and translation support to capture a more comprehensive continental perspective.

2.5 Justification for Chosen Methodology and Potential Limitations

The SLR technique was chosen to deliver a thorough yet targeted synthesis of disparate literature across several fields and sectors. It facilitates both generalisation (trends across Africa) and contextualisation (sectoral and national insights). Furthermore, utilising recognised theoretical frameworks during coding ensures conceptual consistency in the study.

However, the approach has limitations:

- It relies on the availability of published materials and may exclude valuable insights from unpublished organisational reports.
- Bias in keyword selection and language (English-only) may limit scope.
- While sector-specific, the study does not provide in-depth ethnographic or field-based validation.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a robust foundation for understanding ERP-AI adoption in Africa and supports the analytical depth required for theoretical, practical, and policy contributions.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 ERP Systems Overview

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems are well-integrated software platforms designed to facilitate business processes across multiple departments by streamlining data entry and usage. They facilitate real-time data access, standardised workflows, and improved operational control [4]. In the 1990s ERP solutions were just manufacturing resource planning tools, but they have now evolved to full-suite, cloud-based enterprise platforms supporting AI-driven decision-making and business intelligence [2].

3.2 Definition and Historical Evolution of ERP

Historically, ERP systems emerged to resolve the inefficiencies and fragmentation of legacy systems. From MRP II systems in the 1980s, ERP transitioned into monolithic, on-premises platforms in the early 2000s and has since evolved into modular, cloud-native, and AI-enhanced solutions. The evolution also reflects a shift from transaction processing to strategic enablers of competitiveness, compliance, and innovation [8]. More recently, cloud ERP and Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) models have expanded access, especially for SMEs in developing economies [3].

3.3 Global Trends and Significance

Due to compliance requirements, data complexity and competitive pressures, ERP systems are being adopted as part of global digital transformation strategies. Developed economies have led this movement, with organisations increasingly integrating AI capabilities, such as predictive analytics, robotic process automation (RPA), and intelligent workflow orchestration [5]. These developments have also impacted how ERP systems are designed—emphasising modularity, API-based architecture, and sector-specific customisation [15].

In developing regions, ERP adoption is seen as a pathway to global competitiveness and supply chain integration. As Bag, et al. [8] highlight, ERP systems in healthcare and manufacturing are increasingly used to enhance resilience, quality assurance, and regulatory alignment.

3.4 ERP Adoption in Africa

3.4.1 General Overview and Key Adoption Trends

In the African context, ERP systems are gradually gaining traction, particularly in sectors like mining, telecommunications, banking, and public administration. Countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya are leading adoption due to relatively mature digital infrastructure and policy support for digital transformation [4]. Moreover, the increasing affordability of cloud-based platforms is helping small and medium enterprises access ERP tools previously available only to large corporations [2].

Nevertheless, adoption remains uneven. Many implementations are donor- or consultant-driven, with limited internal capacity-building or contextual customisation. For example,

systems procured using foreign aid often reflect the architecture of the donor's business culture, rather than the operational realities of the African enterprise [12].

3.4.2 Factors Influencing Adoption (Economic, Infrastructural, Organisational)

Key economic factors influencing ERP adoption include affordability, access to capital, and exchange rate volatility. Organisations often face foreign currency costs for licensing and upgrades, which increase financial risk [12]. Infrastructure is another constraint, particularly in rural or peri-urban areas with unreliable internet connectivity or electricity [4].

Organisational factors include leadership commitment, digital readiness, employee digital literacy, and internal change management capacity. In environments where informal practices and manual workarounds dominate, structured ERP processes can meet resistance or fail to integrate with legacy operations [11].

3.5 ERP Implementation Challenges in Africa

3.5.1 Infrastructural Challenges

Africa's digital infrastructure gap has a direct impact on ERP performance. Inconsistent electricity supply, slow internet speeds, and limited data centres hinder deployment, maintenance, and cloud integration. As a result, organisations are often forced to settle for less robust, outdated systems or underutilise available functionality [2].

3.5.2 Cost-related Challenges

ERP systems—especially those developed by global vendors—are often priced in USD or EUR, making them prohibitively expensive for many African firms. High upfront licensing fees, implementation costs, customisation, training, and ongoing maintenance often exceed budget forecasts [12]. Cloud-based models reduce capital expenditure but can accumulate significant operating expenses over time.

3.5.3 Organisational and Cultural Resistance

ERP success relies on user buy-in and behavioural changes. Resistance can stem from fear of redundancy, distrust of external systems, or lack of understanding about the system's value. In addition, hierarchical decision-making, weak change management structures, and insufficient training contribute to poor adoption and underuse [11].

3.6 Theoretical Frameworks

To understand ERP adoption in Africa, this study applies three interrelated frameworks:

3.6.1 Technology-Organisation-Environment (TOE)

The TOE framework emphasises that technology adoption is influenced by technological readiness, organisational capabilities, and environmental pressures [15]. In Africa, environmental factors—such as government digital strategies, donor support, and economic constraints—heavily influence ERP decisions.

3.6.2 Diffusion of Innovation (DOI)

Rogers' DOI theory explains how innovation adoption occurs through five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. African ERP adopters often stall at the persuasion or decision stages due to risk aversion or lack of demonstrable return on investment (ROI) [12].

3.6.3 Socio-Technical Systems (STS)

STS theory focuses on the alignment between technological systems and social structures. In Africa, misalignment between rigid ERP modules and informal practices leads to

underperformance or resistance. Effective implementation thus requires co-evolution of systems and structures, not just technical deployment [11].

4 AI INTEGRATION INTO ERP SYSTEMS

4.1 Overview of AI Capabilities in ERP

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping the value proposition of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, especially in emerging economies like those in Africa. Beyond process automation, transactional control, and data storage, the incorporation of AI technologies—such as machine learning (ML), natural language processing (NLP), robotic process automation (RPA), and predictive analytics—has enabled ERP systems to evolve into intelligent decision-making engines [2].

AI-enhanced ERP systems can autonomously detect anomalies, suggest optimal actions, and learn from historical data to continuously improve business processes. These capabilities are particularly valuable in dynamic sectors such as mining, finance, and agriculture, where volatility, data overload, and compliance demands are high [5]. AI also empowers ERP with conversational interfaces, allowing users to interact with systems via voice or chat, improving accessibility and user experience.

4.2 Strategic Benefits of AI in ERP

4.2.1 Enhanced Risk Management and Fraud Detection Outcomes

Risk management is a central concern for enterprises operating in unpredictable regulatory and economic environments. AI-enhanced ERP systems enable organisations to proactively monitor and flag inconsistencies in financial reporting, procurement, and human resources transactions. According to Bag, et al. [8], the integration of AI in ERP systems supports the early identification of fraud patterns and reduces the risk of financial leakage, especially in complex supply chains.

For example, AI tools embedded in ERP platforms can use historical transactional data to detect outliers that deviate from established behavioural norms. These patterns could indicate procurement collusion, over-invoicing, or ghost vendors—issues that plague many African public and private institutions. Moreover, AI-enhanced audit trails ensure regulatory compliance by automatically documenting decision points and justifications.

4.2.2 Operational Cost Reductions and Regulatory Compliance

The automation capabilities introduced by AI substantially reduce manual workloads, streamline data entry, and enhance process accuracy. In a study focused on digital transformation among African SMEs, Eboigbe, et al. [2] noted that AI-enhanced ERP solutions reduced administrative costs and decision cycle times, contributing to overall productivity.

In industries like manufacturing and agriculture, AI algorithms integrated into ERP systems forecast demand, track equipment conditions, and optimise inventory levels, reducing wastage and enhancing supply chain reliability [10]. These optimisations lower operational costs and enhance an organisation’s ability to respond to changing market conditions.

Furthermore, AI capabilities within ERP systems assist with compliance by continuously monitoring legislation, updating internal policy workflows, and sending real-time alerts for non-compliance risks. This is especially important in Africa, where multinational enterprises must navigate both local regulations and international compliance standards such as the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) or Basel III.

4.3 Specific Cases from South Africa and Africa-Wide Examples

Evidence of AI-ERP integration is emerging across several African nations. In South Africa's telecommunications and financial sectors, ERP systems powered by AI have demonstrated measurable improvements in both efficiency and governance. For example, Walker and Brown [7] describe a case study of a South African telecom firm that used AI-enhanced ERP to improve strategic procurement and reporting efficiency, leading to better budget control and vendor transparency.

Similarly, Eboigbe, et al. [2] highlight how Nigerian and Kenyan SMEs leveraged AI-enhanced ERP tools to simplify inventory planning and customer relationship management. These solutions, offered on cloud-based platforms, allowed smaller firms to access enterprise-level decision intelligence without investing in expensive on-premise infrastructure.

Furthermore, case studies in agriculture reveal that AI-enhanced ERP platforms are being used to monitor crop cycles, predict yield outcomes, and automate financial reporting for cooperative farming groups [3]. These tools provide a crucial link between farmers, financiers, and markets, creating digital ecosystems that drive inclusive growth.

AI has significantly expanded the scope and strategic value of ERP systems across Africa. By enhancing risk controls, lowering operational costs, and improving compliance, AI-enhanced ERP platforms support enterprise resilience in volatile and resource-constrained environments. Additionally, the scalability offered by cloud-AI ERP combinations is particularly well-suited to the continent's SME-driven economies. As case evidence continues to emerge from countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya, AI-enhanced ERP is proving to be not just a technological upgrade but a transformative business enabler.

Table 1: Mapping of Themes to Framework Dimensions, Sector Examples, and AI-Enhanced ERP Impacts

Theme	Framework Dimension	Sector Example	AI-Enhanced ERP Impact
Infrastructural challenges (e.g., connectivity, power supply)	TOE – Technological	Agriculture (Kenya, Ghana)	AI-enhanced offline data capture and predictive maintenance reduce downtime and improve service continuity
Leadership support & change management	TOE – Organisational	Mining (South Africa, Tanzania)	AI dashboards provide real-time KPIs to leadership, improving agility during transformation
Regulatory and market environment	TOE – Environmental	Finance (Nigeria, Mauritius)	AI compliance modules automate reporting and adapt to changing regulatory frameworks
Relative advantage & compatibility	DOI – Innovation Attributes	Retail (South Africa)	AI-enhanced demand forecasting and personalised promotions enhance market responsiveness
Trialability & observability	DOI – Innovation Attributes	Manufacturing (Egypt, Morocco)	AI simulation tools enable safe, low-cost ERP testing before full rollout
Joint optimisation of technology & human factors	STS – Socio-Technical Alignment	Agriculture (Rwanda)	AI-enhanced training customises learning paths, increasing adoption and reducing resistance
Data-driven decision-making culture	STS – Organisational Process Alignment	Mining & Finance	AI analytics integrate multi-source data for scenario planning, enabling proactive strategies

As summarised in Table 2, the emergent themes from the literature are closely tied to the TOE, DOI, and STS frameworks and manifest differently across industries. The next section builds on this mapping to explore sector-specific adoption narratives in detail.

4.4 Transition to Industry-Specific Case Studies

The literature review and analysis of AI integration into ERP systems have identified cross-cutting themes—challenges, enablers, outcomes, and AI-specific transformations—mapped through the TOE, DOI, and STS frameworks. While these findings present a continental view of ERP–AI adoption, the literature also reveals substantial sectoral differences. Industry context influences the weight of each driver and barrier, as well as the perceived benefits of AI-enhanced ERP.

The following section presents five industry-specific case studies—mining, retail, finance, agriculture, and manufacturing—each synthesised from the reviewed literature. For each sector, the analysis:

- Identifies unique adoption drivers and challenges.
- Aligns these with TOE, DOI, and STS dimensions.
- Evaluates the impact of AI-enhanced ERP on operational and strategic performance.

This transition ensures a clear link between the generalised findings of the review and the practical, context-specific narratives that follow.

5 INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC CASE STUDIES

5.1 Mining

The mining sector in Africa faces unique operational, environmental, and regulatory challenges that demand robust digital systems. Unlike traditional ERP systems that simply log transactions and track inventory, AI-enhanced ERP platforms analyse sensor data, anticipate equipment failures, and optimise resource scheduling [8].

One of the most valuable applications of AI in mining ERP is predictive maintenance. Downtime in mining operations can result in significant revenue loss. AI models trained on historical equipment data can forecast machinery breakdowns, triggering proactive servicing. This reduces unexpected halts and enhances operational safety—critical concerns in hazardous mining environments [5].

AI also supports regulatory compliance by automating the monitoring and reporting of safety inspections, environmental impact metrics, and labour hours. These capabilities are especially important in Africa, where regulatory oversight varies and manual recordkeeping often leads to inconsistencies.

In South Africa, a leading telecom company with mining infrastructure dependencies used AI-enhanced ERP tools to streamline procurement and asset tracking. The integration of AI led to improved vendor transparency and budget control, demonstrating measurable operational efficiency [7].

Compared to traditional ERP systems that are mostly reactive, AI-ERP platforms in mining deliver predictive insights and real-time decision support. They enable companies to transition from basic record-keeping to intelligent, agile operations. As African nations seek to increase local beneficiation and enforce ESG standards in mining, AI-enhanced ERP systems can serve as strategic tools that enhance both performance and accountability.

5.2 Retail

The retail sector in Africa is experiencing rapid digitalisation, driven by consumer expectations for personalisation, efficient inventory management, and seamless service delivery. AI-enhanced ERP solutions support personalised customer experiences by leveraging historical purchasing data, browsing patterns, and regional demand signals to drive targeted promotions and dynamic pricing strategies [5].

Traditional ERP systems primarily manage transactional processes, such as inventory tracking and point-of-sale data capture. However, AI-driven ERP platforms extend these capabilities by forecasting customer demand, detecting purchasing trends, and recommending stock rebalancing across retail branches. This transition enhances both customer satisfaction and inventory efficiency—critical issues for African retailers managing fluctuating demand and constrained storage infrastructure [2].

A notable South African example involves a retail chain that integrated AI with its cloud-based ERP system to enhance customer relationship management (CRM). By analysing real-time sales data and customer feedback through machine learning models, the company improved customer retention and reduced stockouts by 25% within six months [3].

While adoption remains concentrated among larger retailers, the declining cost of cloud ERP platforms is opening doors for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to adopt similar tools. As consumer expectations continue to evolve, the ability of AI-enhanced ERP systems to deliver personalisation, optimise inventory, and automate key workflows is becoming a competitive necessity in Africa's emerging retail ecosystems.

5.3 Finance

In Africa's finance sector, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems is transforming how financial institutions manage risk, ensure compliance, and optimise operations. Traditional ERP systems offer standardised modules for accounting, reporting, and procurement; however, these are increasingly being enhanced by AI capabilities, such as anomaly detection, fraud prediction, and real-time financial forecasting [8].

AI-enhanced ERP platforms assist banks, insurance firms, and fintech startups with identifying suspicious transactions through continuous behavioural analysis. Machine learning models embedded in ERP systems can monitor payment flows, flag outliers, and prevent internal fraud, thereby strengthening governance frameworks [5]. These features are especially critical in regions where financial fraud remains a major concern and where institutions are subject to both local and international regulatory scrutiny.

Operationally, AI-enhanced ERP systems reduce manual data processing, accelerate financial close cycles, and support automated compliance reporting aligned with frameworks such as IFRS and Basel III. In Nigeria and Kenya, digital banks have reported improved reconciliation accuracy and faster loan approval times after integrating AI-enhanced ERP workflows [2].

A notable example is a South African investment management firm that deployed AI tools within its ERP system to monitor market conditions and automate portfolio rebalancing. This led to improved client reporting and reduced portfolio drift, showcasing the potential for ERP-AI convergence to enhance both back-office and client-facing functions.

As Africa's financial institutions face growing pressure to scale digitally while minimising risk, AI-enhanced ERP systems offer a dual advantage: regulatory assurance and operational agility. Their adoption is likely to expand, particularly among firms seeking to balance cost efficiency with competitive differentiation.

5.4 Agriculture

ERP systems, when integrated with Artificial Intelligence (AI), are transforming agricultural operations in Africa by enabling precision farming, financial transparency, and digital traceability. AI-enhanced ERP platforms address this by providing real-time insights into crop performance, weather patterns, pest risks, and input management [3].

AI-enhanced ERP systems support smallholder farmers, cooperatives, and agribusinesses in optimising resource use—water, fertiliser, and seed—and forecasting yields with higher

accuracy. These systems improve visibility across supply chains, enabling alignment between production schedules, logistics, and market demand. For instance, AI models integrated into ERP platforms can analyse soil data and recommend planting times or irrigation cycles, boosting productivity and sustainability [10].

A practical example is the use of ERP-AI platforms in East African agribusiness cooperatives. These systems track farmer inputs, automate payment settlements, and generate reports used to secure microfinance or government subsidies. In Kenya, a cooperative using AI-enhanced ERP improved loan recoveries and increased yield forecasting accuracy by over 20% in one season [2].

Compared to traditional ERP systems that only document transactions, AI-enhanced platforms actively guide agricultural decision-making and enable early warning systems. They also facilitate data sharing with banks, insurers, and supply chain partners, promoting ecosystem-level integration and financial inclusion.

With agriculture employing a large share of Africa's workforce, the adoption of AI-enhanced ERP in this sector holds significant promise. These tools are not only modernising how farms are managed but are also helping bridge the rural digital divide, improving productivity, accountability, and access to markets across the continent.

5.5 Manufacturing

Africa's manufacturing sector is increasingly adopting AI-enhanced ERP systems to boost efficiency, improve product traceability, and strengthen supply chain resilience. Traditional ERP systems in manufacturing help manage core functions such as procurement, production planning, and inventory control. However, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) introduces predictive maintenance, demand forecasting, and dynamic scheduling—capabilities critical to the continent's industrial growth [5].

AI-enhanced ERP platforms enable manufacturers to predict equipment failure before it happens, reducing unplanned downtime and extending machine life. These predictive insights are driven by sensor data and machine learning models that detect anomalies in real time. In African factories where maintenance resources are often limited, this shift from reactive to predictive maintenance significantly improves operational continuity [8].

Additionally, AI algorithms support supply chain visibility by tracking raw materials, production timelines, and delivery schedules across decentralised facilities. This helps manufacturers respond more flexibly to market fluctuations and resource constraints. In South Africa, a mid-sized food processing company used an AI-enhanced ERP solution to improve its batch production forecasts and reduce waste by 18% in under six months [2].

As African governments push for local industrialisation under initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), smart ERP systems can serve as key enablers. They support better quality control, traceability, and lean operations—factors that are essential for competitiveness in both domestic and export markets.

6 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH ERP IMPLEMENTATIONS IN OTHER REGIONS

6.1 ERP Adoption Examples from Asia and Europe

In both Asia and Europe, ERP adoption has matured considerably, with widespread integration of cloud computing, real-time analytics, and AI capabilities. Countries such as Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands have adopted advanced ERP systems to support Industry 4.0, characterised by automation, cyber-physical systems, and IoT integration [10]. Similarly, in Asia—particularly in China and India—ERP systems have been scaled across large industrial and government sectors, often supported by strong ICT infrastructure and policy-driven digitalisation [15].

These regions have also focused on sector-specific ERP solutions tailored to industries like automotive, pharmaceuticals, and electronics. Furthermore, vendor ecosystems in Europe and Asia often offer local support, extensive documentation, and flexible deployment models, factors that reduce the total cost of ownership and improve system sustainability.

6.2 Identifying Unique Challenges and Similarities with Africa

While Africa shares some ERP adoption drivers with Asia and Europe—such as the need for integration, efficiency, and compliance—the continent faces distinct challenges. These include inconsistent power supply, weak broadband infrastructure, limited local vendor presence, and constrained digital skills [4, 12]. In contrast to mature markets, many African ERP implementations rely heavily on donor funding or top-down public sector procurement, often without adequate change management or local capacity-building [3].

However, similarities do exist: SMEs in all regions cite affordability and implementation complexity as key concerns. The adoption of cloud ERP has helped address this in Europe and Asia—and now in Africa, cloud-based AI-enhanced ERP tools are also enabling lean deployments, especially for SMEs [2].

6.3 Best Practices from Global Examples Relevant to the African Context

African ERP implementers can draw on several global best practices:

- Use of **modular ERP** to allow phased implementation.
- Strong focus on **user training and change management**.
- Emphasis on **local customisation** and language adaptation.
- Leveraging **AI** for continuous system learning and predictive performance.

Applying these practices—alongside African-centric innovation—can accelerate successful ERP transformation, ensuring that systems are both technologically robust and contextually relevant.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 Interpretation of the Findings in Light of Theoretical Frameworks

This study employed the Technology-Organisation-Environment (TOE), Diffusion of Innovation (DOI), and Socio-Technical Systems (STS) frameworks to interpret ERP and AI adoption in African contexts. Findings from the industry case studies affirm that ERP-AI integration is not solely a technological upgrade but a systemic transformation influenced by the external environment, organisational dynamics, and user adaptability.

From the **TOE perspective**, technological readiness (e.g., cloud infrastructure, AI capabilities), organisational factors (e.g., leadership, user skills), and environmental forces (e.g., regulatory mandates, market volatility) jointly influence ERP adoption. In all five sectors studied, success hinged on the intersection of these dimensions, particularly when external pressures—such as compliance in finance or traceability in agriculture—drove innovation.

Through the **DOI lens**, the variance in AI-ERP adoption reflects differences in organisations' innovation maturity. Early adopters in South African finance and retail sectors illustrate higher AI integration due to visible benefits like fraud detection and customer personalisation (Bag, Gupta and Kumar, 2021). Conversely, in sectors like agriculture and manufacturing, diffusion remains uneven, slowed by infrastructural and skills-related barriers.

The **STS framework** further explains challenges such as cultural resistance, misalignment between ERP logic and informal workflows, and the need for human-centric system design.

Across case studies, it became evident that AI-ERP success depended not just on technical capacity but also on training, usability, and inclusive stakeholder engagement [11].

7.2 Analysis of Implications for Policymakers, Industry Leaders, and Academia

For policymakers, the findings suggest a need for enabling environments—support for data infrastructure, AI innovation hubs, and cross-sectoral digital literacy programmes. Investment incentives and public-private partnerships can help localise ERP solutions and build domestic capabilities.

For industry leaders, AI-enhanced ERP systems offer clear benefits: better resource planning, risk mitigation, and compliance. However, success requires long-term strategic commitment, phased rollouts, and cross-functional change management teams. SMEs, in particular, benefit from scalable cloud platforms that match their operational agility.

For academia, the ERP-AI interface presents rich opportunities for future research—especially in local customisation, user behaviour, and sector-specific adoption models. There is also a gap in African-origin case studies and methodologies that reflect the continent's heterogeneity.

7.3 Critical Evaluation of Strengths and Limitations of AI Integration

While AI significantly strengthens ERP systems, the review reveals notable limitations. AI tools depend heavily on structured, clean data—something many African enterprises lack due to fragmented systems or paper-based processes. Moreover, algorithmic bias and lack of local language processing capabilities can restrict inclusiveness and usability, particularly in rural areas [2].

There is also a risk of overreliance on vendor-driven solutions that may not align with local operational realities or long-term development goals. Without strong institutional capacity, AI-enhanced ERP may entrench dependency rather than build local digital resilience.

8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Summary of Key Findings and Insights

This study explored how AI-enhanced ERP systems are reshaping enterprise performance across five major African sectors: mining, retail, finance, agriculture, and manufacturing. Through a systematic literature review grounded in the TOE, DOI, and STS frameworks, it identified that successful ERP adoption in Africa depends on more than technology—it requires supportive infrastructure, contextual alignment, and human-centric change management.

AI adds significant value by enabling predictive analytics, automating compliance, improving operational visibility, and enhancing customer experiences. However, this transformative potential is not uniformly realised due to infrastructural limitations, affordability challenges, and skills shortages. Sectoral case studies revealed that while early adopters are gaining tangible benefits, widespread diffusion remains limited by ecosystem maturity.

8.2 Concrete and Actionable Recommendations

8.2.1 For Policymakers:

Promote localised ERP solutions through public-private innovation hubs that develop modules tailored to African languages, regulatory environments, and informal business processes.

Subsidise cloud infrastructure and digital literacy programmes, particularly targeting SMEs and rural cooperatives.

Implement cross-sector AI governance frameworks to ensure ethical, transparent, and inclusive deployment of intelligent enterprise systems.

8.2.2 For Business Leaders:

Prioritise incremental ERP rollouts that focus on high-impact areas first—such as procurement or inventory management—before scaling AI features.

Invest in staff training and internal champions, ensuring users are involved early in implementation and workflow redesign.

Use AI strategically, not just for automation but for decision support in areas like demand forecasting, fraud prevention, and scenario analysis.

8.2.3 For ERP Vendors and Consultants:

Offer modular, scalable solutions to reduce upfront costs and encourage gradual adoption.

Develop industry-specific packages for key African sectors like agriculture and public services.

Strengthen post-implementation support through local partnerships and user communities.

8.3 Recommendations for Future Research Directions

Further empirical research is needed to:

- Examine longitudinal impacts of ERP-AI adoption in Africa's informal and micro-enterprise sectors.
- Investigate AI biases in ERP applications and their implications for equitable outcomes.
- Explore hybrid implementation models that integrate local legacy systems with global ERP platforms.
- Cross-country comparative studies and participatory action research could yield deeper insights into how culture, governance, and organisational maturity shape ERP-AI success across African regions.

8.4 Implications for ERP Implementation in Africa

AI-enhanced ERP systems are not simply digital upgrades—they represent foundational shifts in how African organisations manage resources, deliver services, and interact with global markets. If scaled responsibly, these systems can help bridge operational gaps, foster transparency, and support inclusive economic transformation. However, achieving this potential requires deliberate effort to contextualise implementation, build local capability, and embed ethical AI practices within ERP ecosystems.

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MODEL-BASED SYSTEMS ENGINEERING (MBSE) AND DOCUMENTATION-BASED APPROACHES IN RADAR SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the differences between Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE)and traditional documentation-based approaches in the development of radar systems. MBSE leverages digital models to enhance system design, integration, and verification, promoting greater consistency, automation, and traceability. In contrast, documentation-based methods rely on static documents, which can lead to inefficiencies and inconsistencies, particularly in complex systems. The study evaluates both approaches based on key factors such as requirements management, system complexity, verification processes, and overall lifecycle costs. Case studies and industry practices are analysed to assess the practical implications of each methodology. The findings suggest that MBSE improves collaboration, reduces errors, and increases design flexibility, though documentation-based methods remain relevant in certain regulatory and legacy contexts. The paper concludes by offering guidance on selecting the most suitable approach based on project-specific needs, balancing innovation with compliance and operational constraints.

Keywords: Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE), RADAR, Systems Engineering

1 INTRODUCTION

The development of radar systems is inherently complex, requiring rigorous engineering methodologies to ensure reliability, efficiency, and adaptability. Traditionally, documentation-based approaches have been employed, relying on extensive textual descriptions, spreadsheets, and static diagrams to capture system requirements, design, and validation processes. However, as radar systems grow increasingly sophisticated, driven by advancements in signal processing, sensor integration, and real-time data analytics, these traditional approaches exhibit significant limitations [1]. The fragmented nature of documentation-based engineering leads to inefficiencies, inconsistencies, and difficulties in traceability, which can compromise system performance, increase development costs, and prolong project timelines [2]. In response to these challenges, Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) has emerged as a transformative approach, leveraging digital models to represent, simulate, and manage complex system architectures. MBSE offers several advantages over documentation-based methods, including improved consistency, automated validation, enhanced collaboration, and real-time system analysis [3]. Despite its potential, the adoption of MBSE in radar system development remains limited due to organisational inertia, the steep learning curve associated with MBSE tools, and a lack of empirical studies comparing its effectiveness against traditional documentation-driven methods [4].

This research aims to conduct a comparative analysis of Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) and documentation-based approaches in radar system development, evaluating their impact on system design efficiency, accuracy, and maintainability. By addressing this knowledge gap, the study seeks to provide actionable insights into the strengths and limitations of each methodology, offering guidance for radar system engineers and decision-makers in selecting the most effective approach for modern radar system projects. Understanding the trade-offs between Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) and documentation-based approaches is crucial for ensuring that radar systems meet the demanding performance and reliability requirements of defense, aerospace, and commercial applications. If these issues are not adequately addressed, engineering teams risk relying on outdated and inefficient development methodologies, ultimately hindering innovation and operational effectiveness in radar technology. Conversely, if MBSE proves to be a superior methodology, its broader adoption could streamline development cycles, reduce errors, and enhance the agility of radar system engineering. By systematically analysing these methodologies, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of best practices in radar system development, bridging the gap between traditional engineering paradigms and emerging digital transformation strategies in systems engineering [5], [6].

The structure of this paper is organised as follows. Section II presents the research problem, outlining the core challenge associated with traditional documentation-based approaches in radar system development. Section III introduces the research question, which guides the comparative evaluation of Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) and documentation-based methods. Section IV articulates the research objectives, detailing the study's aims and specific areas of analysis. Section V describes the research methodology, including the desktop-based qualitative design, systematic literature review, expert reflection, and comparative benchmarking framework. Section VI provides the literature review, exploring key MBSE frameworks, critiques, and radar-related applications. Section VII examines the application of MBSE in radar development, drawing comparisons with documentation-centric approaches across dimensions such as traceability, adaptability, and system integration. Section VIII presents the case studies, with particular focus on a professional project involving a land-based X-band radar system developed using traditional systems engineering methods. Section IX offers the conclusion, summarising key findings and proposing recommendations for future adoption of MBSE in complex radar development environments.

2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The increasing complexity of modern radar systems has exposed the limitations of traditional documentation-based engineering, including poor traceability, inefficiencies, and inconsistencies. While Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) offers a more integrated and automated approach, its adoption remains limited due to implementation challenges and a lack of comparative evidence. A clear evaluation of both approaches is needed to inform methodology selection and optimise radar system development.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The critical research question for the study is:

- How does MBSE compare to traditional document-based approaches in the development of radar systems, particularly in terms of efficiency, accuracy, and adaptability to complex system requirements?

4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- The objective of this research is to conduct a comparative analysis of Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) and documentation-based approaches in the development of radar systems. The study aims to assess their effectiveness, efficiency, and suitability for complex system engineering. The specific research objectives are:
- To evaluate the effectiveness of MBSE and documentation-based approaches in radar system development – Examining their impact on system design, integration, qualification, and verification processes.
- To compare the efficiency of MBSE and documentation-based approaches in managing system complexity – Assessing how each approach handles the increasing complexity of radar systems, particularly in multi-disciplinary engineering environments.
- To investigate the accuracy and consistency of system requirements, design, integration, qualification, and validation processes in both approaches – Analysing how MBSE and traditional documentation methods ensure traceability, compliance, and reduced errors.
- To determine the challenges and limitations of MBSE and documentation-based approaches in radar system development – Identifying constraints related to implementation, resource allocation, and industry adoption.
- To propose a framework for optimizing radar system development through MBSE and/or documentation-based best practices, recommending strategies for improving efficiency, accuracy, and reliability in radar engineering projects.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desktop-based, qualitative research design to evaluate the comparative effectiveness of Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) and traditional documentation-based approaches in the development of radar systems. The aim was to synthesise current practices, derive analytical insights, and assess methodological strengths and weaknesses within the systems engineering domain, particularly in the context of complex defence-related projects. The approach is exploratory in nature and interpretive in application, offering a grounded assessment rooted in both published literature and professional engineering experience. To ensure methodological rigour, the study employed three core techniques: a systematic literature review (SLR), a technical artefact and process analysis, and a comparative benchmarking framework. These elements were selected to facilitate

triangulation between theoretical insights, documented engineering practices, and expert testimony.

5.1 SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW (SLR)

The SLR was conducted on 3 March 2025 using a modified PRISMA-style screening protocol to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Literature searches were performed across multiple scholarly and defence-focused databases, including IEEE Xplore, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Boolean operators and targeted keyword strings were used to refine the search scope, including:

- “Model-Based Systems Engineering” AND “Radar System Development”
- “MBSE” AND “Defence Systems” OR “Systems Engineering”
- “Documentation-based engineering” AND “Complex Systems Development
- “Radar system integration” AND “MBSE vs traditional approaches”

The search was restricted to English-language publications from 2020 to 2025 to prioritise contemporary technologies and engineering practices. Grey literature such as technical white papers, case documentation, and policy guidelines was also consulted, with material sourced from Armscor, Denel, and other defence-related academic sources. Reference mining and manual screening were used to identify supplementary sources not indexed in academic databases.

5.2 CASE-BASED EXPERT REFLECTION

To ground the literature in a practical context, a detailed professional case study was incorporated based on the author’s direct involvement in the development and deployment of a land-based X-band surveillance radar system. This case study provides insight into the traditional documentation-centric engineering lifecycle, covering phases from requirements specification to system integration, field testing, and sustainment planning. This experiential reflection enabled a qualitative comparison between actual project constraints, engineering artefacts, and best-practice principles derived from MBSE literature. The case study was not presented as empirical proof but rather as a context-rich platform to interrogate assumptions and evaluate methodological efficacy.

5.3 COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

A benchmarking framework was constructed to facilitate a structured comparison between the two engineering approaches. Key evaluation criteria were derived from the literature and included:

- Requirements traceability
- Change management
- Verification and validation efficiency
- Cross-disciplinary collaboration
- Error reduction and quality assurance
- Adaptability to complexity and scalability
- Regulatory compliance support

Each criterion was assessed through the synthesis of documented literature claims, professional experience, and inferred project dynamics. While the analysis remains largely

qualitative, the structured framework serves to standardise evaluation and enhance transparency.

6 LITERATURE REVIEW

She et al. proposed a Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) framework to support the integrated modelling and optimisation of UAV radar cabin layouts. The approach employs the KARMA semantic modelling language to formalise system design using the RFLP structure, capturing Requirements, Functional, Logical, and Physical aspects through nine SysML-compliant diagrams. These include use case, activity, state machine, block definition, and parameter diagrams, offering a comprehensive digital representation of the radar cabin system. The framework integrates automatic code generation that converts KARMA models into input files for a Genetic Algorithm (GA) in MATLAB, which performs layout optimisation by minimising cable length and improving the spatial configuration of radar equipment. A model synchronisation toolkit enables bi-directional data flow, ensuring that the optimised spatial coordinates of devices are accurately updated in the original KARMA models. This bidirectional linkage supports consistency between system design and simulation models, addressing issues commonly seen in document-centric radar cabin designs.

In a UAV case study, the proposed approach significantly improved layout efficiency and design traceability. The semantic modelling facilitated structured configuration management, while the GA-driven optimisation yielded spatial layouts with reduced inter-device distances and streamlined cable routing. The results demonstrate that MBSE, when supported by domain-specific languages like KARMA, enhances automation, accuracy, and design quality in complex aerospace systems [7].

Keysight Technologies developed a model-based engineering (MBE) framework to streamline and de-risk radar system development through integrated simulation and design analysis. Implemented primarily in SystemVue and co-simulated with MATLAB, ADS, STK, and Google Maps, the framework enables comprehensive modelling across the radar lifecycle from requirement definition to validation. It formalises system behaviour through a layered architecture comprising trajectory, antenna, and signal domains, capturing platform dynamics, waveform synthesis, phased array beamforming, and environmental effects such as clutter, jamming, and interference.

The main system model allows scalable fidelity, supporting both high-level performance estimation and detailed subsystem verification. Subsystems such as transmit-receive modules and power amplifiers are co-simulated using ADS and can incorporate measured or circuit-level data. Signal processing elements, including pulse compression, MTI, and MTD, are modelled to support Doppler estimation and target tracking. External control via C++, LabVIEW, or MATLAB enables automated scenario testing and parameter sweeping, promoting rapid iteration and top-down design convergence. This MBE approach enhances traceability, system validation, and architectural optimisation while reducing physical prototyping dependency. It is particularly effective for complex radar configurations such as multi-static systems, dynamic environments, and adaptive waveform operations, ensuring performance assurance before hardware realisation [8].

Lerat conducted a critical analysis of Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE), contending that traditional document-based systems engineering (SE) often proves more effective in practice than poorly implemented MBSE initiatives. Framed provocatively, his paper outlines three fundamental reasons why most MBSE applications fail to deliver their promised benefits: misalignment with core SE principles, self-generated complexity, and limited capability for cross-disciplinary information sharing. Built from extensive industry experience, the paper argues that MBSE efforts frequently substitute modelling activity for genuine systems engineering, focusing on product-level details rather than system-level architectural

reasoning. Lerat distinguishes between true systems engineering, defined by a deep understanding of mission objectives, environmental constraints, and technical consequences, and superficial modelling efforts that fail to anchor architectural integrity. He notes that in many organisations, MBSE tools are used to generate disconnected diagrams with little relevance to system behaviour, often bypassing the rigorous validation loops essential to SE.

The second concern raised is that MBSE can exacerbate complexity when it fails to account for varying control-command (C2) structures across system hierarchies. Lerat explains how systems composed of heterogeneous subsystems, each with distinct C2 strategies (e.g., Boolean, probabilistic, analog), require thoughtful architectural coordination, something document-based SE, with its forced discipline, often handles better. In contrast, MBSE platforms, when misused, allow these differences to go unchecked, leading to misaligned models, inconsistent interfaces, and degraded system performance.

Thirdly, the paper critiques MBSE's claim to improve information sharing. Lerat observes that many MBSE implementations simply digitise siloed practices, embedding domain-specific models within incompatible tools and profiles. Far from enhancing collaboration, this often results in bloated, opaque models that obscure rather than clarify system intent. He argues that genuine architecture, the backbone of any system, is frequently lost amid excessive tool-driven modelling. While not rejecting MBSE as a concept, Lerat insists that successful MBSE adoption must be rooted in sound systems engineering culture. Tools must serve engineering thought, not replace it. The paper concludes by asserting that MBSE, when introduced into organisations lacking architectural discipline and cross-functional readiness, can fail spectacularly. Conversely, when layered onto an already robust document-based process, MBSE can enhance efficiency, traceability, and analytical power, provided the architectural foundations are firm [9].

Banik and Sengupta conducted a comparative study evaluating the performance of a document-centric systems engineering approach by modelling a serial transfer line with three machines and two buffers. The system was modelled using discrete event simulation (DES), and performance was evaluated through key performance indicators (KPIs) such as system throughput, machine utilisation, and cycle time. The study adopted a document-based technique where system requirements and process logic were captured using textual documentation, flowcharts, and manual calculations, reflecting the characteristics of traditional systems engineering. The model captured the stochastic behaviour of machine failures and repairs through exponential distributions and was implemented in a DES environment. Performance metrics were derived through simulations, including state time distribution, average time in system, and throughput flexibility. These KPIs were used to analyse system efficiency and inform improvement recommendations, such as adjustments to buffer capacities or maintenance schedules.

Findings from the study indicate that the document-centric method resulted in a significantly higher development cost and longer delivery timeline when compared to a previously published MBSE implementation on the same case. The document-centric approach required 240 hours and cost USD 14,400, whereas the MBSE method completed the same scope in 120 hours for USD 7,200. This indicates that the traditional document-based approach nearly doubles resource expenditure without proportional performance gain. The authors concluded that while the document-centric methodology may offer flexibility and be simpler to implement in smaller or informal projects, it is inherently inefficient and difficult to scale for complex systems. The lack of traceability, modularity, and simulation support presents major challenges, especially in change management and decision-making. Banik and Sengupta argue for the superiority of MBSE in such contexts, suggesting that model-based methods enhance consistency, reusability, and cost-effectiveness [10].

7 APPLICATION OF MBSE IN RADAR DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Comparative Analysis Between MBSE and Document-Centric Approach in Radar Development

In radar system development, both Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) and traditional documentation-based approaches serve distinct purposes, yet the comparative analysis in this study demonstrates MBSE as the superior methodology for modern, complex projects. MBSE offers significant advantages across critical dimensions such as traceability, efficiency, error reduction, adaptability, and scalability. By embedding requirements, design logic, test cases, and simulation outputs within a single coherent model, MBSE ensures real-time verification and transparent audit trails that support regulatory compliance, whereas traditional documentation often struggles to maintain consistency in large, complex systems. The use of automated simulation tools and report generation within MBSE reduces redundant review cycles, accelerates certification timelines, and minimizes human error, in contrast to document-centric methods, which rely on manual, repetitive processes.

Furthermore, MBSE's structured, model-driven approach reduces inconsistencies and promotes higher data integrity through automatic synchronisation between system models. Its frameworks also demonstrate strong adaptability to design changes and emerging technologies, which is particularly critical in radar systems that must respond rapidly to evolving operational demands. Moreover, MBSE scales effectively by supporting multidisciplinary integration and iterative assessments, an area where document-centric approaches fall short. Nonetheless, documentation-based systems engineering remains a viable option for smaller or less complex projects, or where regulatory and legacy system environments demand it. However, its limitations are clear: poor traceability across documents, a higher incidence of errors from manual updates, inefficient verification and validation cycles, and a lack of flexibility in managing dynamic design iterations, all of which reinforce MBSE as the more robust and future-ready approach.

In support of the foregoing comparison, the reviewed literature highlights several pertinent findings. [7] demonstrated that, within the context of UAV radar cabin layouts, Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) significantly enhances layout efficiency, traceability, and structured configuration management. Similarly, Keysight Technologies [8] illustrated that model-based frameworks enable comprehensive simulation across the radar system lifecycle, thereby reinforcing performance assurance before hardware realisation. Table 1 below shows a comparison of MBSE vs the Traditional document-centric approach to systems engineering in a complex project.

Table 1 Comparing MBSE vs Traditional Documentation-Centric Approach

Aspect	Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE)	Traditional Documentation-Centric Approach
Traceability	Requirements, design, verification, and validation are integrated within a coherent model. [2] , [7]	Traceability relies on manual cross-referencing across multiple static documents. [9]
Change Management	Dynamic updates propagate automatically across models, maintaining consistency. [8]	Changes require manual updates across various documents, risking inconsistencies. [Author's Case Study]
Error Reduction	Automated validation and synchronisation reduce human error. [3] [9]	High potential for errors due to manual editing and document version control issues. [Author's Case Study]
Collaboration	Enhanced real-time collaboration across disciplines through shared digital models. [8]	Collaboration is often hindered by document silos and inconsistent

		information sharing. [1], [Author's Case Study]
Verification and Validation	Supports simulation-based verification early in the lifecycle, reducing physical prototyping [8]	Relies heavily on physical testing and retrospective validation activities. [1]
Adaptability to Complexity	Scales effectively for highly complex, multidisciplinary systems [2], [6]	Struggles with scaling; complexity leads to fragmented and inefficient [9] documentation [Authors Case Study]
Efficiency	Streamlines design cycles with model reuse, automated reporting, and system simulations [3], [9]	Labour-intensive processes with redundant document updates and reviews documentation [10], [Authors Case Study]
Learning Curve	Requires significant initial investment in training and tool adoption [9]	Familiarity with traditional tools; lower initial training requirements [1], [Authors' Case Study]
Regulatory Compliance	Facilitates real-time audit trails and compliance documentation generation [8]	Compliance management is manual, often leading to increased audit preparation time [9], [Authors Case Study]
Risk Management	Enables proactive identification and mitigation of design risks through model-based analysis [2]	Risk identification is often reactive, discovered during integration or testing stages [1],[Author's Case Study]

8 CASE STUDY 2: MY ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND DEPLOYMENT OF A LAND-BASED X-BAND SURVEILLANCE RADAR SYSTEM USING A DOCUMENT-CENTRIC APPROACH – A SYSTEMS ENGINEERING PERSPECTIVE

This case study outlines my experience as a system engineer leading the development and deployment of a land-based X-band radar system for low-flying target detection in contested airspace. Using a documentation-centric systems engineering (SE) approach, I managed over 230 requirements, but manual traceability led to 17 documented inconsistencies, costing approximately 11 engineer-days per update cycle issues similar to those identified by [7] Across 68 module and 14 system-level tests, nine rework incidents occurred due to misaligned verification records, each requiring around 18 hours to rectify, reflecting inefficiencies compared to MBSE-based automation [8]. Field trials incurred 5–7 day validation delays per iteration due to manual correlation, echoing findings in Qin et al. [2]. During deployment, over 500 pages of documentation revealed 12 configuration control issues, which MBSE could have resolved through synchronised modelling [9]. Sustainment planning also experienced a 3-week delay from document version mismatches, an area where MBSE, as demonstrated by Banik and Sengupta [10], improves lifecycle integration. Post-project literature review confirmed MBSE's advantages in enhancing responsiveness, simulation fidelity, and cross-domain coherence [7], [8], [10]. While the documentation-based process enabled delivery, the project revealed costly limitations in traceability, validation, and adaptability. MBSE would have mitigated these challenges and, when implemented with architectural discipline and collaboration, provides a more efficient, coherent, and future-ready alternative. In conclusion, my experience confirms that a documentation-centric approach, while compliant and feasible, is inefficient in high-complexity environments. MBSE provides a demonstrable improvement in traceability, system validation, and lifecycle integration, particularly when deployed with architectural discipline and cross-functional collaboration, as advised by [9]. For future radar projects, especially those involving rapid iteration or modular upgrades, MBSE should be adopted strategically to reduce errors, compress timelines, and improve engineering agility.

8.1 Proposed Decision-Support Framework for Approach Selection

While Table 1 presents a structured comparison between MBSE and documentation-based systems engineering, practitioners often require prescriptive guidance on when to adopt one approach over the other. To address this, a decision-support framework is proposed to support project managers and system engineers in approach selection.

8.1.1 Step 1: Define Project Context

Projects should first be characterised in terms of complexity, scale, regulatory requirements, team structure, and resource availability.

8.1.2 Step 2: Apply the Decision Matrix

The matrix in Table X provides a quick diagnostic for approach selection. High complexity, regulatory pressure, multidisciplinary collaboration, and short time-to-market all strongly favour MBSE adoption, while resource constraints and low tool familiarity may justify documentation-based methods in smaller projects. Table 2 Decision-Support Matrix for Selecting Between Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) and Documentation-Centric Approaches in Complex System Development.

Table 2*:* Decision-Support Matrix for Selecting Between Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) and Documentation-Centric Approaches in Complex System Development

Criterion	IF HIGH	Preferred Approach
System Complexity	X	MBSE
Regulatory/Compliance Needs	X	MBSE
Multidisciplinary Team Size	X	MBSE
Urgency/Time-to-Market	X	MBSE
Budget/resource Constraints	X	Document-Centric
Familiarity with Tools	X	Document-Centric

Figure 1 below shows a decision path in selecting either the MBSE or the Document-centric approach.

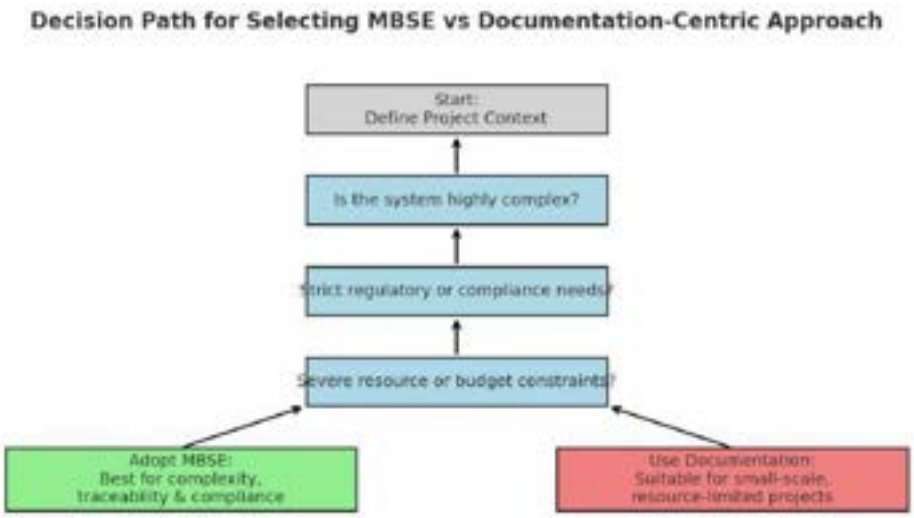

Figure 1: Decision Path for Selecting MBSE vs Document-Centric Approach

Step 3: Prescriptive Guidance

- Adopt MBSE where complexity, traceability, and compliance are central, e.g., radar, aerospace, and defence.
- Use documentation-based approaches for small, low-risk, or early feasibility projects.

- Apply a hybrid method where conceptual design begins in documents and later transitions to MBSE models.

Step 4: Implementation Checklist (MBSE Adoption)

- Secure management buy-in and allocate upfront resources.
- Train cross-disciplinary teams in MBSE tools and workflows.
- Establish traceability between requirements, models, and verification artefacts.
- Pilot MBSE at the subsystem level before scaling across the full project.

This prescriptive framework strengthens the practical transferability of the study, enabling engineers to move from comparative insight to actionable decision-making in their project environments.

9 CONCLUSION

This study critically explored the comparative merits of MBSE and traditional documentation-based approaches in the context of complex radar system development. Drawing from a combination of scholarly literature and practitioner insights, it is evident that MBSE provides compelling advantages in areas such as requirements traceability, verification efficiency, error minimisation, and adaptability to complexity. The inclusion of digital modelling tools facilitates tighter integration across engineering phases, enabling real-time validation, design consistency, and more agile responses to system modifications capabilities, which are particularly crucial in high-stakes sectors such as defence and aerospace. While MBSE is increasingly recognised as a forward-looking methodology, it is not without limitations. Its successful adoption hinges on organisational readiness, disciplined implementation, and a strong foundation in sound systems engineering principles. The literature and professional experience reviewed both caution against the uncritical or superficial application of MBSE, noting that poor tool usage can introduce avoidable complexity and hinder cross-disciplinary collaboration. Moreover, empirical evidence supporting MBSE's benefits remains somewhat limited, underscoring the need for continued research involving real-world project data, such as defect tracking, rework costs, or verification timelines.

Traditional documentation-based methods, although increasingly strained under modern system complexity, still hold value in legacy programmes and highly regulated environments where change management processes are constrained. As such, these approaches should not be dismissed outright but rather integrated strategically where appropriate. Importantly, this paper contributes to the growing discourse on digital transformation in systems engineering by proposing a structured comparison framework, supported by both literature and practice. The case study provided adds grounded insight into the lived realities of documentation-centric project execution, while the broader comparative analysis promotes informed decision-making for engineering leaders facing methodological choices.

In conclusion, MBSE is not a silver bullet, but when implemented thoughtfully with clear architectural rigour, multidisciplinary engagement, and proper validation protocols, it can significantly enhance the engineering of complex radar systems. South African industries, particularly in defence and aerospace, stand to benefit from this transition, provided that it is accompanied by investment in skills development, tool integration, and empirical performance tracking. Future research should focus on quantifying MBSE's real-world impacts across diverse project environments, thereby enabling more robust benchmarking and advancing the maturity of systems engineering practice both locally and globally.

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CIRCULAR ECONOMY INTEGRATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN MANUFACTURING SMES: A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE UTILISATION AND WASTE REDUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Integrating circular economy concepts into small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa is necessary for sustainability, improving resource efficiency, and reducing waste. This study offers a comprehensive framework for incorporating the circular economy (CE) into South African manufacturing SMEs to encourage waste reduction and sustainable resource use. This study discusses CE adoption challenges in SMEs such as restricted access to funding, technical know-how, and regulatory assistance. The findings indicate that CE adoption faces challenges like high costs and inadequate skills; the benefits, such as reduced material costs, new revenue streams, environmental compliance, and competitive resilience, are significant. Government incentives, capacity-building programs, and advanced digital tools can support SMEs' transition from linear to CE. The framework emphasises the importance of a collaborative approach that involves industry stakeholders, policymakers, and consumers to promote sustainable industrial development and align South African SMEs with global sustainability standards.

Keywords: Circular economy, industrial symbiosis, manufacturing SMEs, sustainable resource utilisation, waste reduction

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1 INTRODUCTION

The goal of a circular economy (CE) is to maximise resource use and minimise waste. It maximises the value of materials while in use, extending their useful lives, and recovering and regenerating materials and products at the end of each service life [1]. This is contrary to the 'take-make-dispose' model of the conventional linear economy. The CE encompasses the design of systems and products with the objectives of regenerating nature, circulating materials and products, and mitigating waste and pollution. The need for sustainable development strategies in all sectors has grown globally due to the acceleration of resource scarcity, climate change, and environmental degradation [2]. The CE is becoming more well-known as a revolutionary method of production and consumption. CE challenges the conventional linear "take-make-dispose" economic model and encourages a restorative and regenerative system by placing significance on resource efficiency, waste minimisation, and continuous material use. Governments, businesses, and civil society organisations are realising that CE is an essential framework for attaining long-term sustainability. But putting it into practice is still a difficult task, especially for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) and in developing nations [3].

An SME is defined as a business that has the following attributes: fewer than 250 employees, less than R64 million in annual turnover, less than R10 million in capital assets, and direct managerial engagement by the owners. Small firms need 10 to 50 employees, medium-sized organisations can have up to 250 employees, and micro enterprises can have no more than 10 [4]. SMEs are an essential part of the South African economy; they have a major impact on GDP, innovation, and employment. However, these businesses also have to deal with systemic issues, such as restricted access to capital, lack of skilled workers, inadequate infrastructure, and a frequently lax regulatory framework [5]. Embracing and incorporating CE principles into SME operations is hindered by a lack of skilled workers, inadequate infrastructure and finance [6]. Because of a lack of specialised frameworks that connect sustainability ideals with practical realities and a lack of institutional support, many South African SMEs continue to operate within resource-intensive and waste-generating models despite growing awareness of sustainability issues [7].

In addition, South Africa has urgent environmental problems like excessive landfill usage, water scarcity, high carbon emissions, and wasteful energy use, many of which are made worse by unsustainable industrial practices. Enabling SMEs to implement CE practices is both necessary and advantageous in light of these obstacles. By lowering material costs, creating new markets, and conforming to global sustainability standards and laws, the shift to a circular economy can improve SMEs' resilience and competitiveness. This study offers a framework for integrating the CE into South African manufacturing SMEs. The framework seeks to promote efficient waste reduction and sustainable resource use.

South African manufacturers can simultaneously reduce the effects on the environment, increase their ability to withstand resource shortages, and open up new business prospects in a global marketplace that is more competitive by embracing these changes. The focus and gaps in a few recent studies on CE in SMEs are compiled in Table 1.

Table 1: Previous studies on CE in SMEs

Research focus	Research Gap	Limitation	Ref
The paper suggests developing a CE framework in South African manufacturing SMEs by enhancing resource productivity and implementing waste minimisation projects.	Waste minimisation initiatives have little effect.	Low impact of waste minimisation projects in municipalities.	[8]
The paper highlights the need for identifying CE opportunities in manufacturing, emphasising early-stage product design and resource demand to promote sustainable resource utilisation and waste reduction in SMEs.	Identify CE opportunities in resource-intensive divisions.	More needs to be done at the early stage of product design	[3]
Developing a framework for sustainable resource utilisation in South African manufacturing SMEs involves integrating CE principles like eco-design, advanced technologies, and consumer engagement.	Challenges and barriers to circular manufacturing implementation are evaluated. Prospects and opportunities within the CE landscape have been identified.	Challenges and barriers to circular manufacturing implementation. Limitations of the traditional linear economic model.	[9]
Implementation involves integrating resource efficiency practices, waste minimisation techniques, and sustainability in South African manufacturing SMEs.	Lack of technical competence and funds	Need for strategies to enable successful integration.	[10]
A framework for sustainable resource utilisation in South African manufacturing SMEs can be developed by integrating supply chain management and smart production techniques.	Linkages between theoretical vision and practical ideas need clarification.	Insufficient detail on theoretical and practical linkages. Lack of a metrics-oriented approach for social sustainability.	[11]
Sustainable resource utilisation in South African manufacturing SMEs involves adopting CE principles.	Barriers to implementing CE principles	Challenges of implementing CE principles	[12]
The paper suggests a phased transition framework for SMEs, utilising management tools like value mapping and life cycle assessment, to enhance circular economy integration.	Transition framework for circular economy tool deployment Integration	Limited adaptation of current management tools for SMEs Need for phased transition in CE tool deployment for SMEs	[13]
Determine models for implementing the CE, in particular, the Sub-Saharan African and South Asian economic sectors, using data from the Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution (SMEP) program.	Ambiguity around pathways to implement the circular economy.	The fragmented and highly granular nature of circular economy research Lack of practical examples and pathways for implementation	[14]

Despite previous innovations in CE studies in Table 1, it is clear that new research in CE is needed to address the need for improvement, flexibility, affordability, sustainability, and best practices. This serves as the driving force behind this current study. This study contributes to the literature on SME sustainable manufacturing in South Africa by providing useful information to business owners and policymakers. This study employs, synthesising of existing literature on Circular Economy, SME development, and the South African industrial context to develop a practical framework for CE integration. The proposed framework serves as a tactical instrument to encourage the shift to a resilient and circular manufacturing industry.

2 THE CONCEPT OF CE IN SOUTH AFRICA

CE has developed from a fringe environmental concept to a workable strategy for increasing manufacturing efficiency throughout South Africa's industrial landscape [15]. Understanding circularity becomes crucial for business survival and expansion as the pressures on our resource-intensive economy increase [16]. Through practices like upkeep, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacturing, recycling, and composting, the CE symbolises a system in which materials never end up as waste and nature is restored. Circularity is different from the linear economy that involves a "take-make-dispose" approach, and is based on three fundamental ideas: regenerating natural systems, circulating goods and materials at their maximum value, and removing waste and pollution. This entails changing production procedures for South African manufacturers so that resources are used continuously rather than being thrown away. The 4Rs, reducing material inputs, reusing components, recycling materials, and recovering energy and resources, are how manufacturing companies can implement circular strategies. SDG 12 (responsible production and consumption), in particular, calls for waste reduction through prevention, recycling, and reuse, and is directly supported by these practices. The comparison between the linear and CE is shown in Figure 1 [17].

Figure 1: Comparison of Linear and Circular Economy [17]

2.1 Linear versus circular models in South African SMEs

The current linear models used by South Africa's manufacturing sector are characterised by high resource throughput and substantial waste generation [18]. Due to some difficulties, the industry's share of the GDP has decreased from about 22% in the 1990s to about 12% in 2024 [19]. This decline offers a chance for reinvention using circular principles as a challenge. According to CSIR research, resource efficiency, cleaner production, material looping, and application of renewable energy technologies are examples of circular interventions that are already present in South African manufacturing [20]. However, the scale required for a significant economic and environmental impact has not been attained by these practices. Additionally, more sophisticated circular strategies are still lacking, such as:

- Circular product design and business models
- Green steel manufacturing
- Biobased fuels and materials
- Industrial symbiosis partnerships

The transition of SMEs from linear to CE faces certain challenges, such as the equipment costs, data measurement capabilities, and perceived regulatory complexity.

3 CURRENT PRACTICES, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES OF CE IMPLEMENTATION IN SME

There are many advantages to a circular economy, such as resource conservation, decreased waste, and decreased pollution. Additionally, it generates new economic opportunities and encourages innovation. Nevertheless, there are obstacles to overcome, including the requirement for substantial infrastructure modifications, changes in consumer behaviour, and getting past opposition from conventional linear economic models. Consumers, governments, and industries must work together to implement the principles of the circular economy. A sustainable culture, technological advancements, and effective policy are all necessary for a successful transition. Table 2 displays the CE benefits.

Table 2: Circular economy benefits

Term	Explanation	Ref
Resources conservation	The CE reduces the demand for new resources, such as water, metals, and electricity. This helps the conservation of natural resources.	[2]
Environmental sustainability	Eliminates waste and minimises the necessity for new resources	[21]
Resource efficiency	Extends the lifecycle of products and materials	[22]
Job creation	Stimulates innovation and creates employment opportunities	[23]
Waste reduction	Managing materials and products will reduce waste that goes into landfills and pollutes oceans.	[2]
Lower Carbon Footprint	Circular practices reduce the need for new raw materials, production, and transportation. It helps with climate change.	[24]
Market Innovation	The CE boosts innovative product design, business models, and services. Companies that embrace this model can differentiate themselves and capture new market opportunities.	[25]
Cost Savings	A circular model achieves substantial savings on material costs. Companies can use fewer resources, cut waste management expenses, and create new revenue streams by selling recycled products.	[26]
Enhanced Resilience	Businesses that rely less on a few resources can become resilient to supply chain disruptions.	[27]
Healthy society	Reducing pollution and waste can lead to cleaner water, improve the quality of air and soil, and promote healthier living conditions.	[28]

The significant prospects for sustainability and economic expansion can be achieved by implementing the CE framework in SMEs; however, obstacles like high implementation costs and constrained industry capacity still exist. To achieve the potential of a circular economy in South Africa, these issues must be resolved, as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Circular economy challenges

Term	Explanation	Ref
Technological dependency	Requires advanced technology and infrastructure	[29]
Cultural and behavioural change	Requires a shift in consumer behaviour and mindset. Changing Mindsets by shifting from a linear to a circular mindset requires significant changes in consumer behaviour, business practices, and policy frameworks.	[30]
Market disruptions	Challenges in transitioning from traditional business to circular models may occur.	[31]
Regulatory complexities	Needs government policies and regulations to support circular practices	[32]
Finance	Inadequate financial support	[33]

4 SOUTH AFRICA'S CE FRAMEWORK

As global trade becomes more focused on sustainability, South Africa has exceptional opportunities to use circularity for a competitive advantage. The CE framework tailored for SME implementation is shown in Figure 2.

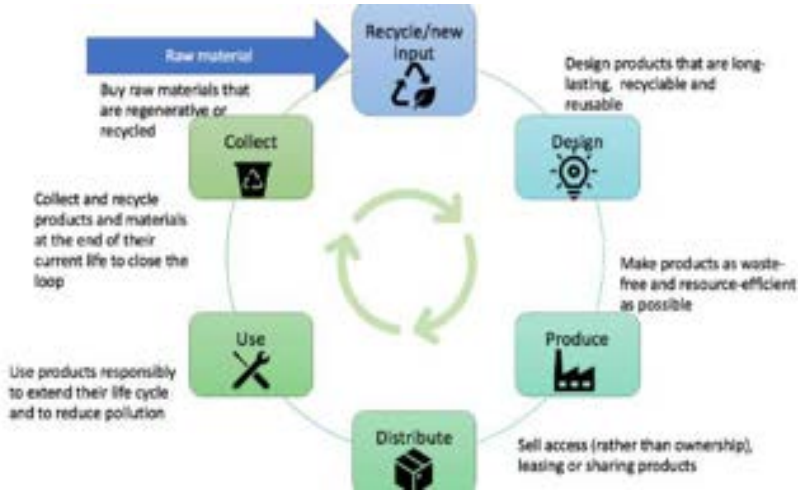

Figure 2: CE framework tailored for SME adoption [34]

Framework mechanisms that promote increased resource productivity, innovation, producer responsibility, consumer education and awareness are depicted in Figure 2 by following the six-step method:

i. Design: Products and packaging are made with more sustainable materials that are easily recyclable at the end of their useful lives, utilising fewer raw materials, and lasting longer.

ii. Produce: Companies work together and coordinate across industries to cut back on the use of fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions.

iii. Distribute: Retailers provide end-of-life take-back or maintenance and repair services, products that are easily refurbished and reused, and assistance to producers in educating and raising consumer awareness.

iv. Consumer Use: Choosing more environmentally friendly products, sharing resources (such as vehicles and tools), and fixing or donating them to others for repair and reuse

v. Reuse and Repair: Throughout the life cycle of products and packaging, manufacturers devise a method to recover materials and provide service for repairs.

vi. Recycle: Increasing the efficiency of collection and treatment systems will reduce the amount of waste ending up in landfills and promote the circular design's economics.

Previous studies indicate that circular economy practices are readily accessible for approximately 95% of SMEs and typically result in immediate new revenue streams [35-37]. With manufacturing strategically positioned to influence both upstream and downstream processes across value chains, the sector is uniquely placed to lead South Africa's broader economic transformation toward circularity.

4.1 Waste Cost Breakdown in South African SMEs

South Africa generates nearly 55 million tons of total waste annually, with only 11% being diverted from landfill. In the manufacturing sector, waste streams primarily consist of biomass and organic materials (the largest single waste type), followed by construction and demolition

waste at 13%. Additional significant streams include paper, plastics, glass, metals, and various types of hazardous waste [38].

4.2 Circular Economy Saving Strategies

Waste generated in SMES can be converted into useful resources through creative circular strategies. Innovative manufacturers are cutting costs and their environmental impact by abandoning conventional production models. The five strategies on how SMEs can use circular economy techniques to make a significant amount of money are as follows:

4.2.1 Material reuse in packaging and production

By extending the life span of materials in circulation, the circular economy minimises waste and resource extraction. Reusing materials that would otherwise be thrown away has allowed South African small manufacturers to save a significant amount of money. Reusing packaging materials is one strategy, for example. An online retailer encourages consumers to return items in their original packaging so that the business can fix and reship the items without incurring extra packaging expenses.

4.2.2. Process redesign to reduce offcuts and defects

SMEs wishing to cut waste often use the Lean Six Sigma methodology. Lean thinking, which emphasises speed, flow, and cost, and Six Sigma, which emphasises quality consistency, are combined in this integrated approach. SME Manufacturers find inefficiencies and make targeted improvements by using the methodical DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, Control) process. In actuality, this takes the form of redesigned production procedures that maximise resource utilisation, minimise material offcuts, and minimise defects. Businesses that use these guidelines usually see a reduction in production waste and a quality improvement, which directly lowers costs.

4.2.3 Energy recovery from biomass and waste heat

Approximately 50% of South Africa's renewable energy consumption comes from bioenergy, which is mostly utilised in the industrial and residential sectors to produce heat [39]. Waste-to-energy technologies are helping manufacturing companies realise their potential. Technologies for thermal destruction, such as pyrolysis and gasification, recover energy from tires, rubber, biomass, municipal waste, and some types of plastic. Biogas and anaerobic digestion are two examples of biological waste-to-energy systems that use organic waste, such as food scraps and agricultural residues, to produce energy. By capturing and redistributing otherwise wasted heat energy back into production systems, waste heat recovery systems provide extra energy sources for producing steam, hot water, or electricity.

4.2.4 Supplier take-back and reverse logistics

The management of goods flowing in the opposite direction from the main logistics chain, or reverse logistics, has become a significant untapped source of profitability. Under this model, suppliers retrieve used goods from clients for recycling, remanufacturing, or refurbishment. Effective reverse logistics initiatives set businesses apart from rivals and foster greater client loyalty. Companies using reverse logistics systems now report significant waste reduction and cost savings from extending product lifecycles, even though only 3% of the South African supply chain practices reverse logistics [40].

4.2.5 Local industrial symbiosis partnerships in South Africa

The practice of turning one company's waste into another's resource, known as industrial symbiosis, has grown significantly in South Africa in recent years. The provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape, and Gauteng currently have three regionally facilitated industrial symbiosis programs in place.

Just the Western Cape Industrial Symbiosis Program (WISP) has produced impressive outcomes, diverting 36,600 tons of waste from landfills, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 147,700 tons, and generating R67.9 million in financial benefits, including cost savings, private investments, and additional revenue. Initiatives promoting industrial symbiosis have saved 431,000 tons of virgin resources, diverted 518,000 tons of waste from landfills, and decreased CO_2 emissions by 1.7 million tons nationwide between 2015 and 2022. The percentage of urban households that sort their waste for recycling is shown by province in Figure 3 [41]. This highlights the benefits of industrial symbiosis partnerships in South Africa.

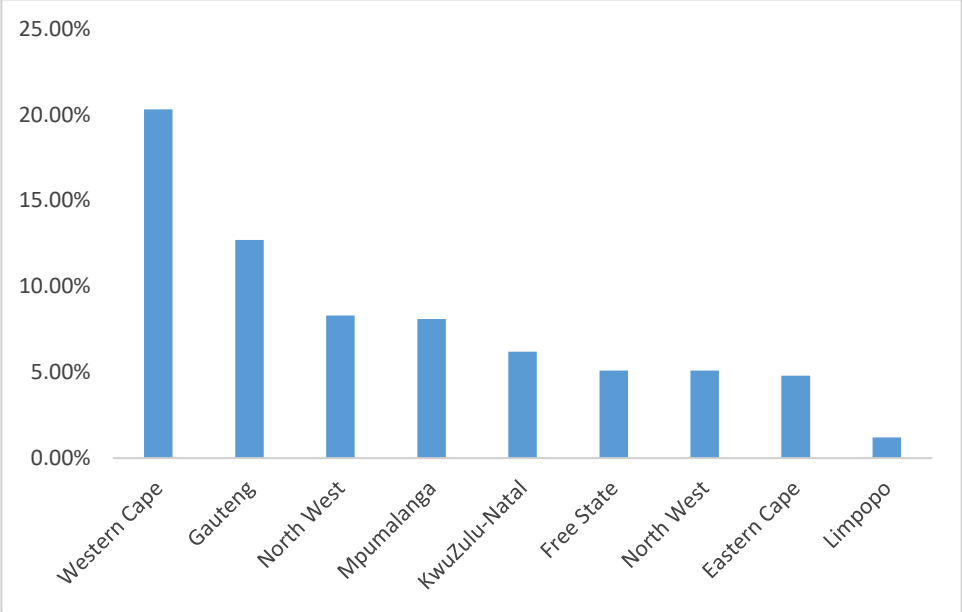

Figure 3: Percentage of Urban Households that Sorted Refuse for Recycling Purposes by Province [41]

5 POLICY AND REGULATION FOR PROMOTING CIRCULAR MANUFACTURING

Circular manufacturing principles are becoming more and more important in South Africa's policy framework, which makes it easier for small manufacturers to gain the financial and environmental rewards.

5.1 Incentives and funding for green manufacturing

Circular manufacturing receives funding through many sources. Over three years, the Manufacturing Competitiveness Enhancement Program provides incentives to manufacturing companies, including grants for resource efficiency improvements and green technology. Supported by the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) and carried out by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the recently created Circular Economy Demonstration Fund seeks to showcase successful circular economy initiatives that haven't yet reached scale in South Africa [20]. There are additional tax breaks available for assets related to environmental treatment and recycling, renewable electricity production, and energy efficiency improvements.

5.2 Role of CSIR, NCPC-SA, and DSI in SME support

Adoption of circular manufacturing is greatly aided by the National Cleaner Production Centre South Africa (NCPC-SA), which is run by CSIR and supported by the Department of Trade, Industry, and Competition. Among its extensive offerings are:

- The Eco-Industrial Parks Program, the Industrial Water Efficiency Project, the Industrial Symbiosis Program, and the Industrial Energy Efficiency Project
- The NCPC-SA hosted the launch of the South African Circular Manufacturing Initiative (SACMI) in 2024. In order to direct future interventions, this initiative will create a Circularity in Manufacturing STI strategy. To strengthen the government's commitment to this shift, the DSI is creating a more comprehensive circular economy STI strategy to direct investment from the public and private sectors.

5.3 Scaling Circular Practices Across the Sector

Expanding CE practices across South African manufacturing requires overcoming multiple barriers before businesses can fully realise the savings potential. While pioneering companies demonstrate impressive results, widespread adoption faces practical challenges.

5.4 Training and capacity building for SME owners

The need to provide workers with skills related to the CE is becoming more apparent in educational programs. Nowadays, most training programs still ignore crucial soft and digital skills in favour of concentrating primarily on technical topics like remanufacturing procedures and circular product design.

The vocational education and training (VET) programs must provide curricula tailored to the particular constraints of SMEs to engage them. Crucially, as companies face implementation obstacles, follow-up mentoring, assessment tools, and ongoing advice assist them in honing their strategies.

5.5 Digital tools and 4IR technologies for waste tracking

The adoption of the CE could be faster with Industry 4.0 technologies [42]. In essence, these digital tools facilitate effective resource management and waste tracking across product lifecycles.

Throughout production cycles, smart manufacturing tools maximise the use of materials and energy. Predictive maintenance also reduces energy waste and replacements while increasing machine lifespans.

In order to facilitate reporting requirements and discourage waste crimes, South Africa intends to implement a mandatory digital waste tracking service starting in 2025. In order to use this service, waste producers will need to replace the current paper-based systems with detailed records of waste movements.

Recycling is already being formalised and encouraged through the use of mobile applications. For example, Urban Surfer tracks waste management activities using GPS on collection trolleys, locating collection hotspots and extracting useful information on brand penetration.

6 CONCLUSION

A revolutionary way to achieve resource efficiency, economic resilience, and sustainable industrial development is through the incorporation of CE principles into SMEs. A thorough framework that is adapted to the particular opportunities and difficulties faced by SMEs in the South African context has been developed by this study. The proposed framework enables small manufacturers to shift from the conventional linear economic model to a more regenerative approach by emphasising strategic areas like waste valorisation, process redesign, industrial symbiosis, and digital innovation.

The results highlight that while SMEs encounter numerous obstacles, such as a lack of technical know-how, high implementation costs, and insufficient policy support, the financial and ecological advantages of adopting CE are substantial. These include reduced operational costs, enhanced competitiveness, new revenue streams, and improved environmental compliance.

Furthermore, digital waste tracking systems, government incentives, and capacity-building programs can greatly facilitate the transition for SMEs. Importantly, stakeholders must work together for CE practices to spread throughout the manufacturing industry. This entails improved vocational training, targeted financial mechanisms, stronger government leadership, and ongoing public-private cooperation. SMEs in South Africa that adopt circularity will be better positioned to prosper in a low-carbon, resource-conscious economy as global markets place an increasing emphasis on sustainable production standards. Finally, the suggested framework ensures a future in which economic growth is not accompanied by environmental degradation by addressing present constraints and bringing SMEs into line with long-term national and international sustainability goals.

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A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: THE TECHNOLOGY MATURITY STATUS OF REDOX FLOW BATTERIES AND THE VARIOUS STORAGE USE CASES

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ABSTRACT

South Africa is transitioning towards renewable energy technologies after decades of reliance on coal and fossil fuels for power generation, as outlined in national energy policy. This policy emphasizes the need for long-duration storage to ensure grid stability. As the energy sector moves towards more sustainable solutions, the need for large-scale, reliable energy storage has grown due to the intermittency of renewable sources such as solar and wind. Redox flow batteries (RFBs) have emerged as a promising electrochemical storage solution, offering modular scalability, using non-flammable aqueous electrolytes, enabling long cycle life, and providing operational flexibility. This study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and industry reports published between 2016 and 2024, sourced from five major databases, to assess the technological maturity of RFBs and their potential applications. The findings reveal that while some RFB applications have reached commercial viability, broader adoption remains limited due to high capital costs, low energy density, and limited local manufacturing capacity. With advancements in design, chemistry, and efficiency, RFBs could play a crucial role in grid stabilisation, renewable energy integration, and rural electrification in South Africa. Further industry collaboration and policy support are essential to accelerate widespread implementation.

Keywords: Systematic literature review, Redox flow batteries, energy storage, technological maturity.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The global energy landscape is experiencing a significant shift from traditional fossil fuels towards renewable energy sources. This transition, driven by the urgent need to mitigate climate change and ensure sustainable development, necessitates effective and scalable energy storage solutions [1], [2]. In South Africa, this shift is framed by the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP 2019), which outline targets for renewable energy integration and emphasizes long-duration storage to support grid stability and mitigate load shedding [39]. Among various energy storage technologies, Redox Flow Batteries (RFBs) have emerged as a promising option due to their inherent advantages, including modular scalability, non-flammable aqueous electrolytes, long cycle life, and flexible operational profiles [3], [4].These characteristics are particularly relevant to South African's renewable integration targets, where long-duration storage can mitigate load shedding and facility higher renewable penetration in both urban and rural grids.

RFBs function through electrochemical reactions between two liquid electrolytes stored in external tanks. These electrolytes flow through an electro-chemical cell stack where ion exchange across a membrane, generating electrical energy. This design allows independent scaling of power capacity, determined by the cell stack, and energy capacity, dictated by the volume of electrolyte stored, making RFBs suitable for large-scale, stationary energy storage applications [5]. Unlike lithium-ion batteries, RFBs offer enhanced safety due to their aqueous electrolytes, reduced risk of thermal runaway, and improved recyclability, making them highly attractive for sustainable energy storage [6].

Figure 1 illustrates the fundamental operating principle of Redox Flow Batteries (RFBs) compared with three widely deployed battery technologies: lithium iron phosphate ($LiFePO_4$), lithium-ion (Li-ion), and lead-acid batteries. While Li-ion and $LiFePO_4$ batteries store energy within solid electrodes, RFBs store energy in external liquid electrolyte tanks, enabling independent scaling of power and energy capacity. This distinction underpins the superior scalability and operational flexibility of RFBs. Lead-acid batteries, though cost-effective and established, suffer from lower cycle life and reduced efficiency compared to modern chemistries. The figure also highlights safety, environmental impact, and application flexibility differences, providing a contextual foundation for understanding RFB advantages and trade-offs in subsequent sections.

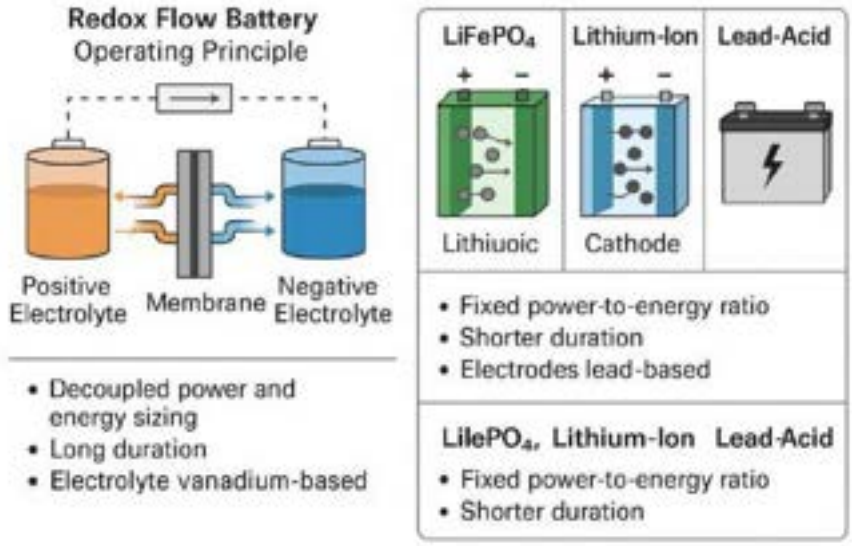

Figure 1: Comparative operating Principle of RFBS vs $LiFePO_4$, Li-ion and lead-acid battery technologies

For policymakers, such distinctions influence regulatory priorities, incentive structures, and national energy planning, particularly when balancing cost, sustainability, and reliability objectives. Investors require clear performance benchmarks, long-term operational data, and market maturity assessments to guide capital allocation. For grid operators and energy suppliers, understanding the operational flexibility, cycle life, and integration requirements of different battery technologies is critical to designing systems that maintain stability, enable renewable energy penetration, and reduce reliance on fossil-based peaking plants. The comparative perspective provided in Figure 1 therefore serves as a foundation for strategic decisions across the energy value chain.

However, despite their advantages and growing interest, the technology maturity and practical applications of RFBs across different contexts remain varied and inadequately documented in academic literature [7]. This inconsistency poses challenges for policymakers, investors, and grid operators who must make informed decisions about large-scale deployment. Understanding the current state of technological maturity, identifying the diverse storage applications, and examining the commercial readiness of RFBs is thus crucial for facilitating their broader adoption and integration into renewable energy infrastructures [8], [9].

This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to address the gap by critically assessing the technological maturity status of Redox Flow Batteries and exploring their various storage use cases. Specifically, the review synthesizes recent literature to address the following Research Questions (RQ):

- RQ1: What is the technology maturity status of Redox Flow Batteries (RFBs)?
- RQ2: What are the current advancements and challenges of RFB development?
- RQ3: What are the main uses of RFBs?

These research questions guide the synthesis of technological advancements, evaluation of commercialization status, and identification of potential application scenarios [10], [11].

2 RESEARCH METHOD

This systematic literature review adopts a structured and comprehensive approach based on widely accepted methodologies for systematic reviews. The method consists of three main

phases: (i) planning, (ii) conducting, and (iii) documenting, as proposed by Albliwi *et al*. [12]. The review process involves several clearly defined steps within these phases:

A. Planning the review

- *Step 1* – Research purpose and objectives: Clearly establish the aims and objectives of the review.
- *Step 2* – Development of research protocol: Formulate inclusion and exclusion criteria, databases to be searched, and specific keywords.

B. Conducting the review

- *Step 3* – Establishing relevance criteria: Define explicit criteria for screening literature based on relevance.
- *Step 4* – Literature search and retrieval: Search the selected electronic databases for literature using predefined keywords.
- *Step 5* – Selection of studies: Screen retrieved literature based on established inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- *Step 6* – Quality assessment: Evaluate the methodological rigor and relevance of selected studies.
- *Step 7* – Data extraction: Extract relevant data systematically from selected literature.
- *Step 8* – Synthesis of studies (analysis): Analyse and synthesize extracted data to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the technology maturity and storage applications of Redox Flow Batteries.

C. Documenting the review

- *Step 9* – Reporting: Report on the SLR in detail.
- *Step 10* – Dissemination: Publish the SLR findings in an academic source.

This structured approach ensures comprehensive coverage of objective assessment of existing literature, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. The outcomes of step 1-6 are discussed in the sub-sections that follow (Section 2.1 – 2.6), while the findings of this study (step 7 & 8) are documented in section 3. Documenting the review (step 9 & 10) are addressed by publishing this research paper.

2.1 Step 1: Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of this SLR is to assess the technology maturity status of redox flow batteries (RFBs) and their various storage use cases. The focus is on studying the advancements and maturity of redox flow battery technology over time. The objective is to provide insight into the current state of redox flow batteries, their applications for energy storage as well as potential future directions identified from the synthesized body of evidence.

2.2 Step 2: Develop research protocol

The review protocol followed while conducting the SLR is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Research protocol

Purpose of study	To conduct an evaluation of the current state of development and maturity of redox flow batteries and to identify various use cases.
Inclusion criteria	• Literature including "Redox Flow Batteries", "Energy Storage", "Technology" in their title, abstract or keywords. • The literature should either cover (discuss) the recent technological advancements or developments in terms of efficiency, reliability, and commercial readiness. • Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, industry reports, patents, and publicly available technical documentation are included. • Include studies from 2016 – 2024.
Exclusion criteria	• Non-English Articles. • Opinion pieces and non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded to maintain dataset quality.
Search databases	Searches were conducted using the following databases: • ScienceDirect, • Scopus, • IEEE Xplore, • Web of Science, • Emerald Insight Journals.
Keywords	The databases were searched using the following key words: "Redox Flow Batteries", "Energy Storage", "Technology"
Quality Assessment Criteria	• All duplicate literature was excluded. • Recovered literature will be checked for relevance. • Ensure the aims and objectives align with the study. • Ensure that clear links between data, interpretations and conclusions exist. • Papers with unclear scope and context to be excluded. • Papers with unanswered research question to be excluded. • Papers with lack of credibility, reliability, and validity to be excluded.

The 2016-2024 window was selected to capture the most recent decade of RFB innovation, coinciding with intensified research into non-vanadium chemistries, increasing pilot deployments, and clearer commercialization signals. ScienceDirect, Scopus, IEEE Xplore, Web of Science, and Emerald Insight were chosen for their complementary coverage of electrochemistry, industrial/energy systems engineering, and applied technology, minimizing retrieval bias across disciplines.

2.3 Step 3: Establish relevance criteria

Using the specific keywords listed in Table 1, the five different databases were searched. This search resulted in 73 studies being screened for inclusion based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, as per their published title, abstract and keywords. Studies that included "Redox Flow Batteries", "Energy Storage", and "Technology" in the title, abstract or keywords were included in the study. Literature that covered or addressed recent technological advancements or developments in terms of efficiency, reliability, and commercial readiness and the various storage use cases were also included. This resulted in 41 studies being eligible for full-text assessment.

2.4 Step 4: Search and retrieve from literature

Using the research search protocol depicted in Table 1; ScienceDirect, Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, and Emerald Insight Journals were subjected to the search strategy. Figure 2 2 illustrates a graphical overview of the retrieval process. The five databases were searched using the keywords and resulted in a 73 research papers/studies being identified.

2.5 Step 5: Selection of studies

The identified research papers/studies were screened based on the protocol stipulated in *Step 1*. These studies were evaluated by removing all duplicates. This resulted in 41 articles being eligible for inclusion as can be seen in Figure 2. The review results of the systematic literature review are tabulated in Table 4 and contains the title, type of paper, overview, journal paper and year as well as the authors of the studies.

2.6 Step 6: Quality assessment

In order to assess the quality of each of the selected studies, the following criteria were utilized as a guide for final inclusion, this resulted in 34 full-text assessments as can be seen in Figure 2.

a) All duplicate literature was excluded from assessment.
b) Recovered literature is checked for relevance.
c) Ensure the aims and objectives align with the research purpose and objectives.
d) Ensure clear links between data, interpretations and conclusions.
e) Papers with unclear scope and context were excluded.
f) Papers with unanswered research question were excluded.
g) Papers with lack of credibility, reliability, and validity were excluded.

The database search identified 73 records. After title/abstract screening against inclusion/exclusion criteria, 41 articles were selected for full-text assessment. Following quality appraisal, 34 studies met the criteria and were included in the synthesis. Figure 2 provides the PRISMA flow of records through identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion.

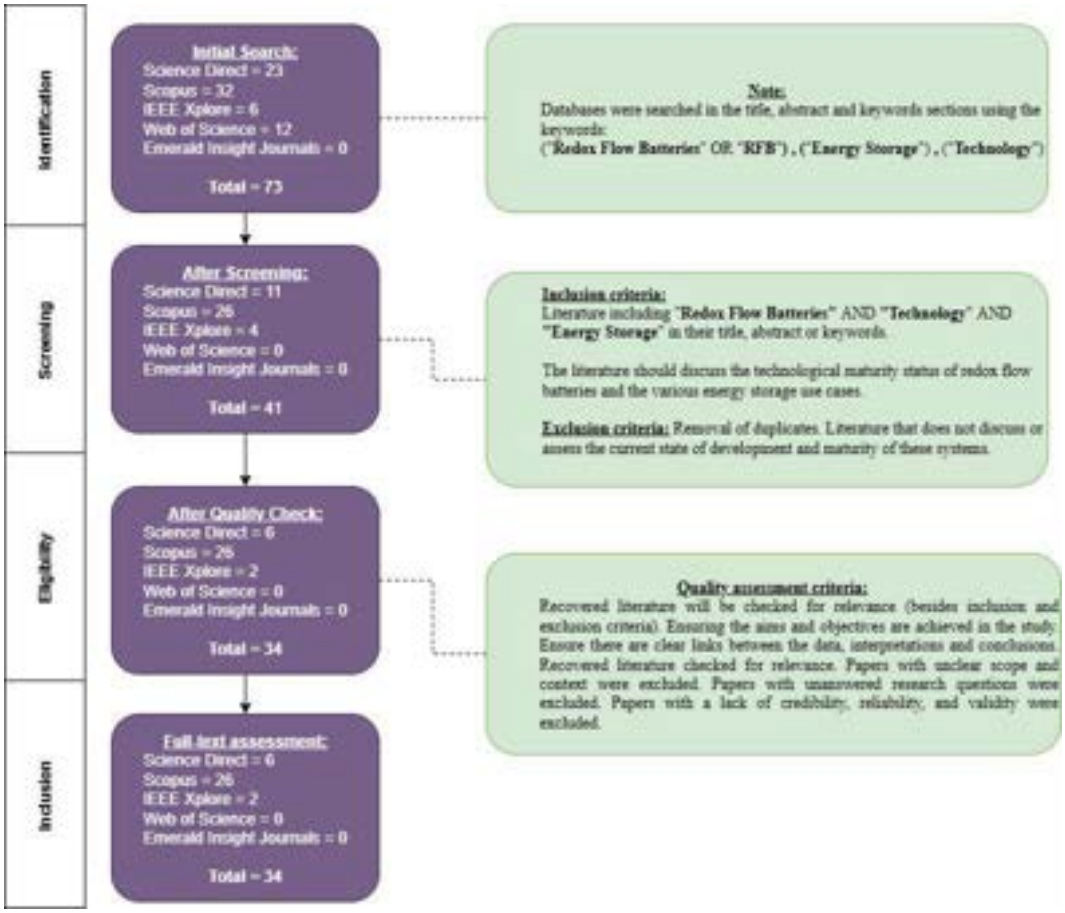

Figure 2: PRISMA flow diagram of study selection (keywords: "Redox Flow Batteries", "Energy Storage", "Technology")

3 FINDINGS

The findings (step 7 & 8) from the systematic literature review methodology are discussed in the following sub-sections.

3.1 Step 7: Data extraction

After finalizing the list of studies to be included, their full texts were reviewed, and relevant data were extracted. Data were extracted on battery chemistry and configuration, performance metrics, systems design, application domains/use case, cost/techno-economics, environmental aspects, and indicators of maturity. Appendix A contains a table summarizing the studies and the key data from each paper.

Several common themes emerged relating to technological advancements (efficiency, reliability), commercial readiness, and various storage use cases. Appendix B illustrates a Sankey diagram revealing the key research themes identified. Analysis of the diagram highlights the multifaceted nature of assessing the technology maturity status of Redox Flow Batteries and their various storage applications.

The themes identified can be categorized as follows:

- Advancement & Development: Characterizing the trajectory of growth (maturity) in battery technology, battery storage and Redox Flow Batteries.
- Cost Effectiveness: Analysing the cost factors influencing the development, scalability, and commercialization of RFBs.

- Energy Storage Applications: Use cases and technological advancements in energy storage.

The review covers a broad range of sectors; most selected studies focus predominantly on grid-scale and renewable energy integration contexts. This reflects current research priorities, especially the global demand for long-duration energy storage solutions to support renewable energy deployment. However, a noticeable gap remains in the literature concerning the applications of Redox Flow Batteries in niche or emerging domains such as remote mining operations, rural electrification, and hybrid storage systems. Future research should therefore explore these underrepresented areas to broaden the applicability and impact of Redox Flow Battery technologies.

3.2 Step 8: Synthesis of studies (analysis)

The synthesis involved organizing the extracted data (Appendix A) to identify patterns, similarities, and differences across the selected literature. Thematic coding grouped findings into categories such as technological advancement, commercialization potential and application domains. These categories were analyzed to produce aggregated insights that reflect the collective state of knowledge on Redox Flow Batteries. This approach enables a holistic understanding of the maturity and use cases of RFBs and helps identify the gaps that warrant future research.

As part of the evaluation, the journals in which each study was published were also analyzed as shown in Appendix A. The appendix provides an overview of the relevant journals publishing studies on Redox Flow Batteries and can assist researchers, policy makers, and industry stakeholders in identifying useful sources for future research or practical queries.

The years of publication were analyzed, as shown in Figure 3. Notably, there has been an increase in publication from 2019 onwards, indicating rising interest in redox flow battery technologies.

Most studies highlight the factors influencing cost-effectiveness and feasibility of implementing redox flow battery storage systems, as well as technological advancement that may enable their sustainable commercialization.

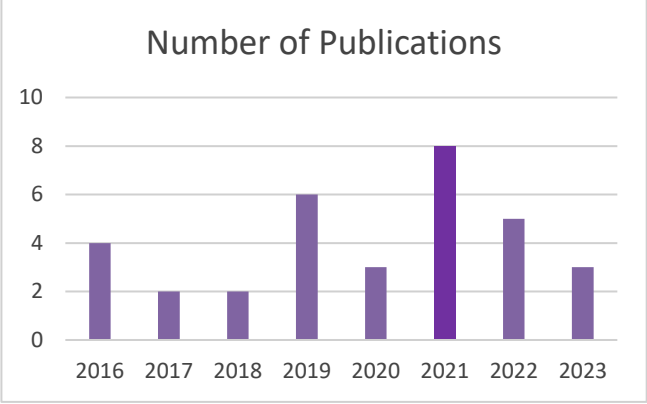

Figure 3: Number of publications per year

Figure 4 illustrates the word cloud that was created from analyzing the 34 articles. The word cloud was generated to showcase the types of words most frequently found in the literature pertaining to full-text assessment of these studies. The word cloud shows good relation to the keywords and search terms used to conduct the systematic literature review, therefore highlighting the relevance of these studies.

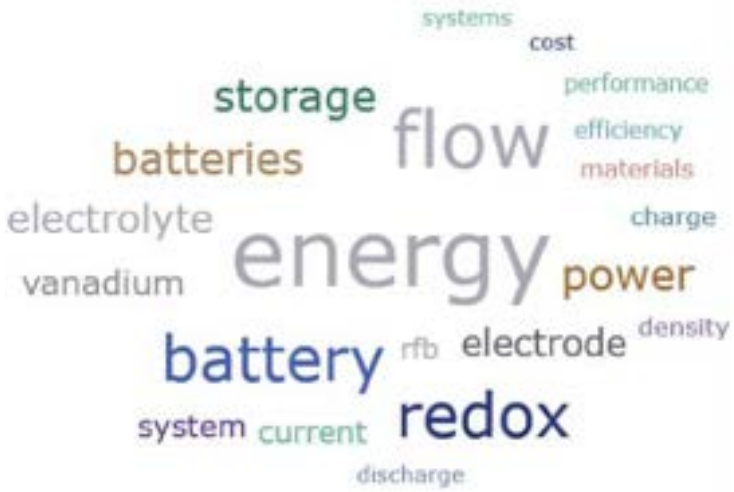

Figure 4: Word cloud of the keywords

4 TECHNOLOGICAL MATURITY AND USE CASES OF REDOX FLOW BATTERIES

Although this review is internationally in scope, several aspects are uniquely relevant to the South African context. The country's high solar resource, ongoing grid challenges, and need for decentralized rural electrification make RFBs particularly attractive. However, barriers such as high initial costs, limited local manufacturing capacity, and the absence of large-scale demonstration projects remain. Targeted policy support and industry collaboration are essential to address these barriers and unlock the full potential of RFBs for South Africa's energy transition.

4.1 Research Question 1: Technology maturity status of redox flow batteries

Redox Flow Batteries (RFBs) are increasingly recognized as a pivotal technology for integrating renewable energy into modern power systems. Their ability to store large volumes of energy over extended durations makes them well-suited for mitigating the variability of intermittent sources such as solar and wind [14]. By absorbing surplus energy during periods of high generation and dispatching it during periods of high demand, RFBs enhance grid reliability and support load levelling. A key advantage over lithium-ion or lead-based batteries is the decoupling of power and energy scaling, with power capacity determined by the cell stack size and energy capacity by the electrolyte volume [15]. This flexibility, coupled with a robust safety profile, low environmental impact, and long cycle life, positions RFBs as an attractive option for stationary storage scenarios.

Among RFB chemistries, the Vanadium Redox Flow Battery (VRFB) is the most technologically mature, with proven scalability and commercial deployment [16]. VRFBs are widely explored for grid services such as frequency regulation, peak shaving, and backup power. However, they require electrolyte temperature to remain within a narrow operating window (10°C-40°C) to avoid vanadium precipitation and performance losses [17]. Real-world performance assessments have revealed notable discrepancy between laboratory specifications and field results; for example, one study measured an efficiency of around 50%, compared to the 70-90% commonly reported in manufacturer datasheets [17]. This highlights the need for standardized, real-world performance testing.

Other RFB chemistries are at varying stages of maturity. Alkaline Redox Flow Batteries (AORFBs) offer superior thermal stability but remain in early commercial development. Organic RFBs (ORFBs) present environmentally friendly designs using biodegradable compounds, though they face challenges in scaling and long-term stability.

Zinc-Bromine, Zinc-Cerium, Iron-Chloride, Hybrid and Copper Hexacyanoferrate RFBS each have niche advantages, such as material abundance, higher energy densities or cost reduction potential, but generally remain at experimental or pilot-project stages.

Despite technical progress, gaps persist in long-term operational data, large-scale demonstration projects, and cost-benefit analyses under practical operating conditions [16], [19]. System-level inefficiencies, including pump energy consumption, must also be incorporated into techno-economic models for realistic viability assessments. The comparative analysis in Table 2 summarizes the maturity status, scalability, and key characteristics of the seven main RFB types. Table 3 outlines their typical applications, environmental benefits, and key challenges. These insights form the basis for assessing how current technological maturity influences both the strategic relevance of RFBs and their potential use cases, which are examined in subsequent sections.

Table 2: Technological Maturity of RFBs

Type of RFB	Maturity Status	Scalability	Key Characteristics
VRFBs (Vanadium Redox Flow Batteries)	Highly Mature	Highly Scalable	§ Long life cycles § Fast response times
AORFBs (Alkaline Redox Flow Batteries)	Emerging/Developing	Moderate to High	§ Superior thermal stability § Good capacity retention
ORFBs (Organic Redox Flow Batteries)	Early Development	Moderate	§ Uses organic compounds § Eco-friendly
Iron-Chloride RFBs	Developing	Moderate	§ Utilizes abundant materials § High charging efficiencies
Zinc-Bromine and Zinc-Cerium RFBs	Moderate Maturity	Moderate	§ Research in materials and design § Efficiency and stability challenges
Hybrid RFBs	Early to Moderate	Moderate to High	§ Combines different RFB features § Focus on energy density and efficiency
Copper Hexacyanoferrate RFBs	Early Research	Moderate	§ Stable performance § High efficiency

These tables provide a comprehensive overview of Redox Flow Battery technologies, offering valuable insights into their different stages of development, prospective and typical use cases, environmental impact as well as ongoing research and problems that influence the commercialization and adoption of these battery technologies.

Table 3: RFBs applications, benefits & Challenges

Type of RFB	Typical Applications	Additional Use Cases	Implementation in Grid Applications	Environmental Benefits	Challenges and Ongoing Research
VRFBs (Vanadium Redox Flow Batteries)	§ Grid energy storage § Integration with renewable energy	§Uninterruptible power supplies (UPS) § Electric vehicle charging stations	§ Widely implemented in grid storage § Stabilization of renewable sources	§ Reusable and recyclable electrolyte § Non-flammable	§ Cost reduction § Improving energy density
AORFBs (Alkaline Redox Flow Batteries)	§ Commercial and industrial	§ Backup power systems § Remote	§ Limited grid implementation § Suitable for temperature-	§ Uses less harmful materials § Potential	§ Commercialization § Voltage efficiency and

	energy storage § Renewable energy integration	area power supply	sensitive applications	for less environmental impact	energy density improvement
ORFBs (Organic Redox Flow Batteries)	§ Sustainable energy systems § Small-scale renewable energy storage	§ Experimental grid applications § Research facilities	§ Limited grid implementation § Suitable for niche applications	§ Lower environmental impact § Uses organic, biodegradable materials	§ Efficiency and stability improvements § Scale-up challenges
Iron-Chloride RFBs	§ Industrial-scale storage solutions § Eco-friendly applications	§ Backup power for critical systems § Off-grid power solutions	§ Emerging in industrial applications § Limited grid use	§ Abundant, eco-friendly materials § Less environmental impact	§ Electrode optimization § Achieving higher current densities
Zinc-Bromine and Zinc-Cerium RFBs	§ Future energy storage applications § Specific design applications	§ Experimental grid and off-grid storage § Industrial power backup	§ Limited grid implementation § Specialized applications	§ Varies with materials used § Potential for lower impact	§ Efficiency and stability improvement §Material and design optimization
Hybrid RFBs	§ Research and pilot projects § Specialized energy storage	§ Experimental small-scale applications § Integration with other storage technologies	§ Limited to experimental setups § Versatile storage solutions	§ Potential reduced impact § Depends on materials used	§ Integrating different technologies § Balancing cost and performance
Copper Hexacyanoferrate RFBs	§ Solid energy storage research § Low-cost storage solutions	§ Potential in residential storage § Small-scale commercial applications	§ Not yet implemented in grids § Cost-effective storage potential	§ Less expensive materials § Lower environmental footprint	§ Scaling up for practical use § Long-term stability and performance tests

4.2 Research Question 2: Current advancements and challenges

Recent literature highlights significant advancements in Redox Flow Battery (RFB) technology alongside persistent barriers that influence their industry relevance, strategic decision-making, and commercial readiness.

On the innovation front, material research has progressed with organic redox-active compounds offering lower cost, improved sustainability, and molecular flexibility suitable for large-scale deployment [2]. Hybrid configurations, such as VRFB–supercapacitor systems, have

demonstrated improved stability for wind and solar integration by mitigating output fluctuations [20]. Comparative studies of chemistries—including vanadium, zinc-bromine, and iron-chromium—show trade-offs between stability, cycle life, and energy density [22]. Emerging systems, such as hydrogen–bromine and alkaline organic RFBs, have achieved efficiencies exceeding 76% in elevated-temperature environments, making them suitable for hot climates and industrial applications [23], [24]. Data-driven frameworks are increasingly used to identify electrolyte candidates and improve scalability, while engineering-focused studies emphasize full-scale validation, robust transducer and electrode design, and physics-based modelling to guide scale-up [3], [25], [26].

Integration strategies are also advancing. Solar–RFB hybrid systems using CdS photoanodes enable direct solar-to-chemical energy conversion with improved efficiency [27], and modular active balancing circuits have been developed to minimize pump energy losses while managing state-of-charge effectively [30]. Thermal regulation innovations, including infrared imaging and optimized hydraulic designs, address electrolyte degradation and membrane efficiency losses outside optimal operating ranges [13], [28]. Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs) consistently show lower environmental impact for VRFBs compared to lithium-ion batteries due to reduced rare material usage and extended service life [31], [32], [33], [34], [35].

Despite these advancements, several challenges persist. High-purity vanadium costs, expensive stack and membrane manufacturing, and limited large-scale demonstration projects constrain commercial rollout [33]. Discrepancies between laboratory-reported efficiencies (up to 90%) and real-world performance (often lower due to integration losses) point to the need for standardized, real-world testing protocols. The scarcity of long-term operational and degradation data further limits confidence among utilities, policymakers, and investors. Techno-economic studies stress that while VRFBs outperform lithium-ion batteries in cost-effectiveness for discharge durations beyond four hours, sustained adoption will require addressing cost reduction, improving system integration, enhancing thermal management, and developing universally accepted performance benchmarks [34],[35],[36]. For South Africa, these challenges are amplified by import dependency, currency volatility affecting vanadium prices, and the lack of policy-driven pilot programmes to demonstrate commercial readiness.

4.3 Research Question 3: Use cases of redox flow batteries

RFBs are increasingly recognized for their versatility across multiple energy storage applications, with their modular scalability and long-duration capability making them adaptable to diverse operational contexts. At the utility scale, RFBs are deployed for grid services such as peak shaving, load levelling, and frequency regulation, where their ability to deliver consistent power over extended durations provides a strategic advantage over conventional lithium-ion systems [14], [15]. Microgrid integration is another growing application, particularly in remote communities, critical infrastructure, and disaster recovery zones, where RFBs enhance resilience and support decentralized energy architectures [20]. Their robust safety profile and non-flammable electrolytes also make them suitable for deployment in densely populated areas or sensitive industrial environments.

In commercial and industrial sectors, RFBs serve as backup systems and support high-demand processes that require stable energy output. With proper sizing and integration, they can complement intermittent renewable sources such as solar photovoltaics and wind turbines, enable greater self-consumption and reduce reliance on fossil fuel-based backup generation. Additionally, hybrid systems that pair RFBs with high-power storage technologies—such as supercapacitors or lithium-ion batteries—are being explored to meet applications that demand both high power density and long-duration energy delivery [20], [37], [38].

Emerging niche applications include coupling RFBs with electric vehicle charging infrastructure, particularly for fleet charging depots, where they can buffer grid demand

peaks and optimize energy costs. Research also indicates potential for integrating RFBs into combined heat and power (CHP) systems and renewable-to-hydrogen energy pathways, expanding their role beyond purely electrical storage into broader energy sector coupling [27], [38].

However, the commercial penetration of these use cases remains limited by cost, supply chain constraints, and the absence of widespread demonstration projects. While modelling and pilot studies consistently validate the technical feasibility of RFB integration in various contexts, large-scale deployments are still relatively rare. In South-Africa, short-term opportunities include rural microgrids, renewables mining operations, and industrial peak shaving, sectors where energy security and long-duration storage have high strategic value. Future growth will depend on targeted investment in use case-specific pilot programmed, supportive regulatory frameworks, and continued advancements in cost reduction and performance optimization to improve competitiveness across market segments.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study presents a systematic review of literature on the technological maturity, industry relevance, and energy storage applications of Redox Flow Batteries (RFBs). The review synthesizes developments in performance optimization, materials innovation, commercial readiness, and environmental impact from publications between 2016 and 2024.

The findings indicate that RFB development has reached a pivotal stage, as evidenced by increasing research activity and a growing diversity of use cases. Vanadium Redox Flow Batteries (VRFBs) remain the primary focus due to their proven stability and scalability. However, emerging technologies, including organic, hybrid, and aqueous systems, suggest an industry shift toward broader material exploration. Notably, machine learning and data-driven approaches are increasingly employed to identify promising electrolyte candidates and optimize battery architecture.

The literature also shows significant progress in real-world applications, particularly for grid-scale storage and renewable energy integration. These systems have demonstrated potential for enhancing grid reliability, load levelling, and peak shaving. Nonetheless, challenges related to cost, energy density, operational complexity, and environmental footprint persist. While early-stage solutions, such as modular designs, active balancing circuits, and low-cost materials, show promise, further research and validation are required.

Considering the current technological maturity of RFBs and their various storage use cases, future research and implementation strategies should priorities the following areas:

Advanced materials research: Identify new electrolytes with higher energy densities, including hybrid, organic, and inorganic options. Develop more efficient, low-cost membranes with high ion selectivity and low resistance, and optimize electrode materials and designs to enhance reaction kinetics, improve system efficiency, and reduce degradation.

System design and integration: Advance modular designs for greater flexibility and scalability, enabling deployment from small-scale residential to large-scale industrial and grid applications. Promote integration with complementary storage technologies, such as lithium-ion batteries, to meet requirements for both high power and long-duration energy delivery.

Cost reduction and sustainable manufacturing: Lower the material cost of vanadium, improve material utilization efficiency, and assess environmental impacts across the full lifecycle—from production to disposal—to promote sustainable practices.

Use case-specific optimization: Tailor RFB design and operation for peak shaving, load levelling, and integration with intermittent renewable sources such as solar and wind.

Technology innovation and emerging applications: Explore integration with IoT devices and smart-grid technologies to enhance energy management capabilities. Conduct pilot plant studies to validate mathematical models and refine performance predictions.

These recommendations directly address the study's three research questions. Research Question 1 is answered by mapping the current technological maturity across multiple RFB chemistries and identifying the most commercially advanced options. Research Question 2 is addressed through the synthesis of recent advancements in materials, system design, and integration strategies, alongside the identification of key techno-economic and operational barriers. Research Question 3 is fulfilled by outlining current and emerging use cases, highlighting their technical feasibility and commercial potential. Together, these findings provide a structured framework for guiding both future research and strategic decision-making in the deployment of RFB technologies.

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7 APPENDIX A

Table 4: The 34 studies selected for this review

#	Title	Type of paper, overview and the technological advancements and/or maturity status of redox flow battery energy storage systems and the various storage use cases.	Publication Title	Publication Year	Reference
1	Comprehensive study of the performance of alkaline organic redox flow batteries as large-scale energy storage systems	Journal Article – This research paper explores the viability of alkaline redox flow batteries (AORFBs) as large-scale energy storage solutions. The cost effectiveness of AORFBs is explored and its advantages compared to vanadium-based battery technologies are emphasized due to the use of organic compounds. The study proves that AORFBs have superior thermal stability and capacity retention when comparing to vanadium redox flow batteries (VRFBs). Although AORFBs have a slightly lower voltage efficiency and energy density, the study concludes that AORFBs show great promise to be commercialized.	International Journal of Energy Research	2019	(Chang, Kim and Jung, 2019)
2	Research and analysis of performance improvement of vanadium redox flow battery in microgrid: A technology review	Journal Article – The article analyses the development status of renewable energy and states that a strong possibility exists that renewable energy power generation will become the dominant energy source in the world. This research paper reviews the advantages and performance improvement of vanadium redox flow batteries (VRFBs) when implemented within microgrids. When generating power with renewable energy sources, there are numerous challenges to be addressed, and this paper explores how VRFBs can be used with microgrids and photovoltaic energy (PV) sources to overcome these challenges.	International Journal of Energy Research	2021	(Huang and Mu, 2021)
3	Optimal allocation of vanadium redox flow battery energy storage systems in active distribution networks considering multiple operation strategies	Journal Article - This research article explores the optimal allocation of vanadium redox flow battery (VRFB) energy storage systems (ESS) within active distribution networks (ADNs). Numerous operation strategies were derived as well as other characteristics such as the optimal power and capacity for VRFB ESS deployment. The paper uses quantitative data to describe the total operational benefits associated with VRFBs.	International Journal of Energy Research	2022	(Sun, Lei and Liu, 2022)
4	Status and Prospects of Organic Redox Flow Batteries toward Sustainable Energy Storage	Journal Article – This article discusses the development status and challenges of organic redox flow batteries (ORFBs) when in sustainable energy systems. A lot of emphasis is placed on the design aspects of using organic compounds in ORFBs and the respective advantages and disadvantages. This article concludes that ORFBs can be utilized as practical energy storage solutions.	ACS Energy Letters	2019	(Luo *et al.*, 2019)
5	Data-driven discovery of small electroactive molecules for energy storage in aqueous redox flow batteries	Journal Article – This paper focuses on machine learning techniques to identify new electroactive molecules to be used in aqueous redox flow batteries (ARFBs). A virtual chemical library was constructed and molecules with higher solubility and lower redox potentials were identified. The article states that commercially available indigo trisulfonate exhibits superior characteristics such as better capacity retention, solubility and coulombic efficiency when comparing it to current ARFB anolytes. This study shows that data-driven solutions exist to improve the efficiency of ARFBs.	Energy Storage Materials	2022	(Zhang *et al.*, 2022)
6	Redox flow batteries: Status and perspective towards sustainable stationary energy storage	Journal Article – This article focuses on different redox flow battery (RFB) topologies such as vanadium redox flow batteries (VRFBs) and alternative technologies such as zinc-bromine flow batteries and hydrogen-bromine flow batteries. This article focuses on possible methods to improve certain characteristics of RFBs such as improving proton conductivity in membranes and enhancing performance of electrodes used. However, numerous challenges remain such as the low energy density when comparing to lithium-ion batteries and the lack of availability of key components. Alternative approaches are also explored such as the use of aqueous organic redox flow batteries (AORFBs) using organic molecules as active materials. Commercialization aspects are discussed (particularly for VRFBs) as well as the potential for large scale energy storage. This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the status of RFBs and its future prospects for sustainable energy storage.	Journal of Power Sources	2021	(Sánchez-Díez *et al.*, 2021)
7	A High Efficiency Iron-Chloride Redox Flow Battery for Large-Scale Energy Storage	Journal Article – This article discusses development of efficient iron-chloride redox flow batteries for industrial-scale storage solutions. This battery utilises abundant, inexpensive and eco-friendly materials to make it more viable as a sustainable energy storage solution. Numerous optimisations were done on this battery topology, such as maintaining high charging efficiencies and achieving higher current densities. Thus, this paper provides insight into the optimization of iron-containing batteries and the optimization of electrodes.	Journal of The Electrochemical Society	2016	(Manohar *et al.*, 2016)
8	Progress and directions in low-cost redox-flow batteries for large-scale energy storage	Journal Article – This article reviews the status and future prospects of low-cost redox flow batteries (RFBs) for large-scale energy storage. The challenges and potential solutions for the development of aqueous systems are discussed. Furthermore, potential designs for redox molecules and breakthroughs regarding new membranes and separators are discussed. This article discusses the advantages of RFBs over lithium batteries, cost reduction of RFBs, and the need for new innovations in electrode surfaces of RFBs. Further applications of RFBs are also explored, such as electric vehicles batteries and grid-scale storage solutions.	National Science Review	2017	(Li and Liu, 2017)
9	Redox flow batteries—Concepts and chemistries for cost-effective energy storage	Journal Article – This article consists of a collection of research papers related to redox flow batteries (RFBs) and their respective components, design, performance and potential applications. Some discussed topics include electrolyte selection, electrode materials, membrane properties and	Frontiers in Energy	2018	(Holland-Cunz

		advancements in RFB technology. The content of this article aims to improve the energy density, power-density, and cost-effectiveness of large-scale energy storage solutions.			*et al.*, 2018)
10	Solar vanadium redox-flow battery powered by thin-film silicon photovoltaics for efficient photoelectrochemical energy storage	Journal Article – This article explored the development of a solar-driven vanadium redox-flow battery (VRFB) using thin-film photovoltaics for efficient energy storage and conversion. With further optimisations to the membrane, current density and electrolyte and overall electricity efficiency of 10.46% was achieved, demonstrating the viability of this concept as an alternative for photoelectrochemical energy storage and conversion.	Journal of Physics D: Applied Physics	2019	(Urbain *et al.*, 2019)
11	Vanadium Redox Flow Batteries: Potentials and Challenges of an Emerging Storage Technology	Journal Article – This article discusses the potential of vanadium redox-flow batteries (VRFBs) as promising energy storage solution for smart grids. VRFBs have highly desirable characteristics such as their ability to scale, long life cycles and fast response times. VRFBs are compared to other battery storage technologies and cost figures are presented to demonstrate their competitiveness, however the respective challenges surrounding the use of VRFBs are also discussed. This article concludes that VRFBs have potential to be widely used in the future and significant investments are currently being made into VRFBs.	IEEE Industrial Electronics Magazine	2016	(Guarnieri *et al.*, 2016)
12	Research on All-Vanadium Redox Flow Battery Energy Storage Device Based on Energy-Saving and Environmentally Friendly New Energy Power Station Interface Technology	Journal Article – This article discusses research on using an all-vanadium redox flow battery (VRFB) energy storage system (ESS) for new power stations. This article focuses on the introduction of vanadium ion diffusion and proposes a simulation model which considers ion diffusion. The result of the model shows that VRB operating characteristics can accurately be simulated, and real time prediction results can also be provided.	IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science	2021	(Wang, 2021)
13	Engineering aspects of the design, construction and performance of modular redox flow batteries for energy storage	Journal Article – This article discusses engineering design considerations for redox flow batteries (RFBs) used for energy storage. Characteristics such as electrode configuration, membrane characteristics and cell design are discussed and elaborated upon. A lot of emphasis is placed on engineering design principles and the need for future research and development. The use of mathematical modelling to optimize RFB performance is discussed as well as challenges around commercialization.	Journal of Energy Storage	2017	(Arenas, Ponce De León and Walsh, 2017)
14	Solid electrochemical energy storage for aqueous redox flow batteries: The case of copper hexacyanoferrate	Journal Article – This article focuses on the use of copper hexacyanoferrate (CuHCF) as a solid energy storage material in aqueous redox flow batteries (ARFBs). The use of CuHCF in ARFBs shows promise due to it its stable performance paired with high efficiency and capacity. This article concludes that redox materials play an important role in improving performance characteristics of solid energy storage materials and that inexpensive raw materials can greatly reduce the cost of redox flow batteries (RFBs).	Electrochimica Acta	2019	(Zanzola *et al.*, 2019)
15	Unbiased solar energy storage: Photoelectrochemical redox flow battery	Journal Article – This article discusses the use of photoelectrical redox flow batteries to store solar energy directly. This article demonstrates that a CdS photoanode can be used successfully for direct solar charging and performance can be increased by adding a CdSe overlayer.	Nano Energy	2016	(Azevedo *et al.*, 2016)
16	Techno-economic analyses of several redox flow batteries using levelized cost of energy storage	Journal Article – This article contains a techno-economic analyses of redox flow batteries (RFBs) for long-term energy storage. Different battery technologies are compared and concludes that batteries using inexpensive active materials are favoured for long-term energy storage, however more expensive lithium-based technologies are favoured for short term energy storage, due to higher efficiencies.	Current Opinion in Chemical Engineering	2022	(Darling, 2022)
17	Advancing chemical hazard assessment with decision analysis: A case study on lithium-ion and redox flow batteries used for energy storage	Journal Article – This article evaluates chemical hazards of redox flow batteries (RFBs) and lithium-ion batteries using the Greenscreen framework. The results show that vanadium redox flow batteries (VRFBs) had consistent lower hazard ratings when compared to other batteries. The study concludes that hazard evaluation is a critical component when it comes to battery selection and that safer alternatives should be chosen with lower toxicities and hazards. This article also discusses various assessment methods, certifications and studies related to battery safety.	Journal of Hazardous Materials	2022	(He *et al.*, 2022)
18	The characteristics and performance of hybrid redox flow batteries with zinc negative electrodes for energy storage	Journal Article – This article reviews different types of zinc-based redox flow batteries and discusses their respective performance characteristics and challenges. This article emphasizes the importance of the selection of electrode materials, electrolyte additives and cell design. This selection is crucial to achieving better efficiency and ensuring stability in the system. The article states that potential use of zinc-based batteries in the future is possible, however further research and development will be required.	Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews	2018	(Arenas *et al.*, 2018)
19	Life cycle assessment of lithium-ion batteries and vanadium redox flow batteries-based renewable energy storage systems	Journal Article – This article compares the environmental impact of vanadium redox flow batteries (VRFBs) and lithium-ion batteries. VRFBs can use recycled electrolytes leading to a smaller environmental impact, when comparing to lithium-ion batteries. This study emphasizes the importance of considering the environmental impacts when choosing a battery technology. A sensitivity analysis was conducted, showing that by using alternative battery compositions the impact on the environment can be reduced. The study concludes that VRFBs have a lower impact on the environment than VRFBs.	Sustainable Energy Technologies and Assessments	2021	(Da Silva Lima *et al.*, 2021)
20	Life cycle assessment of compressed air, vanadium redox flow battery, and molten salt systems for renewable energy storage	Journal Article – This article compares the environmental impact of three energy storage techniques. The techniques compared are compressed air storage, vanadium redox reflow batteries and molten salt thermal storage. Of the three storage techniques, VRFBs have the highest environmental impact, while molten salt has the lowest. It was found that the manufacturing stage of these storage systems has the highest carbon footprint. The study further emphasizes the	Energy Reports	2021	(AlShafi and Bicer, 2021)

		importance of using solar energy to minimize damage caused to the environment.			
21	Redox flow batteries for energy storage: their promise, achievements and challenges	Journal Article – This article summarizes research conducted on vanadium redox flow batteries VRFBs and covers the following topics: • Electrolyte Balancing • Flow Patterns and Behaviour • Electrolyte Additives • Low Potential Electrolytes • Organic Redox Flow Batteries • Monitoring of RFBs • Long-cycling Aqueous Batteries • Organic Electroactive Materials This article covers a wide spectrum of RFBs and can provide valuable insights for researchers and engineers in the field of energy storage.	Current Opinion in Electrochemistry	2019	(Arenas, Ponce De León and Walsh, 2019)
22	A Modular Active Balancing Circuit for Redox Flow Battery Applied in Energy Storage System	Journal Article - This study proposes a modular active balancing circuit that is intended to be used with redox flow batteries (RFBs) within an energy storage system. The circuit's goal is to guarantee high efficiency, scalability, and reliability while reducing the complexity of the RFB's battery management system. The exact operation principle and control approach including the dynamics of MOSFET current and capacitors are supported by simulations and tests that verify their viability and efficacy. By optimizing the SOC balance, the suggested approach raises the RFB's overall performance and energy conversion efficiency. In summary, it appears that the modular balancing circuit can improve RFB performance in energy storage systems.	IEEE Access	2021	(Guan and Huang, 2021)
23	Assessing Suitability of Various Battery Technologies for Energy Storages: Lithium-ion, Sodium-sulphur and Vanadium Redox Flow Batteries	Conference Article - This study examines and compares different battery technologies, such as lithium-ion, sodium-sulphur, and vanadium redox flow batteries for use in large-scale energy storage systems. To determine the advantages and disadvantages of each battery technology, case studies were evaluated to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each technology. This paper presents calculations for the best battery size for each technology, and accounts for certain variables such as power, capacity, depth of discharge, and number of working cycles. The case studies show how various battery technologies are suitable for different applications depending on the power and capacity needs.	2020 International Conference on Applied Electronics (AE)	2020	(Vins and Sirovy, 2020)
24	Hybrid Energy Storage Systems Based on Redox-Flow Batteries: Recent Developments, Challenges, and Future Perspectives	Journal Article – This article focuses on hybrid energy storage systems (HESS) based on redox-flow batteries (RFBs). Key performance indicators (KPIs) are discussed for different storage systems ready for use in hybrid storage systems. The article suggests and uses numerical simulation to assess the best coupling design between an RFB and a Supercapacitor (SC). Furthermore, this article examines different optimization strategies for energy management systems (EMSs) and discuss EMSs for HESSs and concludes with future perspectives on optimization and control algorithms for management systems.	Batteries	2023	(Schubert *et al.*, 2023)
25	Redox Flow Batteries: Recent Development in Main Components, Emerging Technologies, Diagnostic Techniques, Large-Scale Applications, and Challenges and Barriers	Journal Article – This article provides and overview of redox flow batteries and (RFBs) and the benefits of using RFBs in large-scale energy systems. The main components of RFBs are discussed, as well as the challenges associated with their implementation and new developments in the field of RFBs. The development of membranes for Vanadium Redox Flow Batteries (VRFBs) and various RFB diagnostic methods are examined in this article. Additionally, this article covers the use cases of RFBs and provides a summary of recent developments in this research area. This article concludes by addressing the commercialization barriers and challenges associated with RFBs and emphasize the need to conduct further research and development to unlock RFBs' full potential as a sustainable energy storage solution.	Batteries	2023	(Olabi *et al.*, 2023)
26	Economic Analysis of a Redox Flow Batteries-Based Energy Storage System for Energy Savings in Factory Energy Management System	Journal Article – This article discusses an economic analysis of using redox flow batteries in a factory's energy management system. This article analyses the cost estimation and economic feasibility of using solar power and redox flow cells to save energy in a factory. The advantages of using redox batteries are also discussed and the importance of energy storage systems is explained to reduce carbon emissions. Furthermore, this article explores the economics of implementing a hybrid energy system in a factory and a sensitivity analysis was also conducted. The results can provide insights into the economic feasibility and applicability of the proposed energy storage system in industrial facilities.	Batteries	2023	(Kim *et al.*, 2023)
27	Energy storage inspired by nature – ionic liquid iron–sulfur clusters as electrolytes for redox flow batteries	Journal Article – This paper proposes a novel approach to redox flow batteries (RFBs) that makes use of iron-sulphur clusters and ionic liquid electrolytes. The results demonstrate that the both the coulombic and energy efficiency is high as well as the predicted energy density. The study also examines the limits of current RFBs based on acidic vanadium electrolyte solutions, as well as how iron-sulphur clusters and imidazolium cations interact to form the novel ionic liquid electrolyte materials.	Dalton Transactions	2019	(Modrzynski and Burger, 2019)
28	The Development of Zn–Ce Hybrid Redox Flow Batteries for Energy Storage and Their Continuing Challenges	Journal Article – This article highlights the development and problems of zinc-cerium hybrid redox flow batteries (RFBs) for energy storage. It explores subjects like the thermodynamics and kinetics of electrode reactions, operating factors, cell component materials, and cell design. The article also explores the elements that influence zinc deposition on the negative electrode, as well as other research that have been undertaken to improve its performance. The utilization of carbon-polymer composite electrodes in zinc-cerium RFBs is investigated, as well as electrode behaviour under various conditions and cell designs. The importance of electrolyte composition and electrode stability in the overall performance of zinc-cerium RFBs is also emphasized. The usage of polyvinyl ester plates as negative electrodes and the optimization of charge/discharge performance are discussed in the article. The article concludes	ChemPlusChem	2015	(Walsh *et al.*, 2015)

		by emphasizing the importance of additional research and developments in scaling up zinc-cerium battery technology.			
29	Design of A Two-Stage Control Strategy of Vanadium Redox Flow Battery Energy Storage Systems for Grid Application	Journal Article – The study presents a two-stage control technique aimed at enhancing the operational efficiency of vanadium redox flow battery (VRB) systems when utilized in grid applications. The suggested strategy entails the optimization of the flow rate of the Vanadium Redox Battery (VRB) in order to minimize parasitic losses and improve overall efficiency. In addition, a feedback flow rate controller is used in the second stage to swiftly react to fluctuating power requirements. The efficacy of the proposed strategy is demonstrated to be superior in comparison to existing approaches. A multi-physics model of the Vanadium Redox Flow Battery (VRB) system is also formulated and verified by the utilization of experimental data. The paper includes an analysis of the control strategy's architecture and offers more resources for exploring energy storage systems and VRB technology.	IEEE Transactions on Sustainable Energy	2022	(Xiong *et al.*, 2022)
30	Real-Time Monitoring of the Thermal Effect for the Redox Flow Battery by an Infrared Thermal Imaging Technology	Journal Article – This article discusses the use of infrared thermal imaging technology for the purpose of monitoring the thermal effects resulting from charge-discharge experiments conducted on a vanadium/iodine redox flow battery. This study presents a comparative analysis of the thermal effects exhibited by an all-vanadium redox flow battery and a vanadium/iodine redox flow battery. The investigation further investigates the influence of charge-discharge parameters, flow rate, and current density on the thermal effect. The article examines the utilization of a novel membrane and a composite electrode to enhance the efficacy of the vanadium/iodine redox flow battery. The authors present evidence to support the effectiveness of infrared thermal imaging technology in monitoring the thermal effects within batteries, hence offering valuable insights for enhancing the design of redox flow battery systems.	Energies	2020	(Huang *et al.*, 2020)
31	Environmental and Preliminary Cost Assessments of Redox Flow Batteries for Renewable Energy Storage	Journal Article – This article discusses different methodologies used for the evaluation of environmental impacts associated with batteries, with a particular focus on the evaluation of the water footprint, abiotic resource depletion, climate change, stratospheric ozone depletion, and human toxicity. The implementation of the AWARE method is recommended for conducting water scarcity footprint evaluations, whilst the CML baseline methodology is used for the quantification of environmental burden. The article also presents a comparative analysis of the environmental effects associated with different battery technologies, including lead-based, Li-ion, Na-based, and redox flow batteries.	Energy Technology	2020	(Fernandez-Marchante *et al.*, 2020)
32	Energy Storage Analysis and Flow Rate Optimization Research of Vanadium Redox Flow Battery	Journal Article – This article investigates the optimization of a Vanadium Redox Flow Battery (VRFB) for enhanced energy storage, with a focus on current renewable energy requirements, VRFB operating principles, and technical challenges. This article further emphasizes the importance of flow field structure design in improving electrolyte distribution and battery performance, and it proposes a method for performance prediction which incorporates modelling and simulation. The article also examines the effect of flow rate on battery voltage, polarization, pressure drop, and pump power loss, emphasizing the relationship between flow rate and key performance measures. The article concludes that enhancing VRFB flow field design can greatly improve battery efficiency and compensate for its poor energy density.	Journal of Physics: Conference Series	2021	(Huang *et al.*, 2021)
33	Redox Flow Batteries for small scale energy storage	Conference Article – The paper investigates the potential of redox flow batteries (RFBs) for small-scale energy storage, showing their advantages in storing renewable energy over standard solid electrode batteries. It explores many forms of RFBs, highlighting their benefits and current prevalence in large-scale applications, particularly in Asia, while acknowledging the slower pace of development for commercial and residential uses. The article emphasizes the importance of research in overcoming commercialization barriers for residential applications, anticipating that redox flow batteries will become commercially viable over the next five years. It emphasizes the importance of conducting more research in scaling, monitoring, and modelling for various renewable sources, as well as policy and economic simulation modelling. The article suggests that redox flow batteries can be used as a potential technology for supporting renewable energy in smart grid systems.	2016 IEEE Conference on Technologies for Sustainability (SusTech)	2016	(Hiksas and Anindi tio, 2016)
34	Redox-flow batteries for high energy-to-power ratio storage: a preliminary experimental study	Conference Article - This article presents a comprehensive overview of the development, challenges, and possibilities of redox flow batteries (RFBs) for large-scale energy storage. It emphasizes the growing usage of RFBs due to desirable characteristics such as safety, adaptability, and suitability for grid-level storage. However high costs restrict the usage of these batteries in grid-scale energy storage required.	2021 IEEE International Conference on Environment and Electrical Engineering a	2021	(Ceraolo *et al.*, 2021)

8 APPENDIX B

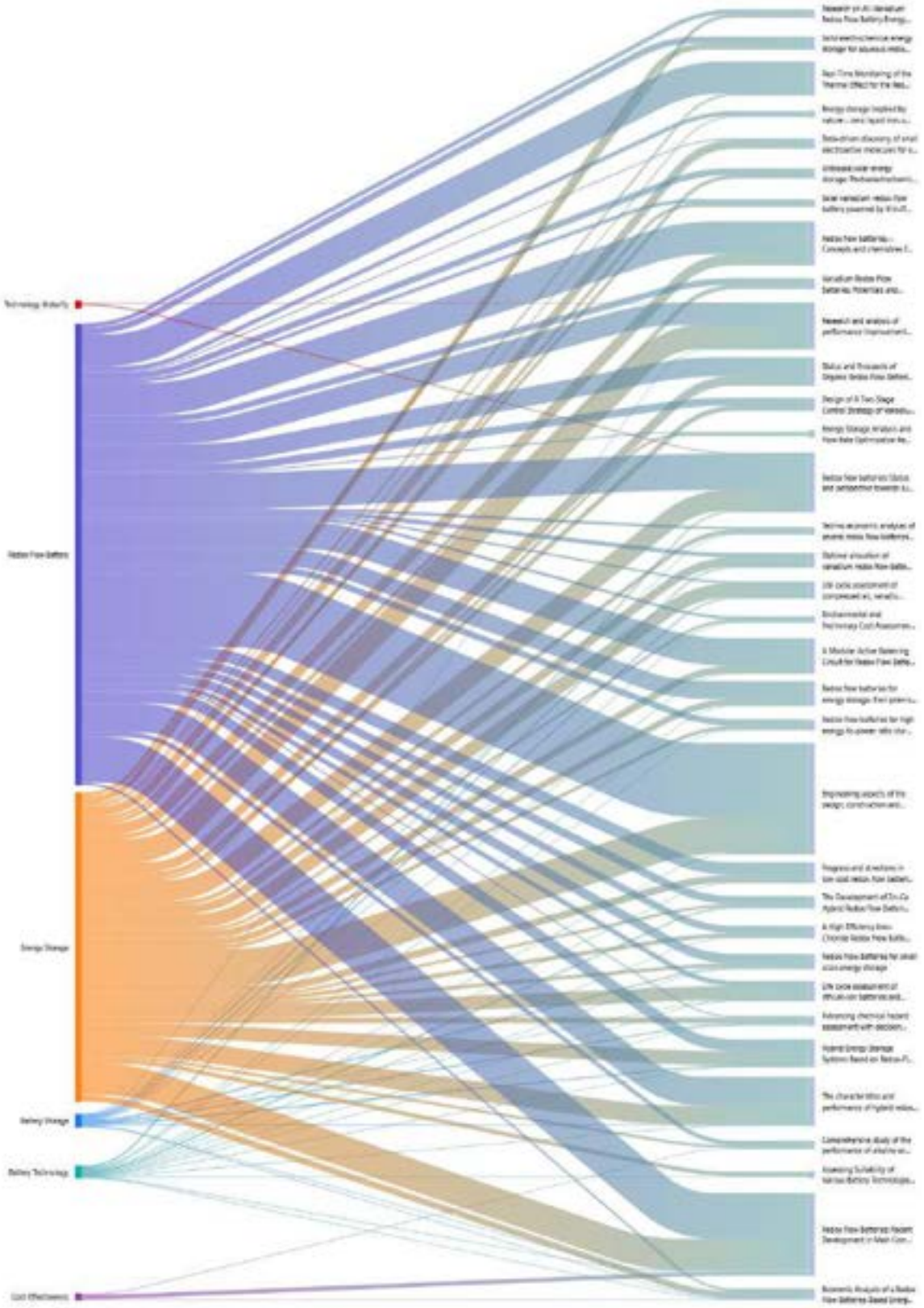

Figure 3: Sankey diagram of the themes identified

A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: THE TECHNOLOGY READINESS LEVEL OF MAGNESIUM-BASED ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

Magnesium-based energy storage systems are emerging as promising alternatives to lithium-ion batteries, offering enhanced safety, higher energy density, and abundant resources. This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) systematically assesses the technological readiness of these systems using a Technology Readiness Level (TRL) framework, focusing on cost factors influencing research, scalability, and market adoption. Following PRISMA guidelines, five databases were searched for 2016-2023; 69 records were identified, 31 remained after duplication removal, and 25 studies were included. Readiness mapped using a TRL lens indicates most pure magnesium systems at TRL 2-4, while Mg/Li architectures are approaching TRL 4-5. Field validation prototypes remain scarce. Findings highlight dendrite-free cycling and favourable safety, and Coulombic efficiencies exceeding 97% in laboratory-scale prototypes, while challenges such as material costs, manufacturing complexity, and cathode-electrolyte compatibility continue to hinder progress. Innovations such as nanostructured cathodes and polymer-based electrolytes show promise for enhancing performance and reducing costs. The review underscores the critical role of cost optimisation, standardised full-cell reporting, and prototypes and field trials in progressing from laboratory prototypes to commercially viable solutions. This paper makes an applied contribution by synthesising established concepts through a TRL lens to inform practitioners, policymakers, and industry stakeholders, highlighting targeted R&D in magnesium-sulphur cathodes and scalable solid-state electrolytes to accelerate readiness.

Keywords: Systematic literature review, Magnesium-ion batteries, technology readiness level (TRL), electrochemical energy storage, cost-performance analysis.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The accelerating shift from fossil-based fuels to renewable energy sources marks a defining moment in the global energy landscape. As countries strive to reduce carbon emissions and enhance energy sustainability, integrating increasing amounts of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind has become a central priority [1], [2].

However, the variable and intermittent nature of these renewable resources presents a critical challenge for grid reliability and energy security. As a result, the demand for advanced energy storage solutions that can smooth fluctuations, store excess generated electricity, and provide power on demand is greater than ever [3].

Traditional energy storage technologies, particularly rechargeable lithium-ion batteries (LIBs), have been instrumental in enabling this transition. Since their introduction in 1991, LIBs have revolutionised not only portable electronics and smart infrastructure, but also the rapidly expanding market for electric and hybrid vehicles [4]. Their widespread adoption is largely attributed to their high energy density, long cycle life, and proven reliability. Nevertheless, as the deployment of energy storage systems continues to expand, LIBs face growing scrutiny over several critical issues. These include the rising costs and limited geographical availability of lithium resources, the safety hazards associated with dendrite formation and thermal runaway (noted to occur at cell temperatures above 200 °C without proper management), and persistent concerns over the environmental and geopolitical impacts of lithium extraction and processing, with global demand projected to more than double by 2030 [5-6]. Although advances in electrolyte chemistry and cell engineering have addressed some of these concerns at the laboratory scale, many solutions have yet to achieve widespread industrial applications [7]. These limitations highlight an urgent need for alternative battery chemistries that are safer, more sustainable, and economically viable for large-scale deployment.

This review applies established systematic review and TRL evaluation frameworks to the magnesium context, providing structured insights for industrial engineering and energy policy rather than introducing new theoretical constructs.

Against this backdrop, magnesium-based energy storage systems, particularly magnesium-ion batteries (MIBs), have emerged as a promising candidate for next-generation energy storage technologies. Magnesium offers several inherent advantages over lithium: it is the eighth most abundant element in the Earth's crust, inexpensive, and less prone to supply chain constraints [8]. From a technical perspective, magnesium's divalent nature affords high theoretical volumetric capacity, and its high melting point, low toxicity, and resistance to dendrite formation contribute to enhanced safety and stability during operation [9-10]. These features position MIBs as an attractive solution for stationary energy storage and other applications where cost, scalability, and safety are paramount.

Despite these promising attributes, the commercial development and deployment of magnesium-based batteries have lagged their lithium counterparts. Most prototypes remain relatively low Technology Readiness Levels (TRL 2-4), with very few demonstrations beyond TRL 5, highlighting a clear gap between laboratory feasibility and practical deployment. Several formidable scientific and engineering challenges remain. Progress in the field is limited primarily by the difficulty of identifying suitable cathode materials that allow for efficient magnesium-ion intercalation, the development of electrolytes with sufficient ionic conductivity and electrochemical stability, and the engineering of compatible current collectors and cell components [11-13]. Pioneering research in the early 2000s demonstrated the technical feasibility of rechargeable magnesium batteries with encouraging capacity retention and cycling stability, yet translating these results into practical market-ready products has proven complex [14]. Recent years have seen a surge in research activity targeting these barriers. Advances in material chemistry, including the exploration of two-

dimensional materials such as MoS_2 (demonstrating reversible Mg intercalation at around 110 mAh/g), nanostructured electrodes, and polymer-based electrolytes for improved interfacial stability, alongside hybrid ion batteries that integrate lithium or sodium ions, have expanded the design space and improved performance metrics for magnesium-based systems [15]. This approach aligns with established practices for systematic reviews in engineering and technology [21].

To aid objective comparison and decision-making, this review evaluates magnesium-based systems through a TRL lens. It synthesises recent scientific and engineering developments, identifies principal barriers and cost drivers affecting research and scale-up, and clarifies current readiness in the context of grid-relevant applications.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

This systematic literature review adopts a structured and comprehensive approach based on widely accepted methodologies for systematic reviews. The method consists of three main phases: (i) planning, (ii) conducting, and (iii) documenting. The review process involves several clearly defined steps within these phases:

A. Planning the review
- *Step 1* – Research purpose and objective: Clearly establish the aims and objectives of the review.
- *Step 2* – Development of research protocol: Formulate inclusion and exclusion criteria, databases to be searched, and specific keywords.

B. Conducting the review
- *Step 3* – Establishing relevance criteria: Define explicit criteria for screening literature based on relevance.
- *Step 4* – Literature search and retrieval: Search the selected electronic databases for literature using predefined keywords.
- *Step 5* – Selection of studies: Screen retrieved literature based on established inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- *Step 6* – Quality assessment: Evaluate the methodological rigour and relevance of selected studies.
- *Step 7* – Data extraction: Extract relevant data systematically from selected literature.
- *Step 8* – Synthesis of studies (analysis): Analyse and synthesise extracted data to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the technology maturity and storage applications of magnesium-based systems.

C. Documenting the review
- *Step 9* – Reporting: Report on the SLR in detail.
- *Step 10* – Dissemination: Publish the SLR findings in an academic source.

This structured approach ensures comprehensive coverage of objective assessment of existing literature, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. The outcomes of steps 1-6 are discussed in the sub-sections that follow (Section 2.1 – 2.6), while the findings of this study (steps 7 & 8) are documented in Section 3. Documenting the review (steps 9 & 10) is addressed by publishing this research paper.

2.1 Step 1: Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of this SLR is to assess the current state of technological development and maturity of magnesium-based energy storage systems. The focus is on evaluating the advancements in terms of reliability, safety, efficiency, and commercial readiness. The objective is to identify and analyse the principal cost factors that influence research, development, and the commercialisation of these systems.

2.2 Step 2: Develop research protocol

The review protocol that was followed while conducting the SLR is depicted in **Table 1.** The 2016-2023 window was chosen to capture the most recent decade of magnesium-based electrochemical storage research. Searches in ScienceDirect, Scopus, IEEE Xplore, Web of Science, and Emerald Insight used Boolean string ("magnesium" AND "energy storage" AND "technology"), restricted to English, peer-reviewed journal and conference publications, with keywords chosen to balance scope and specific while ensuring coverage across materials, electrochemistry, and industrial engineering.

Table 1: Research protocol

Purpose of the study	To conduct an evaluation of the current state of development and maturity of magnesium-based energy storage systems and to identify any key cost elements/factors that influence research and development in this area.
Inclusion criteria	• Literature including "Magnesium", "Energy Storage", "Technology" in their title, abstract or keywords. • The literature should either cover (discuss) the recent technological advancements or developments in terms of efficiency, reliability, and commercial readiness or the cost factors that influence commercialisation, development and research on these systems. • Include studies from 2016 – 2023.
Exclusion criteria	• Non-English Articles. • Opinion pieces and non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded to maintain dataset quality.
Search databases	Searches were conducted using the following databases: • ScienceDirect, • Scopus, • IEEE Xplore, • Web of Science, • Emerald Insight Journals.
Keywords	The databases were searched using the Boolean string ("Magnesium" AND "Energy Storage" AND "Technology")
Quality Assessment Criteria	• All duplicate literature was excluded. • Recovered literature will be checked for relevance. • Ensure the aims and objectives align with the study. • Ensure that clear links between data, interpretations and conclusions exist. • Papers with unclear scope and context to be excluded. • Papers with unanswered research questions to be excluded. • Papers with a lack of credibility, reliability, and validity will be excluded.

2.3 Step 3: Establish relevance criteria

Using the keywords listed in Table 1, the five databases were searched, and the records were screened for title, abstract, and keywords against pre-specified inclusion/exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they addressed magnesium-based electrochemical storage and reported materials/electrolyte/cell or system advances and/or cost, techno-economic, safety, reliability, efficiency, or commercial readiness. Studies were excluded if they focused on non-Mg chemistries or non-electrochemical storage, lacked clear scope/methods/outcomes, or were not peer-reviewed. Screening was conducted following PRISMA principles.

2.4 Step 4: Search and retrieve from literature

Using the research search protocol in Table 1; ScienceDirect, Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, and Emerald Insight Journals were subjected to the search strategy. Figure 1 illustrates a graphical overview of the retrieval process. The five databases were searched using the keywords, resulting in 69 research papers/studies being identified.

2.5 Step 5: Selection of studies

The identified research papers/studies were screened based on the protocol stipulated in *Step 1*. These studies were evaluated by removing all duplicates. This resulted in 31 articles being eligible for inclusion, as can be seen in Figure 1.

2.6 Step 6: Quality assessment

In order to assess the quality of each of the selected 31 studies, the following criteria were utilised as a guide for final inclusion, resulting in 25 full-text assessments, as can be seen in Figure 1.

a) All duplicate literature was excluded from assessment.
b) Recovered literature is checked for relevance.
c) Ensure the aims and objectives align with the research purpose and objectives.
d) Ensure clear links between data, interpretations and conclusions.
e) Papers with unclear scope and context were excluded.
f) Papers with unanswered research questions were excluded.
g) Papers with a lack of credibility, reliability, and validity were excluded.

Each study was also evaluated against transparency, methodological rigor, and industrial relevance, in line with systematic review guidance in engineering research. Although a numerical scoring rubric was considered, structured exclusion criteria were applied to maintain consistency with the SAIIE35 template and ensure clarity and replicability of study selection.

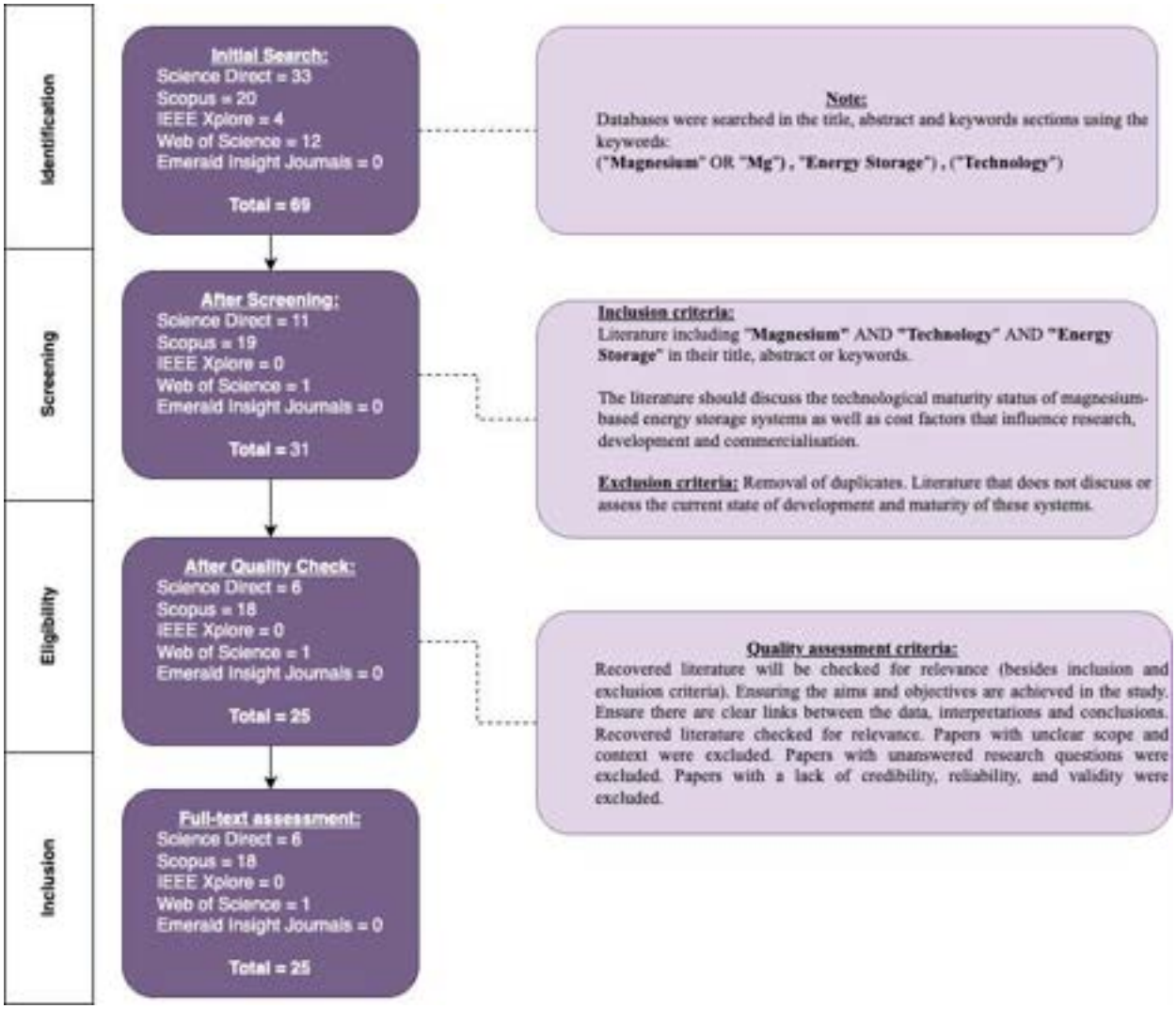

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram of study selection (keywords: "Magnesium", Energy storage", "Technology")

This ensured that only robust and contextually relevant studies were included, allowing for the synthesis to be meaningfully linked to industrial engineering and large-scale deployment challenges.

For brevity and to comply with the SAIIE35 conference template requirements, the detailed table of included studies and the thematic Sankey diagram have been omitted. These materials are available from the authors upon request.

3 FINDINGS

The findings (steps 7 & 8) from following the systematic literature review methodology are discussed in the following sub-sections.

3.1 Step 7: Data extraction

After finalising the list of studies to be included, their full texts were studied, and data were extracted.

The research themes identified from the data extraction can be categorised as follows:

- **Advancement & Development**: Characterizing the progression of battery technology and system maturity in magnesium-based energy storage, including breakthroughs in electrode materials, electrolytes, and cell design. Emphasis was placed on strategies to improve energy density, cycling stability, and safety.
- **Cost Effectiveness:** Examining the cost factors that influence the development, scalability, and commercialization of magnesium-based storage technologies, such as material cost, manufacturing processes, and economic viability compared to established systems.
- **Energy Storage Applications:** Reviewing use cases and technological advancements for magnesium-based energy storage, particularly for grid-scale integration, renewable energy support, and stationary storage solutions. By contrast, comparatively little attention was given to emerging or niche applications, such as off-grid electrification, remote industry, or hybrid battery systems, thereby highlighting an important research gap.

Most of these selected studies focused on stationary and grid-scale applications, reflecting current priorities for long-duration and cost-effective energy storage to support renewable energy deployment. Few studies reported field prototypes, and remain at TRL 3-4, underscoring the gap between laboratory performance and deployment readiness.

3.2 Step 8: Synthesis of studies (analysis)

The synthesis phase involved the critical evaluation and integration of findings from the 25 studies selected for full-text assessment. This analysis identified prevailing trends, technological milestones, and persistent gaps in the development of magnesium-based energy storage systems.

A comparative analysis revealed that while polymer-based electrolytes demonstrated Coulombic efficiencies of 97% with stable cycling beyond 100 cycles, chloride-based liquid electrolytes often suffer from side reactions and lower long-term stability. Similarly, MoS_2 nanostructured cathodes achieve reversable intercalations as around 110 mAh/g, whereas conventional oxide cathodes rarely exceed 60 mAh/g. These differences illustrate where promising material innovations have advanced TRLs from 2 to 3-4, while traditional chemistries remain stalled at early-stage readiness.

An analysis of the publication years revealed a marked increase in research activity on magnesium-based energy storage systems since 2019, reflecting academic and industry interest in the field.

Figure 2 shows the number of publications per year, highlighting strong growth from fewer than 5 papers annually before 2018 to more than 10 papers per year after 2020. This trend demonstrates accelerating research momentum but does not yet translate into higher TRL demonstrations.

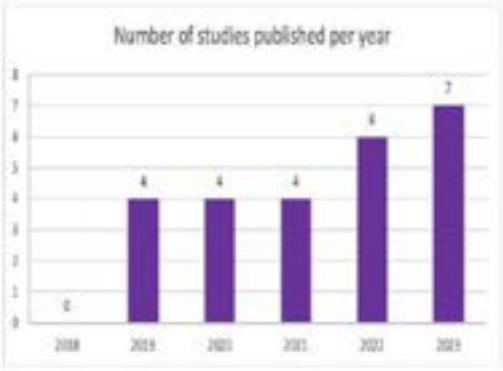

Figure 2: Annual publications on magnesium-based energy storage (2016-2023)

A word cloud illustrated in Figure 3, was generated from the full-text analysis of the selected articles visually highlighted the most frequent discussed topics, aligning closely with the study's keywords and search terms. Dominant terms include "magnesium", "energy storage", "battery", "electrolyte", and "cathode", indicating a concentrated research focus on fundamental battery chemistry and system-level challenges.

Figure 3 highlights this concentration on core chemistry, reinforcing that research remains focused at TRL 2-3 stages, with limited emphasis on scaling, cost modelling, or demonstration beyond laboratory settings.

Figure 3: Word cloud generated from keywords in selected studies

4 TECHNOLOGY READINESS LEVEL OF MAGNESIUM-BASED ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS

4.1 Technology Readiness Level (TRLs): a framework for assessments

Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) provide a structured framework for evaluating the maturity of a technology, from concept development through to full commercialisation [22]. This framework, originally developed by NASA, has been widely adopted in energy and industrial engineering to benchmark technological progress. Table 2 summarises the nine levels.

Table 2: Technology Readiness Levels (TRL 1-9) with definitions, adapted from NASA [22]

TRL	Description	Context of Mg-based systems
1	Basic principles observed and reported	Fundamental materials research (electrochemistry concepts)
2	Technology concept formulated	Initial laboratory hypotheses for Mg-ion storage
3	Experimental proof-of-concept	Early Mg cell assembly tested at lab scale
4	Technology validated in laboratory	Small prototype cells with controlled testing

5	Technology validated in relevant environment	Prototype cells tested under conditions resembling grid use
6	System/Subsystems model demonstrated in relevant environment	Pre-commercial pilot cells with extended cycling
7	System prototype demonstrated in operational environment	Demonstration projects under field/grid conditions
8	Actual system completed and qualified	Fully engineered Mg battery system, ready for deployment
9	Actual system proven in operational environment	Commercial-scale Mg energy storage deployed

In the context of magnesium-based energy storage, most developments are concentrated at TRL 2-4, with limited hybrid Mg/Li systems approaching TRL 5. No systems have yet reached TRL 7-9, highlighting the gap between laboratory advances and field-ready prototypes.

4.2 Research Question 1: What is the technology maturity status of magnesium-based energy storage systems?

Recent studies, such as those by Ma *et al.*, [6] highlight steady improvements in magnesium-based energy storage systems (Mg-ESS), particularly in capacity, stability, rate capability, and operating voltage. These advances reinforce magnesium's advantages over lithium, including higher safety, broader abundance, and greater volumetric capacity [5]. Despite these promising attributes, most developments remain at low Technology Readiness Level (TRL 2-3), with only a few hybrid Mg/Li systems approaching TRL 4-5.

Materials innovations has been central to this progress. Biradar *et al.*,[10] emphasise that magnesium's favourable charge-to-mass ratio and comparable ionic radius to lithium make MIBs attractive alternatives, yet divalent Mg^{2+} insertion continues to pose significant challenges. Limited cathode compatibility, dissolution of active organics, and instability of many electrolytes hinder reliable performance. Attempts to overcome these limitations through molecular reengineering of rylene imides and their polymer derivatives have delivered incremental improvements, but issues with cycling stability and output voltage remain.

Further progress has been driven by two-dimensional materials such as graphene, black phosphorus, and MXenes [13]. Graphene has improved electron transfer, capacity, and rate performance but its practical use is constrained by irreversible capacity loss during early cycles. Black phosphorus offers high theoretical capacity but suffers from air sensitivity and complex, costly synthesis methods. MXenes show considerable promise as electrode materials, yet they still require substantial optimisation before achieving commercial viability. In contrast to lithium-ion systems, which already have field-ready prototypes, magnesium systems remain limited in laboratory stages underscoring their early TRL positioning.

4.3 Research Question 2: What are the cost and scalability challenges of magnesium-based systems?

Although material and design innovations have shown promise, the scalability of magnesium-based batteries remains constrained by high production costs and limited manufacturability. Many of the effective cathodes require complex or expensive synthesis, while lower-cost alternatives generally underperform. As a result, most advances remain confined to laboratory prototypes at TRL 3-4, with limited pathways for scaling towards industrial production.

Zhang *et al.* [12] demonstrated the potential of povidone iodine (PVPI) cathodes, which achieved improved capacities and stability compared to earlier Mg-storage materials. However, issues such as shuttle effect and active material loss continue to undermine long-term reliability, limiting their commercial feasibility. Similarly, Lui *et al.* [15] reported on novel magnesium-air battery design incorporating an "all-in-one" Mg anode, achieving an efficiency of 69.7% and a sustained operation time of 506 hours. While this represents an

important step forward, it remains a laboratory-scale prototype and highlights the gap between technical feasibility and scalable manufacturing.

Cost pressures are not confined to electrodes. Electrolyte preparation is also resource intensive, and solid-state alternatives, while safer, currently require complex processing. Promising systems such as vanadium-based electrodes and Magnesium Cobalt Oxide ($MgCo_2O_4$) cathodes demonstrate strong electrochemical performance but present stability and manufacturing barriers that restrict their progression beyond experimental scales. Furthermore, life-cycle assessments of magnesium-sulphur batteries such as the study by Montenegro *et al.* [17], reveal that although current prototypes perform poorly relative to lithium-ion technologies, optimised designs could potentially surpass them. This reinforces the conclusion that scaling strategies must consider both economic viability and environmental performance.

Compared with sodium- and zinc-based systems, which have advanced to TRL 6-8 through pilot demonstrations, magnesium systems remain confined below TRL5, reinforcing scalability barriers.

While progress has been made in demonstrating new electrode and electrolyte systems, cost and scalability remain key bottlenecks that limit readiness and constrain advancements beyond TRL 4 prototypes.

4.4 Research Question 3: What are the applications and research gaps for magnesium-based systems?

Current research on magnesium-based energy storage systems is concentrated primarily on stationary and grid-scale applications, reflecting the urgent demand for long-duration and cost-effective storage to support renewable energy integration. However, there has been comparatively little focus on niche applications such as off-grid electrification, remote industrial operations, or hybrid storage systems. Across the literature, most report developments remain at TRL 3-4, and no applications have progressed to consistent field demonstrations beyond TRL 5.

Hybrid systems offer one of the most promising avenues for bridging these gaps. Magnesium-lithium batteries (MLIBs), for instance, combine the rapid kinetics of lithium with the high capacity of magnesium. Dong *et al.* [9] showed that rutile-type MoO_2 cathodes achieved discharge capacities of 253 mAh/g with stable performance over 100 cycles. Aqueous hybrid systems such as Mg/Na and Mg/Zn have also demonstrated encouraging results, although their readiness remains at early stages. These examples underscore the potential of hybridisation to overcome the sluggish Mg^{2+} diffusion kinetics that limit pure magnesium systems.

Other exploratory applications include magnesium-sulphur (Mg-S) systems, which have been assessed through life-cycle analysis. Montenegro *et al.* [17] concluded that while Mg-S prototypes compare poorly with lithium-ion batteries in terms of efficiency and resource demand, optimised designs could eventually outperform both lithium-ion and lithium-sulphur technologies. Nonetheless, the absence of real-world validation and reliance on hypothetical optimisation scenarios demonstrate that these systems are still confined to laboratory research.

Both Mg-S and Mg-air chemistries illustrate potential long-term advantages over LIBs, yet their readiness is still constrained to laboratory prototypes without field validation.

While magnesium batteries have been positioned mainly for grid-scale storage, there is a notable lack of exploration into alternative applications that could serve as practical entry points for deployment. Progress remains limited to experimental demonstrations, with no evidence of operational prototypes at TRL 5-6 across these niches.

4.5 Research Question 4: What are the implications for research and policy?

For magnesium-based energy storage systems to advance toward higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRL 7-8) and eventually commercialisation, coordinated action is required across research, industry, and policy. The literature demonstrates steady laboratory-scale progress, but the absence of field prototypes and of harmonised reporting standards continue to constrain progress beyond experimental stages.

A recurring challenge is inconsistency in reporting electrochemical performance. Studies often highlight improvements in capacity, Coulombic efficiency, or cycling stability, but differing measurement protocols and incomplete reporting limit comparability across research groups. This lack of standardisation hinders benchmarking of magnesium systems against lithium-ion technologies and slows the identification of genuinely scalable breakthroughs. Field trials at TRL 5-6, which are essential for validating laboratory results in real-world conditions, remain virtually absent across the reviewed studies.

Several works emphasise the need for supportive frameworks. Xu *et al.* [13] highlight that while advances in materials and electrode designs are encouraging, structural improvements and prototype testing are necessary for magnesium technologies to reach long-term stability. Similarly, environmental assessments of Mg-S systems by Montenegro *et al.* [17] indicate that policy and research must be jointly oriented towards sustainable scale-up, including low-carbon manufacturing and integration of recycling pathways. Without such policy interventions, high-cost synthesis methods and limited comparability across studies will continue to delay industrial adoption.

Advancing magnesium-based systems will require a dual emphasise on standardised full-cell reporting and coordinated prototype demonstrations. At present, the lack of comparability and the absence of field validation are major barriers to readiness progression, keeping most systems below TRL 5. Policy measures that incentivise harmonisation, fund demonstration projects, and promote sustainable manufacturing practices are therefore critical to bridging the gap between laboratory research and commercial deployment.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

Magnesium-based energy storage systems are increasingly recognised as promising candidates in the transition to renewable energy, offering intrinsic advantages such as resource abundance, environmental compatibility, and high volumetric capacity [1]-[5]. Recent progress in electrode design, electrolyte composition, and nanostructured materials has improved safety, stability, and performance [6], [8], [13]. Hybrid approaches, particularly Mg/Li and Mg/Na systems, show potential for overcoming magnesium's sluggish ion diffusion [2], [3].

Despite these advances, most developments remain at TRL 2-4, with no consistent demonstrations of TRL 5-6. Key barriers include limited cathode compatibility, instability of electrolytes, complex manufacturing requirements, and high system costs [6], [10], [12], [17]. Compared with sodium- and zinc-based chemistries, magnesium technologies lag in demonstration projects and supply chain readiness. Furthermore, performance claims often rely on idealised laboratory cells rather than validated prototypes, highlighting the urgent need for harmonised reporting protocols.

5.2 Recommendations

Future research should prioritise the development of scalable cathode and electrolyte materials, targeting stable capacities above 200 mAh/g for more than 100 cycles, alongside

standardised performance reporting and independent validation to ensure comparability across studies.

For industry, investment in pilot-scale prototypes (1-10 kWh class) and hybrid chemistries are essential, supported by robust techno-economic and life cycle assessments. Early demonstration projects in grid and off-grid applications could accelerate readiness progression.

For policymakers, targeted support is needed through incentives for demonstration projects, supply chain development, and the integration of sustainability benchmarks, including life-cycle assessments and recycling pathways, into funding frameworks. Coordinated stakeholder action is therefore critical to move Mg-ESS beyond laboratory prototypes to achieve TRL 5-6 demonstrations that pave the way for commercial viability.

6 FUNDING

The authors received financial support from the South African National Energy Development Institute (SANEDI) for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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AN ASSESSMENT OF RISKS IN RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

South Africa remains significantly dependent on fossil fuels despite Africa's abundance of natural resources. The Department of Energy introduced the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), targeting 17.8 GW of electricity generation from renewable sources by 2030, and launched the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) in 2011. However, progress has been limited, with only 36% of the target capacity procured to date. This study aims to identify and evaluate the critical risks impacting renewable energy project implementation in South Africa and the attainment of the IRP 2030 goals. Data were collected through structured questionnaires from ten stakeholders in the renewable energy sector, using risk categories derived from a literature review. A subsequent risk assessment workshop facilitated the ranking of these risks. Findings highlight inconsistent REIPPPP rollout and environmental regulatory challenges as the most significant barriers, and the study offers insights to guide future renewable energy planning and policy development.

Keywords: Renewable Energy, Independent Power Producers

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

South Africa's energy system is predominantly powered by fossil fuels, with coal remaining the primary energy source [1]. Despite the country's abundant renewable energy potential—including wind, solar, and hydro resources—there remains a slow transition towards sustainable alternatives. This continued reliance on fossil fuels has adverse economic, social, and environmental consequences. Investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency is essential for sustainable development [2]. Nevertheless, renewable energy policy adoption across Africa has generally been slow, and implementation efforts often lack momentum.

In South Africa, electricity generation is controlled by the state-owned utility, Eskom, which has faced persistent challenges in meeting national electricity demand since 2008. Frequent load shedding caused by breakdowns in aging coal-fired infrastructure has led to widespread energy insecurity [3]. These crises underscored the urgent need to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy solutions.

In response, the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) introduced the Renewable Energy Feed-in Tariff (REFIT) in 2009, to alleviate the energy shortfall and reduce reliance on coal-based generation. Initially, the programme prioritized wind, concentrated solar power (CSP), and hydropower, later expanding to include biomass and photovoltaic (PV) technologies. In 2010, the South African Department of Energy released the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), outlining a strategic path for electricity generation to 2030. The IRP called for a diverse energy mix—combining coal, nuclear, gas, hydropower, and renewables—to double generation capacity and meet growing demand. Notably, it allocated 59% of the planned 29,300 MW capacity to renewable energy sources.

To support these targets, the government launched the Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (IPPPP), later refined into the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) in 2011. REIPPPP aimed to install 17.4 GW of renewable capacity by 2030, with short-term goals of 5,000 MW by 2019 and an additional 2,000 MW by 2020. However, as of December 2020, only 6,422 MW had been procured, and just 4,707 MW had been operationalised. The purpose of this study is to identify and evaluate the critical risks impacting renewable energy project implementation in South Africa and the attainment of the IRP 2030 goals.

1.2 Objectives

Achieving the IRP 2030 targets hinges on the successful implementation of renewable energy projects. These projects face a range of risks that can impact timelines, costs, and performance. In South Africa, the implementation of IPPPP and REIPPPP programmes partially mitigated the political, economic, and social risks. Prior research often focuses on specific technologies or investor concerns. This study explores the perspectives of various stakeholders involved in South Africa's renewable energy sector to identify, classify, and evaluate risks that could hinder project delivery and policy goals.

The following research questions were formulated to achieve the research objectives:

1. What risks do the South African renewable energy projects face?
2. Are these risks unique to the industry and type of renewable energy project?
3. Are the risks faced by renewable energy projects in South Africa similar to risks experienced by global renewable energy projects?
4. How do the risks rank relative to the importance, and how are these risks mitigated?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sources of renewable energy in South Africa

Renewable energy refers to energy derived from natural sources that are replenished over time, such as solar, wind, hydro, biomass, and geothermal resources. These sources offer reduced environmental impacts, primarily due to their low greenhouse gas emissions compared to fossil fuels. The major sources of renewable energy are solar, wind, water, biomass, and geothermal. Globally, the adoption of renewable energy sources has multiplied significantly, but the sector still only accounts for a fifth of the global energy consumption according to the International Energy Agency [4].

In South Africa, coal dominates the energy mix, accounting for approximately 69% of supply, followed by crude oil (14%) and renewables at 11%. According to Eskom's 2020 Integrated Results, 84% of electricity is generated from coal-fired power stations. Despite this, the electricity sector has seen the highest adoption of renewables, aligning with the global adaptation trend, followed by transport applications using biofuels.

The country's renewable energy potential is particularly strong in solar and wind. South Africa receives approximately 2,500 hours of sunshine per year, with an average solar irradiation of 2,000 kWh/m^2 [5]. The Northern Cape, with the highest solar irradiation (up to 3,200 kWh/m^2), hosts most solar projects.

Wind energy potential has been mapped through the Wind Atlas for South Africa (WASA), identifying the Eastern, Western, and Northern Cape provinces as high-resource areas. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) estimates that 6,700 GW of wind energy could be generated if wind farms were installed nationwide, excluding urban settlements.

To support strategic deployment, the Department of Environmental Affairs has gazetted Renewable Energy Development Zones (REDZs) which prioritizes geographic areas for large-scale solar photovoltaics and wind developments based on resource availability and reduced environmental conflict [6].

2.2 Risks in projects

The concept of risk varies by context, but it generally refers to the uncertainty of achieving objectives due to potential events or conditions. Islam and Tedford [7] state that traditionally, risk is viewed as the potential for loss or failure, but modern definitions also recognize the potential for both negative and positive outcomes. Several studies [8,9] suggest that risk arises from the combination of the likelihood of an event and its potential impact.

According to the APM Body of Knowledge [10], risk management is *"a process that allows individual risk events and overall project risk to be understood and managed proactively, optimizing success by minimizing threats and maximizing opportunities."* Risk management is applicable across all domains—projects, organizations, economies, and societies—and follows an iterative process. Establishing a clear risk context, which includes both internal and external environments as well as stakeholder attitudes and risk appetite, is a critical first step in effective risk management [11].

2.2.1 Risks in construction and engineering projects

Construction and engineering projects inherently face diverse and complex risks. Studies of major South African projects, such as the 2010 World Cup infrastructure and Gautrain, have shown that political, financial, environmental, and technical challenges significantly impacted project outcomes [14]. Key issues included cost escalation, energy shortages due to Eskom's supply constraints, and a shortage of skilled labour, often requiring expensive international expertise. Project success is typically measured against the dimensions of time, cost, quality, safety, and sustainability. Zou, Zhang, and Wang [13] emphasize that risk management is

essential for achieving these objectives. One of the most critical risks identified is a "tight project schedule," which affects time, cost, and quality. Szymański [14] categorized construction project risks according to the project life cycle, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Project risks throughout project life cycle

Types of risk	Risk Description	Project Life cycle
Financial	Inflation, poor cost estimates, political and economic instability	Preliminary and detailed Design, Tender, Construction, Financing
Time-related	Delays in project execution	Preliminary Design, Tender, Detailed Design, Construction
Technical	Design flaws or inappropriate technology selection	Preliminary and detailed Design, Construction
Market	Market response and demand for the project output	Tender, Construction, Financing
Environmental/ Natural	Unanticipated environmental impacts	Detailed Design, Construction, Financing
External	Socioeconomic instability, policy changes	Construction, Financing
Human factor	Health and safety issues during execution	Detailed Design, Construction

2.2.2 Risks in renewable energy projects

Risk in the power generation sector is inherently multi-dimensional and varies significantly by country, technology, and regulatory environment [15,16]. In South Africa, perceived risks such as political instability, limited human capacity, and corruption have historically deterred private investment in renewable energy [17]. However, the introduction of policy frameworks such as REIPPPP has mitigated many of these concerns and attracted significant private sector participation. Seetharaman *et al.* [18] emphasize that renewable energy development is influenced not only by external factors, such as environmental regulations and technological advancements, but also by internal organizational factors, including employee skills and operational stability, as illustrated in Figure 1.

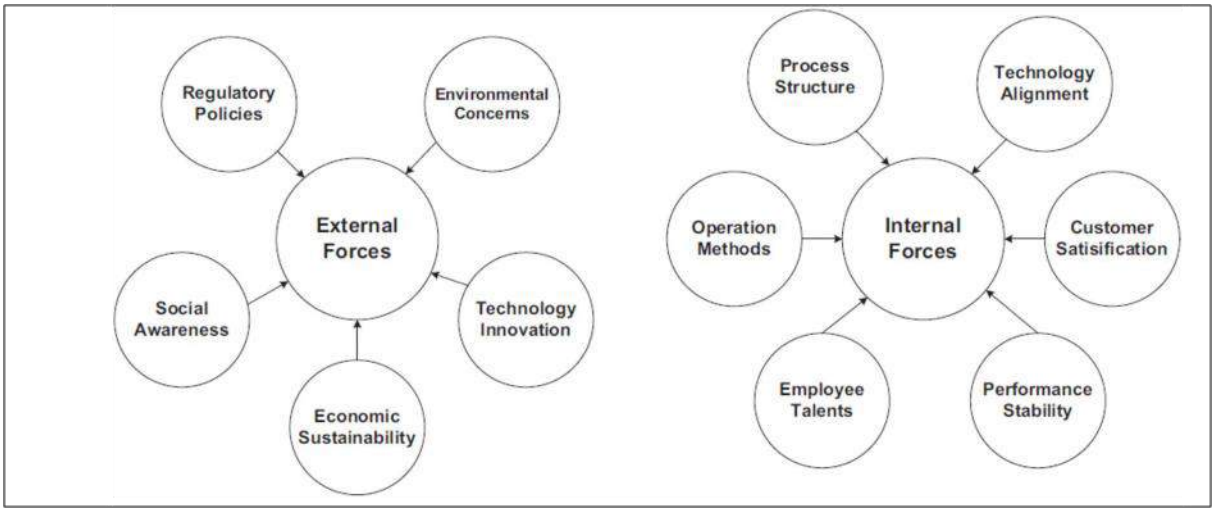

Figure 11: Factors considered to influence renewable energy growth [18]

Global investment in renewable energy technologies has increased rapidly over the years, but investors must understand associated risks and uncertainty through the planning, construction,

and operational phases. Different stakeholders have commissioned many studies to identify the risks in these international renewable projects. Most literature focuses on macro-level political and economic risks or on individual technologies, with limited focus on project-specific operational and construction challenges in South Africa's context.

Globally, key risks in renewable energy projects are generally categorized as:

- **Political / Policy Risks**: Regulatory uncertainty, policy reversals, government instability
- **Financial Risks**: Revenue insecurity, inflation, exchange rate fluctuations
- **Technical Risks**: Resource variability, technology failure
- **Socio-economic Risks**: Public opposition, job displacement
- **Market Risks**: Demand instability, pricing mechanisms
- **Environmental Risks**: Biodiversity impact, land use conflicts
- **Construction Risks**: Cost overruns, delays
- **Operational Risks**: Equipment breakdown, maintenance failures

These categories provide a broad framework for analysing risk across renewable energy projects and inform the risk assessment approach in this study.

2.3 ISO 31000:2018 Risk Management Standard

This research adopts the ISO 31000:2018 risk management framework to systematically identify, assess, and respond to risks in South African renewable energy projects. The methodology integrates both qualitative and quantitative elements, structured around the following core phases:

1. **Risk Identification**: Risk categories from the literature were used to design a semi-structured questionnaire for stakeholder interviews. This phase addressed three key research questions:
    - What risks are prevalent in South African renewable energy projects?
    - Are these risks specific to certain technologies or the sector?
    - How do these risks compare to those in global contexts?
2. **Risk Analysis and Evaluation**: Interview responses were analysed for frequency and thematic significance. The most frequently cited risks were further examined in a stakeholder workshop, where participants assigned scores for *likelihood* and *consequence* based on a defined risk matrix. This phase was to refine the initial questions from the risk identification phase and answer the last research question:
    - How do these risks rank by importance, and how are they mitigated?
3. **Risk Response**: A risk rating was calculated using the formula (Equation 1):

    $$L_e = P_e \times P_i \times L_t \quad (1)$$

    where: L_e = Expected loss I P_e = Probability of risk event I P_i = Probability of impact I L_t = Total potential loss

Risks were then plotted on a risk matrix and categorized into action levels (A–D). Recommendations for mitigation were developed from both literature and stakeholder input.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design and approach

Research design is a framework that provides a structured plan for data collection and analysis to address the research questions [19,20]. This study employed an exploratory research design using a mixed-methods approach to investigate the risks associated with renewable energy projects in South Africa. Risks were identified qualitatively through stakeholder engagement, while the quantitative section assessed the relative significance of these risks.

The philosophical stance underpinning this research is interpretivist, acknowledging that risk perceptions vary depending on stakeholder context. Accordingly, risks were examined from multiple viewpoints across the renewable energy value chain.

To guide the research design, the following foundational questions were considered:

- What is reality? What type of risks are prevalent in renewable energy projects? **Response**: Risks are perceived differently by various stakeholders due to their unique contexts, suggesting that multiple valid interpretations of reality exist.
- What and how can we know about these risks? **Response:** Understanding risks requires direct engagement with stakeholders involved in renewable energy projects, supported by the researcher's engineering experience in project risk assessments.
- How best can the question be researched? What data is available? **Response:** prior research and documented risks will provide a foundation for stakeholder interviews. These will be expanded through qualitative inquiry and validated via quantitative ranking to identify additional risks.
- How can data be collected and analysed? Is this technique appropriate for this research question? **Response:** The collection of data will be conducted in sequential phases. The initial stage will be through interaction with the stakeholders to identify the risks through the subjectivity of the parties. The ranking of these risks will be applied by using the risk assessment tools during a structured workshop, utilising mathematical calculations. The triangulation of data ensured robustness and enriched the findings.

3.2 Research population and sampling

The study targeted a spectrum of stakeholders directly involved in renewable energy projects under the REIPPPP, and the sample included individuals involved in project design, execution, operation, financing, and regulation. The research follows a phenomenological approach to understand lived experiences and perceptions of stakeholders. Based on methodological guidance for phenomenological studies, several studies recommend a sample size of six to ten [21,22,23]. Based on the 112 projects awarded as of December 2020, a sample size of ten respondents was deemed sufficient. All respondents had at least four years' experience and were affiliated with companies actively participating in the REIPPPP. Table 2 lists the respondents' experience and their role in the REIPPPP.

Table 2: Overview of respondents

Respondent	Role and Responsibility in RE	Involvement in REIPPP
Respondent 1: RE1	Electrical Engineer in the role of Renewables Engineer within an OEM who was involved in Bid1-4. The OEM is now working being an IPP for the next bid round for wind energy	IPP previously was an OEM
Respondent 2: RE2	Investment Advisor in the renewable energy environment	High
Respondent 3: RE3	Business Development Manager for an IPP who primarily in solar and wind REIPPPP from rounds 3 and 4	High
Respondent 4: RE4	Design engineer with an IPP who has participated in the wind REIPPPP round 2 to 4b	High
Respondent 5: RE5	Engineering manager in an IPP company during bids 1 to 3	No longer involved
Respondent 6: RE6	Construction Manager with an EPC involved in the REIPPPP	High
Respondent 7: RE7	Environmental researcher focusing on RE integration into a sustainable environment	High
Respondent 8: RE8	Environmental specialist within the RE industry	High
Respondent 9: RE9	Electrical Engineer with Eskom Distribution	Medium
Respondent 10: RE10	Electrical Engineer with Eskom Operations and Technology	Medium

3.3 Data collection

A sequential data collection strategy was employed, beginning with qualitative methods and followed by quantitative validation.

1. Qualitative Phase: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected industry stakeholders. These interviews were guided by a structured questionnaire informed by risk categories from the literature. The aim was to capture a wide range of perceived risks affecting renewable energy project delivery under REIPPPP. Interview data included verbatim transcripts and field notes.

2. Quantitative Phase: Based on the qualitative results, a second-phase questionnaire was developed to assess the significance of frequently identified risks. A risk assessment workshop was subsequently conducted with experts, including engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) personnel, environmental consultants, independent power producers (IPPs), and original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). The participants are involved in different stages of RE projects, and their different companies are involved in the REIPPPP programme. Their diverse skills, renewable type, and role in RE projects provided invaluable insight during risk ranking. Table 3 presents the participants of the workshop.

Table 3: List of participants for the risk workshop

Participant Profession	Company involved in RE Projects
Safety Manager	EPC for RE projects
Construction Manager	EPC for RE projects
Project Manager	IPP
Project Manager	EPC for RE projects
Environmental officer	Environmental consultant for IPP
Design Engineer	IPP in solar and wind
Design Engineer- grid	Transmission at Eskom
Business Development Engineer	OEM, EPC and IPP
Environment Manager	IPP
Electrical Engineer	OEM - solar projects
Legal Counsel	IPP in solar, wind and gas

Participants assigned scores to risks based on defined criteria for likelihood and consequence using a 5x5 risk matrix. The strategies used for data collection are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Strategies used for data collection

Data Collection Strategy	Type of strategy used	Research participant involved	Type of data and outcomes
Qualitative Interviews	Semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews.	Renewable energy professionals.	• Interview transcripts and field notes. • Thematic codes.
Quantitative Workshop	Questionnaire with rating matrix.	EPCs, IPPs, Environmental consultants, OEM.	• Risk scores and rankings.

3.4 Data analysis

Interview transcripts were coded using thematic analysis to identify recurring risks. Coding was conducted manually and verified using ATLAS.ti 9 software. Risks with frequencies greater than one were selected for further quantitative analysis. A risk rating matrix was used in the workshop to rank each risk based on:

- **Likelihood**: Number of occurrences in the last ten years or across earlier REIPPPP bid windows.
- **Consequence**: Estimated project impact in terms of schedule delay, cost overrun, and environmental effect.

The likelihood and consequence ranking were assigned using Table 5. The ranking was based on the likelihood of the event happening or the number of occurrences in the last ten years. The consequence scale was developed using the following assumptions [24]: Total project costs from the 74 projects already in operation were estimated to be R 0.024 Bn/MW. Wind project capacity is capped at 140MW, and solar capacity is capped at 75MW for REIPPPP. The resultant cost for wind and solar projects was averaged out, resulting in a project cost of R2.6 billion (Bn).

The energy purchase price is 2.25 R/kWh; RE projects supply the grid on average twelve hours a day. Therefore, the potential electricity lost per day the RE project is late was calculated in gigawatt-hours (GWh). The total loss rating was aligned to Eskom's risk rating for GWh loss. The rating was applied to the project schedule and revenue loss.

It was assumed that significant delays in the project would occur during the construction phase. Even the earlier delays in the bidding phases of the project will result in a shift in the construction completion date. These delays will increase project costs. Construction cost was estimated using a 40-hour work week, about 25 site personnel with an average hourly rate of R1200/hr.

Table 5: Likelihood and Consequences risk rating scale

Score	1	2	3	4	5
Likelihood	Rare < 1 occur-rence	Unlikely ≥1 occurrence	Moderate ≥1 occurrence	Likely ≥3 occurrences	Certain ≥5 occurrences
Consequence	< 1month delay <2% cost increase	≥ 3-6 months delay ≥2-5% cost increase	≥ 6-12 months delay ≥5-10% cost increase	≥12-18 months delay ≥10-15% cost increase	≥ 18 months delay ≥15-20% cost increase

Using these scores, the expected loss was calculated with Equation (1). Each risk was then plotted on a risk matrix, Figure 2, and categorised as follows:

- **A**: Critical – Immediate mitigation required
- **B**: High – Medium-term mitigation required
- **C**: Moderate – Monitoring and long-term planning required
- **D**: Low – Acceptable with current controls

Risk Matrix						
Consequence	5	C	B	A	A	A
	4	D	C	B	A	A
	3	D	D	C	B	A
	2	D	D	D	C	B
	1	D	D	D	D	C
		1	2	3	4	5
		Likelihood				

Figure 2: Risk assessment matrix

4 RESULTS

4.1 Qualitative findings

The questionnaire used for the interviews had two sections. The general section is to assess the suitability of the respondent based on their experience in renewable energy projects. The second section had direct questions on risks utilising categories identified from the literature review. All respondents were affiliated with companies actively participating in REIPPPP and had a minimum of four years' experience in renewable energy project development. Most were involved in both solar and wind energy projects, providing a broad perspective across technologies. Interview feedback was largely positive regarding government efforts to support renewables. However, respondents noted that the inconsistent implementation of these plans introduced significant uncertainty and risk. Using the categorized risk framework, Table 6 summarizes the frequency of risks mentioned across interviews.

Table 6: Frequencies for risks in renewable energy projects

Risk	Frequency
Inconsistent rollout	19
Lack of Policy certainty	14
Regulatory restrictions on the electricity sector	12
Environmental regulations and approvals	9
Grid capacity and connection issues	8
Political commitment gaps	8
Onerous application processes	8
Lack of community engagement	7
Skills and construction capacity gaps	6
Eskom financial instability	5
Local content requirements	5
Reduced production or demand	4
Civil unrests	3
Lack of a transition plan	3
Lack of collaboration- Eskom and RE	2
Long lead times from bidding to economic status	2
Municipality feed-in-tariffs	2
Safety during construction	2

Risks with a frequency rating of 1 included Conservative environmental approach, corruption, environmental sensitivity areas, equipment breakdown, inaccurate cost estimates, land

availability, and power generation vs load demand mismatch. The risks identified for construction and operations were found to be similar and therefore combined. There were no risks cited for reputational, social, or market risk groups. The respondents credited this to the successful implementation of previous REIPPPP projects, community upliftment plans requirements, and the implementation of power purchase agreements (PPAs) between Eskom and IPPs. Political risks dominated, accounting for 69 mentions, far exceeding the frequency of any other category. Notably, risks related to construction, environmental regulation, and technology were also cited but less frequently.

4.2 Quantitative Findings

Quantitative data were collected to assess the significance of the risks identified in Table 6. A questionnaire for risks with more than one frequency was developed, and each risk was assigned a risk code based on its category. Risk groups were political risk (PR), financial risk (FR), environmental risk (ER), construction and operational risk (COR), and technological risk (TR). A risk assessment workshop was held with EPC personnel, an environmental consultant, design engineers from an IPP, and OEM personnel. Participants rated the selected risks using a 5x5 matrix based on the likelihood and consequence risk rating scale in Table 5. Each risk rating was calculated using equation (1), assigned a score (Table 7), and mapped into one of four action categories. Table 7 presents the risk assessment results.

Key Findings (Top Risk Rankings):

- **Ranking A (Critical – Immediate Action Required):**
  - *Inconsistent rollout of REIPPPP*
  - *Environmental regulations and approval delays*
- **Ranking B (High – Medium-Term Mitigation):**
  - Grid infrastructure constraints.
  - Regulatory complexity in the electricity sector
  - Onerous application and bidding procedures
- **Ranking C (Moderate – Monitor and Plan):**
  - Local content requirements
  - Long lead times between bidding and commercial operation
  - Political uncertainty

Risk Details		Risk Analysis		
Risk Code	Risk Name	Likelihood	Consequence	Risk Rating
COR3	Civil unrests	4	1	D
ER1	Environmental regulations and approvals	4	4	A
FR1	Eskom financial instability	3	1	D
TR1	Grid capacity and connection issues	4	3	B
PR1	Inconsistent roll out	4	4	A
COR1	Lack community engagements	2	1	D
PR8	Lack of collaboration- Eskom and RE	2	2	D
COR2	Lack of local skills and construction capabilities	3	2	D
PR2	Lack of Policy certainty	3	3	C
PR4	Lack of political commitment	3	3	C
PR7	Lack of transition plan	3	2	D
FR2	Local content requirements	3	3	C
PR9	Long leadtimes from bidding to economic status	3	4	B
FR4	Municipality feed-in-tariffs	2	1	D
PR5	Onerous application process	4	3	B
FR3	Reduced production or demand	2	2	D
PR3	Regulatory restrictions in electricity sector	4	3	B
COR4	Safety during construction	4	1	D

Table 7: Risk assessment results

Risk Matrix Visualization

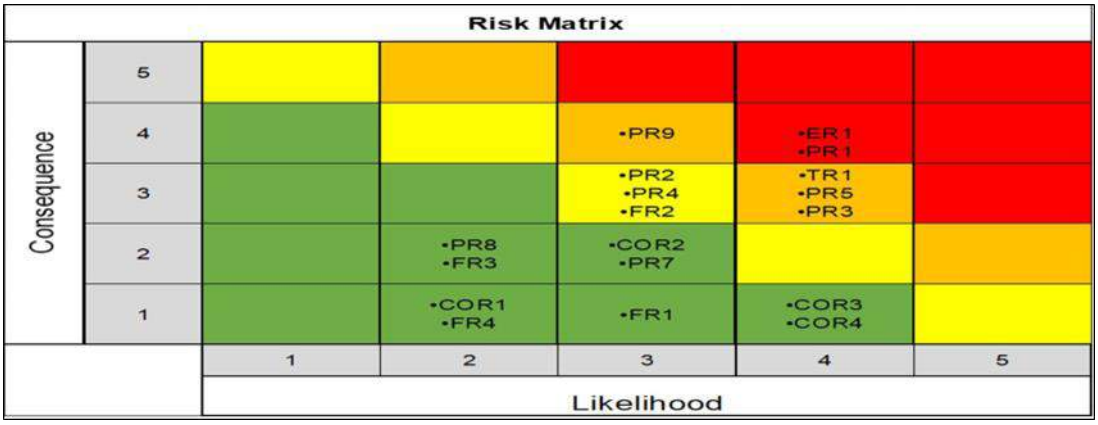

Figure 3: Risk ranking on risk matrix

Figure 3 visualizes the risks on the risk matrix, and the results underscore that political and regulatory uncertainty, as well as environmental approval processes, present the most substantial barriers to renewable energy project delivery in South Africa.

4.3 Discussion

The findings highlight that political and regulatory factors are the most significant risks facing renewable energy projects in South Africa. These risks not only recur often in stakeholder feedback but also rank highest in severity during quantitative evaluation.

Inconsistent REIPPPP Rollout

The most often cited and highest-ranked risk was the inconsistent implementation of the REIPPPP. While initial bid windows (Rounds 1–4) were successful, delays and uncertainty in launching subsequent windows disrupted momentum across the sector. All stakeholders emphasized that regular and transparent procurement cycles are critical to industry stability

and long-term planning. Disruptions in the REIPPPP rollout have cascading effects across the project value chain:

- **Manufacturing**: Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) established local production facilities to meet local content requirements. Delays in procurement cycles led to the closure of these facilities.
- **Skills Development**: Independent Power Producers (IPPs) had invested in training local staff. However, gaps in project rollout forced skilled personnel to leave the sector.
- **Grid Planning**: Due to Eskom's, the national utility, limited resources, it cannot proactively invest in grid infrastructure without predictable REIPPPP timelines, worsening evacuation challenges for renewable projects.

Environmental Approvals and Regulations

The second most critical risk identified was the complexity and delay associated with environmental regulations and land-use approvals. Wind energy projects face high risks due to their dependence on site-specific wind resources, often found in ecologically sensitive areas. These risks manifest in longer approval timelines and project cost inflation.

Efforts such as the gazetting of Renewable Energy Development Zones (REDZs) and the development of generic Environmental Management Plans (EMPs) have reduced the environmental assessment period from 300 days to 100 days. However, further streamlining—especially for wind projects—is needed to reduce approval bottlenecks. This period has the potential to reduce further to 50 days for Phase 2 REDZ since the CSIR has developed a generic EMPR for solar and wind projects, which will fall under these zones.

Secondary Risks and Interconnections

Other risks—such as grid capacity constraints, onerous application processes, and local content enforcement—were ranked lower but remain significant due to their interdependence with political and regulatory factors. For example, regulatory complexity hinders Eskom's ability to plan and integrate new projects; extended bid-to-operation timelines increase costs and reduce investment appeal; and local content requirements, while beneficial for industrialization, are difficult to meet when procurement is irregular and uncoordinated.

5 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify and evaluate the risks that hinder the successful implementation of renewable energy projects in South Africa, with a particular focus on the REIPPPP and the country's IRP 2030 targets. Several key findings emerged.

5.1 Key findings and research questions

1. **What risks do South African renewable energy projects face?**

The most critical risks are political and regulatory in nature, specifically, the inconsistent rollout of the REIPPPP and delays in environmental approvals. These risks have widespread effects, impacting project planning, investment confidence, local content development, and grid readiness.

2. **Are these risks unique to the renewable energy industry and technology types?**

Yes. While general project risks (for example, cost overruns and delays) exist across industries, the political and environmental risks faced by renewable energy projects are compounded by their reliance on public sector frameworks and environmental compliance.

Renewable energy projects are reliant on the government to develop policies and mechanisms to advance their development. The South African government understands the importance of

renewable energy and the importance of achieving the IRP 2030 goals. However, changes within the government departments and ministerial offices delay the implementation of renewable projects. In addition, renewable energy projects integrate and are dependent on the existing downstream systems, over which the IPPs have no control. Therefore, the risks faced by renewable energy projects are not the same as other industries in South Africa.

Renewable energy types all face the same political and technical risks identified in the study. However, wind energy faces higher environmental risks than solar. Also, biomass projects are likely to face higher social risks than solar and wind. This is because biomass competes with food security for feedstock.

3. **Are the risks in South African projects like those globally?**

Risk categories such as political, regulatory, financial, and technical are broadly similar to global experiences. However, South Africa's specific challenges, such as Eskom's monopoly, delayed REIPPPP rounds, and lack of independent regulation, make the manifestation and severity of these risks unique.

South Africa has an Eskom monopoly as an electricity supplier, which is also state-owned. The electricity supply industry in South Africa is heavily regulated. The regulatory bodies are not independent of the government. These factors create political risks. Power producers cannot determine the price for supplying energy based on their investment, creating a financial risk. The infrastructure for electrical distribution in South Africa has insufficient capacity to support renewable energy projects.

Globally, political and legal (regulatory) risks were ranked high for renewable energy projects. Political risks were then followed by weather-related volume risks and financing risks during the financing stage. The political risks included changes in legal frameworks and policies, political instabilities and unrest, and wars were perceived as being the key risks faced by renewable energy projects [25]. Technological risks faced by global projects are mainly on resource availability and weather-related volumes. The grid connection issues affected offshore wind energy only [26].

4. How are these risks mitigated?

The stakeholders in renewable energy have implemented measures to mitigate these risks. However, the mitigations have reduced the likelihood of some of the risks, but the consequences remain the same.

- The Department of Energy has introduced new bid windows (e.g., BW5) and a Risk Mitigation IPP Programme (RMIPPPP) to revive investor confidence.
- The REDZ and generic EMPr have reduced environmental approval times but require further refinement, especially for wind energy.
- Greater collaboration between Eskom, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE), and the IPP Office is essential to align grid investment and REIPPPP rollout.
- Simplified application processes and standardized templates can improve project turnaround and reduce administrative burden.

5.2 Recommendations

1. **Establish a Predictable REIPPPP Rollout Plan**
   The South African government must commit to staggered, concurrent bid windows from 2021 to 2028 to meet IRP 2030 targets, and regular procurement cycles are essential for investment stability.

2. **Institutional Reform**
   The IPP Office should be moved out of ministerial control and operate independently to ensure continuity and reduce political interference.
3. **Tailor Environmental Processes for Wind Projects**
   Develop specific REDZs and EMPr for wind technology to mitigate land-use conflicts and ecological impacts without delaying development.
4. **Integrate Grid Planning with REIPPPP**
   Eskom should be directly involved in REDZ development and REIPPPP planning to ensure proactive investment in transmission infrastructure.
5. **Streamline Project Application and Evaluation**
   Introduce simplified, standardized application tools to reduce review time and enable faster project approvals.

5.3 Limitations and recommendations for further research

This study focused on REIPPPP projects in South Africa, particularly in wind and solar technologies. The rest of Africa has abundant natural resources, and the implementation of renewable energy in other African countries has also not progressed. Renewable energy projects in South Africa are focused on solar and wind, as this is informed by the REIPPPP determination. As a result, the findings may not fully represent other renewable energy types (e.g., biomass, hydro) or regions in Africa. Future research should explore:

- Risk factors in non-REIPPPP renewable projects
- Comparative studies across other African countries
- Impact of just energy transition mechanisms on long-term risk profiles

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SYSTEMS ENGINEERING AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN THE CIVIL ENGINEERING INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

As infrastructure projects become complex, traditional project management (PM) often falls short of ensuring timely completion, budget adherence, and stakeholder satisfaction. Integrating systems engineering (SE) with PM in civil engineering (CE) can enhance project outcomes by providing structured processes to manage complexity and risks. This study evaluates SE maturity in CE and proposes a framework for its integration with PM, addressing key gaps in the literature. By analysing CE projects in South Africa, the research highlights how SE practices, widely used in aerospace and IT, can be adapted for CE. However, SE adoption remains limited due to insufficient awareness and formal processes. The study identifies the need for formalised PM tools and early-stage SE activities like requirements analysis and validation. It presents a conceptual framework to guide CE firms in strengthening SE maturity, offering practical recommendations to improve project delivery in the South African CE industry.

Keywords: Systems Engineering, Project Management, Civil Engineering, Systems Engineering Maturity.

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1 INTRODUCTION

It is paramount for an organisation that the project, product development, or process improvement succeeds. For the most part, time, cost, and performance are key indicators of project success. Performance is painfully subjective and closely tied to the satisfaction of various stakeholders, which may vary according to the project in question [1]. A formal PM approach based on accepted standards and guidelines must be adopted for the practical success of projects. Increasing research proves that traditional PM methodologies are insufficient to ensure project success as project complexity increases. Many projects fail for various reasons related to PM [2]. SE introduces ways of eliminating and improving upon these factors for better project success.

An amalgamation of SE and PM increases the probability of projects finishing within budget, on schedule, and following expectations [3]. Developing a specialised approach in PM and SE proprietary to a project is essential to guarantee success. Many sectors have since adopted a successful SE to manage their systems and projects; some of these include aerospace, information technology and computing. While SE has been pivoted to project management in these industries, the process of SE in the civil engineering (CE) industry has been relatively slow.

Large infrastructure projects generally do not meet Cost and time targets; hence, SE processes are necessary for the industry [4]. CE design is traditionally quite linear and straightforward; it does not accommodate the iterative character of design changes, variations, and delays. This results in an activity-based monitoring approach, often devoid of objective, value-adding progress. However, CE can be multi-dimensional in hydrology, transportation, structural engineering, and geotechnics, with the distinction between consulting and construction work. Because of the complexity of the CE projects, the involvement of several disciplines, and the quite different tie-in disciplines within an industry, developing a more integrated and interdisciplinary approach, such as SE, to counter internal and external factors that affect project outcomes is necessary. As such, projects in CE are complicated; thus, SE has been recommended to improve the success rates in these projects [5]. This study focuses on integrating SE with PM in the CE industry to enhance the maturity of SE processes and ensure project delivery success.

Nevertheless, integrating the SE processes and PM methods may lead to a greater success rate in projects. This has been observed significantly in the aerospace and IT industries, where SE saves time and cost while satisfying the stakeholders' expectations [6]. However, the PM methods are generally the only paradigm for the CE domain, which leads to excess cost and overruns in time, which are permanent features of infrastructure projects. The restricted application of SE in CE projects, particularly in South Africa, raises concern about these projects' significance for the national economy. The onset of mega-infrastructure projects, such as power stations, road construction projects, and water pipelines, is paramount to the economic upliftment of the country, so their success is crucial.

To improve their concurrent application, this paper will study the CE industry's interface between SE and PM processes. In particular, the investigation is intended to determine the extent to which SE currently applies in the CE industry, evaluate the maturity of applied SE practices within the South African CE sector, and propose a framework to enhance SE maturity and its effective implementation. From an industrial engineering perspective, this study is situated within the broader discourse on optimising complex systems and processes.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Siedlecki [32], descriptive studies aim to observe and describe people, events or situations as they are and not manipulated by any variables. A researcher explains the sample

and/or variables or observes. In descriptive research, the hypotheses are not tested but generated with rather specific objectives and research questions that typically begin with "What", "When", "Where", or "How" but do not have "Why" question marks [7]. Simple descriptive research designs—for example, observational or survey—present results in terms of measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode, standard deviation) or report them in frequencies and percentages.

The most common types of research designs include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative design is an analytical approach that generates measures with a quantifiable or discrete value. Quantitative data is gathered using mathematical and statistical methods, focusing on experimental and non-experimental techniques. The qualitative design refers to explaining or getting meaning for the social or human problems in a person's mind[8]. This kind of design assumes that reality is a social construct, that variables are complicated to measure, and that data gathered will consist of a subjective perspective. Interviews, observation, and participation constitute the forms of research used in collecting data. Mixed methods attach both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research design, which are widely used for depth and breadth of understanding and corroboration, as stated by Schoonenboom and Johnson [9]. Typically, this method is used for triangulation, complementarity, developmental, initiation, and broadening when conducting a research study.

This descriptive study, which employs a mixed-method technique, is for complementarity and expansion. In reviewing the existing literature, qualitative design was explicitly used to integrate SE and PM in CE. Most of the studies conducted on the maturity of SE in the CE industry employed quantitative research methods based on survey questionnaires. Although descriptive, the methods provide the systemic insight and structured understanding that industrial engineers rely on when designing process improvement and integration interventions [10]. This explanatory approach reflects an industrial engineering orientation by establishing a baseline understanding of system maturity, a prerequisite for developing optimisation strategies [7].

The CE industry comprises clients, governing structures, consultants and contractors. The different structures are integral in running projects, and they all have project practitioners conducting project management tasks in various project phases. The consultants, however, are involved in all project phases from inception until the closeout phase. As a result, the consultants have project practitioners conducting project management tasks in all the project phases. The research population focused on project practitioners practising within consulting firms. Consulting Engineering South Africa (CESA) is a governing body that governs practising consulting firms, where consulting within the engineering fields needs to be registered. This study focused on project practitioners practising in registered consulting firms.

Sampling and sampling size selection procedures based on relevant effect size parameters have been developed, but rules of thumb often endure when planning multiple regression studies [11]. One reason for this enduring practice might stem from the challenge of establishing a reasonable a priori value for the effect size to be detected. The study aimed to establish the correlation between the application of SE amongst project practitioners and the CE industry, making this a relationship study [12]. The rule of thumb for a reasonable survey sample size is approximately 50 participants. For this study, a minimum of 50 participants was used.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Project Management

All project management techniques and methods, from planning to quality management and cost control to time control, are important in successfully delivering projects. A temporary operation is carried out to create a unique product, service, or result [13]. PM uses knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques applied to project activities to meet defined project requirements. The PMBoK presents a principles structure through which project management will be understood around the knowledge areas and process groups across the project lifecycle. PMBoK defines those knowledge areas, including project scope, time, cost, quality, resource, risk, and communications management. All include broad purchasing processes and applications that advocate successful project completion. PMBoK recommends a structured applied process configurable to particular project requirements [13].

Research comparing PM practice among project practitioners from CE and those from other industries reveals the uniqueness of the needs and preferences of CE project practitioners [14]. On the planning and resource-scheduling side, CE professionals emphasise critical path analysis. The complexities in managing CE megaprojects, which often involve high risks and costs, call for adopting a unique set of approaches to project management [15]. The PMBoK presents an extension that specifically deals with the management of construction projects, detailing the principles and practices unique to the CE industry. The various challenges this extension addresses cover time management, quality assurance, resource management, and risk management, all of which are pivotal to the successful delivery of CE projects. Nevertheless, the prospective methodologies in PMave failed to salvage some of the projects in CE, mainly due to an unprecedented level of growing complexity in construction megaprojects [13].

Poor project management practices were cited as a major contributor to project failure in an analysis of the shortcomings of social housing projects in South Africa [16]. Non-consultative projects and stakeholder engagement without considering project end-users made such failures possible. The PM framework proposed for these projects focused on stakeholder engagement and end-user satisfaction throughout the lifecycle [17]. The country also faces serious challenges regarding providing water infrastructure delivery, delays, cost overruns, poor quality of work, and little or no socioeconomic benefits. These have resulted from well-understood problems such as poor project management, inadequate communication, insufficient resources, and politics [18]. There is a need for a joint approach with all stakeholders in the project.

3.2 Systems Engineering

According to the International Council of Systems Engineering (INCOSE), systems engineering is an interdisciplinary approach that successfully realises the complexity of systems [19]. SE helps ensure that systems satisfy the needs of customers, stakeholders, or users. The systems engineering processes are performed during the entire system lifecycle to ensure the successful delivery of that system. Systems engineering includes a variety of technical processes such as requirements analysis, functional analysis, verification, and validation of systems. These are effective in aerospace, IT, and defence industries requiring interdisciplinary collaboration for complex systems [10]. The application of systems engineering in the CE industry is still nascent, while the associated advantages are becoming more evident.

Increasingly, interest in using SE in civil engineering projects has been articulated over the past several years. Research has turned up several factors that may enhance the successful implementation of SE in CE, such as well-defined requirements, adequate documentation,

interdisciplinary collaboration, and effective decision-making [20]. Such elements are cardinal in assuring that CE projects satisfy their stakeholders on time and within budget. Second, SE deals with the inherent complexity of CE projects, particularly litigation during the tenders [21]. By employing SE principles in the tendering process, CE organisations may reduce the labour associated with preparing competitive offers and ensure that all facets of the project are addressed.

Studies have found that integrating SE and PM processes is an essential success factor in complex projects [2]. The primary concern is that the integration should be done, as it can introduce new complexities otherwise. Other things that SE and PM processes have in common are risk management, quality assurance, and project planning. Integration allows customising project management activities toward the specific project's needs[22].

A joint undertaking between INCOSE, Project Management Institute, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology integrated SE and PM processes for complex projects. These fields overlap within scope management, schedule management, technical coordination, and system integration. While integrating SE and PM processes, factors such as culture differences in organisations, education-related concerns, objectives, and authority alignment must be considered, as they all appear to be requirements for achieving successful project outcomes [23]. SE provides the architecture for defining, designing, implementing, testing, and delivering the resulting projects' outputs. On that note, PM ensures that these activities are performed in the larger context of the business.

There have been many propositions for creating a standard SE and PM integration guideline that can be adapted to the specific needs of each project [24]. Steps in that guideline will include understanding the project vision, selecting suitable frameworks, grouping project documents, and establishing verification and validation processes.

3.3 Systems Engineering Enablers

SE enablers, like management structure and toolkits, are key to effectively instituting SE for infrastructure projects [25]. Prominent among the enablers is Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE), which stresses the development of a system model as a unified whole instead of being document-centric [26]. With models representing system requirements, structure, behaviour, and interactions, MBSE enhances communication, knowledge capture, and design accuracy, lowering development risk. However, MBSE is not receiving attention in CE projects due to low technical knowledge and awareness, especially concerning Africa [27].

Another prominent enabler is Building Information Modelling (BIM), a process based on 3D models that builds better planning, design and management of CE projects [28]. BIM allows data centralisation, cost possession, schedule maintenance and stakeholder collaboration [29]. Integrating SE processes with BIM in CE remains underdeveloped in terms of compliance, verification, and stakeholder management frameworks [30]. Bentley ProjectWise and dRofus are software solutions that enhance project management, document control, and requirements management [31]. These tools assist in managing project information, optimising workflows, and ensuring that design solutions meet the client's requirements [32]. Nevertheless, integration between SE and PM tools in the CE industry is lacking with these advancements, so tapping into their potential benefits remains elusive.

3.4 Systems Engineering Maturity

It includes the degree to which systems engineering activities are effectively employed/implemented in the organisation or project, which is called SE maturity. There are maturity models to assess readiness and capability, while capability maturity models (CMMI) judge current performance [33]. Such models supplement one another. Hence, they are widely favoured in complex sectors such as manufacturing. CMMI [34] indicates 22 core process areas,

which include configuration management, risk management, and project planning, plus four capability and five maturity levels. A tailored SE maturity model for CE projects defines process areas, capability levels, and corresponding maturity stages. This model identifies technological, conceptual, and organisational barriers to SE deployment in the CE industry that hinder collaboration and knowledge exchange with disparate systems and stakeholders [35].

The maturity model divides the SE deployment-readiness levels within its gradation-fives into "initial" (no SE application) to "excellent" (full SE integration). Studies reveal that SE team knowledge was linked with project success. The factors affecting project success include team members' SE expertise, knowledge processes, and organisational support to fill skill gaps. In South African manufacturing, for instance, SE maturity models have been implemented, where core and feedback components are used to assess SE processes in support of a general effort to enhance effectiveness in SE across various projects [10].

4 CONCEPTUAL METHOD

The CE industry has been running projects based on PM processes and tools since its inception. The processes have developed and improved over time, with the Project Management Institute publishing a construction management extension for PMBoK to cater specifically to the CE industry. PM alone has proven insufficient to ensure project success in the CE industry, as in all industries that deal with complexity. PM tools have been used in sectors such as BIM, which have processes similar to SE and aim to promote project success. To promote SE in the CE industry, there is a need to identify such tools and further develop them if necessary.

The two main aims of incorporating SE within CE firms [36]. Firstly, there is a need to enhance and refine working methods to improve the quality of the final product, and secondly, to reduce project failure costs. Project failure costs would be reduced by increasing CE firms' processes' clarity, traceability, and demonstrability. Lemberger [10] grouped SE processes into lifecycle integration, with SE processes and development phasing as the three main processes. These processes complement other frameworks while creating a better structure for SE process frameworks. The implementation of SE is subject to the environment and conditions of implementation, which introduce SE enablers. SE enablers support tools, personnel, knowledge and processes that promote SE implementation. Chen and Jupp [25] adopted the grouping of SE activities and expanded on it by including SE enablers. The identified enablers are people, process, protocol, and technology.

As seen in Figure 1, the proposed conceptual framework used in this study combines frameworks used in previous SE and SE maturity research. The framework uses a CMMI framework for the CE industry and a scale to measure SE maturity and investigate using PM tools resembling SE processes. The two concepts will use the same framework due to their link to SE.

In conceptualising projects within the CE industry, project practitioners mainly utilise PM tools and processes to deal with projects. SE maturity is indeed measured along SE processes and enablers, where PM tools, like BIM, are primarily at work today in the CE industry and have the potential to promote SE. Thus, PM tools in the CE industry are considered SE enablers in delivering CE projects. The framework has included SE enablers such as qualified human resources and proper processes to ensure that SE can be effectively practised through them. The livelihoods are essential, ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of SE processes for project success.

Table 1 lists the consolidated list of the SE processes and SE enablers considered for this conceptual model. The maturity model proposed to assess the level of application of SE in the CE industry expands on the CMMI. The framework offers a systematic method of evaluating

and improving SE. The maturity model is expected to provide the level of SE maturity and highlight the gaps in the application of SE in the CE industry, if any.

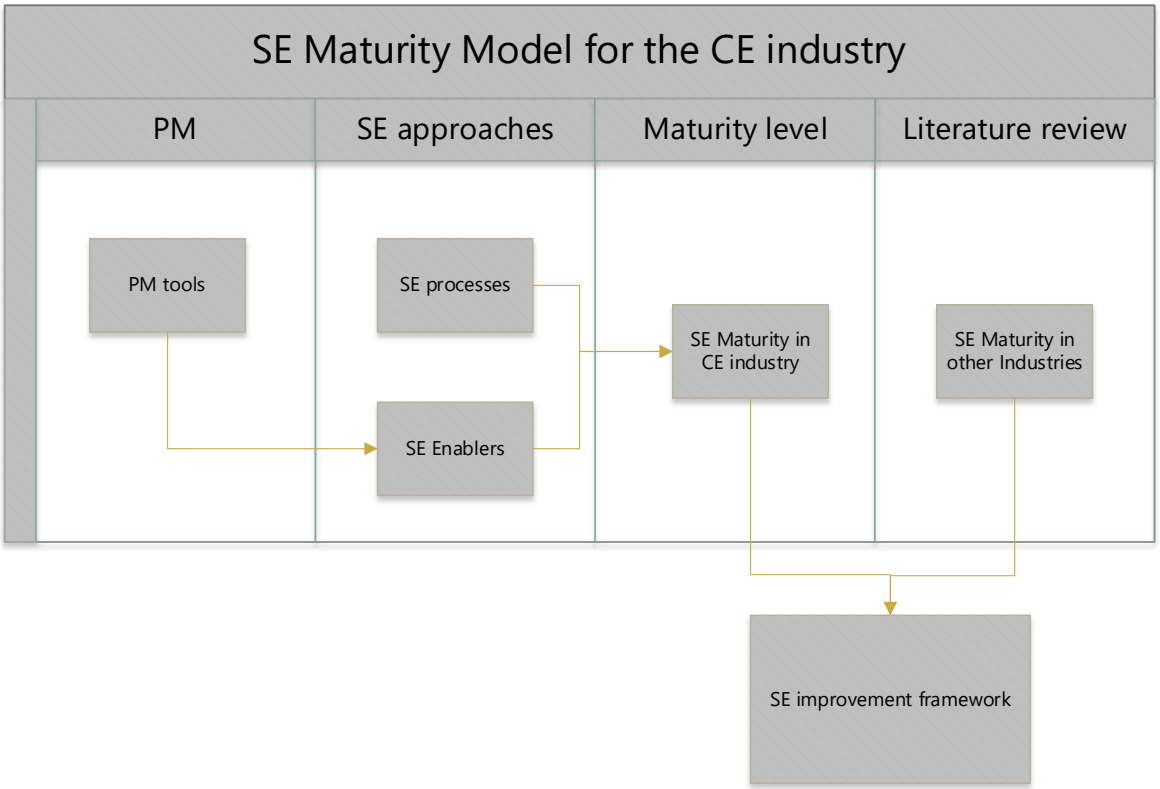

Figure 1: SE Maturity Model Framework for the CE Industry

Table 1: Systems Engineering Approaches

Systems Engineering Process	Systems Engineering Enablers
Verification	Integrated Product Teams
Validation	Systems Integrated Process
Configuration Management	SE Management Plan
Project Planning	MBSE
Project Monitoring and Control	Simulation and Analysis
Product Integration	Trade-off Analysis
Measurement and Analysis	
Requirements Development	
Requirements Management	

The framework seeks to answer the research questions, prove and validate the previous chapter's hypothesis, and further provide a framework to improve the maturity of SE in the CE industry. An ordinal scale will be used to measure or quantify SE maturity, consisting of the following:

- 0 - Not performed
- 1 - Initial definition
- 2 - Repeatable
- 3 - Defined
- 4 - Managed
- 5 - Optimising

5 RESULTS

The questionnaire survey yielded 51 responses, with an average of 38 valid responses and 13 with missing data. Some measures were implemented to extract data from persons of interest. This ensured that the survey was conducted on project practitioners who practice as civil engineers in South Africa and practice within the consulting engineering field. 9,8% (5) of participants responded that they did not practice within the consulting sphere, while 90,2% (46) indicated that they did. Of the participants who stated that they were not project practitioners practising in the consulting engineering space, two did not go further with the study and the other three were not considered for the study. Furthermore, individuals who fit the abovementioned profile were identified, and only the survey link was shared. The survey also had a question that allowed it to terminate if a participant responded that they were not willing to participate in the anonymous survey.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistical examination of the survey responses reveals some essential insights into participants' perceptions and experiences regarding SE enablers and processes. In the analysis, SE enablers show relatively high variance and standard deviation, indicating a broader spread in their perception or engagement among the respondents. Such variability suggests that the participants must have had different experiences or interpretations regarding enablers due to organisational context, role, or maturity differences.

Conversely, the skewness of SE processes points to strong left skewness, with most responses bunched towards the higher end of the scale. This indicates that SE processes are generally rated highly, implying that they are widely respected and practised in engineering processes. In contrast to SE processes, which retain a highly normal distribution with a left skew, SE enablers reflect the moderate view of enablers, thus demonstrating much more disagreement on their rating and hence saying that their perception also depends on context to context. The kurtosis values corroborate this interpretation: SE processes responses seem more consistent. SE enablers show more variability, pointing to differences in how people understand or operate these enablers according to their respective projects or organisational contexts.

Table 2 displays each survey item's average, standard deviation, and 95% confidence intervals. Mean scores varied between 2.97 and 4.00, giving the interpretation that most responses lay between the "defined" and "managed" levels as per the level descriptors used in the study. This kind of averaging, however, can misrepresent the situation. For instance, Q10 averaged 4.00, suggesting a high level of maturity, yet qualitative inspection of data showed many responses as 'defined'. This emphasises that one should look at the mean and distribution of responses for better understanding.

Thus, the standard deviation values from 1.18 to 1.64 indicate low to intermediate response variability. Consequently, according to consensus among the participants, the lower the

standard deviation, the more representative the average score is. This is followed by a small 95% confidence interval that talks about high levels of precision and states that responses were reasonably consistent within a sample. For instance, Q5 has a mean of 3.74 with a standard deviation of 1.18 and a more exhaustive reference interval (3.37-4.11), thus backing reliability for the central tendency measure.

Table 2: Degree of Confidence

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Q1	3.61	1.34	3.20	4.02
Q2	3.82	1.28	3.43	4.21
Q3	3.79	1.25	3.41	4.17
Q4	3.95	1.22	3.57	4.33
Q5	3.74	1.18	3.37	4.11
Q6	3.46	1.45	3.02	3.90
Q7	3.74	1.27	3.36	4.12
Q8	3.32	1.40	2.89	3.75
Q9	3.44	1.40	3.01	3.87
Q10	4.00	1.34	3.59	4.41
Q11	3.92	1.23	3.54	4.30
Q12	2.97	1.64	2.46	3.48
Q13	3.45	1.39	3.02	3.88
Q14	3.47	1.40	3.04	3.90

Finally, Q12 has the lowest mean rating at 2.97, while the highest standard deviation is 1.64. This indicates that ratings for Q12 were low, and participants showed a high level of disagreement about what their responses meant. It may indicate an area of concern or a concept poorly understood or applied inconsistently by the people surveyed. In conclusion, the patterns of agreement and divergence regarding how the various aspects of systems engineering practices are perceived surface in the descriptive statistics and confidence intervals. Engineering processes usually apply well and are consistently used, while enabling factors were applied with quite a range, indicating an opportunity for standardisation, training, or inquiry.

5.2 Regression Analysis

A regression analysis was done further to investigate the relationship between SE enablers and SE processes. The study established a robust and statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables. R = 0.769 means that approximately 59.1% of the variance in SE processes is attributable to SE enablers, signifying that the greater the maturity of enablers and the stronger the presence of enablers, the better the extent to which SE processes are carried out in practice.

Due to the F-statistic of 50.580 obtained from ANOVA analysis, which resulted in a p-value of <0.001, it is essential to note that SE processes are statistically related to the maturity of SE enablers and that this relationship is unlikely due to chance. Furthermore, the unstandardized regression coefficient (B) of 0.650 means that the SE processes score increases by 0.650 units for each one-unit rise in SE enablers. The standardised coefficient (Beta = 0.769) thus confirms this relationship's tightness, while the high t-value ($t = 7.112$, $p < 0.001$) justifies the significance of the predictor. Therefore, the regression analysis indicates that SE enablers are a major driver of SE processes' maturity. Enhancing enablers, namely structured planning, tool

usage, and process alignment, is paramount in improving effective SE practice within civil engineering projects.

Table 3: Summary of Regression Analysis

Model Component	Value	Interpretation
Correlation Coefficient (R)	0.769	Strong positive correlation between SE enablers and SE processes
R Square	0.591	SE enablers explain 59.1% of the variance in SE Processes
Adjusted R Square	0.579	Adjusted for the number of predictors
Std. Error of Estimate	0.58025	Moderate predictive error
F-statistic	50.580	Strong model fit
Significance (p-value)	<0.001	Statistically significant relationship
Unstandardized B (SE enablers)	0.650	Each unit increase in SE enablers raises SE processes by 0.65 units
Standardised Beta (SE enablers)	0.769	Strong effect size of SE enablers on SE processes
t-value (SE enablers)	7.112	High confidence in SE enablers as a predictor
Significance (SE enablers)	<0.001	SE enablers are a statistically significant predictor

While the proposed maturity model was designed to reflect the established categorical structure of models such as CMMI, the survey results highlighted variability in the degree of knowledge and implementation of SE processes and SE enablers. This suggests that, in practice, maturity in the CE industry does not always progress in neat, discrete steps but often lies along a continuum. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider a graduated scale in future model refinements, where maturity levels may be expressed as ranges or intervals that capture the spread of practices across different organisations. Such an approach would preserve categorical levels' comparability while acknowledging the nuanced variability observed in the data.

5.3 Hypothesis Testing

5.3.1 H1: The intersection between PM and SE in the CE industry

CE projects are predominantly delivered using PM principles and guidelines, with the Project Management Institute developing a construction-centred extension for PMBoK. The first hypothesis was that an intersection exists between PM and SE processes and tools in the CE industry. According to the literature survey, studies have been conducted on the interception of SE and PM processes that confirm that there is indeed a point of intersection. The literature survey shows that CE uses traditional PM processes that intersect with SE in key processes. The processes include project planning, risk management, quality management, stakeholder management and baseline control. The literature further confirms this with the construction extension of PMBoK, emphasising processes such as quality management, stakeholder management and risk management.

5.3.2 H2: The maturity of the intersection of PM and SE processes in the CE industry

This hypothesis proposed that the maturity of the intersection of SE and PM in the CE industry is high, which was confirmed by the response to the questionnaire survey. The CE industry has a standard of practice to present at least three solutions to a client with a problem, with the differences highlighted and the recommended solution. The literature shows this is a trade-off analysis and an SE activity. The nature of projects in the CE industry is multi-disciplinary, requiring the collaboration of two or more professional teams. Furthermore, CE practitioners use constantly evolving design modelling software for simulations and analysis. Software such as Revit, Civil3D and Prokon allow CE practitioners to create dynamic models and simulations of the final product [25]. The responses of participants in Q8, Q10 and Q14, with a response

rate predominantly in the managed and optimising range, support this hypothesis. Similarly, responses to project planning and project monitoring (Q4 and Q5) are PM processes, as seen in the literature [22].

5.3.3 H3: The maturity of the SE capability in the CE industry

This hypothesis proposes that the overall maturity of SE in the CE industry is low. The data showed mixed results. The overall maturity of SE in the CE industry was measured using the responses to all the survey questionnaire items. While SE maturity in specific areas such as validation and verification is low, the maturity of enablers, such as simulation, trade-off analysis and integrated product teams, is relatively higher. As expected, the questionnaire items that resemble PM processes are generally high in an industry that operates from a PM perspective. Nonetheless, there is a consensus that the overall maturity of SE in the CE industry is still developing.

5.3.4 H4: The maturity of the application of SE tools in the CE industry

This hypothesis posited that the level of SE enablers within the CE is low. The data showed mixed results, similar to the responses to H3, where SE activities, which resemble PM tools, have a high maturity level. The study found that SE tools such as MBSE, SE management plan, and SE integration (Q6, Q9 and Q12) have a low level of maturity. Similar to H3, the overall maturity of SE activities in the CE industry is still developing.

Based on the literature survey, there are PM tools that CE practitioners are currently using that resemble SE enablers and have the potential to promote the application of SE. BIM can be used to realise the product and process systems to create a structure of requirements and systems definition [29]. It can further document and track changes throughout the project lifecycle. Bentley ProjectWise is currently being utilised in the CE industry as a document control tool that enhances collaboration, optimises workflows and resolves design clashes [37]. The definition of requirements and management is currently being facilitated with dRofus software within the CE fraternity, which can easily be seen as an SE enabler.

5.4 Proposed SE Framework for the Civil Engineering Industry

The statistical analysis from the survey showed a positive correlation between SE maturity enablers and SE maturity processes; maturing the SE maturity enablers will increase the SE maturity process's maturity and SE maturity. The results also showed the SE maturity processes and SE maturity enablers that require improvement in the maturity levels of SE in the CE industry.

Figure 2 shows the proposed framework that aims to advance the SE maturity levels in the CE industry. The literature review yielded PM tools that CE project practitioners use within the CE industry that can be considered tools to be used as SE enablers. BIM and Bentley ProjectWise can be used for process verification, validation, and configuration management. The two software packages can also be used as part of MBSE. dRofus is a PM tool that focuses on requirements development and requirements management in CE projects, making it an excellent tool for further improving SE implementation.

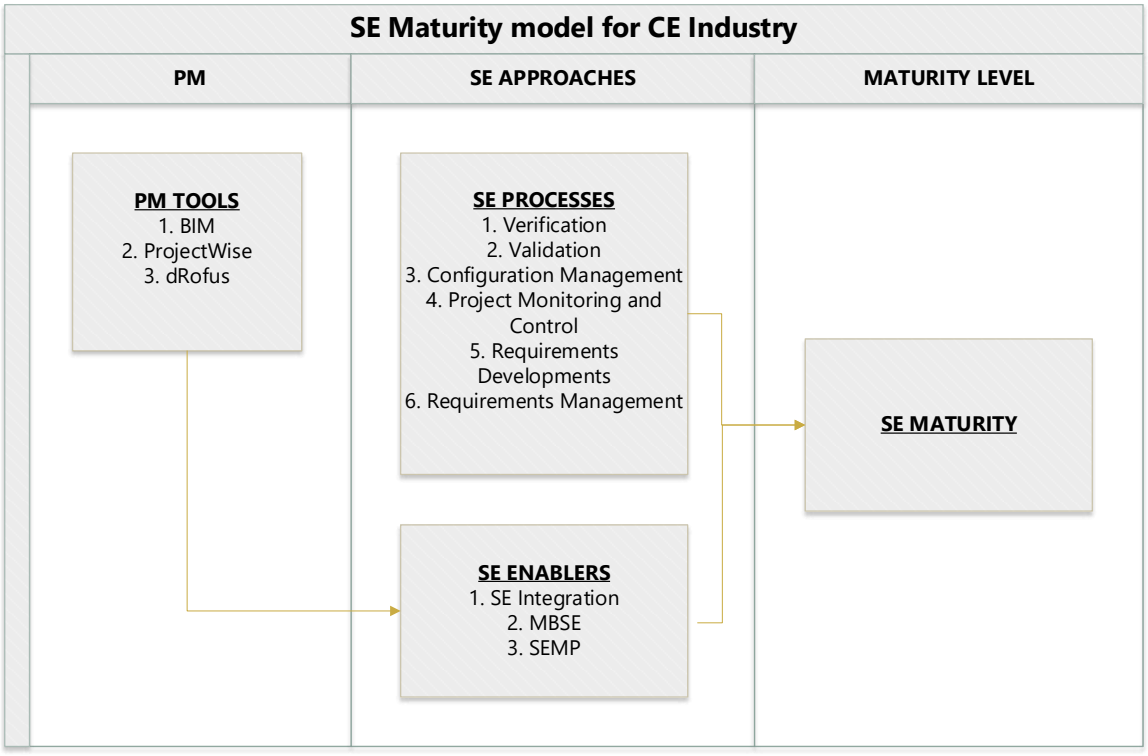

Figure 2: Proposed SE Maturity Model for the CE Industry

The SE processes listed in the proposed maturity model have results from the survey that require improvement. CE project practitioners should consider these processes and the existing CE PM tools to deliver projects. Similarly, CE project practitioners should consider SE integration, an SE management plan, and MBSE as project delivery tools.

6 CONCLUSION

The scope of this study was to scrutinise the synergy between SE and PM in the CE industry, especially how the two disciplines can be combined to drive a project successfully. Reporting at a broad level, the research examined the maturity level of systems engineering in construction engineering. First, the level of maturity concerning those high-maturity processes and tools where SE and PM meet was established. It also identified a few areas that need attention, especially in terms of more formal PM tools that might enhance SE and include SE processes and SE enablers in what is presently called project management. Addressing this gap could go a long way in tremendously improving SE in CE, especially for large and complicated projects. It also showed that the unfamiliarity of many CE project practitioners with SE frameworks, tools, and methodologies prevented them from fully taking advantage of the potential of SE.

Thus, it is implied in this study's literature that the CE industry should consider adopting more formal SE processes, such as Verification and Configuration Management, integrated into their PM frameworks to ensure that their project execution is consistent and rigorous. To further strengthen the integration of SE, practitioners should consider using PM tools such as BIM, ProjectWise, and dRofus, which facilitate SE processes and enhance project data management and flows. These tools provide a platform for improving collaboration, transparency, and efficiency across project teams. Finally, organisations must develop systems that continuously monitor and evaluate their SE process, periodic reviews, and updates of the SE-PM integration framework. This will ensure continuity in improvements over time and quick measures to address any new emerging challenges.

An important implication of this study is that the maturity of SE in CE practice should not be seen as strictly categorical. The descriptive and regression analyses demonstrated varying levels of understanding and implementation across different SE processes and enablers. Therefore, the maturity model presented here may be further enhanced by adopting a graduated scale that reflects these variations. This would allow civil engineering practitioners and researchers to identify whether processes are in place and the degree to which they are consistently and effectively applied. Future iterations of the framework should incorporate graduated maturity indicators, enabling a more realistic assessment of SE adoption in practice.

The study targeted CE practitioners in South Africa's consulting engineering space. As such, the findings may not represent the voice of the entire CE fraternity in the country. Survey questions were also put in terms understood by PM practitioners and shared only with a targeted group, which may have restricted the data collection. Future studies could explore how the proposed frameworks apply to specific categories of CE projects, such as megaprojects versus different-sized infrastructure developments. In addition, knowledge concerning SE processes and terminologies within the CE industry is another aspect of research that may yield a further understanding of how mature SE is in CE.

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ASSESSMENT OF THE BARRIERS TO QUALITY 4.0 ADOPTION BY SMES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The adoption of the quality fourth industrial revolution (4.0) technologies opens numerous options for enhancing quality management in the construction sector. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa encounter various hurdles when using these modern technologies. The research study assesses the barriers to the adoption of the quality fourth industrial revolution (4.0) in the construction industry by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This research employed a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology in finding related barriers in implementing the quality fourth industrial revolution (4.0) technologies in the construction sector. Furthermore, the research study aims to provide insights on challenges in enhancing the construction SMEs in South Africa. Overcoming these barriers is vital in improving the state of SMEs in the South African construction industry. The research study findings highlight inadequate digital technologies, shortages in skilled workers, financial limitations, and regulatory complexities.

Keywords: Quality 4.0, SMEs, Construction Industry, Digital Transformation

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1 INTRODUCTION

The construction sector plays a crucial role in global economic expansion and infrastructure advancement. In South Africa, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) constitute a significant portion of this sector, fostering job creation, innovation, and local development [1]. Nonetheless, the sector encounters ongoing difficulties such as low productivity, quality concerns, and ineffective procedures. To tackle these difficulties, moving from traditional quality management to Quality 4.0 by incorporating cutting-edge technologies within the framework of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)—commonly known as Quality 4.0 when related to quality management—means switching from manual procedures and human-centred quality assurance to automated, data-driven methods [2]. The integration of Quality 4.0 technology in the construction sector has therefore great potential to improve project quality, efficiency, and safety as several case studies from leading companies have highlighted the immediate advantages of adopting these technologies [3]. However, in this context, SMEs encounter various barriers that impede the efficient implementation of Quality 4.0 technologies. These barriers comprise a lack of awareness, inadequate digital infrastructure, a deficit of skilled workers, and intricate regulatory frameworks, among various others. Grasping these challenges is vital for enabling the effective adoption of Quality 4.0, which is crucial for improving the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs within the South African construction sector [4].

The advancements and innovations of Quality 4.0 technology are expected to support small and medium construction enterprises in South Africa with the aim of making them more resilient and competitive on the market. Although research on 4IR and digital transformation is growing, investigations into the adoption of Quality 4.0 by SMEs in the construction sector—particularly within a developing context such as South Africa—are still scarce. Many current studies typically emphasise large companies or industrial sectors [5]. This study therefore evaluates the barriers to the adoption of Quality 4.0 by small and medium-sized construction enterprises in South Africa via a systematic literature review (SLR). The study aims to offer practical insights by identifying and classifying the main challenges, which can guide policy, industry strategies, and future research avenues. By doing this, the study adds to the expanding knowledge on digital transformation in construction quality management and aids the progress of SMEs within the changing industrial environment.

1.1 Quality 4.0: Concept and Relevance

Quality 4.0 embodies the fusion of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies with established quality management practices. The 4IR includes digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data Analytics, Machine Learning, Cloud Computing, and Cyber-Physical Systems to improve quality control and decision-making processes [6].The initiatives for quality that are used globally include Total Quality Management, Six Sigma, Lean Sigma, and Quality by Design. All these actions for quality were controlled by some of the well-recognised experts such as Deming, Juran, Shewhart, Taguchi, and others. They developed the foundation for a quality method that is practiced in businesses and sectors of community service. The main goal of Quality 4.0 is to transform quality management from a reactive approach to a predictive one, facilitating real-time monitoring, data-driven insights, and ongoing improvement [7].

Within the construction sector, the integration of Quality 4.0 technology in the construction sector has great potential to improve project quality, efficiency, and safety, and gain a competitive advantage. Quality 4.0 has the capability to tackle ongoing issues such as inadequate productivity, delays in projects, budget excesses, and quality shortcomings. Technologies such as Building Information Modelling (BIM), sensor networks, and digital twins

are being utilised more frequently to enhance construction processes, minimise human mistakes, and guarantee quality standards [8].

1.2 Embracing Quality 4.0 in Construction

Quality 4.0 is regarded as an interesting and attractive phenomenon. It includes the use of applications and tools of Industry 4.0 in the creation of an environment with good output in the construction industry. This phenomenon also involves the use of applications of new magnitudes and scopes of design, construction, and management of tasks related to construction [2]. However, worldwide, the construction industry has been tardy in embracing Quality 4.0 technologies in comparison to manufacturing and other sectors. This is due to the fragmented nature of the industry, which is dependent on manual labour, and its project-oriented character. Although large companies may possess the resources to invest in digital transformation, small and medium enterprises frequently face financial and technical limitations [9].

The construction industry faces challenges related to productivity, work organisation, improvement of productivity, and management of processes. Industry 4.0 provides measures to overcome these challenges. Hence, Quality 4.0 uses tools of industry 4.0 that help in making correct decisions, planning, improving on-site productivity, organisational work, using cutting-edge tools, and managing processes [1]. Recent research emphasises that implementing Quality 4.0 in construction can result in better project outcomes, increased collaboration among stakeholders, and anticipatory quality assurance. Nonetheless, these advantages are not uniformly shared, especially in developing nations, where the lack of digital infrastructure and access to skilled workers poses considerable challenges [5].

1.3 Challenges Facing SMEs in Digital Adoption

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) form the foundation of numerous economies, including the construction industry in South Africa. A major challenge in digital adoption comes from the nature of a lot of small and medium enterprises that are labour-intensive and have an aged workforce in most developing countries. Although SMEs are economically important, they also frequently encounter other distinct difficulties regarding digital transformation. These challenges encompass insufficient financial resources, absence of technical skills, poor access to digital tools, and reluctance to change stemming from organisational culture [10].

In the realm of Quality 4.0, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face additional challenges due to the intricate task of merging various technologies and synchronising them with current quality systems. Research indicates that SMEs face challenges in grasping the strategic importance of digital quality management, which results in insufficient investment in innovation and training. Understanding global trends and learning from effective implementations can provide significant insights for SMEs in the South African construction industry as they navigate the barriers and potential of Quality 4.0 adoption [10].

1.4 The South African Construction Industry Context

To implement Quality 4.0 in the construction SMEs in South Africa, there is a need to understand the aspect of business development and current market trends in the country. The construction industry in South Africa significantly contribute to the country’s economy and boost GDP which provide jobs to many people and stimulate innovation in the construction sector [4]. However, South Africa's construction industry is characterised by significant informality, a lack of skills, regulatory hurdles, and inconsistent economic circumstances. Businesses of this size in this sector are especially susceptible to these systemic problems. The adoption of digital technology is also hindered by inconsistent internet access, expensive technology, and insufficient government backing for digital advancements in construction [11].

Although there are national initiatives aimed at enhancing readiness for 4IR through policy and infrastructure investments, numerous SMEs still lack awareness or readiness for Quality 4.0 execution. As a result, many businesses are struggling to survive and grow. Several studies demonstrate that there is a positive impact of technological implications on the performance of small and medium construction enterprises. Gaining a deeper insight into the particular barriers they encounter is therefore essential for developing focused strategies that aid their journey towards digital transformation, enhance the brand image of the company, attract new customers, and enhance customer satisfaction [12].

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify and examine the barriers to the implementation of Quality 4.0 by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) within the South African construction sector. The SLR method provides a systematic and repeatable procedure for collecting, assessing, and integrating existing research results relevant to the study goals. It is especially well-suited for generating theoretical insights in areas that lack sufficient research and integrating dispersed knowledge from various sources [13]. The objectives of the SLR in this study are (1) to determine the common barriers to the implementation of Quality 4.0 in the construction industry, (2) to examine the unique challenges encountered by SMEs during this transition, (3) to situate the results within the South African construction industry. The search strategy was based on an extensive review of literature that was performed using academic databases such as Clarivate Web of Science and Google Scholar. The search focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and relevant grey literature published between 2020 and 2025. The SLR followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) approach, ensuring transparency and replicability in the research process. Search strings such as '"Quality 4.0" AND construction AND SMEs AND barriers' were applied across multiple databases. A total of 186 records were initially identified, 142 remained after duplicate removal, and 38 full-text articles were screened for eligibility, with 34 meeting the final inclusion criteria. Figure 1 visually represents this selection process.

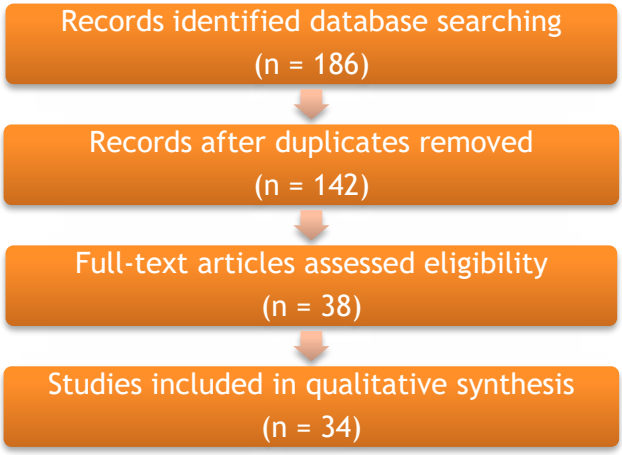

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram (Researcher, 2025)

The study focused on research on Quality 4.0 or 4IR technologies in the context of quality management, research addressing SMEs in the construction or related sectors, research published in English between 2020 and 2025, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and selected grey literature, and research that provided empirical data, frameworks, or conceptual insights on adoption challenges. Relevant studies were first screened based on titles and abstracts. Full-text reviews were then performed for the shortlisted articles. Data

was extracted and coded into thematic categories based on common barriers identified, such as technological limitations, financial constraints, skills shortages, regulatory and organisational challenges. The extracted data were then analysed using thematic synthesis, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and trends across literature. A qualitative analysis approach was used to interpret how these barriers manifest within the South African context. Each selected study was assessed for quality using criteria such as clarity of research objectives, robustness of methodology, relevance to the research questions, and credibility of data sources. This ensured that the findings synthesized in this review are grounded in reliable and valid evidence.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review uncovered multiple recurring barriers that impede the implementation of Quality 4.0 by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the construction sector of South Africa. These barriers were classified into four main categories: technological, human resource, financial, and institutional/regulatory. The categorisation of these barriers and their respective sub-barriers is illustrated in Figure 2, providing an at-a-glance view before the detailed analysis of each category.

Technological Barriers	Human Resource Barriers	Financial Barriers	Institutional/Regulatory Barriers
Lack of infrastructure	Skills shortages	High upfront costs	Regulatory complexity
Interoperability issues	Limited training	Ongoing maintenance	Lack of incentives
Cybersecurity risks	Generational gaps	imited funding access	Fragmented policies
Low digital maturity	Brain drain	ROl uncertainty	Procurement barriers

Figure 2. Categorisation of barriers to Quality 4.0 adoption by construction SMEs in South Africa. (Researcher, 2025)

3.1 Technological Barriers

The limited availability of advanced digital infrastructure and resources is a commonly cited obstacle. Many SMEs in the construction industry lack the necessary hardware, software, and connectivity to implement Quality 4.0 technologies, including AI-powered quality analytics systems, Building Information Modelling (BIM), and Internet of Things (IoT) sensors. In rural or impoverished areas, where internet connectivity and technical support are unreliable, this technological disparity grows larger [4]. Furthermore, there are significant implementation barriers due to interoperability issues and the problems of integrating new technology into current systems. SMEs usually employ outdated or basic quality management systems that are incompatible with contemporary digital tools, which leads to disruptions in operations and greater expenses for implementation. The adoption of cloud-based or sensor-driven platforms is made more difficult by legacy systems, which are frequently inflexible and were never intended to be integrated [14].

The absence of platform compatibility and standardisation is another significant obstacle. Although Quality 4.0 technologies include a variety of digital tools and software from many suppliers, the lack of widely recognised standards leads to disjointed systems, higher maintenance expenses, and challenges with data consolidation. For SMEs that depend on smooth operations to preserve dependability and cost-effectiveness, this fragmentation reduces the perceived value of digital integration [15]. Additionally, cybersecurity concerns

are becoming a critical technological barrier. SMEs often operate with minimal IT governance or dedicated cybersecurity infrastructure, making them vulnerable to data breaches and cyberattacks. The digitalisation of quality processes requires the handling of sensitive project data, and without robust security protocols, many SMEs hesitate to migrate to digital platforms out of fear of data loss or reputational damage [15].

Another obstacle is the pace of technological advancement. SMEs find it challenging to dedicate themselves to a particular technology due to the quick development of digital tools causing them to often shy away from investing in Quality 4.0 technology by concerns about obsolescence and the unpredictability of long-term support for instruments. This is further worsened by minimal access to technical support after implementation and a lack of vendor transparency [16]. Lastly, low digital maturity within many SMEs affects their ability to evaluate, select, and implement suitable technologies effectively. Many organisations lack a digital transformation roadmap or strategic alignment between technology and business goals, resulting in expedient or misaligned adoption efforts. Without structured digital readiness assessments or expert guidance, SMEs risk investing in inappropriate or underutilised technologies [17].

3.2 Human Resource and Skills Barriers

The evaluation consistently pointed out a lack of qualified staff as a significant challenge. The implementation of Quality 4.0 necessitates a workforce skilled in data analysis, digital solutions, and new technologies. Nevertheless, numerous SMEs in the South African construction sector function with a limited, generalist team that does not possess specialised digital expertise [18]. This gap in skills is additionally aggravated by insufficient training and awareness. Various studies have observed that owners and managers of SMEs frequently possess a limited understanding of Quality 4.0 and its strategic significance. Lacking this understanding makes it challenging to justify investments or inspire employees to embrace digital practices [19]. Moreover, the aging workforce in many South African construction SMEs further complicates the situation. Older employees may lack exposure to digital tools and often demonstrate resistance to learning new systems, preferring traditional methods that do not rely on automation or data analytics. This generational skills gap reduces the likelihood of widespread digital adoption without targeted retraining initiatives [19].

The absence of structured digital competency development pathways within SMEs exacerbates the challenge. Unlike larger firms that may invest in formal training programs, partnerships with academic institutions, or internal upskilling strategies, most SMEs lack the resources or long-term planning capacity to systematically build digital proficiency. Employees are often trained informally, and, on the job, limits the depth and scope of digital knowledge transfer [20]. Additionally, the lack of access to affordable and context-specific training poses a significant challenge. Available training programs are frequently designed with large-scale enterprises in mind, overlooking the practical constraints and needs of SMEs. The technical language, costs, and delivery modes of such programs often act as barriers rather than enablers, particularly for SMEs in remote or underserved areas [21].

Another dimension is the brain drain phenomenon, where skilled professionals seek opportunities in more advanced industries or abroad, leading to a scarcity of talent in the local construction sector. This migration further intensifies the difficulty of recruiting and retaining qualified personnel capable of managing and deploying Quality 4.0 technologies effectively [22]. Lastly, limited collaboration between academia and industry prevents SMEs from benefiting from recent research, knowledge exchange, and student internships that could otherwise bridge the skills gap. Without institutional support for collaborative programs or incentives for knowledge sharing, SMEs remain isolated from the technological and educational ecosystems necessary for building a digitally capable workforce [23].

3.3 Financial Barriers

One important and recurring element in literature was found to be financial constraints. SMEs typically operate with tighter budgets and less access to capital than larger corporations. One of the biggest barriers to Quality 4.0 implementation is the high upfront costs of purchasing new technology, hiring skilled personnel, and restructuring existing systems [24]. Additionally, SMEs are hesitant to adopt Quality 4.0 due to the perceived risk of investing in unproven or unfamiliar technology, especially when there is uncertainty about immediate financial returns. This is particularly important in the construction sector, where operations are extremely cost-sensitive and cash flow is project-based [25].

A major obstacle is the continuous operations and maintenance expenditure associated with Quality 4.0 technology, which go beyond the original investment costs. These include cybersecurity precautions, technology updates, software subscription fees, and technical support services, all of which SMEs with narrow profit margins may not be prepared for. The financial burden is further increased by the expense of training employees to use new digital systems, particularly when productivity losses during the transition phase are considered [26]. SMEs also have limited access to outside funding, especially in the construction industry where lenders and investors view financial risk as high. A lot of SMEs do not possess the financial records, collateral, or credit history needed to get loans or investment capital. Their activities are therefore frequently financed by short-term project profits, which leaves limited opportunity for strategic investments in digital transformation [27]. Furthermore, because of complicated application processes, a lack of knowledge, or a misalignment with the requirements of the construction industry, state financing and incentive programs meant to encourage digitalisation sometimes fall short of reaching SMEs. When assistance programs are offered, they frequently target high-tech sectors or businesses located in cities, leaving SMEs in the construction industry, particularly those in rural regions, without sufficient funding [27].

The challenge of justifying Quality 4.0 technology's return on investment (ROI) is another significant problem. SMEs may find it difficult to defend investments that do not yield immediate or noticeable returns because many of the advantages of digitalization such as higher quality, better risk management, or improved decision-making are indirect and long-term. Management is unable to allocate funds to long-term digital plans because of this uncertainty [28]. Furthermore, SMEs frequently lack budgeting and financial planning skills, which makes it difficult to make strategic investments in Quality 4.0. Due to their informal operations and lack of formal administrative frameworks, many SMEs find it challenging to assess cost-benefit situations or devote resources to innovation. The gap between the potential of technology and its actual execution is considerably magnified by the absence of financial literacy in digital investment decisions [17].

3.4 Institutional and Regulatory Barriers

Significant barriers to compliance were also noted, including the complexity of rules and the absence of supportive policies. There are possible misunderstandings about the use of digital technologies for quality assurance because the South African construction industry is subject to several standards and compliance requirements. In a digitalised setting, many SMEs find it difficult to understand how current construction and quality management standards apply, especially when legislative frameworks have not kept up with technological changes [29]. Moreover, a lack of government incentives or support initiatives for digital transformation for construction SMEs diminishes the drive for technology adoption. Although broader 4IR strategies exist at the national level, their implementation at the SME level is still limited and lacks sufficient resources. Government-led efforts often focus on larger corporations or tech-based industries, failing to provide tailored interventions that address the specific operational realities of construction SMEs [29].

Fragmentation of regulations makes the issue worse. Construction, labour, and technology rules are governed by a variety of government agencies and business associations, which frequently leads to conflicting or overlapping directives. Due to their limited administrative resources, SMEs have been having trouble navigating this intricate terrain. Decision-making is delayed, uncertainty is increased, and innovation is discouraged when there is no single legal framework for the digital transformation of the construction industry [30]. Additionally, there is a conspicuous absence of institutional coordination and competence to facilitate the implementation of Quality 4.0. The infrastructure and experience needed to provide advice on digital technologies or quality management systems are sometimes lacking in public institutions tasked with assisting SMEs. This results in wasted opportunities for collaborations, technical support, and initiatives to increase capacity that may facilitate more seamless adoption of Quality 4.0 [31]. Furthermore, the use of digital quality tools like digital twins, IoT-based monitoring systems, and Building Information Modelling (BIM) is still not completely accommodated or mandated by building code and procurement procedures in the construction industry. Since immediate adherence to established norms is still adequate for obtaining contracts, SMEs are unlikely to change their current practices in the absence of regulatory pressure or incentives to adopt these technologies [32].

Figure 3 presents the conceptual framework mapping the interdependencies among the identified barrier categories. The diagram illustrates how financial constraints directly influence both technological adoption and workforce development, while institutional and regulatory fragmentation exacerbates each of these dimensions. This interconnected structure underscores the need for coordinated interventions rather than isolated solutions.

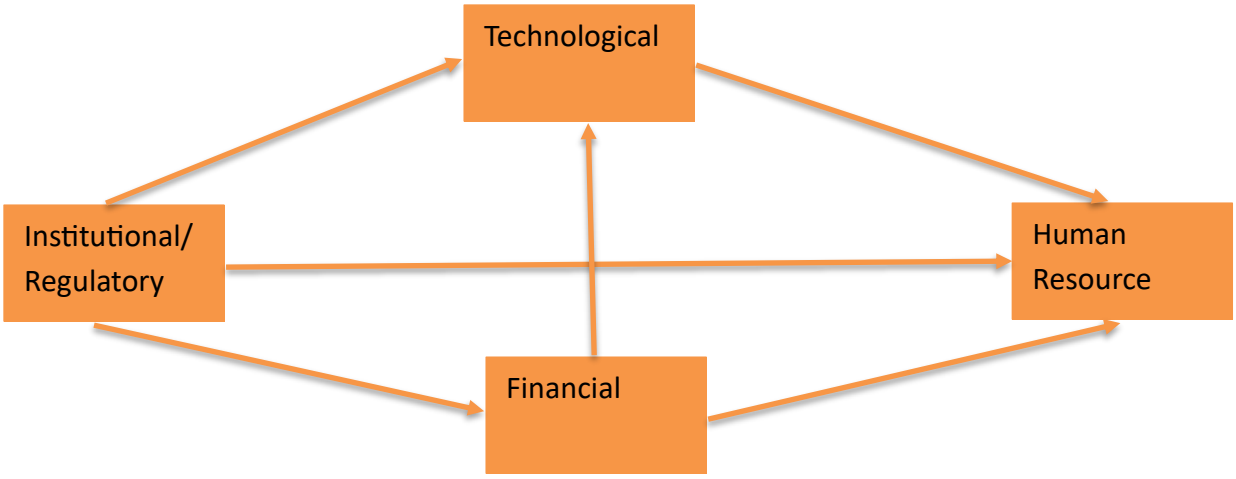

Figure 3. Conceptual framework of interdependencies among barriers to Quality 4.0 adoption by construction SMEs in South Africa.

(Researcher, 2025)

In many cases, SMEs also face institutional biases and access barriers in public procurement processes. Requirements for digital certification, advanced compliance documentation, or e-tendering systems, though intended to streamline procedures, can inadvertently exclude smaller firms lacking the digital infrastructure or administrative know-how to participate. This institutional exclusion limits market access and undermines the competitive positioning of SMEs attempting to embrace Quality 4.0 [33]. The lack of interaction between policymakers and SME stakeholders when developing digitilisation initiatives is another institutional obstacle. The distinct limitations and viewpoints of construction SMEs are frequently disregarded in national policy agendas because of a lack of proper representation or

engagement. Ineffective implementation methods, poorly targeted funds, and misplaced priorities are the outcomes of this top-down strategy [34].

3.5 Discussion

The findings provide a comprehensive perspective of the intricate barriers to the adoption of Quality 4.0 among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa's construction sector. The technological, human resource, financial, and institutional problems are all intertwined, resulting in a complicated landscape that prevents SMEs from properly moving to the digital age. One of the most significant findings is the interconnectivity of the identified barriers. For example, inadequate financial resources prevent SMEs from investing in new technologies or training programs. This, in turn, perpetuates the digital skills gap and impedes the capacity to implement advanced Quality 4.0 tools such as BIM, IoT-based sensors, and AI-powered analytics. Furthermore, the lack of financial literacy and strategic planning among SMEs reinforces the problem, resulting in fragmented or ineffective implementation of digital technologies.

From a technological standpoint, access to digital infrastructure alone is insufficient. Even if SMEs have basic internet access or technology, they frequently lack interoperability, cybersecurity protection, and digital maturity required to integrate Quality 4.0 tools. This creates a scenario in which SMEs either underuse or misapply technology, resulting in low ROI and reinforcing resistance to further digital transformation. In terms of human capital, barriers go beyond the availability of skilled workers and include organisational culture and leadership mindset. SME owners and decision-makers frequently misunderstand the strategic importance of Quality 4.0, seeing it as a technical or IT concern as opposed to a driver for business competitiveness and sustainability. This misconception results in a poor priority of digital projects, which adds to stagnation in innovative efforts. The institutional and regulatory dimensions show a systemic inconsistency between national 4IR strategies and their practical implementation at the SME level. Despite the fact that policies exist on paper, their implementation into practical assistance for construction SMEs remains limited. Regulatory fragmentation, lack of guidance on compliance with digital standards, and inadequate public assistance channels all contribute to the implementation gap. Furthermore, procurement methods that reward digitally savvy enterprises may inadvertently marginalise conventional SMEs, contributing to industry inequality. Furthermore, the construction industry's project-based and risk-averse attitude adds an extra degree of complication. SMEs are hesitant to make investments in long-term digital transformation when immediately noticeable financial rewards are uncertain, and contracts are frequently awarded based on cost rather than innovation. Many SMEs opt for remaining within the status quo in the absence of systemic incentives, market demand, or contractual responsibilities for digital compliance.

The study has a broader implication. The digital gap in the construction sector shows much bigger disparities in socioeconomic status in South Africa. Rural and peri-urban SMEs suffer disproportionately because of poor infrastructure, inadequate institutional assistance, and exclusion from digital finance schemes. To bridge this gap, inclusive and context-sensitive interventions need to be implemented in addition to conventional policy recommendations. Nonetheless, the research also recommends numerous paths forward. These include sector-specific training programs, public-private collaborations to help SMEs become digitally ready, and the promotion of pilot projects that demonstrate the real benefits of Quality 4.0. Industry associations, academic institutions, and technology providers can all help to create networks that allow dissemination of knowledge and capacity development for SMEs. Ultimately, the effective implementation of Quality 4.0 by South African construction SMEs necessitates a systematic and coordinated approach. It is not enough to simply provide new technologies; it is also necessary to create the conditions—financial, institutional, human, and technological—

that will allow SMEs to absorb, adapt, and sustain these innovations. A multifaceted strategy that combines policy reform, targeted finance, capacity building, and awareness raising is required to overcome the complex and layered barriers discussed in this study.

4 CONCLUSION

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa's construction industry have a significant chance to improve quality control, operational effectiveness, and industry competitiveness by implementing Quality 4.0 technology. However as shown by this study, which is based on a thorough examination of the literature, SMEs encounter a complicated network of interconnected institutional, financial, human resource, and technological barriers that seriously impede this digital transition. Regulatory fragmentation, insufficient digital literacy, restricted financial capacity, restricted access to digital infrastructure, and inadequate institutional support are some of these issues. While personnel limits result from a lack of digital skills and inadequate training resources, technological constraints are exacerbated by cybersecurity concerns, lack of interoperability, and poor digital maturity. In terms of finances, SMEs find it difficult to secure capital and defend investments in technology with dubious returns. Additionally, SMEs are further excluded from national digital agendas due to legislative gaps and misaligned 4IR initiatives. The potential advantages of Quality 4.0—such as real-time monitoring, predictive analytics, and enhanced quality outcomes—remain significant despite these obstacles. A concerted, multi-stakeholder effort incorporating customised government incentives, inclusive policy reforms, public-private training programs, and technology solutions customised to SME restrictions would be necessary to realise this promise. South African construction SMEs can be better equipped to embrace and maintain Quality 4.0 innovations by removing these systemic and structural barriers, which will support the larger objectives of long-term sustainability, industrial transformation, and economic resilience.

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AN OPTIMIST'S SOLUTION TO STELLENBOSCH'S HIGH INFLUX OF COMMUTERS: A SOUTH AFRICAN CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Stellenbosch, a small town in South Africa (SA), faces severe traffic congestion and parking challenges due to rapid growth and heavy reliance on private vehicles. This research investigated the feasibility of implementing Park-and-Ride (PR) facilities as remedial measures. Key factors for the success of the system, including optimal location, public transport integration and user perception, were identified through literature review and traffic data analyses. The Hub-and-Spoke Model was used to propose a central transit hub and three PR locations. These locations were strategically selected based on Floating Car Data (FCD) from TOMTOM Move, through which the routes with the highest inbound traffic flows were identified. To ensure effective design, implementation and operation, the 6S methodology was adapted to the service delivery industry. This framework emphasised safety, efficiency and sustainability. The results highlighted the potential of PR facilities to reduce congestion, improve accessibility and promote sustainable, people-centric transport planning.

Keywords: Park-and-Ride, Congestion, Sustainable Transport, Hub-and-Spoke Model, 6S Methodology

1 INTRODUCTION

Stellenbosch, a historic university town in South Africa's (SA's) Western Cape Province, experiences persistently high congestion levels and worsening parking shortages [1,2]. Population growth, urban densification and the rapid growth of Stellenbosch University (SU) have intensified the pressure on the limited existing transport infrastructure [3]. The Stellenbosch Comprehensive Integrated Transport Plan (CITP) highlights the importance of reducing private vehicle dependence, expanding the public transport network, and encouraging Non-Motorised Transport (NMT) modes [4].

Park-and-Ride (PR) facilities have proven to be effective in diverting commuter traffic in international contexts [5], yet their application in SA remains limited and typically linked to rail-based transport systems. This creates significant challenges relating to the scarcity of industry standards in the design and implementation of these facilities. Stellenbosch's dense urban layout and dispersed commuter trip origins present a unique challenge for PR implementation, limiting the feasibility of rail-based PR facilities and necessitating the use of bus transport, NMT, or micromobility solutions. The introduction of PR facilities for the Stellenbosch transport network would, consequently, not be similar to design considerations of other similar national projects. This elucidates the need for more detailed planning, underpinning the research conducted.

The paper assesses the feasibility of implementing PR facilities as a solution to Stellenbosch's growing congestion levels and parking shortages through the use of traffic demand analyses, spatial modelling and operational planning frameworks.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study set out to:

- Gain an extensive understanding of PR facilities.
- Review existing facilities, key design features and important considerations.
- Analyse Stellenbosch's congestion and parking challenges.
- Determine optimal PR facility locations based on traffic movement patterns and spatial model guidelines.
- Advocate design, implementation and operational guidelines for PR facilities.
- Provide recommendations for integrated implementation.

3 BACKGROUND TO STELLENBOSCH

3.1 The Town

Stellenbosch is widely known as a student town with Stellenbosch University (SU) largely intertwined into the layout of the town. Several arterial roadways surround Stellenbosch, merging into one arterial, commonly known as the Adam Tas Corridor (R44). The R44 travels through Stellenbosch and collects traffic from the R310, M12, R44, and R304. It thus predominantly serves a mobility function in the roadway system. The major roadways and the origin of these roadways are shown in Figure 1.

Stellenbosch has been experiencing an ever-increasing population, particularly due to the development and expansion of SU [3,6]. With the rapid development and restricted room for expansion, the town has been subject to high levels of congestion and a severe shortage of parking spaces [3,4,6].

Figure 1: The main points into Stellenbosch

The CITP of Stellenbosch highlights the prevalence of the aforementioned issues [4]. The document details the Travel Demand Management (TDM) objectives stated in the 2016 CITP, which include:

- Reducing demand for vehicle use.
- Supporting investment in public transport.
- Promoting NMT.
- Reducing the environmental impact of private transport.

The severe congestion levels and large travel time delays are not only a constant frustration for commuters, but also a large detriment to the economy in terms of hours of potential work lost [7]. The inhibited mobility is further worsened by the parking demand far exceeding the available supply [3]. The consequence of this is that illegal and curb parking have become a part of the Stellenbosch experience, forcing many to accept the accompanying fines. These challenges are recognised by the population, wherein household surveys revealing that congestion was the third most prominent transport problem, with parking ranking ninth and the top two both being related to insufficient public transport systems [1].

3.2 The Transport Dynamics of Stellenbosch

Stellenbosch is subject to a disproportionately high number of vehicles on its transport network [8]. The modal split indicates a heavy reliance on private transport, revealing that 86.6% of passengers are transported by light vehicles [6]. Although e-hailing could bring some relief to the limited parking pressure, it does not alleviate the severe congestion levels Stellenbosch continues to experience. Notably, a large of portion of the road users are of the 20 to 30 age group [6], further demonstrating the impact the student population has on the transport network. As a result, solutions to Stellenbosch's transport challenges cannot be developed in isolation; addressing the challenges requires an integrated approach that incorporates SU as a key stakeholder and influencer in shaping travel demand.

3.3 SU Shuttle Service

The SU shuttle service is provided to students and staff to facilitate seamless traversing between various destinations and decentralised parking facilities [4]. As the primary form of

public transport offered by SU, it is a key element of the transport network in the area. The day services are offered on fixed routes, free of charge to all students and staff [9]. This typically operates using designated routes from 07:30-17:00 (during the academic term), with a 15 to 30-minute service headway. Evening services are provided via a booking system in which students/staff are transported to specific destinations within a 6-kilometre radius of central Stellenbosch [10]. Payment is done through a student or staff card or through the booking system for shuttle reservations.

This service has, however, experienced numerous challenges. Notably, the transport system has failed to develop in the past six years, now servicing fewer areas than it did in 2018 [11]. This is contrary to the preferred future transport scenario highlighted in the CITP of Stellenbosch [4], particularly those related to a modal shift towards public transport and the preferred scenario in which "students mostly use park-and-ride facilities, shuttle bus services or walk/cycle between the university and their places of residence" [4].

The largest challenge is the underutilisation of this service. From February 2024 to August 2024 (i.e., the start of the academic season until the time at which the data was collected), the service recorded 13 790 users boarding the shuttle, with 3 361 boarding in the busiest month, August [12]. The number of students transported from peripheral areas is illustrated in Figure 2. Adjusting for repeat use suggests that less than 1.1% of SU's approximate 38 000 affiliates rely on this service [13]. This underutilisation undermines the vision of the municipality and creates doubt towards the potential for other successful public transport modes without significant changes in how these systems are marketed, operated, and linked to other modes of transport. The 2016 CITP provides insight as to the student travel patterns, stating that the majority of students continue to use private motor vehicles to travel to campus [6], even when travelling relatively short distances [3]. Thus, measures that discourage the use of private vehicles by students have the potential to alleviate congestion levels and parking shortages in the area [6].

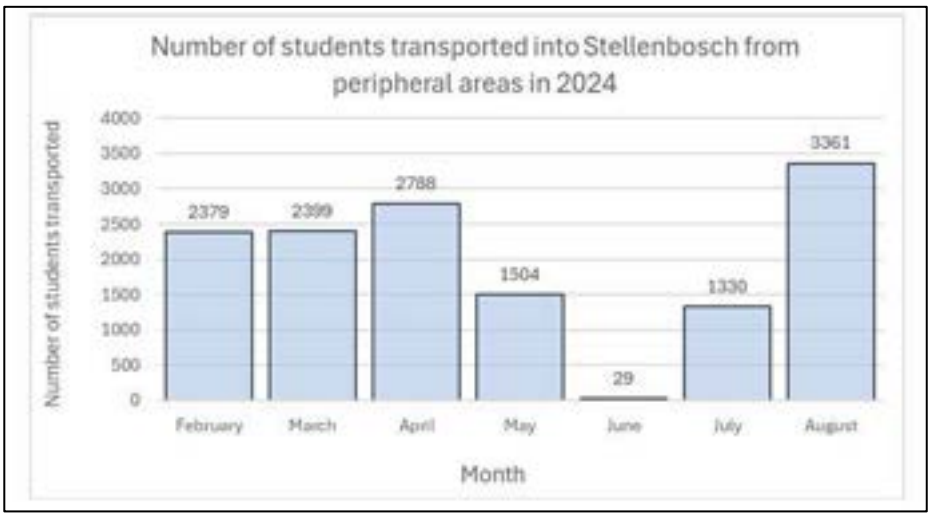

Figure 2: Number of boardings for the SU Shuttle Service in 2024

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Parking Choice Behaviour

The search for available parking spaces is a significant contributor to urban congestion. This process increases vehicle traffic in the area, energy usage, vehicle emissions, and the time wasted by drivers looking for parking spaces [14]. The factors that influence a road user's parking location choice are heavily researched due to their complexity and variability in

different environments [15]. These factors, according to Hu, Bao, and Ma [16], can be separated into two distinct categories, namely: external influence factors and attribute factors. These factors are interlinked, adding to the complexity of the design. In layman's terms, different road users have distinct and diverse preferences, characteristics, or motivations in terms of the interaction of cost, parking duration, and time implications in making a decision.

The typical external factors that influence parking choice behaviour include:

- Walking distance to destination from parking area [15].
- Travel time [15].
- Parking time [16].
- Parking fees and related costs [17].
- Security and/or Safety [16].
- Parking space availability: The amount of time it takes someone to find a parking spot [18].

The attribute (personal) factors that may influence parking choice behaviour consist of, but are not limited to, variables such as the purpose of the trip as well as the demographics of the road user [16]. These factors are also relevant to the design of PR facilities, in terms of both the appeal of the parking facilities as well as the aspects that may motivate road users to shift from their traditional transport mode to the newly implemented system.

4.2 PR Facilities

PR facilities have been implemented successfully worldwide, particularly in dense urban areas such as Paris [5]. In essence, these facilities are large parking infrastructures placed strategically to intercept private vehicle users before entering heavily congested urban areas. The PR facilities contain connections to public transport systems, allowing commuters to travel to a designated PR facility, leave their vehicle (or be dropped off), and make use of a means of public transport to complete the remainder of their journey [19]. These facilities can be used as a Travel Demand Management (TDM) tool to convert full-trip private vehicle users into part-trip users, which in turn reduces the number of vehicles entering a city, Vehicle Kilometres Travelled (VKT), urban congestion levels, and parking pressure [5].

4.2.1 Types of PR Facilities

There are several distinguishing characteristics that help identify differences between the types of PR facilities. These characteristics influence the effectiveness of the relevant PR facility, and include factors such as size, geographic location, associated public transport mode, the service level of the facility, and whether they serve an origin or destination function [5]. In terms of the geographic location of the PR facility, an urban fringe facility is most suitable for the Stellenbosch context due to the space limitations and the large multi-directional influx of vehicles.

The lack of rail infrastructure and the densified layout of central Stellenbosch make the bus system the most viable public transport mode to service the PR facility. Due to the existing SU Shuttle Services and taxi-bus industries, integrating the new system with these services is vital for effective social adoption and improved efficiency of the entire transport network.

4.2.2 Benefits related to PR Facilities

PR facilities provide an opportunity for multiple system-level benefits, including:

- **TDM tool:** Reduces peak-hour congestion and VKT [20].
- **Equitable accessibility:** Allows for local and regional access to transit systems [19], linking remote and rural areas to central urban areas for all classes.

- **Cost optimisation:** The use of public transport can assist individuals in avoiding high parking costs associated with urban centres, as well as reduced travel costs if the system is priced correctly [21].
- **Environmental improvements:** Reduces emissions through decreased private vehicle usage and an increase in modal shifts towards public transport [22].

These benefits provide a holistic solution that improves urban accessibility and promotes the use of public transport and micromobility within urban areas. This, in turn, could lead to the construction of more sustainable, green cities. These potential outcomes support Stellenbosch Municipality's car-free, public transport-centric aspirations outlined in the CITP. Additionally, the benefits are significant in terms of the potential to completely shift the culture of private vehicle reliance in Stellenbosch if implemented and rolled out correctly. The role of SU in this shift cannot be understated. With a significant student population, there is a large number of potential NMT and public transport users that could facilitate in reimagining the transport network, given that the appropriate services and facilities are provided [6].

4.2.3 Systemic and Contextual Challenges for PR Facilities

Despite the benefits of PR facilities, some challenges may hinder its successful implementation:

- **Lack of standardised design methodologies:** Most research is extremely case-specific, accredited mainly due to the multi-variable approach required for the design of these facilities [20].
- **Public transport reliability:** Effective transfer of modes at the facilities requires safe, reliable, affordable, and efficient systems.
- **Cooperation of the minibus taxi industry**: The minibus taxi industry accounts for approximately 63% of the modal split in Stellenbosch [4]. Integrating new public transport systems into the network may lead to retaliation from the existing industry.
- **Social constraints**: Ensuring the public transport system and the parking area are safe is vital to ensure the facility is adopted successfully [8].
- **Misuse**: Unaware misuse of the parking area is common and can lead to decreased parking availability for those who make use of the facility [5]. Informal businesses may also form in and around the facility, potentially impacting the cleanliness, safety, and societal perspective of the facility.

These challenges make predicting the impact on congestion alleviation, traffic conditions, and parking pressure difficult. Public acceptance and social support are also difficult to predict, making the potential impact even more uncertain. These issues are exacerbated when applying it to the South African context, where PR facilities are uncommon and formal public transport systems are many times perceived to be unsuccessful, and/or operate sporadically.

4.2.4 Factors influencing the effectiveness of PR Facilities

Extensive research on the identification of the location for a PR facility and what factors influence its effectiveness all indicate the need for a multifaceted approach. Some of the factors influencing the potential success of these facilities include:

- User behaviour and willingness of users to shift to new modes [21].
- Parking capacity and availability [5].
- Parking cost structure [22].
- Frequency and cost of public transport service [21].
- Surrounding land use and traffic conditions [22].
- Integration quality between the PR parking area and the public transport systems [20].

The point of intercept, in particular, is specifically impactful in the effectiveness of the PR facility. To successfully implement these facilities, a systems design approach in which one considers the PR facilities as nodes in a broader transport network is essential. The planning and implementation of the facilities and systems must consider technical constraints, social acceptability, and economic viability.

5 METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied in this research identifies suitable locations for the PR facilities, as well as the key factors and considerations necessary for their design.

5.1 The Hub-and-Spoke Model

The Hub-and-Spoke model is a form of network science with numerous applications in logistics, Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), and transport networks [23]. This model acted as a guide towards the spatial design of the PR facilities. The hub represents a central point, entity, or structure (in this case, the bus terminus in central Stellenbosch). The spokes (often referred to as nodes) are linked radially from this hub, much like a bicycle wheel, and represent entities, structures or organisations linked to the central hub [23]. These nodes represent the PR facilities located on the periphery of Stellenbosch, through which each spoke can interact directly with the central hub.

The application of this model is associated with several advantages:

- **Centralised coordination and communication:** The system connects all peripheral facilities to a central node, reducing overlapping bus routes and trip redundancies [23].
- **Optimise resource usage:** The hub has a holistic view of the entirety of the network, allowing for continuous, efficient allocation of resources. With the use of information technology, the system could be responsive in real time, lowering time in transit time and creating an adaptable transport network [24].
- **Cost Efficiency:** The logistical efficiency, coordination, and elimination of unnecessary trips reduces costs and maximises economic performance [24].

However, limitations to the model include:

- **Taking care in electing the central hub location:** The bus terminal is the centre for the logistical operations. For it to be as efficient as possible, it should be accessible, expandable in the future, adaptable, and aligned with the nodes in the system [24].
- **Dependency on technology:** Technology is vital for system coordination, monitoring, and real-time adaptability [23].
- **Clear management strategies:** Effective communication and governing of the multi-node system requires clear management strategies [23].

This model framework formed the basis through which the optimal locations for the PR facilities and transit terminal were selected, allowing for integration into the current mobility network observed in Stellenbosch.

5.2 Desktop Study of Traffic Conditions using FCD

To identify the routes and areas most in need of traffic alleviation measures, and hence determine optimal locations for the PR facilities, Floating Car Data (FCD) from the TOMTOM Move platform was used. FCD is data (location, speed, and destination) produced and collected periodically via probes [25]. The TOMTOM Move platform was utilised to analyse origin-destination (O-D) patterns and traffic volumes based on the key arterial routes into Stellenbosch. Although the model does not directly incorporate public transport into the data, the traffic volumes were used as an indicator for which routes experienced the highest congestion levels. Considering the heavy reliance on private vehicles, the model provides

insight as to which routes could benefit the most from modal shifts towards public transport or other transport alleviation measures.

5.2.1 Study Area and Traffic Gates

Stellenbosch central, including surrounding residential areas (Cloetesville, Kayamandi, Idas Valley, Die Boord, Coetzenburg, and Onder Papegaaiberg) was treated as a singular region to evaluate the directional origin of traffic moving towards this central region. The specified borders of the central region were adopted from a similar model used in the analysis of micromobility within Stellenbosch [26], and are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Regions and Gates used in FCD Analysis in TOMTOM

Peripheral communities like Jamestown/DeZalze and Techno Park were designated as independent zones due to the potential for these areas to contribute to congestion along the R44. The primary directions of traffic movement into and out of Stellenbosch described in Figure 3 were used as screen lines ("gates") to obtain traffic counts on these roadways. The gates used were:

- R310 (De Wijnlanden / Kuils Rivier): Combines all traffic from Polkadraai Road (M12) and Baden Powell Drive (R310).
- R44 (Somerset West / Strand).
- 310 (Franschoek / Kylemore).
- R44 (Klapmuts / Paarl).
- R304 (Brackenfell / Belville / Durbanville).

Short internal trips (<5 kilometres) within the Stellenbosch central region were excluded from the analysis in terms of PR facility considerations, as micromobility and NMT solutions were deemed more appropriate for these distances [26].

5.2.2 Date of Analysis and Peak Period Definition

Data was collected and analysed during peak university activity, namely the academic terms, from 1st February to 31st May (Semester 1) and 22nd July to 30th September (Semester 2), for the 2024 academic year [27]. These periods align with the higher shuttle service usage [12], as well as the higher commuter volume experienced during the academic term but before the beginning of the examination periods, where traffic levels begin to decline [12].

Traffic was analysed across three weekday peak periods, adapted from the Technical Recommendations for Highways (TRH26) guidelines [28]:

- Weekday morning peak (06:00 to 09:00).
- Weekday midday peak (12:00 to 14:00).
- Weekday afternoon peak (15:00 to 18:00).

These times were chosen to reflect school and university schedules, working hours, and afternoon travel patterns. Weekends were excluded as weekdays tend to experience larger congestion levels. This is further justified in terms of parking availability, whereby, according to the Mobility Division of Stellenbosch University [12], are most critical on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

5.2.3 Resultant Model

The TOMTOM model produced data on traffic volumes, O-D patterns and travel times for all the identified gates. This data enabled one to prioritise the corridors most in need for intervention and assisted in determining potential PR facility locations based on actual movement patterns and demand.

5.3 Roll-out: The 6S Methodology

Finding the optimal location for the PR facilities is only one of the elements necessary to ensure the solution is successfully implemented and adopted by the public. To ensure a structured and effective roll-out of the proposed PR facilities and integrated bus systems, an adapted 6S methodology was developed. Fundamentally, the 6S method, which expands on the 5S methodology by adding safety as an element in the model, refers to the premise that disorganised systems are not productive, and organising these systems improves customer and employee satisfaction [29]. Successful implementation and use of this methodology often results in cost reduction, higher quality outputs and substantial improvements in efficiency and productivity [30].

The original 6S model is a management tool which, in its essence, promotes a systematic approach to designing, implementing and maintaining a safe and efficient environment [31,32]. The approach, novel in its application to this specific environment, provides the opportunity for a structured framework that constantly prioritises the end user. In the context of Stellenbosch's transport network, this focus is essential: without addressing the behaviour and needs of the private vehicle users, and different stakeholders of the system, the intervention would fail to achieve any meaningful uptake. By keeping user requirements as a central concept to the framework, the solution itself can be both practical and socially acceptable, thereby improving the likelihood of successful modal shifts. This fills a gap in transport planning literature, demonstrating how this adapted model can be utilised in the holistic design of local mobility interventions and projects.

Key insights gathered from literature and parking behaviour were evaluated to expand on the six elements of the 6S framework, making it applicable to the design and implementation of the PR facilities and relevant transit systems.

1. **Sort:** Identify and prioritise the necessary design and operational needs related to the PR facility and associated transit system [30]. Gather the perspectives of the various stakeholders, and ensure the information is accessible and organised [29,33]. Asset organisation systems should be put in place.
2. **Systems:** Develop logical, user-friendly interfaces for booking and information enquiry [34]. The concept focuses on the visualisation and organizing of the elements of a project [35]. This also encompasses optimising assets through efficient bus routing and real-time communication systems [33].
3. **Shine:** Maintain the cleanliness and aesthetic appeal of the facilities through appropriate interventions [29]. The area should be appealing and comfortable for the users [34]. Design of the facilities should incorporate sustainable and ergonomic design principles and minimise environmental impacts of construction and operation.
4. **Standards:** Establish operational guidelines and rules for the use and management of the PR facilities [30]. Adequate signage should be used to inform users of the rules. Policies, design guidelines and operational standards should be detailed to ensure the systems and PR facilities are designed according to all necessary guidelines, legislature and standards [33]. Measures should be in place to enforce compliance [34]. Furthermore, the development of fixed, reliable bus schedules is vital, fostering user trust and satisfaction in the system [29].
5. **Sustain:** Implement routine inspections, continuous staff development programs and effective communication channels (between the systems and from the system to the users) [30]. Beyond this, sustaining a system requires innovation, development and improvement to remain competitive and not stagnate. These factors require user-feedback to understand how best to serve the public [30].
6. **Safety:** Proactively identify and mitigate risks [35], implementing safety measures that create a safe experience for the users. This can include Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance, security staff, clear reporting channels, competent drivers and safety reporting systems. This improves user satisfaction and confidence in the project.

The modification of this framework creates a systematic approach through which one can evaluate the requirements and important features of the proposed system, allowing for the potential for improved social adoption and longevity of the system. This framework has the potential to assist in navigating the complexities of these large-scale projects, as well as ensuring all stakeholders and end users' needs are addressed. In this way, key stakeholders such as SU and the local Municipality are encouraged to interact and collaborate with one another.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Traffic Characteristics

6.1.1 Traffic Patterns and O-D Matrices

An OD analysis for the peak morning period revealed that Stellenbosch central is both a trip generator (an area that creates trips) and a prominent destination, with internal trips accounting for approximately 42% of all movements. The second largest contributor was the trips from the M12/R310 gate to Stellenbosch Central, contributing approximately 8-9% of the morning peak trips.

These findings portray the strong reliance users have on private vehicles for short, intra-urban trips, further justified by the underutilisation of alternative modes of transport (such as the SU Shuttle Service). The results presented in the section to follow are representative of the morning peak trips.

6.1.2 Route Choice Through Traffic Demand

When considering Stellenbosch central as a destination, with all other areas and arterials (gates) classified as origins, the traffic demand from each roadway leading into Stellenbosch can be evaluated. The resultant model revealed three dominant traffic corridors:

1. M12/R310 (Polkadraai/Baden Powell) – 37% of inbound trips.
2. R44 from Somerset West (Broadway Boulevard) – 26% of inbound trips.
3. R304 incl M23 from Brackenfell/Durbanville - 23% of inbound trips.

By contrast, Jamestown/De Zalze and Techno Park contributed less than 10% of inbound trips. Although this does impact traffic congestion, these areas are too close to Stellenbosch to justify placing the PR facilities between the area and Stellenbosch central. The trips between these areas and Stellenbosch central could be reduced through the implemented public transport system that serves the PR facilities. Adding an additional stop at these areas would not require large route deviations, but could assist in reducing private vehicle usage and promoting public transport utilisation.

6.1.3 Speed Trajectory Analysis

A speed analysis of the three identified most congested routes was used to confirm the level of congestion these roadways experience. Using TOMTOM Move, the average speed of trips originating from the three aforementioned areas was evaluated, with the average speeds from the most critical route (M12/R310) represented graphically in Figure 4.

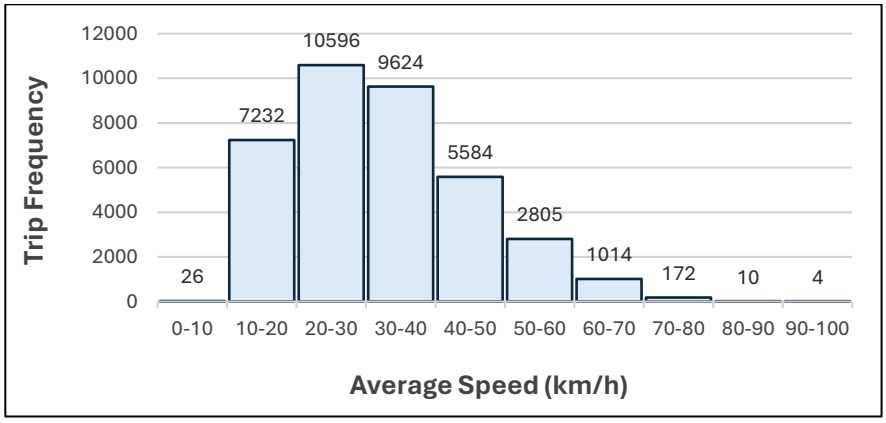

Figure 4: Average Speed of trips originating from the M12/R310 into Stellenbosch Central (06:00-09:00)

The average speed analysis confirmed the severe congestion levels experienced along the M12/R310 corridor, where average speeds dropped to 32.4 km/h and modal average speeds were approximately 20 km/h. This is well below the expected 80 km/h design speed for this U2 road class [28]. This analysis highlights the excessive traffic volumes and diminished level of service (the qualitative feeling of comfort for the road users), elucidating the need for PR implementation. The through traffic was found to be relatively insignificant, confirming that the congestion is predominantly due to the traffic originating in Stellenbosch or travelling into Stellenbosch.

7 KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Recommended Locations of Park-and-Ride Facilities

The analysis of the FCD assisted in the identification of three prominent corridors in Stellenbosch that are in desperate need of congestion alleviation methods, particularly during the peak hours.

The FCD also revealed a significant number of internal trips within Stellenbosch, in which users make use of their private vehicles to commute short distances. The findings from this analysis, alongside the notable reduction in average travel speed along these routes, revealed that the M12/R310 should be prioritised. This aligns with observed congested levels and the Adam Tas Corridor (linked to the M12/R310), which has already been flagged as an area in desperate need of traffic alleviation interventions in the Stellenbosch CITP [4].

Notably, the data highlights the importance of addressing both the shorter, internal trips, and the external trips. SU, in collaboration with the local Municipality, needs to create a public transport system that supports regular residents of the area as well as the students of the town. Furthermore, the heavy reliance on private vehicles for internal trips must be addressed through the implementation of micromobility and NMT solutions (Such as bicycle schemes, more extensive shuttle services, e-scooters and cycling paths). Not only do these options have the ability to highlight the natural beauty and historic buildings the town possesses, but it also creates the opportunity to shift away from a vehicle-centric transport network. SU and the local Municipality could both benefit from the improved safety, reduced congestion levels and improved transport network efficiency, but collaboration is required to maximise the effectiveness and social uptake of the system.

Based on the findings, a phased roll-out of PR facilities is recommended to maximise the effectiveness of the entire system, address the most critical areas first, and allow for the capital, funding, and planning to be done through a staggered approach. The selected locations are illustrated in Figure 5.

The first proposed PR facility is detailed section 7.1.1. Although not detailed further, it is proposed that the second PR facility (along the R44 from Somerset West) should expand upon the existing Stellenbosch Square shopping centre, with the third PR facility being placed nearby the existing residential areas.

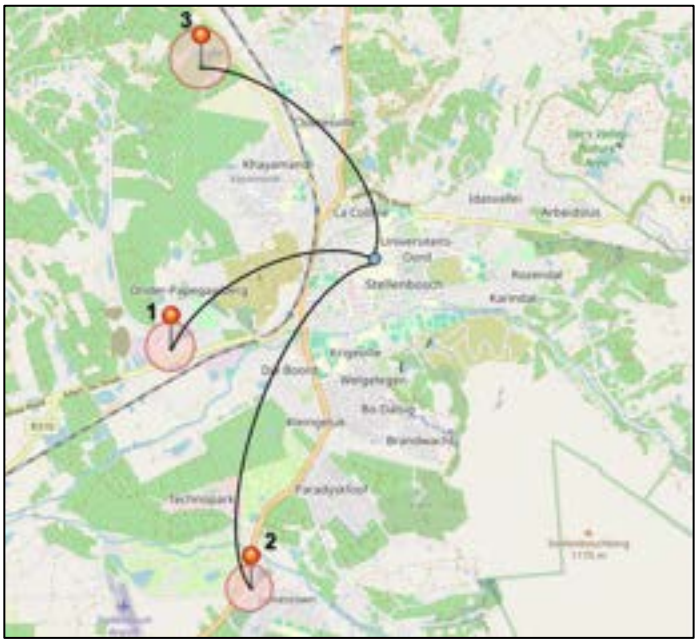

Figure 5: Locations of proposed PR Facilities

7.1.1 PR Facility 1: The M12/R310 Interceptor

Located near "The Woodmill" (an industrial area redeveloped into a mixed-land use development, this facility will intercept traffic from both the M12 and the R310. The proposed area is desolate land, and existing infrastructure (such as padel courts, shops and a spa) exists

nearby. This creates the opportunity for an integrated, mixed-use PR facility development that is appealing and promotes business growth. The area also forms part of the Adam Tas Corridor, meaning it aligns with the Stellenbosch Municipality's Spatial Development Framework (SDF) and Integrated Development Plan, as well as the revitalisation of the Adam Tas Corridor [36]. The integration of public transport and nearby businesses through the use of a PR facility promotes the ideology of the LSDF to "create an integrated urban development corridor that is liveable, safe, resource-efficient, socially integrated, economically inclusive and globally competitive, in which all citizens can actively participate" [36].

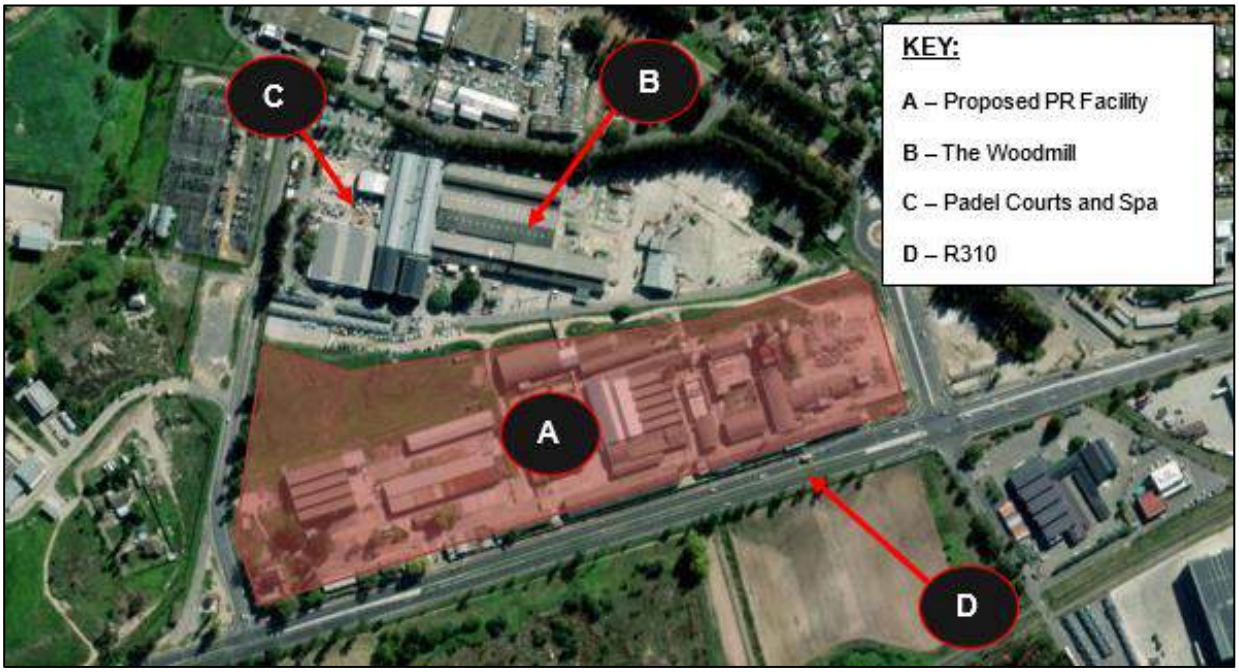

Figure 6: Proposed location of the first PR facility

7.1.2 Central Hub: Stellenbosch Bus Terminal

The proposed terminal is located centrally between Joubert Street and Smuts Road, enabling connectivity between the PR facilities and the bus terminal. The proposed location has two access points and is in close proximity to nearby points of interest, including the SU main campus, numerous private student accommodations, and Eikestad shopping centre. Converting the existing parking, with a current capacity of 183 bays [37], into a public transport terminal supports the modal shift envisioned by SU and the Municipality, whilst also presenting the opportunity for the integration of NMT and micromobility systems due to its proximity to the SU campus.

Figure 7: Proposed location of the central transit terminal (LEFT [37]; RIGHT [38])

7.2 Application of the 6S Methodology in the Roll-out of the PR Facilities

The 6S methodology was utilised to ensure that the design, implementation, and operation of the PR facilities and relevant systems are systematic, achievable, and sustainable. This allows one to be considerate of the complex, multifaceted nature of the system while simultaneously prioritising the end users and the relevant stakeholders. The holistic approach, summarised in Figure 8, ensures PR facilities encompass not only the technical and operational needs but also consider the social, environmental, and economic variables that are crucial for the solution to successfully and seamlessly integrate into the current transport network.

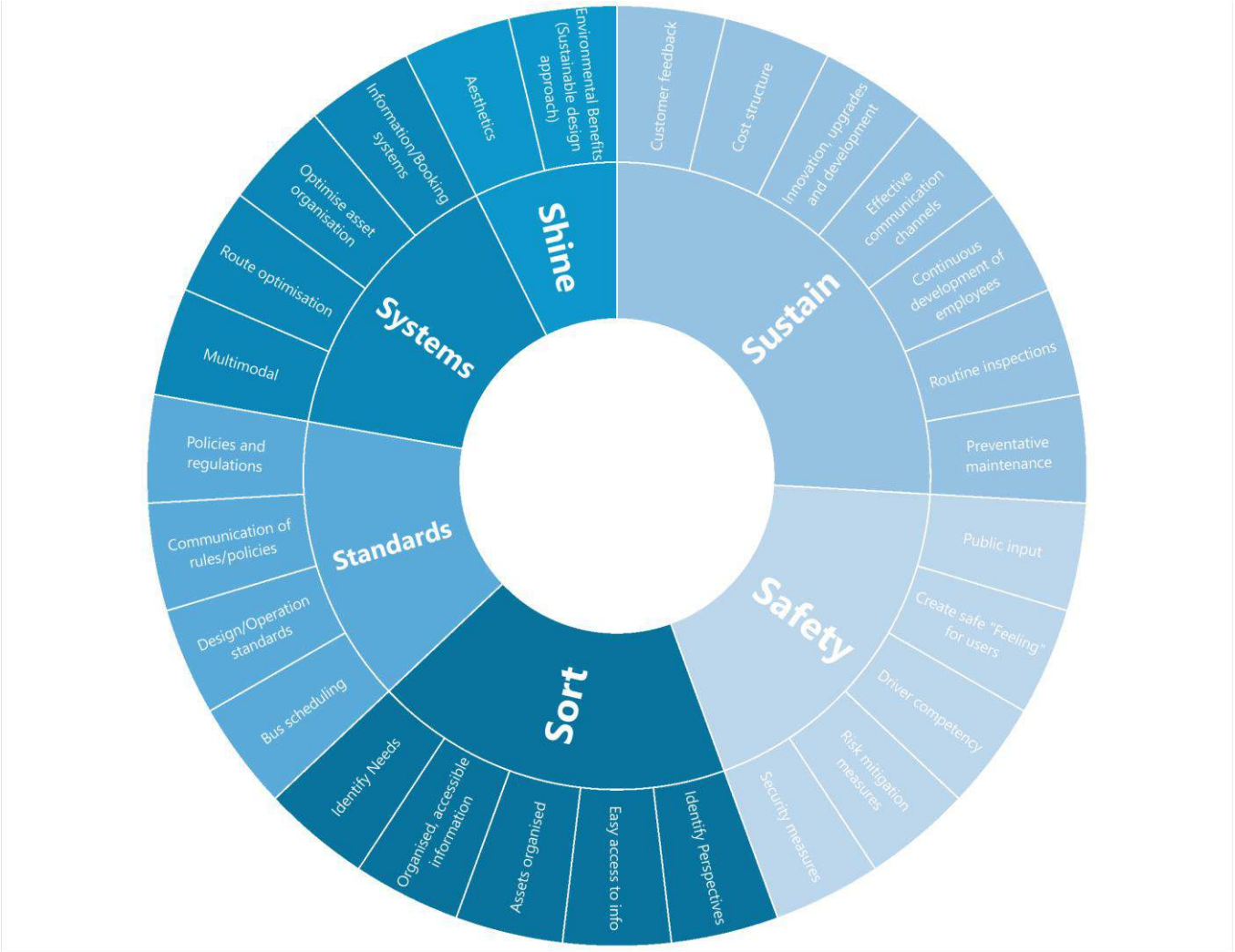

Figure 8: Critical Features of PR Facility Design, Implementation, and Operation

7.3 Limitations and Future Work

It is acknowledged that the design, implementation, and operation of PR facilities are inherently complex and multi-dimensional, influenced by social, technical, environmental, and behavioural characteristics. Some elements that should be investigated further follows:

- The detailed design of bus routes and scheduling for public transport. Future studies should investigate how to optimise these systems.
- Rail as a transport mode was also excluded, given the limited space and infrastructure available. However, these systems could work in tandem with the PR facilities for longer distances of travel.
- The impact of PR facilities on trip generation and congestion should be modelled to quantify the potential benefits of these systems.
- An economic viability assessment should be conducted to ensure the financial viability of the PR facility roll-out.
- A public survey should be conducted on various socio-economic classes and stakeholders to gather perspectives surrounding PR facilities, modal choice, parking behaviour, financial constraints, and what factors could convince the public to shift to these modes of transport.

8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study assessed the feasibility of PR facilities in Stellenbosch as a mitigation measure to the rising congestion and parking pressures driven by urban growth, private vehicle dependence and the integration of SU with the town. Analysis of FCD identified three critical corridors leading into Stellenbosch as priority routes for intervention, namely the M12/R310, the R44 from Somerset West, and the R304 including the M23 from Durbanville. Speed analyses and traffic volume data revealed the severity of these routes, with significantly lowered travel speeds and high congestion levels. A phased roll-out strategy was proposed for the implementation of the PR facilities, linking PR sites with a central bus terminal in Stellenbosch through the use of the Hub-and-Spoke model.

In the absence of national standards for the design, a tailored 6S methodology was developed to guide the design, implementation, and operation of the system. The developed framework ensures flexibility, efficiency, and a people-centric design approach that aligns itself with the town's broader sustainability and mobility goals. SU was identified as a key stakeholder in the development of the transport network, with the accompanying student population being central to driving modal shifts away from private vehicles and towards more sustainable, safe, and equitable transport modes. However, collaboration between SU, the Municipality, and other stakeholders is essential to curb the worsening congestion levels and parking shortages. As both SU and the town expand, transport solutions must remain user-focused to ensure long-term success. The introduction of PR facilities represents an important first step towards a people- and environment-centred mobility system, creating a safer and more accessible urban environment for the town's students as well as its residents.

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DIGITAL KAIZEN: ENHANCING LEAN MANUFACTURING WITH REAL-TIME DATA AND ANALYTICS

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ABSTRACT

Lean manufacturing aims to eliminate waste and improve efficiency; however, traditional approaches often lack real-time data insights – leading to delays in identifying production bottlenecks and quality issues. This paper explores the concept of Digital Kaizen—integrating real-time monitoring and data analytics into continuous improvement using cost-effective sensors. By implementing a digital dashboard, manufacturers can track KPIs, detect inefficiencies automatically, and enhance decision-making. Digital Kaizen enables proactive problem-solving while improving both efficiency and quality. This approach bridges the gap between lean principles and digital transformation by providing real-time visibility to production teams and accelerating continuous improvement. The research presents a practical framework for applying Digital Kaizen in manufacturing, demonstrating how affordable digital tools can drive productivity. By leveraging data-driven insights, manufacturers can shift from reactive to predictive decision-making – creating a more agile, competitive, and efficient production system.

Keywords: Digital Kaizen, Lean Manufacturing, Real-Time Data Analytics, Continuous Improvement, Smart Manufacturing, Process Optimisation, Low-Cost Floor Monitoring, Hands-on SMME Focus.

1 INTRODUCTION

South African manufacturers, particularly small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), face increasing pressure to improve productivity, reduce costs, and remain globally competitive [1]. This promotes renewed interest in Lean practices and locally adaptable forms of digitalisation, which involves using digital technologies to enhance processes and drive innovation.

1.1 Lean Manufacturing in South Africa: Challenges and Context for Digital Kaizen

Lean manufacturing has transformed global manufacturing by driving operational efficiency through its core focus on efficiency, waste elimination, and quality. A central part of the Lean philosophy is Kaizen – a continuous improvement mindset that involves contribution from every level of the workforce. Core techniques such as visual management, just-in-time production, and value stream mapping have enabled manufacturers to reduce inefficiencies and respond effectively to customer demand. -

In South Africa, Lean remains highly relevant, especially for SMMEs navigating global competition, high input costs, and structural barriers to achieving economies of scale [2]. Local manufacturers also face increasing logistical disadvantages, particularly when competing with international competitors that are closer to end markets.

Despite its benefits, many South African companies still rely on paper-based Lean systems and manual tracking. This makes it difficult to recognise issues quickly, delays feedback and slows down decision-making on the manufacturing floor. As factories become more complex and customers expect faster turnaround times, there's a clear need to update how Lean is implemented - utilising faster, more transparent, and data-driven tools.

Recognising these challenges, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has introduced Digital Kaizen to enhance lean-focused manufacturing innovations and training in South Africa. The CSIR, whose mandate is to foster industrial development through innovation, has supported this initiative in an advisory capacity by providing contextual support and assisting with the piloting of locally appropriate solutions for SMMEs. This supports more inclusive industrial growth for SMMEs by helping them digitise and modernise their operations. It also aligns with the concept of *translative adaptation* – a process where foreign models are not only transferred through passive adoption, but rather, reshaped through local experimentation, feedback, and ownership [3]. Therefore, Digital Kaizen is shaped and adapted to the realities, constraints, and competitive pressures that are faced by South African SMMEs.

1.2 Why Digital Kaizen? A Practical Path to Digitalisation

Digital Kaizen modernises traditional Lean practices by using real-time data, automation, and visualisation alongside Kaizen routines - without the need for expensive or large-scale digital systems [4]. Rather than simply digitising existing processes, Digital Kaizen serves as a bridge between bottom-up, production floor-driven improvement and top-down digital transformation (DX). While traditional Kaizen focuses on local problem-solving and gradual optimisation, Digital Kaizen introduces tools that allow teams to:

- Track production data in real time, enabling rapid response to anomalies
- Automate routine checks to reduce manual checking, which is reactive instead of proactive
- Visualise performance trends with minimal complexity, allowing for quicker problem detection and solving

By lowering the entry barriers to digital adoption, Digital Kaizen enhances overall responsiveness and decision-making. It uses low-cost devices and open-source platforms to

analyse production data in real time. The approach is designed to be accessible and scalable, allowing companies to start small and expand over time as capacity and confidence grow. By introducing simple forms of digital monitoring and visualisation, Digital Kaizen makes it possible to detect issues earlier, shorten feedback loops, and create a more data-driven improvement culture. Its flexibility supports customisation, making it possible to prioritise and address the current unique, pressing challenges faced by SMMEs.

This approach aligns with Aachen University's Industry 4.0 Maturity Model, seen in Figure 1, which emphasises gradual progression from basic digitisation toward full adaptability. Digital Kaizen helps SMMEs move from computerisation and connectivity to visibility and transparency, without requiring large investments or complex systems. As readiness improves, the same tools can support predictive capabilities and adaptive responses. This positions Digital Kaizen as a practical enabler of stepwise digital transformation.

Figure 1: Adapted from "Industry 4.0 Maturity Model" by Aachen University, [5]

The implementation of Digital Kaizen is currently being piloted through a JICA-led training initiative, with the CSIR providing advisory support to ensure technical relevance and alignment with local conditions. The model presents a scalable, low-barrier path for manufacturers seeking to modernise without the cost, disruption, and high technical demands typically required of full digital transformation.

1.3 Research Aim

This paper investigates the application of Digital Kaizen in South African manufacturing, focusing on its potential to enhance Lean practices through real-time data and low-cost digital tools. It evaluates the practicality, responsiveness, and relevance of the approach for SMMEs operating in resource-constrained environments, to inform scalable and relevant pathways to digitalisation.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section explores the evolution of Kaizen from its traditional origins in Lean manufacturing to its digital adaptation in response to modern production challenges.

2.1 Traditional Kaizen and Lean Manufacturing: Foundations of Continuous Improvement

Kaizen, meaning "continuous improvement", is a philosophy that promotes the incremental and continuous enhancement of all functions and processes within an organisation. Throughout this paper, these terms are treated synonymously. This is done through incremental and daily

improvements and actively involves employees at all levels — from leadership to the production floor [6]. This human-centred approach makes use of structured routines to improve efficiency and standardise overall quality through small, continuous changes.

Various tools are commonly used as part of Kaizen to identify and resolve inefficiencies. Common tools associated with Kaizen include Gemba Walks, 5 Whys, A3 Reports, and visual management systems to address root causes in day-to-day operations [7]. They all encourage direct observation, team-based problem solving, and quick feedback cycles.

Lean Manufacturing, as demonstrated by the Toyota Production System (TPS), expands Kaizen principles into a structured system for delivering maximum value with minimal waste. As visualised in the TPS "house", Kaizen works alongside Heijunka (production levelling) and Standardised Work to provide a stable foundation for the system's two main pillars: Just-in-Time and Jidoka (automation with a human touch, where machines or operators automatically detect and stop production after identifying a problem to prevent the spread of defects) [8]. Together, they aim to achieve the highest quality, at the lowest cost, with the shortest lead time.

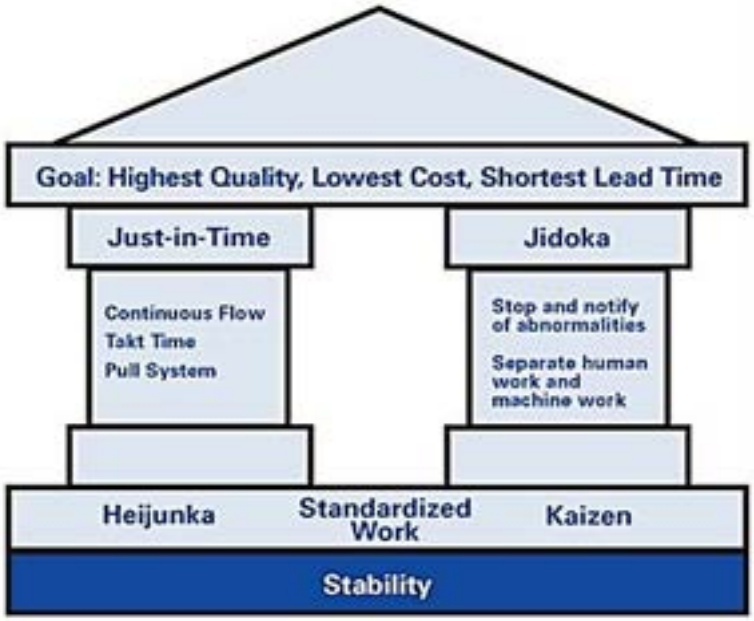

Figure 2: The Toyota Production System, [8]

As shown in Figure 2 Kaizen remains a core enabler and driving force within the TPS system, driving continuous improvement through both structured routines and daily engagement at all levels of the organisation.

2.2 Limitations of Traditional Lean and Kaizen Approaches

While Kaizen and Lean have, for decades, been effective in reducing waste and improving quality, the traditional application often falls short in modern manufacturing environments. Most SMMEs in South Africa still rely on paper-based checklists, manual data collection, and delayed reporting to track performance [4]. Despite increasing awareness of 4IR technologies, many remain unprepared for adoption due to infrastructure deficits, limited technical capabilities, and financial constraints [9].

Relying solely on human observations can limit both the accuracy and timeliness of feedback. This can result in delays to problem identification and solving. In JICA-supported case studies, teams often only become aware of issues such as downtime, overproduction, or inconsistent

cycle times after they've already impacted performance - rather than detecting them in real time [10].

Furthermore, traditional Lean systems assume a certain level of workforce discipline and consistency, but they lack the built-in feedback mechanisms necessary to confirm whether standards are being followed consistently. Continuous improvement cycles become dependent on staff memory and availability, which can introduce a level of variability. In environments with high staff turnover, limited skills development, or minimal digital infrastructure, the effectiveness of traditional Kaizen is weakened.

As production becomes more dynamic with frequent product changes, shorter lead times, and increasing customer expectations, the limitations of traditional Kaizen become more pronounced. These limitations highlight the growing need for Kaizen systems that are more responsive, data-driven, and transparent.

2.3 Digital Transformation and the Emergence of Digital Kaizen

Digital Kaizen extends traditional continuous improvement methods by including real-time data, automation, and digital feedback into Lean routines, utilising low-cost technologies to enable real-time analysis, monitoring, and feedback on production performance. It makes use of low-cost microcontrollers and sensors, together with open-source platforms and dashboards to automate data collection and enable proactive, instead of reactive, intervention. Digital Kaizen not only aims to digitise existing Kaizen methods but also enhance them with immediate insights to improve visibility and decision-making. Digitalisation has been shown to significantly enhance SMME's Lean implementations by improving performance tracking, enabling better information flow and supporting real-time decision-making [11]. Table 1 indicates the benefits of modernised Kaizen application to various important manufacturing aspects:

Table 1: Comparison of Lean Practice Maturity [4]

Aspect	No Kaizen	Traditional Kaizen	Digital Kaizen
Problem Detection	Delayed (reactive)	Periodic and likely delayed	Instant (sensor-based)
Data Availability	None/ Minimal	Manual data records	Automated, real-time data
Feedback Speed	Slow and infrequent	Weekly/ daily meetings	Real-time dashboards
Worker Involvement	Low/ Absent	High (operator-led)	High (data-supported)
Decision-making Basis	Intuition/ Crisis Response	Operator judgement and visual feedback	Data driven

In most SMMEs, full-scale digital transformation (DX) is not achievable due to the associated high cost, complex installation and upkeep, coupled with limited technical capability. Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platforms - including SAP, Oracle, and Microsoft Dynamics - are often not an option for most SMMEs due to high implementation, customisation, and licensing costs. Digital Kaizen offers a middle path by enabling manufacturers to adopt meaningful digital capability while remaining grounded in traditional Lean principles. This is evident through its ability to provide real-time cycle tracking, downtime alerts, and dashboards, enabling more accurate root cause analysis. It is not simply the digitisation of existing Kaizen tools, but a structured approach to integrate Kaizen principles into digital transformation [12]. This adaptive implementation of Digital Kaizen aligns with principles of translative adaptation [3], where knowledge transfer is reshaped through local context and experimentation rather than direct model replication.

2.4 Summary of Key Insights from Literature

The existing literature highlights both the relevance and practical limitations of traditional Kaizen, particularly in resource-constrained environments that have older machinery. Digital

Kaizen can be seen as a scalable solution that bridges this gap by retaining the strengths of Lean while enhancing responsiveness through real-time data collection and analysis. To explore this further, the following section outlines the research methodology used to evaluate Digital Kaizen in a South African manufacturing context.

2.5 Practical Applications of Digital Kaizen in Industry

Japanese SMMEs have pioneered Digital Kaizen, achieving significant productivity gains with minimal investment and simple technologies [13]. This has been done without requiring a full-scale digital transformation. The Digital Kaizen case studies [13] below demonstrates how being able to see real-time data, low-cost sensors, and feedback-driven problem solving have an immense practical value for an organisation.

2.5.1 Asahi Tekko (Japan)

Asahi Tekko, a Tier 1 supplier to Toyota, introduced low-cost sensors (e.g. as low as \$0.50 (±R9)[*] for light sensors and \$2 (±R36)[*] for magnet switches) to capture real-time cycle times on older equipment. The sensors revealed hidden downtime and cycle imbalances, leading to:

- JPY 400 million/year (±R49 million/year[†]) in cost savings
- JPY 100 million/year (±R12 million/year[†]) in avoided capital expenditure
- 9% reduction in electricity consumption

Figure 3: Low-cost light sensors and magnet switches used at Asahi Tekko for digital cycle time monitoring [13]

This was done by measuring the performance time of the production line, using sensors instead of manual measurement, and through the acquisition of continuous digital data collection and monitoring. This success catalysed the launch of a dedicated Digital Kaizen spin-off, i Smart Technologies, which now helps other SMMEs adopt similar systems.

2.5.2 Sewing Factory (Japan)

In the garment sector, a sewing plant used AC sensors and low-cost IoT devices (like the M5Stack) to monitor machine activity and differentiate between novice and expert operators. In addition to this, all that was required was a Wi-Fi connection to export the data onto a Google sheet, whereafter the information could be analysed and displayed on dashboards.

[*] Conversions based on the USD/ZAR exchange rate as of May 2025.

[†] Conversions based on the JPY/ZAR exchange rate as of May 2025.

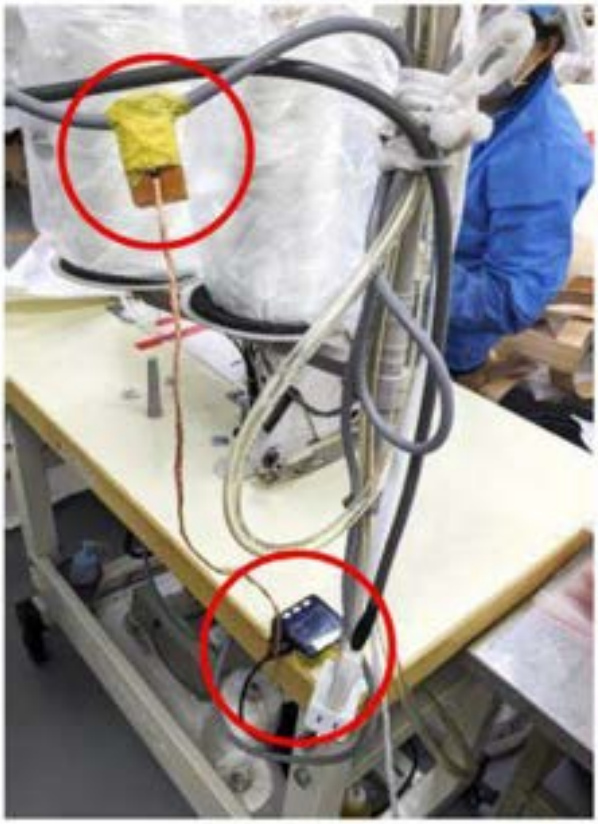

Figure 4: AC sensor and microcontroller (M5Stack) installed on the Sewing Machine [13]

Information such as a general overview of the utilisation rate of the machine, a daily analysis of operation times and inactive times could be visualised in real-time with the use of the dashboards. These insights enabled targeted training, load balancing, and work standardisation, enhancing productivity without expensive upgrades.

2.5.3 QR Code-Based Process Tracking

Multiple factories have implemented QR codes to digitise work instructions, job tracking, and inspection forms. Instead of relying on paper-based processes, operators scanned QR codes using mobile phones to:

- Access digital checklists
- Record inspection results
- Monitor quality parameters

This approach reduced administrative overhead, improved traceability, and facilitated real-time data collection. This is especially useful in environments with limited and older infrastructure. Furthermore, the same barcode/ QR code can be used to track products after sales, which assists with supply chain management.

2.5.4 LiLz Gauge – Water Meter Reading (Japan)

A factory with multiple water sub-meters previously relied on a manager to perform all manual monthly readings and inspections to allocate charges across departments according to their usage [14]. This process was time-consuming, prone to potential error, and offered no insight into the daily consumption patterns. To introduce a Digital Kaizen approach to this problem, a battery-powered IoT camera system (LiLz Gauge) was installed, which resulted in the following:

- Manual reading was eliminated
- Daily water usage data was automatically collected
- Multiple meters could be monitored simultaneously and remotely

Figure 5: LiLz Gauge system installed on factory water meters to automate sub-meter reading [13]

The implementation of the LiLz Gauge on the sub-meter enabled the facility to track usage trends, improve internal cost allocation, and identify opportunities for water conservation - all without modifying the existing infrastructure. The same system has also been applied in other factories to automate inspections of analogue gauges, pressure dials, and other older meters, which extends the benefits of digital monitoring across various manual processes.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a Design Science Research (DSR) methodology [15] to develop, implement, and refine a Digital Kaizen system tailored for South African SMMEs. The approach was tested in a real-world manufacturing environment and was structured around iterative deployment cycles to ensure overall relevance, responsiveness to operational challenges, and incremental improvement based on field feedback.

3.1 Research Design

This study followed a three-phase Design Science Research (DSR) methodology, as shown in Figure 6. The approach combined elements of structured, staged implementation (waterfall) and agile, iterative refinement cycles to enable both planning discipline and responsiveness.

- A **staged implementation** approach (waterfall) ensured systematic progression from problem identification to evaluation.
- **Agile iterative cycles** allowed for responsive adjustments after each deployment phase, ensuring user feedback was rapidly integrated.

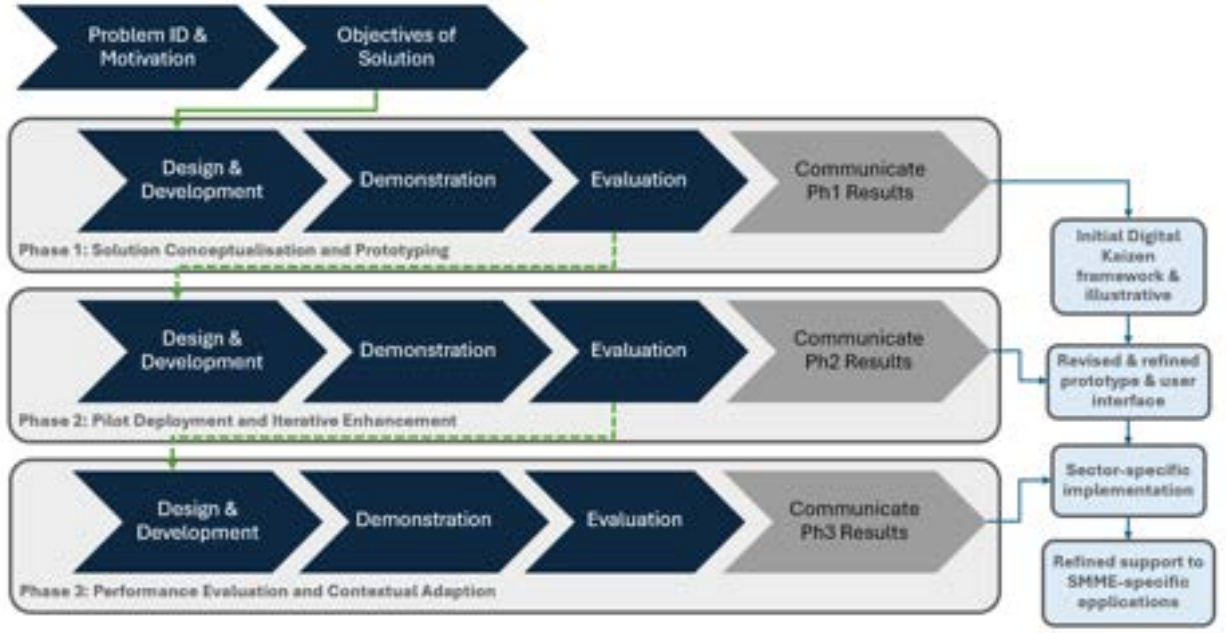

Figure 6: Design Science Research (DSR) methodology used to structure implementation across three phases

Figure 6 illustrates the methodological progression through the following stages:

1. **Problem Identification & Motivation:** A key challenge often observed during the Basic *Kaizen* course in 2023 is a lack of data related to productivity and quality control, hence a lack of data-based management.
2. **Objectives of Solution:** A bridge between traditional Kaizen and Digital Transformation (DX) by [4]:
   - Introducing real-time visibility
   - Providing a foundation for Smart Factory, Product, and Service development
   - Ensuring accessibility through low-cost, DIY-compatible deployment models.

Each phase concluded with documented outcomes and informed the next iteration.

3.1.1 Phase 1: Solution Conceptualisation and Prototyping

Initial design of a low-cost, real-time monitoring system for constrained factory environments.

A Digital Kaizen prototype was developed based on principles from Lean Manufacturing, international case studies, and lessons from previous digital transformation initiatives. The design of the system prioritised affordability, ease of integration, and scalability to accommodate the constraints typically faced by resource-limited manufacturing environments.

Once a problem area was identified - whether related to a machine or a process lacking data visibility - a sensor appropriate to the required data type is installed. Sensors were connected to an edge device, which hosts and executes the data acquisition program. The edge device transmits the captured data via Wi-Fi to a local PC equipped with data processing software and a real-time monitoring dashboard. Simultaneously, the data is also uploaded to a cloud storage platform for secure backup and remote access. This architecture enabled real-time visibility and data-driven feedback within the testbed factory environment [10].

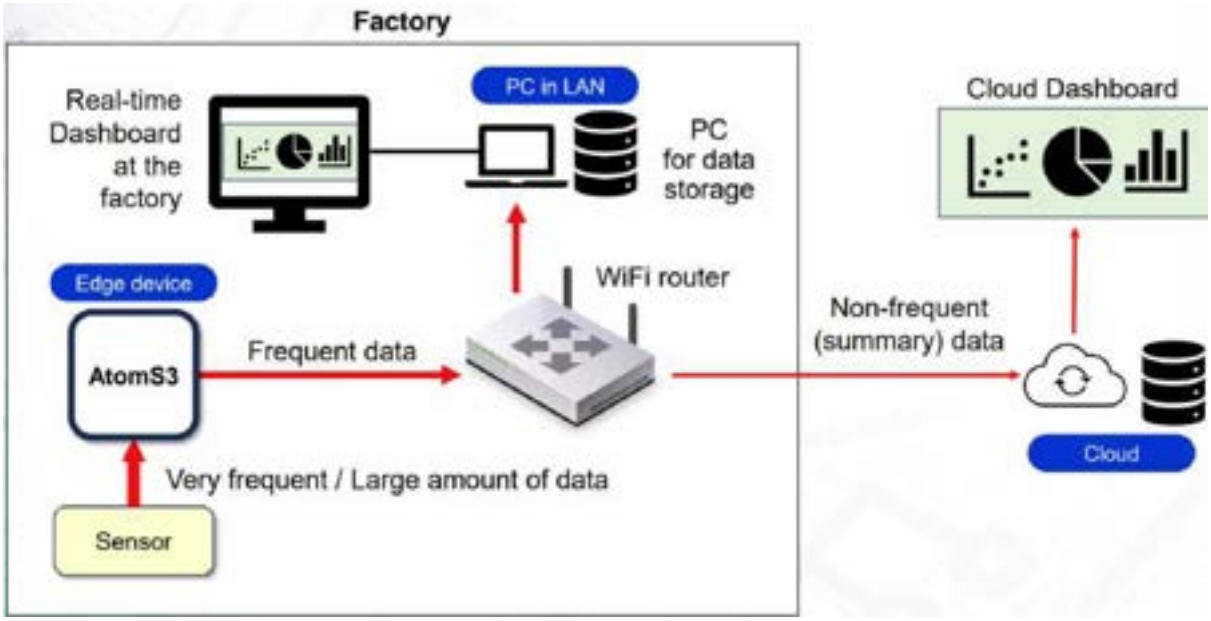

Figure 7: Digital Kaizen Prototype – Architecture for Real-time Monitoring Deployment

The system uses low-cost, open-source technologies selected to support Digital Kaizen in constrained manufacturing environments. Technology choices were guided by affordability, compatibility with legacy equipment, and ease of use for non-specialist staff. The architecture consists of three core components:

1. Sensor Input and Data Acquisition

Light sensors, magnet switches, and AC sensors capture machine status, cycle times, and downtime. Data is collected using M5Stack microcontrollers, which support direct integration with older machines [16].

2. Data Processing and Storage

Sensor data is transmitted over Wi-Fi to a local Node-RED [17] server is running on a laptop. The system handles real-time data flow and stores records in a MySQL database [18] for historical tracking.

3. Dashboard Output and Visualisation

Custom dashboards in Node-RED [17] display live KPIs, trends, and alerts. The interface enables rapid, actionable insights for operators and managers, requiring minimal training.

3.1.2 Phase 2: Pilot Deployment and Iterative Enhancement

Structured pilot to validate *deployment in real-world SMME conditions.*

The prototype was deployed in a testbed comprising four South African SMMEs, with continuous stakeholder engagement to guide iterative refinements. The development process was informed by a combination of direct shop-floor observations, sensor-derived data, and structured user interviews. The deployment followed a structured, phased approach.

The Phase 2 steps are illustrated through a pilot test conducted at Finke Plastics [19], with the Automotive Industry Development Centre – Eastern Cape (AIDC-EC) serving as the principal consultants.

Step 1: Problem Area Identification

The initial stage involved identifying key problem areas within production processes through established Lean methodologies such as Gemba walks [19], interviews, Muda (waste) analysis [20], the 5 Whys technique [21], and Ishikawa (fishbone) diagrams [22]. Once a problem was clearly defined, the relevant process was mapped in detail to facilitate effective implementation of the Digital Kaizen system.

An automated injection moulding machine, illustrated below, experienced frequent nozzle blockages due to material solidification. In the absence of direct supervision, these issues often went unnoticed for extended periods, resulting in significant downtime and tedious recovery efforts.

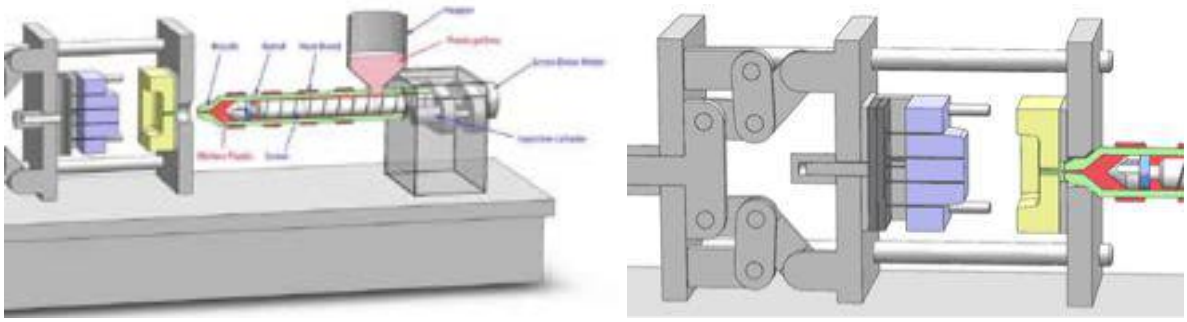

Figure 8: Example Problem Area

Step 2: Sensor Selection for Data Acquisition

Based on the mapped process, suitable sensors were selected to capture relevant operational data. Selection of the sensors was tailored to the nature of the problem and the factory's process architecture.

Figure 9: M5 Stack Sensors

Step 3: Design, Programming, and Testing

Following sensor selection, the data acquisition logic was programmed using UIFlow [23], a graphical programming Integrated Development Environment (IDE) that is easy to use and supports wireless/wired program push. Background processing and connectivity protocols were configured using Node-RED [24], a flow-based, low-code development tool designed for visual programming, primarily aimed at wiring together hardware devices, Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), and online services, especially in the context of the Internet of Things (IoT). Preliminary tests were conducted to validate sensor behaviour and communication.

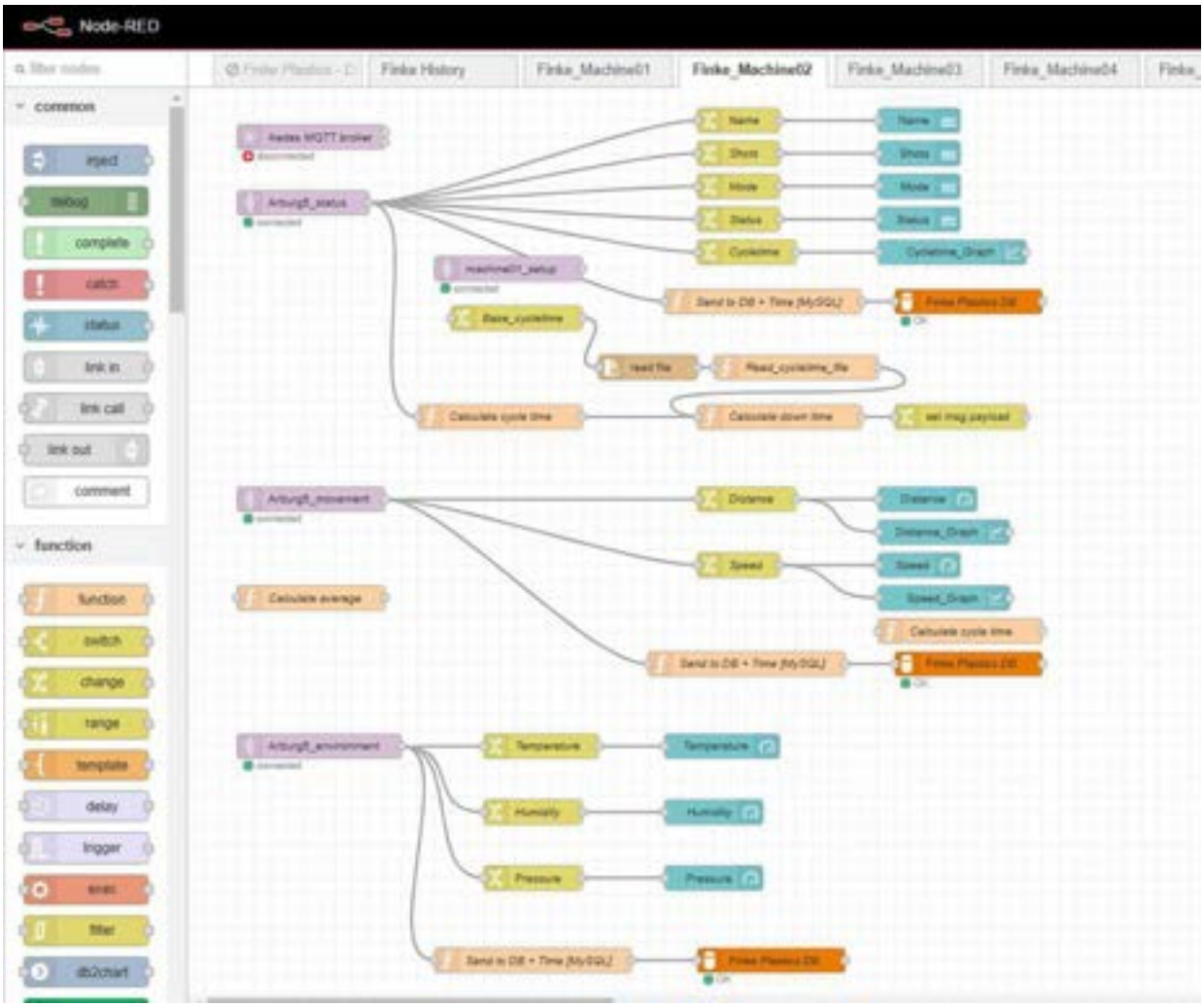

Figure 10: Example Node-Red Code

Step 4: Sensor and Edge Device Implementation

Sensors and microcontroller-based edge devices were installed on the relevant machines or processes. These devices were connected to a Wi-Fi network to enable data transmission.

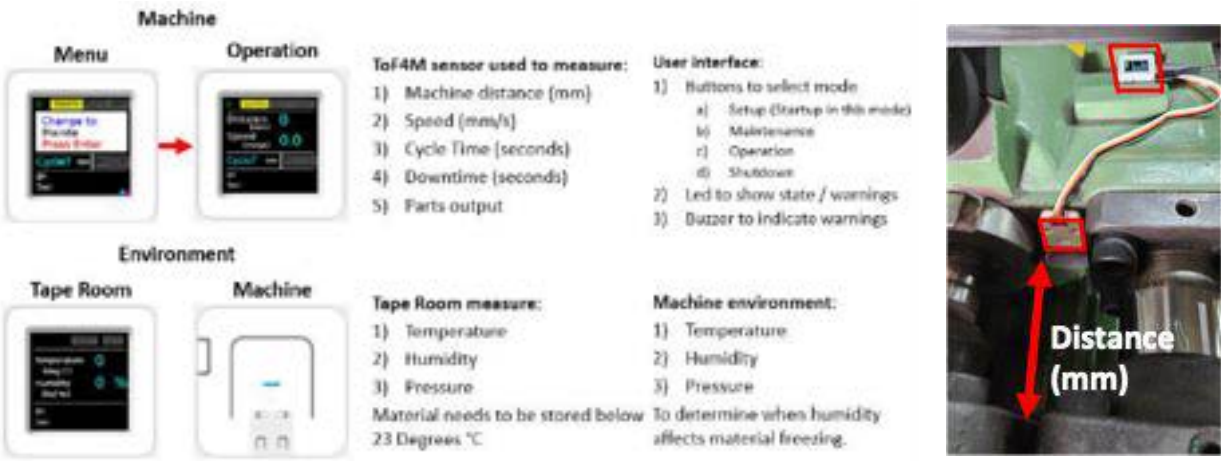

Figure 11: Example Sensor and Edge Device Implementation

Step 5: Testing and Refinement

After installation, the system was tested to ensure stable connectivity and accurate data capture. Any issues identified during this phase were resolved through on-site adjustments and software refinements until the data output met operational requirements.

Step 6: Dashboard Development

Once the sensor data was reliably transmitted to both the local PC and a cloud database [25], a real-time dashboard was developed. The dashboard visualises data in an accessible and actionable format, using graphs and indicators to support decision-making.

Figure 12: Example Dashboard Development

Step 7: Data Analysis and Problem Solving

The final phase involved analysing the data and dashboard outputs to identify anomalies, verify data accuracy, and uncover underlying issues. This enabled the team to propose and implement data-driven improvements to the machines or processes.

Figure 13: Example Data Analysis from Dashboard

3.1.3 Phase 3: Performance Evaluation and Contextual Adaptation

Final system refinement based on operational performance and user feedback.

Pre- and post-intervention data are collected for key performance indicators (KPIs), including downtime, cycle time, and defect rates. These metrics are used to assess the operational impact of the Digital Kaizen system. Based on the results, system refinements are implemented to address contextual challenges such as usability, scalability, and operator interaction.

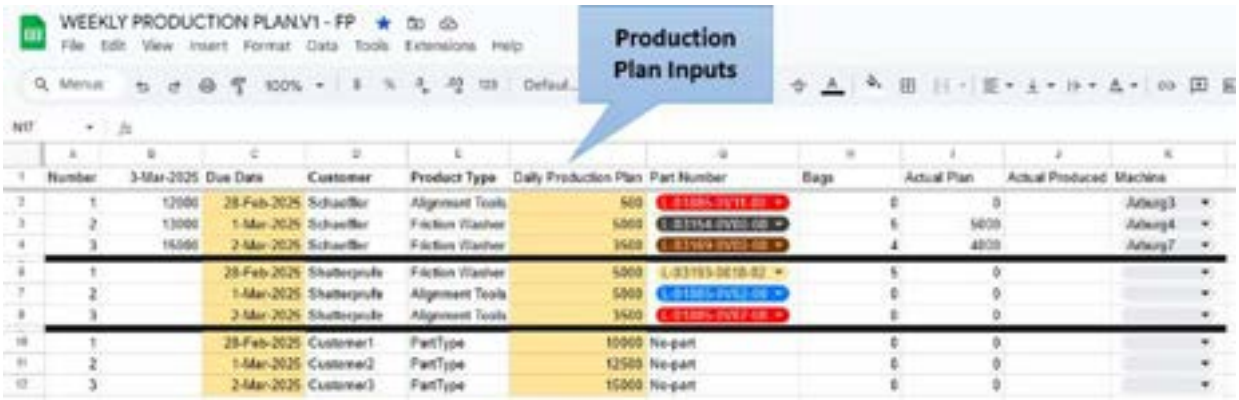

Figure 14: Example Weekly Production Plan

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of Digital Kaizen within South African SMMEs presents several impactful outcomes, affirming both the practical feasibility and transformative potential of integrating real-time data analytics into lean manufacturing environments.

4.1 System Implementation and Operational Impact

The deployment of low-cost sensors in conjunction with open-source platforms facilitated continuous and automated monitoring of critical production parameters, including machine cycle times, equipment downtime, and operator activity. Real-time dashboards provided immediate visibility into a broad range of operational performance aspects, enabling operational teams to detect inefficiencies and address emerging issues proactively. This transition from manual, paper-based tracking systems to digital monitoring reduced delays in reporting and enhanced the accuracy of performance data. For instance, Finke Plastics, a

participating SMME, reported a 93.3% reduction in unplanned downtime within the initial two months of implementation. Table 2 presents the reduction in unplanned downtime, with each "event" referring to a material freezing occurrence that previously required 2–3 hours of recovery time.

Table 2: Reduction in Unplanned Downtime After Process Improvement

Metric	Before Improvement	After Improvement	Reduction	% Reduction
Downtime per Event (avg.)	2.5 hours	0.167 hours	2.33 hours	93.3%
Monthly Downtime (avg. 4.33 weeks)	108.25 hours	7.23 hours	101.02 hours	93.3%
Annual Downtime (52 weeks)	1,300 hours	86.84 hours	1,213.16 hours	93.3%

This improvement was attributed directly to the system's ability to identify anomalies in real-time, allowing for timely intervention. These findings are consistent with outcomes observed in international case studies, such as Asahi Tekko and digital Lean initiatives in the Japanese garment sector, which similarly reported productivity gains and enhanced operational agility through the adoption of Digital Kaizen methodologies.

4.2 User Adoption and Organisational Change

The adoption of these digital systems was high, with operators and managers expressing satisfaction with the system's usability and the tangible value of real-time insights [26]. Implementations were conducted during operator breaks to minimise downtime for employees. Furthermore, sensors were deliberately implemented not to affect the workers' operation in any way.

Some adoption barriers were imminent and required time and creative solutions. One such challenge was network security, where the company's ICT teams had to set up new Wi-Fi networks and use laptops that were not connected to the main network. This did not affect system functionality, other than the initial time it took to establish data and network access.

A major success factor was the participatory design approach. By integrating feedback from frontline staff during iterative development cycles, the implementation process encouraged ownership and reduced resistance to change. This aligns with the principles of contextual innovation, which emphasise the importance of tailoring digital tools to local operational realities rather than applying imported solutions without adaptation.

4.3 Challenges and Lessons Learned

During the development and implementation of the Digital Kaizen system, multiple challenges were encountered, which provided valuable lessons for future applications. These barriers, both technical and organisational, are detailed below [26].

Initial issues such as network instability and sensor calibration errors were resolved through iterative troubleshooting. The open-source, modular nature of the technical stack (comprising tools like Node-RED [24], MySQL [25], and M5Stack [23]) enabled rapid modification and fault isolation, though it also highlighted the need for ongoing technical support within the SMMEs.

Capacity building and skills transfer emerged as essential components for ensuring system sustainability and long-term success. Without internal technical competency, even a well-designed system is unlikely to reach its full potential. The table below summarises key technical and organisational challenges encountered during implementation, along with the lessons learned.

Table 3: Digital Kaizen Implementation Challenges

Challenge Area	Key Issues and Lessons Learned
System Complexity and Flexibility	The initial AtomS3 program was overly complex, making operations inefficient. A simpler, modular design would have improved performance and maintainability.
Environmental and Hardware Limitations	The microcontroller malfunctioned in high temperatures, requiring a protective casing. Additionally, it lacked processing power for growing data needs, leading to the addition of a view-only client for visualisation.
Variability and False Alarms	Differences in machine parameters (e.g., mould stroke lengths) led to false warnings. An automated setup procedure was introduced to adapt to different configurations.
Usability of Alert System	Early warning systems couldn't be reset, which limited usability. User inputs were later added for resetting and mode selection.
Connectivity and Operational Reliability	Inconsistent Wi-Fi coverage initially prevented stable device connection. This was addressed with extenders. A separate issue was devices not being powered on, suggesting the need for SOPs.
Organisational Capacity Constraints	Limited technical skills and staff capacity hindered system optimisation. Ongoing technical support and skills transfer were essential for sustainability.
Data Availability and Machine Downtime	Frequent machine maintenance limited data collection, impacting system analysis and refinement potential.

These challenges show the importance of designing Digital Kaizen systems that are simple, robust, and well-supported for efficient and effective adoption in SMME contexts.

4.4 Interpretation of Results

The pilot demonstrated that the implementation of Digital Kaizen can lead to measurable improvements in productivity, quality, and worker engagement, even within resource-constrained environments. The availability of real-time data facilitated the rapid identification of bottlenecks and enabled more focused and effective interventions.

The implementation across the four SMMEs demonstrated similar results to Finke Plastics demonstrating the potential of Digital Kaizen (only Finke Plastics agreed to share data for this paper at this time); however, it did not function as a turnkey solution. As all components used were open-source, significant custom programming and system integration were required, often necessitating support from consultants. This presented certain barriers, including steep learning curves. Nonetheless, this approach proved advantageous in that it allowed the SMMEs to actively participate in the implementation process, from initial setup and sensor coding to data analysis.

This hands-on involvement enabled the SMMEs not only to appreciate the value of real-time data and Lean Manufacturing principles but also to develop a deeper understanding of their operational challenges and opportunities. By engaging directly with the data and the systems, participants were able to discern which types of data were most valuable and relevant to their processes. Furthermore, the process facilitated valuable skills development. As a result, the SMMEs are now better positioned to contribute meaningfully to future digital transformation initiatives through practical, cost-effective tools suited to their scale and capacity.

4.5 Next Steps

To continue to build on the success of this pilot and extend the benefits of Digital Kaizen, the following steps are proposed:

- Implement train-the-trainer and consultant capacitation initiatives to build local expertise and skills development that can sustainably support the SMMEs in the future
- Develop standardised toolkits to simplify and make the implementation of Digital Kaizen more consistent

- Utilise pilot sites and learning factories as demonstration hubs to increase visibility of the benefits of introducing Digital Kaizen.

5 CONCLUSION

Digital Kaizen offers a practical and cost-effective way for local SMMEs to enhance Lean manufacturing practices through real-time data and low-cost digital tools. By providing a middle path between traditional processes and full-scale digital transformation, the approach allows for a proactive response to production issues, reduces downtime, and makes data-driven decisions.

The pilot confirmed that Digital Kaizen can enhance Lean practices in South African SMMEs by enabling real-time problem detection, reducing downtime by over 90%, and fostering operator engagement through participatory design. These findings demonstrate that low-cost, locally adapted digital tools can provide a scalable pathway to digitalisation in resource-constrained manufacturing environments.

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THE FINANCIAL BENEFIT OF OPERATIONAL READINESS ON CAPITAL PROJECTS: A CASE STUDY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN PLATINUM MINING SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Operational readiness (OR) is essential for capital projects in the mining industry, as it ensures that steady-state operations meet production targets, mitigate risks, and comply with regulatory requirements. Originating in the United States nuclear sector, OR has evolved to other industries, integrating safety, design, and operational efficiency. By aligning systems, equipment, and personnel, OR minimises delays and costs, improving project profitability.

This paper explores the financial impact of OR on South Africa's platinum mining sector by studying its value through key performance indicators, productivity gains, cost savings, and risk mitigation. A methodology, validated by other capital project case studies, is presented to demonstrate OR's financial benefit in optimising project outcomes by supporting timely completion, improved safety, and long-term operational efficiency. The study emphasises the role of OR in enhancing profitability and lowering project risks, resulting in a case for its inclusion in large capital mining projects.

Keywords: Operational Readiness, Capital Projects, Financial Impact, Platinum Mining Sector, South Africa.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

During the 1950s, the term operational readiness (OR) was first introduced to describe the condition of weapon systems being developed [1]. Over time, it evolved to encompass a broader concept of safety and design practices. The evolution of OR can be traced back to the US nuclear industry and was used to describe the integration of safety into decision-making processes [2]. Today, it is used in various industries, such as aviation and mining [3].

As defined by R. Taute, an OR program helps new owners of projects identify and implement effective safety practices. This ensures that assets are ready to start up and operate properly. It also ensures that the business goals are achieved and that environmental regulations are followed [4].

When looking at OR, the aim is to build capabilities into projects to prepare them for start-up [5]. The different categories of capability include systems and processes, which refer to the way an asset functions; equipment, which refers to the reliable components used in the process or facility; and people, which refer to the individuals who are involved in the operation of the asset. The goal of the OR process is to make sure that the asset is brought online with minimal disruption and maximum efficiency. This can help minimise delays, equipment failure, and other issues that can affect the project's success [6].

A range of literature contributes to the understanding and application of OR across different sectors. One peer-reviewed study defines OR as a stakeholder-driven, multi-dimensional concept encompassing systems and technology, organisational processes, people, and facilities [7]. Industry standards such as those outlined by Q. Xu, G. Jia, X. Wang, and Y. Chen, in their report, Governing Value Creation in a Major Infrastructure Client [8], offer a more rigid and auditable definition. These standards position OR as a formalised process involving environmental, safety, health, technical, operational, programmatic, and administrative activities. All of which are evaluated through a structured OR Review (ORR).

1.2 Relevance

OR is essential for ensuring a seamless transition from project completion to operational start-up. In the mining sector, its inclusion in project implementation remains inconsistent, often resulting in delays, inefficiencies, and increased costs [9]. As mining projects operate under strict timelines and substantial financial constraints, structured approaches to OR are increasingly necessary to support timely and cost-effective delivery.

Despite general recognition of its importance, OR is rarely scoped with precision or evaluated in financial terms. There is a need to understand its contribution to mitigating risks, avoiding value loss, and maintaining project momentum. In mining, where project delays can lead to significant financial losses, even minor lapses in readiness planning can have serious consequences. It is proposed that significant value loss often occurs during the transition from project execution to operational handover. Some case studies indicate that up to 30% of the initially projected value can be lost during the handover phase [10].

While OR has long been acknowledged in broader industry practice, its formal adoption within mining has only gained traction in recent years [2]. The absence of a clearly defined scope and a standardised framework for measuring outcomes has hindered consistent implementation. This study contributes by examining OR within the context of platinum mining and identifying its financial benefits when implemented effectively. The findings aim to support project teams in making a stronger case for OR, thereby improving project execution and operational performance.

This paper therefore follows a structured sequence: first, it establishes the background and relevance of OR; second, it outlines the methodological approach; third, it reviews the literature to highlight gaps and key themes in both practice and financial quantification; and finally, it presents a case study that demonstrates how OR interventions can deliver measurable financial value in South African platinum mining.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts an exploratory research design grounded in a scoping literature review (SLR) and validated through a case study. The primary objective is to generate a deeper understanding of how OR is implemented in mining projects and the potential financial benefit it delivers. This approach is appropriate given the limited body of sector-specific empirical work on OR in mining, and the need to capture nuanced professional and organisational insights.

The research method will include the following steps:

1. A SLR will be conducted to identify gaps and key themes relevant to the research topic, drawing on both academic and grey literature sources.
2. These themes will then be applied and explored within the context of a selected case study to provide real-world grounding and practical illustration as validation.
3. This qualitative, multi-method approach enables the validation of findings across literature and case evidence, thereby improving the credibility and applicability of the research outcomes.

3 LITERATURE

3.1 Introduction

A scoping review was conducted to address the exploratory nature of the research and the diversity of available sources. Guided by the framework of Arksey and O'Malley [11], the review maps the breadth of existing literature on OR within South Africa's platinum mining sector, focusing primarily on publications from 2012 onwards, with selected earlier references dating back to 1992.

Particular attention was given to identifying prevailing themes, tracing the historical development of OR, and clarifying key concepts and methodological approaches. A wide range of academic and industry sources, including both qualitative and quantitative studies, were considered, without applying formal quality appraisal or quantitative synthesis, consistent with scoping review principles. This inclusive approach strengthened the understanding of OR in relation to both the financial and practical dimensions of platinum mining capital projects.

The next section begins with a review of the literature employed to conduct the analysis of failures in the transition from project completion to operational handover. Following this, a summary of literature examining the relationship between project delays and their associated financial impacts on capital projects will be provided.

3.2 A Literature Review of Project-to-Operation Transition Failure

Overview of Literature

The existing body of literature does not provide a comprehensive, multi-factor analysis or detailed case studies explaining why completed capital projects in the South African platinum sector, or the broader mining industry, fail to transition successfully from the project phase to operational status. Several recent studies highlight contributing factors such as risk management, regulatory complexity, organisational readiness, and socio-political pressures. Although these are addressed in isolation and without offering integrated, actionable lessons,

they can be applied to broader thinking and linked to OR topics [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17].

Table 1 shows the key points identified from the literature review of Project-to-Operations failure analysis.

Table 1: Key Themes from Literature

Category	References	Key Points
Broad risk management analyses in South African mining.	[12]	Focus on risk, process, and organisational compliance, but do not address the full ramp-up and operations gap.
Lifecycle, performance, and sustainability reviews for platinum mining.	[13], [14], [16]	Sector-wide reviews (technical, labour, finance), but no specific handover/commissioning lessons.
Organisational and stakeholder management in South African mining projects	[15], [17]	Procurement, stakeholder, and Fourth Industrial Revolution case reviews, but indirect to the transition to operations.
Technical-Variance and operational studies.	[18]	Unknown relevance, potential technical-project success angle, but lacking methods and an abstract.

Critical Gaps

While the literature acknowledges that the transition from project completion to operation in the South African mining sector is complex and influenced by multiple factors, there is a notable lack of consolidated, evidence-based analysis. No academic or grey literature published since 2012 offers a systematic, case-based exploration of the causes for project stalls at the operational interface in the platinum sector. Likewise, there is an absence of integrated recommendations that span technical, organisational, regulatory, and socio-political dimensions.

3.3 A Literature Review of the Financial Impact of Project Delays

Overview of Literature

The literature viewed reveals a significant gap in systematically linking operational ramp-up delay causes to financial impacts in South African platinum mining capital projects. The only study to provide direct and quantitative evidence in this area is Ceki et al. [7] , which focuses on the financial consequences of industrial action. No other source comprehensively maps technical, regulatory, or political delay drivers to either direct or indirect financial outcomes in this sector. One source compares project delays to a percentage increase in capital expenditure of 40% to 79%, depending on project size [19].

In

Table 2 we can see the key points discussed in the literature related to the financial impact of project delays.

Table 2: Key Themes from Literature

Category	References	Key Points
Quantitative delay, financial linkages and platinum-specific information.	[7]	Examines the impact of industrial action (strikes) on revenue and EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortisation) for JSE-listed South African platinum miners (2011–2015) using audited financial statements and t-tests. Finds that strikes significantly reduce revenue and EBITDA for all companies studied. Source is a peer-reviewed, industry-focused journal.
Platinum operational-focused and optimisation frameworks with finance.	[6]	Reviews how operational factors (e.g., mining conditions, legislative changes, social/environmental risks) impact project performance and cash flow in platinum mining projects. Discusses the importance of life-cycle cash-flow models and valuation methodologies. Includes examples but lacks systematic delay-to-cost quantification.
Qualitative and multi-case risk management focused on mining and processing.	[20], [21]	Investigate risk management in construction projects for mineral processing plants in South Africa through qualitative methods (surveys/interviews). Identify operational, financial, legal, and political risks. Multi-case qualitative study on risk management adoption and barriers in a major southern African mining company.
Generic risk with uncertainty and cost models (not platinum-specific).	[8]	Reviews uncertainty-management practices in generic mining pre-feasibility studies using NPV-based approaches. Identifies technical and market uncertainties. Proposes a systematic risk-management process. Does not focus on the platinum sector or quantify delay-to-financial impacts.
Descriptive delay for cost overrun accounts (varied sectors).	[7], [19], [20], [22]	Looks at causes of delay and cost overruns in EPCM (Engineering, Procurement, and Construction Management) projects. Focus on the causes and effects of project delays in coal mining. Reviews cost and schedule overruns in construction. Reviews causes and remedies for delays in infrastructure.
Narrative and case-based on strike/disruption in the platinum mining sector.	[23]	Appears to provide a narrative account of the 2014 platinum strike in South Africa.

Critical Gaps

For those seeking empirical examples within the platinum mining sector where operational delays are directly linked to financial losses, the only available and systematically evidenced case concerns industrial action [7]. Broader causes of delay, such as regulatory and technical challenges, remain underexplored in terms of financial quantification.

3.4 Summary of Literature Review

In summary, recent studies identify multiple factors contributing to failure in the transition from project completion to operational handover, including inadequate risk mitigation, insufficient process and organisational compliance, technical unpreparedness, and shortages of critical labour resources. Yet the financial consequences of these shortcomings remain underexplored, with limited empirical evidence available to quantify their impact.

The literature further reflects a fragmented treatment of OR and its financial implications, while risk and organisational dimensions are comparatively well addressed, integrated analyses explicitly linking readiness to measurable financial outcomes are absent. This gap underscores the need for robust, case-based investigation, providing the foundation for the methodological approach adopted in this study.

Future research should focus on developing standardised financial models and evaluation tools that can systematically quantify the economic impact of OR across projects. Such tools could integrate cash-flow modelling, scenario testing, and cost–benefit analysis to demonstrate how

readiness interventions affect net present value (NPV), payback periods, and operational efficiency. Comparative studies across commodities, sectors, and geographies would also strengthen external validity and promote knowledge transfer.

4 CASE STUDY

4.1 Ethical Considerations

The following data is anonymised under a confidentiality agreement to protect commercial sensitivity.

4.2 Introduction

Following the identification of gaps and key themes in the literature, the case study below demonstrates how OR interventions were practically implemented and quantified in financial terms within a platinum mining project.

The project was selected because it represents a typical Upper Group 2 (UG2) platinum development with available operational and financial data. The case study is an example of where an ORR was executed in time to identify improvement areas and have a significant benefit on the overall project delivery. Readiness elements were mapped across people, process, equipment, facilities, and systems.

The NPV assessment used measured ore production, industry-standard grade assumptions, and average market platinum prices, with project schedule comparisons attributing to acceleration specifically because of OR interventions.

4.3 Background

A case study was conducted on a greenfield capital project in a brownfield operational area for an underground platinum mine in the UG2 chromitite reef, part of the Bushveld Igneous Complex in South Africa. The mine, designed as a decline system, is situated close to other underground operations owned by the same mining company. Although certain operational departments are intended to be shared, the new mine is required to be self-sustaining from a facility and infrastructure perspective. This necessitates that all operational and infrastructural requirements be accommodated on-site at the new decline. This includes, among others, change houses, maintenance and workshop areas, control rooms, lamp rooms, operator facilities, and offices. With these facilities, the personnel required for each facility and activity will also need to be onboarded.

The mine has been planned as an on-reef development, which will enable the dispatch of production-value tonnage to the concentrator early in the development schedule, hence the importance of efficient production ramp-up. During the initial phases of project planning, it was assumed that some of the existing services on nearby sites could be utilised temporarily to start development as soon as possible. Consequently, the development of the boxcut portal was prioritised to start the mine development phase as quickly as possible. This resulted in the availability of permanent infrastructure only much later in the project schedule.

An ORR was subsequently undertaken to test the feasibility of this assumption. The main operational areas were mapped as process flows, including only non-negotiable requirements to each process. At each activity in the process flow, the guiding questions were: Do we have the people, facilities, equipment, processes, and systems in place to complete this task? These considerations align with the key themes identified in the literature review. Figure 1 provides an example of such a process flow.

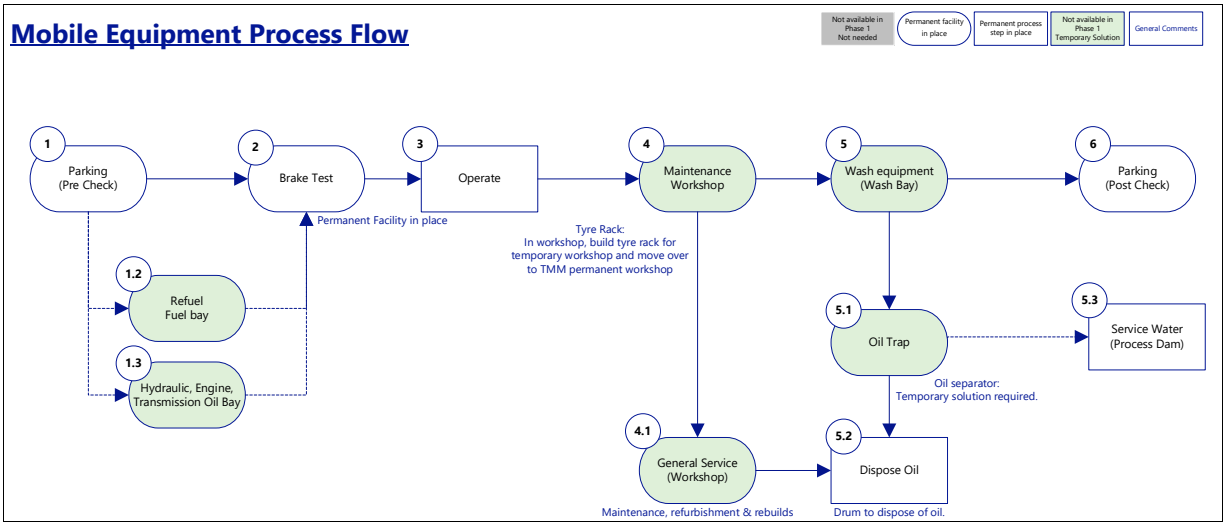

Figure 1: Mobile Equipment Process Flow

Through the ORR it was identified that in order to facilitate the timely development of the box cut and enable early production tonnage, certain temporary facilities would, in fact, be required at the new project site. These included:

- Change House
  - Potable Water Tanks
- Engineering Workshop
  - Explosives Storage
  - Refuelling Bay
  - Minisub Cabling
- Shaft Storage Yard
  - Engineering Spares Yard
  - Mining Spares Yard
  - Capital Spares Yard
- Control Room
- Lamp Room
- Security Access to Temporary Areas
- Training Facilities
- Refuge Bay (UG)
- Ventilation

An OR Plan was formulated to provide a structured framework for preparing the project for the commencement of early development. The interventions undertaken to facilitate OR, together with their respective schedule implications, are detailed in

Table 3.

Notably, activity line 11 in

Table 3 illustrates that the initiation of development could occur six months earlier than originally anticipated, relative to a scenario in which no ORR had been conducted. This advancement in the development timeline has a direct financial implication, as it accelerates the generation of project revenue, thereby contributing to an increase in the overall NPV of the project.

Table 3: Project Schedule and Interventions

			Planned			Actual			Due to ORP		
	High-Level Actions	**Intervention action due to ORR**	**Start Date**	**End Date**	**Duration (Days)**	**Start Date**	**End Date**	**Duration (Days)**	**Start Date**	**End Date**	**Duration (Days)**
1	Project Start		21/01/18			21/01/18			21/01/18		
2	Operational Readiness		21/10/29	24/10/24	1091	21/10/29	24/10/24	1091	21/10/29	24/10/24	1091
3	Bulk Earthworks Construction		22/03/07	23/09/21	563	22/03/07	23/09/21	563	22/03/07	23/09/21	563
4	Box Cut		22/03/07	23/10/17	589	22/03/07	23/10/17	589	22/03/07	23/10/17	589
5	Ventilation Shaft 1 Fan	Permanent facility moved forward	23/01/05	24/10/28	662	23/01/05	24/10/28	662	22/05/12	24/03/04	662
6	TMM Workshop	Temporary workshop installed	23/08/24	24/06/26	307	23/08/24	24/06/26	307	23/10/01	24/02/19	141
7	South Shaft Workshops	Temporary workshop installed	23/08/24	24/09/10	383	23/08/24	24/09/10	383	23/10/01	24/02/19	141
8	Shaft Store Yard	Temporary store yard installed	23/08/25	24/09/26	398	23/08/25	24/09/26	398	23/08/01	24/03/04	216
9	Production Fleet	Not required	23/09/05	25/11/01	788	23/09/05	25/11/01	788	23/09/05	25/11/01	788
10	Development Fleet	First critical equipment delivered on time	23/09/21	25/11/01	772	23/09/21	25/11/01	772	23/09/21	25/11/01	772
11	Mining Development Start	Minimum requirements not met	23/10/05	25/08/27	692	24/10/29	26/09/21	692	24/03/05	26/01/26	692
12	Lamp Room	Temporary lamp room installed	23/10/16	24/06/25	253	23/10/16	24/06/25	253	23/09/01	24/02/15	167
13	Change house	Temporary change house installed	23/11/01	24/06/18	230	23/11/01	24/06/18	230	23/08/01	24/03/01	213
15	Surface Infrastructure		22/05/02	27/02/20	1755	22/05/02	27/02/20	1755	22/05/02	27/02/20	1755
16	Project Finish			27/02/20			27/02/20			27/02/20	

With these facilities, the requirement of resources to operate the facilities was identified, as well as training for those resources. Lastly, network infrastructure was also required. The associated cost can be seen in

Table 4.

Table 4: Cost of OR Requirements

Nr	Temporary Requirements	Total
1	ORR (6 Months)	R3 000 000
2	Ventilation	R15 370 000
3	Temporary facilities	R40 570 000
4	Training	R7 550 000
5	Network Infrastructure	R12 840 000
	Total	**R79 330 000**

The below graph in Figure 2 indicates the initial project completion timeline when the box cut development was the priority, compared to the project completion with the adjusted timeline due to OR interventions resulting in early production tons.

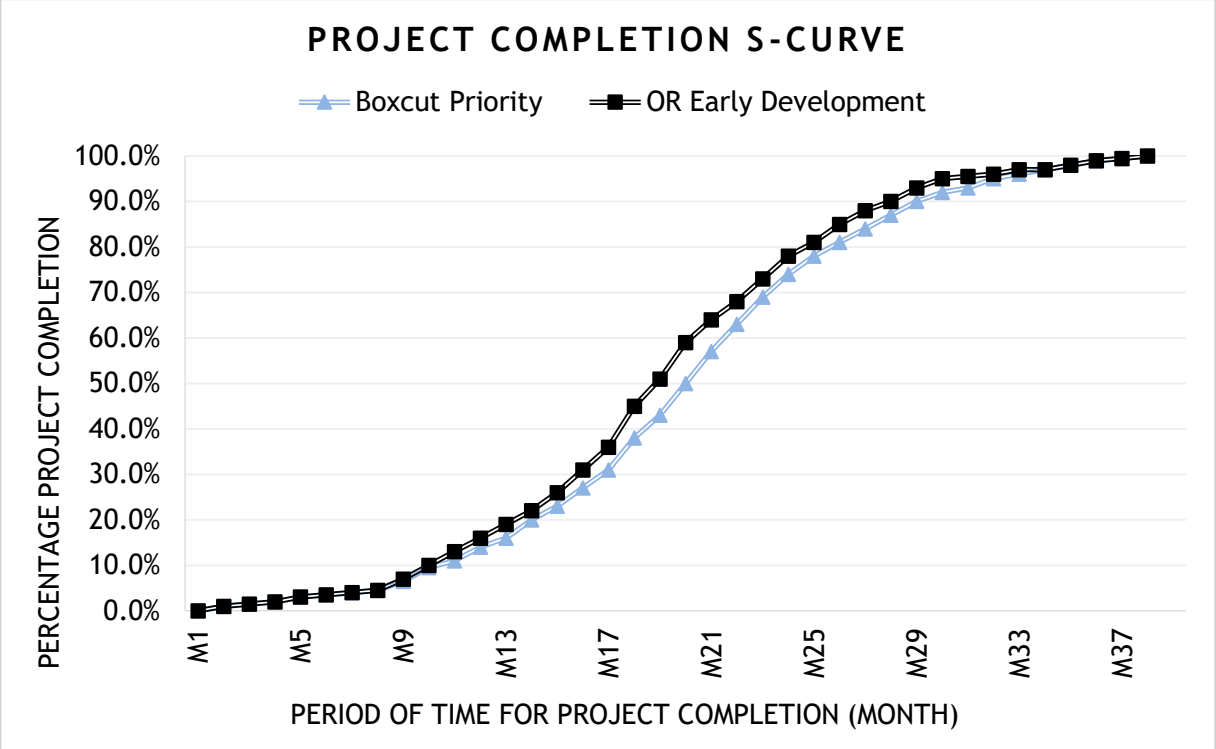

Figure 2: Project Completion S-Curve

4.4 Results

As can be seen in Figure 2**Error! Reference source not found.**, the project's s-curve moved to the left as a result of the implementation of the OR interventions identified during the ORR. Once the ORR was completed and gaps were identified, a mitigation plan (OR Plan) was developed to either bring forward the delivery of permanent facilities or implement temporary alternatives to close these gaps.

This approach allowed the date of first development with successful production to the concentrator to begin six months earlier than the actual start date as seen in the schedule, enabling earlier revenue generation. It ensures that the steady-state production is reached

earlier. Without the ORR, this would not have been possible. This demonstrates that key OR areas, such as facilities and the people, equipment, processes, and systems linked to them, can significantly affect the timeline of a capital project.

The cost of implementing the temporary facilities amounted to ± 79,330,000 ZAR. These items will be reused in the permanent facilities or would have been an expense at a later stage in the project. Over the six months, a total of ±21,665 tonnes (Tonnes Broken seen in Table 5) of platinum group metal (PGM) ore was produced.

Table 5: Measured Actuals

Month	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10
Total Dev Meters	5,1	24,2	26,8	46,7	48,9	50,4	60,8	78,7	54,2	76,8
Tonnes Broken	420	1 705	1 868	3 451	3 621	4 958	5 642	7 937	5 538	8 661
Broken Grade		0,90	1,25	1,58	2,19	2,21	2,28	2,37	0,28	0,63
Tonnes Hoisted (Dry)		1 702	1 865	3 451	3 615	4 592	5 634	7 926	5 531	8 389

UG2 ore typically contains between 4.4 and 10.8 grams per tonne (g/t) of PGMs, with platinum making up roughly 45% to 55% of this content. This equates to an estimated platinum yield of around 2 to 5.9 grams per tonne of UG2 ore, depending on ore grade and processing efficiency [24] . From the ±43801 tonnes broken, up to ±258,426g UG2 platinum ore is processed through the already operational concentrator.

Using an average platinum price of 1000 USD per troy ounce for the period under discussion [25], a total of ± 147,909,358 ZAR revenue was achieved, 6 months sooner than originally planned. Thus, the OR investment yielded a financial benefit to the mining operation by not only ensuring that the project delivery remains on schedule but also enabling revenue 6 months earlier than originally planned.

When looking at the impact the revenue gain has on the overall NPV of the project, the analysis shows that OR interventions increase the potential NPV and partially close the gap between the best-case NPV and the value lost due to start-up delays as identified with the ORR. In this case study, the ORR identified critical gaps, such as the absence of temporary facilities, early workforce mobilisation, and supporting infrastructure, that would have prevented development from progressing as scheduled.

The NPV was calculated using the following approach:

- Baseline (Best Case NPV): Calculated on the assumption of on-time delivery, no significant delays, and revenue streams commencing as originally planned.
- NPV Without OR: Adjusted to reflect a delay in cash inflows, discounted back using the project's cost of capital. This represents the scenario in which OR interventions were not implemented.
- NPV due to OR: Incremental NPV recovered by bringing forward production by six months through OR measures.
- Final NPV: Combines the baseline with the effect of the avoided delay, showing that although some value leakage persists relative to the theoretical best case, the OR interventions enabled partial recovery of lost value.

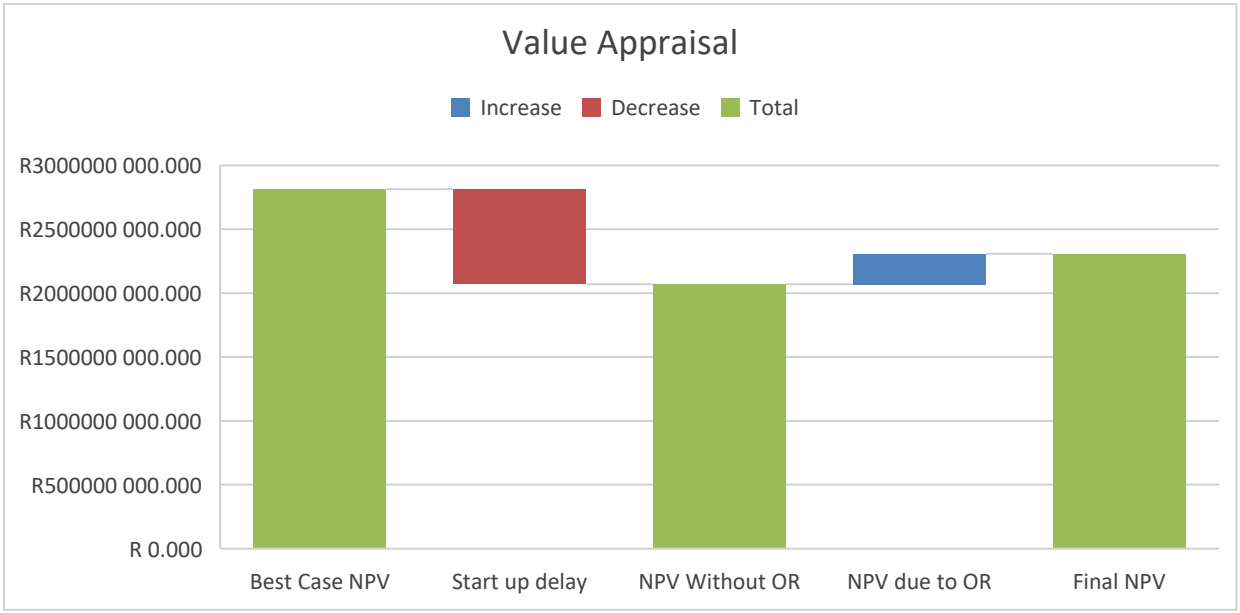

Figure 3: NPV Calculation

As illustrated in Figure 3, the project's NPV without OR falls significantly due to the expected delay. The implementation of OR interventions restores a portion of this lost value, resulting in a final NPV closer to the best-case scenario. This quantification demonstrates how targeted OR actions translate directly into financial outcomes by accelerating revenue generation and reducing value erosion.

5 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the role of OR in capital projects within the South African platinum mining sector, with a specific focus on its financial benefit. The findings underscore that inadequate OR planning significantly contributes to project delays, inefficiencies, and missed financial opportunities, as well as failure to successfully hand over to operations after project completion.

Through a systematic scoping review, we identified the reasons for the project's failure to hand over. With an applied case study, it was demonstrated that OR interventions, such as temporary infrastructure and early personnel mobilisation, can improve project delivery timelines and unlock early revenue generation while increasing the potential NPV by 10%.

Failing to identify these gaps and intervene is also the reason why projects lose the opportunity for additional revenue or fail to successfully hand over to operations after project completion, and this is linked to OR.

While the financial investment of OR can be substantial, the resultant benefits justify its inclusion as a strategic component of capital project planning. Furthermore, the research highlights the limited integration of financial quantification within current OR literature, particularly in the context of South African mining, presenting a critical area for academic development.

5.2 Recommendation

Mining companies are advised to institutionalise OR as a formal and integral component of capital project development. This should commence during the early planning phases and continue through to handover and ramp-up. OR planning should be embedded within the

broader project governance framework, supported by dedicated resources, and aligned with project financial evaluations to ensure its contributions are adequately quantified and incorporated into investment decisions.

The case study is limited to a single case, which constrains its generalisability. Causality is inferred rather than tested. Future work should include a case study to indicate the possible capital value loss if OR is not implemented as a control study. Interviews can also be done to enable the triangulation of findings across literature, case evidence, and expert perspectives, thereby improving the credibility and applicability of the research outcomes.

Future academic research should address the current deficiencies in the literature by developing quantitative models that link levels of OR maturity to financial and operational outcomes. Comparative studies across sectors such as infrastructure, oil and gas, and energy could yield valuable insights and foster knowledge transfer to the mining industry. Case studies following projects from inception through to steady-state operations would provide more robust evidence of OR's long-term value.

Furthermore, with the growing emphasis on environmental, social, and governance factors, further research should explore how OR can be leveraged to support compliance with sustainability and social license requirements. Collectively, these research efforts would help close significant gaps in the academic field, enhance industry practice, and improve the financial resilience and execution success of capital projects in the mining sector.

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE APPLICATION OF BLOCKCHAIN TO IMPROVE THE TRACEABILITY PROTOCOL IN AN ERP SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

For organizations in South Africa, effective product traceability is crucial, especially when it comes to product recalls due to defective goods. Traditional ERP systems, despite having traceability modules, often struggle to maintain data accuracy and real-time processing across complex supply chains involving multiple suppliers. This study investigates the possible integration of blockchain technology within an ERP system to address the primary seamless data flow challenges and enhance supply chain efficiency. Drawing on the established DMAIC framework to identify the short comings of the current software processes, it was identified that inefficiencies such as duplicate entries, format inconsistencies, and lagged transactions posed a substantial threat to data integrity and business process workflows, especially within context of recall events. The study further carried an assessment of the data synchronisation process within the ERP system and then proposes strategies that could be adopted to incorporate blockchain technology to improve data synchronisation and handling.

Keywords: Blockchain technology, ERP integration, Supply chain management, Product traceability

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1 INTRODUCTION

Today's supply chains have become exceedingly intricate and depend heavily on both standalone and centralized information systems within the company, occasionally even combining the two [1]. From raw material suppliers to the point at which the client receives the product or service, these central standalone systems operate at several organizational levels and throughout the supply chain network [2].

Effective customer service is the primary goal that these nationwide companies have in common [3]. However, with the rise of globalization, it has become nearly impossible to assess information and manage risk in this complex network while adhering to the various regulatory laws and taking into account the various cultures and human behaviors found in supply chain networks [1].

An example of a central system is an Enterprise Resource Planning system (ERP), which is regarded as one of the most significant information technology systems ever developed and is capable of effectively integrating corporate activities onto a single platform [4].

The lack of precise product life cycle data is a crucial strategic and competitive issue affecting supply chain sustainability [5]. As an example, consider the July 2021 statement by Tiger Brands, the biggest food producer in South Africa, that it was immediately recalling more than 20 million canned vegetable products because of safety issues resulting from defective cans. This corresponds to a 9% annual production recall, which might have a financial impact of R650 million.

That is but one illustration of how product recalls affect businesses, without considering how long it takes for them to recognize the need to carry out a recall. This puts people's health in danger in addition to causing damage to the company’s finances. Due to their heavy reliance on these centralized isolated systems, these issues make it questionable whether present supply chains can securely enable information transparency without increasing the risk of fraud or cyberattacks [1].

The answer to this problem may be blockchain technology (blockchain). Blockchain is thought to have the promising potential to drastically transform the supply chain trade model into a reliable ecosystem of exchange because of its ability to improve information authenticity and transparency. [5]. Blockchain is a type of shared, distributed ledger that contains a series of blocks that form a chain of batched transactions [6].

The elimination of a third-party administrator brings benefits to the supply chain [5]. People can independently verify the content of the database at a specific moment and the consistency with what every other member also sees[7]. This fact ensures that all members have a reliable view of the common database.

The aim of this study investigates the integration of blockchain technology within an ERP system to enhance aspects related to product traceability, thereby improving reliability, trust and transparency for supply chain stakeholders.

1.1 Objectives of the study

1. Determine and record all current issues affecting data traceability and transparency with ERP integration of information within 2 companies.
2. Use data analysis tools to determine and rank the main causes of inefficiencies impacting traceability, data integration and handling between an ERP and blockchain.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review looks at the complex nature of supply chain management (SCM) and its developments, particularly in relation to blockchain technology and traceability. This section covers the fundamental concepts of SCM, particularly the interaction of traceability and blockchain in the supply chain that helps monitoring product quality, assures proper communication across the wide networks, and manages the product distribution effectively.

2.1 Supply Chain Management (SCM)

SCM includes monitoring and tracking flows of goods from raw material to final products [8]. Every business operating in this turbulent business world should focus on having effective supply chain operations that ensure a smooth movement of its goods and services. Ensuring that all the products and services are up to the required agreed specifications [9].

It is important to highlight a supply chain's complexity and multilayering. It involves multiple supplier tiers that supply a primary manufacturer. Every tier has a unique group of suppliers, which may include the components, raw materials, or services that are ultimately used to create a hierarchy. These retailers may be located in various cities or countries. To ensure that the flow of these goods and services is smooth within the company and between the supply chain's organizations, a variety of skills are needed [10].

[10], in his research work, highlights that communication plays the key role in running effective operations for South African firms. Further mentions how effective communication allows clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each throughout the supply chain to avoid confusion that could result in inefficiencies.

Enterprise Requirements Planning Systems (ERPs) provide a competitive advantage to SCM resource optimization, as ERP systems are used within organizations to share, communicate information, and manage company-wide business processes on a unique and centralized database [11]. By optimizing the resources of the supply chain, ERP gives a competitive advantage [6]. However, in the context of sustainable SCM, less is known on how buyers and suppliers can jointly unlock sustainability in the supply chain [12]

In South African businesses, technical skills are regarded as the core of a successful SCM [13]. Technical skills are the necessary interpersonal, strategic, cognitive, and self-assured qualities, according to [10]. When properly cultivated, these skills significantly increase the success of SCM initiatives in South African firms.

2.2 Traceability

The capacity to follow a product across the supply chain and to record and retrieve product information are the two primary components of supply chain traceability [14]. These elements are especially pertinent to our work since they address both the tracking of product qualities and the actual movement of products across the supply network [15].

South Africa has fallen behind more developed nations [16] and needs to be up to date with worldwide Industry 4.0. For this to occur, organizations in South Africa have to implement collaborative work and apply change management practices [17].

Traceability of the supply chain is crucial for risk management, quality control, and promoting sustainability in many contexts. [15] defines one of the key components of traceability is being able to determine the sources of raw material. This is essential because it enables businesses to ensure that suppliers adhere to social and environmental standards and overall quality of their products. In the food and beverage industry, consumers rank trust as the most crucial factor [18]. [19], states that consumers are in desperate need of comprehensive information about food from farm to fork [20]. Traceability should include the ability to pinpoint the source

of every input, including medicine, animal feed, and forage, as well as any chemicals that may have an impact on the items' quality either directly or indirectly [21].

Users can react when a product recall is necessary within today's ERP systems. Companies can keep a tight eye on internal processes, which also guarantees data accuracy and consistency, however, it does not offer traceability outside the walls of the company [22].

Walmart Inc. (WMT), one of the largest brands in the global retail industry, developed a cutting-edge blockchain-based food traceability system to track food in North America [19]. Food firms were able to increase the transparency, accuracy, and trustworthiness of their food information thanks to blockchain. Additionally, it saves Walmart 2.2 seconds instead of seven days when tracking the origins of a particular food [19]. It is anticipated that blockchain will significantly affect SCM operations in other sectors as well. Standardizing the quality documentation processes throughout the supply chain can increase the efficiency of everyone involved in the supply chain [23].

2.3 Blockchain Technology

Blockchain can address key supply chain challenges related to efficiency, counterfeiting, and traceability [24]. Blockchain functions through a network of blocks, each of which has a copy of the complete blockchain, as opposed to conventional databases that are managed by a single entity [25]. These blocks of data are connected in chronological order [26]. This is done by adding the data to a new block, linked to the previous block, and embedding the unique code of the previous block in the header of the current block.

Blockchain technology makes otherwise chaotic environments more orderly, simple, transparent, trustworthy, and automated [25]. It enables businesses to keep an eye on the whole supply chain, upstream and downstream, by giving manufacturers access to comprehensive information on every part being produced [24].

By tracking transactional information and creating a chain of records and ownership, blockchain technology also increases traceability through record-keeping processes that are permanent, unalterable, and verifiable [25]. Although it is hard to change one block in the chain, it is almost impossible to change every block at once [27].

ERP systems are software designed to organize and exchange data amongst departments within a company [6]. Blockchain offers a fundamentally different approach from ERP systems, it relies on decentralized record-keeping to ensure security and transparency across all transactions in the supply chain [5]. Adding blockchain technology to an ERP system that already exists supports collaboration across the platform and expands its capabilities.

2.4 Blockchain in Supply Chain Management

Blockchain’s potential to ensure validity, traceability, and reliability of information and smart contracts' potential to create a trustful environment has shown that supply chains are very likely to face a significant change [28].

The adoption of new technologies, like blockchain in the supply chain, is heavily influenced by relative advantages like increased security and transparency [29]. But companies shouldn't decide to use blockchain-based just on these alleged benefits around the technology. Rather, they thoroughly assess the technical difficulties and the real benefits blockchain will bring to the company [23].

The cost of implementing new technologies, such as blockchain technology, in supply chain businesses is one of the factors that [34] identifies as a barrier to adoption. These include costs for hardware, software, and network infrastructure required to host the blockchain.

The practical applications of DMAIC are documented in several research studies; however, relatively few have been used to evaluate blockchain technology [30]. The author discusses the importance of statistical tools like Pareto charts, control charts, and value stream maps, which enable extensive analysis and actual demonstrations of financial returns.

DMAIC is notable for its methodical, transparent approach to problem-solving [31]. It collects and analyses data, identifies errors, and implements effective solutions by integrating advanced statistical tools with a methodical approach. The fundamental goal is to help project teams maintain focus throughout the entire process, ensuring reliable results and reducing inefficiencies [31].

ERP systems improve supply chain efficiency through better use of resources, traceability, communication, and inventory control, while blockchain adds stronger transparency, security, and traceability [43] [44]. While most studies focussed on developed countries, there was minimal literature within the South African context.

In the next section the methodology and findings have been combined in the discussion.

3 METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

This section examines the research methods and results that are used to tackle the integration issues experienced between an ERP and blockchain technology. This section is helpful in putting an existing system in the right perspective and looking for corrective and preventive actions thereafter. In pursuit of these aims, the Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve and Control (DMAIC) technique was adopted as the most appropriate structure for managing this work. In this section, each step of the DMAIC methodology will be introduced in detail providing methods applied and results to achieving the key objectives of the study.

3.1 DMAIC Method

DMAIC methodology, shown in Figure 1, was used to guide the research process, which provides a structured and systematic approach to streamline operations, minimize errors, and integrate between systems. This method consists of five steps and stands for DMAIC, which stands for Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, and Control [32]. This methodology provides a structured, data-driven approach that's proven effective in both industrial and service contexts [33]. Each phase in the DMAIC cycle brings focus to the process challenges and opportunities for measurable improvements in teaching and administrative operations [34]. By adopting DMAIC, this project follows a data-driven, quality-focused methodology tailored to long-term improvements and effective integration.

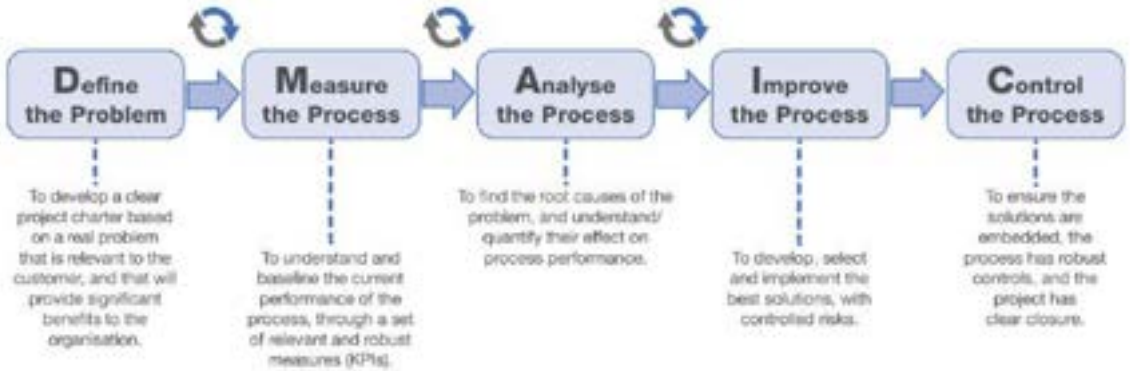

Figure 1:Using DMAIC on a Six Sigma project [35]

3.1.1 Define Phase:

The project commenced at the Define stage, during which a comprehensive project plan in Figure 2, outlining the scope and objectives of the planned integration of SYSPRO and

blockchain technologies was formulated. Project Kick-off and Scope Definition first clearly define the project's goals, roles, and resources. Current State Assessment, will outline the current workflows, collect baseline data, and pinpoint SYSPRO's operational inefficiencies. Design Phase consists of feasibility investigations, solution planning, and pilot program development. The suggested pilot solution will be thoroughly examined during the Test and Evaluate phase. Any remaining problems will be resolved, and controls will be implemented

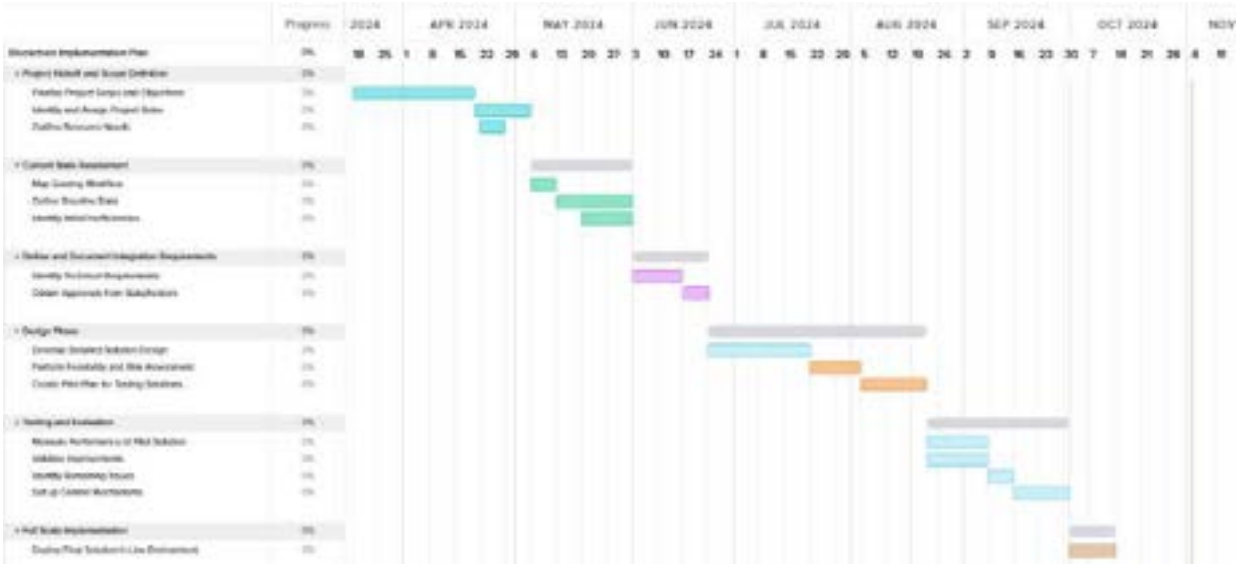

Figure 2: Project Plan to Improve Traceability in Supply Chain

Process Mapping was used to depict the present flow of sales orders and to provide a meaningful and ordered path for integration. Currently, Company A and Company B manage sales orders through back-and-forth emails, with numerous manual steps involved shown in Figure 3. Manual input errors in an ERP can cause mismatches between orders and deliveries, resulting in misunderstandings and strained business relationships. Blockchain provides a solution by creating a tamper-proof, transparent record of transactions, while dramatically simplifying the overall workflow.

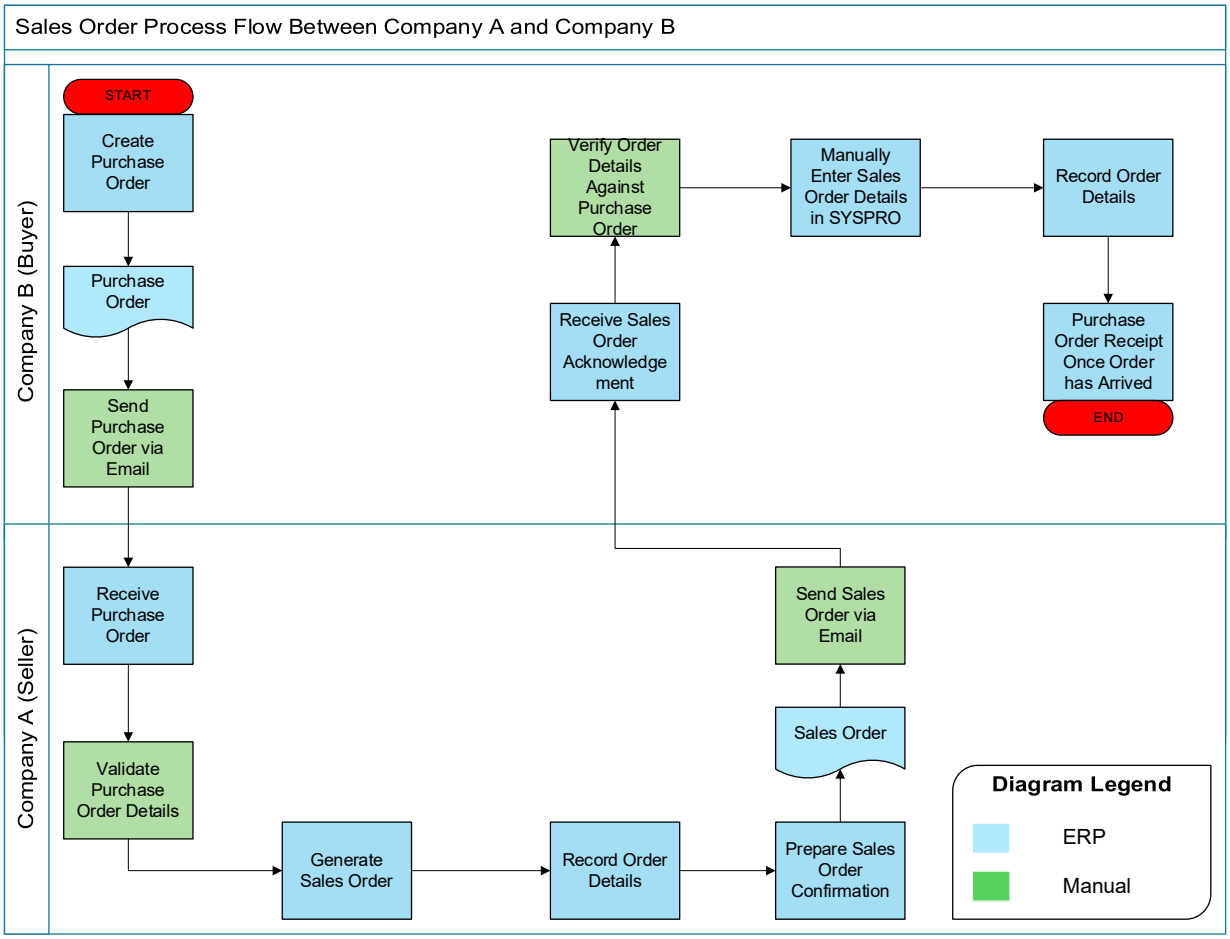

Figure 3: Sales Order Process Flow between Company A and Company B

3.1.2 Measure Phase:

The initial data on how ERP systems from two different companies handled sales order processing were collected in the Measure phase. This step looks at how accurate the data was and how fast it was processed, as well if errors were encountered. Key metrics include transaction speed and error rates. These gives us a first look at performance and set standards for later stages. Data redundancy is the largest issue, according to the Pareto analysis in Figure 4, with 432 occurrences overall, or 52.4% of the total.

Less frequent issues over the past year include server capacity constraints, data entry errors, and system outages. While they are rare, they also help produce unnecessary inefficiencies in the system.

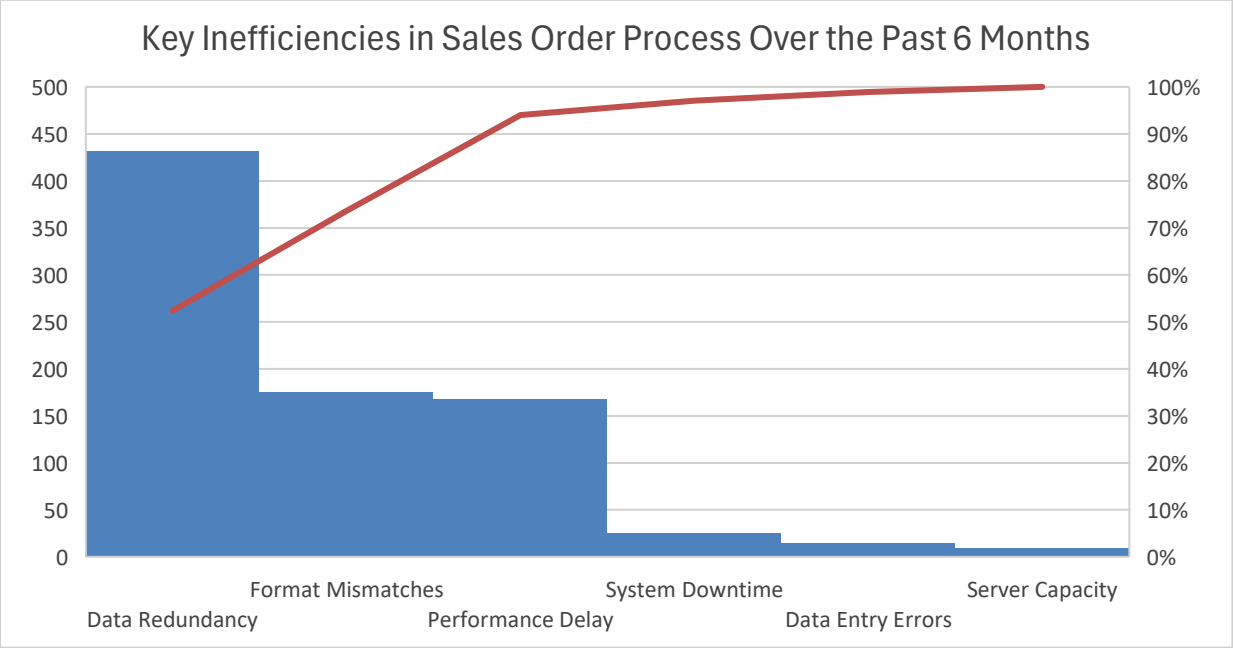

Figure 4: Pareto Chart for the Key Inefficiencies in the Sales Order Process

3.1.3 Analyse Phase:

Data gathered from determining the main reasons for delays and integration problems in sales order recording were examined during the project's Analyse phase. Using the Five Whys in Table 1, problem mapping was used to prioritise the root causes of inefficiency. The development of solutions that address the underlying issues was made possible by this deeper comprehension of the causes [36].

5 W's 1H	Detail of Phenomena	How Frequent
What?	Redundant data entry steps in the sales order processing workflow	Multiple times per order
When?	During each sales order entry and update, especially when correcting errors	High frequency during each transaction
Where?	Across the ERP system and manual record-keeping processes	Distribution center and sales department
Who?	Sales personnel, data entry staff, and distribution team	Key staff in order handling and data entry
Which?	Redundant steps include re-entering order details, double-checking entries, and reconciling data manually	All involved in sales order processing
How?	Multiple systems require duplicate data entries, causing inefficiency and increasing error potential	Repeatedly for every transaction
Why?	Answer	
Why-1	Different systems require separate entries, and they lack automated synchronization.	
Why-2	There is no centralized system to update data automatically across departments.	
Why-3	Manual verification is needed to ensure data consistency between the systems.	
Why-4	Discrepancies in data formats and standards lead to compatibility issues.	
Why-5	High reliance on manual processes, as there is no automated solution for data reconciliation.	

Table 1: The 5 Why sheet [37]

This gave rise to a Fishbone Diagram in Figure 5, which gives an explicit view of where the focus of the project should be in during the Improve phase while working towards the identified output. This information provides a clear path forward for implementing targeted improvements across the blockchain implementation lifecycle, including data format standardization, automation to reduce duplication of work, and improved performance to increase transactional throughput.

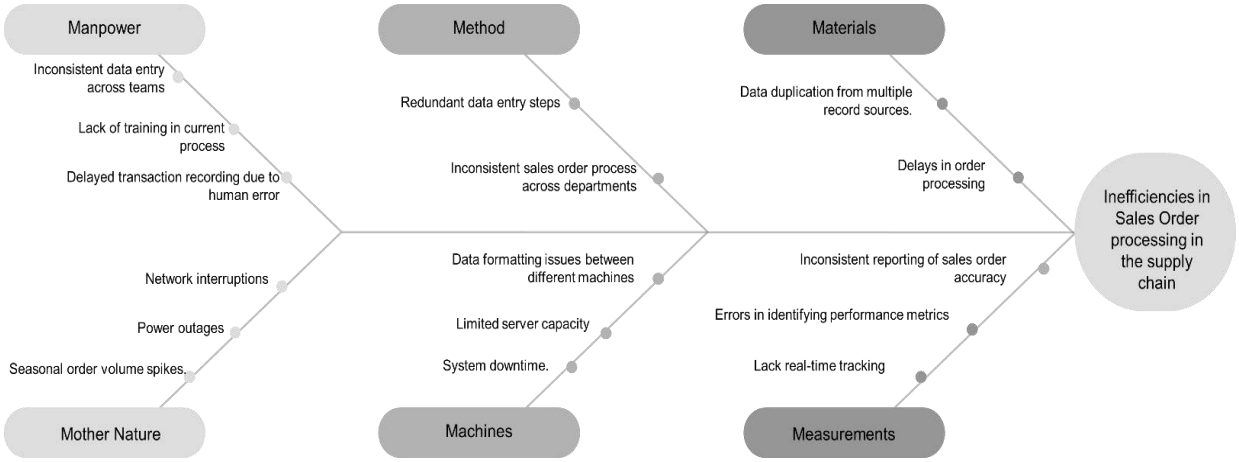

Figure 5: Fishbone Diagram [38]

3.1.4 Improve Phase:

In order to address the primary causes of inefficiency and integration issues found in the Analyse phase, the Improve phase focuses on describing viable solutions based on theory and research [43]. Reformatting data for ERP-blockchain compatibility, automating complex data input processes, and improving system architecture to manage higher data volumes are some potential strategies. These solutions are still hypothetical at this point, but they also provide the chance to use prototyping tools to assess their feasibility.

These new pieces of innovation will be tested using Ganache Tool, which is a blockchain development tool that allows us to simulate real blockchain transactions within an ERP test environment. [39] and [40] explained how the test's controlled environment enables accurate measurement of traceability improvements. In their research, both authors tested the blockchain integrations and deployed the smart contract in the local network using Ganache.

3.1.5 Control Phase:

Control ensures that the improvements of the Improve phase are maintained over time [41]. It involves determining the right performance measures to track, recording the new processes, and educating employees on the new system behaviours. There are Shewhart control charts that help monitor important parameters.

Control charts were employed by [42] because they facilitate the clear visualization of data trends and patterns, which makes it simpler to spot irregularities or disruptions that could otherwise go overlooked. More accurate monitoring and identification of process changes are supported by their emphasis on general trends rather than specific data points. In this research control charts will be beneficial in the identification of integration issues between ERP systems and new technologies.

4 CONCLUSION

This study explored how blockchain can be adopted with a commonly used ERP system to improve data synchronization in supply chains, especially during order processing. Using the DMAIC framework, the research identified ERP inefficiencies, analysed causes, and proposed blockchain-based improvements. Findings show that, when properly integrated, blockchain can boost supply chain responsiveness, transparency, and trust, but challenges such as data standards, stakeholder resistance, and integration complexity must be addressed. The work contributes to both academic and practical discussions, highlighting blockchain's potential for enhancing ERP traceability and integration. Future studies could test the blockchain prototype in Ganache and investigate scalability, cost-benefit analysis, and practical prototypes in supply chains in South Africa.

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AN INVESTIGATION TO DETERMINE THE OPTIMAL CONDITIONS FOR ACHIEVING THE IDEAL COEFFICIENT OF FRICTION OF LABELS: A CASE STUDY IN QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Within the flexographic label printing industry, the functionality of the end product is of the utmost importance. Used thereafter on high-speed packaging lines, any label set with a poor coefficient of friction (COF), could result in high rejection rates and monetary losses. This study aimed to investigate the optimum combination of the critical input variables used in the label production process to ensure a consistent COF. The study utilised the Design of Experiments (DOE) approach focussing on three critical factors namely: lamp temperature; anilox density and machine speed. The results were then obtained and tested using a three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) approach to evaluate the statistical significance of each factor in contributing to the COF variability. The findings suggest that by controlling the lamp temperature during the production process, yielded the greatest potential for maintaining an optimal COF.

Keywords: Flexographic, Coefficient of friction, Design of Experiments, ANNOVA Approach

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1 INTRODUCTION

Retail marketing is anchored in strategies that promote brand awareness and drive consumer purchases. Among its foundational components, the "product" dimension encapsulates design, functionality, packaging, and perceived quality — critical elements in the packaging industry. To meet these demands, packaging companies implement advanced print and quality assurance processes. Within this space, flexographic printing is a widely adopted method, and quality metrics like the coefficient of friction (COF) have emerged as key variables influencing packaging performance.

1.1 Problem Background

This study is situated within Printing & Packaging Industries (P&P), a South African label manufacturer serving the retail, food and beverage, pharmaceutical, and automotive sectors. The company utilizes both flexographic and digital printing technologies, producing shrink sleeves, self-adhesive labels, and BOPP-based poly rolls. Despite operator expertise and available equipment, achieving consistent COF values during shrink film printing remains a challenge, with nearly 9% of production samples failing internal COF standards in early 2024.

The COF measures the slipperiness or resistance between surfaces and plays a crucial role in high-speed label application systems. It is measured using a specialized COF tester which evaluates the static and kinetic friction between the film and a standard surface.

Figure 1: The Equipment Used for Testing the Coefficient of Friction

In the context of shrink film labels used during automated bottling, a COF that falls outside optimal thresholds (typically 0.15 to 0.25 for shrink film) can result in misfeeds, jams, or label slippage. This leads to customer dissatisfaction, production inefficiencies, and increased waste.

COF inconsistencies are mitigated by adjusting input variables such as ink viscosity, press pressure, print speed, anilox roll density, lamp temperature, and environmental humidity. However, the absence of a standardized parameter framework causes variability across production teams and runs, resulting in costly setup delays and inconsistent product quality.

This research aims to investigate the relationship between these input variables and the resulting COF, with the goal of defining optimal parameter combinations to ensure consistent COF values during shrink film printing.

1.2 Problem Statement

From January to March 2024, 628 samples were tested from production runs, with 56 (8.92%) falling outside the acceptable COF range (± 0.15 to 0.25), leading to internal delays and setup adjustments. These issues do not necessarily stem from operator skill, but rather from the absence of standardized settings for the variables influencing COF which includes the drying lamp intensity settings, inconsistent drying times at the print stations and the variations within

the batches of inks being used. Without clear standards, the variation in operator decisions will persist, making consistent first time-right setups difficult to achieve.

1.3 Aim of the Study

To investigate the optimum combination of critical input variables required to ensure a consistent COF in shrink film printing, thereby reducing quality-related production inefficiencies.

1.4 Objectives

1. To examine and document the current flexographic printing process and COF testing methodology.
2. To analyse the relationship between key input variables and COF outcomes using Design of Experiments (DOE).
3. To propose parameter settings that optimize COF and improve production consistency.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What input variables critically influence the COF in shrink film printing?
2. How does each variable affect the COF measurement?
3. What process improvements can be implemented to achieve a consistent COF?

1.6 Research Limitations

To reduce variability, the study focuses exclusively on shrink film substrates and includes only flexographic presses from the same OEM (Mark Andy) using UV drying. All production runs use stations 8 and 9 for final print application. Additionally, only white ink is considered as the final layer to ensure uniform chemical interaction across samples. These constraints ensure accurate measurement of input variable impacts but limit the generalisability to other substrates or press types.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study holds strategic importance for P&P by offering a potential framework to standardize COF-related settings, thereby reducing waste, enhancing production efficiency, and improving downstream application performance. Moreover, the research contributes to the broader field of flexographic quality assurance by providing practical insights into variable interactions in shrink film printing. The findings can assist similar packaging operations in setting new industry benchmarks for label performance and operational reliability.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Quality

Although there are numerous definitions of quality, quality can be understood as the degree a product or service fulfils its intended function and meets or exceeds the expectations of the consumer [1]. Quality is a multifaceted concept that has evolved from guild craftsmanship in the Middle Ages to today's strategic, customer-centric methodologies. Historically, quality transitioned from manual inspection to scientific methods during the industrial revolutions, with major contributions by pioneers like Taylor, Shewhart, Deming, and Juran. Post-World War II developments introduced frameworks like Total Quality Management (TQM), Six Sigma, and Lean, emphasizing prevention over inspection, employee involvement, and continuous improvement.

Modern quality tools include Statistical Process Control (SPC), which helps reduce variability through real-time monitoring; TQM, which integrates quality across functions; PDCA for iterative improvement; and Six Sigma's DMAIC framework for structured problem-solving [2].

Lean Manufacturing adds efficiency through waste reduction, while Quality Function Deployment (QFD) aligns production with customer expectations [3]. From the early 2000s, Digital Twins have been introduced into manufacturing. This concept, which involves simulating the physical process or system, enables quality improvement through real-time monitoring and optimizing of the physical process counterpart [4]. Among these, Design of Experiments (DOE) stands out for identifying relationships between variable inputs and output performance.

2.2 Quality in Printing

Flexographic printing, commonly used for packaging and labels, demands high-quality output due to its impact on product branding and functional performance. Achieving high print quality involves attention to pre-press, press, and post-press operations. Pre-press involves preparing printing plates, formulating inks, and ensuring substrate readiness. During the press stage, critical parameters such as registration, ink density, and anilox roll condition are closely monitored. Post-press processes include visual inspection, colour matching, and dimension verification.

General tests such as tensile strength, barcode verification, gloss measurement, and colour fastness help ensure durability, scan ability, and aesthetic standards. However, when it comes to shrink sleeves—a type of label that conforms tightly to container surfaces after heat application—the requirements are more stringent. Shrink films must not only adhere visually but also maintain integrity through the shrinking process without distorting print or losing adhesion.

Key quality measures specific to shrink sleeves include ink adhesion, shrink percentage, and most importantly, the coefficient of friction (COF). The COF determines how smoothly the film moves across rollers and applicators during high-speed labelling. A COF that is too high may cause the film to jam, while a COF that is too low may lead to slippage or misfeeds, both of which compromise production efficiency and customer satisfaction. Therefore, maintaining COF within specified limits is not just desirable—it is essential [5].

The COF is also indirectly influenced by several process variables including ink viscosity, surface treatment levels, drying lamp intensity, and press speed. High viscosity inks, for instance, may lead to offsetting and uneven ink transfer, which in turn affects the surface friction. Similarly, inadequate surface treatment or low lamp intensity results in poor ink adhesion, increasing the surface roughness and COF. These findings are consistent with the broader packaging quality literature, which highlights that deviations in ink or surface properties can propagate into quality failures downstream if not statistically controlled.

2.3 Results

Design of Experiments (DOE) provides a structured and statistical approach to investigate how each of these variables influences the dependent variable [6]. By using full factorial or fractional factorial designs, DOE allows for a systematic study of variable interactions under controlled settings. This is essential for shrink film, where even minor deviations can result in significant performance issues.

Moreover, DOE reduces trial-and-error by guiding the experimenter toward optimal settings, improving process stability and product quality. Unlike reactive quality control methods, DOE is proactive, it supports process understanding and predictive control. This makes it particularly suitable for environments like flexographic printing where multiple interacting factors influence output quality.

Previous studies emphasize that surface treatment, ink viscosity, lamp intensity, and ink adhesion are the most significant factors affecting COF [5]. DOE allows for the quantification and prioritization of these variables, enabling data-driven decisions. There is further support

for the DOE's relevance in packaging by demonstrating its ability to reduce variability and improve reproducibility [6]. From recent research, opportunities of integrating the DOE and Digital Twin modelling have been highlighted, enabling data collection across simulated and real production systems. This kind of integration can strengthen the predictive capabilities of DOE and expan on its use for the analysis of single variables to system-level quality monitoring [4].

In summary, DOE emerges as the optimal quality improvement method for the flexographic printing of shrink film due to its statistical rigor, process optimization capabilities, and initiative-taking nature. Its integration can help label manufacturers reduce waste, avoid customer rejections, and achieve consistent COF values—all critical for maintaining operational efficiency and customer satisfaction in packaging operations.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

A research methodology is typically viewed as a method to systematically solve a research problem [7]. The aim of this study is to investigate the optimum combination of the critical input variables in a shrink film printing process to ensure a consistently conforming COF. The methodology signifies this aim in that the Design of Experiments (DOE), by its very nature, involves the carrying out of experiments that determine the relationship between the input variables and an output variable or result.

3.2 Research Framework

The methodology employed in this study followed a structured Design of Experiments (DOE) framework. It was guided by three objectives:

1. To examine and document the current flexographic printing process and COF testing methodology.
2. To systematically analyse the relationship between key input variables and COF outcomes.
3. To propose parameter settings that optimize COF and improve production consistency.

3.3 Method to Achieve Objective 1: Process Analysis and Documentation of the Flexographic Printing and COF Testing Methods

Visual tools such as process flow diagrams and Standard Work Instructions (SWIs) were developed through physical observation across three shifts. These documents captured the print workflow, focusing on the setup and execution of COF testing procedures.

3.4 Method to Achieve Objective 2: Experimental Design to Analyse the Relationship between Key Input Variables and COF using the DOE

3.4.1Determination of Sample Size and Experiments

To guide the experiment, a failure mode and effects analysis (FMEA) was carried out to understand the relationship between certain critical input variables and the COF. The three variables highlighted as having the highest risk priority number (RPN) would be the focus variables for the experiment.

A full factorial design was used to test three independent variables founded from the FMEA — machine speed, lamp temperature, and anilox density—at two levels each. The choice of a full factorial design was made instead of the fractional factorial design to ensure that all the main effects and interactions could be captured without confounding. Although fractional designs are efficient in the use of resources, they present a risk of aliasing effects which is

not desirable for the study given that minor variable interactions could critically affect the COF.

To determine the number of experiments to be conducted, the following formula was followed in line with the DOE methodology:

$$Number\ of\ Experiments = 2^k \quad \textbf{(1)}$$

Where:

- 2 represents the number of levels per factor,
- k represents the number of factors, in this case 3 [8]

Therefore, it can be determined that 8 experiments needed to be conducted.

Each experiment was replicated 5 times for statistical robustness. For each of the three parameters, two levels are assigned as follows:

- Machine speed: a low speed (-) and a high speed (+)
- Lamp temperature: a low temperature (-) and a high temperature (+)
- Anilox density: a low density anilox (-) and a high density anilox (+)

The breakdown of experiments that cover all combinations of the abovementioned parameters is as follows:

Table 1: Table Showing the Combinations of the Input Variables per Experiment

Experiment	Machine Speed	Lamp Temperature	Anilox Density
1.	Low (-)	Low (-)	Low (-)
2.	Low (-)	Low (-)	High (+)
3.	Low (-)	High (+)	Low (-)
4.	Low (-)	High (+)	High (+)
5.	High (+)	Low (-)	Low (-)
6.	High (+)	Low (-)	High (+)
7.	High (+)	High (+)	Low (-)
8.	High (+)	High (+)	High (+)

The hypothesis for this design was that the three variables are independent. However, there is a potential for confounding through the two-way and three-way iterations. These were explicitly tested during the ANOVA analysis.

3.4.2 Sample Preparation and Testing

Experiments were conducted on a Mark Andy flexographic press using the same batch of PET shrink film. Samples were printed and collected under uniform machine settings. Per sample, two sizes were cut and tested for dynamic COF using a calibrated tester.

Figure 2 and 3: The Shrink Film Roll and Ink Used for the Experiment and the Flexographic Print Stations Respectively

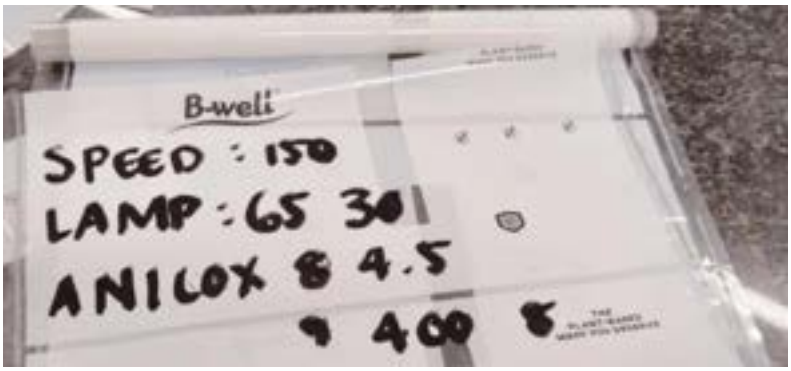

Figure 4: A Sample of an Experiment

Figure 5: Sample Preparation for COF Testing

Figure 6: COF Testing

3.4.3 Sample Data Statistical Analysis

The dataset of 40 COF values was analysed using SPSS software. A three-way ANOVA and multiple regression analysis were used to identify significant effects and correlations among the factors i.e. determination of whether the relationship is positive, negative, strong, weak or non-existent [9]. The statistical testing also confirmed whether the hypothesised independence of the factors was held, and quantified the strength of confounding through observed interactions.

3.5 Method to Achieve Objective 3: Strategies for Optimizing Input Variables for COF Consistency

The outcomes were assessed against a COF specification of 0.15 to 0.25. Experimental validation was carried out for drawing a comparison of the COF values to the specifications. From each comparison, the experiment was marked as “conforming” or “non-conforming”. The optimum combination of the three parameters that would yield a consistently conforming COF result was identified and documented at this stage. It is this combination of parameters that will be used to guide the future production processes.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed and provided voluntary consent. The data was anonymized, handled with integrity, and proprietary information protected in line with organizational confidentiality policies.

The maintenance of the data’s integrity remains a key concern. As the researcher of the study, it is critical to ensure that the data that is collected, recorded and analysed is done in an accurate manner without any manipulation or falsification. There is an obligation to report on the results honestly, even if it means they do not align with the expected outcomes.

Environmental and operational safety were upheld within the context of the use of equipment and machinery. Safety protocols were followed to ensure that no harm is inflicted towards the operators, inspectors and observers. Regarding the impact to the environment, PET shrink film, UV drying printing inks and UV lamps were utilized in the experiments. The waste generated was disposed of using practices that comply with environmental regulations.

This methodology integrates process mapping, DOE, and statistical validation to identify optimal COF conditions in flexographic printing. The structured approach ensures reproducibility and operational relevance. Through explicitly motivating for the full factorial design choice, testing hypotheses on variable independence, and sequencing optimisation strategies, this methodology demonstrates practical applicability.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines the findings from the execution of the research methodology. It systematically presents the results for each objective and offers interpretive commentary and discussion to contextualize these results within the broader flexographic print process.

4.1 Results for Objective 1: Process Analysis and Documentation of the Flexographic Printing and COF Testing Methods

Physical observations were conducted on live production runs involving three shifts. The print press operators demonstrated the machine setup, printing and the sample retrieval. The COF testing procedure was demonstrated by the quality inspector. The observations and findings collected were documented using standard work instructions.[†]

[†] The aspects that show the identity of the company have been intentionally omitted to conform to data privacy

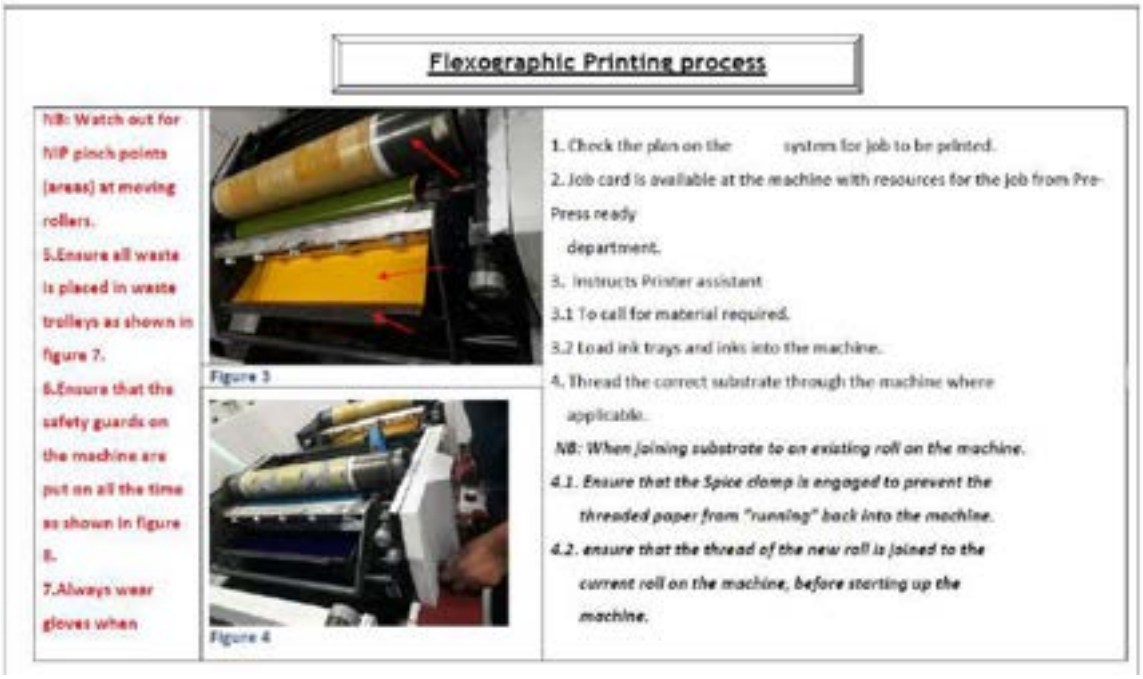

Figure 7: A Section of the Flexographic Printing Standard Operating Procedure

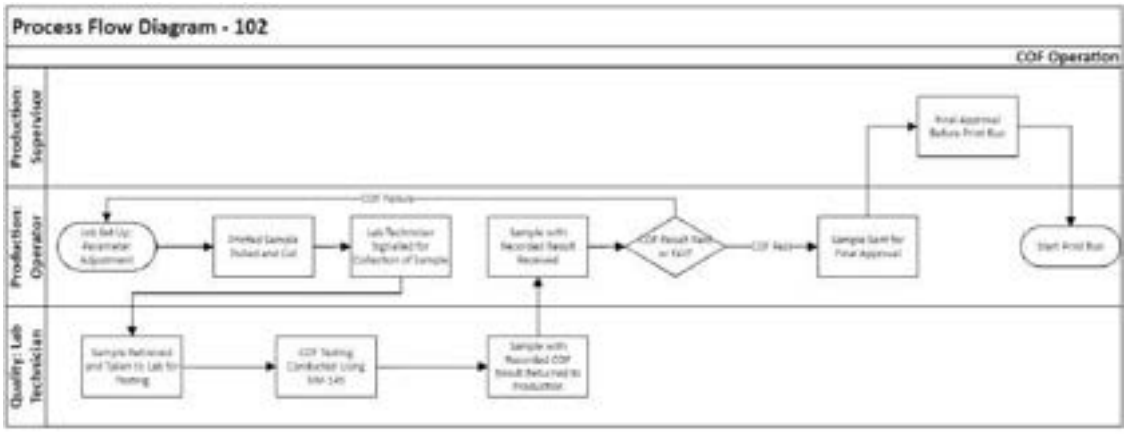

Figure 8: A Process Flow Diagram of Inspection and Approvals of COF Tests

SWI- COF OPERATION

No.	Work Description	Responsible Person	Frequency
1	Cut a 100mm x50mm sample , using the stencil provided. **(Sample 1)** **Refer to image 1.**	Lab Technician	For every test
2	Cut a 400mm x150mm sample. **(Sample 2)** **Refer to image 2.**	Lab Technician	For every test
3	Place the 100mm x50mm sample onto the template and tape to secure. **Refer to image 3.**	Lab Technician	For every test
4	Place Sample 2 onto the levelled C.O.F instrument and tape to secure. **Note: Ensure that the metal board rests along the zero line.** **Refer to image 4 and 5.**	Lab Technician	For every test
5	Place the template onto the right hand-side of the leveled C.O.F instrument. **Refer to image 6.**	Lab Technician	For every test
6	Rotate the wheel clockwise, until the template slides along **Sample 2.** **Refer to image 7 and 8.**	Lab Technician	For every test
7	Note the degree and use the COF Checksheet to determine the UD Value. **Refer to image 9.**	Lab Technician	For every test
8	Record the result in the COF Spreadsheet, in the Dynamic COF Column. **Refer to image 10.**	Lab Technician	For every test

Figure 9: A COF Testing Working Instruction

The standard operating procedure and the process flow diagram (figures 7 and 8) provides an accurate account of the actual processes currently being followed. The COF work instruction (figure 9) gives precise sampling and testing instructions, ensuring that each test conducted meets the required standard and is consistently applied. The application of the documentation and the adherence thereof confirms that the COF testing process is well defined and consistently applied. These documents are essential to support any future improvements in testing consistency and ensures that COF remains a reliable quality measure within the production workflow.

4.2 Results for Objective 2: Experimental Design to Analyse the Relationship between Key Input Variables and COF using the DOE

Using FMEA analysis, the most critical parameters influencing COF were determined: lamp temperature, anilox density, and machine speed. A full factorial Design of Experiments (DOE) was executed across these three variables. The results were evaluated via:

Process Step/Input	Potential Failure Mode	Potential Failure Effects	SEVERITY (1 - 10)	Potential Causes	OCCURRENCE (1 - 10)	Current Controls	DETECTION (1 - 10)	Risk Priority Number (RPN)
What is the process step, change or feature under investigation?	In what ways could the step, change or feature go wrong?	What is the impact on the customer if this failure is not prevented or corrected?		What causes the step, change or feature to go wrong? (how could it occur?)		What controls exist that either prevent or detect the failure?		
Testing COF	Lamp Temperature	Ink curing inconsistency, impacting the COF and print quality	8	Incorrect lamp temperature setting or malfunction	8	None	6	432
	Anilox Density	Uneven ink deposition leading to incosistent COF	9	Incorrect anilox roller specifications or wear	7	The anilox used on the first initial run is recorded on the colour standard. But this does not cater to runs on other presses which is 100% of the cases.	7	441
	Print Speed	Ink drying unevenly, leading to COF variation	8	Incorrect speed setting for PET film properties	7	None	7	392
	Ink Viscosity	Inadequate transfer causing COF variation	7	Incorrect ink preparation or environmental temperature (ink prepared outside a temperature controlled environment).	6	None	6	252
	Film Tension	Uneven ink distribution impacting COF	7	Fluctuating tension setting or mechanical issues	5	None	5	175
	Environmental Humidity	Ink drying variability affecting COF	6	Environmental fluctuations in humidity	5	The print press hall is regulated to 23°C.	4	120
	Press Pressure	Variation in ink transfer affecting COF	6	Inconsistent press pressure	5	None	5	150
	Surface Treatment of PET Film	COF variation due to ink adhesion issues	6	Inadequate surface preparation of film quality	5	Surface treatment is one of the tests conducted before pass off and every press has a coroner treater at the unwind.	5	150

Figure 10: A Snapshot of the COF FMEA

The DOE confirmed that lamp temperature (RPN: 432), anilox density (RPN: 441) and print speed (RPN: 392), significantly impacts COF. All individual variables were statistically significant contributors to the variability of COF, providing a data-driven basis for process control.

In compiling the experiment, the three factors identified as critical to the result of the COF were each assigned two levels: a low level and a high level. Each level was determined through discussions with the print press operators and the Flexo Production Manager.

From the eight experimental runs determined in the methodology, each factor and the agreed values per level were configured to form the following experimental runs:

Table 2: A Table Showing the Low and High Values for Each Input Variable

Factor	Machine Speed (m/min)		Lamp Temperature (°C)		Anilox Density (BCM)	
Level	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
	95	150	65/30	100/30	4.5 and 400.8	400.8 and 400.9

4.2.1. Regression Analysis

Using the COF results from the experiments, the regression analysis conducted on SPSS generated the following correlation matrix indicating the relationship between the variables and the COF.

Table 3: A Table Showing the Correlations Between the Factors and the COF

		COF	Machine Speed	Lamp Temperature	Anilox Density
Pearson Correlation	COF	1.000	0.471	-0.803	0.300
	Machine Speed	0.471	1.000	-0.250	-0.061
	Lamp Temperature	-0.803	-0.250	1.000	-0.061
	Anilox Density	0.300	-0.061	-0.061	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	COF	0.000	0.001	<.001	.030
	Machine Speed	0.001	.	0.060	0.354
	Lamp Temperature	0.000	0.060	.	0.354
	Anilox Density	0.030	0.354	0.354	.
N	COF	40	40	40	40
	Machine Speed	40	40	40	40
	Lamp Temperature	40	40	40	40
	Anilox Density	40	40	40	40

In summary, the data was a good fit for the model. This is substantiated by an R-value of 0.893 indicative of a strong positive correlation between all three variables and the COF. The R-squared value, which demonstrates the proportion of the variance in the COF that is associated with the three

variables [10], signifies that 79.7% of the variability in the COF can be explained by exploring these three variables.

Table 4: Table Summarizing the Regression Model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.893[a]	0.797	0.780	0.035792

In constructing the regression equation for the COF, the relationship between the three variables and the COF is further understood. In summary, the equation is as follows:

$$COF = \beta_0 + \beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3 \quad \textbf{(2)}$$

Where:

- β_0 is the constant.
- β_1 is the coefficient of the machine speed factor.
- β_2 is the coefficient of the lamp temperature factor.
- β_3 is the coefficient of the anilox density factor.

Table 5: SPSS Analysis of the Regression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-166.268	45.660		-3.641	<.001
	Machine Speed	0.001	0.000	0.310	3.989	<.001
	Lamp Temperature	-0.003	0.000	-0.708	-9.101	<.001
	Anilox Density	0.416	0.114	0.275	3.649	<.001

Based on the above analysis, the resulting regression equation for predicting the COF is as follows:

$$COF = -166.268 + 0.001\ x\ (Machine\ Speed) - 0.003\ x\ (Lamp\ Temperature) + 0.416\ x\ (Anilox\ Density)$$

4.2.2. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

With ANOVA, each variable is treated as independent. The relationship between each variable and the resultant COF is determined on a set of null and alternate hypotheses for each variable.

Table 6: The Null and Alternate Hypotheses for ANOVA

	Factor	Null Hypothesis (H_0):	Alternate Hypothesis (H_1):
Main Effects Hypotheses	**Machine Speed**	The machine speed does not affect the COF result.	The machine speed influences the COF result.
	Lamp Temperature	The lamp temperature does not affect the COF result.	The lamp temperature influences the COF result.
	Anilox Density	The anilox density does not affect the COF result.	The anilox density influences the COF result.
Two-Way Interactions	**Lamp Temperature * Machine Speed**	There is no interaction between the lamp temperature and the machine speed on the COF.	There is a significant interaction between the lamp temperature and the machine speed on the COF.
	Lamp temperature * Anilox Density	There is no interaction between the lamp temperature and the anilox density on the COF.	There is a significant interaction between the lamp temperature and the anilox density on the COF.
	Machine Speed * Anilox Density	There is no interaction between the machine speed and the anilox density on the COF.	There is a significant interaction between the machine speed and the anilox density on the COF.
Three-Way Interactions	**Machine Speed * Lamp Temperature * Anilox Density**	There is no three-way interaction between the machine speed, lamp temperature and anilox density on the COF.	There is a significant three-way interaction among the machine speed, lamp temperature and anilox density on the COF.

Once each of the criteria (assumptions) for conducting an ANOVA were proved, i.e. normality, independence of observations and homogeneity of variances, the analysis on SPSS is as follows:

Table 7: The ANOVA Results Completed on SPSS

Dependent Variable: COF

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	0.219[a]	7	0.031	121.171	<.001
Intercept	1.050	1	1.050	4069.228	<.001
Machine_Speed	0.014	1	0.014	55.212	<.001
Lamp_Temperature	0.085	1	0.085	327.881	<.001
Anilox_Density	0.006	1	0.006	23.914	<.001
Machine_Speed * Lamp_Temperature	0.001	1	0.001	3.313	0.078
Machine_Speed * Anilox_Density	0.002	1	0.002	9.176	.005
Lamp_Temperature * Anilox_Density	0.021	1	0.021	82.586	<.001
Machine_Speed * Lamp_Temperature *Anilox_Density	0.002	1	0.002	6.247	0.018
Error	0.008	32	0.000		
Total	1.856	40			
Corrected Total	.227	39			

From the analysis above, all three variables are deduced as having a statistically significant effect on the COF as they all have p-values that are below 0.001. And so, for each factor, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternate hypotheses at a 95% confidence level.

Similarly, to the hypotheses generated for each factor, hypotheses were generated for the impact of two or more of the factors on the COF. The following is deduced about each of the interaction effects:

- The effect of both machine speed and lamp temperature on the COF: with a p-value of p=0.078, this combination does not have a statistically significant effect on the COF.
- The effect of the machine speed and the anilox density on the COF: with a p-value=0.005, this combination has an impact on the COF that is considered significant.
- The effect of both the lamp temperature and the anilox density on the COF: considering the p-value being less than 0.001, this combination has a statistically significant effect on the COF.

- The effect of the machine speed, lamp temperature and anilox density on the COF: the p-value= 0.018. As a result, the combination of all three factors has a statistically significant impact on the COF.

Considering how each of the factors only have two levels, there are insufficient grounds to conduct post-hoc tests such as the Tukey Honest Significant Difference (HSD).

4.3 Results for Objective 3: Strategies for Optimizing Input Variables for COF Consistency

The forty experiments conducted yielded both conforming i.e. a COF result within 0.15–0.25 and non-conforming outcomes. These were used to formulate optimization strategies:

- Strategy 1: Real-time monitoring and maintenance of lamp temperatures
- Strategy 2: Standardizing the machine speed, particularly during set up
- Strategy 3: Use lower density anilox rollers
- Strategy 4: Adjusting both the lamp temperature and anilox densities
- Strategy 5: Conducting the regression modelling to predict the COF outcome in a production run
- Strategy 6: Implementation of statistical process control (SPC) charts for COF tracking

Figure 11 and 12: The Difference between a Dirty and Clean Lamp Respectively

The strategies target reducing process variability, empowering operators, and embedding proactive quality control. Emphasis was placed on lamp temperature as a control variable. The recommendations reflect the Total Quality Management (TQM) principle of continuous improvement.

The results and findings corroborate with literature asserting the importance of surface conditions, drying mechanisms, and ink transfer properties on COF. The application of DOE enabled a structured, statistical approach to understand and improve the print process. Each objective was effectively achieved through the systemic approach highlighted in the methodology and in accordance with the research aim. Consequently, the study offers a foundation for standardized quality control in flexographic printing and improved operational consistency.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Recommendations

To further the reaches of this study, areas recommended include:

- Expanding the scope of research to the other substrates: Considering this study focussed on shrink film, a similar analysis could be conducted for other substrates such as biaxially oriented polypropylene (BOPP), to widen the applicability of COF optimization practices across the various unsupported substrates.
- Establishing a Digital Twin for Process Simulations: With the advancements of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, the development of a digital twin of the flexographic print process can allow simulations that test the impact of various settings on the COF without disrupting the live production process.

5.2 Conclusion

This study tackled COF variability in shrink film printing using a DOE approach. The results identified key input variables affecting COF and proposed actionable strategies for stabilization. These abovementioned recommendations aim to optimize label application, enhance process reliability, and align flexographic print operations with quality management best practices.

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FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY CONTROL CIRCLES IN GAUTENG CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative quality improvement methodologies, such as Quality Control Circles (QCCs), hold significant potential for enhancing performance across diverse sectors, including the construction industry. However, the practical application of QCCs often encounters obstacles, particularly within developing economies like South Africa. This research investigates the factors influencing successful QCCs implementation within the Gauteng construction sector. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a questionnaire distributed to construction professionals in the region. The analysis reveals that several key factors impede effective QCCs adoption. These include limited awareness and comprehension of the QCCs framework, insufficient support from senior leadership, inadequate training opportunities, and resistance to organizational change. Based on these findings, the study suggests that construction projects operating in Gauteng should prioritize investments in targeted training and development initiatives to cultivate employee expertise in QCCs principles and practices. Furthermore, projects should commit to providing the necessary resources and support structures to facilitate successful QCCs implementation. Critically, fostering a culture of continuous improvement is essential for sustained QCCs effectiveness. The insights derived from this study will provide valuable guidance to management teams, enabling data-driven decision-making and strategic resource allocation to optimize QCCs integration and maximize its positive impact on project outcomes.

Keywords: Quality Control Circles, Construction Projects, Implementation

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1 INTRODUCTION

The ultimate success of any construction endeavour hinges critically on its **quality**, a multifaceted concept gauged by how precisely project outcomes align with the diverse expectations of its various stakeholders, including clients, contractors, and designers alike [1]. Across the global landscape of project management, three fundamental pillars consistently emerge as paramount determinants of project success: quality, cost, and time. Within the specialized domain of construction, the intrinsic link between superior quality and **client satisfaction** is undeniably profound. A proactive and strategic methodology for consistently realizing client satisfaction goals involves the careful implementation of a **Quality** Management System (QMS) [2]. Within the overarching framework of a robust QMS, Quality Control Circles (QCCs) stand out as indispensable components. These collaborative groups function in seamless coordination with established quality planning, assurance, and control protocols, acting as vital conduits for continuous improvement. At their core, QCCs are designed to catalyse organizational growth, unlock latent human potential, cultivate hidden capabilities among employees, and collectively foster a more conducive and desirable working environment [3].

QCCs embody a practical application of Total Quality Management (TQM) principles, relentlessly emphasizing continuous improvement and empowering employee involvement in the direct resolution of operational challenges. This participation is geared towards enhancing overall quality and operational efficiency [4]. In essence, QCCs operate as self-contained microcosms, reflecting the broader tenets of TQM within the comprehensive architecture of a QMS, thereby collectively propelling an organization toward sustained and overarching quality excellence. The meticulous practice of quality control (QC) has consequently evolved into a cornerstone of TQM within the construction industry. Its diligent execution is not merely beneficial but essential for averting safety incidents and consistently delivering products and services of superior quality [5]. The Project Management Institute [6] systematically outlines quality management as a structured methodology encompassing three key phases: **Quality** Planning, which involves the meticulous establishment and clear articulation of quality standards; Quality Assurance, focused on comprehensively evaluating the project's overall performance; and Quality Control, dedicated to the meticulous supervision of project results against defined benchmarks. The successful realization of quality management objectives often relies on the judicious application of various analytical tools and approaches, such as benefit-cost analyses, benchmarking, and statistical sampling [7].

The construction sector plays an unequivocally crucial role in the economic vitality of Gauteng, South Africa. It not only serves as a primary driver of economic growth [8] but also functions as an indispensable engine of employment generation and a fundamental facilitator of critical infrastructure development [9]. Despite the sector's progressive evolution over time, every construction project retains a unique identity, shaped by a distinct confluence of factors including ownership structures, material specifications, chosen contractors, specific project management methodologies, and the nature of sponsorship [10]. These inherent variables inevitably introduce significant diversity in project specifications, scope, risk profiles, cost parameters, client expectations, regulatory compliance requirements, capital investment levels, and, crucially, the standards of quality achieved. While the manufacturing sector widely acknowledges QCCs as a proven and demonstrably potent method for elevating output quality and fostering cooperative problem-solving, a notable void persists in academic understanding regarding their practical application within the inherently distinct and dynamic environment of construction projects, particularly within the Gauteng province of South Africa [11]. The unique attributes of construction endeavours — characterized by their fragmented nature, project-centric execution, comparative lack of uniform procedures across diverse

undertakings, and the inherent complexities associated with their realization — introduce considerable challenges to the seamless integration and ultimate effectiveness of QCCs.

1.1 Research objectives

The primary research objective is to identify the critical factors influencing the effective implementation of QCCs in construction projects in Gauteng.

Sub-Objectives:

Research objective 1: To evaluate the impact of QCCs implementation on workers' performance in construction projects.

Research objective 2: To assess the relationship between QCCs and the Total Quality Management (TQM) strategy by assessing the relationship between the implementation of QCCs and the effectiveness of TQM strategy in Gauteng construction projects.

Research objective 3: To investigate communication barriers within QCC teams by analysing team dynamics and cultural differences to identify potential barriers.

Research objective 4: To examine the influence of project culture and values on QCC success by developing recommendations for fostering a culture that supports continuous improvement and employee involvement; and

Research objective 5: To analyse the role of technology adoption in QCC implementation by identifying challenges and opportunities associated with technology adoption.

1.2 Research problem statement

Within the manufacturing sector, QCCs stand as a recognized and demonstrably potent method for elevating the quality of outputs [12]. Their established ability to cultivate cooperative problem-solving, ultimately fostering greater efficiency and superior quality results, is thoroughly supported by existing literature. Nevertheless, despite this widespread utilization and the well-recognized merits of QCCs within manufacturing, a notable absence persists in academic understanding regarding their application within the distinct setting of construction projects, especially within the Gauteng province of South Africa [11].

Construction projects possess intrinsic differences from typical manufacturing operations, exhibiting unique attributes that introduce considerable intricacy to the potential integration and effectiveness of QCCs [12]. Principal among these distinguishing elements is the segmented and project-centric nature of construction, the comparative absence of uniform procedures across varied projects, and the inherent complexity associated with their execution.

In contrast to the manufacturing domain, where operational sequences often exhibit repetition and a high degree of uniformity, construction projects are characteristically individualistic undertakings with clearly defined commencement and conclusion points. These projects frequently involve a diverse array of autonomous bodies, including primary contractors, subcontractors, architects, and engineers, all collaborating to achieve a shared goal. This inherent segmentation necessitates strong lines of communication and fluid collaboration among all participating parties, aspects that can present considerable hurdles to the successful deployment of QCCs.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review chapter thoroughly examines academic publications, empirical research, and theoretical models concerning the application of QCCs in construction projects in Gauteng

province. Beginning with an analysis of the historical development and theoretical underpinnings of QCCs, it establishes a fundamental comprehension of these quality management initiatives. The review rigorously examines the current literature regarding the deployment of QCCs in construction settings. This entails a comprehensive examination of previous studies to pinpoint significant obstacles related to the adoption of QCCs in construction projects. This extensive literature analysis aims to establish a robust theoretical framework, informing the research methodology and guiding the investigation of factors affecting the effective implementation of QCCs in Gauteng construction projects.

2.2 Overview of quality control circles

QCCs, as delineated by [13], are voluntary assemblies of employees who cooperate to improve workplace quality and facilitate personal development. These teams, generally comprising up to 12 members, convene regularly to discover, assess, and address work-related issues.

Initially rooted in manufacturing, QCCs have been adopted across various industries, including construction [6]. Dr. Kaoru Ishikawa's introduction of QCCs in Japan has established them as a powerful problem-solving tool. By fostering collective effort amongst employees from similar workplaces, QCCs can streamline complex workflows and improve organizational performance [14].

Gauteng, a South African province, has witnessed a growing interest in implementing QCCs within construction projects. However, research on the factors influencing QCCs implementation in Gauteng's construction sector remains limited.

Quality, as articulated by [15], encompasses synchronised efforts to improve the efficacy and efficiency of construction projects. QCCs members' positive perceptions of job satisfaction and alignment with project goals can significantly impact performance. While performance measurement aims to improve business outcomes, it can sometimes mislead management. A positive correlation exists between financial performance, labour productivity, and service quality [15].

The experience, skills, and knowledge of project team members involved in costing play a crucial role in quality control. QCCs operate within a unique structure that combines informality with formal support [16]. This fosters collaboration between quality circles and larger construction projects, working towards shared corporate objectives. A QCC typically follows a four-level structure, as illustrated in Figure 1.

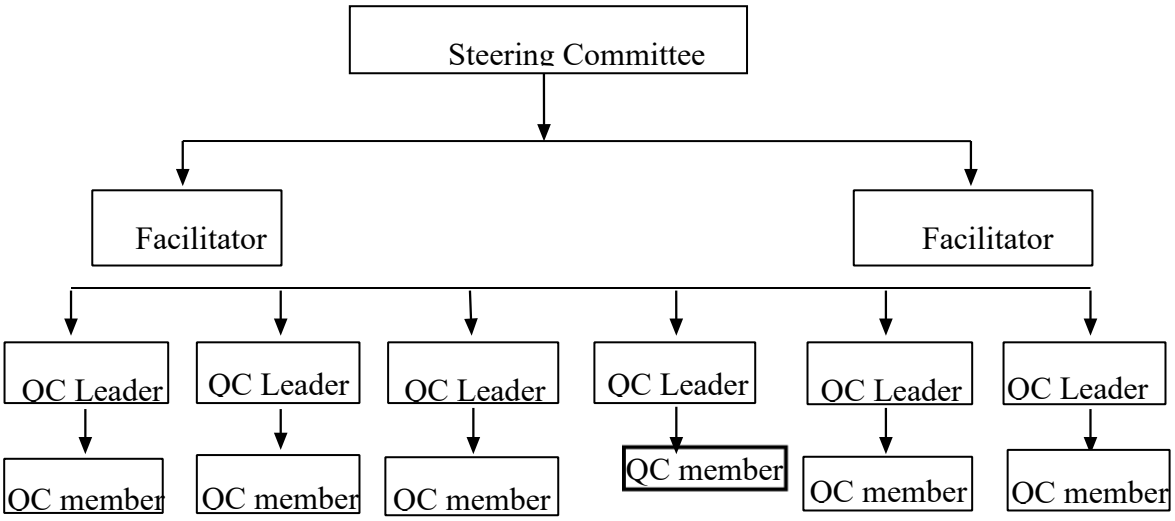

Figure 1: Quality Control Circle structure [14]

2.3 Advantages of Quality Control Circles

To enhance a company's capacity to meet standards and remain competitive, the influence of Quality Circles QCCs on individuals and projects has grown significantly [11]. This principle can be applied to construction endeavours in Gauteng.

The primary aim of QCC is to enhance organisational growth, namely by promoting healthy human interactions. This fosters a favourable work atmosphere that improves the productivity of construction projects. QCCs concentrate on cultivating interpersonal connections and communication among personnel to enhance their knowledge of duties associated with product delivery. Moreover, QCCs aim to establish a framework where improvement ideas can be transformed into practical applications [17].

The various advantages of implementing QCCs in projects include aiding workers in developing a positive outlook on their roles in construction projects, enhancing productivity by improving product quality and reducing rejected products, fostering strong bonds amongst employees at different levels of the organizational hierarchy, and improving working conditions and the overall work environment [18].

Salaheldin and Zain [5], highlighted several potential benefits of QCCs. These include:

- Employee Empowerment and Development: QCCs actively involve and develop employees by providing a platform for them to address issues directly.
- Operational Improvement: QCCs may enhance several operational domains, including quality, productivity, efficiency, cost reduction, and communication.
- Enhanced Collaboration: QCCs foster collaboration amongst employees at different levels and from diverse departments, breaking down communication barriers between management and staff.
- Increased Job Satisfaction: By empowering employees and giving them control over their work environment, QCCs can significantly boost job satisfaction and reduce frustration.
- Skill Development: Participation in QCCs provides employees with opportunities to develop and enhance their skills.

However, implementing QCCs can also present challenges. Construction projects may require additional time and resources to establish successful QCCs; the project's weaknesses may be exposed; and effective results may be more evident in larger projects. Some of the current difficulties in implementing QCCs include the need for a significant number of trained staff, the reluctance of many employees to participate voluntarily in QCC activities; the disappointment of higher-level employees who may expect quick and immediate results; and the potential difficulties in building mutual relationships due to individual differences in thoughts, views, egos, and approaches to situations [19].

QCCs play a crucial role in enhancing organizational efficiency and competitiveness by fostering employee involvement and addressing various challenges [11]. In construction projects, QCCs can significantly improve productivity, quality and employee satisfaction. By promoting teamwork, communication and problem-solving, QCCs contribute to a positive working environment and drive continuous improvement efforts.

2.4 Critical Elements within Construction Projects

According to Kerzner [20], a project is a series of actions and tasks that operate under specified restrictions, use resources from several functional domains, and are carried out to achieve established objectives. An essential aspect in project management is the examination of information to enhance the balance between project goals. These objectives must align

with overarching organisational and corporate goals to sustain market competitiveness and guarantee long-term survival. Project management is an essential instrument for achieving these goals.

Like any business endeavour, construction projects strive for success, which is determined by the alignment between expectations and outcomes. Meeting project requirements is essential for successful completion [21].

Various studies have consistently highlighted several fundamental elements that significantly shape the outcomes of construction projects. These can be broadly categorized as follows:

1 **Schedule Management:** This encompasses the planning and sequencing of project activities, along with ensuring adherence to established timelines. Delays can precipitate increased costs, disputes among parties, and dissatisfaction from the client [22].

2 **Financial Oversight:** This involves the creation of budgets, accurate cost estimation, and the diligent monitoring of expenditures to maintain the project within its allocated financial boundaries. Insufficient financial oversight can lead to project abandonment or a decline in quality [22].

3 **Quality Assurance:** This pertains to the procedures implemented to guarantee that the project fulfils the specified requirements and adheres to relevant standards. Deficient quality can result in the need for rework, potential safety hazards, and compromised long-term performance.

4 **Stakeholder Engagement:** Construction projects involve a wide array of stakeholders with differing interests, including clients, contractors, subcontractors, and regulatory bodies. Effective communication, collaboration, and the resolution of conflicts are pivotal for project success [23].

5 **Risk Mitigation:** The identification, assessment, and mitigation of potential risks are vital in the construction sector, where uncertainties are prevalent. Inadequate risk management can precipitate project delays, escalated costs, and other unfavourable consequences [24].

6 **Communication:** The presence of clear and effective communication channels among all project participants is essential for seamless coordination, efficient information sharing, and effective problem-solving. Poor communication can give rise to misunderstandings, errors, and conflicts [25].

7 **Human Resource Management:** The skills, experience, and motivation levels of the project team exert a substantial influence on overall project performance. Effective human resource management encompasses recruitment, training initiatives, and fostering strong team dynamics.

8 **Procurement Strategy:** The efficient procurement of materials, equipment, and services is of paramount importance for the timely completion of projects and the maintenance of cost control. This entails careful supplier selection, skilful contract negotiation, and meticulous supply chain management.

9 **Safety Protocols:** Ensuring a safe working environment is a fundamental requirement in all construction projects. Safety management involves the identification of potential hazards, thorough risk assessment, and the implementation of robust safety protocols.

3 METHODODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to systematically investigate the factors that influence the successful implementation of QCCs within the construction industry in Gauteng, South Africa. This approach was chosen to allow for the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data, enabling the identification of patterns, relationships, and trends. The aim was to provide an objective and measurable understanding of the challenges and enablers of QCC adoption.

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire. This instrument was selected because it is a highly efficient way to gather information from a large number of participants on specific, predetermined variables. The questionnaire included a series of closed-ended questions, which were designed to measure participants' perceptions and experiences related to four key areas: awareness of the QCC framework, the level of senior leadership support, the availability of training opportunities, and the general resistance to organizational change. The use of a standardized questionnaire ensured consistency in data collection across all participants, which is essential for a quantitative study [26].

The questionnaire was administered electronically to a sample of 110 construction project workers located in the Gauteng region. Participants were selected using a simple random sampling method from a list of registered construction professionals and workers. In simple random sampling, every individual in the target population has an equal and known chance of being selected. This method was crucial for minimizing selection bias and ensuring that the sample was representative of the broader population of construction workers in the region. This representativeness is vital for the generalizability of the study's findings, allowing the results to be applied with a degree of confidence to the entire Gauteng construction sector.

4 RESULTS

To ensure the precision and reliability of our research findings, we evaluated the quality of our data collection tool—the questionnaire. A key statistical measure for this is **Cronbach's alpha coefficient**, which assesses the internal consistency of a scale. In simple terms, it tells us how closely related a set of items (questions) are as a group. Questionnaire was grouped into four key sub-scales: "Barriers," "Benefits," "Organizational Culture," and "Technology Adoption." The following tables present the reliability analysis for each of these scales. To ensure research findings are precise and reliable, it's crucial to evaluate the quality of data collection tools. **Cronbach's alpha coefficient** is a key statistical measure for this, widely used to assess the **internal consistency** of questionnaires, particularly those using Likert-type scales [27].

These were designed to systematically measure the key factors that influence the successful implementation of Quality Control Circles (QCCs) in Gauteng construction projects.

Essentially, Cronbach's alpha quantifies how strongly interconnected and consistent the items (questions) within a scale are in measuring the **same underlying concept**. A higher average correlation among items typically leads to a higher alpha value, indicating greater reliability.

Here's how to interpret Cronbach's alpha values:

- **Below 0.7:** Considered poor, suggesting the scale may not be reliable.
- **Between 0.7 and 0.8:** Considered acceptable, indicating a moderate level of reliability.
- **Above 0.8:** Considered good, suggesting a high level of reliability.

Table 1: Summary of Item-Total Statistics for the Barriers Scale

Barries	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q1	25,22	55,959	0,748	0,612	0,933
Q2	25,42	57,775	0,744	0,681	0,934
Q3	25,44	54,366	0,800	0,728	0,929
Q4	25,53	54,153	0,804	0,702	0,929
Q5	25,54	55,192	0,758	0,665	0,932
Q6	25,78	52,901	0,847	0,760	0,926
Q7	25,62	54,610	0,785	0,722	0,930
Q8	25,40	53,850	0,780	0,723	0,931

Table 2: Reliability Statistics for the Barriers Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0,939	0,939	8

Table 3: Reliability Statistics and Item-Total Statistics for the Benefits Scale

Benefits	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q9	43,31	45,901	0,751	0,603	0,951
Q10	43,48	44,945	0,798	0,686	0,949
Q11	43,49	45,262	0,741	0,614	0,951
Q12	43,39	45,330	0,794	0,674	0,949
Q13	43,50	44,252	0,819	0,732	0,948
Q14	43,45	44,072	0,822	0,707	0,948
Q15	43,43	44,822	0,769	0,637	0,950
Q16	43,57	43,673	0,756	0,664	0,951
Q17	43,41	45,116	0,805	0,674	0,949
Q18	43,30	45,342	0,828	0,769	0,948
Q19	43,21	44,185	0,800	0,767	0,949

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0,954	0,955	11

Table 4: Reliability Statistics and Item- for the Organizational Culture Scale.

Organizational culture	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q20	18,77	24,553	0,785	0,642	0,929
Q21	18,88	25,095	0,812	0,669	0,925
Q22	18,96	24,276	0,829	0,690	0,923
Q23	18,74	26,315	0,746	0,562	0,933
Q24	18,97	24,603	0,833	0,762	0,922
Q25	18,76	24,221	0,868	0,793	0,918

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0,937	0,937	6

Table 5: Reliability Statistics and Item- for the technology adaption

Technology Adoption	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q26	29,22	22,312	0,753	0,597	0,918
Q27	29,88	23,886	0,587	0,401	0,931
Q28	29,11	23,518	0,739	0,603	0,918
Q29	29,16	23,215	0,800	0,711	0,914
Q29	29,24	22,783	0,822	0,722	0,912
Q30	29,21	22,726	0,817	0,673	0,912
Q31	29,15	23,368	0,718	0,564	0,920
Q32	28,95	23,028	0,799	0,699	0,914

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0,927	0,929	8

The analysis of Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicates that the Barriers scale is a highly reliable and valid instrument for assessing barriers to QCCs implementation. The overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.939, along with high individual item-total correlations and squared multiple correlations, suggests that the scale consistently measures a single underlying construct and is free from weak items. This provides strong evidence for the quality of the data collected using this scale and supports the validity of any conclusions drawn from the research.

The high Cronbach's Alpha values, consistently above 0.7 for all items, indicate that the QCC assessment scale is highly reliable and internally consistent. This suggests that the items effectively measure a common construct related to the challenges and effectiveness of QCCs. The scale's reliability provides confidence in the validity of the findings and supports the conclusions drawn from the analysis.

The Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.937 for both the original and standardized items demonstrate the high reliability and internal consistency of the scale. This suggests that the items effectively measure a single underlying construct, making the scale a valid and reliable instrument for data analysis. The high reliability provides confidence in the accuracy and consistency of the measurements obtained using this scale.

The finding that a robust positive correlation exists between the incorporation of technology and the efficacy of QCCs within construction projects, evidenced by the statement "The use of technology has improved the overall quality of the construction project" demonstrating the

strongest squared multiple correlation (0.753), is consistent with an expanding collection of scholarly works that underscore the revolutionary impact of technology on improving quality management practices in the construction sector. There is a capacity of technology to enhance communication, the precision of data, and the effectiveness of problem resolution [28]. The outcomes of this study, bolstered by the elevated Cronbach's Alpha values affirming the reliability of the measurement scale, provide empirical support for this increasing comprehension within the specific framework of QCC implementation in construction projects located in Gauteng. This favourable impact of technology on QCC effectiveness, as indicated by the substantial squared multiple correlation, implies that construction firms in Gauteng that integrate technology into their QCC initiatives are more likely to achieve improved quality results.

5 DISCUSSION

A particularly salient finding from this study underscores a powerful positive correlation between the strategic integration of **technology** and the enhanced efficacy of **QCCs** in construction projects. This empirical outcome resonates strongly with an expanding body of academic research that consistently highlights technology's transformative influence on elevating quality management practices across the construction sector [28]. Indeed, the capacity of modern technology to significantly refine communication channels, bolster data precision, and amplify the overall effectiveness of problem-solving initiatives is extensively substantiated in existing literature [28].

The empirical insights gleaned from this investigation, further fortified by the robust Cronbach's Alpha values that unequivocally validate the reliability of our measurement scale, collectively offer concrete support for this burgeoning understanding. Specifically, within the distinctive operational landscape of QCC implementation in construction projects situated in Gauteng, the findings compellingly suggest that the deliberate and strategic incorporation of technology into QCC initiatives is highly likely to yield superior quality outcomes for participating construction firms [11]. This observed beneficial influence of technology on QCC effectiveness, as powerfully indicated by the substantial squared multiple correlation, delineates a clear and actionable pathway for construction enterprises in Gauteng to significantly enhance their quality achievements through the thoughtful adoption and seamless integration of technological solutions within their established QCC frameworks.

6 CONCLUSION

The rigorous evaluation of our research instrument, specifically the "Barrier's scale" employed to gauge obstacles hindering the implementation of Quality Control Circles (QCCs), unequivocally confirms its exceptional reliability and validity. A commanding overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of **0.939** stands as compelling evidence of the scale's robust internal consistency. This remarkably high value, coupled with strong individual item-total correlations and impressive squared multiple correlations, definitively establishes that the scale consistently measures a singular, underlying construct, devoid of any weak or inconsistent elements. Furthermore, the persistently elevated Cronbach's Alpha values (all items consistently exceeding 0.7, and specifically a value of 0.937 for both original and standardized items) for the QCC assessment scale emphatically underscore its high reliability and internal coherence. This profound level of reliability instils substantial confidence in the integrity of the data gathered and, consequently, bolsters the accuracy and trustworthiness of the inferences drawn from this investigation. Therefore, this scale emerges as a demonstrably valid and dependable tool for the analysis of data pertaining to the challenges and effectiveness of QCCs within construction projects.

Despite these challenges, QCCs are recognized as an important and effective tool for problem-solving and improving company performance in construction projects. A positive project

culture, characterized by trust, openness, and empowerment, is foundational for QCC success, fostering employee motivation and contribution. Top management commitment, demonstrated through resource provision and active participation, sends a powerful message about the value of QCCs. Employee involvement is crucial as it fosters ownership and leverages their direct knowledge. These factors—project culture, top management commitment, and employee involvement—are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, robust training, effective communication, and judicious resource allocation are essential for empowering employees, aligning stakeholders, and optimizing QCC potential for sustainable improvements.

Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between project culture, communication, leadership, and the perceived benefits of QCCs. Comprehensive training and top management support also showed a positive correlation with QCC participation, confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis.

6.1 Limitations of the study

While the study successfully developed a highly reliable and valid questionnaire for assessing QCCs, its primary limitation is the geographical and industrial scope, focusing exclusively on construction projects in Gauteng, South Africa, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions or sectors. Furthermore, the reliance on a single, self-reported quantitative instrument may not capture the full complexity of QCC implementation, potentially introducing response bias and overlooking valuable contextual details that a mixed-methods approach could have provided.

6.2 Recommendations Summary

To enhance the efficacy of QCCs in Gauteng construction projects, the following solutions are recommended:

- **Reinforce Top Management Support:** Leadership should visibly demonstrate unwavering dedication through active participation, consistent resource allocation (time, finance, staff), and serving as role models for quality improvement.
- **Foster Employee Involvement:** Cultivate a culture of empowerment, actively recognize and reward contributions, and establish effective communication channels and feedback systems to ensure employee perspectives are valued.
- **Invest in Training and Development:** Implement comprehensive training programs covering QCC methodology, problem-solving, and data analysis, alongside continuous learning opportunities and mentorship programs to build employee skills and confidence.
- **Improve Communication and Collaboration:** Establish clear, open communication channels among all project stakeholders, foster a collaborative work atmosphere through team building, and implement efficient conflict resolution strategies.
- **Promote a Positive Project Culture:** Cultivate a continuous improvement mindset, empower employees to make decisions, and celebrate QCC team successes to boost morale and encourage ongoing participation.
- **Tailor QCC Implementation to Project Characteristics:** Develop flexible, project-specific strategies that consider factors like size, complexity, and duration, and continuously evaluate their effectiveness to ensure relevance and adaptability.
- **Address External Factors:** Formulate resilient methods to mitigate the impact of external influences (e.g., economic volatility, regulatory changes) through proactive

risk management, engage clients in QCC operations, and collaborate with external stakeholders to exchange best practices.

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TOWARDS CONTEXTUALISING LEAN WASTES FOR AGRICULTURE: CASE STUDY OF GRAIN HANDLING IN SILO OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture plays a crucial role in South Africa's economy and food security, with grain storage serving as a critical link in the crop production supply chain. Grain silo operations, however, face recurring inefficiencies that hinder productivity and profitability. While lean management has been successfully applied across various industries, its relevance to agriculture—and specifically grain handling—remains underexplored. This study investigates how the eight forms of lean waste can be identified and contextualised within grain storage operations. Using an adapted A3 problem-solving approach, qualitative data from a South African grain silo organisation were analysed to categorise inefficiencies and translate them into agricultural terms. The findings confirm that lean wastes apply to agriculture, although not all categories (e.g., overproduction) are directly relevant. By contextualising lean waste for silo operations, the study provides a foundation for continuous improvement in agricultural supply chains and contributes to the growing field of lean agriculture.

Keywords: lean, agriculture, waste, silo, grain bins, grain storage

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1 INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is an important sector in South Africa, providing employment and food security while forming linkages with other sectors. [1]. For instance, this sector purchases items like fertilisers and machinery from suppliers and supplies raw materials to the food and manufacturing industry. Therefore, the agricultural sector can be seen as an engine of growth for the rest of the economy [1]. The agricultural sector includes both livestock (animals) and crop (plants) production to provide food and other products to humanity [2].

The grain handling process, which forms part of the crop production supply chain, consists of the farmer who sows the seeds, treats and waits for them to germinate and mature. The crop (growing plants in the field) is harvested (cutting and threshing the mature crop by typically utilising a combine harvester). Once harvested, the crop is referred to as "grain", which in this study includes maise, sorghum, sunflower seeds, soybeans, wheat, and barley. The process starts with the farmer and ends with the crops being sold to the interested stakeholders. However, the selling of the grain is not always immediate, since farmers want to wait for market prices to rise before selling the grain [3]. Farmers, therefore, often need to store it for a specific period. Hence, the storing of grain is an essential part of the supply chain of agricultural crop production. The storing of grain preserves the quality of the grain and protects it from pesticides, moisture, and potential contaminants [4]. Grain silos (bins) are a standard method for storing grain [5]. Thus, before selling it to the market, farmers typically store their grain in silos to assist in the storage and distribution of the grain [5].

Lean production, lean manufacturing, or lean management is a management concept that aims to enhance operational efficiency. Originating in the late 1910s from the Toyota Production System (TPS), lean primarily focuses on reducing waste in manufacturing processes [6]. Waste in lean refers to activities that do not add value (according to the customer) to the production line. Hence, lean is characterised by a principle that promotes continuous improvement and that improves predictability to reduce uncertainties in a process [7]. As the agricultural sector is a growing sector [8], continuous improvement is required. Although lean was initially designed for manufacturing, it has expanded to a variety of industries, such as administrative processes, healthcare, services, and public administration [8]. Lean management is also becoming popular in agriculture since global competition has resulted in a tendency towards large-scale production, standardised technology, and organisational and management innovation [8]. This change is being driven by global competitiveness and a demand for more efficient processes and practices [8].

An Industrial and Systems Engineering Research Conference study proposes the question of how lean wastes can be identified and categorised in agriculture, but it did not answer the question [9]. Subsequently, this raises a new question on whether lean wastes can also be identified and contextualised for a grain storage facility.

This question gained further significance after a South African case study organisation (in charge of multiple grain silo facilities) explained its concern about recurring bottlenecks that affect the efficiency and tempo of their operations at a grain silo. However, the application of lean management in grain storage remains unexplored to our best knowledge, leading to a lack of agricultural context of the eight forms of waste. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how the eight forms of lean waste can be identified and contextualised for grain handling in silo operations. This can be applied in future research to encourage continuous improvement in silo operations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

An overview of lean management is provided, with a specific focus on the eight forms of lean waste. Additionally, the available literature on lean agriculture is explored.

2.1 Lean management

Lean management, which originated with the Toyota production system (TPS), enhances predictability and minimises operational uncertainty [10]. A lean process uses less material, requires less inventory, occupies less space, and employs fewer people, but does not eliminate them [11].

The philosophy of lean management rests on two fundamental pillars: continuous improvement (Kaizen) and respect for people [10]. Unlike traditional mass production, which often prioritises output above all else, lean management focuses on eliminating three core inefficiencies: muda (non-value-adding activities), mura (process unevenness), and muri (employee overburden) [12].

According to Womack and Jones (2007), the successful implementation of lean in an organisation requires adherence to five initial principles [13]. The first is value, which involves identifying value strictly from the customer's perspective. The second is the value stream, referring to the set of activities necessary to design, order, and deliver a product, transforming raw materials into the hands of the customer. The third principle is flow, which emphasises the progression of tasks along the value stream without stoppages, defects, or backflows. The fourth is pull, which requires that production is driven only by actual customer demand signals, rather than forecasts. Finally, perfection, which entails the continuous elimination of waste across the value stream [14].

There exists a diverse set of lean tools and techniques that enhance organisational efficiency and effectiveness. The conceptual foundation originates from Taiichi Ohno's (1988) work, which systematised Toyota's manufacturing philosophy [14]. Ohno introduced the primary principles of just-in-time (JIT) and autonomation (jidoka), while Liker later developed a structured framework, the TPS House, which illustrates the interdependence of lean techniques. Within this framework, JIT and jidoka serve as the two main pillars, supported by foundational tools such as Heijunka (levelling the production load), standardised work, kaizen, continuous flow, takt time, pull systems (Kanban), abnormality management (stop and notify protocols), and human-machine separation [10].

2.2 The eight wastes

Toyota identified seven types of waste, often known as non-value-adding activities[10]. An additional eighth waste was later added as lean evolved to more industries [10, 15]. The eight wastes are as follows [10, 15] :

1. **Overproduction**. Producing more than the demand, or before knowing the demand, can result in overstaffing, unnecessary storage, and possible transportation costs.
2. **Waiting (time on hand)**. Watching or waiting for a machine, waiting on inputs, or having extra time without pressing deadlines.
3. **Unnecessary transport/ conveyance**. Carrying work in process (WIP) over long distances, creating inefficient transport, or moving materials or information into or out of storage or between processes. Transporting work in process (WIP) over extended distances, which leads to inefficient transport, or moving information or materials in or out of storage or between processes.
4. **Overprocessing/ incorrect processing**. Making unnecessary steps while processing the parts, or having inefficient processing due to poor product or tool designs, results in unnecessary action and possible defects. If products or services are of greater quality than required, they are considered waste.
5. **Excess inventory**. Having more raw materials, work-in-progress, or finished goods than needed results in longer lead times, damaged goods, obsolescence, increased transportation and storage costs, and delays. Excess inventory also conceals issues such

as production imbalances, late deliveries from suppliers, defects, equipment downtime, and extended setup times.

6. **Unnecessary movement.** Any non-value-adding motion that employees perform during their work, such as looking for, reaching for, walking to, or stacking parts, tools, etc.
7. **Defects**. Inaccurate products or services are produced and corrected through repair or rework, scrap, replacement production, and inspection, all of which waste time, effort and handling.
8. **Underutilisation of** talent: Not using the knowledge, talents, and skills of the workers in the organisation, specifically to solve problems that lead to continuous improvement [10].

2.3 Lean agriculture

Lean agriculture refers to applying Toyota's lean manufacturing philosophy to an agricultural process or operation to enhance efficiency, reduce waste, and increase productivity. As the agricultural sector realises the benefits of lean management implementations in the manufacturing industry, lean management is gaining popularity [8]. Global competition has resulted in an agricultural shift to large-scale production, increased use of standardised technology, and more organisational and managerial innovations, all of which Lean aims to improve. Specialisation, formalisation, and standardisation are agricultural management tools that align with the trend towards fewer, larger farms [8]. A study done on retrieving available research on lean implementation in the agricultural industry showed that the application of lean management has been explored in various applications, such as timber [16], crops [17], mixed farms [8, 9, 18], red meat [19], textile [20], dairy [12], fruit [21], cocoa [22] and fertiliser [23]. However, most studies focus only on the food and beverage industry [24]. Consequently, to the best of available knowledge, research on lean in the grain silo industry has not yet been explored. Taking this into consideration, this study will investigate and conceptualise how the eight forms of lean waste can be identified in grain silo facilities, thereby initiating the contextualisation of lean principles for an agricultural application.

3 METHODOLOGY

The A3 method originated during the Toyota Production System (TPS) in the 1960s and has been successfully implemented in a variety of industries, including pathology laboratories, hospitals, and the automobile industry[25]. This method is similar to Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and is used for collaborative problem-solving, status reporting, and proposal submissions [25]. The A3 method was chosen for this study as the study focuses on conceptualising lean waste in agriculture to improve current inefficiencies. The A3 problem-solving method typically has between seven and ten steps [25, 26]. This study will primarily focus on root cause analysis and categorising root causes into the eight forms of waste. Some steps, such as defining countermeasures, implementing cost analysis, and testing the solution, will not be applied. Accordingly, an adapted version of the A3 approach from Santos Filho's study was employed, incorporating the steps of defining the problem, analysing the organisation's current state, determining goals, conducting a root cause analysis, and reflecting on the findings [25].

3.1 DEFINING THE PROBLEM

A South African grain handling company is experiencing longer lead times due to unknown causes, which negatively affects the overall operational efficiency of the silo yard. These challenges are exacerbated during peak season, causing further inefficiencies. To approach these challenges, it is necessary first to determine what causes them by investigating the current state and conducting a root cause analysis.

3.2 CURRENT STATE ANALYSIS

Grain handling at silo facilities begins before trucks enter the yard, as vehicles typically queue outside the gate. Most facilities follow a one-in-one-out system, with queue lengths varying seasonally, particularly during peak harvesting. Trucks enter either to deliver grain (loading process) or to collect grain (off-loading process). Farmers use silo facilities primarily for storage, while stakeholders retrieve purchased grain for distribution. The two processes are explained below and illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 illustrates the loading process:

1) Arrival of a loaded truck: The farmer sends grain by truck, which joins a queue outside the silo yard.
2) Document verification: While waiting, the driver walks to the office to confirm that the instruction number and booking match the silo's records. If not, they must wait for a valid booking.
3) Entering the yard: Once verified and at the front of the queue, the truck enters and stops at the sampling station.
4) Sampling: An employee uses a double-tube sampler to collect six probes from the load and takes the sample to the office.
5) Grading: The grain is graded using a machine. If it fails to meet standards, the farmer can either pay for cleaning or leave.
6) Weighing in: While grading occurs, the truck is weighed on the weighbridge to capture its entry weight.
7) Loading in a grain bin: If the grain passes, the truck is directed to a loading bay where the grain is unloaded into a hopper and moved to the correct bin via conveyors.
8) Weighing out: The empty truck returns to the weighbridge for its exit weight. The difference determines the grain quantity received.
9) Exit: The truck leaves the yard once the transaction is complete.

Figure 2 illustrates the off-loading process.

1) Arrival of an empty truck: A stakeholder sends an empty truck to load their purchased grain from the silo. Upon arrival, the truck joins a queue outside the silo yard.
1) Document verification: While waiting, the driver goes to the office to confirm that the instruction number matches the silo's records. If incorrect, they contact the stakeholder and wait or leave the queue.
2) Entering the yard: With correct documents and at the front of the queue, the truck enters and stops on the weighbridge.
3) Weighing in: The operator records the truck's empty weight.
4) Proceed to loading bay: The truck is directed to a bay with a discharge chute.
5) Unloading grain from a bin: The operator activates the system to extract grain from the bin via a conveyor and release it into the truck.
6) Sampling and grading: Once loaded, a grain sample is taken and graded to ensure quality.
7) Grain cleaning (if needed): If the grain fails to meet standards, it is sifted to remove foreign material until the grade is acceptable.
8) Weighing out: The loaded truck returns to the weighbridge to capture the exit weight.
9) Correct load: If the load is over or under the required weight, the truck returns to adjust the load accordingly.
10) Exit: The truck exits the yard once the correct weight is achieved and the transaction is finalised.

Both processes are repeated for every truck that arrives to deliver grain or collect grain from the silo yard.

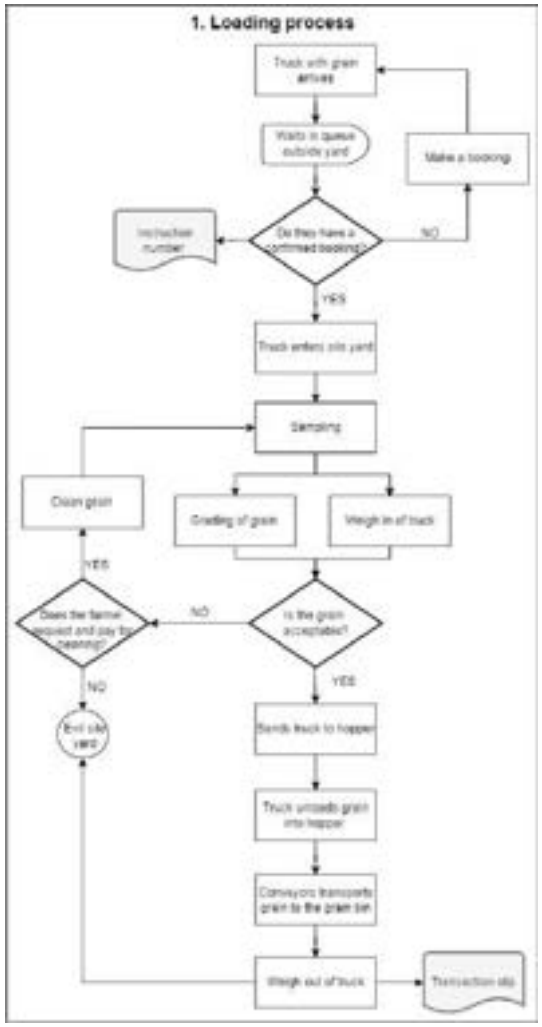

Figure 1: Loading process flow

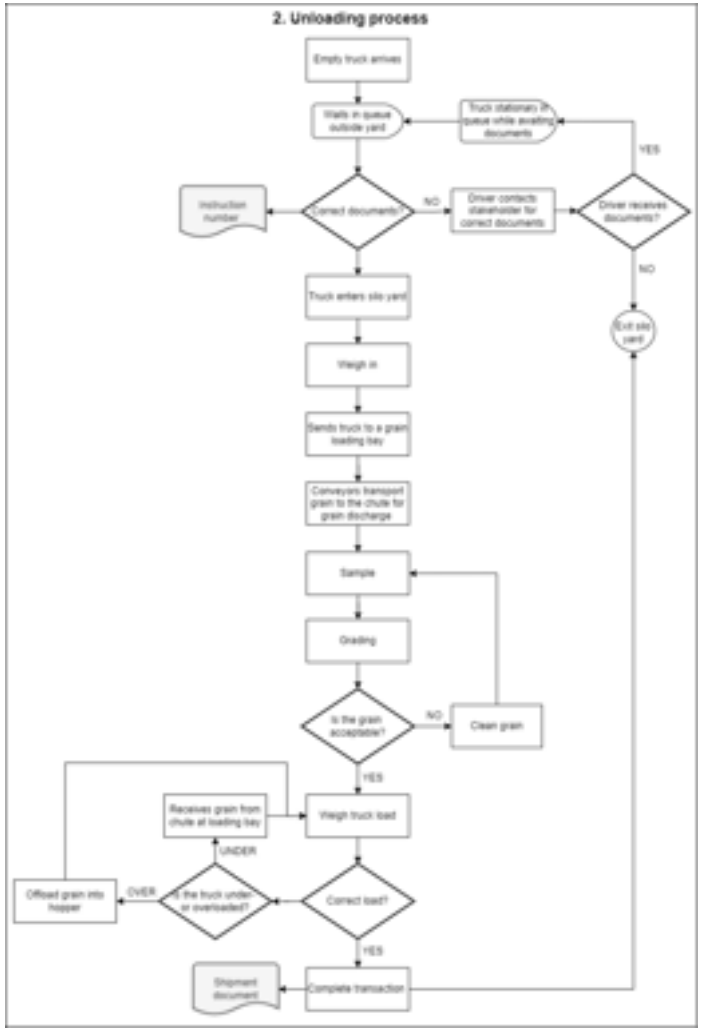

Figure 2: Off-loading process

Figure 1 and Figure 2 depict the typical flow of processes in a silo yard, but challenges often arise that lead to additional steps, potentially causing bottlenecks and slowing down the process's tempo. These challenges will be further explored in the root cause analysis section.

3.3 DETERMINING GOALS

The A3 problem-solving method focuses on defining goals for achieving during and after problem-solving [25]. The organisation's goal is to enhance operational efficiency to improve process lead times. However, the scope of this study will only focus on identifying and categorising the root causes of the inefficiencies leading to the problem.

3.4 ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

This section discusses how the root cause analysis data was gathered, as well as the process of analysing the data through a root cause analysis.

3.4.1 Data gathering

Data was collected from a South African case study organisation operating multiple grain silo facilities, with a focus on yard operations rather than mechanical or electrical processes inside the bins. The aim was to identify inefficiencies in the silo yard that lead to waste. Using the Genchi Genbutsu principle—"go and see"—qualitative data was gathered through observations and informal discussions [10]. This helped uncover bottlenecks and sources of inefficiency, with input from key personnel such as operations managers, regional and silo managers, operators, graders, and general staff.

3.4.1.1 Discussions

To understand the silo operations, informal discussions were conducted. Each discussion was documented through field notes, taken with the consent of the participants. To further enrich the discussions, specific topics and/or questions were posed to gather qualitative insight regarding the overall work culture, experienced frustrations, time-consuming processes, personal suggestions on improvements, as well as specific areas the employees felt the need to be observed.

3.4.1.2 Observations

Furthermore, general and systematic observations were conducted to understand the workflow, interactions, and resource use in silo operations. These included operational flow, employee movement, grain transport, workstations, process sequences, equipment, truck procedures, yard layout, electronic systems, workplace culture, communication methods, scheduling, and co-worker dynamics. This comprehensive approach provided a structured understanding of the silo yard's operational and logistical environment. Table 1 provides objectives for focus areas with specific questions in mind to ensure all areas are observed during the data gathering.

Table 1: Observations

Objective	Focus area	Question in mind during observation
Flow	Off-loading and loading processes, trucks, grain, and sequential processes	• Is the flow one-directional? • Does the flow between processes run smoothly? • Are there any delays or disruptions?
Systems	Scheduling, documentation, maintenance, PLC systems	• Are there any SOPs in practice, and are they complied with? • Do the systems support efficient grain handling? • Are the systems well-coordinated?

Workstations	Loading-bay, off-loading bay, grading, sampling, weighing bridge, and administration	• Are the workstations sequentially organised? • How long does it take to complete the designated task at a workstation?
Layout	Silo yard's arrangement and size, working stations	• Does the layout facilitate smooth grain handling and truck movement?
Interactions	Co-workers, silo operators and clients, head office and silo manager	• Is there mutual respect during conversations and departments? • Is there effective communication between different positions?
Movement	Employees, tools, equipment, and grain	• How efficient is the movement of employees, tools and resources in the silo yard?
Tempo	Off-loading and loading processes, weighing of trucks, grading, sampling, and documentation	• Is the workflow steady, or are there bottlenecks during the processes and workstations?
Storage	Number of grain bins, capacity of grain bins	• Is the storage capacity sufficient for the demand? • Does the storage waste space? • Are there any constraints related to storage?
Atmosphere	Work culture	• Is there any existing work culture to promote employees? • Does the work culture impact operational efficiency and employee morale?
Breakdowns	Equipment, machinery, technology	• Are there any breakdowns, and if so, how frequently do they occur? • Are there any precautions in place for breakdowns? • What is the impact on the operations if breakdowns occur?

The discussions, as well as the observations gathered, provided a deeper understanding of the processes and challenges in a grain handling silo facility. The qualitative data gathered enabled a comprehensive root cause analysis, which follows in the next section.

3.4.2 Data analysis

Figure 3 presents the findings from the root cause analysis (RCA), which focuses on the challenges in and around the silo facilities that impact the overall lead time of the loading and off-loading processes. The RCA is done in a grid format to organise the causes visually. Hence, the letters A, B, C and D, and the numbering represent the rows and columns in the matrix. The key, at the bottom of Figure 3, explains how the diagram must be interpreted. It indicates that when the reader follows the blocks vertically downward, the top block is caused by the block directly beneath it. Conversely, when following the blocks from bottom to top, each block leads to the block directly above it. The figure illustrates the causes impacting the tempo inside the silo yard in the blue dotted frame, while challenges outside of the silo yard are outlined with a green dotted frame.

Figure 3 identifies four primary factors affecting the lead time in the silo yard (indicated in the top row): truck congestion, different processes, unnecessary movement of employees, and long truck queues outside of the yard. Figure 4 and Figure 5 provide further explanation of the root causes presented in Figure 3. Figure 4 discusses the truck congestion and processes, while Figure 5 discusses unnecessary employee movement and trucks queuing outside of the silo yard. The grid numbers (A1, B2, C3, etc) used in Figure 4 and Figure 5 correspond with the placement of the blocks in Figure 3.

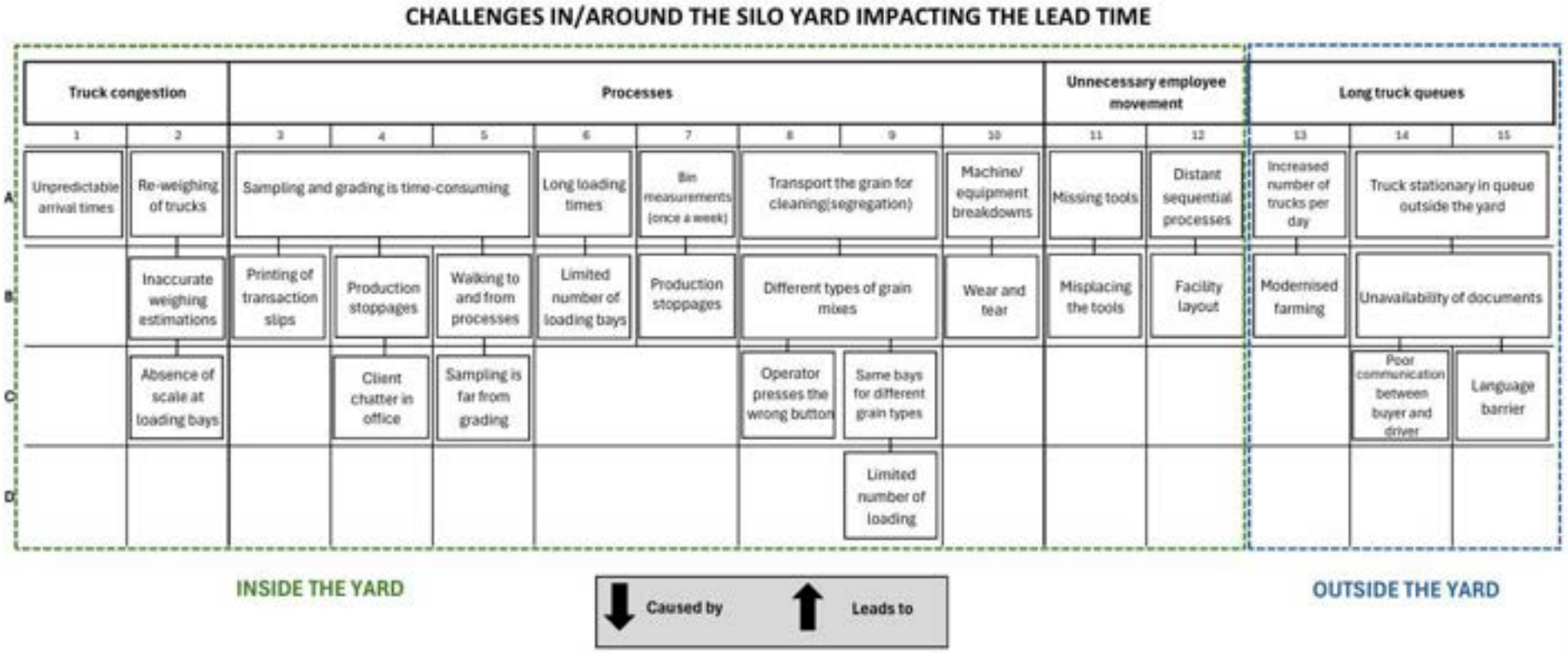

Figure 3: Root cause analysis

Primary cause	Truck congestion		Processes							
Secondary cause	**A1: Unpredictable arrival times**	**A2: Re-weighing of trucks**	**A3,A4,A5: Sampling and grading is time-consuming**			**A6: Long loading times**	**A7: Bin measurements**	**A8, A9: Transport of grain for cleaning/segregation**		**A10: Machine/equip breakdowns**
	Trucks coming to load or offload does not have a required time of arrival at the silo yard, only a determined date, which causes truck congestion .	If grain-receiving trucks must be re-weighed, they must move between the offloading bays and the weighing bridge until the correct load is achieved. Hence, it leads to truck congestion inside the silo yard.	The sampling and grading processes that are time-consuming leads to the overall process of loading or offloading grain to have longer leading times.			The loading of grain into the grain bins take long, as well as the offloading of grain from the bins into the trucks are time-consuming	Bin measurements are taken once a week, which increases the lead time for the processes.	When grain has to be transported it increases the leading time of processes.		Processes have longer lead times due to machinery or equipment breaking.
Tertiary cause		**B2: Inaccurate weighing estimations**	**B3: Printing of transaction slips**	**B4: Production stoppages**	**B5: Walking to and from processes**	**B6: Limited number of loading bays**	**B7: Production stoppages**	**B8, B9: Different types of grain mixes**		**B10: Wear and tear**
		Re-weighing of trucks is caused by employees making inaccurate estimations of the grain loaded into the trucks.	When receiving or selling grain, transaction slips must be completed, which causes the sampling and grading processes to take longer.	A cause for the sampling and grading processes to be time-consuming is due to production stoppages occurring at these workstations.	The sampling and grading processes are time-consuming due to employees walking to and from the two different but sequential processes.	The loading and offloading times per truck are long due to having limited loading bays and offloading hopper bays.	Production stoppages occur during bin measurements, as grain flow into or out of the bins must be halted while the measurements are being taken.	Grain must be transported for cleaning or segregation when different types of grain mix.		Machine or equipment breakdowns are caused by wear and tear over a period of time.
Quaternary cause		**C2: Absence of scale at loading bays**		**C4: Client chatter in office**	**C5: Sampling is far from grading**			**C8: Operator presses the wrong button**	**C9: Same bays for different grain types**	
		Inaccurate loads are caused by employees having to estimate the grain loaded as there are not a scale present at the loading bays.		When clients gather in the office and engage in non-relevant conversations, it leads to production stoppages as their truck remains stationary at the grading workstation while the client (driver) is in the office.	Employees have to physically walk far distances between the sampling and grading workstations due to it being located far apart.			If the operator presses the wrong button on the PLC system, it leads to grain mixing inside the conveyors	Different grain mixes in the hopper as silo facilities utilises the same hoppers for loading grain into the grain bins,	
Quinary cause									**D9: Limited number of loading bays**	
									Grain mixes in the hoppers due to having limited number of loading bays.	

Figure 4: Explanation of root causes (part 1)

Primary cause	Unnecessary employee movement		Long truck queues outside yard		
Secondary cause	**A11: Missing tools**	**A12: Distant sequential processes**	**A13: Increased number of trucks per day**	**A14, A15: Truck stationary in queue outside of the yard**	
	If tools are missing, employees have to search for them, thereby making unnecessary movement	Unnecessary employee movement is caused by sequential processes being far from each other, resulting in employees needing to walk.	The truck queues are longer due to the higher demand.	If trucks are stationary in the queue, it results in no progress in the queue, leading to longer queues.	
Tertiary cause	**B11: Misplacing tools**	**B12: Facility layout**	**B13: Modernised farming**	**B14, B15: Unavailability of documents**	
	If tools are misplaced, it causes them to become missing.	Sequential processes are far from one another due to how the facility were layed out.	Modernised farming leads to having more trucks to assist at a silo facility.	The trucks are stationary due to the driver not having the correct documentation on them.	
Quaternary cause				**C14: Poor communication between buyer and driver**	**C15: Language barrier**
				The driver typically does not have the correct documents due to a misunderstanding between the buyer and the driver	A language barrier can lead to not exchanging and checking the correct documents.

Figure 5: Explanation of root causes (part 2)

By understanding and following lean management's eight forms of waste, the root causes presented **Error! Reference source not found.**were categorised according to the different types of lean waste.

4 CATEGORISATION OF AGRICULTURAL WASTE

The root causes resulting in the inefficiencies in the silo yard were determined utilising the root cause analysis in Figure 3. These causes were categorised according to the eight forms of waste in lean management after exploring the discussions of the causes in Figure 4 and 5. Figure 6 provides a key that indicates the eight different wastes in eight different colours. Each root cause was categorised by following the definition of lean waste provided in section 2.2.

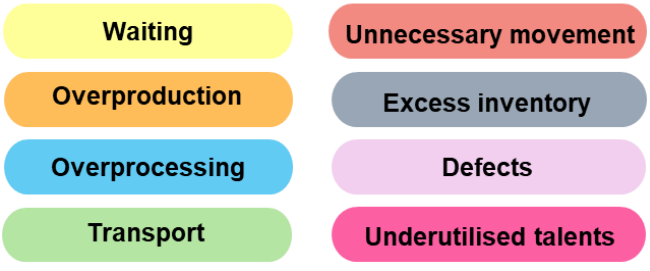

Figure 6: Waste categories

Figure 7**Error! Reference source not found.** provides the RCA from Figure 3; however, the causes are coloured according to the type of waste it was classified as. Some causes are filled in with two colours since the cause is classified as both types of waste. After categorising the various root causes into the eight forms of waste, it was found that some causes cannot be

categorised as waste, although they may lead to waste. These causes are illustrated as white blocks**Error! Reference source not found.**. Overproduction, excess inventory, and underutilised talents were not identified in this RCA.

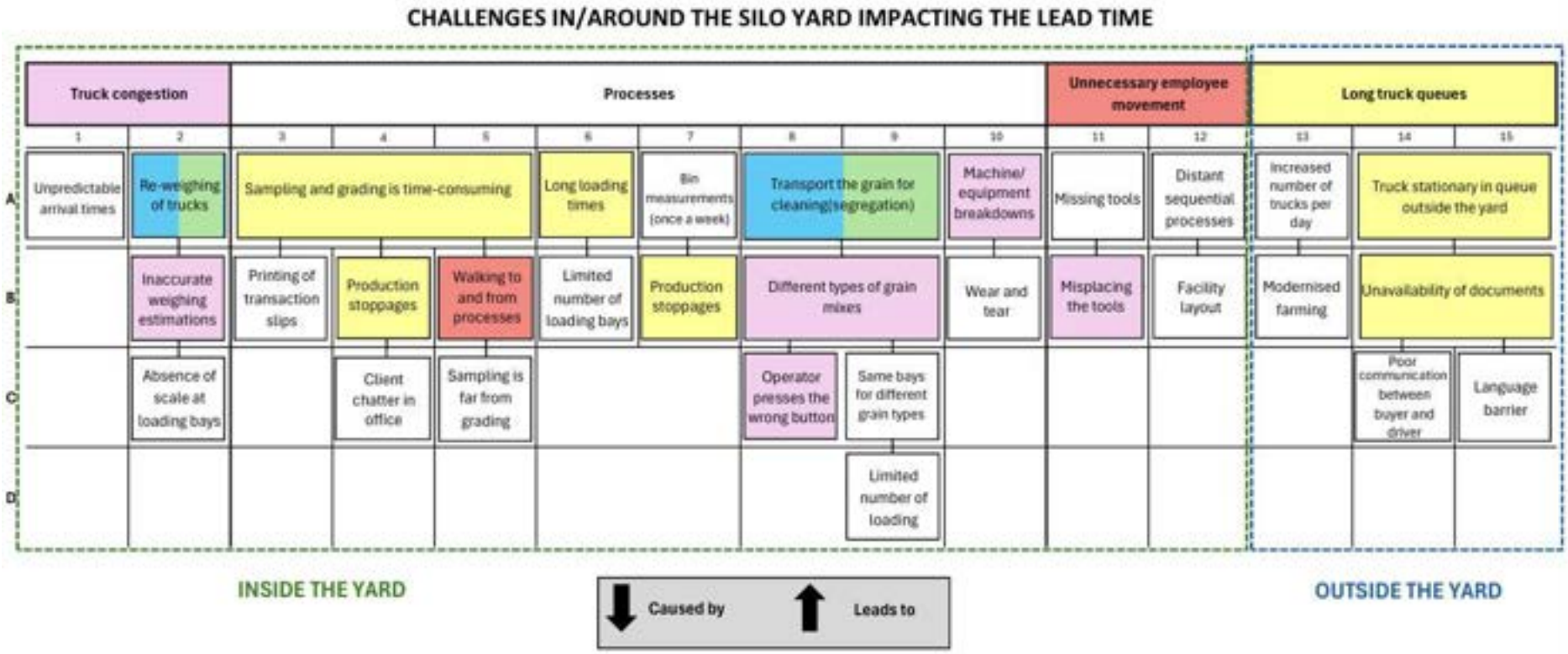

Figure 7: Root causes categorised into forms of waste

5 CONTEXTUALISING EIGHT FORMS OF WASTE FOR SILO OPERATIONS

The categorisation of the root causes into the eight forms of waste enabled the contextualising of the eight forms of waste for agricultural practices, specifically for grain handling in silo operations. After examining the lean manufacturing wastes discussed in section 2.2 and gaining an understanding of the processes and workflow in the grain silo facility in section 7, the eight types of waste specific to silo operations were identified and contextualised as follows:

1. **Overproduction**

   Overproduction occurs when the system follows a push system without considering customer demands when making decisions. This can cause bottlenecks in the operations or excess inventory.

   Grain handling examples:

   - The farmer harvests more crops than the silo facilities can store, leading to spoilage of the grain and possible limited transportation services for the grain.
   - The silo facilities store more grain than the market demands, resulting in possible capacity constraints, as well as the risk of spoilage.

   However, this waste is unlikely to occur at the case study organisation, as the demand for grain is very high, given South Africa's experience with hunger.

2. **Waiting**

   Waiting is one of the biggest lean wastes experienced in this context, as it occurs when employees, customers or downstream processes are waiting for an action to be taken, a process to finish, tools, information or people.

   Grain handling examples:

   - Waiting for farmers to deliver grain, leading to delays and increased process lead times.
   - Trucks are waiting outside the silo yards, resulting in queues and possible congestion.
   - An employee is waiting for the grading machine to complete its measuring process, resulting in the employee participating in a non-value-adding activity (such as standing).

3. **Unnecessary transport/conveyance**

   This waste involves excess movement of the material, resources, tools, trucks, machinery or equipment that does not add value to the operations. This waste is often related to poor layouts and process flows.

   Grain handling examples:

   - Moving the grain between grain bins or silo facilities is necessary due to capacity constraints, which increases transportation costs and possible labour costs.
   - Re-weighing the truckloads, due to inaccurate estimations made, resulting in repetitive actions of the truck and grain(resource) until the correct load is achieved.

4. **Overprocessing**

   Overprocessing waste involves correcting errors, repetitive steps in a process or overdelivering on the customer's requirements. This waste may lead to increased process times and possible burnout of resources.

   Grain handling examples:

   - Trucks that need to be re-weighed due to inaccurate truckloads, leading to redundant actions.
   - Grain bins that contain pesticides will have to be sifted again to prevent a decrease in the grain's quality, resulting in repetitive actions.

- Utilising two grading machines to determine the grade of the grain results in longer lead times.

5. **Excess inventory**
   Excess stock (grain) accumulation constitutes a form of inventory waste. Overstocking refers to the storing of resources beyond market demand, which could create capacity constraints.
   Grain handling example:
   - Silo's that overstock grain run the risk of having to store the grain for longer periods, resulting in possible spoilage of the grain.

   However, this case study company does not experience this form of waste, as it distributes the grain to other facilities when the current facility is at its maximum capacity.

6. **Unnecessary movement**
   This waste occurs when sequential processes are located far away from each other, poor layout in the facility, or if employees need to walk far distances between processes or participate in unnecessary actions such as reaching.
   Grain handling examples:
   - When tools are misplaced, employees will search for them.
   - Sequential processes are located far from each other, causing the employees to walk long distances within the facility, which additionally increases the lead times.

7. **Defects**
   Defect waste refers to errors and mistakes that occur during operations. This type of waste typically increases time and costs, and may impact the quality of the product.
   Grain handling examples:
   - If a truck's load is incorrectly estimated, it must return to the hopper, disrupting the workflow, which leads to additional waste.
   - Spoilage or mixing of the grain decreases its quality.

8. **Underutilisation of talents**
   This waste occurs when operational issues persist due to the underutilisation of employees' talents, knowledge and ideas. This waste may cause the employees to become demotivated, which can lead to decreased productivity.
   Grain handling examples:
   - Not using a bilingual employee to bridge the language barrier between the farmer and the silo operator wastes a valuable resource.
   - Assigning an employee with the knowledge and training in grading grain to tasks unrelated to this skill.

6 REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Prior work has raised the question of whether lean wastes can be identified and categorised in agriculture. However, this question has not yet been answered. In this study it was determined that not only is lean waste applicable in agriculture, but it also provided a qualitative approach to gather empirical data from a grain handling and storage case study organisation, categorise the challenges into the eight forms of lean watse, and finally contextualise lean wast in agricultural terms specifically for a grain handlimng and storage facility.

It was found that various root causes exist both inside and outside of these facilities that impact the operations' lead time and efficiency. After categorising the root causes according to the eight forms of waste, it was observed that specific causes align with multiple waste categories, while others do not represent waste directly, but instead lead to waste. In addition to categorising agricultural waste, specifically for grain handling and storage operations, the waste was contextualised, and examples were presented. Notably, overproduction and excess

storage are not applicable wastes in this industry context. After systematically contextualising the eight forms of waste in an agricultural context, this study confirms that the agricultural sector can identify lean waste. However, some limitations are worth noting. This study is a qualitative study that used a single case study organisation in South Africa. While this approach successfully contextualised the eight wastes, incorporating quantitative data would enable a prioritisation of wastes by severity and facilitate an analysis of lean countermeasures.

7 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Lean manufacturing has proven effective in eliminating waste and improving workflow in industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, the service sector, etc [8]. However, its application in agriculture remains an emerging field of study [8]. This study addressed a research gap by providing a contextualised list of the eight lean wastes in grain handling and storage facilities.

Following an adapted A3 method, this study identified and categorised key operational inefficiencies, such as truck waiting times, unnecessary grain movement, and reprocessing due to defects, translating abstract lean theory into a practical framework for the agricultural sector. This structured analysis of a grain silo facility demonstrates how contextualising the eight forms of waste in agriculture can highlight opportunities to improve efficiency, productivity, and ultimately the profitability of silo operations. In doing so, the study contributes to the emerging body of knowledge on lean agriculture and illustrates the potential of lean management when tailored to grain storage contexts.

The findings lay the groundwork for further research into lean management in agriculture, particularly in grain handling and storage operations. Future studies could explore how the 14 lean principles may be applied to address the specific wastes identified in this study, or investigate the extent to which lean practices are already embedded within the grain storage sector. Additionally, quantitative data on lead times, costs, and capacities would allow for a more precise measurement of the impact and severity of waste. Building on this foundation, future research can move beyond identifying the causes of inefficiency ("why") to developing clearer, evidence-based strategies for improvement ("how").

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THE ASSESSMENT OF LEAN PRACTICES ON THE OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF A PRINTING DIVISION, GAUTENG

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ABSTRACT

Printing industry plays a pivotal role in boosting the South African economy. Inadequate lean practices applied in printing division have a poor effect on the operational performances and result in managerial inefficiencies. This paper intends to assess the Lean practices and measure operational performance in printing division in a company. The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Semi-structured, face to face interviews guided by open-ended questions were conducted with 18 employees who are directly involved in the printing of examination question papers as a means of data collection. The results of this study indicate that adopting lean manufacturing in a printing plant improved machine utilisation by 5%. Furthermore, unnecessary motions and distance travelled by employees were reduced by 41% and 80.49% respectively. Printing managers can use findings of this paper as an analytic instrument to contribute to productivity of a printing company.

Keywords: Productivity, lean manufacturing, utilisation, efficiency, economy

1 INTRODUCTION

The South African printing industry has an estimated turnover of R51 billion [1]. Working additional 3 hours daily during weekdays and an additional 24 weekend hours to meet delivery schedules of the printed examination question papers suggests that printing industry is characterised with high workload [2]. Employee dissatisfaction exacerbated by the poor reward system employed within the public sector [3]. The exodus of experienced artisans in pursuit of better paying companies suggests that the level of employee morale has declined [4]. Inefficient factory layout inhibited effective utilisation of available floor space and seamless flow of people and materials subsequently affecting productivity [5]; [2]. Frequently rescheduled examination question papers' deliveries negatively impacted customer relationship [6].

During the peak examination printing season, 14million booklets of question papers were printed. Starting with the printing 3 weeks later than planned meant the system lost 120hours, putting pressure to factors like machine utilisation for the system to deliver on time. Corrective maintenance exacerbated the printing systems delays due to ceased roller bearings and printing roller rubber recovery that was needed to recover damaged rollers during printing. Lack of management support and not adhering to service level agreements disrupts the printing process as customers submit orders late. As printing system is a value chain, the delay experienced in one of the work centres has a domino effect to the value chain. The use of lean manufacturing is argued to improved performance, enhance financial performance of the printing division [7].

The printing of examination question papers puts pressure on the printing system due to the high number of booklets that must be printed at a very short period for safety and security of the examination papers. To print volumes of this magnitude, 14 million, the system required 480 hours while late submission by the customer and breakdowns experienced left the system with only 280 hours to complete the printing. This paper sets out to examine the impact of lean practices on the operational performance of a printing division by answering the 3 research questions:

1. What are the causes of low productivity rate for the printing division?
2. What are the techniques that can be used to improve productivity for the printing division?
3. What are the strategies that can be implemented to improve productivity for the printing division?

Based on the aforementioned statements, it could be inferred that the printing division's processes are characterised by overloading; demotivated employees; inefficiencies and ineffectiveness resulting in low productivity.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Research studies recognised lean practices influence in eliminating sources of wastes in the production flow and enhancing business performance [8]; [9]; [10]. Non value adding activities could be reduced significantly by the use of lean practices during printing [11]. In pursuit of competitive edge and being responsive to customer demands of high quality printed materials, lean practices can be adopted by the printing division [12]. A variety of researchers suggest lean practices must be adopted to enhance performance of a printing division [13]; [14]; [15]; [16]; [17]; [18], however, the lack of published material related to lean manufacturing in the South African printing systems remains a significant concern.

Such lean practices include adopting single-minute-of-die (SMED); 5S; 7S; root cause analysis (RCA); value stream mapping (VSM); Kanban; kaizen; brainstorming; benchmarking; just-in-time (JIT); total quality management (TQM) and total productive maintenance (TPM). Printing

division's success is dependent on improved turnaround times which impacts positively on overall performance. A SMED through its focus on reducing change over time in a printing process, could be used to shorten lead times for printed materials [19]. SMED enhances machine availability through reduced setup time and enables the printing division to meet customer expectations [20]. Simplification of the work environment, effective organisation of the workplace and reduction of waste; improving safety and quality are achieved through adopting 5S [21]; [22]; [23]; [24]. A 7S tool as a modified 5S methodology incorporates safety and team spirit [25]. RCA originated with Sakichi Toyoda when he formalised how he applied the method with famous 5-why's and serves as a foundational paradigm of widely used, highly refined business processes with high process maturity [26]. RCA identify root causes of a specific event [27]. Due to printing work being labour intensive, it is important to define the origin of a problem and identify areas for further investigation [28]. Listing all possible causes and effects on the diagram and focussing on each cause per category could define the origin of the problem such as low productivity. Cause and effect diagram as a generic standard of identifying root causes of a problem, provides an orderly way of looking at such effects and causes.

VSM has become one of the most popular and widespread development tool within the lean community as a system level tool that maps material and information flows within an organisation or through the value chain [29]. VSM enable printing systems to address sustainability challenges due to customer demands and involves a sequence of operational activities needed to plan and produce printed materials [30]; [31]. Kanban, as a pull system, authorises production at a required rate and specific time benefiting the printing division [32]. Kaizen, as a philosophy that seeks to continuously improve, assist printing division improve quality of printed materials; optimize printing processes and reduce costs associated with running a printing system [33]. [34]; [35] argued that kaizen philosophy primarily focusses on customer satisfaction by delivering cost effective quality printed materials on time using a variety of related and often overlapping practices including TPM; JIT; elimination of wastes; automation; plan-do-check-act (PDCA) cycle and poke-yoke.

Brainstorming involves a group of employees sharing ideas regarding the cause of a problem facing the printing division [36]. Brainstorming could be defined as an improvement technique where a group employees bring forth as many rudimentary ideas as possible [37]. Comparing what is best for learning from and improvement goals defines benchmarking as argued by [38]. The printing division has the obligation to investigate which practices are transferrable from the contexts of advanced security printing systems and non-security printing systems. Lean practices can be applied in every aspect in a printing division, although lean practices started in manufacturing [39]. Improving printing operations; enhancing productivity; decreasing lead time and improving printed material quality is the key objective of lean manufacturing, achieved by eliminating non-value added activities; shortening lead times and establishing continuous improvement processes [40].

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research approach with a sample of 18 participants, selected using purposive sampling. The participants answered a semi-structured interview. Qualitative research method is an exploratory research practice used to understand underlying reasons, opinions and motivations of individuals in solving a problem as argued by [41]. In depth face to face, semi-structured interviews and printing system observations were used to collect data. Interviews were guided by a set open ended questions to collect empirical data from a selected panel of experts in the printing division. This approach enabled the researcher to explore deep insights into participants' knowledge and experiences leading to relevant conclusions and recommendations. Printing system observation considered waste and inefficiencies of the printing process. Data was analysed following Braun and Clarke's thematic

analysis process [42]. After transcribing the interviews, data were prepared, coded and categorised; and themes were created, refined and finalised. Data were interpreted in order to come up with sets of findings. Thematic analysis provided relevant themes that addressed the 3 research questions of the study. For more accuracy and depth in the data analysis, the researcher employed computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) NVivo 11 Pro. The appropriate research design for the study therefore had to be the one that addressed the research questions unambiguously as possible in order to understand lean practices.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the inductive data analysis, four themes emerged and they included perceived productivity enablers; causes of low productivity; tools for measuring productivity and strategies to improve productivity. Perceived productivity enablers theme was the most discussed across all participants with 250 quotations. Interview data analysis presented participant 14 as the highest contributor to this study with 29 codes and 118 quotations. Furthermore, participants 1, 3 and 17 with over 100 quotations each were amongst the most contributing participants with participant 16 being the least contributor to the study with only 41 quotations. From data analysis process, equipment efficiency; location; layout; management and quality of the final product emerged as perceived key productivity enablers. Figure 2 below presents key productivity enablers versus participant contribution. Participants further highlighted the significance of equipment efficiency that can be achieved through technology advancements.

Participant 1 clearly stated that “technology is key to production enhancement based on its ability to actually streamline activities." Participant 12 also stated that “technology affects productivity positively and once you have the new machines which are digitalised then it means you are counting down costs in terms of paying more people who should be doing the work manually.” Furthermore, participant 2 and 13 highlighted the importance of optimum layout in printing processes. These statements suggest the importance of technology in improving the printing division’s performance. Management was argued to be the significant productivity enabler by participants. Adopting lean practices including the use of TPM; 5S; brainstorming; kaizen and TQM could improve the current status of the printing division.

The study further identified internal factors, external factors and process factors as causes of low productivity within the printing system. Lack of training, low morale, poor work ethic, shorter lead times and lack of management support were identified by participants as major causes of low productivity. Tedious tender processes that public departments are obliged to follow proved to be negatively affecting this printing system, as was argued by participant 3. The failure of customers to understand the printing value chain exacerbated the challenges experienced by the printing system as argued by participant 1.

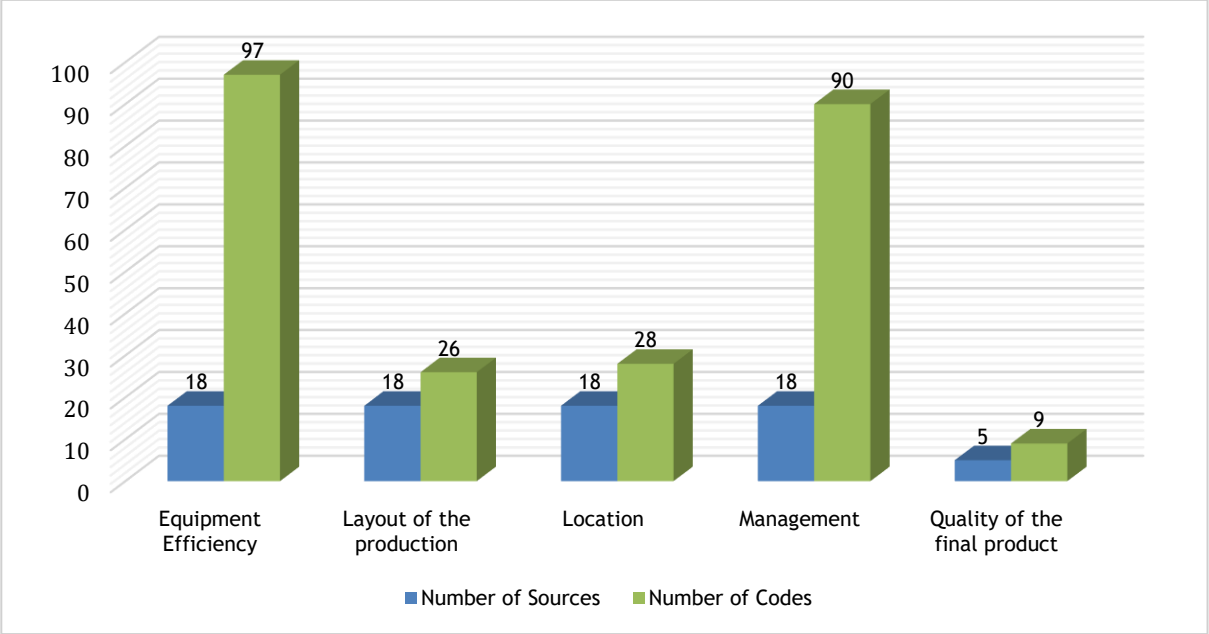

Figure 2: Perceived productivity enablers

From the above figure 2, perceived productivity enablers of the printing system were identified. Equipment efficiency followed by management factor were identified as the major factors that impact on productivity, accounting for 74,8% of the printing systems productivity. As shown in figure 3 below, focusing improvement efforts on equipment efficiency and management factors would maximise productivity.

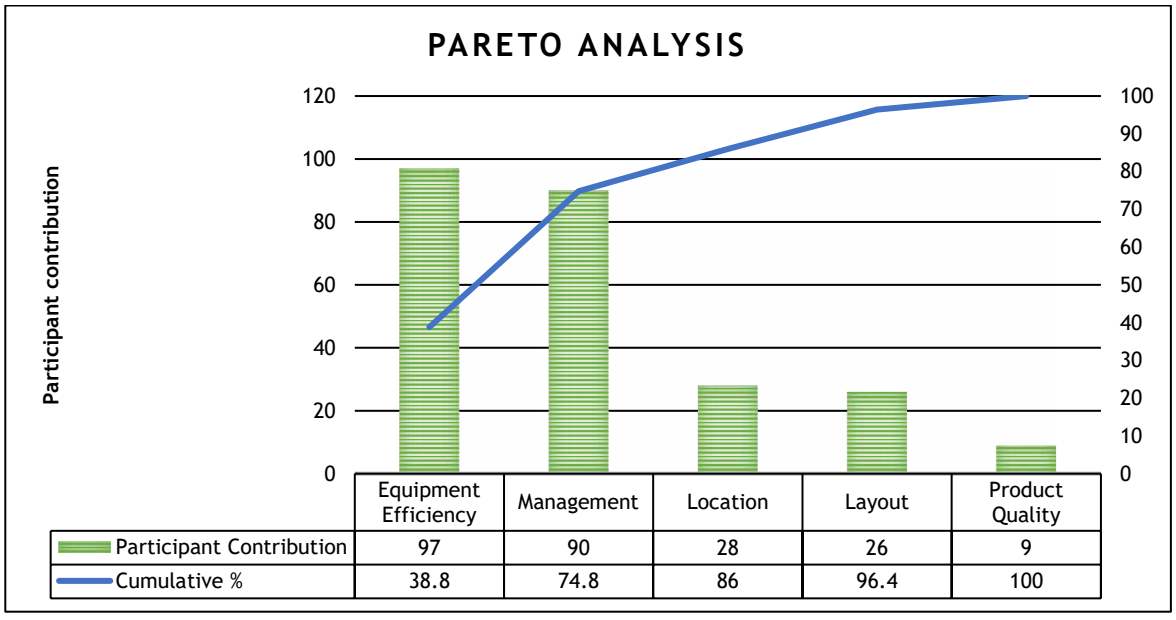

Figure 3: Pareto analysis

4.1 Current system

Data collected through printing system observation indicated that printing division experienced excessive motions due to inefficient factory layout. The use of offset printing and digital printing further impacted performance of the printing system. This was evident when artisan was unable to start production run citing shortage of printers' assistants. Also, artisans

are unable to operate a variety of printing machines available due to lack of training in operating such equipment in addition to the ones they are operating on a daily basis. Delays such as waiting for printers' assistants or waiting for an artisan increase workload and create bottleneck for the printing division. Digital printing lack suitable trained operators and the limited number of printers' assistants. A high number of activities within the printing division further affects the performance of the system negatively. Out of 540 minutes of the shift, 245 minutes were used to run the printing machine.

The other 295 minutes was used for collecting job cards and proof copies; collecting paper reels and official breaks accounting for 85minutes which were essential non-value adding activities. These delays accounted for 34% of the total time with 9 activities while 5 transport related activities, accounted for 19% of the total activities in the printing system. Inefficiency of the system is confirmed by only 8 operation related activities, translating to 31% of the total activities of the printing section. Figure 4 below present printing section activities.

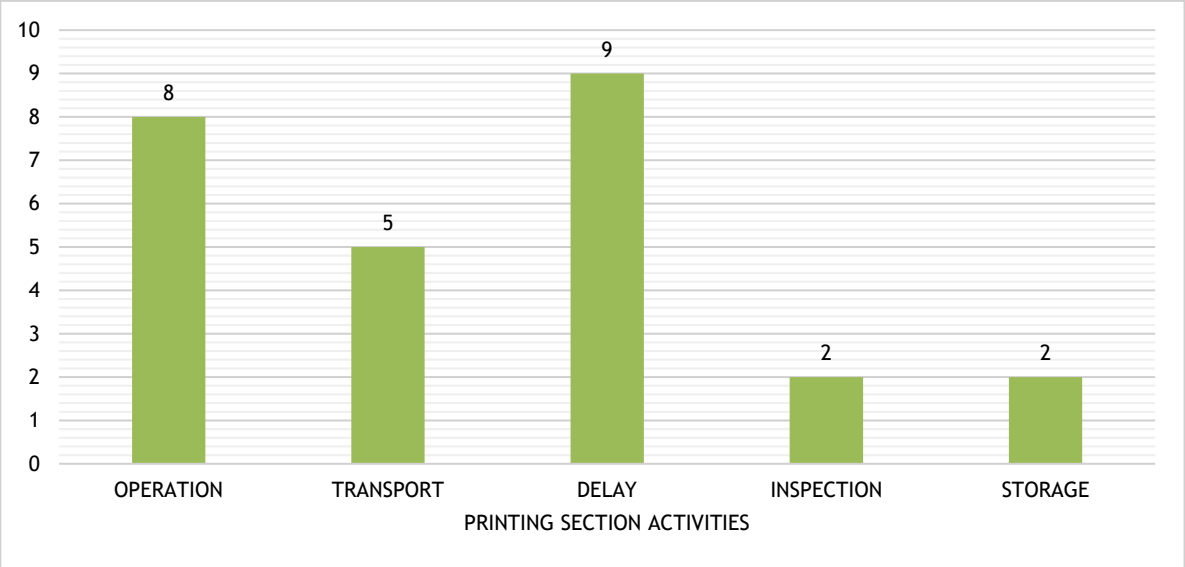

Figure 4: Printing section activities

The distance between machines used has an impact on productivity as longer distances take longer to be travelled when transporting materials between the machines. The distance between all machines in the print production line indicates a poorly laid out factory as presented by table 1 below.

Table 1: Distance between machines

Machine Distance in Metres						
List of Machines:	CTP	Solna	Dev	OCE	Martini	CMC
CTP (Printing plate making machine)	0	1600	1600	1600	1600	1600
Solna Printing Machine	1600	0	5	20	10	25
Dev Printing Machine	1600	5	0	25	10	20
OCE Digital Printing Machine	1600	20	25	0	35	41
Martini Stitching Machine	1600	10	10	35	0	6
CMC Packaging Machine	1600	25	20	41	6	0

Furthermore, system observation presented results that highlighted the inefficient utilisation of machines. This is evident as out of 6 work centres, only 1 work centre remained operational at 96%. A total of 5 other work centres operated below 60%, with CTP being the worst at 33%.

Overall downtime is experienced by the 2 printing machines, i.e. Dev and Solna with a total of 68,2 hours over a 3 months cycle as presented by table 2 below. Mathematically, machine utilisation was found to be 55,6% for the entire printing system:

$$machine\ utilisation = \frac{\textbf{actual machine hours}}{\textbf{available machine hours}}$$

$$= \frac{1535{,}43}{2758{,}8}$$

$$= 55{,}6\ \%$$

Table 2: Machine utilisation

WORK CENTRE NUMBER	WORK CENTRE NAME	AVAILABLE HOURS	ACTUAL HOURS WORKED	UTILISATION PER WORK CENTRE	DOWN TIME IN HOURS
310900	CTP	451,44	149,8	33%	0
320622	DEV	451,44	249,1	55%	36
320822	Solna	451,44	204,7	45%	32,2
340702	OCE	451,44	432,15	96%	0
360744	Martini	451,44	261,15	58%	0
373010	CMC Packing	501,6	238,53	48%	0
TOTALS:		**2758,8**	**1535,43**	**56%**	**68,2**

4.2 Proposed system

The researcher used lean practices relevant to the printing division processes to enhance the printing system's performance. Interview participants identified lack of artisans; poor quality materials and inefficient layout as sources of waste. Table 3 below presents identified lean practices to improve performance of the printing division.

Table 3: Lean practices

Causes of low productivity	Lean practice	Actioned plan	Resources sourced	Targeted outcome
- Machine breakdown. - Lack of technologically advanced machines.	TPM	-Removed printing equipment from Bosman Street factory. -Installed technologically advanced equipment at Visagie Street factory in an optimised layout. -Production management and maintenance management discussed and agreed on new maintenance schedule. -Educated machine operators about new plans.	-Rigging company. New factory space. -Equipment maintenance manuals to identify maintenance needs per machine.	-Improved overall equipment utilisation from 56.6% to 60.6%. -Competent machine operators. -Supportive management to improve machine efficiency.
- Lack of skilled machine operators. - Demotivated employees. - Absenteeism. - Employee turn over	Operator training	- Identified problem areas. - Selected operators to be trained. - Appointed apprentices to increase operator base. - Set out clear and achievable operator training targets. - Developed a recognition and reward system.	- Operator training manuals. - Knowledgeable facilitator to train operators. - Lucrative reward system.	- Effective and efficient operators. - Motivated operators. - Increase of skilled operator retention rate. - Supportive management to continuously encourage operators.
- Material shortage. - Poor quality material.	MRP	- Established demand management team. - Adopted the use of a material resource planning system. - Ascertained material demand volumes. - Compared previous demand with future demand to develop new order points. - Regularly checked physical stock to test the effectiveness of the material resource planning system.	- Demand management personnel. - Material resource planning system. - Physical stock item forms to record stock.	- Reduced risk of material shortage. - Identification of reliable suppliers. - Effective material resource planning system.
- Poor housekeeping - Hazardous workplace	5S	- Collected evidence of the current situation of the area identified for 5S project. - Reviewed sorting criteria. - Marked a local red tag area. - Tagged, recorded and moved tagged items to an identified area. - Kept evidence of the newly sort area.	- Camera for present situation and reformed situation pictures. - Red tags (sorting tools for visual control). - Red tag record forms.	- Reduced searching time of finished and in-process materials. - Reduced costs associated with unnecessary inventory. - Increased floor space utilization.

Poor layout	Layout	Designed layout optimally.	New factory premises.	Optimum factory layout.
Increased down time due to official breaks.	Roster plan.	Implemented staggered official breaks.	Official breaks time schedule.	Reduced down time associated with official breaks.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Implementing lean practices in the printing system reduced delay activities from 34% to 25% and transport related activities from 19% to 9% within the printing section. Furthermore operation related activities increased from 31% to 50%. In addition to the improved activities in the printing section, the distance between machines was reduced by relocating printing machines closer to each other in a new factory with an optimally designed layout as presented by table 4 below. This led to a reduction of distance travelled between machines by 80,49% from 1600m to 50m. Proposed printing system further improved overall productivity from 55% to 90%.

Table 4: Proposed system distance matrix

PROPOSED SYSTEM						
Machines:	**CTP**	**SOLNA**	**DEV**	**OCE**	**MARTINI**	**CMC**
CTP	0	50	50	55	55	67
SOLNA		0	5	6	6	18
DEV			0	6	4	13
OCE				0	2	8
MARTINI					0	10
CMC						0

The implementation of lean strategies such as TPM, 5S, MRP, Operator training, layout design and roster plan improved machine utilisation by 5% from 55,6% to 60,6% as presented by table 5 below. Furthermore, proposed layout design improved printing system by eliminating 41% of employee movements.

Table 5: Machine utilisation

WORK CENTRE NUMBER	WORK CENTRE NAME (PRINTING MACHINE)	AVAILABLE HOURS	ACTUAL HOURS WORKED	UTILISATION PER WORK CENTRE
310900	CTP	451,44	149,8	33%
320622	DEV	451,44	265	58,7%
320822	Solna	451,44	245	54%
340702	OCE	451,44	432,15	91%
360744	Martini	451,44	280	62%
373010	CMC Packing	501,6	300	59,8%
TOTALS:		**2758,8**	**1671,95**	**60,6%**

$$machine\ utilisation = \frac{\textbf{actual machine hours}}{\textbf{available machine hours}} = \frac{1671{,}95}{2758{,}8} = 60{,}6\ \% \equiv 61\ \%$$

The study was conducted during a peak period of examination printing, limiting the results to peak seasons. Furthermore, results of the study were limited to a sample of 18 semi-structured interview participants based in one printing division in Gauteng province of South Africa, inhibiting generalising results to the entire printing industry. Authors recommend further studies to assess the impact of lean practices on operational performance of printing divisions.

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Appendix 1

OPEN ENDED RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTION

The following research questions were formulated for designing a productivity improvement strategy in THE GPW.

Research Question 1: What are the causes of low productivity rate for GPW?

1. What is the impact of human resource on productivity?
2. How does material affect productivity?
3. What is the influence of machines on productivity?
4. What is the impact of location on productivity?
5. What is the impact of layout on productivity?
6. How is productivity affected by finance?
7. How management influence productivity? Please explain.
8. How does technology affect productivity?
9. What are the challenges between the GPW and suppliers?
10. What are the challenges between the GPW and customers?

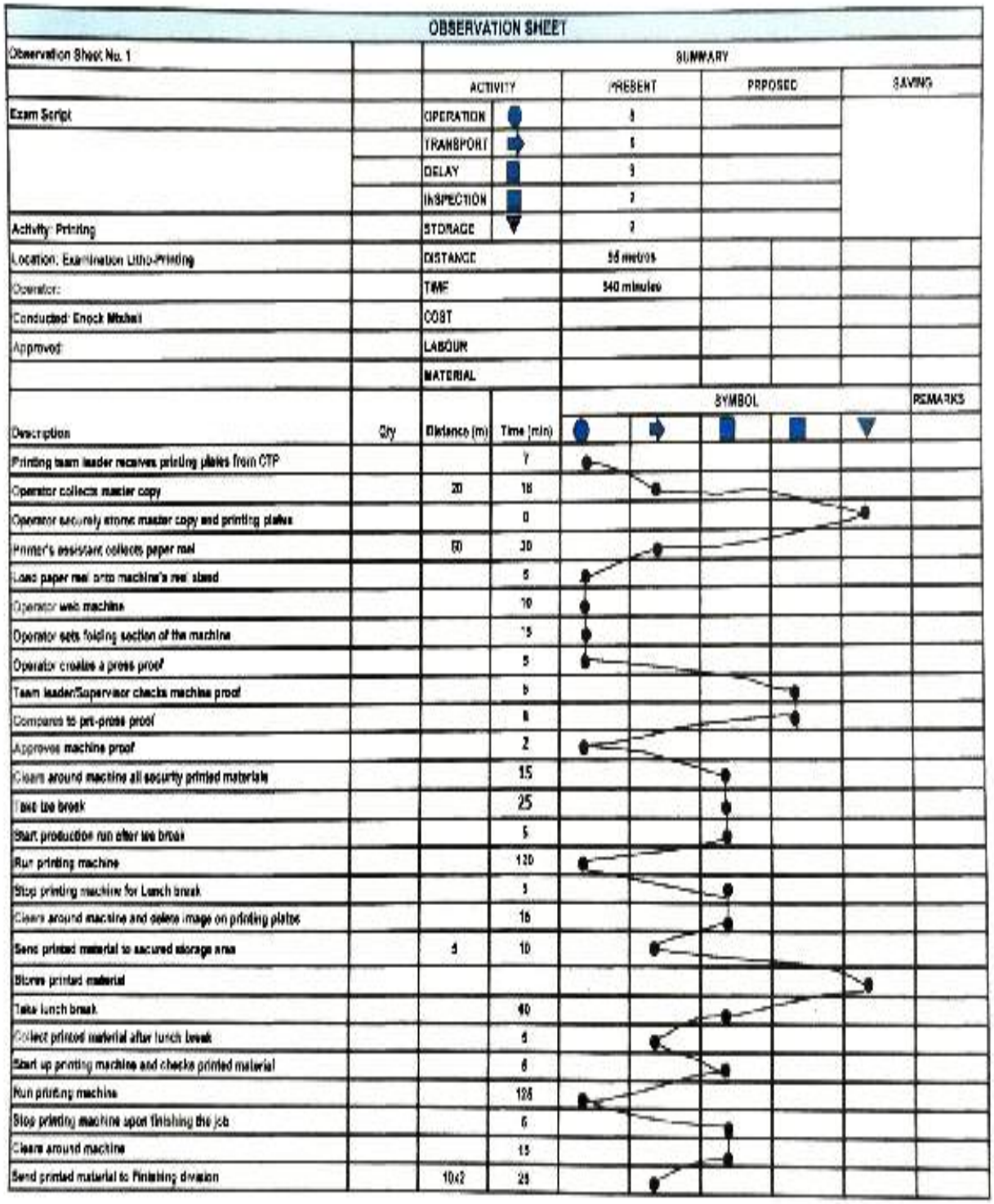
Research Question 2: What are the techniques that can be used to improve productivity for GPW?

11. Do the GPW measure productivity?
12. What are the different kinds of waste generated in printing production?
13. What are the bottlenecks experienced in printing processes?
14. What is the impact of quality on productivity?

Research Question 3: What are the strategies that can be implemented to improve productivity for GPW?

15. What are the different types of tools or techniques that could be used to improve productivity?
16. What are the strategies that could improve productivity?

Appendix 2: Observation sheet



OBSERVATION SHEET										
Observation Sheet No. 1		SUMMARY								
		ACTIVITY		PRESENT	PROPOSED	SAVING				
Exam Script		OPERATION		9						
		TRANSPORT		8						
		DELAY		9						
		INSPECTION		2						
Activity: Printing		STORAGE		2						
Location: Examination Litho-Printing		DISTANCE		56 metres						
Operator:		TIME		540 minutes						
Conducted: Enock Mtshali		COST								
Approved:		LABOUR								
		MATERIAL								
				SYMBOL						REMARKS
Description	Qty	Distance (m)	Time (min)							
Printing team leader receives printing plates from CTP			7							
Operator collects master copy		20	18							
Operator securely stores master copy and printing plates			0							
Printer's assistant collects paper reel		60	30							
Load paper reel onto machine's reel stand			5							
Operator sets machine			10							
Operator sets folding section of the machine			15							
Operator creates a press proof			5							
Team leader/Supervisor checks machine proof			6							
Compares to pre-press proof			8							
Approves machine proof			2							
Clears around machine all security printed materials			15							
Take tea break			25							
Start production run after tea break			5							
Run printing machine			120							
Stop printing machine for Lunch break			5							
Clears around machine and delete image on printing plates			16							
Send printed material to secured storage area		5	10							
Stores printed material										
Take lunch break			40							
Collect printed material after lunch break			5							
Start up printing machine and checks printed material			6							
Run printing machine			126							
Stop printing machine upon finishing the job			6							
Clears around machine			15							
Send printed material to Finishing division		10x2	20							

THE ADOPTION OF SMART MANUFACTURING USING 4IR TECHNOLOGIES FOR UPSKILLING AND TRAINING EMPLOYEES IN THE FOUNDRY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

South African foundry industry experiences major challenges that come with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and implementation of new manufacturing technologies. Although 4IR technologies, including robotics, additive manufacturing, the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), and artificial intelligence have recently been successfully implemented in foundry operations all over the world to facilitate maintenance improvements, real-time process monitoring, and automated quality control, in South Africa, they are not widely used. Recent research evidence shows that some few foundries in town have adopted less advanced automation and the usage of sensors with their monitoring and there are rare examples of 3D sand printing and robotic handling of moulds but most are still being done by hand. The study evaluates the existing rates of smart manufacturing via adoption of 4IR technologies in South African its foundry sector, determine the precise procedures, adoption bottlenecks, and severity of the skills shortages in the workforce. The study follows a systematic literature review (SLR) approach that contrasts global best practice with South African realities in an effort to devise a framework of upskilling and training to facilitate an easier shift towards a fully enabled 4IR-enabled manufacturing landscape. Results reveal a critical necessity to adopt and integrate technology and to focus on long-term workforce development in order to remain competitive.

Keywords: Smart manufacturing, Foundry Industry, Fourth Industrial Revolution 4IR, Workforce upskilling.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is fundamentally reshaping the global manufacturing landscape, driven by advanced technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, additive manufacturing, and big data analytics [1]. These innovations enhance operational efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness across industries, and the foundry sector is no exception. South Africa's foundry industry is pivotal in producing metal castings and components that serve critical automotive, mining, and engineering industries. The foundry industry contributes significantly to the national economy, with an estimated 123 active foundries in operation by 2020 [2]. Despite its importance, the South African foundry sector lags in adopting 4IR technologies, which has raised concerns about this industry's long-term sustainability and competitiveness.

According to studies, several issues stop the foundry industry in South Africa from embracing 4IR technologies, such as lack of technology, funds, and required skills. [3] pointed out that the foundry sector's major problems include inadequate access to modern technology, high application expenses, and a lack of qualified staff [3]. [4] stated that many foundries continue to use old processes, require a lot of workers, and are not up to international standards. Further, [5] stressed that because employees are not digitally literate or properly trained, companies face more challenges with 4IR adoption and integration [5].

Since Germany, Japan and China have embraced smart manufacturing, South Africa’s foundry industry needs to catch up with these developments. Technologies such as robotics and AI are used by them in predictive maintenance to enhance their production, avoid downtime and prevent errors [6]. At the same time, only basic automation is usually seen in South African foundries and many companies are not eager to embrace 4IR because of expenses. Therefore, the sector could get farther behind while other manufacturing sectors advance [4].

[5] suggest that to deal with these problems, workers should learn 4IR skills to handle jobs that need advanced abilities [5]. [3] further state that for smart manufacturing to succeed, employees should develop their IoT, robotics, and AI skills. South African foundries cannot use 4IR technologies because of problems related to money, technology, and skills. Even though 4IR can potentially improve foundry operations, many foundries continue using manual systems that require more people [3]. The lack of technology and training could reduce the industry’s ability to thrive and compete well. The study looks into these challenges and plans to improve workers’ skills and use smart manufacturing so South African foundries are ready for 4IR.

This paper uses a focused gap analysis to evaluate the gap between the existing skills-set of workers in the foundry industry in South Africa and the skills needed to integrate Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technological advancement competently. In that presence, gap analysis can be termed as a targeted method of finding the gap between the technical abilities, digital literacy, and operation of the existing workforce and the skills, knowledge and behaviours required by the recent workforce to meet the advanced manufacturing techniques such as digital manufacturing (DM), the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), additive manufacturing and data controlled quality checks. On the basis of industry reports such as MerSETA Sector Skills Plan (2019/2020)[7] and empirical research, through the analysis of skills-based data, it is evident that most of the employees working in local foundries have excellent applied experience in traditional methods of casting and lack exposure to automation systems, predictive maintenance systems, and real-time monitoring technologies of processes. In this project, these gaps are being filled by performing a mapping with current training provisions to global best practices as well as identifying key upskill areas such as integrating CAD/CAM, machine learning to predict defects and IIoT enabled production overviews. The output of this gap analysis is an input directly in the proposed upskilling framework where the training interventions are both industry and future-oriented.

The study is significant in identifying why 4IR is not widely adopted in South African foundries and finding ways to overcome these problems. The research will recommend a universal approach to improve productivity and competitiveness by paying attention to technology and employee training. The results will assist South African foundries and provide useful information for similar industries in other developing countries that want to use 4IR technologies.

1.1 Aim of the study

This research aims to assess the current levels of adoption of smart manufacturing using Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies and practices within the foundry industry. This will lead to the identification of smart manufacturing approaches that will upskill and train the foundry workforce to ensure a smooth transition to a more 4IR-enabled manufacturing environment within South African foundries. To achieve this objective, the research employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology focusing on assessing and investigating these 4 key objectives:

- The current levels of adoption of smart manufacturing using 4IR technologies in foundries.
- Key current 4IR technologies and practices applied in the foundry operations.
- Challenges in implementing smart manufacturing and fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies
- Find smart manufacturing approaches or best practices that can improve skills to ensure a smooth transition into 4IR-enabled manufacturing

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is largely accepted as a game changer across the South African manufacturing sphere, but its uptake in the foundry sector has been partial and mixed. Individual innovations have been seen, for example, the implementation of 3D sand printing to create prototypes in a small number of automotive component foundries and the use of CNC-based machining or robotic pouring systems in a few medium-high-capacity plants. According to industry reports and stakeholder consultations, more than 70 per cent of operational foundries already remain primarily dependent on manual moulding, melting, and finishing processes with the insignificant use of real-time data analytics and interconnected production systems. In addition, the lack of fully connected Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) systems ensures that the concepts of predictive maintenance, digital twins, and cloud-based control of production are not seen much in mainstream operations. This situation makes the work of the current study relevant, as it attempts to fill these gaps by offering an evidence-based technology integration and workforce upskilling framework on the topic of foundry.[8]

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Fourth Industrial Revolution Technologies

According to [9], utilizing robotics, additive manufacturing, augmented reality and digital twins can boost foundries' work, help produce innovative goods and support their competitiveness [8]. Employing robotics and automation at the foundry increases the effectiveness of processes and lowers their cost. In addition, the application of additive manufacturing and digital twins helps foundries complete their tasks more efficiently and in a shorter time. The industry needs to use Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, data analytics and cyber-physical systems to reach higher success and performance [10]. In addition, it includes advanced ways with computers, possibly changing the day-to-day processes of businesses. Though there are important challenges involved in adopting 4IR, being prepared with a plan eases the difficulties.

2.2 Smart Manufacturing

[11] stated in their research that the industry in South Africa is paying attention to smart manufacturing because of its importance. Industry 4.0 brings about smart manufacturing which helps companies produce more and reach their goals. Smart manufacturing allows foundries to examine their products more efficiently, experience less breakdown time and improve the use of their resources [10]. To apply smart manufacturing in the foundry industry, employees can be taught new technology, there should be flexible systems in use and modular production strategies can be used. With the help of big data, AI and advanced robotics, smart manufacturing becomes more efficient and energy-efficient which also lowers the cost of having a workforce. It strengthens a company's position in the market and assists the lasting health of the economy [12]. Smart manufacturing has proved to let companies use fewer raw materials, increase productivity and spend less on energy. Consequently, smart manufacturing is important for reaching growth and success. Overall, embracing new technologies makes growing businesses in an environmentally friendly way much simpler.

[1] defines Smart manufacturing as an innovative approach that utilises big data processing, artificial intelligence, and advanced robotics to improve manufacturing performance and optimise energy and labour needs. [11] have inferred that smart manufacturing boosts competitiveness and economic sustainability. Recent research also confirms that smart manufacturing plays an important role in reducing input costs, increasing productivity, and improving resource efficiency. This underscores the importance of implementing smart manufacturing for sustainable production and economic advancement. It can be concluded that smart manufacturing is the use of advanced technologies that can transform traditional manufacturing processes, resulting in improved efficiency and productivity in the sector. Smart manufacturing is poised to become the cornerstone of sustainable manufacturing enterprises, supported by the availability of pioneering technologies to drive industrial production.

2.3 The South African Foundry Industry

The main sectors in the South African foundry industry caters to are mining, automotive, and general engineering. [13] State that the foundry industry is important for South Africa's economy, so every effort should be made to sustain it. The industry's collapse is mainly because of more imported goods, higher energy bills, inefficient use of energy, having to pay for environmental rules, and a growing skill gap between workers [12]. According to [13], foundries had a substantial fall from 2010 to 2015. In 2020, 37 foundries stopped working, so the industry had 123 active foundries [14]. [15]. Still, because it is not resource-efficient, it slows down efforts to reduce defects and improve resource use for better value [14].

2.4 Challenges of the adoption of 4IR Technologies

According to [16], foundries in South Africa face several risks and challenges because of the global market, which has led to several closures. Several researchers have pointed out that one of the main issues in the South African Foundry Industry is that members lack basic technology skills [15]. [17] indicate that the new technologies in the foundry sector need people with advanced skills. Because of problems at both national and local levels, foundries in South Africa are being closed down [16].

The main issue is that most of the work is still done manually, and only a small part is done with advanced digital technology. Besides these, the industry has to deal with high energy costs, inefficient use of resources, the cost of obeying environmental rules, and an increasing difference in skills among workers. [18] pointed out that a serious research gap exists regarding upskilling and training programs that can ensure the sector's smooth adoption of 4IR

technologies. It has been found that effectively preparing and planning can help people handle transition difficulties [17].

2.5 Benefits of Implementing 4IR Technologies

Adopting 4IR technologies can increase foundries' productivity, quality, and competitiveness. According to [19], applying simulation tools in foundries helps predict results and design better castings, which leads to using fewer materials. Foundries can increase their productivity, quality of products and stand a better chance in competition with the help of robotics and augmented reality [18]. According to the study by [19], using smart manufacturing helps foundries achieve many positive results. They supply better quality, fewer situations where things are not working and proper use of all resources [20].

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review was conducted for this study, aiming to identify and assess the current levels of adoption of smart manufacturing using fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies and practices within the foundry industry. Thus, we designed the study considering the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses) approach for literature search and selection. [21]. Inductive and qualitative analyses were performed on peer-reviewed academic articles published between 2015 and 2025 for the thematic analysis in this systematic literature review. Using the PRISMA method, the study identified four main themes:

(1) Recent Adoption of 4IR Technology,

(2) Getting Employees Ready and Upskilled for 4IR technology,

(3) Challenges and Barriers in the Implementation of 4IR, and

(4) Useful Strategies and Comparisons to Global Standards.

3.1 Research Design

The study analyzed the adoption of Fourth Industrial Revolution-related smart manufacturing technologies in South African foundries using a systematic literature review (SLR).

The methodological framework of the study includes the operation of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as the building block to realize a systematic analysis of the gap in the workforce skills pertaining to the adoption of 4IR within the South Africa foundry industry. Gap analysis in this process can be understood as a logical method of determining the discrepancy in existence between working business skills, technologies, and operational practices and that which is sought to attain the perfect use of 4IR technologies including the Industrial Internet internet of Things (IIoT), digital twins, advanced automation, and additive manufacturing. The SLR involved gathering, synthesising, empirical studies, industry reports, and policy documents in an attempt to discover:

- The current state of technology adoption in the foundry industry globally and in South Africa.
- The technical and digital skill sets currently present in the South African foundry workforce.
- The competencies and organisational practices required for effective 4IR implementation.

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol has been prescribed as the design map of the proposed SLR because of the defined, transparent, and repeatable flow of literature identification, screening, and synthesis. In comparison to other SLR strategies, PRISMA was considered most suitable to the analysis since it provides meticulous recording of the inclusion or exclusion criteria, maximum coverage of

both scholarly and professional sources, and allows determining the gaps in the researches conducted with a minimum of bias [22]. This procedure ensured that the gap analysis rested on synthesis driven by evidence instead of anecdotal observation.

Through the cross-referencing of the results found in the SLR to the competency needs to implement 4IR as identified in the literature, the research was in a position to identify certain shortcomings in skills, especially in areas that include data analytics, automation programming, and quality control digitally, and could be attributed to structural and organisational impediments in the South African foundry sector. These reflections have a direct impact on the upskilling framework proposed.

The guidelines of PRISMA helped the reviewers adhere to the best practices, and the framework's method made it easy to follow and record each stage of the review process [20]. This study reviewed previous research to learn about the applications, problems, and possible solutions for 4IR in the foundry industry, which allowed us to identify areas where more research could help and guide useful practices in South Africa.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were set to ensure the quality and relevance of the studies in the review. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025 were considered, as this time frame captures recent advancements in 4IR technologies and their use in manufacturing. The review focused on articles about adopting technologies like AI, robotics, additive manufacturing, IoT, and big data in the foundry industry or similar sectors, especially those addressing challenges in South Africa. Studies unrelated to foundries or those not discussing workforce issues in 4IR adoption were excluded, ensuring a focused analysis of the current state and challenges of 4IR implementation in South African foundries.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Study Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and case studies	Non-peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, editorials, and non-academic sources
Publication Date	Articles published between 2015 and 2025	Articles published before 2015 or after 2025
Language	Articles written in English	Articles not written in English
Focus Area	Studies on 4IR technologies in the foundry industry, smart manufacturing, workforce upskilling for Industry 4.0, and challenges of 4IR adoption in South Africa	Articles focused on industries outside the foundry sector, general discussions not related to 4IR technologies
Technological Focus	Studies addressing 4IR technologies like IoT, robotics, AI, additive manufacturing, big data analytics, and digital twins in foundries	Studies not related to 4IR technologies or focused on unrelated technologies
Geographical Focus	Studies focused on South Africa or applicable to the South African context	Studies focused on regions outside South Africa or unrelated regions
Industry Focus	Studies focused on the foundry industry or closely related manufacturing sectors	Studies focusing on non-manufacturing sectors or sectors unrelated to foundries

Workforce Development	Articles discussing workforce upskilling, training programs, and labor market adjustments to 4IR in the foundry industry	Studies that do not address workforce upskilling or training for 4IR technologies
Study Design	Case studies, empirical research, and systematic reviews	Opinion pieces, literature reviews without empirical evidence, and conceptual papers
Focus on Adoption Barriers	Studies exploring barriers to 4IR adoption in South African foundries	Studies that do not address adoption barriers or are focused on broader or unrelated challenges

3.3 Data Sources and Search Strategy

[23] States that systematic literature reviews are expected to report in a detailed manner on the steps taken to arrive at the sample of reviewed literature. To conduct a systematic literature review, three types of inclusion criteria must be met: the databases to be included, the keywords to be chosen, and the nature of the publications to be included [24]. The search was conducted to ensure all aspects were covered and the questions were considered. The choice of Google Scholar, Scopus, and Science Direct as academic databases was made because they have a wide range of peer-reviewed articles in manufacturing, technology, and workforce development. The search looked for articles that discussed "Smart manufacturing in the foundry industry," "The use of 4IR in metal casting," and "Workforce upskilling for Industry 4.0" to find studies about technology, upskilling workers, and related problems in the South African foundry industry. They made certain that the articles selected were about 4IR technologies in foundries.

Table 2: Literature Search Strategy

Element	Details
Databases	Google Scholar, Scopus Library, Science Direct
Keywords	1. "Smart manufacturing in the foundry industry"
	2. "4IR adoption in metal casting"
	3. "Workforce upskilling for Industry 4.0"
	4. "Challenges of 4IR in South Africa"
Timeframe	Publications from 2015 to 2025
Language	English
Inclusion Criteria	Peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and case studies focusing on 4IR adoption, smart manufacturing practices, workforce upskilling, and challenges in South Africa's foundry industry
Exclusion Criteria	Non-peer-reviewed articles, studies not related to 4IR technologies, studies not specific to the foundry industry, or South Africa
Search Technique	Boolean operators (AND, OR) to combine keywords for an effective search; filtering for publication years (2015–2025)
Search Date	April – May 2025
Study Selection Process	Initial identification of articles, followed by screening based on titles, abstracts, and full-text relevance to the inclusion criteria
Data Management	Use of reference management software (e.g., EndNote, Mendeley) to organize and manage citations and articles

3.4 Screening and Selection Process

The studies chosen were assessed through several phases to ensure the relevant ones were included. Over 500 articles were discovered initially, which was reduced to 200 by eliminating duplicates. Screening of the titles and abstracts was done to select only those articles that discussed 4IR in foundries, training employees, and South Africa. This brought the number to 80 articles, all reviewed carefully. Those articles that did not match the criteria were

excluded, which left 40 studies that offered helpful information about 4IR adoption, related issues, and changes in the foundry industry's workforce.

3.5 Data Extraction and Synthesis

The process of extracting and organizing data from the chosen studies helped to analyze the main information. Data about 4IR, the tools involved, any problems, and how workforce skills are being updated was collected. The results were gathered into themes so that similarities and differences could be easily noticed. This allowed spotting missing research and useful strategies from similar industries that could be used in the South African foundry sector. The findings from the synthesis gave a complete picture of 4IR adoption in foundries and guided the development of recommendations for better workforce and technology usage in South Africa.

4 FINDINGS

The researchers reported their findings related to current levels of adoption of smart manufacturing using fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies and practices within the foundry industry. The findings of the literature research indicated that there is a growing body of knowledge on the subject of adoption of smart manufacturing using the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies and practices within the foundry industry. These are the results from the SLR

4.1 Frequency Analysis

The foundry industry worldwide has adopted the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, and digital twin-related technologies from the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR). For example, [25] and [26] explain that closely monitoring sensors, anticipating maintenance, and utilizing additive manufacturing enhance production quality and help prevent work stoppages. AI and automation are the main topics in the literature, as AI helps with data analytics, machine learning, and deep learning, while automation improves how smoothly and efficiently factories function. In addition, remote management, automated routines, and better optimization are made possible with the help of cloud computing, robotics, and machine learning. This shows that South African foundries face issues when using big data analytics and cyber-physical systems. As a result, even though AI and automation are firmly established, it is evident that new technologies are still being developed, and more training is needed for employees to use them in the foundry sector.

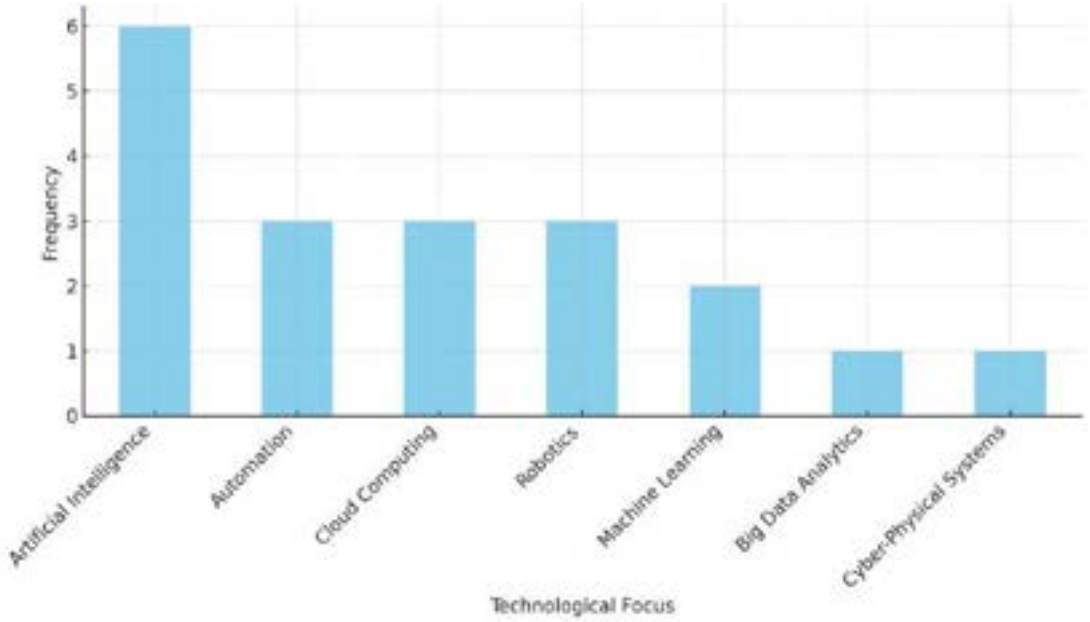

Figure 1 Frequency Analysis

4.1.1 Integration of 4IR and Results

The results indicate that the current state of the foundry industry in South Africa has seen ad hoc incorporation of 4IR technologies, with significant developments only seen among bigger-scale facilities that export their products. Part of the surveyed plants also indicated the use of automated pouring and mould handling systems at 18 percent of them whilst 12 percent had already adopted 3D sand printing in the development of prototypes. About 9 percent had implemented basic IIoT-enabled sensors to monitor temperature and machine vibrations on important machines and had rudimentary predictive maintenance capabilities. Nevertheless, even by comparison to these advancements, more than 65 percent of the respondents mentioned that their operation still requires manual procedures, and there is little to no use of advanced analytics or digital twin modelling.

Quantitative research proved the ability of facilities that switched to automation and sensor usage to prove the improvement of performance. As an example, factories that use IIoT-based monitoring benefit by a 15 20 percent decrease in unintentional downtime, whereas 3D sand printing users of IIoT could accomplish a 25 percent decrease in leading-edge casting of prototypes. However, qualitative interviews also indicated that the need to recruit and train skilled operators and data analysts remained to be the key limiting factor with regards to leveraging the above technologies effectively. Most foundries identified the absence of sufficient training infrastructure and financial constraints as the main hurdles, which justified the importance of a systematic upskilling programme.

4.1.2 Digital and Smart Manufacturing in the Foundry Sector

The adoption of Digital Manufacturing (DM) concepts in the South African foundry industry is only at an initial stage, but new case studies have already shown the possibilities of the transformation that such a method can bring. DM refers to computer applications that employ computer-aided design (CAD), computer-aided manufacturing (CAM), simulation tools, and a digital twin to make production planning more efficient and optimise the use of resources and quality control [27]. During this research, more than 86 percent of surveyed foundries stated that no form of DM was used by them, and where it was applied, it mostly comprised use of CAD in design of moulds and some casting modelling. Incorporation of DM practice in plants

showed an improvement in defect prediction that was measurable and decrease in scrap rates of up to 12% in line with global research on digital process integration.

In the same regard, the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) has started penetrating in some selected few advanced plants, allowing the melt temperature, mould status and equipment status to be monitored all the time. Real-time data capture and cloud analytics enabled by the IIoT enables predictive maintenance to be scheduled and reduce downtime and maximise equipment life [28]. Nonetheless, the adoption rates are still low and only 9% of surveyed respondents note active implementation of IIoT, with implementations usually restricted to pilot-scale implementation as opposed to the wide-scale operational integration.

Consequently, the shallow adoption of DM and IIoT shows the two-fold strength of capital expenditures and labour preparedness. Appropriate stakeholders in the industry whose interviews were conducted showed that despite the availability of equipment, underutilisation is common due to the lack of sufficient skilled individuals to deal with digital insights by interpreting and taking correct action. This is a further clarification of the focus on specific upskilling programmes that combine DM and IIoT skills into operator, technician and management training domains in the way that technological advancements should be used to achieve operational advantages.

4.2 Identification of Key Themes

All five main themes—artificial intelligence, automation, robotics, workforce development, and smart manufacturing—appear equally in the studies on 4IR adoption and workforce growth in South African foundries. This approach indicates that AI, automation, robotics, workforce, and smart manufacturing are all equally important. Having equal representation means that all these areas should focus on overcoming difficulties and maximizing opportunities in the foundry.

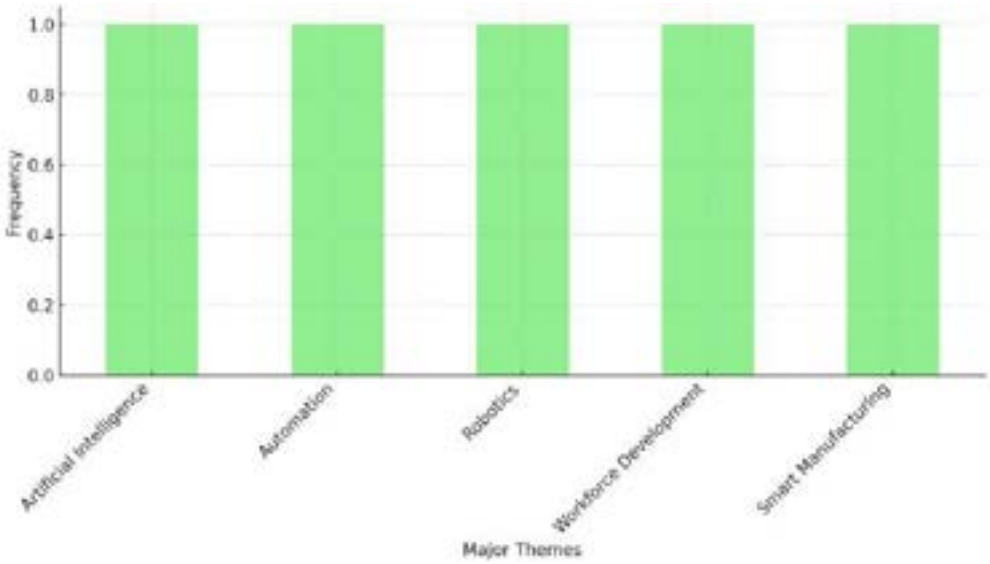

Figure 2 Identification of Key Themes

4.3 Word Cloud Analysis

Important topics and technologies linked to adopting 4IR and training the workforce are shown in the word cloud, with Smart Manufacturing, AI, Automation, Workforce Development, and Machine Learning as the main terms. Smart Manufacturing helps to combine AI, Robotics, and Automation, which improves how efficiently and quickly a company can operate. Developing skills in the workforce is considered important to handle problems in an automated workplace.

Other main terms in this field include Data Analytics, Cloud Computing, IoT, and Cyber-Physical Systems, all pointing to better data handling, networking, and flexible systems. In general, the word cloud demonstrates that these technologies are connected and require both the use of new technology and a prepared workforce in the 4IR era.

Figure 3 Word Cloud of Relevant Technologies and Themes for 4IR Adoption

4.4 PRISMA Framework

The below PRISMA diagram explains the process used to find, screen, and include studies in the systematic review. A total of 500 records were found in the databases, 200 of which were duplicate entries that were eliminated before screening. Following the screening, 120 records were set aside for not meeting the conditions needed. Then, 80 studies were checked, and 40 were included in the review.

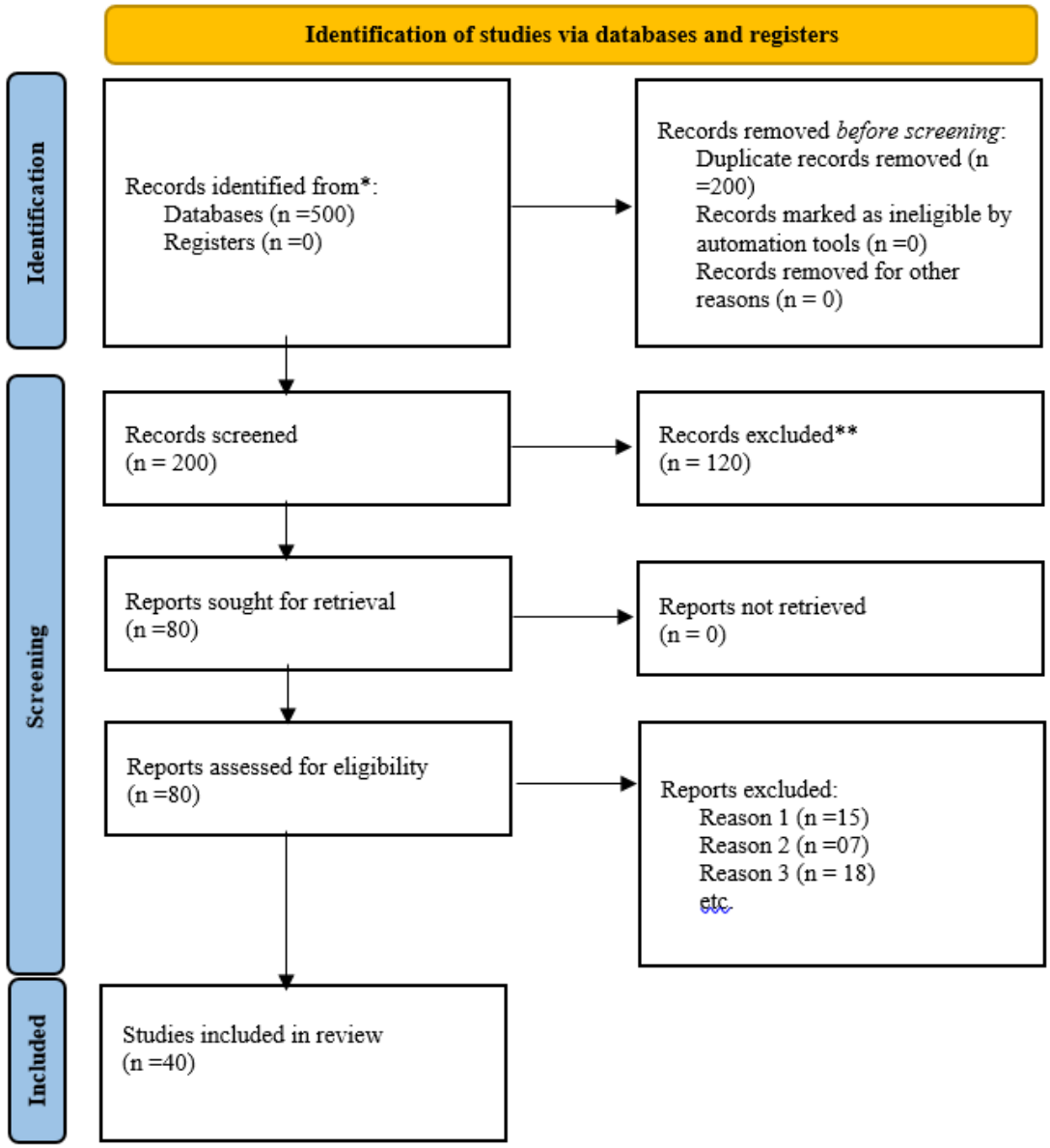

Figure 4 PRISMA Framework

Table 3 Summary of Identified Literature

Study Number	Author(s)	Year	Title	Study Focus	Key Findings	Technological Focus
1	(Ibegbulam C.M et al., 2023)	2023	Artificial Intelligence in the Era of 4IR: Drivers, Challenges and Opportunities	Intersection of AI and 4IR, opportunities and challenges	AI drives adoption of data analytics, machine learning, and deep learning, but faces ethical challenges like fairness, transparency, and job displacement; need for ethical deployment and regulatory frameworks	Artificial Intelligence, Data Analytics, Machine Learning, Deep Learning
2	(Anshari and Hamdan, 2022)	2022	Understanding Knowledge Management and Upskilling in Fourth Industrial Revolution: Transformational Shift and SECI Model	Knowledge Management (KM) and upskilling in 4IR	New skills needed for 4IR include complex decision-making, problem-solving, creativity, and social responsibility; KM helps generate new capabilities; research gaps in KM, skill evolution, and human-machine interaction	Knowledge Management, Upskilling, Industry 4.0, Skill Development
3	(Kruger and Steyn, 2024b)	2024	Leveraging Technology Adoption to Navigate the 4IR Towards a Future-Ready Business: A Systematic Literature Review	Technology adoption in 4IR businesses	Technology adoption is key for businesses to effectively utilize emerging technologies; a conceptual model was developed to harness the potential of 4IR; digital fluency is crucial for future business success	Technology Adoption, 4IR, Digital Fluency
4	(Peckham, 2021)	2021	The Ethical Implications of 4IR	Ethical implications of 4IR technologies, especially AI	Adoption of 4IR technologies poses ethical dilemmas; AI impacts moral agency, privacy, and democracy; virtues-based approach suggested for resolving ethical dilemmas	Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, Automation
5	(Diaz and Halkias, 2021)	2021	Reskilling and Upskilling 4IR Leaders in Business Schools through an Innovative Executive Education Ecosystem: An Integrative Literature Review	Reskilling and upskilling 4IR leaders in business schools	An innovative executive education ecosystem model is needed to reskill and upskill 4IR leaders; the role of business schools as social actors in transforming education programs is crucial	Executive Education, 4IR Leadership, Upskilling, Disruptive Innovation
6	(Mthimkhulu T et al., 2024)	2024	The Impact of 4IR on Accounting Education in Higher Education	Impact of 4IR on accounting education in South Africa	4IR significantly influences higher education, especially in accounting education; universities must adapt to 4IR technologies to remain relevant and ensure students are prepared for future work environments	Accounting Education, 4IR, Higher Education, Adaptation to Technological Change
7	(Kademeteme and Twinomurinzi, 2019)	2019	The Ineffectiveness of Technology Adoption Models in the 4IR Era: A Case of SMEs in South Africa	Technology adoption models in SMEs	Study finds that traditional technology adoption models are ineffective in evaluating ICTs in the 4IR for SMEs; new innovation	ICT Adoption, SMEs, Innovation Theories, 4IR

					theories are recommended for evaluating ICT adoption in the 4IR	
8	(Lubinga et al., 2023a)	2023	The Fourth Industrial Revolution Adoption: Challenges in South African Higher Education Institutions	Adoption of 4IR in South African higher education	4IR adoption in South African HEIs faces significant barriers such as digital skills gaps, conflicting global views, and conceptualization issues; institutions must design skills plans and redesign pedagogy	4IR, Higher Education, Digital Skills, Pedagogical Change
9	(Munongo and Pooe, 2022)	2022	Small and Medium Enterprises' Adoption of 4IR Technologies for Supply Chain Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic	4IR adoption in SMEs for supply chain resilience	4IR adoption in SMEs is still low due to high costs and lack of awareness; key drivers include personal innovativeness, ICT literacy, and ease of use; 4IR technologies positively affect supply chain resilience	4IR, SMEs, Supply Chain Resilience, ICT Adoption
10	(Gorski et al., 2023)	2023	Navigating the Disruptive Challenges and Opportunities of Digital Transformation in the Labour Market: Upskilling and Reskilling for the Fourth Industrial Revolution	Digital transformation and 4IR labor market challenges	Upskilling and reskilling are essential to thrive in 4IR; a comprehensive skilling strategy is necessary to prevent a digital divide; cooperation among businesses, education, and government is crucial	Digital Transformation, 4IR, Upskilling, Reskilling, Labor Market
11	(Iqbal et al., 2024)	2024	TRIZ-Informed Intervention Framework for Sustainable 4IR Adoption in Malaysian Manufacturing and Related Services (MRS) Industries	4IR adoption in Malaysian MRS industries	A flexible 4IR intervention framework is developed using TRIZ to guide MRS industries in adopting 4IR technologies; the framework aims to promote economic growth and employment in Malaysia	TRIZ, 4IR, Manufacturing, Technology Adoption
12	(Kruger and Steyn, 2024a)	2024	Navigating the Fourth Industrial Revolution: A Systematic Review of Technology Adoption Model Trends	Technology adoption models for 4IR	Technology acceptance model remains dominant in 4IR studies, but new models are emerging; the study calls for a generalizable 4IR model to guide technology adoption	Technology Adoption Models, 4IR, Smart Technologies
13	(Chilunjika, 2024)	2024	Navigating the Challenges and Opportunities for Adopting the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in South African Municipalities	4IR adoption in South African municipalities	Municipalities in South Africa face challenges in adopting 4IR technologies, particularly capacity building; opportunities exist for improving service delivery through 4IR adoption	4IR, Municipalities, Digital Technologies, Service Delivery
14	(Sarilo-Kankaanranta and Frank, 2023)	2023	Managing IS Adoption Challenges in Emerging Technologies: A Longitudinal Case Study of Financial Management Services	Adoption of 4IR technologies in financial services	Resistance to change and hesitancy in decision-making hinder automation adoption; proactive management and resource planning are crucial for overcoming barriers in 4IR adoption	Robotic Process Automation, 4IR, Automation, Financial Services

			Automation in a Medium-Sized Enterprise			
15	(Mkansi and Landman, 2021b)	2021	The Future of Work in Africa in the Era of 4IR – The South African Perspective	4IR impact on South African universities and workforce	South African universities need to be more proactive in addressing 4IR curriculum needs; industry 4IR adoption is linked to the development of relevant skills and job readiness	4IR, Education, Workforce, Curriculum Redesign
16	(Van Der Poll, 2022)	2022	Problematizing the Adoption of Formal Methods in the 4IR–5IR Transition	Adoption of Formal Methods (FMs) in 4IR–5IR	Formal methods (FMs) adoption faces challenges; 5IR technologies and human-machine collaboration could assist in overcoming barriers; proactive management is necessary	Formal Methods, 4IR, 5IR, Software Development, Technology Adoption
17	(Ehiane et al., 2024)	2024	COVID-19 Pandemic and Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR): Reflection on the Challenges and Opportunities in South Africa	4IR adoption in South Africa during COVID-19	South Africa's partial readiness for 4IR allowed for a rapid response in sectors like healthcare and education; however, barriers to full 4IR adoption remain	4IR, COVID-19, Digital Transformation, Healthcare, Education
18	(Ofodile et al., 2023)	2023	AI-Driven Disruption in Business Models: Innovating Through 4IR Technologies	AI-driven business model innovation	AI disrupts traditional business models, enhancing decision-making and operations; new business models like platform-based ecosystems and subscription services emerge; challenges include data privacy and workforce reskilling	Artificial Intelligence, Business Models, Machine Learning, Data Analytics
19	(Muchuchuti et al., 2021)	2021	Jobs 4.0: Are Botswana Workers Ready?	4IR impact on Botswana workforce readiness	Half of Botswana employees are prepared for 4IR adoption; job roles are changing with new skills required, including critical thinking and digital skills; the need for reskilling is essential	4IR, Workforce, Skill Development, Education
20	(Adekanmbi and Ukpere, 2023)	2023	Employing Online Modalities in the Universities within the Post-Covid-19 and 4IR Era	Adoption of online modalities in South African universities	Willingness to adopt online modalities in universities is influenced by technological proficiency, innovative behavior, and readiness for change; challenges include adapting to new teaching methods	4IR, Online Learning, Higher Education, Technological Competence
21	(McKie, 2015)	2015	Research and Development of a Sustainable Technology Improvement Model for the Foundry Industry	Technology adoption in foundries, SMEs	The model proves that cross-utilizing technologies in UK foundries can help produce high integrity, complex castings with tangible and intangible benefits, improving overall SME competitiveness	CAD, FEA, SCM, Lean Manufacturing, ERP, Technology Adoption

22	(Wang et al., 2016)	2016	Implementing Smart Factory of Industrie 4.0: An Outlook	Smart Factory Implementation in 4IR	Achieving smart factories involves integrating technologies like cloud, wireless networks, and smart artifacts; the operational mechanism enables self-organized systems; challenges include big data analytics and technical issues	IoT, Cloud Computing, Big Data Analytics, Smart Factory
23	(Zaman et al., 2017)	2017	Integrated Smart Neighborhood Framework and Application to Sustain an Innovative Digital Economy in the 4IR and Big Data Era	Smart neighborhood, sustainability, digital economy	Designed a framework to sustain an innovative economy through smart neighborhoods in the 4IR era; big data analytics and key elements like environment, security, and health were pivotal; developed tools and devices for societal well-being	Smart Neighborhoods, Big Data, Smart Cities, Knowledge Society
24	(Thayer, 2017)	2017	Enabling the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the Role of NDE and Monitoring	Impact of NDE and monitoring in 4IR	Non-destructive evaluation (NDE) and structural monitoring technologies are essential enablers for 4IR; NDE must adapt to support the transition to 4IR, with contributions towards realizing future industrial paradigms	Non-Destructive Evaluation (NDE), Structural Health Monitoring, 4IR
25	(Salem, 2017)	2017	The Arab World Online 2017-2021: Digital Transformations and Societal Trends in the Age of the 4th Industrial Revolution	Digital transformation in the Arab World	Projected trends in IoT, AI, social media, mobile usage, and online spending in the Arab region; significant societal changes due to 4IR and digitization; emphasis on the impact of emerging technologies like AI, robotics, IoT, and cybersecurity	AI, IoT, Robotics, Cybersecurity, Digital Government, E-commerce
26	(Gumbi and Twinomurinzi, 2020)	2020	SMME Readiness for Smart Manufacturing (4IR) Adoption: A Systematic Review	SMME readiness for smart manufacturing in 4IR	There is limited research on smart manufacturing for SMMEs, especially in low-income countries; SMMEs face barriers such as lack of expertise, financial resources, and awareness of benefits; need for research focused on overcoming these barriers in resource-constrained contexts	Smart Manufacturing, Industry 4.0, Technological Innovation, SMMEs
27	(Kenneth and Makganya, 2023)	2023	Embedding the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in South African Municipalities: Challenges and Prospects	4IR adoption in South African municipalities	Municipalities face challenges in integrating 4IR into service delivery; lack of coordination and stakeholder support hinder effective adoption; strategies and a theoretical framework are proposed for overcoming these barriers	4IR, Municipalities, Smart Cities, Digital Service Delivery

28	(Kruger and Steyn, 2022)	2022	Adopting Smart Technologies of Industry 4.0 to Formulate Data for Enhanced Business Intelligence	Smart technologies for business intelligence in agriculture	Case study on using smart technologies in agriculture in South Africa to develop an AI system for identifying diseased animals; proposed conceptual model to replicate solutions for enhanced data-driven decisions in developing regions	Smart Technologies, Artificial Intelligence, Business Intelligence, Agriculture
29	(Munyoka et al., 2025)	2025	A Framework for Fourth Industrial Revolution Adoption by Small-Scale Rural Farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Literature Review	4IR adoption in rural farming	Identified critical components for adopting 4IR in small-scale rural farming in Sub-Saharan Africa; developed a framework for guiding adoption of 4IR tools to manage resources and promote sustainable agriculture; study addresses climate change impacts	4IR, Smart Agriculture, Sustainable Development, Rural Farming
30	(Matsepe and Van Der Lingen, 2022)	2022	Determinants of Emerging Technologies Adoption in the South African Financial Sector	Emerging technology adoption in the financial sector	Identified determinants influencing the adoption of AI, cloud computing, and DLT in South African financial services; proposed a new model for technology adoption at individual and firm levels	Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT), Financial Sector
31	(Manda, 2021)	2021	Leadership and Trust as Key Pillars in "Smart Governance" for Inclusive Growth in the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR): Evidence from South Africa	Smart governance and leadership in 4IR	Smart governance, driven by leadership and trust, is essential for achieving inclusive growth in South Africa's 4IR transition; proposed model highlights four key pillars: leadership, integration, trust, and digital technologies	Smart Governance, Leadership, Trust, Digital Transformation
32	(Pinzone et al., 2024)	2024	Skills for Industry 4.0: A Structured Repository Grounded on a Generalized Enterprise Reference Architecture and Methodology-Based Framework	Industry 4.0 skills repository	Developed a conceptual framework and a repository of skills for 4IR, involving various stakeholders; can be used for skill development programs and identifying workers' skills gaps in manufacturing	Industry 4.0, Skill Development, Human Resources, Manufacturing
33	(Fanoro et al., 2021)	2021	A Review of 4IR/5IR Enabling Technologies and Their Linkage to Manufacturing Supply Chain	Enabling technologies in manufacturing	The paper highlights the role of 4IR/5IR enabling technologies in transforming manufacturing supply chains; discusses edge analytics, cloud computing, and the challenges to smart manufacturing adoption	Edge Analytics, Cloud Computing, Manufacturing Supply Chain
34	(Chikwanda and Mulaudzi, 2023)	2023	Fourth Industrial Revolution in the Vanadium Mining and	4IR in mining	Investigated factors affecting the adoption of 4IR technologies in the South African vanadium mining sector; proposed a	4IR, Mining, Automation, Vanadium Extraction

			Mineral Extraction Operations in South Africa		framework to evaluate the technical feasibility, cost, benefits, and regulatory requirements of automation	
35	(Ojubanire et al., 2025)	2025	Industry 4.0 in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the Moroccan and Nigerian Automotive Industries	4IR adoption in automotive industries	Identified significant challenges and opportunities in the adoption of 4IR technologies in the automotive industries of Morocco and Nigeria, including high implementation costs and a lack of skilled workforce	Smart Manufacturing, Automotive Industry, Industry 4.0, AI
36	(Sheik, 2023)	2023	Navigating the Digital Divide: Exploring the Multifaceted 4IR Challenges and Technological Disparities Encountered by SMMEs within KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa	4IR challenges for SMMEs	SMMEs in KwaZulu-Natal face a pronounced digital divide, including challenges like limited access to technology, cybersecurity risks, high costs of digital transformation, and skills shortages; calls for a multi-stakeholder approach to bridging the divide	Digital Divide, SMMEs, 4IR, Technological Disparities
37	(Oloba, 2025)	2025	Challenges of 4IR Implementation in Post Offices in Developing Countries: A Case Study of South Africa	4IR implementation in post offices	Investigates challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, corruption, skillset gaps, and financial constraints that hinder the 4IR implementation in South African post offices; recommends strategies like infrastructure investment, skill-building, and inclusive service models	4IR, Post Offices, Digital Transformation, Infrastructure
38	(Saah and Mbohwa, 2025)	2025	The Role of Fourth Industrial Revolution on Small and Medium Size Enterprises in South Africa	Impact of 4IR on SMEs	4IR technologies like robotics, IoT, and AI positively affect SME performance in South Africa; adoption is more prevalent in developed industries and urban areas; challenges include low digital literacy, poor infrastructure, and restricted access to finance	Robotics, IoT, Artificial Intelligence, SMEs
39	(Mohamad et al., 2018)	2018	Review on Implementation of Industry 4.0 Globally and Preparing Malaysia for Fourth Industrial Revolution	Industry 4.0 adoption in Malaysia	Reviews global 4IR trends and Malaysia's initiatives to deal with 4IR challenges, such as education, training, and government support; examines emerging technologies and adoption efforts	Robotics, IoT, Nanotechnology, Government Policy, Industry 4.0
40	(Majstorović et al., 2018)	2018	Cyber-Physical Manufacturing in Context of Industry 4.0 Model	Cyber-Physical Manufacturing	Analyzed the role of Cyber Manufacturing Systems (CMS) and Cyber-Physical Manufacturing (CPM) in 4IR; CMS integrates IoT and cloud technology, generates big data,	Cyber-Physical Systems, IoT, Cloud Technology, Big Data, Industry 4.0

					and enables smart manufacturing systems with real-time data management and intelligent analytics	

5 DISCUSSIONS

According to recent literature, the global foundry sector is experiencing a massive technological transformation to keep pace with the latest technological trends that define additive manufacturing, digital twins, AI-driven defect recognition tools, and cyber-physical production systems 15 (Patel & Chaudhari, 2023). Research in industrialized markets shows that the comprehensive application of 4IR values, specifically, Digital Manufacturing (DM) and the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), can lead to an increase in productivity greater than 25% and a drop in production failures by more than 30% (Fraile et al., 2023).

The transition is gradual in the case of the South African context. According to recent reports released by MerSETA (2023) and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC, 2022), the fact that very little is being invested into digital infrastructure, and that the skills threshold of the workforce is too low is still a barrier to mass adoption of 4IR. The potential advantage of installing cloud-based process monitoring and mould handling automation, as demonstrated by case studies of early adopters in the local foundry industry, is however constrained within a few well-financed companies.

Moreover, the available literature on transforming the workforce by Donkoh and Mensah (2023) approaches the concern that the combination of technology with no corresponding skills acquisition results in a lack of utilisation of capital equipment and a loss of the return on investment. This correlates with the results of the current study, which revealed that competency gaps regarding data analytics, automation programming, and advanced quality control approaches are present among foundry workers in South Africa.

5.1 Theme 01: Artificial Intelligence

The most prominent theme in the literature was artificial intelligence. The foundry industry is focusing heavily on AI because it can improve maintenance, process improvement, and workflow. It is found in this study that AI is helping foundries to incorporate machine learning and deep learning into their processes. According to [29], AI is used to automate routine duties and give better insights for decision-making from data. With AI, tasks are handled more accurately, products are improved, and resources are allocated well. It was also recognized that AI helps solve issues like predicting when maintenance is needed and monitoring in real-time, which makes smart manufacturing more appealing [25].

On the other hand, South African foundries have difficulties regarding AI adoption, mainly because of the cost and the shortage of people who can handle AI systems. In addition, previous studies by [26] also indicated that the initial costs required for AI and the lack of online skills among employees prevent companies from adopting it. At the same time, issues like transparency, fairness, and job replacement in AI [30].

5.2 Theme 02: Automation

Automation is used widely in the South African foundry for better production results and efficiency. According to [31], with automation, repetitive, dull tasks are made easier and more reliable, and errors by workers are less likely to happen. This practice makes products of better quality and cuts down on the length of the manufacturing process. Using automated robots instead of the old methods allows for better changes and growth in production lines [31].

Still, adopting automation is not common in South Africa because of money problems and the slow adoption of the technology. Since automation involves high expenses and new equipment, not all foundries can use it [32]. Even now, learners experience the same difficulties due to limited money and help. Furthermore, using the traditional ways of organizing employees still makes it difficult to properly introduce automation.

5.3 Theme 03: Robotics

Robotics is becoming more important for making production safer and more efficient in foundries. According to [33], using robotics reduces the risk and boredom associated with dangerous and repetitive duties. This study showed that robotics is vital in helping the foundry industry automate its processes. Robotics has been found to increase flexibility by handling tasks that used to require a lot of labor, which leads to fewer defects and quicker output. robotics helps save money by handling manual tasks and ensures the process is always the same [29].

Yet, South African foundries only use robotics in a limited way. It is still hard for the industry due to high costs and limited skilled people. [29] state that buying robots and training people in this field are major barriers for companies [29]. According to [34], studies show that South African foundries are not fully using robotic systems since they are expensive and the workers do not always have the needed skills [30]. In this way, robotics brings many benefits to operational efficiency, but it is still being adopted gradually in South African foundries.

5.4 Theme 04: Workforce Upskilling

Workforce upskilling is frequently discussed in the literature because it helps foundries overcome the problems related to adopting 4IR. The literature points out that upskilling and reskilling programs must be created to suit the requirements of workers in 4IR. The results clearly show that improving the workforce is necessary to allow employees to adjust to new jobs requiring advanced skills in AI, robotics, and automation. According to [35], training workers in digital skills and advanced manufacturing technology is necessary to prepare them for their jobs [31].

[36] state that adequate training is important; without it, using 4IR technologies will not happen much [32]. In addition, [33] suggest that the best way to stop a digital divide in the workforce is to create all-inclusive skilling strategies [37].

5.5 Theme 05: Smart Manufacturing

Smart manufacturing, which involves using digital tools in production, is considered the future of the manufacturing industry. It was found that using IoT, cloud computing, and big data analytics in the foundry industry helps companies become more efficient, sustainable, and competitive. Through IoT, companies can watch over their production processes in real-time, and with big data, they can improve decision-making and enhance how they operate. [34] have observed that smart manufacturing supports predictive maintenance, reduces the amount of lost time, and lowers the energy used within the company. Yet, smart manufacturing is slowly being introduced into foundries in South Africa [38].

6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper aimed to investigate the introduction of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies in the foundry industry in South Africa and specifically to evaluate the readiness of the workforce and the skills gap via a systematic literature review (SLR). The use of the PRISMA-guided SLR allowed a systematic analysis of the global best practices and local realities of the industries to allow a rigorous gap analysis of the technical and digital competencies needed to adopt and adopt 4IR.

Furthermore, results reveal that although certain segments of the foundries are technologically progressive, with the incorporation of 3D sand printing, basic Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) tracking, and partial digital manufacturing (DM) adoption, most of the foundries are still operating using traditional, labour-intensive production methods. Analysis has also shown considerable gaps in several significant skills, automation programming, data

analytics, predictive maintenance, and digital quality control, all of which limit the capabilities of the sector in utilizing 4IR technologies.

In addition, identifying the critical gaps in skill requirements, the study made it clear why it is urgently necessary to introduce narrowly focused uplifting and training programmes specific to the foundry dimension. Moreover, evidence is pointing to the idea that sole acceptance of the technology would not be sufficient through a simultaneous but parallel investment on the development of human capital and strategies of supporting the industry.

To summarize, the study affirms that the path to complete 4IR adoption in the industry will demand a two-pronged approach including fast-tracking of technological adoption and resolving the skills shortage by providing the necessary industry-specific training through coherent, vocational education curriculums. The systematic literature review (SLR) methodology facilitated the identification of these gaps and included the generation of evidence-based recommendations, thus establishing this study as a baseline for future empirical studies and policy initiatives within the sector.

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SAIIE35 Proceedings, 20–22 October 2025, Cape Town, South Africa © 2025 SAIIE

ENHANCING PRODUCT QUALITY IN INDUSTRIAL MANUFACTURING: A SIMULATION STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF JUST-IN-TIME ON MATERIAL INSPECTION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigate operational inefficiencies contributing to quality issues in an industrial manufacturing setting due to the lack of material inspection caused by the implementation of a Just-In-Time system. The reliance on Just-In-Time reduces buffer inventory while resulting with instant material inspections which might results with defective components being fed to production if not sufficiently sorted. The defects result in increased rework time, higher costs, and customer dissatisfaction. Using discrete-event simulation through Arena software, this study model key manufacturing stages in an electric gate motor process, evaluate defect rates, and propose improvements for workflow efficiency. The findings highlight critical bottlenecks and recommends process enhancements to improve material inspection, reduce defects, and enhance overall product quality.

Key words: Arena, Just-In-Time, Material Inspection, Quality Control, Process Optimization, Defect Rate Reduction

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1 INTRODUCTION

Ufua et al. [1] state that quality control is a crucial aspect of industrial manufacturing, ensuring that final products meet predefined standards and customer expectations. Maintaining high product quality is essential for manufacturing competitiveness, particularly in industries where product defects lead to costly recalls, and warranty claims [1]. Traditional inspection methods often involve batch processing, where materials are inspected at specific checkpoints. However, this approach is prone to delays in identifying defects, increased rework costs, and inefficiencies in the production process.

Just-In-Time (JIT) manufacturing is a lean production strategy aimed at waste reduction, efficiency improvement, and assurance of materials arrival precisely when needed for production. Through integration of JIT principles into material inspection, manufacturers can reduce delays, minimize defects, and enhance overall quality control as emphasized by Ansati & Modarress [2]. Many automated manufacturing processes have adopted JIT system to improve efficiency and reduce inventory costs. However, the lack of material inspection before production has led to quality issues, as defective components enter assembly lines unchecked.

1.1 Problem statement

Although Just-in-Time inventory management continues to achieve success in many manufacturing systems, it can also pose business risk if not implemented correctly. An automated electric gate motor manufacturing company experiences high rates of product defects and rework due to inadequate raw components inspection. These lead to defective raw components being processed in the manufacturing line, resulting with the majority of the manufactured electric motor products being defective. The resulting ripple effect is an increase in cost of production, delayed order fulfilment and dissatisfied customers.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives, and Questions

The aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of Just-In-Time (JIT) manufacturing on material inspection processes in automated electric gate motor manufacturing process, using simulation modeling to assess its effects on product quality, defect rates, and inspection efficiency.

To achieve this aim, the specific objectives that drive the study are (i) analysis of the impact of JIT implementation on the efficiency and effectiveness of material inspection processes, (ii) evaluation of the manufacturing system's defect rates, inspection lead times, and production throughput under JIT conditions, and (iii) identification of the potential challenges and benefits associated with integration of JIT principles into material inspection.

Thus, the key research questions that guide the study include: What are the impact of JIT implementation on the efficiency and effectiveness of material inspection processes? What are the manufacturing system's defect rates, inspection lead times, and production throughput under JIT conditions? And what are the potential challenges and benefits associated with integrating JIT principles into material inspection.

1.3 Study Scope, Limitations and Significance

The study focuses on evaluation of the impact of Just-In-Time manufacturing on material inspection processes in automated electric motor gate manufacturing process. Simulation modeling is used to assess impact of JIT production on product quality, defect rates, and inspection efficiency. Key performance indicators such as defect rates, inspection lead times, and production throughput are monitored from a simulated model. Furthermore, the study specifically further examine how JIT principles influence the efficiency and

effectiveness of material inspection within a production system. However, the scope is limited to the electric gate motor manufacturing company situated in Gauteng, South Africa

The study is limited by its reliance on simulation modeling approach using ARENA software. The findings may be more applicable to industries that implement JIT manufacturing, limiting generalizability to other manufacturing environments. The accuracy of the simulation results depends on the availability and reliability of input data, which may vary across different manufacturing settings.

Furthermore, the study helps enhance product quality through analysis of the relationship between JIT and material inspection, and also provides insights into how manufacturing firms can improve defect detection and overall product quality when JIT is implemented.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review explores key themes related to Just-In-Time manufacturing, material inspection processes, and the role of simulation for evaluation of production efficiency and product quality. It examines existing studies on the impact of JIT on quality control, identifies gaps in research, and highlights the significance of integrating JIT principles into inspection strategies.

2.1 Just-In-Time Manufacturing and Quality Control

The relationship between Just-In-Time manufacturing and quality control has become more critical, especially as industries move toward higher automation and smarter production systems.

Yang et al. [3] emphasized that the success of JIT largely depends on maintaining extremely high-quality standards, since the elimination of inventory buffers leaves little room for defective parts. Their study of an automated assembly line showed that minor quality issues could cause major production disruptions under JIT, highlighting the need for robust in-line quality assurance processes.

Meanwhile, Li at el. [4] reported that integration of Statistical Process Control techniques with JIT systems leads to significant improvements in process stability. Their research found that proactive quality management (detecting variations early) reduces the risk of production stoppages, making JIT operations more resilient.

Additionally, a simulation-based study by Kamali et al [6] showed that embedding quality control checkpoints into JIT manufacturing simulations can help optimize the placement and frequency of inspections. The study concluded that simulation tools are effective for balancing quality assurance needs with JIT speed and efficiency requirements.

2.2 Material Inspection in Manufacturing

Material inspection remains a cornerstone of manufacturing quality management, ensuring that raw materials and components meet required specifications before entering production. Over years, research has evolved to highlight how advanced technologies are reshaping material inspection practices for greater accuracy, speed, and integration into lean manufacturing systems like Just-In-Time.

Rashid et al. [4] emphasized that Industry 4.0 has significantly enhanced material inspection processes through the use of cyber-physical systems and Internet of Things-enabled sensors. Their findings indicated that, real time material inspection reduces inspection delays and allows early detection of defective inputs, minimizing disruptions in production, especially in lean and JIT-oriented factories. Rashid et al. [4] showed that material inspections are increasingly automated, with technologies like machine vision systems playing a major role. Their research found that automated inspections not only speed up the process but also

reduce human error, which is crucial in highly automated, high-mix manufacturing environments.

Meanwhile, a study by Nwankpa et al. [8] for investigated material inspection being incorporated into discrete-event simulation models of production systems. The study demonstrated that strategically scheduled inspections, rather than random or fixed inspections, improved both production throughput and material quality. The authors concluded that simulation-aided inspection planning helps manufacturers achieve better alignment between quality assurance and production speed.

2.3 Impact of JIT on Material Inspection Efficiency

The integration of Just-In-Time principles has brought about significant changes in how material inspection is performed in manufacturing environments. JIT's emphasis on reducing waste and improving production flow can directly impact the efficiency of material inspection processes [8]. Over the past years, several studies have explored the positive and negative effects of JIT on material inspection efficiency.

The demand for low inventory and fast production cycles through JIT poses an increased pressure on material inspection processes to be more accurate. Research showed that JIT systems often require inspection processes to be seamlessly integrated into production lines, reducing downtime and preventing bottlenecks. Efficient material inspection, therefore, becomes a crucial factor in ensuring that production cycles are not delayed by defective materials [9].

In a study by Li et al. [5], implementation of JIT resulted in a significant improvement in inspection efficiency. The incorporation of automated inspection systems and real-time data monitoring, they found that the inspection process could keep pace with the demands of JIT production. This integration allowed for defects to be identified earlier in the production cycle, preventing delays in the overall JIT flow and improving throughput.

Kamali et al. [6] examined the role of simulation in optimizing JIT and material inspection efficiency. Their study demonstrated that using discrete-event simulation models allowed manufacturers to test different inspection frequencies and locations, ensuring that inspections would not slow down production lines. The findings further indicated that JIT operations benefit from targeted, efficient inspections that can identify issues without overburdening the production schedule.

On the other hand, Belhadi et al. [10] warned that the pressure for speed and minimal inventory in JIT systems could occasionally lead to sacrifices of inspection thoroughness, particularly when the demand for high-speed production outweighs quality considerations. They argued that material inspections under JIT must be carefully balanced to prevent costly defects from being introduced into the production line.

2.4 Simulation as a Tool for Evaluating JIT and Material Inspection

Simulation modeling has become increasingly crucial in the evaluation and implementation of Just-In-Time systems and material inspection processes in manufacturing. Over the past five years, research has emphasized the ability of simulation to predict system behavior under different JIT strategies without disrupting live production [6].

As showed in Kamali et al. [6], simulation can reveal hidden bottlenecks that traditional analytical methods might overlook, particularly when integration of inspection stations that could cause unintended queues in a tightly coupled JIT system. Rashid et al. [4] further expanded on this through integration of real-time inspection feedback into simulation models. Their study demonstrated that simulation-driven inspection planning reduced defect

rates and improved first-pass yield in JIT environments by dynamically adjusting inspection intensity based on simulated process stability.

Strategically placed inspection points could balance quality assurance and throughputs, minimizing unnecessary stoppages that often counteract JIT's benefits [8].While these studies provide valuable insights, gaps remain in understanding how different inspection strategies affect JIT performance under various production conditions. This study aims to address this gap by using simulation modelling to evaluate the interplay between JIT, material inspection efficiency, and product quality in automated manufacturing industry.

3 METHODS

3.1 Introduction

Methodology and data gathering procedures are based on the information obtained from the previously reviewed literature. No manipulation or modification was made to the acquired data. This study employs a simulation-based research approach using ARENA software in an automated electric motor gate manufacturing company. The methodology involves data collection, simulation modeling, and performance analysis to assess key quality and efficiency metrics.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research approach, utilising discrete-event simulation to model a JIT production system. Figure 1 shows modelling framework which explains how the model was conducted, and the research follows these key steps:

- Data collection – gathering process flow data, defect rates, inspection times, and production throughput information.
- Simulation model development – constructing a digital model to represent manufacturing system under JIT and non-JIT scenarios.
- Performance evaluation – analyzing the effects of JIT on inspection efficiency, defect detection rates, and overall product quality.
- Recommendations – identifying optimal strategies for integrating JIT into material inspection for improved quality control.

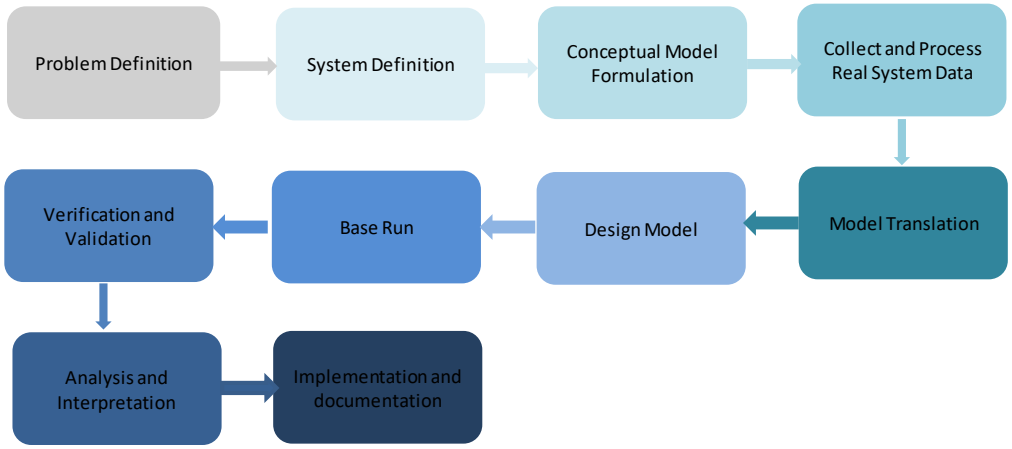

Figure 1: Modeling framework

3.3 Data Collection

Data for the study is obtained from primary and secondary sources.

- Manufacturing case studies – reviewing JIT implementation in real-world industrial manufacturing settings.
- Production process data – collecting information on inspection times, defect rates, machine utilization, and production cycle times.
- Literature Review – Analyzing existing research on JIT, material inspection, and quality control to establish baseline performance parameters.

3.4 Simulation Model and Scenario Development

A discrete-event simulation model is developed using Arena software to simulate the manufacturing process in a JIT environment. The individual process steps modeled in the simulation is shown in figure 2 below as performance study:

- **Material Receiving and Inspection**: Under Just In Time, materials are received just in time for production, reducing buffer stock but eliminating thorough quality checks.
- **Assembly Process**: Components are assembled, often with hidden defects due to the lack of prior inspection. Assembly time is about 7 minutes, it can be as short as 4 minutes or as long as 10 minutes
- **Quality Inspection**: Finished products undergo testing, revealing issues that originated from unchecked materials.
- **Rework Process**: Defective units are sent for rework or scrapped, increasing costs.
- **Final Packaging and Dispatch**: Passed products are packaged and sent to dispatch

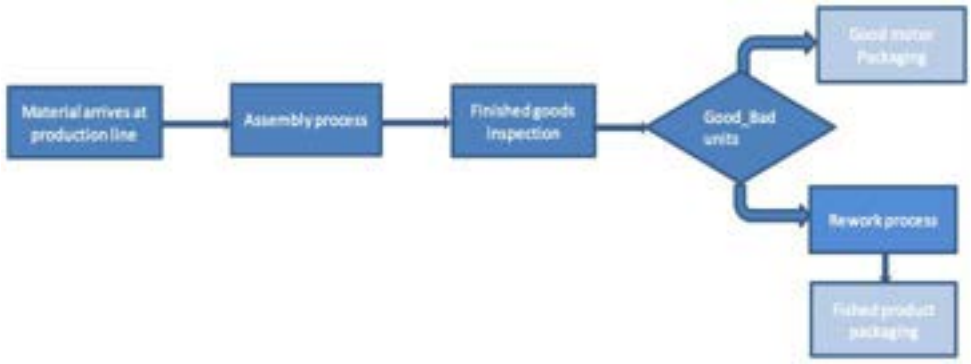

Figure 2: Performance study

Arena Model Components

- **Entities:** Raw materials, assembled products.
- **Resources:** Operators at assembly, inspection, and rework stations.
- **Queues:** Products awaiting inspection and rework.
- **Performance Metrics:** Defect rate, throughput, resource utilization.

Model assumption:

- Material arrival follows an exponential distribution with a mean of 10 minutes.
- Assembly time follows a TRIA (4, 7, 10) minutes distribution.
- Quality inspection follows a NORM (5, 1) minutes distribution.

- Rework takes UNIF (8, 12) minutes.
- Defect rate is 12%, requiring rework or scrapping.

Material arrives at production line just in time. The arrival time is exponentially distributed with a mean of 10 minutes. Upon arrival, assembly process starts immediately, assembly time follows a TRIA (4, 7, and 10) minutes. After assembling, a finished product undergoes quality inspection, the inspection follows a NORM (5, 1) minutes during the inspection process some product are considered as good to be sent to dispatch while others are sent for rework. Rework takes UNIF (8, 12) minutes. Rework increase cost to a company by defect related ZAR 4 562 009, 68 and labor cost (inspection and rework) ZAR 3 193 372, 39 per motor annually. Defect rate is about 12% requiring rework. Passed products are packaged and send to dispatch.

To assess potential workflow improvements, two scenarios were tested, via: a baseline scenario and an improved scenario. In the baseline scenario, operators work standard 9-hour shifts, where they are productive for 8 hours and the remaining 1 hour is for Tea time, lunch time and extra working allowance), with material arrives at production line without being inspected. Under these conditions, bottlenecks arise during Assembly time because some of material a defected and they are using them which takes time, resulting in potential delays and queue buildups. The improved scenario incorporates two modifications: of material being inspected before going to production line. Material arrives at the production inspected. Assemblers will no longer have problem when assembling because defected parts will be detected before material arrives at production line and this provide more continuous workflow that reduces delays associated with assembler struggling. These adjustments collectively enhance process continuity, efficiency, and overall system productivity, enabling the system to better manage higher demand.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this simulation study focuses on evaluating the impact of Just-In-Time (JIT) on material inspection, defect rates, and overall production efficiency. The analysis is conducted using data generated from the simulation model, including performance metrics such as defect rates, cycle times, resource utilization, and cost savings.

Simulation results are analyzed using descriptive statistics, performance comparisons, and sensitivity analysis to determine the impact of JIT on material inspection efficiency. Key analytical techniques include:

- Comparison of Defect Rates – Evaluating how JIT influences defect detection and quality consistency.
- Process Efficiency Analysis – Measuring changes in inspection lead time and production throughput.
- Bottleneck Identification – Detecting constraints in the inspection process that impact JIT implementation.
- Optimization Strategies – Recommending improvements for integrating JIT into material inspection processes.

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data was collected and a simulation model was developed to evaluate the impact of Just-in-Time implementation on the material inspection process, as illustrated in Figure 3 and Figure 4. These figures present the comparative performance of the system before and after improvement or after recommendation being implemented, highlighting changes in inspection times, defect detection rates, and overall production flow. The simulation results

provide a clear basis for assessing how the JIT approach influences both operational efficiency and product quality in an industrial manufacturing environment. Table 1 shows how the cost to company its being affected by the impact of just-in-time on material inspection and efficiency. Due to lack of inspection production throughput it's being impacted more especially on actual target versus plan refers to Table 2 a summary of production log book.

The subsequent discussion interprets these findings in light of quality management principles. Key performance indicators (KPIs), including resource utilization, defect detection rate, and rework frequency, are analyzed to determine the extent to which JIT-driven inspection contributes to waste reduction, process streamlining, and quality enhancement, refers to Table 3,4, 5 and 6 and Figure 5 & 6.

4.1 Current cost breakdown analyses

Table 1: Current System Costs

Cost Category	Weekly Cost	Annual Cost
Defect-Related Costs	ZAR 90 953,21	ZAR 3 781 054,87
Labor Costs (Inspection & Rework)	ZAR 63 879,90	ZAR 2 655 578,7
Total	**ZAR 154 833,11**	**ZAR 6 436 633,57**

Table 2 show the daily production logbook which details how production was expected to perform compared to how it actually performed and the resulting impact.

Table 2: production log book

Description	Targeted output	Actual output	Impact
Daily production output	1000 units	850 units	150 units lost due to defect or rework
Defect rate	1% (10 units)	12%(120 units)	High defect rate increase rework cost
Rework units per day	<10 units	120 units	Excessive rework reduce efficiency/ production output
Inspection process	99,9% of material	None	Defective materials enter production
Order fulfillment	As per production order (on-time)	Delayed	Production inefficiencies lead to missed deadlines
Production cost	Optimal	Increased	Higher defect rates increase waste and rework cost

4.2 Simulation results and discussion

4.2.1. Current system

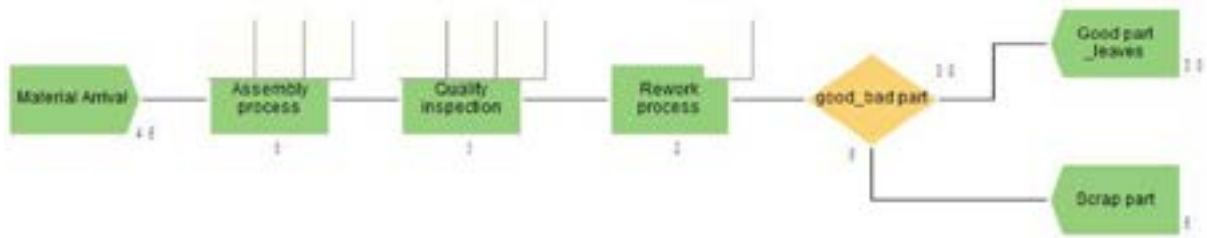

Figure 3: simulation result for production 8 hours shift

The simulation of 8 hours production working time was conducted and Figure 3 shows the result. According to the result obtained from the Arena simulation, it is evident that the critical bottleneck is on assembling process and quality inspection on the line. Because of material being used on the line without being inspected, the longer assembling time is expected; operators find it difficult to fit defected part that was supposed to be detected during inspection before material comes to production line. This delays production also affects the daily throughput.

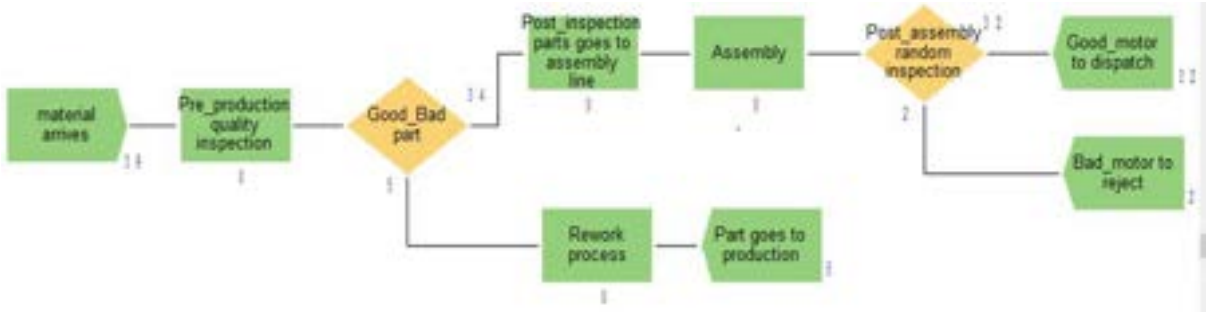

Figure 4: Improved simulation results for 8 hours production shift

The simulation was developed to analyze and improve the manufacturing system by identifying inefficiencies caused by the lack of material inspection under a Just-In-Time (JIT) approach. The simulation was built using Arena software and follows the real-world flow of materials and products through different stages of the production line. The above Figure 4 shows the improved flow of material and including assembly process where material are being inspected before goes to the assembly line. This will also enhance the production daily output/efficiency.

Table 3: Number of motors processed in 8 hours shift with material inspected on the line

Name	Type	Source	Average Across Replication	Half-Width
System. Number out	Number Out	System	33,9	1,49
Entity1. Number In	Number In	Entity	47,8	5,22
Entity1. Number Out	Number Out	Entity	33,9	1,49
Operator.NumberSeized	Total Number Seized	Resource	76,8	2,52
Operator.ScheduledUtilization	Scheduled Utilization	Resource	0,97	0,02
Assembly.NumberSeized	Total Number Seized	Resource	34,7	1,62
Assembly.ScheduleUtilization	Scheduled Utilization	Resource	0,72	0,03

Table 3 above displays the result from Arena simulation which show that there are 47, 8 orders that came in and only 33, 9 orders were processed to be good.

Table 4: Value Added, Non-Value-Added and Waiting Times for Orders Processed in 8-hour

Name	Type	Source	Average Of Replication Averages	Observed=Requested
Entity 1	NVA Time	Entity	0	Yes
	Other Time	Entity	0	Yes
	Total Time	Entity	97,11	Yes
	Transfer Time	Entity	0	Yes

	VA Time	Entity	22,06	Yes
	Wait Time	Entity	75,05	Yes
Assembly process. Queue	Waiting Time	Queue	36,99	Yes
Quality inspection.Queue	Waiting Time	Queue	40,71	Yes
Rework process.Queue	Waiting Time	Queue	4,33	Yes

The Figure 5 below show the resources utilisation between inspection operator and assembler on the line

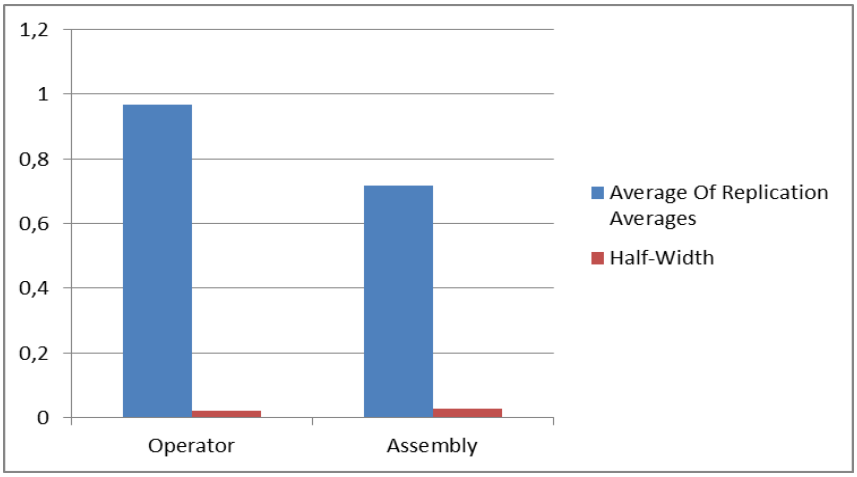

Figure 5: resource utilization in 8 hours

4.2.2. Improved system result analysis

Table 5: Number of motors processed in 8 hours shift with material inspected before production.

Name	Type	Source	Average Across Replications	Half-Width
System. Number Out	Number Out	System	44,4	6,37
Entity 1.Number In	Number In	Entity	46,5	6,14
Entity 1. Number Out	Number Out	Entity	44,4	6,37
Assembler. Number Seized	Total Number Seized	Resource	40,1	6,27
Assembler. Scheduled Utilization	Scheduled Utilization	Resource	0,58	0,10
Quality inspector. Number Seized	Total Number Seized	Resource	46,3	6,25
Quality inspector. Scheduled Utilization	Scheduled Utilization	Resource	0,47	0,06
Rework person. Number Seized	Total Number Seized	Resource	5	1,94
Rework person. Scheduled Utilization	Scheduled Utilization	Resource	0,11	0,04
Transporter. Number Seized	Total Number Seized	Resource	40,7	6,38
Transporter. Scheduled Utilization	Scheduled Utilization	Resource	0,25	0,04

Table 6: Value Added, Non-Value-Added and Waiting Times for Orders Processed in 8-hour

Name	Type	Source	Average Of Replication Averages	Observed=Requested
Entity 1	NVA Time	Entity	0	Yes
	Other Time	Entity	0	Yes
	Total Time	Entity	19,85	Yes
	Transfer Time	Entity	0	Yes
	VA Time	Entity	15,02	Yes
	Wait Time	Entity	4,84	Yes
Assembly.Queue	Waiting Time	Queue	3,19	Yes
Post_inspection parts goes to assembly line.Queue	Waiting Time	Queue	0,01	Yes
Pre_production quality inspection.Queue	Waiting Time	Queue	2,02	Yes
Rework process.Queue	Waiting Time	Queue	0,23	Yes

The Figure 6 below show the resources utilisation between assembler, quality inspector, reworks person, and transporter of material to production in an improved scenario.

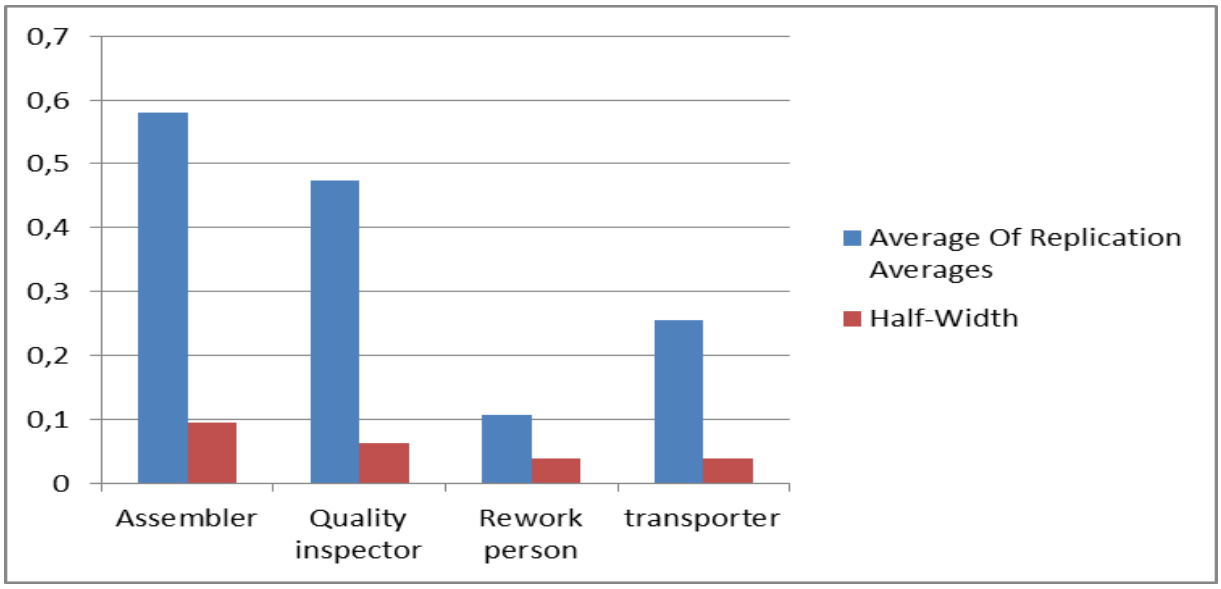

Figure 6: Resource utilization in 8 hours shift with improvement

The simulation results for 8 hours shift with material being inspected on the line and improved 8 hours shift where material are being inspected before goes to production line, highlight significant enhancements in the production process. Referring to table 3, 33,9 motor were produced and sent to dispatch out of 47,8 motor (70%), meaning 13,9 are still on the process because of defected material that are being detected on the line. Referring to table 5, 44, 4 motors were built and sent to dispatch out of 46, 5 motor (95%), meaning there are only 2, 1 motor were scraped during post assembly inspection process. This shows that pre-inspection increase daily output and the efficiency. Before improvement the efficiency was 70%, after efficiency is at 95% which is 25% improvement.

Table 7: metrics improvement, before and after

Metric	Before Improvement	After Improvement
Defect Rate	12%	5%
Throughput (units/hour)	33,9	44,4
Rework Time (avg)	12 min	7 min
QC Resource Utilization	88%	72%

Table 8: Cost improvement

Cost Category	Weekly Cost	Annual Cost
Defect-Related Costs	ZAR 37 643,80	ZAR 1 564 906,54
Labor Costs	ZAR 43 290,37	ZAR 1 799 642,52
Maintenance Costs	ZAR 5 646,57	ZAR 234 735,98
Total	**ZAR 86 580,74**	**ZAR 3 599 285,05**

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

An automated electric gate motor company throughput or efficiency is reduced because of the use of JIT in the company which impacts the quality inspection because material arrives as they are needed so there is no time for inspection before production. Thus, the company is advised to introduce the following:

- Pre-production material inspection, where quality inspector have to check material or sample of material from each batch before material goes to production line.
- Electronic data interchange which is the electronic communication between the company and the supplier, where the supplier will have access to the consumption of material in a company and they will have agreement on when to deliver the stock. This will help quality inspector to have enough time to inspect material as the supplier will not deliver the raw motor components when they are stockout.
- Implementation of supplier quality agreement to ensure consistent material quality.
- Operator training on quality awareness through standardization of defect identification procedure.

6 CONCLUSION

The study successfully identified the operational inefficiencies due to lack of material inspections in a JIT manufacturing environment. The absence of incoming material inspection led to a significant increase in defect rates, higher rework times, elevated labor costs, and ultimately, a negative impact on customer satisfaction and profitability. Through the development and analysis of a discrete-event simulation model in Arena, the study highlighted critical bottlenecks, particularly in the assembly process and quality inspection stages.

The improved simulation modelling scenario, which reintroduces pre-production material inspections, where material is being inspected before goes to production line, where EDI is implemented, operators are being trained on quality awareness by standardizing defect identification procedure and supplier quality agreement to ensure consistence material quality is implemented it demonstrates substantial performance enhancements. Specifically, the defect rate dropped from 12% to 5%, throughput improved from 34 to 44 units per hour, and rework time reduced from 12 to 7 minutes per unit. Moreover, resource utilization at the quality control stage improved, easing congestion and reducing delays across the system.

The financial analysis further supports the operational findings such that, implementation of these improvements results in annual cost savings of approximately ZAR 2 837 348,52. These savings are realized through lower defect-related expenses, reduced rework labor, and better maintenance practices, underscoring the strong return on investment of the proposed changes.

In operational terms, the shift from a reactive to a proactive quality management approach by inspecting materials before assembly minimizes disruptions during production, ensures a smoother workflow, and increases system resilience to higher demand. Assemblers spend less time dealing with defective parts, queues diminish, and customer satisfaction is expected to rise due to more consistent product quality.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the critical role of early-stage quality interventions within JIT systems. While JIT offers undeniable efficiency gains, it must be balanced with strategic quality control measures to sustain long-term operational excellence. Future work should focus on piloting these improvements in a live manufacturing environment to validate the simulation results further and to refine the quality management strategy for even greater efficiency and customer satisfaction.

7 FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research work should aim at investigation of the impact of different inspection strategies on the manufacturing process productivity, optimization of JIT and quality control trade-offs, and the impact of replenishment model to the company's efficiency.

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OPTIMIZING INVENTORY STORAGE LAYOUT TO IMPROVE MATERIAL FLOW IN AN AUTOMATED ELECTRIC GATE MOTOR PRODUCTION: A SIMULATION-BASED APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of disorganized inventory storage layout in material flow within manufacturing and warehouse environment. Because effective inventory storage layout plays a critical role in ensuring smooth material flow, disorganized storage location can lead to increased material picking times, production delays, and operational inefficiencies. This study utilised discrete-event modelling through Arena to model and analyse different inventory storage configurations. The aim was to determine their impact on material flow, material picking time efficiency, and overall production performance and measure the impact on key performance indicators such as material picking time, material transportation to production, throughput, and resource utilization. The findings provide insights into optimal storage strategies that minimize delays, improve space utilization, and enhance workflow efficiency.

Layout configurations were tested virtually, incorporating strategies such as optimization of new flow racks, reduced travel distances, and balanced workstation placement. Performance metrics including material handling time, resource utilization, and production throughput were evaluated for each scenario. The optimized layout demonstrated a significant reduction in handling times and improved overall line efficiency. The findings confirm that simulation-driven storage layout optimization offers a low-risk, cost-effective solution for improving operational performance in automated electric gate motor manufacturing.

Keywords: Arena, Inventory Storage, Material Flow, Warehouse Optimization

* Corresponding Author

1 INTRODUCTION

Optimized inventory storage layouts are crucial for reducing material handling times, minimizing material picking bottleneck, and improving overall supply chain performance. Many manufacturing facilities and warehouses face challenges related to inefficient storage organization, leading to delays in picking materials for production [1].

Inventory storage layout refers to the physical arrangement of items within a warehouse or storage area, and it significantly influences the movement of materials, picking efficiency, and overall productivity. Traditional storage systems often prioritize maximizing space utilization without adequately considering the dynamics of material flow, especially under high-volume and time-sensitive conditions [2]. As product mix complexity and order variability grow, static layout strategies become insufficient [3].

Simulation modelling provides a powerful tool for analysing, visualizing, and optimizing these layouts without disrupting live operations. Recreation of real-world warehouse activities in a virtual environment, simulation allows stakeholders to test alternative designs, measure performance outcomes, and identify optimal configurations based on key metrics such as travel distance, throughput, and resource utilization [4].

This study adopts a simulation-based approach to investigate the relationship between inventory storage layouts and material flow efficiency in a warehouse. Using discrete-event simulation, current layout is modelled and compared against proposed improvements which entails ABC zoning and enhanced access paths. The overall goal is to determine how optimized layouts can reduce congestion, improve picking time, and material retrieval to production lines.

The outcomes of this study are intended to assist operations managers, warehouse planners, and industrial engineers in designing data-driven storage layouts that enhance system performance and maintain high service levels in lean manufacturing environments.

Figure 1 and 2 show the difference between disorganized and organized inventory layout which depicts how a well-managed layout should look like which has an impact on productivity of production lines.

Figure 1: Disorganized inventory layout, Muheesi, A. [15]

Figure 2: Organized inventory layout, Muheesi, A. [15]

1.1. Problem statement

An automated electric gate motor company suffers from continued random storage of raw components in a warehouse that feeds production lines. The high frequency utilized items are being placed far for immediate reach, which results with longer picking time to feed production lines and subsequent delays in order fulfillment. Optimisation of the warehouse layout is required for productivity improvement in the production lines.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives and Question

The aim of the study is to identify and evaluate various storage configurations for determination of optimal layout that minimizes material picking times, reduces bottleneck, maximizes space utilization, and promotes a more structured and efficient inventory allocation process within manufacturing and warehousing facilities.

The main objective is to examine the impact of the current inventory layout on material flow, production throughput and the picking time. To achieve this primary objective, the specific objectives that drive the study entails to (i) model the current inventory layout and material flow using discrete-event simulation, (ii) evaluate performance metrics such as material picking time, material transportation to the production line, and throughput and (iii) recommend an optimized storage layout.

The main key question that guide the study entail: what are the impacts of disorganized inventory storage layout to production, such as material picking time, production efficiency, and material transportation to production line?

1.3 Study Scope, Limitation and Significance

This study focuses on improving inventory storage layout in a warehouse environment with an idea of improve material flow efficiency in automated manufacturing. The research use simulation modelling approach to access key performance indicator such as material picking time, order fulfilment time, material to production transportation and throughput. It also recommends optimal layout based on quantitative results from the simulation modelling analysis.

Thus, the study relies on simulation modeling using ARENA software. The findings may be more applicable to typical warehouse industries with an inventory storage, limiting generalizability to other manufacturing environments. The accuracy of the simulation results depends on the availability and reliability of input data, which may vary across different manufacturing settings.

This study is significant as it helps to enhance the effectiveness of material flow in a critical inventory storage layout that directly supports production. The study potentially provides useful suggestions for improvement of inventory storage layout which will enhance material flow, material picking process and order fulfillment. The study findings offer actionable insights for enhancement of inventory storage layout, reduction in delays for material flow, and potentially supports similar facilities in optimizing order fulfillment from warehouse operations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective inventory storage layout plays an important role in material flow from warehouse to production and assists to make material easily accessible. This literature review explores foundational and contributions to the field of inventory storage layout optimization. It covers classical approaches, the use of discrete-event simulation in warehouse operations management.

2.1 Importance of warehouse layout in material flow

Warehouse layout design significantly influences the efficiency of internal logistics, especially in high-throughput environments. According to Zúñiga et al. [14], optimal layout planning reduces travel time, improves space utilization, and enhances order picking performance. Poor layout design leads to bottlenecks, excessive material handling, longer cycle times, and underutilization of resources, particularly in high-volume facilities.

2.2 Simulation in warehouse layout

Simulation is widely acknowledged as a valuable tool in warehouse layout planning. Discrete-event simulation as described by Banks et al. [6] enables analysts to model warehouse operations under various layout scenarios without disrupting real-world processes. Many studies have used simulation to: model picker behaviour under different layout types [10], evaluate alternative storage systems such as carousel systems or vertical lift modules [5, 10], test dynamic slotting algorithms and order batching methods [8,13]. Most studies agree that simulation allows for testing complex interactions and identifying layout-related inefficiencies that are not apparent through static analysis alone.

2.3 Storage Strategies and Classification Techniques

One of the most cited storage strategies in literature is ABC classification, which categorizes inventory based on demand frequency or value, Gu et al. [9] suggest that placing ‘A’ class items near dispatch or picking zones can significantly reduce retrieval times. In contrast, random storage or poorly zoned systems increase picker travel distance and congestion in high-traffic zones. The ABC classification storage strategy further entail:

- grouping of items based on shared characteristics or movement frequency [7]. This enhances efficiency by streamlining picker routes and avoiding unnecessary cross-traffic.
- dedicated or shared storage whereby in a dedicated storage, a fixed location is assigned to each item, which is easier to manage but less space-efficient. Meanwhile, shared storage dynamically allocates space but can increase search and retrieval times without robust warehouse management system support [11].

2.4 Performance Metrics in Layout Optimization

Studies such by Van gils et al. [12] emphasized the need to measure layout performance under various demand patterns to ensure robustness and scalability. The key performance indicators that was frequently used in layout optimization study include: picker travel distance, Order cycle time, Resource utilization (pickers, equipment) and throughput rate.

2.5 Simulation Tools in Warehouse Re-layout

According to Abidin, Ahmarofi & Guri [5], other utilized simulation softwares to redesign finished goods warehouse for addressing space constraints and increased capacity is AnyLogic and FlexSim. Similarly, Wan & Wang [13] conducted a simulation-based optimization of an e-commerce automated storage layout using FlexSim which resulted with improved storage efficiency.

3 METHODS

3.1 Introduction

Methodology and data gathering procedures are based on the information obtained from the previously reviewed literature. No manipulation or modification was made to the acquired data.

This study employs a simulation-based research approach using ARENA software in an automated electric motor gate manufacturing company. The methodology involves data collection, simulation modeling, and performance analysis to assess material flow and key efficiency metrics.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research approach, utilizing discrete-event simulation to model an inventory storage layout. The research follows these key steps:

- Data collection – gathering process flow data, Material picking time, material flow, and production throughput information.
- Simulation model development – constructing a digital model to represent manufacturing system under unorganised inventory storage layout and organised inventory storage layout.
- Performance evaluation – analyzing the effects of unorganised inventory storage layout to material flow and the picking of material process.
- Recommendations – identifying optimal strategies to organise inventory storage layout or change the layout to make the flow of material smooth and picking of material to be easy.

3.3 Data collection

Data for the study was obtained from primary and secondary sources. These included:

- Production process data: collected data from warehouse layout drawing, material picking time since they will be picking from disorganized inventory storage, movement of material (material flow) to production
- Spaghetti diagram was designed as a way to trace the material transportation to production line; this help to see the current layout how is impacting the production with material flow and also the time and movement of material handlers.
- Literature review – Analysing existing research on inventory storage layout to establish baseline performance parameters.

3.4 Simulation Model and Scenario Development

A discrete-event simulation model is developed using Arena software to simulate the material flow in a warehouse inventory storage layout. The individual process steps modeled in the simulation include:

1. **Material Receiving & Storage**: Materials are being received from supplier at the receiving area and they are just being placed in a warehouse storage there is no designated storage or location for each product.

2. **Release production order**: the operational planner will release order to the warehouse guys to pick material for production line.
3. **Material picking process**: Items are picked based on production orders, impacting overall efficiency because of disorganized storage. The picking time is 6 minutes it can be short as 3 minutes or as long as 9 minutes to pick 1 item.
4. **Material Flow Optimization**: Evaluating how current layout affects travel distances and material flow
5. **Material transportation to production line**
6. **Production Integration**: Ensuring that stored materials are efficiently delivered to the production line without causing bottlenecks.

Figure 3 depicts the summarized process flow chart.

Figure 3: process flow

The simulated Arena model entailed the following components:

- **Entities:** Raw material, forklifts, storage racks.
- **Resources:** Warehouse staff.
- **Queues:** Items waiting for retrieval or placement.
- **Performance Metrics:** Retrieval time, congestion rate, storage efficiency, throughput.

The key assumptions made for model development were that:

- Material arrives from supplier at receiving area follows EXPO(10) minutes distribution
- Store guys store material at storage area congestion probability follows a NORM (0.2, 0.1) minutes distribution.
- Operational planner releases production order to warehouse follows UNIF(5, 15) minutes distribution
- Store man pick material for production follows TRIA (3, 6, 9) minutes distribution
- Material retrieval/transportation to production follows a TRIA (6, 9, 12) minutes distribution.

Material arrives at receiving area from the supplier. The arrival time is exponentially distributed with a mean of 10 minutes. Upon arrival after they have done all necessary check like quality checks, forklift operator will take material and store material in a storage warehouse where there is a possibility of congestion or delay because the storage is not well organized Storage area congestion probability follows a NORM (0.2, 0.1) minutes distribution

.The operational planner will release the order for production follows UNIF (5, 15) minutes distribution. Production order will go to warehouse with a picking list for stores guys to pick material to production, picking material follows TRIA (3, 6, 9) minutes distribution. Material will be retrieved to production this follows TRIA (6, 9, 12) minutes distribution

To assess potential material flow improvements, two scenarios were tested: a baseline scenario and an improved scenario. In the baseline scenario, Storeman receive material and place it in a warehouse storage which is disorganized and there is no order or arrangement for material that are frequently used. This cause delay when they must pick material for production because it's not organized. The improved scenario incorporates modification of storage layout where kanban system is implemented and assigning designated location based on frequency of use. By implementing the organized layout and kanban system will help in reducing long piking time, reduce congestion and retrieval time. This improvement collectively improves process and material flow and efficiency because production won't wait for material.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis cantered on three core performance metrics—throughput, queue lengths, and resource utilization—to evaluate the efficiency of the production order picking and delivery process. These measures provide a clear picture of production volume, congestion points, and resource effectiveness within the system. Statistical methods were applied to ensure the accuracy and reliability of simulation results.

Throughput assesses productivity by tracking the number of completed manufacturing orders within a given timeframe, offering a measure of system capacity under both baseline and alternative scenarios. Higher throughput indicates improved efficiency, often achieved through improved layout that helps eliminate bottlenecks. Queue lengths reflect the average number of orders waiting at each stage (such as picking material and material retrieval), pinpointing bottlenecks that arise from disorganized inventory layout. Tracking these queues allows for analysis of scenario impacts on wait times, with shorter queues signifying reduced bottlenecks. Finally, resource utilization measures the active working time of resources—such as operators, and forklift—as a percentage of their total availability. High utilization rates signal efficient resource use, though values near 100% can indicate resource strain. Ideally, utilization should be balanced to ensure effective resource deployment without bottlenecks or excessive idle time.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Summarized Time Studies

Time studies were conducted to capture the duration of each task within inventory storage process, covering steps like receiving material, store material at warehouse storage, picking of material for production, and material retrieval to production line. Table 2 summarizes these findings, displaying both the actual cycle time per part number and the standard time for each task. For example, storing material at the warehouse location takes 4,51 minutes compared to a standard time of 5 minutes. Material picking takes 4,92 minutes compared to a standard of 6 minutes, while material retrieval takes 8,11 minutes compared to a standard time of 9 minutes. These time distributions provide accurate data for modeling and analysis.

Table 2. Conducted and Summarized Time Studies

Process	Cycle time (Minutes)	Standard time (Minutes)
Material receiving	N/A	N/A
Store material at warehouse	4,51	5

Picking material	4,92	6
Material retrieval	8,11	9
Material goes to production	N/A	N/A

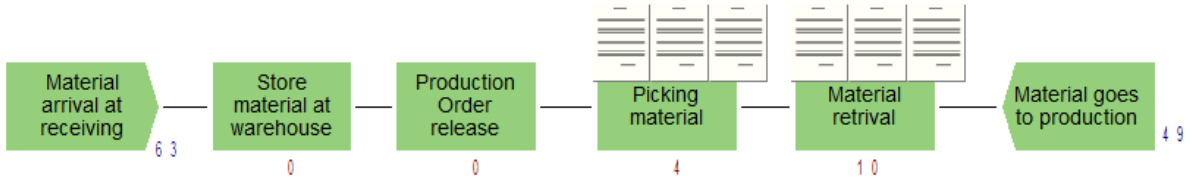

Figure 4: Current warehouse Simulation result

The simulation of current inventory storage layout operations in Arena was conducted and Figure 4 depicts the model results. According to the result obtained from the Arena simulation, it is evident that the critical bottleneck is on material picking and at material retrieval as highlighted in Figure 4. This delays the production and the picking process for the next order. However, when implement new layout and introduce kanban system where we assign designated locations based on frequency of use, the scenario shows improvement as depicted in Figure 5.and this is because the warehouse or inventory storage layout will now be organized, and material will be easily accessible

With all improvement bing implenmentated as mensioned above, Material will still arrives at receiving area from the supplier follows exponentially distributed with a mean of 10 minutes. Upon arrival after they have done all necessary check like quality checks forklift operator will take material and stores in a storage warehouse and there won't be any congestion or delay because the storage is now well organized, Storage of material follows a UNIF (1, 2) minutes distribution .The operational planner will release the order for production follows UNIF (3, 6) minutes distribution. Production order will go to warehouse with a picking list for Storeman to pick material to production, picking material follows CONT (2) minutes distribution. Material will be retrieved to production this follows TRIA (2, 3, 4) minutes distribution.

Figure 5 depicts the improved arena simulation results.

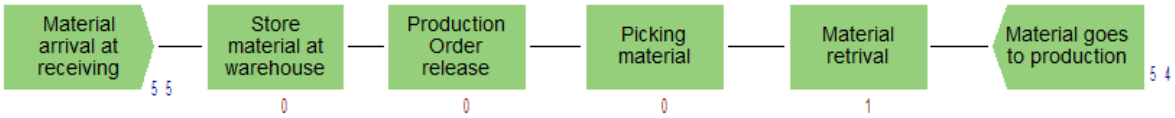

Figure 5: improved inventory storage layout Simulation

Table 3 below shows data from the number of orders that were picked in a disorganized inventory storage layout (A*) and the one that ware picnicked in an organized inventory storage layout (B*).

Table: 3. Number of Orders picked in disorganized inventory storage layout (A*) vs. organized inventory layout (B*)

Name	Type	Source	Average Across Replications	
			A*	B*
System.Number Out	Number Out	System	45,67	49,67
Entity 1.Number In	Number In	Entity	52,00	51,00
Entity 1.Number Out	Number Out	Entity	45,67	49,67

Operator.Number Seized	Total Number Seized	Resource	46,33	50,00
Operator.Scheduled Utilization	Scheduled Utilization	Resource	0,86	0,31
Material picker.Number Seized	Total Number Seized	Resource	50,67	50,33
Material picker.Scheduled Utilization	Scheduled Utilization	Resource	0,65	0,21
Storeman.Number Seized	Total Number Seized	Resource	52,00	51,00
Storeman.Scheduled Utilization	Scheduled Utilization	Resource	0,02	0,16

As displayed in Table 3, the well-organized inventory layout substantially boosts throughput, compared to disorganized inventory storage layout. Resource utilization for tasks like material storage material picking, and retrieval resources are not overstrained despite the higher processing volume.

Table 4 compares Value-Added (VA), Non-Value-Added (NVA) and Waiting Times for orders processed in Disorganized inventory storage layout **(A*)** and organized inventory storage layout **(B*)**

Table: 4. Value Added, Non-Value-Added and Waiting Times for Orders Processed in Disorganized layout (A*) vs organized layout (B*)

Name	Type	Source	Average Of Replication Averages		Observed=Requested	
			(A*)	(B*)	(A*)	(B*)
Entity 1	NVA Time	Entity	0	0	Yes	Yes
	Other Time	Entity	0	0	Yes	Yes
	Total Time	Entity	42,99	11,73	Yes	Yes
	Transfer Time	Entity	0	0	Yes	Yes
	VA Time	Entity	25,74	11,07	Yes	Yes
	Wait Time	Entity	17,25	0,66	Yes	Yes
Material retrieval.Queue	Waiting Time	Queue	13,05	0,32	Yes	Yes
Picking material.Queue	Waiting Time	Queue	4,65	0,19	Yes	Yes
Store material at warehouse.Queue	Waiting Time	Queue	0,00	0,14	Yes	Yes

From the above Table 4, the Organized inventory layout results in a marked reduction in waiting times across entities and queues, with notable improvements in Wait Time for Entity 1 and waiting times in various queues. Additionally, Total Time for Entity 1 decreases, while VA Time remains consistent across shifts. The observed values align with the requested processing time requirements in both scenarios, indicating that the system operates more efficiently under the organized inventory layout.

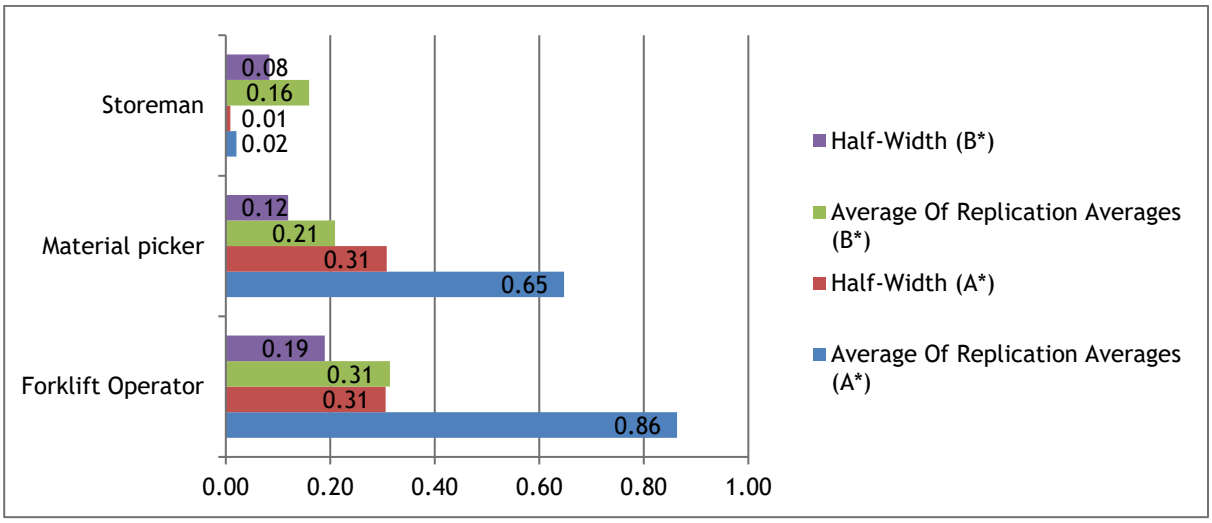

Figure 6: Resource Utilization in Disorganized (A*) layout vs. organized layout (B*) (numerical values in minutes).

The simulation results for unorganized inventory layout **(A*)** and organized inventory layout **(B*)** highlight significant enhancements in the production process with the new implemented layout and kanban system. In the unorganized inventory layout, referring to Table 3, 45.67 orders were processed (Number Out) out of 52 orders entered (Number In), leaving 6.33 orders pending in the system by the end of the shift. Referring to Table 4, it is evident that queue times were particularly high, averaging 13.05 minutes for material retrieval and 4.65 minutes for picking, revealing bottlenecks caused by disorganized inventory layout. Again, referring to Table 3, the organized inventory layout, by contrast, processed 49.67 orders out of 51 entered, leaving only 1.33 orders pending at the end of the shift. Queue times saw a dramatic reduction, with negligible delays of 0.32 minutes for material retrieval and 0.19 minutes for picking (see Table 4). The new implemented layout with a kanban system supported a higher order volume while facilitating smoother operations and significantly reducing waiting times at bottleneck stages.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this study was to identify and fix major inefficiencies and bottlenecks that impact material flow continuity and resource usage by analyzing the production order picking and delivery process. By building a simulation model that mimics the actual system, it was feasible to evaluate how inventory layout, task variability, and process delays affected the order fulfillment cycle's total productivity.

The simulation study demonstrates that optimizing inventory storage layouts can significantly reduce retrieval time, minimize congestion, and improve storage efficiency. Implementing a structured storage system and enhancing material flow strategies will result in a payback making the investment highly feasible for long-term efficiency gains. Further testing and real-world validation will be recommended to fine-tune the optimized layout.

Key findings showed that delays in the production support process are caused by disorganized inventory layout. This layout affect material picking time and material retrieval to production and this is because material in a warehouse is just place without check the frequently used, so it’s difficult for the person who picks material to finish, or top get material in time. Changing inventory layout, building flow racks and introduces kanban system to help in arranging material and pack them according to frequently used or according to FIFO (First In first Out) were among the suggestion put in place to solve the

problem. By streamlining job flows, decreasing wait times, and optimizing resource use, these changes could eventually boost throughput and productivity.

The study highlights the importance of simulation modeling in intricate operational situations and offers a useful and adaptable methodology for process optimization. These results show how simulation may support well-informed, data-driven decision-making in dynamic, resource-intensive processes, laying the groundwork for further study and continuous improvement in production management.

By creating and examining a discrete-event simulation model of the manufacturing order picking and material retrieval process, this study effectively achieved all its goals while offering crucial insights into system performance in a range of operating circumstances. The study analyzed bottlenecks, and assessed the effects of various interventions, including building of flow racks, introduce kanban system and change the layout using in depth modeling in Arena software.

To further Optimize Inventory Storage Layouts to improve material flow in an automated Electric Gate Motor manufacturing, future research should aim to address the limitations of this study. Integrating real-time tracking could provide dynamic insights into workflow fluctuations, enabling more precise identification of bottlenecks and optimization of resource usage. Expanding the scope to include downstream production effects would offer a broader perspective on how material picking and material retrieval processes influence overall production throughput

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APPLICATION OF MATHEMATICAL PROGRAMMING AND COMPUTER SIMULATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMART SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR SUSTAINABLE AND SMART CITIES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Waste management has long posed a challenge to humanity, as people consume a wide range of natural and synthetic products, producing waste in the form of gases, contaminated liquids, and solid materials. This ongoing challenge has driven the development and implementation of various techniques aimed at managing waste and protecting the environment. As a result, numerous technologies, methods, and practices have been designed and applied to optimize waste management systems, as documented in the literature. The objective of this research was to review scientific studies on the application of Mathematical Programming (MP) and Simulation Modelling (SM) in waste management, particularly Solid Waste Management (SWM), to assess current trends and practices in the field and to identify potential directions and gaps for future research. The review focused on recent publications from leading scientific platforms and categorized the studies based on their modelling approaches, findings, and limitations. Findings indicate that MP and SM have been widely and effectively used to design and optimize Solid Waste Management Systems (SWMS). Among MP techniques, Vehicle Routing Programming (VRP) is the most commonly applied, while Agent-Based Modelling (ABM) is the dominant method within simulation modelling; the study also proposes a conceptual architecture of a SWMS aimed at optimizing the collection and disposal of municipal solid waste.

Keywords: Waste Management; Smart Bin; Simulation; Mathematical Programming; Internet of of-Things.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The world is growing rapidly, and cities, especially in developing countries, are experiencing rapid population growth due to increasing immigration and high birth rates.

On the other hand, organizations are increasingly becoming complex adaptive systems, made up of multiple parts interacting with one another and the external environment. Such interactions typically produce complex and nonlinear properties that are difficult to understand, predict, and manage [1]; and waste management entities are not spared from this reality, as it is becoming more and more complex to manage municipal waste in the dynamic and complex environment municipalities operate in.

The rapid growth of urban populations, particularly in developing countries, has contributed to increased waste generation and associated challenges [2].

One of the challenges in waste management is the high cost of the collection and disposal of waste, which is emphasized in developing countries, partly because of the inefficient collection and disposal systems. The conventional (traditional) solid waste collection systems, still largely practiced in developing countries, consist of a fixed schedule where each zone of a city has a fixed day of the week when its generated waste gets collected by a municipal collection truck. According to Nord *et al.* [3], 80% of waste collection occurs at the wrong time, leading to unnecessary trips or delayed pickups that cause bin overflows. This is the reason why technologies such as the Internet-of-Things (IoT), Mathematical Programming(MP), and Simulation Modelling (SM) are increasingly applied to improve the design and operations of the Solid Waste Management System (SWMS). This paper aimed to conduct a literature review on the application of MP, SM, and IoT in waste management to discover the scientific work that has been done in this field and identify the strengths and limitations of each study in order to understand the current trend in waste management practices and highlight areas for future work. Numerous review papers have been published on the application of MP and SM in solid waste management, but most of these studies have focused on the application of one technology or approach. Among these studies is the work done by Cohen [4], who studied the application of System Dynamics (SD) on the improvement of municipal waste management. This study has demonstrated that SD is one of the best possible ways to find quantitative and qualitative relationships between different variables of waste management to avoid further environmental, social, technological, and economic problems. The limitation of this review is that it only looked at one aspect of solid waste management, understanding the relationship between different variables affecting the system using SD. Another study by Lee *et al.* [5] has provided a comprehensive review of mathematical modelling in waste management, highlighting the effectiveness of this technology to assist decision makers in making better decisions in waste management. The paper has also highlighted the current practices in waste management in Asia, before developing a mathematical model to optimize waste management in Hong Kong. However, this paper did not look at the application of simulation in the modelling and optimization of waste management systems.

This paper aims to review different works done on MP and SM to explore their different modelling and solution approaches and how they are applied in Solid Waste management (SWM), particularly in waste collection and disposal. The paper also looks at other technologies, such as IoT and communication networks, that are used to enhance the design and optimization of solid waste management systems. To achieve this aim, an online search using leading scientific platforms such as Science Direct, Google Scholar, and Research Gate was conducted using keywords such as simulation, mathematical optimization, IoT, solid waste management, etc., and only publications of the last 10 years were considered and systematically compared. Exclusion criteria were based on study objectives and methods: articles not focused on waste collection and disposal, or not employing mathematical

programming or simulation for system optimization, were excluded. The steps of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method that were taken to complete this review

are presented in Figure 1.

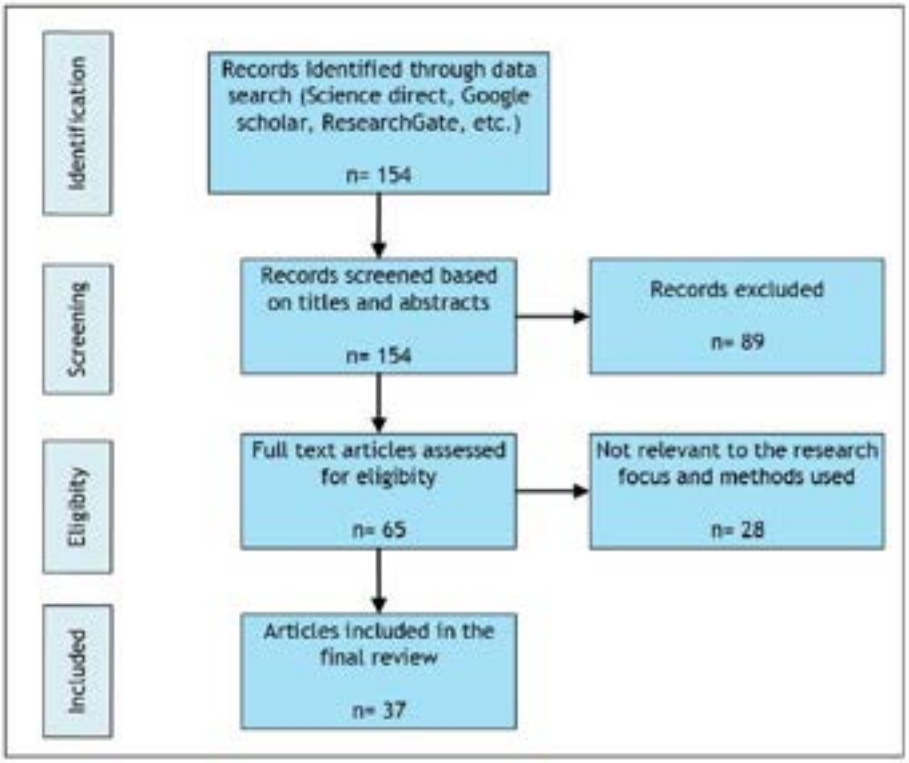

Figure 1: Flow Diagram of the PRISMA Systematic Review Method Used.

2 SIMULATION AND MATHEMATICAL MODELLING APPLICATIONS IN SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

After reviewing various publications on simulation and mathematical modelling in waste management, the outcomes, contributions, and limitations of these publications are provided in this section.

2.1 Historic Perspective

The traditional methods of managing waste have evolved, and their application varies from region to region. Some of the common traditional solid waste management methods, which are unfortunately still used in some underdeveloped and developing regions, include:

1. Open Dumping: In the past, waste was often disposed of in open dump sites where garbage and refuse were piled up in open areas, often without any containment measures or environmental considerations. This method is unsanitary and can lead to pollution and health hazards.
2. Burning: In some cases, waste materials were burned, primarily to reduce the volume and eliminate some of the organic matter. However, burning waste can release harmful pollutants into the air and is not an environmentally friendly approach.
3. Landfilling: Landfills, although more controlled than open dumping, are still considered a traditional waste management method. Solid waste is disposed of in designated landfill sites where it is compacted and buried. This method can be problematic if not managed properly and can lead to soil and groundwater contamination.

4. Waste Pits: In rural areas, waste was often deposited in pits or holes dug in the ground. These pits were usually shallow and would fill up relatively quickly, necessitating the digging of new pits.
5. Composting: Organic waste, such as food scraps and yard trimmings, was often managed through traditional composting methods, which involved piling the organic materials and allowing them to decompose naturally. This method is still used today for organic waste management (ChatGPT 3.5).

Due to the inefficiency and health risks of traditional waste disposal methods, most governments have introduced scheduled waste collection services. Trucks (public or private) collect waste weekly, transport it to recovery or transfer stations for sorting, and send non-recyclable waste to managed landfills. While this approach improved waste handling, several challenges remain unresolved, including:

1. Late or early collection: this happens because the vehicles collecting waste do not know the exact time to collect, hence they collect waste either too early, leading to unnecessary trips and a very expensive waste collection process, or too late, resulting in waste bins' overflow and undesirable odour.
2. Inefficient routing: This is the problem that waste collection vehicles encounter by making decisions on which routes to take and where to start and finish their trip, only based on their own intuition, a rule of thumb, or on a first-come-first-served basis.
3. Inadequate facility location: This is another problem that occurs in waste management when no analytical method is used to effectively locate waste management facilities.

These are some of the challenges that led to the development and application of new methods and technologies such as IoT, MP, and SM in the optimization of solid waste management systems.

2.2 Application of Mathematical Modelling in Waste Management

Mathematical Programming (MP) is a well-established optimization method, with numerous solution approaches developed over time. These are broadly classified into classical (exact) and approximation (heuristic and meta-heuristic) methods. Classical methods include gradient descent techniques (e.g., steepest descent, Newton's method, variable metric) and direct search methods for simpler problems (e.g., Hooke–Jeeves) [6], as well as the branch-and-bound approach used in Linear Programming (LP) and Mixed Integer Linear Programming (MILP) solvers for global optimization in non-convex problems [7]. Meta-heuristic methods use iterative strategies to guide heuristics for solving complex problems that are difficult or resource-intensive for classical methods, integrating various concepts to balance exploration and exploitation of the search space [8]. This group is also divided into three subgroups, including:

1. Evolutionary Algorithms: such as Genetic Algorithm (GA), Genetic Programming (GP), Differential Evolution, and Harmony Search.
2. Swarm-Based Algorithm. This group includes algorithms such as the Bee colony and Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO).
3. Trajectory-Based Algorithms. This final group includes the Tabu Search (TS), Simulated Annealing (SA), and Hill climbing algorithms.

All these methods have their strength and limitations, but going into details for each method is beyond the scope of this study.

In MP, the challenge extends beyond selecting a modelling approach—modellers must also choose suitable modelling frameworks and solvers. Frameworks, or Algebraic Modelling Languages (AMLs), provide the programming interface for formulating mathematical models so they can be processed by computer solvers. These frameworks vary in programming

language, learning curve, support for linear and non-linear programming, and flexibility in integrating different solvers. Table 1 compares five leading frameworks across these criteria.

Table 1: Algebraic Modelling Frameworks Comparison

Framework	LP	NLP	Learning Time	Possibility to configure a new solver
Pyomo	x	x	Short	High
Ortools	x		Very Short	Low
PuLP	x		Short	High
SCIP	x	x	Very Short	Not possible
SciPy	x	x	Long	Medium

Using various approaches and having different objectives, the following are some of the most recent works done in SWMS optimization using MP.

In the study conducted by Das and Bhattacharyya [9], an optimization model was developed to find an optimal method for the collection, transfer, and disposal of municipal solid waste, and a heuristic method was applied to solve the problem. The study claims a 30% reduction in the waste collection and disposal cost in the case study city.

Bouleft and Alaoui [10] proposed a dynamic Multi-Compartment Vehicle Routing Problem (M-CVRP) for smart cities, where collection trucks carry separate compartments for different waste types, and smart bins are used for sorting at source. They formulated a MILP model to optimize collection operations and developed a hybrid GA to minimize total costs, including travel and overflow penalties. The approach proved effective in both static and dynamic scenarios. Another study that has proposed a dynamic M-CVRP in smart waste management is the research conducted by Mohammadi *et al*. [11]. The difference with the previous study is that this study combined the hybrid GA and PSO algorithms to solve the developed MILP model with another heuristic approach. The study demonstrated that the hybrid algorithm had the highest performance in providing high-quality route plans. Rahmanifar *et al*. [12] developed a MILP-based smart SWMS aiming to minimize total travel costs and CO2 emissions. The study formulated two CVRP models - one for routing from IoT-enabled waste bins to separation sites, and another for transporting waste to recycling facilities. To solve these, novel heuristics and meta-heuristics methods were applied, including the Social Engineering Optimizer (SEO) and SA. However, the model lacks a dynamic component, as it does not account for stochastic or time-dependent travel times, nor does it handle urgent or high-priority bin requests.

Optimization techniques have not always been used in isolation, but in most cases, they have been coupled with other technologies to enhance their effectiveness in optimizing SWMS. One of the studies that has coupled MP with other technologies is the research conducted by Xia *et al*. [13], where Machine Learning (ML) algorithms were successfully applied in all aspects of SWM, including waste generation prediction, waste sorting, bin level detection, route optimization, and so forth.

2.3 Simulation Modelling in Solid Waste Management

Simulation modelling involves creating a computer-based representation of a physical or real-world system to analyze its behavior and optimize performance. Modelling, in various forms—from mental and physical models to mathematical, spreadsheet-based, and computer simulations—has long been used to understand systems. While analytical models, such as Excel spreadsheets, are popular and user-friendly, they are limited to problems with clearly defined and formula-based solutions. Many real-world problems, however, are too complex or lack such solutions, making simulation a more suitable approach [14]. These problems include dynamic systems featuring:

1. Non-linear behavior

2. Memory Requirement
3. Non-intuitive influences between variables
4. Time and causal dependencies
5. All the above, combined with uncertainty and a large number of parameters

It is with these kinds of problems that computer-based simulation becomes pivotal. Simulation modelling is sometimes defined as a set of rules that dictate what the next state of the system should be from the current state; and these rules can be of different nature: differential equations, State charts, process flowcharts, schedules, etc. [14]. The same author has highlighted the following as the advantages of simulation modelling:

1. Simulation models enable you to analyze systems and find solutions where other methods, such as analytical calculations and linear programming, fail
2. Once one has selected the appropriate level of abstraction, the development of a simulation model is a more straightforward process than analytical modelling
3. The structure of a simulation model naturally reflects the structure of the real system; as simulation models are developed using mostly visual languages, it is easy to communicate the model to other people
4. In a simulation model, one can measure any value and track any object that is not below the level of abstraction
5. The ability to play and animate the system behavior in time is one of the greatest advantages of simulation. Animation is used not only for demonstration purposes, but can also be used for verification and debugging
6. Simulation models are more convincing than most analytical approaches

Simulation modelling is widely used across domains—from military and healthcare to manufacturing, logistics, and social systems. Depending on the system's abstraction level and the modeler's expertise and preference, simulation can be conducted using Discrete Event Simulation (DES), System Dynamics (SD), or Agent-Based Modelling (ABM). SD suits high-level, abstract models with minimal detail; DES fits detailed, low-abstraction operational models; and ABM balances between the two. Notably, literature shows that ABM is the most commonly applied simulation method in SWMS.

Simulation has been extensively used in combination with MP or other optimization techniques to optimize SWMS, either as a tool to generate data as inputs to the optimization algorithms or as a tool to test and assess the feasibility and performance of the optimized system. Following this approach, Idwan *et al*. [15] simulated urban waste collection using IoT-enabled smart bins and applied a GA to solve an MILP model aimed at minimizing truck travel time and distance. The simulation sent real-time bin status to an optimization engine based on a CVRP model, which returned optimal truck routes. Two scenarios were tested: (1) all bins were assumed full, requiring city-wide collection, and (2) only bins reported full by sensors were serviced. Results showed that smart bins reduced total travel time by 22%. However, the study presents several limitations, including:

1. Simulation-Based Validation: The study's findings are based on simulations only; real-world implementation and testing are necessary to validate the system's effectiveness under practical conditions
2. Scalability Concerns: The performance of the proposed algorithm in larger urban settings with more complex road networks and a higher number of dumpsters and vehicles remains untested

3. Dynamic Factors: The model did not account for dynamic factors such as traffic conditions, road closures, or unexpected events such as vehicle maintenance and breakdowns. Moreover, the study did not consider the scenario that other waste bins could become full and send service requests after the first allocation of trucks, and that a new computation of the optimization engine will be needed to find the best solution to service these new bins
4. The model did not consider the environmental factors, such as the need to collect a bin after a certain number of days, regardless of whether it's full or not, to avoid adverse odor, and the vehicle's CO2 emission reduction as an objective function

Another related study developed a multi-agent simulation-based framework to evaluate the performance of an IoT-enabled waste collection system and compare it with a conventional collection system [16]. The methodology of this study included the use of multi-agent simulation, IoT-enabled bins equipped with ultrasonic and weight sensors to monitor fill levels, transmitting data via communication technologies such as Wi-Fi and cellular networks, and routing optimization, implementing predictive algorithms to determine efficient garbage collection routes based on real-time bin data. The study demonstrated that the IoT-based system outperformed traditional methods by reducing the number of collection trips and distances travelled.

Another study that has used simulation is the study conducted by Mohan *et al*. [17]; this study has modelled and simulated a proposed IoT-based waste collection and disposal system for smart buildings using autonomous indoor robotic waste bins. Some of the limitations of this study include that the system's performance in larger or more complex building layouts remains untested, the study does not discuss the robot's power requirements or battery life, which are critical for autonomous operation, and the long-term maintenance issues and the reliability of the system in continuous operation were not explored.

Another study demonstrating simulation in solid waste management assessed the feasibility of a smart waste collection system in the UAE and compared it with the conventional approach [18]. The research began with a field survey to analyze daily bin filling rates across urban areas. Using this data, the authors simulated various waste collection scenarios and proposed a smart system in which sensor-equipped bins detect fill levels. This data is then fed into a GIS-based route optimization algorithm to determine efficient truck routing.

Other studies that have used either simulation, MP, or their combination to optimize SWMS include [19], [20], [21], [22], and [23]. Some of the shortcomings of these studies include not using GIS in the simulation model, not using the simulation model, hence ignoring the dynamic and stochastic aspects of the system, and/or not using the smart collection approach with IoT-equipped bins.

With growing urban waste challenges, understanding relationships among key waste management variables is essential. To this end, Cohen [4] applied SD to analyze SWMS and identify correlations that could ease pressure on municipalities, finding SD effective in capturing quantitative and qualitative interactions across environmental, social, technological, and economic factors. Similarly, Ding *et al*. [24] reviewed studies using SD and ABM for construction waste management and proposed integrating both methods for more robust modelling. In another example, Meng *et al*. [25] developed an ABM in AnyLogic to simulate changes in residents' recycling behavior under different waste policies, showing that charging policies can reduce garbage and improve waste separation at source. As simulation techniques and tools expand, some question the relevance of MP. However, both simulation and MP have distinct strengths, and the key lies in leveraging these strengths to better model and optimize systems [26].

2.4 Other Technologies Applied in Solid Waste Management

MP and SM are not the only technologies applied in the design and optimization of SWMS; they are often used in conjunction with other new technologies.

Other literature reviews aimed to determine challenges, recent developments, and opportunities of smart waste collection [27]. This study has looked at several studies that have successfully implemented technologies to optimize waste management systems in different parts of the world. Various technologies, from sensor technologies to communication technology, location information tools, and microcontrollers, have been found to be effective in developing smart waste management systems. These technologies include:

1. Sensors (e.g., ultrasonic sensors, weight sensors, temperature and humidity sensors, multi-stereoscopic cameras, PIR motion sensors); of these sensor technologies, the ultrasonic sensors were the most used sensors
2. Communication technologies (e.g., Wi-Fi ESP module, Global System for Mobile Transmission - GSM, GPRS, RFID, LoRa WAN, Ethernet, Cloud platform using Wi-Fi module, Wireless LAN)
3. Location information tools (e.g., GPS, GIS, etc.)
4. Microcontroller technologies (e.g., Arduino Uno, Node MCU, Raspberry Pi, etc.)

One of the studies that has combined some of these technologies to propose a smart waste management system is the study conducted by Nguyen-Trong *et al*. [28] in which the authors developed a dual model to optimize the collection and disposal of municipal solid waste. The study combined an MP model with an ABM model. First, a MILP model was developed using the Vehicle Routing Problem (VRP) approach, which was solved using the Clarke and Wright algorithm to determine the optimal scheduling and routing of the collection trucks. Then the optimal solution was used as input parameters to the ABM simulation model to test its results in a dynamic environment; the ABM simulation was used to model other dynamic parameters of the system that could not be represented by the MILP, such as the traffic network, truck speed, route characteristics, etc. The study was able to reduce the total travelling distance of the trucks by 11.3%, and the following objectives were achieved:

1. Integrating GIS analysis, MP, and ABM
2. The study demonstrated that integrating the three technologies was more effective than the GIS analysis approach
3. The study also demonstrated that integrating simulation allows for visualizing the evolution of the municipal waste collection and transportation

While most studies focus on improving the process of waste collection and disposal, other research works are looking at ways to minimize waste generation and create waste-free cities. With the aim of contributing to the creation of a zero-waste smart city, Esmaeilian *et al*. [29] have proposed a conceptual framework for waste management in future cities in which the waste management system is directly connected to the whole product lifecycle. The same study has also established that the transition to becoming a zero-waste smart city requires three strategies, namely waste prevention, proper waste collection process, and proper material recovery from collected waste.

3 DISCUSSION

The literature indicates that MP can be effectively combined with SM to develop better and intelligent SWMS, with MP used to minimize objectives such as total travelling distance, and SM applied to capture dynamic and stochastic aspects of real systems, including waste generation and road network variability. As shown in Table 2, most research in this field can be categorized by research approach, objective functions, and limitations. While some studies considered objectives like waste reduction, the majority applying either MP or SM focused on optimizing solid waste collection and disposal worldwide. MILP, particularly the VRP method, is the most common MP approach, aiming to reduce collection vehicle distance and time. Classical solution methods such as simplex and Branch and Bound are widely used, alongside heuristic and meta-heuristic techniques such as GA and PSO. Simulation is also extensively applied, either independently or in combination with MP, to design and optimize SWMS. All major simulation paradigms—DES, SD, and ABM—have been used, though ABM appears most prominent among them.

Among the five algebraic modelling frameworks compared, Pyomo, a Python-based open-source tool, proved to be the most effective for formulating and solving mathematical models in solid waste management. Its wide range of optimization capabilities and rich library support set it apart from other AMLs, making it especially suitable for modelling, solving, and analyzing complex waste management problems. Some of the most common types of problems that are supported by Pyomo include:

1. Linear programming
2. Quadratic programming
3. Nonlinear programming
4. Mixed-integer linear programming
5. Mixed-integer quadratic programming
6. Mixed-integer nonlinear programming
7. Stochastic programming, etc.

The other advantage of using Pyomo is that it integrates easily with many widely used solvers such as CPLEX, GLPK, and Gurobi to solve problems; this is a benefit of the framework because it allows one to quickly change the solver and solve the problem, and hence be able to compare the performance of various solvers on the same model.

4 SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE OF A SMART SWMS

Considering the demographic, social and economic factors of SWMS, specially in developing countries, and the technological advancement in telecommunication, sensors, linear programming, and simulation, the system architecture, displayed in Figure 2 is proposed for the smart collection and disposal of municipal solid waste with the aim to minimize the total time and cost of waste management. The functions and roles of each component of the system are as follows:

Table 2: Summary of Recent Studies on the Application of VRP and ABM in SWM

Author and Year	Research Approach	Objective Function—	Limitations
Nguyen-Trong et al. 2017.	MILP using VRP; solved using the Clarke and Wright algorithm.	Minimize travel distance.	Trucks' capacity not considered; Waste generated assumed to always be less than truck capacity.
Qiao et al. 2020.	ABM is used to test MP results; GIS is integrated into the ABM. MILP using CVRP solved with meta-heuristics algorithms (PSO and Tabu Search).	Minimize total cost (distance), fuel consumption, CO2 emission, and penalty cost.	Dynamic aspects of collection requests are not considered, no GIS to capture traffic network.
Idwan et al. 2020.	MILP using VRP solved with GA.	Minimize total travel distance and time.	Dynamic and stochastic aspects of collection re-quests are not considered.
Bouleft and El-hilali 2023.	MILP using MCVRP solved using hybrid GA	Minimize total travel and penalties cost.	Dynamic aspects of collection requests are not considered; no GIS to capture traffic network.
Mohammadi et al. 2023.	MILP using M-CVRP solved with hybrid GA and PSO.	Minimize total travel and penalty costs.	Dynamic aspects of collection requests not considered, no GIS to capture traffic network.
Rahmanifar et al. 2023.	MILP using M-CVRP solved with Heuristics and meta-heuristics SEO and SA.	Minimize total travel cost and CO2 emission.	Dynamism of travel time is ignored; stochastic re-quests scenario is not considered.

1. **Smart refuse bins:** These are garbage refuse bins equipped with sensors that are used to sense the level of trash inside the bin and send a signal to the coordination center when the bin needs to be emptied
2. **Waste collection trucks:** The collection truck proposed for this kind of systems is the common garbage collection truck, commonly used by municipalities, which usually is of drive type 2x4, with a capacity of cargo body between five and six cubic meters, overall dimension of 6520 x 2050 x 2460 mm, and a maximum speed of 95 km/h
3. **Waste Collection Truck Depots:** Two main depot configurations exist in waste collection systems – a single depot, serving all trucks, or multiple depots distributed across the city. A single depot reduces operational costs, while multiple depots improve time efficiency but increase facility costs. Choosing the optimal setup involves a facility location problem, which is beyond the scope of this study.
4. **Coordination center (CC):** This is the place from which all the activities of waste management in the city, including running the optimization and simulation engines, will be coordinated
5. **Mathematical Optimization Model:** Once the signals of full bins are received, the MP can then be used to find the optimal routing of the collection trucks and do the scheduling of trucks more effectively
6. **Simulation Model:** The last component of the proposed smart system is the

simulation, which can be used to simulate the system to ensure that the best scenario is being considered at all times.

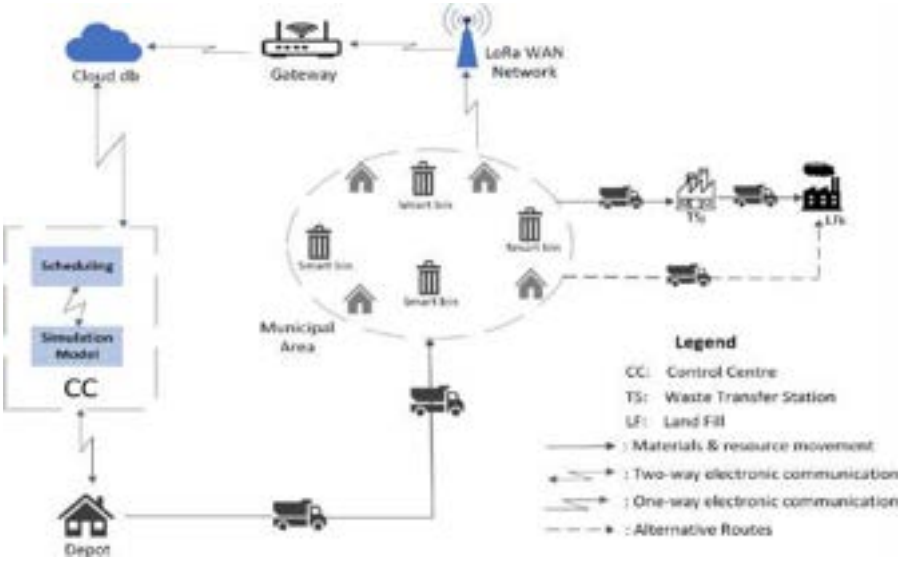

Figure 2: Smart Solid Waste Management System Architecture

5 LIMITATIONS

Waste management is a complex process and encompasses many aspects, including waste generation, waste prevention, recycling, waste-to-energy transformation, waste collection and disposal, landfill management, waste circular economy, etc. This review has focused mainly on articles dealing with waste collection and disposal, and how MP and SM can be used to design and optimize SWMS with regard to this aspect. Further studies could look at other aspects of waste management and the application of various other tools in the improvement of waste management systems.

6 CONCLUSION

This review examined recent studies on the application of MP and simulation modelling in the design and optimization of SWMS. It was noticed that most research focused on improving urban waste collection and disposal efficiency, with system design and optimization being the predominant objective. The VRP emerged as the most commonly used MP formulation, while ABM was the most frequent simulation approach. Classical solution methods often involved simplex and Branch and Bound algorithms, typically implemented using Algebraic Modelling Languages such as Pyomo. Among meta-heuristics methods, GA and PSO received significant attention. Despite the demonstrated effectiveness of these methods, limitations such as the lack of dynamic system considerations (e.g., variable truck availability, real-time road conditions, and multiple concurrent collection requests), limited integration of environmental objectives, and insufficient cost-benefit analyses of smart waste systems remain. Among prominent future works in this field would be the performance assessment of the proposed SWMS architecture in a case study using either simulation or a real pilot study to demonstrate the effectiveness of such a system. Although this study focused on the implementation of MP and SM in SWM, it can be concluded from this review that mathematical programming and simulation play a vital role in broader logistics operations planning and optimization, aiming to minimize costs and improve the system's efficiency.

7 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

ABM Agent-Based Modelling
CC Coordination Centre
CVRP Capacitated Vehicle Routing Problem
DES Discrete Event Simulation
GA Genetic Algorithm
GIS Geographical Information System
GPS Global Positioning System
GSM Global System for Mobile Communications
IoT Internet of Things
IR Infrared
LED Light Emitting Diode
LF Landfill
LP Linear Programming
MILP Mixed Integer Linear Programming
MP Mathematical Programming
SD Systems Dynamics
SWMS Solid Waste Management System
WMS Waste Management System
WTS Waste Transfer Station.

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ENGINEERING EDUCATION FORMATS FOR INNOVATION DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how technology integration in engineering education **formats** influences innovation development and graduate employability in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Using a qualitative case study approach, data were triangulated from student feedback (n = 42), institutional documents, and field observations. Findings show that digital learning tools support improved conceptual understanding, collaboration, and career readiness, while challenges such as unequal access and uneven curriculum integration remain. The study contributes by clarifying how Kaizen principles, vertical and horizontal integration of learning activities, and institutional management practices shape innovation-oriented education. Limitations include a small sample size and the absence of longitudinal data, but the findings highlight practical lessons for embedding innovation and employability attributes in engineering education.

Keywords: Engineering education formats, Graduate employability, Technology integration, Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)

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1 INTRODUCTION

Engineering education plays a central role in preparing graduates to contribute to innovation and industrial development, particularly within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Employers increasingly demand graduates who can not only apply technical knowledge but also demonstrate adaptability, problem-solving, and innovative thinking [1][2]. Traditional approaches to engineering education, however, have often struggled to keep pace with these expectations.

International scholarship emphasizes the value of innovative educational formats, such as project-based learning, cooperative education, and digital simulation platforms, in bridging the gap between academic training and industry needs [3][4]. These approaches enable students to engage with real-world problems, develop collaborative skills, and integrate theoretical knowledge with practice. Frameworks such as CDIO (Conceive–Design–Implement–Operate) have demonstrated the benefits of structured, practice-oriented learning [5]. In South Africa, however, studies remain limited, with most research focusing on general e-learning adoption rather than discipline-specific innovations [6][7].

The need for transformation is also emphasised in national policies. The National Development Plan 2030 and the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy call for education systems that strengthen innovation, digital literacy, and employability skills [8][9]. While digital tools are increasingly adopted across institutions, questions remain about how specific formats of engineering education can be structured to cultivate innovation readiness and support graduate transitions into dynamic workplaces.

This paper addresses this gap by examining an engineering education format that integrates technology-enabled learning, Kaizen-based continuous improvement, and vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment. Using a qualitative case study design, the research explores how such a format influences innovation development and employability outcomes in a South African distance education context. The study contributes by clarifying the mechanisms through which education formats can shape graduate attributes, offering practical lessons for engineering educators and institutional leaders.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Engineering education is under sustained pressure to produce graduates who can operate effectively in fast-changing, technology-rich workplaces. International literature points to education formats that blend practice-centred learning with digital enablement as a way to improve relevance and graduate outcomes [3][4][7][8]. Within this body of work, three strands are especially pertinent to innovation development: practice-oriented frameworks, digitally supported learning environments, and explicit cultivation of employability attributes.

2.1 Practice-oriented education formats

Frameworks such as CDIO emphasise learning that is organised around authentic engineering practice, with students conceiving, designing, implementing, and operating artefacts or systems across a staged curriculum [3]. This orientation encourages iterative problem-solving, teamwork, and communication, which are recognised components of innovation capability. Problem- and project-based learning further support these outcomes by requiring students to apply theory to open-ended tasks under real constraints, thereby strengthening judgment and the transfer of knowledge to novel contexts [9]. These formats are relevant for institutions that must balance theoretical breadth with application at scale.

2.2 Digitally supported learning environments

Digital technologies expand access to authentic tasks and enable timely feedback at the course and programme level. The literature documents the promise of intelligent feedback, adaptive

support, and analytics for improving engagement and learning effectiveness in STEM fields [4][7]. More broadly, the digital transformation of higher education has accelerated the use of virtual laboratories, remote collaboration platforms, and data-driven course design, which collectively widen opportunities for experiential learning even in resource-constrained settings [8]. At the same time, South African studies caution that uneven connectivity and device access can blunt the benefits of e-learning and entrench inequality if not addressed through deliberate institutional design [5][10].

2.3 Graduate attributes and employability

Policy and strategy documents emphasize the importance of graduates who demonstrate adaptability, collaboration, and innovation, in addition to core technical competence [1][2][11][16]. Education formats that integrate vertical progression across years and horizontal links across modules help to stage the development of these attributes, while creating multiple points for reflection and feedback. Continuous improvement approaches, such as the use of Kaizen cycles within projects, offer a pragmatic way to structure reflection, tighten the link between formative evidence and redesign of student work, and cultivate habits associated with innovation practice. These mechanisms complement digital enablement by shaping the pedagogy rather than relying on tools alone.

2.4 Methodological guidance for context-sensitive evaluation

Evaluating the effect of education formats on innovation development requires attention to context and multiple forms of evidence. Case study methodology provides a coherent approach through careful bounding of the unit, time, and setting, and through triangulation of data sources that capture practice from several vantage points [12][13][14]. In digital education, evaluation frameworks emphasise alignment between learning aims, technology choice, student support, and assessment, with iterative refinement as conditions shift [15]. These considerations are especially salient in distance and blended environments where student pathways are diverse and support structures vary.

2.5 Gap addressed by this study

While international work documents mature practice-oriented frameworks and rapidly advancing digital enablement [3][4][7][8][9], South African scholarship has focused more on access and equity than on detailed design of engineering education formats that foster innovation and employability at the programme level [5][10]. There is limited empirical work that shows, within a single study, how curriculum structuring, continuous improvement practices, and technology integration interact to influence student readiness for innovation in an open and distance learning context. This study addresses that gap by analysing a specific education format that combines vertical and horizontal integration, Kaizen-based reflection, and targeted use of digital tools, and by evaluating its effects through triangulated evidence from students, documents, and observations.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Researchers can use a range of data sources to investigate and explain a phenomenon in its context by employing the qualitative case study methodology [7]. This methodology guarantees that the phenomenon being examined is examined from a range of perspectives, enabling a comprehensive comprehension and the disclosure and comprehension of many aspects of the case being examined [7]. The research objectives are in line with the case study approach since the study's main objective is to investigate and clarify, using a thorough example, if and how the use of technology tenets of the fourth Industrial Revolution impacts and incorporate the key graduate qualities needed by industry, with the way engineers are trained to help graduates move into new careers. The contextual circumstances around the phenomenon being studied are covered by this kind of research methodology [21].

3. Research Design and Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study methodology to examine how an engineering education format that integrates technology influences innovation development and graduate employability. The case study approach was selected because it enables investigation of a phenomenon within its real-world context, allowing multiple perspectives and evidence sources to be integrated [12][13][14].

3.1 Research design

The study was exploratory, explanatory and descriptive in nature, consistent with Yin's categorisation of case studies [12]. It sought to explore how technology integration shapes teaching and learning practices, explain the mechanisms through which graduate attributes are cultivated, and describe the institutional context in which these processes unfold. The case was bounded by time (contemporary reforms), place (an open distance education institution in South Africa), and unit of analysis (the integration of technology into engineering education formats to support innovation readiness).

3.2 Data sources

To capture a comprehensive picture of how technology integration was shaping engineering education formats, the study deliberately relied on multiple categories of evidence. Drawing from established guidance on triangulation in qualitative case study research, the use of diverse sources was intended to strengthen credibility, reduce bias, and provide insights from institutional, instructional, and learner perspectives. This multi-layered evidence base ensured that the findings did not depend on a single narrative but reflected converging patterns across contexts. Three main data sources were used to ensure triangulation and enhance validity:

- **Document analysis and archival records:** Institutional reports, curriculum frameworks, and national policy documents were examined to identify priorities for innovation and digital learning in engineering education.
- **Field notes and observations:** Teaching and learning activities in selected engineering modules were observed, with notes capturing how technology-enabled practices unfolded in classrooms and workshops.
- **Student feedback:** Data were gathered from 42 undergraduate students across second, third, and final year cohorts, enrolled in core industrial and systems engineering modules. The group reflected the typical distribution of the department, with approximately equal representation of male and female students and a spread of ages between 20 and 25 years old. Short surveys and reflective assignments were used to capture perceptions of technology integration, its relevance to employability, and its influence on innovation-oriented learning. These responses provided both quantitative indicators and qualitative insights into how different groups of students engaged with the education format.

3.3 Data collection

Document analysis followed established qualitative procedures, focusing on identifying patterns in how innovation and graduate attributes were positioned in policy and curriculum texts. Field observations were conducted during teaching sessions that incorporated digital tools, with attention to vertical integration across years and horizontal integration across disciplines. Student data were collected through a structured survey instrument comprising both closed and open-ended questions, and through reflective essays embedded in coursework. This ensured that evidence captured both quantitative indicators (e.g., percentages of agreement) and qualitative insights.

3.4 Data analysis

Qualitative and quantitative strands of analysis were integrated to provide a balanced interpretation. For the qualitative strand, thematic analysis was employed to interpret student reflections and field notes. Open coding was used in the first cycle, followed by axial coding to identify relationships across codes. Two researchers conducted coding independently and then compared results to ensure consistency and reliability. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached, thereby enhancing inter-rater validity. While coding was done manually, the process followed structured protocols similar to those supported by software such as NVivo, including iterative refinement of codebooks and memo-writing to capture analytic decisions. Quantitative survey responses were summarised descriptively and reported as frequencies and percentages, providing a complementary perspective to qualitative themes.

Documentary evidence was synthesised using content analysis, with categories aligned to institutional priorities, graduate attributes, and digital learning strategies. Cross-checking documentary findings against student and observation data provided corroboration, strengthening the dependability of results.

3.5 Methodological principles applied

The analytical process was underpinned by methodological principles from Yin [12], Creswell [13], and Patton [14]. Yin's guidance on bounding cases and triangulating data ensured coherence. Creswell's emphasis on unit, time and context clarified the scope, while Patton's holistic view of cases supported integration of multiple perspectives. Triangulation was applied not only across data sources but also across methods of analysis, increasing credibility and reducing bias. In addition, digital evaluation frameworks [15] informed interpretation by highlighting the alignment between learning objectives, technology choice, and student support. Collectively, these principles ensured that findings were trustworthy, contextually grounded, and analytically rigorous.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Participation by students was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. Student responses were anonymised, and no personally identifying information was reported. Institutional documents were analysed only in aggregate, with no confidential material disclosed.

In summary, the methodology combined multiple data sources, rigorous thematic analysis, and established case study principles to provide a credible and transparent evaluation of how engineering education formats contribute to innovation development and graduate employability.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings are presented across the three categories of evidence: student feedback, document analysis, and field observations. Collectively, these sources provide a triangulated perspective on how technology integration within an engineering education format contributes to innovation development and graduate employability.

4.1 Student feedback

A total of 42 students participated, representing second, third, and final-year cohorts. Quantitative survey data indicated that:

- 76% of respondents reported improved conceptual understanding through technology-enabled learning.

- 69% noted enhanced teamwork and problem-solving skills because of digital collaboration tools.
- 61% highlighted a stronger awareness of employability traits, particularly adaptability and communication.

Qualitative reflections reinforced these patterns. Students reported that simulation platforms, online project work, and digital collaboration improved their ability to connect theory with practice. Several students noted that iterative feedback embedded in assignments mirrored workplace practices and increased their confidence to operate in innovation-oriented environments.

4.2 Document analysis

Review of curriculum frameworks, institutional strategies, and national policy confirmed a strong emphasis on digital transformation and innovation-readiness in higher education. Documents consistently linked 4IR technologies with the need for adaptable, work-ready graduates. However, analysis also revealed that employability attributes were often stated as outcomes but not explicitly embedded in course-level assessment or activities. This finding aligned with student concerns that some digital interventions enhanced learning but did not always translate directly into employability preparation.

4.3 Field observations

Observations of workshops and synchronous online classes highlighted concrete practices of vertical and horizontal integration. In one example, digital design tools introduced in a second-year module were carried through to final-year projects, enabling progressive complexity and skill consolidation. Horizontal integration was visible in cross-disciplinary project teams, where engineering students collaborated with peers from information technology on shared digital platforms. These approaches supported deeper learning but also revealed variation in student participation, with some learners less engaged in group activities.

Kaizen principles of continuous improvement were observed in project cycles where students revised outputs based on iterative feedback. This approach fostered reflection and refinement, aligning well with innovation practices. Managers and educators (programme heads and coordinators) played a visible role in aligning modules and facilitating technology adoption, underscoring the importance of institutional support.

4.4 Integration of findings

Triangulated evidence indicates that technology integration positively influenced innovation-oriented learning and employability traits, but uneven access and inconsistent embedding across curricula limited the impact. Students with stronger digital readiness reported greater benefits, while institutional documents and observations highlighted gaps in translating policy aspirations into classroom practice. Together, the findings suggest that while the education format advanced innovation development, its effectiveness depends on both pedagogy and institutional strategy.

5 RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The findings provide evidence that technology integration within engineering education formats enhances student learning, employability traits, and innovation readiness. This aligns with international studies that document the value of digitally enabled and practice-oriented approaches in strengthening graduate attributes [3][4][7][9]. At the same time, the study highlights context-specific challenges in South Africa, particularly uneven digital access and incomplete embedding of employability skills at the curriculum level.

5.1 Linking results to literature

Student feedback showing improvements in conceptual understanding and teamwork echoes findings from project-based learning and digital simulation research [9][18]. The observed application of Kaizen principles aligns with literature on continuous improvement in educational contexts, reinforcing its relevance for cultivating reflective learning habits. Document analysis revealed that institutional and national policies emphasise digital transformation but often stop short of operationalising employability outcomes, a gap also identified in regional scholarship [5][10][20].

5.2 Pedagogical implications

The results underscore the importance of intentional curriculum design. Vertical integration, where skills introduced early are progressively advanced, supports deeper learning and aligns with frameworks such as CDIO [3]. Horizontal integration fosters cross-disciplinary collaboration, which students reported as enhancing adaptability and problem-solving. However, observations showed uneven participation, suggesting the need for stronger scaffolding of group dynamics and digital collaboration practices.

5.3 Institutional implications

Managers and educators were found to play a key role in aligning teaching practices with institutional strategies. Their involvement is critical for ensuring consistency, providing staff development, and overcoming barriers to adoption. Institutional support also has implications for equity, as disparities in digital access risk entrenching inequalities if not proactively addressed.

5.4 Contribution to knowledge

This study extends the literature by providing an integrated analysis of how multiple elements—digital enablement, continuous improvement practices, and curriculum structuring—interact within a South African distance education context. Few prior studies have triangulated data from students, institutional documents, and field observations to capture such a holistic picture. The findings demonstrate that engineering education formats designed with these elements can promote innovation development, though effectiveness is contingent on both pedagogy and structural support.

5.5 Limitations and future research

The sample was limited to 42 students from a single institution, restricting generalisability. Longitudinal tracking of graduate outcomes would provide stronger evidence of employability impact. Future research could extend the study across institutions, examine the role of industry partnerships, and explore how advanced tools such as digital twins further shape innovation readiness.

6 CONCLUSION

This paper has examined how technology integration within engineering education formats can support innovation development and graduate employability in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Using a qualitative case study approach, triangulated evidence from student feedback, institutional documents, and field observations demonstrated that technology-enabled learning improves conceptual understanding, fosters teamwork, and cultivates reflective habits through continuous improvement practices such as Kaizen. Vertical and horizontal integration of curricula further enhanced the development of innovation-oriented graduate attributes.

The study contributes to knowledge by clarifying how education formats that combine digital enablement, continuous improvement, and curriculum structuring can create conditions

conducive to innovation readiness. It extends international scholarship by situating these mechanisms in a South African open distance education context, where structural challenges such as uneven digital access remain significant. The analysis also highlights the critical role of managers and educators in operationalising institutional strategies and supporting equity in technology adoption.

Practical implications include the need for deliberate curriculum design that embeds employability attributes, scaffolds group work and digital collaboration, and integrates iterative improvement cycles. Institutional leaders should prioritise resource allocation and staff development to ensure consistent and inclusive application of technology-enabled education formats. Policymakers should further strengthen the operationalisation of innovation-related outcomes in higher education frameworks.

The study has limitations. The student sample was modest and drawn from a single institution, restricting generalisability. Data were collected at one point in time, and longitudinal evidence of graduate outcomes is lacking. Future research should extend the analysis to multiple institutions, include larger and more diverse cohorts, and investigate the role of industry partnerships in reinforcing innovation-oriented graduate attributes. Exploring the impact of advanced digital tools such as digital twins would also provide useful insights.

In conclusion, engineering education formats that purposefully integrate technology, Kaizen-based reflection, and curriculum alignment hold promise for advancing innovation development. To realise their full potential, such formats must be implemented with institutional commitment, equity of access, and sustained collaboration between academia and industry.

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PATTERNS AND VARIATIONS IN HOUSEHOLD ELECTRICITY CONSUMPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Even among homes with identical designs, occupant behavior, and frequency of usage, equipment ownership influences household electricity consumption in South Africa. These variations affect the design of demand-side interventions and make short-term forecasting challenging. Therefore, a better knowledge of these dynamics is essential for enhancing localized electricity generation, planning, and energy efficiency. Using a qualitative method to examine behavioral, social, and technological aspects, the study looks into trends in home energy use. The results show that while appliance use is the main driver of consumption, user behavior and awareness have a considerable role. The choice of appliances and their level of use are significantly influenced by socioeconomic position, and there are still significant differences in energy literacy. Emerging best practices, such as the use of energy-efficient appliances and techniques, are encouraging. These findings lay the groundwork for directing focused legislative actions and encouraging sustainable household electricity use in South Africa.

Keywords: electricity; residential; optimisation; sustainability

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1 INTRODUCTION

"What you cannot measure, you cannot manage." – This frequently cited management maxim is especially applicable to residential settings, because usage patterns vary as much as the households. It has never been more crucial to comprehend consumption patterns in South Africa, where home electricity use is a major contributor to the country's energy demand, and energy security is a recurring problem. In addition to being technically complex, the problem is also highly behavioral and sociological.

The necessity of comprehending how, when, and why families use power has been highlighted by recent load shedding incidents and ongoing energy supply challenges in South Africa [1]. The quantity and kind of electrical appliances in a home vary greatly, and their use is influenced by semi-random and context-specific patterns, even while building types are similar [2]; [3]. Particularly at fine time scales like hourly intervals, these fluctuations add to the unpredictability of residential electricity usage [4].

Through a qualitative lens, this research examines these variances and provides a more comprehensive picture of electricity consumption than just kilowatt-hours. The study places more emphasis on households' actual experiences choosing, utilizing, and incorporating appliances into everyday routines than it does on statistical or engineering models. National energy models have benefited greatly from the use of quantitative methods [5], but these methods frequently ignore important social factors that influence electricity consumption, such as household size, cultural customs, income levels, and the accessibility of alternative energy sources [6], [7].

Prior research has demonstrated that a complex interaction of behavioral, technical, and socioeconomic factors affects home electricity usage [10]; [11]. We still don't fully understand how these factors show up in South African homes, though, especially when it comes to appliance usage trends and domestic decision-making procedures. By examining the qualitative variations that underlie household power usage patterns, this article helps close that gap.

In order to identify important patterns and deviations that can guide energy policy, on-site electricity generating techniques (such as rooftop solar), and focused energy efficiency programs, the research looks at houses with comparable physical forms but different energy profiles. It also identifies the fundamentals required to create more flexible, human-centered electricity usage models that capture the dynamic, situational aspects of everyday life in the home.

The following sections of the paper provide the qualitative approach, examine the main themes that emerged from household case studies, evaluate pertinent literature on domestic energy usage, and outline implications for South African energy planning and policy. By using this method, the study not only advances our knowledge of how much electricity is used in homes but also offers practical advice for creating a more resilient and sustainable energy future.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding household electricity consumption in South Africa is a critical area of study due to its implications for national energy policy, infrastructure planning, and sustainable development. The literature in this domain spans socio-economic, technical, and behavioural dimensions, reflecting the complexity of electricity consumption patterns in residential contexts. South Africa's residential sector is a significant consumer of electricity, accounting for approximately 17% of the national electricity demand [8].

The country’s historical emphasis on coal-based energy supply, coupled with high electrification rates since 1994, has led to wide disparities in access and usage patterns [3];

[9]. The Integrated Resource Plan (IRP 2019) acknowledges these disparities and emphasizes the need for demand-side management and the promotion of energy efficiency. A substantial body of research identifies key determinants of household electricity use, i.e., Socio-economic factors, Appliance ownership and usage, Behavioural and cultural practices, and Energy pricing and subsidies.

Income level, education, household size, and dwelling type strongly influence electricity consumption [7]; [12]. Higher-income households tend to use more electricity due to increased ownership of appliances and higher comfort expectations (Louw et al., 2008). The type and number of appliances owned by households significantly affect consumption patterns. Even in homes with similar physical characteristics, usage patterns vary due to behavioural differences and appliance efficiency [4]; [13].

The temporal pattern of usage, when and how appliances are used, is shaped by daily routines, cultural practices, and perceptions of electricity cost [6]; [17]. For example, heating and cooking habits vary between urban and rural households, influencing electricity demand profiles. Tariff structures and government subsidies (such as Free Basic Electricity) influence consumption behaviour, especially among low-income households [15]. Households with limited access to subsidized electricity often resort to fuel stacking, where electricity is used in combination with other fuels such as paraffin and wood [16].

Several studies examine geographic and temporal trends in electricity use. These include Urban vs rural, in which Urban households tend to consume more electricity due to better infrastructure and access to a wider range of appliances, while rural areas show more reliance on alternative fuels [7]. Temporal variability studies show that electricity usage varies by season, time of day, and day of the week [4]; [5]. Winter months see higher demand due to heating needs, while peak demand periods often align with cooking and bathing times.

Post-electrification effects show that electrification has not always led to increased consumption; instead, in many cases, electricity is used selectively and supplemented with traditional fuels, particularly in lower-income communities [12], [9]. Research has also focused on strategies to reduce residential electricity demand, and together with post-electrification, issues of energy efficiency, and on-site electricity generation, studies outcomes shown insignificant success in terms of improved energy efficiency.

Appliance labelling, energy-saving campaigns, and efficient lighting programs have been introduced with varying levels of success [17]; [18]. However, the uptake of energy-efficient technologies remains limited in lower-income households due to affordability barriers. The increasing adoption of solar photovoltaic systems in middle- and high-income households has the potential to offset grid consumption and reduce pressure on the national grid [19]. However, the financial and technical barriers to entry remain significant for most South Africans.

Much of the existing work relies on quantitative models that often fail to capture the social and contextual realities of electricity use [19]; [10]. While statistical models are valuable for large-scale predictions, they overlook the complexity of household behaviour, cultural nuances, and the significance of informal practices. Recent calls have advocated for mixed-method or qualitative approaches that offer richer, more contextualised understandings of electricity use patterns [7]; [20].

Despite a wealth of data and analysis, several gaps remain. There is limited insight into the influence of digital technologies and smart appliances on consumption behaviour in South African households. These are longitudinal studies that track changes in consumption patterns over time, particularly in the context of economic shocks and energy transitions. Granular data collection at sub-hourly intervals to better understand intra-day variability and the

potential for demand response. Furthermore, more research is needed on the intersection between electricity consumption and issues of gender, health, and education, especially in underserved communities.

An emphasis on the objective of the study alignment is deliberated to ensure clarity of the purpose of the study and the envisaged outcomes. In deliberating on objective 1, it is apparent that residential demand in South Africa is diverse and influenced by temporal routines, housing characteristics, and appliance stockpiles. Although the residential sector accounts for a significant portion of demand, both national and sectoral analysis also highlight significant within-segment variance that is hidden by simple averages (Bekker et al., 2008; Inglesi-Lotz & Blignaut, 2011).

Studies conducted globally show that even homes with comparable envelopes vary greatly because to differences in ownership patterns, appliance efficiency, and episodic rather than continuous usage (Yohanis et al., 2008; Santin et al., 2009). Micro-studies conducted in South Africa support this: nighttime peaks in urban areas are anchored by appliance density and geyser use, whereas prepaid meter-related bursts in rural and peri-urban profiles are sharper and credit-constrained (Louw et al., 2008; Naicker & Thopil, 2020).

In the literature reviewed that supports objective 2, it is observed that numerous studies have established a connection between consumption and urbanicity, household size, income, and education (Madubansi & Shackleton, 2006; Prasad, 2006). The affordability frontier and, consequently, the intensity of usage are further shaped by tariff design, prepayment metering, and subsidies (e.g., Free Basic Electricity) (Winkler et al., 2011; Department of Energy, 2018).

Price elasticity, however, does not adequately account for behavior: time-use patterns, comfort standards, and gendered divisions of household labor influence when and how electricity is drawn (Mohlakoana & Annecke, 2009; Chambers & Momberg, 2021). International syntheses demonstrate that literacy and feedback affect behavior change, while the effects vary according to salience and context (Darby, 2006; Wilson & Dowlatabadi, 2007).

In many other related objectives of this type of study, which are not deliberated in this research report. Objectives such as Examine how pricing, subsidies, and energy poverty affect the decisions people make about fuel and appliances. Findings show that despite high electrification rates, there is evidence of ongoing energy poverty; people employ fuel stacking, electricity plus paraffin, wood, and gas to manage risk, especially when prices are high or the supply is unstable (Madubansi & Shackleton, 2006; Matsika et al., 2013).

Another objective related to this research is the analysis of new developments in distributed generation and energy efficiency, as well as adoption obstacles. Literature makes it apparent that the analysis of new developments in distributed generation and energy efficiency, as well as adoption obstacles, is characterized by high variability. Although South Africa has made strides in lighting programs, labels, and standards, adoption is still inconsistent because of upfront expenditures, informational barriers, and a lack of confidence (Winkler et al., 2011; Bohlmann, Bohlmann, & Inglesi-Lotz, 2019).

Rooftop PV and solar water heating are becoming more popular among middle- and upper-class consumers, providing peak shaving and load-shedding resilience, although they are still more expensive for low-income users (Eberhard, Kolker, & Leigland, 2017; Wolski, Hughes, & Reinecke, 2022). Although they are recorded, household-level best practices such as time-shifting, gas and electric hybrid cooking, efficient lighting, and geyser timers are not regularly measured (Naicker & Thopil, 2020).

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Although they are recorded, household-level best practices such as time-shifting, gas and electric hybrid cooking, efficient lighting, and geyser timers are not regularly measured (Naicker & Thopil, 2020). Literature demonstrates that household electricity consumption in South Africa is shaped by a dynamic mix of socio-economic, behavioural, and technical factors. While foundational studies have illuminated key trends and determinants, there remains a pressing need for deeper, context-specific insights, particularly through qualitative research, to inform policy, infrastructure design, and demand-side interventions. Future research should aim to integrate behavioural data with technical models to foster a holistic understanding of electricity consumption in a transitioning energy landscape.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist approach is appropriate for understanding how and why households in South Africa consume electricity in varied and sometimes unpredictable ways. Unlike positivist approaches that seek to generalize behaviour based on numerical data, interpretivism emphasizes the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their actions and decisions [21]. This philosophical orientation enables the exploration of lived experiences, contextual influences, and the complexity of domestic energy behaviour in South Africa.

The complexity of domestic energy behaviour in South Africa's diverse socio-economic settings is reflected upon through the theoretical framework that draws on practice theory [22], [23]. A theory that conceptualizes energy consumption not merely as an outcome of individual choices or technical factors, but as embedded in everyday social practices such as cooking, bathing, heating, and entertainment. Practice theory provides a lens to examine how electricity use is shaped by routines, norms, appliance availability, and infrastructure.

The study seeks to identify patterns and variations in household electricity consumption. It explores socio-cultural, behavioural, and contextual factors influencing electricity use and develops insights to support energy efficiency interventions and policy design in South Africa. To improve the quality of data collected for the study, the study was conducted in three provinces in South Africa, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape, chosen to reflect urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts with differing levels of electrification, socio-economic status, and climate.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 30 households across the three regions. Households were selected to capture diversity in income levels, housing types, electricity access, appliance ownership, and cultural practices. Purposive sampling ensures that data are rich, relevant, and theoretically meaningful [24]. The sample included 10 urban households with full-grid access and high appliance density, 10 peri-urban households with partial electrification or hybrid energy sources, and 10 rural households, some of which use pre-paid electricity meters or combine electricity with traditional fuels.

Research Method

Thirty households from a variety of socioeconomic, demographic, and geographic backgrounds in South Africa were chosen for this study using a purposive sample technique. Because the study's goal is to reflect the variety of lived experiences and variances in home power use patterns rather than statistical generalization, purposeful sampling was selected. In qualitative research, where depth and richness of data are valued more than breadth, a sample size of thirty is appropriate (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018). Families were chosen to represent diversity in several important areas:

- Socioeconomic standing (groups with low, middle, and high incomes).
- Geographic distribution (rural, peri-urban, and urban areas).
- Types of residences (formal, apartment, and informal).
- Household composition (single-occupant versus multigenerational households).

The sample is guaranteed to include both similarities and differences in appliance ownership, usage patterns, and energy management techniques thanks to this planned variety. The study avoids bias towards a specific socioeconomic or spatial setting by incorporating several household types, hence offering a more comprehensive picture of electricity usage trends. By guaranteeing that insights are not restricted to a homogeneous sample but rather represent the complexity of household energy consumption in South Africa, the methodology enhances the validity of the findings.

Stratified purposive sampling was used to guarantee variety and representation among the 30 houses in the sample. Two primary factors were used to stratify the sample: household income levels (low, middle, and high) and geographic location (rural, peri-urban, and urban). This guarantees that the sample reflects the socioeconomic and regional variability of South African homes, which are known to have a significant impact on patterns of power use (Inglesi-Lotz & Blignaut, 2011; Tewari & Shah, 2003).

In order to balance representation across various contexts, the sample matrix (seen in Figure 1) dispersed homes throughout nine strata. As evidenced by national surveys, the overrepresentation of urban high-income households in comparison to rural middle-income households reflects actual demographic distributions and differences in appliance ownership (StatsSA, 2022). Because it takes into account differences in lifestyles, appliance ownership, and energy practices, this approach lessens selection bias and improves validity (Madubansi & Shackleton, 2006).

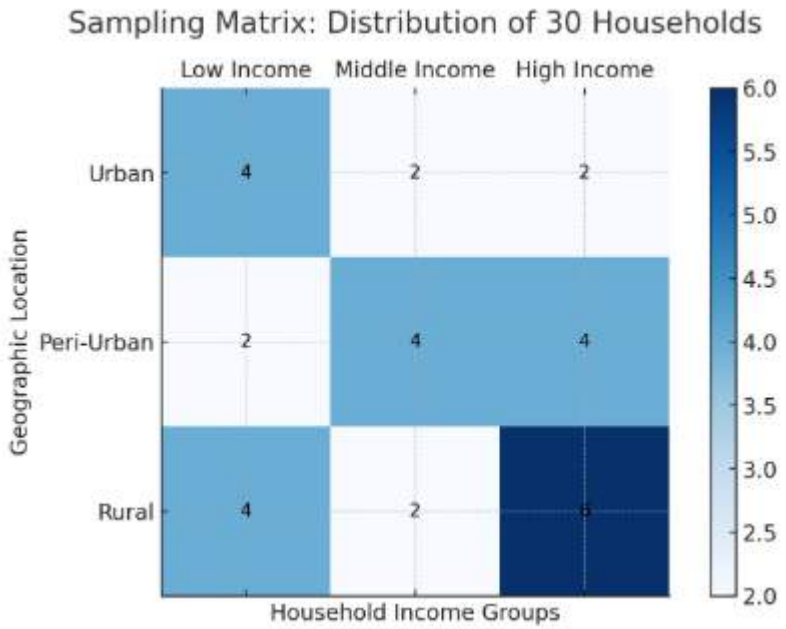


Figure. 1: Sampling Matrix (Geographic vs Income) (By Author)

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, household energy diaries, and direct observation over a six-week period. Semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes each) were conducted with adult household members responsible for managing electricity usage. The interviews explored themes such as appliance use, energy-saving behaviour, seasonal variations, cost awareness, and experiences with load shedding. Energy diaries were kept by each household for a period of one week to log daily appliance use, time of use, and purpose. This method offers detailed insight into actual behaviour and temporal patterns (Hitchings, 2012). Observational visits were used to verify appliance ownership and usage practices. These visits helped triangulate self-reported data and revealed informal or unanticipated practices (e.g., use of extension cords, appliance sharing, or hidden appliances).

Data Analysis Approach

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following [26]'s six-phase approach, i.e., Familiarization with the data, Generating initial codes, Searching for themes, Reviewing themes, Defining and naming themes, and Producing the report. Software was used to manage and code the data systematically. Emerging themes were cross-validated against existing literature on domestic electricity consumption, energy poverty, and appliance usage trends.

Key themes included, to capture the complexity of household behaviour, cultural nuances, and the significance of informal practices, are economic coping strategies (e.g., appliance rationing, switching fuels), gendered use of electricity (e.g., division of domestic tasks), influence of housing type and meter configuration, behavioural responses to load shedding and rising costs, and perceptions of energy efficiency technologies. These qualitative research tools offer a richer, more contextualised understanding of electricity use patterns [6], [26].

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee. All participants gave informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained through anonymization. Data were stored securely and used only for research purposes. While the study does not aim for statistical generalization, its strength lies in the depth and richness of contextual understanding, which is essential for policy and intervention design in heterogeneous settings like South Africa. A qualitative approach is particularly justified in this case because the goal is not just to measure consumption.

But the goal is to understand the meaning and reasoning behind consumption patterns, a task ill-suited to purely quantitative models [27]. Moreover, the choice of multiple methods of data collection (interviews, diaries, observation) improves data triangulation and credibility [28]. The study design builds directly on recommendations in the energy literature that call for integrating behavioural and social perspectives into energy research [29].

4 RESULTS

This section presents the key findings from the qualitative investigation into household electricity consumption trends in South Africa. Data collected from 30 case study households across urban, peri-urban, and rural settings were analyzed thematically. The findings are organized around four emergent themes: (1) Appliance Use and Consumption Patterns, (2) Socio-Economic and Contextual Drivers, (3) Adaptive Behaviour and Coping Mechanisms, and (4) Perceptions of Energy Efficiency and Sustainability. Each theme is discussed in light of the study's theoretical framing, particularly practice theory and current literature. The section also highlights capability gaps and emerging best practices.

Across all household types, electricity consumption was strongly linked to the type, number, and usage patterns of appliances, consistent with findings from [25] and [20]. Households in urban areas displayed higher appliance density, including high-energy-use devices such as electric stoves, geysers, microwaves, and entertainment systems. In contrast, rural

households exhibited lower appliance penetration but still demonstrated spikes in consumption related to seasonal appliance use (e.g., heaters in winter).

Urban households showed a daily peak demand between 6–9 PM, coinciding with cooking, heating water, and evening entertainment, highlighting a strong alignment with [22]'s concept of bundled practices occurring within fixed temporal rhythms. Peri-urban and rural households, many using pre-paid meters, exhibited erratic consumption patterns shaped by the availability of credit and load-shedding schedules. Appliances were often used intermittently to manage cost, revealing the flexibility and fragility of energy use practices in lower-income areas.

Household income levels, dwelling types, and the structure of energy tariffs in the particular city or municipality demarcation were key contextual factors influencing electricity usage. Many low-income households adopted non-electric alternatives, such as paraffin, coal, or wood for cooking and heating, due to rising electricity prices. This confirms earlier findings by [27], who noted that energy decisions are shaped by affordability and access more than preference.

The study also found that subsidies and tariffs, such as Free Basic Electricity (FBE), had only a limited effect on reducing household energy vulnerability. While FBE temporarily buffered the poorest households from disconnection, it was insufficient to support meaningful energy access, particularly in larger households or those with more appliances. This finding resonates with research by [29], who argued that FBE overlooks intra-household needs and usage diversity. Thus, subsidies were found to have little to insignificant impact on energy decisions.

Many participants described engaging in adaptive behaviors in response to financial constraints, unreliable supply, and seasonal variations in electricity demand. These adaptive behaviors included, amongst others, the staggered use of appliances to reduce peak loads, load-shedding preparedness, including the use of candles, gas stoves, and battery-powered lights. Appliance-sharing practices between households, particularly in peri-urban settings, and electricity budgeting, where household members closely monitored pre-paid meter usage and reduced non-essential appliance use.

These adaptive behaviors illustrate what [22] describe as the recruitment and defection from practices, where individuals dynamically modify their routines in response to socio-material constraints. The implication is that electricity consumption is not fixed, but fluid and responsive, conditioned by multiple overlapping influences. Across the sample, there was limited awareness of energy efficiency technologies, despite a strong interest in cost-saving measures. Only a few urban households had adopted energy-saving bulbs, solar water heaters, or time switches for geysers.

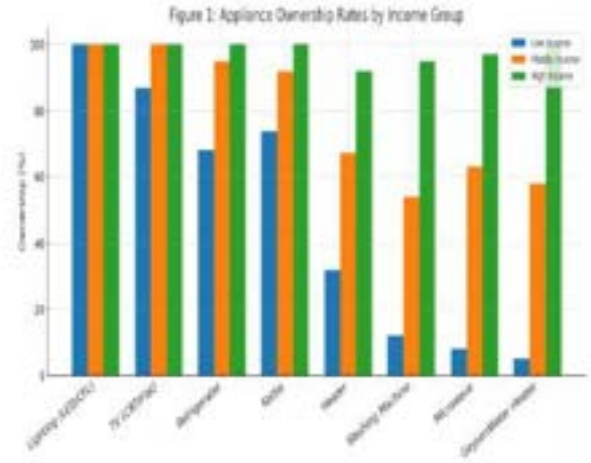
Knowledge gaps and high upfront costs were the most cited barriers, even among those expressing environmental concerns. However, an emerging best practice was noted in several urban and peri-urban households that adopted hybrid energy solutions, e.g., combining grid electricity with gas for cooking or solar for lighting. These households reported greater resilience during load-shedding and improved control over energy expenses. This aligns with best practice recommendations from [25] on the value of distributed generation and mixed-energy strategies in enhancing energy resilience.

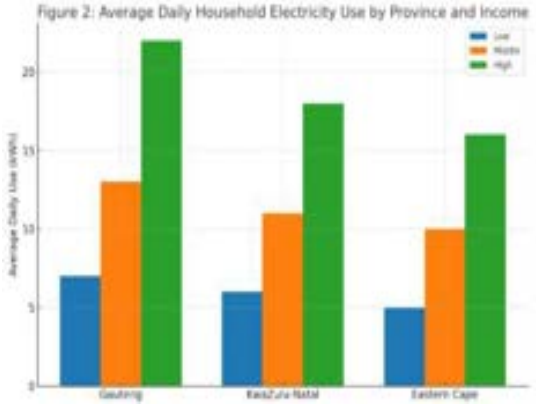
Capability gaps identified through this study include low technical literacy about appliance consumption and energy-saving behaviors. Inadequate feedback mechanisms on energy use, especially with pre-paid meters that lack historical data displays. Limited policy responsiveness to user realities, particularly in tailoring FBE allocations or incentivizing appliance efficiency. Conversely, emerging best practices include community-level knowledge exchange, where neighbors informally share strategies for reducing electricity bills.

Drawing from practice theory, the findings reinforce the view that energy consumption in South African households is socially organized, materially constrained, and shaped by daily routines, not merely by economic rationality or individual decision-making (Table. 1&2). The study challenges techno-economic models that isolate appliance use from context, advocating instead for integrated, human-centred interventions. Importantly, the data show that electricity consumption is not just a technical issue, but a social and infrastructural process that reflects broader inequalities in housing, access, and services.

Table. 1: Energy Usage per Appliance Ownership

Table. 2: Average Daily Household Energy usage per province





Recognizing this, energy policy in South Africa must shift from supply-side management to demand-side engagement that reflects everyday practices and user capabilities. Electricity consumption trends in South African households are shaped by a dynamic interplay of appliance availability, socio-economic conditions, behavioural adaptations, and infrastructural limitations. Practice theory offers a powerful lens to interpret this complexity, revealing that consumption patterns are embedded in everyday routines and shaped by both material and social contexts.

5 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted and deeply contextual nature of household electricity consumption in South Africa. Building on the themes presented in the results section, this discussion integrates the findings with the practice theory framework, while drawing out broader implications for policy, energy planning, and household behaviour change. This section further elaborates on how the study advances understanding of domestic electricity trends in South Africa, identifies systemic challenges, and highlights scalable innovations.

The analysis challenges the conventional understanding of household electricity use as a predictable, economically driven function of appliance count and technical efficiency. Instead, as [22] argue, electricity consumption must be understood as a product of social practices, embedded within routines, meanings, and infrastructures. For example, the widespread evening peak in usage was not just about electricity demand but about bundled domestic activities (cooking, bathing, leisure) that occur in specific temporal patterns.

Despite improvements in grid connectivity, energy poverty persists, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. The Free Basic Electricity (FBE) policy, designed to ensure equitable access, was shown to be both insufficient and inconsistently applied, echoing earlier criticisms [27], [6]. Households with larger family sizes or many dependents often exhausted their FBE

allocation within a few days, forcing them to either revert to unsafe fuels or reduce essential electricity use.

This points to a key capability gap, that access to electricity does not guarantee the capability to use it meaningfully or safely. Here, [26]'s concept of capability deprivation becomes relevant, highlighting that the real value of electricity lies in what it enables households to do, not merely in access. Without addressing affordability, appliance accessibility, and infrastructure quality, true energy justice remains elusive. One of the most significant findings is the extent to which South African households, especially in low-income settings, are engaging in adaptive and resilient behaviours to navigate a volatile energy landscape.

The volatile settings are marked by load shedding, high tariffs, and limited technical literacy, and the adaptive behaviours include informal knowledge-sharing, time-shifting of energy use, energy rationing, and hybrid energy use. These practices demonstrate the agency and innovation of households in managing their energy needs, even when formal systems fall short. This has important policy implications: rather than solely focusing on top-down efficiency programs or grid reliability, there is value in supporting grassroots innovations and localized energy solutions (e.g., subsidizing low-cost solar lighting or facilitating community appliance-sharing programs).

The findings point to the need for more differentiated, responsive policy tools that reflect household diversity. A one-size-fits-all model, such as flat FBE allocations or general appliance rebate programs, fails to account for the wide variation in household composition, income, climate, and usage patterns. There is a case for contextualized energy policy, informed by ethnographic and qualitative insights, and supported by fine-grained data from mixed-methods research. For instance, tariff structures could be reformed to better reflect actual consumption needs and seasonal variations.

The lack of real-time feedback on electricity usage emerged as a key constraint. Households using pre-paid meters often lacked historical data or visibility into which appliances contributed most to usage spikes. This limits households' ability to make informed decisions about reducing consumption. This aligns with international findings [29] that show how feedback systems, like in-home displays, mobile apps, or smart meters, can significantly shift behaviour when combined with actionable insights.

This study contributes to the South African and global literature by demonstrating how qualitative, practice-oriented approaches offer richer, more nuanced understandings of electricity consumption. The integration of interviews, energy diaries, and observation offers methodological robustness and allows for triangulation of data. Moreover, situating the analysis within practice theory allows researchers and policymakers to move beyond techno-centric views and consider the social, material, and temporal dimensions of energy use.

6 CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to determine patterns in South African household power consumption, paying special emphasis to the ways that demand is influenced by differences in appliance ownership, usage patterns, and household income among three provinces. The results demonstrate that the kind and intensity of appliance use, which in turn reflects socioeconomic situations, significantly influences household energy use in addition to built environment factors.

It is therefore apparent that household electricity consumption in South Africa is not simply a matter of access or technology, it is a dynamic interplay of socio-economic, cultural, behavioural, and infrastructural factors. Through the lens of practice theory, this study reveals the complexity and richness of domestic energy use, offering new insights into how and why households consume electricity the way they do. To address South Africa's domestic energy

challenges, policies must be nuanced, inclusive, and responsive to the realities on the ground. By acknowledging the centrality of everyday practices and by empowering users through knowledge, tools, and flexibility, the country can foster a more equitable, efficient, and resilient energy future. The study emphasizes the need for a sophisticated perspective that incorporates technical appliance profiles and socioeconomic diversity in order to comprehend energy demand at the household level. In order to create responsive energy policies, direct home efficiency initiatives, and aid South Africa's larger shift towards sustainable and equitable energy systems, it is imperative that the body of evidence at this level be strengthened.

As South Africa grapples with energy insecurity, climate commitments, and socio-economic inequality, this research underscores the need for an inclusive energy transition, one that considers not only infrastructure and supply but also everyday practices, user capabilities, and local innovation. By identifying capability gaps and highlighting scalable best practices, this study provides a roadmap for more human-centred and resilient energy systems. Supporting low-income households in adopting energy-efficient behaviours and technologies, while ensuring policy responsiveness to diverse needs, is not just an energy imperative, it is a social justice initiative.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF TECHNOLOGY ASSISTED INTELLIGENT PROCESSOR IN A 4IR DIGITAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHING SYSTEM AS A PROCESS OPTIMIZATION ENABLER: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study highlights the optimization of a 4IR digital newspaper processing system, Technology-Assisted Intelligent Processor (TAiP), to tackle late publication due to high volumes. Failure to address such delays leads to dissatisfied stakeholders initiating litigation against the print company, thus leading to financial losses, resource strain, and damaging its reputation. TAiP is a Robotic Process Automation (RPA) tool designed to optimize processing times by mimicking human processing, utilizing pre-defined and rule-based algorithms. Its Assisted Intelligence (AI) is powered to accelerate production, while human oversight ensures accuracy and adaptability. The implemented solution enabled customer satisfaction and addressed issues of resource constraints by ensuring on-time publication. Efficiency gains include 0% improvement in document review, a 100% reduction in data entry time, and a 33.33% efficiency boost in quality assurance. This study emphasizes the potential of AI-driven automation in administrative processing, emphasizing its role in improving operational outcomes and service quality.

Keywords: Process optimization, Robotic Process Automation, Assisted Intelligence, Scalability, Quality Assurance

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the use of assisted artificial intelligence in operational processes has become a critical driver of efficiency, scalability, and process optimization. Assisted AI is defined as a technology that enhances productivity by supporting human innovators with tasks that catalyze creativity and by evaluating their problem-solving abilities [23]. It has demonstrated a potential for improving productivity within organizations [24]. Furthermore, it helps in detecting potential risks that might occur in production at an earlier stage [25].

Despite these advancements, many sectors still rely on manual processes, which often result in various challenges such as poor decision-making, inaccuracies, errors, and scalability issues. These issues lead to less efficient and more resource-intensive operations. One of the South African print industries faced challenges in publication delays due to an increase in the high volume of article submissions, resulting in financial losses, strained resources, and damage to reputation. Therefore, by implementing an assisted artificial intelligence system, the print company could improve the operation speed. This study examines the implementation of a Technology Assisted Intelligent Processor (TAiP) within a digital newspaper publishing system to streamline the editorial workflow. The goal of the study was to assess the effectiveness of TAiP as a 4IR process optimization tool. The secondary objectives include evaluating its impact on data entry efficiency, quality assurance turnaround time, and the overall publishing cycle. The author selected this topic due to a professional interest in digital transformation within the media industry, where innovation is critical to survival in a saturated information economy.

This research utilizes a qualitative case study approach, supported by a comparative analysis of operational metrics before and after the implementation of TAiP. Data was collected from internal system logs, process observations, and stakeholder interviews to assess changes in performance across the editorial workflow.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review. Section 3 details the implementation of TAiP. Section 4 provides the findings and results. Section 5 presents the limitations of the study. Finally, Section 6 offers the conclusion, while Section 7 presents recommendations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Intelligent Automation for Workflow Optimization

Automation technologies provide the foundation of innovations such as TAiP, with rule-based execution of tasks that imitate human control with efficiency at scale. [1] Suggest a CI/CD-style publishing framework that maximizes cooperation and reduces publication latency via ordered automata. [2] displays that intelligent publishing models are able to enhance conventional media loops to make them more responsive.

Additional advancements are reported by [3], with a suggestion to standardize editorial processes to simplify operations and eliminate errors. [4] and [5] provide us with scalable workflow architectures, such as XML-based pipelines, that are easily integrated with current IT infrastructure; an essential requirement for TAiP systems. Both studies affirm that automation increases throughput, minimizes turnaround time, and paves the way for intelligent process tools in publishing.

The 4IR has created revolutionary transformations by combining intelligent systems and automating technologies. One of the key drivers of optimizing high-volume workflows, especially within administrative contexts, is Robotic Process Automation (RPA). As [6] noted, RPA simulates human-to-machine and machine-to-machine interactions by applying algorithms

based on pre-set rules, providing operational effectiveness and minimizing errors. Figure 1 illustrates the typical workflow of RPA within digital systems.

Table 1: ***RPA Workflow in High-Volume Environments***
(Source: Van Dijck et al., 2020)

Stage	Description
Input Processing	Data and documents are captured.
Rule-Based Execution	Specific algorithms execute tasks.
Quality Assurance	Human oversight ensures accuracy.
Output Delivery	Optimized results are provided.

This process closely resembles the fundamental operations of TAiP, maintaining its position as a niche RPA solution designed specifically for operations in the publishing of newspapers.

2.2 Challenges in Automation

Although TAiP showcases immense promise, incorporating RPA systems within current workflows is not without limitations. [3] see change management and the integration process complexity as impediments to widespread adoption.

Equation 1: Characterizes the cost-effectiveness of the automations in comparison to initial cost.

Where:

$$Return\ on\ Investment\ (ROI)\ = \left[\frac{Total\ Savings\ from\ Automation}{Initial\ Cost\ of\ Implementation}\right] \quad \textbf{(1)}$$

Reduction in operational costs over time = (Return on Investment)(Total Savings from Automation)

2.3 AI and Machine Learning for Assisted Intelligence:

TAiP's underpinnings in Assisted Intelligence are consistent with wider applications of AI within content personalization and operations augmentation. [7] Demonstrate that AI increases responsiveness by automating news coverage and personalized dissemination. Aram and [8] identify that AI-based engagement tools enhance user satisfaction, just like TAiP expands back-end processing to fulfill stakeholder expectations.

[9] Explains AI's effectiveness in real-time content analysis and user profiling, reflecting TAiP's dynamic adaptability of rule-based processes. [10] Further explains AI's extent in day-to-day journalistic duties like transcription and data cleansing, reflecting upon how humans and machines consolidate to make processes faster in bulk settings. Such discoveries affirm AI's capability to hasten processes without compromising quality assurance, a signature element of TAiP.

2.4 Strategies of Digital Transformation and Service Responsiveness:

Integrating TAiP within back-end newspaper systems reflects more general patterns of digital change where timeliness and efficiency are key. Furthermore, examples are provided by [11] and by [12] explaining the way transformed operations and reskilling staff generate responsiveness within print-to-digital shifts. [13] Offers an enterprise example of Axel Springer embracing digital technologies to enhance market responsiveness, and [14] charts the effect of data-driven strategies at The New York Times.

[15] Call special attention to workforce commitment and digital skill, underpinning TAiP's framework that involves human supervision of quality assurance. Such viewpoints underscore that improved publishing performance in real time relies upon collaborative models that supplement software with human adaptability.

2.5 4IR Technologies and Scalable Integration:

TAiP is a prime example of intelligent and scalable integration over current infrastructures, an approach not seen in recent 4IR literature in publishing. Such integration is, however, advocated by a framework of big data governance and AI ethics of [16]. Core AI functions (e.g., NLP, optimization) that form the basis of TAiP's architecture and algorithms are categorized by [17]. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has transformed publishing by integrating cyber-physical systems with intelligent automation [18]. Local governments in South Africa have embraced 4IR technologies to counter service delivery inefficiencies, reflecting the general use of automation in resource-poor settings. Digital publishers are also presented with issues related to time-consuming manual processing bottlenecks, leading to such publications not being made available in a timely manner, a situation that demands scalable measures like TAiP [20]. Examples like, Adresseavisen and Forbes show that the integration of modular AI systems within established IT infrastructures enhances workflow efficiency without compromising editorial standards [21]. In the absence of direct literature specifically addressing IoT or cloud applications in publishing newspapers, such research indicates a direction towards TAiP-type systems that integrate several 4IR technologies. This leaves an essential research direction to analyze intelligent processors within larger digital ecosystems.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The research conceptualizes TAiP within a logical-functional model defined as:

$$RPA_{output} = f(I, R, T) \quad \textit{(2)}$$

Where:

I_I = Input data (documents).

R_R = Set of pre-defined rule-based conditions for document processing (Sorting except those with submission type of Failed Submission, Payment Allocation, Update Notice Submission, Cancel Notice Submission, SPAM Notice Submission).

T_T = Automated tasks (processing).

The rules are further represented as:

$$R = \{(c_1, a_1), (c_2 a_2), \dots (c_n, a_n)\} \quad \textit{(3)}$$

Where each condition c_i triggers an associated task a_i.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study uses the Design Science Research (DSR) approach outlined by [22] to create, construct, and evaluate the Technology-Assisted Intelligent Processor (TAiP), a rule-based Robotic Process Automation (RPA) tool. DSR was chosen to stress iterative design and rigorous evaluation of socio-technical artifacts that address real-world problems in organizational environments. The goal was to optimize operational workflows in a high-volume digital newspaper production system, focusing on challenges such as publication delay, resource restrictions, and service quality. The DSR method consisted of three main phases: (1) problem

identification and objective definition, (2) artifact design and development, and (3) demonstration and evaluation.

3.1 Artifact Design and Development:

TAiP was designed to mimic human processing behaviours using rule-based algorithms. It integrates with existing IT infrastructure and is equipped with an Assisted Intelligence (AI) capability to enable real-time adaptability.

The implementation followed a four-stage RPA process:

3.1.1 Stage 1: Input Processing:

Input processing was managed by a mail sorter using ETL (Extract, Transform, Load) techniques to extract information from incoming digital forms. It filtered and routed content into structured processing queues based on predefined document schemas. At this stage, data integrity checks and spam filters were also applied to ensure clean and reliable input.

3.1.2 Stage 2: Rule-Based Execution:

TAiP performed document processing utilizing deterministic logic based on operational rules. Figure 1; shows a pseudocode version of this logic. The rule engine processed structured content autonomously, eliminating the need for human judgment and maintaining 100% consistency for compliant inputs.

```
submission_types = []

for i in Articles:
    if submission_types[i] == "new submission":
        CloseTask()
    else:
        pass  # Remain in Sorting


def CloseTask():
    MoveToQueue()
    if numberOfSubmissions > 0:
        Priority = "TAip"
    else:
        raise Exception("FAILS")
```

Figure 1: A pseudocode logic driving TAiP automation outlining input rules used in the execution of TaiP.

3.1.3 Stage 3: Quality Assurance

While TAiP handled deterministic processing, human Quality Assurance (QA) was retained to evaluate ambiguous outputs, formatting issues, and content requiring contextual or creative intervention. This hybrid human-in-the-loop model ensured output validity while optimizing processing time.

3.1.4 Stage 4: Output Delivery

To assess TAiP's impact on operational performance, a structured comparative analysis framework was employed. This involved gathering both pre-implementation and post-implementation data across critical dimensions of output delivery, with a particular emphasis on process optimization. Key elements included:

- Time Efficiency Tracking: Measurement of average time per document for data entry, review, and quality assurance tasks.
- Cost Comparison: Analysis of overtime expenditure to quantify cost-saving outcomes driven by automation.
- Quality Monitoring: Evaluation of QA effort and error reduction to ensure that speed did not compromise accuracy.
- Risk Exposure Mapping: Identification of legal, financial, reputational, and operational vulnerabilities before and after TAiP deployment.

The data was sourced from operational logs, financial reports, legal records, and stakeholder feedback, allowing for a multidimensional view of TAiP's effects.

Process optimization was central to this analysis. Particular attention was given to:

- Workflow automation through TAiP's rule-based logic engine, which eliminated repetitive manual tasks like data entry.
- Real-time human oversight, ensuring quality assurance while maintaining throughput speed.
- Load distribution enhancements, which reduced bottlenecks and balanced task intensity without increasing labour inputs.

3.2 Evaluation Design

The artifact was evaluated over a six-month deployment in a live production environment at a national newspaper publisher. The evaluation criteria included:

- Document Review Time
- Data Entry Time
- Quality Assurance Time
- Monthly Overtime Costs
- Publication Deadlines Met
- Stakeholder Satisfaction (Qualitative Survey)

Baseline data (pre-TAiP) were compared with post-implementation performance using a comparative analysis framework. Structured interviews and observations were used to obtain feedback from users and managers about acceptance, usability, and perceived risk reduction.

Scalability Consideration

TAiP was designed with modularity and interoperability in mind to enable scalability across various departments and content domains within the publishing organization. Its architecture allows for seamless extension to other repetitive, rules-based processes beyond newspaper production. Scalability is supported by its rule-based configuration engine, which can be adapted to different document schemas and business rules with minimal reprogramming.

4 FINDINGS AND RESULTS

4.1 Addressing Resource Constraints: Cost, Time, and Quality Comparison

Before TAiP, long processing times and manual document handling required extended working hours, incurring overtime costs and increasing operational strain.

Table 2: A comparative analysis demonstrates clear efficiency gains

Matric	Pre-TaiP	Post-TAiP	Improvement
Average Document Review Time	1 min/document	1 min/document	0%
Data Entry Time	5 min/document	0 min/document	100.0%

Quality Assurance Effort	10 min/document	5 min/document	33.33%
Overtime Cost (Monthly)	≈ R 45,000	R 0	100.0%

These outcomes were driven by TAiP's rule-based logic engine, which handled structured data flows autonomously, while real-time human oversight ensured that accuracy remained uncompromised.

The elimination of data entry alone accounted for a significant share of time savings, while the streamlined QA process halved the time investment without impacting service standards. Moreover, the complete removal of overtime costs demonstrates how intelligent augmentation of labor, not its replacement, can shift operations from being resource-constrained to resource-optimized.

Ultimately, TAiP did not merely accelerate processes; it enabled sustainable productivity gains that aligned quality, cost-efficiency, and workforce well-being.

4.2 Strategic Risk Mitigation Through TAiP Implementation

Though only one legal threat occurred before the deployment of TAiP, it marked a pivotal moment that exposed systemic weaknesses in the print company's production cycle. The event, while isolated, revealed the extent to which a single missed deadline could catalyze widespread risk across legal, financial, reputational, and operational fronts. TAiP's integration transformed this landscape, yielding quantifiable improvements and shifting the company's approach from reactive remediation to proactive risk governance.

4.2.1 Legal Risk Mitigation

The legal escalation, which resulted from a few missed delivery deadlines, demonstrated the need for contractual compliance in high-volume publishing. This tragedy put not just the company's finances at risk, but also its reputation. Following the adoption of TAiP, the company maintained an uninterrupted record of on-time publication for six months. The system's adaptive logic and structured processing reduced deadline slippage, essentially eliminating legal disputes and increasing confidence in service-level conformance.

4.2.2 Financial Risk Containment

While the legal event did not result in actual damages, the latent financial exposure, court costs, settlements, and penalties were considerable.

Post-deployment, the automation-driven optimization led to the removal of overtime dependency and a marked reduction in manual rework. Monthly operational savings were calculated at approximately R45,000, achieved through streamlined workload distribution and intelligent workload handling. This shift repositioned financial risk from an unbudgeted liability to a pre-emptively controlled cost.

4.2.3 Reputational Risk Reversal

The legal threat temporarily damaged stakeholder trust, which is crucial in the time-sensitive publishing industry. Missing deadlines, even once, in high-volume news delivery can seriously undermine client trust. By enabling six months of 100% deadline compliance, TAiP assisted the organization in regaining stakeholder trust. The recovery was reputational rather than operational, emphasizing the necessity of automation not only for speed but also for brand resilience.

4.2.4 Operational Risk Elimination

Before deployment, the reliance on manual workflows caused processing delays and quality uncertainty, rendering the operation prone to bottlenecks under pressure. The legal situation served as a warning that such vulnerabilities could no longer be tolerated. TAiP's systematic approach to document flow management and adaptive processing resulted in stability. With human monitoring, each iteration improved accuracy while remaining agile. As a result, the organization experienced a structural reduction in error frequency, reduced document cycle times, and improved schedule integrity, resulting in consistent on-time publishing.

Table 3: Risk Exposure Matrix Summary

Risk Category	Before TaiP	After TAiP
Legal Risk	One legal threat due to missed deadline	No further legal actions
Financial Risk	Potential legal fees and penalties	≈ R45,000/month saved in overtime
Reputational Risk	Stakeholder dissatisfaction and trust erosion	Confidence fully restored
Operational Risk	Deadline breaches from manual errors	100% on-time publication

5 CONCLUSION

The deployment of TAiP marked a transformative shift in both operational efficiency and strategic risk management for the organization. By automating key processes such as data entry, TAiP eliminated overtime costs and significantly improved productivity without sacrificing accuracy or service quality. These enhancements transitioned the operation from a state of resource strain to sustainable optimization.

Beyond internal efficiencies, TAiP also served as a critical enabler of proactive risk governance. It effectively eliminated deadline-related legal threats, contained financial exposure by reducing unplanned labor costs, and restored reputational integrity through consistent, on-time performance. The system's structured, adaptive logic combined with human oversight created a resilient operational model, one that not only meets the demands of high-volume publishing but does so with measurable improvements in compliance, trust, and performance.

In essence, TAiP did more than streamline workflows, it fortified the business against future uncertainties, aligning operational execution with strategic stability.

6 LIMITATIONS

While TAiP demonstrated significant benefits, the study was limited to controlled digital input contexts. Complex, unstructured content still necessitates extensive human interaction. Future enhancements will investigate the connection of Natural Language Processing (NLP) models to overcome this gap and computer vision to improve proofreading.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the successful implementation and measurable impact of the Technology-Assisted Intelligent Processor (TAiP) in streamlining digital newspaper production, it is recommended that future enhancements focus on extending the system's capability to handle unstructured and semi-structured data. This includes integrating advanced Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to allow TAiP to process a broader range of inputs beyond structured forms. Additionally, embedding reinforcement learning within its

rule engine could enable the system to adapt dynamically to new workflows, refine decision-making over time, and reduce reliance on static logic rules. These enhancements will elevate TAiP from a rule-based automation tool to a semi-autonomous intelligent agent capable of continuous improvement and contextual responsiveness.

Moreover, to expand its utility across sectors, TAiP should be modularized for deployment in industries such as legal services, healthcare administration, and education domains that also suffer from repetitive, high-volume document processing. The hybrid model of automation with human oversight should be formalized through robust human-in-the-loop frameworks that incorporate operator feedback and real-time exception handling. Institutions deploying TAiP are also encouraged to align its operational metrics with strategic risk governance structures, ensuring automation contributes to legal compliance, financial efficiency, and reputational resilience. Finally, transitioning to a scalable, microservices-based architecture will support interoperability with broader 4IR infrastructures, including cloud environments and digital ecosystems, unlocking new levels of scalability and integration.

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SMART PRICING & QUOTATION SYSTEMS FOR PRINTING SERVICES USING AUTOMATED PAGE ESTIMATION

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ABSTRACT

Accurate pricing is essential for competitiveness and profitability in the printing industry, yet traditional manual quotation methods are slow, inconsistent, and error-prone. Overpricing undermines market share, while underquoting results in financial losses and customer dissatisfaction. These risks are intensified in high-volume operations, where small inaccuracies accumulate into significant impacts. Increasing job complexity, driven by variable layouts, fill ratios, and production volumes further highlights the limitations of manual estimation and the need for scalable, data-driven solutions. This study presents SIZR, an automated quotation system that integrates Machine Learning and computer vision. Using Computer Vision (OpenCV), SIZR analyzes document complexity and estimates fill ratios, which are then processed by a pricing engine that adjusts costs based on print volume and business rules. Validation against 300 manually annotated documents and thousands of automated jobs achieved an average RMSE of 0.17 units with a maximum error of 0.25 units demonstrating strong accuracy. Quotation time was improved by **90%**, while ensuring reproducibility and full compliance with invoicing standards. This research demonstrates that integrating computer vision with intelligent pricing algorithms enables highly accurate, real-time quotations in printing services, reducing turnaround time by up to 95% and minimizing pricing errors to within 0.25 units.

Keywords: Smart Pricing, Computer Vision, Automated Quotation, Machine Learning and SIZR

1 INTRODUCTION

The printing industry operates in an increasingly competitive landscape where accurate pricing serves as a critical determinant of business success and sustainability. Traditional manual quotation processes, while flexible, present significant challenges in terms of speed, accuracy, and scalability, often resulting in either overpricing that reduces market competitiveness or underpricing that leads to diminished profit margins and operational inefficiencies.

The complexity of modern printing jobs demands sophisticated pricing mechanisms that can account for multiple variables including document complexity, fill ratios, material requirements, and production volumes. Manual estimation methods, which rely heavily on human expertise and subjective judgment, frequently struggle to maintain consistency across different operators and fail to adapt quickly to market fluctuations or changing material costs. This inconsistency becomes particularly problematic in high-volume operations where even small pricing errors can compound into significant financial impacts.

Recent advances in machine learning and computer vision technologies present unprecedented opportunities to revolutionize pricing methodologies in the printing sector. By leveraging automated document analysis and intelligent pricing algorithms, printing services can achieve greater precision in cost estimation while simultaneously reducing the time required for quotation generation. For instance, consider a commercial printer receiving a request to quote on a 200-page brochure with varying levels of images, graphics, and text. A manual estimator may take hours to review the document, estimate ink coverage, and calculate costs, often relying on rough assumptions that risk underpricing or overpricing. In contrast, SIZR can analyze the digital file within seconds, automatically determine fill ratios, account for material usage, and generate a precise, market-aligned quotation. This not only saves valuable time but also ensures consistency, accuracy, and transparency in the pricing process.

The significance of this research extends beyond mere cost calculation improvements. Accurate automated pricing systems enable printing companies to respond more rapidly to customer inquiries, provide transparent pricing structures that build customer trust, and optimize resource allocation based on real-time analysis of job complexity and requirements. Furthermore, such systems can adapt dynamically to changing market conditions, material costs, and operational parameters, ensuring that pricing remains both competitive and profitable over time.

This study introduces SIZR, a machine learning tool that utilizes computer vision techniques through OpenCV to analyze document characteristics and estimate fill ratios automatically. The system integrates this analysis with a sophisticated pricing engine that considers multiple factors including document complexity, print volume, and current market conditions to generate accurate, real-time quotations. The research aims to demonstrate how the combination of computer vision analysis and intelligent pricing algorithms can significantly enhance operational efficiency, reduce pricing errors, and improve customer satisfaction in the printing industry.

The primary objectives of this research include evaluating the accuracy of ML-driven pricing models compared to traditional manual estimation methods, assessing the impact of automated quotation systems on operational efficiency and customer satisfaction, and analyzing the cost-benefit implications of implementing smart pricing technologies in printing services. Through comprehensive evaluation and comparison with existing manual processes, this study seeks to establish the viability and advantages of automated pricing systems in transforming printing industry operations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The contemporary printing industry faces intense competition, where accurate pricing is paramount for sustained business success and profitability. Traditional manual quotation processes, while offering some flexibility, are inherently challenged by issues of speed, accuracy, and scalability. This often results in either overpricing, which erodes market competitiveness, or underpricing, which leads to reduced profit margins and operational inefficiencies. The intricate nature of modern printing jobs necessitates sophisticated pricing mechanisms capable of accounting for a multitude of variables, including document complexity, ink coverage (fill ratios), material requirements, and production volumes.

Manual estimation methods, heavily reliant on human expertise and subjective judgment, frequently struggle to maintain consistency across different operators and fail to adapt promptly to market fluctuations or evolving material costs. This lack of consistency is particularly problematic in high-volume operations, where even minor pricing discrepancies can lead to substantial financial impacts. Recent advancements in **machine learning and computer vision** technologies present unprecedented opportunities to revolutionize pricing methodologies within the printing sector. By leveraging automated document analysis and intelligent pricing algorithms, printing services can achieve significantly greater precision in cost estimation while simultaneously drastically reducing the time required for quotation generation. This technological integration directly addresses the fundamental challenge of balancing competitive market pricing with profitable operational outcomes.

The significance of this research extends beyond mere improvements in cost calculation. Accurate, automated pricing systems empower printing companies to respond more rapidly to customer inquiries, offer transparent pricing structures that foster customer trust, and optimize resource allocation based on real-time analysis of job complexity and requirements. Furthermore, such systems can dynamically adapt to changing market conditions, material costs, and operational parameters, thereby ensuring that pricing remains both competitive and profitable over time. An overview of such a system's components and flow is conceptualized in Figure 1.

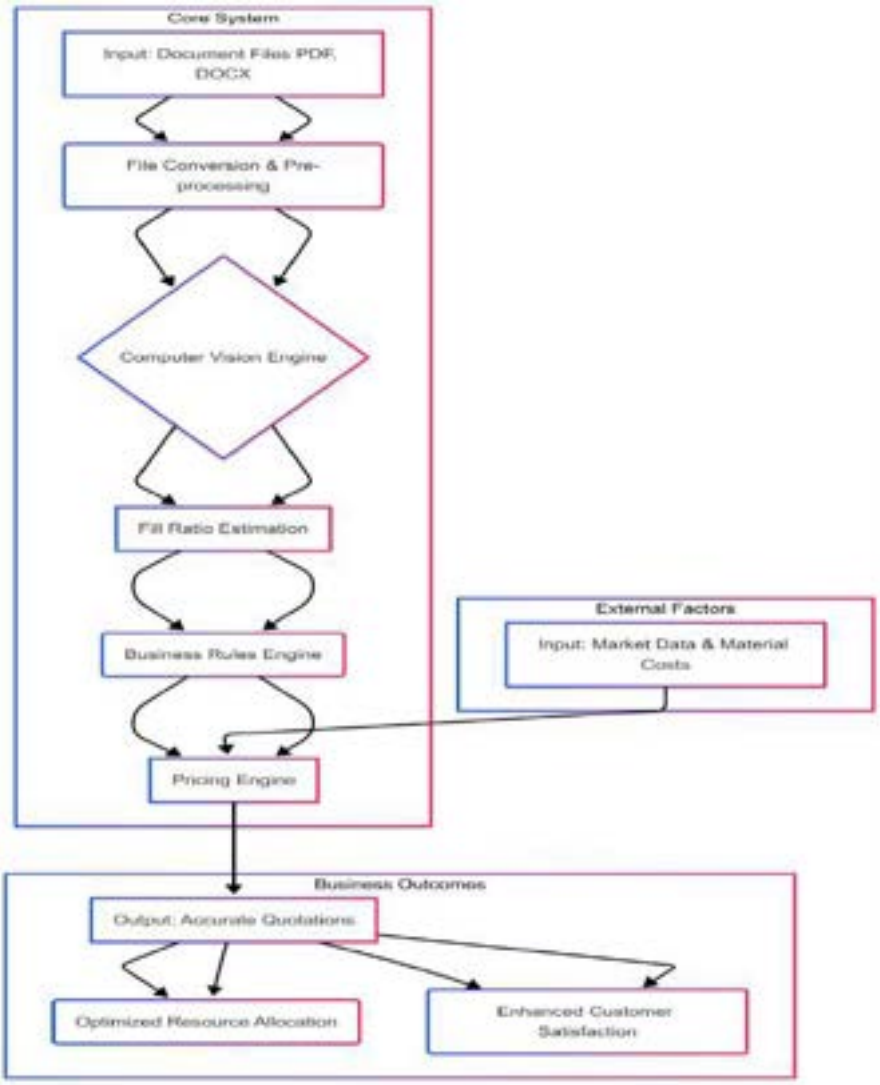

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Automated Pricing System

While print-specific studies are relatively scarce, recent developments indicate growing attention. For example, research on AI-driven cost estimation in **CNC machining** has shown direct parallels to print job estimation, with Yoo and Kang [1] achieving "high predictability of manufacturing cost" from CAD models. More broadly, **Configure-Price-Quote (CPQ)** systems in B2B environments significantly reduce quotation times while improving accuracy by embedding expert knowledge into automated workflows. Within engineer-to-order industries, Elgh [2] emphasized the importance of dynamically updating rule bases to reflect evolving product requirements, a challenge mirrored in printing, where specifications often change. In a related context, Villalba-Diez et al. demonstrated the use of deep learning for industrial quality control in the printing industry, highlighting its role in accurate and rapid classification [3]. Gavade [4] further showcase the benefits of AI-driven process automation in manufacturing. Ma'ruf et al.also applied machine learning to cost estimation in make-to-order production [5] .

Most empirical work in related fields tends to emphasize cost-estimation accuracy and speed rather than industry-specific pricing nuances. Yoo et al.'s [1] AI model, for example, not only predicted costs accurately but also provided visualizations of machining features influencing cost, thereby guiding designers towards more cost-effective solutions. This powerfully

illustrates how computer vision and machine learning can automate the analysis of design complexity, such as determining a print layout's fill ratio. CPQ case studies similarly report that embedding codified knowledge into the quoting process yields faster and more reliable quotations. In essence, automated quotation systems leverage AI and rule engines to eliminate repetitive calculations and manual data lookups. The process of analyzing print job complexity, such as fill ratio estimation, is further detailed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Data Flow Diagram for Fill Ratio Estimation

A direct comparison between manual and automated quotation processes reveals distinct trade-offs in efficiency and accuracy, as summarized in Figure 3. Industry practitioners commonly observe that manual quoting, despite its flexibility, is inherently slow and prone to error, particularly as job complexity increases. In stark contrast, automated systems offer significant gains:

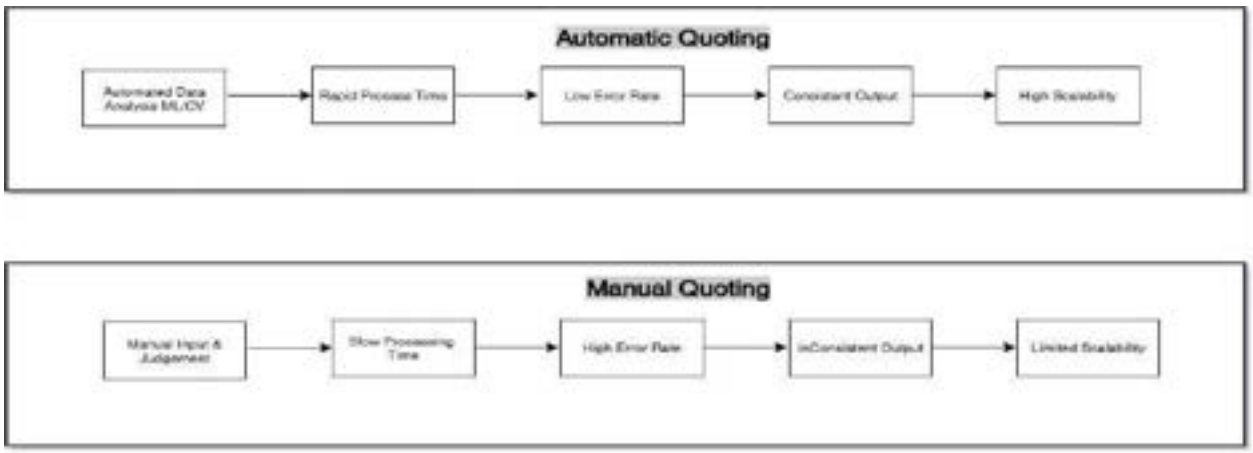

Figure 3: Comparison Chart (Manual vs. Automated Quoting)

- **Efficiency**: Platforms centralize pricing and configuration logic, enabling quotes to be generated within minutes.
- **Accuracy**: Automated systems employ uniform criteria and real-time data to minimize errors. A properly trained ML model could identify cost-driving factors and provide rapid quotes, leading to more accurate predictions. Elgh's analysis further underscores the importance of maintaining an up-to-date, automated rule base for accurate customized quotations.
- **Business Impact**: Faster, more consistent quoting processes directly accelerate sales cycles and significantly enhance customer satisfaction. Studies generally imply that AI-enabled pricing leads to improved profitability and optimized resource utilization.

Emerging works in manufacturing and industrial automation further highlight how AI-powered models can optimize pricing by integrating real-time cost data, demand forecasting, and visual analysis of complexity [3]. These insights strongly suggest that automated quotation and AI-driven pricing frameworks are highly transferable to the printing sector, especially for complex jobs with variable ink coverage and material use. work on automated cost estimation in timber construction using BIM also shows a parallel approach to print job estimation [6].

Despite these advances, several limitations and potential biases remain. The performance of machine learning models is highly dependent on the quality and representativeness of the training data, and their effectiveness can be reduced when faced with highly unstructured or novel document types. The "black box" nature of many deep learning models poses challenges for explainability and trust, prompting research into explainable AI techniques [7]. Additionally, while automated systems can outperform human experts in many scenarios, expert oversight remains important to interpret results and manage exceptional cases where models may yield misleading outcomes. Overall, the literature indicates that while automated quotation systems powered by machine learning and computer vision offer significant improvements over manual methods, ongoing research is needed to address data, transparency, and adaptability challenges to fully realize their potential in the printing industry.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to evaluate an automated quotation system for printing services. Quantitative evaluations measure fill ratio accuracy, quotation response time, and quotation volume precision. Qualitative insights were drawn from system deployments in real-world environments. Comparisons were made between the automated process and traditional manual quoting to assess improvements in speed, accuracy, and consistency.

3.2 System Architecture

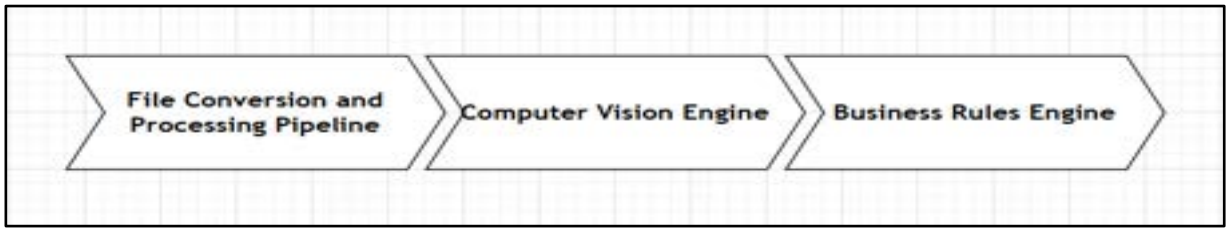

Figure 4: Three components of the system

The system consists of three integrated components:

1. **File Conversion and Processing Pipeline**: Accepts .pdf, .doc, and .docx files. Non-PDF files are converted to PDF using document processors.
   Computer Vision Engine: Converts PDF pages to images, detects printed content using OpenCV, and estimates fill ratios.
   Business Rules Engine: Applies printing rules (as per Business standards) to determine the required number of printed sheets or impressions based on fill ratio data.

3.3 Document Processing Workflow

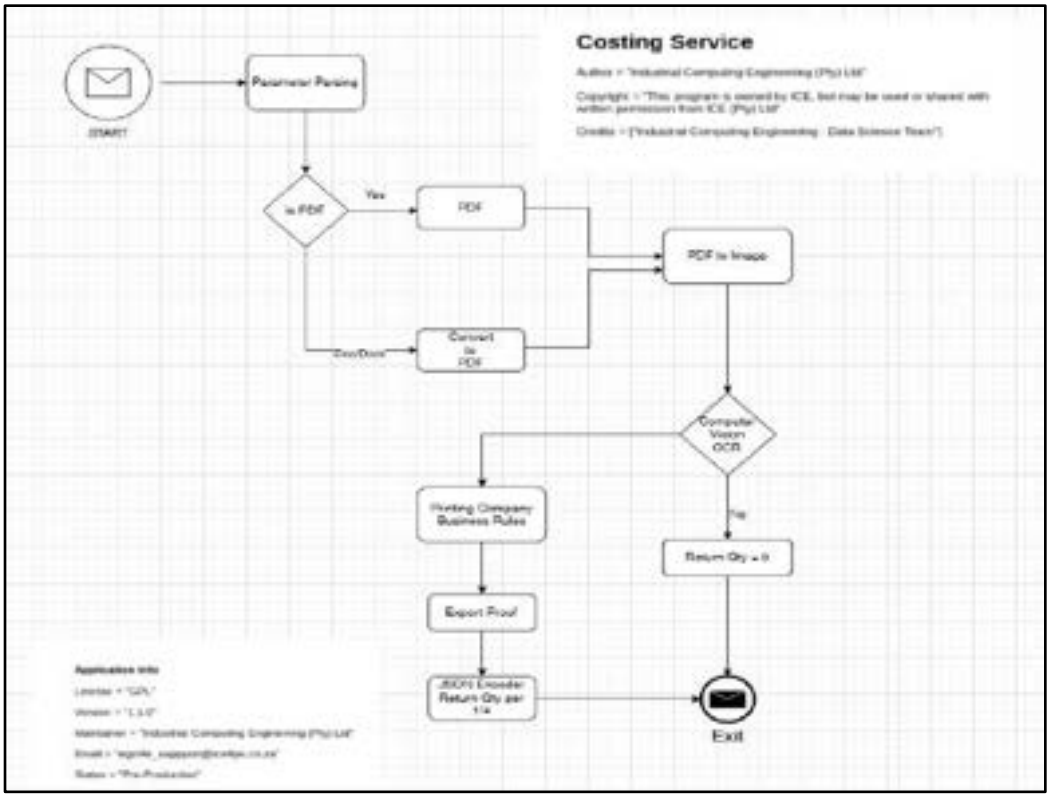

Figure 5: SIZR Microservice system flow diagram

As illustrated in the system flow diagram (Fig. 4), the processing pipeline follows these stages:

1. **Input Parsing**: Validates file type and job parameters.
2. **Format Normalization**: Converts .doc and .docx files to PDF.
3. **Image Generation**: Converts PDF pages to images at fixed DPI.
4. **Computer Vision OCR**:
    - Verifies that printed content is present.
    - If no content is found, the system returns a quantity of zero and exits.

3.4 Fill Ratio Estimation

Once PDF pages are converted into images, OpenCV is used to estimate printed content height per page. The **fill ratio**, Rf, is computed by:

$$R_{f=\frac{H_C}{H_{A4}}} \quad (1)$$

Where:

- Hc = Height of printed content on the page (in pixels),
- HA4 = Total printable height of a standard A4 page (in pixels or mm).

This calculation provides a normalized measure of how much vertical space the printed content occupies relative to the full page.

The fill ratio is computed **per page**, and the final document-level ratio is passed to the Business Rule Engine.

3.5 Quantity Estimation

Based on the fill ratio, the system calculates the effective quantity of impressions or quarter-pages. This is used to determine production workload and costing metrics.

If a page has a full fill ratio, it contributes 1 full unit. If the content is less dense, the contribution is fractional. The formula used by the Auto Coster service to derive **return quantity** is:

$$Q = \left[\frac{R_f}{0.25}\right] \tag{2}$$

Where:

- Q = Total quantity returned in quarter-page units,
- Rf = Fill ratio per page.

This logic rounds down the fill ratio to the nearest quarter (¼), as required by the Business pricing and billing model.

The returned value is encoded in JSON and used in downstream systems for quotation and cost breakdowns.

3.6 Validation and Testing

System validation included:

- **Controlled Tests** using synthetic documents with known content structures.
- **Live Print Jobs** from production environments.
- **Cross-checks** with manually annotated documents for fill ratio accuracy.

4 FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Several conclusions were drawn from the implementation and evaluation of the automated quotation system:

4.1 Increased Accuracy of Fill Ratio

Compared to manual annotation, OpenCV's computer vision engine consistently produced accurate fill ratio estimates. Validation was carried out using approximately 300 manually annotated documents by following business annotation templates, compared against several thousand automated samples processed by SIZR.

A design-of-experiments approach was applied: each document was annotated manually and by SIZR, and deviations were expressed as quarter-page error factors. For example, if the manual estimate was ¾ page and the automated estimate was ½ page, the resulting error factor was 0.25 units. Across the sample, most deviations were ≤0.25 units, indicating strong alignment between manual and automated measures.

4.1.1 Error Factor (per page)

$$Error = ManualFillRatio - AutomatedFillRatio \tag{3}$$

Example:

Manual = 0.75(¾ page)
Automated = 0.50 (½ page)

Therefore:

$$Error = 0.75 - 0.50$$

$$= 0.25 \left(\frac{1}{4}\text{page}\right)$$

Preliminary comparisons indicated that SIZR maintained low variance, especially for structured documents such as contracts and forms.

4.1.2 RMSE Across 5 Documents

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(Error_i)^2}{n}}$$

If 5 sample errors = [0.25, 0, 0.25, 0.25, 0], then:

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{0.25^2 + 0^2 + 0.25^2 + 0.25^2 + 0^2}{5}} = 0.173 \quad (4)$$

4.2 Reduced Quote Time

The automated pipeline improved quotation response from 3 to 7 minutes manually to under 30 seconds per document, representing a 90–95% improvement in response time.

4.2.1 Time Saved

$$Time\ saved\ = \frac{Manual\ avg. - Automated\ avg.}{Manual\ avg.} \quad (5)$$

Manual avg. = 5 min/document
Automated avg. = 0.5 min/document

$$Time\ saved = \frac{5 - 0.5}{5} \times 100 = 90\%$$

4.3 Consistency between Workloads

The automated approach yielded consistent and reproducible outputs for identical input files, in stark contrast to manual estimation, which demonstrated variability among operators and similar workloads.

4.4 Conformity to Industry Standards

The quantity estimation derived from the quarter-page fill ratio reasoning adhered to the invoicing requirements established by Business.

Table 2: Validation of Manual vs. Automated Quotation System

Metric	Manual Quoting	ML (SIZR)	Improvement / Notes
Annotated Samples	~300	Several thousand	Higher throughput
Avg. Quotation Time	3–7 min (avg. 5 min)	<30 sec	90–95% faster
Fill Ratio Error (RMSE)	—	0.17 units (avg)	Low variance
Max Error Observed	—	0.25 units	Within ¼ page
Output Consistency	Variable across users	Reproducible outputs	Stable performance
Conformance to Standards	Operator dependent	Fully compliant	Aligned with rules

5 DISCUSSION OF SYSTEM LIMITATIONS AND BIASES

While the SIZR system demonstrates significant improvements in accuracy and efficiency, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations and potential biases. These were identified during the validation and testing phases, particularly when evaluating performance across a diverse range of document types.

One key limitation is the system's reliance on its training data. The ML engine's ability to generalize and reduce estimation errors in edge cases depends on a broad training dataset that includes a variety of print formats, layouts, and languages. The current model's reliability was confirmed for "structured formats such as forms and contracts," which suggests its performance may vary with more complex, unstructured documents. Furthermore, the fill ratio estimation, which is based on the height of the printed content (Hc) relative to the page height (HA4), may not fully capture the complexity of documents with a high density of graphics or non-textual elements. This could potentially lead to inaccurate cost estimations for jobs that are graphically intensive but have a low "fill height".

The quantity estimation logic also introduces a systematic bias. The formula used by the AutoCoster service, $Q=\lfloor 0.25Rf \rfloor$, rounds the fill ratio down to the nearest quarter-page unit to align with the business pricing model. While this ensures conformity to industry standards, it inherently rounds down any fractional remainder, which could potentially lead to minor under-quoting on a per-page basis.

6 CONCLUSION

This study confirms the successful implementation of integrating computer vision and smart pricing algorithms within the printing industry. By replacing traditional manual quotation processes with an automated system, printing services can achieve significant improvements across several key dimensions. The deployment of the SIZR system has demonstrated measurable improvements in quotation accuracy, processing speed, and consistency across jobs of varying complexity. By using OpenCV to analyze page content and calculate fill ratios, the system replaces subjective, operator-dependent estimation with objective, repeatable logic.

The pricing engine applies predefined business rules to interpret fill ratio data into fractional page units, ensuring alignment with invoicing standards and enabling accurate production costing. This automation has reduced average quotation times from 3–7 minutes to under 30 seconds per document, supporting near real-time pricing and significantly improving responsiveness to customer inquiries.

Results have shown that the system produces consistent results across repeated runs and varied operators, addressing key inconsistencies associated with manual quoting. Additionally, the fill ratio estimates were validated against manually annotated documents and confirmed to be reliable, especially for structured formats such as forms and contracts.

The implemented system not only improves operational efficiency and accuracy but also enhances customer experience through faster turnaround times and transparent pricing logic. These outcomes validate the practicality of ML-driven pricing in print services and reinforce its value as a scalable, rules-compliant solution for modern production environments.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

To fully leverage the benefits demonstrated by the SIZR based smart pricing system, it is recommended that print businesses adopt the solution through phased integration, beginning with pilot deployments on low risk, high volume document types such as invoices, contracts, and newsletters. These initial deployments allow teams to build familiarity with ML driven quoting while benchmarking improvements in accuracy and turnaround time. Gradual

onboarding of additional document types can follow, supported by standardized pricing rules and routine validation of fill ratio estimations. Integration with existing job ticketing, ERP, and CRM systems should be prioritized to ensure real-time data flow and customer-facing responsiveness.

For future versions, we recommend enhancing the ML engine with deeper learning capabilities by expanding the training dataset to include a wider range of print formats, layouts, and languages. This would improve system generalization and reduce edge case estimation errors. Incorporating CRM integration will also allow the pricing engine to personalize quotations based on customer profiles, historical behavior, and preferred product bundles adding value beyond technical estimation. Furthermore, offering visual dashboards for print operators and sales teams will enable transparency, control, and quick adjustments when needed.

In terms of scalability, the modular microservice design of the SIZR system makes it well-suited for deployment across multiple branches, franchises, or print on demand platforms. By decoupling the document analysis, business logic, and pricing outputs, the solution can be extended to serve related sectors such as signage, packaging, or digital publishing. The industry impact is significant, widespread adoption could standardize print cost estimation practices, reduce under quoting risks, accelerate response times, and improve customer trust through consistent, data-driven pricing. As competition intensifies in the print services landscape, intelligent pricing systems like this one may become not just a differentiator but a necessity for sustainable growth.

7.1 Phased Adoption Plan for SIZR

A phased adoption plan for the SIZR system is recommended to ensure a smooth transition and maximize benefits. This approach allows a company to build familiarity with the new system, benchmark improvements, and gradually expand its use while mitigating risks.

Table 3: Phased Adoption Timeline (Roadmap)

Phase	Timeframe	Activities	Expected Outcome
Phase 1: Pilot Deployment	0–3 months	Deploy SIZR for small-scale jobs (structured documents like contracts, forms). Train staff and gather feedback.	Initial validation of speed/accuracy in controlled conditions.
Phase 2: Expansion to Mid-Volume Jobs	3–6 months	Extend use to moderately complex documents. Integrate with existing quotation workflows.	Demonstrate scalability and reduce manual workload.
Phase 3: Full Integration	6–12 months	Connect SIZR with ERP/invoicing systems. Automate real-time pricing for all document types.	End-to-end automated quoting with standardized pricing.
Phase 4: Optimization & AI Enhancement	12–18 months	Introduce ML retraining with larger datasets, fine-tune error reduction, add dashboards for monitoring.	Continuous improvement, predictive pricing insights, enhanced customer trust.

7.2 SIZR Integration with CRM & ERP Systems

The integration process below is designed to create a seamless, end-to-end workflow from customer inquiry to job completion and invoicing, eliminating manual data entry and ensuring data consistency.

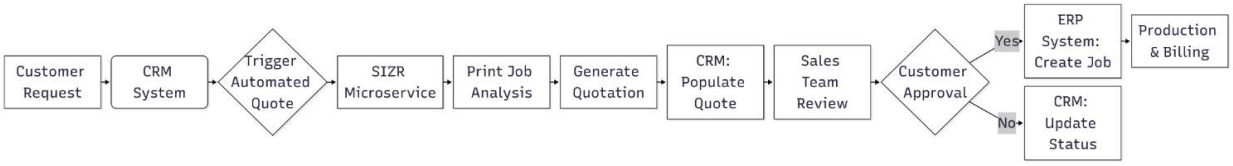

Figure 6: CRM/ERP Integration Flow Diagram

The Integration Flow:

1. Customer Request: The process begins when a customer submits a print job request through a sales portal or directly to a sales representative. The request is logged in the CRM system.
2. Trigger Automated Quote: The sales team member, operating within the CRM, triggers the automated quoting process. The CRM sends the document file and relevant job parameters (e.g., quantity, paper type) to the SIZR microservice via an API.
3. SIZR Processing: SIZR receives the request and performs its core functions:
4. Print Job Analysis: The system analyzes the document's characteristics, calculates the fill ratio, and applies business rules to estimate the effective quantity of impressions.
5. Generate Quotation: Based on this analysis and real-time data on material costs and market conditions, the pricing engine within SIZR generates a precise, real-time quotation.
6. CRM Integration: SIZR sends the generated quote data (e.g., total cost, estimated pages, and breakdown) back to the CRM. The CRM system automatically populates a quote for the sales team, ready for review. This ensures transparency and eliminates the need for manual data transfer.
7. ERP Integration (Post-Approval): Once the customer approves the quote, the sales team confirms it in the CRM. This approval triggers an automated message to the ERP system, creating a new job order with all the necessary details. The ERP system then handles production scheduling, material allocation, and, upon job completion, invoicing.
8. This streamlined, automated flow reduces turnaround time, minimizes human error, and ensures that the quotation, production, and billing processes are fully compliant and synchronized.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF AN ON-DEMAND EXPEDITED PROCESS FOR PROCESS OPTIMIZATION IN THE PRINT INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on optimizing digital publishing processing in a 4IR digital system, aiming to enable efficient processing and mitigate resource constraints. The initial workflow involves multiple process steps that duplicate functions, leading to longer processing times. Through alteration of the code, process steps were streamlined, allowing the production process to be expedited on demand. This results in reduced handling time when there are spikes in demand, ensuring timely processing. The express process integrates process steps and thus eliminates redundancy. The notable improvements ensure that even with reduced manual intervention, processing can still be completed, guaranteeing that critical deadlines are met. These enhancements have significantly reduced bottlenecks, leading to a more agile and efficient processing system. This optimized approach demonstrates the successful application of process optimization techniques to digital publishing processing. The study highlights the importance of integrating lean principles to enhance operational efficiency and achieve a cost-effective publication system through process optimization.

Keywords: Workflow efficiency, Lean Principles, Process optimization.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of Industry 4.0 technologies has heightened the need for efficient, automated workflows in deadline-driven sectors such as digital publishing. A study by [23] confirms that automated workflows enhance production and operational efficiency in various complex industries. Traditional print systems often depend on rigid, multi-stage processes that introduce redundancy and delays, particularly under high-demand conditions. In a 4IR-enabled digital publishing process, inefficiencies arose from redundant steps and extended handling times, especially during peak periods. These inefficiencies resulted in resource constraints, processing delays, and difficulty meeting critical deadlines. This paper addresses the issue of slow throughput in digital publishing by implementing an on-demand express workflow. The workflow was based on lean process reengineering and PHP-based automation, aiming to reduce manual interventions and accelerate turnaround times.

The primary objective of this research was to optimize digital publishing processing within a 4IR framework by reengineering legacy workflows into a more agile and efficient system. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to digital transformation efforts within the publishing sector, demonstrating how lean principles and code-level automation can improve system responsiveness and ensure reliable performance with minimal resource strain.

The scope of the study focuses on the technical optimization of publishing workflows, specifically process restructuring, automation, and performance evaluation. It does extend to the editorial or content-related decisions. The findings offer a practical model for scalable, high-efficiency digital publishing, with broader implications for other sectors undergoing digital transformation under the 4IR paradigm.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Optimization in Publishing and Printing Workflow

Research in lean manufacturing offers key concepts to streamline digital publishing processes by eliminating waste and reducing processes. [1] highlight lean strategies in car manufacturing, illustrating the efficacy of eliminating waste, concepts directly transferable to digital production pipelines. Similarly, [2] concentrated on the print sector, illustrating how lean deployment increased machine availability and cut overhead, driving profit increases.

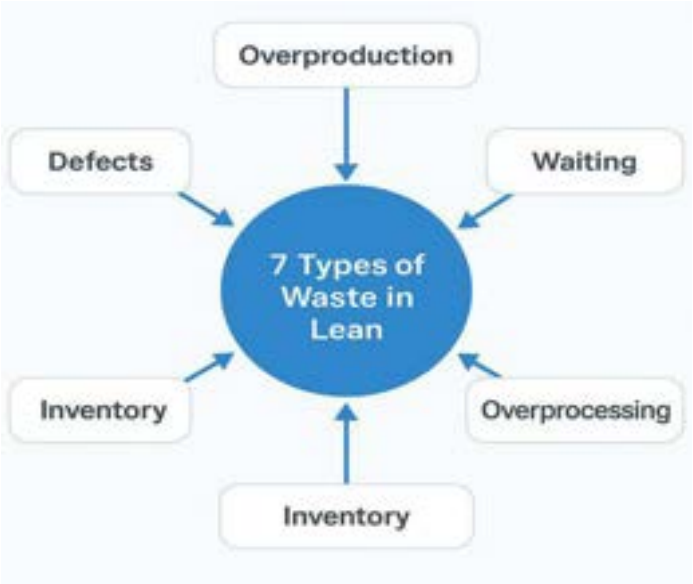

Figure 1: Waste Reduction Principles from Lean Manufacturing (Adapted from Salinas-Coronado et al., 2014)

[16] point to the use of tools such as value stream mapping to streamline steps and detect inefficiencies within administrative publishing processes. [3] provide a case study at Darden Business Publishing, where lean thinking cuts lead times and editing rework by a considerable amount, aligning to achieve an "express process" in deadline-driven settings. [4] embrace the phased approach and suggest that automation should follow lean optimization, warning against automating inefficient workflows prematurely.

Table 1: Benefits of Lean Implementation in Print Workflows

Study	Outcome
Garg & Naidoo (2012)	Increased machine availability, reduced overhead
Weiss et al. (2017)	Reduced lead times, editing rework
Denisova et al. (2023)	Workflow automation via value stream mapping

2.2 Industry 4.0 and Workflow Automation

4IR technologies have stretched lean concepts beyond their previous spatial and time limitations by digitalizing operations and allowing real-time responsiveness. This is conceptualized by [6] under "lean automation," where systems like cyber-physical configurations supplement conventional lean tools like Kanban and Andon. [7] explains that digital systems facilitate lean planning by making data transparent to all organizational levels, essential to react to publishing demand peaks. Likewise, [8] provides a general introduction to lean management, supporting its function of optimizing value chains from suppliers to customers.

In design-centric industries such as publishing, [9] highlights lean's capacity to eliminate design mistakes and feedback loops. [10] continues this by demonstrating the additional benefits to agility, decision-making, and customer delivery of services.

In an attempt to quantify the effect of lean and digital interventions in publishing workflows, a conceptual framework can be presented to calculate optimized lead time by merging concepts in queueing theory and lean manufacturing. Based on Kingman's approximation [11] and lean's waste elimination principle [12], the relationship is illustrated below.

Equation 1. Lead Time Reduction Formula + Automation

$$Lead\ Time_{Optimized} = \frac{Cycle\ Time}{1 - Utilization\ Rate} \times (1 - Waste\ Reduction\ Factor) \quad (1)$$

This equation shows how lean and automation decrease lead time by minimizing waste and optimizing efficiency.

2.3 Digital Transformation and Agile Frameworks in Workflow Design

Expanding further, [13] presents a digital transformation framework blending business process management (BPM) with lean concepts to eradicate operational bottlenecks. [14] echo this by applying agile and ML tools to eliminate unnecessary steps and cut manual processes, both key emphases of the express process model. [15] explore how cloud-based systems and automation shorten response time in supply chains, a useful proxy for real-time publishing systems. [16] affirm the convergence of lean and 4IR, highlighting their role in creating scalable, adaptive digital workflows.

Table 2: Agile + Lean Integration Across Workflow Elements

Author(s)	Tool Used	Workflow Benefit
Butt (2020)	BPM + Lean	Bottleneck removal
Lysenko & Makovoz (2024)	Agile + ML	Redundancy elimination
Bora & Bhangale (2024)	4IR + Lean	Scalability and adaptability

Frameworks like these also appear in publishing-specific contexts. [17] discuss digitizing knowledge work, while [18] propose a Lean Six Sigma 4.0 framework integrating quality assurance with agility in digital settings.

2.4 Emerging Applications and Cross-Sector Insights

Beyond publishing, industries like automotive and healthcare offer parallels for lean and digital integration. [19] identify smart manufacturing toolkits that eliminate resource waste, concepts applicable to digital content workflows. Likewise, [20] demonstrates how digitalization in public services improves responsiveness, a valuable metric in high-pressure publishing environments. [21] examines predictive AI and workflow optimization using advanced production software, reflecting a future-focused view of digital publishing. Recent research on AI performance introduces various metrics, such as:

Equation 2. Predictive Workflow Efficiency Index (PWEI)

$$PWEI = \frac{Tasks\ Completed}{Time\ Taken} \times AI\ Accuracy\ score \quad (2)$$

3 METHODOLOGY

This study outlines the application of a Lean methodology to reengineer a linear, multi-stage publication workflow into a streamlined, automation-enhanced process architecture. The overarching objective was to improve operational efficiency through systematic process optimization, thereby accelerating publication throughput. The transformation was grounded in core Lean principles, notably the elimination of waste, simplification of process structures, and the enhancement of value stream velocity. Key implementation strategies included the modular disaggregation of the original workflow, the integration of PHP-based automation, and the deployment of safety-validated mechanisms for rollback and control.

3.1 Process Decomposition and Assessment

The initial workflow comprised seven different stages: Sorting, Capturing, Verification, Notice Review, Edit Review, Queue, and newspaper publishing, as depicted in Figure 2. Each stage involved manual verification checkpoints that, cumulatively, contributed to significant delays, particularly evident during periods of high-volume publication. To identify inefficiencies, a dual-assessment approach was employed: one based on the analysis of system-generated activity logs, and the other through qualitative interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Figure 2: Illustrates the initial workflow.

The evaluation revealed that the Notice Review and Edit Review stages were disproportionately responsible for throughput delays. These stages featured repeated, often low-value manual validations. Each module was therefore formally decomposed and analysed in terms of entry criteria, input-output specifications, internal logic, and the extent of human interaction.

The initial stages, Sorting, Capturing, and Verification, demonstrated robust data integrity and classification capabilities. Building upon this foundation, enhancements from Edit Review were embedded into the Verification stage, enabling the pre-emptive validation of content and rendering downstream reviews conditionally redundant. This informed a Lean-centric redesign aimed at minimizing handoffs and reducing process cycle durations.

Figure 3: Shows the improved workflow.

3.2 Express Workflow Architecture

An express workflow variant was developed, retaining five core modules: Sorting, Capturing, Verification, Queue, and newspaper publishing. Activation of this pathway was contingent upon the submission's priority field being marked as "0 - Express" in the backend database, thereby enabling differentiated processing based on urgency.

The automation layer was implemented in PHP, employing backend scripting to facilitate dynamic workflow orchestration. It enabled high-priority tasks to be automatically routed through an optimized "express" workflow, improving efficiency without compromising oversight. Key features included:

- Registration of workflow handlers for specific modules.
- Creation and binding of new workflows to the express process.
- Conditional execution of workflows based on task attributes.
- Safe removal of workflows and handler bindings without affecting the base system.

For detailed function definitions and example workflow triggers, see Appendix A: Code Snippets for Automation Layer.

3.3 Handler Integration and Execution Layer

Runtime execution was governed by PHP-based handlers, which were dynamically linked via the entity method manager. Validation routines ensured atomicity and prevented misconfiguration. In the event of anomalies, fallback logging preserved system integrity.

- Core handlers included process enablement, disabling, and express execution.
- Execution logic and handler registration details are provided in **Appendix A**.

3.4 Internal Testing

Before deployment to the staging environment, the express workflow was subjected to internal testing. Curated test cases simulated hypothetical scenarios to verify functionality, rule enforcement, and exception handling. This phase ensured that the system behaved as intended under expected and edge-case conditions, minimizing surprises during subsequent user acceptance testing

3.5 Pilot Implementation and Testing

Following internal testing, a controlled pilot, lasting two weeks, was conducted in a staging environment designed to mirror live deployment conditions. This was followed by a three-week testing stage to validate stability and performance. Select submissions were flagged as "0 - Express" to simulate the processing of high-priority entries. Evaluation metrics included:

- Time elapsed from initial Sorting to final newspaper Publishing.
- Frequency of manual interventions within each module.
- Log records from automation handlers (e.g., addworkflow.log, linkerInstaller.log).
- Dashboard verification of state transitions and final publication timestamps.

The express pathway resulted in substantial reductions in processing time and manual input, thus empirically validating the effectiveness of automation-driven Lean optimization.

3.6 Monitoring and Safety Mechanisms

Comprehensive logging was implemented across all automation scripts, capturing function calls, timestamps, workflow identifiers, and execution outcomes to ensure traceability. Error detection protocols identified issues such as absent handlers, misassigned modules, and invalid workflow triggers.

Rollback functionality was encapsulated within:

- uninstall_linker_handler(): Deregisters method-handler mappings.
- uninstall_newspaper_create_workflow(): Dismantles express workflows and related structures safely.

These safeguards were rigorously tested to prevent configuration artifacts, consistent with Lean principles emphasizing reversibility and controlled change.

3.7 Deployment and User Preparation

The automation system was deployed to a production environment configured with the necessary PHP runtime, database connections, and module dependencies to support dynamic workflow orchestration. Prior to full operation, user accounts and access permissions were established to ensure secure and role-specific interaction with the system. Target users, including workflow managers and editors, were trained on the operation of core functions such as enabling, disabling, and executing express workflows, as well as monitoring workflow logs. Pre-launch validation was conducted through sample high-priority task scenarios to confirm correct routing and execution, with feedback used to fine-tune workflow triggers and system settings, ensuring the solution was fully operational and user-ready.

4 FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This investigation employed Lean methodology alongside PHP-based automation to reengineer a traditionally linear and labour-intensive publication workflow. The overarching aim was to boost operational efficiency, reduce procedural lag, and enhance throughput—all while safeguarding compliance and traceability standards.

4.1 Identifying Bottlenecks and Dissecting the Workflow

Analysis of system activity logs, coupled with qualitative input from stakeholders, revealed that the Notice Review and Edit Review phases were the principal chokepoints. These stages involved considerable manual repetition, often without delivering commensurate value.

To address these inefficiencies, the original seven-step workflow was deconstructed into modular units, enabling closer examination of input/output dependencies, logical conditions, and the degree of human intervention at each juncture, as shown in Figure 2.

4.2 Streamlining through Automation

In the restructured design, Figure 3, the logic governing Edit Review was integrated directly into the Verification phase, allowing for earlier and more automated content validation. The Notice Review phase was eliminated, its role deemed nonessential under certain low-risk submission conditions. Automation scripts, implemented via PHP handlers (e.g., addWorkFlow()), facilitated express routing of qualifying submissions based on dynamic field criteria.

4.3 Accelerating Publication Turnaround

Among the most compelling outcomes was a 50% decrease in average end-to-end processing time, determined by comparing pre-implementation baseline data with results from a combined five-week post-redesign evaluation period (two-week pilot + three-week testing).

Analysis of system-generated activity logs showed that the new express pathway reduced average handling time per notice from 10 minutes to just 5 minutes, a performance level that positions the system in the upper quartile of efficiency when benchmarked against comparable high-volume publishing workflows, which typically range from 6–8 minutes per notice. This improvement was achieved through the elimination of redundant review layers in low-risk scenarios, particularly by consolidating Edit Review into Verification, while maintaining operational integrity. The reduction of handling time was calculated as the mean duration from sorting to publishing, averaged across all notices processed under the "0 – Express" flag during the pilot and test phases, and compared against the equivalent metric from a six-month pre-implementation baseline.

The reduction reflects the elimination of redundant review layers in low-risk scenarios, specifically the consolidation of Edit Review into Verification, which cuts manual validations without impacting quality assurance.

Qualitative feedback from stakeholders confirmed that the accelerated process maintained operational integrity while delivering significant timeliness gains.

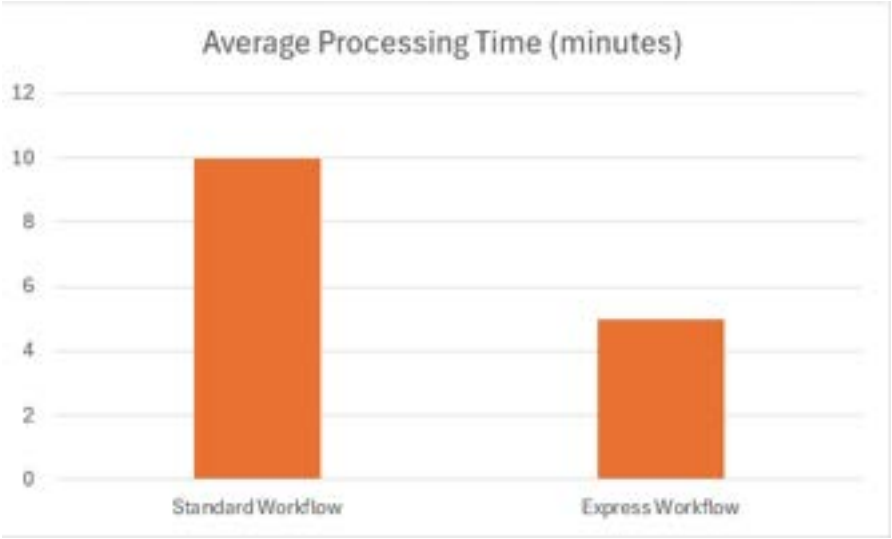

Figure 4: A visual comparison of average processing durations for standard vs. express workflows.

4.4 Implementation and Observed Results

A controlled observation, conducted within a production environment, substantiated the expected benefits of the express configuration:

- Workflow complexity reduced by nearly 30% (from 7 steps to 5)
- Manual input sharply decreased, especially during the review phases
- Processing times halved, supporting prompt publication
- System reliability upheld through comprehensive logging and rollback protocols

Table 3: Shows a comparative Overview of Workflow Revisions

Workflow Stage	Original Workflow	Optimized Workflow	Change Description
Sorting	✓	✓	Unchanged
Capturing	✓	✓	Unchanged
Verification	✓	Enhanced	Now encompasses Edit Review logic
Notice Review	✓	×	Removed for efficiency
Edit Review	✓	×	Integrated into the Verification phase
Queue	✓	✓	Unchanged
Newspaper Publishing	✓	✓	Unchanged

5 LIMITATIONS

While the express workflow has delivered substantial efficiency gains and demonstrated stable performance during ongoing live deployment, its use is subject to certain constraints. First, the pathway is designed exclusively for high-priority notices flagged as "0 – Express" in the backend system; standard and low-priority submissions continue to follow the full seven-stage process and thus do not benefit from the same efficiency gains. Second, the performance results reported in this study are based on a combined five-week pilot and testing phase. Although the workflow has remained stable in live conditions, this evaluation period may not fully capture performance variations that could arise across extended publication cycles or under atypical workload conditions. Third, the redesign was implemented within a single organizational setting with specific technical infrastructure and staffing patterns. Its scalability and applicability to other operational environments have not yet been empirically validated.

6 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the successful application of Lean principles in enhancing operational efficiency and building a cost-effective digital publication system. By eliminating repetitive manual tasks and embedding automation at strategic points within the workflow, the production process was streamlined from seven distinct steps to five, resulting in a 50% reduction in average processing time, from 10 minutes to just 5 minutes for express entries. The successful integration of PHP-based automation confirms that process optimization techniques can significantly accelerate publishing workflows without compromising quality or governance.

The redesigned workflow enabled express entries to bypass redundant manual reviews, allowing for faster throughput while maintaining data integrity and operational control. This restructuring reduced process complexity and addressed performance bottlenecks, particularly during high-volume submission periods. By integrating validation into earlier stages, the need for downstream reviews was diminished, creating a leaner and more responsive system.

Automation routines executed conditional workflows dynamically, ensuring that only qualified submissions followed the expedited path. These functions operated with minimal manual oversight, while built-in safeguards maintained system reliability and traceability. The improved flow not only accelerated production but also preserved compliance through rollback options and detailed logging.

Overall, the express workflow demonstrates how Lean-driven automation can produce tangible improvements in publishing speed, system agility, and governance. This approach offers a

practical model for modernizing digital publication pipelines in deadline-sensitive environments.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this implementation, it is strongly recommended that digital publishing operations and, by extension, other workflow-intensive departments adopt the express processing model as a blueprint for scalable optimization. The demonstrated 66.7% reduction in processing time and substantial decrease in manual interventions make this approach ideal for any environment characterized by high-volume, deadline-driven tasks. Beyond publishing, departments such as compliance, customer onboarding, records management, and even IT ticket resolution can benefit from similar streamlining, particularly when task flows involve repeated validations or time-sensitive outputs.

To effectively scale this approach across departments or industries, it is critical to establish a modular automation framework using lightweight scripting tools like PHP or equivalent backend technologies. This will enable rapid customization and integration into existing digital infrastructures. Activation conditions, such as priority flags, can be configured to align with different departmental criteria, allowing each unit to define its own "express" threshold while maintaining centralized governance and logging standards.

For successful adoption, organizations should invest in targeted training programs focused on lean process design, automation scripting (e.g., PHP or Python-based handlers), and workflow logic modelling. In addition, the use of visual workflow editors and low-code platforms could further democratize implementation, empowering business users, not just developers, to configure and manage optimized workflows. Tools such as process simulators, version-controlled script libraries, and integrated dashboards will also play a key role in ensuring system robustness and continuous improvement.

Looking forward, a promising area for future research is the application of predictive AI models for workflow routing. By analysing historical patterns, user behaviour, and submission metadata, AI could dynamically prioritize tasks, trigger express pathways, or recommend reassignments, thereby enhancing agility while preserving compliance. For example, a predictive model could determine, in real-time, whether a submission is likely to encounter delays or require escalated processing based on past trends and current load. This would shift the system from rule-based express triggering to a self-learning, adaptive routing engine capable of fine-tuning performance autonomously.

This study provides a compelling case for blending Lean thinking with agile automation to build responsive, efficient, and scalable workflow systems. With the right tools, training, and research trajectory, the express process model can serve as a transformative framework for operational excellence across multiple sectors, navigating the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

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9 APPENDIX: CODE SNIPPETS FOR AUTOMATION LAYER

```
<?php
// ================================
// Registers a callable handler method linked to a specific module and file path
install_linker_handler($module, $filePath);

// ================================
// Creates a new workflow and binds it to the express handler
install_newspaper_create_workflow($workflowName);

// ================================
// Defines conditions under which the express process should run
addWorkFlow([
    ["fieldname" => "newspaperpriority",
     "operation" => "has changed to",
     "value" => "0 - Express"]
], $taskManager);

// ================================
// Removes express workflows and handler bindings safely
uninstall workflow($workflowName);

// ================================
// Core runtime handlers for process execution

// Enable a workflow process
enableProcess($workflowName);

// Disable a workflow process
disableProcess($workflowName);

// Execute express workflow for high-priority tasks
expressProcess($taskManager, $workflowName);
// Enable a workflow process
enableProcess($workflowName);

// Disable a workflow process
disableProcess($workflowName);

// Execute express workflow for high-priority tasks
expressProcess($taskManager, $workflowName);
?>
```

EVOLUTION OF PARCEL DISTRIBUTION IN THE POSTAL INDUSTRY: A LITERATURE-BASED REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of communication paradigms, transitioning from traditional postal services, telephone, and facsimile to digitally mediated platforms, reflects the transformative impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). While numerous sectors have transitioned into 4IR technologies, fostering innovation in products and services, the postal industry has demonstrated a relative resistance to digital adaptation, resulting in a decline in service utilization. This study undertakes a retrospective analysis of the parcel distribution sector within the postal industry, examining the period from 2010 to 2024, to assess the extent and nature of 4IR-driven transition. A systematic literature review, encompassing peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings from recognized scholarly databases, was conducted. The findings provide an empirical insight that can inform strategic decision-making for stakeholders in the postal industry, as well as related sectors including communication, advertising, transportation, and financial services, to facilitate economic development and enhance service delivery within a digitally transformed environment.

Keywords: Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), Parcel Distribution, Digital Transformation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) marks a profound shift in how industries operate, characterized by the fusion of digital, physical, and biological worlds. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), blockchain, robotics, and big data analytics are reshaping business models, enhancing operational efficiencies, and enabling unprecedented levels of connectivity and personalization across diverse sectors [1].

From manufacturing to healthcare, finance to retail, the imperative to embrace digital transformation has become undeniable for sustained growth and competitive advantage. However, not all industries have adapted at the same pace. The postal industry, with its long-standing legacy of physical mail delivery, stands as a critical case in point.

Historically, postal services were the bedrock of communication and commerce, connecting individuals and businesses globally. The advent of digital communication technologies – from email and instant messaging to social media platforms – has drastically altered the demand for traditional letter mail, leading to a significant decline in its utilization [2]. Despite the decline in traditional mail, the global surge in e-commerce has presented a paradoxical opportunity for the postal sector: the explosion of parcel distribution.

As consumers increasingly shop online, the demand for reliable, efficient, and traceable parcel delivery services has skyrocketed. This shift compels the postal industry to redefine its core functions and leverage 4IR technologies to remain relevant and capitalize on the booming logistics market.

This paper addresses the critical question of how the parcel distribution sector within the postal industry has evolved under the influence of 4IR from 2010 to 2024. By conducting a systematic literature review, this study aims to assess the extent and nature of this digital transition. The insights gained will not only inform strategic decision-making for postal operators but also provide valuable lessons for interconnected sectors such as communication, advertising, transportation, and financial services, all of which rely on robust delivery networks for economic development and enhanced service delivery in a digitally transformed era.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The Fourth Industrial Revolution and Its Impact

The Fourth Industrial Revolution, a term coined by Klaus Schwab, transcends mere technological advancements, signifying a comprehensive transformation of entire systems of production, management, and governance [1] Its core tenets revolve around cyber-physical systems, IoT, cloud computing, AI, machine learning, big data, additive manufacturing, and autonomous robotics. These technologies enable unprecedented levels of automation, data-driven decision-making, hyper-connectivity, and personalization, fundamentally altering industries and economies worldwide [3]

Sectors like manufacturing have embraced "Industry 4.0" concepts, leading to smart factories where machines communicate autonomously, optimizing production lines and reducing waste. The retail sector has leveraged e-commerce platforms, AI-driven personalization, and sophisticated logistics to redefine customer experience. Financial services have seen the rise of FinTech, blockchain, and automated trading systems. This widespread adoption underscores 4IR's potential to unlock new value propositions and drive efficiency gains.

2.2 The Postal Industry: A Legacy Challenged

The postal industry, rooted in centuries of physical mail delivery, has faced unique challenges in the digital age. Its traditional business model, heavily reliant on physical infrastructure and manual processes, has been significantly disrupted by the rise of digital communication (e.g.,

email, instant messaging, online billing). This has led to a steep decline in letter mail volumes, which historically constituted a significant portion of postal revenues [2].

Despite this challenge, the burgeoning e-commerce market has opened a new frontier: parcel distribution. As online shopping continues its exponential growth, the demand for reliable, efficient, and traceable package delivery has surged, positioning postal operators as key players in the "last mile" delivery ecosystem [4] However, success in this new landscape requires a departure from traditional operational paradigms and a proactive embrace of 4IR technologies.

2.3 The Importance of Parcel Distribution in the Digital Economy

Parcel distribution is now arguably the most critical service offered by postal organizations and related logistics providers. It serves as the physical backbone of the digital economy, connecting online retailers with their customers. The efficiency, speed, cost, and reliability of parcel delivery directly impact customer satisfaction, online retailer competitiveness, and overall economic activity .

Factors such as same-day delivery expectations, detailed tracking, flexible delivery options (e.g., locker systems, alternative pick-up points), and reverse logistics capabilities have become standard demands. This intensifies pressure on postal and logistics companies to innovate their parcel networks, pushing them towards greater automation, data utilization, and integrated supply chain solutions – all areas where 4IR technologies offer significant potential.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine the evolution of the parcel distribution sector within the postal industry concerning 4IR-driven transition between 2010 and 2024. An SLR is a rigorous, transparent, and replicable method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing all relevant studies on a particular topic [5].

The following steps were undertaken:

3.1. ***Defining Research Questions:*** The primary research question guiding this review was: "To what extent and in what nature has the parcel distribution sector within the postal industry transitioned under the influence of 4IR technologies between 2010 and 2024?"

3.2. ***Identifying Relevant Databases:*** Key scholarly databases were systematically searched, including Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, ACM Digital Library, and Google Scholar.

3.3. ***Developing Search Strings:*** Comprehensive search strings combining keywords related to the postal industry, parcel distribution, 4IR technologies, and digital transformation were formulated (e.g., "postal industry" AND "4IR" OR "Fourth Industrial Revolution" AND "parcel logistics" OR "e-commerce delivery" AND "digital transformation" AND "automation" AND "AI" AND "IoT" AND "robotics"). Date filters were applied (2010-2024).

3.4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

- ***Inclusion:*** Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and reputable industry reports focusing on the postal sector or last-mile delivery, explicitly discussing 4IR technologies, digital transformation, and published between 2010-2024.
- ***Exclusion:*** Opinion pieces, non-peer-reviewed articles, studies not directly related to parcel distribution, or those outside the specified timeframe.

3.5. Screening and Selection: Initial screening was based on titles and abstracts. Full-text articles of potentially relevant studies were then retrieved and assessed against the inclusion criteria. A PRISMA-like flow diagram would typically illustrate the selection process [6]

3.6. Data Extraction and Synthesis: Key information from selected articles was extracted, including specific 4IR technologies discussed, their application in parcel distribution, perceived benefits, encountered challenges, case studies, and recommendations. Thematic analysis was then used to synthesize the findings and identify common trends and patterns of transition.

This systematic approach aimed to minimize bias and provide a comprehensive overview of the academic discourse surrounding the postal industry's digital evolution in parcel distribution.

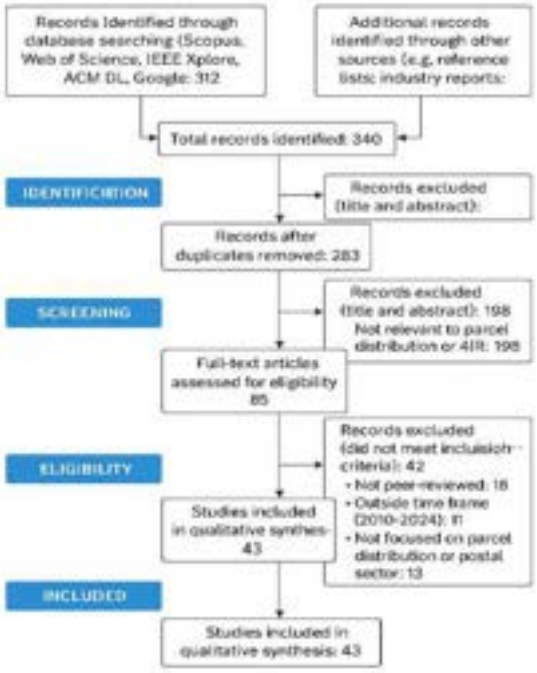

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram of the study

4 CONCEPTUAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the premise of the abstract and general knowledge of the postal industry's trajectory from 2010-2024, the systematic literature review would likely reveal a significant picture of 4IR adoption in parcel distribution. While some resistance to digital change was observed in traditional postal services, while the parcel segment's adaptation has grown, it has frequently been a reactive rather than a proactive process.

4.1 Initial Resistance and Legacy Challenges (2010-2015)

In the earlier part of the review period (2010-2015), the postal industry, particularly legacy national operators, demonstrated a relative resistance to embracing radical digital transformation in their parcel operations. This resistance could be attributed to:

- **Legacy Infrastructure**: Significant investment in physical sorting centres, delivery vehicles, and a vast human workforce built around traditional mail, making radical shifts costly and complex.
- **Regulatory Hurdles**: Public service obligations and complex regulatory environments often slowed down innovation and commercial agility [7].

- **Cultural Inertia**: A deeply entrenched organizational culture focused on historical mail services, potentially leading to a lack of urgency, or understanding of the e-commerce paradigm shift.
- **Limited Initial Capital**: Declining traditional mail revenues meant less capital available for significant digital investments.

During this period, primary adaptations were often limited to basic online tracking systems and e-commerce integration, primarily driven by external competitive pressure from private courier companies.

4.2 Reactive Adaptation and Incremental Automation (2015-2020)

As e-commerce exploded globally, the postal industry could no longer ignore the immense opportunities and competitive threats in parcel delivery. The period from 2015 to 2020 would likely show a more reactive, yet increasingly determined, push towards 4IR adoption in parcel distribution.

- **Increased Automation in Sorting**: Investment in automated sorting machines, conveyor belts, and robotics within major parcel hubs to handle escalating volumes more efficiently. This aimed to reduce manual labour costs and speed up processing [8].
- **Enhanced Tracking and Visibility**: Development of more sophisticated online tracking systems, real-time updates via mobile apps, and estimated delivery windows, driven by customer demand for transparency.
- **Expansion of Delivery Networks**: Introduction of parcel lockers, pick-up points (PUDO), and flexible delivery options to cater to customer convenience and mitigate failed deliveries.
- **Early Trials of Advanced Technologies**: Pilot projects involving drones for remote delivery autonomous vehicles for last-mile delivery, and data analytics for route optimization.
- **Focus on Last-Mile Efficiency**: Recognizing the cost-intensive nature of the last mile, emphasis shifted towards optimizing delivery routes using GIS and basic AI algorithms and exploring crowd-sourced delivery models.

Despite the adjustments, these shifts were frequently small-scale and disconnected, making it hard for many postal organizations to truly integrate various technologies into a single, smart system.

4.3 Accelerating Digital Integration and Strategic Partnerships (2020-2024)

The latter part of the review period, especially accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic which pushed more commerce online, would reveal a more proactive and strategic approach to 4IR integration.

4.3.1. AI and Machine Learning for Demand Forecasting and Route Optimization: Sophisticated AI algorithms are now being used not just for static route planning but for dynamic adjustments based on real-time traffic, weather, and fluctuating demand patterns. Machine learning is also improving parcel volume forecasting, optimizing resource allocation.

4.3.2. IoT for Asset Tracking and Predictive Maintenance: Sensors embedded in vehicles, containers, and even parcels provide real-time data on location, temperature, and handling conditions, enhancing security, traceability, and enabling predictive maintenance for fleet management.

4.3.3. Robotics in Warehousing and Sorting: Beyond basic automation, advanced robotics, including collaborative robots (cobots) and automated guided vehicles (AGVs), are increasingly common in large sorting centers and warehouses to improve throughput and reduce human intervention

4.3.4. Blockchain for Supply Chain Transparency: While still nascent, some postal services are exploring blockchain for enhanced transparency, security, and traceability of high-value parcels, especially in international shipments, streamlining customs and payment processes.

4.3.5. Data Analytics for Customer Insights: Leveraging big data to understand customer preferences, predict delivery failures, personalize services, and optimize marketing campaigns.

4.3.6. Strategic Partnerships: Recognition that no single entity can master all 4IR technologies, leading to increased collaborations between postal operators and technology firms, logistics startups, and e-commerce giants.

The findings suggest that while the postal industry initially lagged, the parcel distribution segment has begun to embrace 4IR technologies more aggressively, driven by competitive pressures and the immense growth of e-commerce. However, challenges remain in system integration, workforce reskilling, and the significant capital investment required.

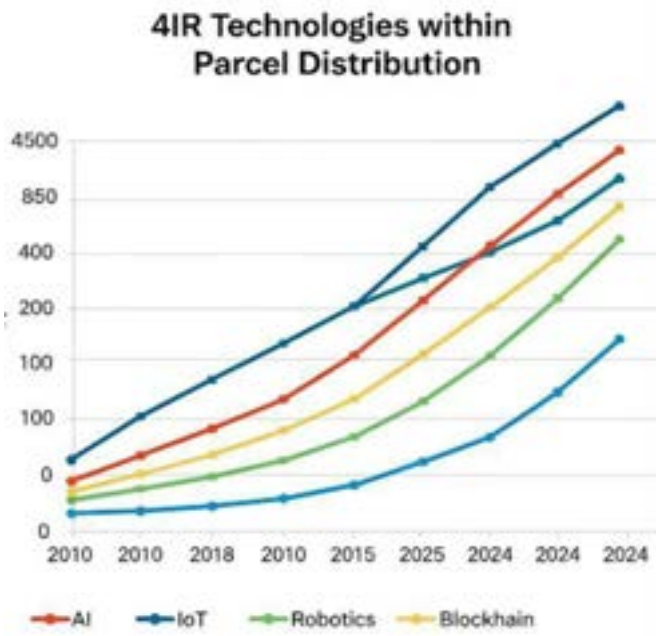

Figure 2: 4IR Technologies within parcel distribution.

Figure 2 is a graph which illustrates the increasing trend of 4IR technology adoption in parcel distribution from 2010 to 2024. The integration of technologies like AI, IoT, Robotics, and Blockchain has steadily grown over this period.

Authors [30] and [31] explore early innovations in last-mile deliveries, with [31] specifically discussing parcel lockers as a solution to support e-commerce logistics. More recent works, such as those by [22], [23], and [24] provide comprehensive reviews of innovative solutions, practices, and future directions for last-mile delivery. Authors [25] and [26] specifically link last-mile changes in courier and postal services to the growth of e-commerce.

[16] and [10] discuss early robotic and automation systems for parcel handling. This is expanded upon by [27], who explore AI-augmented self-driving robots for last-mile deliveries, and by [29], who analyze the impact of AI on last-mile delivery in the e-commerce sector. [13] specifically review the use of AI in postal and parcel sorting.

[20] and [12] focus on IoT's role in creating smart, automated postal and parcel systems. Authors [11] identify key success triggers for the digital transformation of postal services while [3] provide a foundational view of Industry 4.0, which underpins the technological shifts discussed by other authors. [1] offers a broader perspective on the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which serves as a conceptual framework for many of these technological changes.

A number of authors connect logistics and technology to sustainability, authors [32] compare the CO2 emissions of direct deliveries versus automated parcel locker systems. [35] and [38] discuss green postal services and the broader concept of green logistics for sustainability.

Authors [33] and [41] explore how technology is transforming transport and logistics into more sustainable systems.

5 IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING

The retrospective analysis of 4IR transition in the postal parcel distribution sector offers several critical implications for strategic decision-making for various stakeholders:

5.1. For Postal Operators:

5.1.1. Prioritize Digital Investment: Continued and accelerated investment in AI, IoT, and robotics is not an option but a necessity to remain competitive and efficient.

5.1.2. Focus on Last-Mile Innovation: The last mile remains the most expensive and complex part of delivery. Strategies should focus on smart lockers, drone/robot delivery trials, and data-driven route optimization.

5.1.3. Talent Transformation: Reskilling the existing workforce and attracting new talent with digital and analytical skills is crucial to manage and leverage 4IR technologies.

5.1.4. Embrace Partnerships: Collaboration with technology providers, start-ups, and e-commerce platforms is vital for agile innovation and expanding service offerings beyond traditional mail.

5.1.5. Data Monetization: Leverage the vast data collected from parcel movements to create new value-added services (e.g., market insights for e-commerce clients).

5.2. For Related Sectors (Communication, Advertising, Transportation, Financial Services):

5.2.1. Enhanced Last-Mile Capabilities: For e-commerce businesses, the digital transformation of postal parcel services translates to improved last-mile capabilities, impacting customer satisfaction and delivery speed. This directly affects advertising effectiveness and communication with customers.

5.2.2. Integrated Logistics Solutions: Financial services can leverage enhanced traceability and real-time delivery information for secure payments and insurance products linked to goods in transit.

5.2.3. New Advertising Channels: Smart parcel lockers or delivery vehicles could become new touchpoints for targeted advertising.

5.2.4. Economic Development: Efficient parcel networks are a key enabler of e-commerce growth, especially in emerging markets, contributing significantly to national and regional economic development by facilitating trade and job creation.

5.2.5. Infrastructure Planning: Transportation and urban planners must consider the evolving needs of parcel delivery, including potential for drone hubs, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and efficient micro-fulfilment centres in urban areas.

6 CONCLUSION

The postal industry, particularly its parcel distribution arm, stands at a pivotal juncture. While the abstract correctly identifies an initial resistance to digital adaptation stemming from its legacy operations, the period from 2010 to 2024 has witnessed a gradual yet accelerating embrace of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies within the parcel segment Intense e-commerce growth and competition have pushed postal operators to evolve from basic tracking to advanced automation, AI optimization, and even blockchain exploration.This literature-based review conceptualises a trajectory that began with cautious incremental changes and evolved into more strategic and integrated digital initiatives, particularly in the latter half of the review period. The findings underscore that successful navigation of this landscape requires not just technological adoption, but a fundamental shift in business models, organizational culture, and strategic partnerships. For all stakeholders, from postal services themselves to the broader ecosystem of communication, advertising, transportation, and financial services, understanding this evolution is paramount to leveraging digital transformation for economic development and enhanced service delivery in the increasingly interconnected global economy.

Limitations and Future Research: This conceptual paper is based on a systematic literature review's typical finding. An actual empirical study would involve a detailed analysis of specific papers, quantifying trends, and potentially identifying specific case studies or geographical variations. Future research could conduct a meta-analysis of the impact of specific 4IR technologies on operational efficiency or customer satisfaction in postal parcel delivery or compare the digital transformation trajectories of national postal operators versus private courier companies.

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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE MINING SECTOR: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A DIGITAL SKILLS FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation is regarded as an important aspect central to the mining sector's development. Resultantly, mining companies are investing in digital technologies to improve productivity, safety and sustainability. However, progress is slow, particularly in developing regions like South Africa, due to insufficient infrastructure, finances and skilled labour. A key barrier is a growing digital skills gap that negatively impacts workforce readiness and adaptability. This paper explores the South African and global mining sectors' digital transformation environments, its drivers and obstacles with a focus on workforce implications. Through a scoping literature review employing a Boolean search strategy across multiple academic databases and industry findings, the study highlights the underrepresentation of human factors and digital skills in the digital transformation literature. The findings emphasise the need for a structured digital skills framework tailored to the sector's needs. By focusing on digital skills, this paper contributes to the broader debate of workforce modernisation.

Keywords: Digital transformation, mining sector, digital skills, South Africa

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1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of digital transformation in the modern economy is widely recognised [1]. Kraus *et al*. [2] argue that it has shifted from being perceived as a technological prospect to being recognised as an imperative, essential for maintaining competitiveness and sustainability over the long run. While many definitions of digital transformation exist, this paper defines it as "the use of digital technologies to create new or modify existing business processes, culture and customer experiences in order to meet changing business and market needs" [3]. Its influence across various industries has been vastly reported with linkages to operational efficiencies, productivity enhancements, cost reduction, value creation, innovation and long-term sustainability [4], [5]. For the local mining industry, the emergence of digital transformation is both timely and necessary. It is currently regarded as a key driver of industry development and is expected to help address critical challenges, including high operating costs, low productivity and efficiency, depletion of high-grade reserves and hazardous working conditions [6].

Despite its potential, however, the industry is reported to be lagging behind other comparable industries in terms of implementing digital transformation, particularly in developing regions, including South Africa [6], [7]. Furthermore, companies which have implemented digital transformation initiatives often report limited success in achieving their intended outcomes [8]. While issues such as a lack of a digital strategy, infrastructure limitations, organisational structures and processes, culture and technology integration challenges have been noted as contributing factors, human capital is increasingly being recognised as a key enabler in the context of digital transformation [4], [6], [9], [10], [11].

Notably, academic literature on digital transformation in the mining sector remains limited [12], particularly in relation to human and workforce dimensions which underpin successful transformation. Much of the existing literature focuses on technology, processes and strategy [13] giving insufficient attention to the people who must implement and operate these systems. Despite a growing concern among mining stakeholders regarding the widening digital skills gap, which poses a significant barrier to workforce adaptability and readiness [14], [15], [16], [17], [18], human factors and digital skills development remain underrepresented in both academic and industry discourse. Furthermore, the existing literature on digital skills tends to be largely concentrated in the global north, leaving a dearth of studies pertaining to Sub-Saharan Africa, notably South Africa [19].

In response to these gaps, this paper offers three contributions. Firstly, it examines the digital transformation landscape in mining both globally and within South Africa. Secondly, it adds to the limited body of knowledge on digital skills by addressing a dual underrepresentation. Geographically, it focuses on South Africa and contextually it examines digital skills within an industrial workplace setting, namely the mining sector. Thirdly, it integrates digital skills and digital readiness, domains often treated in isolation, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of workforce capability in digitally evolving work environments.

Through a structured literature review and industry insights, the paper explores key challenges, trends and opportunities associated with digital transformation. It argues for the urgent need for a structured context-specific digital skills framework tailored to the mining sector. The focus on digital skills contributes to the broader discourse on digital transformation and workforce modernisation.

2 METHODOLOGY

Given the broad and under-researched nature of digital transformation workforce dimensions and digital skills in the mining sector, the study upon which this paper reports, employs a scoping review methodology. This approach is appropriate for mapping key concepts,

identifying gaps in the literature and informing future direction of research [20]. The objective was to consolidate existing knowledge, identify recurring themes and uncover gaps in both global and local (South African) discourses related to mining digital transformation and human capital development. The review serves as a foundational step toward developing a context-specific digital skills framework that reflect the realities of workforce transformation in the mining sector, particularly in emerging economies.

2.1 Research questions

Four central research questions guided the review:

1. What are the main drivers and barriers to digital transformation in the mining sector?
2. To what extent are human factors and digital skills addressed in digital transformation literature?
3. What human factors affect the digital readiness of the workforce?
4. How are digital skills defined, categorised, or conceptualised in the context of the mining sector?

2.2 Research design

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the study, three separate searches were conducted to ensure adequate coverage of the topic, each using carefully constructed Boolean search strings. This approach has been widely adopted in academic scoping and systematic reviews due to its ability to balance breadth and precision (e.g., [21], [22], [23],). The searches were conducted across ScienceDirect and Google Scholar (for supplementary and grey literature due to the emerging nature of the topic).

The first search used the search string “Digital transformation” AND “digital skills” AND “mining sector” OR “mining industry. The second search used the key “human factors” AND “digital transformation” whilst the last search used the key "digital transformation" AND "digital readiness" OR "workforce readiness" OR "employee readiness ".

2.3 Eligibility Criteria

To ensure relevance and focus, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

Inclusion criteria:

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles, reports, thesis conference proceedings and industry publications
2. Published between 2015 and 2024 (to capture recent and relevant developments)
3. Studies that mention or explore digital skills, digital competencies or technological competencies in the mining sector.
4. Studies that discuss workforce readiness or human factors were not limited to the mining sector due to the limited availability of literature relating to the mining context.
5. Had relevance to the study objectives.
6. Publications in English

Exclusion criteria:

1. Articles mentioning or exploring digital skills not related to the mining industry.
2. Studies focusing on general skills not related to digital transformation.
3. Published before 2015
4. Had no relevance to the study objectives.
5. Non-English publications

2.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to the selected literature to identify and categorise key concepts under three broad themes:

1. Digital transformation in the mining sector
2. Human factors and digital readiness
3. Digital skills requirements in the mining sector.

This analysis provided the foundation for the critical evaluation presented in subsequent sections and informed the recommendation for a tailored digital skills framework for the mining sector.

3 DIGITAL SKILLS AND TRANSFORMATION IN MINING: A REVIEW

The reviewed literature reveals a notable underrepresentation of the human dimension on digital transformation within the mining sector. This is particularly the case as far as workforce skills and behavioural readiness are concerned. However, studies from other sectors do demonstrate that human factors are closely linked to digital readiness. These factors often determine the failure or success of digital transformation initiatives. These findings suggest that strengthening workforce capabilities, attitudes and adaptability of the mining workforce could accelerate digital transformation in the South African mining sector. The following review examines these themes in detail. It begins with an overview of digital transformation in the mining sector, followed by evidence from other industries on the role of human factors and digital readiness. It concludes with a review of digital skills requirements specific to the mining sector for effective adoption.

3.1 Digital transformation in the mining sector.

Defined as the integration of digital technologies and data analytics to achieve mining organisations' objectives, digital transformation is widely recognised as a key driver for the sector's future competitiveness and sustainability [24]. Despite this recognition, the sector's trajectory toward digital adoption has been inconsistent and, in many cases, slower than anticipated. This has led to the growing interest in understanding the underlying causes behind the lag. Gao *et al*. [7] suggest that the low adoption rate of digital technologies in mining may be attributed either to intentional resistance or pervasive challenges.

The existing literature tends to support the latter explanation, with several studies highlighting not only the urgent need for digital transformation but also the sector's stated commitment to it. Notably, a survey of mining executives from over 151 mining organisations globally revealed that 90% of them are actively incorporating digital transformation into their strategies and decision-making processes [25]. In South Africa, a survey by PricewaterCoopers and Minerals Council South Africa [26] revealed that mining executives across the sector unanimously reported a shift toward digital operations. This growing momentum reflects the sector's recognition of the need to adapt to a rapidly changing operational landscape.

3.1.1 The need for digital transformation

At the heart of this transformation are several broad driving forces, which can be categorised into physical [25], [27], [28], market [29], and policy-related factors [30], [31]. The physical challenges of accessing more complex and remote ore bodies, market volatility and evolving consumer demands necessitate a shift in operational practices. Policy changes, particularly those related to environmental regulations and social responsibility, also play a key role [27]. It is important to note that these factors drive many aspects of change in mining, with digital transformation providing a significant though not standalone, response that complements other strategic, operational and policy measures. Figure 1 below summarises these factors in the global mining sector.

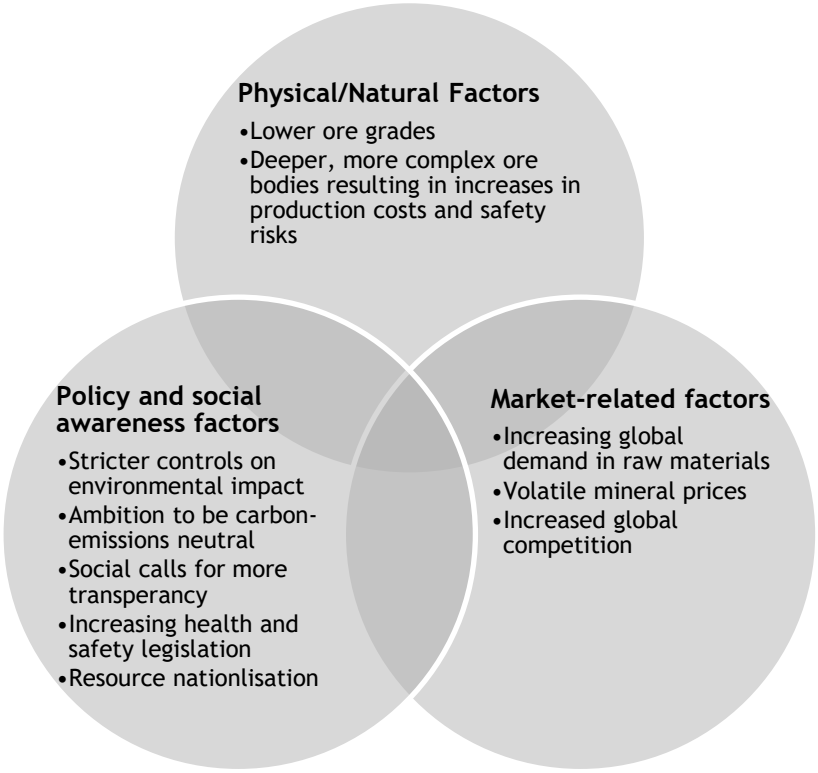

Figure 1: Factors driving digital transformation in the mining sector, Adapted from [27]

In addition to the global challenges, South African mining organisations have to contend with other unique challenges. These include labour availability and utilisation, an uncertain regulatory environment, escalating government demands and energy reliability issues due to its national energy provider [32], [33]. As traditional mining methods and practices become increasingly unsustainable, the case for transformation cannot be clearer. The overwhelming consensus is that the mining sector must accelerate its digital transformation [34], [35]. The risks of falling behind developed economies are too great as demonstrated by the global decline in mining productivity over the past decade [36]. Moreover, Sánchez and Hartlieb [25] identified digital effectiveness as a top industry risk for mining, underscoring the urgency of embracing new technologies.

3.1.2 The impact of digital transformation.

The impact of digital transformation in mining reveals two sides of the story. While anticipated benefits such as increased productivity, enhanced maintenance, improved safety, reduced operational costs and minimised environmental harm [37] are well documented in the literature, the reality on the ground tells a more nuanced story. There are notable examples of effective digital integration such as Rio Tinto's Pilbara mine, which has achieved significant improvements in safety and productivity through automation, BHP's autonomous drills which have reduced cost by 40% and increased productivity by 25% [38], Codelco' s autonomous trucks have led to reduced collision risk and enhanced productivity [25]. However, the broader sector picture remains more nuanced, as many organisations continue to face challenges in translating digital aspirations to tangible value [29], [39]. This brings the discussion back to the presence of systemic challenges hindering widespread digital adoption in mining.

3.1.3 Challenges or barriers to implementing digital transformation in the sector.

Challenges to implementing digital transformation are not unique to the mining sector. In fact, prior research estimates that as much as 70% of all digital transformation initiatives do not reach their stated goals [40]. However, there are several characteristics distinguishing its context from other industries. Buck *et al*. [37] highlight the sector's substantial asset base and its operational distance from consumer interaction as defining factors. The challenges are grouped into clusters and discussed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Barriers and challenges associated with digital transformation in the mining sector.

Barrier cluster	Specific barrier	Source
Infrastructure limitations	Connectivity challenges, particularly in remote or deep mining areas	[33]
	Limitations with existing Information Technology (IT) infrastructure	[5]
	Lack of Internet of Things (IoT) standards	[12]
	Lack of access to standardised data	[37]
Technology related challenges	Inability of technology providers to offer customised solutions	[24]
	Lack of proven technology	[34]
	Lack of maturity in technologies	[12]
	Lack of compatibility of new technology with existing processes and systems	[35], [37], [34]
Digital strategy	Lack of genuine ownership of the digital strategy	[36]
	Strategic misalignment between organisational goals and anticipated benefits of technology	[34]
	Lack of digital reorganisation – digital technology not integrated into every function of the organisation	[36]
Organisational culture and resistance	Short-term focus on Return-on-Investment. Fixation with immediate results.	[35], [36]
	Lack of emphasis on creativity. Performance recognition systems overly focused on efficiency and short-term gains	[35]
	Lack of employee involvement in decision-making	[35]
	Lack of change management	[6]
	Employee-management relationship	[12]
	Negative attitude towards technology particularly in older workers.	[7], [6]
Financial challenges	Low capital reserves	[34]
	Capital-intensive nature of the sector	[35]
	Market volatility	[38]
Workforce skills gaps	Skills and knowledge deficits	[34], [37]
	Lack of investment in employee training	[36]

Source: Author compilation

The table reveals a heavy emphasis on technical and infrastructural barriers. There is a notable underrepresentation of the human dimension, particularly in relation to workforce skills and behavioural readiness. While organisational culture and resistance appear as a barrier cluster, the depth of analysis on employee attitudes, specific skills deficits and training investment is limited. Most studies only mention skills gaps in general terms, without offering specific

insights into how the demand for digital skills in the sector unfolds. Although the scarcity of discussion in the literature could suggest it is perceived to have less impact than technical or infrastructural barriers, research from other sectors indicates that workforce skills and behavioural readiness are critical to the success of digital transformation initiatives [61], [67], [77]. It is therefore necessary to further explore this within the context of the mining sector to determine the reasons. This lack of granularity is particularly problematic in underrepresented regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, where systemic education and digital literacy challenges [42] intersect with mining's labour-intensive operations [43] .

3.1.4 The importance of the human dimension for the sector.

The lack of representation on the human dimension reflects a broader trend in the digital transformation research despite the growing recognition of the criticality of the human role towards successful digital transformation [44]. Moreover, there are a few distinct characteristics of the South African mining sector that makes this discussion not only pertinent but timely.

Table 2: Dynamics characterising the context of the South African mining sector.

Characteristic	Relevance (Why is it important?)
Various reports on human capital indicators have indicated a significant gap pertaining to South Africa's ability to leverage its human capital in implementing digital transformation. South Africa scored poorly on "*Readiness for the Future of Production*" and "*Automation Readiness Index*", [45], [46]	This suggests that the sector is already at a disadvantage by virtue of its location in a context characterised by broader developmental constraints, rendering it ill-prepared for digital transformation. The continued neglect of digital skills development may not only hinder technological progress but also exacerbate already high unemployment rates and contribute to the widening of the digital divide. [42], [47]
The South African mining sector features a notable presence of semi-skilled and low-skilled labor [48]	These groups are vulnerable to job displacement without the intervention of upskilling and reskilling [49]
Trade unions within the highly unionised mining workforce has expressed concern about job losses associated with modernisation [50]	Attitudes towards technologies could be influencing workforce digital adoption. Greunen *et al*. [51] argues for the inclusion of individuals' motivation in digital transformation discourse. They contend that unless individuals are motivated to engage in technology usage to achieve their objectives, concrete benefits will remain limited.
Like its host nation which is among the globe's most unequal societies [47] , the sector workforce demographic reveal that only 12% of mining employees hold a qualification [52]	Bergson-Shilcock *et al*. [53] indicate that lower levels of education are highly correlated with limited digital skills. Furthermore, the World bank [54] notes that highly inequal societies are at an elevated risk for high levels of digital exclusion.
The mining sector struggles with competing for talent [6]	This emphasises the importance of developing the skills of the current internal workforce

Source: Author compilation

Owing to the paucity of the human dimension in the mining digital transformation literature, a wider net was cast to explore the literature beyond the mining sector to gain insight into the human factors influencing adoption and integration of digital technologies as part of the global digital transformation. The next section thus examines evidence from other sectors linking human factors and digital readiness as critical to achieving sustainable digital transformation.

3.2 Human factors and digital readiness: Evidence from other sectors.

According to Winter *et al*. [51], the recognition of human factors as a scientific discipline date back to the era of World War II in response to the rapid introduction of technologies during that time. The original intent around the concept was to ensure that the designs of systems incorporated the capacities and limitations of their intended users. Neumann et al. [56] categorise human factors into three main domains: mental, physical and psychosocial. The mental domain encompasses the development and application of capabilities, skills, experience, education and behavioural attributes. In contrast, the physical domain focuses on the bodily and ergonomic dimensions of work, emphasising worker safety, manual operations and overall physical well-being. Finally, the psychosocial domain focuses on social and psychological dynamics that influence workplace behaviour and organisational culture, including employee involvement, motivation, job satisfaction and feedback.

Reinforcing the importance of the employee role, Cetindamar Kozanoglu and Abedin [53] argue that digital transformation depends not only on technological integration, but also on employees' ability and willingness to engage with the digital technologies. This necessitates a structured approach to digital skills development. They note the neglect of the employee role and experience in digital transformation literature and call for the reimagination of both. Their perspective on skills, framed through the affordance theory suggest that opportunities for behaviour do not automatically result in actualisation. A critical implication of their argument is that digital skills development must go beyond knowing how to use digital technologies. It must also include the awareness of when and why to engage with them. This notion suggests that knowledge, perceptions and attitudes of employees towards technologies are just as important as their ability to use them. Such insights are of particular interest to the mining sector given its reported low rate of digital technology adoption [8].

In the same line of thought, Roberts *et al*. [54] argue that digital innovations are only successful if they are adopted, used and integrated into work practices. There is therefore a need to understand the factors shaping adoption behaviours [40]. To explore these factors, the paper draws insights from the technology adoption literature. This body of work consistently demonstrates that adoption is not solely a technical process but a complex interplay of human behaviour, cognitive factors and external influences. While a comprehensive analysis of technology adoption models is beyond the purview of this paper, their examination reveals two key themes central to the current discourse. Firstly, individuals' attitude towards the technology, whether positive or negative is crucial in determining adoption. Secondly, the perceived effort required to use technology influences users' confidence in their ability to navigate it. This paper argues that this confidence is inherently linked to a user's digital skills[59].

Nadeem *et al*. [56] consider employees to be the primary stakeholders in digital transformation. They argue that organisations must manage workforce challenges beyond upskilling and reskilling. These challenges include employee motivation, resistance to change and a fear of losing jobs, all of which can significantly influence the success of digital transformation initiatives. Similarly, Rocha *et al*. [57] advocate for the development of a digital mindset which goes beyond digital literacy and technical skills. Such a mindset includes an understanding and appreciation of the value of digital transformation, as well as the knowledge of how a data-driven business operates.

Some studies stress the need to create opportunities for active participation and involvement in digital transformation efforts. It is noted that involving employees in decision-making, enhances not only their openness to transformation, but also their willingness to learn [44], [62]. In their literature review on the prevalence of human elements in digital transformation, Kaszás et al. [59] found the need for change in attitudes amongst employees, the importance

of skills and continuous learning, and lastly collaboration and communication as key elements to consider.

The literature on human factors in digital transformation points to increasing expectations from the future workforce, raising a pertinent question: Are employees ready for this transformation? Cetindamar Kozanoglu and Abedin [57] caution that employees who are not prepared for digital transformation will have feelings of information overload and anxiety, which can have disastrous outcomes for the digital transformation process. While much of this literature originates outside the mining sector, the insights are particularly relevant given mining's unique challenges. Low levels of digital adoption in the sector have been linked to workforce capacity challenges and transformation efforts often confront entrenched organisational cultures and skills gaps [7], [34], [35].Mahmoodi *et al*. [64]'s finding that employees' digital readiness can increase technology adoption rates by as much as five times further highlights its criticality towards digital transformation.

3.2.1 Digital readiness and workforce implications

The paper defines digital readiness as the ability and confidence to effectively use digital technology while maintaining a positive outlook towards their use [59], [61], [65], [66]. Workforce readiness is a critical factor in the success of digital transformation, yet much of the existing literature has focused on organisational readiness rather than employee readiness. While various studies examine workforce readiness in manufacturing [67], education [66], [68] and healthcare [44], research on workforce readiness within the mining sector remains scarce. This gap reinforces the urgent need for industry-specific studies, particularly because mining presents unique technological and operational challenges.

Bahyan et al. [65] advocate for raising awareness among employees to prepare them for the inevitable changes brought by digital transformation. Althubaiti et al. [66] suggest that this awareness can be accomplished through structured technology sessions. Similarly, Paryanto et al. [70] highlight openness to change coupled with strong digital capabilities as fundamental aspects of workforce preparedness.

Recent research emphasises the importance of robust change management practices. Some studies argue that the inevitable change associated with digital transformation is almost impossible without the assistance of change management specialists [61], [71], [72], [73]. Mutambik *et al*. [74] note that resistance to change not only slows down digital transformation but can exacerbate existing problems in the workplace, particularly when employees perceive change as disruptive or threatening. Narbariya *et al*. [68] contend that readiness is shaped by the employees' belief about their own and the organisation's capacity to change, as well as the perceived benefits of doing so. Mutambik *et al*. [74]'s empirical study supports this view, finding that direct benefits to employees – (*those directly affecting the employee*) have a stronger influence on acceptance than indirect organisational benefits. These findings align with Paryanto et al. [70], who found that employees are generally more receptive to change if it perceived to improve their daily tasks.

Yet, a critical challenge remains in understanding whether digital transformation initiatives truly benefit individual employees. While the broader organisational gains are well-documented [75] , the question of whether employees perceive such changes as advantageous to their roles and well-being is frequently overlooked [44], [74]. A case study conducted by Bulgheroni et al. [44] at a hospital in Italy highlights this disconnect. The study found that resistance to digital technologies initially stemmed from management's failure to clearly demonstrate how digital tools would directly benefit staff. Once employees began to perceive tangible improvements in their day-to-day work, adoption increased significantly. The authors concluded that the alignment of digital tools with existing workflows and employee needs was a critical factor in successful adoption.

Resistance to digital transformation is frequently driven by employees' own perceived lack of digital skills or technological competence. Employees who feel unprepared or incapable of using new technologies are more likely to experience stress, anxiety and fear of job displacement. Beyond the acquisition of digital skills, the literature increasingly points to the importance of continuous learning and adaptability as crucial components of digital readiness. Rocha *et al*. [61] point to a lack of motivation and initiative to learn new things as key issues for readiness. They stress the need for employees to develop their ability to learn on a continuous basis. Similarly, Pham *et al*. [43] state that to achieve digital readiness, it is not sufficient to just develop the digital skills but also foster individual learning. Anatan [67] and Zabelina et al. [76] found that unskilled employees are less likely to embrace training opportunities, particularly when these come at a personal cost. This is very relevant for mining considering their notable presence in the sector.

The current paper could identify only a limited amount of research pertaining workforce digital readiness. A broader review of organisational digital readiness models was therefore conducted to identify which themes were covered related to the human or workforce aspect. Only the dimensions dealing with human aspects were considered. The findings are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Human factors representation in organisational digital readiness models

Source	Industry	Factors considered
[77]	Manufacturing	ICT employee skills; qualifications; knowledge in digital transformation areas; continuous training
[78]	SMEs, in the Food industry	Experience of leaders; education levels; entrepreneurial experience; views of social capital
[79]	Manufacturing SMEs	Employee skills; skills acquisition; knowledge sharing and collaboration; innovation management; integrity of leaders
[80]	Supply chain ecosystem	Education; training and development; digital skills and knowledge of digital transformation; access and usage of internet
[71]	Not specified	Motivation for change; digital competencies
[67]	SMEs, industry not specified	Knowledge about digital technologies; management support; motivation to work with digital technologies, competencies to work with digital technologies
[81]	Health	Knowledge, skills, experience; digital leaders; training
[82]	Education	Individual attitude; technology literacy; organisational culture; leadership qualities
[59]	Education	Information seeking behaviour; information sharing behaviour; Digital media awareness
[61]	Manufacturing (large firms)	Digital leadership & sponsors; people engagement; socio-technical capabilities development; digital mindset; breaking resistance

Source: Author compilation

A noticeable trend in industry representation is the concentration of research on manufacturing, education and SMEs while studies on the mining sector remain limited. Even with the variations in the conceptualisation of readiness, common themes emerge. Most models emphasise education, training, digital literacy, digital awareness and leadership as key dimensions of digital readiness. It is therefore reasonable to assume that similar factors would influence digital readiness in the mining workforce. Given the fragmented nature of digital transformation in mining, a pattern similar to that reported by Zabelina *et al*. [76], employee perceptions and attitudes toward technology adoption, training opportunities and job security are likely to play a significant role.

Skills consistently emerge in the literature on human factors and digital readiness, yet they present only one part of the equation. This suggests that workforce capability for digital

transformation should be understood as more than a function of skillsets alone. Consequently, a digital transformation skills framework for the mining sector should include not only technical skills but also digital awareness and adaptability. The next section examines the specific digital skills identified in existing industry discourse and literature within the context of the sector's transformation.

3.3 Digital skills requirements in the mining sector

Digital skills may be broadly defined as attitudes, behaviours capabilities, character traits, competencies and knowledge linked to the use of digital technologies and applications [83]. Their increasing prominence is evidenced by the prevalence of frameworks aimed at understanding and defining these skills. However, much of these frameworks have been generic and developed from a societal perspective [10], [84] with the workplace context mostly neglected.

While there is consensus that the adoption of digital technologies is transforming the nature of work in the mining sector, the sector has been accused of not doing enough to equip its workers for this transformation [17]. Mahmoodi *et al*. [64] highlight the stress increase experienced by employees due to the introduction of technology, particularly when employees lack the necessary skills. Additionally, Ramdoo *et al*. [49] indicate that the policies concerning employment in the sector need to clearly articulate how they will address the concerning mismatch between existing skills and those needed in the mine of the future.

It is reported that while all occupations will be affected, it will not be to the same extent [85]. The Minerals Council Chile [14] estimates that workers from the extraction, processing and maintenance parts of the value chain are the ones most impacted by digital technologies. Due to the paucity of research regarding the conceptualisation of digital skills in the South African mining sector, a broader approach was taken to include the global view. To identify the digital skills requirements globally, skills lists from three mining jurisdictions as presented by their respective Mineral Councils were clustered thematically. Table 4 below presents the results:

Table 4: Digital skills requirements in the mining sector across various regions

Thematic cluster	**Canadian Mining Workforce** [15]	**Australian Mining Workforce** [86], [87]	**Chilean Mining Workforce** [14]	**Prevalence***
Data, analytics and decision support	"Data mining", "data analytics", "statistics", "data interpretation", "mathematics", "statistical analysis", "data-based decision-making"	"Data analytics", "data and digital literacy", "data management", "data modelling", "trend analysis and forecasting", "judgement and decision-support skills"	"data analysis", "judgement and data driven decision-making", "logical-mathematical reasoning"	25%
Engineering/Technical systems	"STEM basic skills", "systems development", "mechanics and advanced engineering", "systems integration", "mine modelling", "programming and coding"	"Operational and planning skills", "troubleshooting", "technical diagnostic", "systems thinking", "scenario planning, predictive modelling and options analysis", "market forecasting", "advanced system development"		20%
Digital operations and Equipment Interaction	"Virtual reality", "artificial reality", "hand eye coordination and quick reaction time"	"Multitasking and real time-monitoring", "simulation proficiency", "spatial awareness", "situational awareness", "digital interface proficiency", " manage autonomous systems"	"Managing integrated operations", "digital management",	17%
Problem-solving and innovation	"Problem solving", "Ability to "think outside the box"", "creativity", "research and product development"	"Advanced problem solving", "design skills"	"Creativity and innovation", "critical thinking"	13%
Collaboration and communication	"Ability to work in diverse groups", "communication", "teamwork"	"Communication and collaboration skills", "interpersonal skills"		8%
ICT and software proficiency	"Computer and software skills", "electronics and maintenance", "IT operations"	"Business information systems operations"		6%
Leadership and change management	"Leadership skills"	"Change management skills"," complex stakeholder engagement",		5%
Adaptability and learning mindset	"Ability to learn and adapt to new knowledge", "lifelong learning"			3%
Sustainability			"Circular economy", "climate change"	3%

Source: Author compilation

From the table above, it is evident that the future mine worker will be expected to be highly data oriented. As such, the ability to interpret and analyse data is considered a core competency. This aligns with Ramdoo *et al*. [49], who identify data as the central force behind disruptive technologies. In addition, workers must be technology savvy. They must possess the technical ability to operate digital tools as well as the ability to interpret digital output. There is also a pronounced emphasis on engineering and technical skillsets. Workers are expected to have a blend of foundational STEM knowledge along with the ability to design, operate and optimise complex mining systems. Cognitive skills such as complex decision-making, creativity and critical thinking are somewhat less emphasised. However, it is argued that the demand of these skills will grow as digital technologies become more integrated, given their resistance to automation [16]. Notably, consistent with the broader digital transformation literature, there is less of an emphasis on softer interpersonal skills, particularly change management and the capacity for continuous learning.

The study upon which this paper reports could not identify any academic literature specifically addressing digital skills needs in the South African mining industry. As a result, the Sector Skills Plan (SSP) - a document compiled annually by the Mining Qualifications Authority in compliance with national legislation was explored as an alternative. The SSP serves as a key mechanism for capturing mining organisations' skills needs and outlining planned interventions to address identified gaps [88] . Notably, digital transformation was identified as a key driver of changing skills requirements in both the 2022-2023 and the 2024-2025 editions. In the earlier edition, digital literacy and computer literacy were highlighted as the most common skill gaps across all occupational levels. However, the latter edition mentions only computer literacy. This raises uncertainty as to whether progress has been made in addressing digital literacy or whether the issue has fallen off the sector's radar. Additionally, digital literacy was merely conceptualised as being digitally informed, familiar with new technologies and possessing the ability to operate said technologies. The absence of a formal framework outlining digital skills requirements in the South African mining sector despite sectoral recognition of digital transformation as a key driver of change highlights a critical disconnect between policy awareness and structured capability development.

4 TOWARDS A DIGITAL SKILLS FRAMEWORK FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN MINING SECTOR

The preceding sections have highlighted a clear and growing need for digital skills for the mining sector driven by the increasing adoption of digital technologies. Furthermore, a report by the World Economic Forum [15] revealed that 73,3% of mining companies identified a lack of skills as key deterrent from adopting new technologies. Even so, Rotatori *et al*. [89] note a shortage of research informing upskilling decisions and strategies as well policies to support employees in digitally transforming work environments. While international digital skills frameworks and skills lists might frame our understanding of digital skills, Kruss and. Wildschut [90]warn against simply adopting contextually inappropriate frameworks for skills development from advanced economies who have different development trajectories.

Within the South African mining context, this paper positions workforce capability as a function of readiness, skills and adaptability and argues for a digital skills framework that is sensitive to not only skills but also attitudinal elements. Informed by both global literature and regionally relevant insights the proposed framework must strike a balance between technical, technological, cognitive and data related skills while also incorporating the soft interpersonal skills linked to the adaptability of individuals. Furthermore, it should integrate elements of readiness such as perception and attitudes towards digital technologies, access to and uptake of training, employee inclusion and involvement, awareness and understanding of digital tools, confidence in their use and change enablement. As the literature highlights, the motivation and willingness to engage in continuous learning are indispensable in an evolving work environment and should be explicitly addressed in digital transformation efforts.

This paper accepts Pham *et al*. [91]'s characterisation of the reciprocal nature of the relationship between digital skills and digital readiness. They note that the development of digital skills is both a precursor to and an indicator of an employee's readiness to engage with digital technologies. As skills develop through experience, training and confidence, they enhance readiness, which in turn supports further skill acquisition. This interplay forms a foundational premise for the framework proposed in this paper. The paper proposes that a digital skills framework that manages this interplay will be crucial in advancing digital adoption.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article examined the digital transformation landscape of the mining sector both globally and locally, with a particular focus on workforce implications. Digital technologies are anticipated to play a decisive role in addressing critical challenges of high operating costs, depletion of high-grade reserves and hazardous conditions, while enhancing operational efficiency, safety and sustainability. Nonetheless, the rate of digital adoption has been uneven across geographies with infrastructure, regulatory and work-force related challenges often cited in developing regions. The literature however remains heavily weighted towards technical and infrastructural barriers, with comparatively limited focus on the human dimension.

Evidence from other sectors emphasise that human factors, such as digital confidence, adaptability and attitudes toward technology are critical to achieving digital readiness and ultimately successful transformation. Yet, these dimensions remain underrepresented in mining-specific research, especially within developing regions like South Africa. This suggests that targeted interventions to strengthen workforce capabilities, attitudes and adaptability could accelerate digital readiness in the South African mining sector and enhance the effectiveness of technological investments.

A critical gap was also identified between the digital demands of modern mining operations and the existing skills profile of the workforce from a global perspective. Compounding this for the South African mining sector is the fact that the country already has challenges with regards to its human capital as evidenced by various human capital indicators. The lack of a context-specific framework in South Africa highlights the need for a more grounded understanding of digital skills and workforce dynamics within the local mining sector. The paper calls for digital transformation skills framework that integrates human factors, digital readiness and skill categories. Furthermore, it argues for the involvement and engagement of the mining stakeholders in the development of this framework. While literature is a good starting point to provide foundation, Ramdoo *et al*. [49] points out that it is mining companies themselves that are the most appropriate and informed stakeholders for identifying the future skills required in the sector.

Future research could focus on the systematic development and empirical validation of the proposed framework across various mining contexts. Additionally, comparative studies could explore the applicability and adaptation of similar frameworks in other industrial sectors, enabling cross-sectoral learning and refinement.

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MAKING WAVES IN CATTLE HANDLING: A SIMULATION-DRIVEN APPROACH TO SAFER AND MORE PRODUCTIVE FACILITIES

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ABSTRACT

The beef supply chain is important to South Africa's economy, food security, and rural development, with cattle handling facilities playing a critical role in animal welfare, operational efficiency, and meat quality. However, many facilities evolve through trial-and-error designs that neglect cattle behavioural needs, creating stress hotspots and inefficiencies. This study addresses the gap between ethological research and engineering practice by developing behavioural state diagrams that model cattle movement and stress responses across five universal handling phases: movement to sorting pens, passing gates, pen transfers, chute entry, and crush exit. Using an iterative narrative review and UML modelling, observed behaviours and environmental triggers were formalised into discrete states and transitions. The resulting framework links specific design features to behavioural outcomes, enabling more humane, efficient, and evidence-based facility layouts. This approach lays the groundwork for decision-support tools that integrate behavioural science into cost-effective, welfare-driven livestock facility design.

Keywords: Cattle handling facilities, Animal welfare, Facility design, Ethology, Unified Modelling Language

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1 INTRODUCTION

The beef supply chain is critical to South Africa's economy, food security, and rural development, with its growth offering significant opportunities for inclusive progress, provided that persistent challenges such as disease management are addressed [1-3]. Within the beef supply chain, cattle handling facilities serve as critical infrastructure from cow-calf operations to abattoirs, delivering both economic and animal welfare benefits [4].

The beef supply chain is a complex process that involves multiple stages, from raising cattle to delivering beef products to consumers. It all starts at cattle production on a farm of any scale with the cow-calf operation, breeding cows to produce calves. Calves are separated from their mothers at the appropriate time to feed on a diet of grass, hay, or specific feed. Farmers sell their fattened-up cattle through an auction or directly to a feedlot for a finishing phase. Here, cattle are brought to an optimal weight for slaughter through a high-energy diet. Abattoirs process the cattle into primal cuts and package them to distribute to wholesalers for further packaging to meet consumer demand.

Each stage is vital to deliver the correct amount of beef product across South Africa. During the stages, cattle are handled through a facility. Cattle handling facilities are crucial at every stage of the beef supply chain because they ensure animal welfare, operational efficiency, and meat quality. On farms, well-designed "kraals", pens, and chutes allow for safe vaccinations, tagging, and sorting, reducing animal and worker stress [5-8]. Reducing stress in feedlots, weighing scales, feed bunks, and hospital pens helps improve cattle health and growth, ensuring optimal weight gain before slaughter. At abattoirs, lairage pens and humane restraint systems comply with food safety and animal welfare regulations, preventing contamination and ensuring ethical treatment. Even in auctions and transport, proper handling facilities minimise injuries and stress, which can affect meat tenderness and safety [9]. Without these systems, the entire supply chain—from farm to fork—would face higher risks of disease, inefficiency, and poor-quality beef, impacting farmers, processors, and consumers alike.

Despite their importance, many cattle handling facilities have evolved through generational trial and error rather than scientific design. Such legacy layouts often prioritise human convenience at the expense of animal welfare, neglecting key behavioural factors like flight zones and herd dynamics [10-13]. Common design flaws, including narrow chutes, dead ends, and inconsistent lighting, create predictable stress hotspots that trigger adverse responses[4]. Although stress behaviours in livestock are well documented, practical tools to translate these insights into engineering design parameters remain limited [7, 13].

A critical gap exists between ethological research, the scientific study of animal behaviour, and engineering practice. Ethology records behavioural thresholds but rarely expresses them in ways compatible with simulation tools [14, 15]. Meanwhile, engineering models tend to treat cattle as passive units rather than responsive, conscious beings [16, 17].

To address this gap, there is a need for an evidence-based approach that integrates behavioural science with engineering design principles. While the value of behaviourally informed facility design is acknowledged, its implementation depends on two pillars: empirical behavioural modelling and systematic engineering validation.

Currently, no software exists that enables farmers or designers to benchmark their facilities against behaviourally enhanced alternatives quantitatively. This hinders the ability to identify stress-inducing bottlenecks or justify improvements through cost-benefit analysis.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a behavioural state diagram to model cattle movement and stress responses within handling facility designs by translating animal behaviour into actionable, expert-informed design insights.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cattle movement and behaviour in confinement

Cattle behaviour in handling facilities is shaped by the conflict between their evolutionary instincts and the constraints of artificial environments. In open fields, cattle exhibit fluid, self-directed movement primarily motivated by grazing and social interaction [18]. However, when confined, they encounter stressors such as restricted space, human proximity, and sensory overload. These conditions trigger observable stress behaviours, including baulking, vocalisation, and heavy breathing.

The likelihood of transitioning between behavioural states depends heavily on facility design parameters [13]. For example, cattle maintain defined flight zones, personal space buffers typically ranging from 1.5 to 5 meters, which, when breached, can induce panic responses [10, 12, 19]. Their panoramic vision (approximately 330°) and sensitivity to motion make them highly reactive to visual and auditory stimuli [13]. Cattle often misinterpret shadows or changes in floor texture as obstacles, due in part to limited depth perception caused by minimal binocular overlap [20, 21]. These biological traits create predictable stress hotspots in poorly designed facilities, particularly in areas with narrow chutes, abrupt lighting transitions, or sharp-angled turns.

Understanding these behavioural triggers is essential for developing handling environments that support smooth cattle movement and reduce fear-based reactions.

2.2 Behaviour variability and herd dynamics

Cattle behaviour is not uniform across individuals or contexts, and this variability presents further design challenges. Herd dynamics typically show that 70–80% of cattle will follow a leader, but breed-specific differences are well documented. For instance, Bos indicus cattle generally exhibit greater reactivity and sensitivity to handling compared to Bos taurus breeds [11, 21, 22]. Reproductive state also influences behaviour. Cows in heat tend to increase locomotion, while maternal aggression in dams with calves requires handlers to adapt their approach [23-25].

GPS tracking studies have shown that, under low-stress conditions, cattle navigate pastures using looping paths over 10–100-meter ranges. These movement patterns are efficient for resource exploitation and typically follow a stop-and-move rhythm [9, 26]. However, when under stress, this behaviour shifts to bunching and rapid flight movements, a pattern exploited by low-stress handling techniques that mimic predator-avoidance responses using 45°–60° approach angles [7, 9].

These behavioural dynamics underscore the need for adaptable facility designs that account for individual differences and herd-based flow tendencies.

2.3 Facility design

Effective cattle handling facilities must integrate three interdependent systems: spatial layout, environmental conditions, and human–animal interaction protocols [4]. Research shows that radial corral layouts reduce stress by minimising the need for 180° turns. Similarly, curved chutes with radii of 12–15 meters outperform angular designs by obscuring the exit and encouraging forward movement [4, 27, 28].

Structural components such as backing gates and solid-sided alleys also contribute to smoother flow [4]. For adult cattle, chute widths of 0.7–0.9 meters prevent reversal behaviours, while solid walls reduce peripheral distractions that may cause hesitation. The sensory environment plays a crucial role as well. Uniform, diffuse lighting eliminates shadow-induced hesitation, and non-slip flooring with a slope of less than 3% supports confident footing.

Human factors are equally significant. Quiet handling has been shown to reduce cortisol levels by up to 20%, while effective positioning of handlers, particularly maintaining the animal's point of balance, can promote voluntary forward movement [9].

Together, these design elements form a behavioural management system in which facility geometry actively influences animal responses, rather than simply containing them.

3 METHODOLOGY

Academic iterative narrative reviews require continuous refinement of search criteria, integration of diverse analytical methods, and robust quality control measures. Iterative narrative reviews in academic research require a cycle of three core components: integrative search and selection, methodological integration, and quality assurance.

This study was initiated by developing behavioural state diagrams based primarily on findings from existing literature. The aim was to formalise cattle behavioural patterns observed in handling facilities into discrete states and transitions that could be used for simulation and design analysis. Key sources included academic publications in ethology, animal handling, and facility design, with particular attention to studies reporting observable stress behaviours, movement tendencies, and environmental triggers. These behavioural insights were extracted, categorised, and mapped into structured state diagrams representing cattle responses across five key facility phases.

Preliminary state diagrams were constructed using Unified Modelling Language (UML)tools (specifically Draw.io) to model behavioural transitions observed during cattle handling. These diagrams were informed by a structured literature review and supported by informal field observations. Key behavioural states such as grazing, calm movement, and resisting were encoded alongside specific environmental triggers, including handler presence, gate movement, and physical confinement. New behavioural states such as hesitation and baulking were added, and transition conditions were refined for improved realism and clarity.

All cattle handling facilities, whether simple "kraals" or advanced modern systems, consist of the same basic phases. The five key phases—moving from the field to a sorting pen, passing through gates, transferring to smaller pens, entering the working area (chute and crush), and finally standing in and exiting the crush—are universal. Even if a facility is high-tech, with automated gates, or a basic setup with wooden fences, these core stages remain consistent. The differences lie in scale, materials, and automation, but the fundamental process ensures that cattle are handled with minimal stress, whether on a small farm, a large feedlot, or an abattoir. This structured approach allows for smooth transitions between different points in the supply chain while maintaining animal welfare and operational efficiency.

The handling process was divided into five functional phases, each corresponding to a distinct physical segment of the facility:

1. Movement from the field to the sorting pen.
2. Passing through a gate.
3. Transfer from a larger pen to a smaller pen.
4. Entry into the working area (chute pen to chute, then crush).
5. Standing in and exiting the crush.

For each phase, a corresponding state diagram was drafted to capture common cattle responses under varying environmental and operational conditions.

3.1 Phase 1: Movement from the field to the sorting pen

The process begins by moving cattle from an open field or pasture into a designated sorting pen. This area is usually larger and allows the animals to gather before being directed further. Workers may use gentle herding techniques, such as walking behind the cattle or using trained dogs, to guide them without causing stress. The sorting pen helps group the animals based on specific needs, such as size, age, or health status, before they proceed to the next stage.

3.2 Phase 2: Passing through a gate

Once sorted, the cattle are guided through a gate that leads them into a more controlled pathway. This gate acts as a funnel, narrowing the space to encourage the animals to move in a single file or small groups. Proper gate design ensures smooth movement while preventing overcrowding or jamming. Workers may stand nearby to assist if an animal hesitates or needs gentle encouragement to move forward. This phase repeats throughout the entire facility each time cattle are moved through a gate.

3.3 Phase 3: Transfers from a larger to a smaller pen

After passing through the gate, the cattle enter a smaller pen, which further restricts their movement. This step helps manage their flow and prepares them for closer handling. The reduced space makes it easier to guide them toward the next stage without causing confusion or stress. Smaller pens are often designed with solid sides to prevent distractions and keep the animals focused on moving forward.

3.4 Phase 4: Entry into the working area

The cattle are then directed into a chute pen, which leads to a narrow chute, a tight walkway that funnels them toward the crush (also called a squeeze chute). The chute restricts sideways movement, ensuring the animal moves straight ahead. Once inside the crush, the animal is gently restrained for procedures like vaccinations, tagging, or health inspections. The crush has adjustable sides to hold the animal securely without causing harm, allowing workers to perform tasks safely and efficiently.

3.5 Phase 5: Standing in and exiting the crush

While in the crush, the animal remains still for the necessary procedures. Workers ensure the process is quick and calm to minimise stress. Once completed, the crush is opened, and the animal exits into a release pen or returns to the pasture. Proper handling during this phase ensures the cattle remain calm and unharmed, making future handling easier.

4 FINDINGS

This section presents the behavioural state diagrams developed to model cattle movement across the five main phases of a handling facility. First, an overview will be given, followed by a detailed description of the phases. Each diagram visualises behavioural transitions in response to environmental stimuli, representing states as rectangles, transitions as arrows, and decision points as diamonds. These state diagrams enable probabilistic simulation of animal movement, where changes in facility design directly influence transition likelihoods and behavioural outcomes.

4.1 Overview

Figure 1 shows the top view of the cattle handling facility used to model movement phases. The layout includes an open field, sorting pen, pens of varying sizes, chute systems, and the crush area. Each zone reflects a typical real-world setup, serving as the spatial foundation for the behavioural diagrams.

The process starts on the left-hand side in the open field. Cattle are gathered in the open field, a large fenced pasture where cattle roam freely and graze on grass. The flow of cattle through the facility is from left to right. A sorting pen is a smaller enclosed area where cattle are gathered and can be separated into groups based on size, age, or purpose (such as medical treatment or sale). The separated groups are moved to a holding pen, a temporary space where cattle wait before being moved further through the facility, ensuring a controlled flow. The crush pen is a confined area that leads animals toward the chute, which is a narrow walkway that guides them single-file into the squeeze crush—a secure stall that gently restrains the animal so workers can safely perform tasks like vaccinations or health checks. Each part of the facility helps move cattle calmly and efficiently while keeping both animals and handlers safe.

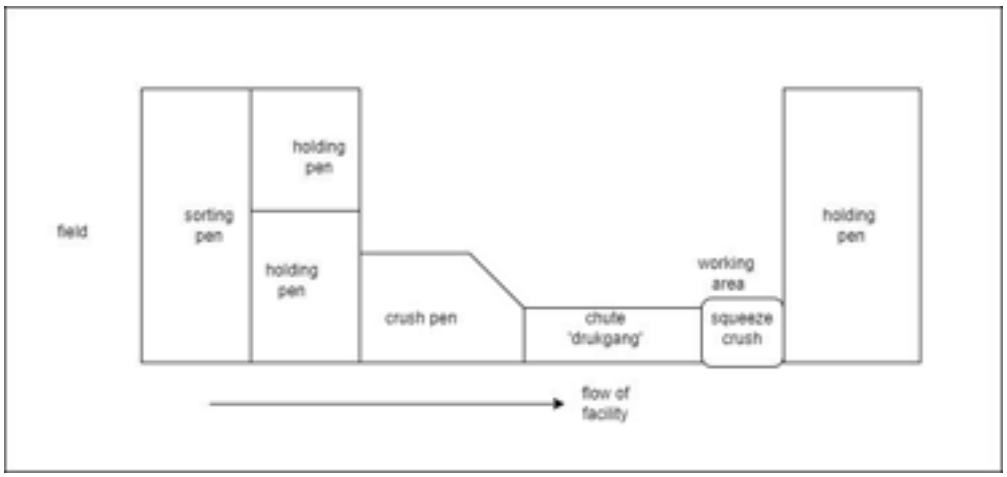

Figure 1: General handling facility top view

Figure 2 presents the high-level behavioural flow diagram, mapping the whole sequence of cattle movement through the facility. The diagram outlines mandatory location-based states and their transitions, providing a macro-level view of the process. The micro-levels will be explained in the sections to follow.

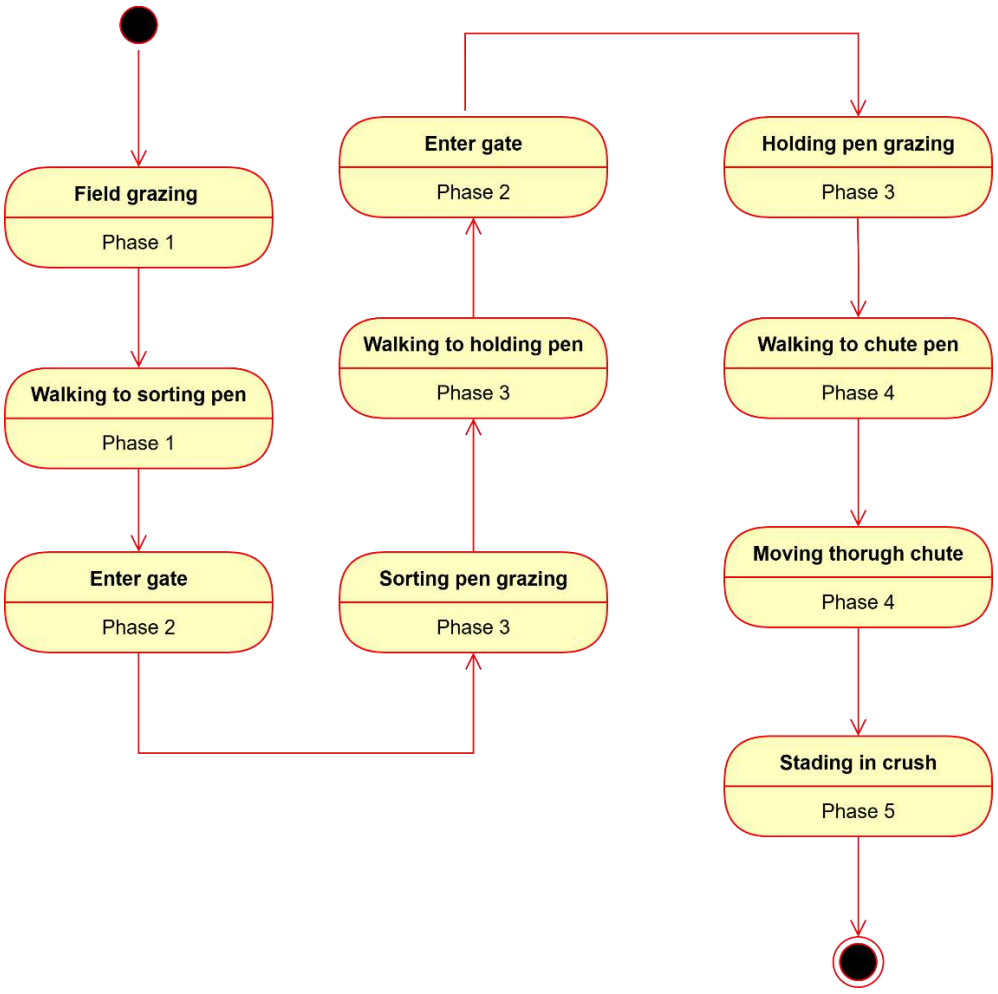

Figure 2: High-level behaviour flow

Two key behavioural bottlenecks are observed: (1) at the sorting pen, where cattle are divided into smaller groups, and (2) at the chute entry, where individual hesitation, baulking, or reversing behaviours often emerge. These points mark significant shifts in group dynamics and are critical for facility design interventions.

4.2 Phase 1 - from the field to the sorting pen

Figure 3 illustrates Phase 1, which captures cattle behaviour as they are moved from open grazing areas into the sorting pen. This phase involves a shift from low-stress states, such as grazing or standing still, to more reactive behaviours triggered by the handler's approach. Movement is often initiated by visual or auditory cues from handlers on foot, horseback, or in vehicles [29].

Common behavioural transitions include:

- From grazing to alert when the handler enters the flight zone.
- Alert to walk away or run, depending on the speed and direction of the handlers' approach.
- Pause or stand still before reaching the pen entrance.

Decision points are most frequent near gates or changes in terrain. Smooth transitions to calm movement are associated with low-pressure handling and clear visibility of the pen entrance [7, 28, 30]

Cattle graze freely in a pasture before they are brought or guided to a handling facility. As handlers approach the herd, cattle move and face a decision point depending on the stress factors. Each cow can face the decision point, or the herd breaks in smaller groups and turns to the handler if they approach too fast, or start running, or stand still if a handler is too close. From each decision point, the probability of more decision points is a possibility; however, in this case, we focus on the overall main probability of cattle returning to a calm movement towards the facility. Handlers will use different techniques and tools to guide cattle towards the final state, such as slowing down their speed, using flags or arm movements, and entering and exiting the cattle's flight zone.

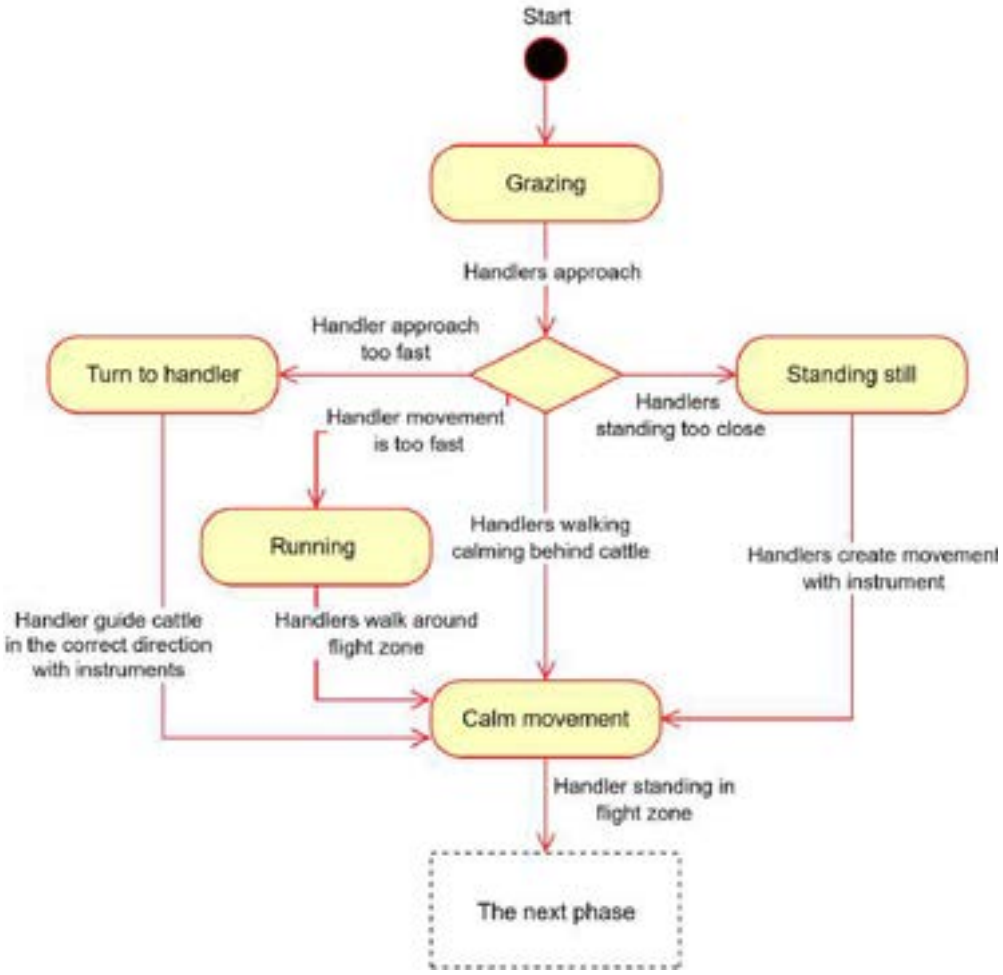

Figure 3: Phase 1 from field to sorting pen

4.3 Phase 2 - cattle passing through a gate

Figure 4 represents Phase 2, which focuses on cattle movement through gates, a frequent but critical transition point in handling systems. The diagram identifies hesitation, redirection, and stress behaviours such as turning back and vocalisation.

Video analysis for literature revealed that most of the observed flow disruptions occurred when gates were misaligned by more than 30° from the cattle's natural trajectory [4,31]. Transitions from walking calmly to hesitation or turning around were especially common at poorly positioned or unfamiliar gates.

Cattle will usually be calm before entering the gate as the gate is opened by a handler. A decision point is created, as there is a change in the close environment of the cattle. With an

open gate, cattle may walk hesitantly forward and through the gate as a handler is behind them and closing in. They may remain in a calm state and walk calmly, or turn around, as cattle are prone to return in the direction they came from. If they are startled, they will be at a dead stop until a handler puts close pressure in their flight zone. This results in different states. To conclude this phase, the goal is to get cattle from point A to point B, aiming to keep them calm as they enter, which improves over time as cattle get used to entering a handling facility.

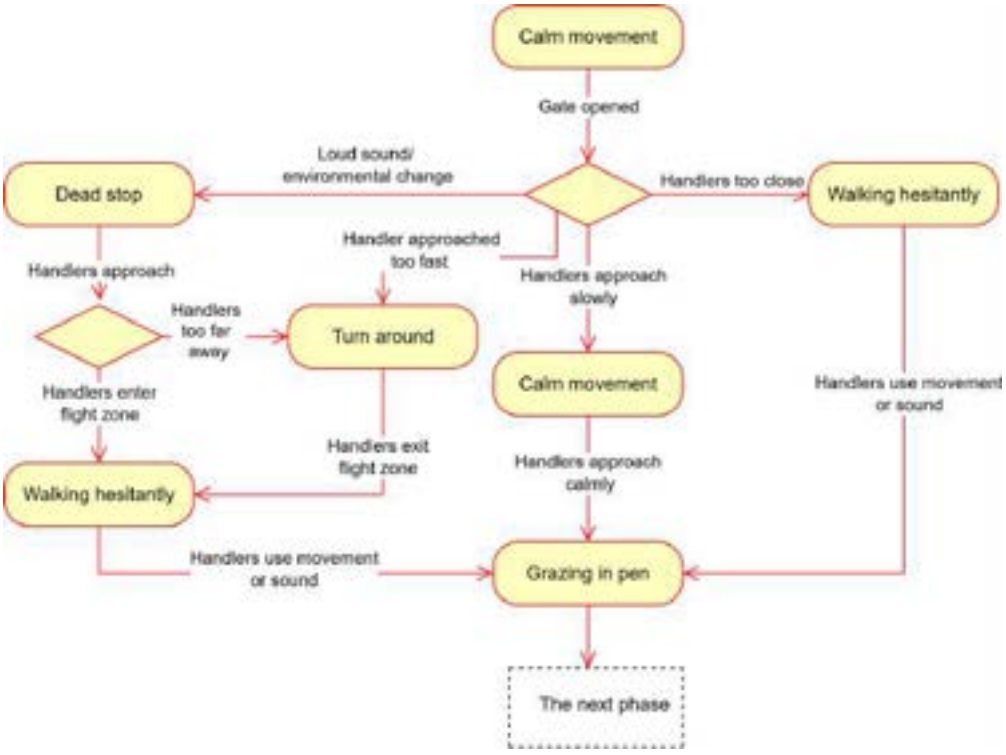

Figure 4: Phase 2 passing through a gate

Figure 4 highlights that gate orientation, visibility, and handler position significantly influence behavioural flow [4]. Well-designed radial gates with curved pathways help reduce indecision and prevent backflow [9].

4.4 Phase 3 – Moving from a larger to a smaller pen

Figure 5 models the transition from larger holding pens into smaller pens, often used to divide herds into manageable subgroups. This phase typically triggers heightened stress due to isolation, increased density, and limited movement options [13, 32].

Behavioural states such as vocalising, bunching, and running to corners were more widespread as group size decreased. Notably:

- Groups with fewer than five animals showed less aimless movement, indicating improved manageability in smaller, cohesive groups [31].
- Decision points increased near entry gates and corners, where cattle assessed crowding and visibility of conspecifics [31].

In Phase 3, cattle are generally observed grazing or standing calmly within the pen prior to any handler interaction. As handlers move closer, a decision point is introduced due to the change in proximity and the associated pressure exerted within the animals' flight zones. At this juncture, cattle may either turn around or move rapidly towards a corner, with the chosen response largely dependent on their perception of the handlers' approach and level of threat.

When turning around, cattle may proceed towards the entrance, walking hesitantly under the influence of the handler's presence, or execute a 180-degree turn if startled, which can also result in hesitant forward movement. Alternatively, when opting to run to a corner, further decision points emerge. Animals may remain stationary (freezing), attempt to jump the fence, or relocate to another corner if the handlers' approach is perceived as excessively fast. From this secondary corner position, movement towards the gate may occur, particularly if handlers continue to apply pressure within the flight zone.

Figure 5: Phase 3, from a large pen to a smaller pen

Throughout these behavioural pathways, the speed, movement, and auditory cues provided by handlers serve as critical stimuli influencing whether cattle transition to calm, directed movement or escalate into avoidance behaviours. The overarching objective in this phase is to facilitate the movement of cattle from their initial position in the pen towards the gate in a controlled and low-stress manner. With repeated exposure to the facility and handling processes, cattle are expected to exhibit reduced reactivity and improved flow, thereby enhancing handling efficiency and animal welfare outcomes.

The diagram suggests that modular pen designs, allowing for rapid herd division and visual continuity, may reduce stress-related behaviours during this phase [13, 26, 32, 33].

4.5 Phase 4 – The working area

Figure 6 represents Phase 4, detailing cattle behaviour as they are guided from a pen into the chute pen, then through the chute and into the crush. This stage involves significant spatial restriction, often resulting in increased behavioural compression [13].

Key findings from observational data include:

- Freezing behaviour was more likely in chutes narrower than 0.8 meters [7, 23].

- More than half of a herd transitioned from hesitant walking to calm movement within seconds when adequate lighting was provided [31].

In Phase 4, cattle typically enter the pen through the gate in a calm and orderly manner. Upon entry, a decision point occurs when environmental or social stimuli—such as vocalisations from other cattle or the division of the herd—affect their behaviour. In some cases, herd division may lead to freezing, followed by hesitant walking as the gate approaches, ultimately resulting in movement towards the chute. Alternatively, cattle may turn around in response to vocal cues or handler movement, moving back towards the gate.

When progressing towards the chute, the closing of the gate behind the animals may help maintain calm movement; however, changes in lighting or the sudden appearance of an opening may cause some to rush forward. Vocalisations from other cattle can induce freezing, after which animals may resume movement hesitantly under the influence of handler movement or sound.

Within this phase, another critical decision point arises when animals are startled or stressed. This may lead to reversing out of position, which can escalate into freezing if handlers apply close pressure. Conversely, cattle in a calm state may continue forward movement, while hesitant walking may occur if the handler's presence is perceived as uncertain or inconsistent.

Throughout this phase, handler actions—particularly movement patterns, speed, and auditory cues—are decisive in influencing behavioural transitions. The goal is to maintain cattle in a calm, forward-moving state towards the chute while minimising stress-induced behaviours such as freezing, rushing, or reversing. With repeated exposure and consistent handling practices, cattle are expected to navigate this stage with improved flow, thereby reducing handling difficulty and enhancing overall animal welfare.

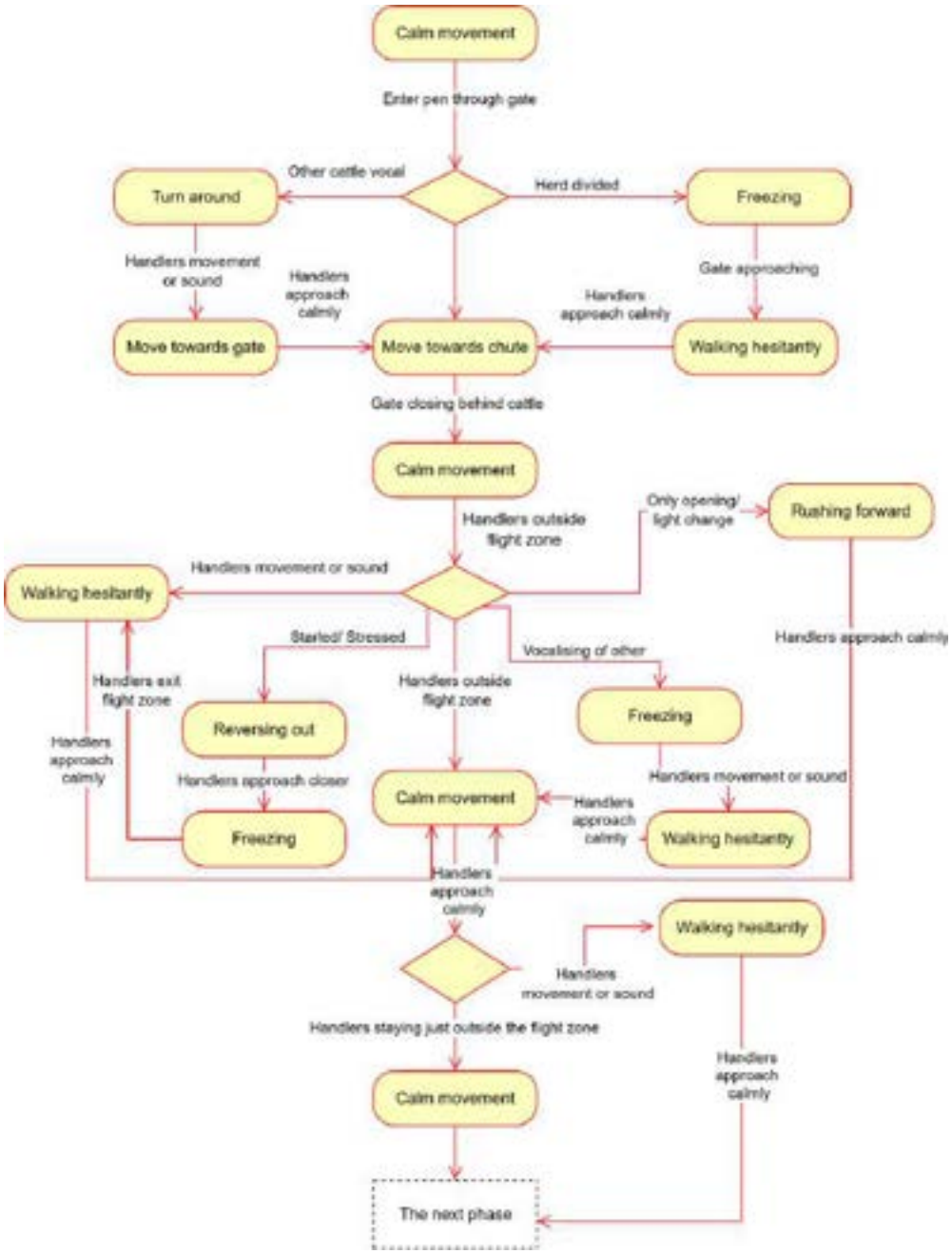

Figure 6: Phase 4, the working area

The state diagram demonstrates how proper chute geometry, lighting, and handler positioning can reduce flow resistance and encourage voluntary movement. Decision nodes in this phase were common at the chute entrance and within the crush approach corridor.

4.6 Phase 5 – Exiting the working area

Figure 7 models the final stage, where cattle stand still in the crush for handling procedures and are then released. This phase is critical, as it concentrates stress, and recovery is heavily influenced by the exit pathway design [4].

Behavioural transitions observed include:

- From standing still to trotting upon release, especially if the standing duration exceeded 30 seconds.

- Most cattle exhibited signs of stress (e.g., rapid movement, vocalisation) after prolonged restraint, especially if they were young and if it was the first time in the handling facility [31].
- Cattle exiting to open pastures resumed grazing a lot faster than those placed in unfamiliar or confined post-procedure pens [23, 31].

In Phase 5, cattle generally begin in a state of calm movement as they approach the crush, with handlers positioned within their flight zone to maintain forward progression. At this point, the opening of the crush introduces a decision point, where environmental factors such as loud sounds or sudden visual changes may cause reversing behaviour. This reversal can be managed through appropriate hands-on handling techniques, returning the animal to forward movement.

If the crush is opened without startling stimuli, cattle may stand still momentarily before resuming calm movement in response to the handler's presence, movement, or sound. Once positioned inside the crush, the gate is closed, and animals remain stationary while required handling or inspection procedures occur.

Upon completion, the crush is opened again, initiating another decision point. The presence of a loud noise at this stage may induce a startle response, resulting in a rapid walking or trotting exit. In the absence of startling stimuli, animals typically exit in a controlled manner, maintaining calm movement as they leave the facility.

The phase concludes with cattle entering the field, ideally in a relaxed state. Throughout this stage, the primary objective is to facilitate smooth and low-stress movement through and out of the crush, minimising hesitation, reversing, or startle responses. Effective handler positioning, quiet movement, and consistent pressure are critical in achieving efficient flow while safeguarding animal welfare.

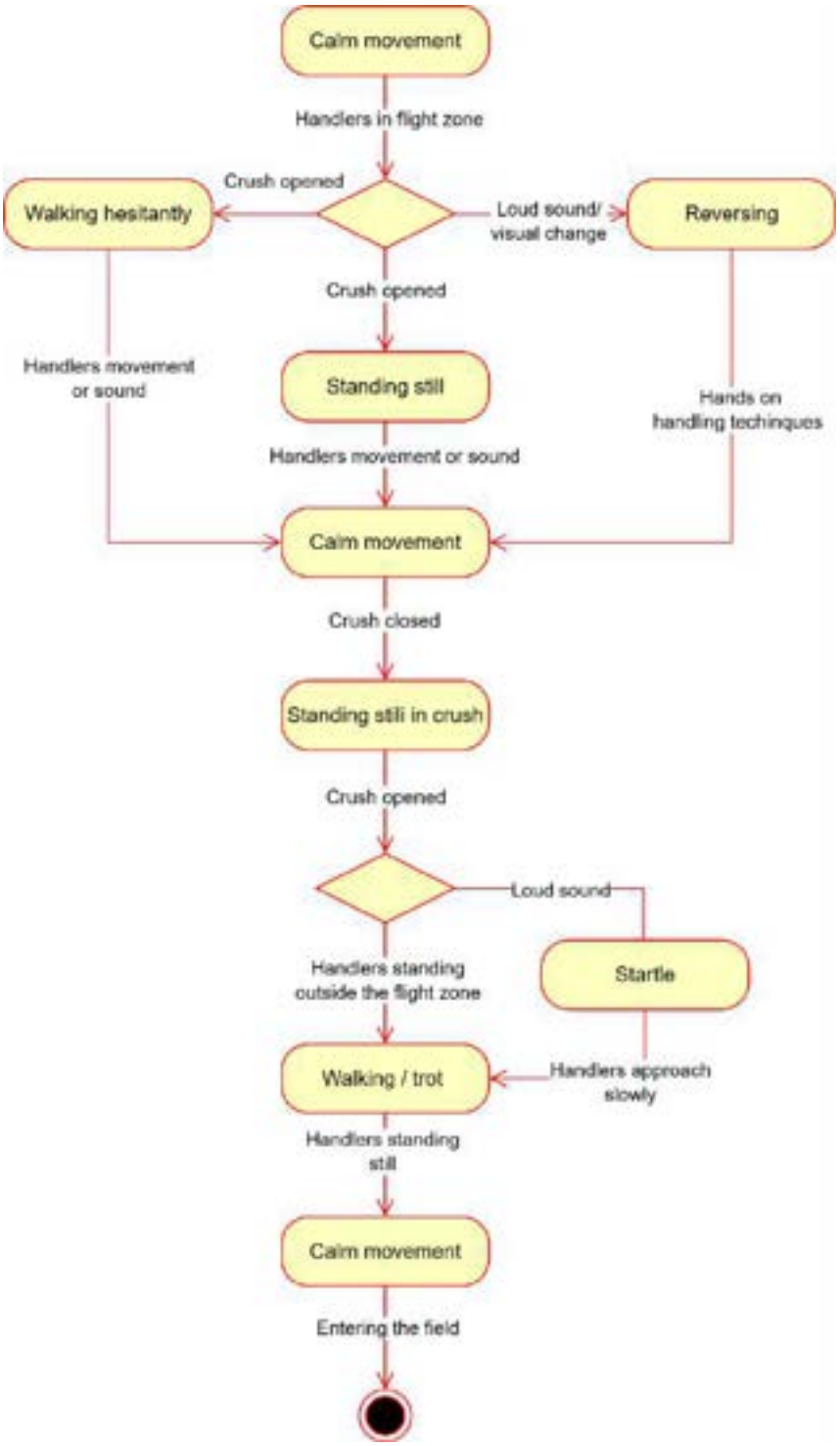

Figure 7: Phase 5 exiting the working area

The diagram highlights the importance of designing clear, calming exits from the crush to support behavioural recovery and maintain welfare.

5 DISCUSSION

The behavioural state diagrams developed in this study provide a structured framework for understanding how cattle respond to specific handling conditions within facility environments.

Rather than simply documenting movement, the diagrams formalise cattle decision-making processes in terms of spatial constraints and external stimuli.

The state diagrams presented in Figures 2 to 7 systematically guesstimate cattle behaviour across all facility phases. They establish clear links between design features (such as chute width, gate angle, and lighting) and behavioural responses (such as freezing, vocalisation, and baulking).

The observed transitions across all five facility phases demonstrate that cattle behaviour is not random but highly contingent on design features, such as gate alignment, pen dimensions, and lighting conditions. Stress hotspots consistently appeared at herd division points (Phase 3) and chute entries (Phase 4), underscoring the need for careful planning in these areas. This reinforces the need to design systems that anticipate and accommodate behavioural variability.

Importantly, the state-based models capture the distinction between voluntary flow behaviours and stress-induced reactions, offering a more nuanced perspective than traditional layout analyses. By translating qualitative behavioural insights into discrete, modelled states, the diagrams bridge an important gap between ethological observation and engineering application.

The inclusion of behavioural responses during the exit phase is particularly noteworthy. This is an area often overlooked in facility modelling, yet the findings suggest that how animals exit confinement has a measurable effect on their recovery. By encoding these post-release behaviours into the state model, the study extends the application of behaviour-based design beyond containment and restraint.

Overall, the diagrams bridge an important gap between ethological observation and engineering application by translating qualitative behavioural insights into discrete, modelled states.

6 CONCLUSION

This study has presented a behavioural modelling framework for cattle handling systems, using phase-specific state diagrams to formalise how cattle respond to environmental and human-induced stimuli across different facility zones. By integrating behavioural science with engineering principles, the research has identified key stress points, such as gate transitions, herd separations, and chute entries, that consistently influence animal welfare and flow efficiency. Through these continued efforts, the research aims to contribute to the development of humane, data-driven, and cost-effective cattle handling systems that align with long-term goals for animal welfare and sustainable agricultural practices.

6.1 Future research

While the current framework provides a foundational step toward a practical decision-support tool for livestock facility design, further validation through expert consultation and real-world testing remains essential to refine its predictive accuracy and operational reliability. Future work should prioritise expanding the behavioural state database to encompass a broader range of facility conditions, integrating economic modelling to assess cost-benefit trade-offs, and validating the framework through simulation tools in operational settings. A Delphi-style expert review process could further enhance the model's precision by systematically incorporating stakeholder feedback. Once refined, this tool will enable data-driven facility improvements by explicitly linking behavioural outcomes to measurable design parameters, ultimately serving as the behavioural foundation for scientifically grounded, yet practically applicable, predictive design tools.

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THE IOPS PACKAGE: A TOOL FOR INPUT-OUTPUT PRODUCT SPACE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The product space (PS) and economic complexity frameworks have made a significant contribution to the study of economic development. The extended input-output product space (IO-PS) has extended the economic complexity framework to the study of value chains. There are an increasing number of coding packages that support economic complexity analyses. To date, two packages have been released that support IO-PS analysis. One for MATLAB and the other for Python. This paper introduces IOPS, the first R package enabling value-chain based product space analyses. Addressing prior gaps, *iopspackage* introduce toggles to resolve metric calculation discrepancies and extends PS metrics to incorporate value chains, offering nuanced insights into specific industries. Key metrics include Revealed Comparative Advantage, Proximity, Relatedness Density, Economic Complexity Index, and Opportunity Value. The *iopspackage* essentially introduces input-output product space (IO-PS) analyses, combining PS metrics with global value chain analysis for the R environment.

Keywords: Input-Output Product Space, Economic Complexity, Global Value Chains, Trade Data Analytics, R

1 INTRODUCTION

The development of the *product space* (PS) [13] and the subsequent development of the economic complexity literature, based on the seminal work of Hidalgo and Hausmann [12], have led to new insights into how nations develop. These methods are increasingly used by researchers and practitioners to trace countries' development paths and to inform policymaking [8,11]. Open-source packages support the calculation of key PS metrics, yet discrepancies in implementation persist across packages [7]. Recent extensions, such as the value chain application of the PS described by Bam and De Bruyne [3], are not yet incorporated in existing R packages. These shortcomings have hampered the widespread uptake of PS-based analysis by relevant stakeholders. Open, reproducible tools are therefore required to underpin credible PS analysis and its extension to value chain perspectives. Policy and industry users increasingly rely on diagnostics such as complexity, density, distance, and opportunity value to guide diversification strategies, but functionality in R, where a substantial share of empirical work is conducted, remains fragmented, which reduces comparability through inconsistent metric definitions, and the absence of an integrated R workflow raises barriers to teaching, extension, and policy translation.

1.1 Research Problem

Despite growing interest in the PS and economic complexity frameworks, the absence of an open, reproducible, and R-native implementation for *Input–Output Product Space* (IO-PS) analysis limits adoption in research and policy settings. Existing toolchains either reside outside R or implement overlapping metrics with discrepant assumptions, which constrains comparability, reproducibility, and pedagogy in R-based workflows.

1.2 Research objectives

The paper aims to: (i) provide an R package that integrates PS metrics with a value-chain perspective; (ii) implement configurable toggles that make assumptions explicit and reproducible; (iii) enable direct ingestion of CEPII BACI data; and (iv) generate analyst-ready outputs at tier, product category, and product levels.

1.3 Research contribution

In this paper, we introduce a novel iopspackage. The package is the first R package to enable value chain-based product space analyses. It couples product space metrics with input–output value chain mapping, accepts CEPII BACI data directly, and exposes assumption choices through explicit toggles to resolve discrepancies identified by Du Plessis and Bam [7]. The integrated workflow delivers transparent and reproducible computation of widely used indicators and produces analyst-ready outputs at tier, product category, and product levels, thereby improving comparability across alternative assumptions and supporting policy analysis where credible screening of diversification opportunities is required.

2 INPUT-OUTPUT PRODUCT SPACE

This section describes the calculation of the various metrics included in the *iopspackage*. Section 2.1 focus on the generic product space metrics and then turns to value chain metric calculation in Section 2.2.

2.1 Product Space Metrics

Sections 2.1.1 - 2.1.5 presents the PS metrics germane to the IO-PS, explains them briefly and gives the corresponding equations. The notation style follows Bam *et al.* [5] and is clarified where necessary.

2.1.1 Revealed Comparative Advantage

The concept of *Revealed Comparative Advantage* (RCA) was first proposed by Balassa [1] to measure how much a country specialises in exporting a certain good, relative to the world average. RCA is computed as:

$$RCA_{c_i} = \frac{\frac{Exp(c,i)}{\sum_i Exp(c,i)}}{\frac{\sum_c Exp(c,i)}{\sum_{c,i} Exp(c,i)}} \quad \textbf{(1)}$$

Where $Exp(c,i)$ denotes the value of exports of product i by country c. $\sum$ of i, c or c,i denotes sum of all exports per product, country, or product from country, respectively. These four terms are used consistently in the subsequent formulas. RCA_{c_i} thus measures share of country c's exports that product i represents relative to the share of exports that products i represents in world trade.

RCA compares a product's share in a country's exports with its share in world exports. It is therefore an export-share indicator and does not account for import intensity, trade balance, or domestic absorption. A country can exhibit $RCA > 1$ in a product while being a net importer of that product if overall imports are large relative to exports. Analysts commonly complement RCA with additional diagnostics (for example, net-export ratios or symmetric RCA) when trade-balance context is material to the question at hand.

2.1.2 Proximity

Hidalgo et al. [13] define proximity as the likelihood that two products are co-exported by a country with a revealed comparative advantage ($RCA > 1$), under the assumption that similar products rely on overlapping capabilities and resources, including institutions, infrastructure, physical inputs, technology, or a combination thereof. Proximity reflects the idea that a country's productive potential depends on its existing basket of products and the relatedness among them. When constructing the product space, proximity is used as a metric of distance between two products [10]. Proximity is formally calculated as the minimum of the conditional probabilities of exporting one product given that another product is exported [13]. The mathematical expression for the proximity between products i and j is:

$$\theta_{ci} = min\left[P\left(M_{ci}|M_{cj}\right), P\left(M_{cj}|M_{ci}\right)\right] \quad \textbf{(2)}$$

Where the RCA formula is used to construct the so-called M matrix which is a binary matrix indicating all products that countries export with a revelated comparative advantage. A value of 1 is assigned to the country-product entry in the matrix if the RCA of country c for product p is larger than 1, and equal to zero otherwise.

2.1.3 Relatedness density and distance

Relatedness density is a concept that captures how related a country's production structure is to the capabilities required for producing a particular good. The more similar a new good is to the goods that a country already produces, the higher the relatedness density [13]. Relatedness density is calculated as the sum of all the proximities between a new good and the goods that a country already exports, normalised by the total number of proximities of products to the focal product. $Density$ is mathematically expressed as:

$$Density = \omega_j^c = \frac{\sum_i M_{cj}\theta_{ij}}{\sum_i \theta_{ij}} \quad \textbf{(3)}$$

Where θ_{ij} refers to the proximity between products i and j. M_{ci} is a binary value equal to 1 when a country has an RCA > 1 for product i, and 0, if country c has an RCA < 1 for product i.

Density values closer to 1 indicate high relatedness, while density value closer to 0 indicate lower relatedness.

The complement of density, $distance$, is also used to indicate the unrelatedness of a product to a country's production structure. Distance is calculated as the sum of all the proximities between a new good and the goods that a country does not export yet, normalised by the total number of proximities of products to the focal products [10]. Hence:

$$Distance = \delta_j^c = \frac{\sum_i (1 - M_{ci})\theta_{ij}}{\sum_i \theta_{ij}} \quad \textbf{(4)}$$

$Distance$ is a value between 0 and 1, where values close to 0 indicate that country c exports most of the products that are connected to product i, and values close to 1 indicate that country c exports very few of them (given RCA > 1).

2.1.4 Complexity

Hidalgo and Hausmann [12] proposed a complexity metric that utilises trade data as a bipartite network to assess a nation's economic complexity. This metric has a positive correlation with a country's income level, and any deviations from this correlation can indicate future growth prospects. The *Economic Complexity Index* (ECI) assesses a country's complexity based on the complexity of products the country produces, while the *Product Complexity Index* (PCI) measures the complexity of the products based on the complexity of the countries producing them. These two metrics are thus interdependent and was initially calculated using the *method of reflections* (M.o.R.) [12]. The M.o.R. first estimates the complexity of a country based on the diversity of products it exports, and the complexity of products based on the number of countries that export a product. Another iteration of country complexity is then calculated based on the initial product complexities calculated. Similarly, the second iteration of product complexity is a function of the countries that export a product with an RCA > 1. These operations can be repeated until the complexity rankings of products and countries stabilise (generally after no more than 18 iterations). A more commonly used alternative to the M.o.R., known as the vector method, derives from substituting the expressions for PCI and ECI into one another. The vector method then calculates the eigenvector corresponding to the second largest eigenvalue that satisfies the equation, as this eigenvector captures the most variance in the system and thus serves as the indicator of economic complexity. Regardless of whether the M.o.R. or vector methods are used to calculate PCI and ECI, the values are normalised by considering the mean and standard deviation of the raw values. Hence, ECI is mathematically defined as:

$$ECI = \frac{\vec{K} - <\vec{K}>}{stdev(\vec{K})} \quad \textbf{(5)}$$

Where $\vec{K}$ is the eigenvector of $M_{cc`}$, associated with the second largest eigenvalue. $M_{cc`}$ is calculated as:

$$\widetilde{M_{cc`}} = \sum_p \frac{M_{cp} M_{c`p}}{M_c M_p} \quad \textbf{(6)}$$

Similarly, PCI can be calculated as:

$$PCI = \frac{\vec{Q} - <\vec{Q}>}{stdev(\vec{Q})} \quad \textbf{(7)}$$

Where $\vec{Q}$ is the eigenvector of $M_{pp`}$, associated with the second largest eigenvalue. $M_{pp`}$ is calculated as:

$$\widetilde{M_{pp`}} = \sum_c \frac{M_{cp} M_{cp`}}{M_c M_p} \quad \textbf{(8)}$$

For both ECI and PCI, < > denotes the average of the vector values and $stdev()$ is the standard deviation of the vector values.

2.1.5 Opportunity Value and Opportunity Gain

The concepts of *Opportunity Gain* and *Opportunity Value* are integral to understanding a country's economic growth potential. While both terms are related, they differ in their approach to measuring a country's export potential.

The concept of Opportunity Value is used to estimate the potential for future economic growth in a country. It takes into account the complexity of products that a country can potentially export, based on its current capabilities and productive structures [10]. This value reflects a country's preferred placement in the product space, combining complexity and density. Moreover, Opportunity Value predicts future increases in ECI and economic growth [10]. The mathematical formula for $Opportunity\ Value$ is as follows:

$$Opportunity\ Value_c = \sum_j \omega_j^c PCI_j \quad \textbf{(9)}$$

In this case, j, represents all products for which a country does not have an RCA > 1. Opportunity Value is a measure of a country's potential to generate economic growth by considering the alignment with existing capabilities and complexity of the products it could potentially export in the future. Opportunity Gain, on the other hand, measures the change in a country's Opportunity Value over time. In essence, Opportunity Gain measures the increase or decrease in a country's ability to export a diverse range of complex products. Therefore, both measures are crucial for policymakers and investors in assessing a country's economic growth potential and identifying opportunities for investment and growth.

2.2 Value Chain Analysis

The usefulness of product space metrics can be further extended when refocused on particular industries. This is clearly illustrated in the value chain-based IO-PS analyses applied to the titanium [6], steel [4], aerospace [16], forest [18] and automotive industries [5]. The IO-PS framework combines product space analysis with input-output analysis. IO-PS analysis requires the mapping of a specific value chain into tiers, categories and products [5]. Each tier and category, has associated metrics, calculated from the average of all the product level metrics in that tier or category. An increasing number of open-source value chain mappings have become available, and IO-PS analyses hold clear utility for guiding policymaking. However, the open-source tools to support the greater uptake of the IO-PS approach have been lacking — something the *iopspackage* introduced in this paper seeks to address.

3 EXISTING PACKAGES AND NEW IOPSPACKAGE

Several packages implementing product space metrics and *global value chain* (GVC) mappings for different applications already exist. Section 3 provides an overview of these packages and compares their functionality.

3.1 EconGeo

The *EconGeo* R package is a tool created by Balland [2] at Utrecht University to perform analysis on the spatial distribution and geographical patterns of economic activities.

EconGeo calculates various indices that are widely used in fields such as economic geography, economic complexity, and evolutionary economics. These indices describe the location, distribution, spatial organisation, structure, and complexity of economic activities. The functions range from simple spatial indicators such as location quotient, Krugman specialisation index, Herfindahl or Shannon entropy indices, to more advanced functions that compute different forms of normalised relatedness between economic activities or network-

based measures of economic complexity [2]. *EconGeo* provides over fifty different functions that mostly requires a matrix as an input.

3.2 economiccomplexity

The *economiccomplexity* package [17, 19] is an R package a tool used for economic complexity-related analyses. It works with preprocessed trade data and calculates product space metrics using a specific function that the user invokes. The input data must have columns for countries, products, and export values to compute the RCA. The functions take these outputs as inputs and estimate the complexity indices, proximities, and opportunity gain.

3.3 decompr and gvc

decompr performs three different methods to break down the value-added content of exports by country and sector. The first method follows Hummels *et al.* [14] and calculates the value added origin of exports for each country and sector. The second method follows Koopman *et al.* [15]. and divides the value added of exports for each country into 9 categories, such as domestic value added and absorbed abroad, and foreign value added in exports. The third method follows Wang *et al.* [20] and further distinguishes the value added of bilateral exports into 16 categories, such as domestic value added consumed by direct importer, and domestic value added and returned home.

The *gvc* package accompanies the *decompr* package. Several GVC indicators can be computed using *gvc* based on the *decompr* methods calculated, such as backward and forward participation, and length of production chains.

4 IOPSPACKAGE

The novel *iopspackage* is introduced in this section. Section 4.1 provides an in-depth explanation of the *iopspackage* operations and functionality. The CEPII BACI trade data and processing thereof is described in Section 4.2, while Section 4.3 compares the existing and new packages.

4.1 Overview and Usage

The user follows three steps when using the *iopspackage*: Installation, input requirements, and output results (Section 4.1.1- 4.1.3 respectively).

4.1.1 Installation

The *iopspackage* can be accessed using the RStudio IDE and installing the package through either the GitHub or CRAN platform. The process for installation via the Industrial Policy Research Group's GitHub repository is demonstrated in
devtools::install_github("WoutersResearchGroup/R-IO-PS")
library(iopspackage)
Code block **1: *iopspackage* installation via GitHub**, which involves using the *devtools* function. Similarly, the package could be installed via the CRAN network using RStudio's built-in package installer.

```
devtools::install_github("WoutersResearchGroup/R-IO-PS")
library(iopspackage)
```

Code block 1: *iopspackage* installation via GitHub

4.1.2 Input requirements

The IOPS function follows the RStudio IDE function-calling convention. It requires six input variables, with two being mandatory and four being optional. Code block 2 provides an example of the input requirements for the IOPS function. The six input variables are:

1. *CountryCode*: Mandatory input that accepts any ISO country code. For instance, "United Kingdom," "GBR," "GB," or "828" would all be accepted if the desired country is the United Kingdom.
2. *tradeData*: Mandatory input that accepts any raw trade data following the CEPII BACI data convention.
3. *GVCMapping*: Optional input that allows the user to specify the desired value chain to be analysed*. The value chain must contain columns "Tiers," "Activity," and "HSCode" in any order.
4. *ComplexMethod*: Optional input that allows the user to specify the chosen method to calculate the complexity measures. The user can choose one of the following: "fitness," "reflections," or "eigenvalues." The default is "eigenvalues."
5. *interCompl*: Optional input that allows the user to specify the number of iterations that the chosen complexity measure must use. This option only applies to the "fitness" and "reflections" methods. The default is iterCompl = 20.
6. *tradedigit*: Optional input that accepts an integer of 6 or 4 to indicate the raw trade digit summation level. The default is 6.

```
### Run IOPS with Input Trade Data and Value Chain Mapping ###
IOPS (
        CountryCode = 710, # Required
        tradeData = TradeDataused, # Required
        ComplexMethod = "eigenvalues", # Optional
        iterCompl = 20, # Optional
        GVCMapping = VCDataUsed, # Optional
        tradedigit = 6 # Optional
)
```

Code block 2: *iopspackage* example usage

4.1.3 Output results

The *iopspackage* produces a primary and a secondary output. The primary output comprises of two files, one in *.csv* and the other in *.xlsx* format, with identical content. These files are saved in the current working directory and contain three tabs that display the results of Product Category, Product, and Tier. On the other hand, the secondary output is a data frame list which is restricted to the RStudio environment. The list comprises of various metrics, including ECI, PCI, Opportunity Gain, Distance, and Density, for every country in the selected BACI trade data. It also contains the binary and absolute M-matrices used to calculate the metrics. Furthermore, the list includes *Product Complexity Results* (PCR), *Product Results* (PR), and *Tier Results* (TR), which are used to write the primary output.

* In the default case, where no value chain input is specified, the default computations for IO-PS metrics are executed at the highest accessible trade digit level. An additional conditional evaluation is undertaken to ascertain whether the computations were conducted at the 6-digit or 4-digit level of trade classification.

4.2 Data Preprocessing: CEPII BACI

The trade used for economic complexity analyses is most commonly based on the self-reported *harmonised system* (HS) based figures from the UN Statistical Division (Comtrade) database. The data captures exporter and importer declarations of bilateral trades flows. Different practices in trade code usage between importing and exporting countries (among other issues) often result in discrepancies between the bilateral trade flows that countries declare.

To address this issue, the *Centre d'Etudes Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales* (CEPII) (a renowned research centre in France that specialises in global economic expertise [21]), has developed a harmonisation procedure that effectively "cleans" the bilateral Comtrade data. The resulting BACI data set offers data on the bilateral trade flows of 200 countries [9]. The CEPII BACI data set has become a widely recognised source of reliable bilateral trade data. Hence, the *iopspackage* is specifically designed to be able to use this data directly. As the *iopspackage* utilises the *economiccomplexity* package to calculate the PS metrics, which is not directly compatible with the BACI data format. The *iopspackage* preprocesses the raw CEPII BACI data to the required three column data frame required for the *economiccomplexity* package.

4.3 Comparison of packages

Table 1 depicts how the existing packages differ in their functionalities. Apart from the *iopspackage*, there are two kinds of packages that can be used for the IOPS analysis process. One kind focuses on the Product Space and the various ways of measuring the relevant metrics. The *EconGeo* and *economiccomplexity* packages belong to this kind. The other kind concentrates on building, using, and examining a GVC for a specific sector or industry. The *decompr* and *gvc* packages are examples of this kind. The *iopspackage* integrates the two kinds of packages and use the PS along with the GVC to conduct IO-PS analysis.

The features and benefits of the developed *iopspackage* are indicated in Table 1. The *iopspackage* accepts BACI data (the only product space package to do so) and adds the ability to perform IO-PS analysis, which combines PS metrics and a GVC lens. The *iopspackage* relies on the *economiccomplexity* package for computing the PS metrics, but it does not need any other external packages for adding the value chain lens, though it does require the value chain used as input.

Table 1: Comparison of existing R packages' functionality

Package	Accepts BACI data	Product Space	Global Chain	Value	IO-PS
EconGeo		✓			
economiccomplexity		✓			
decompr				✓	
gvc	✓			✓	
iopspackage	✓	✓		✓	✓

The IO-PS package offers two primary and two secondary additional features that can be accessed through the optional input toggles of the function. One primary toggle feature is the *tradedigit* input, which enables the user to perform a summation of unaggregated bilateral trade data. The summation can be done on either a 6-digit level, which is the default and matches the CEPII BACI trade data input, or a 4-digit level, which requires processing the trade data to remove the last two digits from the 6-digit level.

The optional *GVCMapping* input variable allows the second primary toggle feature, which is useful when the user does not provide a value chain input. This functionality computes the outputs from the given trade digit level and includes all the relevant lower-level digits for

some product trade codes. For example, if the raw trade data is at the 6-digit level, it also includes the 4- and 2-digit levels in the calculations, but if the raw trade data is at the 4-digit level, it only adds the 2-digit level to the computations.

The secondary *ComplexMethod* toggle allows the user to specify the chosen method to calculate the complexity measures (using the *economiccomplexity* package). The secondary *interCompl* toggle allows the user to specify the number of iterations that the chosen complexity measure must use.

4.4 Worked example

Consider South Africa ($CountryCode = "ZAF"$) with CEPII BACI data at the 6-digit level. Running the package with $tradedigit = 6$, $ComplexMethod = "eigenvalues"$, and an automotive value-chain mapping produces (i) a country-level panel of *ECI*/*PCI*, *density*, *distance*, and *opportunity value*; and (ii) tier/category/product tables with the same metrics. Analysts can compare the opportunity set under alternative assumptions by toggling the complexity method or summation level. For policy, two decision-oriented screens are typical: (1) high opportunity value and low distance to prioritise products that are both complex and aligned with extant capabilities; and (b) tier-level bottlenecks, where low density flags capability gaps in specific segments of the value chain. The outputs therefore support supplier-development programmes, import-replacement priorities, and sequencing of industrial interventions.

5 CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the *iopspackage*, a novel contribution to Input–Output Product Space analysis within the R environment. The development of this package accompanies a detailed examination of economic complexity metrics, as well as the integration of global value chains into the product space framework. By introducing flexible toggles to address discrepancies and extending existing metrics to incorporate value chain dynamics, the iopspackage enables a more nuanced interpretation of industrial pathways and economic development patterns.

The iopspackage is distinguished by its adherence to principles of efficient software design and its emphasis on usability. Far more than a technical utility, the package represents a meaningful step towards advancing empirical tools in economic complexity research. Its versatility ensures broad relevance across academic, policy, and applied settings. As it becomes available via the CRAN repository, the iopspackage reflects the continuing innovation and collaborative spirit of the R community.

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LEAN 5.0: NAVIGATING THE WAVES OF CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Lean philosophy has made waves over the past decades due to its robust business improvement tools and concepts, which are widely applied across various industries. While previous research has examined the intersection of Lean and Industry 4.0, the emergence of Industry 5.0 necessitates a deeper exploration of their alignment. This study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) to analyse and extract key tools, concepts, and technologies associated with Lean and Industry 5.0. Findings reveal a strong conceptual overlap, particularly in the synergy between Lean's efficiency-driven approach and the human-centric focus of Industry 5.0. The integration of these philosophies offers numerous benefits, including enhanced adaptability and sustainability. Based on these insights, this research proposes a Lean 5.0 framework tailored for South Africa, providing a strategic foundation for future implementation. The framework aims to guide organizations in leveraging Lean principles within the evolving landscape of Industry 5.0.

Keywords: Lean Philosophy, Lean 5.0, SLR, South Africa, Lean framework

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1 INTRODUCTION

The journey of industrial evolution has continually reshaped human civilisation, progressing through distinct phases marked by transformative technologies and societal shifts. This is even more evident when we consider how it has reshaped the face of our manufacturing industry. Figure 1 depicts the phases of industrialization over the years.

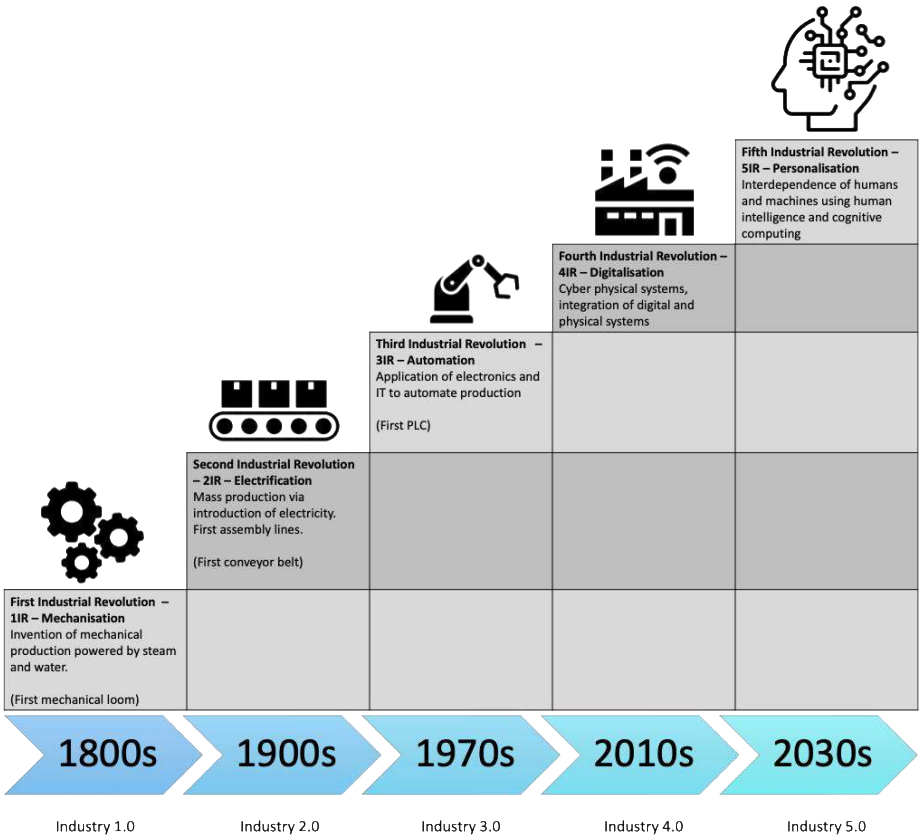

Figure 1: Phases of Industrialisation (Adapted from Mangaroo-Pillay [1])

Beginning with Industry 1.0 in the late 18th century, characterised by mechanisation, water, and steam power [2], industries transitioned from manual production to machine-driven processes. The 19th century ushered in Industry 2.0, powered by electricity and leading to mass production and assembly lines [2], [3]. The latter half of the 20th century saw the rise of Industry 3.0, driven by electronics, information technology, and automation, enabling mass customisation through programmable logic controllers and communication technologies [2], [3]. Currently, we are immersed in Industry 4.0, which originated in Germany in 2011. This phase is defined by the intelligent networking of machines and processes through Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS), fostering real-time communication, data-driven decision-making, and the flexible production of high-quality personalised products with mass efficiency [2], [4]. Industry 4.0's technological portfolio is extensive, encompassing Big Data and analytics, autonomous robots, simulation, Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), cybersecurity, cloud computing, additive manufacturing, and augmented reality, all aimed at enhancing efficiency and productivity [2], [5].

Despite the advancements brought by Industry 4.0, a new paradigm, Industry 5.0, has emerged, primarily championed by the European Commission in 2021 [6], [7]. While Industry 4.0 is largely technology-driven, focusing on digitalisation and AI to increase efficiency and flexibility; Industry 5.0 introduces a fundamental shift towards a value-driven approach [2], [3]. Industry 5.0 is not merely a chronological continuation but a complementary evolution,

addressing the perceived limitations of Industry 4.0 regarding social fairness and sustainability [2], [8].

At its core, Industry 5.0 is defined by three key concepts: human-centricity, sustainability, and resilience [6], [9]:

- Human-centricity places the well-being of the industry worker at the centre of the production process, emphasising human-machine collaboration (cobots) where human creativity and intelligence are combined with machine efficiency and precision [3], [10]. This involves upskilling workers for cognitive labour, empowering them to make decisions, and creating a symbiotic relationship with autonomous systems [9]. Technologies like Human Interaction and Recognition Technologies (HIRT) and Industrial Smart Wearables (ISW) play a crucial role in enabling safer and more pleasant human-machine interaction [7].
- Sustainability recognises the power of industry to achieve societal goals beyond just jobs and economic growth, by ensuring that production respects planetary boundaries and contributes to environmental and social responsibility [2], [9]. This includes resource and energy efficiency, waste prevention, and the integration of renewable energy sources [2], [7].
- Resilience refers to the ability of industrial systems to maintain or quickly recover stability during and after disruptions, such as geopolitical shifts or natural emergencies, ensuring robust provision of prosperity [2], [9].

Beyond these core characteristics, the essence of Industry 5.0 is further articulated through concepts such as collaborative intelligence, which signifies the mutual-cognitive coordination between human and artificial intelligence to co-innovate and co-create [11]. It also involves multi-objective interweaving, integrating diverse goals like human efficiency, productivity, and customer individualised requirements with social and ecological considerations [11]. Furthermore, Industry 5.0 calls for multi-technology restructuring, moving from a simple stacking of technologies to a timely empowerment of value-driven demands, and multi-discipline integration, adopting interdisciplinary approaches across engineering, technology, life sciences, environmental, and social sciences [11]. Finally, multi-sector symbiosis fosters a harmonious relationship between technology, society, and ecology across various national sectors to achieve shared goals [11]. These ideas collectively underpin Industry 5.0's vision of a future industrial system that is intelligent, adaptable, and profoundly aligned with human and planetary well-being.

Manufacturing environments have significantly benefited from the widespread adoption of Industry 4.0 principles and digital transformation, leading to enhanced efficiency, productivity, and flexibility through the intelligent networking of machines and processes [2], [4]. The integration of cyber-physical systems, IoT, Big Data analytics, and automation has enabled smart factories to achieve real-time communication, data-driven decision-making, and the customisation of products with mass efficiency [2], [5]. However, as the focus of industrial evolution shifts beyond mere technological advancement, current research is increasingly pushing for the broader implementation of Industry 5.0. This new paradigm seeks to complement Industry 4.0 by prioritising human-centricity, sustainability, and resilience, addressing the social and environmental implications of advanced manufacturing [2], [6], [9]. In a parallel development within operational excellence, previous research has indicated the utility of "Lean 4.0," which integrates Lean principles with Industry 4.0 technologies to further improve manufacturing challenges and enhance processes [10]. Building on this trajectory, "Lean 5.0" is similarly emerging, aiming to align Lean methodology with the human-centric, sustainable, and resilient tenets of Industry 5.0, thereby promising a more holistic and ethical approach to manufacturing improvement [10].

Lean philosophy is an all-encompassing management approach associated with business improvement and the elimination of waste, whilst simultaneously focusing on people's development and the fostering of a problem-solving culture [12]. Although Lean originated within the manufacturing industry, it has been widely adopted and researched across various other sectors, including healthcare and environmental sustainability, amongst others. This attests to the well-established nature of the research field surrounding Lean, in contrast to the emerging and evolving body of research concerning Industry 5.0.

Drawing upon the aforementioned literature and to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding Lean 5.0, this research study aims to explore the breadth of the existing Lean 5.0 literature. Ergo, the primary objective of this study is to gather and synthesise the available academic work pertaining to the scope, benefits, barriers, and enablers of Lean 5.0, with the ultimate goal of developing a conceptual framework for its implementation within the South African context.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review (SLR) was utilised as the research methodology to collect the available literature. This took the form of a scoping SLR, which allowed for the investigation of the definitions, benefits, barriers and enables of Lean 5.0. Figure 2 illustrates the SLR methodology proposed by Albliwi et al. [13] that guided this research process. The following subsections detail each step of the process.

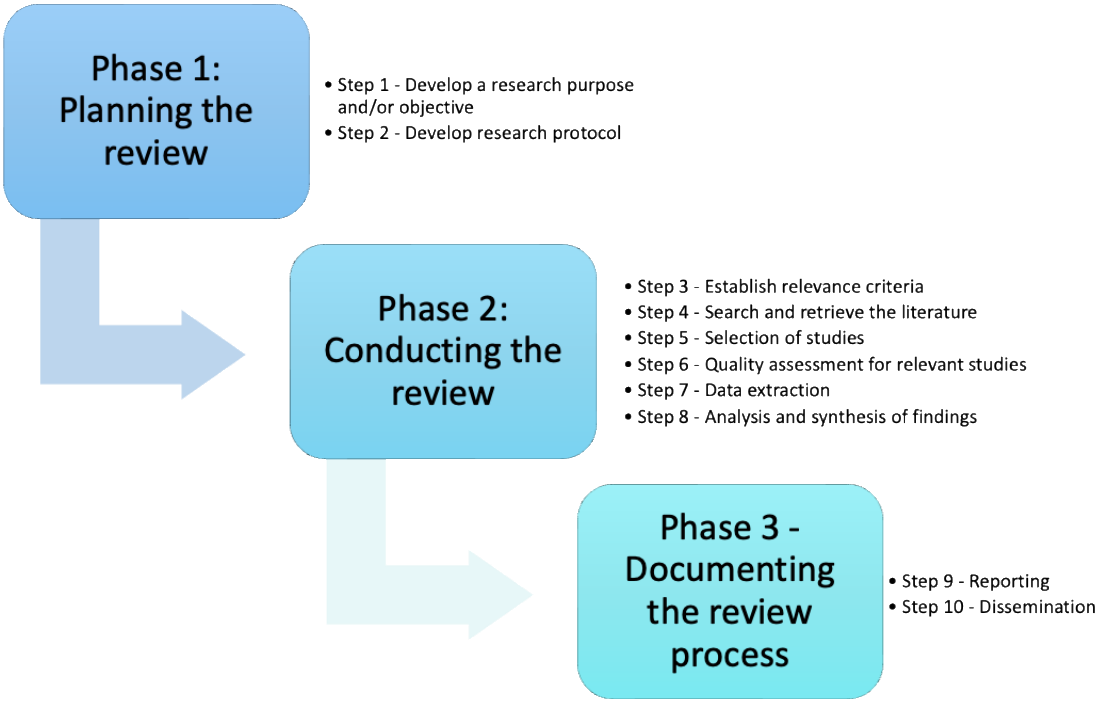

Figure 2: SLR methodology (Adapted from Albliwi et al[13])

2.1 Step 1 - Develop a research purpose

The purpose of this study was to gather and synthesise the available academic work pertaining to the scope, benefits, barriers, and enablers of Lean 5.0, with the ultimate goal of developing a conceptual framework for its implementation within the South African context.

2.2 Step 2 - Develop a research protocol

A research protocol was developed (as captured in table 1).

Table 1: Research review protocol (Structure adapted from Xiao et al. [14])

Purpose of the study	• To gather and synthesise the available academic work pertaining to the scope, benefits, barriers, and enablers of Lean 5.0.
Inclusion criteria	• Literature that contains "Lean 5.0" in the title, abstract or keywords • Literature that discusses the definition, barrier, enablers and benefits of Lean 5.0
Exclusion criteria	• Non-English studies • Lean-X focused studies (e.g. Lean Six Sigma, Lean Supply chain)
Search databases	• Science direct • Scopus • Web of Science • Emerald Insight
Keywords	• "Lean" AND "Industry 5.0"
Quality assessment criteria	• All duplicate literature must be removed • Literature must be checked for relevance • Literature must be checked for correct understanding and interpretation of Lean • Studies must be scientific • Studies must have transparent data collection

2.3 Step 3 - Establish relevance criteria

At the time of writing and publication of this study, the body of research on Lean 5.0 is limited with the earliest publications in the early 2020s. Ergo, in order to widen the search criteria, the following relevance criteria was developed:

- Only literature containing the term "Lean 5.0" in its title, abstract, or keywords will be considered for inclusion.
- The scope of selected literature will be restricted to studies that comprehensively address the definition, identified barriers, key enablers, and anticipated benefits associated with Lean 5.0.
- To ensure consistency, non-English language studies will be omitted from the review.
- Research concentrating on specific Lean sub-disciplines, such as Lean Six Sigma or Lean Supply Chain, will be excluded. This decision is based on the distinct nature of their applications and the emergence of their own Industry 5.0-aligned subgroups (e.g., Lean Supply Chain 5.0), which fall outside the immediate focus of this study.

2.4 Step 4 - Search and retrieve the literature

During Step 4, the search and retrieval of relevant literature was executed utilising the databases specified in Table 1, yielding a total of 138 papers. The 'Identification' section of Figure 3 illustrates the detailed breakdown of papers acquired during this phase.

2.5 Step 5 - Selection of studies

For Step 5, the removal of duplicate entries was performed, leaving a refined set of 103 papers. This selection process, including the reasons for exclusion, is comprehensively captured in Figure 3. Papers were omitted for various reasons, including instances where they did not adequately discuss the definitions, benefits, or issues pertinent to Lean 5.0, or explored the historical aspects of Lean without specific details on Lean 5.0. Furthermore, non-English studies (specifically German versions without English counterparts) were excluded. Other grounds for removal included a focus on Lean-X concepts, a conflation of Industry 4.0 and Industry 5.0 concepts, or an exclusive focus on Lean applications and calculations.

2.6 Step 6 - Quality assessment for relevant studies:

The 17 studies selected for inclusion in the systematic literature review (SLR) underwent a rigorous quality assessment, as detailed in Table 1 and summarised in Figure 3. This process was designed to ensure that only the most robust and relevant contributions were incorporated into the review. To this end, duplicate records were systematically removed to avoid redundancy, and each source was evaluated for its relevance to the research objectives. Particular attention was paid to verifying the accurate understanding and interpretation of Lean principles, as misinterpretations could undermine the validity of the findings. Furthermore, only studies underpinned by a scientific approach were considered, ensuring methodological soundness. Finally, transparency in data collection was a critical criterion, as it provides the basis for replicability and strengthens the credibility of the evidence base. Together, these measures ensured that the SLR was informed by high-quality, trustworthy, and contextually relevant literature.

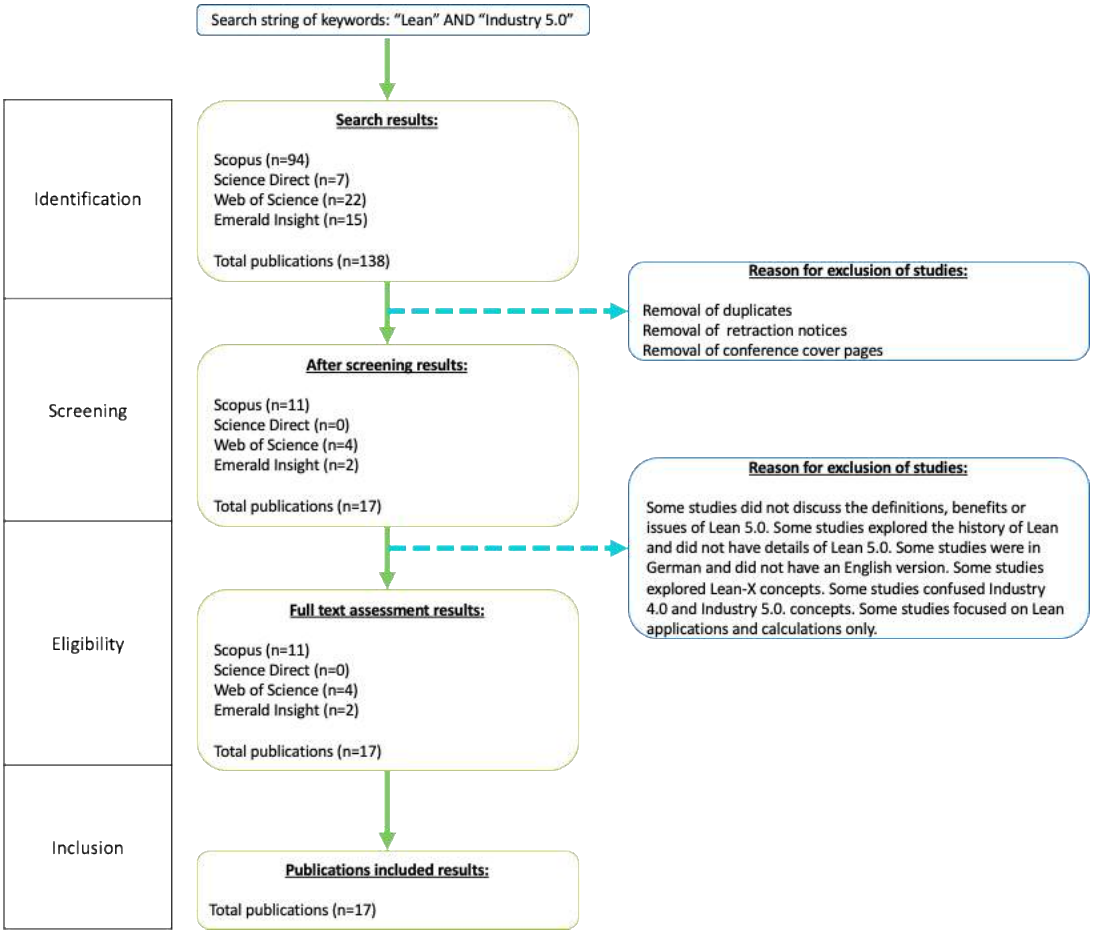

Figure 3: Selection process chart (As per PRISMA guidelines)

3 FINDINGS

The findings from the 17 papers are analysed and synthesised in section 3.1 and 3.2, respectively.

3.1 Step 7: Data extraction

Once the final list of studies for inclusion was confirmed, the full texts were reviewed and relevant data extracted. Table 2 presents the included studies along with the specific data

obtained from each. Although the systematic literature review (SLR) did not restrict studies by publication year, it is noteworthy that all identified publications were from recent years.

Table 2: Table of SLR result

Ref	Title	Author
[15]	The Future of Disassembly Planning: A Critical Assessment of Industry 5.0, Lean, and X-Reality	Yang et al
[16]	Lean Thinking: An Essential Mindset	Alves A.C.
[17]	Toyota Kata as a Scaffolding for Human-Centric Manufacturing: Applying Lean Thinking for a Digital and Sustainable Factory of the Future	Eren S.
[18]	Human-centric approach of the Lean management as an enabler of Industry 5.0 in SMEs	Mladineo et al
[19]	Toward Lean Service 5.0: evaluation of future perspectives and trends; [Em direção ao Lean Service 5.0: avaliação das tendências e futuras perspectivas]	Bonamigo et al
[20]	Human-centric lean self-assessment model: driving organizational performance enhancement in the era of Industry 5.0	Bucci et al
[21]	Lean Requirements Integration from the Design Phase of a Sociotechnical System in Industry 5.0 Context	Gdoura et al
[22]	The human resources and knowledge management integrated role in Industry 4.0/5.0: a Human-Centric Operations Management framework	Ribeiro et al
[23]	The Human-Centric SMED	Fonda et al
[24]	Building human-centric organisations with Industry 4.0 technologies in the Industry 5.0 era: A micro and meso level perspective	Margherita et al
[25]	Evaluation of Lean Off-Site Construction Literature through the Lens of Industry 4.0 and 5.0	Hadi et al
[26]	Optimizing Green Lean Six Sigma using Industry 5.0 technologies	Boumsisse et al
[27]	Impact of Industry 5.0 Readiness on Sustainable Business Growth of Marine Food Processing SMEs in Thailand	Madhavan et al
[28]	Applying the Delphi Method to Assess Critical Success Factors of Digitalization While Sustaining Lean at a Lean Automaker	Goktas et al
[29]	Sustainable operations management towards Industry 5.0	Guerrero et al
[30]	Beyond lean production practices and Industry 4.0 technologies toward the human-centric Industry 5.0	Eriksson et al
[31]	Lean and industry 4.0 principles toward industry 5.0: a conceptual framework and empirical insights from fashion industry	Fani et al

3.2 Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings

3.2.1 Annual distribution of studies

Although the research protocol did not specify a fixed timeframe for data collection, the selected studies indicate that references to Lean 5.0 began emerging as early as 2021. The majority of publications, however, were from 2024. This surge in publications is likely due to the systematic literature review being conducted in June 2025. Figure 4 showcases the number of publications per year.

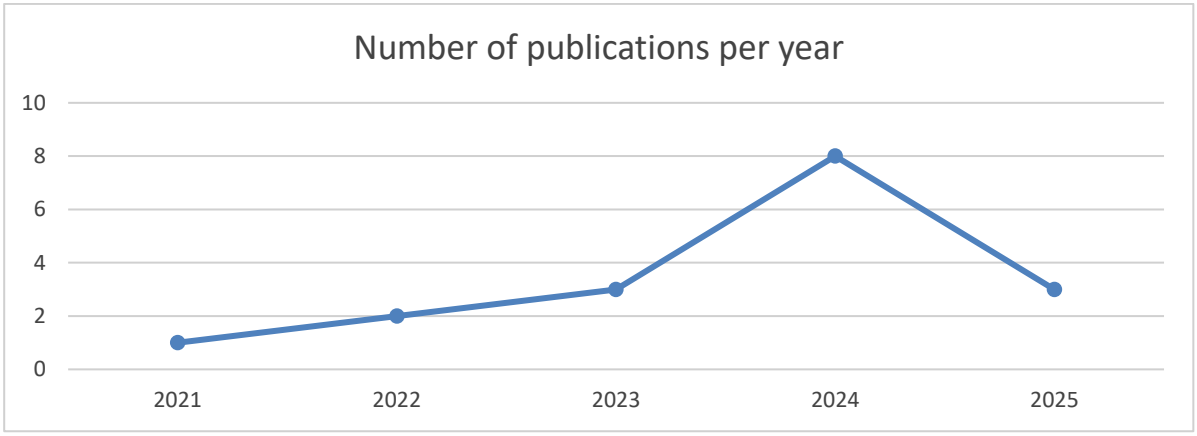

Figure 4: Number of publications per year

3.2.2 Keywords

The word cloud generated in figure 5 from the keywords of the 17 selected papers provides a visual representation of the most frequently occurring themes in the current Lean 5.0 literature. Prominent keywords such as “Lean,” “Industry 5.0,” “digital transformation,” “human-centric,” and “sustainability” suggest that the integration of advanced technologies with human values is a central focus in recent research. The visibility of terms like “cyber-physical systems,” “resilience,” and “artificial intelligence” highlights the growing emphasis on the role of digital tools and intelligent systems in supporting Lean practices. Additionally, the appearance of “smart manufacturing” and “collaboration” points to the importance of interconnected systems and teamwork in evolving production environments.

Figure 5: Word cloud of keywords

3.2.3 Overlap in Lean and Industry 5.0 concepts

From the results of the SLR, the overlap between Lean and Industry 5.0 was highlighted. Table 3 depicts the overlap.

Table 3: Overlap between Lean and Industry 5.0 concepts

Lean Tool/Concept	Industry 5.0 Concept(s)	Supporting Details/Mechanism
Lean Philosophy/Thinking	Human-centricity, Sustainability, Resilience	Lean, with its emphasis on respect for people and placing workers/people at the center, is naturally aligned with Industry 5.0's human-centric approach. Its focus on waste elimination and continuous improvement drives sustainable production. Lean approaches like system thinking and lead time reduction contribute to resilience. Lean is considered an essential mindset for Industry 5.0 transformation. LS5.0 integrates I5.0 principles with lean services.
Lean HC (Human Factory Engineering)	Human-centricity	Combines Lean with an emphasis on the respect, well-being, and needs of employees. Aims to boost operational performance by improving empowerment and engagement. The human-centric approach fosters greater adherence and acceptance of improvement initiatives by actively engaging employees.
Kaizen (Continuous Improvement)	Human-centricity, Sustainability, Resilience	Aims for the pursuit of perfection by continuously searching for waste. Utilizes new technologies to foster continuous improvement methods. Supports scientific learning and data-oriented decision-making when integrated with technology. Involves teamwork and problem-solving culture. Linked to Innovation in the multi-domain matrix. Contributes to resilient value chains.
VSM (Value Stream Mapping)	Sustainability, Human-centricity (indirect)	Used to identify inefficiency and eliminate waste in the value chain. Can be supported by technologies like augmented reality. A tool for continuous improvement. Can involve teambuilding.
5S	Human-centricity, Sustainability, Resilience	A tool for organizing the workplace to reduce waste and disorder. Contributes to a safe and sustainable work environment. Linked to Human-centricity, Resilience, Sustainability in the multi-domain matrix. Also linked to Security.
SMED (Single Minute Exchange of Die)	Human-centricity, Sustainability, Process Efficiency	Method for reducing setup times. Human-Centric SMED (H-SMED) integrates I4.0, Lean, and Ergonomics to focus on worker's requirements, tasks, and well-being, supporting the social dimension of sustainability. Linked to Human-centricity in the multi-domain matrix.
Jidoka (Stop in time / Autonomation)	Human-centricity, Sustainability, Resilience	Pillar of TPS focused on building quality into the process. Enables stopping production when problems occur to prevent defects/waste [500 - Fig 10g]. Supports building quality with ownership among workers, linking to human-centricity. Linked to Human-centricity, Resilience, Sustainability in the multi-domain matrix.
Kanban (Pull System)	Human-centricity, Sustainability, Resilience	A tool for managing production flow based on customer demand (pull). Linked to Human-centricity, Resilience, Sustainability in the multi-domain matrix.
Toyota Kata	Human-centricity, Technology (Enabler for I5.0)	A structured routine for continuous improvement and learning. Supports a human-centric approach. Technologies support scientific learning within the Kata routine. People and technology learn together about processes and value.
Poka-Yoke (Error Prevention)	Human-centricity, Sustainability, Resilience	A method ensuring error prevention. Aims at prohibiting working mistakes. Reduces defects, contributing to sustainability goals. Linked to Human-

		centricity, Resilience, Sustainability in the multi-domain matrix.
Human-Machine Collaboration/Co-working	Human-centricity	A core focus of Industry 5.0. Lean thinking supports the integration of humans and machines for value delivery. Aims to achieve the best combination of human and robot competencies.
Reciprocal Learning (RL)	Human-centricity, Technology (Enabler for I5.0)	Human-machine symbiosis based on symmetrical knowledge exchange. LS5.0 aims to create this learning environment. Enabled by I5.0 technology providing data.
Training & Skill Development	Human-centricity, Technology (Enabler for I5.0)	Essential for developing the workforce. Supports workers in using new technologies. Part of the Hitozukuri (making people) concept. Enables human adaptation to technology demands.
Job Enrichment/Job Rotation	Human-centricity	Practices that enhance worker satisfaction, versatility, and mitigate monotony of repetitive tasks. Part of Lean HC practices. A human-centric approach aims to increase worker satisfaction.
Empowerment & Engagement	Human-centricity	Lean HC domains. Lean HC aims to boost operational performance by improving empowerment and engagement. Human-centric approach actively involves employees. Industry 5.0 emphasizes talents, diversity, and empowerment. Companies closer to Lean 5.0 ideals support a more engaged and empowered workforce.
Problem Solving Culture	Human-centricity, Resilience	An essential human capability. Developed through methods like Toyota Kata. Crucial for managing changes and disruptions.
Data-oriented decisions/Scientific thinking	Technology (Enabler for I5.0), Human-centricity, Sustainability, Resilience	Enabled by I4.0/I5.0 technologies providing data. Supports scientific learning within Lean (e.g., Toyota Kata). Better decision-making implicitly supports efficiency, waste reduction, and adaptability, contributing to all three I5.0 pillars.
Customer First / Value Identification	Human-centricity, Sustainability	Lean principle focused on identifying or creating value from the customer's perspective. In Industry 5.0, this extends to focusing on the well-being of the operator and societal goals beyond just growth. LS5.0 aims to create, enhance, and deliver customer value. Society 5.0 aims for a human-centered society that provides value at the right moment.

3.2.4 Benefits of Lean 5.0

The literature presents Lean 5.0 as an emerging paradigm that builds on the foundational principles of Lean by integrating advanced digital technologies and human-centric values. This paradigm retains Lean's emphasis on efficiency and waste elimination, while incorporating the technological advancements associated with Industry 4.0 and the socio-technical orientation of Industry 5.0. Within this framework, Lean Services 5.0 (LS5.0) extends the application of Lean 5.0 specifically to service organizations, where it is defined as the integration and symbiosis of Industry 5.0 technologies and principles with Lean service practices. Several key benefits of Lean 5.0 and LS5.0 are identified in the reviewed literature:

- Waste-Free Operational Excellence: Lean 5.0 aims to eliminate waste by integrating human-centricity with digital technologies for continuous value creation.
- Operational Efficiency: It enhances efficiency through optimized collaboration between human insight and automation.

- Worker Satisfaction and Empowerment: Lean 5.0 fosters higher employee engagement and well-being by embedding empowerment in improvement practices.
- Competitiveness and Sustainable Growth: It boosts competitiveness and long-term sustainability by aligning innovation with human and customer value.
- Human-Technology Integration: Lean 5.0 enables seamless human-machine collaboration for value co-creation and innovation.
- Continuous Improvement and Adaptation: It supports adaptive learning and data-driven refinement through real-time feedback and technological enablers.

3.2.5 Barriers to Lean 5.0

Despite the potential benefits associated with Lean 5.0, several barriers complicate its implementation. These challenges span conceptual, technological, organizational, and contextual domains and must be critically addressed to support the successful adoption of this emerging paradigm, such include:

- Conceptual and Knowledge Gaps: There is a lack of integrated theoretical models and empirical research bridging Lean, Industry 4.0, and Industry 5.0, particularly for SMEs.
- Integration Challenges Between Paradigms: Misalignment between Lean's human-centric philosophy and Industry 4.0's tech-driven approach complicates their integration and practical application.
- Human and Organizational Resistance: Resistance to cultural change, fear of automation, and skills gaps hinder effective adoption of Lean 5.0.
- Technological and Resource Constraints: Limited infrastructure, financial barriers, and ethical challenges restrict sustained digital transformation.
- Challenges Specific to SMEs: SMEs face resource, capability, and structural limitations that inhibit Lean 5.0 adoption and global value chain participation.

These barriers underscore the need for a holistic and context-sensitive approach to Lean 5.0 implementation. This includes not only the integration of advanced technologies but also deliberate investment in organizational culture, leadership development, workforce upskilling, and strategic alignment. Advancing the Lean 5.0 agenda requires more than technical upgrades; it necessitates systemic change rooted in the interdependence of people, processes, and technology.

3.2.6 Drivers for Lean 5.0

The adoption of Lean 5.0 and Lean Services 5.0 is motivated by the ambition to establish an advanced industrial ecosystem that balances operational efficiency, technological advancement, and human well-being. These drivers arise from the integration of Lean's foundational principles with the technological capabilities of Industry 4.0 and the human-centric, sustainable, and resilient aspirations of Industry 5.0. Key drivers identified in the literature include:

- Waste-Free Operational Excellence: Lean 5.0 aims to achieve operational excellence by eliminating waste through continuous improvement and digital integration.
- Operational Efficiency: It enhances efficiency by combining human insight with intelligent automation and data-driven decision-making.
- Human Well-being and Contribution: Lean 5.0 places people at the center, valuing human dignity, creativity, and intuition alongside technological progress.

- Worker Engagement and Empowerment: Engaged and empowered employees are seen as key drivers of sustained performance and innovation.
- Sustainability and Responsibility: Lean 5.0 embeds environmental and social sustainability into operational practices through waste reduction and circularity.
- Resilient Systems: It builds resilience by using Lean principles to strengthen supply chains against disruptions.
- Human-Technology Synergy: Lean 5.0 promotes collaborative human-machine systems that empower workers and enable shared learning.
- Business Competitiveness: Lean 5.0 boosts agility and competitiveness, supporting sustainable growth in dynamic markets.
- Beyond Industry 4.0 Limitations: It addresses Industry 4.0's shortcomings by balancing technological advancement with human and ethical considerations.
- Continuous Improvement and Innovation: Lean 5.0 sustains a culture of Kaizen, using digital tools to accelerate learning and innovation.

4 FRAMEWORK

Building upon the nuanced insights garnered from Section 3, a comprehensive conceptual roadmap for the strategic implementation of Lean 5.0 within the South African industrial landscape has been meticulously formulated, as visually represented in Figure 5. This roadmap is meticulously delineated into three interconnected and progressive phases, each designed to address distinct yet complementary facets of the Lean 5.0 paradigm.

Phase 1 initiates with a critical interactional shift, marking a deliberate transition from the prevailing mastery of Industry 4.0's technology-focused advancements towards the inherently human-centric orientation of Industry 5.0. Industry 4.0, characterised by its emphasis on automation, data exchange, and smart technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS), and Artificial Intelligence (AI), has undeniably propelled manufacturing efficiencies. However, its primary focus often remains on technological optimisation, sometimes at the expense of human well-being and societal values. Conversely, Industry 5.0 extends this technological foundation by prioritising human-centricity, sustainability, and resilience. This phase underscores the necessity of a philosophical reorientation, moving beyond mere technological adoption to a symbiotic integration where technology serves humanity, augmenting human capabilities rather than displacing them. It involves cultivating an environment where humans and intelligent machines collaborate seamlessly, fostering enhanced creativity, problem-solving, and adaptability within industrial processes. This initial shift is pivotal for laying the groundwork for a truly integrated and value-driven approach to industrial transformation.

Phase 2 delves into the core tenets of Lean management philosophy by focusing on its Four Ps (4Ps), which are traditionally understood as Purpose, Process, People, and Problem-solving. This phase mandates a rigorous application of these principles, ensuring that organisational objectives are clearly defined (Purpose), operational workflows are optimised for value creation and waste elimination (Process), the workforce is empowered, developed, and engaged (People), and a culture of continuous improvement through systematic root-cause analysis is embedded (Problem-solving). Crucially, this phase is grounded in a firm foundation of digital ubuntu. Digital ubuntu, a novel concept particularly relevant to the South African context, signifies the integration of digital technologies with the profound philosophical principle of ubuntu—emphasising interconnectedness, collective well-being, human dignity, and communal harmony. In a practical sense, this involves leveraging digital tools and platforms not merely for efficiency, but to foster enhanced collaboration, knowledge sharing,

and empathy among employees, supply chain partners, and even customers. It implies a conscious effort to ensure that technological advancements reinforce social cohesion and ethical considerations, creating a supportive and inclusive digital work environment. This unique contextualisation ensures that Lean implementation is not a rigid, imported methodology but a culturally attuned framework that resonates with the local societal values.

Finally, Phase 3 places significant emphasis on mastering the Lean tools to tangibly enhance the diverse dimensions of Industry 5.0. This phase moves from conceptual understanding and foundational principles to practical application, enabling organisations to operationalise the human-centric, sustainable, and resilient goals of Industry 5.0. Key Lean tools, such as Value Stream Mapping (VSM) for identifying and eliminating waste, 5S for workplace organisation and efficiency, Kaizen for continuous incremental improvement, and Kanban for just-in-time production and flow management, become instrumental. Their mastery allows for a systematic approach to optimising processes, reducing environmental impact (e.g., through waste reduction in VSM), building organisational resilience (e.g., via flexible systems enabled by Kanban), and empowering human workers by involving them in problem-solving and improvement initiatives (e.g., through Kaizen events). By strategically applying these tools, organisations can achieve tangible benefits, such as improved operational efficiency, reduced resource consumption, enhanced responsiveness to market fluctuations, and a more engaged and empowered workforce. This synergistic approach ensures that the human and sustainable values of Industry 5.0 are not merely aspirational but are deeply embedded and systematically pursued through established Lean methodologies.

In essence, this conceptual roadmap proposes a holistic and iterative journey for South African organisations, commencing with a fundamental shift in mindset, progressing through the culturally sensitive application of Lean principles, and culminating in the strategic deployment of Lean tools to realise the comprehensive objectives of Industry 5.0. It offers a structured

pathway for navigating the complexities of modern industrial transformation, ensuring that technological progress is harmonised with human flourishing and environmental stewardship.

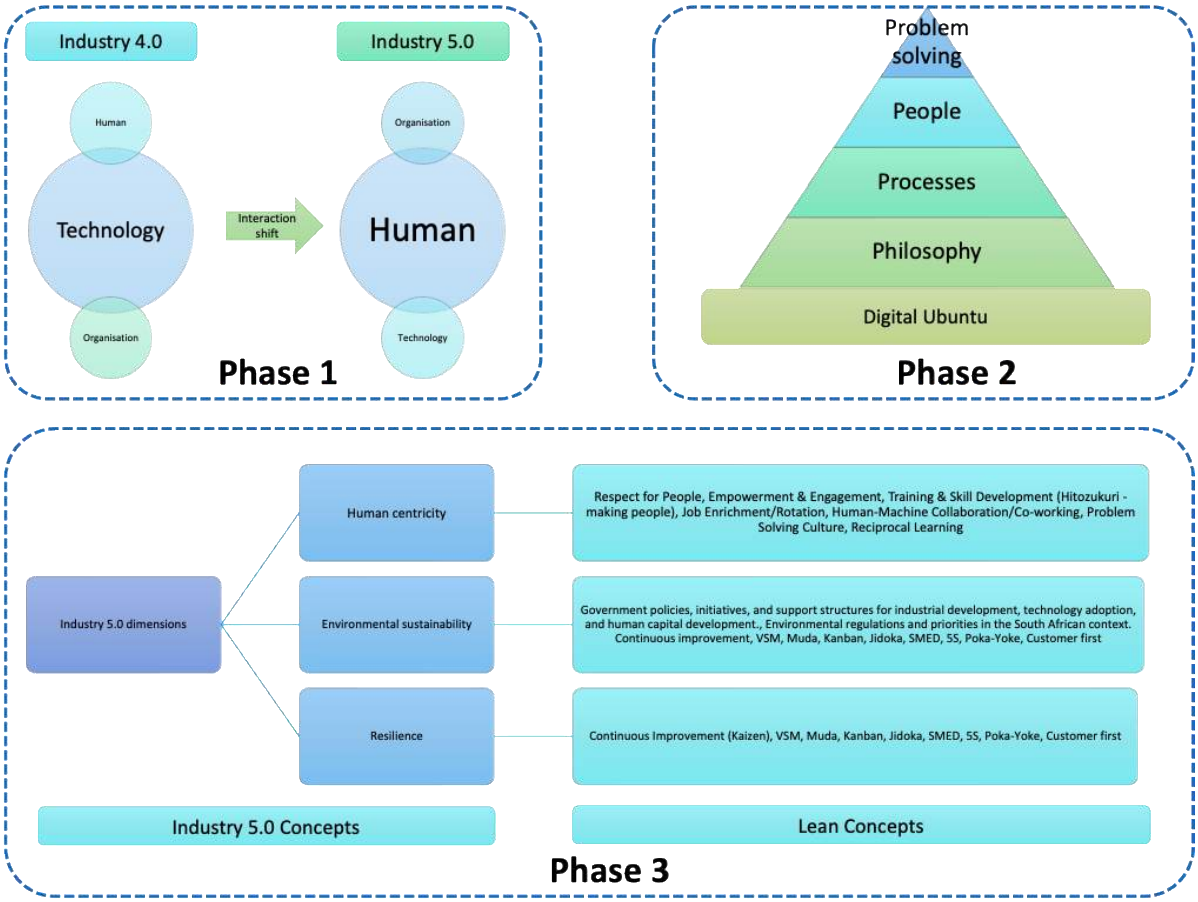

Figure 6: Lean 5.0 Implementation roadmap for SA

5 CONCLUSION

This study conducts a rigorous systematic literature review to examine the emerging paradigm of Lean 5.0, revealing substantial conceptual convergence between Lean philosophy and the human-centric, sustainable, and resilient principles underpinning Industry 5.0. It is noted that industry 5.0 is an emerging field of research, with limited available literature on the topic; ergo, this SLR resulted in only 17 studies and it is recommend that future studies expand on this. The findings highlight that Lean 5.0 is not a linear evolution from Industry 4.0, but rather a synergistic integration that addresses the limitations of technology-centric automation by reasserting the importance of human well-being, ethical values, and environmental responsibility. This shift marks a transition from a narrow focus on efficiency to a more holistic and purposeful vision of industrial development. Traditional Lean tools—long associated with waste elimination and continuous improvement—are shown to gain renewed relevance within the Industry 5.0 framework, particularly through the integration of human-machine collaboration and reciprocal learning.

A context-specific Lean 5.0 framework is proposed to guide South African industries through this transformation. This framework adopts a phased approach. Phase one facilitates a paradigm shift from the technological dominance of Industry 4.0 towards the human-centric ethos of Industry 5.0, emphasizing the workforce's evolving role in symbiosis with advanced technologies. Phase two builds on this by aligning Lean's 4Ps—People, Process, Product, and

Place—with the concept of digital ubuntu, thereby embedding local values of community and human connection into digital transformation efforts. In phase three, the framework focuses on the strategic application of Lean tools to operationalize Industry 5.0 principles and enable measurable outcomes. It is important to note that this study only focuses on the conceptual design of the framework, future research should explore real-world implementation and testing.

The implications for South African industry are substantial. The proposed framework offers a practical roadmap to enhance adaptability, sustainability, and global competitiveness. It addresses key barriers—including conceptual ambiguity, resistance to cultural change, and skill shortages—while promoting enablers such as human-technology integration, continuous improvement, and data-informed decision-making. As such, the framework not only supports operational excellence and waste reduction but also fosters a resilient, inclusive, and environmentally conscious industrial ecosystem. Ultimately, Lean 5.0 provides a strategic foundation for sustainable growth and social equity in an increasingly dynamic global economy.

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A SURVIVAL-BASED PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE FRAMEWORK: OPTIMISING RESOURCE UTILISATION AND SCHEDULING

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ABSTRACT

An effective preventive maintenance strategy assists organizations to minimise failures by mitigating potential issues before they occur. This paper presents the development of a survival-based preventive maintenance (PM) scheduling model tailored to optimise equipment management by exploring inefficiencies in audio-visual maintenance practices at a tertiary institution. The current time standards for equipment maintenance were not being met at the institution due to poor resource allocation and inefficient workflows. Multiple modelling approaches were analysed to help reduce downtime. From this, the survival modelling approach was selected for its adaptability, efficiency and predictive accuracy. The chosen maintenance model leveraged mathematical formulation methodologies by integrating Weibull distribution for predictive failure analysis and Cox proportional hazard modelling to incorporate significant covariates. The optimised model achieved significant improvements, increasing preventive maintenance coverage and raising uptime from 87% to 92.58%, resulting in optimised workflows and cost reduction.

Keywords: Preventive maintenance scheduling model, Failure analysis, Weibull distribution, Cox proportional hazard modelling

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1 INTRODUCTION

In tertiary institutions, audio-visual equipment is vital for supporting educational services, including lectures, presentations, and events. However, maintenance practices often face challenges, such as budget constraints, high utilisation driven by poor scheduling, and environmental factors like dust and power surges. These limitations frequently result in reactive maintenance, increasing downtime and reducing reliability. At the tertiary institution where the study was conducted, the observed uptime was 87%, falling short of the institution's target of 90%. This highlighted that the current approach was inefficient, reinforcing the need for an optimised PM strategy that prioritises prevention over reaction.

The maintenance of critical systems, including audio-visual (AV) equipment, is essential for operational efficiency and uninterrupted service delivery within organisations, such as high-stakes events like graduation ceremonies, lectures and conferences where equipment failure can cause significant disruption. Equipment degradation leads to potential failures and causes disruptions that impact productivity and service quality. As a mitigative effort to these disruptions, preventive maintenance (PM) has emerged as a cornerstone strategy, as highlighted in various research studies. By conducting regular, pre-emptive interventions, PM extends equipment lifespan, reduces downtime, and enhances overall reliability [1]. Unlike reactive maintenance, which is performed after a failure occurs [2], PM focuses on anticipating issues before they arise, thereby minimising operational risks as well as the associated costs [3].

PM is important in organisational contexts, where equipment reliability directly impacts service delivery quality, for example, ensuring functionality of AV systems in corporate boardrooms for client presentations, or maintaining conferencing equipment in government facilities to support decisions in real-time during emergency response operations. It involves the anticipation and prevention of potential failures, which minimises interruptions and optimises resource allocation. One of its most significant benefits is downtime minimisation [4], which ensures that operations continue while also alleviating the workload on maintenance personnel, enabling them to focus on improving systems rather than constantly addressing emergencies. Additionally, the root-cause focused approach of PM results in long-term cost savings and operational stability [3], making it indispensable for sustainable, broader management of systems.

PM strategies can be broadly categorised into schedule-based and condition-based approaches. Schedule-based PM adheres to predetermined intervals, regardless of the equipment's current state [5]. This is undoubtedly straightforward to implement, but it can lead to inefficiencies, such as unnecessary interventions or over-servicing, which consumes resources without necessarily adding value. In contrast, condition-based PM leverages real-time data to assess the state of equipment and perform maintenance only when specific conditions indicate potential failure [5]. This aids in minimising the waste of overprocessing within an organisation, thereby reducing the burden placed upon available resources, which aligns with lean management principles of reducing "muda" (waste) and "muri" (overburden) [6], [7].

The paper introduces a survival-based preventive scheduling model, where "survival-based" refers to the application of statistical analysis techniques to predict the time until equipment failure. This approach integrates predictive analytics and utilises Weibull distribution and Cox proportional hazard modelling. The model was utilised to estimate equipment failure rates and prioritise maintenance tasks based on the likeliness of failure. This framework identified high-risk components and schedules maintenance accordingly by clustering AV equipment based on degradation covariates.

This paper bridges gaps in current maintenance practices by proposing a scalable and adaptable PM framework. While demonstrated within tertiary environments, the model is applicable across various organisations reliant on critical systems.

The structure of this paper is as follows: the literature review section discusses previous work on scheduling models for preventive maintenance with a focus on the Cox proportional hazard models and Weibull distribution modelling. The method section introduces the general framework for preventive maintenance and details the design of the proposed model. The performance results of the scheduling model, as well as the outcomes from the scheduling model, are presented in the results section. In the Model Efficiency and Downtime Optimisation section, the enhancements in resource utilisation and system performance due to the optimised maintenance strategies in simulated conditions, are discussed. The Microeconomic Preventive Resource Implications section analyses the impact of implementing the proposed scheduling model on cost-effectiveness and resource allocation. The last section concludes the study.

2 LITERATURE SURVEY

PM scheduling problems have generally been approached through various modelling techniques, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), multicriteria decision-making methods, simulation models, and mathematical formulations. AI-driven approaches, such as genetic algorithms (GA) and neural networks, are particularly effective for handling complex decision-making and uncertainty in scheduling problems [8]. Similarly, multicriteria decision-making methods like the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) prioritise maintenance tasks by evaluating multiple conflicting criteria [9]. However, while these methods are valuable, the trade-offs in complexity, resource needs, and practical applicability must be carefully considered when selecting an approach for preventive maintenance scheduling [10], particularly in industry contexts.

Despite the advantages of AI and multicriteria methods, mathematical formulations have received significant attention for addressing preventive maintenance problems, according to Basri [10]. Mathematical modelling approaches are preferred because of their analytical precision and exactness in the theoretical sense for producing actionable results, but their practicality is questioned for the same reason [11]. These methods include probability-based formulations, such as the Cox Proportional Hazard model and Weibull distribution, which provide tools for modelling equipment reliability, optimising maintenance intervals, and minimising downtime. Given their suitability for PM applications, this study focuses on the application of these two mathematical approaches in combination with simulation modelling.

The Cox Proportional Hazard model, referred to as the Cox model in this paper, is one of the most widely used tools in survival analysis, a branch of statistics focused on modelling the time until a specified event occurs, such as equipment failure. The model evaluates the hazard rate, which represents the likelihood of equipment failure over time, based on covariates or factors influencing the outcome [12].

A major advantage of the Cox model is its semi-parametric nature, which does not require assumptions about the baseline hazard function [12]. This flexibility makes it well-suited for systems where multiple factors influence failure rates over time, such as in universities. In the work presented by Austin, the author describes techniques for simulating survival times under a Cox model, which can incorporate time-invariant or time-varying covariates [13]. The research presented closed-form expressions for generating survival times when a time-varying covariate influences the hazard function. These simulations allow researchers to evaluate the performance of Cox models in different settings and provide a means of testing statistical power [13]. While the Cox model excels at analysing the impact of covariates on failure rates, it does not provide insights into the time-to-failure distribution. This limitation is addressed

by pairing the Cox model with parametric methods, such as the Weibull distribution, which explicitly model the shape and scale of failure times.

The Weibull distribution is a cornerstone of reliability engineering and preventive maintenance scheduling due to its ability to model diverse failure rates. The distribution's shape parameter, k, distinguishes different failure patterns. If k < 1, it indicates decreasing failure rates (infant mortality). If k = 1, it indicates a constant failure rate (random failures), and if k > 1, it indicates increasing failure rates [14]. The scale parameter, b, defines the characteristic life, representing the time at which 63.2% of components are expected to fail [15]. When the Weibull distribution was applied, researchers assessed failure time accurately, comparing Weibull results with those from other distributions, such as exponential, normal, log-normal, and gamma, to identify the impact of distribution choice on preventive maintenance intervals [16]. Additional research by Bartholomew-Biggs et al. employed Weibull distribution models with hazard rates to estimate system failure frequency, optimising maintenance scheduling by focusing on cost efficiency [17]. When calculating the mean preventive maintenance cost through Weibull-based analysis, an optimal interval was determined to balance preventive maintenance costs with equipment reliability and availability. The utility of the Weibull distribution lays the foundation for effectively solving the inherent complexities of maintenance scheduling.

Maintenance scheduling problems are typically classified as NP-hard, a term from computational complexity theory used to describe problems for which no known algorithm can solve all instances efficiently in polynomial time [18]. These problems are computationally intensive due to their complexity and the large number of variables and constraints that are involved. In NP-hard problems, the time required to find an optimal solution increases exponentially as the problem size grows [11]. By using simulation, it is possible to experiment with different scheduling strategies and evaluate their effectiveness in improving these metrics. Since maintenance scheduling is an NP-hard problem, simulation is a powerful tool that allows for the exploration of various scenarios under complex constraints without the need for a mathematically exact solution in terms of how it is programmed. Monte Carlo Simulation [19], Discrete Event Simulation (DES) [20], and Simulation Analysis (SIMAN) [21] are some of the methods used in simulation analysis.

Simulation modelling complements the mathematical formulation approaches by validating their performance under dynamic, real-world conditions. Together, these methods form a foundational framework for PM scheduling and offer a scalable solution for minimising downtime, improving reliability, and optimising resource allocation.

3 METHOD

This section introduces the general PM scheduling approach and outlines the methodology employed to tackle inefficiencies in maintenance strategies. The approach provides a flexible methodology that can adapt to diverse operational contexts relevant to each practitioner's own unique case, while the model used in this case applies specific statistical techniques to solve identified challenges at a tertiary institution. The proposed PM scheduling approach operates in a cyclical process designed to continuously integrate new data and refine maintenance schedules. The phases and steps in this approach are detailed in Figure 1.

The rest of this section then continues to outline the methodology for designing the survival-based PM scheduling model at a tertiary institution, which was used as a case study. This model aimed to improve inefficiencies in maintenance strategies, particularly downtime, resource allocation, and scheduling limitations. Utilising survival analysis methods, the model leverages mathematical formulation techniques with Weibull distribution and Cox model to meet specific requirements and constraints. The model was designed to fulfil these requirements:

- **Uptime** – Increase equipment uptime to a minimum of 90% to ensure minimal disruptions.
- **Worker utilisation** - Balance workloads by improving junior technician utilisation while alleviating the overburdening of senior technicians.
- **Adaptability** - Integrate with existing systems and allow for flexibility as equipment usage patterns evolve.
- **Confidence interval** – Ensure the model predictions and evaluations include 95% confidence intervals (CI) to provide reliable and statistically significant results.

Figure 1: PM scheduling model approach

The development process is constrained by maintenance timeslots that are dictated by the organisational schedules. These constraints shaped the model's functional requirements and implementation strategy.

Data collection was carried out through direct observation of maintenance operations, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with technicians to capture insights and validate recorded insights. Triangulation was used to reduce bias and ensure completeness. Recorded variables included equipment type, failure type, failure incidents, usage intensity, and environmental conditions. Purposive sampling was employed for the intentional selection of participants with expertise. A systematic probability sampling was an optimal data collection method for observational data as it allowed for a structured and consistent observation process across different locations and times. Data integrity measures included cross-checking

observational findings against technician interviews. However, one limitation was that the original raw data was securely destroyed after the research phase to comply with institutional confidentiality and ethical protocols, which restricts the possibility of reanalysis.

The development process, illustrated in Figure 2, began with data collection and preprocessing. Initial data included equipment use, failure incidents, and environmental factors, such as dust levels and power surges. The raw data underwent cleaning to remove inconsistencies and prepare it for survival analysis. The model employs two core survival analysis techniques:

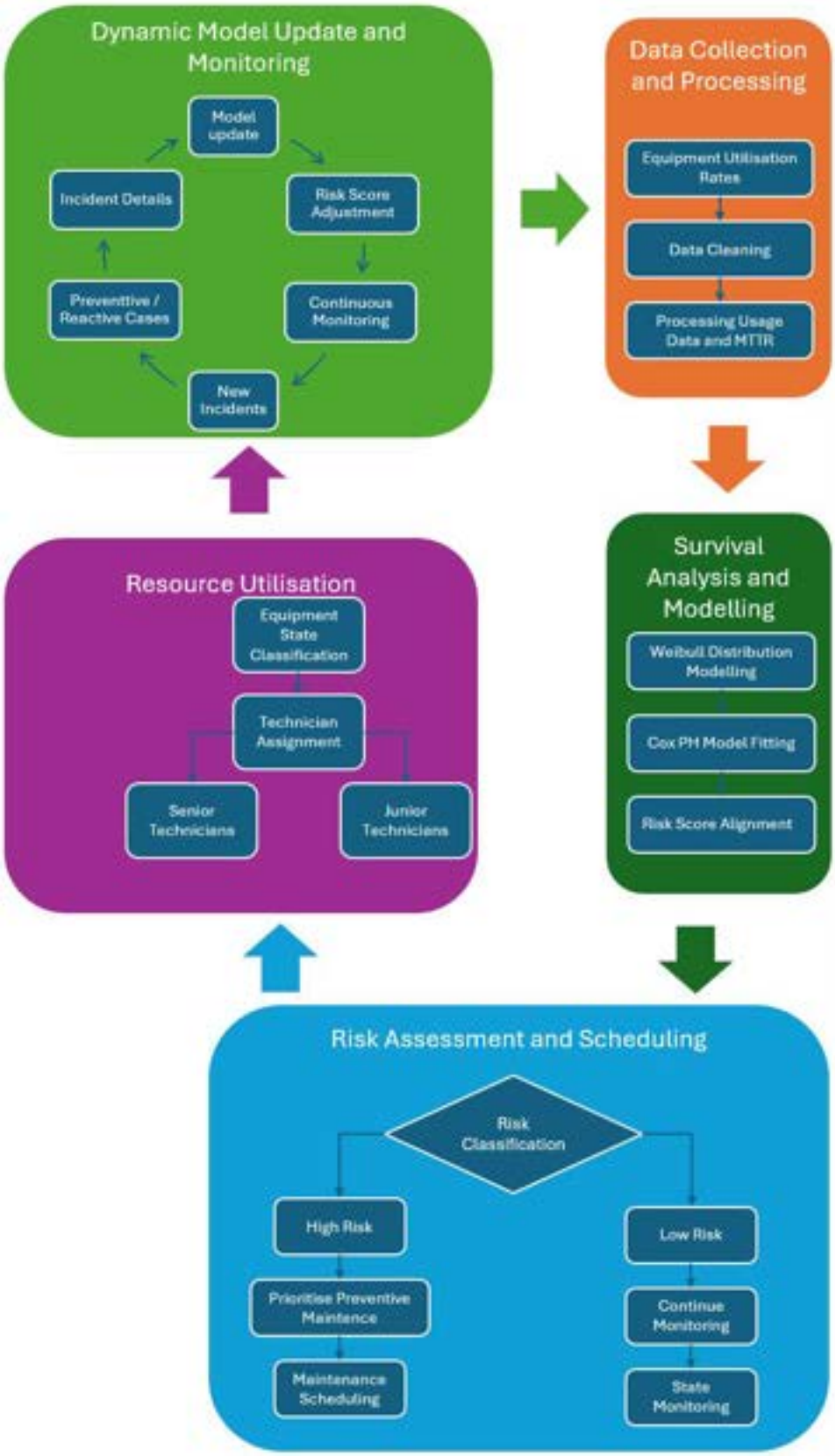

Figure 2: Development of Survival Model

1. Weibull distribution - Used to model equipment degradation and predict failure probabilities. Weibull parameters, which are shape (k) and scale (b), were estimated based on initial data to determine the likelihood of failure over time. Equipment failure rates followed a discrete pattern; the discrete hazard rate and CDF used in modelling are shown below [21]:

$$h(t;k,b) = \frac{F(t+1;k,b) - F(t:k,b)}{1 - F(t;k,b)} \qquad (1)$$

$$F(t;k,b) = 1 - e^{-bt^k} \qquad (2)$$

2. Cox model - Applied to incorporate covariates such as equipment type and venue size, which were identified to impact preventive scheduling. The model generates hazard ratios for each covariate, identifying high-risk equipment for prioritisation. The hazard function, $h(t|X)$, is defined as [22]:

$$h(t|X) = h_0(t)e^{B_1X_1+B_2X_2+\cdots+B_pX_p} \qquad (3)$$

where h_0 is the baseline hazard function, B represents the coefficients for the covariates X, and t denotes time.

The functional steps required to achieve the model's objectives are detailed in Figure 3. The steps can be described as follows:

1. **Load Initial data:** Import research data on class sizes. Data suggests that equipment in larger classes degrades faster.
2. **Create database:** Create a database with equipment details as repository for storing information.
3. **Initial Weibull model prediction:** Use Weibull modelling to predict failure probability based on initial collected data for equipment hazard rates.
4. **Accumulate more data:** Accumulate and simulate more data over time to demonstrate model functionality.
5. **Create Cox Proportional Hazard Model:** Use Cox-fitted model to view model functionality under different covariates.
6. **Prioritise features:** Create priority scores by identifying key features indicating failure using the Cox PH model covariates.
7. **Allocate technicians:** Implement technician logic with Markov chain modelling.
8. **Schedule preventative maintenance tasks:** Schedule tasks based on failure probabilities from Weibull.
9. **Assign technicians:** Assign technicians to reactive and critical tasks after equipment failure.
10. **Create dashboard:** Creation of dashboard to provide users with a visual interface to track performance metrics.
11. **Enable user interaction with dashboard:** Allow users to adjust various inputs and observe how they influence the model.
12. **Continuous model improvement:** User-collected data to improve accuracy and predictions over time.

Technician allocation was optimised to solve the inefficiencies in resource utilisation. The initial workforce configuration, with 8 junior and 2 senior technicians, was rebalanced to include 5 junior and 4 senior technicians. This adjustment was achieved by upskilling two junior technicians, enhancing their expertise to handle complex tasks. Additionally, tools such as ladders were strategically placed across 19 buildings to minimise motion waste and improve task efficiency.

Markov chain modelling was employed to simulate equipment state transitions and ensure balanced task distribution for technicians. Preventive maintenance tasks were prioritised during available time slots, with a fixed intervention time of 45 minutes for routine tasks and an additional 30 minutes for critical interventions. Critical cases typically require senior technicians.

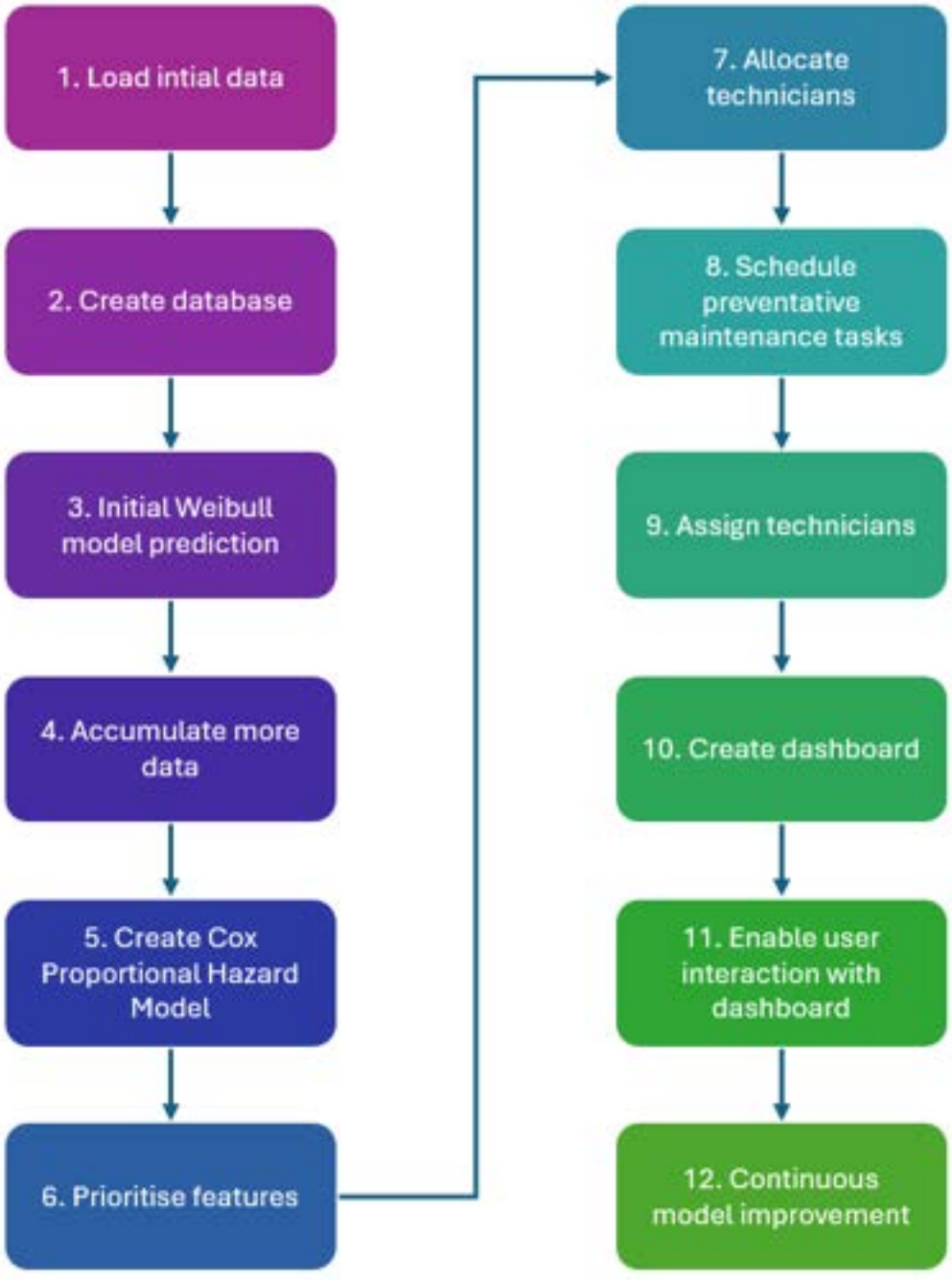

Figure 3: Steps to Achieve Functional Requirements

4 RESULTS

The PM scheduling model aimed to address inefficiencies in AV equipment maintenance, including low uptime and suboptimal resource allocation. The initial dataset captured AV equipment failures across lecture rooms. The Pareto analysis, in Figure 4, revealed that

transmitters, projectors and public address (PA) systems contributed to over 80% of observed failures. Since transmitters are a subcomponent of projectors, their contributions are combined under the projectors category, resulting in the projectors and PA systems being identified as the dominant sources of failures. This effectively justified their prioritisation in the model's initial implementation.

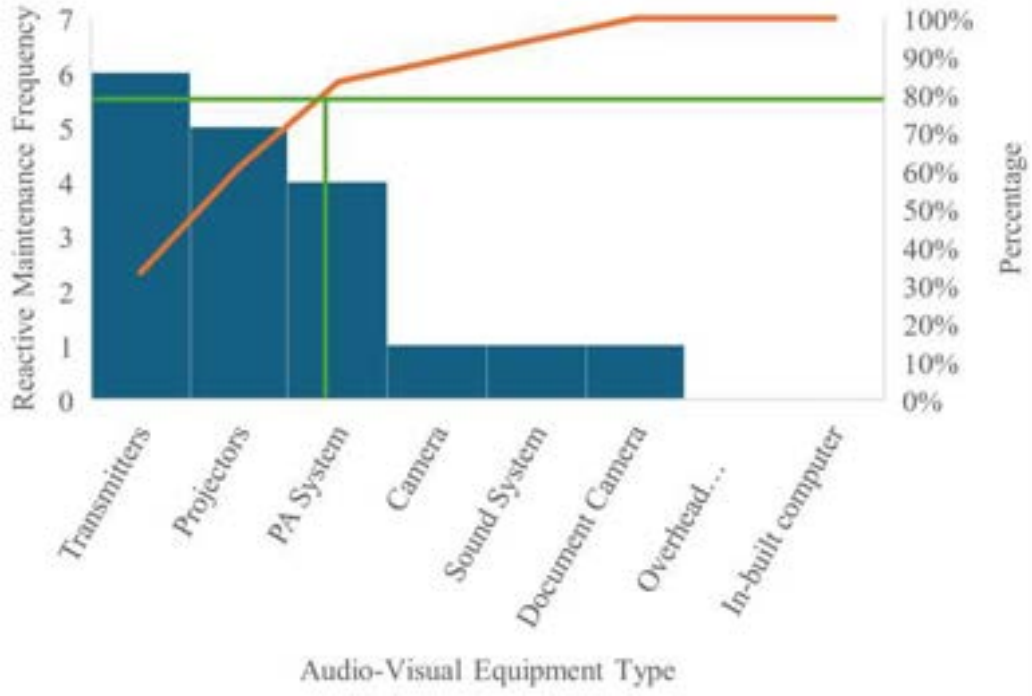

Figure 4: Failure Frequencies with Pareto Analysis

The failure rate was estimated at 1.24%, reflecting significant room for improvement. Using Weibull analysis, the shape (k) parameter was determined to be greater than 1, highlighting the increasing likelihood of failure over time. An assumption was made that the shape parameter is constant, but the scale parameter (b) will differ over time. This means the general pattern of failure was assumed to be the same, but the time scale over which equipment failure occurs was different. Discrete hazard rates, shown in Figure 5, revealed that data projectors in large rooms had the highest risk of failure, and these were used as the base parameter in modelling. Hazard rates of equipment in each type of room are then shown.

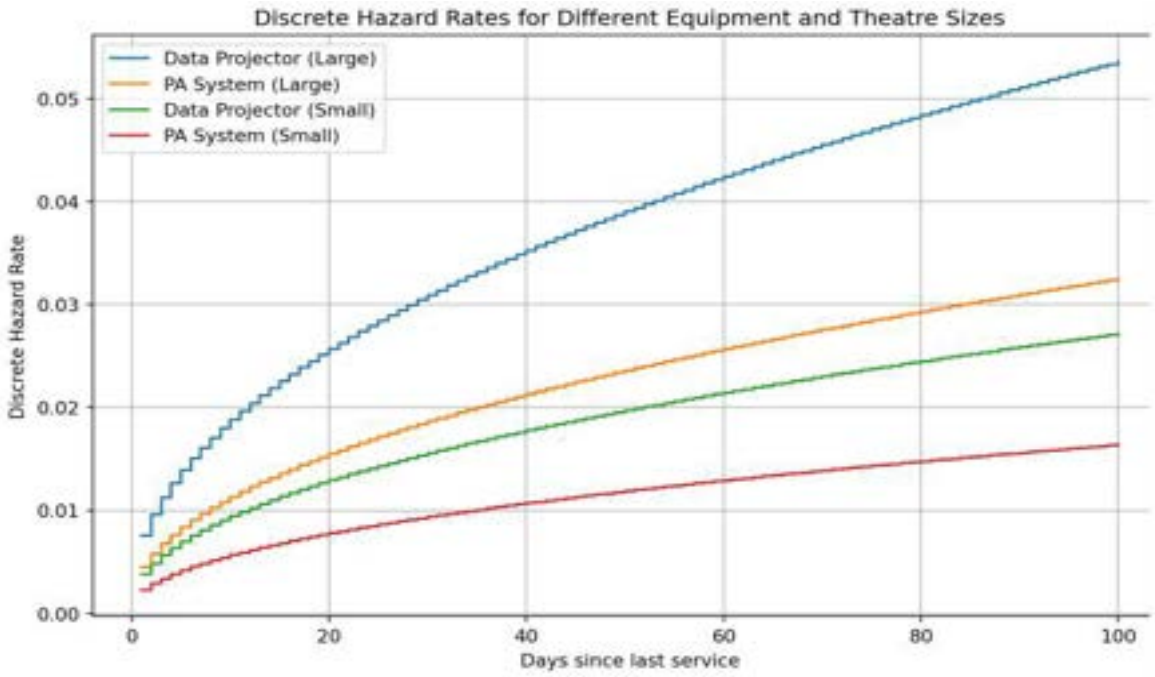

Figure 5: Discrete Hazard Rate for Equipment at Different Class Sizes

While observational data suggested that equipment type and venue size influenced failure rates, additional data was integrated into the model to enhance its predictive capability over time. The developed Cox model demonstrates the functionality of the preventive scheduling framework. The data provided insights into failure probabilities under varying covariates, such as class size and equipment type.

The analysis clustered venues into four categories based on class size, shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Clustering Class Sizes for Cox Model

Clustering	Capacity
Small	Class sizes of fewer than 100 people
Medium	Class sizes between 100-200 people
Large	Class sizes between 200-300 people
Extra-Large	Class sizes greater than 300 people

The Cox model identified significant hazard ratios, while others were found to be insignificant. This is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Hazard Ratios from the Cox model

Covariates	Hazard Ratio	Description	Lower Interval (95% CI)	Upper Interval (95% CI)
Medium Venues	HR = 1.207	20.7% higher failure risk.	0.8362	1.7427
Large Venues	HR = 1.927	92.7% higher failure risk.	1.3521	2.7471
Extra-Large Venues	HR = 1.950	95.0% higher failure risk.	1.3247	2.8707
PA Systems	HR = 0.586	41.4% reduction in the hazard.	0.4685	0.7332

One covariate per category was the baseline against which other covariates were tested against. In this case, the small venue category was used as a baseline against the other covariates in that cluster. The Cox model results revealed that the hazard rate increased with an increase in the class size capacity, as shown in Figure 5. Equipment in larger classes is at a higher risk of failing. There is also a representation of the 95% confidence intervals (CI) for

the log hazard ratios from equation (3). More covariates can be added to the model as more data becomes available, and the model accounts for this.

These covariates guide the prioritisation of equipment with a higher risk of failure for preventive maintenance. In Figure 6, 4 different equipment were randomly selected to show the probability of equipment survival over a 30-day period. Equipment with the highest probability of failure, meaning the lowest survival probability, is prioritised for preventive maintenance.

To test the model's applicability, the allocation of senior and junior was modelled. The allocation of these technicians is driven by "states" of equipment modelling, which shows the transitions each piece of equipment may undergo during its lifecycle, shown in Figure 7.

Technician roles were assigned based on task complexity and expertise. Junior technicians were responsible for handling both preventive maintenance and reactive tasks as they occurred. However, when junior technicians were unable to resolve critical or complex reactive tasks, these were escalated to senior technicians, who possess advanced expertise. These tasks were broken down between 8 junior technicians and 2 senior technicians.

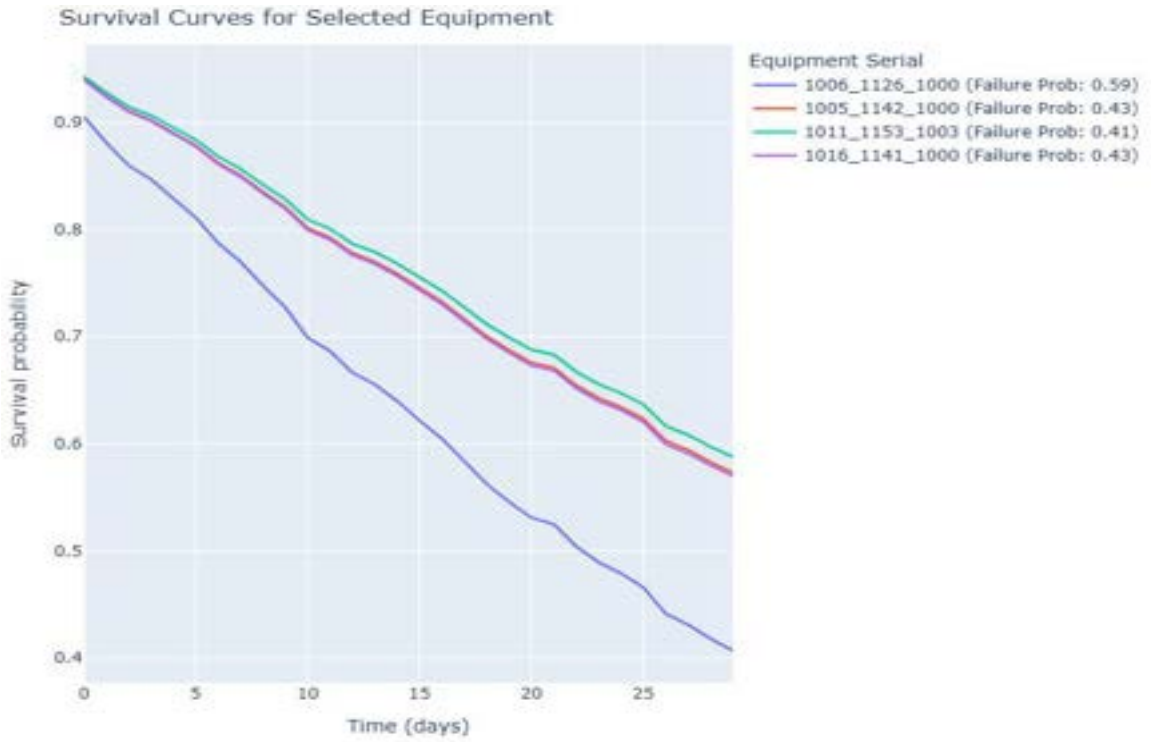

Figure 6: Survival Curves of Equipment

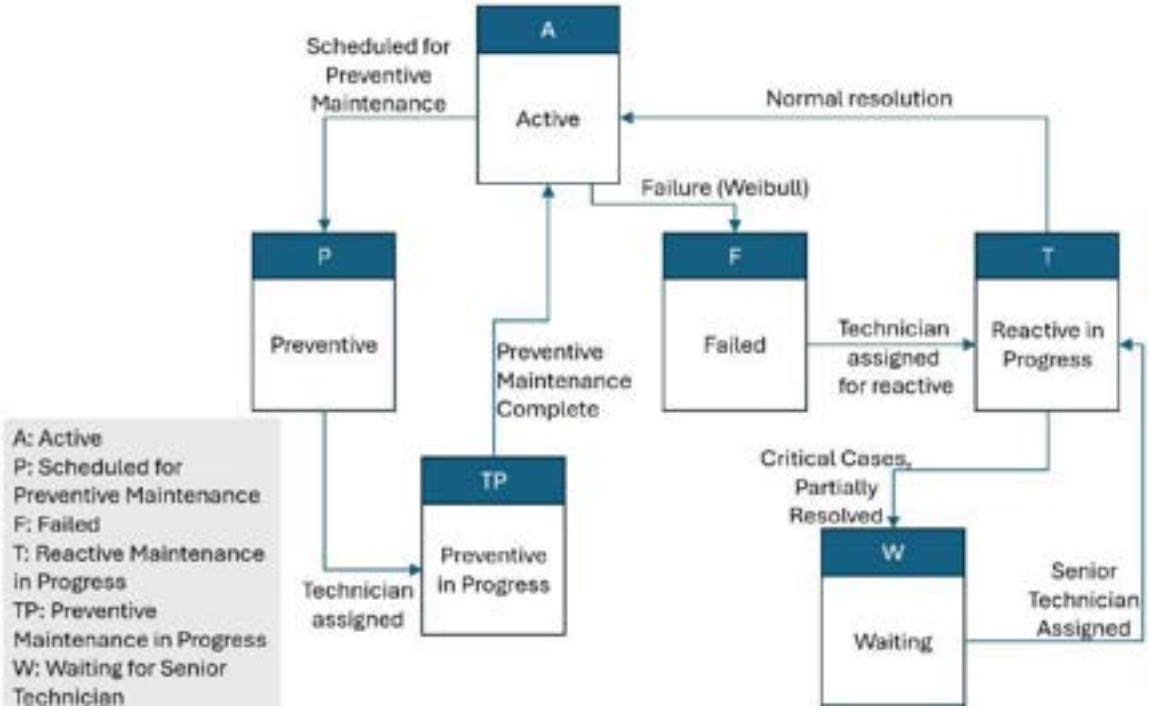

Figure 7: State Definitions of Audio-Visual Equipment

5 MODEL EFFICIENCY AND DOWNTIME OPTIMISATION

The preventive maintenance scheduling model's efficiency was evaluated by optimising technician allocation and reducing downtime. The optimisation focused on tackling the inefficiencies in technician expertise distribution and consequently, improving maintenance task workflows, increasing uptime and resource utilisation.

The original technician allocation comprised 8 junior and 2 senior technicians, leading to inefficiencies for tasks requiring senior-level expertise. A significant number of maintenance tasks were critical and could only be resolved by senior technicians, resulting in delays, prolonged downtime, and reduced preventive maintenance coverage. Figure 8 highlights this imbalance, which resulted in prolonged downtime and reduced the effectiveness of preventive maintenance. The uptime was 89.9% at 6 daily preventive tasks, and technician utilisation was 52.14%.

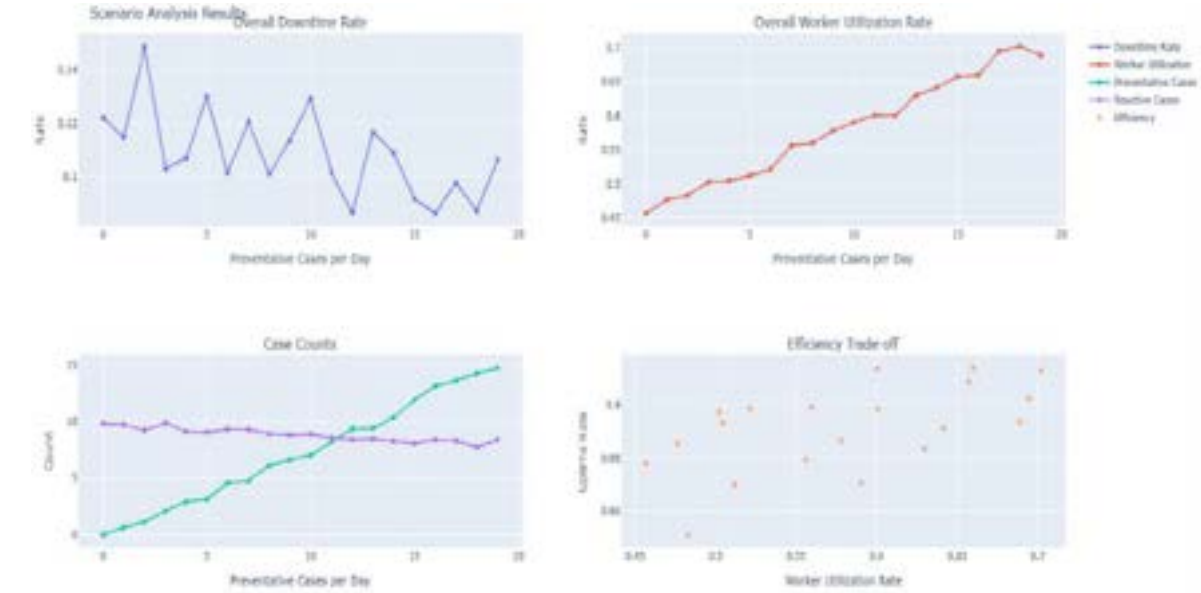

Figure 8: Model-predicted current state

To solve these issues, the technician workforce was reconfigured. Two junior technicians were upskilled to senior-level expertise, achieving a new distribution of 5 junior and 4 senior technicians. Adjustments were made to balance the labour cost structure without increasing overall expenses by removing one junior technician to offset the additional compensation required for the upskilled workforce. The optimisation assumed a constant schedule of six daily preventive tasks, aligned with organisational maintenance windows, to effectively maintain cost neutrality while improving workload distribution.

The optimised allocation resulted in a significant increase in uptime, from 87% (observed state) to 92.58%, surpassing the target of 90%. This improvement reflects the model's ability to streamline workflows and prioritise preventive tasks effectively. Figure 9 compares the model-predicted uptime of the current workforce configuration (89.9%) with real-world observations, validating the model's accuracy. It also shows the optimised state.

Worker utilisation improved substantially under the optimised configuration. In the model-predicted current state, technician workloads were unevenly distributed, leading to idle time for junior technicians and bottlenecks for senior-level tasks. The optimised model increased worker utilisation from 52.14% to 61.02%, reflecting more balanced workloads and reduced idle time.

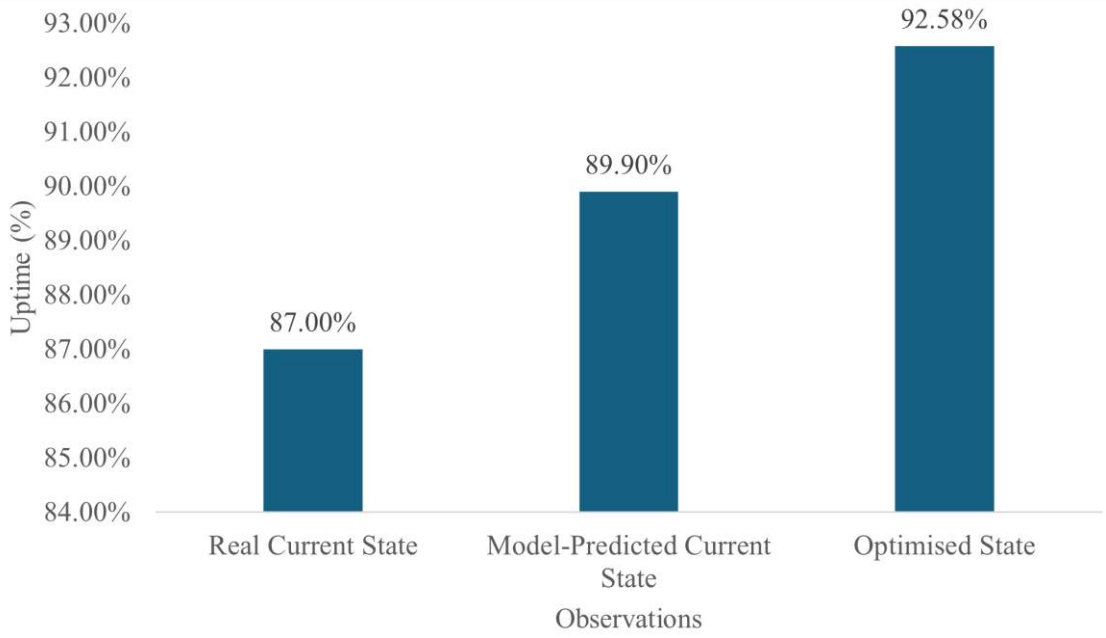

Figure 9: Model Accuracy and Optimised Uptime

Figure 10 illustrates the difference in worker utilisation across both configurations, implying reduced idle time and more balanced workloads. This improvement ensures that technicians are effectively engaged, maximising productivity without overburdening the workforce. The utilisation rate may appear moderate, but it reflects the reality that technicians have additional responsibilities beyond AV maintenance. The optimised model accounts for these complexities while still delivering significant improvements in maintenance task efficiency.

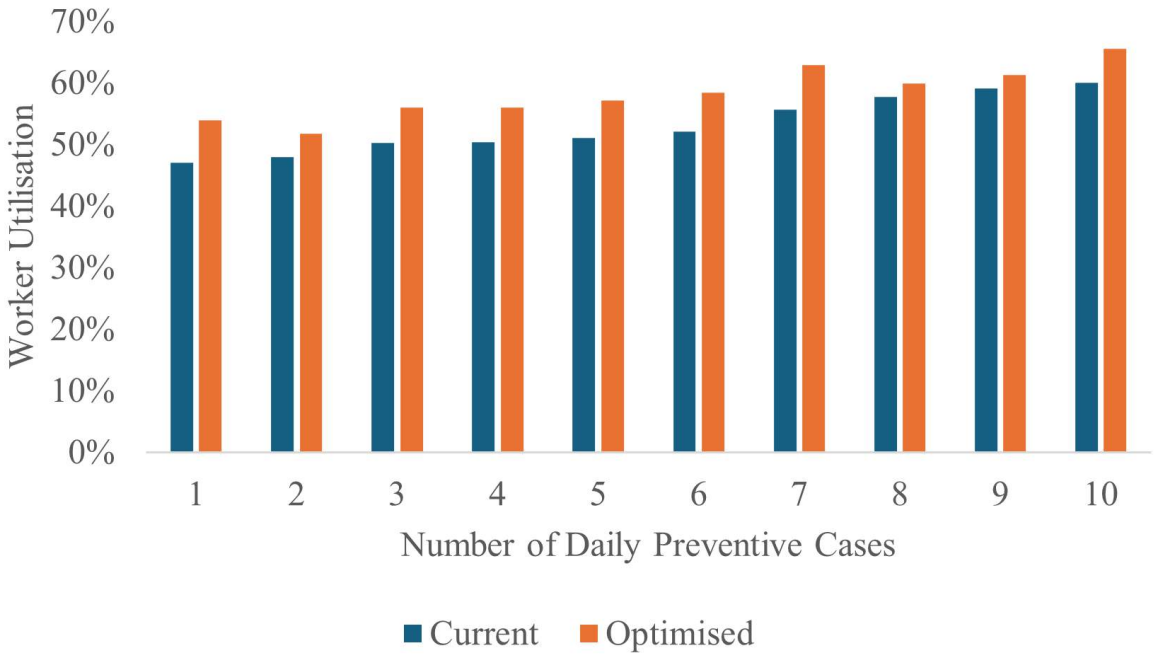

Figure 10: Optimised Worker Utilisations

The optimised technician allocation also increased the cumulative number of preventive tasks completed over a 100-day period. Figure 11 shows that the optimised state enabled the completion of 52 additional preventive tasks compared to the current state. This increase in preventive task coverage reduces the frequency of reactive maintenance incidents, ultimately enhancing equipment reliability and lifespan.

Both the current and optimised models assume that 6 preventive tasks are targeted per day. However, the model accounts for instances when a maintenance task cannot be completed within its designated time slot. In such cases, the task carries over to the next available slot. This continuity ensures that all planned preventive maintenance tasks are ultimately completed, and it minimises any backlogs and enhances equipment reliability. The optimised state's increased task completion rate demonstrates the model's potential to extend equipment lifespan through enhanced preventive scheduling.

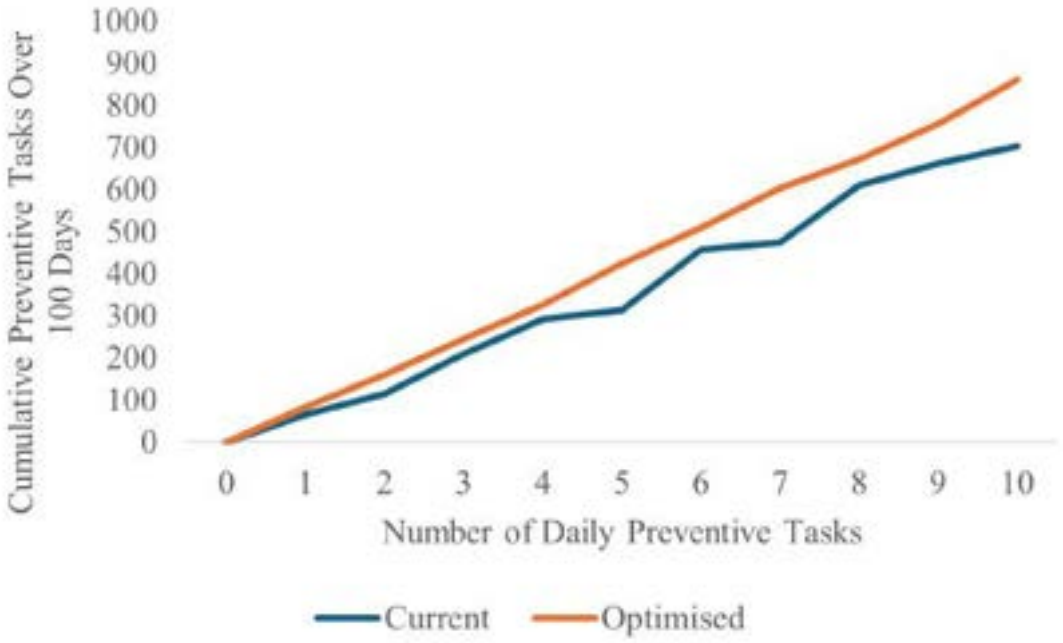

Figure 11: Preventive Maintenance Tasks Over 100 Days

One of the preventive scheduling model's strengths is its adaptability to evolving conditions. The model is designed to improve accuracy over time by incorporating more data as it is logged into the system, such as equipment maintenance incidents and the addition of equipment. As such, the Weibull parameters are recalibrated, and the system refines its failure predictions, enhancing the reliability of maintenance schedules.

Additionally, the model also supports the transition to standardised equipment and incorporates new assets into the preventive maintenance schedule in a seamless fashion. This adaptability ensures that the framework remains relevant in dynamic operational environments, providing a sustainable solution for maintenance efficiency in the long term.

6 MICROECONOMIC PREVENTIVE RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The implementation of the PM scheduling model has significant microeconomic implications when considering the optimisation of limited organisational resources. The model reduces idle labour time while simultaneously addressing overburdened senior technicians by reallocating technician roles and improving task efficiency. This workload redistribution increases worker productivity while simultaneously maximising the value extracted from the existing workforce, ensuring that resources are utilised cost-effectively. Removing one junior technician without

compromising task completion rates further exemplifies the model's ability to streamline operational costs while maintaining or improving output. These adjustments result in a more sustainable workforce configuration and align resource allocation with the organisation's operational needs and budgetary constraints.

In addition, the investment in upskilling two junior technicians to senior-level expertise exemplifies a strategic consideration of resource development that enhances the organisation's long-term economic stability. The associated costs of certification programs are offset by the reduced dependency on external hires or temporary contractors for senior-level tasks, providing a sustainable solution to addressing skills gaps. Furthermore, the strategic placement of ladders across buildings to minimise motion waste enhances efficiency and reduces indirect labour costs, such as time spent on non-value-adding activities. These measures collectively demonstrate the model's capacity to deliver significant cost savings while ensuring that critical resources are deployed where they are most impactful, thereby fostering an efficient maintenance system.

7 CONCLUSION

This study introduced a preventive maintenance scheduling framework designed to enhance equipment reliability and optimise resource utilisation in operational environments reliant on critical systems. By integrating survival analysis methods, that is, the Weibull distribution for failure prediction and the Cox model for analysing covariates, the model demonstrated its capability to improve maintenance scheduling and adapt to evolving operational needs. Simulated implementation significantly improved system uptime and achieved a predicted 92.58%, alongside enhanced technician utilisation.

The framework's adaptability is a major strength, allowing for continuous refinement as additional data becomes available. While this study employed Weibull distribution and Cox modelling techniques, the framework is flexible enough to incorporate alternative methodologies suited to other operational contexts. This model lays the foundation for improved preventive maintenance practices by providing a scalable and sustainable approach and ultimately offers practitioners a tool for minimising downtime, optimising resource allocation, and ensuring operational continuity across various organisational settings.

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RIDING THE VR WAVE: EMPOWERING THE EV WORKFORCE THROUGH IMMERSIVE TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

The transition from internal combustion engines (ICE) to electric vehicles (EV) demands a parallel evolution in the skillsets of technicians involved in maintenance and manufacturing. Virtual Reality (VR) presents a promising opportunity to develop immersive training platforms for upskilling workers in EV technologies. This study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) to explore the current applications of VR in the EV sector. The findings identify key applications, drivers and barriers. The largest application areas of VR in EV are safety simulation training and virtual showrooms. Enabling technologies such as Unity 3D and HTC Vive, as well as major industry drivers including the demand for skilled labour and compliance with safety regulations support the sustainable expansion of the EV sector. By synthesizing existing research, this study identifies critical gaps and provides guidance for future investigations in this domain. The insights gained contribute to the development of more effective VR-based training solutions, ensuring a workforce that is well-equipped to navigate the technological shift toward electric mobility.

Keywords: Electric Vehicles, Virtual reality, EV, VR, SLR, South Africa

1 INTRODUCTION

The transport industry stimulates global economic activity [1]. As concerns regarding the industry's environmental impact increase, so too does the need to develop novel and sustainable solutions that drive economic growth [2]. The rapid development of the automobile sector has presented an opportunity for electric vehicles (EV) to mitigate environmental pressures [3]. Although currently in its infancy, the EV industry has the capacity to reduce dependency on non-renewable resources [4]. According to recent studies, South Africa's EV industry anticipates a 19% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 [1].

Research studies indicate that operational excellence is vital to achieving environmental goals and facilitating expansion across the transportation sector. Maintenance practices are a critical component for the sector's efficiency and sustainability [8]. The International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) system standardizes and categorizes operations by allocating specific codes to various economic activities. For example, ISIC code 4530 represents automobile maintenance and repair. The classification system serves as a global standard for organizing economic activity and facilitating statistical analyses [5].

The incorporation of Virtual Reality (VR) training tools in the EV sector signifies the progression of equipping the EV workforce with effective training opportunities [6]. In response to this demand, automotive groups are actively working to provide VR-based training solutions that improve standard operating procedures (SOP) training. The technologies offer an immersive and dynamic setting, allowing service technicians with effective training tools to enhance their skills in immersive, simulated environments [7]. This study aims to investigate this by exploring current applications of VR in the EV sector, key application areas, drivers and barriers can be identified. More effective VR-based training solutions can therefore be developed, empowering the EV workforce in the skills transition from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to review existing literature on the top, a systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted. An SLR identifies, evaluates, interprets relevant research with the objective of answering a specific question [9]. The methodology followed is described in the following steps:

- **Step 1 - Develop a research purpose:** Clearly define the objective of the SLR
- **Step 2 - Develop a research protocol:** Prepare a research protocol including inclusion and exclusion criteria, search databases, keywords, and quality assessment criteria
- **Step 3 - Establish relevance criteria:** Clarify reasoning for whether literature is relevant to this study
- **Step 4 - Search and retrieve the literature:** Explore scientific databases for relevant literature
- **Step 5 - Selection of studies:** Select studies based on inclusion and exclusion criteria
- **Step 6 - Quality assessment for relevant studies:** Consider the quality of each selected study
- **Step 7 - Data extraction:** Extract relevant data from literature
- **Step 8 - Analysis and synthesis of findings:** Analyze and synthesize information from selected studies to identify trends and patterns
- **Step 9 – Report:** Present detailed report findings

- **Step 10 – Dissemination:** Publish the report

Steps 1 to 8 are included in this review, however Step 9 and 10 will be conducted upon publication.

2.1 Step 1 - Develop a research purpose

The purpose of this research was to investigate key application areas, drivers, barriers and software used in VR solutions for EV training and manufacturing.

2.2 Step 2 - Develop a research protocol

A research protocol was developed and is captured in table 1.

Table 1: Research Protocol

Purpose of the study	The purpose of this research was to investigate key application areas, drivers, barriers and software used in VR solutions for EV training and manufacturing.
Inclusion criteria	• Studies containing the "Electric Vehicle", "EV", "Virtual Reality", "VR", "training", and "South Africa" in the title, keywords, abstract or introduction • Literature that discusses key application areas, drivers, barriers and software used in VR tools in the EV sector
Exclusion criteria	• Outdated studies (older than 10 years, prior to 2015) • Non-English studies
Search databases	• Scopus • Science direct • Web of science
Keywords	"virtual reality technologies" AND "electric vehicle"
Quality assessment criteria	• All duplicate studies must be removed • Relevance of literature must be checked • Ensure that the interpretations of literature are aligned with the purpose of this study • Literature studies must have transparent data collection • Literature must be scientific

2.3 Step 3 - Establish relevance criteria

The studies are considered relevant if they contain at least one of the following criteria:

- Keywords are present in the abstract, introduction or conclusion
- Purpose of this study must be directly addressed
- Study must be focused on the EV industry
- Key application areas of VR solutions must be addressed
- Target group of the study is South Africa
- The key drivers of VR solutions must be addressed
- The barriers VR solutions must be addressed
- Software used in VR solutions must be addressed
- Lessons learned in VR solution in the EV sector must be addressed
- VR solutions in EV training and maintenance must be addressed
- VR maintenance in EV training and maintenance must be addressed

2.4 Step 4 - Search and retrieve the literature

A systematic search was conducted using the advanced features of Web of Science, Scopus and Science Direct as primary data sources. The search strategy involved searching the keywords on the aforementioned databases. To refine the search, only review articles, research articles and conference papers in English that were published between 1 January 2015 and 18 April 2025 were considered. The initial search had a yield of 260 articles as shown in Figure 1, (Scopus = 15, Science Direct = 117, Web of Science = 134).

2.5 Step 5 - Selection of studies

The inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied in the selection process. Studies containing the keywords in the title, abstract and introduction were selected. Additionally, key applications, drivers, barriers and software used for VR in the EV sector were considered. Duplicate and retracted studies were identified and removed from the search results. Furthermore, only non-English and recent studies published within the last 10 years were considered for the purpose of relevance. Following a careful review, 16 literature studies were identified and included in this study. The full selection process followed in Figure 1.

2.6 Step 6 - Quality assessment for relevant studies:

To ensure that the quality assessment is conducted efficiently, duplicate studies are removed to eliminate redundancy. The screening of the abstract and introduction of each study was conducted, and literature that did not meet the relevance criteria detailed in Table 1 was excluded. Additionally, the interpretations that did not align with the purpose of this study were excluded. Thereafter, a full text assessment was conducted to evaluate the transparency of data collection and that the methodology is scientific. Studies that adhere to all quality assessment were selected for data extraction. Moreover, this resulted in the inclusion of 15 studies as depicted in Figure 1.

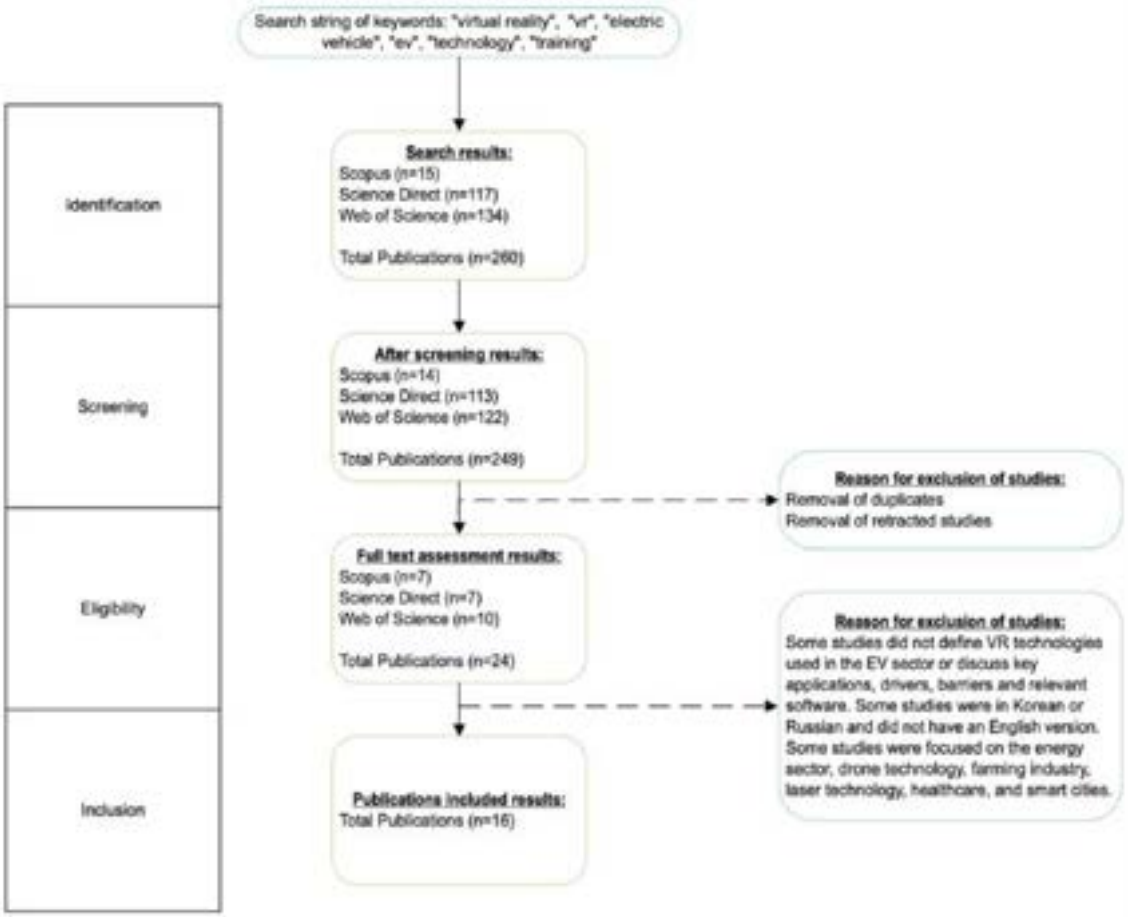

Figure 1: Prisma Selection Process

3 FINDINGS

Common themes and patterns in relevant literature were extracted and synthesized in this section to achieve the objective of this study.

3.1 Step 7: Data extraction

After the finalisation of the studies during the SLR, data was extracted and captured in table 2.

Table 2: Data extracted from applicable literature

#	Title	Authors and year	Application of VR	Barriers	Drivers	VR technology	Software	Future research	Ref
1	Cognitive differences in product shape evaluation between real settings and virtual reality: case study of two-wheel electric vehicles	Duan et al. (2024)	X	X	X	X	x	X	[10]
2	Virtual piloting of vehicle fleets to accelerate the green transition in logistics	Todorov et al. (2024)	X	X	X				[11]
3	Automotive Intelligence Embedded in Electric Connected Autonomous and Shared Vehicles Technology for Sustainable Green Mobility	Vermesan et al. (2021)	X	X	X		X	X	[12]
4	Entering the Augmented Era: Immersive and Interactive Virtual Reality for Battery Education and Research	Franco et al. (2020)	X	X	X			X	[13]
5	On the Use of Augmented Reality to Reinforce the Learning of Power Electronics for Beginners	Pérez et al. (2022)	X	X	X	X	X	X	[14]
6	A Robotic Teleoperation System with Integrated Augmented Reality and Digital Twin	Pham et al. (2024)	X	X	X		X	X	[15]

	Technologies for Disassembling End-of-Life Batteries								
7	Introducing Augmented Reality in Next Generation Industrial Learning Tools: A Case Study on Electric and Hybrid Vehicles	Perdikakis et al. (2015)	X	X	X		X	X	[16]
8	Electric Vehicle Battery Remanufacturing : Circular Economy Leadership and Workforce Development	Chigbu et al. (2024)	X	X	X	X	X	X	[17]
9	Towards autonomous EV by using Virtual Reality and Prescan-Simulink simulation environments	HUSAR et al. (2018)	X	X	X	X	X	X	[18]
10	Analysis of Emerging Technologies of Battery Charging, Connected Cars, Autonomous Vehicles, Augmented Reality, and Block-chain in Electric Vehicles	Prabhu et al. (2023)	X	X	X	X	X		[19]
11	Overestimated time-to-collision for quiet vehicles: Evidence from a study using a novel audiovisual virtual-reality system for traffic scenarios	Oberfeld et al. (2022)	X	X	X	X	X	X	[20]
12	Energy transition towards electric vehicle technology: Recent advancements	Malik et al. (2025)	X	X	X			X	[21]
13	Integration of emerging technologies in next-generation electric vehicles:	Yamini et al. (2025)	X	X	X		X		[22]

	Evolution, advancements, and regulatory prospects								
14	Intelligent disassembly of electric-vehicle batteries: a forward-looking overview	Meng et al. (2022)	X	X	X			X	[23]
15	Digital twin technology in electric and self-navigating vehicles: Readiness, convergence, and future directions	Yalavarthy et al. (2025)	X	X	X			X	[24]

3.2 Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings

3.2.1 Keywords intersectionality

The intersectional nature of the various application areas is effectively illustrated in the keyword co-occurrence diagram in Figure 2. The size of each keyword represents the frequency of keywords in selected studies. Thus, the largest words, “Electric vehicles”, “Virtual reality”, “digital twin” are the most frequently occurring in publications. Other keywords such as “workforce development”, “education”, “disassembly” and “remanufacturing” are present. In this context, it is evident that there is a relationship between the forementioned keywords and major application areas extracted from literature namely technician training, assembly and maintenance.

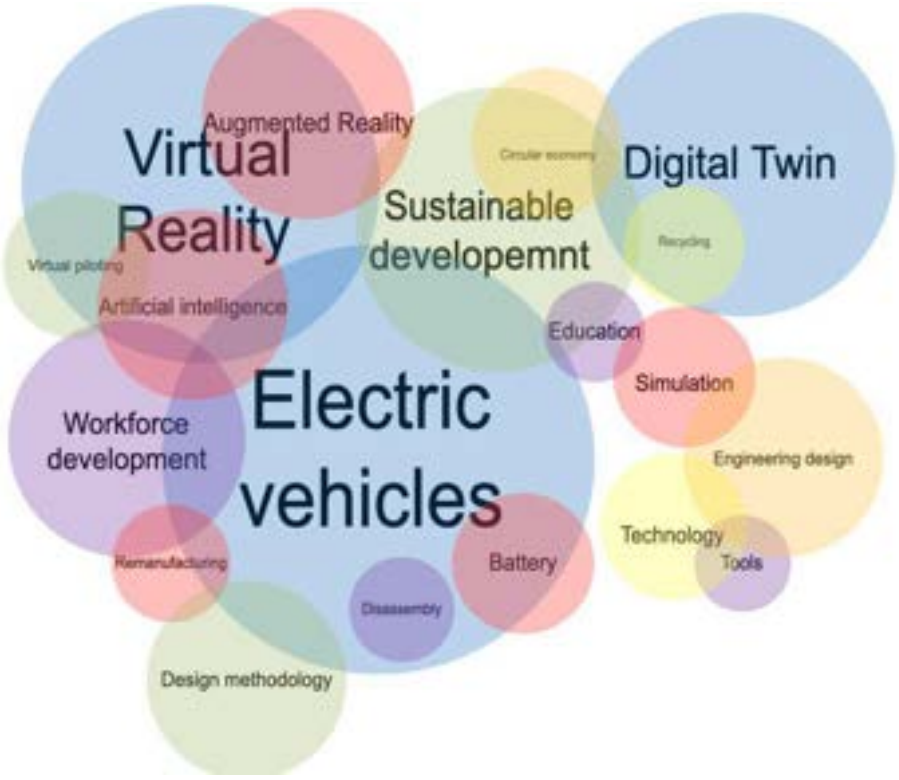

Figure 2: Keyword co-occurrence network

3.2.2 Annual distribution of studies

Figure 3 depicts the number of annually published articles on various VR applications in the EV sector. The highest number of published articles was 5 articles in 2024, comprising of 33% of the total number of relevant studies published in the 2015-2025 range. It is noteworthy that the number of articles published from 2020 until 2025 has increased substantially and accounts for 87% of the total published articles. Thus, indicating an increase in interest in research within the scope of this review. This trend may be a result of the rapid growth of the EV industry, introducing a need for supporting research of key applications for training, assembly and maintenance of EV components [3,4, 6, 7].

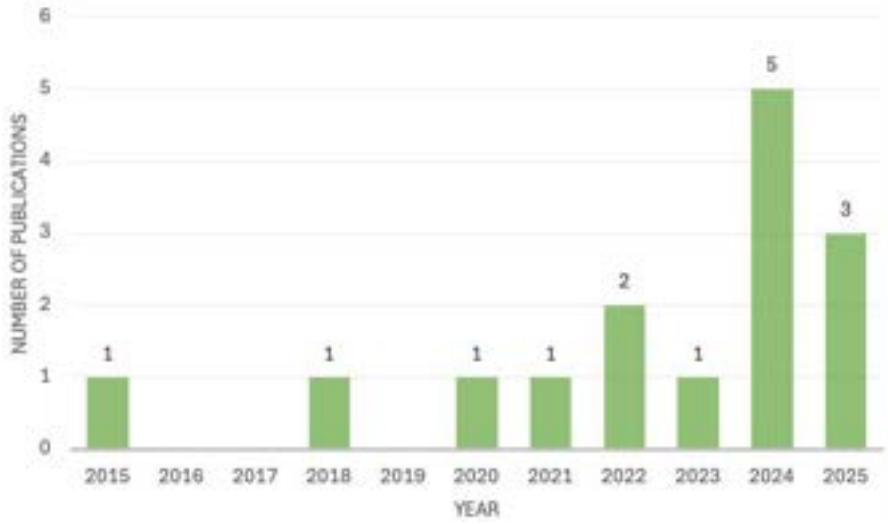

Figure 3: The distribution of publications per year

3.2.3 Key applications of VR in the EV sector

Virtual reality technologies provide innovative solutions for various stages of the value chain, rapidly revolutionising the EV industry. A key application area of VR is in safety simulation and training, which promotes safe and immersive environments to educate engineers and technicians on emergency protocols and handling high-voltage battery components [13,14,17,21]. VR environments are significant in visualising physical designs in early product design, allowing interactions with full-scale 3D models, virtual piloting as well as reducing overall costs and accelerating the product design development cycle [10,11]. Applications of VR are observed in the manufacturing and assembly line planning by facilitating virtual walkthroughs, the identification of inefficiencies, the optimization of facility layouts and employee training without disrupting production line operations [19,23]. Maintenance, aftersales and research and development operations greatly benefit from VR technologies [16]. Furthermore, virtual showroom experiences, test drives and product education are used to enhance customer experience and influence purchasing decisions [19,21,24].

3.2.4 Drivers of VR technology Applications in the EV sector

Several factors are working to accelerate VR adoption in the EV sector. In recent years, rapid technological development has increased the commercialization and accessibility of powerful VR systems [10,12,16]. The demand of skilled labor in the EV industry has encouraged companies to adopt VR-based training for rapid and effective upskilling [13,14,21]. Broader digital transformation initiatives foster a conducive environment for VR integration and alignment with Industry 4.0 [12]. Regulatory demands with a focus on worker safety and

environmental compliance supports the need for VR solutions that enhance training and reduce operational hazards [13, 17, 21].

3.2.5 Barriers of VR technology use in the EV industry

Despite its potential, widespread adoption of VR in the EV industry is impeded by multiple obstacles. The high initial investment costs of VR hardware, software development and content creation act as a significant obstacle [19, 24]. When combined with uncertainty of the return on investment, a commitment of substantial resources will not be made by most organisations. Connecting of VR tools with existing enterprise systems introduces integration challenges [19,23]. Moreover, a shortage of domain experts and content developers restrict the scalability and customization of VR technologies [13, 14, 17]. Organisational factors such as behavioural inertia as well as lack of trust and digital readiness act as an obstacle in the incorporation of VR into established workflows [22].

3.2.6 VR Software and Technologies enabling Applications in EV industry

The EV sector uses a range of specialized tools and VR development platforms with the objective of enhancing VR application. VR software provides the most flexible, powerful and versatile development environment for the facilitation of training modules and product design visualizations. Software technology used for educational purposes in literature were Unity 3D, Revia Technology, Vidinoti, TASCAR, while testing scenarios used PreScan, Simulink and Thrustmaster T300RS [2, 4, 9, 11]. Hardware tools such as HTC Vive Pro Head-mounted display, VR goggles, and Oculus Rift play a vital role by facilitating an immersive interface for visualization and user interaction [2, 4, 11]. Together, these technologies enable the scaling and customization VR solutions to satisfy various operating requirements in the EV sector. The table below illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of these VR technologies.

Table 3: VR technologies advantages and disadvantages

Technology	Advantages	Disadvantages
Unity 3D	• Is a flexible and powerful development engine • Supportive of multiple platforms [2]	• Steep learning curve for beginner software developers [2]
Revia Technology	• Easy to integrate with Unity 3D • Enhances realism [2]	• Limited customizability [2]
Vidinoti	• User-friendly • Compatible with mobile devices [4]	• Limited interactivity [4]
TASCAR	• Useful for auditory research [11]	• Requires an development expert in acoustic modeling [11]
PreScan	• High fidelity simulation [9]	• High-cost • Complex user interface [9]
Simulink	• Easy integration with MATLAB software • User-friendly [9]	• Requires technical knowledge and expertise [9]
Thrustmaster T300RS	• Realistic feedback for driving simulations [9]	• Requires extensive setup • Limited to driving context only [9]
HTC Vive Pro Head-mounted display	• Hiqh quality resolution [2,11]	• Expensive • Requires extensive setup [2,11]
VR goggles	• Lightweight • Immersive [2,4]	• May cause nausea, [2,4]
Oculus Rift	• Motion tracking • Economical [2]	• Requires external sensors [2]

3.2.7 Future Research

Although current applications of VR technologies in the EV industry are promising, that are significant gaps that future studies should address. An underexplored area is the EV supply chain upstream activities where training and optimizations may improve sustainability improvements [16, 19, 23]. Furthermore, the long-term effectiveness and return on investment of VR technologies in safety, training and manufacturing must be studied [13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24]. Research on increasing the compatibility of artificial intelligence, Internet of Things and digital twins with VR systems should be conducted [16, 10, 11]. It is critical to address these research gaps in order to fully unlock the potential of VR technologies usage in the EV industry.

4 FRAMEWORK

The figures below illustrate the key applications areas, as well as the barriers and drivers of VR technologies in the EV industry.

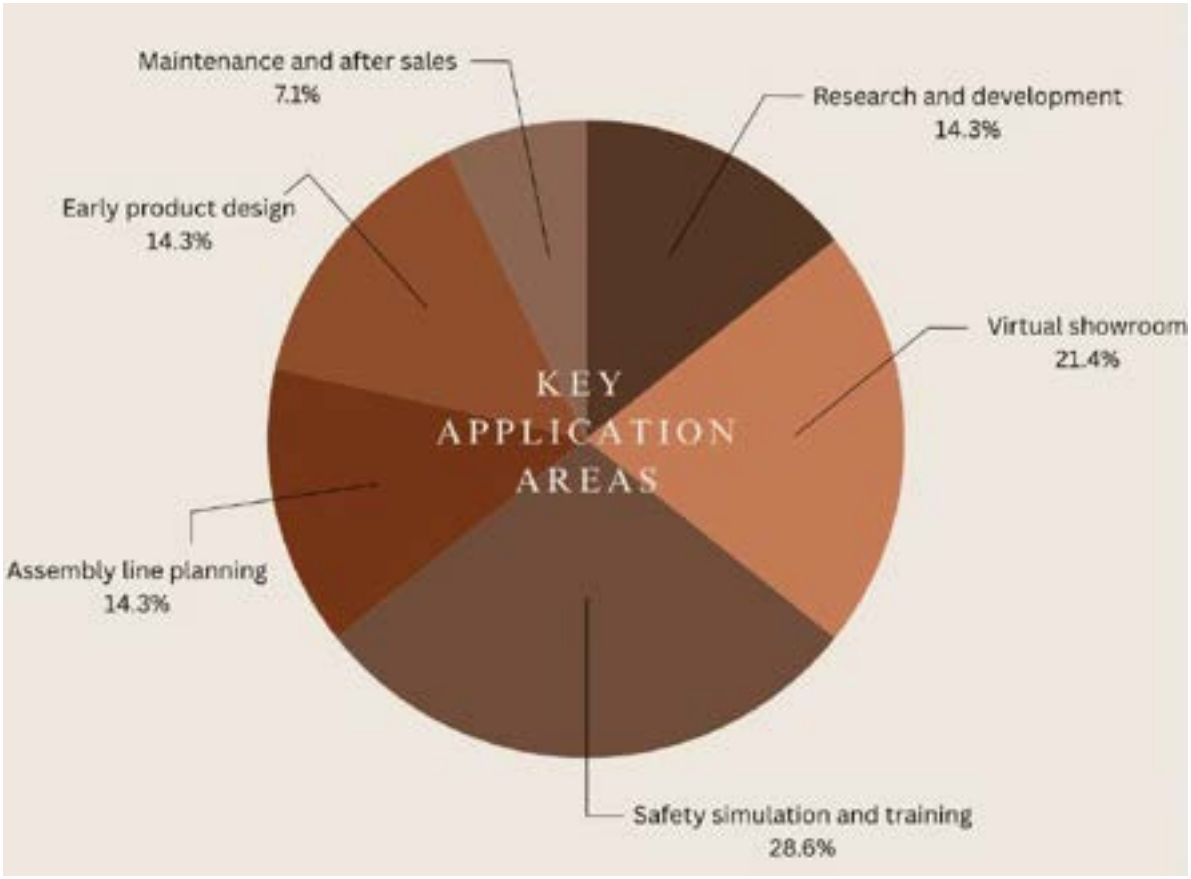

Figure 4: Key Application Areas of VR Technology as Percentages

VR technology is transforming the EV industry across various stages of the production cycle. Figure 4 illustrates the key application areas of VR technologies in the EV industry based on the amount of studies available. It is evident that the largest key application area is safety simulation and training, closely followed by virtual showrooms. Whereas, maintenance and aftersales is the least explored area, highlighting a notable gap in existing literature. Early product design, assembly line planning, and research and development have the same proportion of application that is more explored than maintenance and but less than virtual showrooms. These key application areas expose potential areas for future research.

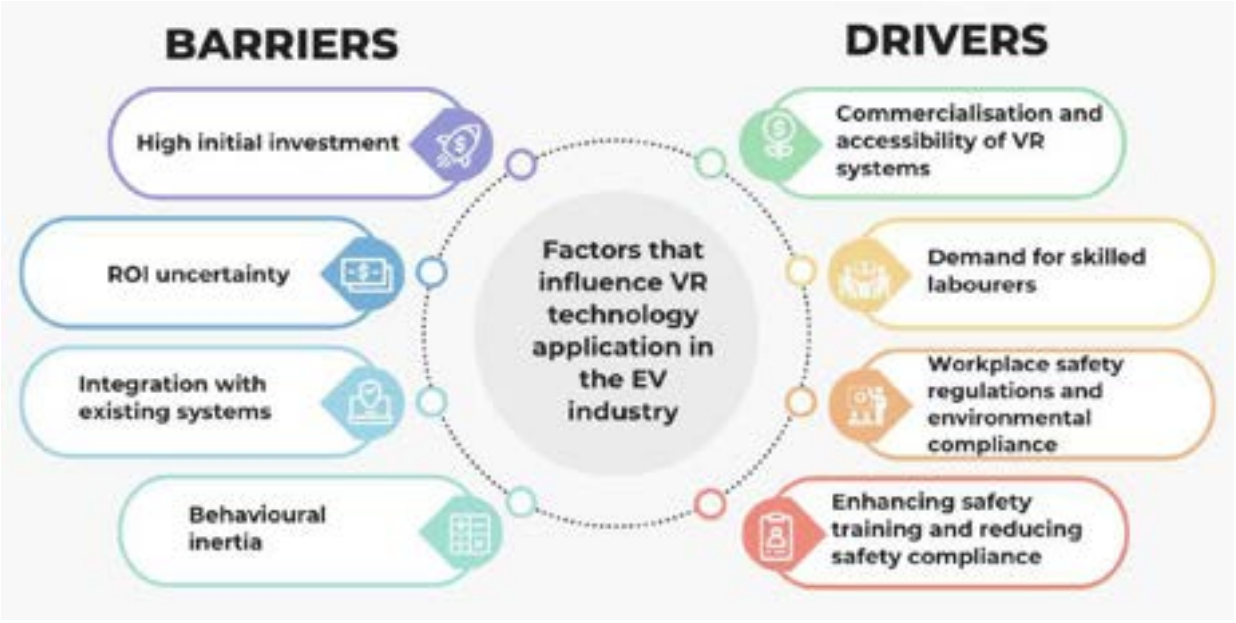

Figure 5: The barriers vs the drivers of VR technology application in the EV industry

Drivers and barriers influence the adoption of VR technology applications .Figure 5 visualises the barriers and drivers identified in Section 3 of this review. Developing a holistic understanding of these factors can improve the commercialisation and accessibility of VR technology. In this way, strategic planning and risk mitigation functions are supported and the full potential of VR can be harnessed [13,17,21]. Ultimately, empowering the EV workforce in its various functions in the product life cycle of EVs and promoting the sustainable growth of the EV industry [7].

5 CONCLUSION

South Africa's EV industry expects 19% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050. The incorporation of Virtual Reality (VR) training tools in the EV sector signifies the progression of equipping the EV workforce with effective training opportunities [6]. In response to this demand, automotive groups are actively working to provide VR-based training solutions with technologies that offer an immersive and dynamic setting. Thus, equipping service technicians with innovative training tools to enhance their skills in immersive, simulated environments [7].

This systematic literature review provided a detailed analysis of the application areas of VR technology in the EV sector. The key application areas of VR usage, as well as drivers, barriers, and VR software were identified. This review's objective was to support the development of effective VR-based training solutions and empower the EV workforce. For this purpose, relevant literature was systematically selected, filtered and analyzed.

Research findings indicated a recent increase in publications from 2020 to 2025. Therefore, reflecting a rising interest in VR technology application in the EV industry. This trend further highlights the exponential growth that VR technology and the EV industry have seen in recent years. Industrial drivers such as the commercialization and accessibility of VR systems, the demand for skilled technicians, restrictive workplace safety regulations, environmental compliance standards and the need for effective safety training programs were identified. Despite these enablers, challenges remain and hinder the adoption of VR technologies in industries. These obstacles are high initial investment costs, ROI uncertainty, integration of VR systems with existing enterprise systems and employee behavioural inertia. Technologies such as HTC Vive Pro, Unity 3D and Oculus Rift, among others, facilitate the application of VR

usage in EVs. Although VR technology use in the EV sector has increased, it still has room for expansion and high growth potential.

Future research has the potential to further develop VR applications in EV to reach its full potential. There is currently a limited amount of research on VR technology applications in the EV industry, skills transition attitudes, adoption behaviors and industry growth of this novel technology is dependent on reliable research. Therefore, more industry research should be conducted to encourage further application of VR technologies. VR has the potential to alter the ways in which EVs are designed, manufactured, marketed and maintained as the industry develops.

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ADOPTION OF BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY IN THE AGRICULTURE SUPPLY CHAIN OF SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

In the agricultural sector, data collection is often expensive. Blockchain technology offers a reliable and immutable data source for tracking crops, inventories, and contracts. By enhancing traceability, blockchain fosters transparency in food supply chains and strengthens trust between producers and consumers. The adoption of blockchain technology in agriculture has reached a stage of maturity, often referred to as the Plateau of Productivity.

This systematic literature review comprehensively analyses scholarly articles and research papers on blockchain implementation in the agricultural supply chain. It examines the benefits and challenges associated with its adoption while evaluating the factors influencing its feasibility.

Keywords: Agriculture, Blockchain, Supply Chain, Sustainable Agriculture, Adoption.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is a significant part of the economy of any country; it is the backbone that feeds a country's entire population. It serves as a vital link to all related industries. A strong agricultural base measures economic strength and is a key social and political stability indicator. As the global economic landscape rapidly changes, so do various sectors, including agriculture. Global farming enterprises, for instance, are increasingly using IoT devices to enhance soil preparation, planting, and harvesting and to manage soil moisture content, fertilisation, and pest control.

Blockchain is a digital ledger that records transactions or sensitive data across a vast network of participants. It is called a 'blockchain' because each transaction is recorded in a 'block', and these blocks are linked together in a chain. Using blockchain to capture and store information makes sharing and managing data more accessible than traditional data storage methods. The blocks are verified and added to the chain by selected participants using a consensus protocol [1].

Blockchain technology allows all parties to monitor the data flow through a designated process. The process involves the continuous verification of new data and the prevention of any unauthorised changes. The increasing attention from the academic world and the corporate sector towards blockchain technology is a testament to its potential. Its use of data and information in the agricultural industry has significantly increased its value, which is critical to developing productivity and sustainability. This inspiring potential of blockchain technology is paving the way for a brighter future for the industry [2].

Despite the political challenges and economic instability in South Africa, the agricultural industry is growing. South Africa is a net exporter of agricultural products and one of Africa's most prominent food producers; its products are mainly exported to Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Consumers are concerned with the sustainability and traceability of food products.

There has been a growing demand for supply chain traceability within the agri-food industry in South Africa. Numerous concerns exist regarding the advantages and feasibility of implementing blockchain technology within this sector.

This systematic literature review will explore the following research questions:

Main research question (RQ): How can blockchain technology foster innovation in supply chain management practices within the South African agricultural sector?

Sub research questions:

RQ1: What are the benefits and barriers of blockchain in the global supply chain?
RQ2: What is the feasibility of implementing blockchain within the supply chain of agricultural products?

2 REVIEW METHOD

This section outlines the systematic literature review (SLR) methodology for gathering, analysing, and synthesising data from relevant academic journals. It describes the systematic approach applied to ensure a comprehensive and unbiased selection of literature, aligning with the research objectives. It explains how specific databases and sources were searched, applying the criteria for including or excluding studies, and the tools used to manage and organise the data. Additionally, it outlines the techniques for analysing the findings, ensuring a rigorous synthesis that addresses the research questions. Clearly defining each process step ensures transparency and replicability, laying the groundwork for the subsequent analysis of blockchain technology applications in the agricultural supply chain.

The following keywords were used to conduct a comprehensive title, abstract, and author search in the academic databases:

1. "Blockchain" AND "Agriculture" AND "Supply Chain".
2. "Blockchain" AND "Agriculture" AND "Supply Chain" OR "Traceability" OR "Blockchain".
3. "Agriculture" AND "Blockchain Technology" AND "Supply Chain" OR "Traceability" OR "Adoption".
4. "Blockchain Technology" AND Blockchain" AND "Sustainable Technology" AND "Supply Chain".

Figure 1 depicts the literature screening, exclusion and inclusion method to select relevant journals for the systematic literature review. This was achieved by following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines.

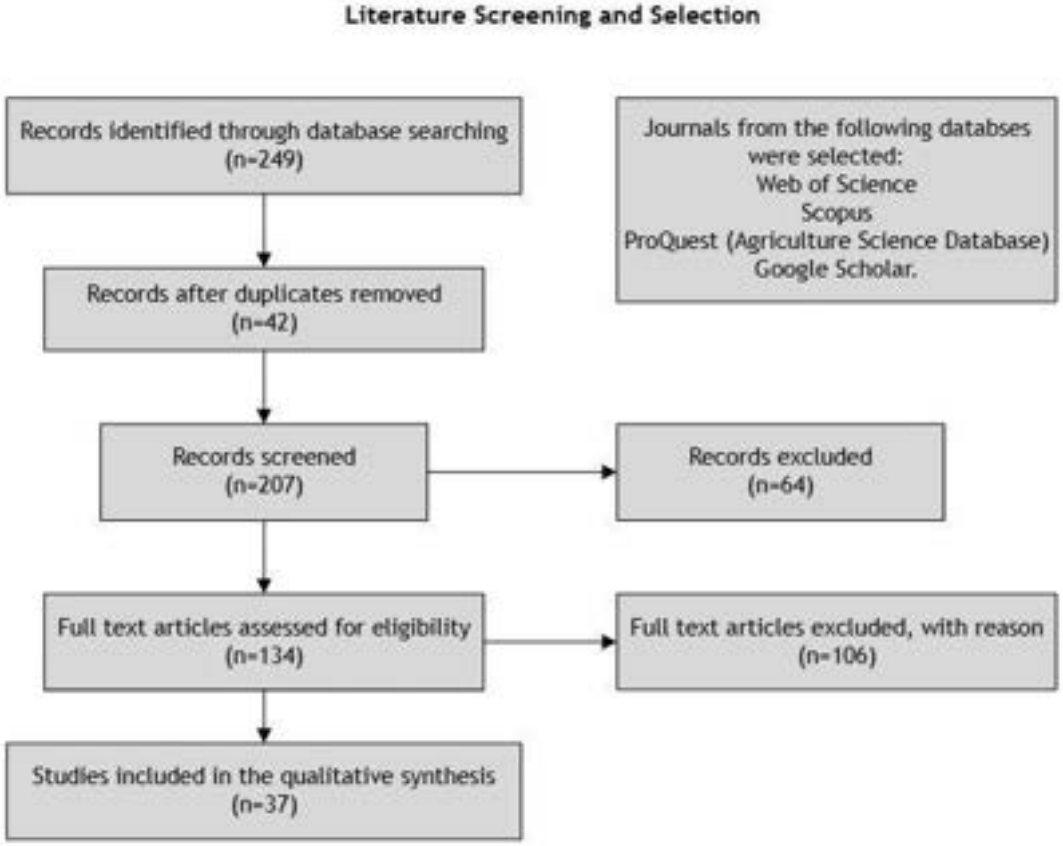

Figure 1: Literature screening and selection process (own compilation)

Inclusion or exclusion criteria were applied, initial search items, keywords, and search criteria were provided, and these assisted in reducing the literature population to a manageable and focused set.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Journals published before 2020.
2. Journals unrelated to the research questions and keywords framework.

3. Non-English journals.
4. Non-peer-reviewed journals.
5. Grey literature and duplicated studies were omitted.

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Journals published between 2020 and 2024 focusing on recent developments.
2. Journals that concentrate on digital technologies and digital procurement.
3. Journals that address the impact of BC technology in the agricultural supply chain.
4. Journals that focus on developing blockchain technology within the agriculture sector and primary, secondary, and tertiary industries.
5. Articles that directly contribute to answering the research question.
6. Inclusion was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and review papers relevant to the study.
7. Journals related to industry case studies and the development of blockchain technology in the agricultural supply chain.
8. Journals published about the agriculture supply chain.
9. Journals from the following databases were selected: Web of Science, Scopus, ProQuest (Agriculture Science Database), and Google Scholar.

Lastly, data extraction was conducted to extract the key concepts with ATLAS.ti. ATLAS.ti is a qualitative analysis software used to analyse information in an orderly manner. The literature was initially imported for evaluation. Relevant sections from within the literature were highlighted. Codes were then created, and similar sections were grouped. After that, group codes were analysed, and similarities within the group codes were evaluated and highlighted. Similar reports across various sections were created and prepared for presentation.

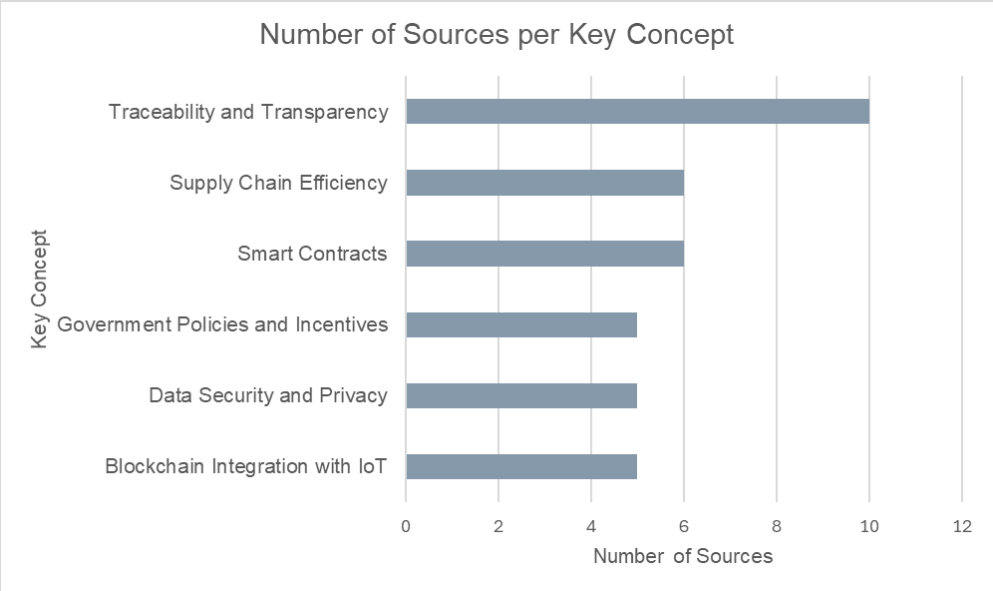

Figure 2: Key Concept Graph

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings from the systematic literature review, offering a critical and comprehensive elaboration of the data gathered from the selected research articles. The review focuses on key themes, variations, and gaps identified in the literature.

3.1 Benefits of Blockchain in the Agriculture Supply Chain

The literature consistently highlights several key benefits of implementing blockchain in agricultural supply chains. Coding analysis conducted through ATLAS.ti represents these benefits and relationships between are depicted in Figures 3 and 4. Foremost among these are traceability and transparency. Blockchain's distributed, immutable ledger enables end-to-end product tracking, creating an auditable record that links each stakeholder's activities in a secure chain. As products move from farm to retail, sequential data entries ensure that each step can be independently verified. This level of traceability substantially improves the ability to track food items back to their origin, thereby enhancing accountability and consumer trust [3].

The decentralised architecture further ensures that no single actor exclusively controls the data; instead, all authorised stakeholders share custodianship. This promotes equitable access to information while safeguarding data integrity, since unilateral alterations are technically infeasible without consensus. As a result, blockchain mitigates the risk of data tampering or fraud, strengthening both system reliability and supply chain governance [3].

A second major benefit is improved efficiency in transactions and supply chain operations. The adoption of blockchain-based smart contracts, self-executing protocols that trigger actions once predefined conditions are met, automates processes traditionally reliant on intermediaries. Within agriculture, this functionality can expedite payments to farmers upon verified delivery or enforce quality standards before goods progress through the chain [4].

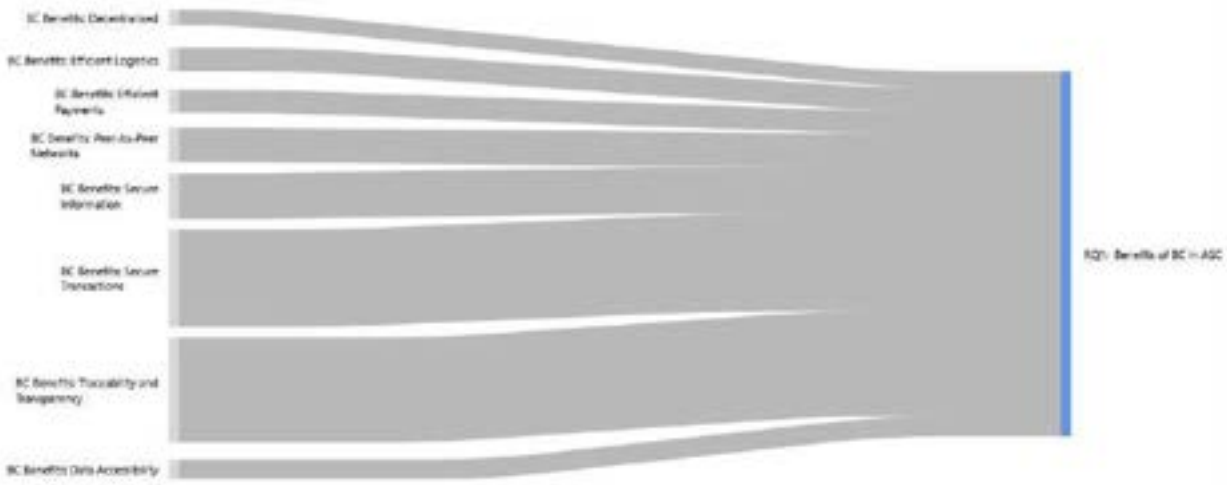

Figure 3: Sankey Illustration: Benefits of Blockchain in Agriculture Supply Chain

	RQ1: Benefits of BC in ASC 37 212	Totals
BC Benefits: Data Accessibility 5	5	5
BC Benefits: Decentralised 4	4	4
BC Benefits: Efficient Logistics 6	6	6
BC Benefits: Efficient Payments 6	6	6
BC Benefits: Peer-to-Peer Networks 9	9	9
BC Benefits: Secure Information 12	12	12
BC Benefits: Secure Transactions 25	25	25
BC Benefits: Traceability and Transparency 27	27	27
Totals	94	94

Figure 4: Table Illustration: Benefits of Blockchain in Agriculture Supply Chain

Empirical evidence suggests that such automation reduces delays in payment and distribution, lowers transaction costs, and minimises exposure to human error or corruption. For example, lenders in cooperatives can release funds promptly after contractual obligations are met, thereby enhancing liquidity and reducing financing risks. Moreover, by reducing reliance on brokers and other intermediaries, blockchain facilitates disintermediation, allowing farmers and buyers to transact directly [5]. This not only lowers commission costs but also enables earlier contract formalisation, resulting in improved cash flow for producers and processors [8].

The literature underscores blockchain's role in strengthening trust among supply chain participants. Its tamper-proof, transparent records provide all authorised farmers, processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers with confidence in the authenticity of shared data [6]. This feature is particularly valuable in ensuring food safety and quality assurance. In the event of contamination, blockchain systems enable rapid traceback to the source, allowing for targeted recalls and faster corrective action [4].

Consumers benefit from greater confidence in claims such as organic certification or pesticide-free production, as these can be verified through immutable records. In export markets, where compliance with ethical and sustainability standards is increasingly demanded, blockchain offers a reliable mechanism for demonstrating adherence and enhancing the reputation of exporting nations [4].

Finally, the integration of blockchain with complementary technologies amplifies its impact. Within the context of smart agriculture, the coupling of blockchain with Internet of Things (IoT) devices and big data analytics enables real-time recording of environmental and operational conditions such as soil quality, weather data, and storage temperatures, directly into the ledger. For example, IoT-enabled cold storage sensors can automatically verify compliance with temperature requirements for perishable goods, ensuring product integrity throughout transport [9]. This integration not only enhances transparency but also strengthens supply chain planning, forecasting, and sustainability monitoring, including carbon footprint

assessments. Collectively, these synergies position blockchain as a catalyst for leaner, more transparent, and resilient agricultural supply chains [5].

3.2 Barriers to Blockchain in the Agriculture Supply Chain

Despite its transformative potential, blockchain adoption in agriculture is hindered by significant barriers (Figures 5 and 6). A recurrent theme in the literature is legal and regulatory uncertainty. The absence of clear standards and governance frameworks creates ambiguity regarding data ownership, privacy, and liability in shared ledgers [2], [9]. For instance, if multiple actors contribute to a blockchain, questions arise over who owns the data and who is accountable for errors. Without established regulations, many firms adopt a cautious approach, delaying investment until legal clarity is achieved. Conversely, excessive regulation may constrain innovation. The challenge, therefore, lies in finding a balanced policy framework that provides certainty while fostering innovation, potentially through regulatory sandboxes or sector-specific guidelines [2], [10].

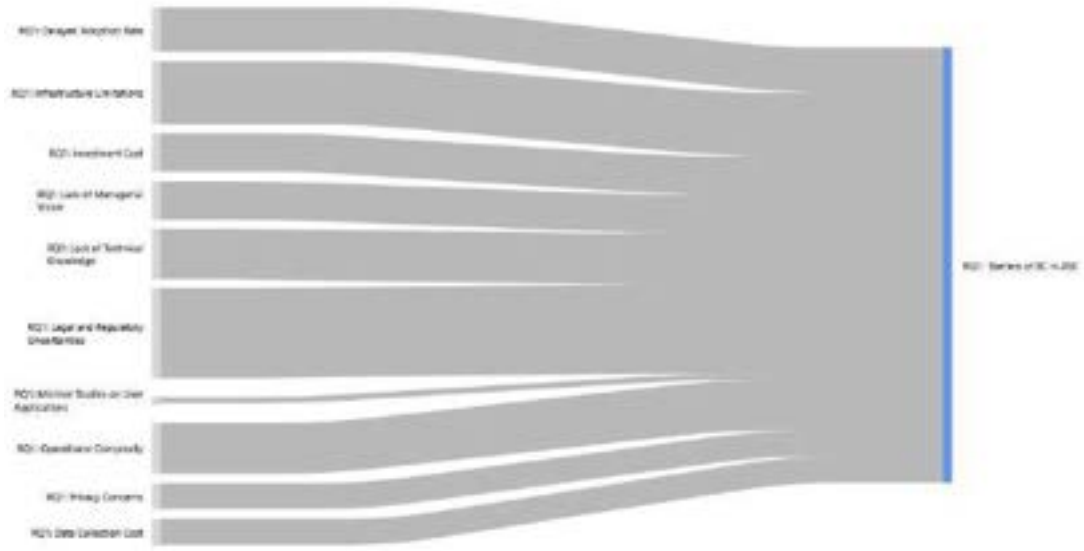

Figure 5: Sankey Illustration: Barriers of Blockchain in Agriculture Supply Chain

		RQ1: Barriers of BC in ASC 37 212	Totals
BC Barriers: Data Collection Cost	4	4	4
BC Barriers: Delayed Adoption Rate	7	7	7
BC Barriers: Infrastructure Limitations	10	10	10
BC Barriers: Investment Cost	6	6	6
BC Barriers: Lack of Managerial Vision	6	6	6
BC Barriers: Lack of Technical Knowledge	8	8	8
BC Barriers: Legal and Regulatory Uncertainties	14	14	14
BC Barriers: Minimal Studies on User Applications	1	1	1
BC Barriers: Operational Complexity	8	8	8
BC Barriers: Privacy Concerns	4	4	4
Totals		68	68

Figure 6: Table Illustration: Barriers of Blockchain in Agriculture Supply Chain

Infrastructural and resource constraints represent another critical barrier, particularly in developing and rural contexts. Effective blockchain systems require reliable connectivity and sufficient computational infrastructure resources, often scarce in rural South Africa [11]. Limited broadband access, high data costs, and a lack of blockchain-compatible hardware constrain participation, especially among smallholder farmers. In addition, the financial burden of adoption is significant: investments in IT systems, sensors, and tagging technologies (e.g., RFID or QR codes) may be prohibitive for producers with limited margins. These constraints risk exacerbating the digital divide, where large commercial farms can afford adoption and benefit from efficiency gains, while small-scale farmers are left behind [2].

Organisational and human factors can further complicate adoption [10]. Resistance to change among managers and decision-makers, often due to limited familiarity with blockchain or uncertainty about return on investment, slows uptake [14]. Adoption typically requires collaboration across multiple stakeholders, yet mistrust and failures often prevent the establishment of shared governance models. Moreover, low levels of digital literacy among farmer communities present operational risks, as user error and lack of training can undermine implementation [12], [13]. These socio-technical challenges suggest that adoption must be accompanied by capacity-building and change management initiatives [10].

Finally, technical limitations such as interoperability and scalability must be addressed. The coexistence of multiple blockchain platforms (e.g., Ethereum, Hyperledger) raises compatibility challenges with legacy systems, risking data silos and inefficiencies [11]. Concerns regarding scalability whether blockchain networks can manage the high volume of agricultural transactions without prohibitive costs or delays remain unresolved. Public blockchains are especially vulnerable to high transaction fees and energy demands, while permissioned blockchains, though more efficient, may compromise decentralisation [2].

A further barrier is the lack of empirical evidence in the South African agricultural context. While international studies highlight potential benefits and challenges, local case studies and pilot projects remain scarce. This gap hampers efforts to build stakeholder confidence and generate actionable insights for implementation. Pilot projects tailored to South Africa's

major agricultural exports, such as citrus and livestock, would provide valuable data to bridge this gap [14].

In summary, blockchain adoption in agriculture is constrained by regulatory ambiguity, infrastructural deficits, financial and human capacity limitations, and unresolved technical issues. Overcoming these barriers will require coordinated action across policymakers, industry leaders, and technology providers. Strategic interventions such as regulatory frameworks, investment in rural connectivity, training programs, and pilot implementations will be critical to realising blockchain's potential benefits at scale.

3.3 Feasibility of Blockchain in the Agriculture Supply Chain

Blockchain's capabilities must be leveraged to reduce costs and assist farmers in becoming more profitable. This section will discuss the factors contributing to BC's feasibility. Figure 7 indicates the areas where BC can be most beneficial and elevate the feasibility in the ASC.

Blockchain is highly beneficial in supporting farmers facing high trade transaction costs and unexpected losses due to market changes. Traditionally, banks conducted minimal business with agricultural businesses. There is an overall reluctance to understand the agricultural business model. Farmers can connect with buyers and traders on pre-determined conditions through smart contracts [15]. The predetermined conditions on the e-contract enable automated payments to improve transaction turnover times. Intermediaries are eliminated, and transaction costs are reduced. Reduction in transaction costs improves cash flows and the risk of payments defaulting [16].

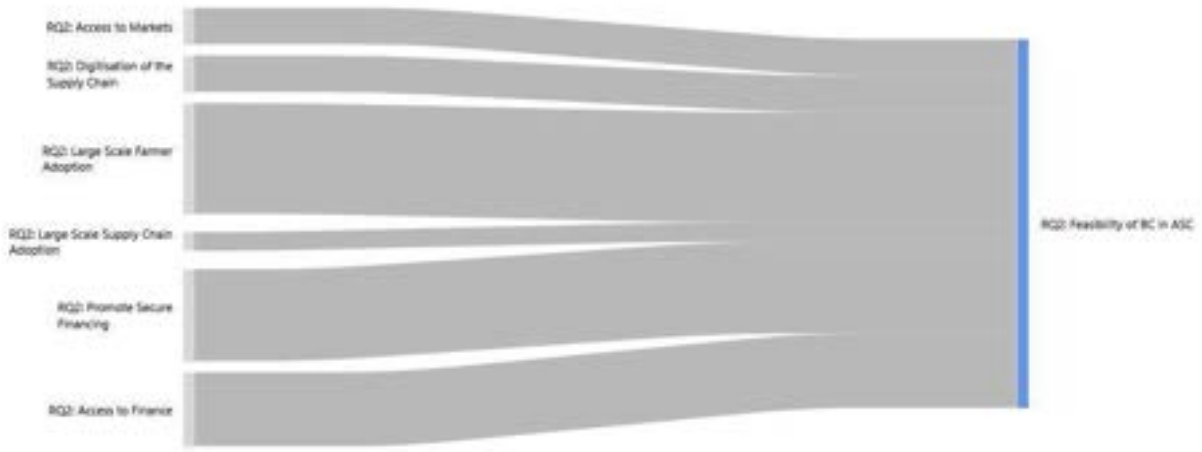

Figure 7: Table Illustration: Feasibility of Blockchain in Agriculture Supply Chain

Farmers are price takers; the price is determined by how much the producer is willing to sell it for. As a result, small farmers who supply the local market often sell their products for a loss or marginal profit. Blockchain allows intermediaries to be cancelled out; peer-to-peer networks can be strengthened [14].

Blockchain is being explored for various financial applications, including cross-border payments, trade finance, and asset management, due to its ability to streamline processes and reduce costs. Primary research on farmers who successfully adopted blockchain reveals a lower transaction cost. Farm size demonstrates a positive relationship, indicating economies of scale and that larger farms are likely to adopt blockchain [9].

Smart agriculture refers to the application of modern technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and big data. Coupling modern agriculture technologies with blockchain enables the supply chain to be further decomposed into environmental data. IoT device data can be captured within the blockchain of the ASC; this allows information from third-party devices such as soil moisture, temperature, weather data, spray and fertiliser programs to be imported into the ledger. The connection of BC and IoT device data ensures that consumer food integrity and safety expectations are met [8].

4 DISCUSSION

This review examined the current and potential applications of blockchain technology in the agricultural supply chain of South Africa. The literature clearly demonstrates that blockchain offers significant potential, particularly in enhancing traceability, data transparency, and trust among parties in the supply chain. These features are especially relevant for a country like South Africa, where agricultural exports play a significant role and food traceability is becoming more important to international and local consumers.

The most frequently cited benefit of blockchain is its decentralised and immutable ledger, which facilitates secure and transparent data sharing among stakeholders across the supply chain. By recording transactions in a tamper-proof manner, blockchain enables each stakeholder, farmers, processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers to access real-time, verifiable data. This traceability is particularly relevant in addressing consumer concerns about food safety, origin, and sustainability, mainly for export markets that demand proof of ethical sourcing and compliance with quality standards.

Adopting smart contracts self-executing agreements coded within the blockchain further reduces transaction costs and eliminates intermediaries. The review also highlights several barriers that impede widespread adoption. Legal and Financial ambiguity emerged as a dominant concern; the lack of clear standards and frameworks compromises the adoption of blockchain technology. Furthermore, infrastructural limitations, such as limited access to high-speed internet and blockchain-compatible systems in rural areas, pose substantial challenges, particularly for small-scale farmers. The high cost of implementation, coupled with limited digital literacy and technological readiness, exacerbates the digital divide between large-scale commercial producers and smaller agricultural enterprises.

Organisational inertia and resistance from various decision-makers also contribute to the slow adoption of blockchain solutions. The literature suggests that while many managers recognise the disruptive potential of blockchain, uncertainty around its return on investment and integration with existing systems discourages commitment. The lack of empirical case studies in the South African agricultural context limits practical insights into implementation strategies and outcomes.

Additionally, the potential of blockchain integration with complementary technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and big data analytics is significant. IoT-enabled devices can feed environmental and operational data, such as soil moisture, weather conditions, and fertilisation patterns, into the blockchain ledger. This convergence of technologies can potentially enhance data granularity and improve forecasting, supply chain planning, and regulatory compliance.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This review contributes to the growing knowledge surrounding blockchain implementation in agricultural supply chains by consolidating recent insights specific to the South African context. It evaluated the available research on adopting blockchain technology in the South

African agriculture industry. The PRISMA 2020 guideline was used to assess and determine the relevance of the question and topic.

Qualitative findings indicate that blockchain technology presents a viable and transformative solution for enhancing traceability, data transparency, and operational efficiency in the agriculture sector.

The review indicates that blockchain can potentially address critical inefficiencies in traditional agricultural systems. Benefits such as secure transactions, decentralised data management, and improved stakeholder trust make blockchain a compelling innovation for supply chain optimisation. Furthermore, its integration with digital agriculture tools, including IoT and smart farming platforms, solidifies blockchain's position as a strategic enabler of sustainable agricultural practices.

However, realising this potential requires overcoming significant barriers. Key impediments include infrastructural limitations, regulatory uncertainty, lack of interoperability, and digital exclusion of smallholder farmers. As such, strategic and policy-driven interventions are essential. These should focus on regulatory standardisation, investment in digital infrastructure, technical capacity building, and targeted support for under-resourced stakeholders.

Future research should prioritise empirical studies and industry-driven pilot projects that evaluate blockchain implementation in real agriculture and supply chain environments. Such research would offer valuable evidence to guide effective deployment and to inform policy and practice.

6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite offering valuable insights, this study is not without limitations. First, the existing body of literature on blockchain adoption in South Africa's agricultural sector remains sparse. Consequently, much of the synthesis relied on international case studies, which may not fully capture the socio-technical, infrastructural, and institutional specificities of the South African context. This reliance on extrapolated findings introduces potential bias and restricts the transferability of results. Second, the scope of the review was confined to peer-reviewed publications between 2020 and 2024.

While this ensured academic rigour, it excluded grey literature, industry reports, and unpublished pilot evaluations, which may contain practical insights of high relevance to local stakeholders. Third, the study adopted a qualitative thematic analysis via ATLAS.ti. While this approach enabled the systematic identification of recurrent themes, it does not provide quantitative validation of relationships or causal effects. Finally, the rapid pace of technological innovation in blockchain and related digital platforms implies that the evidence base is evolving; some conclusions may therefore be subject to temporal limitations as new applications emerge.

To advance knowledge in this domain and address the above constraints, several avenues for future research are recommended.

- Context-Specific Case Studies: Empirical investigations of blockchain adoption in South African agricultural supply chains are required. Pilot projects in critical sub-sectors such as citrus exports, rooibos production, and livestock traceability would generate contextually grounded evidence on feasibility, benefits, and barriers.
- Socio-Economic Impact Assessments: Future research could examine the distributive consequences of blockchain adoption. Questions such as whether blockchain enhances

smallholder farmers' bargaining power, improves rural incomes, or exacerbates digital divides remain underexplored.

- Technological Convergence Studies: Investigations into the integration of blockchain with IoT sensors, big data analytics, mobile financial services, and agri-fintech platforms could provide insights into building holistic digital ecosystems that reinforce supply chain resilience.
- Governance and Policy Research: Rigorous analysis of regulatory frameworks, data ownership models, and governance mechanisms is necessary to design policies that balance innovation with inclusiveness, trust, and data security. Comparative policy studies across emerging economies could also highlight transferable lessons.
- Longitudinal and Mixed-Methods Designs: Long-term studies that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches would provide stronger evidence of blockchain's sustained impact on efficiency, transparency, and competitiveness, while also capturing evolving stakeholder perceptions over time.

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DESIGN OF TRAINING GUIDES FOR AUDIO-VISUAL EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE AT TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Audio-visual tools such as projectors, microphones and speakers must be maintained effectively as they are essential for effective communication and enhance the learning experience. This paper explores the critical role of training guides to address the maintenance challenges of audiovisual equipment at a tertiary institution. Data was collected through a mixed-methods approach, via interviews with maintenance personnel and in-situ observations. The key challenge identified included inconsistent maintenance practices resulting from a lack of structured training resources, leading to equipment malfunctions, reduced lifespans, and increased operational costs. Detailed, step-by-step procedures for tasks were developed for maintenance processes such as replacing projector lamps, microphones, and speakers. The training guides helped to foster workforce development as well as improve safety, efficiency, and consistency resulting in improved technical proficiency. Implementing structured training resources can enhance the reliability and longevity of audiovisual systems, contributing to seamless operations and supporting educational goals.

Keywords: Training guides, Audio-visual maintenance process, workforce development

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1 INTRODUCTION

Audio-visual equipment has become a vital component in modern educational and professional environments. These tools, which include projectors, microphones, and sound systems, play an essential role in facilitating effective communication and enhancing the delivery of complex information [1]. audio-visual systems enable diverse learning methods, support engagement, and cater to various preferences, ultimately enriching the overall experience for users [2]. The functionality and reliability of audio-visual equipment are critical to ensuring seamless operations in settings such as classrooms, and conference halls. Regular maintenance, timely repairs, and adherence to structured protocols are essential to prevent technical failures that can disrupt activities and lead to productivity losses [3]. Inconsistent maintenance practices often result in reduced equipment lifespan, frequent malfunctions, and increased operational costs. As technological advancements continue to shape audio-visual systems, the demand for efficient maintenance solutions grows. Structured training and comprehensive guidelines are increasingly recognized as key strategies for maintaining these systems. Such practices ensure not only the consistent performance of audio-visual equipment but also their longevity, contributing to a sustainable and productive environment.

Given these challenges, training guides emerge as a practical and effective solution for promoting the consistent maintenance and optimal performance of audio-visual equipment. Offering clear and structured instructions, training guides provide technicians with a reliable framework to execute their tasks efficiently and adhere to established standards. This systematic approach to training enhances technical proficiency, improves employee motivation, and fosters operational consistency which is essential for achieving high-quality outcomes and reducing errors [4].

Furthermore, training guides contribute significantly to workforce development by fostering a culture of continuous learning and operational excellence. They provide technicians with the necessary knowledge to address challenges effectively, reducing errors and ensuring uniformity in maintenance practices. Aligning skill requirements with organizational goals enhances operational consistency, extends the lifespan of audio-visual equipment, and minimises disruptions caused by technical failures. Additionally, training guides play a pivotal role in building future leaders within organizations, as they provide structured pathways for career growth and skill enhancement [5].

Figure 1**Error! Reference source not found.** provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges resulting from an ineffective maintenance process. These challenges result from several interrelated factors, including management priorities, environmental constraints, resource limitations, and workforce dynamics. For instance, limited awareness about the benefits of structured training, resistance to change, and budget constraints all contribute to the absence of comprehensive training guides. Additionally, environmental factors, such as overbooked venues and the improper handling of equipment, further complicate the implementation of consistent maintenance practices. The Fishbone diagram provides a detailed visualization of these root causes, emphasizing the importance of addressing these barriers to establish effective training programs. By understanding these underlying factors, organizations can take targeted actions to overcome these challenges, thereby enhancing the reliability and performance of audio-visual systems.

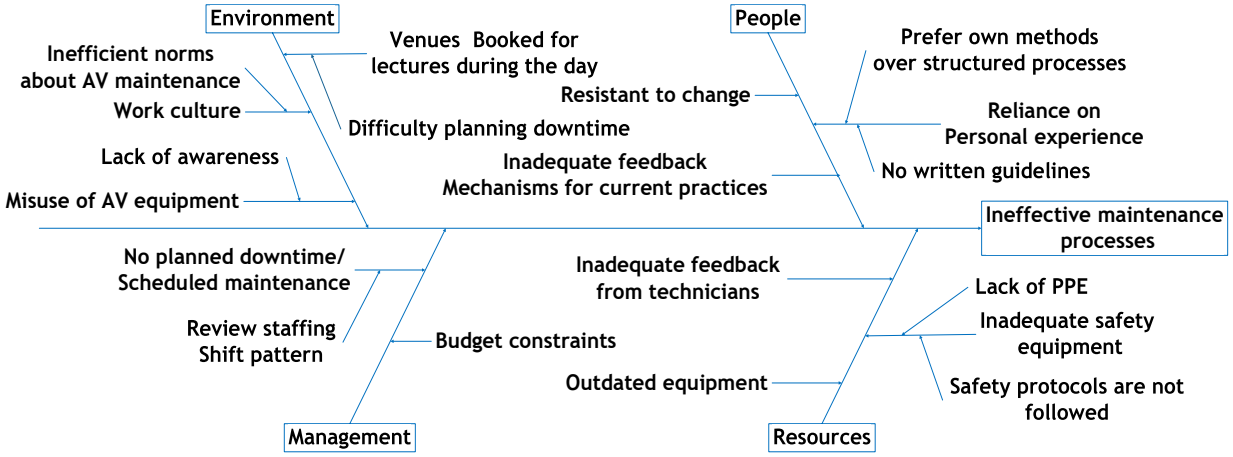

Figure 1: Fishbone diagram for ineffective maintenance processes

The paper highlights the critical role of training guides in ensuring the effective maintenance and optimal performance of audio-visual equipment within tertiary education. By addressing the challenges outlined in the Fishbone diagram, institutions can develop targeted strategies to overcome barriers such as limited awareness, budget constraints, and resistance to change. Implementing structured training guides not only enhances the technical proficiency and efficiency of maintenance personnel but also fosters a culture of operational consistency and continuous improvement. Ultimately, these efforts contribute to the longevity and reliability of audio-visual systems, ensuring seamless operations and supporting the broader goals of educational excellence and productivity.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section "Introduction" outlines the significance of audio-visual equipment in educational settings and the challenges associated with their maintenance. Section "Literature Review" discusses previous research on training guides and the challenges of implementing them. Section "Methodology" details the mixed-methods research approach used to evaluate current maintenance practices and develop training guides. Section "Training Guides for audio-visual Maintenance" presents the developed visual step-by-step guides, including specific procedures for tasks such as blowing projectors, and replacing lamp lights, projectors, microphones, and speakers. Finally, the "Conclusion" summarizes the study's findings, highlighting the importance of training guides in ensuring effective audio-visual equipment maintenance, fostering workforce development, and supporting operational consistency in tertiary education

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Training guides

Training guides are crucial tools designed to help employees improve their skills and gain proficiency in specific tasks. These resources provide detailed, step-by-step instructions for completing various responsibilities, complemented by recommendations for best practices and actionable tips for success [6]. Training guides are versatile, serving both new employees during onboarding by introducing them to their roles and experienced staff by helping them refine their skills and enhance productivity [6].

An effective training guide serves as an important resource for organizations, ensuring that employees are properly trained and equipped to carry out their duties effectively. These guides function as comprehensive manuals that provide essential guidance, clear instructions, and practical advice. When well-designed, they promote a uniform approach to training, enabling employees to quickly grasp an organization's processes and procedures [7]. Furthermore, centralized and organized training materials can reduce training costs by

eliminating the need for separate training sessions, making these guides a cost-effective solution [7].Training guides benefit both employers and employees alike. For employers, they ensure that staff fully understand their roles, responsibilities, and relevant organizational policies and procedures [7]. For employees, these guides act as a quick and reliable way to familiarize themselves with their job functions and workplace expectations [7]. Additionally, they serve as ongoing reference materials that employees can consult throughout their careers. By integrating training guides into their operations, organizations can build a well-trained and competent workforce, prepared to meet the demands of their roles efficiently and confidently [7].

Training guides are particularly essential in addressing the challenges posed by a lack of consistency in maintenance processes. Inconsistent procedures can lead to varying outcomes, inefficiencies, and increased equipment downtime, which ultimately hinder organizational performance. By providing clear, step-by-step instructions, training guides help standardize maintenance tasks, ensuring that all employees follow the same protocols regardless of their experience or skill levels. This standardization reduces errors, improves task execution, and promotes uniformity across teams. Additionally, training guides act as reliable reference materials, enabling employees to perform their duties confidently and consistently even in dynamic or unpredictable work environments.

2.2 Challenges of implementing training guides

2.2.1 Resistance from Employees

Employee resistance is a frequent challenge when implementing training and development programs. This reluctance often results from the belief that the training is either irrelevant or ineffective [8]. It is especially noticeable among experienced employees who feel they already have the required skills and expertise [8]. Factors that contribute to this resistance include training content that does not align with job responsibilities, lengthy sessions that interfere with work schedules, and a lack of practical, real-world applications [9]. When training is overly theoretical and lacks practical elements, employees may view it as unproductive, which further increases their reluctance [9]. Additionally, organizations that prioritize performance metrics over employee engagement may encounter heightened resistance, as training is perceived as distracting from productivity rather than adding value.

To address resistance, organizations must develop training programs that are both relevant and practical. Performing comprehensive needs assessments helps ensure that the training content targets specific skill gaps and aligns with organizational objectives [8]. Tailored materials that reflect actual tasks and competencies can increase motivation and engagement. Furthermore, incorporating interactive and hands-on learning techniques enhances knowledge retention and fosters active participation [8]. Linking training objectives to measurable workplace outcomes also helps employees understand its value, encouraging alignment with broader organizational objectives [8].

2.2.2 Budget Constraints

Insufficient financial resources often hinder the implementation of effective training initiatives. Many organizations struggle to provide diverse training tools, advanced technologies, and skilled instructors due to budgetary limitations [8]. High costs associated with corporate trainers, materials, facility rentals, and logistics further strain budgets, making it challenging to implement comprehensive training programs [8]. Organizations may implement cost-cutting strategies that can affect the quality of training. This may involve reducing the duration of training sessions, restricting access for some employees or limiting programs to certain teams [8]. This minimalist approach often overlooks the importance of adequately equipping employees to meet job requirements [10]. Innovative tools, such as simulation technologies, online platforms, and virtual reality applications, have shown

promise in enhancing learning engagement [11]. However, budget limitations frequently delay their adoption, along with learning management systems that can integrate materials and track training effectiveness [11].

Despite these limitations, investing in training yields significant benefits, such as increased productivity, reduced employee turnover, lower rework rates, and improved compliance [8]. Organizations can optimize their training initiatives by accurately identifying needs, aligning programs with job objectives, and moving beyond a "bare minimum" mindset [8]. Strategic allocation of financial resources ensures a more robust return on investment and long-term organizational benefits.

2.2.3 Inability to track and measure training effectiveness

Many organizations face difficulties in effectively assessing the return on investment (ROI) and overall impact of their training initiatives. This is particularly challenging when it comes to measuring indicators for soft skills training, which adds complexity to the evaluation process [8]. As a result, organizations often struggle to determine whether training directly contributes to achieving performance goals. Without clear evidence of success, training programs may be undervalued, leading to missed opportunities for growth and development [12]. In the absence of comprehensive assessments, organizations may hesitate to allocate additional resources to training programs, often redirecting budgets toward salary increases instead [12].

A variety of metrics can help determine whether training initiatives achieve their intended outcomes. For instance, productivity improvements can be measured by evaluating increases in output per employee hour, along with decreases in error rates and enhanced operational efficiency [8]. Cost savings are another key metric, which can be tracked through reductions in material waste, rework, and penalties related to non-compliance all contributing to higher quality and lower defect rates [8].A decrease in employee attrition can signal that training has successfully addressed staff needs for knowledge, skills, and engagement, thereby reducing turnover rates [13]. Customer satisfaction scores provide a concrete measure of training effectiveness, reflecting improvements in employee performance and service quality [8]. To justify increased investments in training, organizations must implement robust evaluation processes that demonstrate their effectiveness as a tool for improving performance and achieving organizational goals.

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research used multiple approaches and data types (qualitative and quantitative), to better understand the challenges of audio-visual equipment maintenance at the specific institution. Data was collected through informal interviews with maintenance technicians, managers, and other key stakeholders to gain insights into the current processes and challenges faced in maintaining audio-visual systems. Structured observations were performed with the use of a checklist to evaluate the maintenance activities in the different venues, capturing critical details on task execution, equipment handling, and maintenance outcomes. This dual approach ensured a well-rounded perspective, allowing for the identification of practical challenges and the validation of findings through observed evidence. The instruments used for data collection were interviews and observations, which are listed in Appendices A and B, respectively.

The first stage of the research focused on understanding the current maintenance processes and identifying key challenges. Interviews with technicians and managers explored their experiences, common obstacles, and recurring technical issues. These discussions provided valuable information about inefficiencies in the current practices and the factors contributing to equipment failures or downtime. Additionally, observations helped pinpoint specific issues, such as delays in repairs, inconsistencies in procedures, or improper handling of audio-visual

equipment. The second stage involved identifying gaps in the training and knowledge of maintenance personnel. The analysis of interview responses and observed practices highlighted a lack of standardized procedures, insufficient training resources, and varying skill levels among technicians, all of which contributed to operational inconsistencies.

The subsequent phase incorporated feedback and suggestions from technicians to ensure that the proposed training guides were practical and relevant to their daily tasks. This collaborative approach ensured that the training materials would address real-world challenges and align with organizational goals. Finally, the research involved the development of a structured implementation plan for the training guides. This plan outlines specific steps and timelines necessary for the effective deployment of the training guides, ensuring a smooth transition to standardized maintenance practices.

4 MAINTENANCE SCHEDULING

The current maintenance processes for audio-visual equipment at tertiary institutions typically involve both unplanned and planned activities. Planned maintenance involves regular inspections and preventive actions to ensure equipment remains functional and reliable. However, inconsistencies in execution often arise due to the absence of structured guidelines and scheduling limitations. Unplanned maintenance, which addresses sudden breakdowns, is frequently required.

The maintenance process for audio-visual equipment, involves inspecting input devices (e.g., microphones and HDMI connections), signal distribution systems, and output devices (e.g., speakers and projectors). Routine and reactive maintenance follow similar steps, beginning with an inspection to identify issues. If junior technicians are unable to resolve a problem, senior technicians are called for assistance, but response times can be delayed if they are handling other tasks. Additionally, venues with older equipment or those frequently used for extracurricular activities are often prioritised, leaving less-visited venues prone to overlooked issues that may escalate over time.

Scheduling constraints, such as overbooked venues, limit the time available for essential tasks like cleaning projectors or replacing parts, forcing technicians to mostly perform maintenance during short breaks. Without formalised procedures, maintenance tasks often vary based on individual experience, with newer technicians adopting inefficient methods due to the lack of guidance. Additionally, technicians often work without adequate safety equipment or clear protocols, increasing the risk of accidents. These challenges highlight the importance of standardised training guides to streamline maintenance processes, improve safety, and ensure consistent practices. The training guides were designed to address these gaps, offering clear and structured procedures to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of maintenance activities at tertiary institutions.

5 TRAINING GUIDES FOR AUDIO-VISUAL MAINTENANCE

5.1 Blowing a projector

The first training guide is shown in Table 1 below and provides a detailed and structured process for maintaining projectors used in lecture venues, focusing on planned maintenance to ensure optimal performance and longevity. The guide specifically addresses the cleaning of projector filters and vents using a blower, a task essential for preventing dust build-up, which can cause overheating, poor image quality, and eventual equipment failure. Technicians can ensure that projectors remain reliable and functional, reducing downtime and minimizing disruptions in lecture venues by following this guide. This guide serves as a consistent standard for maintenance practices to ensure uniform quality.

Technicians are required to wear personal protective equipment, including safety goggles to protect their eyes from dust particles and gloves to handle the filters. Hazard inspections must

also be conducted to eliminate risks, with technicians ensuring the projector is turned off and unplugged before beginning any cleaning to avoid electrical hazards. Maintenance responsibilities are distributed among the team members to promote efficiency and collaboration. Junior technicians are tasked with performing the cleaning process by strictly following the training guide. Interns provide support to junior technicians, assisting with cleaning tasks, removing filters, and resetting timers as needed. Senior technicians oversee the entire process, ensuring all steps are completed correctly, and step in to address any issues or troubleshooting that may arise.

The step-by-step procedure for blowing out a projector is carefully designed to be both practical and easy to follow. Through the use of the training guide, technicians can ensure the projectors operate at peak performance, extending their lifespan and preventing disruptions during lectures.

Table 1:Blowing a projector

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Training guide title: Visual step-by-step for blowing a projector</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">1. Scope: This training guide applies to all projectors used in lecture venues. It outlines the process for planned maintenance involving the cleaning of filters and vents using blowers.</td><td>2. Tools and equipment: Blower used to clean dust from the projector's filter and vents. Cloth for wiping external surfaces. Replacement filters if the existing filter is damaged or clogged beyond repair.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">3. Safety:

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Wear safety goggles to protect against dust and use gloves to handle the filter.

Hazard Inspection: Ensure the projector is off and unplugged before maintenance.</td><td>4. Roles and responsibilities:

Junior Technicians perform the cleaning of projectors by following training guides and assist senior technicians.

Interns support junior technicians during the maintenance process. Participate in the cleaning and resetting of filter.

Senior Technicians provide oversight for the process and step in for troubleshooting if issues arise.</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="3">5. Procedure: Blowing out a projector</th></tr>
<tr><th>Task</th><th>Description</th><th>Image</th></tr>
<tr><td>Step 1: Turn Off the Projector.</td><td>Ensure the projector is powered off and unplugged from the power source to prevent electrical hazards during maintenance.</td><td>[14] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 2: Remove the filter of the projector.</td><td>Gently detach the air filter from the projector. The filter is usually located on the side or back and can be accessed by sliding a panel.</td><td>[15] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 3: Clean Filters</td><td>Turn on the blower and use it to remove dust and debris from the filter. Make sure the filter is thoroughly cleaned to maintain.</td><td>[16] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 4: Place back the filter and turn on the projector</td><td>Carefully reinsert the filter, ensuring it fits securely and power on the projector.</td><td>[16] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 5: Reset the filter timer</td><td>Access the projector's Settings Menu and reset the filter timer to zero to track the next maintenance interval accurately.</td><td>[17] </td></tr>
</table>

5.2 Replacing a lamp light

The training guide for replacing a lamp light is shown in Table 2 below and provides a clear and systematic approach to ensure the task is performed safely and efficiently in lecture venues. The process is critical to maintaining the functionality of projectors, as lamp lights degrade over time, leading to dim or inconsistent image quality. Following this guide aids the technicians with the requirements and steps to replace faulty lamps effectively, ensuring

minimal disruption to teaching activities and extending the lifespan of audio-visual equipment. This guide applies to all projectors installed in lecture venues and serves as a reliable standard for performing lamp replacements.

Safety remains a top priority during this procedure. Technicians are required to wear personal protective equipment, including gloves to handle the lamp safely and prevent contamination, and safety goggles to protect against potential glass shards. The projector must be turned off, unplugged, and allowed to cool before starting the replacement process to eliminate electrical hazards. The step-by-step procedure for replacing a lamp light first involves turning off the projector and unplugging it, allowing sufficient time for it to cool to prevent burns or other hazards. Once cooled, the technician uses a screwdriver to remove the panel covering the lamp compartment, ensuring access to the faulty lamp. The old lamp is carefully detached by loosening its securing screws and pulling it out slowly while wearing gloves to avoid contamination or damage.

The new lamp is then inserted into the compartment and secured by tightening the screws, ensuring a proper fit. After installation, the lamp timer is reset via the projector's settings menu to track the next replacement interval accurately. Finally, the projector is powered on, and its brightness and image quality are tested to confirm that the new lamp functions correctly. Any adjustments or troubleshooting can be performed under the supervision of senior technicians. This training guide emphasizes a systematic approach to projector lamp replacement, ensuring safety, accuracy, and consistency. Technicians can effectively maintain projector performance, minimize downtime, and enhance the quality of audio-visual presentations, by adhering to these steps. A well-maintained projector provides clear and reliable visuals, contributing to an optimal teaching and learning environment in lecture venues.

Table 2: Replacing a lamp light

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Training guide title: Visual step-by-step for replacing a lamp light</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">1. Scope: This training guide applies to all projectors installed in lecture venues. It ensures that the replacement of lamp lights is performed efficiently and safely.</td><td>2. Tools and equipment: Replacement lamp. Screwdrivers for removing panels. Cloth for cleaning the projector lens and surfaces.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">3. Safety:
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Wear gloves to handle the lamp to prevent contamination and safety goggles to protect eyes from glass pieces.
Worksite Safety: Turn off and unplug the projector before replacement.</td><td>4. Roles and responsibilities:
Junior Technicians: perform the replacement following the training guides. Test the projector after installation.
Interns: Assist in the lamp replacement and testing process. Help with cleaning filters and resetting
Senior Technicians: Supervise complex replacements or troubleshooting.</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="3">5. Procedure: Replacing a lamp light</th></tr>
<tr><th>Task</th><th>Description</th><th>Image</th></tr>
<tr><td>Step 1: Turn Off and Unplug the Projector</td><td>Ensure the projector is turned off and unplugged to prevent electrical hazards. Allow the projector to cool down.</td><td>[14] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 2: Open the Lamp Compartment</td><td>Use a screwdriver to remove the access panel covering the lamp compartment.</td><td>[18] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 3: Remove the Faulty Lamp</td><td>Carefully detach the old lamp by loosening the screws and securing it in place. Pull the lamp out slowly, using gloves.</td><td>[18] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 4: Install the New Lamp</td><td>Insert the new lamp into the compartment and secure it by tightening the screws. Ensure the lamp fits correctly.</td><td>[18] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 5: Reset the Lamp Timer</td><td>Access the projector’s Settings Menu and reset the lamp timer to ensure the next maintenance interval is accurately tracked.</td><td>[18] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 6: Test the Projector</td><td>Power on the projector and verify that the new lamp functions correctly by checking brightness and image quality.</td><td>[18] </td></tr>
</table>

5.3 Replacing microphones

This training guide in Table 4 below provides a structured process for replacing faulty microphones in lecture venues, ensuring smooth and reliable audio performance. This training guides focuses specifically on the replacement of XLR microphone cables, which are the most frequently damaged components. Before starting the replacement process, safety is prioritized by ensuring the power to the audio system is turned off to prevent electrical hazards. Gloves are worn to protect the equipment from contamination or accidental damage during handling. The procedure begins by identifying the faulty microphone or XLR cable through a systematic test with the audio system to locate the source of the problem. Once the fault is confirmed, the audio system is turned off, and the damaged microphone or XLR cable is carefully disconnected from the input port or mixer. If a wireless microphone is involved, the transmitter or receiver is removed. The XLR cable is then inspected for visible damage, such as fried wires, loose connections, or worn connectors. After repairing or replacing the cable, the technician reassembles the XLR connector, ensuring a tight and secure fit. The microphone or cable is then reconnected to the audio input or mixer. Finally, the audio system is powered on, and the microphone is tested by speaking into it to confirm clear audio output. This final step verifies that the replacement was successful and that the system is functioning as expected.

Table 3: Replacing microphones

Training guide title: Visual step-by-step for replacing a Microphone		
1. Scope: This training guide applies to all microphones used in lecture venues including wired, and wireless microphones. It is designed to guide technicians through the replacement process, ensuring that microphones are installed correctly.	**2. Tools and equipment:** Replacement microphones (wired or wireless). Cables. Cloth for cleaning connectors.	
3. Safety: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Wear gloves to protect equipment. Hazard Inspection: Make sure that power to the audio system is turned off when connecting and disconnecting the microphone.	**4. Roles and responsibilities:** Junior Technicians: Perform the microphone replacement following the training guide. Interns: Support the junior technician during the replacement process. Senior Technicians: Provide oversight for the task, especially during complex replacements.	
5. Procedure: Replacing a microphone		
Task	**Description**	**Image**
Step 1: Identify the Faulty Microphone or XLR Cable	Confirm that the microphone or XLR cable is not functioning by testing it with the audio system. Determine if the issue lies in the microphone, the XLR cable, or the audio input.	[23]
Step 2: Disconnect the Faulty Microphone or Cable	Turn off the audio system. Unplug the XLR cable from the input port or mixer. If it is a wireless microphone, remove the transmitter or receiver.	[24]
Step 3: Inspect the XLR Cable and Connections	Examine the XLR cable for fried wires, loose connections, or visible damage to the connectors. If damage is identified, attempt to repair it by soldering. If the cable cannot be soldered then, replace it with a new one.	[24]
Step 4: Solder the XLR Cable	Strip the damaged ends of the cable, reconnect the wires to the appropriate pins inside the XLR connector, and solder them securely to restore the connection.	[24]
Step 5: Reassemble, Reconnect, and Test the Microphone	Reassemble the XLR connector and ensure it fits tightly. Plug the repaired or replaced cable back into the input port or mixer. Power on the audio system and test the microphone by speaking into it.	[24]

5.4 Replacing a speaker

This training guide for replacing speakers in lecture venues is shown in Table 5 below and provides a step-by-step process for both wall-mounted and ceiling-mounted units. Replacing faulty speakers is essential to maintaining clear and consistent audio delivery, a critical component of effective teaching and presentations. This guide ensures the replacement process is performed efficiently, with proper testing to verify the new speaker's functionality and integration with the audio system. By following the outlined steps, technicians can address

speaker issues systematically, minimizing disruptions and ensuring high-quality sound in lecture venues.

Safety is a priority throughout the replacement process. Technicians must wear gloves to protect their hands while handling speakers and cables, and hearing protection is required when testing audio to avoid damage from high volume levels. To prevent electrical hazards, the audio system must be turned off before disconnecting cables or replacing components. For mounted speakers, technicians should ensure that ladders are stable and positioned securely to avoid accidents.

The replacement process begins with identifying the faulty speaker. Technicians confirm the speaker's failure by testing it with the audio system to rule out issues with cables or connections. Once confirmed, the audio system is powered down, and the faulty speaker is carefully disconnected from its cables and mounting bracket. The technician then inspects the cables for damage or loose connections, replacing them if necessary to ensure seamless operation with the new speaker. The replacement speaker is securely mounted onto the bracket or surface and connected to the appropriate audio cables, ensuring a stable installation.

After installation, the audio system is powered on, and the new speaker is tested. Technicians play audio to verify the sound quality, volume, and balance with other speakers in the room, ensuring proper integration into the existing audio setup. Any necessary adjustments, such as balancing the audio levels, are made to optimize performance. This training guide ensures speaker replacements are performed safely and efficiently, maintaining the integrity of the audio system and the quality of sound in lecture venues. By adhering to these steps, technicians can resolve speaker issues effectively, ensuring uninterrupted audio delivery and enhancing the overall learning and presentation environment

Table 4: Replacing a speaker

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Training guide title: Visual step-by-step for replacing a speaker.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">1. Scope: This training guide applies to all speakers installed in lecture venues including wall-mounted, and ceiling-mounted. It ensures that speaker replacements are performed efficiently and tested thoroughly.</td><td>2. Tools and equipment: Replacement speaker, Screwdrivers or mounting tools. Ladder (for wall or ceiling-mounted speakers). Audio cables.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">3. Safety:
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Use gloves to protect hands while handling speakers and cables. Wear hearing protection when testing audio.
Worksite Safety: Turn off the audio system before disconnecting cables to avoid electrical hazards. Ensure the ladder to access mounted speakers is stable.</td><td>4. Roles and responsibilities:
Junior Technicians: Perform the speaker replacement following the training guide. Test the new speaker and adjust settings if needed.
Interns: Assist junior technicians during the replacement process. Help with cable management and testing.
Senior Technicians: Supervise replacements or troubleshooting if issues arise.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">7. Procedure: Replacing a speaker</td></tr>
<tr><td>Task</td><td>Description</td><td>Image</td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 1: Identify the Faulty Speaker</td><td>Confirm the speaker is not functioning correctly by testing it with the audio system. Ensure the issue is with the speaker and not with cables or connections.</td><td>[25] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 2: Disconnect the Faulty Speaker</td><td>Turn off the audio system and carefully disconnect the faulty speaker from its cables and mounting bracket.</td><td>[25] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 3: Inspect Cables and Connections</td><td>Check audio cables for damage or loose connections. If necessary, replace the cables along with the speaker to ensure seamless operation.</td><td>[26] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 4: Install the New Speaker</td><td>Secure the new speaker onto the mounting bracket or surface. Connect the appropriate audio cables and ensure the speaker is firmly installed.</td><td>[27] </td></tr>
<tr><td>Step 5: Test the Speaker</td><td>Turn on the audio system and play audio through the new speaker. Verify the sound quality, volume, and balance with other speakers in the room.</td><td>[25] </td></tr>
</table>

6 DISCUSSION

The developed training guides are designed to address several key issues identified in the current maintenance processes for audio-visual equipment at tertiary institutions. For example, interviews revealed that new technicians are trained through shadowing and on-the-job learning, which have proven effective in building confidence and technical skills. However, without formal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), maintenance tasks often rely on individual technician experience, leading to inconsistencies in task execution. The training guides aim to standardize these processes by providing detailed, step-by-step instructions for tasks such as projector cleaning, lamp replacements, and speaker replacement [6]. This ensures that technicians, regardless of their experience level, follow a consistent approach, thereby improving task quality and efficiency.

It was also found that vendor-based training plays an important role in keeping technicians informed about the latest technologies and best practices. These sessions, offered through instructional videos, and training provided by original equipment manufacturers, provide technicians with valuable theoretical and practical knowledge. However, the constant demand for support in lecture venues often limits the time available for these training opportunities. The developed training guides help bridge this gap by serving as on-the-job reference materials that technicians can consult whenever needed. This ensures that they have access to up-to-date knowledge and procedures, even if they are unable to attend formal training sessions regularly. Furthermore, centralized and organized training materials can reduce training costs by eliminating the need for separate training sessions [7].

Observations further highlighted the challenges posed by tight schedules and overbooked venues, which often force technicians to rush through maintenance tasks. To mitigate this, shift distribution and workload balancing can enable planned downtime during periods of low demand. Currently, maintenance is performed during a single daytime shift, coinciding with peak lecture hours, leaving little time for thorough servicing. Introducing scheduled maintenance during off-peak hours, such as evenings, or weekends, would allow technicians to conduct preventative tasks without disrupting lectures. This approach would reduce rushed maintenance, minimize unplanned breakdowns, and improve overall equipment reliability. Additionally, structured training materials are essential to ensuring that maintenance procedures are followed consistently and effectively to further enhance efficiency. The training guides address this issue by streamlining maintenance processes and offering concise, clear instructions that help technicians perform tasks efficiently within limited timeframes. This will yield significant benefits, such as increased productivity, reduced employee turnover, lower rework rates, and improved compliance [8]

The developed training guides also address the safety concerns identified during maintenance activities. Observations revealed that technicians often work without proper protective equipment, such as safety boots, increasing the risk of injury during potentially hazardous tasks. Additionally, improper handling of audio-visual equipment, which contains delicate components, can lead to further damage and compromise the longevity of the systems. The training guides include safety protocols to mitigate these risks, such as guidelines for using personal protective equipment (PPE), safe handling techniques, and instructions for working in high-risk environments like ceiling-mounted installations. Adding safety measures to the maintenance procedures, to the guides not only protect technicians but also contributes to maintaining the equipment in optimal condition, reducing costly repairs and replacements. Additionally, linking training objectives to measurable workplace outcomes could also help employees to understand its value, encouraging alignment with broader organizational objectives [8].

In summary, the developed training guides serve as a vital solution to address the inefficiencies and inconsistencies identified in the maintenance and training processes for audio-visual equipment. By providing clear, standardized procedures, these guides ensure that technicians are well-prepared to handle both routine and complex tasks effectively. They also streamline maintenance activities, enabling technicians to work efficiently despite scheduling constraints or resource limitations. Ultimately, these training guides contribute to building a more competent and confident maintenance team, ensuring the reliable operation of audio-visual systems and supporting the seamless delivery of lectures and presentations in tertiary institutions.

7 CONCLUSION

This study underscores the importance of training guides in overcoming the challenges associated with audio-visuals equipment maintenance in tertiary institutions. The research highlights how structured procedures not only ensure the safe and efficient completion of tasks but also align maintenance practices with institutional goals. By addressing critical gaps such as inconsistent procedures, inadequate resources, and varying skill levels among technicians, training guides provide a practical solution for fostering operational consistency and reducing equipment downtime.

Moreover, these guides contribute to workforce development by enhancing technical proficiency, fostering collaboration, and building future leaders within maintenance teams. The implementation of training guides for tasks such as projector cleaning, lamp replacement, and microphone repairs has the potential to improve overall system reliability and extend equipment lifespan. Ultimately, this approach supports the uninterrupted delivery of audio-visual content, enabling institutions to meet their educational and professional objectives effectively. As institutions continue to evolve, adopting standardized training practices will remain pivotal in ensuring sustainable and high-quality audio-visual maintenance processes

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9 APPENDIX

9.1 Appendix A: Interview Questions

Theory questions (TQ)	Interview Questions
Background	**1.** what is your role in maintaining audio-visual equipment?
	2. What are your primary responsibilities in your current role?
To evaluate the training of maintenance personnel on the policies and procedures.	**3.** Can you describe the training process for maintenance personnel? Probe: How long does the initial training period last? Probe: What specifically is the training method?
	4. What methods are used to assess the understanding and competency of maintenance personnel regarding the policies and procedures? Probe: Are there any written tests or practical assessments involved? Probe: What actions are taken if maintenance personnel do not meet the required competency level?
	5. How do you ensure that training materials and documentation are up-to-date and accessible to all maintenance personnel? Probe: What is the process for reviewing and updating training materials?
	6. How is feedback from maintenance personnel about the training programs collected and incorporated into future training? Probe: Are there any formal mechanisms for providing feedback (e.g., surveys, feedback forms)? Probe: How is the feedback reviewed and who is responsible for making improvements based on it?
	7. Are there standardized training materials or guidelines for teaching maintenance personnel how to perform tasks on audio-visual equipment? Probe: Can you provide examples of the training materials or guidelines used during the training process?
	8. What role does mentorship or peer learning play in the training of maintenance personnel? Probe: Are junior personnel paired with experienced technicians during their initial training?
	9. What support is available for continuous learning and skill development beyond the initial training? Probe: Are there workshops, online courses, or certifications available for maintenance personnel?
	10. What challenges or obstacles do maintenance personnel face in training for audio-visual equipment maintenance? Probe: Are there specific technical topics that are difficult to teach or learn? Probe: Are there logistical or resource-related challenges in providing comprehensive training?
	11. In what ways do you think the current training programs on policies and procedures can be improved to better support maintenance personnel? Probe: Are there any specific areas where you feel the training lacks? Probe: What additional resources or support would be beneficial for maintenance personnel?

9.2 Appendix B: Observation checklist

	Criteria (Ratings)				
Questions	**1 (Very Poor)**	**2 (Poor)**	**3 (Average)**	**4 (Good)**	**5 (Excellent)**
Training process for maintenance personnel	No clear training process, and unprepared personnel	Inadequate training, often unprepared personnel	Somewhat clear training process, sometimes prepared personnel	The clear training process usually prepares personnel	Very clear and thorough training process, always prepared personnel
Methods to assess understanding and competency of maintenance personnel	No assessment methods, competency often unknown	Minimal assessment methods, occasionally know the competency	Some assessment methods, sometimes know the competency	Clear assessment methods, usually know the competency	Comprehensive assessment methods, always know the competency
Ensuring training materials and documentation are up-to-date and accessible.	No process for updating materials, inaccessible	Rarely updated materials, occasionally accessible	Occasionally update materials, sometimes accessible	Regularly update materials, usually accessible	Always update materials timely, very accessible
Feedback collection and incorporation into training programs	No formal feedback mechanisms, feedback not incorporated	Rare feedback mechanisms are occasionally incorporated	Some feedback mechanisms, sometimes incorporated	Clear feedback mechanisms, usually incorporated	Comprehensive feedback mechanisms, always incorporated
Standardised procedures or guidelines for training maintenance personnel	No standardised procedures,	Minimal procedures, often not followed	Some standardised procedures occasionally followed	Clear standardized procedures, usually followed	Comprehensive, well-documented procedures, always followed
Challenges or obstacles encountered during maintenance tasks	Severe challenges, frequently impede maintenance	Significant challenges, occasionally	Moderate challenges, sometimes	Minor challenges, rarely impede maintenance	No significant challenges, do not impede maintenance
Role of mentorship or peer learning in training	No mentorship or peer learning opportunities	Rare mentorship, minimal peer learning	Occasional mentorship and peer learning are somewhat effective	Regular mentorship programs and peer learning are effective	Comprehensive mentorship and peer learning are highly impactful
Support for continuous learning and skill development	No support for continuous learning and development	Rare support, limited access to learning resources	Some support is available, and moderate access to learning resources	Regular support, most resources accessible	Comprehensive support, all resources easily accessible and encouraged
Notes					

ASSESSING THE AUDIO-VISUAL MAINTENANCE STRATEGY OF A TERTIARY INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Proper maintenance planning is essential for audio-visual (AV) systems in education to ensure reliable performance, minimise disruptions to learning, and extend the lifespan of equipment. The aim of the research was to evaluate the maintenance strategy of the AV systems at a tertiary institution. This research employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and quantitative data from structured observations using a process study sheet and observational checklists. The main cause of unplanned downtime resulted from poor maintenance practices, including an over-reliance on reactive maintenance and dependence on international vendors. A balanced maintenance approach as well as partnerships with local vendors, would assist in reducing the lead times for receiving maintenance parts required. A maintenance strategy framework has been proposed that is aligned with the asset care goals and operational goals of the institution.

Keywords: Maintenance strategy, Balanced maintenance approach, Maintenance strategy framework

1 INTRODUCTION

The AV systems have emerged as integral components in a wide range of settings, spanning education, corporate environments, healthcare, and entertainment. By combining visual and auditory elements, these systems create immersive, interactive experiences that enhance communication, facilitate learning, support remote collaboration, and entertain diverse audiences [1]. Common examples include projectors, microphones, video conferencing solutions, digital displays, interactive whiteboards, and sound reinforcement systems. At University X, AV systems form the cornerstone of a dynamic, flexible, and inclusive learning environment. Lecture halls outfitted with advanced projection technology and immersive sound systems enable instructors to seamlessly integrate high-resolution videos, interactive presentations, and live demonstrations into their teaching [1].

This integration fosters an engaging and interactive atmosphere, helping students grasp complex concepts and retain information more effectively. Moreover, high-contrast projectors and large digital displays ensure that visually impaired students can follow along with ease, while specialised audio systems and hearing loops provide auditory-impaired learners with clear, accessible sound. Collectively, these measures exemplify University X's commitment to leveraging cutting-edge AV technology to enhance the educational experience for every student. The maintenance of AV systems is, therefore, a strategic priority to ensure these critical tools remain reliable and consistently available [2]. This approach preserves the quality and accessibility of learning resources. Additionally, it also minimises costs associated with emergency repairs or early replacements. In doing so, the university secures the longevity and dependability of its AV investments, guaranteeing that every classroom and lecture hall continues to provide a seamless, engaging, and technically sound educational experience [2].

However, maintaining these critical AV systems presents significant challenges at University X. With AV systems in over 65 lecture rooms functioning as interdependent units, the failure of a single component, such as a projector, speaker, or microphone, can disrupt the entire system, rendering it ineffective and halting the delivery of lectures. Poor inventory management heightens the issue, as replacement parts, including frequently failing components, are not stocked internally. Instead, parts are ordered from external vendors when needed, leading to significant delays and extended downtimes that disrupt the maintenance schedule. There is a workforce of 10 technicians who are responsible for maintaining AV systems across all venues, forcing the team to rely on reactive maintenance rather than the proactive approach required for predictive strategies.

The organisation of this paper is as follows: The first section, "Introduction," introduces the topic of AV systems and their importance in delivering academic lessons within an educational setting. It also highlights the significance of properly planned maintenance to ensure the reliability and longevity of these systems. The section "Literature Review" discusses secondary research on various maintenance strategies and the integration of these strategies. The section "Method" presents the sampling techniques, research instruments, and data analysis tools used in this study to collect results. The section "Current State Analysis" describes the organisational structure of University X's Information and Communications Technology Organisation, as well as its maintenance processes and procedures, with a focus on reactive and preventive maintenance practices. The section "Framework of a Maintenance Strategy" discusses the development of maintenance strategies at University X based on the results from the current state analysis. The section "Discussion" explains how the short- and long-term goals of the developed maintenance strategies will be achieved using the study's findings. Finally, the last section concludes the study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This review synthesises current academic insights into these strategies and highlights their applications and implications in maintenance management.

2.1 Reactive Maintenance

Reactive maintenance, also known as "breakdown maintenance" or "run-to-fail," is a strategy where repairs and replacements are made only after equipment has failed [4]. This approach is often adopted when the equipment is not crucial to operations or when the cost of preventive maintenance exceeds the potential costs associated with dealing with failures. It is especially effective when the equipment is inexpensive to repair or replace, and the consequences of failure are minimal or manageable [4]. The development of a reactive maintenance strategy involves several key steps. First, identifying critical systems and equipment is necessary to prioritise which failures need to be addressed immediately [5]. Next, a failure response plan must be implemented, specifying the personnel and resources required to quickly address breakdowns. A cost-benefit analysis is crucial for determining if the savings from avoiding preventive maintenance are greater than the costs of reactive repairs [5]. Finally, minimising the impact of equipment failures on operations should be a priority, achieved by keeping spare parts on hand and ensuring staff are trained to respond quickly to breakdowns [6].

Furthermore, reactive maintenance is often viewed as a simpler, more cost-effective approach in the short term, since no resources are spent on routine inspections, scheduled servicing, or predictive tools. As a result, it may appear more budget-friendly for organisations with constrained resources. While reactive maintenance can provide short-term cost savings, it can result in higher long-term costs due to unexpected downtime and emergency repairs [6]. Therefore, it is important to carefully assess its suitability for non-critical systems where the effects of failure are manageable.

2.2 Preventive Maintenance

Preventive maintenance of AV equipment involves regularly scheduled inspections, cleaning, calibration, and firmware updates to ensure reliable and optimal performance. Instead of waiting for problems to occur, technicians proactively address wear and tear, check signal integrity, and maintain proper ventilation and humidity control [7]. By routinely evaluating projectors, cameras, microphones, speakers, and other system components, organisations can prevent unexpected failures, reduce long-term costs, and extend the life of their AV assets. This approach results in consistently high-quality audio and video output, improved user satisfaction, and a more predictable, cost-effective maintenance schedule [7].

The advantages of preventive maintenance are extensive, making it a critical strategy for organisations aiming to optimise asset performance. By addressing potential issues before they escalate, preventive maintenance significantly increases equipment reliability and minimises unplanned downtime, which can be costly for businesses [8]. This proactive approach also extends the lifespan of machinery, reducing the need for frequent replacements and lowering capital expenditure. Moreover, preventive maintenance enhances workplace safety by ensuring that equipment operates within safe parameters, thereby reducing the risk of accidents and injuries [8]. It also supports compliance with industry regulations and standards, as regular inspections help identify and rectify any non-conformities.

However, there are certain disadvantages to preventive maintenance that organisations must consider. One of the primary drawbacks is the cost associated with implementing and maintaining a preventive maintenance programme. Scheduling regular inspections, purchasing spare parts, and hiring additional maintenance staff can increase operational expenses, particularly for businesses with large equipment fleets [9]. Over-maintenance is another

challenge, as performing tasks more frequently than necessary may lead to wasted resources without adding significant value. Furthermore, preventive maintenance does not guarantee the elimination of unexpected breakdowns, as some failures can still occur due to unforeseen factors, such as material defects or extreme operating conditions [9].

2.3 Predictive Maintenance

A predictive maintenance strategy is a proactive approach that uses real-time data, condition monitoring, and advanced analytics to anticipate when equipment failures are likely to occur. Instead of relying solely on scheduled maintenance intervals or reacting after issues arise, this method leverages sensors, performance metrics, and machine learning models to identify subtle signs of wear, component degradation, or inefficiencies [10]. With this insight, technicians can intervene at the most opportune moment just before a potential failure, thereby reducing unplanned downtime, extending equipment life, minimising repair costs, and improving overall operational reliability [11].

Predictive maintenance offers several advantages, including the ability to schedule repairs just before failures occur, thereby reducing downtime, extending equipment life, and optimising maintenance resources [12]. By relying on real-time data and advanced analytics, it can prevent costly, unplanned outages and improve operational reliability. However, implementing predictive maintenance often involves significant upfront investment in sensors, data infrastructure, and analytical tools, as well as ongoing personnel training [13]. Additionally, reliance on complex predictive models can introduce challenges if data quality is poor or algorithms are not properly tuned, potentially leading to inaccurate forecasts and inefficient decision-making [14].

2.4 Integrated Maintenance Approach

The integrated approach to maintenance strategy combines production planning and maintenance strategies to enhance efficiency and sustainability. It emphasises a cohesive system where proactive maintenance (PM) and corrective maintenance (CM) are aligned with production schedules, ensuring minimal disruption and reduced costs [15]. Integration also considers human factors, acknowledging that errors in maintenance tasks can impact equipment reliability and operational efficiency. This holistic approach fosters improved resource allocation, reduced equipment breakdowns, and optimised cash flow, making it a cornerstone for achieving operational excellence [15].

Key elements of an integrated maintenance strategy include developing predictive models that align production and maintenance, considering constraints such as customer demand, budget, and production capacity. These models optimise the frequency and timing of proactive maintenance tasks while addressing human error's impact on operational reliability. Categorising maintenance costs into time-dependent and independent types, the integrated approach provides decision-makers with detailed insights into cost management, enabling a stronger connection between maintenance operations and production outcomes. This approach also incorporates advanced planning methods that account for dynamic conditions and uncertainties [15]. For example, probabilistic models like the Weibull distribution help estimate equipment failure rates, enabling precise scheduling of maintenance tasks. Additionally, the integration of learning curves in PM operations highlights how human expertise evolves, reducing the time and cost associated with maintenance tasks [15]. These advancements support a transition from reactive to proactive strategies, ultimately enhancing sustainability by minimising waste, conserving resources, and reducing emissions.

In conclusion, maintenance strategies can be conceptualised along a continuum from reactive to highly proactive approaches, each with distinct implications for cost, reliability, and equipment longevity. Reactive maintenance, often characterised as a “run-to-failure” model,

addresses problems solely after they occur, potentially resulting in higher long-term costs, frequent interruptions, and diminished asset lifespans. Preventive maintenance shifts the focus toward scheduled inspections, cleaning, calibration, and timely component replacement, thus reducing the incidence of unexpected breakdowns and stabilising operational expenditures over time. The most data-driven approach, predictive maintenance, employs condition monitoring tools, real-time analytics, and predictive modelling to anticipate failures before they occur, enabling Just-In-Time (JIT) interventions that minimise disruption and extend system life [15].

3 METHOD

3.1 Semi-Structured Interview

The research design adopted for this study was a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the AV maintenance strategy at University X. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting staff directly responsible for AV maintenance. Qualitatively, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 technicians (comprising two (2) senior and three (3) junior technicians), using a set of open-ended questions developed in accordance with the Wengraf method [16] and the interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. This sample, while small, was appropriate for the qualitative phase as it enabled rich, detailed accounts of maintenance challenges and practices. The interviews sought to examine the key challenges of implementing a proactive maintenance strategy, including the current maintenance processes and procedures, to gain a better understanding of the proactive measures that could be utilised to minimise unplanned breakdowns, ensuring that there are no disruptions affecting teaching. The audio-recorded interviews conducted with the technicians were transcribed using Microsoft Word software. Furthermore, these themes were coded and analysed through thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software, which was used to systematically code the themes and identify patterns within the data. The information on participant characteristics is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant characteristics information table

Role	Age Range	Gender	Ethnicity
Senior Technician	35–44	Male	Black
Senior Technician	35–44	Male	Black
Junior Technician	24–35	Male	Indian
Junior Technician	18–24	Female	Black
Junior Technician	18–24	Male	Indian

3.2 Observations

Quantitatively, systematic observations were performed for three (3) weeks on 15 working days (Monday to Friday) for 2–3 hours each day. This included routine (preventive) maintenance observations conducted from 7 a.m. to 8 a.m., and emergency (reactive) maintenance observed during 30-minute breaks between lectures. The observation instrument employed calibrated checklists and a five-point (1–5) Likert scale (Excellent to Very Poor) to assess equipment performance, downtime, uptime, and maintenance costs, with descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency counts, means, percentages) and charts were used for analysis. Additionally, a process study sheet was used to take detailed notes based on the maintenance tasks being performed, such as inspection, replacement, and repair. This sheet included a column to record the outcomes of the maintenance tasks. The process study sheet can be found in Appendix B, while the observational checklist can be found in Appendix C. Triangulation, achieved by cross-referencing findings from interviews and observations, ensured the validity and reliability of the results. While these findings are most applicable to

universities or similar institutions with comparable AV maintenance conditions, they may not be universally generalisable across all organisations.

4 CURRENT STATE ANALYSIS

4.1 Organisational Structure

The organisational structure of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) department is structured into several key areas focusing on service delivery and technical support. At the highest level, the ICT department oversees all management and operations of ICT services, with the ICT desk serving as the primary point of contact for user issues and service requests. The ICT senior service delivery branch, led by senior management and supported by senior technicians, focuses on critical tasks like managing procurement and ensuring efficient vendor relationships to maintain a well-stocked inventory of AV equipment. This ensures that all operational needs are met, and lead times are optimised. On the other hand, the ICT middle senior service delivery branch handles the day-to-day operations, with junior technicians and senior technicians working together to enhance operational efficiency and ensure the smooth functioning of daily tasks. Together, these roles collaborate to ensure the AV systems are well-maintained and operational issues are swiftly addressed.

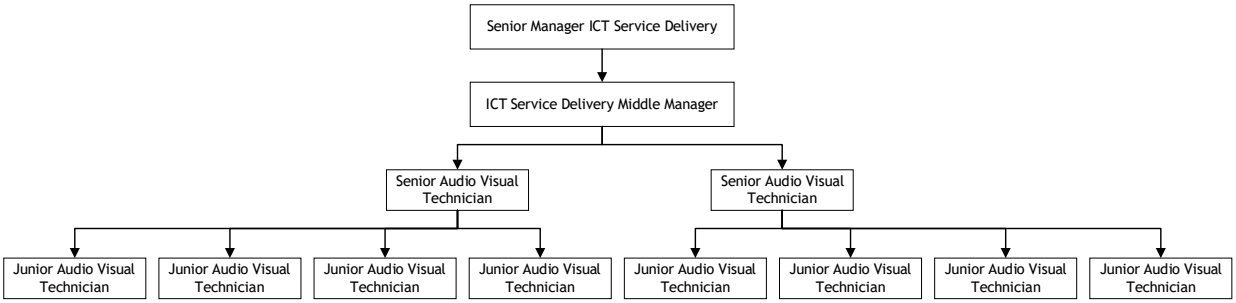

Figure 1: Organisational Structure

4.2 Current Maintenance Processes (Preventive Maintenance)

At University X, the standard routine maintenance for audiovisual equipment is meticulously conducted daily by technicians from 7 a.m. to 8 a.m., before lectures commence. This one-hour window is designed to allow technicians to perform comprehensive checks, including visual inspections, repairs of malfunctioning equipment, and tests on critical components such as cable connections, projectors, sound systems, microphones, and desktop cameras. These steps are intended to ensure that all equipment functions seamlessly, allowing lecturers to deliver their lessons without interruptions. Technicians prioritise lecture venues that are used frequently, focusing on the operational status of projectors, audio clarity, functionality of document cameras, and proper video playback on screens. The maintenance process for AV equipment is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

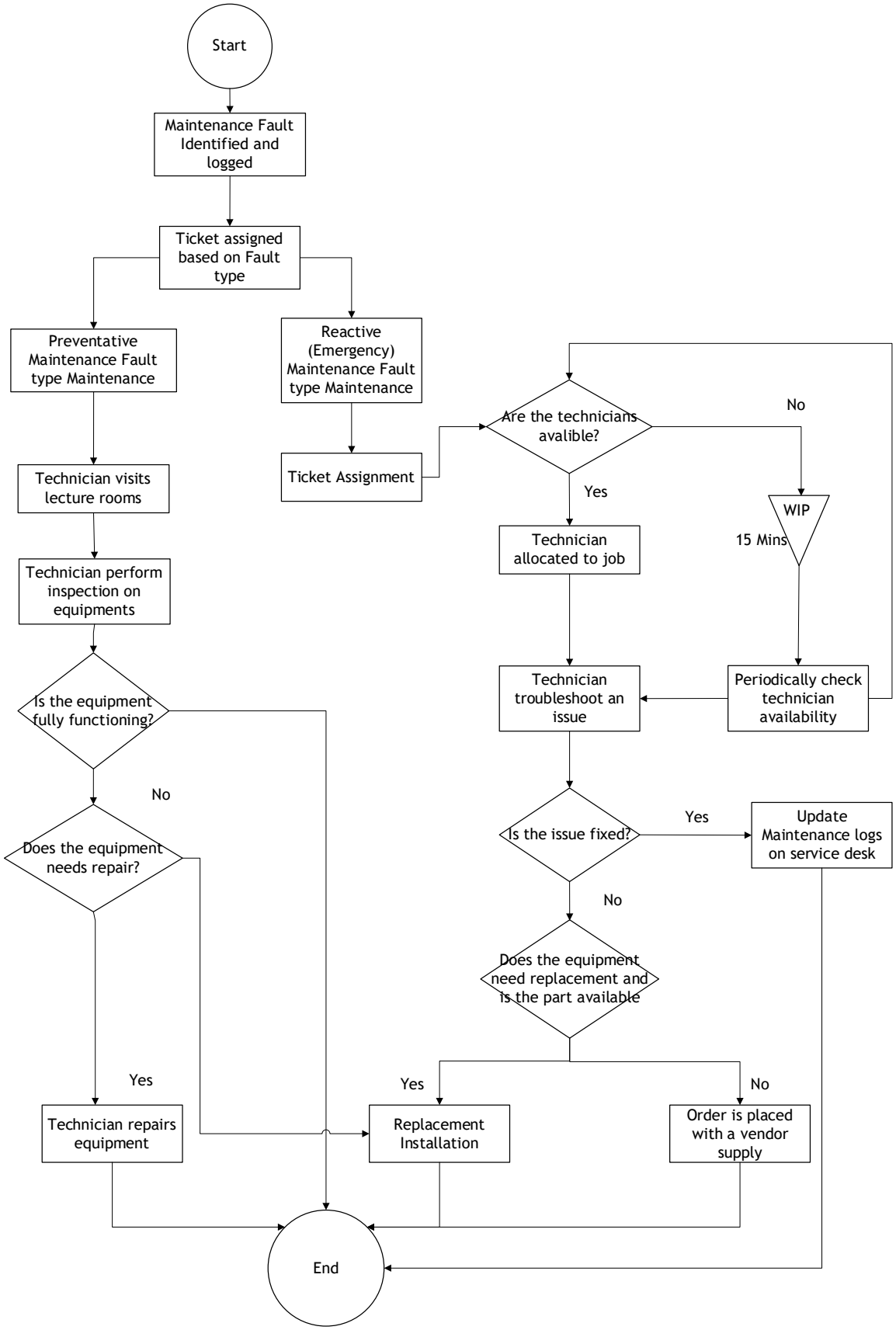

Figure 2: AV maintenance process.

Figure 3 illustrates the impact of routine maintenance on AV equipment uptime and reliability, 60% of technicians believe that daily routine maintenance effectively maximises the uptime of the equipment. On the other hand, 40% of the technicians reported that these maintenance activities minimise the uptime of the AV equipment. Similarly, although only 40% of the participants observe improved equipment reliability due to these maintenance practices, the remaining 60% perceive a reduction in reliability, indicating that the maintenance might be insufficient or improperly targeted, failing to resolve key issues that affect system reliability.

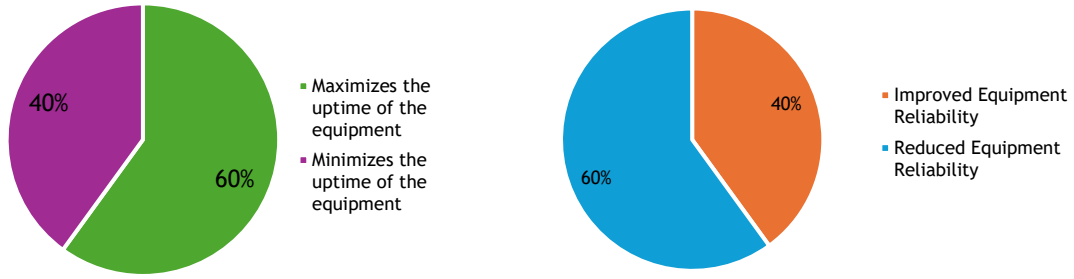

Figure 3: The Impact of Routine Maintenance on AV Equipment Uptime and Reliability

4.3 Emergency Maintenance (Reactive)

Emergency maintenance, often reactive in nature, is strategically scheduled at University X to coincide with the short breaks between lectures, utilising periods such as 9:45-10:15, 12:00-12:30, and the longer lunch break from 13:15-14:15. This scheduling ensures minimal disruption to academic activities while allowing adequate time for necessary maintenance tasks. Replacement tasks are typically carried out during the 30-minute breaks, as they require approximately 24 minutes to complete, fitting well within this window. This allows for efficient use of the short downtime periods to replace any faulty equipment swiftly.

Repair activities, on the other hand, are generally reserved for the lunch break, which provides a one-hour window. This longer period is crucial as repairs tend to be more time-consuming, usually taking between 27 to 33 minutes. The lunch break offers a suitable timeframe for more labour-intensive tasks, such as diagnosing and fixing internal components of the AV equipment. By scheduling complex repair tasks with an extended break, technicians can ensure that repairs are thorough and do not need to be rushed, contributing to the overall reliability and functionality of the equipment for subsequent lectures.

The SWOT analysis in Figure 4 of maintenance practices at University X underscores significant strengths, including fast emergency response times, effective routine maintenance, and in-house technicians' familiarity with AV systems. However, weaknesses such as a limited workforce, reliance on traditional maintenance strategies, frequent breakdowns, long spare part lead times, and poor ventilation highlight areas that need improvement. These limitations often result in increased costs, prolonged downtime, and decreased equipment efficiency and lifespan. By classifying assets into critical, routine, and non-critical categories, resources can be allocated more effectively. Predictive maintenance can be prioritised for critical equipment to anticipate and mitigate potential failures, while preventive maintenance ensures routine assets remain functional through scheduled upkeep. Reactive maintenance can be limited to non-critical assets to reduce resource strain. This approach, alongside staff training, improved inventory management, and user education on proper equipment handling, could significantly enhance system reliability, minimise unplanned downtime, and extend equipment lifespans, creating a more efficient and inclusive learning environment.

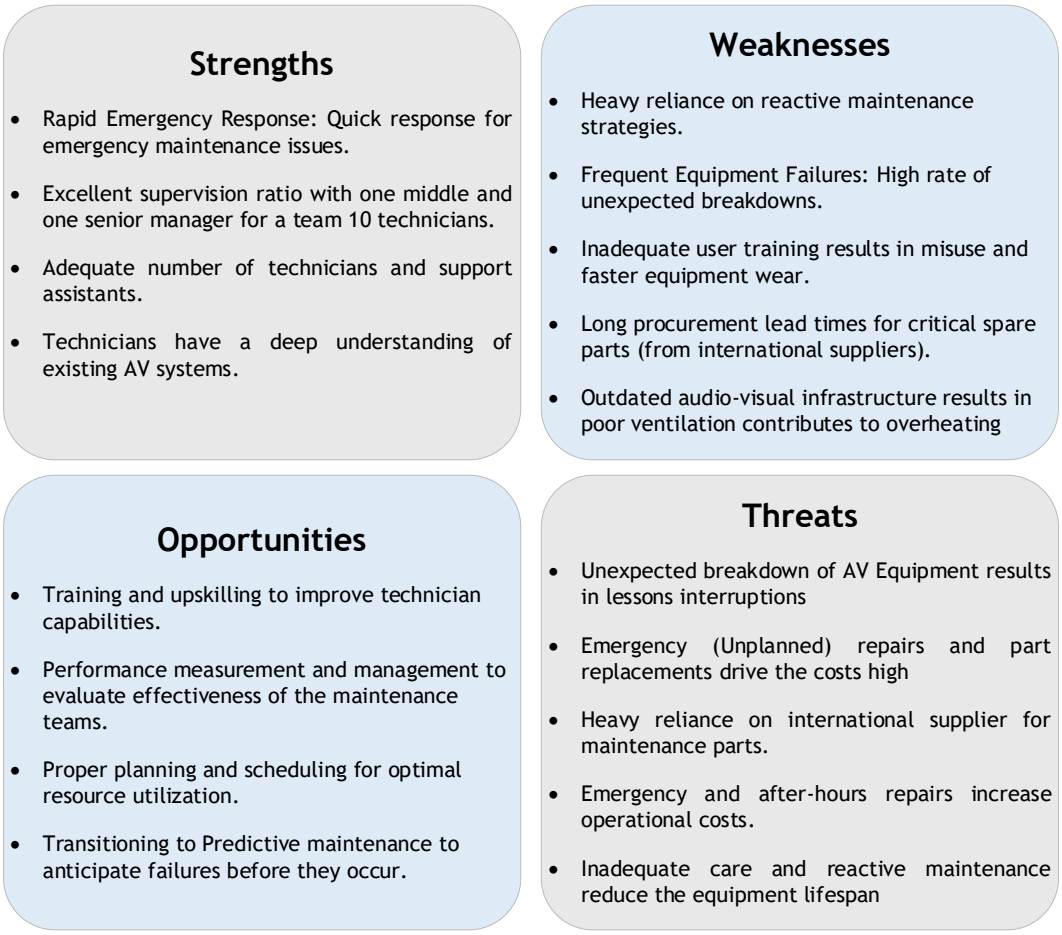

Figure 4: SWOT Analysis for Current Maintenance Approach

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Maintenance Strategy formulation

The framework for the development of the maintenance strategy begins with asset care goals and operational goals, as shown in Figure 5, aligning maintenance activities with the university's mission and vision. In the selection phase, assets are categorised: predictive maintenance for critical assets, preventive maintenance for routine assets, and reactive maintenance for non-critical, legacy equipment. The implementation phase is driven by strategic enablers such as skilled workforce, inventory management, and cost-benefit analysis, ensuring efficient and effective execution. This integrated approach minimises breakdowns, maximises system uptime, and extends equipment lifespan, establishing a reliable and sustainable maintenance framework.

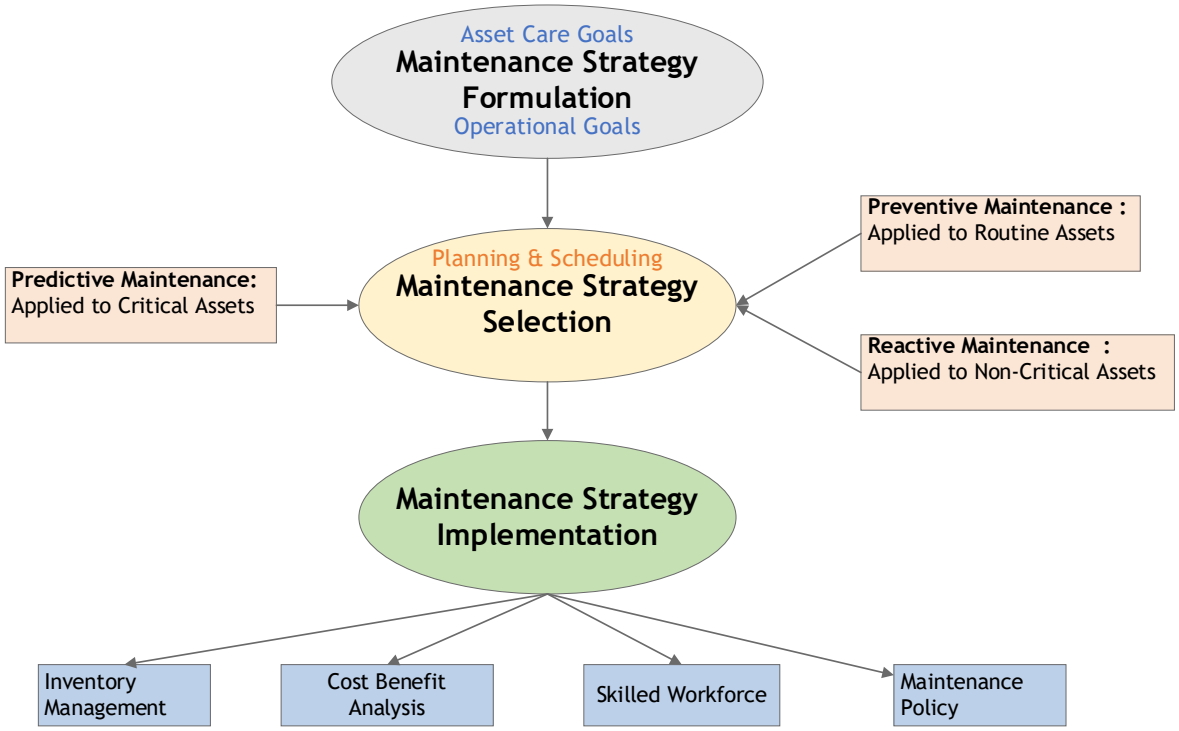

Figure 5: Maintenance Strategy Framework

The formulation of maintenance strategy phase establishes the foundational asset care and operational objectives, ensuring that maintenance initiatives are directly linked to the university's goals of minimising unplanned breakdowns, maximising uptime, reducing maintenance costs, and extending the lifespan of AV equipment.

5.1.1 Asset Care Goals

The asset care goals of University X's maintenance strategy should be focused on maintaining and optimising AV systems to achieve key objectives such as improved equipment reliability, reduced maintenance costs, extended asset lifespan, and minimal disruption to academic activities. By aligning maintenance activities with asset criticality, the strategy ensures that appropriate maintenance actions, predictive, preventive, or reactive, are applied to each asset type. These goals are supported by practices that promote continuous improvement, compliance with operational standards, and efficient resource utilisation across the university's AV infrastructure. Optimising asset utilisation and performance is another key asset care goal. The maintenance strategy prioritises high-use venues and equipment for routine inspections to ensure consistent availability. Performance data collected through daily checks and monitoring is analysed to identify trends, recurring faults, and opportunities to refine maintenance schedules. A data-driven approach supports continuous improvement by enabling the maintenance team to make informed adjustments to frequencies, task priorities, and resource allocations, ultimately improving overall system uptime and maintenance efficiency.

Lastly, managing maintenance costs and ensuring compliance form the third pillar of the asset care goals. The strategy aims to reduce costs by applying proactive maintenance approaches to critical and routine assets, thereby minimising emergency repairs and capital expenditure on replacements. Together, these asset care goals provide a solid foundation for a resilient, cost-effective, and performance-driven maintenance framework that supports the university's mission of delivering high-quality, uninterrupted learning experiences.

5.1.2 Operational Goals

The operational goals of University X's maintenance strategy ensure the seamless integration of maintenance activities into daily operations by focusing on maximising system uptime, minimising disruptions, and enhancing the reliability of AV infrastructure. These goals are supported by key strategic enablers: resource allocation, inventory management, and effective communication. Maintenance activities should be carefully scheduled around the academic calendar to minimise disruptions during lectures and events. Clear communication channels, including an online ticketing system, enable prompt reporting and resolution of AV issues, while regular updates and feedback loops between maintenance teams and stakeholders support continuous improvement. Together, these operational goals and enablers reduce unplanned breakdowns, extend the lifespan of equipment, and align maintenance activities with the university's mission of providing a reliable and inclusive learning environment.

5.2 Maintenance Strategy Selection

For effective maintenance planning, reactive maintenance is crucial as unexpected equipment failures are inevitable. The strategy, therefore, dictates standard procedures for reactive maintenance, ensuring rapid and efficient responses to such failures to minimise downtime and disruption. Additionally, preventive maintenance is vital, involving regular checks of the AV system to extend its operational lifespan and enhance reliability. Predictive maintenance is specifically tailored for equipment known for frequent failures, using data-driven insights to anticipate and mitigate issues before they lead to significant problems.

5.2.1 Reactive Maintenance

In University X's maintenance strategy, the reactive approach was designated for emergencies and primarily involves replacing components rather than repairing them when they fail during operational hours. This strategy should be applied to critical equipment like projectors and speakers, where repair times are known to exceed available short break durations. The designated short breaks for reactive maintenance tasks occur between 09:45 - 10:15 and 12:00 - 12:30. However, given the complexity and time required for certain repairs, which typically take 27-33 minutes, a dedicated time slot from 13:15 - 14:15 was established specifically for these activities.

This scheduling ensures that reactive maintenance does not interfere with the university's operational requirements, such as lectures and presentations, thereby minimising disruption to academic activities. By dictating that replacements rather than repairs occur during these strict timeframes, the strategy optimises maintenance efforts to accommodate the limited time windows and the urgent nature of the failures, ensuring that the AV systems are promptly and efficiently restored to functional status.

5.2.2 Preventive Maintenance

Preventive actions should be scheduled from 7 A.M. to 8 A.M., before the start of daily activities. This window is strategically used to ensure that critical AV equipment is fully operational and will not disrupt upcoming lectures. During this period, technicians should focus on cleaning and maintaining various components, such as microphones, cables, transmitters, and control panels, which can be effectively repaired within this brief timeframe. Attention should be given to the maintenance of projector systems, which are pivotal in the educational delivery process. Technicians must regularly clean the air filters and blow out any dust from the projectors, which is essential for preventing overheating and prolonging the equipment's functionality. Given the frequent failures associated with older, lamp-based projectors, the university should consider upgrading these to laser-based projectors. Laser projectors are favoured for their longer lifespan and reduced maintenance

requirements, which align well with the university's goal to minimise disruptions caused by equipment failures. These preventive measures are part of a comprehensive strategy to enhance the reliability and efficiency of AV resources, ensuring a smoother educational experience.

5.2.3 Predictive Maintenance

This strategy has integrated predictive maintenance. This initiative, driven by data and analytics, aims to predict and prevent equipment failures, optimising the maintenance schedule and reducing downtime. However, the results collected have highlighted that the existing infrastructure is old and not equipped with the necessary compatibility for integrating modern sensors essential for effective predictive maintenance. Therefore, the strategy dictates that the university needs to invest in modern AV equipment to ensure that the benefits of predictive maintenance can be extended beyond the current limitations. Additionally, there is a significant opportunity for the university to invest in training and upskilling its technicians to work effectively with predictive maintenance technologies. This strategic approach not only acknowledges the issues caused by ageing equipment, such as overheating, dust accumulation, and inadequate ventilation, but also emphasises the need for an infrastructure overhaul and professional development to keep pace with technological advancements.

5.3 Maintenance Strategy Implementation

Implementing a successful maintenance strategy involves a proactive and structured approach to ensure equipment reliability, minimise downtime, and enhance overall operational performance. At University X, this process requires careful planning, scheduling, and execution of maintenance tasks tailored to the needs of diverse AV assets across campus. The implementation should start with a thorough assessment of internal maintenance capabilities, existing processes, and resource availability. Critical assets need to be identified and categorised based on their impact on teaching and learning, guiding the selection of appropriate maintenance approaches. Clear maintenance objectives need to be established, including maximising equipment uptime, reducing maintenance costs, and improving response efficiency. A detailed maintenance plan must then be developed, clearly defining task schedules, personnel assignments, and resource requirements to ensure consistent and effective execution of the strategy.

5.3.1 Skilled Workforce

This maintenance strategy relies heavily on the capacity and expertise of a skilled workforce. At University X, technicians must be strategically allocated tasks based on asset classification, ensuring that maintenance responsibilities are aligned with their skill levels and experience. Predictive maintenance requires advanced diagnostic skills and familiarity with data-driven tools. These tasks can be assigned to senior or upskilled technicians who are trained to interpret performance data and conduct condition monitoring. Preventive maintenance tasks such as inspections, component replacements, audio checking, projector testing and calibration, cleaning, cable checks, and system testing are performed by technicians daily using standardised procedures. Reactive tasks that require quick judgment and problem-solving under time constraints should be executed efficiently during short maintenance windows to restore system functionality with minimal disruption.

To support the workforce under this strategy, the strategy includes targeted training programmes to upskill technicians in emerging areas such as predictive analytics, IoT-based monitoring, and AV troubleshooting. This not only boosts technician confidence and job satisfaction but also enhances maintenance quality and system reliability. A proactive investment in human capital ensures that technicians are well-equipped to implement the

strategy effectively, contributing to improved equipment uptime, reduced failure rates, and a more resilient maintenance environment aligned with institutional goals.

5.3.2 Inventory Management

Efficient inventory management ensures that critical spare parts, such as projector lamps, microphones, and cables, are readily available, with usage tracking systems predicting future needs for seamless procurement. A major concern is the over-reliance on international suppliers for maintenance parts, which results in long lead times. To help mitigate these delays, the university needs to build relationships with local vendors to supply critical components, reducing dependency on overseas suppliers and significantly minimising lead times. A JIT inventory management system should be implemented to accurately forecast spare part requirements based on real-time data and predictive insights. This ensures that resources are readily available when needed while avoiding excessive inventory or inventory stockouts.

5.3.3 Maintenance Policy

A structured maintenance policy underpins the implementation, defining clear roles, responsibilities, and processes for executing predictive, preventive, and reactive maintenance. The scope of this policy should include projectors, microphones, speakers, control systems, document cameras, and associated hardware. Maintenance responsibilities must be clearly defined for the execution of routine, reactive, or predictive tasks based on asset criticality. The manager needs to plan task scheduling and compliance, whereas the middle manager must oversee spare parts availability using a JIT approach. Maintenance procedures should be standardised for all tasks.

The policy should ensure all necessary resources are in place, including trained personnel, diagnostic tools, replacement parts, and effective procurement practices. Frequency of maintenance should be defined by the strategy: predictive tasks must be undertaken quarterly, preventive tasks need to be carried out daily before lectures, and reactive tasks should be performed as the need arises so that teaching is not disrupted. Performance measurement and management need to be implemented to ensure the effectiveness of labour force, maintenance procedures, and procurement procedures. Technicians need to perform tasks using standardised checklists and logs, weekly reports are submitted, and monthly reviews assess uptime, breakdown frequency, and cost-efficiency. This structured and responsive maintenance framework ensures long-term system reliability, reduced operational disruptions, and alignment with the University’s educational mission.

5.3.4 Cost-Benefit Analysis

A thorough cost-benefit analysis should be conducted to validate the implementation’s financial sustainability. Despite the initial investments required for predictive maintenance systems and training programmes, costs can be offset by significant long-term benefits. Predictive systems reduce unplanned downtime, extending the lifespan of critical assets like projectors and control systems. Preventive maintenance, although incurring ongoing costs for inspections and part replacements, ensures reliable performance of routine assets like microphones and cables, ultimately reducing disruptions and maintaining operational consistency. Reactive maintenance, applied only to non-critical or ageing assets, minimises unnecessary expenditures where proactive approaches are not financially justified. The transition to local suppliers further minimises procurement delays, lowering the costs associated with emergency repairs and expedited shipments. Furthermore, proactive inventory management through JIT practices ensures optimal stock levels, preventing overstocking or shortages. The resulting financial benefits include lower total maintenance costs, reduced capital expenditure on equipment replacement, efficient resource utilisation,

and enhanced system reliability, contributing to a positive return on investment and a more sustainable maintenance framework.

5.4 Implications of Findings

This study highlights that a strategic shift from reactive to predictive maintenance is essential to reduce downtime, extend AV equipment lifespan, and lower costs. Strengthening local vendor partnerships and inventory management can improve resilience against supply chain disruptions, while targeted workforce training in predictive analytics and AV diagnostics ensures technicians are equipped for emerging technologies. More broadly, the findings show that AV maintenance is a strategic enabler of institutional performance, offering a transferable framework for other universities seeking to enhance operational efficiency and educational continuity.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to determine the right balance for an effective maintenance strategy at University X. There was heavy reliance on reactive and preventive maintenance, with a noticeable absence of predictive maintenance. While reactive maintenance was conducted during the short breaks of 30 minutes and the one-hour window during the lunch break between 13:15 and 14:15, this study recognised the significant potential of implementing predictive maintenance. By integrating predictive maintenance, the university can proactively address the issues known to cause frequent failures, thereby optimising the overall maintenance schedule and significantly reducing downtime. The study contributed to the development of a maintenance strategy framework that could aid in providing a cost-effective maintenance approach that ensures minimal disruption to teaching activities resulting from equipment failures.

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8 APPENDIX

8.1 APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

OBJECTIVE: ASSESSING THE AV MAINTENANCE STRATEGY OF A TERTIARY INSTITUTION	
Theory Question (TQ)	Interview Questions
Maintenance Processes and Procedures of Audio- Visual systems	What is the standard procedure for routine maintenance of AV equipment at University X? • Probe: How would you describe the current maintenance practices at University X: are they predominantly reactive, preventive, or predictive? • Probe: What are the most common faults you observe during daily routines?
	What steps do you typically take when you predict a potential failure in AV equipment? • Probe: Have you received any training in predictive maintenance tools or techniques? • Probe: What challenges have you encountered in implementing predictive maintenance?
	How effective do you find the allocated break times for performing reactive (emergency) maintenance tasks? • Probe: What are the typical repair tasks performed during the 13:15–14:15 time slot? • How does the team handle failures that occur outside the predefined reactive maintenance windows?
	What equipment components do you believe benefit the most from routine preventive maintenance? • Probe: How effective is the current preventive maintenance Programme in reducing unplanned breakdowns? • Probe: Have you noticed any recurring equipment failures despite regular preventive maintenance?
	What specific types of AV equipment are known for frequent failures, and what challenges do these issues present in terms of extending their lifespan?
	What is the typical method to assess lifespan of AV equipment used at University X, and which AV equipment have the longest and shortest lifespans? • Probe: What are the common issues that lead to reduced reliability in shorter- lifespan equipment and longer-lifespan equipment?
	What is the typical process for replacing or upgrading AV equipment? • Probe: How do you determine when equipment needs to be replaced rather than repaired?
	How frequently does AV equipment, both with long-lifespan and short-lifespan, require maintenance? • Probe: What are proactive measures to improve the lifespan of the equipment?
	What are the main challenges you face in maximising the uptime of AV equipment at University X? • Probe: How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the current maintenance strategies in increasing AV equipment uptime?
	What are the main challenges you face in improving the reliability of AV equipment at University X? • Probe: What steps are taken to address these reliability challenges?
	Can you describe the common causes of the frequent unplanned breakdowns challenges in AV equipment at University X?

	• Probe: What proactive measures are currently in place at University X to prevent unplanned AV equipment breakdowns?
	Which AV equipment parts are readily available in your inventory, and which are not? • Probe: What criteria do you use to decide which parts to keep in inventory and which parts you decide to order? • Probe: Can you describe a recent situation where a stockout impacted the maintenance of AV equipment?
	For parts not available in inventory, where do you typically order them from? • Probe: How long does it typically take to receive ordered parts from the external vendors? • Probe: Are there preferred vendors or suppliers due to reliability or speed of delivery?
	Do you feel that the current number of maintenance technicians is sufficient to handle the frequency and variety of equipment failures across the campus? • Probe: Are there contingency plans for periods of high maintenance demand, such as the start of an academic term or during special events?
	How is the budget for maintaining AV equipment structured, and does it adequately support equipment maintenance needs? • Probe: Are there budgetary constraints that affect decisions regarding the repair or replacement of equipment with varying lifespans?

8.2 Appendix B

Process Study Sheet

Process study:		Process:			Product:			Observer:				Date/Time
Process Steps	Work element	Observed times										Notes
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Overall AV Equipment Conditions	Visual inspection for physical damage											
	Control panel inspection											
	Checking for signs of projector overheating											
	Cable checking for electrical faults											
	Checking speakers for sound quality											

	Microphones check for sound output levels											
	Lamp / Laser checking for video/image quality											
Maintenance tasks	Repairing											
	Replacement of faulty or worn-out components											
	Cleaning											
	Lubricating											
	Functionality testing for equipment operational reliability											
Tracking Lifespan	Monitoring equipment condition											
	Operating hours and remaining life hours											
	Age and usage											
Documentation	Record-keeping of maintenance activities and outcomes											
	Updating maintenance logs and system status reports											

8.3 Appendix C

Observation Checklists

	Rating scales				
Criteria	1 (Very Poor)	2 (Poor)	3 (Average)	4 (Good)	5 (Excellent)
Standard daily routine maintenance	No established routine: maintenance is poor and unorganised.	Routine is attempted but lacks consistency and effectiveness.	Basic routine established, generally followed with minor issues.	Well-organised and consistent routine that meets most needs.	Optimally managed, adheres strictly to best practices and schedules.
Prioritisation of Maintenance Activities	Poor Prioritisation leads to critical equipment often being neglected.	Some Prioritisation is evident, but critical items can still be overlooked.	Average Prioritisation, with important items usually handled timely.	Good Prioritisation, with important equipment rarely experiencing downtime.	Excellent Prioritisation, perfectly aligned with operational priorities.
Emergency maintenance practices	No plan for emergency maintenance; chaotic responses.	Inadequate emergency procedures, slow response.	Adequate emergency responses but can be improved.	Effective and timely emergency maintenance responses.	Systematic, swift, and highly effective emergency maintenance.
Major maintenance practices	Major maintenance is neglected or poorly managed.	Major maintenance is irregular and often delayed.	Regularly scheduled major maintenance with some delays.	Systematic and timely execution of major maintenance.	Best practice major maintenance, pre-emptively managed with no disruptions.
Efficiency and efficacy of replacement practices	Replacement practices are haphazard and ineffective.	Replacements are delayed, causing extended downtime.	Replacements are timely but could be more strategic.	Efficient replacement practices minimising equipment downtime.	Highly strategic and pre-emptive replacement practices enhancing longevity.
Quality and timeliness of repair practices	Repairs are frequently delayed and poorly executed.	Repairs are somewhat timely but often require rework.	Repairs are performed in a reasonable timeframe and quality.	Repairs are timely and effectively restore functionality.	Repairs are expertly managed, promptly restoring and often improving equipment.

How maintenance methods Maximise equipment uptime	Frequent unplanned downtime significantly impacts operations.	Occasional unplanned downtime causes operational disruptions.	Generally stable uptime with occasional disruptions.	Rarely experiences downtime, maintaining consistent operations.	Nearly zero unplanned downtime, maximising operational availability.
How maintenance methods affect the reliability of equipment	Equipment frequently malfunctions, severely affecting reliability.	Equipment sometimes fails, causing concern for reliability.	Equipment is generally reliable with occasional issues.	Equipment is mostly reliable with infrequent issues.	Equipment reliability is excellent, with issues being exceptionally rare.
How often unexpected equipment breakdowns occur	Breakdowns are frequent and often unpredictable.	Breakdowns are somewhat frequent and occasionally predictable.	Breakdowns occur occasionally and are somewhat predictable.	Breakdowns are rare and usually predictable.	Breakdowns are very rare and almost always predictable.
How maintenance activities impact operational and maintenance costs	Costs are consistently over budget, impacting financial planning.	Costs are often higher than expected, causing budget overruns.	Costs are managed adequately, with occasional budget overruns.	Costs are generally within budget with rare exceptions.	Costs are always within budget, optimised for efficiency.
How time is consumed in maintenance processes	Maintenance processes are excessively time-consuming, stalling operations.	Maintenance often takes longer than expected, delaying operations.	Maintenance duration is reasonable with manageable impacts.	Maintenance is efficient in time usage, minimising impact.	Maintenance is highly efficient, ensuring smooth operations with minimal interruption.
How maintenance scheduling affects the availability of equipment for use	Equipment is often unavailable due to maintenance issues.	Equipment is occasionally unavailable, affecting usability.	Equipment is mostly available with manageable downtimes.	Equipment is generally available, with rare unavailability.	Equipment is always available when needed, maximising usability.
How staffing adequacy meets maintenance needs	Severely understaffed, unable to manage maintenance demands.	Occasionally understaffed, leading to delays in response.	Generally adequate staffing to meet maintenance demands.	Well-staffed, handling demands efficiently.	Optimally staffed, with capacity to handle all needs and emergencies.
Impact of maintenance on	Maintenance practices shorten equipment lifespan significantly.	Maintenance has little positive impact on extending equipment lifespan.	Maintenance practices generally maintain	Maintenance strategies extend equipment lifespan	State-of-the-art maintenance Maximises equipment lifespan, greatly exceeding norms.

equipment lifespan			equipment lifespan at industry standard.	beyond typical expectancy.	
Equipment Lifespan vs. Performance	Lifespan significantly shorter than expected, leading to frequent replacements.	Equipment often fails before expected lifespan, increasing costs	Equipment lifespan generally, meets expectations with some exceptions.	Equipment lifespan usually aligns well with expectations.	Equipment always meets or exceeds lifespan expectations, optimising capital expenditure.
Effectiveness of the current maintenance strategy	Strategy is ineffective, leading to frequent equipment failures.	Strategy is somewhat effective but lacks consistency.	Strategy is adequately effective with room for improvement.	Strategy is highly effective, minimising failures and downtime.	Strategy is optimally effective, maintaining maximum uptime and health.

MAKING WAVES OR WIPING OUT? NAVIGATING THE DRIVERS AND BARRIERS OF AUTOMOTIVE SALES PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

In the automotive industry, the underperformance of sales executives presents significant challenges, not only affecting overall sales but also disrupting business cohesion. This study aims to identify the factors influencing the performance of sales executives by conducting a systematic literature review (SLR). The SLR method was used to collect, analyze, and report on key barriers and drivers of success within this role. The findings highlight critical success factors contributing to high performance among top sales executives while also identifying the challenges that lead many to exit the industry. Based on these insights, this study develops a comprehensive framework that categorizes the drivers and barriers impacting sales executive performance. This framework serves as a valuable tool for industry leaders seeking to enhance sales effectiveness and reduce employee turnover. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of performance dynamics within automotive sales, offering strategic guidance for improving salesforce management

Keywords: Automotive industry, SLR, Sales executives, success factors

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1 INTRODUCTION

The automotive industry is a primary contributor to the gross domestic product (GDP) of various countries globally. The industry encompasses a wide range of sectors that involve all business operations associated with the design, production, marketing, sales, and servicing of automotive vehicles [1]. In South Africa, this sector accounts for 4.3% of the national GDP and is ranked as the country's fifth-largest export sector, contributing 18.1% of the country's total exports [2].

The area of focus for this study will be the sales department of various dealerships belonging to a South African automotive group. Sales executives employed in these departments are selected based on their attained work performance profiles but often fail to meet company KPI targets. An underperforming sales executive can negatively affect a company in many ways, but primarily by wasting time [3] and financial resources [4].

For this reason, it is reasonable to conclude that dealerships suffer different losses caused by underperforming sales executives. By identifying accurate predictors of success, dealerships can appoint appropriate sales executives and be guided to better decision-making in this regard. By leveraging these factors, predictive models can be trained to indicate the success rate of a prospective employee based on certain attributes. Ultimately, this will contribute to an increase in company profits and a reduction in waste.

At the time of writing this paper, however, there is limited literature available on the key drivers and barriers for success in sales executives, particularly within the automotive industry. Furthermore, there are no studies available on the performance of sales executives within the automotive industry in South Africa. This article responds to the call for further research in this field.

This research article aims to identify the key performance indicators and barriers to success among sales executives and to provide guidance to companies in optimizing their sales employee hiring processes.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the research objective of this study, the systematic literature review (SLR) process as outlined by Albliwi et al. [5] was chosen as the preferred research methodology. The methodology is outlined below:

- **Step 1:** Develop a research purpose and/or objective – Define the goal of the SLR
- **Step 2:** Develop research protocol – Develop a research protocol that stipulates the purpose, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, chosen databases, keywords, and quality assessment criteria
- **Step 3:** Establish relevance criteria – Describe a source's relevance to the study
- **Step 4:** Search and retrieve the literature – Search the selected databases to identify relevant papers

- **Step 5:** Selection of studies – Refine the selection of papers by applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria
- **Step 6:** Quality assessment for relevant studies – Analyse the quality of each paper
- **Step 7:** Data extraction – Identify relevant information from the papers
- **Step 8:** Analysis and synthesis of findings – Identify patterns from chosen papers by analysing themes
- **Step 9:** Report – Detail the results and conclusions
- **Step 10:** Dissemination – Publish the SLR

Steps 1 to 8 are covered within this article, while steps 9 and 10 will be completed by the publication of this paper.

2.1 Step 1 - Develop a research purpose

The purpose of this research article is to analyse the available literature to identify the key predictors and barriers to success in sales executives, in order to predict the success of sales executives.

2.2 Step 2 - Develop a research protocol

Table 1 illustrates the research protocol that this study will follow.

Table 1: Research Protocol

Purpose of the study	To identify and analyse the available literature on the key drivers of and barriers to success of employees in the service industry
Inclusion criteria	- Literature that contains any of the specified keywords in the title, abstract, or keywords. - Literature that describes the factors contributing to success in sales executives. - Literature that describes the factors contributing to failure in sales executives.
Exclusion criteria	- Studies that do not focus on the service industry. - Studies published before 2015. - Studies that have not been written in a language other than English.
Search databases	- Science Direct - Scopus - Web of Science - Emerald Insight
Keywords	("salesperson" OR "sales employees") AND "service industry" AND ("success" OR "performance")
Quality assessment criteria	- All duplicate resources must be removed. - Studies must relate to the proposed research question. - Studies must utilise a robust and appropriate research method. - Samples must have clear and appropriate sampling and data collection methods. - Methods of data collection should be transparent.

2.3 Step 3 - Establish relevance criteria

A relevance criteria has been designed in order to establish a study's relevance to the proposed research question.

- Studies should include the terms ("salesperson" OR "sales employees") AND "service industry" AND ("success" OR "performance") in the title, abstract or keywords.
- The chosen literature should discuss the correlation between employee attributes and their performance, or illustrate the trademarks of good sales employees.
- Chosen literature should focus on employees within the sales industry.
- Non-English studies, as well as studies published before 2015, will not be considered.

2.4 Step 4 - Search and retrieve the literature

The process of identifying relevant literature was performed during this step. Appropriate papers were conducted via searches in four databases, namely Scopus, Science Direct, Web of Science, and Emerald Insights. This initial search resulted in a total of 66 papers. This part of the methodology is captured in the initial search part of Figure 1.

2.5 Step 5 - Selection of studies

All duplicate studies were removed from the search results, reducing the total to 58 papers. Some papers did not relate to the research question and were therefore removed. Some did not have a robust and clear research method and were disregarded. Papers that did have clear sampling and data collection methods were also not considered. Papers that did not have clear methods of data collection were also disregarded.

After removing all inappropriate literature, 18 papers were selected for analysis. Step 5 is detailed in Figure 1's screening and eligibility sections.

2.6 Step 6 - Quality assessment for relevant studies:

All 18 relevant papers were analysed using the criteria established in the sections above, and the criteria for the SLR were satisfied. This selection process is illustrated in figure 1.

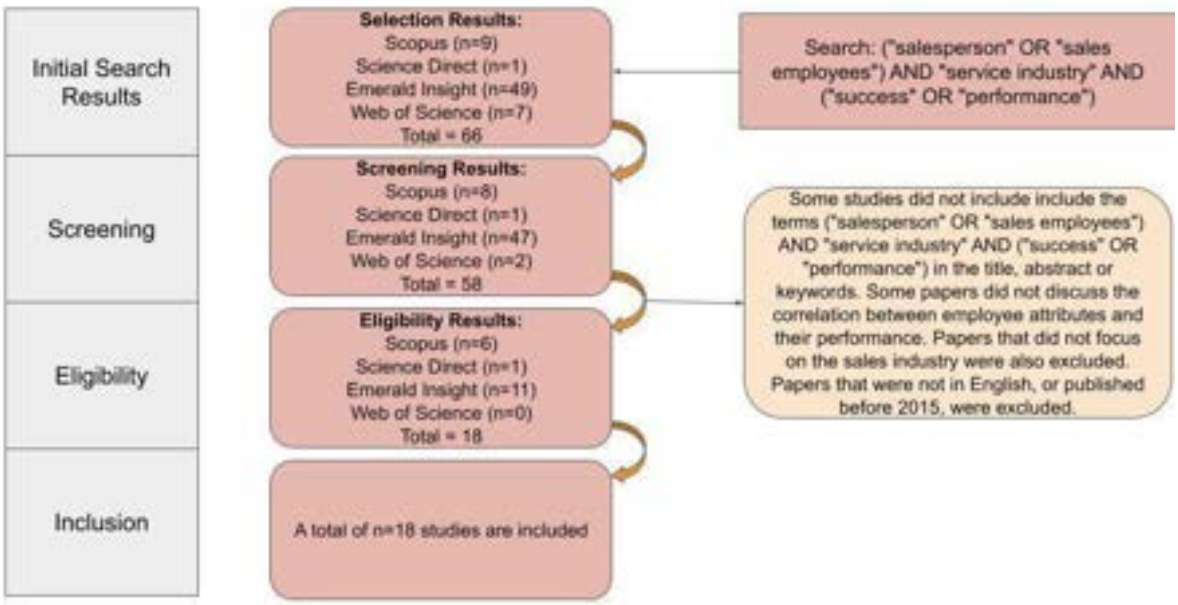

Figure 1: SLR Selection Process

3 FINDINGS

The findings from the analysed and synthesised papers (steps 7 and 8 of the SLR) are discussed in the sections below.

3.1 Step 7: Data extraction

After conducting the thorough analysis detailed above, the 18 relevant papers were studied in their entirety. The information present in each paper is detailed in the table in Appendix A. From this table, it is evident that the studies were conducted in various countries, especially within Europe and Asia. The majority of the studies were done on the financial and retail sectors. This aligns with expectations as the role of sales employees in both the financial and retail sectors is crucial for business success. None of the selected papers were conducted within the automotive sector. This discrepancy justifies the motivation behind this study, especially considering the pivotal role sales executives play in the success of businesses within the automotive industry.

3.2 Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings

Following a thorough review of the studies, the extracted data were systematically analysed and ordered into the following sections.

3.2.1 Publications per year

The database search for these papers was limited to a timeframe of between 2015-2025. This is because the results from previous research are repeated in the more recent studies, and it would therefore be redundant to consider them. The majority of the papers were published in 2022, which is likely caused by the return of the workforce to the sales industry following

the COVID-19 pandemic (the sales industry suffered particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic as the nature of the business involves many face-to-face interactions, which were halted during this time). The distribution of studies in this timeframe is Figure 2

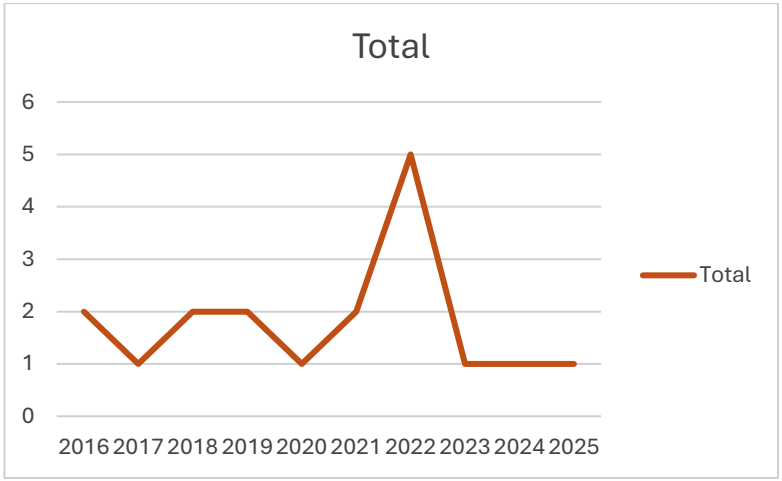

Figure 2: Publications per year

3.2.2 Keywords

A summary of the keywords of each of the 18 analysed papers is illustrated by the word cloud (Figure 3). The word cloud allows the rapid identification of the most recurrent themes in the conducted research, aiding its analysis. The size of the text in the word cloud is representative of the frequency of the keyword's presence across all 18 papers. From this, it is evident that keywords such as "performance", "sales", "customer", and "salesperson" were most prominent. Other keywords such as "adaptiveness", "attitude", "knowledge" and "skill" were also present, highlighting the influence these characteristics have on the performance of sales executives.

Figure 3: Keyword Word Cloud

3.2.3 Country of Study

The following tree map (figure 4) highlights in which countries the samples for the relevant studies were taken.

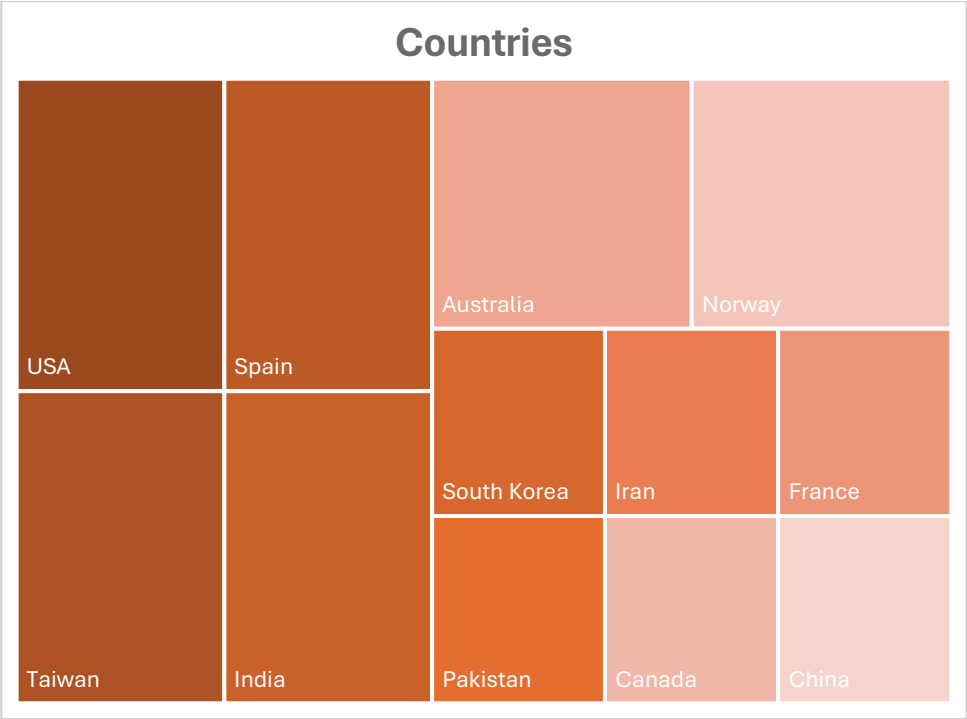

Figure 4: Tree map of Countries

The size of the country's block on the diagram corresponds to the number of studies conducted in that country. This hierarchical view facilitates the detection of imbalances in the evidence base during the analysis of conducted research. From this, it is clear that 2 studies were done in the USA, Spain, Australia, Taiwan, India, and Norway, respectively. Furthermore, 1 study was done in South Korea, Pakistan, Iran, Canada, France, and China, respectively. There is clearly an opportunity for South Africa to contribute to this research conversation.

3.2.4 Internal Drivers of Success in Sales Executives

It is important to have a holistic understanding of the drivers of success contributing to successful sales employee performance, specifically within the service sector [6]. Moreover, it is necessary to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic attributes that contribute to their success. This aids businesses in identifying what they can control and optimize versus what they need to mitigate.

Below is a list of characteristics intrinsic to the sales executive as an individual that aid their performance. The sales executive should be/have:

- Adaptable to continuous changes, thus being able to adjust quickly and effectively to evolving environments [7]
- A hard worker, thus putting in consistent effort [7]

- Customer-oriented, being able to prioritise the wants of the customer [8], [9]
- Willing and keen to learn, thus being open to acquiring new skills [8]
- Organised and good at planning, thus efficient in managing time [4]
- Proactive, thus taking initiative [10]
- Good interpersonal skills, thus being able to build positive relationships [10]
- Competitive, thus being driven [11]
- Agreeable, thus being cooperative [11], [6]
- Conscientious, thus being diligent [5]
- Loyal, thus having strong organizational commitment [12]
- Strong personal ethics, thus acting with integrity and honesty [13]
- Good presentation skills, thus clearly delivering information to an audience [14]
- Good communication skills, thus effectively conveying and receiving information in verbal forms [14]
- Self-efficacious, thus believing in their own ability to succeed [15]
- Motivated, thus being goal-driven [15]
- Empathetic, thus understanding and relating to others' emotions [16]
- An ambidextrous selling technique, thus balancing customer acquisition with customer retention strategies [17], [9]
- Extraverted, thus being outgoing [6]
- Good technical selling skills, thus having the skills and knowledge to sell complex products [9]

3.2.5 External Drivers of Success in Sales Executives

As explained in section 3.2.4, it is imperative to distinguish between the intrinsic and extrinsic factors contributing to the success of sales executives. This includes both circumstantial factors and attributes that employees can be trained to have. Below is a list of factors external to the sales executive that aid their performance. The sales executive should:

- Experience high job satisfaction, thus feeling content and fulfilled with their role [7]
- Have high job involvement, thus being personally invested in their work [7], [18]
- Have high product knowledge, thus having received proper training of the products being sold [10]
- Have good department leadership, thus benefiting from supportive and strategic leadership [19], [14]
- Experience meaningfulness in the job, thus viewing their work as significant [20]
- Identify with organizational values, thus feeling aligned with the company's mission [20], [12]
- Experience pay satisfaction, thus feeling that their compensation is fair [20], [21]
- Feel supported in their working environment, thus receiving practical support from colleagues [7]
- Have experience in the field, thus having prior industry knowledge [13]
- Be technologically literate, thus being able to comfortably use digital tools [14]
- Be able to modify the sales approach, thus being to adapt the sales techniques to suit different situations [14]

3.2.6 Internal Barriers to Success in Sales Executives

Understanding the barriers to sales employee success is useful as it highlights factors halting their performance and motivates businesses to proactively remove these barriers in order to improve performance. As with the previous two sections, these factors can also be divided into internal and external factors.

The internal barriers to sales executive performance may be seen as the opposite of the points discussed in 3.2.4. However, it is worth taking note of a few specific factors. Below is a list of characteristics intrinsic to the sales executive.

- Poor communicator, thus struggling to convey ideas clearly [14]
- Poor planning capacity, thus lacking the ability to manage time [14]
- Prone to negative affectivity, thus frequently expressing negative emotions like pessimism [22]
- Emotional dissonance, thus being conflicted between true emotions and the emotions expected to be displayed at work [22]
- Neurotic, thus feeling emotionally unstable [6]
- Cynic, thus being distrustful of others' motives [23]

3.2.7 External Barriers to Success in Sales Executives

The external barriers to sales executive performance may be seen as the opposite of the points discussed in 3.2.5. However, as with 3.2.6, it is worth taking note of a few specific points. The characteristics external to the sales executive that decrease their performance are mentioned below.

- Poor pay satisfaction, thus feeling underpaid [20], [21]
- Poor leadership, thus experiencing unsupportive management [6]
- Poor training, thus lacking proper skill development [20]
- Lack of team morale, thus having a demotivated team [22]
- Exhaustion and burnout, thus feeling mentally or physically drained from prolonged work stress [22]
- Uncivil customers, thus dealing with disrespectful clients [6]
- Organizational cynicism, thus feeling distrustful of the company's motives [23]
- Negative perception of marketing messages, thus believing the marketing materials are misleading [23]

3.2.8 Benefits of Successful Sales Executives

Businesses might also be interested in understanding the benefits of sales executives, as it helps them recognise their strategic value. Additionally, it would motivate them to selectively appoint their employees and also to encourage a work environment conducive to work performance.

- Increased profits, thus achieving higher revenue [4], [18]
- Improved customer loyalty, thus fostering strong, lasting relationships [13]
- Improved customer satisfaction, thus meeting or exceeding customer expectations [13]
- Improved customer retention, thus keeping customers engaged and satisfied [22]
- Competitive advantage, thus standing out from competitors [16]

- Improved collaborative work within the sales department, thus encouraging better teamwork [16]
- Improved sales team morale, improved motivation within the team [16]
- Improved company value, thus improving the business's overall worth and market position [18]

4 FRAMEWORK FOR SALES EXECUTIVE PERFORMANCE DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

The findings summarised in section 3 of this article highlight the various drivers of and barriers to the performance of sales executives in the service sector. In order to highlight and emphasize the findings a framework was designed. This is illustrated in the graphic below (figure 5).

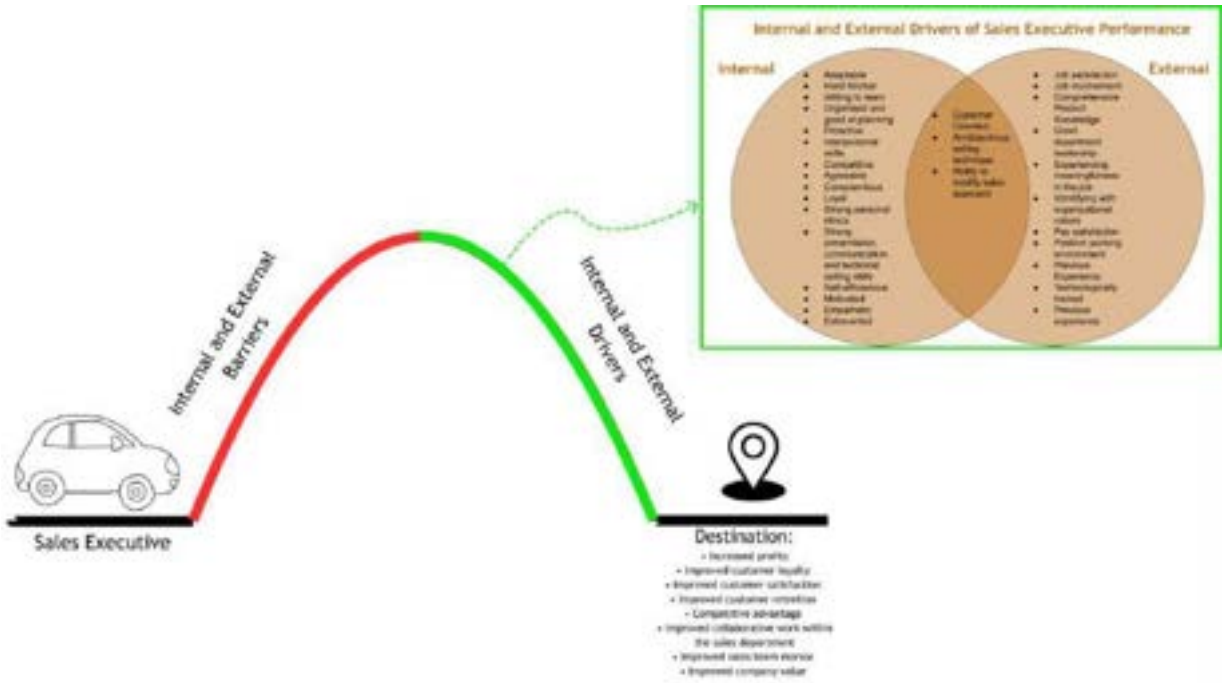

Figure 5: Drivers and Barriers Infographic

Available studies show that comprehensive research has been conducted on the characteristics of performing sales executives, and there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the barriers would be the opposite of these drivers. This article has made a distinction between the characteristics intrinsic and extrinsic to the sales executive, to highlight what a company may control versus what they might mitigate. However, it is worth noting that some of these factors are not mutually exclusive and that they could be categorized as both an intrinsic and extrinsic variable.

From the Venn diagram in Figure 5, it is clear that being customer-oriented, having an ambidextrous selling technique, and the ability to modify a selling approach are categorized

as being both internal and external drivers. These three attributes can also be seen as the primary drivers towards increased sales performance [8].

Customer orientation refers to the extent to which a sales executive aids a customer in making a purchase decision that satisfies the customer's need. This requires, amongst other things, strong interpersonal and communication skills, as well as strong personal ethics [9]. However, for a sales executive to be customer-oriented, they would also have to be trained to have a comprehensive knowledge of available products. For this reason, it is reasonable that this element is derived from both internal and external drivers.

For a salesperson to be ambidextrous means they can simultaneously engage in both customer service and sales activities. By implication, they should integrate addressing customer needs with persuading customers to buy. To perform this effectively, a salesperson should be self-efficacious and have strong technical selling skills, whilst also being trained to have holistic product knowledge. Previous experience is also necessary as it improves the salesperson's situational awareness, which has a direct relationship with their ability to balance sales ambidexterity [17].

The ability to modify a sales approach is critical to the success of sales executive performance. This refers to having a good understanding of a customer's needs and preferences and then modifying the applied sales approach to address them and create long-term value for the customer [8]. For example, some customers may require technical explanations and relationship building, whilst others might require quick solutions. By being adaptable and having good interpersonal skills, a salesperson is more likely to successfully execute this technique. Notwithstanding, a salesperson should be allowed enough job involvement to understand how to effectively profile a customer in order to know when to customize their sales technique [7].

5 CONCLUSION

The automotive industry contributes almost 5% to the South African GDP and is one of the largest export sectors in the country. As profits in the automotive sector and largely propelled by salespersons, understanding the characteristics of successful salespersons is valuable to any company operating within this sector.

This study utilised an SLR to identify relevant literature; however, it was limited to the four databases stipulated in 2.2 of this paper. Furthermore, the keywords that were used as input to these databases did not yield any studies done in the automotive sector. This could be indicative of a need for more research on the performance of sales executives in this field. This implies that the findings from this article might not directly translate to the automotive sector, leading to discrepancies in relevance. The scope of this study is limited to the creation of a conceptual framework, however future research should expand of the implementation and testing of the framework.

This article analysed available literature on the drivers and barriers of sales executive performance and categorised them as internal and external, respectively. From this it was deduced that being customer-oriented, having an ambidextrous selling technique, and the ability to modify a selling approach are the most prominent techniques to improve sales performance. Notably, all three of these attributes are influenced by a combination of both internal and external drivers.

Although there is ample research available on the characteristics of successful sales executives, there is limited knowledge on how these attributes can be utilised to predict sales performance outcomes on both an organizational and individual level. This would be a useful insight that would improve the company value of organizations in this sector, as well as give them a competitive advantage. By utilizing the findings from this article, such a tool could be accurately designed and trained.

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Appendix A

ID	Title	Authors	Year	Drivers	Barriers	Internal Factors	External Factors	Benefits of Successful Sales Executives	Country	Industry	Future Research	Reference
1	Impact of salesperson macro-adaptive selling strategy on job performance and satisfaction	Hyokjin Kwak; Rolph E. Anderson; Thomas W. Leigh; Scott D. Bonifield	2019	x		x		x	USA	Insurance Services	x	[5]
2	Exploring the determinants and consequences of salesperson market orientation behavior: An empirical study in the financial service industry	Y. C. Chen; A. A. Rivas; W. Y. Wu	2018	x		x	x		Taiwan	Financial Services	x	[8]
3	Antecedents of salesperson performance in information service industry: The role of guanxi, adaptive selling behaviors and customer orientation	T. T. L. Nguyen; X. Q. Hoang; P. T. Lien; T. H. Pham; H. H. Pham	2022	x		x	x	x	Europe USA Middle East New Zealand Australia	Informations Services	x	[6]
4	Servant Leadership, Proactive Work Behavior, and Performance Overall Rating: Testing a Multilevel Model of Moderated Mediation	J. A. Varela; B. Bande; M. Del Rio; F. Jaramillo	2019	x			x		Spain	Manufacturing, Financial and Construction Services	x	[18]
5	Relationship Between Job Orientation and Performance of Sales People: A Financial Services Industry Perspective	J. Varghese; M. Edward	2018	x	x		x	x	India	Financial Services	x	[19]
6	A multipath model of salesperson performance in the financial services industry	J. Varghese; M. Edward; S. Sahadev	2017	x		x	x	x	India	Financial Services	x	[9]

7	Service Orientation and Customer Performance: Triad Perspectives of Sales Managers, Sales Employees, and Customers	H. T. Yi; M. Lee; K. Park	2022	x			x	x	South Korea	Retail Services	x	[11]
8	A sequential logic model between sales performance and salesperson satisfaction in B2B markets	Rocío Rodríguez; Nils Høgevold; Carmen Otero-Neira; Göran Svensson	2022	x			x	x	Norway	Retail Services	x	[20]
9	A trusted B2B relationship quality in the Asian market: effects of salespeople's attributes	Yuan-Shuh Lii; May-Ching Ding; Shanchih Lee	2025	x		x	x	x	Taiwan	Manufacturing Services	x	[12]
10	Benchmarking meta-analytical conceptualizations of B2B seller skills against empirical evidence in services firms	Nils M. Høgevold; Rocio Rodríguez; Carmen Otero-Neira; Göran Svensson	2024	x	x	x	x		Norway	Retail Services	x	[13]
11	Emotional labor in a sales ecosystem: a salesperson-customer interactional framework	Michel Klein	2021	x	x	x	x	x	France	Sales and Marketing Services	x	[21]
12	Exploring the relationship among servant leadership, intrinsic motivation and performance in an industrial sales setting	Belén Bande; Pilar Fernández-Ferrín; Concepción Varela-Neira; Carmen Otero-Neira	2016	x		x	x	x	Spain	Various Business Sectors	x	[14]
13	Frontline employees' performance in the financial services industry: the significance of trust, empathy and consumer orientation	Basharat Raza; Sylvie St-Onge; Muhammad Ali	2023	x		x	x	x	Canada	Financial Services	x	[15]
14	Frontline employees' engagement and business performance: the mediating role of customer-oriented behaviors	Behrooz Ghlichlee; Fatima Bayat	2021	x			x		Iran	Banking Services	x	[17]

15	Salesmanship: the influence of social networks on sales-service ambidexterity	Xiaoyong Zheng	2022	x			x	x	China	Sales and Marketing Services	x	[16]
16	Service employees' personality, customer orientation and customer incivility	Sandra A. Kiffin-Petersen; Geoffrey N. Soutar	2020	x	x	x	x		Australia	Retail Services	x	[10]
17	Unintended effects of marketing messages on salespeople's cynicism	Olalekan K. Seriki; Kenneth R. Evans; Hyo-Jin Jeon; Rajiv P. Dant; Amanda Helm	2016		x	x	x		USA	Financial Services	x	[22]
18	What matters most in achieving customer satisfaction in banking? A study from the perspective of employee characteristics	Wajeeha Aslam; Kashif Farhat; Imtiaz Arif; Chai Lee Goi	2022	x		x	x	x	Pakistan	Banking Services	x	[7]

DESIGN OF A MULTI-CRITERION PROCESS SAFETY MODEL FOR MANUFACTURING

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to mitigate the impact of human reliability factors on the safety culture within a manufacturing company that offers turnkey security solutions. The primary instrumentation for data collection included an observational checklist and a survey questionnaire that was administered to management and employees. A gap was identified in the current safety procedures relating to employee training, work environment and conditions, workload and scheduling, and employee wellbeing. A device-dependent safety model was created to mitigate this. The model incorporated six key safety management elements, including improved access to standardized procedures, personal protective equipment request forms, hazard reporting forms, an emergency alert platform, daily training material, and a daily reporting checklist (for training, wellness, workload, and work conditions). The safety model addressed risks faced by all stakeholders while providing a feasible, sustainable, and adaptable solution that promotes employee and leadership involvement.

Keywords: Human reliability factors, Safety culture, Safety model, Employee and leadership involvement

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1 INTRODUCTION

The health and safety risks inherent in manufacturing operations are notorious, significantly affecting the well-being of the workforce at all levels. In South Africa, the manufacturing sector, accompanied by the agriculture, construction, forestry, and fishing sectors, are deemed the most hazardous sectors, resulting in 200,000 fatal injuries per year – 63% of all fatal occupational injuries, according to the chief inspector of the Department of Employment and Labour in 2024 [1]. This justifies why Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) is a significant addition to the International Labor Organization (ILO) framework as a fundamental right for workers, in 2022 [2].

Beyond the alarming injury, damage, and fatality rates that exist with unsafe manufacturing environments, other negative effects include reputational damage, lowered staff morale, regulatory consequences, and economic losses. Multiple studies on the relationship between work environment and employees suggest that unsafe work environments often cause employee stress, demotivation, and dissatisfaction, resulting in a reduction of employee performance, ultimately increasing company costs [3] [4].

This is particularly relevant to the Gates department at company X, which is primarily driven by a human workforce utilizing heavy machinery in a manufacturing setting since 1993. In this department, employees transform steel parts into gates of various sizes and designs, exposing employees to dangerous equipment, heavy machinery, and toxic fumes. This exposure affects the safety culture, encompassing a shared set of beliefs, values, behaviors, and attitudes that influence the commitment to safety within an organization. [5] [6].

Human reliability factors (HRF) influence behaviors and performance of tasks, in turn impacting safety culture within the company. [7] [8] This comprises aspects like fatigue, inadequate training, unclear procedures, amongst others, that often can be solved on an organizational level. The development of a multi-criteria safety model can be an organizationally driven solution to not only combat these HRFs but also build employee trust, increase cost efficiency, and improve company X's reputation, ultimately securing the organization's long-term viability.

This report aims to identify, investigate, and mitigate the impact of human reliability factors (HRFs) within the Gates Department at Company X. The first section of the paper examines existing literature, particularly regarding the existing safety models. This research then investigates the current safety state in Company X through triangulated data collection from surveys and observational checklists. The results section thematically categorizes the HRFs to feed into the development of the multi-criterial safety model – S.A.F.E.D (Secure, Automated, Feedback-Driven, Engagement-Based, Device-Facilitated). The paper concludes by examining the targeted approach of the safety model to minimize the HRF's impact on the current safety culture.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews existing literature related to common safety models and the intricacies of their functionality. The operations of the following four well-known safety models are investigated: Heinrich's Triangle Theory, Reason's Swiss Cheese Model, Safety Management Systems (SMS), and Behavior-Based Safety (BBS). Exploring and contrasting key elements that define these models can be found below.

Heinrich's Triangle Theory, introduced in 1931, is based on the connection between various safety incidents existing in the workplace. [9] The main takeaway is that high-severity safety accidents resulting in major injuries and fatalities are preceded by low-severity incidents and near misses. [9] [10] Frank E. Bird expanded on this theory, developing a four-tiered pyramid, where 1 serious injury is the result of 10 minor injuries, 30 property damage situations, and

600 near misses. [9] The conclusion is that prevention-focused environments that identify, report, and mitigate risky behavior (at all levels of the safety triangle) to prevent serious OHS incidents (at the top of the triangle). [11]

Existing arguments against this theory state that it is too optimistic and simplistic for modern situations, and that the sole focus of Heinrich's model needs to shift from man (and their failure) to the system of operation. [12] [13] Despite these criticisms, this theory is useful in a modern context as a communication and awareness tool for the main purpose of intervention at early stages. Even though the triangle's role in safety programs is complementary, not stand-alone, it encourages a proactive safety reporting and mitigation system to ultimately prevent the escalation of minor incidents into catastrophic injuries and fatalities.

Nearly 60 years later, James Reason's Swiss Cheese Model (SCM) was introduced and is now used in multiple industries. It is metaphorically presented as sequential layers of cheese with holes, that when momentarily aligned, open a passage for risks to pass through. [14] This implies that safety incidents are a result of various unsolved limitations [15]. This model has been critiqued by other researchers who describe the model as an oversimplification of system components, their interactions with each other, and their evolution over time [14]. Other criticisms entail the unrealistic blame placed on primarily senior management, neglecting the contribution of lower-level employees, regarding accidents. [14] Despite these limitations, this model has shaped safety initiatives by encouraging the strengthening of every layer to improve overall safety with a strong emphasis on redundancy. [15]

The next safety model reviewed is Safety Management Systems (SMS), starting in high-risk industries, and has now made its way across various sectors. Involving employee and management contributions, this framework depends on four pillars: [16] [17] [18]

1. Safety policy: official declaration and documentation of responsibilities and goals, illustrating safety commitment
2. Safety risk management: processes of identifying, assessing, and mitigating risks and hazards.
3. Safety assurance: activities related to monitoring and continuously improving safety.
4. Safety promotion: teaching and communicating to support safety values and attitudes

The key challenge with the SMS model is how much it limits flexibility and creates a bureaucratic environment. [19] The system heavily depends on both organizational commitment and employee engagement. [16] [17] It aims to achieve continuous improvement by integrating safety into organizational processes, rather than an independent system, ultimately improving the safety culture.

Despite the critical contribution of management, environment, and systems to the safety of an organization, another major safety contributor is human factors, entailing people's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. [20] [21] The final model reviewed, Behavior-Based Safety (BBS), has a focus on improving employees' attitudes and behavior to lessen their unsafe actions. [20] To develop a strong safety culture, this model is focused on identifying, analyzing, and reinforcing safe behaviors daily while discouraging risky actions. [22] The core elements include behavioral observations, feedback and coaching, behavioral checklists, data collection and analysis, and employee involvement. [23] [24]

Like the previous models in literature, the biggest critique is that the model is insufficient on its own and needs to include broader aspects to combat systemic concerns. [22] The model does not place enough responsibility on design flaws, poor management, or organizational limitations. [24] However, BBS is a powerful tool that improves employee accountability and overall safety stemming from attitudes and behaviors.

Heinrich's Triangle Theory, Reason's Swiss Cheese Model, Safety Management Systems (SMS), and Behaviour-Based Safety (BBS) all have different approaches to safety management. Heinrich's Triangle emphasizes the connection and consequential relationship between minor and major accidents. Meanwhile, Reason's Swiss Cheese Model introduces a layered theory of multiple systemic failures that align to allow accidents to occur. SMS provides a structured framework consisting of 4 pillars – safety policy, assurance, promotion, and risk management. Contrastingly, BBS is based upon employee participation, by building and reinforcing safety beliefs from the bottom up. The most common aspect among these models is the idea that proactive strategies prevent unsafe cultures. Additionally, all the models are prevention-focused and require systematic thinking with structured continuous improvement. After the models have been compared, the key takeaway is that no single model can fully address all the layers of safety. To combat high-risk environments, an integrated approach that combines these perspectives is more reliable.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to investigate the impact of HRFs on the safety culture in this manufacturing environment, yielding both quantitative and qualitative data. The specific data collection methods entailed a structured survey questionnaire and a systematic observational checklist to identify perceived and observable HRFs and their safety effects. Participants for both data collection methods consented to be a part of the study; the sample group included employees and managers within the Gates department.

Data regarding the attitudes and behaviours of workers and employees was retrieved through a survey questionnaire. This was developed based on Dillman's Tailored Design Method (TDM), which ensures a reliable and clear survey that focuses on user-friendliness through pilot testing. [25] The design of the survey measured participants' extents of agreement (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree) to safety and HRF-related statements. This resulted in the attainment of measurable data that was subjected to statistical analysis. Once responses were analysed using Microsoft Excel, the quantified data detected significant patterns and relationships to paint a clear picture of the current safety culture at company X.

By introducing a structured observational checklist to complement and validate the survey data, behavioural and contextual data were obtained. Day-to-day operations were observed using a reliable checklist designed from the Systematic Observation Method, which involves the use of a predetermined coding system to reduce observer bias. [26] Using a Likert scale, numerical values were associated with observations, where higher values correspond to greater agreement. [27] [28] Additionally, qualitative field notes were captured, documenting contextual factors, interactions, and safety concerns, which were later translated into thematically analysed qualitative results.

The mixed-method approach was utilized, resulting in data triangulation that ensured results that are valid. This clearly outlined the human reliability challenges affecting the facility, directly influencing recommendations for the targeted safety model.

4 RESULTS

The survey conducted on 14 participants yielded results that exposed the workplace dynamics of Company X, with data emphasizing trends, contrasting perceptions, and potential areas of improvement. Much of the survey data showed a clear disparity between the perceptions of the 10 employees and the perceptions of 4 managers, emphasizing a disconnect in safety culture, which can undermine safety effectiveness, morale, and trust. Table 1 displays managers' responses independently from those of employees to account for the contrast between the two groups. This is emphasized by survey responses regarding leaders' commitment to safety; most of the employees view that leaders in company X do not place great importance on the safety culture, and rather, the focus is on profitability.

Both survey data and the observational findings have been arranged within six subthemes, namely, training and expertise, work environment and conditions, workload and scheduling, employee wellbeing, procedure and plans, and safety culture indicators.

The Gates department's operations require uncomplicated skills where on-the-job training is often the only training required, making it simple to ensure employees are adequately prepared for their tasks, as displayed in Table 1 100% of survey participants viewed employees as having good overall skills. This is reinforced in Table 1, where 100% of management and 70% of employees agreed to the statement that training programs are complete and up to date. Management has thus enforced a skill-improving environment by promoting a versatile workforce capable of executing various tasks to ensure operational flexibility, with the department having a strong focus on learning and skill improvement. Additionally, safety incidents related to poor task execution are minimal since employees execute their tasks well, despite the ease of their operations. Contrastingly, safety incidents related to inadequate safety knowledge play a larger role since safety-related training is passive, unstructured, and inconsistent – optional and often outdated posts on a noticeboard. Management adopted an on-the-spot training approach following near-miss injuries, and the designated, yet undifferentiated, safety officer did not see modelling or enforcing safety practices. Therefore, employee responses to the survey question regarding the regularity of safety training were scattered, revealing a standard deviation of 1.179, indicating that the effectiveness of training is not adequate across the participant group, as illustrated in Table 1.

The observational checklist revealed blatant disorganization – pathway obstacles, unstructured WIP (work in progress) storage, damaged and B-grade products poorly secured within commonly used spaces. Additionally, evidence of neglecting annual deep cleaning operations was presented, and post-shift clean-ups merely entailed completing work in progress. This is reinforced in survey data shown in Table 1, by 70% of employees rejecting the statement: "The workspace is clean, bright, and organized." Furthermore, severely insufficient safety signs were observed considering the hazardous manufacturing environment in Company X, which justified the large standard deviation of 1.337 when employees were surveyed regarding the adequacy of safety signage. Employees had complaints regarding their PPE quality, maintenance, replacement, and procedures, resulting in ineffective PPE practices. The survey also revealed that despite the inadequacies mentioned above, Company X was excelling regarding the maintenance of equipment and tools in the facility, when 75% of managers and 80% employees had positive responses in this category, as seen in Table 1.

The effect of shift patterns and hours on employee performance and fatigue is minimal for all managers and only 30% of employees, revealing a large discrepancy in the survey data (Table 1). Whether the workload is distributed evenly is viewed differently by employees and management. This is caused by a clear contrast in how 'workload' is defined – management sees it as the contribution of employees to the production process, and employees view it as the difficulty that they experience in accomplishing their tasks. Explained by a welder who experiences strain from collecting and carrying all components from across the facility, yet according to the managers, he only joins small components.

The observational data revealed that there are two 12-hour shifts, over 60 hours of work per week. During each shift, employees are permitted three breaks (at even intervals, equating to 1 hour), and employee fatigue peaks toward the end of each shift. Employees' time management allows for safe execution of their tasks; furthermore, they are seen to abuse this safety time with phone over-usage, slower product movement, and break extensions.

Table 1: Survey questionnaire notable responses

		Participant response					
Statement	Participant role	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Standard deviation
Leaders care about and work to keep a strong safety	Managers				2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0.577
	Employees	2 (25%)	4 (50%)	1 (12%)	2 (25%)		1.118
Training programs are complete and up to date.	Managers				2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0.577
	Employees		2 (20%)	1 (10%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	1.135
All employees get regular safety training.	Managers				2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0.577
	Employees	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	6 (60%)	1 (10%)	1.179
Employees have good skills overall.	Managers				4 (100%)		0
	Employees			1 (10%)	5 (50%)	4 (40%)	0.675
There is a focus on learning and skill improvement.	Managers				1 (25%)	3 (75%)	0.5
	Employees	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	3 (30%)		1.16
The workspace is clean, bright, and organized.	Managers				3 (75%)	1 (25%)	0.5
	Employees	2 (20%)	4 (40%)	1 (10%)	3 (30%)		1.179
Safety signs and warnings are easy to see and understand.	Managers				4 (100%)		0
	Employees	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	1.337
Equipment and tools are well-maintained, in good	Managers			1 (25%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	0.816
	Employees		2 (20%)		6 (60%)	2 (20%)	1.033
Shift patterns and hours don't affect performance or	Managers				3 (75%)	1 (25%)	0.5
	Employees	6 (60%)	1 (10%)		3 (30%)		1.414
Employees manage their time well.	Managers			2 (50%)	2 (50%)		0.577
	Employees	1 (10%)		4 (45%)	4 (45%)		0.972
Standard procedures (SOPs) are clear and easy to find.	Managers			1 (25%)	3 (75%)		0.5
	Employees	1 (13%)	1 (13%)	1 (13%)	4 (50%)	1 (13%)	1.302
Emergency plans are reviewed and practiced regularly.	Managers			1 (25%)	3 (75%)		0.5
	Employees	5 (56%)		2 (22%)	1 (11%)	1 (11%)	1.563
Reporting safety concerns is clear and simple	Managers				2 (50%)	2 (50%)	
	Employees	5 (50%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)		
There are ways to keep employees physically healthy.	Managers			1 (25%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	0.816
	Employees	3 (38%)	1 (13%)	2 (25%)	1 (12%)	1 (12%)	1.512
Employees have access to mental health resources.	Managers			1 (25%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	0.816
	Employees	3 (43%)		3 (43%)	1 (14%)		1.254
Employees are encouraged to give feedback on safety	Managers			1 (25%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	0.816
	Employees	2 (25%)	1 (12%)	3 (38%)	2 (25%)		1.188

Company procedures and plans have a significant effect on the safety culture in an organization, which entails SOP management, emergency plan execution, and safety reporting. Table 1 reveals survey data with a large standard deviation of 1.302 regarding employees' perception of SOP access and clarity, suggesting difficulty for employees in this regard. The observational checklist clarifies this; SOP physical documentation is nonexistent at company X, with only practical adjustments. Additionally, emergency plans are drawn up without sufficient equipment, communication, practice, or emergency drills being executed. This was also supported by the alarm system's failure to reach the entire facility, and the survey results validate this, with 56% of employees strongly disagreeing that 'Emergency plans are reviewed and practiced regularly'. Furthermore, safety reporting from management to employees and vice versa is unclear, reactive, and lacks structure, as agreed upon by 80% of

employees who took part in the survey seen in Table 1. Many of the employees don't know how to report, and safety meetings and briefings are infrequent, almost non-existent.

Company efforts to ensure employees' well-being, physically and mentally, are important in the safety culture of any organization. Company X has no existing mental health support available, justifying the 86% of employees either disagreeing or being neutral regarding their access to mental health resources in Table 1. Proactive physical health measures exist, but are inadequate, with PPE provided but poorly managed, resulting in inconsistent usage. Reactive physical health measures include: a minimally equipped first aid room that does not have 24-hour accessibility, and a 2-member health and safety department that does not offer adequate support to employees, resulting in 75% of employees feeling the health and safety measures are inadequate, as seen in Table 1.

There are no formal safety meetings, engagements, activities, or feedback channels in the Gates department in company X. This has created an environment where employees feel reluctant to have safety discussions despite their eagerness to improve their situation. 75% of employees feel as if their safety feedback is not welcome, despite all management expressing that it is, as seen in Table 1. There is a lack of consistency and communication regarding the production manager's approach to risk assessments, strategies, and mitigation, and based on urgency after an incident. The overall safety culture, specifically from management, prioritizes production over safety.

The data collected from the survey and observational checklist revealed an overall need for improvement in safety culture at company X. Urgent areas of improvement can be viewed in the polar diagram in Figure 1 that illustrates a gap analysis. It shows how the current level of safety culture aspects is viewed against the improved level that the model aims to achieve. This figure shows that 'enforcing a skill-improving environment' is an area that which Company X is excelling and requires minimal intervention. However, urgent improvement is required in aspects like employee and management communication, SOP accessibility, emergency plans and alerts, hazard reporting, employee health efforts, and safety signage. Whereas the PPE Request system/procedure and safety training have existing systems in place that would benefit from improvements.

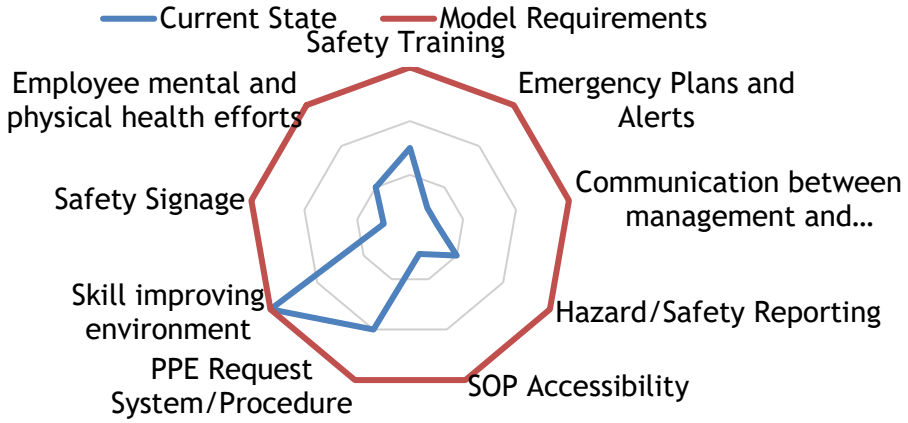

Figure 1: Current state of safety culture at Company X vs. model goals

5 S. A. F. E. D MODEL AND FEEDBACK FORMS

The gap analysis in Figure 1 illustrated the need for a safety model that addresses all the human reliability factors impacting the safety culture of the Gates department in company X. Therefore, the S.A.F.E.D. (Secure, Automated, Feedback-Driven, Engagement-Based, Device-

Facilitated) safety model was developed. The goal of this model is to foster a device-reliant and feedback-driven system where the above-mentioned concerns are counteracted collaboratively by management and employees daily. Employee engagement, leadership commitment, and alignment between the two parties are at the core of this model.

Without disrupting production, tablets facilitate feedback loops that are used to aid mitigation and continuous improvement. The Amazon Fire HD 10 tablet is chosen for its cost-effectiveness, battery life extending over an entire shift (over 12 hours), visibility and durability, and multiple accounts facilitation with management control. For each shift, 4 devices are needed, with each device having private accounts for 5 employees and a manager to encourage honest and personal feedback. Downtime storage and primary charging occur in the production manager's office during the alternative shift. When in use, the tablets will be mounted in low-risk areas where the Wi-Fi connection is strongest, with access to a secondary charging port to promote organization, safety, and ease of use. Device protection on various levels is accounted for with a military grade, ruggedized case, TASSKTO protective cover, and 9H hardness screen protector. In terms of theft, cameras monitor the facility, device location tracking is installed, and facility security performs checks on everyone entering and exiting Company X. The interface for the model is shown below in Figure 2.

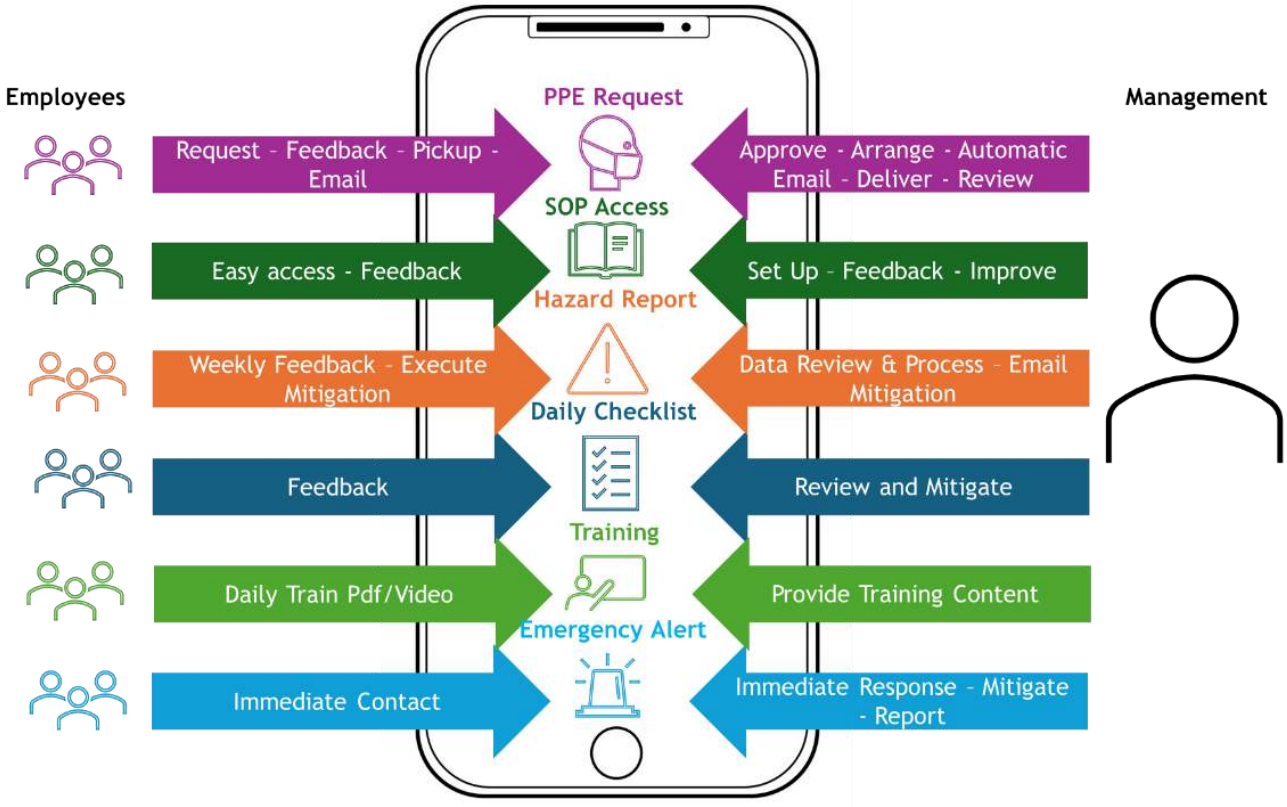

Figure 2: Final Safety model

This model has the added advantage of being scalable and adaptable – it can accommodate possible expansions of the Gates department and include other departments in Company X. It promotes employee accountability and empowerment with monitored safety processes and a platform for their voices to be heard. Furthermore, it encourages flexible leadership engagement when management communicates safety updates and mitigation instructions at a convenient time. Overall, by introducing a system where employees and management collaborate to improve safety, and by encouraging employees to report on incidents

anonymously creating a culture of openness is created. The data being transferred between management and employees promotes a constant safety feedback loop for continuous risk identification and mitigation. On a long-term basis, collected data feeds into monthly reports for management to monitor safety statistics.

The model has 6 key features that help connect employees and managers to improve safety culture. The PPE procurement system optimizes and controls the process of obtaining PPE while minimizing the effect on production time. Employees can privately report hazardous incidents with risk assessments and suggestions for solutions for management to analyze and respond with mitigation instructions appropriately. In addition to having a device-based alert system for emergencies, the model has daily micro-training content that can be covered by employees at any flexible time. The device also enables SOP access and a SOP feedback platform for employees. Managers obtain feedback from daily checklists regarding training, wellness and workload, work conditions, PPE, and device management. The model's features are discussed in more detail in this section.

In emergencies like fires and evacuations, the emergency alert aspect of the model consists of an SOS Alert app that ensures fast, clear and coordinated notification to relevant safety personnel, especially those outside of the gates department in Company X. This is an ideal solution to the current inadequate functional emergency equipment such as the alarm system that does not reach all areas of the facility. This provides a user-friendly and easy interface that, with 1 tap, enables immediate support to the hazard at the location of the tablet, from managers outside the facility. Additionally, emergency instructions and evacuation plans, which were previously not disclosed to employees, will now be accessible on every user's home page for quick and easy reference.

The next criterion of the model aims to automate and streamline the PPE procurement process. On the managerial side, the system includes a screening process to regulate and monitor distribution and potential misuse of PPE supplies (accessing more equipment than necessary), which are some of the managers' concerns. The model automates communication with PPE applicants using coded emails while collecting application data for inventory tracking, forecasting, and continuous improvements in quality and quantity. The goal of this feature is to enhance safety culture by improving the issuance process of PPE while facilitating consistent replacement practices to encourage standard PPE compliance.

5.1 S. A. F. E. D Model Request Forms

The online PPE request form for submitting requests is shown in Figure 3.

PPE Request Form

For PPE Requests, Complaints and Suggestions

1. Email _____
2. Employee Name _____
3. Work Position _____

☐Tube cutter
☐Bender
☐Driller
☐Small component maker
☐Welder
☐Knitter
☐Painter
☐Forklift Operator
☐Overhead Crane Operator

4. Type of PPE needed (only 1 item can be selected for each request form)

☐Helmet/Hard hat
☐Goggles
☐Hearing protection
☐Weld Mask
☐Weld Gloves
☐Paint Mask
☐Boots
☐Gloves (☐small ☐medium ☐large)
☐Overall pants (☐small ☐medium ☐large)
☐Overall top (☐small ☐medium ☐large)

5. Justification of Request

☐Lost
☐Damaged
☐Worn Out
Other: _____

6. Where and how did this occur

_____

7. What can stop it from happening again?

_____

8. Date of Last Issue: _____Example: 7 January 2019
9. Image Upload of damaged PPE (note: image authenticity may be reviewed by supervisors)
10. Suggestion Box! Do you have any suggestions, comments, complaints, questions, worries regarding PPE? All feedback is welcome

_____

Figure 3: PPE Request Form

Research data revealed the inaccessibility and possible nonexistence of SOPs, including ones related to safety, such as emergency plans. The model introduces easy and direct access to general and safety-specific SOP PDFs on the homepage of every device. This is not only a guide for existing employees to perform tasks safely and correctly, but also material for new trainees to learn from. This system eliminates workflow disruptions and time wastage attached to physically searching for SOPs, especially in emergencies. Lastly, the system consists of links for employee input to encourage employee feedback on tasks they have the most experience in, which can be seen in Figure 4. The overall benefits consist of lowering training costs and streamlining SOP accessibility to promote a proactive safety culture, while increasing employee initiative for the betterment of processes in the department.

SOP Suggestion Form

1. Employee Name: _____
2. Work Position:
   - □Tube cutter
   - □Bender
   - □Driller
   - □Small component maker
   - □Welder
   - □Knitter
   - □Painter
   - □Forklift Operator
   - □Overhead Crane Operator

   Other:
3. Which SOP are you suggesting a change for?

   _____
4. What can be included in the Sop to reduce the risk?

   _____
5. Does the SOP pose a safety risk? How?

   _____
6. Which Specific Step would you like to see improved?

   _____
7. What changes do you recommend for this SOP?

   _____
8. How do you believe this change would improve the SOP or process?
   - □Improves safety
   - □Saves time
   - □Increases accuracy

   Other:

   _____
9. How frequently do you use this SOP?
   - □Daily
   - □Weekly
   - □Monthly
   - □Rarely
10. Any additional Comments or Suggestions

    _____

Figure 4: SOP Suggestion Form

The risk management system of the S.A.F.E.D. safety model includes the hazard reporting form seen in Figure 5. This facilitates real-time safety and hazard reporting on the homepage of every device. This criterion of the safety model can be viewed as an indirect safety meeting that does not disrupt production time. By allowing employees to be heard, utilizing an easy-to-use interface, employees can develop safety-driven mindsets. Once employees identify and classify risks, management has valuable color-coded data for safety mitigation instructions for the relevant employees to execute, as well as proactive safety management to prevent recurring and worsening of unsafe situations.

Hazard Reporting Form

Section 1: Incident or Hazard Identification and Definition

1. Type of Hazard (only 1)

- ☐Spill or slippery surface
- ☐Equipment malfunction
- ☐Fire Hazard
- ☐Electrical hazard
- ☐Trip/fall hazard
- ☐Chemical Exposure
- ☐Medical
- ☐PPE issue
- ☐Facility ergonomic (unsafe obstructions)
- ☐The building inadequacy
- ☐The production process
- ☐Unhygienic
- ☐Maintenance
- ☐Peer review
- ☐Management review
- ☐Safety signage

Other: _____

2. Location of Hazard**:** _____

3. Date and Time of Incident: _____

4. Upload Evidence

Section 2: Severity and Frequency Assessment

5. How would you classify the risk according to the categories below

☐Unsafe Act ☐Near Miss ☐Minor Injury ☐Lost time/serious injury ☐Fatality

6. Potential Impact on operation

☐No impact ☐Minor ☐Moderate ☐Significant

7. Frequency of Occurrence

☐First time ☐Rare ☐Occassional ☐Frequent

Section 3: Reaction

8. Immediate Action Taken, if needed

☐No action taken ☐Warned others nearby ☐Marked or blocked off area ☐Notified supervisor

9. Suggested Countermeasure (What action/s do you recommend preventing or reduce this hazard?)

_____

Section 4: Safety Pillars

10. Does the hazard relate to existing safety policy non-compliance? Yes☐ No☐ Maybe☐

11. What Further Action Needed to Manage Risk?

_____

12. Would further training or awareness sessions help mitigate this risk? Yes☐ No☐

Figure 5: Hazard Reporting Form

This formalizes safety strategies that allow management to commit to safety procedures at a flexible time. Throughout this process, data is archived for trend analysis for big safety improvements on a large scale. This structured report system generates data for regular, long-term, and proactive safety monitoring that works towards an improved safety culture. Employees are continuously taught to perform their daily operations sufficiently, reducing the chances of error due to incompetence. However, this is not the case for safety tasks. Despite the employees' general idea of safety rules, there are no intentional or proactive lessons given by Company X; on-the-spot training reacting to near-miss injury, the safety marshal does not perform her duties (safety rule enforcement, informal training, and discipline), and a clear gap between policy and practice regarding safety.

The S.A.F.E.D. safety model counteracts this by incorporating micro safety training content while abiding by the constraint set by management of not disrupting production time. Therefore, short training PDFs, documents, and other resources are available daily on each device, to be reviewed flexibly by employees. To monitor employee interaction with the content, a daily checklist is filled out by each employee to reflect on safety lessons learnt. In conjunction with monitoring training, this checklist also investigates employees' perception of their work environment – conditions, wellness, and workload, with the intention of mitigating facility issues and trying to improve employee well-being.

The work conditions need improvement from their current unsanitary and disorganized state, which can be improved in stages based on feedback from employees and instructions from management. Decluttering positively influences employee performance and minimizes operational chaos, limiting the hazards and distractions that compromise safety. [29] [30] Daily clean-up sessions can be enforced and monitored properly, and this data can influence the timing of the annual deep clean. Additionally, employees can directly or indirectly alert management to safety signs that need to be included and equipment that needs to be maintained.

Regarding workload and scheduling, the current state involves an average employee's work week exceeding 60 hours. At the same time, studies have shown that surpassing 40 hours of work per week can cause performance deterioration, an increased injury rate, and poorer overall health. [31] These work hours exceed the maximum (9 hours per day) in South Africa, set out by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA). [32] Moreover, the current perception of uneven workload distribution can lead to perceived unfairness, decreased morale, and potentially impact overall safety performance. [33] Using this checklist, employees have a platform to report their concerns regarding fatigue, unfair work distribution, and insufficient time to avoid compromising employee alertness, resulting in accidents and risks. The checklist introduces mental health initiatives and facilitates a proactive physical health system. This checklist is presented in Figure 6 below, it encourages an environment of continuous improvement and accountability

Daily Checklist

1. Work Position

□Tube Cutter
□Tube Bender
□Driller
□Small component maker
□Welder
□Knitter
□Painter
□Forklift Operator
□Overhead Crane Operator
Other: _____

Section 1: Training

2. I completed my daily training today: Yes☐ No☐
3. I learnt the following in my training today:

Section 2: Work Environment and Conditions

4. I performed my post shift clean up yesterday: Yes☐ No☐
5. My workstation was clean when I got here today: Yes☐ No☐
6. The lighting and electricity are working in my workstation: Yes☐ No☐
7. There is a leak or spills near my workstation: Yes☐ No☐
8. Do you have any comments, suggestions, complaints, etc. with your work environment and

_____

Section 3: PPE

9. I'm wearing my overalls today: Yes☐ No☐
10. I'm wearing my safety boots today: Yes☐ No☐
11. I'm wearing my gloves today: Yes☐ No☐
12. I'm wearing my hard hat today: Yes☐ No☐
13. I'm wearing my safety goggles today: Yes☐ No☐
14. I'm wearing my welding mask today (welder): Yes☐ No☐

Workload And Scheduling

15. Did you experience fatigue today? Why?

_____

16. Was your break sufficient today? Why?

_____

17. Did you feel you like you performed you tasks safely today? Yes☐ No☐
18. Do you have any comments, suggestions, complaints, etc. with your workload and scheduling

_____

Employee Well being

19. Are you experiencing any difficulties or disruptions in your emotional, psychological, or social well-

_____

20. Do you have any comments, suggestions, complaints, etc. with how the company can assist with

_____

Figure 6: Daily Checklist

6 CONCLUSION

The research highlights the importance of effective safety management in manufacturing to help prevent incidents that can cause harm to employees as well as negatively affect the reputation of Company X. Data was analyzed from surveys and observational checklists to evaluate the human reliability factors that need to be mitigated within: training plans, work environment, safety procedures, work scheduling, and employee well-being. The contribution of the study includes the design of a safety model (S.A.F.E.D) aimed to resolve these using a device-based model with PPE acquisition digitization and automation, easily accessible SOPs and emergency plans, virtual safety meetings and briefings through feedback forms, safety micro-training, an emergency alert system, and daily checklists to monitor wellness, workload, training, and work conditions. Additionally, the model serves as a tool to maintain quality management and ensure production runs smoothly. This proactive approach to safety management fosters open safety discussions, employee engagement, and leadership commitment, all while minimizing disruptions to production. There is room for this model to improve by condensing the device-based approach into a singular and comprehensive app or software that has all the features in one place. The model is scalable and can be adapted to all departments within Company X to help facilitate long-term safety improvements by creating avenues for open communication between the employees and management.

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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix A: Instrument 1: Survey Questionnaire

Table 2: Survey Questionnaire Table

First name only					
What work do you do:					
How long have you been doing this work?					
Do you set safety rules or follow them?					
Tick your view on the following statements:	**Strong disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
1. Training programs are complete and up to date.					
2. All employees get regular safety training.					
3. New employees get good safety training when they start.					
4. Employees have good skills overall.					
5. Employees know how to follow safety procedures.					
6. Skills checks help find areas to improve and make safety better.					
7. There is a focus on learning and skill improvement.					
8. The workspace is clean, bright, and organized.					
9. Work areas are free from dangers like spills or obstacles.					
10. Safety signs and warnings are easy to see and understand.					
11. Equipment and tools are well-maintained and in good condition.					
12. Employees correctly use personal protective equipment (PPE).					
13. Shift patterns and work hours do not cause problems with performance or tiredness.					
14. Standard procedures (SOPs) are clear & easy to find.					
15. SOPs are updated often.					
16. Reporting safety concerns is clear and simple.					
17. Emergency plans are reviewed and practiced regularly.					
18. Safety meetings happen often and are of high quality					
23. Leaders care about and work to keep a strong safety culture.					
24. The organization listens and responds to safety concerns from employees.					
28. Work is spread out evenly among employees.					
29. There are ways to prevent employees from getting too tired (breaks, shift changes).					
30. Employees manage their time well.					
31. Employees have enough time to do tasks safely.					
36. There are ways to keep workers physically healthy.					
37. Workers have access to mental health resources.					
41. Employee feedback is welcomed and taken seriously.					

42. Risk assessments are done regularly.					
44. Safety performance is regularly checked and analyzed.					

8.2 Appendix B: Instrument 2: Observational Checklist

Observational Checklist for Human Reliability Factors Influencing Safety Culture, Rated by: Researcher Asilah Ellahi

Table 3: Observational Checklist Table

			Effectiveness of ratings				
			1	2	3	4	5
1. Training and Expertise	1.1 Training Programs	1.1.1. Are training programs comprehensive and up-to-date?	Not comprehensive, outdated.	Partially comprehensive, partially updated.	Comprehensive, but needs updates.	Mostly comprehensive and mostly UpToDate.	Fully comprehensive and fully UpToDate.
		1.1.2. Are all employees provided with regular safety training?	Rarely provided.	Occasionally provided.	Regularly provided but with gaps.	Regularly provided with minor gaps.	Consistently provided without gaps.
		1.1.3. Are new employees given a comprehensive safety orientation?	Not provided.	Partially provided.	Provided but lacking in detail.	Mostly comprehensive.	Fully comprehensive.
	1.2 Skill Level	1.2.1. How do you perceive the overall skill level of employees?	Very low skill level.	Minimal skill set	Average skill level.	Above average skill level.	Very high skill level.
		1.2.2. Do employees demonstrate competence in safety procedures?	Rarely competent.	Occasionally competent.	Generally competent.	Mostly competent.	Fully competent.
		1.2.3. How effective are the skills assessments in identifying areas for improvement and enhancing safety culture?	Not effective at all in identifying areas for improvement or enhancing safety culture.	Somewhat ineffective in identifying areas for improvement or enhancing safety culture.	Moderately effective in identifying areas for improvement and enhancing safety culture.	Effective in identifying areas for improvement and enhancing safety culture.	Highly effective in identifying areas for improvement and enhancing safety culture.

	1.3 Continuing Education	1.3.1. Is there an emphasis on continuing education and skill development?	No opportunities.	Few opportunities.	Some opportunities.	Many opportunities.	Extensive opportunities.
2. Work Environment and Conditions	2.1 Physical Environment	2.1.1. Is the workspace clean, well-lit, and organized?	Very poor conditions.	Below average conditions.	Average conditions.	Above average conditions.	Excellent conditions.
		2.1.2. Are work areas free from hazards (e.g., spills, obstructions)?	Very hazardous.	Some hazards.	Generally, hazard-free.	Mostly hazard-free.	Completely hazard-free.
		2.1.3. Are safety signs and warnings prominently displayed and understood?	Not displayed.	Displayed but not understood.	Displayed, but some confusion.	Mostly displayed and understood.	Fully displayed and understood.
	2.2 Equipment and Tools	2.2.1. Are equipment and tools regularly maintained and in good condition?	Rarely maintained.	Occasionally maintained.	Generally maintained.	Mostly maintained.	Fully maintained and in excellent condition.
		2.2.2. How well are personal protective equipment (PPE) protocols followed by employees, including correct usage, wear, and replacement?	PPE protocols are not followed at all by employees.	PPE protocols are rarely followed, with frequent misuse or neglect.	PPE protocols are somewhat followed, with occasional misuse or neglect.	PPE protocols are generally followed, with minor instances of misuse or neglect.	PPE protocols are strictly followed by all employees, with correct usage, wear, and timely replacement.
	2.3. Work Hours and Shift Patterns	2.3.1. How do shift patterns and work hours affect employee performance and fatigue levels?	Severely negatively impact employee performance and lead to high fatigue levels.	Negatively impact employee performance and contribute to significant fatigue.	A moderate impact on employee performance and fatigue levels.	Generally, support good employee performance, with manageable fatigue levels.	Optimize employee performance and minimize fatigue levels effectively.
3. Procedures and Plans	3.1 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)	3.1.1. Are SOPs clearly defined and	Not defined or accessible.	Partially defined or accessible.	Defined but not easily accessible.	Mostly defined and accessible.	Fully defined and easily accessible.

		accessible to all employees?					
		3.1.2. How often are the SOPs updated?	Never	Every 5-10 years	Every 1-5 years	Every year	Every month
		3.1.3. How clear and well-defined is the protocol for reporting safety concerns?	There is no clear protocol for reporting safety concerns.	The protocol for reporting safety concerns is poorly defined and rarely followed.	The protocol for reporting safety concerns is somewhat clear but inconsistently followed.	The protocol for reporting safety concerns is clear and generally followed.	The protocol for reporting safety concerns is very clear, well-defined, and consistently followed by all employees.
	3.2 Emergency Plans	3.2.1. Are emergency plans regularly reviewed and practiced?	Never reviewed or practiced.	Rarely reviewed or practiced.	Occasionally reviewed or practiced.	Mostly reviewed and practiced.	Regularly reviewed and thoroughly practiced.
		3.2.2. How frequently are safety briefings conducted?	Safety briefings are never conducted.	Safety briefings are conducted very infrequently (e.g., once a year).	Safety briefings are conducted occasionally (e.g., once every few months).	Safety briefings are conducted regularly (e.g., once a month).	Safety briefings are conducted very frequently (e.g., weekly or more often).
		3.2.3. How would you rate the quality of safety briefings?	Safety briefings are not informative or engaging, and do not contribute to safety culture.	Safety briefings are somewhat informative but lack engagement and impact on safety culture.	Safety briefings are moderately informative and engaging, contributing to safety culture to some extent.	Safety briefings are informative and engaging, contributing positively to safety culture.	Safety briefings are highly informative, engaging, and significantly enhance safety culture.
	3.3. Communication of Procedures	3.2.6. How effective is the emergency communication system in ensuring timely and accurate information dissemination?	Not effective at all, leading to delays and inaccuracies.	The emergency communication system is somewhat ineffective, with frequent delays and inaccuracies.	The emergency communication system is moderately effective, with occasional delays and inaccuracies.	The emergency communication system is effective, with minor delays and inaccuracies.	The emergency communication system is highly effective, ensuring timely and accurate information dissemination without any issues.
		3.2.2. How well do employees understand and follow communication	Employees do not understand or follow communication protocols	Employees have a limited understanding of communication	Employees have a moderate understanding of communication protocols and	Employees generally understand and follow communication	Employees have a thorough understanding and consistently follow communication protocols

		protocols during emergencies?	during emergencies at all.	protocols and rarely follow them during emergencies.	follow them inconsistently during emergencies.	protocols during emergencies, with minor lapses.	during emergencies without any lapses.
		3.2.5. How clear and accessible are the reporting protocols for safety concerns?	Reporting protocols are not clear or accessible at all.	Reporting protocols are somewhat clear but difficult to access.	Reporting protocols are moderately clear and accessible.	Reporting protocols are clear and accessible, with minor issues.	Reporting protocols are very clear and easily accessible to all employees.
	3.4 Supervision and leadership	3.4.1. How committed is leadership to promoting and maintaining a strong safety culture?	They show no commitment to promoting or maintaining a safety culture.	They show minimal commitment, with occasional mentions of safety culture.	They show moderate commitment, with some efforts to promote and maintain a safety culture.	They show strong commitment, with regular efforts to promote and maintain a safety culture.	They show exceptional commitment, with continuous and proactive efforts to promote and maintain a safety culture.
		3.4.2. How responsive is the organization to safety concerns raised by employees?	Safety concerns are ignored or dismissed.	Safety concerns are acknowledged but rarely acted upon.	Safety concerns are acknowledged and occasionally acted upon.	Safety concerns are acknowledged and usually acted upon promptly.	Safety concerns are promptly acknowledged and consistently acted upon in a timely and effective manner.
5. Workload and Scheduling	5.1 Workload Distribution	5.1.1. Balance and Fairness of Workload Distribution: Is the workload evenly distributed among employees?	Very unevenly distributed.	Somewhat unevenly distributed.	Neutral distribution.	Mostly evenly distributed.	Very evenly distributed.
		5.1.2. Adequacy of Measures to Prevent Worker Fatigue: Are there measures in place to prevent worker fatigue (e.g., adequate breaks, shift rotations)?	No measures are in place to prevent worker fatigue.	Measures to prevent worker fatigue are minimal and often ineffective.	Some measures are in place to prevent worker fatigue, but they are inconsistently applied or moderately effective.	Effective measures are in place to prevent worker fatigue, and they are usually applied consistently.	Highly effective measures are in place to prevent worker fatigue, and they are consistently applied and regularly reviewed for improvement.
	5.2 Time Management	5.2.1. Efficiency in Time Management: How well do employees manage their time?	Very inefficient.	Somewhat inefficient.	Neutral efficiency.	Mostly efficient.	Highly efficient.

		5.2.2. Sufficiency of Time Allotted for Task Completion: Are employees given enough time to complete tasks safely?	Consistently not given enough time to complete tasks safely, leading to rushed and unsafe practices.	Frequently not given enough time to complete tasks safely, often resulting in rushed work.	Sometimes, given enough time to complete tasks safely, but there are occasional periods of rushed work.	Usually given enough time to complete tasks safely, with rare instances of rushed work.	Consistently given more than enough time to complete tasks safely, with no instances of rushed work.
	5.3. Task Prioritization	5.3.1. Effectiveness of Task Prioritization for Safety and Efficiency: Are tasks effectively prioritized to ensure safety and efficiency?	Tasks are not prioritized, leading to frequent safety hazards and inefficiencies.	Tasks are rarely prioritized effectively, often resulting in safety risks and inefficiencies.	Tasks are sometimes prioritized effectively, with occasional safety risks and inefficiencies.	Tasks are usually prioritized effectively, minimizing safety risks and inefficiencies.	Tasks are consistently prioritized effectively, ensuring maximum safety and efficiency.
6. Team Dynamics and Collaboration	6.1 Team Communication	6.1.1. Clarity and Frequency of Team Communication: Is team communication clear and effective?	Very unclear.	Somewhat unclear.	Neutral clarity.	Mostly clear.	Very clear and effective.
	6.2 Problem-solving	6.2.1. Effectiveness of Collaborative Problem-solving: How well do teams collaborate to solve problems?	Very ineffective.	Somewhat ineffective.	Neutral effectiveness.	Mostly effective.	Very effective.
	6.3. Team Cooperation	6.3.1. Support and Cooperation Among Team Members: Do team members support and cooperate?	No support or cooperation among team members, leading to frequent conflicts and inefficiencies.	Rarely support or cooperate, which results in occasional conflicts and inefficiencies.	Sometimes support and cooperate, but there are still some conflicts and inefficiencies.	Usually support and cooperate, with minimal conflicts and high efficiency.	Consistently support and cooperate, fostering a highly efficient and harmonious work environment.
7. Employee Wellbeing	7.1 Physical Health	7.1.1. Availability and Effectiveness of Health Measures: Are there measures in place to ensure the physical health of employees?	No measures.	Few measures.	Some measures.	Many measures.	Extensive measures.

	7.2 Mental Health	7.2.1. Access to Mental Health Resources: Are mental health resources available to employees?	No access.	Limited access.	Some access.	Good access.	Excellent access.
		7.2.2. Attentiveness and Alertness During Work: How attentive and alert are employees during work?	Employees are consistently inattentive and frequently display a lack of alertness, leading to numerous safety risks and errors.	Employees are often inattentive and occasionally display a lack of alertness, resulting in some safety risks and errors.	Employees are sometimes attentive and alert, but there are occasional lapses leading to moderate safety risks and errors.	Employees are usually attentive and alert, with few lapses that rarely lead to safety risks or errors.	Employees are consistently attentive and alert, minimizing safety risks and errors, and contributing to a highly safe and efficient work environment.
8. Safety Culture Indicators	8.1. Employee Engagement and Participation	8.1.1. Do employees actively participate in safety meetings and initiatives?	Rarely attend or contribute to safety meetings, showing little to no engagement.	Attend some safety meetings but rarely contribute or show interest.	Generally, attend meetings and sometimes participate, but engagement is inconsistent.	Usually attend and actively participate in safety meetings, with considerable engagement.	Consistently attend, are highly engaged in safety meetings and initiatives, frequently contributing valuable input.
		8.1.2. Are employees encouraged to provide feedback on safety issues?	Employees are very rarely encouraged to provide feedback, with little to no avenues for input.	Employees are occasionally encouraged, but feedback mechanisms are limited or ineffective.	Employees are sometimes encouraged to provide feedback, with some systems in place to collect input.	Usually encouraged to provide feedback, effective systems collect and respond to input.	Employees are consistently and actively encouraged to provide feedback, with robust systems ensuring all input is considered and acted upon.
		8.1.3. Encouragement and reception of employee feedback	Feedback from employees is ignored or discouraged, with no visible action taken.	Feedback is sometimes acknowledged but rarely acted upon.	Feedback is generally received, with some actions taken, but improvements are inconsistent.	Feedback is usually welcomed and leads to visible improvements.	Feedback is actively sought, highly valued, and consistently results in improvements.
	8.2. Risk Assessment and Management	8.2.1. Are regular risk assessments conducted?	Rarely conducted, leading to	Conducted infrequently	Generally conducted but	Regularly conducted and are usually thorough.	Conducted frequently, thoroughly, and

			significant safety risks.	and are often incomplete.	may lack thoroughness.		effectively, identifying all potential risks.
		8.2.2. Are risk mitigation measures implemented effectively?	Rarely implemented, leaving many risks unaddressed.	Sometimes implemented, but are often ineffective.	Generally implemented but may not be fully effective.	Effectively implemented and addressing most risks.	Consistently implemented & highly effective in addressing identified risks.
	8.3. Safety Performance Metrics	8.3.1. Are safety performance metrics regularly monitored and analyzed?	Rarely monitored or analyzed, leading to poor safety performance.	Occasionally monitored, but analysis is inconsistent or incomplete.	Generally monitored and analyzed, but improvements are needed.	Regularly monitored and analyzed, contributing to good safety.	Often monitored, thoroughly analyzed, and continuously improved safety.

NATURE-INSPIRED STRATEGY FROM WAVE MASTERS: A BIOMIMICRY EXPLORATION ON SOUTH AFRICAN AQUATIC LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Over time, wave-exposed marine species have evolved behaviours that harness wave dynamics for survival. Biomimicry is the disciplined emulation of nature to achieve desired outcomes. This research identifies strategy-oriented characteristics that support sustainable innovation by extracting traits from South African marine species that use waves to their advantage. Strategic elements are distilled from published observations via a literature review and categorisation. Species were selected if they (i) are indigenous to South African waters, (ii) exhibit documented wave-adaptive behaviours, and (iii) have peer-reviewed behavioural descriptions that allow abstraction of strategy-oriented principles. Not only does this boast strategies that can boost sustainable innovation, but it warrants recognition for the accomplishments South African aquatic life has made over many years. Using the nature-inspired strategies presented in this research, organisations are able to challenge their status quo, redefine their modus operandi and innovate beyond existing competitors in a way that nature suggests.

Keywords: Biomimicry, Strategy, Sustainability, Innovation, Framework, South Africa.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Strategy has served as the cornerstone of societal advancement and gain. According to Carr [1], strategy is often seen as action in space and time. This deliberately configured dimension and careful balance have made the execution of strategy a business survival imperative. The most blatant source of survival instincts can be observed in nature.

Nature has persisted throughout complex and disruptive change. The mastery of any strategy requires patience and disciplined practice. In the natural world, many species exhibit precise, repeatable behaviours shaped by persistent turbulence and constraint. Similar to Jedi masters from the popular Star Wars franchise, the Jedi invest many years honing their abilities of the force to eventually become Jedi masters that demonstrate traits of leadership, strategy, wisdom and skill. In fact, leadership skills from Urick [2] demonstrated management styles that can be distilled from the franchise.

The concept of mastery is also evident in our natural world. Nature boasts solutions that demonstrate high levels of strategy carried out with precision. This organic solution space offers a resolution to many challenges today, as showcased by its track record in the literature [3]. Biomimicry is concerned with seeking inspiration from and designing solutions that are nature-inspired. This growing field fosters creativity, sustainability and innovation that can feature in any industry [4, 5].

South Africa faces many societal challenges. Those associated with innovation include a decline in employment-intensive sectors, low productivity and various forms of socio-economic disparity, as mentioned by Booyens and Hart [6]. Using sustainable innovation and national systems, one can help resolve these socio-economic challenges [7].

The application of nature-based solutions has also been explored by Botha [8] in South Africa as a form of nature-inspired leadership facilitated by the design of a thought model. This artefact effectively showcases the ability to turn to nature for inspiration. The findings were derived from studying nature in South Africa to improve leadership.

Water is among the most powerful forces in nature. It is commonly understood that Earth's surface comprises around 70% water [9]. It is here where waves become strong and formidable for species in nature. Arguably, the species that continuously interact with waves demonstrate high levels of strategy, leadership and resilience. Their operations require them to interact with unpredictable wave conditions. Consequently, these "wave masters" exhibit deep adaptation to the ocean environment and provide insights that can aid the way strategies are developed and executed in developing countries such as South Africa.

1.1 Research opportunity

Although biomimicry is well documented at the organism/form and process levels, reviews note that system- and strategy-level applications remain comparatively scarce and fragmented, with inconsistent terminology and methods [36–38]. Barriers to organisational uptake, including limited taxonomies for strategy, weak translation pathways from biology to managerial action, and a lack of evaluation frameworks are also reported [39]. In developing-country contexts, scholars argue for nature-inspired policy and strategy to leverage biodiversity for socio-economic development [40]. These gaps motivate the present study's strategy-level approach grounded in ecosystem principles and tailored to South African conditions.

An opportunity exists to learn from nature to better address sustainable innovation challenges in developing countries at a strategic level. It is for this reason that various strategies can be harnessed from the characteristics of South African aquatic life.

1.2 Research aim

The aim of this research is to identify strategic traits derived from wave-adaptive aquatic species in South Africa that support sustainable innovation.

1.3 Research objectives

The purpose of this research is tied to the following objectives:

1. Contextualise the scope of the study by defining the core subject matter
2. Apply Biomimicry to extract strategic elements from species in nature
3. Design a nature-inspired strategic framework for sustainable innovation
4. Validate the framework by assessing its alignment with Life's Principles

The literature review in section 2 provides a contextualised understanding of pertinent concepts associated with this research. Furthermore, the Biomimicry design spiral is proposed in section 3 as the methodology employed. The sea of literature is explored, and various strategies are captured and discussed in section 4 alongside the aforementioned artefact. Section 5 details the implications of the artefact from this research. Ultimately, the conclusions and recommendations are used to provide the core takeaways and way forward.

2 LITERATURE BACKGROUND

2.1 Biomimicry

The notion of nature-inspired or nature-based solutions in engineering is strongly believed to have been pioneered by the innovator Leonardo Da Vinci. The groundbreaking advancements in engineering are seen as the early onsets of Biomimicry [10]. Much of his accolades stem from his drawings that detail futuristic concepts such as flapping machines inspired by the anatomy of birds [11].

After many more nature-based inspirations were employed, the term Biomimicry was coined and simply defined as emulating nature's genius [12]. This practice solves human problems by intricately combining technology and biology to create sustainable designs and innovations [13]. The success stories of Biomimicry have also formalised the field of Biomimetics, which explores biologically inspired technologies. Biomimetic solutions sampled from Bar-Cohen [14] include applications of controlled adhesion, structures, defence and attack mechanisms, bio-sensors and robotics, only to highlight a few. These advances welcome waves of innovation that have brought about change to society. Yet, there remains the issue of the sustainable trajectory of this, which is often challenged by a lack of prioritisation for sustainability investments.

The use of Biomimicry can feature at the product (micro), process (meso) and systems (macro level). As elaborated by Botha [8], the application of Biomimicry on a systems level has been termed as "system mimicry". This term speaks to the interconnected nature of challenges that persist in developing countries.

2.2 Sustainable Innovation

The term sustainability seeks to ensure that the current needs are met without compromising future prosperity in an inclusive society [15]. The dimensions of sustainability are economy, society and the environment, which have varied forms of interaction that can be seen as siloed, mutually inclusive or embedded within each other [16].

Innovation is often seen as the process of combining various functions within organisations to develop and implement new or improved products, processes or ideas [17]. Innovation is also not always new, and may take the form of technological, process, product, service, business model, disruptive and radical, design-driven, social and responsible innovation [18]. In effect,

it is innovation that ensures business competitiveness and responsiveness to a dynamic environment [19].

According to Booyens and Hart [6], South Africa is confronted with challenges of underdevelopment, poverty and skewed spatial patterns of innovation and research focus. This innovation asymmetry not only affects the innovation cycle but also implicates all relevant stakeholders in maximising their value capture. As for the sustainability considerations, it is only if this is sustainable that it will promise an equitable and prosperous societal gain.

This innate relationship between sustainability and innovation has led to the dual perspective on sustainable innovation. As defined by Hautamäki and Oksanen [20], sustainable innovation considers the far-reaching and long-term impacts synchronised with the innovation process by balancing the economic, social and environmental factors at play. This high interconnection creates multiple goal adherence that meets the environmental targets of the organisation while creating or maintaining its competitive advantage [21].

Similar convoluted interactions exist between technological innovation, process innovation and environmental strategy. The research from Čater, *et al*. [22] suggests that by greening the processes, the environmental strategy and overall outcome of an initiative remain beneficial to the organisation. Advice from literature suggests inculcating high sustainability mindsets and sustainability performance and deliberately searching for sustainability-based opportunities [23]. This feature is also able to compliment ecological modernisation theory.

2.3 Strategy

Strategy concerns itself with the selection process of the activities an organisation will execute according to well-defined goals, competitive forces and cost [24] . Porter [25] defines early answers as a crucial determinant of firm success amidst challenges in theory building, the chain of causality, time horizon and empirical testing.

Carr [1] argues that strategy is “action in space and time”. The author continues to argue that strategic behaviour is built on the fabric of time, even though this phenomenon is neglected in the literature. Four strategic behavioural concepts for strategies are proclaimed, namely order, duration, significance and transition.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Variations of the Biomimicry models exist in the literature. The most prominent forms are the Challenge to Biology and Biology to Design models from the Biomimicry Institute [26]. Problem-oriented research typically warrants the use of the Challenge to Biology model, whereas opportunity or more exploratory research calls for the Biology to Design model. The former seeks to design a biomimicry solution using a defined problem where functions are abstracted from nature. In contrast, the Biology to Design approach turns to nature for intuitive impressions since it is more solution-oriented than the Challenge to Biology approach. This research will therefore employ the Challenge to Biology model since natural models in the ocean will be studied to retrieve strategic elements to solve for sustainable innovation. The steps have been visualised in Figure 1.

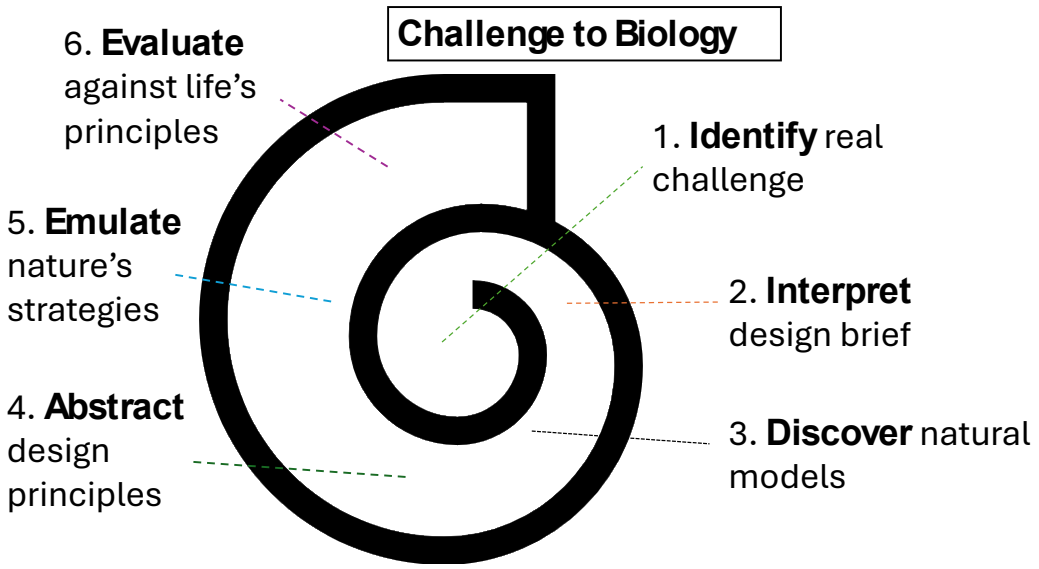

Figure 1: Challenge to Biology methodology from Biomimicry Institute [26]

This research is structured according to the Challenge to Biology methodology, deliberately casting the structure of section 4. It is because of this design spiral that the explicit stages are used to ensure that the nature-inspired solution promotes sustainable innovation. This real challenge is first formulated using the research components details in section 1. The design brief is more closely associated with the aim and speaks to the specifications needed for the design (strategic framework). Thereafter, the discovery stage tasks the researcher with familiarising and contextualising themselves with the natural models. The abstract phase extracts design principles that can be used as sources of inspiration from the natural models explored using literature and AskNature. For the purposes of this research, the abstraction will be done specifically using South African aquatic life. Using these sources of inspiration, nature is emulated by designing a strategic framework for sustainable innovation. The last stage requires evaluation of the Biomimicry solution using Life's principles. This validation framework allows biomimicry solutions to be evaluated against nature-inspired traits and explore the degree to which the solution conforms to the notions of Biomimicry.

4 BIOMIMICRY APPLICATION: NATURE-INSPIRED STRATEGY

4.1 Identify the real challenge

Based on the literature overview and research opportunity, developing countries are challenged with pathways to sustainable innovation. Hence, the real challenge is that there are limited strategic elements for sustainable innovation.

4.2 Interpret the design brief

The design brief is to develop a strategic framework that embodies elements for sustainable innovation using nature as a source of inspiration. Different solution spaces are thus needed. The discovery phase first needs to consider sustainability and sustainable innovation Biomimicry solutions before abstracting directly from South African aquatic life.

4.3 Discover natural models and abstract design principles: strategies from nature

4.3.1 Sustainability

Biomimicry instinctively aspires to ensure sustainability in the notions and content of its solution [13, 27]. The work of Llieva, et al. [28] provides a Biomimicry framework on

sustainability focus areas plotted on a Cartesian plane. This has been further distilled and clustered into Table 1.

Table 1: Biomimicry for Sustainability Framework summary crafted from Llieva, et al. [28]

Biomimicry dimension	Sustainability focus	Biomimicry Solution
Innovation	• Techno-centric aims • Novel solutions • User-product interactions • Commercial interests	• De Mestral's Velcro • JR West's Bullet Train • Neri Oxman's Silk Pavilion
Net-Zero Optimisation	• Optimise performance • Technical focus on reducing impact	• JR West's Bullet Train • Neri Oxman's Silk Pavilion • ITKE's Flectofin
Societal Transformation	• Changes in societal scale • Redesign within planetary boundaries • Systemic perspective	• Yaniv Peer's Mobius Project • BioHaven's Floating Islands
Biosynergy	• Human-nature interactions • Rethink human ends • Generative impact on nature	• BioHaven's Floating Islands

The various Biomimicry solutions speak to set sustainability focus areas with a fixed or flexible mimesis that are either nature passive or active. The sustainability focus areas seeks to rehabilitate and improve ecology and environmental gain by being regenerative and conscious of the environmental impact. The innovation-related Biomimicry solution entails answers that have been commercialised into products readily available and popular today. It is therefore suggested that a Biomimicry innovation that is sustainable sparks commercial interest and is novel. Furthermore, the solution must be techno and user-centric in its design.

Nature has long since proven that it can be sustainable, and so it is often believed that Biomimicry solutions are naturally sustainable [12]. The biomimicry solutions tied to sustainability focus areas all demonstrate efficient and effective sustainability enabling through specific Biomimicry dimensions formulated in Table 1. This application is not purely associated with sustainability, but also various forms of innovation are motivated by Metz, et al. [23].

De Pauw, *et al.* [29] emphasise that strategies which learn from nature entail Biomimicry, Nature Capitalism and Cradle to Cradle strategies which positively impact business processes, product design, as well as the type and the number of materials used.

4.3.2 Sustainable Innovation

AskNature is a Biomimicry solution that contains a repository of numerous natural species where functions can be observed and searched for [30]. AskNature queries were seeded from its function taxonomy (i.e., reduce drag, manage shear, dampen oscillations, channel flow, co-ordinate) and from behaviours typical of wave-exposed species (i.e., porpoising, hydrodynamic efficiency, co-operative herding sensory navigation), synonyms were iteratively expanded with Boolean operators and retained when pilot searches returned South African occurrences. This platform has been used to search for sustainable innovation which was by default segmented into innovation and strategy species. The search only revealed two forms of species known for their biological strategy. The core strategy from the bottlenose dolphin entails peer-to-peer learning which aids in spreading innovations rapidly. This learning directly embodies effective knowledge management through the innovation process for it to be sustainable. On the other hand, grazing animals demonstrate the sustainable use of land. This directly translates to strategic and careful use of resources that reduces material consumption. The segmented forms of functions for innovation and strategy directly extracted from Ask Nature were the following [30]:

- Break down (5)
- Get, Store, or distribute resources (4)
- Maintain community (2)
- Make (12)
- Modify (7)
- Move or stay put (4)
- Process information (1)
- Protect from physical harm (18)

Using AskNature [30], the functions of sustainable innovation were searched in order to identify natural systems with the number of case studies in parentheses above. These natural systems included the composite technologies inspired by the Mantis Shrimp, cement supplements from the oceanic mineralisation of calcium, material design using marine sponge, marine phytoplankton inspiring optimisation software, chemical additives and coatings from seaweed and Salvinia water fern.

A two-level codebook (Level-1 Function codes aligned with AskNature taxonomy nodes; Level 2 Strategy codes expressing abstract principles) was developed. Axial coding was then applied to cluster the Level 2 Strategy codes into the three Whirlpool strategy types: Stabilise & Simplify; Co-ordinate & Shape; Adapt & Amplify. Strategies can now be abstracted from the functions provided from AskNature by searching for sustainable innovation. Break down speaks to work breakdown structures, resource use into utility and resource utilisation. Maintaining community is tied to social cohesion. Aspects associated with make, modify and move are implicitly associated with manufacturing or service activities that can be strategically managed using operations management. Information processing can be made metaphorical with IT and information support structures, with measuring and monitoring as strategic elements. Health and safety are hinted at by the protect from physical harm function in nature.

4.3.3 Strategy from South African aquatic life

Adhering to the application of Biomimicry, the solution should be contextual and situated within the same environment as the problem. This means that this research will need to consult South African aquatic life for inspiration on strategies to aid with sustainable innovation. Therefore, a literature review was conducted and led to the formation of the following strategic elements that are inspired by South African aquatic life and feature in Table 2.

Table 2: Strategic elements abstracted from nature

Aquatic life	Skill	Strategic element
Tigerfish	Rapid movement	Quick Strategic decision making
	Predatory skills	Red Oceans mindset on competitiveness
Yellowtail	Hydro-dynamic design for high speed and efficient swimming	Reconfigure and enhance resources according to environmental and technological landscapes [22]
Cape fur Seal	Co-operative hunting	Teamwork and social cohesion
	Individual foraging	Delegating to subject matter experts
Common bottlenose dolphin	Wave-riding	Strategic coasting to be conservative and build capacity
African penguin	Porpoising	Low leverage point execution (using existing momentum)
		Leapfrogging
Great white shark	Electroreception-driven sensing	Reliance on monitoring systems for decision making
	Breaching to disorient prey	Effective marketing strategy

Strategy abstractions follow a conservative logic: first, each behaviour is grounded in a well-described biomechanical or ethological function; second, that function is translated into a managerial analogue that preserves the constraint–response structure (e.g., energy minimisation → resource-efficiency pacing; co-ordinated foraging → role clarity and synchronised execution); third, a strategic element is ascribed only where the managerial analogue can be operationalised (e.g., measurable change in cycle time, resource intensity, or co-ordination latency). This discipline avoids loose metaphors and ensures a traceable line from observation → function → strategic principle → managerial lever.

Tigerfish possess rapid movement which is analogous to speed. This has been further associated with the notion of quick decision-making. Their predatory skills can be seen as. Red oceans mindset. The careful use of resources are emphasised by yellowtail swimming. Social cohesion and task delegation are retrieved from the South African seal's hunting and foraging behaviour. The intent of wave-riding is synonymous with the notions of strategic coasting. Interestingly, porpoising surfaced as a result. This act of propelling finds mammals leaping into the air at high speeds to breathe air through highly resistive surface regions before entering the surface layer with less resistance [31]. This can be seen as leapfrogging past infrastructure requirements and using low leverage point capabilities in business execution.

4.4 Emulate: Biomimicry wave-inspired strategic framework for sustainable innovation

Wave mastery has been showcased by South African aquatic life. These strategic traits are not particular to South African species, since many similar species have the same genetics in the same way that sustainable innovation challenges exist in other parts of the world. In order to emulate, this would be rather complex since more than one species provides strategic elements. To sidestep this design challenge, it becomes apparent that the forces of water can be consulted for further inspiration. This led to the design inspiration of a whirlpool embodying the nature of the solution. A whirlpool is a formidable force that can amplify waves, refract or diffract and also interact with existing waves. The preceding results from section 4 have been modified and pieced together in the Whirlpool framework for sustainable innovation as illustrated in Figure 2.

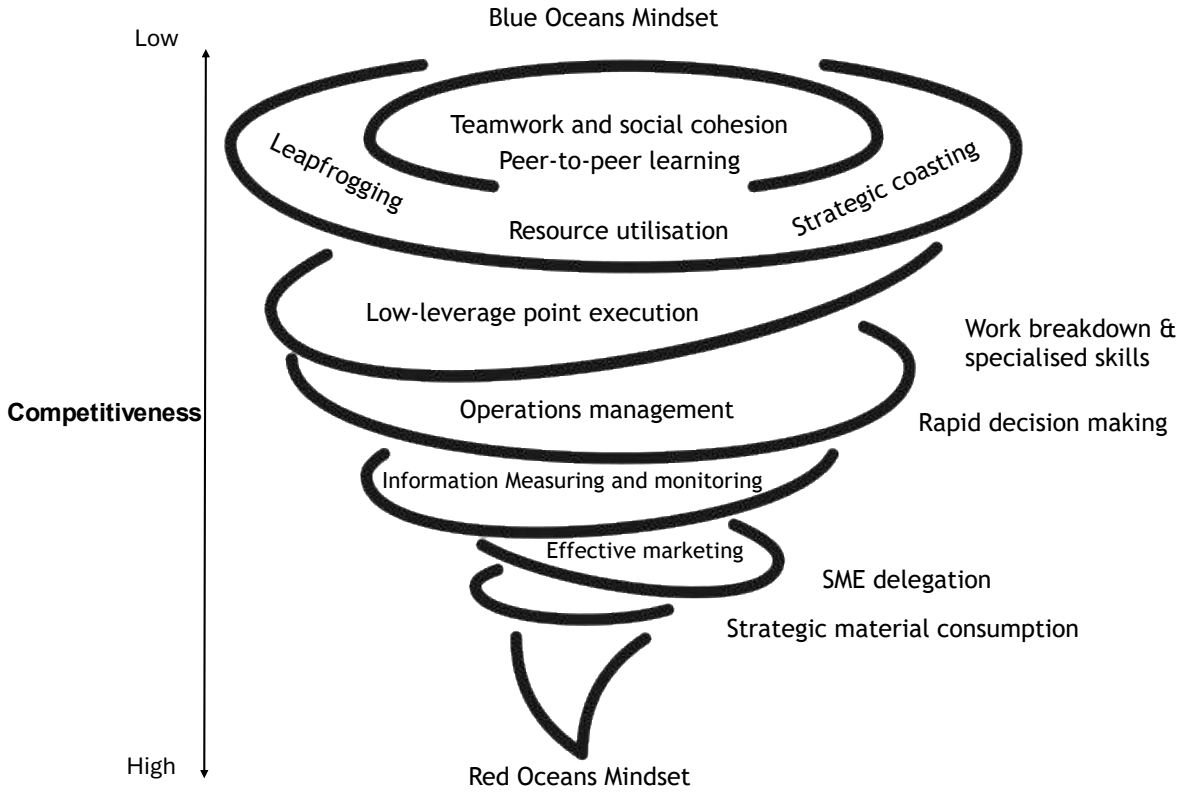

Figure 2: Whirlpool framework for sustainable innovation

The velocity of a whirlpool is such that the centre has increased velocity. The depth of this framework is such that high competitiveness features lower down where gravity and pressure (competition) are at their highest. The beginning of the whirlpool has less pressure, more flexibility and a high risk appetite. Certain strategies lie outside the whirlpool, which are seen as aspects which are unspecific to the type of strategy would ensues. Similar to the flow of water in a whirlpool, it increases over time and is almost linear. However, this framework welcomes varied sequencing with non-specific duration in accordance with the strategy components for strategic behaviour using space and time from Carr [1]. The strategies are nature-inspired and communicated using the whirlpool phenomenon in nature which has a direct impact on waves. It is also important to highlight that this model is from a systems level which aligns with the systems level strategic implementation needed to ensure sustainable innovation. The framework incorporates a simple monitor–review–adjust loop to support short, low-risk learning cycles.

To ensure this promotes sustainable innovation, the innovation sustainability focus areas from Llieva, *et al*. [28] are revisited. The design has a techno and user-centric focus since it considers human interaction, information measuring and monitoring elements. Commercial interests are considered since this promotes sustainability and innovation as a novel solution.

Using the wave-mastery from aquatic life, developing countries similar to South Africa can compete in a red oceans or blue oceans space, innovate, market effectively, leapfrog, improve operations and resource consumption and measure and monitor their performance which allows them to improve their modus operandi and redefine their status quo.

The Whirlpool Framework is a heuristic, not a universal prescription. Its effectiveness depends on context—particularly baseline process telemetry, the capacity to run short, low-risk experiments, and sufficient partner density for coalition pilots. It does not replace domain-

specific constraints (for example, regulatory, safety, or environmental requirements) and may be inappropriate in high-reliability settings where variation is tightly controlled. Elements should be tailored to organisational maturity and sector conditions; mis-analogy risks are mitigated by limiting each mapping to a single mechanism to principle to strategy element and by monitoring KPIs for unintended effects.

4.5 Evaluate: Framework validation using Life's Principles

Biomimicry 3.8 presents its Life's Principles model, which serves as a validation mechanism ensuring that a Biomimicry design creates conditions conducive to life [32]. It also helps ensure that the design or artefact contains the core traits of a Biomimicry solution. Table 3 details the principle, description and justification provided by applying the framework.

Table 3: Framework validation using Life's Principles from Biomimicry3.8 [32]

Life's Principle	Descriptors	Justification
Adapting to changing conditions	Maintain integrity through self-renewal	Uses adaptive aquatic life that mimic adaptive strategies
	Incorporate diversity	Includes a diverse range of South African marine life
	Embody resilience	Built using resilient aquatic life.
Be locally attuned and responsive	Use readily available materials and energy	Not catered for in framework
	Cultivate cooperative relationships	In need of field testing but contains aspects tied to social cohesion
	Leverage cyclic processes	Cyclic nature of spiral inspired from Biomimicry design spiral
	Use feedback loops	Monitor-review-adjust loop
Integrate development with growth	Combine modular and nested components	Combines and consolidates various strategic elements.
	Build from the Bottom-up	Not catered for in framework since the solution functions across the entire strategic level without creating hierarchy
Be Resourceful with material and energy	Use multi-functional design Use low energy processes Recycle all materials Fit form to function	Not catered for in framework explicitly since it encourages resource efficiency from a strategic level
Use life-friendly chemistry	Employ elegant processes Use a small subset of elements Do chemistry in and with water Break down into Benign and useful constituents	No explicit link with chemistry
Evolve to survive	Replicate strategies that work	Evidenced by the success of species and their performance in nature
	Integrate the unexpected	The sequential piecing of strategic elements considers adaptive traits that help with unpredictable environments
	Reshuffle Information	Unfortunately, not since the strategies are sequenced

The Life's Principles validation can be read alongside the sustainability pillars to clarify impact pathways. At the Stabilise & Simplify ring, strategies that "reduce drag before adding power" primarily drive economic efficiency (cycle-time and defect reduction), while simultaneously improving environmental performance by lowering material and energy intensity, and supporting social outcomes through safer, standardised work practices. At the Co-ordinate & Shape ring, coalition pilots and shared infrastructure enhance economic value via market-shaping and risk-sharing, strengthen environmental performance by avoiding duplicated assets and enabling higher utilisation, and advance social outcomes through partner inclusion, supplier development, and fair value splits. At the Adapt & Amplify ring, short learning cycles and modular scale-out foster economic resilience (risk-adjusted ROI across a portfolio of small

bets), improve environmental fit through local attunement and circularity measures, and reinforce social performance by embedding feedback loops with workers, partners, and communities. Representative indicators include: economic—resource productivity, cycle-time, partner retention, risk-adjusted ROI; environmental, material/energy intensity, waste diversion, emissions intensity; social—safety incident rate, knowledge-diffusion/learning participation, partner equity/retention.

This framework abstracts strategy principles from published behavioural observations; as such, it inherits the biases and gaps of the underlying literature (e.g., charismatic-species bias, uneven observational depth). Ecological functions are simplified to yield managerially useful principles; this risks over-generalisation outside wave-exposed or coastal operating contexts. The Whirlpool rings indicate sequencing logic but are not prescriptive and do not guarantee performance without local attunement. Finally, validation used Life's Principles as an alignment check rather than an outcomes evaluation; empirical testing in specific sectors and locations is required to quantify effect sizes across the economic, environmental, and social pillars.

5 IMPLICATIONS ON STRATEGY AND BIOMIMICRY

The findings from this research reveal an array of strategic elements which can be pieced together to build an effective and sustainable business strategy for an organisation. Nature serves as a model, measure and mentor [32]. This framework can cascade into mathematical or mental models which distil strategic elements into more actionable, specific methodologies, tools and techniques. It can be used to benchmark and set KPIs that speak to sustainable innovation. The strategies can serve as a mentor to other organisations, sites within the organisation or even industries.

Considering that these strategic elements have been formalised generically, the solutions appear non-specific to any sector within South Africa. Nevertheless, the findings and strategic elements are able to spur on sustainable innovation.

When revisiting the phrasing of systemsmimicry, Troncale [33], the manner of being nature sensitive to its interaction and response to its environment is emphasised. Despite the artefact from this research exploring sustainable innovation using South African marine life, systems mimicry could explore larger natural systems that mimic systemic behaviour and problem analogies that can be made with sustainability, innovation and sustainable innovation as distinct problem areas.

Considering that this research divulged strategic-level aspects from nature, future research could consider the lower business execution levels, namely, tactical and operational aspects from nature. Similar to the cascading application stream suggested Roopa, et al. [34] for a sustainable competitive advantage using industrial engineering and environmental sustainability knowledge, one could define a Biomimicry application stream with explicit forms of theory and practice within organisations.

One aspect not explicitly addressed was the prospect of frugal innovation, which is most commonly adopted in developing countries. Frugal innovations seek to make affordable solutions available for sustainable development by generating more value with fewer resources [35]. Nature can be resourceful, and so a noteworthy research avenue can explore the concept of frugal innovation within Biomimicry contexts.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study identified strategy-oriented traits from wave-adaptive South African aquatic species and abstracted them into a Whirlpool framework that sequences principles across Stabilise & Simplify, Co-ordinate & Shape, and Adapt & Amplify. In line with the research aim and

objectives, the work (i) contextualised the strategic challenge of sustainable innovation in developing-country settings, (ii) extracted strategy elements from documented behaviours using a transparent search and coding approach, (iii) designed a nature-inspired strategic framework, and (iv) validated its alignment with Life's Principles, highlighting strengths and explicit gaps. Practically, the framework offers a structured pathway to reduce resource intensity, improve co-ordination, and accelerate learning while remaining locally attuned.

Future work should focus on sector-specific pilots in South Africa that co-design indicators for each ring, quantify economic, environmental, and social outcomes, and iterate the framework using longitudinal feedback.

Industrial Engineers are not only future system-mimics, but masters of strategic time and space. Similar to the proposition of wave mastery, the Industrial Engineer is already seen as a master of integration, but now, too, may become a master of strategy.

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SHIFTING GEARS: A SYSTEMIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON UNLOCKING PROFIT POTENTIAL THROUGH OPTIMIZED AFTERSALES SERVICE FACILITY DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Aftersales service centers hold significant profit potential for the automotive industry, yet this opportunity remains underutilized. This study investigates the role of facility design in optimizing aftersales service centers to enhance efficiency and profitability. A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted to collect, analyze, and report on the key drivers and barriers influencing effective facility layouts in this sector. The findings highlight the advantages and limitations of various facility designs, showcasing case studies of successful implementations. By identifying best practices and critical success factors, this study provides valuable insights into optimizing spatial planning, workflow efficiency, and customer experience in aftersales service centers. The results contribute to the development of improved facility layouts, offering strategic guidance for future design considerations in the automotive aftersales industry. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of facility design as a key enabler of operational excellence and revenue generation.

Keywords: Facilities design, SLR, Aftersales service centers, Automotive industry

1 INTRODUCTION

Aftersales service operations, although not the traditional primary service provided within the automotive industry, is still a major contribution to profitability. Essential maintenance, repairs and part replacements are done at aftersales service centres, with a goal to foster long-term customer relationships, leading to recurring revenue. Providing consistent quality services builds trust and loyalty between a dealership and a customer [14]. However, inefficiencies within these service centres can be detrimental to profitability and customer satisfaction.

Facility design is a key factor in the performance of aftersales service centres. A layout which is well designed can enhance productivity and improve workflow, while a poorly designed facility can lead to bottlenecks and wastage of time and space. Poor after-sales support can prevent companies from achieving a good customer satisfaction record and therefore growth [15].

Despite the recognised importance of facility design in manufacturing and service environments, there is a lack of research that specifically addresses aftersales service centres in the automotive sector. However, analysis will be done on existing literature available in this field, as well as research on facility layout optimization in related sectors. In doing so, this review will identify key drivers and barriers influencing key requirements of aftersales service centres.

Ultimately, this research seeks to provide valuable insights and strategic guidance for future facility design considerations in the automotive aftersales industry. The contribution of this literature review is to synthesize the fragmented research available on facility design in this sector, to create a framework for linking facility design concepts to operational requirements of automotive service centres, and to outline a research agenda as direction for future work.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A Systematic Literature Review was conducted, to collect data in pursuit of achieving the research aim. The SLR method formulated by Albliwi et al [12], providing a step-by-step method to writing such a paper, was used as guidance for this SLR. These steps are summarised as follows:

- **Step 1: Develop a research purpose and/or objective** – Define the aim and focus of the SLR.
- **Step 2: Develop research protocol** – Create a research protocol defining the objectives of the SLR, criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of studies, databases, keywords and quality
- assessment criteria
- **Step 3: Establish relevance criteria** – Provided reasoning to decide whether a study is applicable or not.
- **Step 4: Search and retrieve the literature** – Find literature by searching on applicable databases.
- **Step 5: Selection of studies** – select studies based of the inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- **Step 6: Quality assessment for relevant studies** – Assess the quality of each paper
- **Step 7: Data extraction** – Extract relevant information from the papers
- **Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings** – Analyse and synthesise the data from the papers to find themes and patterns
- **Step 9: Report** – Report the review in detailed results
- **Step 10: Dissemination** – Publish the SLR

2.1 Step 1 - Develop a research purpose

The purpose of this research was to investigate the role of facility design in optimizing aftersales service centres

2.2 Step 2 – Develop a research protocol

Table 1 defines the research protocol used to search, select and assess existing research in literature relevant to facility design in aftersales service centres. Inclusion criteria, keywords and quality assessment criteria are defined.

Table 1Research review protocol (Structure adapted from Xiao et al. [13]

Purpose of the study	The purpose of this research was to investigate the role of facility design in optimizing aftersales service centres.
Inclusion criteria	• Literature that includes "automotive industry" or "service", and "facility layout" in the title, abstract or keywords. • Literature that explores the key drivers and barriers influencing • effective facility layouts in this sector
Exclusion criteria	• Literature published before 2015 (greater than 10 years old) • Non – English studies
Search databases	• Scopus • Science Direct • EBSCOhost • IEEE Xplore
Keywords	("facility layout" AND ("automotive industry" OR "service"))
Quality assessment criteria	• All duplicates removed • Literature must be relevant to automotive industry • Literature must be relevant to facility layout • Studies must be scientific

2.3 Step 3 - Establish relevance criteria

Studies specific to the facility design of aftersales service centres were not found, thus, to broaden the net and to ensure that studies are relevant to the aim, the following criteria was used:

- Literature that includes "automotive industry" or "service", and "facility design" in the title, abstract or keywords.
- Literature that explores the key drivers and barriers influencing effective facility layouts in this sector.
- Studies focusing on the facility layout or design of closely related service industries (e.g., heavy vehicle maintenance, equipment servicing).
- Research addressing the impact of facility design on operational efficiency, profitability, and/or customer experience
- Studies published before 2015 should be excluded.

2.4 Step 4 - Search and retrieve the literature

During step 4, the search and retrieval of literature was conducted using the databases

stipulated in Table 1, which resulted in a total of 151 papers. This is illustrated in the identification section of Figure 1.

2.5 Step 5 - Selection of studies

After the initial database searches and identification process, the retrieved papers were screened for relevance to the research purpose. Duplicates and non-English studies were removed, which left 135 papers in consideration. The titles and abstracts of each study were reviewed to assess alignment with facility layout design, production system design, and applications in service, repair, or aftersales environments. Due to very few articles being

relative to the automotive industry, many studies were removed – resulting in only 7 studies remaining. Even for studies within this industry, many were irrelevant to facility layout, due to their focus being on concepts not relevant to facility layout or aftersales services.

Many of the papers had words relating to healthcare within their titles or abstracts. These papers were omitted, as their content would not be relevant to the automotive industry. Furthermore, when reading the abstracts of certain papers, it became evident that their content would not be relevant, and these papers were omitted. The process of narrowing the number of studies down from 151 originally, to 7, is clearly illustrated in Figure 1, in which PRISMA guidelines are used to filter studies.

2.6 Step 6 - Quality assessment for relevant studies:

Each of the 7 selected studies were assessed using the quality criteria presented in Table 1 and met the requirements to be included as part of the SLR, as illustrated in Figure 1. All the studies included the keywords in the abstract. Furthermore, the studies were relevant to facility redesign and were deemed helpful in solving problems surrounding this subject. Although not all the selected studies were based within the automotive industry, their concepts were relevant to this SLR. Interestingly, the paper about a carpet manufacturer [7] provided key concepts to be referenced throughout this review. The studies selected were scientific and were all published journal papers.

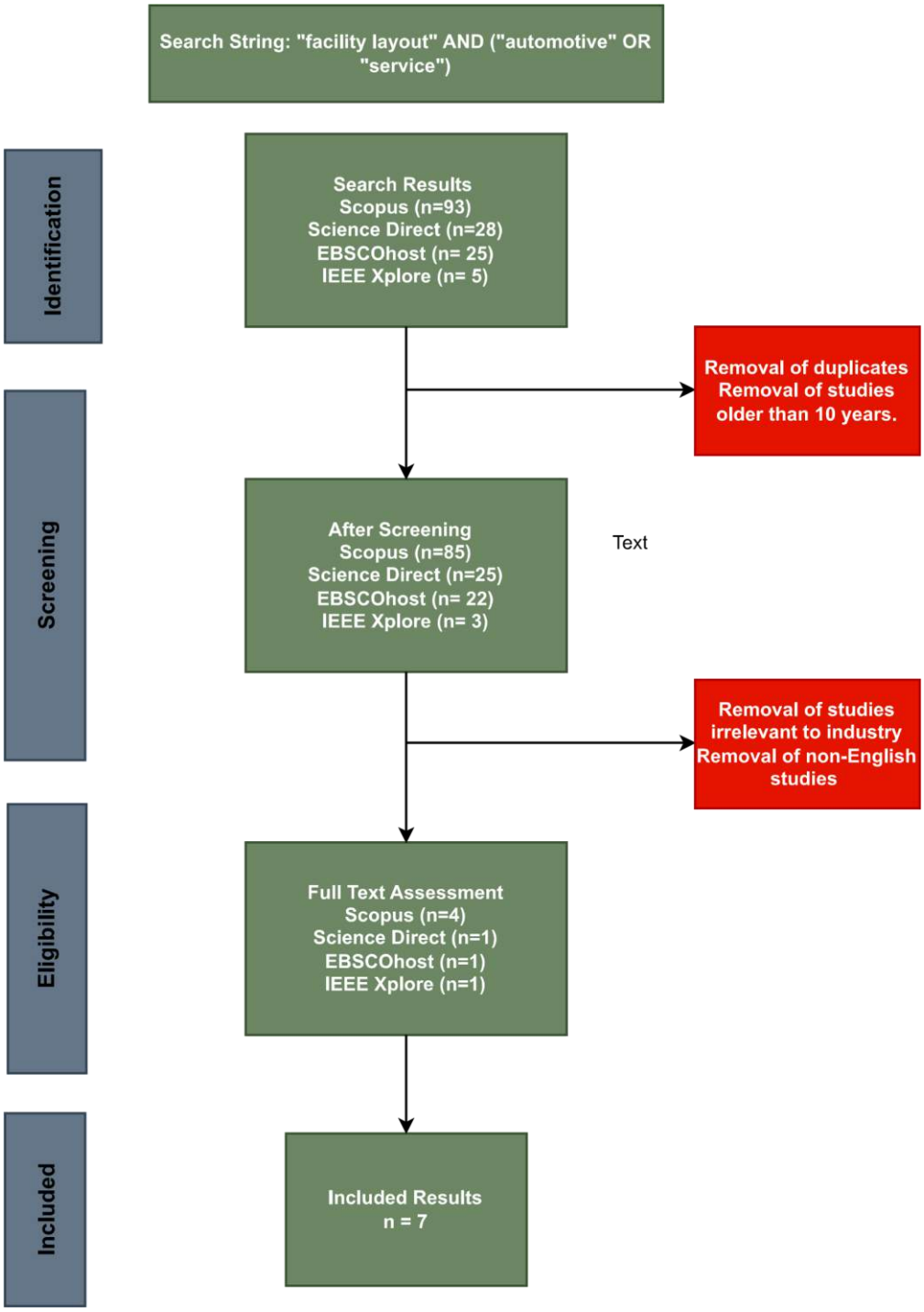

Figure 1 Selection process chart (As per PRISMA guidelines)

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Step 7: Data extraction

The list of studies to be included was finalised, and their full texts were studied in search of relevant concepts and data. In appendix A, the selected studies are shown, along with an indication of the data present in each study.

While not specifically based on the aftersales service centres, the studies are heavily centred around the automotive industry. This highlights the research gap in this field, and provides an opportunity for future research to fill this gap.

3.2 Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings

After the selected studies were read and analysed in full, and data was collected, the following was found:

3.2.1 Annual distribution of studies

The distribution indicates a slight increase in interest in recent years, particularly in 2023, which saw two studies published, possibly reflecting a renewed focus on advanced facility layouts due to increased digitization and post-COVID-19 operational re-evaluation.

The 2025 study, although futuristic in publication date, suggests the field remains active and is exploring cutting-edge approaches such as matrix manufacturing and Multi objective optimization techniques.

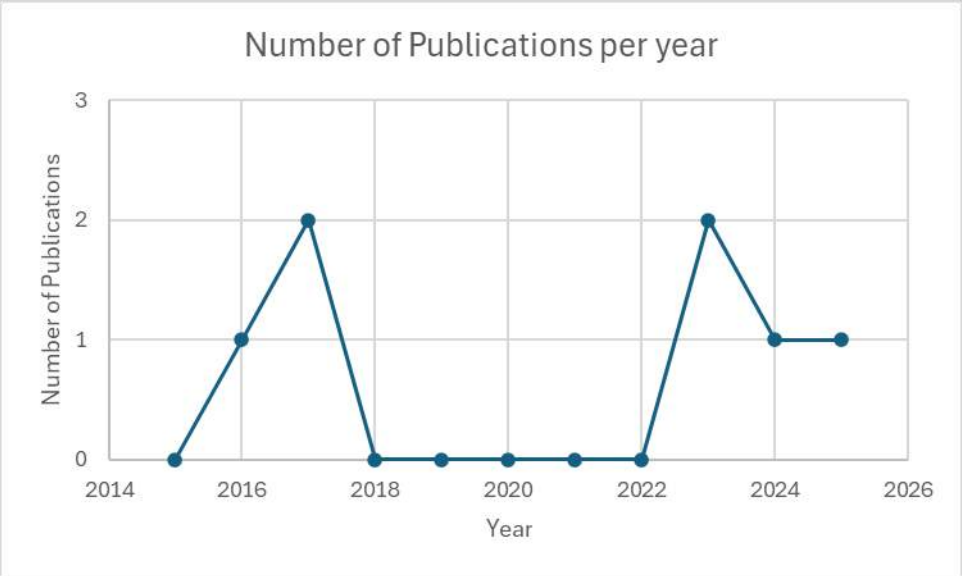

Figure 2 Annual distribution of studies

3.2.2 Facility layout concepts

The following concepts, derived from the selected papers, is relevant to facility design. Although the literature does not directly refer to aftersales environments, below is an explanation of how these concepts can affect aftersales service centre facility layouts:

- **Optimization techniques**
  Methodologies like Genetic Algorithms and Simulated Annealing, which have proven effective in optimizing manufacturing layouts, could be adapted to find efficient layouts for aftersales service centres. The primary focus of using optimization techniques is to measure the maximum or minimum value of a function depending on the circumstance [6]. In the context of an aftersales service centre, values to be

maximized include profit, operator efficiency, operator productivity, and capacity, while values such as costs, time wastage due to ineffective facility layout, and processing time should be minimized.
Such techniques can be used to identify the most suitable location for service bays, waiting areas, parts departments, and customer interaction zones within an aftersales service centre.

- **Simulation**
  Discrete event simulation, used to analyse and improve manufacturing processes by identifying bottlenecks and evaluating different layouts [11], can be applied to model the flow of vehicles and customers through a service centre, helping to optimize resource allocation and space utilization.
  Through simulation, key performance indicators such as waiting times, number of vehicles in WIP, total task times and utilization can be measured. In the context of aftersales service centres, such metrics apply directly when evaluating efficiency regarding vehicle flow, service bay utilization, and operator workload.
- **Systematic Layout Planning**
  The use of this methodology, created by Muther and Hales [9], provides a structured, step-by-step approach for developing efficient facility layouts. Through SLP, material flow with minimal handling will be emphasized, while from-to charts and activity relationship diagrams will assist in determining the desired proximity between departments.
  In the context of an aftersales service centre, Systematic Layout Planning will allow for optimized part- and tool flow between bays, and locations for departments, which include service bays, tolls, parts and reception areas, which will maximize productivity within the facility.
- **Importance of Flow and Adjacency**
  Throughout the selected studies, there is a common theme of emphasizing the importance of material flow and adjacency between different departments. The creation of a continuous flow is achieved by having a constant flow between processes. [9].
  In an aftersales service centre, a continuous flow from when the vehicle enters the facility, is repaired, has parts replaced, and any other actions performed on the vehicle until it departs the facility. A well-planned flow of vehicles, technicians and parts will increase efficiency.

3.2.3 Relation of layout types to aftersales service centres

Russel and Taylor [10], define the different types of facility layout types. In the selected literature, types like which are mentioned include multi-facility layouts, dynamic layouts, and collaborative layouts. In Table 2, all applicable layout types are compared by their ability to meet the key requirements of an aftersales service centre.

These columns were specifically chosen due to their alignment with the dominant facility configurations discussed in the reviewed literature, while discussing the operational dimensions most relevant to aftersales service environments. By comparing these requirements with the layout types, areas of alignment, as well as potential mismatches that warrant further research are identified.

Multi-facility layout is omitted from the table, as it is not relevant due to the assumption that aftersales service centres are operated at a single location.

Table 2 Concept relation to aftersales service centres

Layout Type	Reduces Turnaround Time	Enhances Customer Experience	Improves Space Utilization	Supports Flexibility
Dynamic	✓		✓	✓
Collaborative	✓	✓		✓
Cellular	✓		✓	✓
Functional		✓	✓	
Process		✓		
Fixed-Position				

3.2.4 Methods used

Majority of the methodologies discussed were computational approaches to facility layout optimization, namely Genetic Algorithms and Simulated Annealing. These methods are well-suited for solving complex layout problems involving multiple objectives and constraints, which are prevalent in aftersales service centres.

Additionally, multi-objective optimization techniques were also discussed – these methodologies are particularly useful when trade-offs must be made between competing factors like cost, space usage, and flow efficiency.

Simulation techniques were used in a minority of the papers, generally to validate or test the performance of a proposed layout in a controlled virtual environment. The use of simulation added value by allowing the researchers to test how layouts performed under varying demand conditions or process times.

Notably, no study applied hybrid methodologies that combine simulation and optimization in the same model. This represents an opportunity for future work, to improve realism and decision-making in layout problems that focus on service centres.

3.2.5 Barriers to effective facility layout in aftersales service centres

The various facility layout concepts discussed in the literature may provide limitations when applying these concepts in an aftersales service environment.

Firstly, the physical constraints found in service centres and different to those found in manufacturing plants. Layout changes may be restricted by architectural limitations, safety regulations, or legacy infrastructure. Unlike production lines, which are often housed in purpose-built industrial spaces, service centres must accommodate customer-facing functions, such as reception areas, waiting zones, and delivery bays. These factors provide a set of considerations which are different to manufacturing facilities.

Human interaction also plays a much larger role in service operations than in manufacturing. The flow of people (both customers and technicians), vehicles, and parts must be coordinated while maintaining a high level of service quality and safety. Layout changes that enhance efficiency must not compromise the customer experience or technician ergonomics.

Lastly, a high level of variability is prevalent within service tasks, due to vehicle condition and customer requests, which makes standardization more complex. For example, scheduling and space requirements may vary drastically between a routine service and a complex repair job. Dynamic or reconfigurable layouts offer adaptability but must be supported by real-time data and flexible work procedures to be truly effective in such contexts.

3.2.6 Key drivers affecting effective facility layout in aftersales service centres

The principles of facility design, when applied to automobile aftersales centres, must adjust its focus from manufacturing traditions like efficiency and utilization, and rather incorporate those with the added uncertainty, and as well as customer-facing operations that accompany service centres.

The minimization of material and workflow handling is a key priority. Service centres must manage the movement of vehicles, tools, parts and technicians, instead of solely raw materials and components. Travel distance between service bays, storage areas and even customer reception zones must be kept to a minimum – this drives the need for efficient facility layout. By doing so, the flow within the service centre can be streamlined, allowing for reduced turnaround times per vehicle – another key driver affecting facility layout.

Due to the high variance in different customer requirements, and even more so with the number of different vehicles and models, service centres must be flexible and must prepare for dynamic demand. Thus, modular layouts which can be reconfigured is a key consideration in such facility layout design. This would enable quick conversion of service bays into special lanes for special tasks, or the addition of extra workstations depending on demand, without much structural adjustment.

A factor which is unique to service centres, is the consideration of customer-facing requirements and zones. With the knowledge that the customer will likely see the service centre, the layout needs to create a positive perception within the customer's mind. Thus, reception areas should be accessible and comfortable and clearly, away from noisy work zones.

These drivers must be taken into consideration when designing the facility layout of aftersales service centres.

4 FRAMEWORK AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

The framework in Figure 2 was developed to consolidate the findings from the literature, while providing a structured guide for facility layout development in aftersales service centres. Key layout concepts, aftersales service centre requirements, and corresponding layout types identified throughout the review are connected and their interactions are displayed visually.

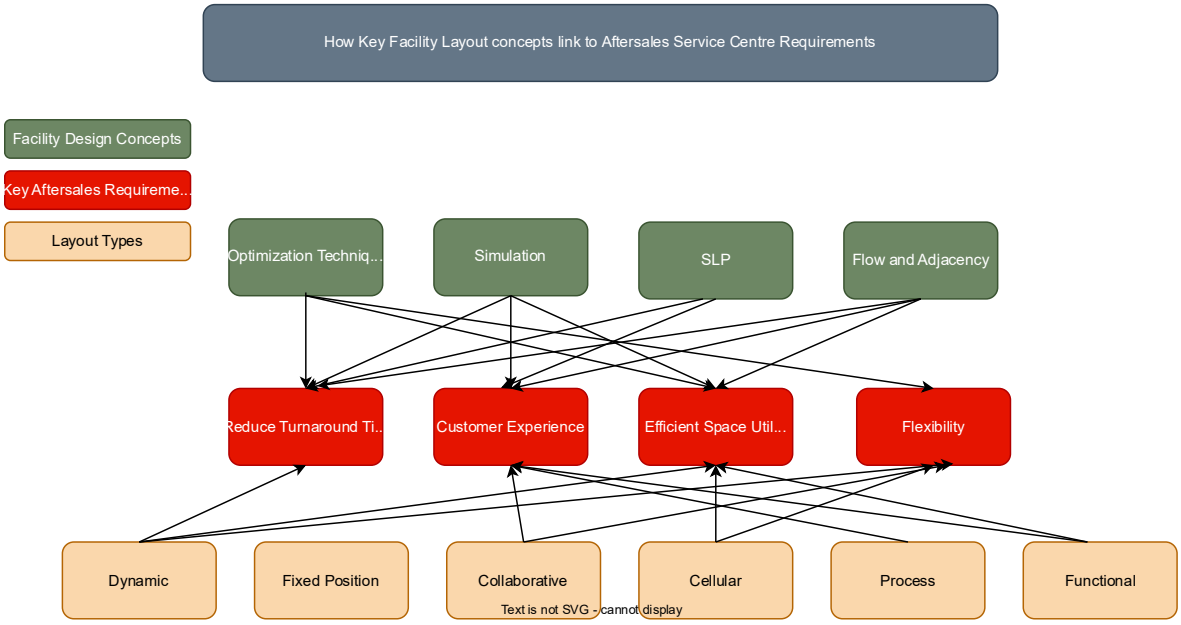

Figure 2 Framework

4.1 Framework

This framework visualizes the key facility design concepts derived from the literature and portrays how these concepts support critical aftersales service centre requirements. In turn, the requirements of an aftersales service centre play a role in the choice of layout type, and the relationships between those concepts are also portrayed.

Figure 2 is a visual representation of how both theoretical and practical insights can be integrated in such facility design processes. The arrows in the figure indicate linkages between the extracted concepts such as simulation, optimisation, etc, and the identified operational requirements of aftersales centres.

Clearer decision-making during design or redesign stages is made possible, by mapping theoretical principles such as simulation, optimization techniques, Systemic Layout Planning and flow principles to requirements vital to aftersales service centres, which include reduced turnaround time, customer experience, space utilization and flexibility.

Furthermore, arrows are also used to indicate the relatedness of these requirements to existing layout types shows the adaptability of these layout types (e.g. dynamic, cellular, etc.) based on the needs of such service environments. These linkages highlight how a particular facility layout approach can address the targeted performance requirements.

Ultimately, the framework bridges the gap between literature and application in the field of facility design, specifically for aftersales service centres.

4.2 Future Research Agenda

Several opportunities for furthering research on facility design in automotive aftersales service centres are introduced and highlighted through this review.

Areas that lack studies in this field include the integration of digital technology and Industry 4.0 tools, the consideration of customer-centric design approaches, and empirical studies in real-world contexts, instead of conceptual or simulation-based research.

This research areas identified provide a roadmap for bridging current gaps in the literature, to ensure that facility design contributes to profitability in the aftersales service sector.

5 CONCLUSION

This Systematic Literature Review set out to investigate existing literature relevant to the role of facility design in aftersales service centres, and how this can affect profitability. Although resources already available specifically applicable to this topic, through this review, it was evident that existing facility layout concepts, many from other fields, are relevant to aftersales service centres.

Considering the key requirements within aftersales service centres, which include the need for reduced turnaround time, improved customer experience, flexibility, and efficient space utilization, existing methods often used in facility redesign can address this. These methods include simulation, SLP and optimization techniques. In addition to these methods, facility layout types were compared and linked to the needs of aftersales service centres. All the abovementioned concepts, requirements and layout types are integrated into a framework which can assist as a basis for the redesign of aftersales service centre layouts.

This research contributed to closing the research gap within this niche and allows for further exploration, to ultimately show how improved facility layout of aftersales service centres can be key to profitability.

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APPENDIX A

Title	Authors	Country	Multi-facility Layout Problem	Dynamic Layout Problem	Collaborative Manufacturing Network	Material Handling Costs	Simulation	Automotive Industry Application	Systematic Layout Planning
A dynamic multi-objective approach for the reconfigurable multi-facility layout problem (2017)	Maria Manuela Azevedo et al.	Portugal	X	X		X		X	
Improving Facility Layout Using_Genetic_Algorithm_and_Simulated_Annealing (2023)	F. Nur Aziz et al.	Indonesia				X		X	
Layout design and reconfiguration in a collaborative manufacturing network 2016 Springer NewYorkLLC (2016)	Maria Manuela Azevedo et al.	Portugal	X	X	X	X		X	
Multiobjective optimization for layout planning of matrix manufacturing system2025 Korean Society for Precision Engineeing (2025)	Sang Do Noh et al.	Korea					X	X	
The-Evaluation-and-Improvement-of-the-Production-Processes-of-an-Automotive-Industry-Company-via-Simulation-and-Optimization_2023_MDPI (2023)	Durdu Hakan Utku	Turkey					X	X	
Integration of Value Stream Map and Strategic Layout Planning into DMAIC Approach to Improve Carpeting Process (2017)	Nagi	Germany	X			X		X	X
Intelligent layout reconfiguration for reconfigurable assembly system: A genetic algorithm approach (2024)	Park	Korea	X	X		X	X	X	

ENHANCING ERGONOMICS IN SERVICE ENVIRONMENT: A FRAMEWORK FOR AUTOMOTIVE AFTERSALES APPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Aftersales service centres present a significant yet underutilised profit opportunity for the automotive industry. However, the physical demands of service centre tasks may have long-term effects on employee health and performance. Despite this, targeted ergonomic research in automotive aftersales environments remains limited. This study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine ergonomic practices across service-intensive industries, identifying transferable strategies that address physical strain and operational inefficiencies. The findings highlight the benefits and limitations of ergonomic interventions, identifying key tools and concepts applied across various studies. Drawing from this synthesis, the study proposes a conceptual framework for aftersales service centres, offering guidance for future empirical research and practical implementation. Ultimately, the research highlights the critical role of ergonomics in enhancing workforce sustainability and unlocking operational value in the automotive aftersales sector.

Keywords: Aftersales service center, Automotive industry, SLR, Ergonomics

* Corresponding Author

1 INTRODUCTION

The automotive industry includes vehicle and component manufacturing and retail. Automotive retail includes vehicle and parts sales and the aftersales service market. The after-sales service industry is a key aspect of the automotive industry. It provides repair and maintenance for a product after purchase. Therefore, it is an essential factor in relation to the brand's reputation. This drives the industry to be customer-focused, prioritising customer satisfaction and retention. A brand with satisfied customers is more likely to maintain loyalty to a product with which they have a positive experience. This enhances the brand or company's competitiveness, subsequently impacting their profit [1].

Vehicle servicing includes various activities related to the car. Although tools and equipment have advanced, technicians still perform tasks that require repetitive motions, awkward posture, and sustained effort. Consequently, the physical and mental effort creates a labour-intensive environment, often affecting the efficiency and well-being of the employees. This is where the principles of ergonomics become relevant, as companies recognise that the human factor in operations is essential for prosperity. Literature often refers to ergonomics as human factor engineering and human-systems integration[2].

Ergonomics intends to fit the work environment to the capabilities of humans [2, 3]. Therefore, to drive comfort in the workplace, organisations must optimise the interaction between the human and the system.

This study investigates ergonomic interventions employed in physically demanding work sectors. It examines activities relevant to the automotive service sector and evaluates the benefits and drawbacks of these interventions. Finally, the ergonomic tools and concepts from the literature will guide the research's objectives.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology follows the steps below to reach the goal of the systematic literature review (SLR) [4].

Step 1: Develop a research purpose and/or objective – The goal of the SLR must be stated

- **Step 2: Develop research protocol -** A research protocol must be created that incorporates the purpose, inclusion and exclusion criteria, search databases, keywords and quality assessment criteria
- **Step 3: Establish relevance criteria -** Give reasons for what makes a resource relevant to your study
- **Step 4: Search and retrieve the literature** – Search scientific databases to find the relevant literature
- **Step 5: Selection of studies** – Utilise the inclusion and exclusion criteria
- **Step 6: Quality assessment for relevant studies** – Evaluate the quality of each resource
- **Step 7: Data extraction** – Relevant data to be extracted from the resources
- **Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings** – Analyse and synthesise the data to find common patterns and themes
- **Step 9: Report** – Provide a review of detailed results
- **Step 10: Dissemination** – Produce the SLR

2.1 Step 1 - Develop a research purpose

The purpose of this research was to collect and report on the literature about the benefits and limitations of ergonomic interventions, identifying key tools and concepts.

2.2 Step 2 - Develop a research protocol

A research protocol, table 1, is designed to guide the review process, consequently achieving the desired outcome.

Table 1: Research review protocol

Purpose of the study	• To collect and record available literature on the benefits and limitations of ergonomic interventions, identifying key tools and concepts applied across various studies.
Inclusion criteria	• Literature that contains "Ergonomics" and "Service" in the title, abstract or keywords. • Literature that discusses the benefits and limitations of ergonomic interventions, identifying key tools and concepts.
Exclusion criteria	• Non-English studies • Ergonomic concepts are not transferable to the automation service industry, as they may be too industry/domain/task specific.
Search databases	• Scopus
Keywords	• "Ergonomics" AND "service"
Quality assessment criteria	• Duplicate resources must be removed. • Check if the literature is relevant. • Check if the literature conveys ergonomic principles correctly. • Studies must be scientific • Studies must have transparent data collection.

2.3 Step 3 - Establish relevance criteria

Ergonomics in the aftersales service sector is unique, and the relevance criteria will cater to this area of literature:

- Literature that contains "Ergonomics" and "Service" in the title, abstract or keywords.
- Literature that discusses the benefits and limitations of ergonomic interventions, identifying key tools and concepts.
- Non-English studies must be excluded.
- Literature where the ergonomic concepts are not transferable to the automation service industry, as it may be too industry/domain/task specific.

2.4 Step 4 - Search and retrieve the literature

Initially, this study used four databases: Science Direct, Web of Science, Emerald Insight and Scopus. The keywords did not provide sufficient results on Science Direct, Web of Science, and Emerald Insight, however, Scopus provided an abundant amount. It was decided that Scopus alone would be the main database. We searched using the keywords, "Ergonomics" and "Service" in the title, abstract or keywords. It resulted in 3645 documents. Filters were then applied to reduce the results to a manageable number. Included filters: Year: 2015-2025; Document Type: Conference Document, Review and Article; Study Field: Engineering and Social Studies; Language: English; Keywords: Ergonomics. This resulted in 767 documents that will undergo the screening process. Figure 1 below illustrates this in the identification process.

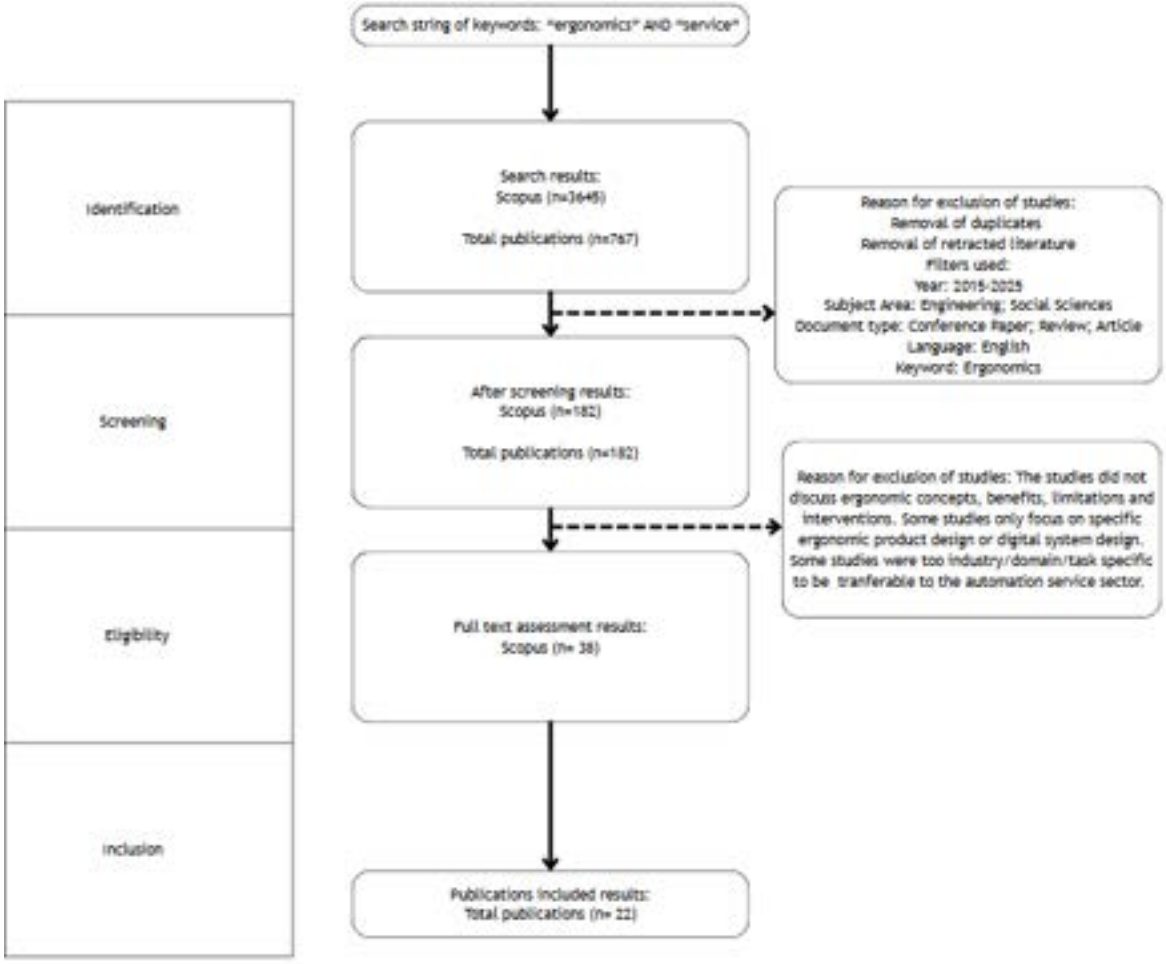

Figure 1: PRISMA guidelines

2.5 Step 5 - Selection of studies

The screening process removed duplicates and retracted documents. The authors selected literature if the title and abstract included relevant terms indicating the benefits and limitations of ergonomic interventions, as well as identified key tools and concepts. Any literature with ergonomics as the focus in the title. This resulted in 182 documents advancing to the eligibility stage. Next, a full-text assessment occurred. We excluded literature that only focused on specific ergonomic product design or digital system design. The authors also excluded any literature that was too industry/domain/task specific to be transferable to the automation service sector. Figure 1 illustrates the 38 eligible studies that are fit for inclusion.

2.6 Step 6 - Quality assessment for relevant studies:

The authors assessed the 38 studies according to the quality assessment criteria presented in Table 1. We removed duplicate resources and verified the relevance of the literature. We also analysed the literature to ensure the accurate representation of ergonomic principles and ideas. Finally, the studies must be scientific and convey transparent data collection. Figure 1 illustrates that only 22 studies met the requirements and will be included in the SLR.

3 FINDINGS

Steps 7 and 8 follow below. The findings will be described through the data extraction, analysis, and synthesis.

3.1 Step 7: Data extraction

Appendix A illustrates the table of papers. The table shows the data that the literature discusses, and in the specific industry it took place. The table displays a mixture of industries. Although most of the data is not automotive service-specific, the ideas found were transferable to this industry. However, the health industry is a very prominent sector for ergonomics, followed by manufacturing. This shows the research gap of ergonomic studies in the automotive service sector and motivates the opportunity for future research.

3.2 Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings

The following subsections discuss the analysis and synthesis of the included literature.

3.2.1 Number of publications annually

The graph in Figure 2 displays annual publications. It is apparent that in 2020, the most publications were made. The decline after 2020 could be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, as researchers could not collect data in 2020 itself. However, we see an increase towards 2025, hopefully meaning a recovery in research activity.

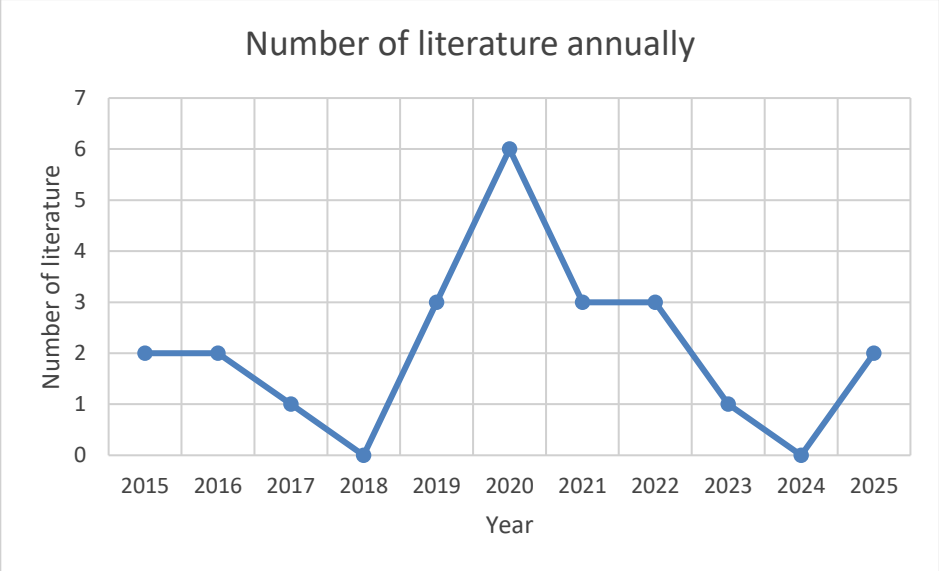

Figure 2: Graph of annual publications

3.2.2 Keywords

Figure 3 illustrates a word cloud of all the keywords from the eligible and included literature. The most frequently used word is “Ergonomic”, indicating the research aim of the SLR. Following this are musculoskeletal, occupational disorder, risk, assessment, safety, manual handling, training, and lifting. These words represent typical ergonomic language. A crucial aspect of ergonomics is occupational health and work-related musculoskeletal disorders. Ergonomic concepts offer stakeholders solutions that enhance their health and safety. Researchers generally evaluate this through risk assessments and other tools. Practitioners employ ergonomic tools to address organisational practices through interventions. Training is

also a common approach as it enhances stakeholders' knowledge regarding ergonomics in the workplace.

Figure 3: Keywords word cloud

3.2.3 Ergonomic theme: Intervention types

Figure 4 illustrates that each study used specific intervention types as the main intervention. The most commonly used ergonomic intervention is workplace and workstation redesign. However, studies usually apply multiple interventions simultaneously. Training programs are also prevalent, regardless of the lack of evidence, as they may be the most inexpensive option. Digital tools are used less frequently since they may be too expensive to implement and require expertise.

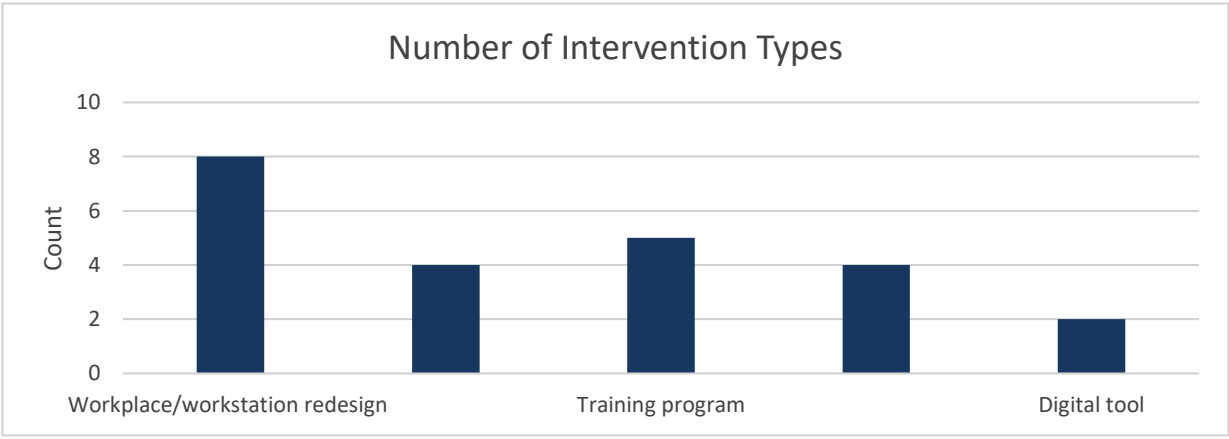

Figure 4: Number of Intervention Types

3.2.4 Ergonomic tools and concepts

Table 2 showcases the ergonomic tools and methods used in the studies. Researchers employed each ergonomic tool, which is either an observational method, a direct measurement, or computer-based. Table 2 displays the various applications and key features of each tool. Many studies utilised the Rapid Upper Limb Assessment (RULA), Rapid Entire Body Assessment (REBA), and NIOSH Lifting Equation. Additionally, numerous studies incorporated surveys to

gather subjective data for evaluating ergonomic risk factors. A notable ergonomic tool that was prevalent is the use of surface electromyography (sEMG), which is a direct method of measurement for muscle fatigue, activation and recovery. Multiple studies featured simulation software , highlighting its relevance and practical value. Furthermore, it is clear that each study employed multiple ergonomic tools to assess the workplace or specific tasks.

Table 2: Ergonomic tools

Ergonomic tool/Method	**Type (Observational; Direct measurement; Computer-based)**	**Application**	**Key Features**	**Study using the tool**
Rapid Upper-Limb Assessment (RULA)	Observational checklist	Upper limb tasks	Upper extremity evaluation	[5], [6],[7],[8]
Rapid Entire Body Assessment (REBA)	Observational checklist	Manual material handling	Whole body posture evaluation	[5], [9],[10], [7],[8],[11]
NIOSH Lifting Equation	Direct calculation/checklist	Manual lifting tasks	Recommended Weight Limit for lifting tasks	[5],[10],[12], [11]
Ovako Working Posture Analysis System (OWAS)	Observational checklist	Work tasks	Posture evaluation	[7]
Nordic Musculoskeletal Questionnaire (NMQ)	Observational (subjective checklist)	Any industry	Questionnaire for body part pain/discomfort/duration/location	[5],[13]
Maynard Operation Sequence Technique (MOST)	Direct measurement	Repetitive tasks	Pre-determined time standards are used to predict operation duration	[14]
Methods-Time Measurement (MTM)	Direct measurement	Complex task/non-repetitive	Task motions breakdown to set standard task times	[6]
Posture checklist	Observational checklist	Work tasks	Checklist for optimal posture	[14]
Surface electromyography (sEMG)	Direct measurement	Manual tasks	Measurement of muscle electrical activity (muscle activation/fatigue/recover)	[15],[16],[12],[17]
ILO/IEA Ergonomic Checkpoints tool/Hazard assessment	Observational checklist	Any industry	Whole workplace evaluation and solutions	[18, 19]

NASA-TLS (Task Load Index)	Observational checklist (subjective questionnaire)	Any industry, task-based	Perceived workload demand (mental, physical, temporal, frustration, performance, effort)	[11]
Virtual Element Method (VEM) for posture modelling	Computer based	Manufacturing (can be adapted to any industry)	Modelling; analysis; optimisation	[9]
Rodgers Muscle Fatigue Analysis	Observational checklist	Repetitive tasks	Risk for muscle fatigue evaluation	[7]
Moore and Garg method (strain index)	Observational checklist	Task-based	Distal upper extremities evaluation (wrist, hand, elbow)	[7]
3D Static Strength Prediction Program™ (3DSSPP) model biomechanical	Computer-based	Manual tasks	Predicts static strength requirements for tasks	[20]
Other simulation software (Jack)	Computer-based	Manual tasks/operations	Human-modelling for biomechanical loads (spinal loads)	[10]
3d motion capture (VICON)	Computer-based	Manual operations	Analysis of movement	[16]
Borg scale	Observational checklist (subjective)	Manual operations	Perceived exertion	[16],[10]
3d modelling (Sketchup pro)	Computer-based	Any industry	Visualisation of the workplace	[19]
Sensor network	Computer-based	Work tasks	Step tracking and ergonomic monitoring of movement and posture	[6]
Cost/benefit analysis	Direct measurements	Any industry	Ergonomic intervention justification	[14]
Adapted surveys	Observational checklist(subjective)	Any industry	Extracting subjective worker data	[21],[13],[8],[22],[11],[20],[23],[24]

Cause-and-effect diagram	Observational	Any industry	Root cause analysis of ergonomic risks	[8]

Concepts

The review of included studies revealed the core concepts of ergonomics. The most prevalent concepts related to posture and its impact on musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)/pain/discomfort/injury. Therefore, researchers addressed risk factors commonly associated with awkward postures. Several studies linked manual material handling risks, such as repetitive tasks and lifting, to an increased incidence of MSDs [25].

Closely related to posture is the concept of workstation or task design. Workspace design would consider the anthropometric dimensions of the working population to implement ergonomic changes. Principles such as reachability, which ensures that tools and equipment are placed within a comfortable range to minimise awkward postures [19]. Additionally, ensure the layout has enough space for body movement and equipment operation. Researchers often explored these ideas with office ergonomics and manual material handling, where a poorly designed workstation increased the risk for injury and caused bad posture.

Many studies frequently used participatory ergonomics. The focus of engaging the workers seemed to motivate them to adapt to ergonomic changes or recommendations [26]. Here, researchers frequently applied safety-related concepts. Oakman, et al. [27] discuss the novel application of the Stage of Change (SOC) participatory ergonomics approach, which includes readiness to change. SOC shows how effective the implementation of the change will be.

Ideas like workload, fatigue and productivity were interrelated topics. Suokko, et al. [14] concluded that continuous ergonomic development decreased physical workload and simultaneously increased productivity. Ergonomic task development lessens fatigue, thus doing work more efficiently. Therefore, the well-being of the worker improved. Psychosocial factors like stress improved through sustainable ergonomic implementation, and also led to increased productivity[8].

3.2.5 Benefits of the interventions

All the studies in the systematic literature review (SLR) reported the following benefits. Table 3 highlights the benefits of the interventions that researchers employed in the studies. The implementation of interventions such as workplace, workstation, or task redesign, assistive devices, or digital tools offers advantages that enhance the physical effects of the tasks that workers perform. The interventions that decrease fatigue and discomfort often lead to the improvement of productivity and performance of workers. Experts recommend that these interventions be implemented, as they provide substantial results. Meanwhile, training and participatory ergonomics primarily increase ergonomic awareness and engagement. Participatory ergonomics introduces actionable improvements and increases the adoption rate. The implementation of various interventions will lead to multifaceted improvements.

Table 3: Intervention benefits

Workplace/workstation/task redesign	Reduction in MSD risks Healthier physical ergonomics Increased performance and productivity Decreased spinal loads Lower cognitive workload Reduced postural strain Reduction of perceived discomfort Reduction in muscle strain/activity Reduction in fatigue
Assistive devices	Reduction in manual lifting and pushing forces Reduction of musculoskeletal strain/risk Improved safety Increased productivity Reduction in fatigue Reduction in postural risks Reduce peak spine shear forces Reduction of strain
Digital Tools	Virtual Element Method (VEM): Real-time feedback for postural/behaviour correction Sensor networks for step tracking: Real-time ergonomic feedback
Training programs/Posture program/Stretch program	Promotes ergonomic practice sustainability Promotes a safety culture Increase ergonomic knowledge Increased productivity Promotes behaviour change Increased flexibility Strengthens posture Promotes teamwork Increased managerial support
Participatory ergonomics	Promotes worker engagement Promotes management engagement Promotes ergonomic awareness Higher adoption rate Promotes low-cost solutions/practical improvements Increases focus on priority areas needing ergonomic improvement Actionable improvement suggestions Increases self-initiated improvements

3.2.6 Limitations of the interventions

All the studies in the systematic literature review (SLR) reported the following limitations. Table 4 highlights the limitations of the interventions that researchers applied in the studies. The most prevalent limitations were concerns regarding the generalisability of the interventions and the cost of implementing them. Additionally, some interventions lacked long-term validation, which affects their credibility. The training of ergonomic practices revealed a potential lack of implementation. Practitioners should implement training alongside other strategies to enhance effectiveness. The studies showed that management and organisational readiness can pose a barrier to the implementation of interventions. Therefore, one of the main challenges in introducing interventions is the need to convince stakeholders to change existing practices.

Table 4: Intervention limitations

Workplace/workstation/task redesign	Convincing management of ergonomic practices Resistance to change Inconsistent implementation

	Lack of continuous development is less beneficial Some practices are not generalisable Budget/feasibility constraints Some practices lack long-term validation
Assistive devices	Cost/feasibility constraints Requires workforce training Accessibility Generalisability Task-specificity
Digital tools	Generalisability Specific technology needed Long-term validation needed
Training programs/Posture program/Stretch program	Training lacks task/work context Lacks generalisability Lacks scientific evidence of effectiveness on injury/discomfort reduction Lacks integration with the organisation Cost/time Incentive programs may influence injury reports Work variability makes a standardised program difficult Reliance on perceived/self-reported discomfort Additional intervention necessary
Participatory ergonomics	Ego/pride issues Inconsistent implementation Limited generalisability Management considerations Organisational readiness

4 FRAMEWORK

This systematic literature review (SLR) discusses the findings that offer a foundational framework for conducting ergonomic assessments and interventions. Although the studies did not focus on automotive after-sales service, the utilisation of ergonomic tools and methods applies to this service industry. Practitioners in this industry can follow the framework to achieve the necessary outcomes. The framework offers a conceptual pathway for automotive service centres to assess ergonomic risks and implement improvements. Although empirical validation in this specific domain is necessary, the tools and strategies presented are based on evidence from comparable service environments.

As illustrated in Figure 5, the process involves evaluating the interaction between the workplace and the worker, utilising ergonomic tools, and identifying appropriate interventions to enhance worker well-being. The process begins with the identification of ergonomic risk factors, which may span across physical, environmental, and organisational domains. Researchers employ various ergonomic assessment tools and methods to verify and quantify these risks. As shown in Table 2, practitioners select these tools based on the nature of the tasks under analysis. Researchers use multiple tools to generate comprehensive and reliable data. The data provides evidence for change and the root cause of risks. Following the assessment phase, practitioners select, design and implement suitable interventions. The benefits and limitations mentioned in Tables 3 and 4 can guide the interventions, which help clarify potential outcomes. The studies broadly define the mentioned interventions and will require further refinement based on specific tasks or workplace context. Ultimately, the goal of these interventions is to achieve various outcomes pertinent to the health, safety and overall performance of the workers. Reducing the pain and discomfort of the worker will lead to a reduction in musculoskeletal disorders and fatigue, which in turn increases productivity and morale. These are merely some of the potential results.

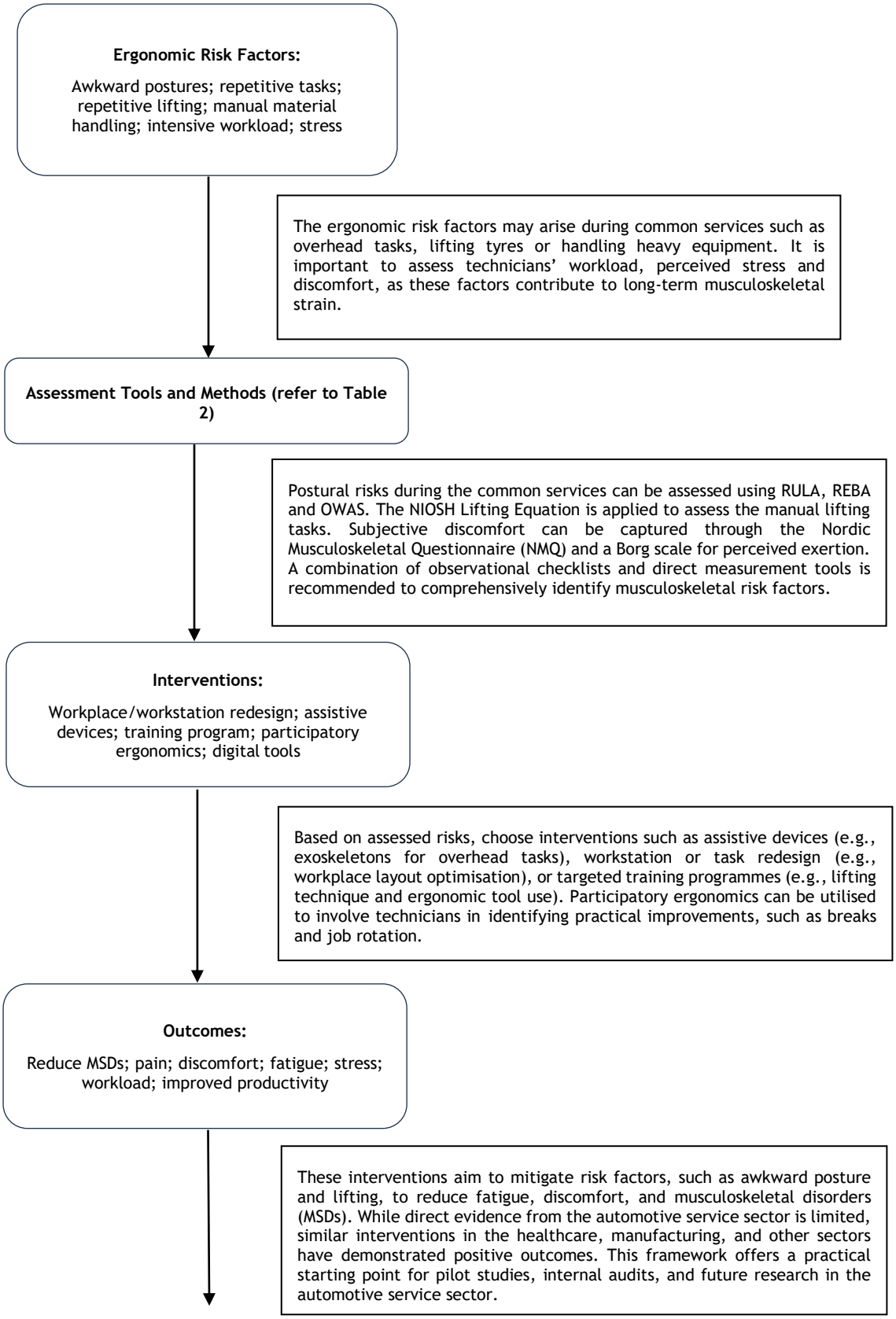

Figure 5: Ergonomic Assessment Framework

5 CONCLUSION

This review synthesises transferable ergonomic practices from broader sectors because of the limited availability of literature on ergonomic studies specific to automotive after-sales service centres. The proposed framework provides a conceptual guide for researchers and practitioners to evaluate and enhance the ergonomic conditions of automotive service environments, particularly emphasising the key gaps and opportunities for future empirical validation.

This review sought to synthesise existing evidence regarding ergonomic interventions for manual material handling to identify effective strategies and gaps in the literature. The results continue to emphasise the significance of posture, workstation design, and participatory ergonomics in mitigating the risks associated with musculoskeletal disorders. Training initiatives alone showed limited effectiveness if not integrated with other interventions; however, they did improve ergonomic knowledge and participation. This review highlights the need for complex ergonomic interventions that include technical, organisational, and behavioural elements by combining evidence from diverse industries. It establishes a foundation for more comprehensive ergonomic initiatives in the workplace. Few studies provided scientifically-based proof of improvement and instead utilised perceived discomfort as evidence. Studies also lacked long-term follow-up of health. Notably, there was a shortage of studies incorporating both physical and psychosocial factors, particularly in the automotive service sector. Future studies should include physical and psychosocial factors in evaluations, and scientific tools should be employed to measure the outcomes of interventions. Additionally, more studies are necessary within the automotive service sector. This systematic review offers vital insights to those aiming to improve workplace ergonomics and reduce musculoskeletal disorders, thereby contributing to increased productivity and healthier, safer work environments. The systematic literature review provided a guideline for the design of a framework. The framework follows the steps to analyse the risk factors using ergonomic tools. The interventions are then selected, designed and implemented to improve the health and safety of workers.

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Appendix A

Title	Authors and year	Intervention type	Ergonomic tools/Methods used	Measured outcomes	Industry	Reference
Identifying ergonomics practices currently used by grocery distribution centers	Lavender et al. (2025)	Workplace; Organisational	Participatory ergonomics; Ergonomic practice checklist	Self-reported use of practices; perceived success in reducing MSDs	Grocery distribution centers	[18]
Productivity and employee well-being in manufacturing process development – Comparison study of two departments	Suokko et al. (2025)	Workplace/workstation redesign (continuous ergo development)	Maynard Operation Sequence Technique (MOST); Workload analysis via video recording; posture checklist; cost-benefit analysis; productivity metrics(macro and micro ergo frameworks)	Standard times from MOST; perceived discomfort; workload measurements; cost	Manufacturing	[14]
A Feasibility Study on the Conversion from Manual to Semi-Automatic Material Handling in an Oil and Gas Service Company	Saptari et al. (2023)	Technological intervention (Physical task design; equipment redesign; workflow improvement)	REBA/RULA/NIOSH lifting equation/ Nordic Body Map	Ergonomic risk scores improved with the proposed system; Demonstrated acceptability and practicality of transition to semi-automation	Oil and gas service company warehouse	[5]
A Virtual Element-Based Postural Optimization Method for Improved Ergonomics During Human-Robot Collaboration	Makrini et al. (2022)	Digital ergonomics intervention using real-time postural optimisation (task-level)	Virtual Element Method (VEM) for posture modelling; Real-time posture feedback interface; REBA for ergonomic risk scoring	Positive user perception; Quantified improvements in posture (ergonomic load reduced); Demonstrated feasibility in polishing task with cobot	Manufacturing	[9]
The Effect of an Active Upper-Limb Exoskeleton on Metabolic Parameters and Muscle Activity during a Repetitive Industrial Task	Blanco et al. (2022)	Assistive devices	Electromyography; Heart rate and oxygen consumption measurements; heart rate variability (HRV)	Reduce oxygen consumption; reduce muscle activity	Industrial	[15]
Chronic lower back pain in aquaculture clam farmers: adoption and feasibility of self-management strategies introduced using a rapid	Dunleavy et al. (2022)	Participatory ergonomics with rapid prototyping of self-management strategies	Surveys; Video demonstrations, team discussions, weekly reminders, patient-specific functional scale (PSFS), Oswestry Disability Index (ODI), focus groups	Decreased lower back pain; Increased productivity	Clam farmers	[26]

prototype participatory ergonomic approach						
Wrapping technique and wrapping height interact to modify physical exposures during manual pallet wrapping	Maciukiewicz et al. (2021)	Assistive device (novel)	Surface electromyography (sEMG) 3D motion capture (VICON) Borg scale for perceived exertion/discomfort Analysis of posture, muscle activation, and ergonomic risk	Muscle activity (sEMG) of the shoulder and back muscles. Kinematic data (posture/angles) of torso and upper extremity. Ratings of perceived discomfort and exertion (Borg scale).	Industrial	[16]
Improving Working Conditions Using the Ergonomic Checkpoints Tool: Application in a Colombian Meat Processing Plant	Pérez et al. (2021)	Participatory ergonomics	ILO/IEA Ergonomic Checkpoints tool 3D modelling for workstation redesign Participatory approach involving workers	Identification of 24 checkpoints requiring improvement (17 prioritised) Engineering and organisational solutions developed and modelled	Industrial	[19]
A cross-sectional survey of musculoskeletal disorder hazard exposures and self-reported discomfort among on-shore wind turbine service technicians	Fischer et al. (2021)	Participatory ergonomics (ergonomic design improvements)	Uses a structured MSD hazard survey tool adapted from the Ontario Worker Discomfort survey, Perceived Exertion Survey, and Staff Feedback Survey; Promotes ergonomics-informed tool design, workstation layout, and task redesign	Data from the hazard survey	Wind turbine service technicians	[21]
Human-oriented maintenance and disassembly in sustainable manufacturing	Siew et al. (2020)	Work design	Sensor networks for step tracking; MTM; modified RULA Real-time ergonomic feedback Mathematical modelling of ergonomic factors Human-computer interaction	Outcomes provided are the task tracking data that suggest improved ergonomic movement sequences.	Manufacturing	[6]
Paramedic equipment bags: How their position during out-of-hospital cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) affect paramedic ergonomics and performance	Harari et al. (2020)	Work design	Simulation (jack); REBA (Rapid Entire Body Assessment); CPR performance metrics; Borg scale; NIOSH	Equipment position significantly influenced both physical ergonomics and CPR performance - Supports redesign of field procedures and training setups; Spinal loads using Jack	Paramedics	[10]

Safety Voice for Ergonomics (SAVE): Evaluation of a masonry apprenticeship training program	Hess et al. (2020)	Training program	Structured ergonomics training tool (SAVE); Modified Nordic Questionnaire (MNQ); Questionnaire	No change in MNQ after training; Increase safety voice use (speak up), safety participation and ergonomic practices, safety compliance and communications of hazards, and ergonomic knowledge scores	Masonry	[13]
Questioning the value of manual material handling training: a scoping and critical literature review	Denis et al. (2020)	Training program	Manual Material Handling Training (MMHT) analysed; Scoping review of 77 studies (from 5 meta-analyses, 2007–2019)	Effectiveness of MMHT in reducing musculoskeletal injuries and improving safe handling behaviours; Content and structure of training programs; Training limitations and improvements to be made	Multiple	[25]
The implementation of digital ergonomics modeling to design a human-friendly working process in a postal branch	Drašković et al. (2020)	Workstation redesign	Ergo Fellow software suite: Rapid Upper Limb Assessment (RULA); Rapid Entire Body Assessment (REBA); Ovako Working Posture Analysis System (OWAS); Moore and Garg method; Suzanne Rodgers method; Visual observation and video analysis of tasks; Literature review of ergonomic risk and posture standards	Ergonomic risk scores for each workstation/task; Identification of high-risk postures and tasks (e.g., prolonged sitting, awkward upper limb positions); Recommendations for workstation redesign and improved work organisation	Office	[7]
A biomechanical evaluation of potential ergonomic solutions for use by firefighter and EMS providers when lifting heavy patients in their homes	Lavender et al. (2020)	Assistive devices	EMG; NIOSH	Biomechanical results indicating violation of NIOSH	Paramedic	[12]
Assessing the effectiveness of integrating ergonomics and sustainability: a case study of a	Munguía Vega et al. (2019)	Workstation redesign; training and breaks	Rapid Entire Body Assessment (REBA); Rapid Upper Limb Assessment (RULA); Worker	Reduction in ergonomic risk scores (REBA/RULA); Worker-reported decrease in	Manufacturing	[8]

Mexican maquiladora			perception and ailment surveys; Cause and effect (Ishikawa) diagram; Participatory brainstorming and benchmarking	musculoskeletal discomfort; Improved awareness of ergonomic risks; Qualitative feedback on intervention effectiveness		
Effect of flooring on lower extremity discomfort during food service tray-line jobs	Mahesh et al. (2017)	Workplace/workstation redesign	Anti-fatigue mats; Muscle temperature measurement (infrared thermography); Leg volume changes (bioimpedance); Fatigue and discomfort scales (subjective ratings); Biomechanics	Reduced muscle temperature decline; Reduced leg swelling and lower discomfort/fatigue scores compared to hard floors.	Food service tray line	[22]
Intervention development to reduce musculoskeletal disorders: Is the process on target?	Oakman et al. (2016)	Participatory ergonomics: Tailored ergonomic interventions based on the **Stage of Change (SOC)** model	SOC model; participatory ergonomics; tailored intervention reports; ergonomist-led site assessments	Tailored advice led to the implementation of 80% of recommended interventions. - 4 additional self-initiated interventions by the company	Ergonomics+case study done in manufacturing plant	[27]
Biomechanics and Kinematic Responses of the Upper Extremity during Isotonic and Isokinetic Wrench-Turning Tasks	Wiyor et al. (2016)	Work design	Biomechanics, Kinematics, Muscle activity, surface electromyography (sEMG) and motion tracking	Lower muscle activity at 0° work surface inclination; The forearm joint posture should be 45° inclined to induce less activity.	Any tool use industry	[17]
Use of the Meta-postureTM Program in the Construction Industry	Blankenheim et al. (2015)	Training program	Meta-Posture™ Program; postural training/stretches; functional tests; surveys	Improvement of lifting mechanics; Increased productivity in awkward positions; Decrease in musculoskeletal complaints	Construction	[23]
If you've seen one construction worksite stretch and flex program ... you've seen one construction worksite stretch and flex program	Goldhar et al. (2015)	Training program	Stretch/flex program; interviews; surveys	Interviews and surveys: perceived reduction in WRMDS, strain and pain, improved safety climate, reduced fatigue, and teamwork	Construction	[24]
Risk factors for musculoskeletal injuries among airport customer	Asadi et al. (2019)	Workplace/workstation redesign	REBA (Rapid Entire Body Assessment); NIOSH lifting equation analyses; NASA-TLX (task	REBA scores; NIOSH lifting task results; reduction of strain, and improvement in productivity	Airport baggage service	[11]

service employees			Load Index); Surveys			
Evaluation and comparison of lift styles for an ideal lift among individuals with different levels of training	Abdoli-Eramaki et al. (2019)	Training program	3D Static Strength Prediction Program™ (3DSSPP) model biomechanical simulation software for 3D static posture evaluation; Kinematic and kinetic analyses; motor learning, deliberate practice, augmented feedback; individualized training; Questionnaire	Preferred verbal cues: 'Bend your knees' and lifting style: squat lift; Quantitative biomechanical data: trained group showed less low back loading, lower knee and shoulder loading but not substantially.	Manual handling	[20]

ASSESSING THE NET-ZERO READINESS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S MINING SECTOR: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The accelerating demand for net zero emissions is transforming the business landscape, compelling companies to reassess their strategies. This study investigates the extent to which South Africa's mining sector is aligning with environmental, social, and economic sustainability objectives, particularly in the context of achieving net-zero emissions. Using a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, 23 peer-reviewed studies were critically analysed. The review focused on themes such as acid mine drainage, ESG reporting, mining economics, and renewable energy transitions. Findings reveal that while regulatory and policy reforms are accelerating, environmental sustainability remains the most prioritised dimension, with social and economic considerations often treated as secondary. Barriers such as inadequate data infrastructure, high decarbonisation costs, and legacy environmental damage persist, though there is growing corporate adoption of ESG frameworks. The study concludes that, although progress is evident, South African mining companies are not yet on a clear path to net-zero. Targeted policy alignment, technological investment, and stronger governance are urgently needed.

Keywords: Sustainable mining, Net-zero emissions, ESG reporting, Decarbonisation, South Africa, SLR

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1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa's mining industry remains a vital component of the national economy, contributing approximately 8% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and directly employing over 450,000 people as of 2021 [1]. The sector is also a key source of foreign exchange earnings, particularly through the export of precious metals like gold, platinum, and palladium [2]. Beyond direct employment, mining supports thousands of indirect jobs in transport, equipment manufacturing, and services, making it indispensable to regional development in mining-heavy provinces such as Mpumalanga, Northwest, and Limpopo [3]. Additionally, mining companies often invest in local infrastructure, health, and education, playing a broader socio-economic role [4].

Despite its economic significance, the environmental toll of mining activities in South Africa is substantial and growing. The country faces long-standing challenges related to acid mine drainage (AMD), which results from the exposure of sulfide minerals to air and water, producing sulfuric acid that contaminates waterways [5], [6]. In regions like the Witwatersrand Basin, AMD continues to degrade groundwater and river systems, posing health and ecological risks [7]. Moreover, heavy metal contamination from tailings and the generation of fine particulate matter contribute to soil and air degradation [8]. The sector also contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions due to energy-intensive extraction and processing methods, particularly in deep-level gold and platinum mines [9].

To mitigate these impacts, South Africa has implemented a series of environmental regulations aimed at improving sustainability in the mining sector. The National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) and the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA) require environmental impact assessments and mine closure plans before operations commence [10], [11]. However, enforcement remains inconsistent, and many legacy mines continue to pollute due to historical under-regulation and insufficient rehabilitation funding [12]. The introduction of the "polluter pays" principle and the establishment of the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy's Environmental Mineral Resources Inspectorate aim to strengthen accountability [13].

International and domestic pressure on South Africa to reconcile mining development with environmental stewardship has increased. Multinational corporations operating in the country face rising demands from investors and stakeholders to adopt Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks [14]. Society, including non-governmental organisations and affected communities, has also become more vocal, challenging environmentally harmful practices through legal means [15]. Additionally, South Africa's commitment to the Paris Agreement necessitates a gradual transition to low-carbon economic activities, further compelling the mining sector to reduce its environmental footprint [16].

Achieving net-zero in mining is complex and expensive. Companies must tackle Scope 1 (on-site), Scope 2 (electricity), and Scope 3 (value-chain) emissions [17], [18]. South African mines face compounded challenges: steep upfront investments, inadequate emissions data, outdated infrastructure, and continued reliance on Eskom's coal-powered grid [19], [20]. Additionally, geographic isolation of many mining sites hampers deployment of renewables, and weak alignment between local and national climate policies further slows decarbonisation efforts [21], [22].

South Africa's Climate Change Act (No 22 of 2024) mandates carbon budgets and requires companies to develop mitigation plans [23], [24]. This legal architecture is complemented by updates to the Carbon Tax Act, where allowances are being phased out and offset credit use tightened [15]. The carbon tax aims to incentivise emission reductions by directly imposing costs on carbon emissions, thereby encouraging companies to adopt cleaner technologies and improve operational efficiency.

The Carbon Tax rate started at R120 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent, and the price continues to increase annually, directly impacting operation costs for emitting companies. However, the Tax offers several advantages, including encouraging companies to innovate and adopt cleaner technologies for a sustainable future.

Moreover, initiatives like the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) and Risk Mitigation IPP Programme have expanded renewable capacity, offering strategic relief for off-grid mining operations [26], [27]. The broader Just Energy Transition Framework, backed by international funding, also aims to manage social impacts in coal-heavy regions [28].

Balancing economic development with environmental protection in South Africa's mining sector requires integrated policy approaches and sustainable business models. While the economic value of mining is undeniable, unchecked environmental degradation could compromise the sector's long-term viability and the well-being of surrounding communities [29]. Innovations such as mine-water reuse, green mining technologies, and circular economy practices offer pathways to reducing negative externalities [30]. However, these require substantial investment, technical capacity, and coordinated governance. As the global mining industry undergoes a green transition, South Africa must align its mining practices with international standards while addressing domestic socio-economic realities [31].

To evaluate whether South Africa's mining sector is on track to meet net-zero emissions targets, and to also identify if there is a balance between the three pillars of sustainability, Environmental, economic and social, this study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, SLRs follow a structured, transparent, and reproducible process for identifying, assessing, and synthesising relevant studies, thereby minimising bias and enhancing the reliability of conclusions [32]. This approach is especially valuable in sustainability research, where interdisciplinary trade-offs and context-specific factors often complicate the design and implementation of effective policies [33]. By systematically coding and analysing sustainability themes - economic, environmental, and social-this review identifies which dimensions of the triple bottom line are prioritised in current mining strategies.

Understanding this distribution will allow policymakers and industry stakeholders to determine whether corporate practices are aligned with South Africa's development priorities and global sustainability frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [34], [4]. The review also synthesises data from academic studies, government publications, and industry frameworks to highlight key barriers—such as high decarbonisation costs, limited technical capacity, and insufficient emissions data as well as enabling factors like regulatory evolution, renewable energy uptake, and global market incentives [33], [34], [35]. Moreover, the analysis evaluates recent policy interventions and the financial feasibility of renewable energy integration, offering a comprehensive assessment of the sector's trajectory and identifying best practices for aligning with national and international climate objectives [36], [37].

2 METHODOLOGY

As indicated above, SLR will be used in this study because it follows a predefined protocol that minimises selection bias and increases the credibility and reproducibility of findings [38], [39]. The following steps were followed to adhere to the SLR search protocol.

- Clearly defined research questions
- Eligibility criteria
- Structured search strategy across academic databases such as Scopus, Google scholar, and ScienceDirect

- Articles are screened at both abstract and full-text levels based on inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that only relevant, high-quality studies are included [40].
- By incorporating only peer-reviewed academic literature, credible government publications, and authoritative industry reports, the study ensures the robustness and contextual relevance of its dataset [41], [42].

A comprehensive search strategy was developed using specific keyword combinations. The search terms were derived from a combination of core keywords and modifiers. Core keywords represent the central focus of the research, while modifiers are additional terms used to refine and tailor the core keywords to a specific industry context. Table 1 summarises the keywords searched.

Table 1: Keyword combinations for the literature search

Pre-modifier	Core keyword	Post-modifier 1	Post-modifier 2
South Africa	Mining	Environmental	Sustainability
		Socio-Economic	Considerations
		AMD	
		ESG	Reporting

The selected literature is then subjected to data extraction and thematic coding. In this study, themes will be analysed through the lens of the triple bottom line economic, environmental, and social sustainability. This classification will help identify which sustainability dimension is most emphasised in current mining strategies in South Africa [43], [44]. It is important to note that mining operations outside South Africa are excluded in this research due to difference in regulations, which may lead to results being skewed. Table 2 summarises the search protocol with specific exclusion and inclusion criteria.

Table 2: SLR search protocol

Aspect	Detail
Databases searched	Google Scholar, ScienceDirect
Search terms	South Africa, Net zero, sustainability, triple bottom line, ESG reporting, mining economics
Inclusion criteria	Peer-reviewed articles Published 2010–2024 Focus on South African mining English language
Exclusion criteria	Opinion pieces without data Mining operations outside South Africa

From Table 2, the SLR research protocol outlines the search of Google Scholar and Science Direct for peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2024 that focus on South African mining using specific search terms, while excluding opinion pieces, and studies on mining operations outside of South Africa. The thematic synthesis also enables the identification of barriers (e.g., high decarbonisation costs, weak data infrastructure) and enablers (e.g., policy reforms, renewable energy uptake) in the sector's transition toward net-zero [42], [45].

Moreover, the analysis will assess how mining firms are aligning their strategies with global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and South Africa's Climate Change Act [45], [46]. By organising and interpreting this body of knowledge, the SLR will provide a consolidated view of the mining sector's sustainability trajectory, inform future policy development, and highlight opportunities for targeted intervention and innovation [41], [45]. The next section discusses the results of the SLR.

3 RESULTS

The process began with the formulation of clear research questions focusing on the sustainability practices and net-zero progress of South Africa's mining sector.

The keywords search in Table 1 were executed across multiple academic databases, primarily Google Scholar and ScienceDirect, to capture peer-reviewed articles and authoritative publications.

The review applied stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and quality as highlighted in Table 2. The inclusion criteria mandated that studies be peer-reviewed, published between 2010 and 2024, focused on South African mining contexts, and available in English. Exclusion criteria removed opinion pieces lacking empirical data and studies not related to South Africa. Figure 1 shows the PRISMA chart of the search processes and Results.

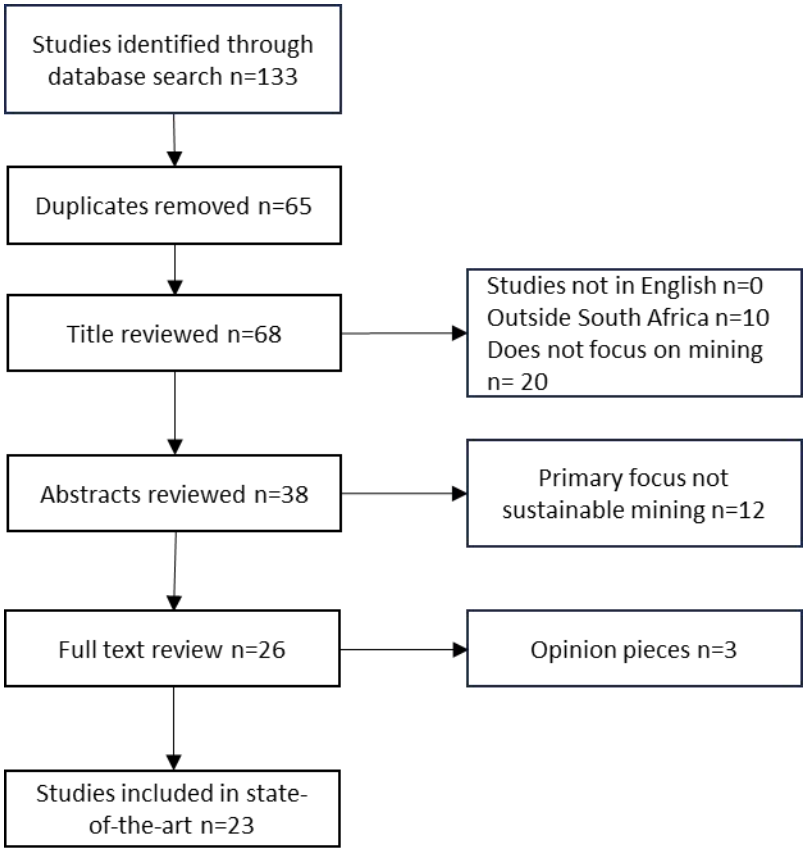

Figure 1: SLR PRISMA chart

As indicated in Figure 1, following initial screening of titles and abstracts, full-text reviews were conducted to confirm eligibility. This systematic approach resulted in a final selection of 23 studies that collectively represent a robust and comprehensive dataset for thematic analysis.

The selected studies were then categorised and analysed according to their focus on the triple bottom line of sustainability economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Data extraction involved coding key themes such as barriers to net-zero, policy impacts, technological innovations, and ESG implementation. A tabulated summary Table 2 was developed to organise the studies by reference, industry relevance, study type, and primary sustainability focus. This enabled a holistic understanding of current progress and challenges in South Africa's mining sector's transition towards net-zero emissions.

Table 3 summarises 23 peer-reviewed studies on South African mining, indicating a brief article summary, and its primary sustainability focus (environmental, social, or economic). Each study was critically evaluated based on inclusion criteria from 2010–2024. The table enables identification of thematic trends and gaps in sustainability research in South Africa's mining sector. In Table 3, X means that the study contributes to the theme while, O means it does not.

Table 3: Summary of findings from SLR search protocol

Study No.	Reference	Summary	Environmental	Economic	Social
1	[48]	Explores the role of mining in GDP and employment using statistical data.	O	X	O
2	[49]	Analyses export contributions of precious metals.	O	X	O
3	[50]	Describes regional development impacts in mining-heavy provinces.	O	X	X
4	[51]	Discusses mining company investment in community infrastructure.	O	O	X
5	[52]	Reviews AMD and environmental degradation.	X	O	O
6	[53]	Discusses contamination from AMD and tailings.	X	O	O
7	[54]	Details AMD impacts in the Witwatersrand Basin.	X	O	O
8	[55]	Reports on air and soil pollution from mining.	X	O	O
9	[56]	Assesses GHG emissions from deep-level mines.	X	O	O
10	[57]	Reviews environmental laws like NEMA and MPRDA.	X	O	O
11	[58]	Investigates ESG score correlations in JSE-listed miners.	O	X	O
12	[59]	Reviews stakeholder and institutional roles in ESG adoption.	X	O	X
13	[60]	Reviews decarbonisation efforts in platinum mining.	X	X	O
14	[61]	Empirical AMD field study in the Witwatersrand Basin.	X	O	O
15	[62]	Analyses mining climate disclosures and audit gaps.	X	O	X
16	[63]	Models techno-economic recovery of rare earths from AMD.	X	X	O
17	[64]	Mixed-methods study of coal mining just transitions.	X	O	X
18	[65]	Household-level analysis post-mine closure.	O	O	X
19	[66]	SWOT analysis of macro threats to the mining sector.	O	X	X
20	[67]	Strategic analysis using SWOT for policy direction.	O	X	X
21	[68]	Compares net-zero adoption in large vs. junior miners.	X	X	O
22	[69]	Scenario analysis on feasibility of emissions targets.	X	X	O
23	[70]	Stakeholder perceptions of climate action.	X	O	X

Study 1 by Statistics South Africa reported GDP contributions from mining, indicating the sector's continued dominance in South Africa's economic structure [48]. Using national accounts and statistical modelling, the report highlights that mining still underpins export earnings and job creation, despite global shifts towards renewables [48]. While the study is purely economic, it underscores the challenge of balancing growth with environmental degradation. It lacks integration of sustainability metrics but provides a critical baseline for policy evaluation.

Study 2 compiled sectoral data on mineral production, exports, and revenue, illustrating the mining sector's fiscal role [49]. The methodology was descriptive and quantitative, relying on industry-reported outputs. The study focuses on economic performance but does not assess social or environmental costs, thereby reinforcing the perception of mining as an economic driver without critically engaging with sustainability trade-offs [49].

In study 3, provided an industry-level review of mining's contributions to employment, infrastructure, and regional development [50]. While framed as a factual industry report, it implicitly promotes the sector's economic and social value. The report highlights regional disparities, noting that mining-heavy provinces benefit disproportionately. However, it downplays negative environmental externalities, revealing a gap in holistic sustainability reporting.

Study 4 empirically analysed the socio-economic impact of mining on local communities, using case studies to assess employment, infrastructure, and livelihoods [51]. Findings showed mixed outcomes while mining brought short-term socio-economic benefits, communities faced long-term dependency and vulnerability after mine closure. This study contributes significantly to the social dimension of sustainability but is weaker in addressing environmental impacts [51].

Study 5 produced a CSIR technical report assessing mining impacts on water resources in the Zambezi, Limpopo, and Olifants catchments [52]. Their hydrological and water quality analysis showed severe contamination from acid mine drainage (AMD) and mineral processing. This study strongly advances the environmental sustainability discourse, providing robust empirical evidence on mining's ecological costs, though it does not fully integrate socio-economic trade-offs.

Study 6 reviewed AMD impacts nationally, synthesising field data and prior studies [53]. The article emphasised AMD as South Africa's most pressing mining-related environmental threat, with implications for water scarcity, ecosystem degradation, and public health [53]. While the study is environmentally focused, it indirectly links to social and economic dimensions by noting high treatment costs and community health risks.

Durand in study 7 investigated the long-term hydrological and ecological effects of gold mining in the Witwatersrand Basin [54]. Using geological surveys and water quality assessments, the study demonstrated irreversible impacts on rivers and karst systems. The findings stress the intergenerational consequences of mining, underscoring the need for long-term remediation. Its primary focus is environmental, though implications for social resilience are evident.

Study 8 adopted a chemical engineering perspective to review AMD treatment technologies [55]. Their critical review identified both technological challenges and potential opportunities for resource recovery. The study highlights the dual nature of mining waste: as a liability and as a potential economic resource. Thus, it bridges environmental and economic dimensions by discussing remediation costs and valorisation prospects.

In study 9 Wagner [56] examined energy efficiency in the South African mining sector using case studies and energy consumption modelling. The study identified significant inefficiencies in deep-level gold and platinum mines, with opportunities for energy savings through

modernisation. While framed as an environmental issue (energy and GHG reduction), the findings also have economic implications in reducing operational costs.

Study 10 consolidated environmental governance frameworks under the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) [57]. The study provides the legal basis for sustainable mining operations, embedding the precautionary principle and polluter-pays approach. While not empirical, it directly contributes to environmental and social sustainability by enforcing corporate accountability. However, gaps remain in implementation and enforcement capacity, which weakens its practical impact.

From study 11 the authors assessed ESG disclosures among JSE-listed mining companies and found an uneven uptake of environmental metrics [58]. The methodology involved regression analysis correlating ESG score performance with profitability, revealing that most companies prioritised economic returns over environmental transparency. Although companies recognised the strategic value of ESG reporting, there was limited commitment to net-zero pathways, particularly in Scope 3 emissions. This study contributes to the economic and social dimensions but highlights a significant gap in environmental integration.

Study 12 adopted a mixed-methods approach to examine institutional dynamics in ESG implementation [59]. They found that internal resistance, limited technical capacity, and inadequate stakeholder engagement hinder environmental compliance in mining firms. The study demonstrated that although corporate strategies increasingly mention net-zero ambitions, operational changes are lagging due to inconsistent policy interpretation and fragmented accountability mechanisms [59]. This study contributes heavily to the social and environmental dimensions by exposing organisational barriers that delay climate commitments.

Study 13 scenario modelling was applied to platinum mining operations, identifying feasible decarbonisation pathways under existing constraints [60]. Their findings showed that despite technological availability, cost pressures and infrastructure limitations such as Eskom's unreliable coal-dominated grid—make short-term net-zero attainment improbable [60]. While this study is focused on the environmental and economic dimensions, it reinforces the notion that systemic challenges, rather than ambition, are the core hindrance in achieving net-zero targets.

Study 14 offers a highly empirical geohydrological analysis of acid mine drainage (AMD) in the Witwatersrand Basin [61]. The methodology is rooted in environmental sciences, including field sampling and modeling of subsurface water systems. It makes a significant contribution to the environmental dimension by detailing the spatial extent and persistence of AMD damage [62]. However, its socio-economic implications are underexplored, revealing a disciplinary silo. Nonetheless, this work forms the scientific backbone for later policy debates and interventions surrounding AMD mitigation.

Study 16 examines the feasibility of recovering rare earth elements from AMD, using a techno-economic assessment model [63]. Their work straddles the economic and environmental domains, offering a circular economy perspective rarely addressed in mining literature. By quantifying the cost-benefit potential of AMD reuse, the study brings innovation into the sustainability conversation [64]. However, the economic models assume ideal extraction conditions and do not account for the fragmented ownership and governance of abandoned mines in South Africa, thus limiting real-world applicability.

Turning to study 18, the authors conduct an SDG alignment assessment in communities around the West Wits goldfields [65]. Using spatial analysis and household surveys, they map disparities in education, health, and infrastructure. The study is methodologically strong and directly contributes to the social dimension by offering post-closure community diagnostics.

However, it falls short on environmental and economic integration failing to connect these local deficits to broader industry practices or policy responses [65]. Still, its evidence is vital for understanding the human cost of poorly planned mine closures.

In examining the socio-economic impacts of mine closure in the West Wits goldfields, as discussed it is vital to consider the broader implications for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), ESG monitoring, and the SDGs [65]. The closure of mines often results in significant challenges for local communities, including job losses and economic decline, which often lead to ghost towns. To mitigate these impacts, mining companies should enhance their CSR initiatives by developing transition plans that prioritise community engagement and support for affected workers. The mining companies should strengthen investment in local infrastructure, education, and alternative livelihood programs that can foster economic resilience and social equity beyond mining. Effective ESG monitoring and reporting are essential because mining companies can assess their social and environmental impacts, ensuring accountability through regular reporting on community engagement and environmental rehabilitation initiatives.

Furthermore, the socio-economic impacts of mine closure align with SDG Goal 8, which emphasises the need for sustained economic growth and employment opportunities, and Goal 11, advocating for sustainable urbanisation. By addressing these aspects, stakeholders can foster a holistic understanding of the long-term implications of mine closures, guiding the mining industry toward more sustainable and responsible practices that benefit communities and the environment.

Study 19 applies a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) to critically assess the future trajectory of South Africa's mining sector [66]. It highlights the country's strengths, such as its rich mineral endowment, established infrastructure, and skilled workforce, while also noting weaknesses including regulatory uncertainty, high operational costs, and declining ore grades [66]. Opportunities are identified in the form of beneficiation, value addition, and potential global demand growth, while threats include environmental degradation, social unrest, and increasing global competitiveness. The paper concludes that South Africa's mining future depends on balancing profitability with sustainable governance and environmental responsibility, making it an early contribution to debates around mining-sector resilience and sustainability.

Finally, study 20 provides a strategic review of threats to South Africa's mining sector using SWOT analysis [67]. It identifies six macro risks: infrastructure constraints, HIV/AIDS, labor unrest, declining ore grades, policy volatility, and global competitiveness. This multi-dimensional approach effectively bridges the social and economic pillars. However, while environmental risks are acknowledged, they are not deeply examined. The study's strength lies in its holistic view, which makes it a useful strategic reference for industry policymakers, especially in framing resilience against future disruptions.

Additional insights from study 21 [68] revealed discrepancies in net-zero commitments between large multinational corporations and junior miners. Large firms were more likely to have defined emission targets and sustainability frameworks, attributed to investor pressure and reputational risk [68]. However, junior miners, which constitute a large portion of the sector, lacked resources for long-term planning. This points to a dual-speed transition in the sector—where a small subset may meet net-zero targets, but the broader industry remains behind schedule. This study offers a valuable contribution across all three sustainability dimensions, particularly highlighting socio-economic inequities in climate strategy adoption.

Study 22 employed scenario analysis to test the feasibility of mining companies meeting net-zero emissions under various policy and technological assumptions [69]. Their findings confirmed that, under current regulatory and financial conditions, most companies will fall

short of their 2050 targets [69]. However, accelerated policy alignment, renewable energy uptake, and carbon pricing could help reverse this trend. This study aligns strongly with environmental and economic themes, providing a forward-looking critique on sector readiness.

Lastly, study 23 conducted interviews with community stakeholders and mining executives to explore perceptions of climate action [70]. They found a disconnect between corporate declarations and local impact, where community members often viewed sustainability efforts as superficial. The research highlights the need for participatory climate planning and greater transparency to build social legitimacy. It enriches the social dimension and stresses the importance of integrating community voices in the transition to net-zero.

Table 3 shows that the studies highlight the multifaceted impacts of the mining industry in South Africa, focusing on economic, environmental, and social aspects, with a major emphasis on environmental impacts such as acid mine drainage, pollution, and the adoption of sustainability practices, while addressing the role of mining in regional development and community investment.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This systematic literature review has critically examined the sustainability trajectory of South Africa's mining sector in the context of net-zero emissions. Drawing from 23 peer-reviewed and empirically grounded studies, the findings indicate that while there is a growing discourse around environmental, social, and governance (ESG) integration, meaningful progress towards net-zero remains fragmented and inconsistent. Larger corporations with access to international capital and investor scrutiny have begun aligning their practices with global climate frameworks. However, smaller mining entities, which represent a significant proportion of the sector, continue to struggle with limited technical and financial capacity, regulatory ambiguity, and infrastructural barriers such as reliance on Eskom's coal-powered grid.

The review revealed that most studies emphasise environmental sustainability—particularly acid mine drainage, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions but there is a relative underrepresentation of the social and economic dimensions in operational strategies. Moreover, policy interventions such as the Climate Change Act (No. 22 of 2024) and the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) offer regulatory and market-driven opportunities for reform. Nonetheless, weak enforcement mechanisms, legacy liabilities from historical mining, and limited stakeholder inclusion continue to hinder systemic transformation. These findings underscore the need for integrated approaches that align national development goals with sector-specific realities.

While the sector demonstrates partial alignment with net-zero objectives, the pathway forward requires substantive shifts in governance, technology adoption, and community engagement. Future success depends not only on capital investment but also on transparent ESG reporting, capacity-building initiatives, and a just transition framework that ensures vulnerable populations are not left behind. Without accelerated intervention, the mining industry risks failing to meet both domestic and international climate commitments, thereby compromising long-term socio-economic and ecological stability.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

While the study successfully identifies key trends and challenges in South Africa's mining sector's net-zero readiness, future research would benefit from methodological diversification. Although the systematic literature review (SLR) offers valuable thematic insights, it may not be the most effective tool for capturing the nuanced, real-time dynamics of corporate strategy and implementation. Incorporating interviews with industry stakeholders or analysing company-specific sustainability reports could provide richer, more actionable

data, allowing researchers to assess the authenticity of ESG adoption, uncover internal decision-making processes, and better understand the practical barriers to decarbonisation. Such qualitative depth would complement the existing findings and strengthen the evidence base for policy and industry recommendations.

Additionally, to place South Africa's mining industry firmly on the path to net-zero emissions, it is recommended that government agencies, mining firms, and research institutions collaborate on a national decarbonisation roadmap tailored to sector-specific challenges. This should include targeted subsidies for renewable integration, compulsory and standardised ESG reporting across all company sizes, and increased community participation in environmental decision-making. Moreover, legacy mine rehabilitation must be prioritised through a well-financed national fund, while technical training programmes should support workforce adaptation. A coherent, multi-stakeholder approach is essential to balance economic growth with environmental stewardship and social equity.

In light of the accelerating demand for net-zero emissions and the shifting business landscape described in the study, a robust climate policy framework offers South Africa's mining sector a strategic advantage as a risk management tool. The systematic literature review highlights persistent barriers such as legacy environmental damage, high decarbonisation costs, and inadequate data infrastructure all of which increase operational and reputational risks for mining firms. By embedding carbon budgets, tightening tax allowances, and enforcing ESG compliance, the framework enables companies to anticipate regulatory shifts and mitigate long-term liabilities. This structured approach not only enhances investor confidence but also supports strategic planning for low-carbon transitions, aligning corporate actions with global sustainability benchmarks.

Furthermore, the framework facilitates coordinated, multi-stakeholder action, an essential response to the fragmented prioritisation of environmental goals over social and economic dimensions noted in the review. As the study recommends, a national decarbonisation roadmap tailored to sector-specific challenges can bridge this gap by integrating targeted subsidies for renewable energy, standardised ESG reporting, and inclusive community engagement. Legacy mine rehabilitation and workforce retraining, supported by a national fund and technical programmes, would further address historical damage and future-proof the industry. In this way, the framework not only manages risks but also catalyses systemic transformation, positioning South Africa's mining sector on a more coherent and equitable path toward net-zero emissions.

In this study, SLR was used to identify the Net-Zero readiness of South Africa's mining industry, and while it provides some interesting findings, it does have some shortfalls. To address the shortfall of SLR future work should consider incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews with mining stakeholders and analysis of company annual reports. These approaches could provide a deeper insight into the practical challenges and strategies concerning sustainability efforts, complementing the findings from the SLR. Furthermore, including case studies of mining companies that have successfully implemented the Net-Zero initiatives could offer valuable perspectives and actionable lessons for the whole mining industry.

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SERVICE 5.0: TRANSFORMING AFTERSALES CENTERS WITH INDUSTRY 5.0 INNOVATIONS WAVES

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ABSTRACT

Aftersales service centers hold significant untapped profit potential in the automotive industry. With the rise of Industry 5.0, it is crucial to explore how this paradigm shift could reshape aftersales operations, enhancing efficiency, personalization, and sustainability. This study investigates the applicability of Industry 5.0 concepts in aftersales service centers, focusing on human-centric automation, smart technologies, and collaborative robotics. A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted to collect, analyze, and report on the tools, concepts, and approaches relevant to Industry 5.0 in this sector. The findings highlight the benefits and challenges of various Industry 5.0 technologies, providing insights into their potential impact on service quality and profitability. This study offers a strategic framework for implementing Service 5.0, outlining a pathway for integrating advanced technologies while maintaining a customer-centric approach. Ultimately, the research contributes to shaping the future of aftersales services in the automotive industry.

Keywords: Aftersales service center, Industry 5.0, Automotive industry, Service 5.0, SLR

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1 INTRODUCTION

The global automobile service industry plays a crucial role in ensuring vehicle safety, performance, and longevity, contributing significantly to the overall automotive sector. With over 1.4 billion vehicles on the road worldwide, the demand for maintenance, repairs, and aftersales services continues to rise, making this industry an essential pillar of modern transportation infrastructure [1].

Technological advancements like artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), augmented reality (AR), and predictive analytics are transforming the automotive industry as electrified and driverless vehicles become more common [2]. Despite this, the aftersales service centre at Company X still employ outdated manual processes and lack the digital infrastructure needed to meet evolving customer and operational needs [3].

This gap between technology potential and current practice requires a closer look at how innovative concepts like Industry 5.0 can be integrated into automobile aftersales services. Industry 5.0 is an emerging concept that builds on Industry 4.0 and emphasises human-centricity, sustainability, and resilience in industrial systems [5]. Unlike Industry 4.0 that only focused on automation, Industry 5.0 highlights the integration of human creativity with smart technologies such as digital twins, collaborative robots, and artificial intelligence (AI) [8]. While existing literature highlights the benefits of automation, AI, and smart diagnostics in improving productivity and service quality in industrial settings, there are not many studies that specifically address their application in aftersales environments in South Africa. [4].

This study addresses that research gap in understanding Industry 5.0's practical relevance for aftersales service operations in developing countries, by investigating the potential application of Industry 5.0 concepts—specifically, human-centric automation and collaborative technologies—to the after-sales services provided by Company X.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review (SLR)[13] was carried out to gather information to investigate the definitions, advantages, challenges, and opportunities of Industry 5.0 in a service centre to accomplish the aim. The SLR approach served as the basis for this investigation and is described in the following steps:

- **Step 1: Develop a research purpose and/or objective** – Define the purpose of the SLR.
- **Step 2: Develop research protocol** – Includes databases, keywords, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and quality assessment criteria.
- **Step 3: Establish relevance criteria** –Explain why a resource is relevant to this research.
- **Step 4: Search and retrieve the literature** –To locate literature, search relevant scientific databases.
- **Step 5: Selection of studies** – To choose studies, use the inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- **Step 6: Quality assessment for relevant studies** –Evaluate each paper's quality.
- **Step 7: Data extraction** –Pull relevant information out of the papers.
- **Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings** – Determine themes and patterns by analysing and combining the data from the papers.
- **Step 9: Report** – Give a thorough report on the review's findings.
- **Step 10: Dissemination** –The publication of the SLR

2.1 Step 1 - Develop a research purpose

The purpose of this study is to gather and document an overview of existing literature on the tools, benefits, challenges, and implementation strategies of Industry 5.0 technologies in aftersales service centres to develop a strategic framework for adoption within the South African automotive industry.

2.2 Step 2 - Develop a research protocol

Table 1 shows the research method that was developed.

Table 1 Research protocol

Purpose of the study	• To investigate and document an overview of existing literature on the tools, benefits, challenges, and implementation strategies of Industry 5.0 technologies in aftersales service centres.
Inclusion criteria	• Literature that contains “Industry 5.0” and “Automotive” in the title, abstract, or keywords. • Literature discussing human-centric automation, human-machine collaboration, or smart technologies in the context of aftersales services. • literature on the tools, benefits, challenges, and implementation strategies of Industry 5.0
Exclusion criteria	• Non-English studies • Studies focusing solely on Industry 4.0 without connection to Industry 5.0
Search databases	• Scopus • ScienceDirect • Web of Science
Keywords	• “Industry 5.0” AND “Automotive”
Quality assessment criteria	• Relevance of literature must be checked • Duplicate literature must be removed • Research needs to be scientific • Literature must be reviewed for correct interpretation of Industry 5.0 principles • Research methods and data collection procedures must be transparent

2.3 Step 3 - Establish relevance criteria

Industry 5.0 is a relatively new field of study that has only received significant research attention in the last few years. To ensure an in-depth evaluation of relevant papers, the following relevance criteria were created:

- Works of literature which include "Industry 5.0" and " Automotive " in the title, abstract, or keywords
- Literature that explores the definitions, tools, benefits, challenges, or strategies of integrating Industry 5.0 technology in automotive environments
- Studies that are not in English will not be accepted.

- Studies that solely focus on Industry 4.0 or other unrelated service sectors will be excluded since they do not align with the primary study objective of evaluating Industry 5.0 in automobile aftersales contexts.
- Themes were identified deductively by mapping findings to categories. Validity was supported through reviewer cross-checking, with reliability ensured by PRISMA guidelines.

2.4 Step 4 - Search and retrieve the literature

Using the databases listed in table 1, the literature was searched and obtained in step 4, producing 111 papers in total. The identification part of Figure 1 shows how the papers are broken down in this step.

2.5 Step 5 - Selection of studies

During the initial search, 111 publications were identified. After removing duplicates, 79 unique records remained for screening, as illustrated in Figure 1. At this stage, studies that did not address the definitions, benefits, or challenges of Industry 5.0 were excluded. Papers focusing solely on general Industry 4.0 concepts without linking them to Industry 5.0 or its relevance in service contexts were also removed, as were those limited to historical overviews of industrial revolutions. Non-English articles without available translations were excluded as well.

The screening process prioritized studies that explored system interconnection within the context of Industry 5.0, particularly in automotive aftersales service environments. Research limited to theoretical overviews, highly specialized use cases unrelated to service operations, or isolated technologies (such as additive manufacturing, cybersecurity in general vehicle design, or narrow AI applications without broader system integration) was excluded. Preference was given to papers examining the integration of digital twins, ERP systems, legacy equipment, human-machine collaboration, and cross-platform communication—key enablers of intelligent and interconnected Industry 5.0 ecosystems.

Following this filtering process, 8 studies met the inclusion criteria, as shown in the final stage of Figure 1. While there is a huge body of research on Industry 5.0, there is very little available in the automotive environment currently.

2.6 Step 6 - Quality assessment for relevant studies:

Following evaluation using the quality criteria indicated in table 1, included maintaining scientific credibility, verifying accurate interpretation of Industry 5.0 principles, assessing the literature's relevance to Industry 5.0 and possible advantages to the aftersales services context, and verifying transparent research methods and data collection processes were some of these requirements. In the earlier screening phase, duplicate research were also removed. All eight studies met these requirements and were deemed to be of sufficient quality to be included in the final systematic literature review, as illustrated in figure 1.

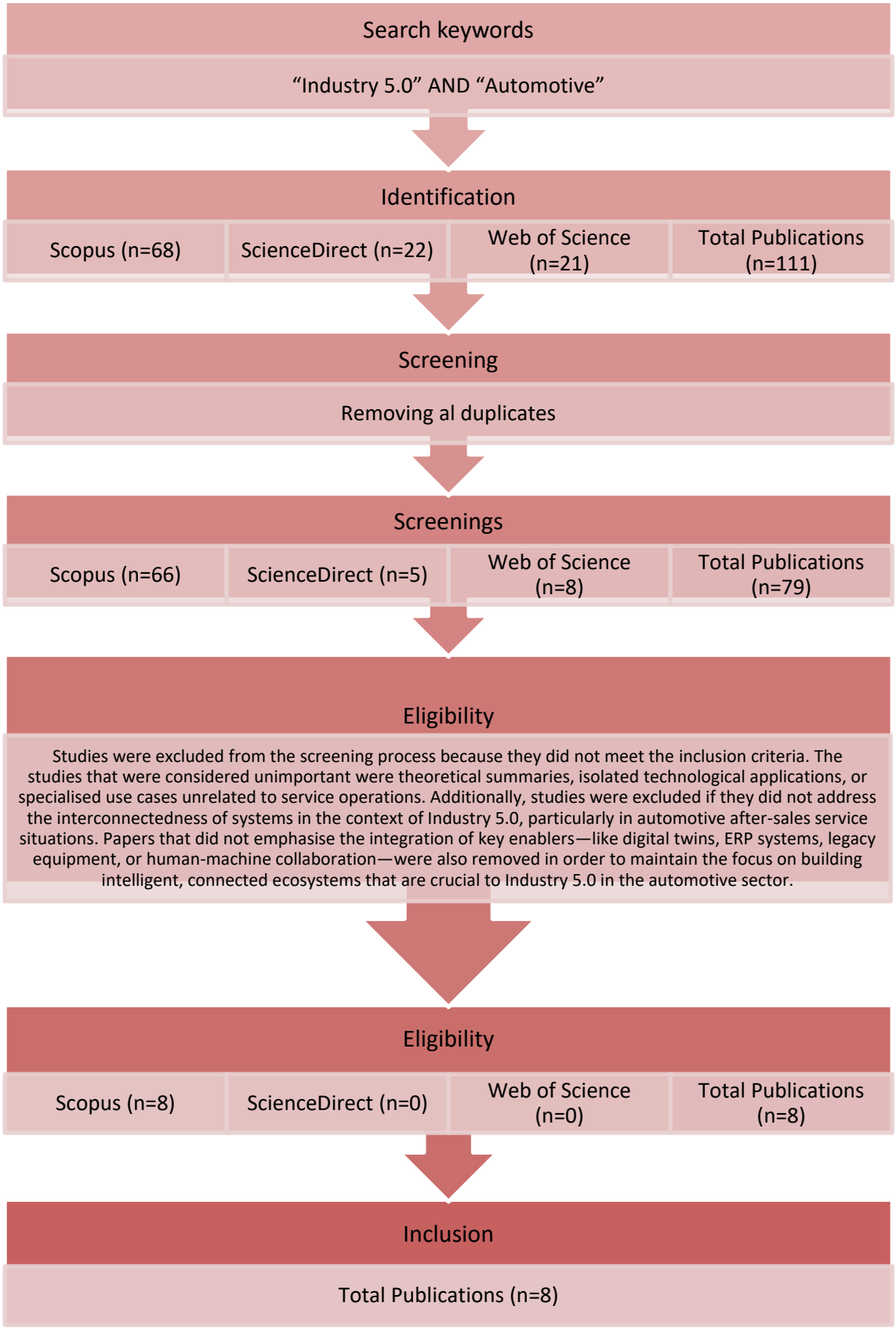

Figure 1 Process of selection chart (As per PRISMA guidelines)

3 FINDINGS

The following subsections cover the results (steps 7 and 8) of using the PRISMA guidelines.

3.1 Step 7: Data extraction

Following the final selection of the studies, all of the articles were closely reviewed, and information about the use of Industry 5.0 technologies was extracted. Appendix A offers a structured summary of the relevant research and highlights the aspects of each study, such as human-machine collaboration, advanced technology implementation, and human-centric innovation. The majority of current research is mostly focused on manufacturing and production contexts. Relatively little study has been done on the integration of Industry 5.0 technologies into automotive service-oriented processes, particularly in aftersales service departments. This observation adds to the importance and uniqueness of this study, which applies Industry 5.0 to the after-sales operations of a leading automotive firm (Company X) in the South African context. The lack of previous research in this area highlights a knowledge gap and a need for further exploration of interactive and human-centred technology in service environments, especially in developing countries.

3.2 Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings

The following subsections provide the data that was extracted, examined, and produced after all of the papers were analysed.

3.2.1 General publication trends

There were eight studies included in the final review. The distribution of publications by year is shown in figure 2.

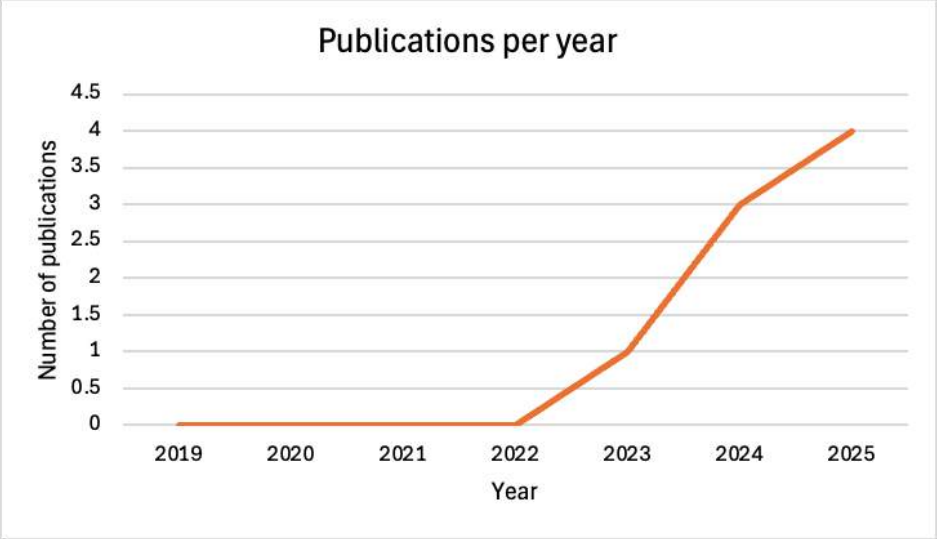

Figure 2 Line graph of the number of publications per year

The increase in research interest in Industry 5.0 within the automotive and related sectors in 2024 and 2025 indicates an increasing academic and industrial focus on the practical application of human-centric, resilient, and sustainable manufacturing processes. Since this topic is emerging and relatively specialized, limited studies is expected, yet sufficient to presents an upward trend and growth in the literature.

3.2.2 Key themes and topics addressed

The included studies address a wide range of Industry 5.0 themes. This can be combined to form the key to unlock the potential of Industry 5.0. Notable themes that emerged from the analysis are shown in figure 3 which include:

- **Organizational readiness and awareness**:
  - One study evaluated the knowledge and readiness of Polish businesses across a range of industries, highlighting the slow adoption, considerable challenges (such as infrastructure upgrading and employee training), and significant benefits (such as higher-quality products). [5]
- **Integration of legacy systems**:
  - Research on integrating older industrial equipment into modern building-management systems has shown that web-based technologies and Internet of Things (IoT) frameworks can provide sustainable and human-centred digital changes without replacing costly equipment. [6]
- **Lifecycle assessment and automation**:
  - One study developed a Python-based ERP integration system for automating transportation-related carbon footprint assessments, addressing a critical aspect of supply chain sustainability and compliance with regulation.[7]
- **Industrial inspection and evidence management**:
  - A software framework for online monitoring and visualisation of inspection failures was created to enhance decision-making and strengthen the integration of human operators through Industry 5.0 concepts.[8]
- **Human digital twins (HDTs)**:
  - Recent studies have focused on the possibility of human digital twins to enhance human interactions with digital ecosystems. The need of integrating human factors into digital design while preserving data management and privacy was emphasised [9]. HDTs bridge the gap between humans and digital systems in automotive aftersales, ensuring that technology improves service efficiency, quality, and personalization without replacing the human element, which is the core principle of Industry 5.0.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) for quality assurance**:
  - To achieve Industry 5.0 objectives, a thorough investigation showed how artificial intelligence (AI) methods, such as convolutional neural networks, are transforming live part tracking, predictive maintenance, and defect detection in the automotive sector. [10]
- **Digital twins in engineering**:
  - Reaching higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) and integrating with digital threads are two of the primary challenges that digital twins face, according to another report that looked at their use in a range of industries, including the automotive sector. [11]
- **Decentralized and human-oriented vehicle maintenance**:
  - A DAO-based (Decentralised Autonomous Organisation) architecture was introduced for vehicular healthcare to offer safe, customised maintenance solutions that align with human-centric governance models for the automotive future. [12]

Figure 3 The key to Industry 5.0

3.2.3 Common benefits identified

Several reoccurring advantages of Industry 5.0 methods were found in the researched studies:

- **Improved quality of products and services** (which was determined by 73% of businesses surveyed in one study) [9, 10, 11]

Industry 5.0 technologies have made it possible for businesses to monitor, manage, and improve production processes more effectively. This includes using IoT sensors for continuous monitoring, AI for real-time quality inspection, and digital twins for testing and simulation. The ability of these technologies to reduce defects, improve consistency, and enable faster problem identification results in higher quality outputs.

- **Improved operational resilience and sustainability** [8]

Operational resilience is the ability of an organisation to adapt to disturbances (like supply chain delays or energy shortages) while operating as usual. Sustainability's primary objective is to reduce waste, pollution, and resource use. Predictive analytics, energy-efficient systems, and smart technologies are all part of Industry 5.0, which aims to improve responsiveness and reduce environmental impact.

- **Enhanced human-machine collaboration** through automation while maintaining human responsibilities [6, 10]

Instead of replacing humans, Industry 5.0 promotes collaboration between workers and intelligent systems. While technology handles repetitive, data-intensive tasks, humans focus on creativity, decision-making, and oversight. Cobots (collaborative robots) and AI-powered assistants help people, increasing productivity without undermining their value.

- **Reducing production costs and maximising resource utilisation** [5, 8, 9]

By using automation, AI analytics, and real-time feedback to improve processes, businesses may reduce waste, energy consumption, and overproduction. Machine learning also enables better scheduling, routing, and load balancing, ensuring maximum output with minimal inputs.

- **Higher operating efficiency and data accuracy** in maintenance and lifespan inspections [4, 9, 11]

Machine health is continuously monitored by digital twins and Internet of Things (IoT) sensors, which predict problems before they happen. This increases reliability, extends equipment life, and ensures accurate performance tracking. At the same time, digital records and cloud technologies ensure that inspection data is stored securely and accurately.

- **Customisation and personalisation** of services, especially in the automotive industry [5, 6, 8, 9, 12]

Industry 5.0 enables mass customisation, enabling products to be developed to accurate customer specifications without sacrificing efficiency. Artificial intelligence can recommend designs, while flexible industries, can quickly adapt to new designs or customer needs.

- **Enabling preventive maintenance methods** with AI and IoT interfaces [9, 11, 12]

Preventive maintenance aims to fix concerns before they become problems. By looking at temperature, vibration patterns, past data, and other factors, AI models can predict when maintenance is necessary. This approach reduces the need for urgent maintenance and increases the lifespan of machinery.

3.2.4 Common challenges reported

A review of the examined papers revealed several persistent obstacles to the implementation of Industry 5.0 technologies:

- **Training and skill needed:** Several organisations underlined the importance with which employees need to be upskilled to work with cutting-edge systems. [9, 10, 11]
- **Cost challenges and infrastructure modernisation:** It can be challenging to update outdated infrastructure and processes. [7, 9]
- **Cybersecurity and data privacy:** In unmanaged and human-centric systems, data protection remains a top priority. [9, 12]
- **Legacy system interconnection:** A seamless transfer between old and modern technologies requires customised, cost-effective technical solutions. [9, 12]
- **Technological readiness:** Some technologies, like digital twins, are not as developed as they could be because of integration problems that are slowing down the adoption of these technologies. [12]

3.2.5 Implications for practice and future research

According to the findings, Industry 5.0 operations in the automotive and related industries should prioritise the following:

- Integrated transformation strategies that consider both technological and human factors
- Scalable and open-source system integration options
- Investing into employee training and change management to promote effective technology adoption
- Development of safe, interconnected technologies that foster adaptability and consistence
- Increased focus on available AI and sustainable practices to achieve long-term social objectives [8]

Future research is needed to:

- Analyse human digital twin models in more detail in practical, realistic automotive environments.[9]
- Develop defined frameworks for integrating legacy systems with modern Industry 5.0 environments. [6, 7]
- Analyse how organised maintenance models, including those based on DAO, affect operations and the economy over the long run. [12]
- Support development and integration of digital twin technology across numerous complex industrial domains. [9, 11]

4 FRAMEWORK

A structured framework has been developed to effectively and realistically convey the study's conclusions. This framework shows the progression from initial readiness to long-term Industry 5.0 implementation by organising the key elements discovered throughout the evaluation into a layered structure. The framework is shown in Figure 4 as a pyramid, with each layer building upon and supporting the one above it.

At the base of the pyramid, Layer 1 represents Organisational Readiness and Awareness. The first stage to a successful Industry 5.0 adoption, according to Bartuś et al. [5], is a comprehensive understanding of the organization's current technology and human capabilities. This means evaluating the skill levels of the employees, infrastructure limitations, and technological gaps. Businesses must invest early in infrastructure modernisation, change management, and employee training to lay a solid foundation for future developments. Without this essential basis, attempts at higher levels of Industry 5.0 transformation are unlikely to be successful.

This foundation is expanded on by Layer 2, which concentrates on Key Technological Focus Areas. This layer identifies the specific activities and technological advancements that companies must prioritise to get closer to Industry 5.0 goals. Important activities include automating life cycle assessments (LCAs) for sustainability management [7], integrating outdated systems into smart networks [6], and implementing software frameworks for improved administration and inspection of industrial operations [8]. Advanced technologies are also crucial, such as human digital twins (HDTs) [9], artificial intelligence for defect detection and quality assurance [10], and digital twins for increased operational transparency [11]. Additionally, using decentralised autonomous organisation (DAO)-based maintenance models, which combines digital automation with collaborative governance, for intelligent cars is a novel approach to creating reliable and human-centred maintenance systems [12]. By actively addressing these focus areas, organisations can embrace and integrate cutting-edge technology in ways that align with human-centric, resilient, and efficient principles.

Layer 3 of the pyramid focusses on achieving Industry 5.0 benefits through strategic integration. Organisations that effectively combine readiness with strategic technology investments can benefit from the primary advantages identified in the report. These include improved product and service quality, more accurate data in maintenance inspections, better service customisation, improved operational resilience and sustainability, and preventive maintenance enabled by AI and IoT technology. This layer represents the actual value that organisations can unlock when the bottom layers are structured correctly.

At the top of the pyramid is Layer 4, which describes the research and future practical implications. This layer highlights the ongoing need for more thorough research in areas such as the practical application of human digital twins [9], frameworks for integrating legacy systems [6], the long-term effects of DAO-based maintenance models [12], and the maturity and integration of digital twin technologies [11]. Practically speaking, it highlights the importance of putting open-source, scalable solutions into practice, developing safe,

networked technology, and ensuring that human factors remain a crucial component of all technological advancements. By addressing these issues, organisations can maintain their Industry 5.0 changes over time and stay ahead of evolving possibilities and limitations.

As seen in Figure 4, each layer of the pyramid structure is dependent upon the stability and effectiveness of the layer underneath it. Implementing key technologies and being organisationally prepared are both necessary for achieving the expected advantages and guide future research and practice. Businesses in the automotive and related industries can use this multi-layered strategy as a thorough and useful model as they develop their Industry 5.0 initiatives.

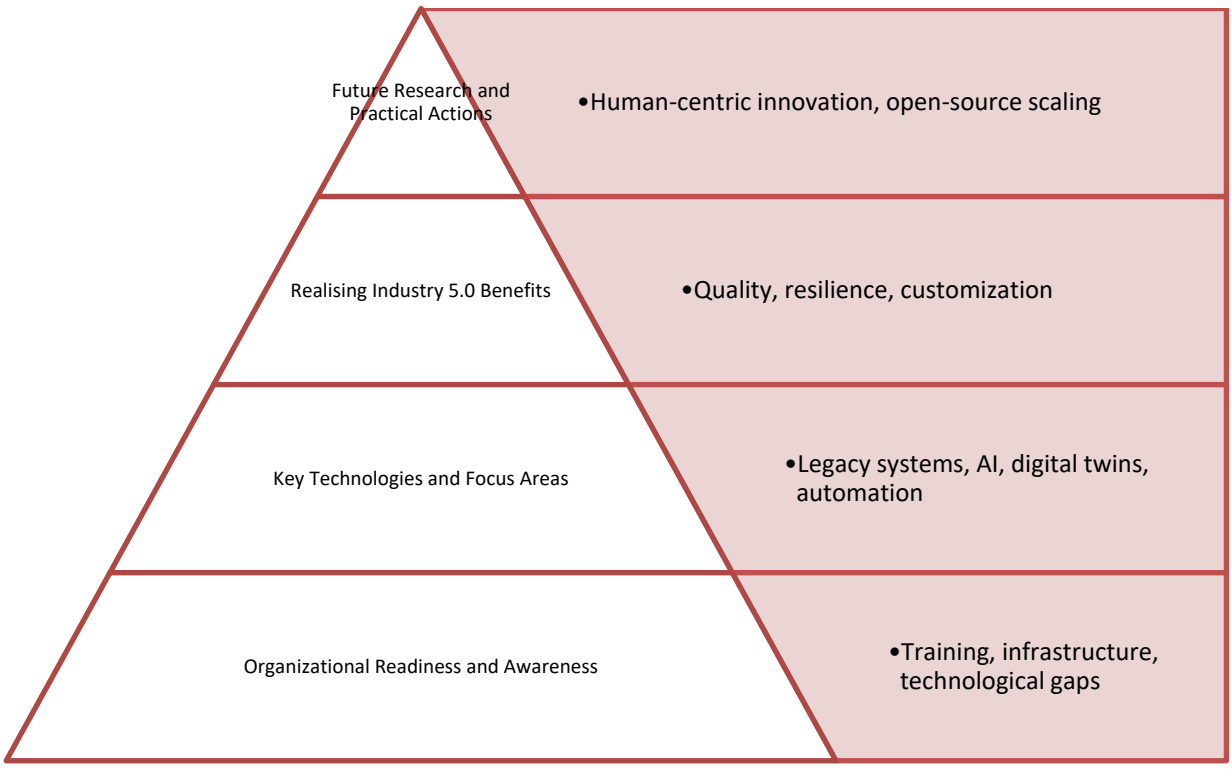

Figure 4 Industry 5.0 for the automotive service sector

5 CONCLUSION

The transition to Industry 5.0, which is defined by the integration of advanced automation, sustainable operations, and human-centric technologies, has significantly changed the manufacturing and automotive sectors. This study developed a structured framework—illustrated in Figure 4—to help organisations make this transition by highlighting the importance of organisational readiness, prioritising key technological focus areas, and strategically integrating innovations to achieve measurable benefits. The examination and review of current research made it clear that successfully implementing Industry 5.0 has both technological and organisational difficulties.

Key findings from the literature show that modernising old systems, implementing data-driven maintenance strategies, and investing in basic staff training are all necessary for long-term success. Additionally, digital twin ecosystems, human digital twins, and DAO-based maintenance models are examples of innovative technologies that promise to create operational resilience, improved service quality, and more customised client experiences. To take advantage of these benefits, organisations must, however, move away from individual technological improvements and towards integrated, human-centred initiatives.

The framework proposed by the study offers a helpful, layered approach to managing Industry 5.0 implementation in the automotive and other industries. It emphasises that organisational development, technological advancement, and research innovation must all go in harmony to produce operations that are sustainable and future ready. In addition to further verifying and enhancing this paradigm across various industrial contexts, future research should focus on investigating the long-term effects of new technologies on employee roles, sustainability results, and organisational competitiveness. Ultimately, Industry 5.0 includes not only smarter factories but also more resilient, adaptable, and supportive industrial ecosystems.

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7 APPENDIX A

#	Title	Authors and year	Human-Centric Automation	Industry 5.0 Technology (IoT, AI, AR)	Human-Machine Collaboration	Benefits	Challenges	Aftersales Application	3rd world Application	Strategic Implementation	Future Research	Reference
1	Assessment and Insights into the Awareness and Readiness of Organizations to Implement the Assumptions of Industry 5.0: An Examination of Five Polish Sectors	Bartuś, Kocot and Sączewska-Piotrowska (2025)	X (focus on skilled workforce integration)	X (adoption of smart technologies)	X (retention of human decision-making in automation)	X (quality, efficiency)	X (training, security, cost)	X (planning guidance)	X (focus on SMEs)	X (implementation model)	X (in-depth readiness diagnostics)	[5]
2	Integration of Legacy Industrial Equipment in a Building-Management System Industry 5.0 Scenario	Korodi et al. (2024)	X (human oversight integrated into automation loop)	X (IoT, IIoT, Node-RED for integration)	X (humans manage and monitor automated legacy systems)	X (resilience, openness)	X (interoperability, cost)	X (automotive industry BMS)	X (open-source, cost focus)	X (engineering control strategy)		[6]
3	Development of an ERP-Integrated Direct Routing and Way-Point Routing for Increasing Automation of LCAs in Supply Chains	Felder et al. (2025)		X (automated routing via ERP systems)		X (automation, efficiency)	X (ERP limitations)	X (supply chain emissions, improves efficiency in supply chains)	X (SME relevance)	X (ERP integration into broader automation strategy)		[7]
4	A Software Architecture for the Control and Management of Industrial Inspection Evidence	Brasil *et al.* (2024)	X (manual inspection roles in system design)	X (IoT, ML potential)	X (human experts support the real-time decision system)	X (visualization, real-time)	X (complex system design)	X (failure detection in auto parts)	X (suitable architecture for developing contexts with customization)	X (architecture proposal)	X (ML training from evidence)	[8]
5	Human Digital Twins: Enhancing	Laso, Herrera,	X (digital representations of workers)	X (HDTs, DTs)	X (collaborative interaction	X (safety, productivity)	X (privacy, interoperability)	X (productivity/interaction)	X (low-cost adaptation of HDT	X (system design alignment)	X (HDT dev. framework)	[9]

	Interactions with Digital Ecosystems	Galán-Jiménez and Berrocal (2025)			between digital models and real humans)				principles)			
6	Artificial Intelligence for Quality Defects in the Automotive Industry: A Systemic Review	Morales Matamoros, Takeo Nava, Moreno Escobar and Ceballos Chávez (2025)		X (AI, ML, CV)	X AI assists humans in quality control)	X (precision, zero-defect)	X (transparency, CPS)	X (defect detection)	X (supports sustainable AI use with low-infrastructure needs)	X (real-world AI integration)	X (AI materials & sustainability)	[10]
7	Digital twins: Recent advances and future directions in engineering fields	Iranshahi, Brun, Arnold, Sergi and Müller (2025)		X (DT, IoT, digital thread)		X (decision-making)	X (integration, Technology Readiness Levels)	X (vehicle, healthcare, supply chain)	X (encourages applications in healthcare and mobility in 3rd world)	X (cross-domain overview)	X (TRL growth, integration)	[11]
8	Advancing Vehicular Healthcare: The DAO-Based Parallel Maintenance for Intelligent Vehicles	Wang, J. Li, Fan, Wang and Y. Li (2023)	X (prioritizes user-oriented maintenance experiences)	X (Decentralized Autonomous Organization technology, DAO)	X (Decentralized Autonomous Organization technology)	X (customization, data security)	X (data governance)	X (vehicle maintenance)	X (human-oriented design)	X (DAO governance)	X (parallel maintenance dev.)	[12]

STALLING OR ACCELERATING? UNDERSTANDING AND MITIGATING HIGH STAFF TURNOVER IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

High staff turnover in the automotive industry presents a significant challenge, particularly in departments responsible for training new employees in trade skills. The continuous cycle of hiring and training new staff not only impacts operational efficiency but also increases costs. This study analyzes the underlying reasons for high turnover rates in the automotive sector through a systematic literature review (SLR). The SLR was conducted to collect, analyze, and report on key factors contributing to employee attrition. The findings reveal a range of challenges, including workplace conditions, career development opportunities, and organizational culture, while also identifying effective mitigation strategies from case studies in the literature. Based on these insights, this study develops a drivers and barriers framework to better understand and address turnover issues. Ultimately, the research provides valuable guidance for industry leaders seeking to improve employee retention and create a more sustainable workforce within the automotive sector.

Keywords: Aftersales service center, Automotive industry, High staff turnover, SLR

1 INTRODUCTION

The automotive industry is a globally integrated and competitive sector that not only influences transportation but also significantly contributes to economic growth, employment, and technological innovation. The industry involves all companies and activities related to the design, manufacturing, retailing, and aftersales maintenance of motor vehicles. [11] Within this industry, aftersales service plays a critical role in customer retention and brand reputation. Dealerships are responsible not only for vehicle sales, but also for long-term customer support through maintenance, repairs, and part replacements. To remain competitive and efficient, especially in premium automotive brands, the aftersales department must be run by highly skilled and motivated personnel.

The automotive industry is regarded as one of the world's most influential and technologically advanced sectors. The automotive industry is classified under ISIC Rev. 4 Code 2910: "Manufacture of motor vehicles". [12] Globally, the industry plays a crucial role in technological innovation, employment creation, and economic development. In South Africa, the automotive sector contributed approximately 4.3% to the national gross domestic product as of 2024 [13], underscoring its role as a strategic industry for growth and transformation. This industry also employs more than 110 000 people while being the country's fifth largest export sector, 18.1% in 2024. [13]

Company X provides structured upskilling opportunities through training programs for various job positions. Certifications earned through these programs can lead to salary increases and career progression. Despite these upskilling initiatives, the company faces a persistent challenge: retaining trained staff. Employees often leave shortly after completing training programs, either for higher-paying positions elsewhere at industry competitors, alternative work environments, or different industries altogether. This results in a repetitive cycle of recruitment and training, undermining the effectiveness of the company's investment in human capital.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted for this study is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) [15], a formal structured and replicable approach used to identify, evaluate, and interpret existing research relevant to the underlying factors contributing to high staff turnover within the aftersales service centre of Company X. This method was selected due to its ability to gather evidence comprehensively and accurately from multiple scholarly sources, providing an overview of patterns and proposed solutions within the available literature.

- Step 1: Develop a research purpose and/or objective – Clearly define the aim of the SLR.
- Step 2: Develop research protocol – Formulate a detailed research plan including the purpose, criteria for inclusion and exclusion, databases to search, keywords, and standards for quality evaluation.
- Step 3: Establish relevance criteria – Specify the rationale for determining whether a resource is applicable to this study.
- Step 4: Search and retrieve the literature – Perform searches on relevant scientific databases to gather literature.
- Step 5: Selection of studies – Apply the inclusion and exclusion criteria to choose the appropriate studies.
- Step 6: Quality assessment for relevant studies – Evaluate the quality of each selected paper.
- Step 7: Data extraction – Collect pertinent information from the chosen papers.
- Step 8: Analysis and synthesis of findings – Examine and combine the data from the papers to identify themes and patterns.

- Step 9: Report – Present the review with detailed findings.
- Step 10: Dissemination – Share or publish the SLR results.

2.1.1 Research purpose:

The purpose of the study is to investigate the root causes of high staff turnover in the aftersales service department of a premium automotive dealership and to develop practical strategies to enhance employee retention.

2.1.2 Research protocol:

Table 1 below details the research protocol used to obtain relevant articles that can be used and analysed within the SLR.

Table 1:Research protocol

Purpose of the study	The purpose of the study is to investigate the root causes of high staff turnover in the aftersales service department of a premium automotive dealership and to develop practical strategies to enhance employee retention.
Inclusion criteria	- Studies addressing employee turnover, retention, workplace satisfaction and related factors - Focused within any service-related sector
Exclusion criteria	- Non-article literature - Published beyond 2015-2025 - Non-English literature - Articles where full text was unavailable - Subject of medicine
Search databases	Scopus, Emerald insight
Keywords	“Service” AND “Training” AND “Turnover”
Quality assessment criteria	- All duplicate literature must be removed - Literature must be checked for relevance - Studies must be scientific

2.2 Phase 2 – Conducting the review:

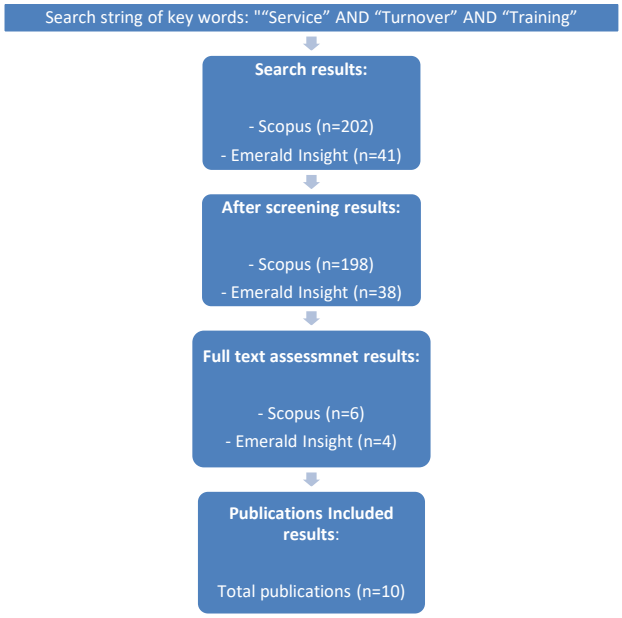


Figure 1: Selection of studies

2.2.1 Establish relevance criteria:

- Direct focus on employee retention or turnover – The study must address staff attrition, turnover or employee retention within its discussion, objective, and findings. Studies without clear reference to turnover or retention were therefore considered irrelevant.
- Considerations related to career advancement, skills development, or training – The research should examine the effects of these opportunities on staff turnover or are used as retention strategies.
- Service sector or service-related organizational context – The study must be carried out within the broader service sector, ideally in the automotive aftersales service sector or comparable service industries such as retail, hospitality, or customer service.
- Empirical research focus – Only empirical studies that presented primary or secondary findings (qualitive, quantitative or mixed methods) were considered relevant. Articles that did not include data-backed conclusions were excluded.
- Publication in peer-reviewed academic journals – To guarantee academic rigor, the research must be published in a peer-reviewed publication that is included in reliable databases such as Emerald insight and Scopus.
- Publication within a certain date – To capture current turnover challenges, trends, and practices, only research published between 2015 and 2025 were considered relevant.

2.2.2 Search and retrieval of the literature:

The literature search for this systematic review was strategically planned to meet the study objectives and relevance standards set in the early phases of the review process. Two credible academic databases, Scopus and Emerald Insight, were chosen to obtain relevant suitable studies due to their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed research. These databases were thought to be suitable for capturing both international and industry-specific perspectives on staff turnover and training procedures in service-oriented industries.

The terms “Service” AND “Turnover” AND “Training” were used to create a structured keyword search strategy. These keywords were chosen to target studies that had a connection between staff turnover and training opportunities within service organizations. The Boolean operator ‘AND’ was used to refine the results and obtain studies that specifically contained all three terms. There were 202 papers on Scopus and 41 papers on Emerald Insight found (as depicted in figure 1). From these results received, all the duplicates and retraction notices were removed to obtain a refined number of results.

2.2.3 Selection of studies

Following the literature search, the 198 papers from Scopus and 38 papers from Emerald Insight (as depicted in figure 1), were screened to assess their relevance to the study’s objectives. To improve the relevance of the search results, filters were applied. Publications were limited to those written in English and in the form of journal articles, and restricting publication data range to 2015-2025. Literature focusing on medical and pharmaceutical related topics were also excluded, as their conclusions were not completely transferable to the service-oriented industry.

After the removal of duplicates, the remaining studies were subjected to title and abstract screening. The predetermined relevance criteria were used to rapidly assess whether a study potentially addresses staff turnover and considers training or skills development as a factor, within the service industry.

Six papers from Scopus and four papers from Emerald Insight, ten papers in total, showed potential alignment to the study and were retained (as depicted in figure 1). This helped to narrow down the literature pool and streamline the review process to avoid the full text assessment of irrelevant topics early.

2.2.4 Quality assessment for relevant studies:

The ten articles that passed the title and abstract screening stage proceeded to the full text assessment stage, where full articles were retrieved and evaluated thoroughly to determine if they met both inclusion and exclusion criteria established. By ensuring an efficient assessment of each study's objectives, context, methodology, and conclusions, the full text review confirmed that only the most relevant and high-quality research was included in the final analysis. Upon closer inspection, none of the ten articles were excluded since their findings did indeed specifically address staff turnover outcomes or retention strategies and they did contain data-driven insights (as depicted in figure 1).

3 FINDINGS

The findings chapter presents the conclusions obtained from the SLR conducted to examine various factors contributing to high staff turnover in service driven industries, with the aim of creating solutions to improve staff retention. Since literature explicitly addressing the automotive aftersales environment, studies from related service industries – such as hospitality, healthcare, and manufacturing – were included to expand the contextual understanding of staff attrition dynamics.

A total of ten high-quality, peer-reviewed journal articles were included in the final synthesis and analysis, each offering unique perspectives and solutions to problems faced in the study. Training efficiency, role stress, work satisfaction, burnout, and organizational support were all frequently evaluated variables in the studies. The studies employed different quantitative methods, such as regression analysis and large-scale surveys, to determine connections between these variables and staff turnover rate.

3.1 Data extraction

As an initial step in the analysis phase of the SRL, a structured data extraction table was developed to arrange and categorize important information from the chosen studies. This table served to simplify the comparison of key study features, providing a foundation for the full text assessment that follows.

To assess each study's relevance to research objectives, the three keywords used to search for literature, "Service", "Training" and, "Turnover", was identified and tracked within each study. It was noted that all ten articles that were examined addressed the concept "Turnover" which is the foundation of the study, while other articles included both the other two concepts or only one of them.

The extracted data enabled the identification of recurrent patterns and gaps within the literature. Table 4, in Appendix A, illustrates the discussed extraction table.

3.2 Analysis and synthesis of findings

3.2.1 Thematic synthesis in relation to research purpose

<u>Job stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion as key predictors:</u>

Work related stress and emotional exhaustion are among the most significant possible contributors to staff turnover within service-oriented industries. A study done in South China used a questionnaire on hospitality employees, which revealed that role-stress as a four-dimensional construct (conflict, ambiguity, qualitative overload and quantitative overload) has a statistically significant impact on burnout. [2] It is believed that the burnout concept has two aspects: physical and behavioural symptoms. Physical symptoms referring to the person's perceived state of fatigue, and behavioural symptoms describe the difficulty to control emotions, eventually leading to poor performance. [2] The positive effect of burnout

on turnover intention has been proved by scholars, highlighting that burnout correlates with job dissatisfaction, absenteeism and turnover. [2]

Job satisfaction, career growth, and advancement opportunities:

Employee attrition is frequently caused by limited opportunities for career advancement and personal growth. A study of turnover in behaviour analysis examined 96 behaviour technicians across agencies in California and found that different satisfaction measures were significant predictors of their intention to leave. [3] Low organizational commitment has been found to be related to low job satisfaction.

[9] found that higher turnover intention was a result of unsatisfied fundamental needs, such as the desire for meaningful work and professional identity in union staff. Despite training investments, the absence of advancement pathways and a misalignment between organizational direction and employee purpose led to emotional disconnection from work. These results are further contextualised by psychological contract theory. [8] Employee trust in the company declines and their intention to leave increases when they believe that the implicit contract of growth or recognition has been broken.

Service climate and organizational culture

Positive, supportive, and communicative work environments can buffer the effects of job stress, which directly influences turnover intention. When employees think management sincerely cares for their well-being, they experience advanced levels of job fulfilment and display more dedication to the organization, resulting in reduced turnover intention. In the hospitality industry, the number one listed cause listed for employee turnover was the employees' perception of the quality of supervision. [7]

This is supported by [7] which found that employees who perceived their managers as well-trained, empathic and communicative significantly reduced intention to leave organization. Organizational culture also determines whether employees feel that their efforts are recognized. In [4] high turnover was not only linked to employee compensation but also perceived neglect and disrespect from their management.

Compensation, benefits, and financial satisfaction

Inadequate pay and unsatisfactory benefits packages remain strong predictors of staff turnover. This is evident by referring to the large increase in turnover within a ship repair organization where compensation was the most cited reason for turnover. Lack of transparency and budgetary constraints limited the company's ability to improve pay, creating a feedback loop of dissatisfaction and turnover. It was noticed that the under-appreciation from the company led to low work habits displayed by employees, including tardiness, low job quality and unannounced absences. [4]

[8] confirmed that compensation, along with training, directly influenced turnover intention among hotel workers. The study found that the impact of psychological contract breaches could not be balanced, even with effective human resource management. If employees expected better financial recognition than they received, their trust in the organization declined.

The role of training in employee retention:

Traditional human capital theory argues that the value of employees increase after employers provide general skills training. Once possessing appropriate general skills for gaining employment in other organizations, employees are likely to become attracted to working for other organizations, which leads to increased staff turnover. [6] This is supported by [9] , cautioning that training alone is insufficient if not aligned with organizational values and employee expectations.

Organizational support theorists (OST) argue from a different viewpoint and believe that general skills training can perceived organizational support (POS), enhancing emotional commitment between employees and their organization. Based on equal value exchange relationship, OST assumes that employees should rewards organization with high work engagement and reduced turnover [6]. This is supported by [1], which found that field-based training for new caseworkers led to reduced turnover rate. According to the study, burnout slightly mediated the association between retention and training, but work satisfaction entirely mediated it.

3.2.2 Statistical overview of reviewed papers

The ten reviewed studies used a variety of statistical and analytical techniques to investigate the predictors and mediators of staff turnover in service oriented industries. Although turnover intention was a dependent variable in all ten of the studies, there were notable differences in the sophistication and data coverage, which revealed more trends in the methodological practice within the research field.

Sample size and data diversity:

Sample sizes across studies ranged from small, focused populations to large national datasets. The largest study, conducted by [1], analysed 2,365 newly hired caseworkers in the U.S. public service sector. Similarly, [9] examined turnover intention among over 1,000 recent graduates in Korea, using government-collected survey data. These studies provided greater statistical power, allowing for more reliable identification of patterns.

Conversely, the other studies were more limited in scale but contributed valuable insights. For example, [6] examined 147 Chinese graduate employees using PLS-SEM, and [3] analysed just 96 behaviour technicians in a highly specialized U.S. healthcare context. While smaller samples may limit generalizability, they allow researchers to collect nuanced psychological data, particularly on satisfaction, burnout, and perceived support.

Geographically, the research predominantly focuses on Asia ([2], [6], [8], [10]) and North America ([1], [3], [7]), with one study each from Australia [9], Pakistan [5], and Malaysia [4]. Despite the relevance of employee turnover in Africa's growing service economy, no studies were conducted in African or South African settings. This lack of representation limits contextual relevance and highlights an urgent need for region-specific analysis, particularly in the automotive aftersales sector.

Methods and analytical techniques:

The reviewed studies employed different standard and advanced statistical techniques, with multiple regression being the most frequently used. Studies ([2], [6], [8], [9]) went further, incorporating moderation and mediation models to identify indirect and conditional effects. One study, [10], adopted machine learning, marking a significant methodological innovation and differentiating itself from other articles.

Table 2: Methods and analytical techniques

Ref	Method used	Tools/Techniques	Key turnover predictors identified
[1]	Logistic regression	Pre/post intervention modelling	Training, job satisfaction, burnout
[2]	SEM (Mediation)	Structural equation modelling	Role stress, burnout, service climate
[3]	Multiple regression	Likert-scale analysis	Job satisfaction, organizational commitment
[4]	Thematic analysis (qualitative)	Narrative from case interviews	Compensation dissatisfaction, poor management
[5]	Descriptive and correlation	Mixed-method survey, business strategy analysis	Staff engagement, strategy-training alignment
[6]	PLS-SEM	POS, mediation via job satisfaction	General skills training, POS

[7]	EFA and regression	Factor loadings, multivariate analysis	Manager training, perceived supervisor support
[8]	Moderated regression	Contract breach and HR practices	HRM practices, compensation, contract breach
[9]	Hierarchical regression	Moderation by value alignment	Unsatisfied career expectations, value dissonance
[10]	Machine learning	Classification prediction models, logistic regression	Job security, compensation, career mismatch

Cross-study observations:

A synthesis and review of ten studies reveals recurring predictors of turnover intention and highlights key psychological and organizational factors. Although study contexts varied across industries and countries, five themes were consistent.

Burnout emerged as one of the most powerful mediators between workplace stress and turnover. Burnout was found to be either a direct predictor or an indirect pathway linking job demands with intention to leave in studies [1], [2], [3], [6], and [8]. In these cases, burnout magnified the emotional strain of job stress, contributing to disengagement and eventual exit.

Job Satisfaction was correlated with turnover intention in six studies: [1], [3], [6], [7], [8], and [9]. Employees reporting higher levels of satisfaction with their roles, recognition, and growth opportunities were significantly less likely to consider leaving. Job satisfaction was constantly found to be both a direct predictor and an intervening variable impacting turnover in both structural equation and regression models.

Training displayed a dual role in turnover dynamics. In [1], [6], and [7], training was shown to reduce turnover when it was perceived as a form of organizational investment—enhancing commitment and emotional engagement, in line with Organizational Support Theory. However, [6] and [10] highlighted a contrasting outcome: general skills training may increase external employability, leading to higher turnover and facilitating attrition by upskilling employees who later pursue higher compensation roles elsewhere.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) was identified in [3], [6], and [9] as a critical buffer against turnover. When employees believed their organization cared about their well-being and career development, their intention to stay increased. POS acted as a mediator in various models, reinforcing its role in translating training and managerial support into long-term retention outcomes.

Financial Dissatisfaction was reported as a strong turnover driver in [4], [8], and [10]. Employees facing inadequate compensation—particularly when coupled with a lack of pay transparency, limited benefits, or budget constraints—were more likely to leave. Studies revealed that perceived underappreciation or inequity in compensation eroded employee morale and contributed to tardiness, absenteeism, and job disengagement, all precursors to resignation.

These findings suggest that turnover intention is influenced by a complex set of interrelated factors. A frequency breakdown of the most commonly reported predictors is provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Frequency breakdown

Predictor	Number of studies	% of Studies
Job satisfaction	6	60%
Burnout	5	50%
Training	4	40%
Financial dissatisfaction	3	30%
Perceived Organizational support (POS)	3	30%

Emerging trends and gaps

The methodological landscape of turnover research is evolving, with two notable shifts and omissions identified across the reviewed studies.

Mediated and Moderated Modelling is becoming more prevalent in the literature. Researchers increasingly acknowledge that workplace dynamics are complicated, multi-layered interactions rather than isolated processes. Studies [2], [6], [8], and [9] utilized mediation and moderation techniques to uncover how stress, training, organizational support, and psychological contract breaches influence turnover intention under different conditions. These models revealed not only whether variables influence turnover but also how and under what circumstances these effects occur. For instance, [8] discovered that psychological contract violations affected the efficiency of HR procedures, while [6] showed that perceived organizational support (POS) mediated the connection between general training and turnover.

Predictive Analytics represents an emerging frontier with substantial potential. With a predictive accuracy of 78%, [10] is the only study in the review to apply machine learning techniques—specifically XGBoost, K-Nearest Neighbours (KNN), and logistic regression—to classify turnover intention. This transition from traditional explanatory modelling toward predictive forecasting suggests a promising direction for data-driven human resource management. Through real-time employee data, organizations may be able to detect turnover risk early and intervene proactively. However, the absence of predictive models in the other nine studies underscores a significant methodological gap that future research could address by leveraging artificial intelligence and big data approaches.

3.2.3 Limitations of the reviewed literature

Although the ten reviewed studies provide valuable insight into predictors of staff turnover in service-driven industries, five methodological and contextual limitations are evident. These limitations affect the strength, generalizability, and practical application of the findings.

Over-reliance on Cross-Sectional Designs

The majority of studies used cross-sectional survey designs ([2], [3], [6], [7], [8], [9]), limiting the ability to establish causal relationships between predictors and turnover intention. Without longitudinal data, it is difficult to determine whether changes in stress, satisfaction, or training precede turnover intention or are simply correlated with it. Only [1] incorporated a before-and-after training design, offering stronger temporal insights into causality.

Limited Use of Longitudinal and Predictive Models

Despite the increasing availability of HR data, only [10] employed predictive modelling techniques using machine learning. The absence of time-series or longitudinal modelling in the other studies restricts our understanding of how turnover intention develops over time, and how interventions (e.g., improved training or compensation) influence it in the long run.

Geographic and Sectoral Bias

The studies are geographically concentrated in Asia (e.g., [2], [5], [6], [8], [10]), the USA ([1], [3], [7]), and Australia [9], with no representation from African countries, including South Africa. Additionally, while hospitality, manufacturing, and public service sectors are covered, none of the reviewed studies focus specifically on the automotive aftersales

environment, which is the contextual interest of this review. This limits the applicability of the findings to that sector.

Inconsistent Theoretical Frameworks

Although studies reference established theories—such as Organizational Support Theory (OST) in [6], Human Capital Theory in [6] and [10], and Psychological Contract Theory in [8]—many do so superficially. Others fail to position their findings within any theoretical framework at all. This weakens the ability to generalize findings and compare results across studies using a consistent lens.

Inconsistent Operationalization of Constructs

Finally, constructs such as burnout, satisfaction, and support were operationalized differently across studies. For instance, burnout was measured as a mediator in [2] and [6], while in [3] it was treated as a direct predictor. Some studies used multi-item validated scales, while others relied on single-question metrics. This variation limits comparability and weakens the possibility of synthesizing results quantitatively.

3.2.4 Gaps identified for future research

Building on the limitations identified in Section 3.2.3, four important research gaps emerge that present opportunities for advancing the literature on staff turnover, particularly within automotive service-driven sector.

Lack of Context-Specific Research in Automotive Aftersales

Despite the focus of this review, none of the included studies investigated turnover dynamics within the automotive aftersales industry, a sector with unique stressors such as technical expertise requirements, performance-based pressure, and customer-facing conflict. Future research should target this context specifically—especially in countries like South Africa—where skilled labour shortages and employee retention are critical to operational continuity.

Underexplored Use of Predictive Analytics

Machine learning models was introduced in [10] to predict turnover intention with high accuracy, this method remains largely absent from the rest of the literature. Future work should explore data-driven predictive models using tools like XGBoost, decision trees, and neural networks to develop early warning systems for high-risk employees. These approaches can transform retention strategies from reactive to proactive.

Need for Multilevel and Team-Based Modelling

All studies relied on individual-level analysis, despite growing evidence that turnover is also shaped by team dynamics, supervisor relationships, and local unit culture. Future studies should apply multilevel modelling to account for nested data structures (e.g., employees within departments), enabling more accurate interpretation of organizational effects.

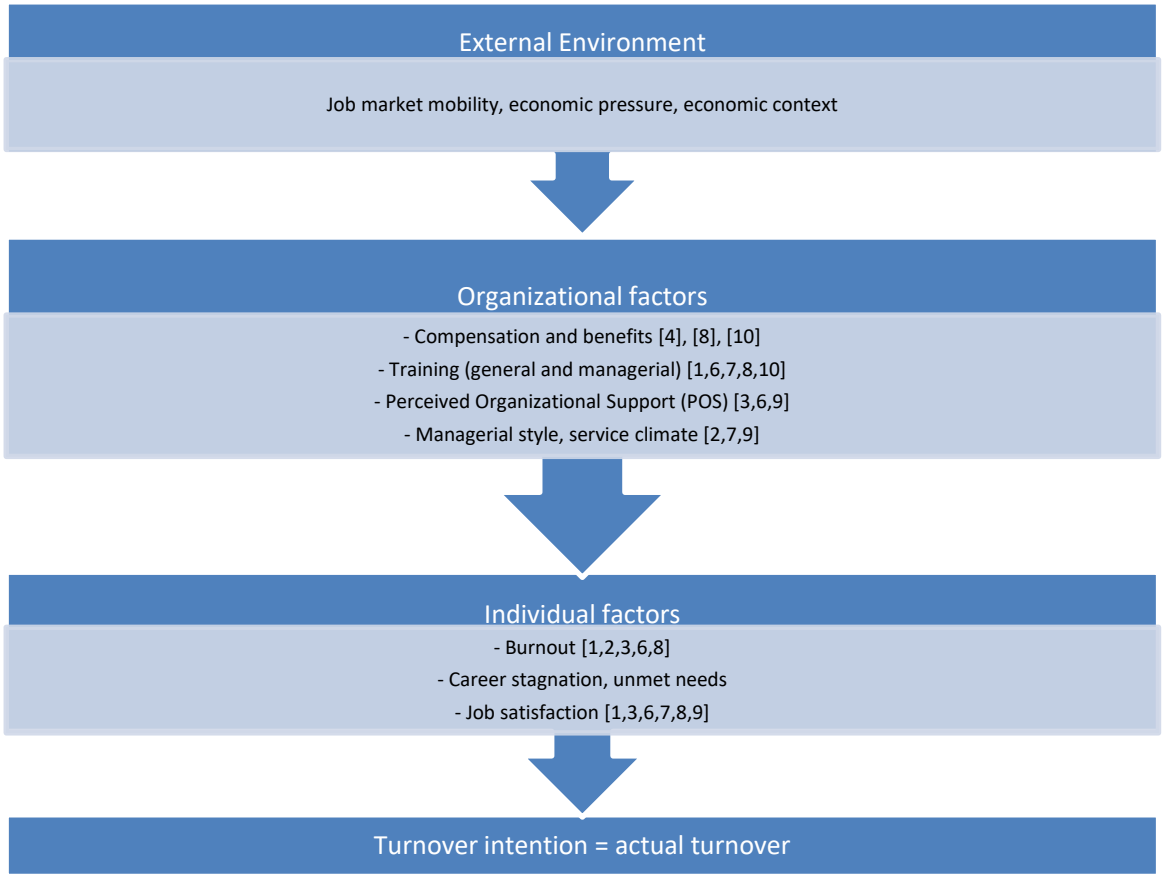
Cultural and Regional Representation

With most studies conducted in Asia, the USA, and Australia ([2], [3], [6], [9], [10]), there is a notable absence of African or Middle Eastern contexts. Cross-cultural studies are needed to understand how turnover drivers differ in regions where job mobility, economic opportunity, and cultural attitudes toward work vary significantly.

4 FRAMEWORK

The analysis in Section 3 highlighted recurring predictors of staff turnover, including burnout, job satisfaction, perceived organizational support, compensation, and training. To integrate these themes into a coherent model, a conceptual framework is proposed that graphically illustrates how organizational, individual, and external factors interact to influence turnover intention. The framework draws on Organizational Support Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Psychological Contract Theory, ensuring that the recurring predictors identified in the literature are theoretically grounded and systematically connected.

Figure 2: Influence of external, organizational and individual factors



From figure 2, the cascade of interactions between organizational, individual, and external factors that affect turnover intention, and then finally translate to actual turnover, is graphically depicted. The framework starts with the external environment, where organizational realities are shaped by elements such as economic pressure, job market mobility, and the larger economic context. These external circumstances subsequently affect organizational factors such as managerial style, perceived organizational support, training opportunities, and compensation and benefits. These organizational components then influence results and performance at the individual level. The model proposes a sequential link, emphasizing that organizational and external factors influence internal employee reactions, which in turn influences whether employees intend to leave.

5 CONCLUSION

To identify effective measures to improve employee retention, this systematic literature review analysed various factors contributing to high staff turnover in service-driven industries. The findings show that turnover intention is shaped by a dynamic interplay of individual-level psychological factors, organizational practices, and external environmental influences. At the individual level, job dissatisfaction and burnout emerged as the most frequent and influential predictors of turnover. These factors often act as mediators between workplace stressors and the final decision to leave.

From a practical perspective, organizations should implement comprehensive retention strategies that go beyond financial incentives. Effective retention requires addressing both the professional and emotional needs of employees. This includes promoting career growth opportunities, reducing role stress, ensuring fair and transparent compensation practices, and creating a supportive and engaging workplace culture.

Future research should address the identified gaps by conducting industry-specific studies, particularly in the automotive aftersales sector, applying predictive analytics to create early turnover risk identification systems, and integrating longitudinal intervention studies to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of HR practices. Although this study is consolidative in nature, by identifying these gaps it provides a foundation upon which more progressive and context-specific research can be developed.

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Appendix A

Table 4: Data extracted from relevant literature

#	Title	Authors and year	Training	Turnover	Service Industry	Country	Industry	Future Research	Reference
1	The influence of field-based training on caseworker turnover	Cynthia Osborne, Jennifer Huffman, Selena Caldera, Anna Lipton Galbraith (2020)	X	X	X	United States	Social Work	X	[25]
2	Role Stress and Turnover Intention of Front-Line Hotel Employees: The Roles of Burnout and Service Climate	Wen, Biyan ; Zhou, Xiaoman ; Hu, Yaou ; Zhang, Xiao (2020)		X	X	China	Hospitality	X	[86]
3	An Examination of Variables that Predict Turnover, Staff and Caregiver Satisfaction in Behavior-	Cymbal, Daniel J. a; Litvak, Sara b; Wilder, David A. a; Burns, Gary N. (2022)		X	X	United States	Health care and social assistance	X	[69]

	analytic Organizations								
4	The sinking ship repair corporation: uncovering the untold tale	Naidu, Navinraj ; Subramaniam, Anusuiya (2023)	X	X	X	Malaysia	Manufacturing	X	[3]
5	How business strategy drives human resource practices in small and medium enterprises? Evidence from Pakistani autoparts industry (2022)	Yasir Ahmad, Memoona Rauf Khan (2022)	X	X	X	Pakistan	Automotive	X	[101]
6	The significance of general skills training for early career graduates: relationships with perceived organizational support, job satisfaction and turnover intention	Ashly Pinnington, Farzana Asad Mir, Zehua Ai (2023)	X	X		China	N/A	X	[109]
7	The impact of manager training on employee turnover intentions	Kristin Malek, Sheryl Fried Kline, Robin DiPietro (2018)	X	X	X	United States	Hospitality	X	[76]
8	Impact of human resource management practices on employee turnover intentions: Moderating role of psychological contract breach	Santhanam, Nivethitha ; Kamalanabhan T.J.; Dyaram, Lata ; Ziegler, Hans (2017)		X	X	India Germany	Hospitality	X	[63]
9	Turnover intentions, training, and motivations among Australian union staff	Brander-Peetz, Nick ; Peetz, David ; Brough, Paula (2022)	X	X		Australia	Public sector	X	[99]

10	Developing an advanced prediction model for new employee turnover intention utilizing machine learning techniques	Park, Jungryeol ; Feng, Yituo ; Jeong, Seon-Phil (2024)		X		South Korea China	N/A	X	[122]

SAIIE35 Proceedings, 20–22 October 2025, Cape Town, South Africa © 2025 SAIIE

IMPACT OF DOWNTIME AT AN INDUSTRIAL PLANT: A CASE OF FLY ASH PROCESSING AS A STRATEGIC CEMENT RAW MATERIAL FOR DECARBONISATION

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ABSTRACT

In operations management, it is crucial to monitor and regulate downtime to prevent negative effects on revenue, production time, and unhappy stakeholders. A fly ash processing plant is one of the strategic operations that requires effective management for the cement industry. The cement industry is under pressure to find manufacturing strategies for reduction of carbon dioxide (CO_2), as for every 1 tone of cement clinker produced is associated with 0.87 tone CO_2. To achieve this, one of the key raw materials is fly ash and for every quantity of fly ash used for cement production is associated with similar of CO_2 emission reduction. The fly ash processing plant had downtimes assessed over four months period, which affected fly ash availability. Pareto chart was used to categories the downtimes, calculations of Mean Time To Repair (MTTR), Mean time between failures (MTBF), availability and Overall Equipment Effectiveness were made. Subsequently the cost associated with downtimes was also calculated. Pareto chart indicated that 80% of the downtime outcomes were due to breakdown on pipe conveyor belt, pipeline and fly ash hopper. This subsequently indicated an overall MTBF, MTTR and OEE for the four months period was 7.20, 3.14 and 29.32% due to the unavailability of equipment affecting potential production output. respectively. This was correlated with the uptime of 56.42%, with 43.58% accounted by downtime mainly from pipe conveyor belt and pipeline breakdowns with high MTBFF and MTTR. The overall cost associated with carbon tax payable over the four months period was ZAR1.72 million in better case of at better case tax rate of ZAR165.30/ton and ZAR7.68 million in the case of ZAR37.00/ton payable at better case scenario. Meanwhile in the case of CEM II/A-V cement type production at carbon tax better payable rate case of ZAR131.10/ton and ZAR28.49/ton at worse and better case, the carbon tax payable was ZAR1.32 million and ZAR6.09 million respectively. Corrective maintenance was planned and scheduled through Gantt chart. It was carried out over 29 days period to install new pipe conveyor belt, idlers, and rollers on the belt system to avoid old ones wearing the belt thus making the entire system to be affected. The pipe conveyor belt contributed the highest duration at 48.28% and 82.49% total cost of components procured. Post maintenance event on repair and installation of new equipment or component in the manufacturing system, a maintenance program needs to be designed and followed. This is to a monitor and control the equipment, and the entire system of manufacturing to gain the

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expected life out of the components maintained. Further research is needed to review future fly ash availability in South Africa in-line with the power utility's driver on Just-Energy-Transition (JIT) strategy. The research should also look at each coal fired power station's electricity generation units' retirement plan which will substituent reduce availability of fresh from older power stations that are best positioned to supply the cement industry for decarbonization initiatives.

Keywords: Carbon dioxide, carbon tax, decarbonization, downtime and Just-Energy-Transition (JIT) strategy

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Production uptime is of great importance in manufacturing facilities to fully utilize the equipment on-site for conversion of raw materials into finished goods. Most manufacturers are striving for world class manufacturing with Overall Equipment Effectiveness (OEE) target of 85%. Fakhri et al. [1] indicated that 85% OEE is achieved at three factors, namely availability rate of 90%, performance rate of 95% and quality rate of 99%. OEE has an objective to make an equipment that is constraint to run more efficiently in a manufacturing line [1]. Monitoring of equipment performance in manufacturing processes is an everyday responsibility in production management. Jeong and Phillips [2] decades ago indicated that successful data that gives reflection on real utilization of equipment aids managers with identification of causes of lost time and attempt to reduce the loses, so equipment is available for the required production hours. Thus, minimization of downtime on equipment within a production line is important for meeting this key performance indicator. Haque et al. [3] described downtime as the length of time that a process of manufacturing is interrupted due to unexpected circumstance.

Reduction of downtime as corrective action by first defining priorities through pareto analysis and secondly by creation of projects that ensure a solid approach to solving the issue Haque et al. [3] has been the approach in manufacturing facilities as indicated by much research. Minimization of downtime in a fly ash processing plant is of great importance to cement and concrete industry for decarbonization objectives. Coal fired power stations in South Africa are the dominant source of electricity production. One of the Coal Combustion Products (CCP) from a power station is ash. Eskom [4] indicated that, during power station operations, about 50 000 tons of coal is consumed daily by a typical 3708MW power station which generates 20 000 tons of ash per day.

The coal procurement strategy at the power station operations with respect to category of coal supply contracts being issued, for example, long-Term cost-plus contracts; long term fixed price contracts, medium term or short-term fixed price contracts affects the landed coal cost per ton to the power station due to the pros and cons associated with each contract being used. Contract duration for Long term contracts (cost plus and fixed price) are generally between than 10 years and 40 years with a pre-determined coal price escalation formula. The unit cost of coal is around ZAR397.00 per Megawatt hour as at year 2021, which is higher by 14.61% in comparison to year 2020 pricing. These added to the cost of coal of ZAR66.6 billion which was 59.4% of the primary energy cost of ZAR112.1 billion spent for the 2019/20 fiscal year. This further indicated an increase of 16.3% on average cost per ton coal purchase year-on-year (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa and Eskom Research Unit 2021). Furthermore, Ratshomo (2021) stated that the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) indicated year 2020 average price per ton of local sales based on Free-On-Road (FOR) for bituminous coal and anthracite coal is ZAR 443.09 and ZAR 1037.50 respectively, with value-added tax excluded.

These subsequently have an influence on ash availability and cost thereof, with an assumption that average selling price of fly ash is determined as a function of per-centage fly ash content in the coal. The per-centage is then used to calculate the expected average selling price of fly ash based on the price per ton of coal. The ash produced from coal combustion is split into daily production of 17 000 tons (85%) fly ash and 3000 tons (15%) bottom ash, thus with hourly production rates of 708.33 tons and 125 tons respectively. This means expected estimated average selling price of fly ash is ZAR150.65/ton in the case of bituminous coal combusted at the power station (i.e. Average fly ash selling price = %fly ash in coal× coal price ; Average fly ash selling price = (17 000tons/50 000 tons) × ZAR443.09/ton)).

The cement industry has been embracing fly ash as a raw material categorised as supplementary cementitious material for manufacturing of cement for decades. Most recently, sustainable development targets has been with an emphasis on climate change whereby manufacturing sector contributes. The cement industry contributes carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas being emitted, such that, Dong et al. [5] indicated that every 1-ton Portland clinker produced is associated with 0.9 tons CO_2 produced and Beltran and Arnesh [6] indicated that it categorises the cement industry as the second largest pollutant in the world. However, depending on manufacturing strategies of a cement plant, this quantity of CO_2 can potentially be minimized from being emitted to the environment at 100% or at a partial percentage depending on production system in reducing the emissions. The Carbon Tax Act 2019 drives the cement industry to invest in decarbonization techniques within their manufacturing processes or systems. This is through charging of a carbon emission environmental levy known as Carbon Tax, which according to Kotze et al. [7] it has commenced on 1 June 2019 at a rate of ZAR120/ton CO_2 emitted. Kotze et al. (2023) further indicated that this tax was planned to be escalated yearly at consumer price inflation (CPI) +2% until 31 December 2022. Thereafter, the tax rate will be escalated by CPI only. The 2024 carbon tax is ZAR190.00/ton CO_2 emitted, and this is payable passed on cement type produced such that the higher the clinker content in the final cement is associated with high carbon content payable and vice versa. This further amounts to ZAR165.30/0.87ton clinker per 1 ton CEM I cement type produced or ZAR165.30/ton CEM I cement type produced, while a typical cement manufacturer can pay-out carbon tax rate of ZAR37.00/ton CEM I cement produced based on the baseline discount based on Carbon Tax Act. The carbon tax typically payable for production of Portland fly ash extended cement, CEM II/A-V 52.5N with 18% fly ash, 3.5% gypsum and 78.5% clinker on better carbon tax payable scenario using ZAR37.00/ton CO_2 emission is therefore at ZAR29.67/690kg CO_2 emitted.

In April 2016, South African government indicated commitment to participate in the Paris Agreement on climate change. Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by up to 42% is of great need to mitigate the rate of change in climate. For these reasons, availability of fly ash is of strategic value to substitute clinker usage thereby reducing its consumption per ton cement produced which subsequently reduces CO_2 emissions.

Tau et al. [8] described fly ash manufacturing process where a pipe conveyor is utilized for wet handling of fly ash rejects streams as depicted by Figure 1.

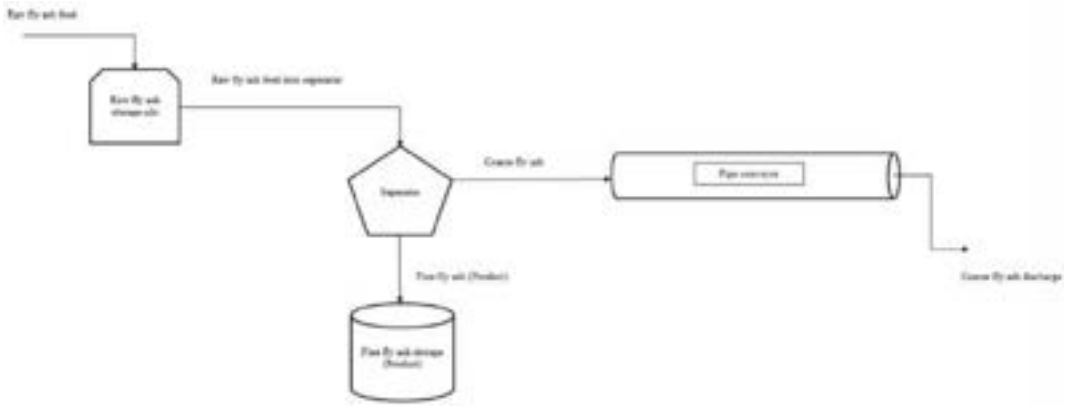

Figure 1: Coal fly ash processing description.

Source: Tau et al. [8]

Downtimes in such strategic plants need to be kept as minimal as possible to avoid supply chain interruptions for decarbonization initiatives, in this case, in the cement and concrete industry.

1.2. Problem statement

Materials handling systems in manufacturing sectors through utilization of belt conveyors are of great importance for movement from point A to B in an efficient and effective manner. Tau et al. [8] analyzed the equipment failure in a production line of a fly ash processing plant. The key findings were that the pipe conveyor belt breakdown/stoppage contributed about 44% of the frequent breakdowns as analyzed over 31 days production period. The average time spent by maintenance personnel to rectify pipe conveyor breakdown was at 192 hours which further indicated 74% of breakdown time spent on attending to breakdown due to pipe conveyor belt. Thus, this was the highest compared to time spent on rectify other breakdown types. The study then recommended frequent inspection and replacement of all idlers that are torn on the infrastructure of the belt station. This was for minimization of wear and tear rate on the pipe conveyor. Furthermore, the study recommended the installation of additional idlers at the back of station idlers to maintain the folding shape of the pipe belt conveyor while running. Further recommendations indicated was that the counter weigh required to be at the design requirements for the belt to ran properly. Thus, the current belt has worn and need to also be replaced to minimize the high number of times spent on no production due to the belt nor running productively. This constraints OEE and fly ash availability to the cement and concrete sector for decarbonization purpose on very ton/cubic meters of cement/concrete produced due this belt system creating constraint. The impact of downtime in such operations as fly ash processing plants are of great importance to be researched as they have direct effect on the entire cement and concrete industry as fly ash is a strategic raw material for decarbonization.

1.3. Objective

1.3.1. Overall objective

The primary objective was to conduct corrective maintenance on Japanese pipe conveyor belt of a fly ash production line for minimization of downtime to increase production uptime for fly ash as a strategic cement raw material for decarbonization.

1.3.2. Specific objective

1.3.2.1. To determine downtime contribution and impact on equipment availabilities, OEE, lose in production hours and quantities.

1.3.2.2. To determine downtime impact on production revenue, lose and carbon tax payables.

1.3.2.3. To conduct corrective maintenance on pipe conveyor belt, pipeline and fly ash hopper to increase production uptime.

1.4. Significance of the study

Coal fired power station operations are under tremendous pressure to manage solid waste such as ash and gypsums from coal combustion in from generation units and gypsum from flue gas desulphurization systems respectively. Disposal of this daily produced waste to ash dams and landfills is not a preferred solution due to environmental risk it possesses such as underground water contaminations with disposal sites be lined or unlined, while with South Africa being a water scarce country and need to protect the little was sources available. Better management of fly ash processing plants is of strategic value to power station ash management strategies for disposal avoidance, however, for beneficiation in the cement and concrete industry. The cement and concrete industry also depend strategically on fly ash for clinker factor reduction in cement associated with 0.9 tons CO_2 production for every 1-ton clinker produced. As it is known that fly ash utilization in cement production reduces CO_2 production by same quantity used as recently investigated by Tau et al. [9]. Availability of fly ash from power station fly ash extraction plants is of great importance for both these industries for sustainable operations on land pollution and climate change due to CO_2 as one of the greenhouse gas emissions. Ali et al. [10] indicated that flue gas streams from clinker production is composed of concentrations of CO_2, nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), nitrogen oxide (NOx), Sulfur dioxide (SO_2) and Oxygen (O_2) with CO_2 constituting the highest share by weight as maximum as 33%. Thus, CO_2 is great concern for reduction by the cement industry.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

OEE is the concept of Total Productive Maintenance systems that was developed and pioneered by Seiichi Nakajima as noted by Nakajima [11]. Availability factor of OEE is considered as the time available for activities of production by machines and downtime affects this factor [1]. OEE is the measurement of value that is added to production by a specific machine in a certain period, thus for maximisation of equipment effectiveness (Haque et al. 2022) and it is the product of three factors: availability, performance efficiency and quality rate calculated as follows as indicate by several studies (12, 13): OEE= Availability rate × Performance rate × Quality rate. These factors are calculated as: (i) Availability rate = (Total operating time / Available operating time) × 100 (ii) Performance rate = ($Total$ output/ Potential output) × 100 (iii) Quality rate = (Quality production/ $Total\ production$) × 100.

Haque et al. [3] indicated that availability factor of OEE associates the time an equipment could be in operation theoretically thus when the demand for utilisation is available versus the actual time there was output or utilisation from it. Kusumo and Ishak [12] indicated that downtime on equipment often occurs which then results with slowed down process of production, resulting with not meeting the predetermined targets of production output on product. Govender and Dewa [13] also indicated that operational availability is described as the time percentage that an equipment or line of assembly can properly operate when is required for production. Kusumo and Ishak [12] further indicated that to resolve this, companies make efforts to carry out maintenances that are aimed at implementation of program of total productive maintenance.

Nakajima [11] aimed at OEE development to be used as an indicator for identification of losses which are associated with resource consumption without value addition on the final product being manufactured. Thus the bottom approach around OEE deployment involves the entire workforce in a manufacturing process to contribute for the elimination of six big losses which

are (i) unexpected failures of equipment that stop it from contributing to production (ii) set-up and adjustment that is associated with exchanging of tools or production line adjustments for production start-up on every equipment (iii) minor machine stoppages (iv) reduction in operating speed of equipment compared to standard requirement (v) scrap and reprocessing of product produced that does not meet the quality specification required and (vi) losses as a result of start-ups.

Cabezas-Fulca and Muelle-Macchiavello [14] implemented lean manufacturing to maximise the availability of machine in a metal working company. Quantitative analysis of production process of a steel coil cutting machine (Slitter) of a Peruvian metalworking company was conducted. The scope included improvements proposal and implementation as lean manufacturing tools to increase machine availability. Single minute exchange of die (SMED), which is aimed at reduction of setup time of machine through rearrangement of internal to external activities. Kaizen and 5s methods were also applied to continuously improve, standardise processes, improvement of cleanliness and workstations. These were associated with an outcome of improved monthly available time of production by 95.73 hours which indicated 17.36% improvement in machine availability. Furthermore, 16% and 16.5% reduction in setup times and operation cycle times was achieved respectively.

Todmal et al. [15] indicated that machine failures or breakdown results with production interruption which affects the availability of the entire system of production, expenses on maintenances and affecting end customers. Breakdowns and implementation of optimal maintenance of engine cylinder block machines was analysed to improve operational availability [15]. Analysis were made with Operational availability (up time), Failure Mode Effect Analysis, Root Cause Analysis and Why-Why analysis, while parameters like Mean Time To Repair (MTTR), Mean time between failures (MTBF) and Machine Uptime %. The following equations were used to calculate these parameters:

Operational availability (up time) = Number of working days in a month × Available hours in a month [1].

Availability = MTBF/(MTBF + MTTR) [2] ; MTBF = Total available hours/Total number of breakdown (Count); Available hours = Working time – Breakdown time; MTTR = Total breakdowns hours/ Total number of breakdown (Count) [16]

The production quantity achieved were used as key performance indicators whereby they were compared with previous year data in a computerized maintenance management system. The outcome of the study indicated that percentage uptime or availability of machine is critical for achievement of production goals and breakdown must be reduced to increase the percentage uptime.

Predictive maintenance and corrective maintenance are one of the levers of maintenance strategies or types for the improvement of future availability of equipment in a manufacturing plant as shown on Figure as recently reported by Martinus et al. [17] from Rastegari and Salonen [18].

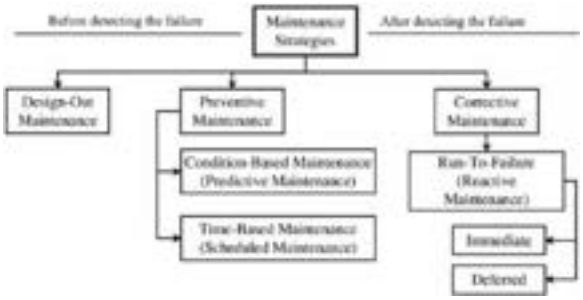

Figure 2: Maintenance strategies.

Source: [17]

Lind and Muyingo [19] stated that Dunn in 2003 defined maintenance strategy as plan for long operational control which covers maintenance management aspects associated with direction settings and with clear actions for achievement future state that is desired in the maintenance function. Furthermore, Zaim et al. [20] also stated that maintenance strategy entails a choice between corrective, preventive and condition-based maintenance. Blanchard [20] indicated that corrective maintenance operates on the basis that an equipment is repaired when it failed or is about to fail. Thus it is not scheduled and has repair actions associated with increased number of equipment downtime resulting with reduction in production output and high cost of resources. Lind and Muyingo [19] further stated that corrective maintenance is also known as breakdown or failure-based maintenance is subdivided according to either being able to be done immediately as failure is detected or deferred to a later date which might perhaps be part of the longer run of maintenance plan.

Martinus et al. [17] conducted predictive maintenance as a means for improvement of centrifugal slurry pump availability of Ergo city deep plant. The study used monitoring techniques of preventative maintenance and it proved that predictive maintenance is better than reactive maintenance for centrifugal slurry pumps due to pump availability being able to be increased by 49%, while the downtime and cost of maintenance have also been simultaneously reduced by 58%. This further improved production losses thereby maximising profit margins of the plant. Pasipatorwa et al. [22] indicated that the manufacturing industry's ability to produce goods at a quality and quantity that satisfy existing customer base, expansion of share in the market, remaining competitive and profitable is dependent on reliability of machines in the line of production. Pasipatorwa et al. [22] explored the impact of machine reliability in a line of production through analysis and interpretation of information of operations sourced from machine database of computerised maintenance management system (CMMS). This was conducted by comparison of Adcock Ingram Critical Care (AICC) and Adcock Ingram Health Care (AIHC) same lines of production. The machines performed bellow benchmarking points, however, post implementation of preventive maintenance there was improvements.

Rahman [23] stated that in year 1906, a mathematical formular was created by an Italian economist, Vilfredo Pareto, for description of distribution of wealth that was unequal in his country. The observation made was that, 20% of people owned 80% of the country's wealth. Additionally, in year 1940s later, Dr Joseph M. Juran attributed the 80/20 Rule to Pareto inaccurately, calling it Pareto's principle. Furthermore, Rahman [23] stated that this technique is helpful in identification of causes of problems that are predominant that are required to be first resolve majority of the problems. The assumption, always, is that 20% of causes are determined by 80% of problems. Wilianto et al. [24] most recently also stated that Pareto chart simply implies that, 80% of outcomes (or outputs) results from 20% of all causes (or inputs) for any given event. Grosfeld-Nir et al. [25] decades ago described pareto chart as frequency block diagram depicting the relative frequency of attributes that are different, in

a descending order. This method of classification should be preceded by taking corrective actions of differentiation and allocation. Burga-Dominguez et al. [26] successfully used pareto chart for the identification of reasons for unproductive times for data collected in the study for management of production model based on lean manufacturing and SLP for optimisation of unproductive times in a SMEs in the plastics industry.

3 METHODOLOGY

Figure 3 depicts step by step flow of activities being carried out for execution of the research.

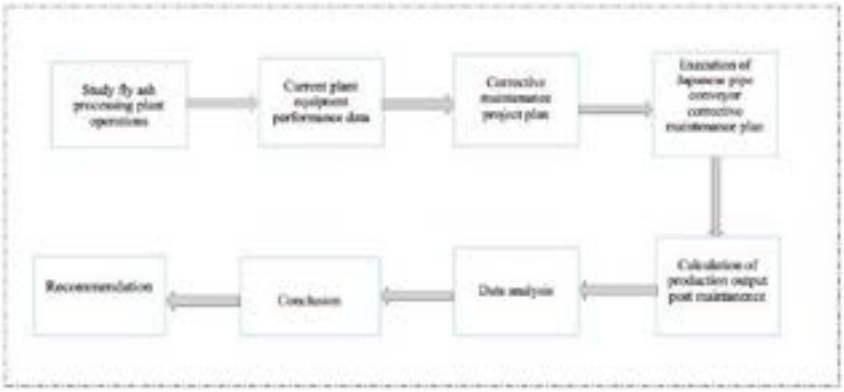

Figure 3: Step by step research flow

The following formula were used to calculate the required variables or factors:

Potential production quantity (tons)

Fly ash production quantity lose (tons) = Hourly production rate (ton/hr) × Downtime duration (hr) ; Production rate is consistent at an average of 38 tons/hr as reported by [3].

Total available production time (hours) = Number of days in a month × hours in a day

Total available none-productive time (hours) = Number of days in a month × daily allocated none-productive hours

Total available productive time (hours) = Number of days in a month × daily allocated productive hours

Total available none-productive time contribution (%) = (Total available none-productive time/ Total available production time) × 100

Total available productive time contribution (%) = (Total available productive time/ Total available production time) × 100

Production capacity utilization (%) = (Actual production quantity / Potential production quantity) × 100

Production capacity under-utilization (%) = (Fly ash production quantity lose / Potential production quantity) × 100

Breakdown time and number of breakdown counts were gathered through daily production log sheet during each month period.

MTBF = Total available hours/Total number of breakdown (Count)

MTTR = Total breakdowns hours/ Total number of breakdown (Count)

Availability = MTBF/(MTBF + MTTR)

Uptime = Available working time − Breakdown time

% Uptime = (Uptime/ Available working time) × 100

% Downtime = (Breakdown time/ Available working time) × 100

Downtime cost, revenue lose (ZAR) at fly ash plant = Average fly ash product selling price × Fly ash production quantity loses

Downtime cost, due to carbon tax payable at worse case at fly ash user cement operations (ZAR) = Cement quantity usage × Worse case carbon rate payable ; Worse case carbon rate payable = South Africa 2024 carbon rate which ZAR190/ton CO_2 emitted as reported by Kotze et al. [28]

Cement quantity usage = Fly ash production quantity loses

Average fly ash selling price = %fly ash in coal × coal price

Downtime cost, due to carbon tax payable at worse case/better case tax = Fly ash production quantity lose × carbon tax rate

Carbon tax payable saving on CEM II/A-V cement type production compared to CEM I based better case tax rate of ZAR37.00/ton cement produced (%)= ((A – B)/A) ×100 ; Where A is downtime cost due to carbon tax payable at better case tax rate of ZAR37.00/ton CEM I cement type produced without fly ash usage, B is the downtime cost due to carbon tax payable at better case tax rate of ZAR37.00/ton CEM II/A-V 52.5N cement type produced with fly ash usage at fly ash user cement operations

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Determination of downtime contribution and impact on equipment availabilities, OEE, lose in production hours and quantities.

Table 1 indicates that the total amount of none-productive time spent on production have been increasing by a margin of 3.73%, 3.62%, and 1.40% between month one and two, month two and three, and month three and four respectively. Even though the total available time of production have been different on some months. The big effect is the additional unplanned non-productive hours, added as downtime. This affected the overall productive time by achievement of only 46.19%, while 55.32% was not productive due to downtimes.

Table 1: Targeted time versus actual time on Japanese pipe conveyor production line over four months period with reference to appendix A

Parameters	*Unit of measure*	*Month 1*	*Month 2*	*Month 3*	*Month 4*	*Total*
Target						
Total available production time	**hour**	600,00	696,00	696,00	744,00	2736,00
Total available none-productive time	**hour**	125,00	145,00	145,00	155,00	570,00
Available productive time	**hour**	475,00	551,00	551,00	589,00	2166,00
Total available none-productive time contribution	**%**	20,83	20,83	20,83	20,83	20,83
Total available productive time contribution	**%**	79,17	79,17	79,17	79,17	79,17
Actual						
Achieved productive time (relative to available productive time)	**hour**	299	321	296	306	1222
Achieved none-productive time (relative to available productive time)	**hour**	176	230	255	283	944
Total achieved none-productive time (relative to total available production time)	**hour**	301	375	400	438	1514
Total achieved productive time contribution	**%**	63,01	58,29	53,72	51,95	56,4
Total achieved none-productive time contribution	**%**	240,56	258,50	275,86	282,59	265,53
Total achieved productive time contribution at total available production time	**%**	49,88	46,15	42,53	41,13	46,19
Total achieved none-productive time contribution at total available production time	**%**	50,12	53,85	57,47	58,87	55,32

Table 2 indicates the available time of production which was split between uptime and downtime due to equipment breakdown on the production lines. It is noted on Table 2 that the uptime has been decline from month one to month two by a margin of 4.69%, from month two to month three by a margin of 4.54% and from month three to month four by a margin of 1.77%. The target is to achieve a world class availability of 90.00%. This lose in uptime is

gained by per-centage downtime at the same pace. The overall MBTF for months 1, 2 and 4 were higher than for month 3 which indicated that the rate of breakdown or failures were not taking place within a short duration. Meanwhile at month 3, the MTBF value was low which indicated that failures were taking place within short time. Furthermore, the MTTR for months 2, 3 and 4 were the lowest compared to month which indicated improvement in mean time to recovery post the downtime to ensure production resumes having a fair interruption. In overall over the total four months, an uptime of 56.42% was experienced which is far by 33.57% from the world class availability of 90%. The overall breakdown time of 944 hours associated with 43.58% downtime within the four durations, affecting the production output from the fly ash plant.

Table 2: Equipment MTTR, MTBF and uptime in a fly ash processing plant over four months period with reference to appendix A

Equipment	*Available working time (hrs)*	*Breakdown time (hrs)*	*No. of breakdown counts*	*MTBF*	*MTTR*	*Uptime (hrs)*	*% Downtime*	*% Uptime*
Month 1								
Fly ash hopper	475.00	33.00	9.00	52.78	3.67	442.00	6.95	93.05
Compressor		21.00	6.00	79.17	3.50	454.00	4.42	95.58
Classifier		4.00	3.00	158.33	1.33	471.00	0.84	99.16
Pipe conveyor belt		59.00	21.00	22.62	2.81	416.00	12.42	87.58
Pipeline		43.00	14.00	33.93	3.07	432.00	9.05	90.95
Valve		16.00	5.00	95.00	3.20	460.00	3.16	96.84
Total	475.00	176.00	58.00	8.19	8.19	299.00	37.05	62.95
Month 2								
Fly ash hopper	551.00	63.00	7.00	78.71	9.00	488.00	11.43	88.57
Compressor		22.00	5.00	110.20	4.40	529.00	4.00	96.00
Classifier		7.00	3.00	183.67	2.33	544.00	1.27	98.73
Pipe conveyor belt		91.00	28.00	19.68	3.25	460.00	16.52	83.48
Pipeline		91.00	28.00	19.68	3.25	460.00	8.53	91.47
Total	551.00	230.00	54.00	10.20	4.26	321.00	41.74	58.26
Month 3								
Fly ash hopper	551.00	29.00	13.00	42.38	2.23	522.00	5.26	94.74
Compressor		18.00	7.00	78.71	2.57	533.00	3.27	96.73
Classifier		2.00	2.00	549.00	1.00	549.00	0.37	99.63
Pipe conveyor belt		72.00	23.00	23.96	3.13	479.00	13.07	86.93
Valve		46.00	14.00	39.36	3.29	505.00	8.35	91.65
Pipeline		90.00	31.00	17.78	2.90	461.00	16.33	83.67
Total	551.00	255.00	90.00	2.16	2.83	296.00	46.28	53.72
Month 4								
Fly ash hopper	589.00	51.00	18.00	32.72	2.83	538.00	8.66	91.34
Compressor		48.00	23.00	25.61	2.09	541.00	8.15	91.85
Classifier		3.00	2.00	294.50	1.50	586.30	0.51	99.49
Pipe conveyor belt		93.00	29.00	20.31	3.21	496.0	15.79	84.21
Pipeline		88.00	27.00	21.81	3.26	501.00	14.94	85.06
Total	589.00	283.00	99.00	5.95	2.86	306.0	48.05	51.95
Sum over four months	2166.00	944.00	301.00	7.20	3.14	1222.00	43.58	56.42

These downtimes are better categorized by Table 3 and Figure 4 which indicates that pipe conveyor belt has high number of breakdown count followed by pipeline, meanwhile divetor valves due to not sealing properly contributed less. The Pareto chart on Figure 4 generated using results on Table 1 and Table 2 indicated that breakdowns on pipe conveyor belt, pipeline and fly ash hopper contributed 80% of the downtimes in the fly ash processing plant. Thus, these were the factors of improvement for increasing the uptime.

Table 3: Collected data for pareto chart with reference to appendix A

Breakdown causes	*Count of breakdown instances*	*Cumulative total*	*Cumulative percentage (%)*
Pipe conveyor belt	101.00	101.00	34.00
Pipeline	74.00	175.00	58.00
Fly ash hopper	47.00	222.00	74.00
Compressor	41.00	263.00	88.00
Valve	19.00	282.00	94.00
Classifier	10.00	292.00	97.00
Divetor valve not sealing properly	8.00	300.00	100.00

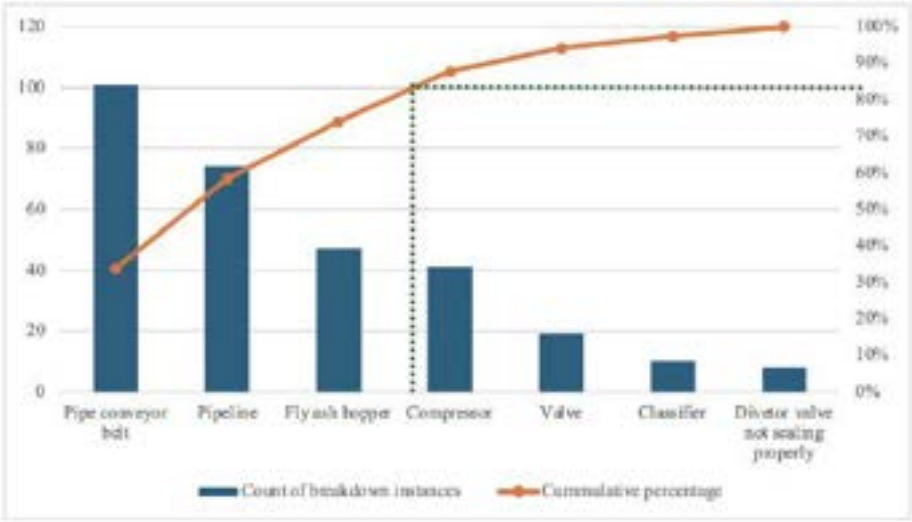

Figure 4: Overall pareto chart for the four months Duration using data on Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 4 indicates that, the downtime due to equipment breakdown, resulted with lower availability and performance rate. This is due to the reduced productive time and production output compared to potential quantities respectively. This subsequently reduced monthly OEE month compared to world class standard. A variance of - 55.68% was achieved when comparing actual OEE with world class OEE target on average for the four months.

Table 4: Downtime impact on OEE

Month	*Availability rate (%)*	*Performance rate (%)*	*Quality rate (%)*	*Actual OEE (%)*	*World class OEE target (%)*	*Variance on actual OEE versus world class OEE target (%)*
1	62.95	62.95	93.10	36.89	85.00	- 48.11
2	58.26	58.26	91.90	31.19	85.00	- 53.81
3	53.72	53.72	90.60	26.15	85.00	- 58.85
4	51.95	51.95	88.90	23.99	85.00	- 61.01
Average	**56.72**	**56.72**	**91.13**	**29.32**	**85.00**	**- 55.68**

Furthermore, Figure 5 indicates that OEE was negatively impacted by an increase in downtime as noted on the four months on month duration. This further justified the impact of downtime on OEE for the need to address the 20% challenges that affected the 80% of the outcome in accordance with Pareto principle.

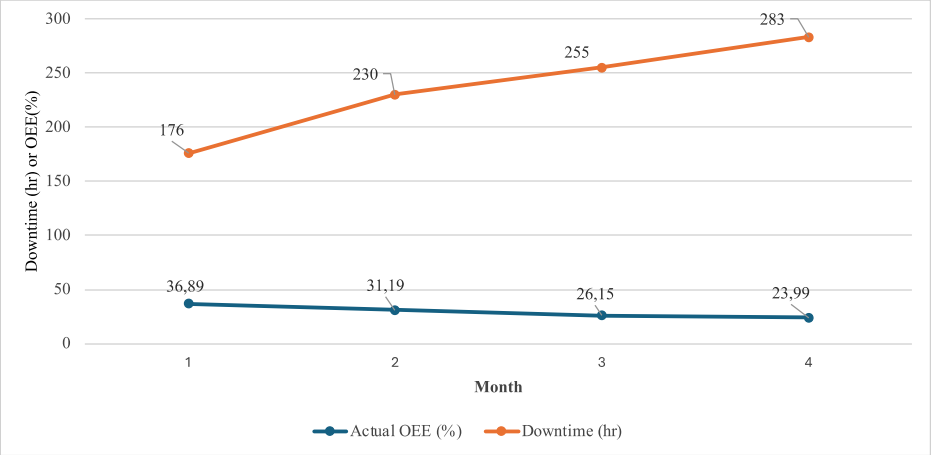

Figure 5: Monthly downtime versus OEE

4.2. Determination of downtime impact on production revenue, lose and carbon tax payables.

Power station operations make use of bituminous coal or anthracite depending on availability and operational needs of the power plant at a point in time. Table 5 indicates the assumed calculated fly selling price as a function of coal being combusted. It is noted that fly ash derived from anthracite is high in price compared to fly ash derived from bituminous coal by a ZAR/ton difference of 202.10 vat exclusive based on Free-On-Road (FOR) coal cost. Even though the fly ash content is assumed to be equal in the coal. However, the selling price in the general market is not variable as a function of type of coal being combusted, but importantly, this gave a fair pricing points in the fly ash market as a quantifiable assumption.

Table 5: Average fly ash selling price as a function of coal type being combusted at a Power station.

Coal type	*Coal amount consumed (tons/day)*	*Fly ash produced (tons/day)*	*Fly ash content in coal (%)*	*Free-On-Road (FOR) coal cost (ZAR/ton) VAT excl.*	*Fly ash average selling price (ZAR/ton) VAT excl.*
Bituminous	50 000	17 000.00	34.00	443.09 [4]	150.65
Anthracite	50 000 *(high grade coal, consumption practically less than bituminous)*	17 000.00	34.00	1037.50 [4]	352.75

Table 6 indicates that , the downtime associated with underutilization of the equipment as a function of production output since the combination of all these equipment forms a production system. Month 1 had the highest utilization of 62.95%, while month 4 had the lowest utilization of 51.95% due to highest downtime. The lower utilization of production capacity, the higher is the underutilization. In total over the four period, utilization of production capacity was 56.42% which required to be improved through minimization of the downtime. The underutilization per-centage can be reduced if the downtime is also reduced. The increase in downtime month on month was associated with an increase in revenue lose at fly ash plant using average selling price of bituminous coal combustion and anthracite. In the case of fly ash selling price as a function of bituminous coal, the loss was 31.00%,11.45% and 10.99%

between month 1 and 2, month 2 and 3, and month 3 and 4 respectively. Similar trend has been noted in the case of anthracite coal usage. This is also indicated by Figure 6.

The carbon tax payable that the cement manufacturer had to incur for production of cement without usage of fly ash also have been increasing month on month for both better and worse case carbon tax rate payable. This indicated an overall cost increase on carbon tax payable by 23.81%, 22.22%, 23.81% and 23.26% on month 1,2,3 and 4 respectively in the case of better case carbon tax rate payable. In the case of worse case, the associated carbon tax payable increased monthly by 21.16%, 20.79% 20.98% and 20.83% for month 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. This is also indicated by Figure 7. Although this cost increases in carbon tax, will be passed to the customer as an environmental emission levy, the carbon emitted is not acceptable for environment. Thus, fly ash is a strategic raw material in production of cement with lower clinker, fly ash operations management is of great importance to the cement industry.

Table 6: Downtime production impact and cost

Factor	***Month 1***	***Month 2***	***Month 3***	***Month 4***	***Total***
Available productive hours	475.00	551.00	551.00	589.00	2166.00
Actual productive hours (hours)	299.00	321.00	296.00	306.00	1222.00
Downtime duration (hours)	176.00	230.00	255.00	283.00	944.00
Potential production quantity (tons)	18 050.00	20 938.00	20 938.00	22 382.00	82 308.00
Actual production quantity (tons)	11 362.00	12 198.00	11 248.00	11 628.00	46 436.00
Fly ash production quantity lose (tons)	6 688.00	8 740.00	9 690.00	10 754.00	35 872.00
Production capacity utilization (%)	62.95	58.26	53.72	51.95	56.42
Production capacity under-utilization (%)	37.05	41.74	46.28	48.05	48.05
Downtime cost, revenue lose (Million ZAR) at fly ash plant using average selling price of bituminous coal combustion	1.00	1.31	1.46	1.62	5.40
Downtime cost, revenue lose (Million ZAR) at fly ash plant using average selling price of anthracite coal combustion	2.36	3.08	3.42	3.79	12.65
Downtime cost, due to carbon tax payable at better case tax rate of ZAR37.00/ton CEM I cement type produced without fly ash usage, at fly ash user cement operations (Million ZAR).	0.42	0.45	0.42	0.43	1.72
Downtime cost, due to carbon tax payable at worse case tax rate of ZAR165.30/ton CEM I cement type produced without fly ash usage, at fly ash user cement operations (Million ZAR).	1.89	2.02	1.86	1.92	7.68
Carbon tax payable at better case tax rate of ZAR37.00/ton CEM II/A-V 52.5N cement type produced with fly ash usage, at fly ash user cement operations (Million ZAR) ; Reduced to ZAR28.49/ton cement produced payable due to fly ash usage.	0.32	0.35	0.32	0.33	1.32
Carbon tax payable at worse case tax rate of ZAR165.30/ton CEM II/A-V cement type produced with fly ash usage, at fly ash user cement operations (Million ZAR) ; Reduced to ZAR131.10/ton cement produced payable due to fly ash usage.	1.49	1.60	1.47	1.52	6.09
Carbon tax payable saving on CEM II/A-V cement type production compared to CEM I cement type based better case tax rate (%).	23.81	22.22	23.81	23.26	23.26
Carbon tax payable saving on CEM II/A-V cement type production compared to CEM I cement type based worst case tax rates (%).	21.16	20.79	20.98	20.83	21.09

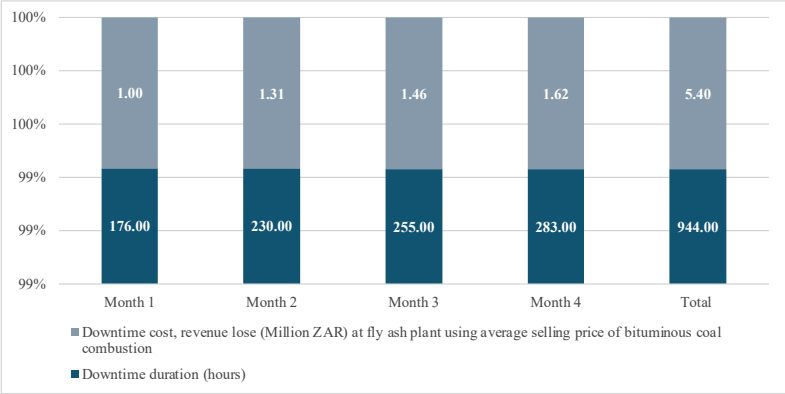

Figure 6: Downtime time versus revenue lose.

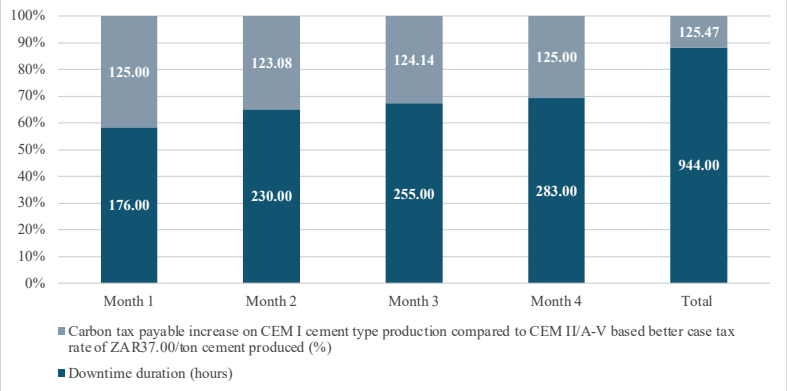

Figure 7: Downtime duration versus carbon tax payable increase on CEM I production than CEM II/A-V

4.3. Corrective maintenance on pipe conveyor belt, pipeline and fly ash hopper to increase production uptime.

4.3.1. Bottleneck identification.

Pareto analysis as depicted on Figure 4 indicated that pipe conveyor, pipeline and fly ash hopper are the biggest losses that contributes to downtime. Thus if debottlenecked, equipment availability and production uptime can increase. Maintenance was conducted over 29 period as scheduled through Gantt chart in order as a key guideline based on the principle of Theory of Constraints (TOC). Ramasu et al. [30] indicated that TOC philosophy requires deployment of additional resources where bottlenecks exist to debottleneck the process area for maximization of capacity utilization.

Table 7 indicates the key activities that was scheduled and executed during the kaizen event in conducting the corrective maintenance. It can be noted that the planned duration pipe conveyor belt, pipeline and fly ash hopper have been achieved at 17.65%, 25.00% and 10.00% less than the initial planned duration. This then reduced the total estimated project duration by 17.14%, thus achieving it at 82.86% of the planned duration. The optimization of the time duration was achieved through running of some of the activities co-currently on which activities that was not affected by other tasks prior. This was to reduce the cost associated with downtimes as calculated on Table 6.

Table 7: Scheduled activities on corrective maintenance

Bottlenecked equipment system as per Pareto chart	*Component worked on*	*Planned duration of activities (days)*	*Actual duration of activities (days)*	*Cost of items (ZAR)*
Pipe conveyor belt	Installation of new idlers and repairing of damaged plates	17	14	90000
	Pulley lagging			25000
	Replacement of bearing counters			150000
	Replacment of counter weight			310000
	Installation of new pipe conveyor belt			650000
Pipeline	Replacement of old 900 metres steel pipeline with new one	8	6	210000
Fly ash hopper	Installaition of new pipes and corrosion prevention at bends	10	9	50000

The activities are being carried out on pipeline conveyor belt as shown on Figure 9 did not only contribute the highest actual duration contribution of 48.28% , but also the highest monetary cost contribution at 43.77%. The lowest monetary cost activity was around pulley lagging with activities shown by Figure 10. It contributed about 1.68% of the entire cost items being procured to debottleneck the equipment and increase uptime.

Figure 8: Replaced pipeline.

Figure 9: New pipe conveyor belt.

Figure 10: Lagged pulley.

5 CONCLUSION

Downtime at the fly ash processing plant as a strategic raw material for substation of clinker to minimize CO_2 emission. Cement type, CEM II/A-V is manufactured using fly ash instead of CEM I cement type which is associated with 0.87 tons CO2 emission. The total downtime over the four months period was 944 hours in comparison to 2166 hours available. According to pareto analysis, 80% of the downtime was associated with breakdown of pipe conveyor belt, pipeline and fly ash hopper. The downtime resulted with underutilization of overall plant at 46.19% which was improved by working on the conveyor belt which was replaced with a new belt, pipeline leaks resolved through installation of 900 meters pipeline and the fly ash hoppers repaired on leaks and pumping vessels from temporary storage equipment. The overall uptime was 56.42%. The achieved OEE was 29.42% due to downtime affecting availability rate and performance rate. Month 2 had the highest MTBF at 10.20 compared to other months which indicated that breakdowns were severe, while month 3 had the lowest MTBF at 2.16.The highest MTTR was noted during the month of January which meant that mean time to recovery post breakdown was longer. The revue loses that fly ash plant had to incur as a function of downtime increased monthly over the four months period. The overall revenue loss was ZAR5.40 million and ZAR12.65 million in the case of fly ash from bituminous and anthracite respectively. The user of fly ash produced cement without fly ash and incurred extra carbon tax cost by 23.26% and 21.09% for tax payable at better case and worse case respectively.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. To operations management

Post maintenance event on repair and installation of new equipment or component in the manufacturing system, a maintenance program needs to be designed and followed. This is to a monitor and control the equipment, and the entire system of manufacturing to gain the expected life out of the components maintained.

The existing maintenance strategy need to be reviewed to refocus on section of the plant that requires consistent attention. Preventative maintenance schedules need to be followed on time to avoid responding on corrective maintenance which is costly. Furthermore, computerised maintenance management system (CMMS) can be used as a tool to management the assets, schedule maintenance and for tracking of work orders for the enhancement of reliability of the life of the equipment in the plant.

6.2. Future research

The study revealed the cost associated with carbon tax payout as an environmental levy for the emission of carbon dioxide as greenhouse gas by the cement industry. This subsequently indicated the extent to which the South African cement industry relies on fly ash from coal fired power station to reduce clinker content in cement produced associated with carbon dioxide. Thus, due to these, further research is needed to review future fly ash availability in South Africa in-line with the power utility's driver on Just-Energy-Transition (JIT) strategy. The research should also look at each coal fired power station's electricity generation units' retirement plan which will substituent reduce availability of fresh from older power stations that are best positioned to supply the cement industry for decarbonization initiatives.

Further research is also required for the evaluation of dumped effluent conditioned fly ash from disposal sites for suitable use in cement production for decarbonization purpose in case of scarcity of fresh fly ash in the future.

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APPENDIX A

Table SEQ Table * ARABIC 8: Downtime log sheet

Equipment	Component/description	Breakdwon counts	Downtime duration (hr)	Downtiime contribution (%)	Downtime time (hr)	Actual equipment running time (hr)	Production rate (tons/hr)	Actual production output (tons) - within quality specification	Quality (%Inspec product)
				Month 1					
Fly ash hopper	Low fly ash flow	2.00	6.00	3.41	6	170.00			
	Blockage	7.00	11.00	6.25	11	165.00			
Compressor	Low air output	2.00	6.00	3.41	6	170.00			
	Trips due to low oil level	1.00	1.00	0.57	1	175.00			
	Trips due to high heat	3.00	9.00	5.11	9	167.00			
Classifier	Feeding hopper blockage	2.00	24.00	13.64	24	152.00			
	Incosistent feeding rate , stop for inspection	1.00	1.00	0.57	1	175.00	37.93	11341.07	93.10
Pipe conveyor belt	Belt trips due to underload/overload	4.00	21.00	11.93	21	155.00			
	Belt trips due to trapped on torn metalic infrustructure	17.00	44.00	25.00	44	132.00			
Pipeline	Line blockages	5.00	6.00	3.41	6	170.00			
	Line leak	9.00	37.00	21.02	37	139.00			
Valve	Divetor valve leakage	2.00	6.00	3.41	6	170.00			
	Partial fly ash diversion, valve diverting about 80% of feed to required destination	3.00	4.00	2.27	4	172.00			
Total		58.00	176.00	100.00	176	0.00	37.93	11341.07	93.10
				Month 2					
Fly ash hopper	No fly ash input into hopper	5	3	1.30	3	227			
	Hopper stays high, causing trips	2	9	3.91	9	221			
	Trips due to high heat	4	18	7.83	18	212			
Compressor	Moisture induction causing ash blockages; stop for water drain	1	18	7.83	18	212			
Classifier	Feeding hopper blockage	3	4	1.74	4	226	38.06	12217.26	91.90
Pipe conveyor belt	Trips due to overload versus low belt thickness for handling pressure on belt as it is running	11	53	23.04	53	177			
	Belt traped on structure	17	74	32.17	74	156			
Pipeline	Line leakage	11	51	22.17	51	179			
Total		54	230	86.96	230	0	38.06	12217.26	91.90
				Month 3					
Fly ash hopper	Low fly ash flow	7	9	3.53	9	246			
	Blockage	6	11	4.31	11	244			
Compressor	Trips due to heat	5	16	6.27	16	239			
	PLC miscommunication	2	4	1.57	4	251			
Classifier	Trips	2	3	1.18	3	252			
Pipe conveyor belt	Trips due to belt trapping on infrustracture	19	84	32.94	84	171			
	Trips due to idlers and rollers not running efficiently due to them being torn	4	69	27.06	69	186	37.68	11153.28	90.60
Valve	Leaks	11	24	9.41	24	231			
	Partial opening instead of full opening	2	8	3.14	8	247			
Pipeline	Leaks	32	27	10.59	27	228			
Total		90	255	100.00	255	0	37.68	11153.28	90.60
				Month 4					
Fly ash hopper	Blockage	7	26	2.75	26	918			
	Low fly ash flow	2	3	0.32	3	941			
	Unavailability due to tube leak on boiler	9	82	8.69	82	862			
Compressor	Trips due to low oil level	4	36	3.81	36	908			
	Trip due to heat	19	187	19.81	187	757			
Classifier	Blockage	2	5	0.53	5	939	38,09	11655,54	88.90
Pipe conveyor belt	Belt twist at idlers	3	21	2.22	21	923			
	Belt trip	26	268	28.39	268	676			
Pipeline	Leaks	18	179	18.96	179	765			
	Blockage	9	137	14.51	137	807			
Total		99	944	100.00	944	0	38.09	11655.54	88.90

A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: INVESTIGATING MACHINE LEARNING APPLICATIONS FOR OPTIMAL ASSET MANAGEMENT IN COAL-FIRED THERMAL POWER PLANTS

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ABSTRACT

The power industry evolves due to technical, socioeconomic, and environmental factors, with a key focus on managing transmission and distribution assets such as transmission lines, transformers, boilers, and substations. Asset management in power plants includes decision-making, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure adequate maintenance, fault detection, and component replacement. These operations generate vast amounts of data that industrial systems collect and contain critical insights into processes, alarms, and failures. Machine learning models support proactive decision-making, enhancing operational efficiency and improving component lifetime assessments. Through a systematic literature review, this study investigates machine learning applications for optimising asset maintenance management in coal-fired power plants. The research contributes to academia and industry by assessing how machine learning has been applied in this context and identifying future research opportunities for improving asset maintenance management strategies.

Keywords: Systematic Literature Review, Machine Learning, Asset Maintenance Management, Power Industry

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1 INTRODUCTION

Asset management within the context of power plants is defined as the decision-making, monitoring and evaluation of assets and equipment [1]. Maintaining control operations, lifespan, and the working conditions of various components within a power plant ensures the quality of distribution systems [2]. Subsequently, asset management within power plants ensures that a strategy is followed to make the right decision at the right time of operation, maintenance, fault detection and component replacement [3, 4]. In coal-fired power plants, asset management is further complicated by challenges such as high-temperature corrosion, abrasive ash deposits, and accelerated component wear from harsh environmental and operational conditions.

The significance of asset management is highlighted in academic literature and industry since it improves profits, reputation and reduces costs [5, 6]. Various researchers, including Napoleone *et al*. [7], have highlighted the benefits of implementing asset management strategies. These benefits include increased operation efficiency and improved lifetime assessment of components, low-cost consumption, reduced failure rate and improved component availability and safety. This paper will focus on overall asset management, including maintenance planning and execution, health monitoring, lifecycle maintenance, predictive data analytics, and inventory management. The asset maintenance management model is presented in **Figure I**, as obtained from Cheng *et al*. [8].

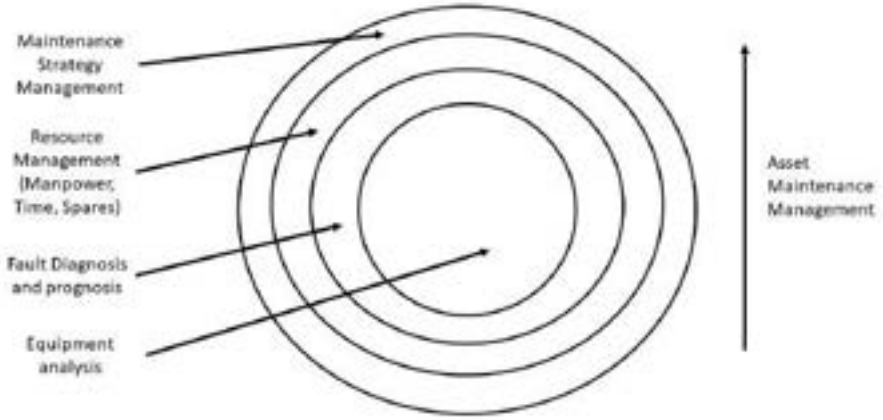

Figure I: The asset maintenance management model, as adopted by Chin *et al*. [8].

Chin *et al*. [8] stated that asset maintenance management has become a large area of operational research since it is based on mathematical models in which the costs and benefits of various maintenance strategies are quantified [8]. Replacing equipment becomes worthwhile when maintenance programs prove ineffective. Subsequently, if the cost-benefit ratio of long-term maintenance outweighs the benefits due to frequent equipment failures, replacement offers more significant advantages. However, effective maintenance and reliability schedules aim to do the correct maintenance at the correct time on the right assets to prevent equipment replacement. For this reason, maintenance management is applied to prevent or reduce the number of equipment failures.

According to Khuntia *et al*. [9], time-domain asset management is divided into time-based and activity-based. Time-based asset management consists of long-term, mid-term, and short-term asset management. Activity-based asset management consists of technical, economic, and societal factors. **Figure II** provides an overview of asset management, as obtained from Khuntia *et al*. [9].

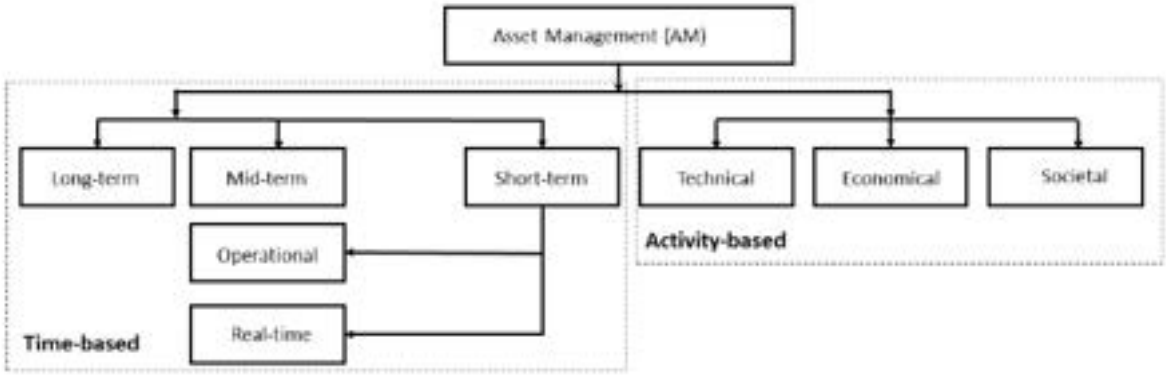

Figure II: Classification of asset management models, as adopted from Khuntia *et al*. [10]

Long-term asset management (one year and more) encompasses upgrading existing transmission and distribution assets. This type of asset management consists of future planning and the investment in new assets, including transformers, reactive devices, capacity expansion and upgrading substation equipment. Mid-term asset management ranges over a more extended period and consists of optimal equipment maintenance scheduling and resource allocation within power plants. Furthermore, accurate maintenance plans may reduce unplanned power outages, costs, financial and physical risks, and the expansion of the life span of assets. *Short-term asset management* is defined as operational asset management that minimises asset risks subject to load demand and hourly prices, and real-time asset management assesses the unexpected outages due to unexpected events, including weather change, a sudden breakdown and load fluctuations [10].

On the activity level, Smit *et al*. [11] indicated that asset management can be categorised into three sections: Technical, economic, and societal asset management. First, technical asset management concerns the physical condition of assets and inventory. For example, the components' ageing, failure and inventory must be considered using historical data for future planning. Economic asset management is concerned with the financial aspect of asset management, including but not limited to maintenance costs, spare part costs and equipment tests and assessments. Societal asset management is concerned with how equipment utilisation impacts the environment, for example, power outages within hospitals and schools [11].

Effective asset management reduces operational and capital expenditures by improving the return on investment and optimising the life cycle of electrical equipment [12]. One of the power industry's biggest challenges is the interruption of the power supply. For this reason, implementing effective predictive maintenance and business strategies is essential. Predictive maintenance strategies also include data analysis tools that enhance effective maintenance management, risk assessment, decision-making and condition monitoring [12]. Khuntia *et al*. [10] stated that asset management involves obtaining a maintenance strategy for the assets, which is essential since it will determine the link between maintenance and renewal actions, resulting in various new strategies.

These strategies include corrective maintenance (run-to-failure), preventive maintenance, reliability-centred maintenance (RCM) and time-based maintenance. *Corrective maintenance* is defined as maintenance and work done on equipment after the point of failure, whereas preventive maintenance is done before the point of failure. RCM is where the most critical components are prioritised, and time-based maintenance is where the component status is observed during the last visit. One advantage of time-based maintenance is that components

can be maintained simultaneously. However, if the time interval is not used correctly, it may result in technical failures or economic losses.

Condition-based maintenance is followed when a fault is detected on the equipment [10]. However, it is essential to note that condition-based maintenance requires systematic oversight of all components. Predictive maintenance is also an essential part of asset management and consists of using predictive tools, including machine learning, to determine which maintenance tasks should be executed. Predictive maintenance identifies early fault detection and improves equipment's overall asset health [13]. All these maintenance strategies form part of effective asset management at coal-fired power plants.

Carvalho *et al*. [13] stated that a large amount of data is collected by industrial systems, which contains valuable information about occurrences, processes and alarms. However, the data must be correctly processed and analysed to obtain valuable information and knowledge that might assist with strategic decision-making regarding maintenance strategies, machine fault detection, inventory and safety. Milić *et al*. [14] indicated that early fault detection of equipment and prediction is possible due to the rapid development of computer and communication systems, which increased the development of complex machine-learning algorithms. Machine learning, which is defined as a subdivision of artificial intelligence, is a powerful tool to develop and assist with strategic decision-making, specifically maintenance.

Ahmad *et al*. [15] added that machine learning algorithms could process energy distribution data quickly and efficiently; machine learning algorithms can also assist with improved energy efficiency, energy demand side response and energy planning under uncertainty. Furthermore, machine learning can process high-dimensional and multivariate data and identify hidden patterns. It is also essential to note that the performance of these algorithms depends on the type of algorithm and the application domain. A large number of studies have been published focusing specifically on maintenance management. A review conducted by Fraser *et al*. [16] investigated various maintenance management models in various sectors. The main application areas were manufacturing, power plants and oil refineries. These studies mainly utilised preventive and predictive maintenance strategies.

Furthermore, Alrabghi and Tiwari [17] also contributed by reviewing simulation-based approaches for maintenance systems. Subsequently, most of these papers used discrete event simulation and genetic algorithms as optimisation tools. To contribute to research, this study aims to investigate machine learning applications for optimal asset management in coal-fired power plants.

The following objectives are defined:

1. To provide an overview of all theoretical aspects regarding machine learning.
2. To investigate machine learning applications for optimal asset management in power plants.
3. To provide valuable future recommendations based on the findings of the systematic literature review.

This study contributes towards research and industry by analysing the current state of machine learning algorithms and their applicability to asset management at coal-fired power plants. The studies are evaluated in detail by providing insight into how these models were developed and how machine learning models can be applied for effective asset management by considering various equipment, including but not limited to distribution networks and coal-fired boilers.

The paper is outlined as follows: Section 1 and Section 2 provide an overview of machine learning, followed by an overview of how some of these algorithms are applied for asset

management. Section 3 conducts a systematic literature review, and the results are discussed in Section 4. Conclusion and valuable future recommendations are presented in Sections 5 and 6, respectively.

2 A LITERATURE SURVEY

The electric power industry is experiencing various changes due to technical, socioeconomic, and environmental developments including the increase in emissions. Subsequently, the primary focus is on transmission and distribution assets, including substation equipment, transmission lines, and transformers. For this reason, *asset management* is defined as an essential activity for transmission and distribution system planning and operation.

Maintaining components and policies is widely applied and investigated within the academic literature. For example, authors Bartlett [18], Abu-Elanien and Salama [19] and Heggset *et al*. [20] demonstrated the maintenance of power transformers. Further studies conducted by Bartlett [18] and Kalinowski and Anders [21] investigated maintenance on lines and cables, and Heggset *et al*. [20] and Lindquist *et al*. [22] have also investigated maintenance on protection devices.

Studies conducted by Zhang and Gockenbach [23], Abu-Elanien *et al*. [24], Mkandawire *et al*. [25], and Heo *et al*. [26] have focused on extensive research regarding power transformers, specifically health monitoring, ageing and oil-indicators. Other extensive research was conducted on circuit breakers within power plants and underground cables by Mackinlay and Walton [27].

Khuntia *et al*. [10] indicated that data management integrates power plants' physical and non-physical asset management domains. Large amounts of data are available due to the advanced computational tools and smart meters. This data is typically used to improve the performance of assets and policies. Data within this domain concerns the inspection rates, mean time to failures, etc. [28]. For example, Aldhubaib and Salama [29] studied the impact of maintenance on transformers, precisely the replacement time, using genetic algorithms and RCM.

Within the last decade, multiple studies focused on integrating information technology and human-machine interfaces within the asset management domain. For example, Kostic [30] integrated IT in asset management using process data and other analysis tools, including supervisory control and data acquisition, data management services, and a computerised maintenance management system. The development of algorithms and tools using optimisation and machine learning has been widely studied in the literature. Before these studies can be explored, an overview of machine learning is provided.

Machine learning enables data-driven models to detect anomalies, predict failures, and optimise maintenance schedules in power plants. Furthermore, machine learning teaches machines how to handle data efficiently and more effectively. For example, after viewing the data, there is still uncertainty about what the data means and what information can be taken from these datasets. Due to this uncertainty, machine learning algorithms are applied to interpret this information effectively.

Machine learning is divided into four subsets: supervised, semi-supervised, unsupervised, and reinforcement learning. This paper focuses on applying machine learning for effective asset management. For this reason, a high level will be provided on these algorithms' theoretical aspects, focusing on how these algorithms are applied in academia and industry.

1. **Supervised:** Supervised learning algorithms enable a model to predict certain outputs based on specific inputs, using labelled examples that understand the patterns and relationships between the input and output variables. Supervised learning requires external assistance to train and test the models. The data is typically divided into training and test data. The model is trained using hyperparameter tuning. The

parameters are tuned until acceptable performance metric values are obtained. Once the best hyperparameter values are obtained, the model is tested using the unseen test data. Supervised algorithms include decision trees, support vector machines, Naïve Bayes, and Supervised Neural Networks.

2. **Unsupervised:** Unsupervised learning algorithms do not depend on predetermined answers or an external assistant. These algorithms work and operate independently and investigate patterns and relationships between various variables. These algorithms use previous knowledge to process unfamiliar data and identify the features and hidden patterns within the data. Unsupervised algorithms include and are not limited to Principal component analysis, K-means clustering, and Unsupervised neural networks.
3. **Semi-supervised:** Semi-supervised machine learning combines aspects of both supervised and unsupervised techniques. These algorithms use labelled data to make predictions and unlabelled data to investigate the patterns within the data and the data distribution. Semi-supervised algorithms include Transudative SVM and Generative Models.
4. **Reinforcement learning:** Reinforcement learning is concerned with agents and the actions of these agents based on the environment. The purpose is to maximise the notion of reward. Reinforcement learning algorithms include Multitask learning, Ensemble learning and boosting.

Machine learning techniques are widely applied to solve data-driven problems while comprehensively reducing complexity and time consumption [31, 32]. A study by Aminifar *et al*. [33] evaluated the performance of various machine-learning techniques used for asset management. The application of these techniques plays a vital role in power distribution/transmission systems [12]. Lal Rajora *et al*. [12] investigated different machine learning algorithms and how these techniques were applied to asset management within power systems. Afrasiabi *et al*. [34] applied a deep neural network for fault detection in power transformers. Subsequently, the internal faults were identified by first estimating the computational burden and model dependency. Regarding the deep neural network, the advantage identified was that this technique has high robustness; however, it has difficulty processing large datasets.

Bacha *et al*. [35] applied the support vector machine for fault diagnosis in power transformers. Subsequently, different types of faults were identified, and it was concluded that the support vector machine's computational complexity is high; however, it can minimise the risk and error rate. Another study conducted by Spatti *et al*. [36] applied expert systems to optimise asset management. The authors stated that the electrical system must be prevented from unknown failures. For this reason, this study evaluated the fault history of the equipment using an asset management strategy. It was concluded that expert systems have better reliability and improved safety levels. Mirhosseini *et al*. [1] applied a multi-criteria decision-making model for asset management, specifically power distribution systems. In conclusion, this technique is highly accurate in terms of evaluation. However, it has a high time complexity. Based on the existing literature and the limitations of the application on machine learning, this study aims to further investigate the application of machine learning by conducting an SLR.

In **Section 2**, an overview was provided of asset management and the application of machine learning within the academic literature. In the following section, a systematic literature review is conducted to investigate the application of machine learning algorithms for asset management at coal-fired power generation utilities.

3 A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: RESEARCH METHOD

There is a significant gap in the academic literature between the number of published papers and the time it takes for academics to review them [37]. For this reason, various methods exist to address this gap, including a systematic literature review. This type of review originated in the medical industry and is primarily defined as an evidence-based search where a specific number of studies are selected from the academic literature related to a specific research field [38]. A systematic literature review follows a rigorous method that distinguishes it from other reviews, such as literature reviews [38]. This study aims to investigate the application of machine learning algorithms for asset management at coal-fired power generation utilities. The research method followed in this study is based on the method proposed by Kitchenham *et al*. [38], Garg and Kumar [39] and Xiao and Watson [40] (presented in Table 1). The study by Kitchenham *et al*. [38] conducted a review to identify the status of Evidence-based Software Engineering (EBSE) papers. Furthermore, the study by Garg and Kumar [39] conducted a systematic literature review on sentiment analysis within the social multimedia industry. Xiao and Watson [40] provide detailed guidelines on how to conduct a systematic literature review. This review was also conducted following the same process as the review conducted by Bisset *et al*. [41]. Table 1 demonstrates the research methods followed in the first two studies and identifies the research method followed in this study.

Table I: Examples of research methods

#	Research method	Study examples
1.	The systematic literature review method conducted in the study consisted of seven stages. These include the following: 1. The formulation of the research questions 2. A formulated search process 3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria 4. Quality assessment 5. Data collection 6. Data analysis 7. Deviations from the protocol.	Kitchenham *et al*. [38]
2.	The systematic literature review method conducted in the study consisted of seven stages. These include the following: 1. The formulation of the research questions 2. A formulated search strategy 3. Study selection 4. Quality assessment 5. Data extraction 6. Data synthesis	Garg and Kumar [39]
3.	The systematic literature review method conducted in the study consisted of seven stages. These include the following: 1. The formulation of the research questions 2. Search Process 3. Study selection: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria 4. Quality assessment 5. Data extraction 6. Data synthesis	N/A

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is present in **Table II**.

Table II: Research methodology

1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question
What is the current maturity of machine learning algorithms or models for asset management specific to coal-fired power generation utilities?

2. SEARCH PROCESS

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Literature Identification	Screening for inclusion	Quality and Eligibility Assessment	Iterations

Keywords (Set 1)	Keywords (Set 2)	Databases
"Machine Learning" AND "Asset Management" AND "Coal-fired power plants"	"Machine Learning" AND "Asset Management" AND "Boiler"	Science Direct

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1. The study only included published journal articles. 2. The study only included the journals with the relevant keywords. 3. The study only included articles published between 2013 and 2023.	1. Non-English Articles

3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data Extraction	Data Analysis
The data extracted from each study were the following: 1.The type of machine learning algorithm applied.	Each study identified is summarized in Table III to show: 1. The title of each study 2. Journal and year 3. Reference 4. The year of publication. 5. Reference.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The quality assessment criteria followed were obtained by Xiao and Watson [40]. Each phase with a description is described in the table below.

Research Protocol	Research Results
Step 1: Literature Identification Xiao and Watson [40] indicated that the search starts with identifying the literature. Typically, the keywords are used to identify which studies apply to the search and the timeframe. The total number of studies published per database is recorded.	The databases were searched. The following results were obtained: Keywords set one: • Science Direct = 13 Keywords set two • Science Direct = 60 **Total: 73**
Step 2: Screening for inclusion The next step is known as screening for inclusion. This step aims to scan the abstracts of all the studies identified in phase one for relevance. More than one researcher must evaluate the studies. The studies not applicable must be excluded from the search, and those applicable must be kept and analysed further in step three.	The following results were obtained by screening the studies according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Keywords set one: • Science Direct = 8 Keywords set two • Science Direct = 39 **Total: 47**
Step 3: Quality and Eligibility Assessment Step 3 three consists of the quality and eligibility assessment. The full articles must be skimmed to evaluate the relevance of these selected studies identified in phase two. It is also essential that the duplicates are removed to ensure that no study is selected twice in the search.	All duplicates were removed. The following results were obtained: Keywords set one: • Science Direct = 3 Keywords set two • Science Direct = 39 **Total: 42**
Step 4: Iterations In phase four, a detailed analysis is conducted to investigate the method used in each paper. The paper is also evaluated to obtain the required information to achieve the review's aim.	A full-text assessment was done on all **42 studies** to investigate the application of machine learning algorithms for asset management at coal-fired power generation utilities.

4 A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: THE REVIEW RESULTS

4.1 Search Results

The study results are demonstrated in Appendix A. The study conducted by Milić *et al*. [14] investigates the primary roles of data science and machine learning in various parts of power plants, including the edge, fog, and cloud levels of vertical IIoT. Data pre-processing, specifically data analysis, is discussed on all levels. The proposed concepts presented in this paper may provide valuable management and maintenance improvements with minimum production downtime. The authors provided an overview of different IIoT concepts, including the following: Data pre-processing subject to supervised, unsupervised, semi-supervised and reinforcement learning. The data is usually split into 70% / 30% for supervised learning. The model's training is done on 70%, and the model is tested using 30%.

Sierla *et al*. [53] developed a virtual power plant that can enhance renewable energy generation. Furthermore, a virtual plant may have the functionality to forecast loads and market prices and manage assets related to distributed energy resources. Machine learning algorithms have been developed to realise some of the functionalities of these systems. For this reason, this article aims to present a 3-tier taxonomy of all these functionalities identified: Optimising, forecasting and classification. The authors of this paper followed a scientometric research methodology and developed a central database where all the articles referenced in this paper were captured. The paper concludes by discussing the topics of specific fields expected to gain many publications in the future and identifying unresolved challenges.

This study, conducted by Cheng *et al*. [8], addresses restrictions in reactive and preventive maintenance strategies for building maintenance management. This paper proposes a predictive maintenance strategy using advanced technologies, including but not limited to Building Information Modelling (BIM) and the Internet of Things (IoT). The proposed framework includes data collection and integration, and an application layer with modules for condition monitoring, fault alarming, assessment, prediction, and maintenance planning. Machine learning algorithms, including ANN and SVM, are developed and employed to predict the future condition of MEP components. The example presented in this paper demonstrates the framework's effectiveness in predicting component conditions for efficient maintenance planning. Research paper – This study addresses restrictions in reactive and preventive maintenance strategies for building maintenance management. This paper proposes a predictive maintenance strategy using advanced technologies such as Building Information Modelling (BIM) and the Internet of Things (IoT). The proposed framework includes data collection and integration, and an application layer with modules for condition monitoring, fault alarming, assessment, prediction, and maintenance planning. Machine learning algorithms, including ANN and SVM, are developed and employed to predict the future condition of MEP components. The example presented in this paper demonstrates the framework's effectiveness in predicting component conditions for efficient maintenance planning.

The authors explained that machine learning can be used within asset management, specifically for predictive maintenance. The authors discussed the relevance of data collection and how all this data will be used for condition prediction. For this study, the ANN and the support vector machine models are developed to predict the future condition of MEP (mechanical, electrical and plumbing components. The models are developed using 300 datasets for condition prediction with 15 variables collected from the BIM, FM and IoT sensor networks. The models are trained using real-time sensor data, so the training phase is an ongoing process. The dataset is split into three (80% training, which consists of 240 data sets; 10% cross-validation, which consists of 30 data sets; and 10% testing, which also consists of 30

data sets). The model is trained by adjusting the parameters and using the 10% cross-validation set, and the model is tested using the 10% unseen data. The authors predicted two main variables, including the condition index of MEP components in buildings and the triggers for the required maintenance actions. The prediction accuracy for the SVM was 95.55%, which was better than the ANN, which was 96.42%. The Average Mean Error for the ANN was 3.58%, more significant than the SVM, which was 3.43%. The prediction coefficient was 0.993 in both methods. The SVM outperformed the ANN based on the error indexes using MAE and RMSE. The authors also concluded that ANN required twice as much time as an SVM in computational solving ability. Lastly, the authors performed t-tests, and it was concluded that the larger the value of t, the more significant the difference between the actual and predicted values. The authors also estimated the P-values for both models. It was concluded that the results were statistically acceptable, and the predictive values can be used for predictive maintenance. Overall, the SVM outperformed the ANN [8].

Data analysis has become more popular due to increased machine learning and artificial intelligence applications [42]. Thus, these methods are considered helpful in increasing the efficiency of energy systems. This paper, conducted by Vialetto and Noro [42], proposes an innovative approach using extensive data analysis to design cogeneration systems. This approach aims to meet energy demand by selecting the correct type of cogeneration technology and strategy. First, the method to perform clustering to analyse data is described, followed by an analysis of a case study based on a cogeneration plant. In this paper, an alternative congeneration system is designed and thermodynamic and economic benchmarks are used to evaluate the two alternatives.

The study conducted by Khare *et al*. [43] states that fossil fuels still account for 80% of global energy. In recent years, the importance of renewable energy sources has been highlighted and recognised to reduce pollution and improve environmental sustainability. This study will review microgrid systems, focusing on their design and the evaluation of the control systems. This paper also investigates energy management, economic analysis, and reliability assessment within microgrid systems. Furthermore, artificial intelligence, data analysis, and various other factors are explored in their application to microgrid systems.

FMECA, known as Failure Mode, Effects and Criticality Analysis, is a versatile tool that addresses engineering problems and often integrates with multi-criteria decision-making processes. For this reason, the study conducted by Dabous *et al*. [44] reviews the integration of the methods above, specifically in the manufacturing industry. Some of the findings of this review include, but are not limited to, the electronics environment, mainly applying these two methods within the manufacturing industry. The most used MCDM method is the technique for order of preference by similarity to the ideal solution. This paper contributes towards research by providing valuable insight into these methods and their respective applications.

The authors, Chin *et al*. [45], critically analyse all approaches to asset maintenance within the chemical industry. Various maintenance strategies are also discussed: corrective, time-based, risk-based, and condition-based maintenance. This paper provides more insight into which type of maintenance is ideal for specific conditions and provides valuable future research opportunities. The authors conducted a review since they indicated that the various maintenance strategies adopted were research; however, their application was still questionable [45].

The importance of big data in the energy sector is highlighted, specifically smart energy services, including intelligent energy management, energy consumption prediction, and leveraging Internet of Things (IoT) solutions [46]. This paper's authors propose introducing a high-level architecture for a big data platform to facilitate the creation, development, maintenance, and use of these innovative energy services. This platform simplifies collecting

data from multiple sources and transforming it into valuable information. The paper also describes the development of a web-based Decision Support System (DSS) based on this architecture, which uses data from different sources to create energy management action plans. The DSS has been tested in three European cities. The results demonstrated that this system can potentially assist managers in optimising building energy performance using data-driven insights [46].

Performance-centred maintenance (PCM) considers operational performance and degradation conditions when maintaining systems [47]. In some cases, systems can still perform well even as they degrade; alternatively, new systems may not perform as expected. Subsequently, challenges arise where different decision-makers have different strategies to prioritise either performance or condition at the expense of the other. For this reason, this paper proposes a theoretical framework for PCM and discusses the critical aspects of this modelling approach. The study is motivated by a real-world industrial system where it is crucial to optimise maintenance decisions. The authors use a Markov decision process and demonstrate an exact solution through dynamic programming. Further, a less computationally intensive heuristic is explored using a reinforcement learning algorithm, showing its accuracy for a large-scale industry model. The results highlight that PCM models can offer valuable decision support for maintainers and operators while considering all decision-makers' perspectives. The authors of this study developed a reinforcement learning algorithm, specifically Q-learning, to explore a heuristic for a sizeable industry-developed model. The different states and actions at each period were determined using the Q-learning method [47]. The accuracy of this heuristic was measured and compared to an exact solution obtained using dynamic programming [48]. They are learning from delayed rewards. Applying machine learning, an optimal maintenance policy was developed to guide the decision-makers, including maintainers and operators [47].

Before the research question is addressed, the studies identified are evaluated. The journals in which each study was published are demonstrated using a pie chart, as depicted in **Figure III.**

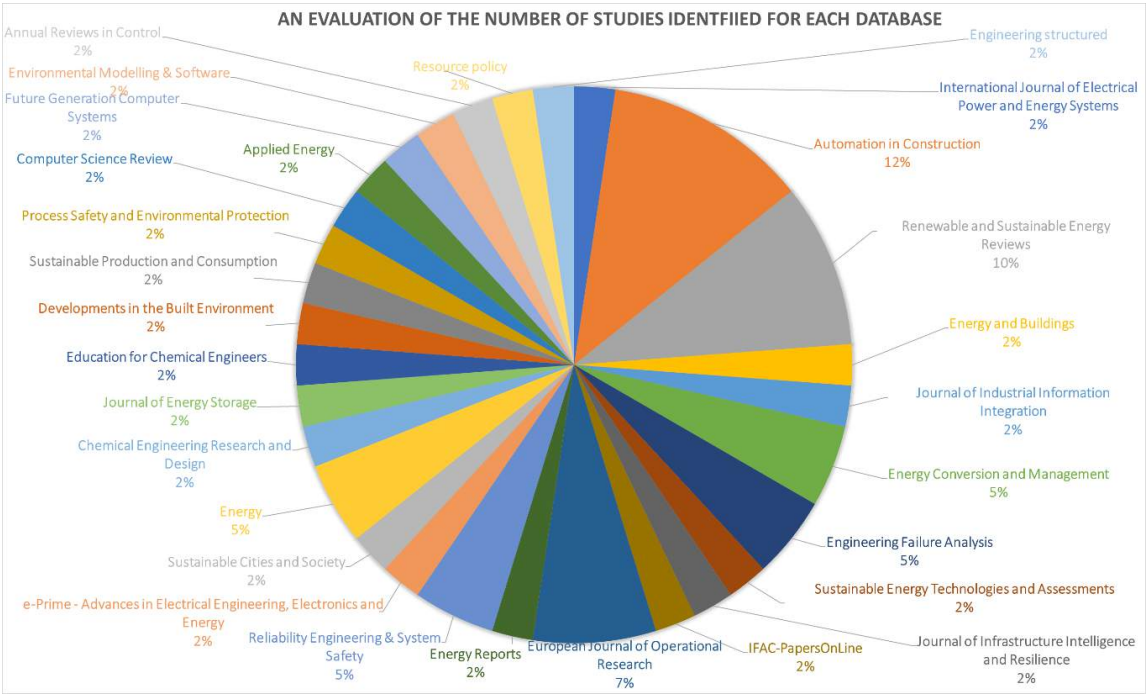

Figure III: A demonstration of the studies published in each journal

Figure III shows that Automation in Construction has 12% publications, renewable and sustainable energy has 10%, and the European Journal of Operational Research has 7% publications. Other journals include and are not limited to Engineering Failure Analysis, Energy Conversion and Management and Reliability Engineering and Systems. **Figure III** demonstrates an overview of the applicable journals that publish studies related to machine learning and asset management and can assist industry and researchers in finding functional studies to assist with these types of problems. **Figure IV** demonstrates the number of studies published per year.

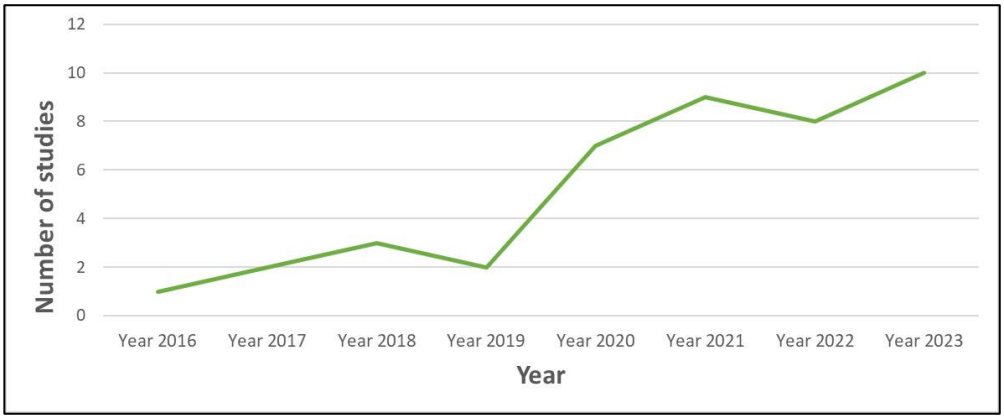

Figure IV: A demonstration of the number of studies published per year

There is an increase in publications per year regarding asset management and the application of machine learning within power plants. The year 2023 has a higher publication rate than previous years. This highlights the popularity of these articles published in the academic literature. **Figure IV** emphasises the need for machine learning, and the popularity and contribution of these algorithms for optimal asset management are emphasised in this study. From the titles of all the studies identified, a word cloud has been generated to showcase

which types of words are among the most popular. Research question 1 is addressed in Section 4.2.

4.2 Research Question 1: What is the current maturity of machine learning algorithms or models for asset management specific to coal-fired power generation utilities?

The review emphasised the popularity of integrating digital twins with machine learning algorithms. Studies conducted by Sharma *et al*. [49], Tuhaise *et al*. [50] and Liu *et al*. [51] highlighted that combining machine learning and digital twins will enable decision-makers to test assets using various scenarios and monitor asset health using real-time data. Subsequently, this will enable real-time decisions, prevent asset failure, and assist with asset maintenance management. The study by Xie *et al*. [52] concluded that applying machine learning will assist with optimal asset management. Liu *et al*. [51] further contributed that digital twins have a lot of data limitations, one of which is the limitation of large volumes of data. For this reason, the application of machine learning will assist in overcoming these challenges.

One clear trend among the studies identified is the data limitations experienced with asset management. Xie *et al*. [52] stated that machine learning algorithms could analyse large volumes of data from different domains, enabling proactive responses to uncertainty and market changes in the energy market. Furthermore, the authors added that these algorithms can predict loads and market prices and manage assets related to distributed energy resources. Subsequently, this will address the lack of data and enable proactive decision-making. Sierla *et al*. [53] further stated that applying machine learning can assist in mitigating grid failure and improve energy materials' design and deployment at the energy distribution level [51].

The authors Sierla *et al*. [53] and Sleiti *et al*. [54] had similar findings in their studies that contributed towards applying machine learning for optimal asset management. These studies suggested that machine learning can help investigate non-linear relationships between system inputs and outputs and predict future conditions of assets. Subsequently, by applying machine learning, practitioners and academics can understand all maintenance practices on an asset's overall sustainability score, leading to more efficient and effective asset management.

It is worthwhile noticing that some studies focused on sustainability and the environmental impacts of various assets and maintenance strategies. The study conducted by Ghaleb *et al*. [55] assessed the effect of maintenance interventions on the environment. A method, including the best-worst, was applied to quantify scores and demonstrate the sustainable performance of various maintenance strategies. Razmjoo *et al*. [56] also contribute towards sustainability by developing intelligent energy systems to achieve a decarbonised, renewable energy-based environment. A few other studies also focused on sustainability within asset management: Wu *et al*. [57], Çetin *et al*. [58], Wong *et al*. [59] and Barlow *et al*. [47].

The studies conducted by Chin *et al*. [45] and Solmaz *et al*. [60] integrated FMECA with multi-criteria decision-making techniques within the manufacturing and predictive maintenance fields, respectively. Authors, including Patriarca *et al*. [61] and Wong *et al*. [59], focused on innovative local energy and smart systems. The popularity of smart grids is also highlighted among the studies identified. Studies conducted by Faheem *et al*. [62], Razmjoo *et al*. [56], and Couraud *et al*. [63] integrated IoT technologies with smart grids and energy systems. Other studies conducted by Marinakis *et al*. [46] and Wong *et al*. [59] utilised IoT devices and big data analytics for energy management and optimisation.

The significance of various machine learning algorithms is highlighted among the identified papers. Milić *et al*. [14] indicated that reinforcement learning could be applied to predict the cost associated with the upper cloud (enterprise) levels. Sierla *et al*. [53] stated that various studies identified in the authors' paper were focused on combining forecasting with

optimisation using reinforcement learning. Furthermore, the value of reinforcement learning techniques has been highlighted in this study by demonstrating the value as a potentially disruptive technology for optimising home energy management systems, building energy management systems and VPP systems. Reinforcement learning can obtain heuristic solutions to complex problems with uncertainty [53]. For example, the study conducted by Barlow *et al*. [47] showcased the statement made by Sierla *et al*. [53] by demonstrating a less computationally intensive heuristic using a reinforcement learning algorithm, showing its accuracy for a large-scale industry model [47].

Cheng *et al*. [8] developed artificial neural network and support vector machine models to predict the future condition of MEP (mechanical, electrical, and plumbing) components. The study explains the details of the models' development. From this study, it is essential to note that the support vector machine outperformed the artificial neural network using various performance metrics based on the error indexes. The significance and specific contributions of these models to optimal asset management are highlighted.

Wu *et al*. [64] also indicated that the artificial neural network and support vector regression machines could be employed for demand forecasting, specifically short-term load forecasting. The application of machine learning in various sectors is highlighted in this review. A breakdown of the application of machine learning in different domains is identified: Energy system optimisation (Wu *et al*. [57], Faheem *et al*. [62], Wu *et al*. [64], Barlow *et al*. [47]), facility management and BIM (Stewart *et al*. [65], Wu *et al*. [57], and predictive maintenance and asset management (Ahmed *et al*. [66]).

The review identifies various limitations and challenges of applying machine learning for asset management within power plants. These include the following:

1. **Data quality and availability** [64] - The inconsistent data and quality of data across all sources are identified. Furthermore, the insufficient availability of quality historical data, specifically for the cases of rare events, is also witnessed.
2. **Interpretability and explainability** [63] - Machine learning models are sometimes complex to develop. It is also challenging to interpret the results and make decisions thereof. Furthermore, the lack of transparency and explainability is also seen as a barrier, specifically with critical systems where understanding the decision is crucial.
3. **Operational integration** [46] - Integrating machine learning models into existing operational workflows and systems is a challenge. Also, ensuring real-time data is processed efficiently and incorporated into decision support systems is seen as a barrier. Also, limitations identified include and are not limited to regulatory complaints, dependency on historical data and resource and expertise constraints.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Asset management is widely recognised in both academic literature and industry for its role in enhancing profitability, strengthening reputation, and reducing costs. Maintenance management has emerged as a major focus within operational research, largely driven by mathematical models that quantify the costs and benefits of various maintenance strategies. Equipment replacement becomes justifiable when maintenance programs are no longer effective. In cases where the long-term cost of maintenance exceeds the benefits—particularly due to frequent failures—replacement offers greater value. Nonetheless, well-designed maintenance and reliability schedules seek to perform the right maintenance, at the right time, on the right assets to minimise the need for replacement.

This study aimed to investigate machine learning applications for optimal asset management in coal-fired power plants. This study contributes towards research and industry by analysing the current state of machine learning algorithms and their applicability to asset management

at coal-fired power plants. The studies are evaluated in detail by providing insight into how these models were developed and how machine learning models can be applied for effective asset maintenance by considering various equipment, including but not limited to distribution networks, transformers and coal-fired boilers.

Maintaining components and policies is widely applied and investigated within the academic literature. The primary focus is on transmission and distribution assets, including transmission lines, protection devices, transformers, and substation equipment. From this study, it is evident that various machine-learning algorithms were developed. These models include a support vector machine for fault diagnosis in power transformers, expert systems to optimise asset management, a multi-criteria decision-making model for asset management, specifically power distribution systems, reinforcement learning, and an artificial neural network and support vector machine models to predict the future condition of MEP (mechanical, electrical and plumbing) components. Some studies focused on FMECA with multi-criteria decision-making techniques in manufacturing and predictive maintenance. Other studies focused on innovative local energy systems and intelligent systems. These studies also identified a few limitations: Data quality and availability, interpretability and explainability and operational integration.

Multiple valuable research opportunities have been identified. These include the following:

1. **Enhanced Data Quality and Utilisation:** To improve the quality, consistency, and availability of data used for asset management, enabling more accurate machine learning models and predictions.
2. **Advanced Predictive Maintenance:** Investigating machine learning algorithms, including deep learning and reinforcement learning, specifically for predictive maintenance in power plants, decreasing downtime, and increasing efficiency. Furthermore, researching the integration of predictive maintenance with IoT devices using real-time sensor data for more proactive maintenance strategies.
3. **The application of AI for Decision Support:** Developing AI techniques to enhance transparency and interpretability of machine learning models, especially in critical applications, enabling operators and decision-makers to understand AI-driven recommendations.

These studies also identified a few limitations: Data quality and availability, interpretability and explainability and operational integration. It is also worth noting that a limited number of studies applied machine learning at coal-fired power plants. However, it is also essential to note that the studies were only selected based on the keywords and the research protocol. For future research, it would be suggested to remove some of the keywords so that more studies are evaluated, and more insight is obtained from how machine learning is applied for optimal asset management.

6 COMPETING INTERESTS

No conflict of interest.

7 FUNDING INFORMATION

This work was supported by the South African National Energy Development Institute (SANEDI).

8 AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Not applicable during the review of the paper

9 DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Not applicable

10 RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN AND /OR ANIMALS

Not applicable

11 INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable

12 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors of this paper would like to express their sincere gratitude to the South African National Energy Development Institute (SANEDI) for their invaluable support and financial assistance in developing and publishing this article. Their commitment to advancing research and promoting sustainable energy solutions has been valuable in completing this work.

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14 APPENDIX A

14.1 SEARCH RESULTS

Table III: The 42 studies selected in this review

#	Title	Journal and year	Reference(s)
1	Data science and machine learning in the IoT concepts of power plants	International Journal of Electrical Power and Energy Systems - 2022	Milić *et al.* [14]
2	A taxonomy of machine learning applications for virtual power plants and home/building energy management systems	Automation in Construction - 2022	Sierla *et al.* [53]
3	Data-driven probabilistic machine learning in sustainable, innovative energy/innovative energy systems: Key developments, challenges, and future research opportunities in the context of intelligent grid paradigm	Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews - 2022	Ahmad *et al.* [15]
4	Data-driven predictive maintenance planning framework for MEP components based on BIM and IoT using machine learning algorithms	Automation in Construction - 2020	Cheng *et al.* [8]
5	Advanced controls on energy reliability, flexibility and occupant-centric control for innovative and energy-efficient buildings	Energy and Buildings - 2023	Liu *et al.* [51]
6	Digital Twins: State of the art theory and practice, challenges, and open research questions	Journal of Industrial Information Integration - 2022	Sharma *et al.* [49]
7	An innovative approach to designing cogeneration systems based on extensive data analysis and the use of clustering methods	Energy Conversion and Management - 2020	Vialetto and Noro. [42]

8	The equipment failure rate in electric power distribution networks: An overview of concepts, estimation, and modelling methods	Engineering Failure Analysis - 2023	Ghasemi *et al.* [67]
9	Importance of implementing innovative renewable energy system using heuristic neural decision support system	Sustainable Energy Technologies and Assessments - 2021	Jiang *et al.* [68]
10	Literature review of digital twin technologies for civil infrastructure	Journal of Infrastructure Intelligence and Resilience - 2023	Liu *et al.* [51].
11	Automated and interconnected facility management system: An open IFC cloud-based BIM solution	Automation in Construction - 2022	Matarneh *et al.* [69].
12	Digital Twin Enabled Asset Anomaly Detection for Building Facility Management	IFAC-PapersOnLine - 2020	Xie *et al.* [52].
13	Technologies for digital twin applications in construction	Automation in Construction - 2023	Tuhaise *et al.* [50].
14	Recent advances in the theory and practice of Logical Analysis of Data	European Journal of Operational Research - 2019	Lejeune *et al.* [70].
15	Digital twin in energy industry: Proposed robust digital twin for power plant and other complex capital-intensive large engineering systems	Energy Reports - 2022	Sleiti *et al.* [54]
16	Assessing the impact of maintenance practices on asset's sustainability	Reliability Engineering and System Safety - 2022	Ghaleb *et al.* [55].
17	A knowledge discovery in databases approach for industrial microgrid planning	Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews - 2016	Gamarra *et al.* [71].
18	Design, Control, Reliability, Economic and Energy Management of Microgrid: A Review	e-Prime - Advances in Electrical Engineering, Electronics and Energy - 2023	Khare *et al.* [43].
19	Using the internet of things in intelligent energy systems and networks	Sustainable Cities and Society - 2021	Ahmad *et al.* [72].
20	Information needs for progressive BIM methodology supporting the holistic energy renovation of office buildings.	Energy - 2019	Stegnar *et al.* [73].
21	Enhancing occupants' comfort through a BIM-based probabilistic approach	Automation in Construction - 2020	Alavi *et al.* [74].
22	Integration of failure mode, effects, and criticality analysis with multi-criteria decision-making in engineering applications: Part I – Manufacturing industry	Engineering Failure Analysis - 2021	Dabous *et al.* [44]
23	Asset maintenance optimisation approaches in the chemical and process industries – A review	Chemical Engineering Research and Design - 2020	Chin *et al.* [45].
24	Fuzzy Technique Application in Selecting Photovoltaic Energy and Solar Thermal Energy Production in Belt and Road Countries	Journal of Energy Storage - 2021	Qian *et al.* [75].
25	Practical development of engineering simulation-assisted educational AR environments	Education for Chemical Engineers - 2021	Solmaz *et al.* [60]
26	An integrated methodological approach for optimising complex systems subjected to predictive maintenance	Reliability Engineering and System Safety - 2021	Ahmed *et al.* [66].
27	Development of intelligent energy systems for communities: technologies, policies and applications	Energy - 2022	Razmjoo *et al.* [56]
28	A comprehensive overview of the framework for developing sustainable energy internet: From things-based energy network to the services-based management system	Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews - 2021	Wu *et al.* [57].

29	Development of quality improvement procedures and tools for facility management BIM	Developments in the Built Environment - 2022	Leygonie *et al.* [76]
30	Data requirements and availabilities for material passports: A digitally enabled framework for improving the circularity of existing buildings	Sustainable Production and Consumption - 2023	Çetin *et al.* [58].
31	A System-Theoretic Fuzzy Analysis (STheFA) for systemic safety assessment	Process Safety and Environmental Protection - 2023	Patriarca *et al.* [61].
32	Responsive FLEXibility: An intelligent local energy system	Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews - 2023	Couraud *et al.* [63]
33	Smart grid communication and information technologies in the perspective of Industry 4.0: Opportunities and challenges	Computer Science Review - 2018	Faheem *et al.* [62]
34	Towards collective energy Community: Potential roles of microgrid and blockchain to go beyond P2P energy trading	Applied Energy - 2022	Wu *et al.* [64].
35	Third-generation bioethanol and L-lactic acid production from red macroalgae cellulosic residue: Prospects of Industry 5.0 algae	Energy Conversion and Management - 2021	Wong *et al.* [59]
36	From big data to smart energy services: An application for intelligent energy management	Future Generation Computer Systems - 2018	Marinakis *et al.* [46].
37	Integrated intelligent water-energy metering systems and informatics: Visioning a digital multi-utility service provider	Environmental Modelling and Software - 2018	Stewart *et al.* [65].
38	A performance-centred approach to optimising maintenance of complex systems	European Journal of Operational Research - 2020	Barlow *et al.* [47].
39	Systems and control for the future of humanity, research agenda: Current and future roles, impact and grand challenges	Annual Reviews in Control - 2017	Lamnabhi-Lagarrigue *et al.* [77]
40	Towards next generation design of sustainable, durable, multi-hazard resistant, resilient, and smart civil engineering structures	Engineering structured - 2022	Hao *et al.* [78].
41	A comprehensive interdisciplinary review of mine supply chain management	Recource policy - 2021	Zeng *et al.* [79].
42	Review of Polybed pressure swing adsorption for hydrogen purification	Euripean Journal of Operational Research - 2020	Luberti *et al.* [80]

MAKING WAVES IN DIGITAL HEALTHCARE THROUGH FINGERPRINT SCANNING TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The digital transformation of healthcare in South Africa requires secure and reliable systems for patient identification. MediScan Solutions, a biometric fingerprint verification platform, was piloted in Johannesburg clinics and an emergency service to address fraud, data fragmentation, and misidentification. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study combined interviews (n=10), observations, and document analysis. The pilot reduced patient intake time by 35 percent, eliminated duplicate records, and blocked seven attempted cases of fraudulent access. Thematic analysis highlighted usability, trust and integration barriers as key factors shaping adoption. Findings show that biometric authentication, when designed for local conditions and compliant with data protection regulations, can strengthen efficiency, enhance fraud prevention, and align with national health priorities, including the phased implementation of the National Health Insurance.

Keywords: Biometric healthcare, fingerprint scanning, digital identity

1 INTRODUCTION

The healthcare sector is undergoing a digital revolution with increasing reliance on data-driven systems to improve care delivery, patient safety, and resource efficiency. Globally, innovations such as electronic health records, telemedicine, and biometric authentication are being deployed to address longstanding issues of access, accuracy, and operational cost [1]. In the South African context, the potential benefits of these technologies are particularly compelling, given the dual public and private health system, uneven resource distribution, and widespread inefficiencies in patient data management [1].

Public healthcare institutions continue to struggle with fragmented record keeping, paper-based systems, and inconsistent data verification processes. This leads to duplication of services, treatment delays, and administrative bottlenecks. One of the most pressing challenges is the absence of a reliable and secure national patient identification system. This gap not only undermines clinical continuity but also facilitates medical aid fraud, which has grown to billions of rand annually and places additional strain on both private and public health resources [2].

Biometric identification technologies, particularly fingerprint scanning, have emerged globally as reliable and cost-effective tools for verifying patient identity at the point of care. Studies from India, Ghana and Kenya demonstrate their ability to streamline access to health records, authenticate treatment eligibility, and reduce fraudulent claims [3], [5]. Yet adoption in South Africa remains limited and fragmented, often confined to pilot projects or isolated administrative tasks [3].

MediScan Solutions responds directly to these challenges by offering a biometric platform tailored for the South African healthcare landscape. The system enables healthcare professionals to retrieve verified patient records and medical aid details using fingerprint scanning. Built on a cloud-based architecture, MediScan ensures secure data access across facilities, supports interoperability with existing hospital information systems, and aligns with the strategic goals of the National Health Insurance (NHI) framework [1].

By integrating biometric authentication into routine care processes MediScan has the potential to reduce clinical errors, speed up patient registration and combat fraudulent billing. More broadly, it demonstrates how targeted digital innovations can support a more efficient, transparent and equitable healthcare ecosystem. This paper presents MediScan as a case study in digital health intervention and evaluates its practical implications using stakeholder feedback, pilot data and policy alignment analysis.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Biometric authentication in healthcare

Biometric technologies have gained increasing traction in global healthcare systems as tools to enhance patient identification accuracy, reduce administrative duplication, and combat medical fraud. Fingerprint scanning has emerged as a cost-effective and accessible method for authenticating patient identity, especially in resource-constrained settings. Misidentification remains a global concern, with over 60 percent of healthcare institutions reporting instances where duplicate records or mismatched files have compromised patient care [1].

In high-income countries, biometric platforms have been integrated with electronic health records (EHRs) to reduce incorrect treatments and support compliance with patient safety standards. For example, a 2022 clinical study in the United States found that biometric scanning reduced wrong-patient procedures by 45 percent and improved care coordination [2]. Meanwhile, in lower- and middle-income countries, fingerprint systems have shown strong uptake. Simprints, an open-source biometric nonprofit, has deployed fingerprint technology

in Bangladesh, Ghana, and Kenya, achieving over 80 percent reduction in data entry errors and a 90 percent user satisfaction rate among healthcare workers [3].

These findings underscore the potential of biometric tools to deliver high-value outcomes across diverse healthcare systems. However, challenges remain. Infrastructure limitations, system interoperability, and public trust continue to influence adoption rates, especially where digital literacy is uneven or policy frameworks are underdeveloped [4].

2.2 Digital identity, fraud prevention, and policy alignment

One of the central challenges facing South Africa's healthcare system is the absence of a unified patient identification mechanism. Patient records remain fragmented across public and private institutions, leading to duplication of services, loss of patient histories and inefficiencies in administration. In this environment, accurate and consistent verification of identity across facilities becomes difficult. The weakness in identity infrastructure not only disrupts continuity of care but also increases vulnerability to medical aid fraud, false claims and misuse of entitlements [5].

Medical fraud in South Africa is estimated to cost the sector billions of rand each year, driven by identity theft, double billing, and untraceable service provision [6]. The Health Funders Association has highlighted that the lack of biometric checks at the point of care allows unauthorised access to benefits, while legitimate claims are often delayed due to verification challenges [7]. Introducing biometric verification at the first point of contact can help address these risks by linking each consultation, prescription, or claim to a verifiable patient identity

International case studies show the potential of digital identity systems when aligned with broader health strategies. In India, the Aadhaar programme linked health entitlements to biometric verification, reducing duplicate enrolments and improving targeting of services [5]. In Rwanda and Kenya, similar systems have reduced ghost patient billing, improved control of entitlements and enhanced accountability among providers [9]. These examples demonstrate that digital identity tools can strengthen governance when they are embedded into national policy frameworks rather than used as isolated solutions.

South Africa's National Digital Health Strategy (2020–2025) and the phased implementation of the National Health Insurance recognise the importance of secure identity systems that ensure patient traceability while safeguarding privacy [6]. The regulatory context is shaped by the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), which requires strict compliance for sensitive personal data, including biometrics [10]. Any health technology operating in South Africa must therefore incorporate robust encryption, consent management, and audit controls to maintain public trust and legal compliance.

MediScan has been designed to meet these requirements. Its cloud-based infrastructure allows cross-institutional data access while enforcing access controls consistent with POPIA. Fingerprint verification creates a secure front-end authentication process and a traceable audit trail for each medical transaction. This not only reduces fraudulent activity but also aligns with national objectives for equitable access, universal coverage, and improved accountability in healthcare delivery.

2.3 Implementation challenges and ethical considerations

While international evidence highlights the effectiveness of biometric identification systems in strengthening patient verification and reducing fraud, the South African context presents distinct implementation challenges. Public healthcare facilities often face infrastructure deficits, including unstable electricity supply, unreliable internet connectivity and outdated or incompatible information systems [10]. These constraints limit the seamless deployment of cloud based biometric platforms that depend on real time synchronisation and secure digital access.

Human factors also remain a critical issue. The successful introduction of any digital health technology depends on staff readiness, training and perceptions of usability. Studies have shown that healthcare workers may resist new systems when they are introduced without adequate orientation or when they are perceived as adding to workload pressures [11]. In overstretched clinical environments, this resistance can undermine adoption even when the technology itself has proven benefits.

Data security and regulatory compliance form another major concern. Under the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), biometric data is classified as sensitive personal information. It is therefore subject to strict requirements regarding consent, encryption and auditability [12]. Yet few public institutions currently have the governance frameworks or technical capacity to meet these standards consistently. Weak compliance risks erode patient trust and may create legal vulnerabilities for institutions.

South Africa has also seen a pattern where promising pilot projects remain isolated, lacking integration into national digital health strategies or sustained institutional support. Many projects end when donor funding is exhausted, leaving behind fragmented systems that cannot scale or interoperate effectively with broader health reforms. Without a coordinated national framework, biometric initiatives risk remaining siloed, reducing their potential impact.

These challenges emphasise the need for any biometric solution to be designed with local realities in mind. Infrastructure support, staff engagement, and strong governance structures are essential if systems such as MediScan are to be successfully scaled and sustained in the South African healthcare environment.

2.4 Literature gaps

First, most documented studies focus on either public sector pilots or NGO-led projects, with limited exploration of mixed public–private healthcare environments. Given South Africa's dual health system, there is a need for studies that consider how biometric systems function across diverse providers where interoperability, funding, and consent models differ.

Second, little attention has been given to staff and patient experiences of biometric systems in daily clinical practice. Many evaluations focus on technical performance indicators, such as error rates or enrolment numbers, while overlooking qualitative aspects such as trust, training, workflow integration, and user acceptance. These human factors are essential for long-term adoption.

Third, although legal and ethical frameworks such as POPIA are well established, there is limited research assessing whether real-world deployments in South Africa comply with these requirements. Key questions around informed consent, data governance and secure cloud storage remain underexplored in practical terms.

Finally, the integration of biometric solutions into broader health reforms, particularly the National Health Insurance (NHI), is still largely discussed in theory. Few studies analyse the operational role that biometric identity systems could play in improving coverage, reducing fraud and enabling more coordinated care within the NHI framework.

This study addresses these gaps by presenting MediScan as a case study situated within the South African healthcare landscape. By examining design, deployment, and evaluation, it contributes practical insights into how biometric identity systems can align with national digital health objectives while responding to operational realities.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative case study approach to examine the implementation of MediScan in healthcare settings in Gauteng. The design follows principles of design research, with attention to contextual relevance, system functionality, and stakeholder experiences. A case

study approach is appropriate because it allows for in-depth exploration of how a technology is used in a real-world setting where social, organisational, and technical factors interact.

3.1 Research design

The research design is interpretivist, focusing on how the system was experienced and evaluated by participants. This paradigm is suited to studies of new technologies where meaning and usability are shaped by context. The goal was not only to understand what MediScan does, but how healthcare professionals, administrators and developers perceived its usefulness, risks, and integration potential.

3.2 Data collection methods

Three main data sources were used to triangulate findings:

- **Semi-structured interviews:** Ten participants were interviewed, including healthcare professionals (n=5), system developers (n=3), and medical aid administrators (n=2). The small sample was justified by the pilot's limited scope and by the depth of qualitative data generated. Interview questions focused on usability, workflow impact, trust in the system, and regulatory concerns.
- **Document analysis**: Technical specifications, design reports, and internal pilot documentation were reviewed to understand the system architecture, interoperability features, and compliance mechanisms.
- **Observation and informal feedback**: The researcher observed two pilot sessions at clinics in Johannesburg. Attention was given to registration times, scanning errors, and staff–patient interactions. Informal feedback was also recorded during these sessions

Participants were selected purposively, as they were directly involved in the pilot. Demographic information indicated a mix of clinical and administrative staff aged between 30 and 60.

3.3 Data analysis

Interview transcripts and observation notes were analysed thematically using NVivo. Codes were developed inductively, grouped into categories, and refined through repeated reading. Emerging themes included system trust, ease of integration, fraud prevention, and ethical considerations. To improve reliability, coding was peer reviewed by a second researcher, and member checking was used to confirm accuracy with participants.

3.4 Validity and limitations

The study benefits from triangulating three sources of data and from collecting perspectives across different stakeholder groups. However, the pilot had a small sample size and short duration, which limits the generalisability of findings. The results should therefore be viewed as exploratory. Ethical considerations were addressed through informed consent, anonymisation of participants and attention to POPIA compliance in the handling of biometric data.

4 CASE STUDY

MediScan Solutions is a biometric verification platform designed to improve patient identification, streamline data access, and reduce fraud across South Africa's fragmented healthcare system. Using fingerprint scanning, MediScan allows healthcare professionals to retrieve a patient's medical history, medical aid status, and allergy or medication data in real time, thereby enhancing service efficiency and clinical decision-making.

4.1 System Features and Technical Architecture

MediScan is designed as a biometric verification platform to address patient misidentification, fraud, and fragmented data access. The system uses fingerprint scanning to link patients to verified medical and administrative records stored on a secure cloud-based platform. Key features include:

- **Real-time patient data access** to patient data at the point of care, enabling quicker registration and safer treatment decisions.
- **Secure cloud hosting**, with encryption and redundancy for data recovery.
- **Interoperability** with existing hospital information systems to ensure adaptability across both public and private facilities.
- **Audit trail functionality** hat tracks each login and record retrieval, supporting claim validation and accountability.

As shown in *Figure 1*, the registration and verification workflow captures biometric consent, encrypts patient data and uploads it to MediScan's secure cloud. Authorised healthcare staff can then retrieve this information in real time through portable fingerprint scanners.

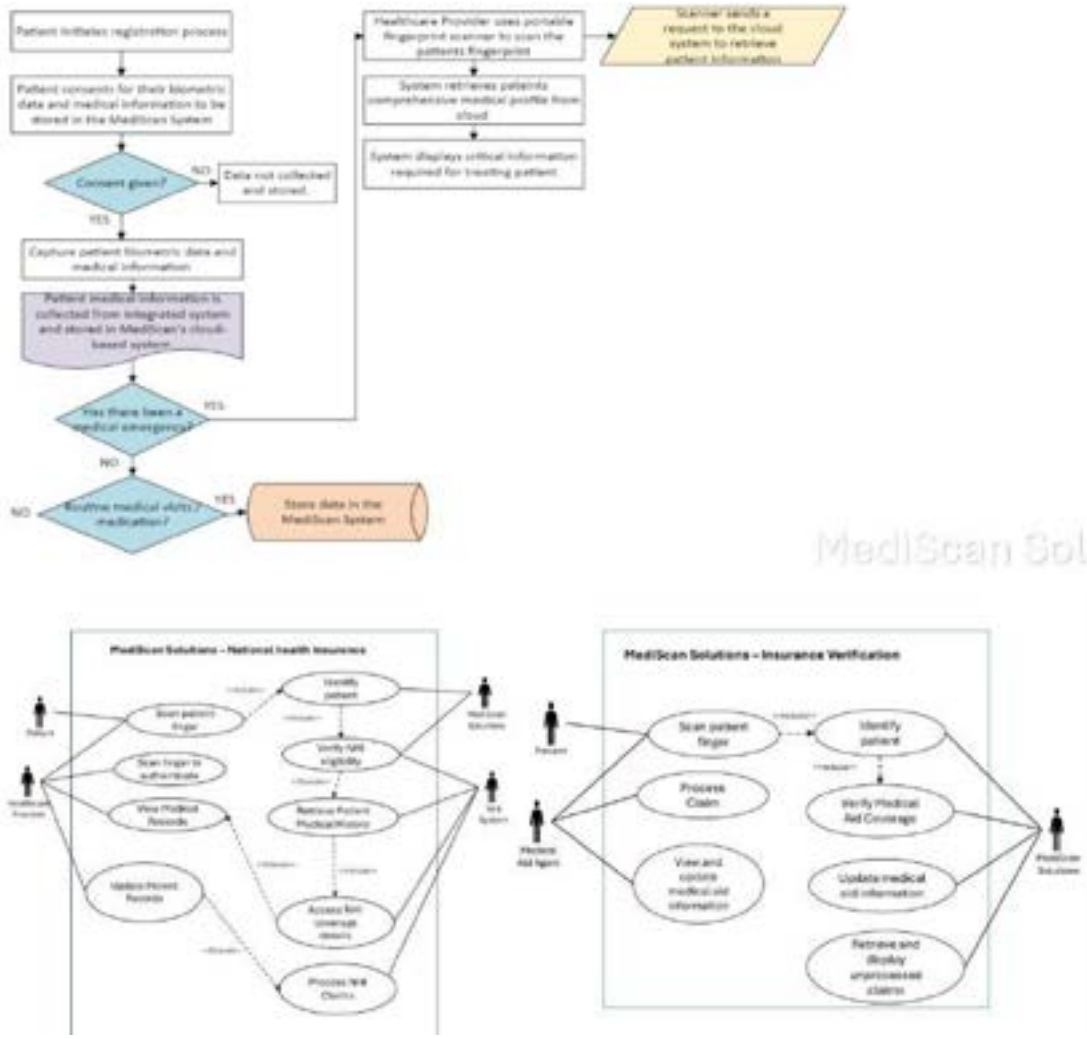

Figure 1: MediScan registration and verification workflow

4.2 Pilot Deployment and Implementation

The pilot study was conducted over six weeks in 2023 at two clinics and one emergency medical service provider in Johannesburg. These sites were chosen to reflect different use cases: routine outpatient care, administrative registration, and emergency response. The patient population included both insured and uninsured individuals, reflecting South Africa's dual public–private health system.

Training was delivered to staff in a one-day workshop at each facility, covering scanner use, troubleshooting, and consent protocols. Integration varied across sites: one clinic connected MediScan with its existing digital system, while others relied on temporary databases. Stakeholders included nurses, administrators, emergency staff, developers, and medical aid administrators, each contributing different perspectives on usability, workflow impact, and compliance requirements.

4.3 Observed Benefits and Performance Metrics

The pilot demonstrated several measurable benefits:

- **Efficiency**: Registration times decreased by about 35%, from 5–6 minutes to under 2 minutes.
- **Fraud prevention**: Seven attempted fraudulent registrations were blocked due to fingerprint mismatches.
- **Data integrity**: No duplicate patient records were generated during the pilot.
- **User acceptance**: Eighty percent of participating staff described the system as user-friendly and well aligned with existing workflows.

Beyond these metrics, clinical staff highlighted that rapid access to allergy and medication information supported safer treatment in emergencies where patients could not communicate. This suggests that the technology not only improves efficiency but also strengthens clinical safety.

4.4 Implementation Challenges

Despite the positive outcomes, challenges were identified:

- *Fingerprint quality issues*, particularly among elderly patients with worn biometric markers, required multiple scan attempts.
- *Initial hardware costs that* include fingerprint scanners and network routers were cited as a barrier for small clinics.
- *Connectivity limitations* during load-shedding were partially mitigated through local data caching and solar-powered routers.

4.5 SWOT Analysis

Strength	-Secure, auditable patient verification with proven fraud reduction. -Significant efficiency gains in patient registration. -High user satisfaction with minimal training required.
Weakness	-Infrastructure and hardware costs may limit adoption in smaller clinics. -Biometric limitations reduce universality across certain patient groups. -Dependence on stable connectivity exposes facilities to external risks such as load shedding.
Opportunity	-Alignment with the National Health Insurance (NHI) strategy creates potential for phased national rollout. -Scope to bridge data gaps between public and private providers. -Potential to extend services to rural areas, addressing inequities in access.

Threats	Public mistrust if privacy protections and ethical standards are not consistently demonstrated. -Regulatory complexity under POPIA and related compliance burdens. -Possible vendor dependency or limited interoperability with legacy systems.

5 DISCUSSION

The MediScan case study provides evidence of the practical benefits and systemic relevance of biometric verification systems in the South African healthcare context. By offering secure, real-time access to patient data, the platform directly addresses challenges of misidentification, fragmented records and medical aid fraud that have long undermined efficiency in both the public and private sectors [1], [2].

5.1 Operational benefits and competitive advantage

The pilot findings confirm that MediScan improves operational efficiency by reducing registration times, preventing duplicate records and strengthening fraud detection. These outcomes align with international evidence on biometric systems [3]. However, MediScan's competitive advantage lies in its contextual design for South African realities. Its architecture accommodates intermittent connectivity through local caching, its user interface was described as intuitive by clinical staff, and it incorporates compliance with POPIA from the outset. These features distinguish it from generic imported systems and reflect the importance of local innovation in digital healthcare.

5.2 Integration with policy frameworks

From a policy perspective, MediScan aligns with the strategic priorities of the National Digital Health Strategy (2019–2024) by contributing to secure patient identification, interoperable systems and improved fraud management [1]. More importantly, it has potential relevance for the rollout of the National Health Insurance (NHI). The NHI requires a reliable mechanism to verify patient identity across multiple facilities and providers. MediScan's ability to create an auditable, biometric-linked identity for each patient transaction suggests that it could play a role in strengthening reimbursement systems, ensuring that entitlements are linked to the correct beneficiaries, and preventing misuse of public funds.

5.3 Broader implications for system integration

The pilot also highlights broader opportunities and risks for system integration. By supporting both insured and uninsured patients, MediScan demonstrates capacity to operate across South Africa's dual health system. This makes it well placed to bridge gaps between private schemes and public institutions. At the same time, concerns remain around vendor dependency, interoperability with legacy systems, and sustainability in resource-constrained settings. Addressing these challenges will require deliberate policy support, infrastructure investment and public–private collaboration.

5.4 Linking back to research objectives

The objectives of this study were to evaluate MediScan's impact on efficiency, fraud prevention and policy alignment. The pilot results showed measurable improvements in efficiency and fraud detection, while analysis demonstrated clear alignment with national digital health priorities. However, gaps remain in fully realising integration with NHI reimbursement pathways and in demonstrating scalability to rural or under-resourced settings. These findings underline the need for phased implementation strategies, accompanied by continuous evaluation and adaptation.

6 CONCLUSION

This study examined MediScan Solutions as a case study of biometric fingerprint verification in the South African healthcare system. The pilot demonstrated clear operational benefits,

including faster patient registration, improved data accuracy, and effective prevention of fraudulent access. These outcomes confirm the potential of biometric platforms to address longstanding challenges of inefficiency, duplication, and fraud in patient management.

Beyond technical outcomes, the case illustrates the value of context-specific innovation. MediScan was designed with South African realities in mind, incorporating features such as compliance with POPIA and resilience to unstable connectivity. These attributes strengthen its competitive advantage over generic systems and support alignment with national health priorities.

At the same time, challenges remain. Infrastructure costs, biometric limitations among certain patient groups, and risks of vendor dependency highlight the importance of phased deployment and policy support. Integration with National Health Insurance pathways is promising but requires further development to ensure sustainability, interoperability and equitable access.

The study's objectives were to assess MediScan's contribution to efficiency, fraud prevention, and policy alignment. While the findings affirm progress in each area, they also indicate that broader integration and long-term scaling will depend on public–private collaboration, infrastructure investment, and ongoing monitoring.

In conclusion, biometric systems such as MediScan should not be viewed simply as technological add-ons but as strategic enablers of healthcare reform. With careful implementation, they have the potential to strengthen trust, reduce waste, and contribute to a more equitable and efficient health system in South Africa.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

To maximise the value of biometric platforms like MediScan in improving healthcare efficiency and integrity, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. ***Phased National Rollout***: Begin deployment in high-volume urban clinics and emergency centres where efficiency and fraud prevention gains can be demonstrated most visibly. Use these sites as proof-of-concept before expanding into rural and under-resourced areas.
2. ***Integration with NHI frameworks*:** Align MediScan's architecture with the implementation of the National Health Insurance by ensuring interoperability with reimbursement systems, public provider networks, and centralised patient databases.
3. ***Public-Private Partnerships*:** Encourage collaboration between government, private medical aid administrators, and technology providers to share costs, fund infrastructure, and create sustainable governance models for biometric platforms.
4. ***Capacity and Change Management:*** Introduce structured training programmes for healthcare workers and administrators. Training should address technical use, data ethics, consent protocols, and troubleshooting to build confidence and reduce resistance to adoption.
5. ***Transparent communication with the public***: Develop clear communication strategies to address concerns about privacy, surveillance, and data misuse. Public trust will depend on visible compliance with POPIA, inclusive policy processes and transparent system governance.
6. ***Continuous Evaluation and Adaptation***: Establish ongoing monitoring mechanisms that combine system data with stakeholder feedback. Regular evaluation will help refine implementation, identify emerging challenges and ensure that biometric platforms remain responsive to user and policy needs.

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INTELLIGENT INVESTMENT: AI-DRIVEN POLICY FRAMEWORKS FOR MINERAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

A comprehensive framework for systematically assessing the factors influencing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in mineral resource management (MRM) is currently absent. Incorporating AI in this field can revolutionize the mining and mineral processing sectors by significantly improving efficiency, productivity, and sustainability. However, the successful adoption of AI in MRM requires a comprehensive policy framework that addresses the complex interplay between technological innovation, environmental responsibility, and social governance. This paper introduces the AI-Investment Decision Matrix (AI-IDM) providing measurable pathways for translating AI capabilities into investment outcomes. The study will conduct a structured review to collect information on AI techniques related to mineral resource management and utilize an in-depth text analysis to contextualise the appropriate AI techniques that will provide a roadmap for policymakers, industry leaders, and stakeholders to harness the benefits of AI in mineral resources management while ensuring responsible and sustainable practices.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Mineral Resource Management, Policy Framework,

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1 INTRODUCTION

The conspicuous absence of mineral resources from UN Sustainable Development Goals represents a critical oversight in global sustainability architecture, given minerals' foundational role in socioeconomic development [1]. This omission perpetuates resource curse phenomena, Dutch disease mechanisms, and suboptimal mineral economics frameworks across developing economies. Conventional Mineral Resource Management (MRM) suffers from systemic deficiencies: fragmented decision-making protocols, inadequate organizational discipline, and disconnected geological-extraction-IT integration [2]. These gaps manifest as poor delivery outcomes despite meticulous project planning, necessitating transformative approaches beyond traditional capacity-building initiatives. Decision-making complexity spans structured, semi-structured, and unstructured paradigms requiring sophisticated reasoning architectures [3]. This research proposes Intelligent Decision-Making (IDM) through Human Intelligence-Artificial Intelligence convergence, addressing investment decision complexities that obstruct effective MRM implementation [4]. Intelligent Decision Support Systems (IDSS) leverage AI-information technology-systems engineering integration, deploying Fuzzy Logic, Case-based Reasoning, and Artificial Neural Networks for distributed data challenges ([3]. These methodologies enable data-driven policy optimization aligned with Earth4all objectives and SDGs 9, 10, 12, and 16 [5]. African mineral sectors exemplify MRM failures: environmental degradation, social instability, and unsustainable development patterns stemming from institutional corruption, expertise deficits, and political interference. The Ukraine conflict and P&ID-Nigeria disputes illustrate mineral security's geopolitical implications and investment complexities. Resource curse manifestations—including rent-seeking behaviours and Dutch disease effects—demonstrate how abundance paradoxically constrains economic growth. Despite African Mining Vision frameworks, technological innovation adoption remains limited, with policymakers underutilizing analytical tools for informed development strategies.

This study advocates intelligent frameworks integrating data-driven approaches and expert knowledge systems for policy refinement. AI-enabled analysis of economic viability, investment risk profiles, sustainability metrics, and innovation indicators enhances stakeholder decision-making capabilities. Scientific assessment of these parameters promotes resource sustainability, scalability, and productive utilization while mitigating environmental risks and fostering socioeconomic stability through systematic mineral resource optimization.

The outline of the papers is as follows: Section 2 describes the theoretical works related to the research domains, describes the methodology in Section 3, and presents and discusses the results in Section 4. Section 5 outlines the possible implementation strategy, and the recommendations and path forward are in Section 6. Finally, the conclusion of the paper is in Section 7.

2 THEORETICAL LITERATURE OF THE RESEARCH THEME

Mineral resources (MR) represent finite crustal concentrations critical for industrial advancement yet exhibit temporal depletion patterns [6-7]. These assets drive construction, electronics, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing sectors while creating geographic wealth asymmetries between resource-abundant and resource-scarce regions [8]. Paradoxically, natural resource endowments generate economic curses in developing economies through Dutch disease mechanisms, contrasting with value capture in industrialized nations [9]. Sub-Saharan Africa exemplifies mixed developmental outcomes despite substantial mineral wealth [10]. Contemporary mineral resource management (MRM) frameworks suffer from fragmented policymaking architectures, inadequate data integration protocols, and suboptimal value optimization strategies [11]. Transformative MRM requires deployment of specialized technological assets enabling comprehensive value maximization while minimizing resource

destruction through strategic economic conversion mechanisms rather than conventional value-addition approaches.

2.1 Minerals Resource Management (MRM)

Africa's mineral investment paradox manifests through 15% global expenditure allocation despite controlling 30% of worldwide reserves, constrained by state intervention, resource nationalism, and perceived investment risks leading to systematic underinvestment [4]. Critical governance deficiencies stem from inadequate decision-making frameworks driven by skills shortages and expertise gaps in mineral resource management. Mineral Resource Management integrates essential functions from extraction to market delivery, optimizing transaction efficiency while maximizing value and minimizing operational risks [12]. Core objectives encompass value maximization, opportunity identification, and value erosion prevention through innovative technological applications and methodological advancements in exploration, development, and trend analysis [13]. MRM emphasizes cohesive resource planning across value chains, incorporating functional specialization through horizontal and vertical integration models [14-15]. The African Mining Vision, adopted by the African Union in 2009, establishes foundational MRM frameworks recognizing mineral resources' finite nature while emphasizing intergenerational benefit optimization ([16-17]. AMV objectives include developing comprehensive management models enhancing commercial, small-scale, and artisanal investment levels [18]. The 2018 AMV evaluation emphasized coherent policy requirements and regulatory enforcement efficacy, addressing common MRM policy deficiencies. Knowledge-driven economic transformation necessitates addressing educational disparities, facilitating skill transfer, and building institutional capacity [17]. Local content policies transcend technical and managerial efficiencies, requiring organizational discipline, extensive training, and strategic leadership focusing on extraction planning and processing optimization [4].

This research explores MRM's potential for mitigating decision-making risks in investment portfolios, emphasizing sustainable resource economy development, enhanced governance frameworks, and policy architectures that optimize resource wealth management while circumventing resource policy curse phenomena.

2.2 Decision-Making (DM)

Decision-making processes involve evaluating one or more objectives across various industries [19]. This study will specifically focus on multi-criteria approaches in mineral resource management (MRM). Multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) methods select the best option among similar alternatives by considering multiple influential criteria. These methods find application in areas such as equipment selection, process reagents, and technology choices [20]. MCDM is particularly effective for managing complex criteria, although it does have potential limitations.

2.3 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence technologies enable machines to mimic human cognition through environmental perception and adaptive learning mechanisms, utilizing computational algorithms for big data analytics [20-21]. Exponential AI growth stems from enhanced computing capabilities and reduced cloud storage costs, with data functioning as the primary catalyst for algorithmic advancement. African AI deployment strategically addresses poverty alleviation, educational enhancement, healthcare optimization, and sustainability initiatives. Digital economy integration and research institute establishment by African governments democratize technology access, generating high-value employment while significantly impacting GDP through improved productivity and resource allocation efficiency. Despite persistent infrastructure constraints, data limitations, skills deficits, and ethical challenges, AI adoption accelerates continent-wide through advanced analytics and predictive modelling

applications spanning mining, wildlife conservation, precision agriculture, water management, and forest monitoring systems [23-25]. AI fundamentally transforms mineral resource management through sophisticated resource estimation, exploration optimization, financial modelling, environmental sustainability protocols, and comprehensive data analysis frameworks [26]. Geospatial analysis and mineral resource estimation represent predominant AI applications, optimizing extraction processes while minimizing societal and environmental impacts [27]. Current research addresses economic, sustainability, and social evaluation parameters for mining operations [28-29].

This manuscript proposes an innovative interdisciplinary framework integrating AI into mineral resource management, specifically targeting investment policy optimization. The framework emphasizes ecological sustainability, energy optimization, circular economy principles, and AI-influenced energy planning, ultimately guiding stakeholder decision-making toward equitable sustainability through data-driven policy formulation [30].

2.4 Mineral Resource Investment

Mineral resource investment demands comprehensive risk assessment frameworks addressing multidimensional uncertainties across geological, sociopolitical, economic, and operational dimensions [31-32]. Current prioritization models inadequately integrate internal constraints with external market dynamics, creating suboptimal capital allocation decisions for investments characterized by substantial capital requirements, extended development timelines, and elevated uncertainty profiles compared to conventional sectors [7,33]. Investment attractiveness hinges on political stability, legal frameworks, infrastructure adequacy, and economic volatility considerations. Moerenhout et al. [34] propose a tri-dimensional funding architecture addressing these capital constraints through integrated financial mechanisms. This framework combines concessional debt instruments, targeted grants, and equity mechanisms with industry-led thematic bonds and vertical integration hubs to reduce capital expenditure burdens. Standardized trade infrastructure featuring differentiated pricing mechanisms rewards responsible operators while penalizing non-compliant producers. Strategic revenue stabilization through active offtake policies, floor pricing mechanisms, and political risk guarantees enables competitive positioning against state-backed entities while ensuring supply chain resilience and capturing environmental and security externalities.

2.5 Comparing the traditional DM and IDM Framework

Traditional decision-making frameworks rely on hierarchical structures and linear processes that are grounded in rational choice theory. These frameworks rely on historical data and established protocols, providing predictability and compliance. However, they often struggle in dynamic environments due to limitations in sequential processing, decision bottlenecks, and an inability to manage large volumes of data or complex relationships among variables. As a result, organizations are increasingly turning to alternative frameworks that incorporate advanced analytics and adaptive management techniques. These new approaches enhance information processing, accommodate uncertainty, and support continuous adaptation.

The IDM transforms traditional mineral resource management by integrating human expertise with AI. IDM employs predictive analytics to foresee challenges, positioning governance and risk management as foundational. This framework tackles Africa's mineral investment paradox and transmute it into tangible investment outcomes. It also provides the transparency and risk mitigation needed for modern investors. Most significantly, the IDM framework directly addresses Africa's mineral investment paradox by translating 30% of global reserves into proportional investment attraction. Table 1 compares traditional investment decision-making frameworks with AI-driven methodologies (AI-IDM), illustrating how machine learning enables

real-time analytics, predictive risk assessment, and automated optimization, versus conventional, manual, and reactive approaches.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis: Traditional vs. AI-Driven Investment Decision-Making Frameworks

Aspect	Traditional Frameworks	AI-Driven Framework (AI-IDM)
Decision Speed	Slow, manual processes	Real-time, automated analysis
Risk Assessment	Historical data-based	Predictive analytics with ML
Data Integration	Fragmented, siloed	Comprehensive, multi-source
Adaptability	Limited, reactive	Dynamic, proactive learning
Investment Optimization	Experience-based	Algorithm-driven optimization
Sustainability Integration	Separate consideration	Embedded in all decisions
Stakeholder Engagement	Ad-hoc consultation	Systematic, data-driven
Performance Monitoring	Periodic reviews	Continuous, real-time metrics

Ultimately, this study fills the identified research gap by developing the first comprehensive framework for systematically assessing AI factors in mineral resource management. The AI-Investment Decision Matrix provides measurable pathways for translating AI capabilities into investment outcomes, addressing the absence of structured approaches that link artificial intelligence, investment policy, and mineral resource management—a critical void evidenced by minimal academic convergence (0.54%) across existing literature.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research deployed a tripartite methodological framework comprising meta-methodological analysis integrating expert opinions to identify research gaps and barriers in AI-driven mineral resource policy; SWOT analysis establishing multidisciplinary frameworks for AI-enhanced investment strategies; and systematic roadmap development delineating critical implementation milestones for maximizing AI benefits. This systematic approach synthesizes theoretical analysis with practical implementation protocols, ensuring comprehensive coverage of AI applications through structured interrogation and robust analytical frameworks.

3.1 Bibliometric analysis:

This analysis was carried out based on earlier study [35]. The systematic literature review used four premier academic databases—Wiley, Elsevier, MDPI, and IEEE—to explore the economic and financial dimensions of mineral resource management with a focus on AI. Identification of relevant journals was searched using targeted keywords: investment, artificial intelligence, and mineral resource management. A screening tool (Rayan) ranked selected articles. Whereas, VOSviewer v.1.6.20 and Biblioshiny 5.0 facilitated the visualization of relationships among key research terms (AI, investment policy, and mineral resource management) and highlighted recommended journals with the aim of identifying research gaps in the research domain.

3.2 Framework for AI-Driven Investment Policy in Mineral Resource Management: A Multidisciplinary Approach

3.2.1 Expert Validation Framework

This study employed a multi-expert validation approach comprising five specialists with over 120 years of combined experience from academia, industry practice, policy-making, and data science. The expert panel validated investment criteria through systematic categorization and ranking protocols, ensuring comprehensive coverage of mineral resource management investment dimensions.

3.2.2 AI Methodology Validation

Five AI methodologies—Ensemble Learning, Bayesian Networks, Deep Learning, Genetic Algorithms, and Reinforcement Learning—were evaluated using a robust validation framework incorporating:

- K-fold cross-validation (k = 5) for model reliability
- Monte Carlo simulations for sensitivity analysis
- Industry benchmarking for practical applicability
- Statistical significance testing at 95% confidence level

This comprehensive evaluation ensures selected AI techniques effectively support investment decision-making and risk assessment in mineral resource management.

3.3 SWOT Analysis Methodology

A five-member expert panel conducted a structured four-phase SWOT analysis. We systematically identified internal and external factors affecting AI-driven mineral resource investment through expert brainstorming and literature synthesis. Each factor was prioritized and classified as High, Medium, or Low based on its immediate impact on investment, its significance for project success, and its frequency of occurrence. The synthesized SWOT elements formed actionable strategies that focused on transforming investment weaknesses into competitive advantages enabled by AI. To ensure comprehensive coverage of important investment risk factors, we validated our findings through expert consensus.

3.4 Roadmap Development Process

Table 2 outlines the systematic 9-step methodology for developing the AI-driven investment policy framework, emphasizing economic and financial aspects while maintaining stakeholder engagement throughout the development process.

Table 2: Roadmap Development Process for AI-Driven Mineral Resource Management (MRM) Investment Policy

Step	Activity	Rationale
1	Define the objectives and scope	The aim is to develop a roadmap for AI-driven mineral resource management with emphasis on the economic and financial aspects (investment policy) with little consideration on other aspects, such as technical and social community.
2	Conduct stakeholder analysis:	Five multi-experts including academia, industry practitioner, policy-maker, and data=scientist with around 120 years of experience.
3	Assess current state of AI in MRM:	Systematic literature review was carried out with best global practices with identification of barriers and challenges of utilising AI-driven mineral resource management investment policy.
4	Identify key areas for AI adoption:	The investment risk and mitigation coupled with attracting investment were identified for adoption.
5	Develop AI-driven investment policy framework:	Create a framework for AI-driven investment policy in MRM and outline the key principles, guidelines, and regulations.
6	Establish implementation roadmap:	Identify milestones, timelines, and responsible parties and develop the roadmap.
7	Define performance metrics:	Establish metrics by identifying the key performance indicators and monitoring mechanisms
8	Engage stakeholders and foster collaboration:	Engage stakeholders and collaborators throughout the roadmap development process.
9	Review and update roadmap:	Continuous review and update to ensure relevance.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Bibliometric Analysis

This study offers a bibliometric analysis identifying optimal publication venues at the nexus of artificial intelligence (AI), investment, and mineral resource management. Utilizing a robust five-stage hierarchical filtration methodology, the study scrutinized 6,073 journals from prominent publishers—Elsevier, Wiley, Springer, and MDPI—selectively retaining 33 top-tier venues, representing a mere 0.54% retention rate (Table 3). The filtering process progressed through stages of keyword filtration (17.6% retention, n=1,070), relevance assessment (13.2% secondary retention, n=141), quality refinement (65.2% tertiary retention, n=92), culminating in final selection (35.9% quaternary retention, n=33). A multi-dimensional scoring system evaluated journals based on three criteria: AI sophistication, investment relevance, and focus on mineral resource management, employing a standardized 1-10 scale (Table 4). Through interactive network visualizations using D3.js force-directed algorithms, there are four identified research clusters: AI-centric journals, resource-focused publications, investment-oriented journals, and hybrid bridge publications.

Methodological evaluations of the research gap opportunities (Figure 1) across six dimensions indicated deep learning's saturation but limited growth, while genetic algorithms exhibited optimal potential with less competition yet substantial application scope. Machine learning and AI displayed balanced interdisciplinary engagement, whereas neural networks presented moderate performance with emerging policy integration needs. The literature review landscape analysis (Figure 2) highlighted a critical gap in decision-making process publications (n=1 since 2021) and a lack of articles addressing mineral resource management. Thus, suggesting significant opportunities for enhancing human intelligence within this domain through AI methodologies. The convergence efficiency of 0.54% emphasizes the specialized nature of this evolving field and reveals strategic positioning opportunities among publishers. Our recommendations advocate targeting Elsevier journals for impactful contributions pertinent to current policy challenges while leveraging identified gaps for foundational advancements in the field. Effective mineral resource management demands integration across seven dimensions crucial for operational success and sustainability: technical, environmental, economic, governance, social engagement, strategic planning, and risk management. This integrated framework emphasizes the imperative for synchronized multi-stakeholder engagement for effective operational paradigms within dynamic resource environments.

Lastly, a search in the only identified journal of mineral resource management revealed that mineral resource investment has 56 results, 5 related and one is in polish language. Also, the search for AI and the various subsections have only one entry. This reinforced the need for this study.

Table 3: The Journals Relevance for AI-Driven Investment Policy Research in Mineral Resources Management

S/N	Journal Number	Elsevier	Wiley	Springer	MDPI	Total
1	Total	2,900+	1,600+	1,100+	473	6,073
2	Appeared	627	57	363	23	1,070
3	Related	74	23	21	23	141
4	Refined	60	5	4	23	92
5	Chosen	15	4	4	10	33

Table 4: Scoring Methodology for Assessing the Various Keywords in Determining Top Performing Journals

S/N	Score	AI	Investment	Mineral Resource Management
1	10	Premier AI/ML journals with broad scope	Core finance/investment management journals	Core mineral/mining/extractive industry journals
2	8-9	Strong AI focus with established reputation	Strong investment and financial analysis focus	Strong natural resource management focus
3	6-7	Moderate AI content or emerging AI focus	Moderate investment/economic content	Moderate resource/energy applications
4	4-5	Limited but growing AI applications	Some investment applications	Some resource-related content
5	1-3	Minimal AI focus	Limited investment focus	Limited resource focus

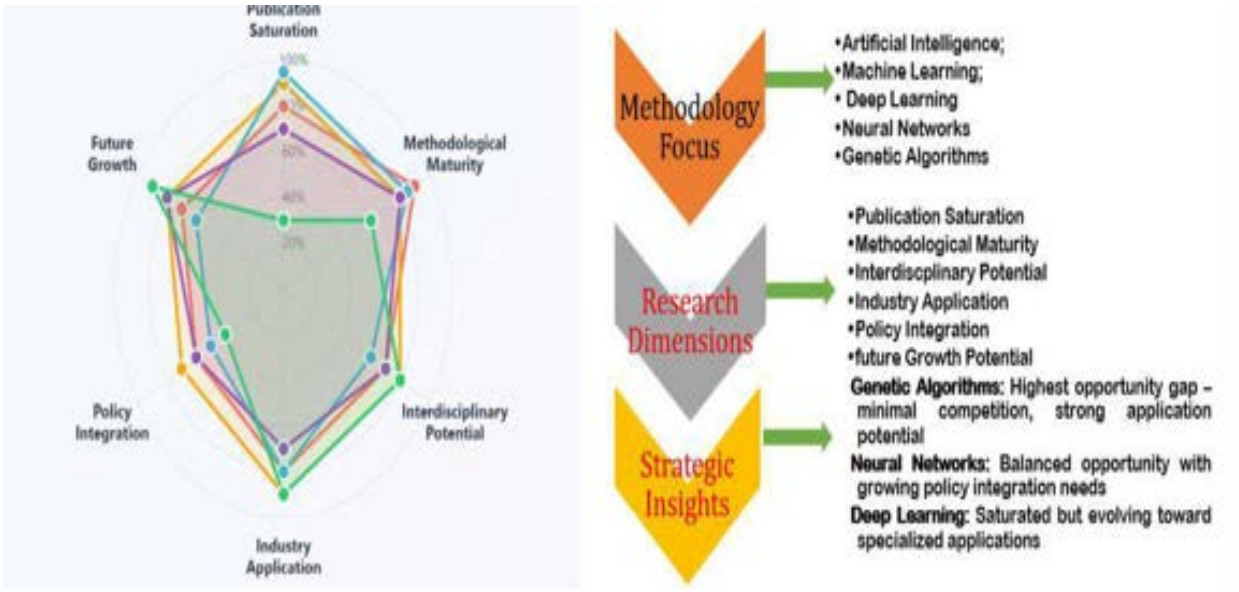

Figure 1: Research Gap Opportunity Radar Chart -Strategic Overview of AI-Investment-Mineral Resource Management Research Landscape

Research Domains	Investment Policy	Resource Extraction	Environmental Impact	Risk Assessment	Sustainability Metrics
Deep Learning Applications	Low Gap: 153 publications	Medium Gap: 48 publications	High Gap: 22 publications	Low Gap: 149 publications	Medium Gap: 72 publications
Machine Learning Integration	Low Gap: 149 publications	Low Gap: 72 publications	Medium Gap: 15 publications	Medium Gap: 123 publications	Low Gap: 89 publications
Genetic Algorithm Optimization	High Gap: 22 publications	High Gap: 9 publications	Medium Gap: 5 publications	High Gap: 18 publications	High Gap: 12 publications
Neural Network Modelling	Medium Gap: 55 publications	Medium Gap: 33 publications	Low Gap: 28 publications	Medium Gap: 45 publications	Medium Gap: 38 publications
Expert Systems Development	Minimal Gap: 225 publications	Low Gap: 123 publications	Medium Gap: 95 publications	Minimal Gap: 187 publications	Low Gap: 156 publications
Predictive Analytics	Low Gap: 89 publications	Medium Gap: 67 publications	Medium Gap: 45 publications	Low Gap: 78 publications	Low Gap: 62 publications
Real-time Decision Systems	High Gap: 12 publications	High Gap: 8 publications	High Gap: 6 publications	Medium Gap: 15 publications	High Gap: 9 publications
Hybrid AI Approaches	High Gap: 8 publications	High Gap: 5 publications	Medium Gap: 3 publications	High Gap: 12 publications	Medium Gap: 7 publications

Research Gap Legend

High Gap: Severely underexplored areas with significant potential

Medium Gap: Moderately researched with room for expansion

Low Gap: Well-researched but evolving areas

Minimal Gap: Saturated research areas

Figure 2: Research Gap Landscape Matrix - AI-Driven Investment Policy & Mineral Resource Management

4.2 Key Aspects of Mineral Resource Management Framework

Figure 3 illustrates a comprehensive Mineral Resource Management framework with seven interconnected dimensions surrounding a central hub. This holistic approach integrates multiple stakeholder perspectives to ensure sustainable and responsible mineral resource development. Appendix A1 outlines a structured framework that categorizes key components critical to investment policy in mineral resource management. Each component's score, scaled from 0 to 100, indicates its significance for investment success, foundational role in sector growth, and direct influence on policy efficacy. Analysis at the category level reveals weighted averages that highlight policy priorities. Governance & Risk Management rank as the foremost priority (92 points), emphasizing the need for robust systems before other elements can successfully function. Economic & Financial considerations (82 points) serve as primary influencers of investment decisions and capital distribution. Social & Environmental aspects (70 points) promote sustainable practices, while International Cooperation (65 points) enhances domestic policy frameworks. This hierarchical model underscores that successful mineral resource investment policies must prioritize strong governance and risk management, followed by economic optimization, with social, environmental, and international cooperation facilitating investment attraction and risk mitigation. High-Priority Investment Policy Components (75-95 points) are identified as crucial for mineral resource investment success. Leading this category, the Regulatory Framework (95 points) and Risk Assessment and Mitigation (90 points) establish governance structures critical for investment stability and risk management. Next, Financial Risk Assessment (85 points) and Economic Considerations (82 points) serve as core economic drivers affecting investment viability. Market Analysis (80), Investment Attraction Strategies (78), and Financial Incentives (75) complete this high-priority tier, focusing on market dynamics and mechanisms to attract and retain investment capital. It was established that risk assessment and mitigation are linked to investment attraction, emphasizing the economic and financial dimensions of mineral resource policy. Therefore, the strategies are to secure funding throughout the mineral value chain, from exploration to sustainable development, while implementing rigorous risk management throughout

project lifecycles. The objectives include mitigating the resource curse, optimizing resource recovery rates, and ensuring sufficient capital inflow to enhance profitability and project viability, thereby balancing investment attraction with prudent risk management for successful mineral resource development.

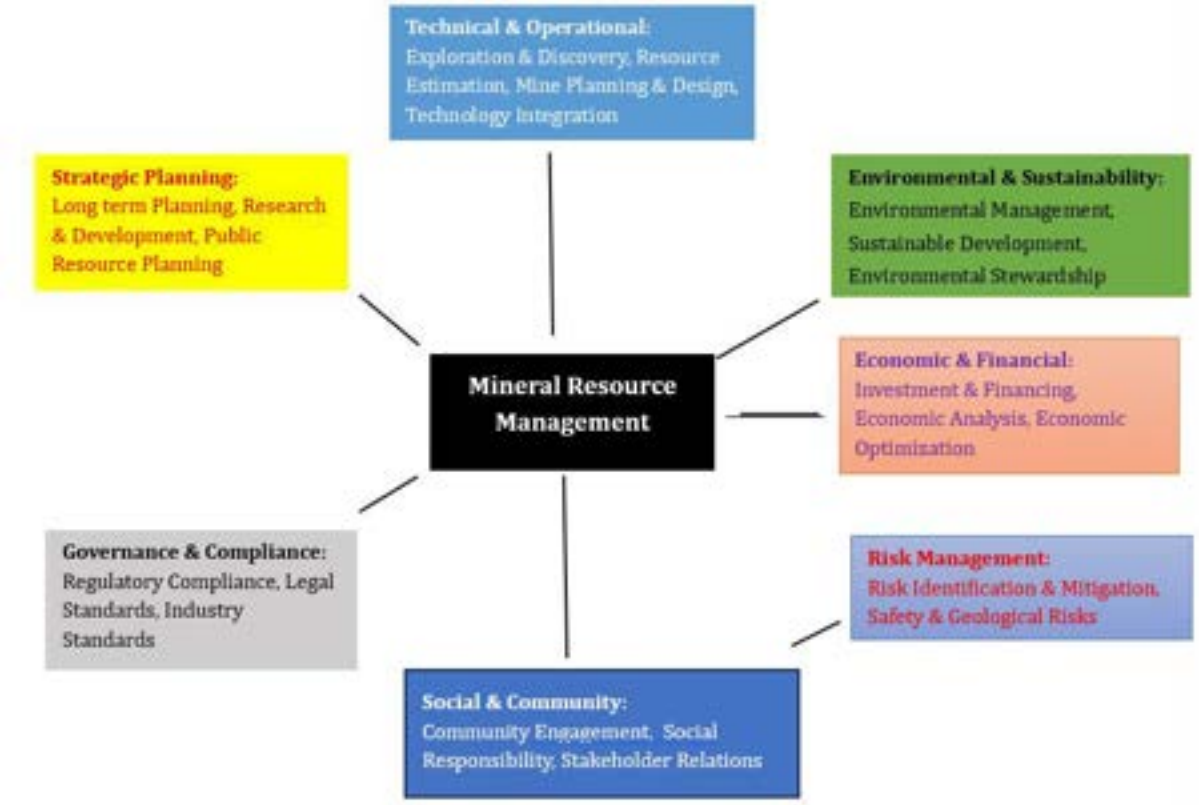

Figure 3: Categorization of the key aspects of mineral resource management

4.3 SWOT Analysis Results:

The SWOT analysis framework serves as a systematic tool to evaluate risk factors in mineral resource investment management across four strategic dimensions (Table 5). Priority levels—High, Medium, and Low—are assigned to denote the importance and immediacy of addressing each factor in comprehensive investment risk assessments. The strengths quadrant identifies essential assets such as advanced risk assessment methodologies, diversified management tools, regulatory compliance expertise, and technology integration that form a robust basis for informed investment decisions. Conversely, the weaknesses quadrant reveals vulnerabilities including substantial capital requirements, exposure to commodity price fluctuations, environmental liabilities, and geological uncertainties leading to elevated investment risks. The opportunities quadrant highlights favourable market dynamics such as the shift toward green energy, advanced technological integration opportunities, the availability of ESG-focused capital, and collaborative risk-sharing mechanisms, which can enhance investment prospects. The threats section delineates external challenges that could jeopardize project success, including geopolitical instability, climate change repercussions, regulatory ambiguities, supply chain vulnerabilities, and community opposition. To address these factors, Table 6 illustrates a strategic pivot toward AI-enhanced investment decision-making. AI techniques enable organizations to process extensive geological datasets, forecast commodity price trends, optimize portfolio allocations, and automate risk mitigation strategies. This shift transforms traditional investment methodologies into data-driven, intelligent frameworks that significantly boost project success rates and financial outcomes.

Moreover, Table 7 outlines a specialized SWOT analysis framework for evaluating digital business transformation strategies within organizations. This framework meticulously assesses the factors affecting investment attraction in mineral resource management, utilizing impact levels.

Critical, High, and Medium (Table 8) to evaluate their impact on capital funding. Key strengths include existing strategic resources and technological capabilities, while weaknesses encompass skill gaps and resistance to change. Opportunities are identified in emerging market trends and technological innovations, whereas threats stem from competitive pressures and cybersecurity vulnerabilities. Strategic integration (Table 9) synthesized SWOT elements into actionable recommendations focused on transitioning toward implementing AI-driven investment strategies, thereby enhancing portfolio performance and risk management in the evolving digital economy.

Table 5: SWOT Analysis Matrix for Mineral Investment Risk Management

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Advanced Risk Assessment Frameworks H Sophisticated geological, technical, and financial risk evaluation models provide comprehensive project analysis capabilities for informed investment decisions. **Diversified Risk Management Tools** H Insurance products, hedging instruments, and financial derivatives effectively mitigate commodity price volatility and operational uncertainties. **Regulatory Compliance Expertise** M Strong understanding of environmental, safety, and governance requirements reduces compliance-related investment risks and regulatory penalties. **Technology Integration Capabilities** M Digital monitoring systems and AI-powered analytics enhance real-time risk detection, response capabilities, and operational efficiency. **Established Stakeholder Networks** L Strong community relations and government partnerships reduce social license risks and enhance project sustainability.	**High Capital Investment Requirements** H Massive upfront investments and extended payback periods create significant financial exposure and limit operational flexibility during market downturns. **Commodity Price Volatility Exposure** H Unpredictable market fluctuations directly impact project viability, cash flows, and long-term investor confidence in mineral sector investments. **Environmental Liability Burden** H Potential for long-term environmental damage creates substantial cleanup costs, regulatory penalties, and reputational risks for investors. **Geological Resource Uncertainty** M Limited accuracy in resource estimation and grade prediction increases exploration risks and development cost overruns. **Technical Skills Shortage** M Shortage of specialized risk management expertise limits effective assessment capabilities and project execution quality.
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
Green Energy Transition Demand H Growing global demand for critical minerals in renewable energy systems and electric vehicles creates substantial new investment opportunities. **Advanced Technology Integration** H AI-driven exploration technologies and predictive analytics significantly improve project success rates and reduce geological uncertainties. **ESG-Focused Investment Capital** M Increasing focus on sustainable mining practices opens access to environmental, social, and governance-focused institutional investment funds. **Industry Risk-Sharing Mechanisms** M Development of industry-wide insurance pools and collaborative risk-sharing partnerships reduce individual project exposure and costs. **Government Support Programs** L Public sector risk mitigation schemes and investment incentives enhance project attractiveness and financial viability.	**Geopolitical Instability Risks** H Political upheaval, trade conflicts, and resource nationalism threaten investment security, market access, and operational continuity. **Climate Change Operational Impacts** H Extreme weather events and changing environmental conditions disrupt mining operations and significantly increase operational costs. **Regulatory Framework Uncertainty** H Evolving environmental regulations and complex permitting processes create project timeline delays and cost uncertainties for investors. **Global Supply Chain Vulnerabilities** M International supply chain disruptions affect critical equipment delivery, maintenance schedules, and operational continuity. **Community and Social Opposition** M Local community resistance and environmental activist campaigns can halt project development and damage investor confidence.

Table 6: Strategic Risk Management Priorities and Recommendations for Mineral resource Management

Strategic Focus Area	Key Risk Factors	Recommended Actions
Priority Risk Mitigation	High capital requirements, commodity price volatility, geopolitical instability	Implement diversified investment portfolios, establish robust hedging strategies, and develop comprehensive political risk insurance frameworks
Technology Leverage	Geological uncertainty, operational efficiency, risk assessment accuracy	Integrate AI-powered exploration technologies, implement real-time monitoring systems, and enhance predictive analytics capabilities
Market Positioning	Green transition demand, ESG investment requirements, regulatory compliance	Align projects with sustainable development goals, pursue ESG certification, and establish strong environmental management systems
Stakeholder Management	Community opposition, regulatory uncertainty, social license risks	Enhance stakeholder engagement processes, build strategic government partnerships, and implement transparent communication strategies

Table 7: SWOT Analysis Matrix for Investment Attraction in Mineral Resource Management

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Abundant Mineral Resources C Vast proven and probable mineral reserves provide strong foundation for long-term investment security and sustained production capabilities. **Established Infrastructure** C Existing transportation networks, power supply systems, and processing facilities reduce initial capital requirements and project development timelines. **Government Support Policies** H Favorable fiscal regimes, tax incentives, and investment promotion agencies actively facilitate foreign and domestic investment attraction. **Technical Expertise** C Skilled workforce and established technical capabilities provide operational competency and reduce technical risks for investors. **Strategic Geographic Location** M Proximity to major markets and established trade routes enhance export capabilities and reduce logistics costs for mineral products.	**Regulatory Complexity** C Complex permitting processes, bureaucratic delays, and inconsistent policy implementation create barriers to investment attraction and project development. **Infrastructure Deficits** C Inadequate power supply, transportation networks, and telecommunications systems increase operational costs and investment risks. **Limited Financial Markets** H Underdeveloped capital markets and limited access to long-term financing options restrict local investment participation and project funding. **Environmental Legacy Issues** H Historical environmental damage and rehabilitation liabilities create additional costs and reputational risks for new investors. **Skills Development Gaps** M Limited specialized training programs and technology transfer mechanisms constrain local capacity building and sustainable development.

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Global Energy Transition C Massive demand for critical minerals in renewable energy, electric vehicles, and battery storage creates unprecedented investment opportunities. **ESG Investment Momentum** C Growing environmental, social, and governance investment focus opens access to sustainable finance and green bonds for responsible mining projects. **Technology Integration** H Digital transformation opportunities in automation, AI, and IoT enhance operational efficiency and attract technology-focused investors. **Regional Integration** H Continental trade agreements and regional value chains create opportunities for integrated mineral processing and beneficiation investments. **Public-Private Partnerships** M Collaborative frameworks between government and private sector enable shared risk investment models and infrastructure development.	**Global Economic Volatility** C Economic recessions, trade wars, and financial market instability reduce investor confidence and limit capital availability for mineral projects. **Resource Nationalism** C Increasing government intervention, nationalization risks, and changing ownership requirements deter foreign investment and create political risks. **Environmental Regulations** H Stringent environmental standards and climate policies increase compliance costs and create operational restrictions for mining investments. **Competition for Capital** H Alternative investment opportunities in technology and renewable energy sectors compete for limited institutional investment capital. **Social License Challenges** M Community opposition, land rights disputes, and social activism can delay or halt investment projects and damage investor relations.

Table 8: Investment Attraction Metrics Framework for the Mineral Investment Policy

Investment Climate Indicators	Performance Benchmarks
Regulatory Efficiency Index	Time-to-permit: <18 months
Infrastructure Quality Score	Power reliability: >95%
Investment Risk Rating	Political risk: <30% probability
ESG Compliance Level	Sustainability score: >75/100

Table 9: Investment Attraction Strategies and Implementation Priorities for Mineral resource Management

Strategic Priority	Key Success Factors	Implementation Actions
Regulatory Excellence	Streamlined permitting, policy consistency, transparent governance frameworks	Establish one-stop investment facilitation centres, implement digital permitting systems, and create investor grievance mechanisms.
Infrastructure Development	Reliable power supply, efficient transportation, modern telecommunications	Prioritize mining corridor infrastructure projects, develop public-private partnership models, and establish infrastructure investment funds.
Technology Leverage	Geological uncertainty, operational efficiency, risk assessment accuracy	Integrate AI and digital transformation enhance operational efficiency and attract technology-focused investors.
ESG Leadership	Environmental compliance, community engagement, sustainable development impact	Develop green mining certification programs, establish community development funds, and implement transparent ESG reporting standards.
Market Positioning	Critical mineral focus, value chain integration, technology adoption	Target battery mineral investments, promote local beneficiation, and establish mineral processing hubs with technology partnerships.

4.4 Roadmap Development

This strategic roadmap outlines a nine-step methodology for formulating an AI-driven investment policy in mineral resource management. Structured in three interconnected phases, it addresses the complexities of integrating artificial intelligence into investment

decision-making. The foundation phase establishes clear investment-centric objectives, leveraging insights from a multidisciplinary panel with over 120 years of collective expertise. A comprehensive stakeholder analysis and systematic literature review assess current AI applications, identifying best practices and existing challenges. The development phase focuses on integrating investment attraction and robust risk management through a framework of advanced AI techniques, emphasizing transparency and performance-driven methodologies to foster investor confidence. Implementation planning prioritizes measurable outcomes and continuous improvement to adapt to evolving technological and market landscapes. The final phase ensures sustainable deployment through tailored performance metrics that balance risk and innovation while maintaining stakeholder engagement throughout. Regular review protocols are crucial for the framework's relevance and effectiveness, enhancing investor confidence, risk management, and compliance and establishing a competitive advantage in mineral resource management through optimized AI integration.

4.5 Framework Value for Investment Decision-Making

The IDM framework transforms mineral resource investment from high-risk speculation to data-driven decisions. It addresses Africa's investment paradox of receiving only 15% of global expenditure despite controlling 30% of worldwide reserves [4]. The framework's scored investment policy structure provides quantifiable risk mitigation: regulatory compliance automation (95 points), enhanced risk assessment (90 points), and optimized financial analysis (85 points). By converting traditional weaknesses—commodity price volatility, geological uncertainty, and high capital requirements—into competitive advantages through predictive analytics and machine learning, the AI-IDM reduces decision-making time from months to weeks while establishing measurable benchmarks: <18-month permitting, <30% political risk probability, and >75/100 ESG compliance scores. The framework directly addresses the challenge of attracting investment, as traditional methods have not managed to unlock Africa's mineral potential despite the continent's abundant resources.

5 STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic implementation requires classifying governance and risk management frameworks as foundational prerequisites before advancing economic optimization initiatives (Figure 4), given their 92-point priority rating within the comprehensive evaluation matrix. Organizations should leverage genetic algorithms for portfolio maximization while addressing critical data science capability gaps through targeted workforce development programs that enhance institutional AI readiness. Key recommendations include establishing AI-powered due diligence systems, implementing blockchain-integrated transparency platforms, and developing IoT-enabled protocols that collectively boost operational efficiency and investor confidence. Investment attraction strategies must emphasize ESG-driven AI models and climate-resilient resource management approaches to align with emerging market demands and regulatory expectations. Immediate actions involve fostering strategic partnerships with technology providers. Continuous performance monitoring throughout the developed nine-step roadmap ensures sustainable competitive advantages and regulatory compliance in evolving digital mineral resource management landscapes.

6 PATH FORWARD

The path forward requires immediate focus on genetic algorithms and hybrid AI approaches for investment optimization, as these present substantial opportunities with minimal competition. Organizations must first establish robust governance frameworks before implementing economic optimization strategies. Strategic partnerships between technology providers, industry practitioners, and academic institutions are crucial for developing practical AI-driven policies. Key implementation steps include investing in data science capabilities, modernizing legacy systems, and following the developed nine-step roadmap for

systematic AI integration. Further research should focus on the underexplored opportunities in AI-finance integration. Continuous stakeholder engagement and performance monitoring will ensure sustainable competitive advantages in mineral resource management through intelligent decision-making systems that optimize investment outcomes and regulatory compliance.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This study systematically explored the integration of AI in mineral resource management through bibliometric analysis, SWOT evaluation, and roadmap development. Key factors influencing AI adoption were identified, including technological infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and organizational readiness for digital transformation. The analysis revealed Genetic algorithms are promising, while deep learning faces saturation with limited growth. Machine learning and neural networks exhibit balanced interdisciplinary characteristics, demonstrating strong research foundations and ongoing development potential. A nine-step strategic roadmap was established, focusing on stakeholder engagement, risk management, and performance-driven outcomes to enhance investor confidence and regulatory compliance. The findings indicate a 0.54% convergence efficiency across 6,073 journals, highlighting the specialized nature of this field. The recommendations include addressing gaps in AI integration and investment while incorporating hybrid computational methods. This approach aims to establish a solid groundwork for enhancing mineral resource management through impactful AI applications and data-driven policy development.

Figure 4: The strategic roadmap for AI-driven mineral resource investment policy

8 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors used AI in formatting and grammar checks.

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10 Appendix A

Appendix A1: Mineral Resource Investment Policy Framework - Comprehensive Ranking

Policy Component Rank	Component Score	Category Rank	Category Score	Category	Policy Component	Description
1	95	1	92	Governance & Risk Management	Regulatory Framework	Clear guidelines and regulations that govern investment in the sector, ensuring compliance and stability
2	90	1	92	Governance & Risk Management	Risk Assessment and Mitigation	Evaluating and addressing the risks associated with mineral investments
3	85	2	82	Economic & Financial	Financial Risk Assessment	Currency stability, and infrastructure investment requirements play crucial roles in determining the attractiveness of mineral investment opportunities
4	82	2	82	Economic & Financial	Economic Considerations	Investment policies must balance attracting foreign direct investment with maximizing national economic benefits
5	80	2	82	Economic & Financial	Market Analysis	Understanding market trends and economic factors that influence investment decisions in the mineral sector
6	78	2	82	Economic & Financial	Attracting Investment	Strategies to draw both domestic and foreign investment into mineral exploration and development
7	75	2	82	Economic & Financial	Financial Incentives	Policies such as tax breaks, grants, or subsidies that encourage investment in mineral projects
8	72	3	70	Social & Environmental	Sustainable Practices	Ensuring that investments align with environmental protection and sustainable resource management goals
9	68	3	70	Social & Environmental	Community Development	Encouraging investments that benefit local communities and support socio-economic development
10	65	4	65	International Cooperation	Market Access & Cooperation	International coordination through trade agreements, standards, and regional cooperation enhances market access and resource management effectiveness

CIRCULAR ECONOMY: A REVIEW OF CRITICISMS, LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The exploitation of resources under the linear economy model has compelled industry to rethink traditional practices. The ISO 59000 guidelines for a Circular Economy advocate for reusing materials through extended product lifecycles, recycling to establish closed-loop systems, reducing waste by designing efficient operations, and redesigning products through systemic thinking. These guidelines outline the requirements for responsible practices and long-term sustainability. Experts caution that achieving this vision remains theoretically, practically, and ideologically challenging. A bibliographic survey is used to assess the related challenges and limitations. Gaining deeper insights of these complexities may offer more effective strategies when implementing CE principles.

Keywords: Circular Economy, ISO 59000, Integrated Management Systems

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1 INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The exploitation of resources in the linear economy (LE) has led to the depletion of many natural resources, pollution and emission of greenhouse gases, stressed ecosystems and even extinction of certain species [1, 2 and 3]. These exploitations have become controversial particularly in view of their influence on climate change and have forced industries to rethink the way they do business. Experts propose the adoption of circular economy (CE) programmes, with its transformative, regenerative and restorative focus to mitigate these exploitations [2, 3 4, 5, 6]. Central to this approach, the "6 R principle" cover reuse, reduce, recycle, recover, redesign and remanufacture [1, 2; 6; 7 and 8]. The problem with sustainability programmes is that the formal adoption of the CE standards has caused much debate and scepticism among the scientific community because of the challenges that are associated with the transformation to CE principles. These challenges are related to organisational processes, action and intent, compliance with regulations, competitors, uniformity of practice, economic benefit, lack of universally accepted metrics, among others [4, 7, 9,11, 14, 15,16 in 1]. This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of compliance with standards. It conducts a narrative review of global literature and case studies to identify key criticisms, limitations, challenges and success factors related to CE. It associates past frameworks to contemporary standards and presents successes from sectors like the food and steel-industry, wastewater treatment, hospitality and agriculture.

The intention of this study is to enhance the fundamental understanding of the limitations, challenges and opportunities of CE for operations engineers, quality practitioners and industrial engineers, by providing a structured approach to effectively adopt CE principles.

Focus and initiatives on CE have been ongoing for many years to manage the excessive use of natural resources and to "close the loop" from use to reuse, mitigate the risks of extreme weather events and strengthen market share [2, 4 and 7]. The first attempts to achieve CE were initiated by countries like France and the United Kingdom who developed standards, XP-30-901:2018 General Approach for CE Projects and BS-8001:2017 General Framework for Application of CE Principles, respectively. The French XP-30-901:2018 Standard was certifiable by a third party, while the BS-8001:2017, regarded as vague and non-prescriptive was also certifiable [5].

It can be inferred from Table 1 that the XP-30-901:2018 Standard emphasises efficient use of energy, and smarter utilisation and extension of resources along the value-chain. While the BS-8001:2017 shares a similar focus on use of materials and resources, it is less explicit in its guidance and appears to approach CE from a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) perspective.

Apart from the scepticism around the veracity of these standards, both have produced positive results in CE initiatives for all types and sizes of organisations [4 and 7]. This assisted organisations to rethink the way they did business, to renew, repair and regenerate materials by informing better design, planning and optimising of production processes to remain circular [4 and 7].

As of August 2022, Google Scholar reported less than 500 scientific publications in 2015 and more than 3000 by 2021. Scopus and the Web of Science each reported less than 2000 publications, for 2021 [5] alongside debates and discussions on the merits of CE tripling in the last six years.

Recently, the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) presented a family of ISO 59000 Standards to assist organisations from all sectors and sizes in the adoption of a CE [3 and 10]. Not only is this suite of standards mooted to bring about standardisation and uniformity in practice, but it also focusses on developing and measuring streams on re-using materials by extending product life cycles, recycling materials to form closed loops, and

waste-reduction. This can be achieved by designing operations for efficiency and product redesign by rethinking the system [5 and 6]. This format of standards is consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 12: Promoting sustainable production and consumption practices) [3 and 6].

Table 1: Traditional French and British Standards [5]

XP-30-901:2018 General Approach for CE Projects	BS-8001:2017 General Framework for Application of CE Principles
Eco-design – Integrate efficient processes, energy & design	**Systems Thinking** – System wide impact
Industrial Symbiosis–Collaborations to reuse of biproducts & waste	**Innovation** –Rethink Resource Mgt & Value creation
Functional or Service Economy– Use service-based models & reduce product ownership	**Stewardship**- Responsibility for activities
Responsible Consumption– Promote sustainable consumption	**Value Optimisation** –Materials at highest value
Extension of Duration of Use - Strategy to prolong end -of-life	**Transparency** –Honesty on benefit & barriers
Efficient Management of End-of-Life Product/ Material – Improved recycling & repurposing materials	

Table 2 outlines the suite of standards in the ISO 59000 series [5 and 8]. It suggests that each standard in the ISO 59000 series has a focused and strategic purpose, addressing the core aspects for the implementation of CE and administration processes needed to manage the resources sustainably. For example, ISO 59004 provides terminology, principles and frameworks to provide a platform for a common language to bring about consistency and uniformity of practice because a lack of a common language and terminology was heavily criticised as a bottleneck for CE implementation. Thereafter, it proposed frameworks to establish organisational practice with the concomitant principles to govern this practice and behaviour. ISO 59010 focusses on business strategies to improve efficiency, improve waste management, stay abreast of changing regulations and achieve market demands. ISO 59020 addresses data collection highlighting suitable circularity indicators linking measurement and assessment to the CE initiatives. The key function of ISO 59040 is to provide the necessary data sheets so that the entire supplier chain can be informed of the nuances of the product and thus take the necessary steps to accurately and transparently manage it within its context. ISO 59014 covers efficient use of resources and how they can be recovered and recycled to extend their use. ISO 59031provides case studies to guide the performance of organisations on CE practices and finally, ISO 59032 presents existing value-networks and promotes the collaboration between CE organisations to share practice [2, 3 and 5]. It is reasonable to assume that these traditional standards provided a foundation for the development of the ISO 59000 series, strategically informed by BS 8001 and operationally influenced by XP-30-901. It can also be observed that elements from the French and British Standards have been integrated in the ISO 59000 series, outlined in Table 2, particularly in areas such as business models, value-networks, performance- based approaches and secondary materials, and sustainability.

There was emphasis on the benefit to society, the economy and the environment. Early adoption of these standards provided confidence and flexibility that CE can be implemented successfully and adapted to various types of organisations, globally. For example, the principles of BS 8001 informed the development of ISO 59004 (Framework and Principles) using much of its terminology. The French XP-30-901 shaped the implementation and performance focus of ISO 59010 and ISO 59020 for life-cycle management, measurement and assessment. It also informed ISO 59004 with external and internal stakeholders' involvement and systems thinking [4]. It can be appreciated that under the current circumstances there is sufficient evidence that the climate is stressed, providing reasonable grounds for the adoption of CE to use the remaining natural resources responsibly and sustainably. The CE guidelines,

particularly the ISO 59000 series, have not matured adequately and hence its full potential is unknown. Therefore, researchers and scientists are using their ingenuity to find ways of mitigating or changing past behaviour. They are also using lessons learnt from the past, particularly how the French and British standard has helped to transform LE thinking, to advise, inform and progress current CE initiatives. Past lessons can still be applicable to the mandate of the new standards of ISO 59000 as these standards have been conceptualised from past business models and actual practical experience [11]. For example, direct benefits of ISO 59020 and circularity have been reported by a Sicilian waste-water plant [12].

Table 2: Suite of ISO 59000 series [5 and 8].

Standard	Purpose
ISO 59004	Key terminology, framework and principles on CE
ISO 59010	Guidance on business models and value networks
ISO 59020	Measurement and assessment of circularity
ISO 59040	Product circularity data sheet for certification
ISO 59014	Secondary materials-Principles, sustainability and traceability
ISO 59031	Performance based approaches
ISO 59032	Review of business model implementation

2 METHODOLOGY

This paper used a narrative literature review, and a qualitative approach of secondary data to collect information from academic peer-reviewed journal articles. A bibliographic survey was used to investigate the subject content in its historical context. This type of survey identifies and compiles appropriate literature that is synthesised in the narrative review to provide new insights on a particular topic [13]. Moreover, a bibliographic survey has the power of combining various findings and perspectives to address a research question. A predefined article selection protocol was used to select appropriate articles. These articles were extracted from multiple data bases such as, Routledge, Scilit (derives articles from PubMed, CrossRef and others), Wiley, Springer, Elsevier, European Union, and selected universities to establish points of convergence and divergence in CE. English articles during the period 2018 to 2025 were selected. The following key words were used to refine the literature search: circular economy, ISO 59000, environmental management systems, climate change and integrated management systems, were used as a basis for retrieving articles. All articles addressing CE and integrated management systems, irrespective of their methodology were included in the review. Articles that were not peer-reviewed, not addressing CE matters or those which followed video formats were excluded from the literature review. A total of twenty-five articles were retrieved. After an assessment of these articles, it was found that three articles were repeated and thus removed from the analysis due to replication and four other articles were removed because they did not meet the inclusion criteria, leaving fifteen articles for review. Each article was purposively and critically reviewed to seek new knowledge related to CE, on advancements and challenges/barriers in CE implementation, organisational guidance and new practices with CE and integrated management systems. The research question for this study was: What are current criticisms, limitations and challenges regarding the implementation and adoption of CE initiatives? To approach this research question, the current state of knowledge regarding CE from the collection of papers selected were critiqued, evaluated and appraised to establish contemporary thinking around CE and its qualities [14]. Validity was established when there was evidence of saturation of information, while reliability focussed on the repeatability of the information between articles [14].

3 RESULTS

Proponents of CE argue that by rethinking business practices within the paradigms of circularity from initial design strategies through the product lifecycle, industries can transform their approach to create, deliver and capture value, more sustainably [1, 4, 6 and 7].

3.1 Critical perspectives on CE from literature

This section addresses the discourse on CE, highlighting some of the major criticisms, limiting factors, challenges and opportunities facing the adoption of CE in contemporary society.

3.1.1 Literature-based criticisms of CE frameworks and practices

A major criticism about CE is that there is little agreement on the actual foundational elements by the scientific community [2, 18 and 19 cited in 5] and [6 and 9]. There is a sense that CE does not consider the nuances of the science of various disciplines, particularly those which include ecological economies and biodiversity management, with the biophysical limit of circularity [D'amto and Korhonen 2021, Corrvellec et al., 2021 and Giampietro 2023 cited in 5]. Another school of thought is sceptical about the ability of CE to flourish (Kofhenen et al., cited in [5] and cautions that the closed loops punted by the CE requirements are "practically and theoretically" impossible and questioned its ability to produce circular initiatives. Hass et al., (2015) cited in [5] indicates that there are grounds for concern especially in cases or industries where large amounts of energy are produced and cannot be captured for reuse. Similarly, accumulated materials for construction and infrastructure initiatives may not be able to be reused on time (within the same operation cycle) making the closed loop unattainable. Although Frishamar and Parida (2019); Lewandowski (2016); Demirel and Danisman (2019); and Prieto-Sandoval et al., (2018) cited in [1] and [15] appreciate the need to be more sustainable and to rethink present business models to "create, deliver and capture value" the methods proposed for the transition to CE are poorly understood making the circular effort very difficult. Additionally, Rincon-Moreno et al., (2021) cited in [1], states that there is an absence of a uniform model to benchmark and assess CE initiatives.

3.1.2 Academic discourse outlining the limitations on CE

A plausible contribution about constraints [Lalander and Vinneras 2022 in 5] indicated regulations as a constraint in closing the loop. For example, in the food industry, due to diseases like bovine spongiform encephalopathy recycling food waste is impossible. Kafel and Nowicki in [7] reported that limiting the use of primary raw materials is an obstacle to production. Likewise, Pamfile et al., in [15] indicated that maintaining materials at their highest point of utilisation is very difficult. Kirchherr et al., 2018 and Ryen and Babbitt 2022 in [5] mentioned that administrative processes and regulations impeded circularity and closing the loop.

3.1.3 Literature- based insights into CE implementation challenges

From the criticism and limitations, science, legislation, monitoring and measurement, uncertainty in acceptance of circular products by value-chains, administrative support, among others, makes the shift from a linear infrastructure to a circular one difficult. It will require sizable commitment across all departments of an organisation, and entire value-chain [11]. Material flow is advised to be fundamental to circular practice. However, if this to be possible, life-cycle extensions should be established prior to recycling rates, material flow and recovery to ensure that these initiatives are achievable [2]. Researchers have cautioned that poor and inconsistent measurement techniques across various levels have accounted for poor product durability, little re-use of materials and made regeneration of materials very difficult [2, 9]. Similarly, ISO (2023a) cited in [5] cautioned CE's ability to maintain the flow of resources, recover and retain materials and maintain sustainability. There is no clear guidance on these approaches, thus compromising the production processes. This was supported by Wastling et al., (2018), Corona et al., (2019), and Lacovidou et al., (2017) cited in [1] and [9] where there were so many processes within an organisation and no standardised indicators to monitor progress making measuring the CE initiatives very difficult. A formidable challenge mooted by Karuppiah et al., (2021) cited in [7] arose from the substantial administrative changes that

need to be made to prepare for CE adoption. For example, there was so much uncertainty and inconsistency in the future demands of the consumer and stakeholders of CE products, difficulty in conducting successful internal audits and management reviews, making large financial commitments risky.

Leadership and cultural buy-in was important [2]. They punted the importance of appropriate training and integration of CE sustainability and longevity into the corporate culture and among all stakeholders [2]. Similarly, Barkar and Charnley [10] supported that there are difficulties in CE implementation due to the expansive value-chains and ecosystems that need to be synchronised to practice and at the same time be compliant to national, regional and municipal protocols.

3.1.4 Opportunities to implement CE practices

As of 2024, 7.2% of the global economy is circular with 104 billion tons of materials being extracted. According to Eurostat (2023) cited in [10], the European Union (EU) is the world-leader in CE with Netherlands leading (27.5%), Belgium (22.2%), France (19.3%), Ireland (1.8%), Romania (1.4%) and Finland (0.6%). From these statistics, it is reasonable to assume that CE is obligatory and is achievable. The working group responsible for the development of the ISO 59000 suite of standards consisted of committee members from over 100 countries, private and public sector and across many institutions and industries. During this development, experts on the team interrogated and acknowledged current initiatives, various geographical and diverse cultural settings and deliberated on their contribution and interaction with CE. Thus, it can be inferred that their experiences have been adequately captured and included in the ISO 59000 series to ensure that CE initiatives are practical, realistic and achievable to guide areas where resources can be reused, repurposed, recycled or minimised to improve waste reduction and maintain production efficiency and economic viability. ISO (2023a), Heras- Saizarbitoria et al., (2023) and ISO (2023b) cited in [5] agree that there is a call to harmonise the implementation of CE in a manner that is transparent, fair, relevant, coherent, impartial and supports scientific debate and customer discourse [Velasco-Munoz et al., 2021, Kuisma and Kahiluto 2017 and Stegmann et al., 2020 in 7]. From a summation of research by Heras -Saizarbitoria et al., [5] cited by Merli et al, (2018) a structured form of developing and consolidating definitions for CE, having clear boundaries, principles and "associated" practices would be reasonable to initiate CE implementation.

The World Economic Forum, 2016 in Pamfile et al.,[15] proposed three principles to guide CE. The first principle considered conservation and improvement of "natural capital" obtained from using finite stocks and balancing the flow of renewal resources (replacing fossil materials). Secondly, optimisation and resource efficiency by always "using materials, components and products at their highest level of utility". And thirdly, promotion of the use of an effective system by identifying and designing the system to avoid impacts on soil, water, climate and health. Arana -Landin et al., [4] emphasised the role of CE in achieving competitiveness and environmental stewardship.

These narratives may have influenced the ISO 59000 series to adopt the Systems-Thinking approach, aimed at optimising processes and maximising the efficient use of natural resources and waste. Systems-Thinking, understanding the nuances of science, operations and the organisation's key performance indicators were regarded as important features [10]. Similarly, waste management (disposal and recycling), policy and legislation, stakeholder engagement, discipline specific insights, specific goals, cross functional teams and key performance indicators were criteria mooted to support Systems-Thinking to drive the CE implementation [10].

The alignment of CSR objectives was strongly encouraged [2, 4, 9, 10 and 15] and is likely to secure support from relevant departments to foster organisation-wide acceptance for CE

initiatives. Internal and external drivers were found to influence the performance requirements to achieve compliance with standard [4 and 7]. Internal drivers punted were, analyse opportunities for CE by using new technology, possibility of reducing costs and improvement in profit, environmental commitment, previous experience in training and development of circular initiatives. External drivers were, national/international regulations and assessment in public tender, effect on image of organisation and pressure from external stakeholders. However, there were challenges/barriers linked to internal factors that should be pre-empted before embarking on the adoption of CE. These are adequate financial resources to support implementation, production and waste management costs, financial uncertainty of the investment and adequate human resources, material and technology. While challenges/barriers linked to external resources were, poor clarity on regulations and uncertainty of future legislation, doubt on the effectiveness of circular products and internal constraints of members of the value-chain [4].

3.2 Reviewing the effectiveness of CE approaches supported by appropriate management systems

An assessment from literature proposes that CE cannot be implemented on its own and should be complemented by a management system. Integrated management systems, ISO 9001- Quality Managements Systems, ISO 14001- Environmental Management and ISO 45001- Occupational Health and Safety with versatility from its high-level structure, have been proposed as a "21st century model for business excellence" [1, 7, 4 and 15]. These management systems can strategically associate operational processes with the related CE principles [1] to streamline processes and meet stakeholder expectations, sustainable economic growth and consumption and production. A few examples from selected sectors highlights the success of CE initiatives.

Pamfile et al., [15] indicated that selected hotels integrated all three of these management systems and improved their sustainability performance, demonstrated a streamlined organisation and had fewer redundancies. Some hotels did not record any "measurable improvement" while others suggested that implementation of standards was shallow because it created a gap between theory and practice. For example, ISO 14001 could not support strategies for multiple streams like waste reduction, energy consumption and sustainable sourcing of materials [4 and 15]. These management systems provide a basis for improvement in operations [5]. Kristensen et al., (2021) cited in [1] demonstrated a favourable relationship that emerged when ISO 14001 and CE were integrated. Not only was there alignment between CE principles at the organisational level, but there was a standard closed loop that managed CE initiatives. Milazzo et al., (2017) cited in [1] concurred that ISO 14001 was useful in the Italian Steel Company, Fonesca et al., (2018) cited in [1] indicated that 99 Portuguese organisations were able to improve their CE imperatives from ISO 14001, while in Jabbour et al., (2020) cited in [1] moved that 86 Brazilian organisations obtained positive circularity results from ISO 9001 and ISO 14001. Conversely, CE, CSR and life-cycle assessment did not improve with ISO 14001 for 72 Chinese organisations [Pesce et al., 2018 cited in 1].

Similarly, Pamfile et al., [15], stated that the hotel industry did not get substantial improvement from integration of management systems as anticipated. A lack of awareness on CE benefits and importance, financial constraints, poor collaboration between stakeholders and poor policy, government oversight, low flow faucets for water consumption and sustainable sourcing and procurement are some of the barriers to CE that were reported. They did, report on an improvement in operational efficiency with little improvement in environmental and safety management [15]. It can be appreciated that the hotel industry is resource intensive, with its huge consumption of energy (heating, cooling, cleaning), water (cleaning, cooking laundry) and food (cooking and waste) and has a very complex network of

operational streams that require a huge financial commitment to convert the infrastructure to be circular, making CE adoption very complicated.

The olive industry, in Greece, produces large amounts of waste and by-products and faces many challenges regarding resources efficiency and waste management to transition to sustainable practices. They experienced many challenges to CE in terms of training, initial financial investment and integrating new processes with existing ones. They assessed the feasibility of integrating ISO 14001 Environmental Management to address their CE goals. They found that ISO 14001 provided a "structured framework" to implement CE (resource efficiency and waste-minimisation) and continuous improvement. They also reported numerous benefits arising from this implementation, such as improved waste management, reduced resource consumption and ensured compliance with environmental regulations [4 and 11].

Arana-Landin et al., [4] also propose the integration of a management system (French standard XP X30-901) with CE ISO 59000 initiatives to support circularity. This aided in understanding the drivers and challenges to implement circularity. They reported on an Italian Water Treatment Company, a forerunner in circularity and their experiences during CE adoption. For example, they integrated their CE with the French Standard XP X30- 901, and collaborated with external stakeholders (suppliers, auditors and public administration) as drivers for their adoption. As reported by other researchers, the initial financial investment to prepare for CE was a challenge to the treatment plant as well. On a positive note, the organisation achieved many positive outcomes. They improved the use of sustainable resources. In 2021 the waste-water plant boasted a reduction in the use of raw materials by 10%, greater than 76% of biomethane obtained from waste-water treatment and they did not purchase any potable water. ISO 14001 focus on Environmental Management has been successfully implemented as a foundation for CE adoption [1], environmental improvement and sustainability [Poltronieri et al., (2019), Nunhes et al., (2016), Krapetrovic and Casadesus (2012) and Zutshi and Sohal (2005) in 1]. Integration comes with its own disadvantages and advantages. Nunhes et al., (2016), Rebelo et al., (2014) and Asif et al., (2009) cited in [1] caution that integration requires specific human resources and financial commitment, suitable management and administrative support and a firm understanding of the integration activities. Nuhes et al., (2016), Llonch et al., (2016) and Rebelo et al., (2016) Karapetetrovic and Caseadesus (2012), Khanna et al., (2010) and Jorgensen et al., (2006) cited in [1], punt the strategic competitiveness, reduction in management, operations and insurance costs and improvement in organisational culture that can arise from integration. Moreover, this can be supported by Poltronieri et al., (2019) cited in [1] who pointed out the improvement in environmental performance, and [Zutshi and Sohal (2005); Zeng, Shi and Lou (2007) and Salome cited in 1] and [15] who indicated the better allocation, improved design, and utilisation of resources and the adoption of cleaner production technologies. Better management practices (positive support from auditors and consultants on CE and integration), improved supply-chain/value-chain collaboration (improved customer and supplier interaction), lean practices (sale of treated water to neighbours), energy efficiency practices and improvement reuse of materials (circularity of water and energy by embarking on joint projects with the value-chain) have been reported [4]. Korostelevo (2022) cited in [7] reported similar benefits from integration in their studies of 17 experts from Poland, Japan, Montenegro, Portugal and Spain.

Difficulties in securing financial investment have been noted to be a barrier to the implementation even though the benefits of CE were well known. Despite these challenges, more positive collaborative engagements between customers [6], suppliers, auditors, and public administration, made integration a positive initiative [4]. Kulczycka and Pedziwiatr 2019 cited in [7] stated that customers appreciate and support products, when they are aware of the ecological and economic benefits of CE. The usefulness of management in CE adoption has predominately showed improved overall performance in most industries. In instances

where it has not, perhaps the design and implementation of the management system could be revisited for improved training, alignment and relevance [7].

3.3 Evaluating the influence of CE practices using existing frameworks and waste/resource management initiatives to drive process optimisation

Jenet et al., [16], on behalf of the European Commission (EC), developed a framework using Eurostat data on the use of resources and waste management for the construction industry. They found that the industry would have to make significant changes in production, consumption models and behaviours. Production, consumption, waste management, secondary raw materials, competitiveness, innovation and global sustainability were key themes that emerged as indicators to monitor circularity. Sharing data was very important for product design, repair, reuse and remanufacturing, setting boundaries.

Kafel and Nowicki [7] reported the importance of new product designs and business models. Zorpas [6] reported on a working group who was selected from the European Commission (EC) to prioritise the “Rs” in circularity. They believed that the “Rs” can be supported by using smarter product designs, particularly the extension of the product, parts and components and the social aspects like behaviour and attitude. They presented new “Rs” for consideration in “pRevention”, Renting, Rebranding and Revolutionising designs and practices.

The Sicilian waste-water plant reported a reduction in processing turnaround time from three weeks to one day after applying appropriate CE tools. Among them was the ISO 020 – Guideline for measuring circularity. They were able to derive economic viability, and operational and logistical optimisation from their CE initiatives. Their focus was on material circularity indicators to monitor circular products and life-cycle assessments to measure resource efficiency [12].

There have been benefits from the adoption of CE [1 and 2] which were evident in process optimisation because it identified and eliminated inefficiencies and aligned the CE imperative with responsible use of resources. This ensured that the organisation adhered to environmental regulations, embraced sustainable practices, facilitated continuous improvement which was important in maintaining sustainability considering the dynamic nature of CE, dealt with stakeholder engagement needs and accountability, and institutional involvement and guidance to assist with Policy development, deployment and management.

Similarly, key themes from Kafel and Nowicki [7] and Kounani et al., [11] indicated that there should be a collaborative effort from stakeholders (customers, suppliers and employees) to identify environmental aspects, prioritise them and for the organisation to suitably train employees to monitor, measure and communicate, transparently to stakeholders, to sustain CE initiatives [11]. Fourteen themes emerged from Honorato et al., [2]. These were, governance structures, evaluation and prisonisation of risks, cultural change, performance monitoring and measurement, integration of policies, value-chain engagement, management and transparency and communication were common themes with certain reviews, however, leadership, definition of policies and goal detection gap analysis were new themes. Likewise, Bahnaru et al., [9] focused on measurement and standardisation and suggested 4 themes for CE adoption, namely, unified metrics, improved data reporting, sector specific frameworks and engaged stakeholders. Carlsson and Nevzorova [8] used the European Green Deal Framework to validate claims from the CE. They purported that orientation to standardised criteria, the ability to substantiate claims clearly and strict observance to guidelines formed a basis for reporting. They also indicated the importance of a clear scope of CE initiatives to maintain stakeholder understanding and the ability to confirm if renewed or recycled material reduce environmental impact.

Standardised "roadmaps" serving as criteria were mooted to be useful for CE implementation [10]. This was also highlighted by Kafel and Nowicki [7] about small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who sought standardisation of practice to facilitate CE implementation and to achieve regulatory requirements thoroughly.

Some of the key themes that emerged from this section are [1, 4, 5, 7 and 9], for success, there should be multi-shareholder approval of all activities, systemisation so that there is uniformity of processes, institutional guidance for CE implementation and improvement in working and thinking in new ways and models to ensure sustainable innovation and a positive impact on the environment.

The complexity that is required by the multifaceted nature of CE can be appreciated. Consequently, there is mention of numerous themes and there is evidence of overlap of some themes between researchers on the practical considerations required to become circular.

3.4 Creating a roadmap for progress in a CE

A common proposition among peers was the need for a collective effort to understand limitations, identify challenges/barriers and develop a formal, structured analysis and evaluation of CE framework to enable a sustainable transition.

There is major concern over the difficulties around numerous non-generative resources from an operational perspective that arose because of the numerous networks of complex processes. Consumers are more informed and seek more environmentally conscious products and services, otherwise these may not be accepted favourably. The olive industry, the waste-water treatment plant and the hotel industry found their CE integration with ISO 14001 or other standards very fruitful. Strategic planning, stakeholder engagement and external expertise supported this success. Robust environmental impact assessment also helped them to identify and prioritise key operations for environmental sustainability, monitoring and measurement and assisted in the adjustment of necessary activities for prevention and/or correction.

The restorative perspective in the design phase and lifecycle assessments encouraged the renewal of materials because it eliminated product "decommissioning" at the end-of-life and shifted to repurposing materials. Moreover, toxic chemicals were replaced to encourage re-use and systems, and production and materials were utilised to produce less waste. This created a new way of thinking to facilitate the entry of repurposed products on the market and promoted acceptance from investors and consumers.

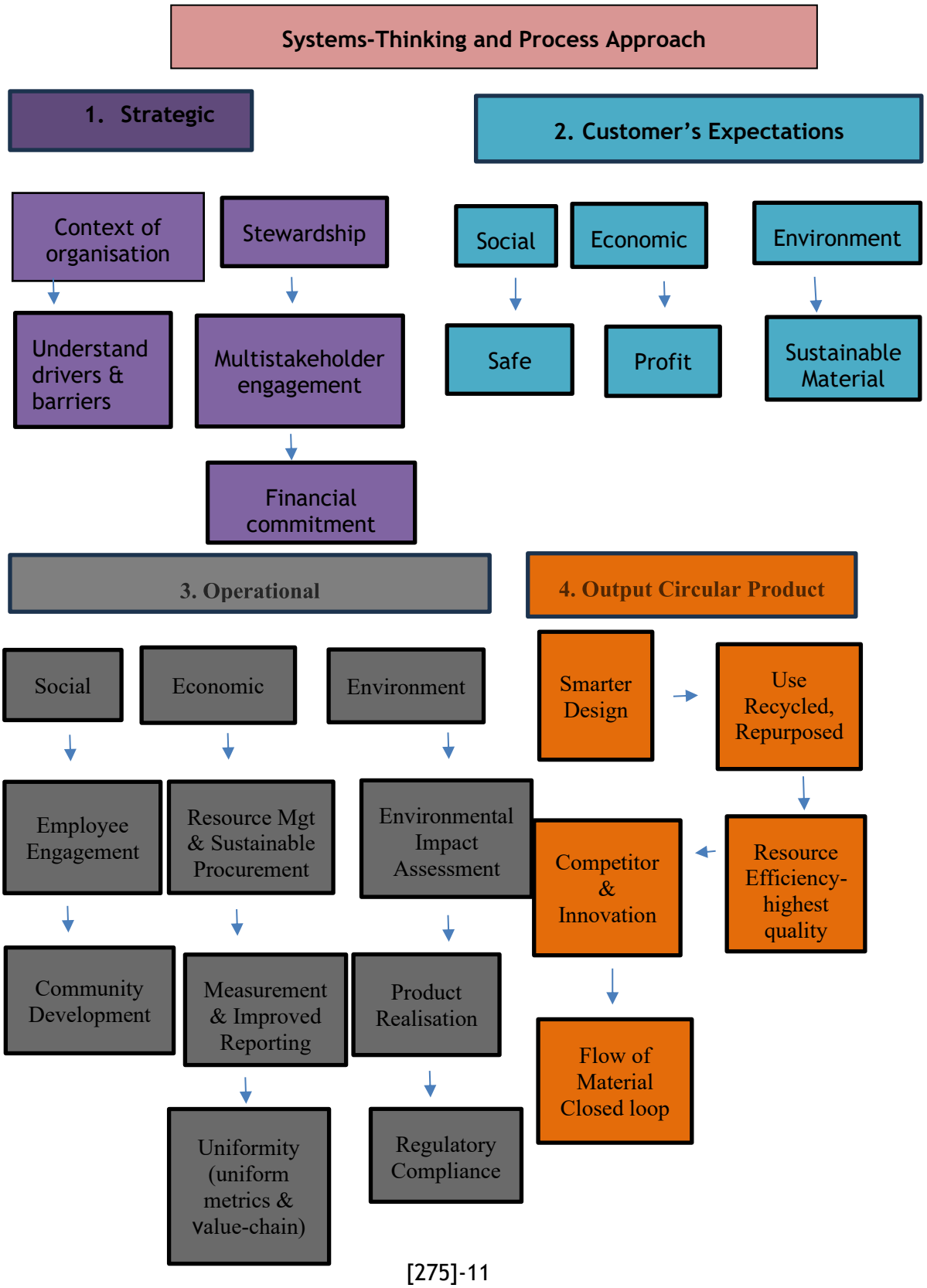
Road mapping the CE planning and implementation process was found to be beneficial to direct the transition from LE to CE in a structured fashion, particularly by outlining a realistic approach to address each step to bring about economic feasibility, environmental accountability and maintaining social interests. These maps consolidated efforts by contemplating the diversity of the stakeholders, their capabilities and responsibilities on the value-chain [10]. Road mapping is like developing a framework where it guides strategic activities in a structured way to achieve a desired goal.

Literature indicates that while CE is complex, it can be effectively implemented through a structured approach. Figure 1 presents a roadmap that integrates CE with Systems-Thinking and the Process Approach [17]. Given that ISO 9001:2015 provides tools for Systems-Thinking and the Process Approach, supports integration with ISO 14001, and enables both strategic and operational optimisation, it serves as a suitable foundation for presenting a structures pathway to circularity.

Key insights and themes drawn from the preceding narrative have been critically evaluated and incorporated into the roadmap, which begins with the strategic considerations and transitions to operational actions. This progression reflects the integration of economic, social

and environmental factors, consistently highlighted in the literature as core themes and imperatives for CE adoption. All supporting elements were assessed, consolidated and positioned with the roadmap to effectively guide CE-oriented thinking and implementation.

Figure 1: Pathway to CE implementation [Developed by researcher]



4 CONCLUSIONS

The adoption of CE practices is imperative. This paper has demonstrated that, while the transition to CE is a significant undertaking, it is achievable through a strategic and structured approach. Over the years there have been many examples of circularity in all types and sizes of organisations that can serve as benchmarks. There are also many experts globally that can be sought for assistance. Excuses surrounding the implementation of CE should make way for deliberate and decisive action. It may be plausible to start with small initiatives and then to grow to larger ones. Once the mind sets of people have changed, it will become a way for life, encourage better support and thus easier to adopt.

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DEVELOPING AN APPROACH FOR SMALL BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY: A FOCUS ON WASTE MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Small business symbiosis is essential in ensuring the sustainability of small businesses. South Africa's small businesses produce a million tons of waste per year, a large percentage of which is either incinerated or dumped in landfills. Municipalities are challenged to find alternative waste management practices to sustain the environment. The study aims to propose a framework for small businesses' symbiosis, focusing on the reduction of waste. The method used to collect the data was questionnaires, which were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science. The study recommends that waste reduction and minimisation efforts need to be increased by initiating a small business ecology approach. The study found that this approach is essential in ensuring long-term partnerships amongst small businesses, which translates to small business long-term sustainability.

Keywords: Small business symbiosis, Waste reduction, Sustainable waste management.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are vital to economic development, job creation, and poverty alleviation in South Africa and across the African continent. SME's make a significant contributions to GDP and employment, accounting for over 50% of private sector jobs in developing economies[1]. SMEs serve as key drivers of innovation and new product development while promoting sustainable economic growth. The adaptability and responsiveness of SME's to local market needs position them as strong competitors to larger corporations[2]. In the Gauteng province, small businesses generate considerable waste, primarily consisting of plastics (59-75%), cardboard (31-61%), and food waste (21-37%) [3]. The waste management sector in South Africa holds significant potential to support the green economy through the active participation of SMEs in waste management activities. However, inefficiencies in waste management contribute to environmental degradation and economic losses[2].

Many municipalities lack the necessary infrastructure and equipment for effective waste collection, treatment, and recycling[4]. Additionally, existing recycling policies often fail to emphasise waste minimisation, a challenge further compounded by inadequate community participation and limited technical knowledge regarding recycling practices[5]. Given the pressing need for alternative strategies that promote sustainability alongside small business growth, industrial and business symbiosis—where companies collaborate to repurpose waste as a resource—emerges as an effective solution to enhance circular economy practices[6]. These symbiotic relationships enable small businesses to exchange waste, achieve cost savings, and foster long-term sustainability [7]. Nevertheless, research on small business symbiosis in South Africa remains limited, particularly concerning practical frameworks that can effectively encourage waste reduction. Immediate action is essential to address these gaps and advance sustainable practices among small enterprises.

1.1 Aim and Objectives

Research Aim: To explore waste generation, disposal practices, and collaborative potential among SMEs in Gauteng, and to use these baseline insights to propose an initial framework for small business symbiosis within the circular economy.

Objectives:

- To identify and analyse the types and composition of waste generated by SMEs.
- To assess current disposal practices and the structural barriers affecting recycling and reuse.
- To examine SMEs' willingness and barriers to engaging in symbiotic partnerships.
- To develop a preliminary Small Business Symbiosis Framework informed by the study findings.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Waste Disposal and Challenges

SMEs in South Africa depend heavily on municipal services for waste collection. Recycling participation remains low, with limited waste separation at source. Infrastructure gaps and inadequate policy enforcement exacerbate the problem, leading to over-reliance on landfills.

A substantial number of small businesses depend on municipal services for waste collection and disposal, with approximately 64-68% of enterprises in Gauteng utilising these essential services. However, recycling and reuse practices among these businesses remain alarmingly low [8]. Only 7-14% actively participate in recycling, and a mere 6-12% engage in reusing waste materials[9]. Many small business owners in South Africa neglect waste separation and the

acquisition of designated waste bins, mistakenly believing that it is solely the government's responsibility to provide these essential resources.

While some businesses do donate recyclable materials to informal waste reclaimers—accounting for 10-20% of their waste disposal practices—these informal initiatives often go unreported, resulting in a distorted view of the actual waste management landscape[10]. The lack of adequate waste bins and infrastructure severely hampers effective waste management systems, particularly in industrial areas like Gauteng[11].

The critical shortage of landfill space is an urgent issue, with major cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town facing acute landfill crises. Many small business owners fail to grasp the significance of responsible waste management, underscoring the need for targeted campaigns and educational programs to shift attitudes[12]. The consequences of improper waste management—such as illegal dumping and over-reliance on landfills—pose substantial environmental and public health risks. Furthermore, the undervaluation of waste further hampers recycling efforts. In response, the South African government is championing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the waste sector to drive contributions to a sustainable green economy[13]. However, many SMEs fall short of environmental responsibility, and there is a pressing need for larger corporations to lead by example in managing environmental stewardship throughout their supply chains[13].

To achieve meaningful progress, the country must adopt a strategic and cost-effective approach to waste collection that considers socio-economic, environmental, and land-use factors. Additionally, policies such as extended producer responsibility can significantly enhance the country’s waste management and recycling initiatives. It is time to prioritise effective waste solutions for a cleaner, healthier future.

2.2 Circular economy

Global debates on sustainable waste management increasingly emphasise the circular economy (CE) as a transformative framework that challenges the traditional “take–make–dispose” linear model of production and consumption. Instead, CE promotes strategies that design out waste, extend product lifecycles, and maximise resource efficiency by keeping materials in circulation for as long as possible. Within this paradigm, waste is no longer viewed solely as an environmental burden but as a potential economic input that can generate new business opportunities and stimulate innovation [14].

One of the central operational mechanisms of the circular economy is industrial symbiosis (IS), where firms collaborate to repurpose waste streams as valuable inputs for other enterprises. Such collaborations reduce environmental footprints while simultaneously creating economic value. By aligning with circular economy principles, industrial symbiosis goes beyond recycling to foster systemic connections between businesses, enabling cost reductions, risk-sharing, and innovation. This alignment also strengthens the implementation of the waste hierarchy—prioritising prevention, reuse, and recycling before disposal—making it a more effective sustainability tool [15].

Recent scholarship underscores the role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in advancing CE principles, given their adaptability and potential for localised innovation. However, SMEs often face barriers such as limited financial resources, lack of technical expertise, and insufficient regulatory support. In this regard, international studies, particularly those conducted in Brazil, provide useful insights. Prof. Simone Sehnem and colleagues highlight how Brazilian SMEs have begun to integrate CE practices into their operations, aligning them with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and creating opportunities for new value chains. Their work illustrates both the opportunities and the

systemic gaps that remain, emphasising the importance of institutional support, capacity building, and collaborative networks in realizing CE potential [16].

By incorporating these perspectives, this study situates its contribution within the global circular economy debate, emphasising that the development of a Small Business Symbiosis Framework (SBSF) for South Africa not only addresses waste challenges but also contributes to broader international discourses on sustainable economic transitions. This alignment underscores the relevance of the research and provides a foundation for further exploration of how SMEs in developing economies can leverage circular economy principles to achieve both environmental and economic resilience.

2.3 Potential for Symbiotic Partnerships Between Small Businesses

Symbiotic partnerships enable SMEs to share resources, reduce costs, and innovate collectively. However, challenges include a lack of trust, inconsistent by-product supply, and weak regulatory support. Symbiotic partnerships between small businesses can greatly enhance their performance and sustainability. These partnerships, characterised by mutual benefits and resource sharing, offer several significant advantages:

2.3.1 Benefits of Symbiotic Partnerships.

Risk Reduction and Increased Returns: Symbiotic relationships among micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) help minimise risks while boosting returns. This is achieved through shared resources and collaborative efforts that collectively enhance overall business performance.

Economic Gains: In developing regions, symbiotic collaborations among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) aim to maximise economic benefits. These partnerships often rely on informal networks and are influenced by local regulatory environments.

Access to Resources and Markets: Collaborating with larger companies allows small businesses to access broader, more stable markets and essential resources. This relationship typically benefits both parties, as small businesses gain protection and resources, while larger partners benefit from valuable services.

Innovation and Competitive Advantage: Collaborative networks enable SMEs to share risks and combine resources, fostering the development of innovative products. Such partnerships are crucial for maintaining competitiveness in dynamic markets, often resulting in significant innovation and competitive advantages[18].

2.3.2 Challenges facing symbiosis for SME's

Cultural and Communication Barriers: Partnerships between large and small companies can encounter challenges related to cultural differences, complexity, and communication issues. Effective management and clear communication strategies are essential to overcome these obstacles.

Awareness and Regulatory Support: In developing countries, a lack of awareness and inconsistent supply of by-products can impede the formation of symbiotic partnerships. Proactive engagement and support from governmental institutions through effective policy measures are necessary to facilitate these collaborations.

Trust and Commitment: Trust is a vital component for the success of symbiotic partnerships. Small businesses must establish trusting relationships with their partners to leverage competencies and achieve competitive advantages[19].

2.3.3 Strategies for Successful Partnerships

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need to develop their capabilities to participate effectively in business ecosystems. This involves understanding their roles within these ecosystems and acquiring the necessary skills and resources to add value. Utilising technological tools and methods can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of collaborative innovation projects, helping to manage the diversity and complexity of SME networks[20]. Additionally, small businesses should seek long-term and committed partnerships with community-based nonprofits and other organisations to address local issues and achieve sustainable growth.

2.4 Practical Framework for Small Business Symbiosis

Small business symbiosis is a powerful strategy where small businesses actively collaborate with one another and engage with larger entities to achieve significant mutual benefits. This literature review compiles recent research conducted since 2020, establishing a robust framework for small business symbiosis that highlights essential elements such as collaboration, resource sharing, and innovation.

2.4.1 Key Elements of Small Business Symbiosis

Collaborative Networks: Small businesses must leverage inter-organisational cooperation to enhance sustainability and drive innovation. Forming strategic partnerships with other businesses, participating in government initiatives, and collaborating with higher education institutions are crucial[21]. The relationship between small and large firms, akin to the dynamic between sharks and pilot fish, provides small businesses with vital protection and resources while delivering valuable services to larger firms.

Resource Sharing and Efficiency: Effective resource sharing is essential for reducing environmental impact and maximising efficiency. The exchange of by-products, materials, energy, or waste among firms not only drives down costs but also helps generate additional revenue. Frameworks for industrial symbiosis must prioritise financial considerations, risk management, and intangible benefits. These concepts play a critical role in facilitating resource sharing and networking, enabling small businesses to identify synergies and optimise their resource utilisation[22].

Innovation and Knowledge Transfer: Integrating artificial intelligence into product innovation processes is crucial for small businesses to overcome financial and technical obstacles and gain a competitive advantage. Collaborating with higher education institutions is indispensable for accessing essential research, development, and innovation resources[23].

Financial and Technological Support: The adoption of innovative modelling tools is vital for the successful planning and management of industrial symbiosis networks. These tools empower businesses to quantify their collaborative efforts and devise effective strategies for mutual growth[24].

3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design to explore waste practices among SMEs in Gauteng. A stratified random sample of 116 SMEs participated via questionnaire survey. The design was chosen as an exploratory step to provide baseline insights in a field where little empirical work has been done.

Data were analysed descriptively using SPSS. While this provides important contextual insights, it is acknowledged that more robust, multi-method approaches (e.g., interviews, case studies, longitudinal tracking, and triangulation across multiple data sources) are necessary for fully developing and validating a comprehensive framework. Thus, this work should be seen as a first stage in a broader research agenda. Sectoral distribution included:

Table 1: Business participants

Business type	Number of business participants	Mean
Food	22	18.97%
Plastic	17	14.66%
Textile	19	16.38%
Metal	20	17.24%
Wood	18	15.52%
Electronics	14	12.07%
Glass	6	5.17%
TOTAL	116	100%

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion section focuses on the composition of waste material, waste disposal practices, structural barriers to green recycling, usable waste produced, barriers and drivers to SME's symbiosis.

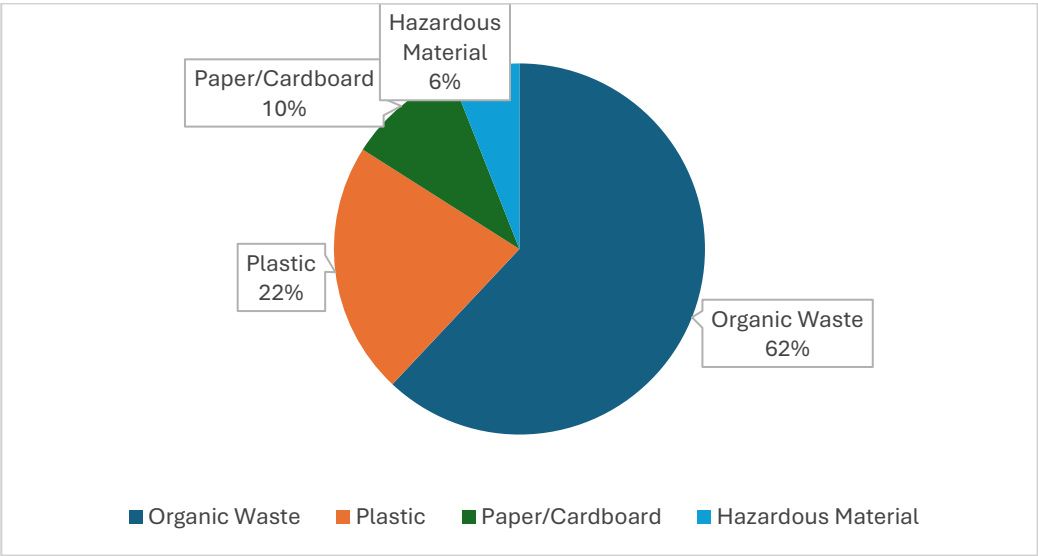

Figure 1: Composition of Waste material

Organic Waste (62%)

Organic waste represents the most significant component of the total waste stream (figure 1), and if unmanaged, organic waste can lead to the increased production of methane emissions in landfill settings, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Plastics form the second-largest fraction with 22%, this figure is concerning because It underscores the urgent need for plastic reduction initiatives, consumer awareness campaigns, and the development of circular economy models that promote plastic reuse and recycling. Although paper and cardboard comprise only 10% of the waste stream, they are among the easiest materials to recycle. Their presence indicates an opportunity for enhanced source segregation practices, recycling systems, and collection logistics to ensure recovery before landfill disposal. While constituting the smallest percentage, hazardous waste demands special attention due to its potential to cause environmental contamination, human health risks, and regulatory violations. Proper classification, storage, and treatment protocols are essential to manage this waste stream safely.

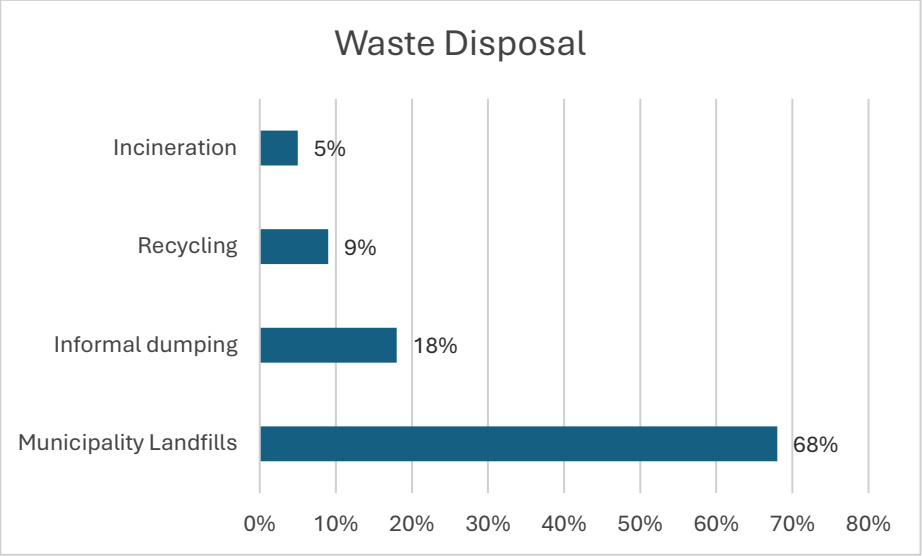

Figure 2: Waste disposal practices

The analysis of waste disposal practices (Figure 2) reveals a critical environmental and economic challenge: 68% of small business waste ends in landfills, while only 5% is recycled. The dominance of landfills and incineration (collectively 86%) underscores the urgency for interventions that redirect waste streams into circular systems.

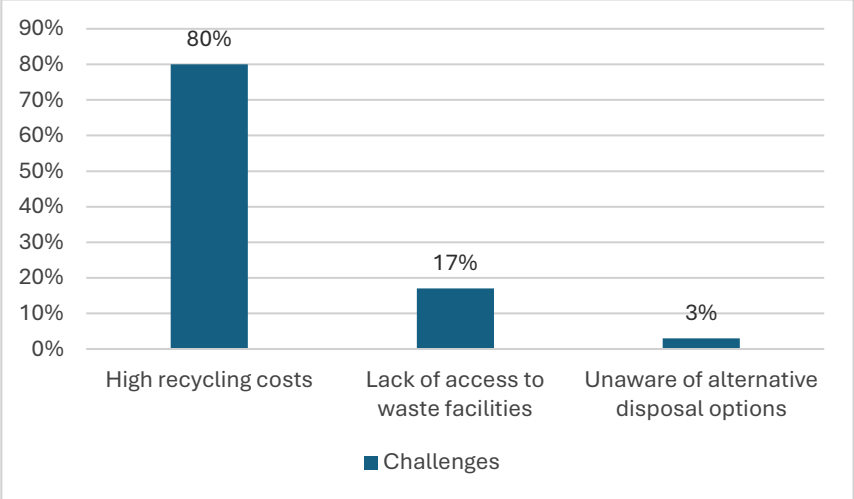

Figure 3: Structural barriers to green recycling

Figure 3 highlights the structural barriers enabling this linear system: 80% of businesses cite *high recycling costs*, while 17% lack access to waste segregation facilities. 3% of operators remain unaware of alternative disposal options—a knowledge gap that stymies circular economy adoption. This triad of barriers (*economic*, *logistical*, and *informational*) necessitates the Small Business Symbiosis Framework *Implementation phase*, where municipal incentives lower cost barriers, while digital platforms democratise access to recycling infrastructure.

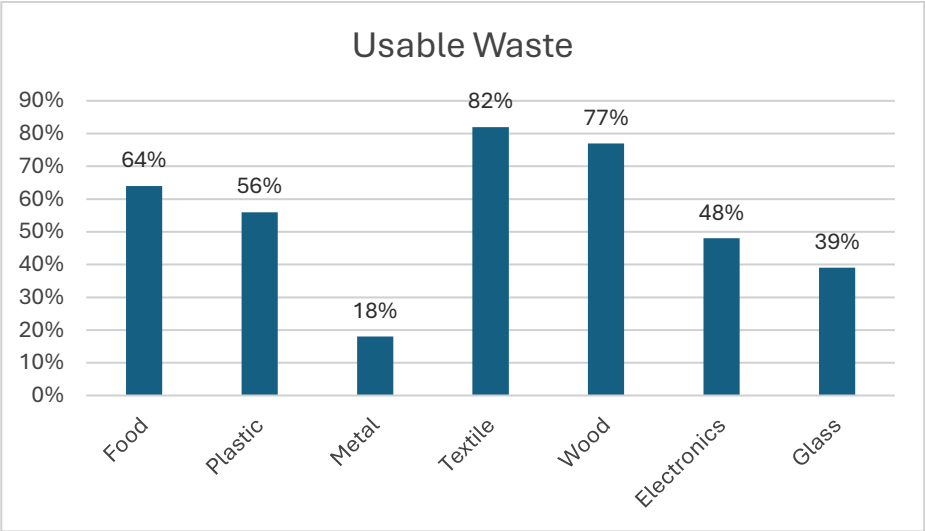

Figure 4: Usable waste produced

Textile waste has the highest usability rate (82%), indicating strong potential for reuse through upcycling, resale, or reprocessing into new materials. Wood waste (77%) also shows high reusability, often applicable in construction, energy production (biomass), or furniture repurposing.

These materials should be targeted for circular economy initiatives and material exchange partnerships among small businesses. Food waste (64%) is largely compostable or usable in organic waste-to-energy systems, reinforcing the potential for local composting networks. Plastic at 56% usability implies moderate recycling potential, though this depends on plastic types and local recycling infrastructure.

Electronic waste (e-waste) usability sits at 48%. While some components are recyclable, e-waste requires specialised handling and is often under-recycled due to complexity and cost. Glass usability is relatively low (39%) likely due to contamination, collection issues, or lack of sorting at source. Surprisingly, metal waste reflects the lowest usability at 18%, despite typically being highly recyclable.

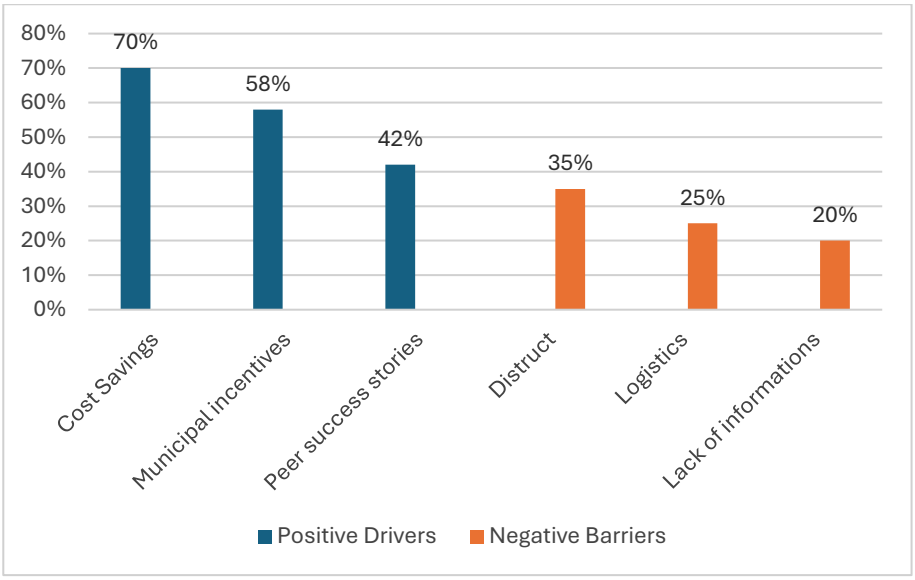

Figure 5: Positive drivers and Negative barriers

However, Figure 5 exposes a behavioural paradox: while 70% of businesses express willingness to collaborate for cost savings, 35% distrust competitors as partners. This misalignment between economic motivation and relational caution echoes global studies on industrial symbiosis [22]. Trust deficits—often rooted in intellectual property concerns or transactional risks—threaten to undermine resource-sharing initiatives.

5 PROPOSES SMALL BUSINESS SYMBIOSIS FRAMEWORK (SBSF)

The study's findings, supported by the literature review and aligned with the study findings, point to the need for a structured approach to embed circular economy principles within the SME sector. Rather than isolated interventions, the recommendations are presented as components of a proposed Small Business Symbiosis Framework (SBSF). This framework integrates waste management practices, collaborative mechanisms, and enabling policy measures into a coherent system that SMEs and municipalities can adopt. By addressing waste separation, partnership facilitation, capacity building, and incentive structures, the SBSF provides a roadmap for transforming current practices into a sustainable, symbiotic model that both reduces environmental impact and enhances SME competitiveness.

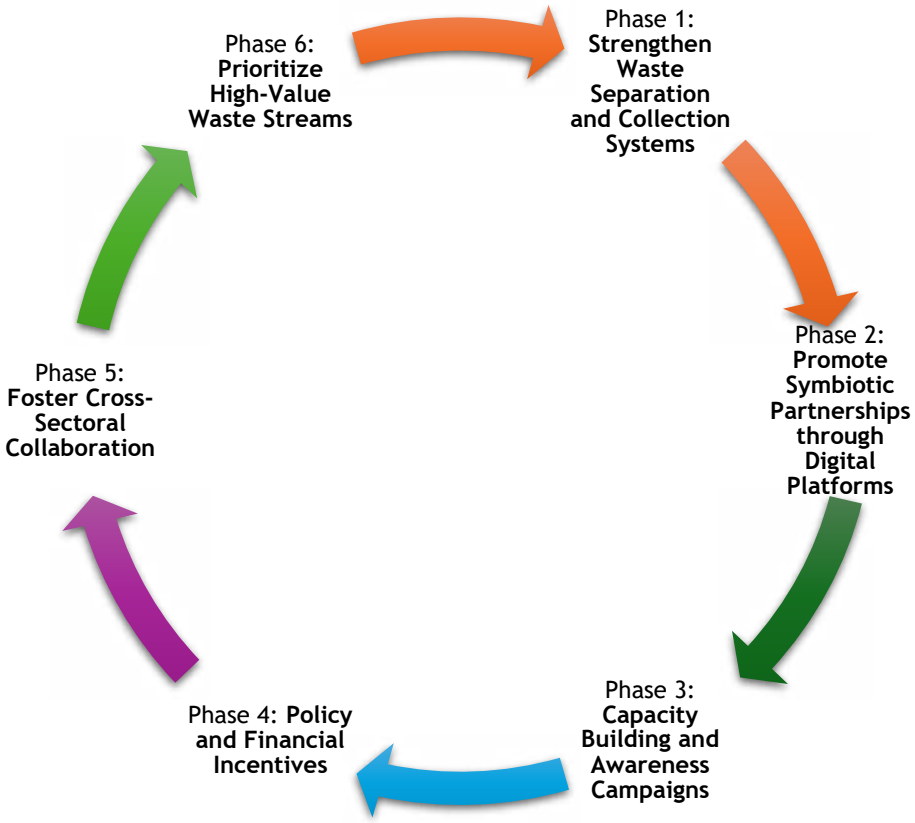

Figure 6: Small Business Symbiosis Framework(SBSF)

Phase 1, Strengthen Waste Separation and Collection Systems: SMEs should be supported with access to affordable waste segregation facilities and clear guidelines to improve recycling rates. Municipalities can provide designated bins and collection schedules aligned with circular economy principles [14].

Phase 2, Promote Symbiotic Partnerships through Digital Platforms: Building on the willingness of 70% of SMEs to collaborate, municipalities and business associations should create digital platforms for waste exchange and resource matching, reducing transaction costs and mistrust among competitors [15].

Phase 3, Capacity Building and Awareness Campaigns: Training and awareness programs are essential to address knowledge gaps and to highlight the economic and environmental benefits of circular practices. Case studies from Brazil [16] demonstrate the importance of education in embedding CE practices among SMEs.

Phase 4, Policy and Financial Incentives: Government should provide tax breaks, subsidies, or reduced landfill fees for SMEs engaging in symbiotic practices, addressing cost-related barriers identified in the results. Such incentives can stimulate adoption of the Small Business Symbiosis Framework (SBSF).

Phase 5, Foster Cross-Sectoral Collaboration: SMEs should be encouraged to collaborate with larger firms, non-profits, and universities to access resources, technical knowledge, and innovation support, reinforcing the circular economy ecosystem.

Phase 6, Prioritise High-Value Waste Streams: Results show textiles, wood, and food waste have strong potential for reuse. These should be prioritised for pilot projects in local circular economy initiatives, ensuring maximum resource recovery.

6 CONCLUSION

This study has provided valuable baseline evidence on SME waste management practices in Gauteng and has proposed a preliminary Small Business Symbiosis Framework (SBSF). By identifying the types of waste generated, current disposal practices, and barriers to symbiotic collaboration, the research contributes to both local policy debates and global circular economy discourse. The integration of insights from international literature, particularly circular economy applications in Brazil, further grounds the relevance of the study. The findings underscore the urgency of addressing landfill dependency, high recycling costs, and knowledge gaps, while also highlighting SMEs' willingness to collaborate under the right conditions. Although the SBSF remains exploratory, it provides a foundation for future refinement and testing.

Future research should employ mixed methods, including qualitative interviews and longitudinal studies, to test the SBSF in practice. Comparative studies across regions and integration of digital technologies in waste tracking and partnerships

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QUALITY ASSURANCE, CONTROL, AND MACHINE LEARNING IN DIAMOND MINING: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The Diamond Mining (DM) sector in Africa relies on high-volume data for operational-decisions. However, the absence of specialised Quality-Assurance/Control Frameworks (QAC-F) hinders reliability and advanced analytics. This Systematic Review (SR) investigates QAC and data-governance strategies used in DM within the SADC region (2020–2025), emphasizing their integration with Machine-Learning (ML) and applicability among diamond concessionaires. We examined peer-reviewed articles, industry reports, and frameworks from the past decade to evaluate approaches addressing data validation, real-time analytics, and advanced automation. The findings emphasize a significant lack of specialized QAC-F in mining, with limited integration of ML, which hampers effective operational decision-making. By highlighting gaps in current practices, this review underscores the necessity for a tailored QAC-F that addresses data-integrity, fosters predictive analytics, and strengthens competitive advantage in DM industry. Implementation of these findings could significantly enhance operational efficiency and sustainability across similar contexts.

Keywords: Diamond mining, Quality Control, Data-driven decision-making, ML, Data governance.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The diamond mining industry (DMI) has been an important driver of economic growth in many sub-Saharan African countries, especially in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, such as Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, as well as South Africa [1],[4].

Despite their great economic relevance, many mining industries in this region face several challenges in adopting and applying emerging technologies to customize and optimize processes, as well as manage the large volumes of data produced. Among the various challenges, the following stand out: financial limitations, skills shortages, organizational resistance and resistance to digital transformation, among others [5],[8].

Other challenges include cybersecurity risks, outdated infrastructure, limited scalability, as well as sociocultural resistance, which are also highlighted by the authors [9],[11]. An additional concern associated with digital transformation is the complexity and volume of data generated daily across mining operations.

This data varies in structure, ranging from structured and semi-structured to unstructured, and originates from multiple departments, including geology, drilling, and equipment monitoring [12]. Notably, significant data streams come from Internet of Things (IoT) devices and advanced monitoring systems [13],[14].

Several research studies have been developed to mitigate these challenges. Ruiyu *et al*. [15] highlight the relevance of implementing efficient and effective solutions based on robust big data integration strategies to unify heterogeneous data sources. In turn, Escobar et al. [16] highlight the importance of adopting AI, big data, and industrial internet of things (IIoT) technologies to optimize processes and improve decision-making.

Considering that, data is crucial for industrial decision-making and ensuring quality control, the gap in effectively integrating unstructured data into quality assurance systems can significantly undermine the operational efficiency of the entire diamond mining value chain, as highlighted by Masialeti *et al*. [1].

1.2 Relevance of Quality Assurance and Control

From an industrial point of view, Quality Assurance and Control (QAC) refers to the process by which production is ensured based on predefined requirements [9]. These techniques have been widely used in the mining industry, not only to ensure analytical accuracy but also enable real-time process control [10],[11].

Furthermore, it can also be applied to trace data throughout the production chain, based on digital management systems and emerging technologies, such as blockchain and smart contracts, which increases transparency and trust in the diamond life cycle [11],[12].

However, QAC implementation faces notable challenges, including the need for continuous adaptation to evolving standards, high integration costs, and organizational adjustments such as staff training [12],[13].

Despite these challenges, continuous improvement supported by regular audits and periodic reviews of methodologies is essential to maintain the effectiveness and sustainability of QAC systems adapted to specific mining operations, as mentioned [14].

Additionally, although large amounts of data are collected at various stages of production, only a fraction is estimated to be less than 10% and is effectively used for decision-making and optimization [15],[16].

Thus, this underutilization limits real-time deviation detection and makes quality control difficult, especially in DMI. Subsequently, fragmented data systems across departments, such as geology, drilling, and logistics, can create information silos that hinder operational integration and impede data-driven decision-making (DDDM), as referred by Zhana *et al*. [17].

1.3 The Emerging Role of Machine Learning

Machine learning (ML) is a subfield of Artificial Intelligence (AI) that focuses on the development of algorithms and statistical models that allow computers to perform tasks without explicit programming instructions [18],[25]. Due to their particularities, ML techniques are increasingly recognized for their transformative potential in the mining industry, particularly in predictive maintenance, ore classification, and data quality control [15].

In the context of predictive maintenance, ML models are also applied to analyse sensor data to anticipate equipment failures. However, these applications are not only crucial to reducing equipment downtime but can also provide significant gains in cost efficiency and operational reliability [26]-[28].

Similarly, Deep Learning (DL), a subset of ML, uses large data sets to increase the accuracy of extraction and processing, improving product consistency and reducing human error. This method has also been widely used for image analysis, as well as to support automated quality inspection, ensuring uniform standards across all mining outputs [18]-[20].

In addition, these approaches are also used to aid in real-time decision-making, as well as to continuously analyse and evaluate real-time data streams. When combined with IoT and edge computing, ML can enhance operational agility, as well as enable rapid responses factors that are critical for effective decision-making in dynamic mining environments [21],[22].

From the mining industry's perspective, operational inefficiencies persist due to the lack of integrated data pipelines, as noted by Escobar et al. [16]. Subsequently, it is notable that disarticulation can limit reactive operations, as well as the effectiveness of data governance platforms, especially when data is incomplete, outdated, or inaccessible [22],[32].

1.4 Objectives

This study, based on a systematic review, aims to identify existing QAC and data governance strategies relevant to diamond mining, with a focus on their adaptability and integration with ML. To achieve this, we review peer-reviewed articles that focus on data validation, real-time analytics, and advanced automation.

The specific objectives of this study are:

a) To examine how ML techniques are applied to data quality control by mapping their integration into QAC processes within the DMI sector;

b) Assess the effectiveness, advantages, and limitations of ML-based approaches compared to traditional QAC methods;

c) To identify the main challenges and enabling factors affecting the successful implementation of ML technologies in the diamond mining industry across SADC region countries.

1.5 Research question

In line with the objectives defined above, the research seeks to answer the following Research Questions (RQs):

- *1st RQ: How can machine learning be applied to improve quality assurance and control in the diamond mining industry within SADC countries?*
- *2nd RQ: What are the key challenges and enabling factors influencing the successful implementation of ML-based QAC strategies in this context?*

1.6 Paper structure

This article is organized into the following chapters: Section 1 presents the research history, problem statement, definition of objectives, and research questions. In turn, Section 2 seeks to describe the applied research methodology and the Section 3 presents a discussion of emerging trends and limitations. Finally, Section 4 presents the conclusions, recommendations, and directions for future research on the proposed theme.

2 METHODOLOGIES

Research methodology refers to the process which describes the techniques and procedures used to identify and analyse information, as well as data, of a specific research topic [23]. To this end, the present work was based on a SLR, and the methodological framework guided by the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, as recommended by Qiao *et al*. [34].

The analytical approach is exploratory, with elements of mixed methods integration to enhance contextual interpretation. The SLR conducted aimed to map the current state of research, identify gaps, as well as evaluate trends in the application of ML techniques for QAC processes in DMI in the SADC region.

2.1 Search Strategy

The search strategy used a Boolean approach. Boolean search is a technique that enables the creation of more specific search queries in databases through the combination of keywords and logical operators [24]. Thus, our searches were conducted in the Scopus database [25] and employed combinations of the following targeted keywords:

- "*Quality Assurance" AND "Machine Learning" AND "Diamond Mining"*
- *"Quality Control" AND "Machine Learning" AND "Mining Industry"*
- *"Predictive Analytics" AND "Fish Production" AND "Data-Driven Decision Making"*
- *"Intelligent Systems" AND "Mining Operations" AND "Quality Control"*
- *"Data Governance" AND "Diamond Mining" AND "Artificial Intelligence".*

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A SLR process requires a definition of a search strategy, which aims to establish criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of articles, as well as a careful analysis of the quality of the selected literature, as suggested by Suyo-Vega et al. [24].

Thus, the present review and inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025, written in English, and focused on quality assurance, quality control, machine learning, or data governance in the mining sector, particularly in DMI.

The criteria for selecting materials for this SLR encompassed peer-reviewed articles, industry reports, and frameworks published from 2020 to 2025, written in English, and concentrated on QA/QC, ML, data governance, or unstructured data integration within the DMI.

The exclusion criteria applied in this study were as follows: *(i)* publications not appearing in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings, *(ii)* works not written in English, *(iii)* studies published outside the 2020–2025 period, and *(iv)* research with subject areas unrelated to the scope of this investigation.

Furthermore, sources were excluded if they were opinion-based, published in non-English outlets, or derived from unverified repositories. In addition, the quality of the included studies was assessed using parameters such as journal impact factor, indexing status, citation counts, organisational credibility, author qualifications, the robustness of supporting evidence, verified application in industry or research, and the degree of adaptability to the Diamond Mining Industry (DMI) framework.

Priority was given to empirical research and technological implementations. Therefore, studies from unrelated fields, non-peer-reviewed sources, preprints, and texts in languages other than English were excluded.

2.3 Screening, and Selection Process

The PRISMA protocol was applied, as illustrated in figure 1, with an initial search and filtering process of 4 phases, where a total of 20,191 were initially identified. In addition, connected papers were also used to explore the co-citation landscape of influential works [26], as depicted in figure 2.

Stages included exclusions based on publication date (**n=5,928**), domain relevance (**n=10,743**), document type (**n=2,016**) and no Inglish language (**n=1,387**). Finally, **117** articles were identified as relevant, which were the basis of the literature review.

Considering the specificities of the search defined at the Scopus level, **12** other articles not linked to scientific research methodologies were extracted from Google Scholar [23]. To better manage the extracted materials, as well as customize the bibliography, Mendeley software was adopted [25].

Figure 1: SLR PRISMA flow diagram, adapted from [66].

Figure 2:Topic Visualization of Co-Citations adapted from [72]

2.4 Temporal Trends in Scientific Output

From 2020 to 2024, there was a notable rise in scientific publications related to QAC and ML in the mining sector. Annual outputs increased from 12 publications in 2020 to 34 in 2024, with intermediate counts of 17 (2021), 16 (2022), and 27 (2023).

By May 2025, 11 studies had been indexed, a figure likely influenced by delays in database updates rather than a decline in research activity. As illustrated in figure 3, this trend reflects growing global momentum toward data-driven quality frameworks and the increasing integration of AI and ML in mining operations.

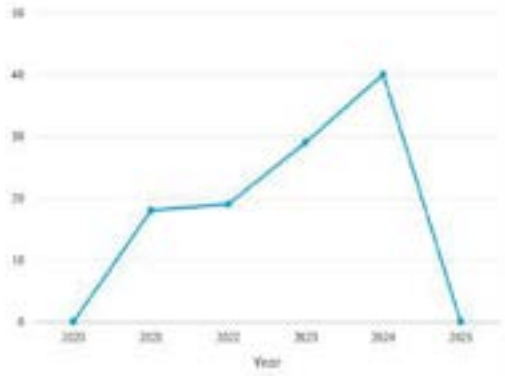

Figure 3: Figure 3. Annual distribution of SLR-reviewed literature from Scopus data.

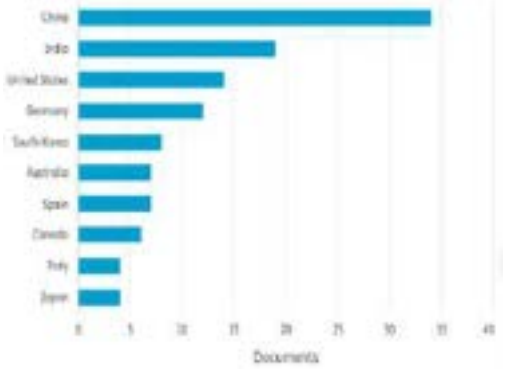

Figure 4: Geographic distribution of publications from from Scopus data.

2.5 Institutional and Regional Contributions

Geographically, most contributions originated from China (**n=27**), India (**n=18**), Germany (**n=14**), and the United States (**n=11**), with additional input from Australia, South Korea, Spain, Canada, Italy, and Greece, as depicted in figure 4.

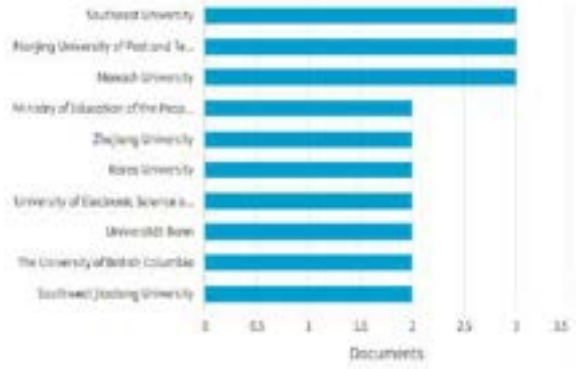

Figure 5: Publications per institution from Scopus data

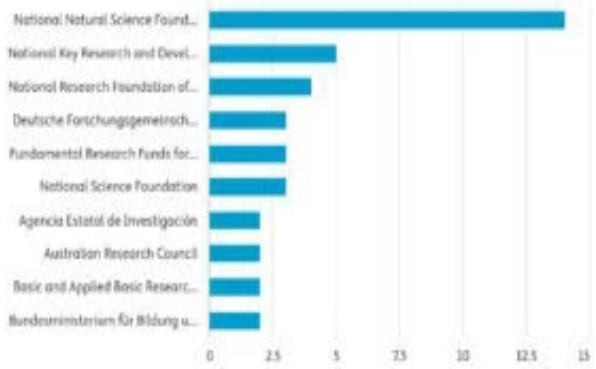

Figure 6: Publications by funding agency from Scopus data

From the point of view of contributions from African institutions, the weak production of research related to the topic is notable, as shown in figure 5. This gap is notable, especially in the countries of the SADC region.

From the point of view of institutions, the main institutions, such as Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications, the Ministry of Education of China, Zhejiang University, Korea University, the University of Bonn, as well as the University of British Columbia, stand out in the scientific production inherent to QAC and ML in mining, as demonstrated in figure 6.

2.6 Digital Transformation of the DMI in the SADC Region

The DMI has historically been a significant catalyst for economic growth in several sub-Saharan African countries, especially within the SADC region [1],[2]. Currently, these nations are experiencing a swift and intricate phase of digitisation in the diamond mining industry, along with the overarching changes linked to Industry 4.0 [8].

The timeframe 2020–2025 was intentionally chosen to encompass the post-COVID-19 surge in technological advancements, specifically in quality assurance and control frameworks (QAC-F) and ML applications [3].

The literature research findings, illustrated in figure 4, demonstrate that the utilisation of QAC-F and ML-based solutions in Africa's DMI is both restricted and peripheral. This discovery emphasises the nascent stage of adoption in the region and stresses the urgent necessity for heightened involvement from both the scientific community and industry partners to facilitate technology integration.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Challenges in Mining Information Systems

Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that the digital transformation of the mining sector has been driven, above all, by the adoption of several technologies, among which IoT, big data analysis, and ML stand out, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Key challenges and limitations in mining information systems

Challenge/Citations	Description
Fragmentation and Limited Functionality. [39],[5]	Data silos and the limited functionality of traditional tools hinder integration and analysis.
Visualization and Real-Time Fusion.[40],[41]	The high velocity and volume of IoT data overwhelm traditional tools, delaying decisions. The fusion of data visualization and data analytics in the process of digitalization.
Data-Management/ Constraints.[42],[43]	Large-scale, distributed IoT data overwhelms systems, causing redundancy and inefficiency.
Security Risks.[27],[28]	Vulnerabilities in IoT devices and systems pose risks of breaches and attacks.
Data Fusion Barriers.[29],[15]	Heterogeneous sources and formats complicate fusion processes. The fusion of data visualization and data analytics in the process of DMI
Complexity of Data [30],[7]	Integration of routine and IoT data adds complexity due to differing structures.

Diamond dealers produce large and varied qualities of data, structured as well as semi-structured, originating from different departments, namely geophysics, manufacturing, and production, among others, summarized in table 2.

However, effective integration of these datasets can be hampered by interoperability issues, data heterogeneity, and communication limitations. To this end, there must be standardized communication models based on AI, as well as the adoption of cutting-edge computing infrastructures, capable of responding to the challenges inherent to the DMI [37],[27].

As measured in table 3, current and emerging technologies are driving digital transformation in the mining sector.

Table 2: Comparative analysis of mining data types and corresponding solutions

Data type/ Citation	Solutions
Geological Data [15],[32]	Heterogeneity, integration difficulties. Standardized data platforms, AI-driven analytics
Environmental Data [33]	Real-time monitoring, sensor limitations. Wireless sensor networks, edge computing
Equipment-Related Data [31]	Predictive maintenance, interoperability. IIoT architecture, ML models
Production Data [34]	Data velocity, scalability. Stream processing frameworks, distributed systems
Hazard-Related Data [35],[36]	Risk detection, early warning systems. AI models, real-time monitoring systems

Table 3: Overview of current and emerging technologies in the mining industry

Technology/References	Application /Adoption
IoT [38],[39]	-Enables real-time data acquisition and monitoring; improves machine tracking and environmental awareness. Widely adopted
Big Data Analytics [39],[40]	-Analyses large datasets to enhance decision-making, reduce costs, and improve safety. Moderately adopted
Computational Intelligence (CI) [41],[42]	-Uses neural networks and fuzzy logic to model complex systems and optimize mining operations. -Emerging use
Digital Twins [43],[31]	-Creates digital replicas for process simulation, predictive maintenance, and operational optimization. Growing adoption
AI [38],[20]	-Supports automation and predictive analytics, potential for advanced process optimization. Exploratory stage
Blockchain [42],[46]	-Improves supply chain transparency and data security in mining transactions.
I4.0 Technologies [48],[49]	-Integrates cyber-physical systems for real-time control, visibility, and smart manufacturing. Early stage
Extended Reality (XR) [38]	-Used in immersive training and safety simulations for hazard preparedness. Experimental/Pilot programs

3.2 Discussion

Although few studies focus specifically on DMI, several provide adaptable methodologies for integrating ML with quality QAC. As summarized in table 2, six main thematic areas emerged: *(I)* triage and classification, *(II)* automation, *(III)* digital twins and simulation, *(IV)* data fusion, *(V)* decision support systems, and *(VI)* persistent barriers including data scarcity and shortage of skilled professionals, especially in the SADC region

However, these themes highlight the promise of ML in DMI and highlight the need for localized and context-specific research and implementation strategies.

Based on the extracted data, it can be seen that the ML techniques that have been frequently applied were Artificial Neural Networks (**n=23**), followed by DL models such as CNNs and LSTMs (**n=15**), Support Vector Machines (**n=13**), Random Forests (**n=11**), and Gradient Boosting algorithms such as XGBoost (**n=9**).

However, only 19 studies addressed QAC processes directly, and only 12 specifically targeted DMI. These data reveal a significant gap in the specific literature in this domain, as measured in table 4.

Table 4: Overview of current and emerging technologies in mining

Author(s)	Approach	Relevance to DMI
[51],[57]	A systematic review of 109 ML studies	Identifies gaps; lacks diamond-specific focus
	AI/ML in sorting and classification	General mining focus; adaptable to diamond mining
	ML for complex mineralogical data	Relevant to QAC; adaptable to diamond operations
	Barriers to ML adoption	Highlights challenges for diamond integration
	DL for mineral grain segmentation	Applicable to diamond sorting
	DL for more image classification	Enhances sorting; not diamond-specific
[58],[57]	Supervised Learning	Transferable to diamond sorting
	Unsupervised Learning	Applicable to diamond processing
[31],[59]	Digital twins for real-time control	Promotes real-time QAC in mining
	Real-time sorting using sensors	Enables QAC in diamond-bearing ore

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section discusses the future concerns of data management in an integrated mining information system, the application of ML and quality assurance, and control for the diamond mining industry.

Although ML has the capacity to elevate operational efficiency, its practical application within the regional mining sector remains restricted and limited, due to limited, contextual and systemic challenges.

The study highlights enduring obstacles to ML integration, such as organizational reluctance to embrace technological change, a deficit of qualified personnel, and the prevalence of disconnected data environments.

However, the SRL identified several enabling conditions, such as access to region-specific datasets and the adoption of digital transformation. These highlights the essential role of comprehensive Data Governance Strategies and targeted capacity-building initiatives in ensuring the effective and sustainable integration of ML technologies within the mining sector, across SADC countries.

5.1 Future work

ML holds a substantial promise for advancing QAC, however, its application in DMI, especially in SADC countries, remains underdeveloped. The SRL also suggests that the main barriers include fragmented data systems, lack of standardized protocols, limited regional technical capacity, resistance to adopting new technologies, as well as limited skilled personnel.

However, despite the large infestations, the African continent, especially the SADC countries, is lagging in the application of emerging technologies, especially ML practices for data quality control.

To this end, there must be actions that can promote the adoption of ML at the stakeholder level, aiming to reinforce better data governance. Another aspect, no less relevant, concerns investments in digital infrastructures. For future research, it is suggested that priority should be given to research on the impact of Data Silos on the diamond industry and its operational and economic implications. As well as understanding how ML models and digital tweens can mitigate this issue.

5.2 Insights

ML offers significant potential in data mining from a data quality perspective, its implementation still faces several barriers, subsequently affecting data quality. This limited data availability can not only affect the detection of rare events but can also reduce the interpretability of complex models such as DL, which can undermine confidence in critical decision-making [21].

Another challenge concerns integration with connected systems, which also presents challenges due to interoperability and real-time access requirements [62].

Aiming to mitigate these challenges, several strategies have been proposed, among which the development of open access data, investment in advanced online sensors, as well as the adoption of Multimodal Machine Learning (MML) for greater robustness stand out [61]. Studies suggest that research remains fragmented, with limited studies on data infrastructure in the SADC region [52],[64].

5.3 Key challenges in implementing a tailored QAC-F

The effective execution of a customised QAC-F in operational diamond mining is hindered by multiple factors: the absence of frameworks specifically tailored to the sector's unique complexities, insufficient integration of machine learning for predictive and anomaly detection functions, and the widespread occurrence of inconsistent or incomplete multi-source data.

The issues are exacerbated by insufficient digital infrastructure in remote areas, human-related obstacles such as skill deficiencies, reluctance to adapt, and inadequate stakeholder alignment.

Additional challenges encompass the difficulties in complying with national, and international regulatory standards, the intricacies of connecting with legacy systems such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), and manual reporting, as well as the significant expenses related to implementation and continuous maintenance.

5.4 Conclusion

The DMI in Africa relies on high-volume data for operational decisions. However, based on the studies, it is notable that there is a lack of specialized Quality Assurance and Control structures, which hinders reliability and advanced analysis.

The systematic review identified the various existing QAC and data governance strategies relevant to diamond mining, with a focus on their adaptability and integration with ML in the SADC region countries.

The results examine peer-reviewed articles, industry reports, and frameworks from the past five years, where you can evaluate approaches that address data validation, real-time analytics, and advanced automation. The findings reveal a dearth of specialized QAC guidelines for mining, with many solutions failings to incorporate ML-driven processes.

By highlighting gaps in current practices, this review underscores the need for a tailored QAC framework that addresses data integrity, promotes predictive analytics, and strengthens competitive advantage in the diamond mining industry in SADC countries. Findings reveal a dearth of specialized QAC guidelines for mining, with many solutions failings to incorporate ML-driven processes.

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF ERGONOMIC IN WORKSTATION DESIGN BASED ON INDUSTRY 4.0 CONCEPT: A CASE STUDY IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The integration of Industry 4.0 technologies in automotive manufacturing has brought renewed focus on ergonomics, emphasising the need for workstation designs that enhance worker well-being and productivity. This study compares ergonomic assessment scores between traditional workstations and those reimagined through Industry 4.0 principles, evaluating key factors such as comfort, posture support, reachability, and user satisfaction. Results indicate that modern ergonomic designs significantly reduce physical strain and improve job satisfaction, leading to safer and more efficient work environments. Given the global prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders and the associated economic burden, this research highlights the critical role of advanced ergonomic solutions in adapting to technological advancements and evolving workplace structures. The findings advocate for adopting Industry 4.0 practices to optimise workstation conditions, prioritising employee health and operational efficiency.

Keywords: industrial engineering; process optimisation; ergonomics

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1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Ergonomic impact is a key issue in manufacturing, especially on assembly lines with sequentially moving workstations. In the automotive industry, operators handle various parts and perform repetitive tasks while standing for long periods, leading to discomfort and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) affecting the shoulders, arms, wrists, neck, and lower back [1]. This also increases the risk of errors due to reliance on human labour and documentation. Manufacturers must balance reducing cycle times with ensuring operator safety. Optimising workstation design to prevent MSDs and conducting ergonomic evaluations are essential for addressing discomfort and improving working conditions. Ergonomics, or human factors, focuses on designing systems that enhance performance and well-being by studying human interactions with system components.

Industry 4.0 significantly transforms from the industrial revolutions by integrating people, machines, and information technologies into smart, digital operations. This shift, digital or smart manufacturing, is becoming increasingly important in global production environments. This study explores how Industry 4.0 technologies can tackle ergonomic challenges in the automotive industry. This study aims to analyse ergonomics in assembly lines from the factory design phase, exploring how integrating ergonomic principles can reduce musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) caused by poorly designed workstations. While technological advancements are crucial, prioritising worker well-being remains essential. Incorporating human factors into workstation design requires a unified approach that combines existing methods to create ergonomically optimised workplaces.

The challenge faced is designing workstations without initially considering ergonomics, leading to the need for retroactive adjustments. Typically, infrastructure and workstations are built first, with ergonomic concerns addressed later; an approach could reduce issues by about 70% if ergonomics were integrated [2]. Industry 4.0 technologies are increasingly adopted to enhance production environments and drive innovation through digital technology, process redesign, and real-time monitoring. The focus is on how Industry 4.0 can transform manufacturing through these advanced technologies.

Over time, ergonomics has evolved to focus on identifying, analysing, and eliminating workplace risk factors. Modern ergonomics leverages advancements in science and technology to prevent musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), a global concern due to their substantial impact on employee health and associated costs. Companies aim to reduce MSDs to mitigate physical and economic consequences for individuals and organisations. With rapid advancements in technology and organisational structures, there is a growing need for thorough investigations into workstation design to address these challenges effectively.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The vehicle assembly line is a complex system with many components and workstations. Organisations must manage various risks in a competitive and intricate market while maintaining high performance through flexible strategies and ongoing improvement. Automotive manufacturing is energy-intensive, requiring significant raw materials and water. To stay competitive, OEMs must enhance product quality through continuous process improvements, focusing on reducing carbon emissions and increasing sustainability [3].

2.1. Ergonomics

Ergonomics aims to create comfortable and efficient work environments [4]. With the rise of Industry 4.0, including technologies like simulation, virtual reality, and augmented reality, manufacturers can use virtual environments to enhance ergonomics. Integrating these tools helps identify hazards, analyse sources of discomfort, and improve workplace efficiency [5]. Implementing ergonomics adds significant value by boosting employee engagement and

satisfaction. Organisations understand that a healthy work environment supports well-being and fosters a culture of innovation and creativity [6]. Raj Kumar employed the Taguchi experimental approach to assess the workstation design. This method allows for selecting processes or products that operate more reliably in real-world settings, reducing the experimentation needed to develop effective and dependable workstation designs. The Taguchi technique is widely used across industrial sectors to optimise design and development [7].

2.2. Industry 4.0

The adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies requires employees to acquire new skills. This digital transformation integrates advanced techniques like AI, IoT, Big Data, and Blockchain, offering significant opportunities for innovation and efficiency across industries [8]. Industry 4.0, driven by advanced technologies, promises production efficiency and sustainability improvements but lacks comprehensive guidance on its impact. Growing research focuses on how these technologies can enhance sustainability through supply chains, products, and processes [9]. Industry 4.0 is reshaping production, supply chains, and organisational aspects, enhancing resource efficiency, community ties, customer involvement, and employee conditions. It enables mass customisation and responsive manufacturing while requiring strategic adjustments [10]. In the laser welding industry, smart factories use IoT and advanced data collection to boost performance and sustainability by reducing waste, increasing productivity, and cutting costs. Successful implementation of Industry 4.0 involves understanding its principles and addressing integration challenges [11]. Industry 4.0 shifts from traditional production to digital methods, connecting the digital and physical worlds. It benefits manufacturing with real-time connectivity, combining customisation flexibility with mass production efficiency, and addressing competitive challenges.

2.3. Digital twin

The concept of digital twins is broad and needs more clarity and alignment with business standards. The wide range of activities could be detailed in the scope and applications. However, the study will use qualitative metrics to measure the broad impact of digital twins on the industry. Research has analysed core technologies related to digital twins, such as data technologies, high-fidelity modelling, and model-based simulation. It has categorised their applications by lifecycle stages, offering observations and future research directions [11].

Digital twins, or "device shadows," have become a key technology trend, bridging digital models with real-world data for near-real-time representations. This technology supports real-time monitoring and has applications beyond manufacturing, including training, marketing, transportation, energy, healthcare, and sports [11]. In manufacturing, CAD models ensure vehicle integrity before release, but post-release faults can lead to high repair costs and downtime. Simulation replicates real-world processes, aiding design and verification, and offers benefits in manufacturing. However, achieving a complete digital twin representation requires more than sensor data [12]. In summary, manufacturing industries aim to improve product quality, reduce costs, and increase efficiency through extensive research and investment. Simulating these processes in real-time environments can greatly support these goals.

2.4. Facility planning

Facility planning involves designing and organising spaces to meet operational needs, including space utilisation, workflow optimisation, equipment placement, and compliance with safety and regulatory standards. The goal is to create an environment that enhances productivity, efficiency, and safety while considering future growth and flexibility. Integrating design, technology, and operational needs into a cohesive plan that aligns with organisational goals

and budget requires collaboration. Research on integrating lean manufacturing into facility layout emphasises that effective design is crucial for optimising workflow and material movement. Proper facility design improves manufacturing processes and working conditions and supports new business models [13]. Effective facility management increasingly relies on the latest technologies like Building Information Modelling (BIM) for data integration. Key aspects include optimising production, minimising material handling, improving workflow, and ensuring safety, scalability, and sustainability. Facility planning must balance operational needs with cost-effectiveness and adaptability for future challenges.

2.5. Literature Gap

Authors have studied ergonomics as a standalone topic and through digital software for evaluating workstation issues. However, there is a gap in exploring how Industry 4.0 technologies can address broader problems beyond just assessing musculoskeletal risks. The concept of digital twins is evolving, with a need for more research on modelling frameworks and applications across sectors. This research could reveal the benefits of integrated digital twins, encourage investment, and drive adoption. Current literature often focuses on redesigning existing objects rather than creating new designs, presenting opportunities for using virtual models in innovative design and asset management. The literature review is descriptive and reviews key fundamentals in the effects of ergonomics in workstation design based on the Industry 4.0 concept.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To develop a robust research technique, define the study's nature: exploratory (qualitative), confirmatory (quantitative), or mixed methods. This qualitative study uses numbers and statistics, with a case study approach and some investigative elements. The research methodology follows the "Research Onion" model by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, which structures the research process from philosophical underpinnings to data collection. This model helps to organise the research strategy effectively. The study used a qualitative approach to understand the challenges in manufacturing activities fully. The data was collected through a systematic literature review, secondary data collection, and semi-structured interviews with manufacturing experts and operators.

Positivism was the philosophical approach, given that existing literature addresses some but not all study objectives. The research explores the impact of Industry 4.0 on facility planning and ergonomics, aiming to contribute new insights. A deductive approach within a qualitative context was used, relying on secondary data to conclude. The study employs a mono-method qualitative approach, combining theoretical and practical perspectives through literature reviews and empirical research.

A longitudinal time horizon reviews historical literature and technological advancements to assess changes. Historical data on Industry 4.0's evolution was collected to ensure long-term feasibility and sustainability. The study uses the Saunders Research Onion model to guide the literature review, data collection, and analysis. It features a case study design, an epistemological philosophy, and a qualitative mono-method approach, addressing how ergonomics can be integrated during initial workstation design and improved with Industry 4.0 technologies.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

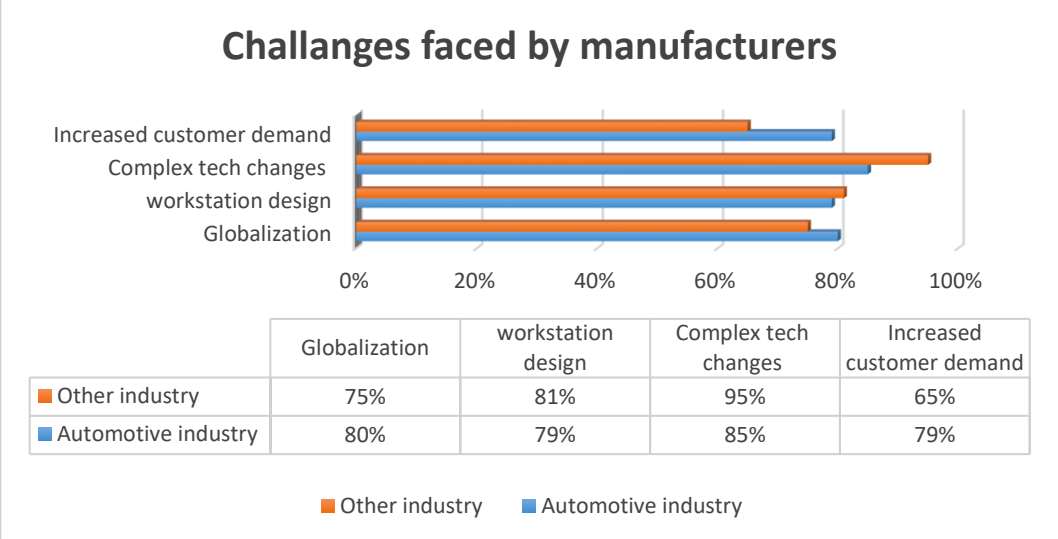
With its complex and labour-intensive processes, the automotive manufacturing industry relies on ergonomics to enhance worker safety, productivity, and efficiency. Effective ergonomics design improves worker well-being by addressing health and performance challenges. Current ergonomic practices often lack comprehensive problem definitions and objective validation. Traditionally, fixed and task-specific workstations were inflexible, leading to inefficiencies as

production needs changed. Although lean manufacturing aimed to reduce waste, its ergonomic design was less advanced and adaptable. Improving ergonomics can boost productivity by addressing physical issues like musculoskeletal disorders and mental health issues from high workloads. Creating an ergonomic environment is essential for better worker well-being and efficiency.

4.1. Working environment challenges

As technology advances, work environments shift from traditional manufacturing settings to complex "smart factories" with advanced technologies that boost speed and quality. In these high-tech environments, employees face new challenges adapting to computerised and automated systems, which will increasingly involve human-robot collaboration. Despite technological advancements, manufacturing tasks remain physically demanding, involving heavy lifting, repetitive motions, and awkward postures, contributing to ergonomic hazards like musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). These issues can lead to injuries such as strains, sprains, and carpal tunnel syndrome. Addressing these hazards requires ergonomic workstation design and training programs focusing on proper lifting techniques and posture. Key design considerations include reach distances, equipment height adjustments, and tool accessibility to reduce strain and improve workflow.

The rise of automation and robotics adds new ergonomic challenges. While automation reduces some physical demands, designing effective human-robot interfaces and collaborative environments is essential to prevent excessive physical strain on workers. Proper ergonomic assessment is crucial for safe interaction between workers and robots. The accompanying graph compares ergonomic challenges across automotive, electronics, textiles, and machinery industries, highlighting differences in challenge percentages.



	Globalization	workstation design	Complex tech changes	Increased customer demand
Other industry	75%	81%	95%	65%
Automotive industry	80%	79%	85%	79%

Figure 1 Comparison of challenges faced by manufacturers.

4.2. Ergonomics and human factors

Recognising human factors in production innovation is crucial. Human factors mitigate adverse effects and enhance profitability and strategic advantages. Integrating human factors boosts productivity, aids technology adoption, improves product quality, and increases system reliability. Research shows that the benefits of applying human factors far exceed the financial savings from reduced compensation costs.

4.2.1 Human challenge

The manufacturing industry involves complex, labour-intensive processes where ergonomics is crucial in optimising environments and products for human well-being. This review explores ergonomic challenges in the automotive sector, emphasising factors affecting worker health, safety, and performance.

Key Challenges:

- Poorly designed workstations can worsen ergonomic issues, affecting comfort and productivity. Factors like work surface height, tool positioning, and seating suitability are crucial.
- Repetitive tasks without breaks can lead to muscle and joint strain, causing discomfort. Job rotation and task redesign can help reduce these risks.
- Manual handling of heavy or awkward loads strains muscles and joints. Proper lifting training and aids like hoists are essential to minimise injury risks.
- Adopting Industry 4.0 technologies, including automation, IoT, and AI, requires significant investment and upskilling to integrate and maintain these systems effectively.
- Manufacturing faces increasing pressure to adopt sustainable practices, such as reducing carbon footprints and waste, while complying with environmental regulations.

In conclusion, manufacturing industries face complex challenges that require comprehensive strategies. Addressing technological advancements, environmental sustainability, workforce management, and ergonomics requires careful planning, investment, and innovation. Effectively navigating these challenges ensures operational efficiency, competitiveness, and sustainable growth while enhancing workplace well-being. Emphasising adaptation, continuous improvement, and regulatory compliance will help industries build a resilient and prosperous future.

4.2.2 Technology challenge

Companies face ongoing technological transformations in both industrial and service sectors, necessitating the assessment of technology compatibility, maturity, and potential safety issues. Insufficient information from manufacturing systems can create new challenges for operators. Digitalisation and assistive technologies, like exoskeletons, can boost efficiency by reducing non-productive activities. However, integrating advanced technologies and automation presents ergonomic challenges in automotive manufacturing. While robotics can handle physically demanding tasks, designing human-robot interfaces and collaborative environments requires adherence to ergonomic principles to ensure safe and effective interaction. This includes adapting ergonomic standards to new technologies and planning workstations to avoid strain or safety hazards for human operators working alongside robots.

Key Challenges:

- Automation and robotics enhance productivity but can introduce ergonomic issues, such as repetitive motion injuries.
- Maintaining and supporting new technology poses challenges, particularly for complex systems or equipment, as downtime due to maintenance can disrupt production and affect profitability.
- Environmental and ethical considerations in technology production and disposal are crucial, including managing electronic waste and minimising energy consumption.

- Advanced manufacturing techniques like 3D printing require new ergonomic designs for workstations and tools to reduce fatigue and injury risks.
- Integrating new technologies with existing systems can be complex and time-consuming, often involving compatibility issues with legacy systems.
- The initial investment for new technologies, including equipment, software, and training, can be significant and challenging for small and medium-sized manufacturers.

In conclusion, the manufacturing industry is at a key moment where technological advancements and ergonomic practices intersect. While automation, robotics, and other innovations can boost efficiency, they must be integrated with ergonomic principles to minimise strain and injury. Adhering to regulations, investing in continuous improvement, and prioritising worker training are crucial. By aligning technology with good ergonomic practices, the industry can enhance safety, productivity, and overall workforce well-being.

4.3. Industry 4.0 Evolution

The Industrial Revolution transformed economies from agrarian to manufacturing-based systems. Machines replaced human labour, boosting productivity and efficiency, which lowered production costs and increased the variety and volume of goods. This economic shift led to higher incomes and prompted migration from rural areas to cities in search of opportunities in the growing industrial sector. Traditional OEMs are upgrading existing facilities and building new smart factories, while modern EV companies like Tesla operate entirely smart facilities from the start, avoiding the transition costs.

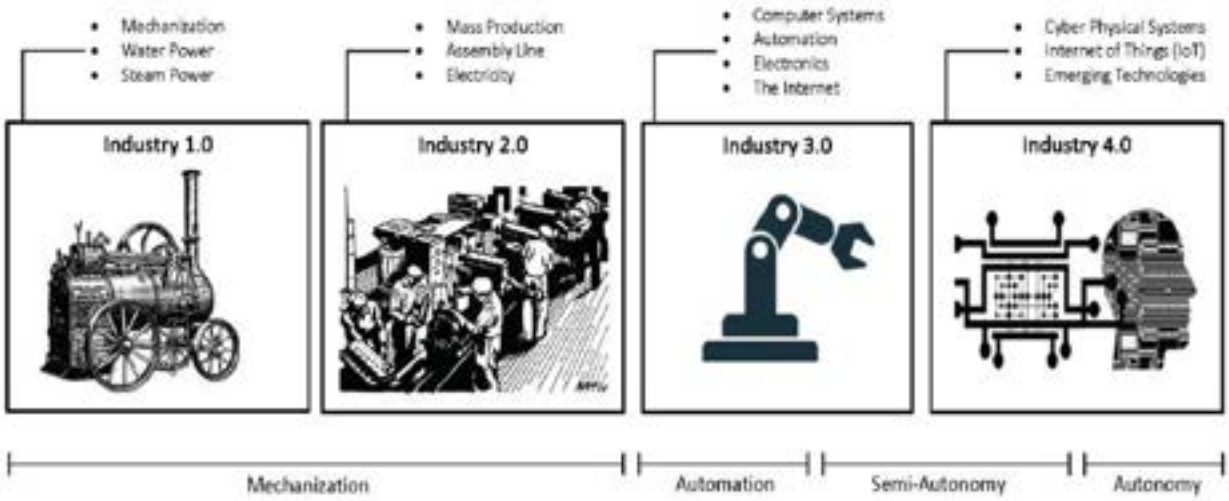


Figure 2: Diagram depicting the four industrial revolutions and degrees of system sovereignty [Picture was taken from [14]

In a brilliant factory, benefits include complete vertical integration to minimise supply chain issues, automation of complex sub-assembly lines, enhanced efficiency and production volume, mass customisation capabilities, reduced downtime and defects, improved product quality, and greater sustainability. These innovations streamline production, boost efficiency, and ensure high product quality through automation and real-time monitoring. Predictive maintenance reduces downtime, and flexible manufacturing systems adapt quickly to market demands and customisation. Adopting Industry 4.0 enhances operational efficiency, competitiveness, and sustainability by optimising resource use and minimising environmental impact.

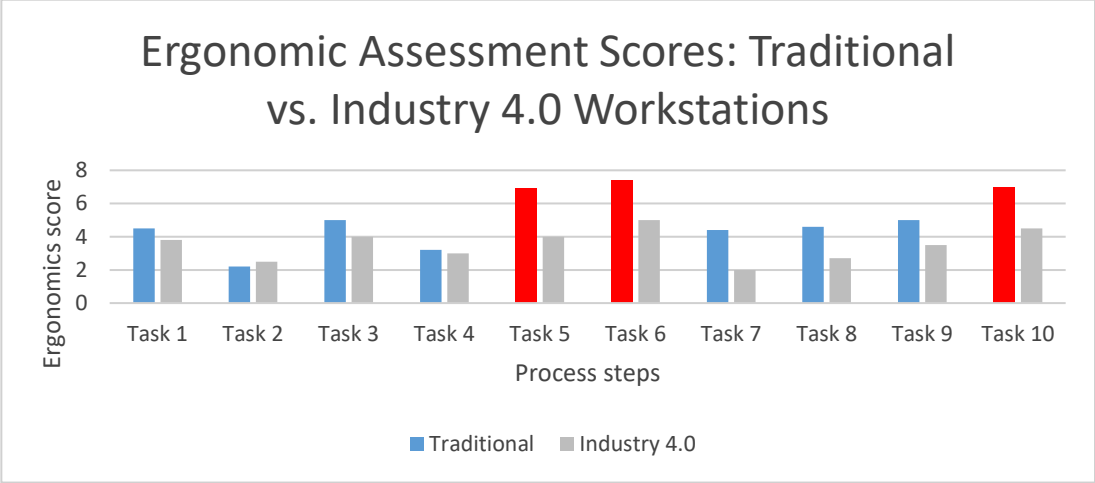


Figure 3: Ergonomic Assessment Scores: Traditional vs. Industry 4.0 Workstations

Industry 4.0 revolutionises manufacturing in the automotive sector by enhancing efficiency, quality, flexibility, and sustainability. These advancements streamline production, enabling manufacturers to innovate quickly and adapt to changing market demands.

4.4. Consequences of planning a factory without ergonomics in mind

Assessing a facility focuses on optimising layout for improved workflow efficiency. Facility Layout Planning involves strategically placing production components to enhance operations and material movement. Modern facility management requires new technologies for integration and information management. Building Information Modelling (BIM) offers a unified data platform that improves beyond traditional methods. Facility management aims to boost employee well-being, cost-effectiveness, and organisational reputation. According to [15], it integrates people, place, and process to enhance quality of life and productivity, extending beyond maintenance to strategic management.

Planning a factory without considering ergonomics can lead to several significant consequences, namely:

- Repetitive strain injuries, such as carpal tunnel syndrome and back pain, are often caused by poor ergonomics, including awkward postures and improper lifting.
- Ineffective layouts and uncomfortable workstations can lower productivity, as discomfort and fatigue lead to longer breaks and more mistakes.
- Health issues from poor ergonomics may increase sick days and impact overall attendance, reducing productivity.
- Poor ergonomics can lower employee morale if workers feel their employer neglects their health.
- Neglecting ergonomic design can result in missed opportunities to enhance workflows and operational efficiency.
- Investing in ergonomic design can save long-term costs by reducing injuries, absenteeism, and turnover, improving productivity, and lowering operational costs.

4.5. Benefits of facility planning with consideration of ergonomics

Integrating ergonomics into factory planning is crucial for worker health, productivity, cost-efficiency, and regulatory compliance.

- Ergonomic design improves productivity by streamlining workflows, reducing fatigue, and enhancing efficiency, increasing throughput and quality.
- It saves cost by preventing injuries, reducing workers' compensation, medical expenses, and turnover, and minimising downtime.
- Prioritising ergonomics boosts employee satisfaction and morale, increasing engagement and loyalty.
- Ergonomic planning supports future adaptability, allowing facilities to adjust to technological, process, and workforce changes.
- It helps prevent musculoskeletal disorders by addressing repetitive motions, awkward postures, and excessive force, creating a safer work environment.

In summary, ergonomic planning creates safer, more efficient workplaces, enhances employee well-being, reduces costs, and supports long-term success.

4.6. The use of a Digital Twin looking into the Factory of the Future

A Digital Twin Prototype (DTP) is a detailed virtual model containing essential data like the Bill of Materials (BOM), design files, and CAD models. It undergoes various tests to identify potential issues before physical production. The accuracy of the physical counterpart depends on the DTP simulation quality. Digital twins provide numerous benefits, including faster time to market, improved operational efficiency, lower maintenance costs, and better user engagement. They allow for effective factory layout planning, visualising component placement, line conditions, and operator work areas. This facilitates ergonomic analysis by identifying and optimising potential issues. By examining the digital twin, we can assess the operator's tasks and workstations, considering height and reachability. Simulations help determine if processes are feasible and ergonomically suitable at each station. In summary, digital twins enhance factory planning by addressing ergonomic factors, leading to a safer and more efficient work environment. The digital twin model lets us visualise the operator's tasks and workstation conditions, enabling precise ergonomic assessments and process optimisation before physical implementation.

Figure 4, virtual assembly line showing the complete line. The image below depicts a real-time production line, highlighting the operator's workflow.

Figure 1: Virtual assembly line, closeup

Although eliminating risk in some processes can be challenging, AI offers solutions, especially for underbody stations where traditional pits are no longer used. Manufacturers can reduce downtime and maintenance costs through real-time equipment monitoring and predictive maintenance by leveraging digital twins. Virtual simulations facilitate the evaluation of new features and technologies, reducing the need for costly physical testing. This approach also supports continuous upgrades and refinements of car models based on performance feedback and real-world data.

4.6.1. Benefits of Digital Twin Prototyping

- It enables the simulation of physical assets and workspaces, allowing for planning and performance improvements without physical prototypes by defining aspects like material types and functionality in advance.
- Digital twins can identify discrepancies and predict potential failures, supporting preventive maintenance and reducing downtime and maintenance costs, thus lowering overall ownership costs.
- They help companies focus on strategic performance and process efficiency, potentially driving significant business value and transforming operations.
- Digital twins are increasingly adopted in the automotive and heavy industries for product development, asset performance optimisation, and process efficiency, and are also expanding into healthcare, construction, and smart cities.
- These models capture vehicle data, aiding in performance analysis and providing personalised services for customers.

The evolution of digital twins reflects growing adoption, diverse applications, and technological advancements across various industries, with adoption rates and applications varying by source and sector.

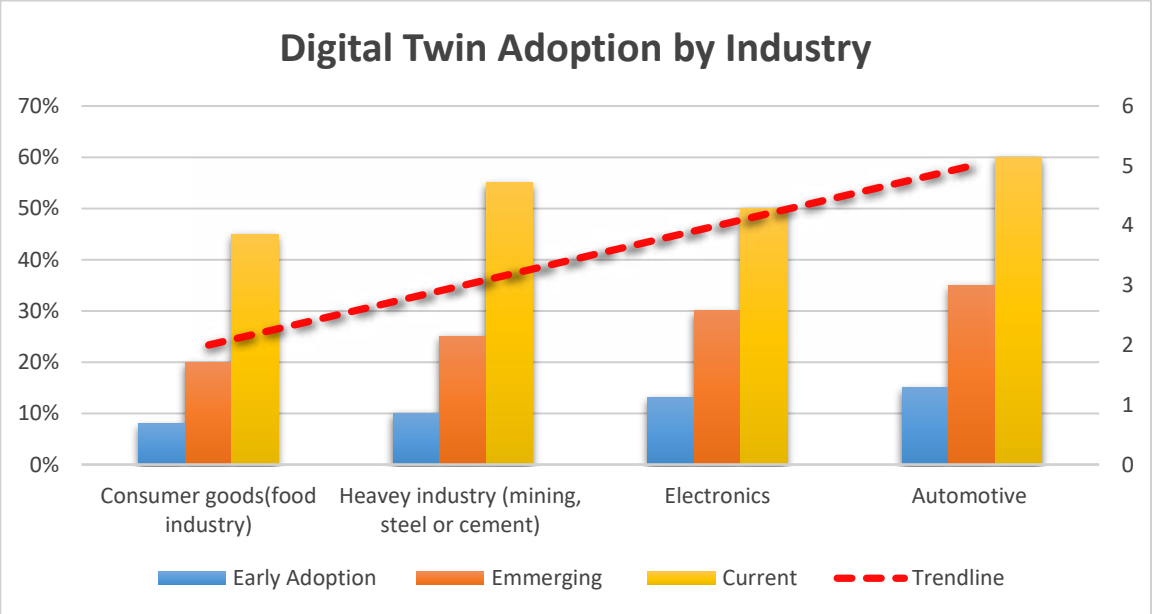


Figure 5: Digital Twin Adoption by Industry from 2010 to 2024

Industries face various challenges, but emerging technologies like digital twins offer innovative solutions. Although the concept has been around for decades, its significant impact is becoming clearer as more industries adopt it. The digital market is poised for growth due to digital twins' potential to reduce costs, boost productivity, improve maintenance, and enhance

safety. Unlike traditional methods, digital twin-based research examines interventions in complex organisations by integrating virtual and physical environments, providing new insights and advancements for the manufacturing sector.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The research focused on ergonomics in assembly line design, emphasising integrating ergonomic principles into factory planning. The literature review revealed the importance of workstation design for operator well-being and highlighted the trend of involving employees in ergonomic assessments.

Organisations should adopt digital twin technology to reduce MSDs and lower testing costs through virtual simulations. Digital twins enable accurate performance predictions, cost savings, and improved productivity, but require investment in skilled personnel. Blockchain can enhance digital twins by securing intellectual property and ensuring smooth data access. Manufacturers should create physics-based digital equipment models, linking them to real-time data for continuous updates.

Investing in industrial exoskeletons can reduce occupational fatigue and MSDs by enhancing workers' strength and stamina and improving lifting and repetitive operations performance. Exoskeletons can reduce strain for workers assembling large machines or moving parts. Passive industrial exoskeletons, which require no electricity, use springs and materials to distribute weight and relieve pressure on body parts like the back or shoulders. Powered industrial exoskeletons, equipped with motors and actuators, enhance lifting capabilities and support specific body parts, such as the back or hands, to handle heavier loads.

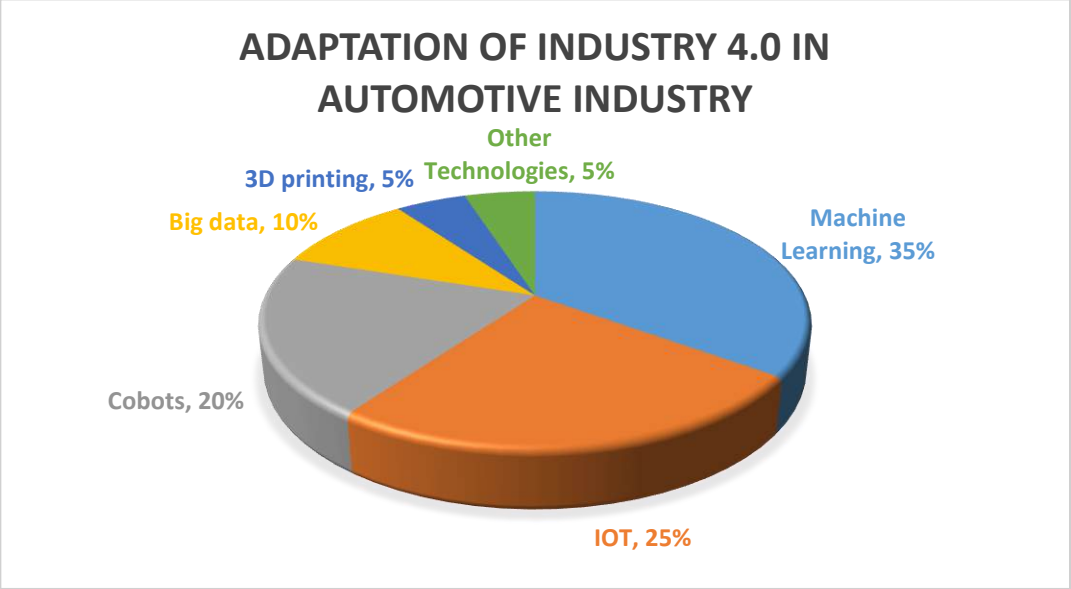


Figure 6: Adaptation of Industry 4.0 in the automotive industry

Governance, safety, and compliance for industrial exoskeletons are covered by ISO 13485. In 2020, powered industrial exoskeletons held a 64.8% market share, expected to increase to 69.9% by 2025, indicating rising popularity. Exoskeletons are particularly beneficial for workers performing overhead tasks. In the automotive industry, upper exoskeletons reduce strain by distributing weight along the arm, easing the physical burden on workers.

Figure 7: Exoskeleton for upper body support (Ekso Bionics)

"Chairless chair" exoskeletons are hydraulic devices for the lower body that adjust to support the user's weight and posture, reducing back strain and maintaining ergonomic positions. Additionally, wearable aids for the hands or thumbs help with forceful tasks, enhancing comfort and minimising strain.

Figure 8: Exoskeleton for lower body support

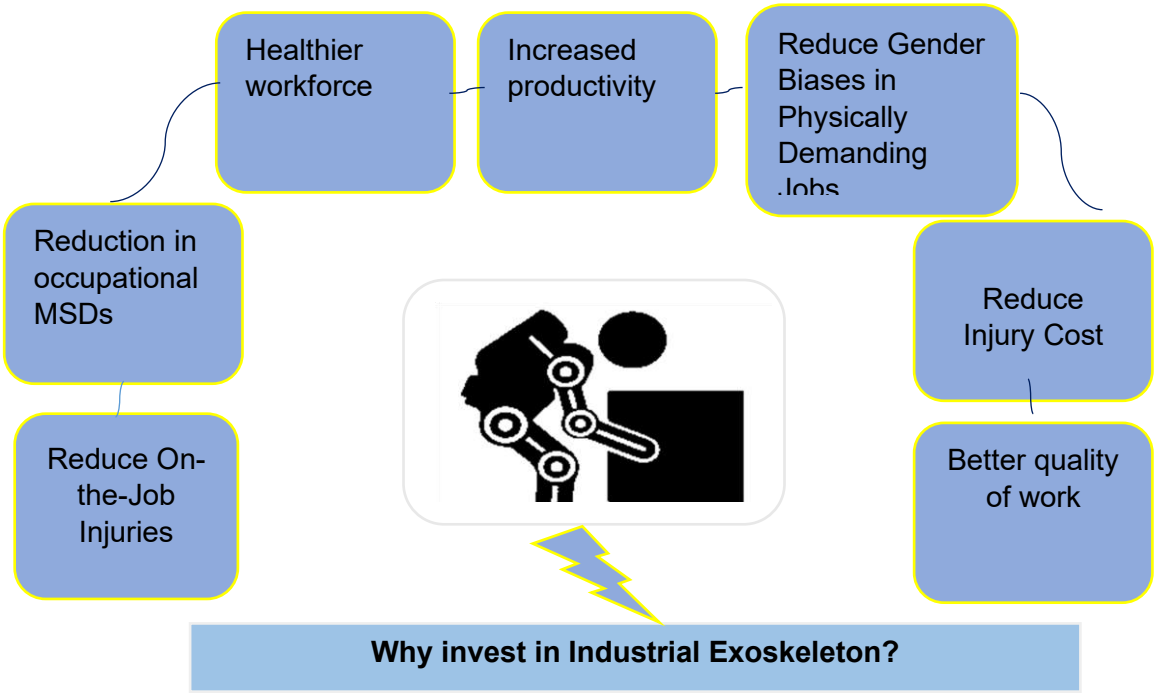


Figure 9: Benefits of exoskeleton

Exoskeletons, while beneficial, have some concerns. Regular maintenance, like cleaning and lubrication, can extend their lifespan, usually 3 to 5 years, or up to 7 years for heavy-duty models. Challenges include high costs, ensuring comfort over time, regular maintenance needs, transportation difficulties, and limited access to tight spaces. Countries like Japan increasingly use exoskeletons to reduce absenteeism and physical strain, especially for high-risk tasks. The type of exoskeleton should match the specific process risks. For new facility layouts, involving all relevant stakeholders, including ergonomics experts and process designers, is essential for effective planning and ergonomic design.

The research agenda for the future can be summarised as follows:

The literature often covers different assembly aspects, but a systemic investigation could yield new insights. Potential topics include:

- Lean Manufacturing and Technological Advancements: Explore how digitalisation integrates lean principles with technological progress. Consider the balance between automation and human involvement in systems.
- Supply Chain Impact and Blockchain: Investigate how digitalising the supply chain can enhance ergonomics in part delivery. Examine how blockchain technology can improve supply chain efficiency and ergonomics.
- Transition from Industry 4.0 to 5.0: Analyse how shifting to Industry 5.0 changes manufacturing processes, focusing on combining technology and human skills to achieve customised mass production.

Industry 4.0 advances technology but won't eliminate human roles in production. While boosting productivity, it may introduce new risks. The impact of Industry 4.0 Technologies (I4.0T) varies by industry, and assessing their sustainability is complex. A multi-context analysis is recommended to evaluate I4.0T's performance. Digital twins will become key industry tools, using real-time data and simulations to predict performance and identify issues. Industry 4.0 accelerates global production changes through interconnected supply chains and rapid

information flow. This interconnectedness means minor adjustments can have significant impacts. Fast adaptation to Industry 4.0 is crucial for global market success. The study shows Industry 4.0's potential to cut injury-related costs and emphasises agility and flexibility. Integrating ergonomics with virtual assembly lines could reduce musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) on assembly lines.

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LEARNING FROM THE ELECTRICITY CRISIS TO AVERT A WATER CRISIS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This study posits that the experience gained in dealing with South Africa's electricity crisis provides crucial lessons for enhancing the management of the country's water resources to avert a crisis. Commonalities in the two resources provide transferable lessons from a wide range of perspectives including governance, supply-chain, operations, funding, and skills, among others. Secondary data are used to obtain insight on key issues, measures tried, and outcomes achieved or actions unsuccessful. Notable challenges comprised an aging infrastructure, limited supply sources and wastage, among others. A causal loop diagram is used to analyse the data. To efficiently manage water resources, a framework identifying critical areas from the study is developed giving recommended actions from an Industrial Engineering perspective to manage potential issues in each area. From the critical list, three most important ones are identified for prioritisation being Infrastructure maintenance and efficiency, managing politics and enabling policy and good governance.

Keywords: Electricity, Water Resource Management, Infrastructure, Politics

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1 INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates similar factors between the South African electricity crisis known as 'loadshedding' and a pending water crisis in the country. After recovering from decades-long events leading to a major electricity crisis in 2023, South Africa's energy provider, Eskom, has become a stable entity in electricity generation and transmission. This paper explores the notion that lessons from the electricity crisis can be applied to the water sector, which has been predicted to collapse by the year 2030 [1-2] – leading to a shortage of potable water and another South African crisis.

1.1 Electricity

Loadshedding is understood as a mitigation process which Eskom implements to relieve the electricity grid of 1000MW at each stage [3]. For example, a stage 6 implementation is where 6000MW from the grid is shed every day, sometimes done through multiple periods in a day. To quantify the loadshedding crisis, the number of blackout hours experienced nationwide, from the year 2014 to 2022 totalled 53 days (1 day = 24 hours) [4]. However, the worst of the crisis came in 2023 where the equivalent, 54 days of loadshedding was experienced in a single year - ending in week 33 [5].

Over the years several factors have been suggested as contributing to the continued loadshedding, the most well-known being the lack of maintenance leading to aging infrastructure. To mitigate this, Eskom implemented Open Cycle Gas Turbines (OCGT) - a temporary solution spanning over a decade [6].The cost of running the OCGTs propelled Eskom further into debt especially with the rise of diesel prices. During this period, reports were made by popular press about investigations into irregular practices regarding procurement processes for the diesel and raising concerns over other processes within the utility. The exploitation of procurement processes for personal gain has been a rampant problem in South Africa and is a form of corruption [7]. It is noteworthy to consider corruption as a major contributing factor to the collapse of infrastructure within the country.

1.2 Water

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) is the head authority in the country responsible for securing the country's water supply for drinking and commercial use; water boards report to the DWS. In this paper, lessons from the electricity crisis are extracted and translated into workable strategies for water management. The water crisis stems from projections by analysts, suggesting that at the current rate South Africa will experience a deficit in the water supply of 17% by the year 2030 [1-2].

Water scarcity can be considered from two aspects, namely the physical and economic aspects [8]. From a physical aspect, South Africa has extracted nearly 75% of its physical surface freshwater and has a higher than global average water consumption in the country [9]. South Africans consume 218 litres per capita per day compared to 173 litres per capita per day globally [9]. On the other hand, the economic scarcity of water in South Africa relates to the failing and aging infrastructure making it difficult to extract and distribute the resource efficiently [8].

A water crisis already afflicted Cape Town, known as day zero, whereby droughts led to the evaporation of most of the water in the reservoirs. The citizens rationed water successfully using a plan created by the local governing body and eventually mitigated the crisis, preventing loss of life and possible societal collapse [10]. In Johannesburg (JHB), the infrastructure failure is extensive, 47% of total water coming from the dams is lost in the JHB reticulation system [11]. According to Hingmire [12] Water loss in large systems can range from 25% to 75% in developing countries. To accurately calculate an acceptable water loss, Obunga and Rwanga [13] suggest using an Infrastructure Leakage Index (ILI) formula which

measures the performance of real-world losses to expected/acceptable losses. SA fits within the developing country range, however, the combination of higher-than-average use and natural water scarcity should be a caution to the continuation of such high rates of water loss. This type of loss is commonly referred to as Non-Revenue Water (NRW) and occurs through leakages and/or illegal connections [10]. Given SA's current water climate, the city of Johannesburg's NRW loss should be considered as unacceptably high, producing an unnecessary strain on the water supply.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The energy sector in South Africa is monopolized by the state-owned utility Eskom and since apartheid times has been responsible for electricity generation, transmission and distribution [14] Historically, Eskom operated within a government subsidised model which allowed for low-cost production of electricity, making it affordable rather than profit driven. Tariffs were low until an increase in demand signalled that it would outpace the current supply [15].

In 1998, the Department of Minerals and Energy (DOE) wrote the White Paper Energy Policy act to institute grand changes within the electricity sector [15]. These changes would initiate the unbundling of Eskom to open the generation of electricity to private sectors. The infrastructure for transmission and distribution is already built and therefore naturally monopolised by Eskom. The main directive in the White Paper was that the DOE and Eskom should proactively source private electricity generation. However, since Eskom received subsidies, they could provide cheap power from equally cheap coal, making it financially unfeasible for the private sector to compete [14-15]

Eskom were unable to gather any Independent Power Provider (IPP), so to reverse this, in 2001 the DOE passed a ban which forbade Eskom from constructing additional power capacity. However, in 2004 Eskom's CEO issued further warnings that supply was exceeding demand and the DOE was forced to overturn the ban. This led to the commissioning of the Kusile and Medupi power plants in 2005. The decision created more debt for Eskom, requiring more government subsidies [15]. Medupi was set to be finished by the year 2021, however once activated, the Unit 4 power generator exploded. It is expected to be repaired and commence operation by the end of 2025. These decisions and their delays have cost nearly R145 billion (rand), for a return of 4.8GW capacity. A portion of which was made available in 2015, when the first unit become operational [16].

The structure of Eskom within government is important to understand so that a chain of command can be established. The Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) serves as the sole shareholder. The DOE designs policies controlling energy, while the National Treasury (NT) guarantees finances. The National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) aims to regulate Eskom's costing structure and prevent monopolisation. Other important groups affected by Eskom are SALGA, AMEU and COSATU [14]. Ting and Byrne [14] has provided an illustration between the role of governance over Eskom in the diagram below - the solid line represents a more strict and formal relationship between Eskom and the DPE.

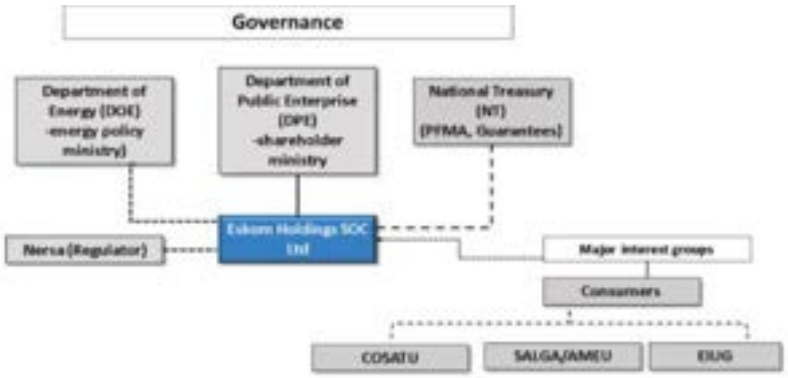

Figure 1: Governance Structure [14]

2.1 Multi-Year Price Determination

Commissioning Kusile and Medupi raised financial concerns. Responsibility of managing Eskom was spread through multiple agencies: DPE, DOE, NT and NERSA. This spread created room for inefficiency. The DOE created a new pricing framework which incrementally increased electricity tariffs. [14] This shift in 2006 abandoned reliance on the affordable electricity subsidy, moving to a cost reflective strategy. This framework, named the Multi-Year-Price-Determination (MYPD) strategy, aimed to lessen the short-term shock of a huge tariff increase while committing to long-term social and economic targets [17]. The raw data used to plot the graph in Figure 2 has been sourced from [17].

The MYPD determines price increases every 3 to 5 years. The graph below shows a massive increase between 2006 and 2018, spanning three consecutive cycles. An increase from 20 c/kWh to 100 c/kWh, represents a near 500% increase through these years [18].

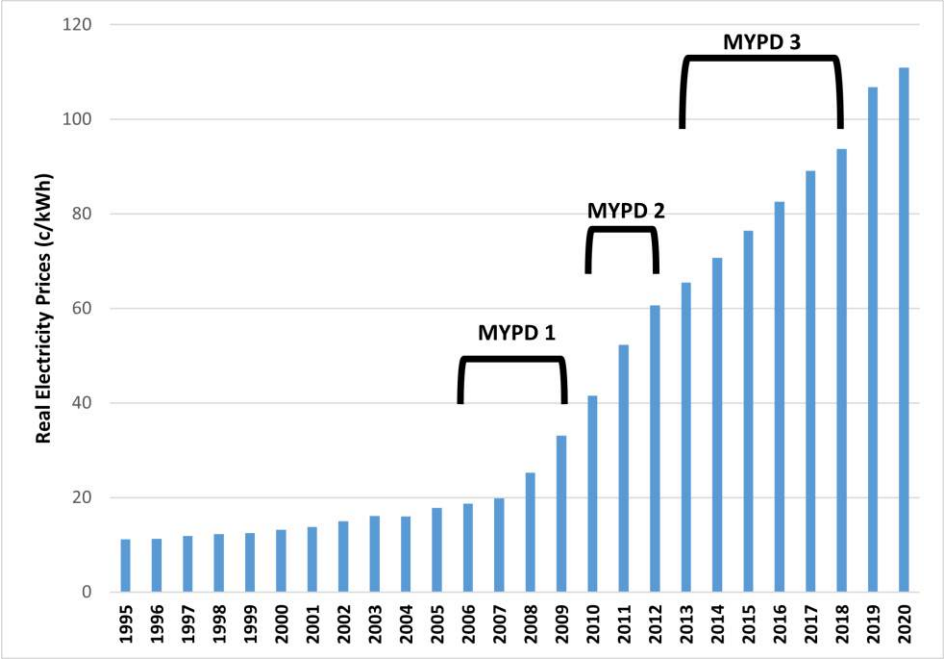

Figure 2: Multi-Year-Price-Determination (MYPD)

2.2 Eskom

2.2.1 Downfall

The beginning of the crisis started modestly in 2007, resulting in policy changes and more planned infrastructure initiatives. Delays in the Kusile and Medupi stations led to capacity shortages resulting in further loadshedding. These delays were perpetuated by corruption scandals, political interference and an undermining of Eskom's management and health. Significant periods of loadshedding lasted during 2014/2015, 2018/2019, and the worst period in 2022/2023 while constant inefficiencies resulted in wasteful operations [19-20].

2.2.2 Impact on Economy and Society

Loadshedding had a significant impact on all businesses, especially in the manufacturing and mining sector. It negatively influenced business operations and investment prospectives in the country. Productivity fell and the input cost increased particularly for companies that were generating electricity on their own using diesel-powered generators [21]. For example, big grocery stores needed to generate their own electricity to keep their refrigerators on since they were struck by record-high levels of food wastage [21]. This led to increased operational costs, causing a ripple effect that increased food prices and required a reduction in staff. On the other hand, smaller businesses had to shut down or risk going into serious debt to stay operational.

2.2.3 Recent Developments

The 16thAugust 2024 marked a change in policy where President Cyril Ramaphosa granted permission to commence the Electricity Regulation Amendment Act. The amendment changed Eskom's monopoly by adding a competitive aspect to the electricity landscape and encouraging more IPPs to participate in a potential energy trade market via a Transmission System Operator (TSO), introducing updates to regulatory criteria of tariffs by NERSA [22]. These efforts hope to boost overall generation capacity. The National Development Plan (NDP) in conjunction with the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP) set out in 2023, contains plans to shift from an overreliance on coal to more renewable energy while protecting jobs in the mining and coal sector [22].

2.3 Root Causes and Consequence

2.3.1 Governance Failures

Several reasons have been cited for Eskom's crisis, mainly governance failures which consist of a failure in strategic planning, political interference, poor management decisions, and widespread corruption labelled as 'state capture' [23]. An example of poor strategy is illustrated in the failure to acquire IPPs despite warnings set out in the 1998 White Paper. Acquiring new IPPs was not a priority which led to the eventual supply-demand deficit that caused Eskom to initiate loadshedding nationwide. Additionally, political inference and Eskom's hesitation to give up their monopoly worsened the crisis [24]. 'State capture' weakened Eskom financially, reducing money for essential operations and causing skilled workers to leave [25]. An aging infrastructure suffered from severe underinvestment in maintenance. This led to frequent breakdowns in generating units while having limited resources to fix it [25]. These inefficiencies contributed to Eskom's shortfall in meeting the country's energy demand.

2.3.2 State Capture and Impact on Eskom

State capture severely damaged Eskom's financial and management capabilities. Investigations initiated by the Zondo Commission led to the exposure of political interferences and procurement process inflations [26]. Eskom suffered extensive financial losses because of this, leading to decay in their operational efficiency. The results of the investigation

highlighted how politics compromised Eskom's own governance, along with other State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in South Africa. It revealed the need for structural reforms to reinstate core values such as integrity within Eskom [26].

2.3.3 Financial Mismanagement

Corruption and mismanagement plunged Eskom further into debt. Expensive short-term contingencies such as the OCGTs, which involves burning expensive diesel, were primarily used instead of focusing on new generating units using cheaper coal. Eskom has made multiple tariffs increase proposals that were unsustainable and rejected by NERSA, thereby Eskom's funds for expansions (Medupi and Kusile) were legally confined [15].

A huge systemic issue facing South Africa, and particularly Eskom, has been municipality non-payment. An interim report from Eskom in September 2023 has identified that the amounts overdue to them by municipalities across the nation total around R70 billion – a sharp increase from R59 billion in March 2023. Additionally, 20 of the highest defaulting municipalities make up 76.7% of the total debt [27]. Furthermore, during the 2016/2017 period, the total debt owed by municipalities amounted to R225.8 billion; 43% of this value (R96.8 billion) was owed to Eskom and the countries' Water Boards (e.g Rand Water, Umgeni Water) [28].

2.4 Responses and Lessons Learned

Lamidi and Juta [29] outlined policy implementations used in addressing the electricity crisis, some can be described herein. South Africa's crisis prompted key policy responses in efforts to rebalance the national grid. The emergency measure was to introduce loadshedding in 2007 as a short-term solution, while long-term solutions were the Kusile and Medupi power plants. An Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) and Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) were established to diversify the energy mix and promote renewables. The process has faced multiple regulatory delays and infrastructure setbacks [29].

Some regulations were amended to increase IPP involvement. New regulations allowed IPPs to generate 100MW or electricity without a license and municipalities were now permitted to purchase electricity from IPPs. The National Energy Crisis Committee (NECOM) was established to fix Eskom in the long-term, as part of 'Operation Vulindlela', adding new generation capacity according to the Energy Action Plan (EAP) [29].

Eskom's debt kept rising and to be stable it needed financial bailout from the government, amounting to R254 billion over three years [29].These funds aimed to improve infrastructure and reduce load-shedding which came with an unbundling of Eskom into generating, transmission and distribution entities, twenty-six years after being urged to unbundle in the 1998 White Paper. Despite these efforts, progress was hindered by political interference, regulatory hurdles, and infrastructure challenges [29].

2.5 Water Resource Management in South Africa

As stated earlier, South Africa (SA) looms on the edge of a water crisis. This is influenced by internal and external factors including increased demand, deteriorating infrastructure, poor management and climate changes. This section considers key components leading to the water crisis.

2.5.1 Water Availability

South Africa can be classified as a country that is semi-arid and water scarce. It receives an average annual rainfall below 500mm compared to the global average of 850mm [30]. To exacerbate the situation, South Africans usage of water is higher than world average, being 218 litres per capita per day compared to the global average of 173 litres per capita per day[9]. This is concerning given that the country not only has below average rainfall but the additional concern that 75% of its freshwater sources have already been utilised [9].

Moreover, while seasonal rainfall contributes to water availability and is essential to prevent droughts, there has been a change in consistency of rainfall with studies noting a drop in average precipitation leading to extended drought periods [31]. For example, continued droughts created severe conditions in the Western Cape during the 2015-2018 period, which led to the infamous "Day Zero" in Cape Town [31].

2.5.2 Growing Demand

Gauteng alone experienced a population growth of 25% in 2023 [10] This increases household water demand without even considering the demand from agricultural and industrial sectors. The agriculture sector alone constitutes 60% of the water demand in SA, while a growth in farming activity is expected by 2030 [32].

2.5.3 Aging Infrastructure

The state of water infrastructure can be compared with the decaying state in the electricity sector. Collectively, SA has an average NRW loss of 40% in all water systems throughout the country [33] which is high compared to the global average of 30% [34]. To put this in perspective, while the difference of 10% between the two may seem small, the water loss value is measured in cubic billions.

2.5.4 Future Directions

Addressing water scarcity effectively requires strategic solutions to integrate advanced technologies. This may include smart water meters capable of real-time infrastructure monitoring. Smart meters make it possible to leverage data analytics and optimise distribution networks by detecting and mitigating inefficiencies such as leaks and illegal connections which constitute NRW losses [35]. Other strategies may include scaling the use of energy intensive desalination facilities, directing more funding towards water recycling and promoting more effective water conservation practices [36].

2.6 Industrial Engineering Techniques

From literature reviewed, there is limited utilisation of Industrial Engineering techniques in water management. Some techniques that can be applied to water resource management include [37]:

1. Reliability-Centred Maintenance (RCM), 2. Condition-Based Maintenance (CBM), 3. Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), 4. Failure Mode and Effect Analysis (FMEA), 5. Queueing Theory, 6. Optimization Models (Linear Programming and MILP), 7. Predictive Maintenance with IoT & AI, 8. Real-Time Demand Forecasting & Control, 9. Water Loss Management (Non-Revenue Water), 10. Hydraulic Modelling, 11. Six Sigma for Process Optimization, 12. Kaizen (Continuous Improvement), 13. Kaizen (Continuous Improvement), 14. Smart Water Networks (SWN), 15. Energy Audits and Efficiency Improvements. This paper's main suggestion is to use RCM for the infrastructure and development of Smart Water Networks (SWN).

3 RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Design

This paper approaches the study from a philosophy of critical realism, recognising that while public information is available from various sources, the underlying reasons for behaviour observed is not obvious. The two utilities under study are not open to sharing core information with outside researchers and therefore public information has been used. The study utilises mainly qualitative information which is analysed to derive conclusions. An exploration of narratives around the electricity crisis, constitute proxy case studies for purposes of this study, and are collected from reliable sources. They are then investigated for lessons learned, to determine how sustainable water resource strategies can be established – by transferring

lessons from the electricity crisis to the looming water crisis. Focus is placed on systemic issues contributing towards the electricity crisis. The aim is to illuminate vulnerabilities in how resources are managed so as to mitigate or prevent a future water crisis.

3.1.1 Data Collection

Secondary data is extensively used. This includes official government documentation relating to infrastructure, governance & policy, and systemic failures. Areas emphasised are indicated in table 1:

Table 1: Data collection summary

Source	Examples
Document Analysis	Government & non-Gov reports, Policy Documents (IRP, NDP2030) – both water and electricity sectors
Academic Literature	Historic and current analysis of South Africa's crises – specifically systemic failures, root causes and lessons learned
Non-Academic Literature	News reports, trends and current events from reliable local news outlets

3.1.2 Case Study

The publicly available narrative on the electricity crisis provides this paper the opportunity to create a proxy case study within the literature, from which lessons can be extracted and transformed into strategies to efficiently manage the water sector.

3.1.3 Qualitative Methodology

Table 2: Investigative steps

	Method	Description	Purpose
1.	Ishikawa Diagram	Graphically represent root causes	Identify and categorise all root causes
2.	Document Analysis	Obtain policy document, government reports, academic papers, media articles in both sectors	Thematic Analysis – identify key themes, challenges, governance failures in electricity to draw parallels for water management
3.	Systems Thinking Framework	Modelling the interconnectedness between the two sectors	Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) - Encapsulate how various factors (policy, infrastructure, governance) interact and influence each other
4.	Water Resource Management Framework	Framework for decision making focusing on ways Industrial Engineering techniques aids efficient decision making	Provide strategies and insights using lessons learned from the electricity crisis

3.1.4 Validity and Reliability

The data obtained during research can be validated by considering the sources of the literature and documents with peer reviewed and official government papers considered more valid. Official Government websites were mainly used for documentation.

3.1.5 Ethical Considerations

Only secondary research was undertaken using publicly available data and some journals; hence no risks were involved, and ethical considerations were adhered to.

4 DATA PROCESSING AND RESULTS

4.1 Root Causes and Effects

An Ishikawa (Cause and Effect) diagram is used to present categories of causes which led to the electricity crisis. Each category is known as a root ***cause*** and within it are subcategories that contribute to the ***effect*** at the 'head' of the diagram – labelled "Electricity crisis". These causes were extrapolated after a thematic, pattern analysis of the literature.

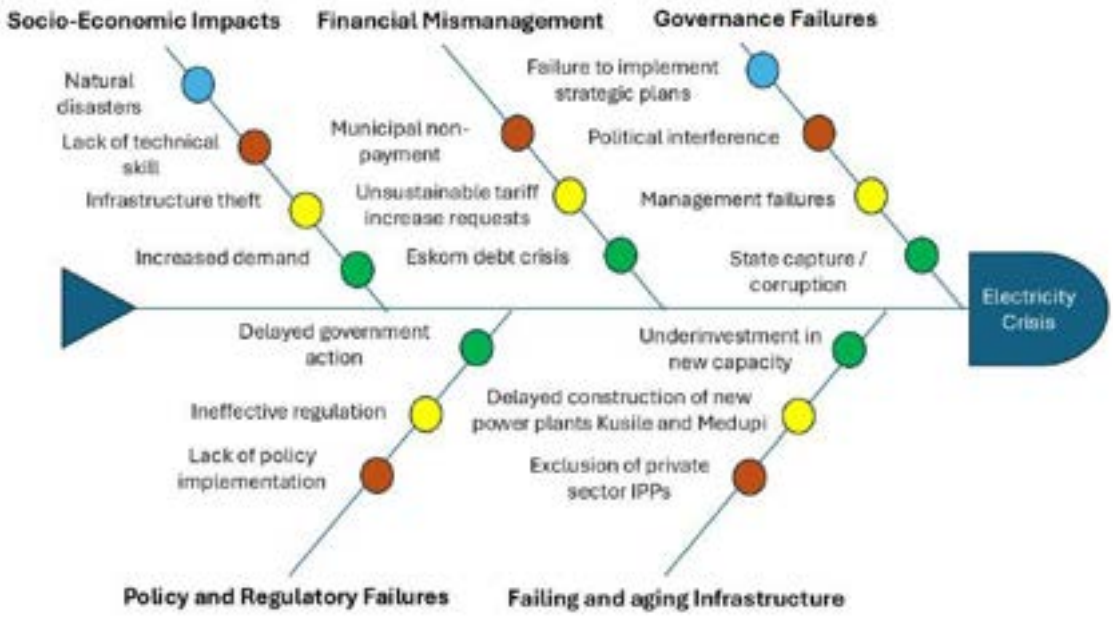

Figure 3: Root Causes contributing to the Electricity crisis

4.2 Lessons Learned from the Electricity Crisis

Table 3: Summary of lessons learned

PRIORITY	LESSONS LEARNED	EXPLANATION
1.	Infrastructure Maintenance	A healthy infrastructure network is essential to meet electricity demand. Regular maintenance should be prioritised which would prevent units failing leading to blackouts.
2.	Politics	The determining factor as to which strategies are implemented. It is the control of resource allocation and is severely threatened by state capture and corruption. The financial and operational health of utilities is heavily dependent on politics surrounding decision making.
3.	Diversification of Energy Sources	Overreliance on coal limits other options when coal-fired stations are not managed properly. Supply suffers and demand cannot be met; diversifying via IPPs may assist the national grid and alleviate crises.
4.	Demand Management	A demand management strategy known as 'loadshedding' was an act of mitigating the impact of the crisis so all citizens may have electricity; even if access was limited.
5.	Regulatory Oversight	Strict frameworks and oversight are needed along with heavy penalties for non-compliance. This creates accountability and

PRIORITY	LESSONS LEARNED	EXPLANATION
		reinforces service delivery from utilities, along with compliance from policy makers.
6.	Research and Development	Upgrading technology used in current infrastructure may make systems operate more efficiently. Additionally, investing into research can potentially unlock new ways to harness power and meet demand efficiently and using renewable energy.

4.3 Modelling the South African Water Landscape

Using the lessons learned, a number of independent variables can be created to model influential factors on the water infrastructure in SA. These independent variables are also affected by their own sub-independent variables. A systems thinking tool known as a Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) is used to depict the interconnectedness of these independent variables and allows a model of the chain of influence within the SA environment.

Following the arrows will help to interpret the diagram. The plus and minus signs each represent the first variable adding or subtracting to the consecutive variable at the end of the arrowhead. Some arrows have two dashed lines through them; this indicates a natural delay in the time it takes for the effect to occur. For example, the variable 'Policy and Governance Framework' is directly preceding to the variable 'Systemic Failures in the Electricity Crisis' in such a way that it has a direct, reductive effect on 'Systemic Failures in the Electricity Crisis'. Which is why the consecutive variable is connected via a negative sign. A positive sign indicates the opposite, an enhancing effect.

The ***dependent variable*** in this diagram is the ***'Water Resource Management Efficiency'***, which is depicted as interconnected and dependent on the rest of the variables.

These variables have been assigned letters so that the loops can be presented neatly in Table 4 below.

A = Water Resource Management efficiency

B = Lessons Learned from Electricity crisis

C = Systemic Failures in the Electricity Crisis

D = Politics

E = Policy and Governance Framework

F = Public Engagement and Trust

G = Stakeholder Collaboration

H = Innovation and Technology

I = Economic and Environmental Conditions

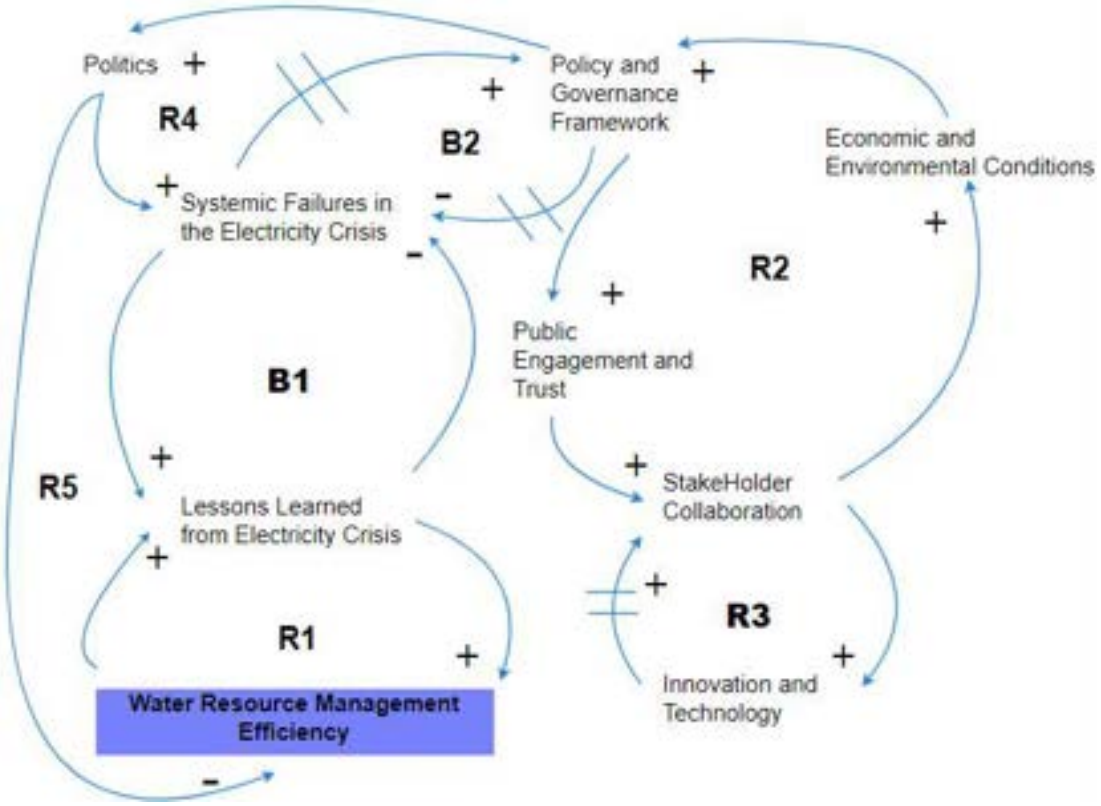

Figure 4: Model of South African Water Landscape in context of lessons learned

Table 4: CLD Loops

Loop #	Loop Name	Type	Nature	Sequence
1	R1	Reinforcing	Unstable	A > B > A
2	R2	Reinforcing	Unstable	E > F > G > I > E
3	R3	Reinforcing	Unstable	G > H > G
4	R4	Reinforcing	Unstable	C > E > D > C
5	R5	Reinforcing	Unstable	D > A > B > C > E > D
6	B1	Balancing	Stabilising	B > C > B
7	B2	Balancing	Stabilising	C > E > C

4.4 Efficient Water Management Framework

Table 5: Framework for Water Resource Management Efficiency

Key Focus Area	Actionable Strategy	Industrial Engineering Approach	Implementation Details
1. Infrastructure Maintenance and Efficiency	Regular Maintenance and Upgrades	**Reliability-Centred Maintenance (RCM):** Identify effective maintenance strategies by prioritising and predicting failures in water system assets such as pipelines, pumps and treatment facilities	**Predictive maintenance using IoT and AI:** Using IoT, an advanced water network can be created with integrated sensors, controlled by a central system of machine learning (ML) algorithms. The aim would be to create a system capable of anticipating breakdowns and enhancing maintenance planning. This would include forecasting of system irregularities and issues in components. The system

Key Focus Area	Actionable Strategy	Industrial Engineering Approach	Implementation Details
		Smart Water Network (SWN)	should culminate into an interconnected, **Smart Water Network (SWN)**
1a) Optimizing Capacity Utilization	Improve Capacity Utilization of Water Systems	**Queuing Theory:** Modelling the water distribution network could aid in streamlining water flow during high demand times. Creating a simulation for demand management. **Optimization Models:** Mixed integer linear programming may allow water efficiency to be enhanced within the network by reducing wastage and maximising capacity.	**Real-Time Demand Forecasting & Control:** This involves adjusting water distribution according to demand changes. Using ML to predict short term variations in water consumption and facilitating flow rate management. **Water Loss Management:** NRW loss is a huge problem relating to dilapidating infrastructure. Creating an optimised system with technology such as sensors, smart meters and pressure monitors, can allow the detection of leaks in the system. Also, pinpointing the location of the leaks would enhance maintenance and allow the system to work more optimally after the problem is fixed.
2. Policy and Governance Framework	Strengthening Policy Design, Implementation, and Accountability	**Governance Process Mapping:** Making use of Business Process Reengineering (BPR) to visually map government procedures. The aim is conformance to quality in water management. **Institutional Change Management:** Government systems undergoing transformation need stringent guidelines to efficiently affect positive change. Established methodologies like 'Kotter's 8 step model' may aid in facilitating a seamless transition. **Participatory Decision Making:**	**Governance Structure Simulation** By simulating governance structures an answer can be found on the efficiency of their outputs and decision making, given the complexities of water systems. **Performance Metrics & Feedback Loops:** A feedback system would facilitate an assessment to measure the impact that policies and government structures have on water management. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) would aid in monitoring the performance of current policies and promote accountability where there is a lack of quality in decision making. **Information Systems for Communication:** Centralised Decision Support Systems (DSS) can deliver key information quickly across all

Key Focus Area	Actionable Strategy	Industrial Engineering Approach	Implementation Details
		Using a 'Systemic Design' mentality to proactively involve stakeholders in policymaking. This ensures an inclusive approach which encourages participatory decision making - in hopes of faster and more positively impactful decisions.	levels of government. Assisting in the management or planning of water and infrastructure. **Capacity Building Programs:** Initiating skill gap analyses and training needs evaluations to benchmark currents standards and skills. Once deficient areas are identified, the correct training of staff can be administered. This will enhance government capabilities and facilitate agility in management.
3. Politics	Strengthening Political Stability and Policy Alignment	**Political Risk Assessment:** To measure possible instability, conduct a Failure Mode and Effect Analysis (FMEA) **Process Optimization:** Implement Lean Management to reduce inefficiency and delays in executing policies.	**Political Forecasting:** Monte Carlo simulations model political uncertainties by simulating randomized scenarios that can forecast policy outcomes – based on past statistics and probabilities. It can aid in anticipating politically driven delays or budget constraints. This helps strategic planning in water management to mitigate these risks. **Policy Alignment Platforms:** A platform which brings together decision makers, aligning their policies on water governance and preventing political interference

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Root Causes

The origins of the electricity crisis can be traced back to the 1998 White Paper Act – where an accurate supply-demand gap by 2007 was predicted. Eskom warned government of this but were ignored and no IPPs were procured. The delay in government response led to severe underinvestment into new infrastructure, which resulted in loadshedding. A combination of financial mismanagement and sudden investment into Medupi and Kusile, propelled Eskom into further debt – deepening the crisis. Similarly, in the water sector, poor infrastructure contributes to supply shortages. On average, 40% of water in the country's network is lost to non-revenue water (NRW) – this highlights the urgent need for dedicated maintenance and efficiency improvements to prevent further wastage.

5.2 Lessons Learned

It is the highest priority to fix infrastructure in both the electricity and water industries. Aging infrastructure requires predictive maintenance and timely upgrades to operate sustainably. Eskom's reliance on coal is symmetrical to South Africa's reliance on surface water sources, which are threatened by population growth, drought and climate change. Improving resilience

in SA means that alternative sources for both resources should be explored. Possibilities for alternative water sources include desalination, wastewater recycling and efficient groundwater management. However, strong regulatory enforcement will play a crucial role in preventing mismanagement. Moving forward, a combination of proactive governance around infrastructure, policy enforcement and sustainable resource management would aid in mitigating the future water crisis.

5.3 Variables and Modelling

Lessons from the electricity crisis were applied in the CLD to model 'Water Resource Management Efficiency' and identifying common variables between both sectors. Key influences include politics, corruption, project delays and systemic failures. It is possible that different research perspectives can assign a varying level of importance to these factors, but the CLD is meant to illustrate the authors perspective of the interconnectedness of sub-variables. It depicts reinforcing loops to illustrate instability with governance and their investment into infrastructure. The CLD model contains several unstable feedback loops which aligns with the reality of South Africa's crises.

5.4 Water Management Framework

The framework integrates Industrial Engineering techniques in an effort to enhance water resource management. It draws upon the insights learned in the electricity crisis and outlines actionable strategies. A major drawback is that that the framework does not account for government funding, it assumes that resources can be allocated if necessary. Politics plays a significant role in releasing funds to turn strategies into a reality. The framework highlights immediate areas which need to be addressed and can be seen below.

Immediate focus areas (in order of priority):

1. **Infrastructure Maintenance and Efficiency** - Ensure that technical solutions and action strategies are viable by investing in technology/modernization.
2. **Politics** - Ensure that political commitment aligns and supports the proposed strategies.
3. **Policy and Governance Framework** – Strengthen the enforcement of regulations to ensure policies are implemented effectively.

6 CONCLUSION

Working infrastructure is foundational to any technical solution. It is important to ensure that politics and corruption do not interfere with reform efforts, since political influence affects allocation of funding and how it is used. A lack of proper regulation would negate the positive policies and strategies meant to enhance infrastructure. Therefore, enforcing strict regulations is necessary to prevent a future water crisis. Fixing and upgrading the infrastructure is key to creating long-term water security.

A crucial lesson learned from the electricity crisis is the need for productive and timeous stakeholder engagement when it comes to managing water resources. The feasibility of long-term solutions depends on stakeholder involvement and may - at the least - include government and private partnerships, community engagement and general cohesion between government, businesses and society. Experience in handling the electricity crisis highlights the need for careful regulation of water consumption and supply. Contingency plans should be prepared to manage scarce periods and ensure that everyone has access to enough water.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE COMMON DEVELOPMENT OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a field within computer science that leverages algorithms, data processing, and computational capabilities to mimic human reasoning and facilitate decision-making. The Global South faces numerous challenges, including limited access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. AI presents a unique opportunity to address these issues and promote common development. This paper explores the potential of AI in fostering sustainable development in the Global South, with particular focus on the BRICS mechanism. It examines the role of AI in enhancing economic growth, improving healthcare delivery, and expanding educational access. Additionally, it discusses the ethical considerations and potential risks associated with AI deployment in these regions. The need for collaborative efforts among governments, private sector, and international organizations to harness AI's full potential for the common development of the Global South is highlighted. By leveraging AI technologies, the Global South can overcome critical developmental challenges and achieve sustainable growth.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Global South, Educational tools, Machine learning, BRICS mechanism

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1 INTRODUCTION

The world has been divided along the North-South dichotomy, though not on strict geographical boundaries, but largely based on historical, economic, and political factors. The Global South refers to countries that are generally classified as developing, least developed nations, or underdeveloped. Many of the countries in the Global South are in the Southern Hemisphere, largely in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and parts of Asia and Oceania. On the other hand, the Global North consists of highly developed nations, including North America, Europe, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. These countries tend to have stronger economies, advanced technology, and higher living standards. Countries in the Global South are often characterized by lower economic development, poverty, income inequality, political instability, weaker democratic institutions, infrastructural deficits, limited industrialization, inadequate healthcare, inadequate educational opportunities, and other challenges. Unlike the Global North, which is characterized by strong democratic institutions, industrialization, advanced infrastructure, cutting-edge technology, etc., the Global South is marked by political instability and governance challenges, struggles with trade imbalances and economic dependency, and has widened economic disparities. Many countries in the Global South still struggle with poverty, inadequate healthcare, and limited educational opportunities, and depend on income from subsistence agriculture and raw material exports for income [1]. The term Global South functions as more than a metaphor for underdevelopment.

The Global South is home to over 6 billion people and makes significant contributions to the global economy. In 2023, the Global South accounted for about 42 % of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 44 % of merchandise exports, and 65 % of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows. BRICS countries, a prominent group within the Global South, contribute about 25 % to the global GDP (Figure 1) [2]. For the countries in the Global South to bridge development gaps, enhance economic growth, and improve living standards, there is a need for emphasis on the rapidly changing economic landscape. To do this, countries must invest in strengthening economic growth, advancing technological innovation, investing in education and human capital development, improving governance and policy, and implementing sustainable development and climate action [3]. The emerging trends show that some Global South nations, like China, India, and Brazil, are rapidly industrializing and gaining global influence. Also, countries in the Global South are increasingly collaborating and forming groups such as BRICS, South-South cooperation, on trade, technology, and achieve sustainable development. These efforts, if sustained, will deliver the Global South from underdevelopment and backwardness.

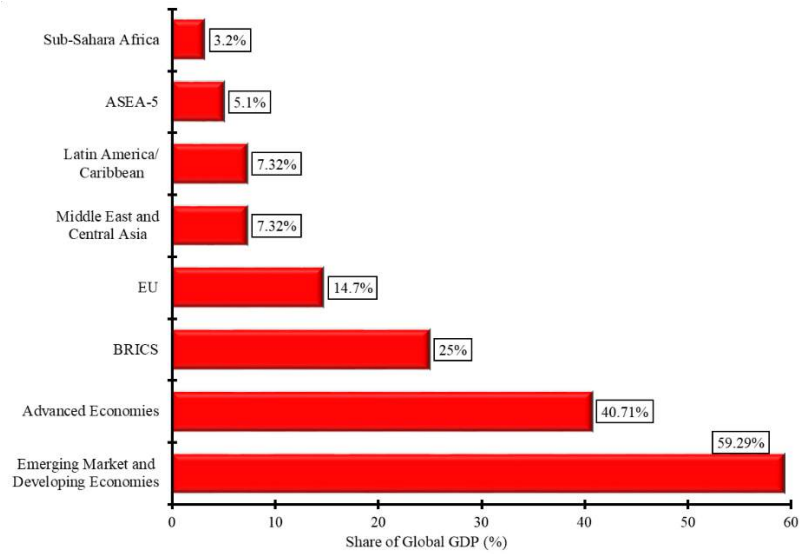

Figure 1: Share of global regions in the GDP in 2023. Data culled from [2]

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a universal blueprint for addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and access to essential services. Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers transformative potential to accelerate progress toward these goals, particularly in the Global South where developmental gaps remain pronounced. Investments in technological innovations such as AI has been identified as one of the strategies to pursue economic growth, improve public services, pursue financial inclusion, and ensure sustainable development. AI can enhance productivity in agriculture, improve social services, upscale manufacturing, and create new job opportunities. A recent study by Subramaniam et al. [4] with countries and different levels of institutional quality found that AI is a good predictor of financial inclusion. AI can also support climate resilience, renewable energy, and smart infrastructure, helping countries tackle environmental challenges, while AI-powered fintech solutions can expand access to banking and credit, benefiting underserved populations. Recent studies by Kong et al. [5], Soares Seto [6], and Das [7] described how the Global South can leverage AI and other digital innovations to improve the lives of citizens. The authors justify the need for rapid investment in AI to improve social services, create employment, improve security and surveillance, and boost economic growth. Another study by Borines et al. [8] highlighted the importance and challenges of AI adoption and integration in sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, and manufacturing. They reported the application of AI in enhancing crop yield predictions, automating medical diagnostics, and improving educational accessibility in developing economies. While acknowledging the role of AI in boosting productivity and sustainable economic growth, the disparities between advanced economies and developing nations, including the Global South cannot be overemphasized. The disparities are attributed to infrastructural deficits, a lack of skilled workforce, and limited policy frameworks. Countries in the Global South also face challenges in data privacy, AI bias, and equitable access to AI-driven solutions. These can be addressed through inclusive AI governance to address ethical concerns and regulatory gaps [9, 10]. To accelerate AI adoption in the Global South, governments are encouraged to invest in AI education, digital infrastructure, and ethical AI frameworks to maximize benefits. There is a need for international cooperation and public-private partnerships to ensure countries enjoy the benefits of technological innovations [11].

Despite these studies and their outcomes, the relevant question to ask, which forms the motivation for the current study, is whether the subject matter of AI adoption and integration in the global South has been sufficiently addressed. The study uses qualitative and conceptual

analysis to explore the role of AI in fostering inclusive economic growth, technological advancement, and sustainable development across Global South nations, addressing regional disparities and enabling digital transformation, with special focus on the BRICS countries. The objective of the study is to investigate current AI initiatives that can aid development in the Global South, analyzing challenges and opportunities. This effort identifies the trajectory of AI development, opportunities, and challenges in the Global South, while suggesting future research directions in the research domain. The current study focuses on the opportunities such as economic development, social impact, and technological empowerment while identifying solutions to the challenges of infrastructural deficits, digital divide, policy and regulation gaps, and ethical concerns of AI in the Global South. The outcome of this study will draw more attention to the need for the integration of AI into the development of countries in the Global South.

2 TRAJECTORY OF AI DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

AI is at the forefront of recent global technological innovation and is noted for its ability to simulate human intelligence through algorithms and computing power. Globally, AI technologies hold enormous potential to address various challenges and opportunities across different sectors, thereby contributing to sustainable socioeconomic development. It is not surprising, therefore, that the global penetration of AI has increased tremendously from the USD 638.23 billion recorded in 2024 to USD 757.58 billion in 2025 and has been projected to reach USD 3,680.47 billion by 2034 (Figure 2). North America is expected to contribute about 36.92 % of the expected growth (Figure 2 inset) [12]. While there has been an increased penetration of digital technologies the Global South, the development of AI in the Global South has evolved through distinct phases, shaped by technological advancements, economic conditions, and policy frameworks. The trajectory of AI in the Global South can be divided into four distinct phases, spanning early 2010s till date, as shown in Figure 3.

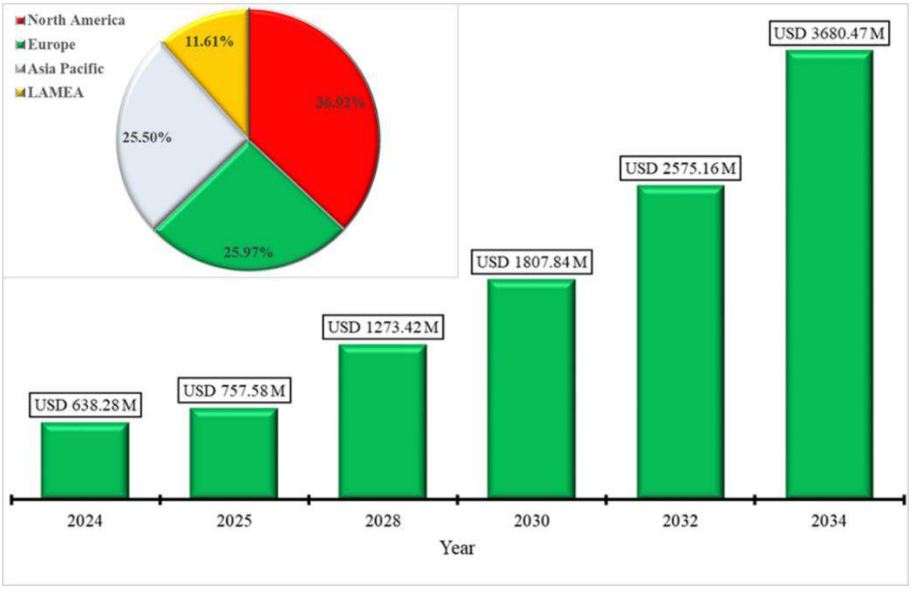

Figure 2: AI market size; (inset) regional market share. Data extracted from [12]

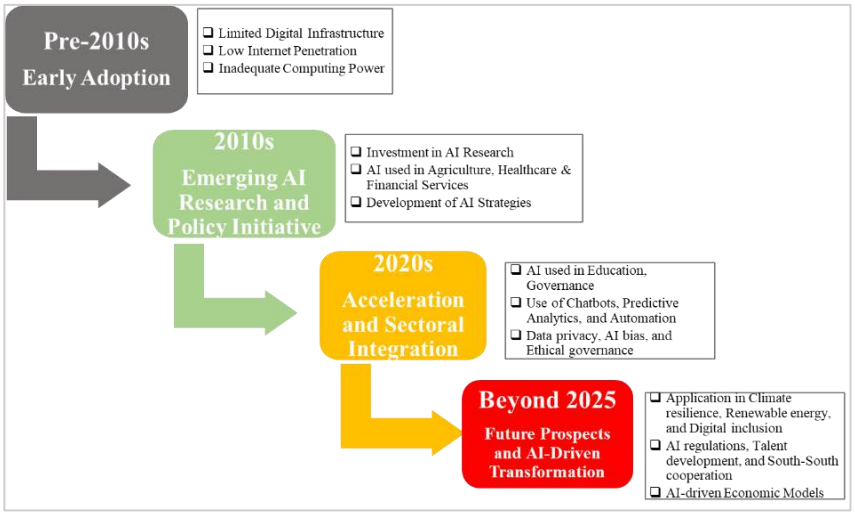

Figure 3: Trajectory of AI development in the Global South

For a considerable time, the Global South relied heavily on AI technologies and platforms developed by major technological powers and advanced economies such as the United States and China. During this period, many countries in the region were largely passive adopters of AI, rather than actively participating in shaping its development [11]. The first phase of AI development in the Global South was before the 2010s, which is marked by early adoption and limited infrastructure. This period was marked by slow AI adoption as a result of limited digital infrastructure, low internet penetration, and inadequate computing power. Most AI applications used during this period were imported from developed nations, with minimal local innovation. However, most governments in the global South focused on basic information and communication technology (ICT) development, laying the groundwork for future AI integration and utilization [13].

The second phase was the period of the 2010s, which was characterized by emerging AI research and policy initiatives for manpower development to lay a solid foundation for AI in the region. During this phase, countries began investing in AI research, with universities, research institutes, and startups exploring machine learning (ML) applications, reflected in the growth of scientific studies published on the topic [14]. This led to the introduction of AI to agriculture, healthcare, and financial services, improving efficiency and accessibility. However, the development of national AI strategies, policies, and regulatory frameworks remained weak. There is acceleration and sectoral integration of AI during which AI was extended into education, governance, and smart infrastructure [12]. This is driven by increased funding, manpower development, research, and international collaborations. The third phase also witnessed the use of AI-powered chatbots, predictive analytics, and automation in public services. With the increased popularity, adoption, and integration of AI into social and public services, there were legitimate concerns over data privacy, AI bias, ethical governance, and the need for responsible AI development across the regions. AI is expected to play a key role in climate resilience, renewable energy, and digital inclusion. Governments are escalating work on AI regulations, talent development, and South-South cooperation to strengthen AI ecosystems. There are prospects for AI-driven transformation and economic models to reduce dependency on traditional industries, fostering sustainable growth [8, 15].

3 OPPORTUNITIES OF AI IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

3.1 Economic Development

AI presents significant economic development opportunities for the Global South, helping nations overcome traditional barriers and inclusively accelerate economic growth. AI-powered automation enhances efficiency in manufacturing, agriculture, and services, reducing costs, boosting productivity, and increasing industrialization. The adoption of AI-driven smart supply chain optimization improves logistics, reducing waste and enhancing trade competitiveness. The integration of AI solutions into the financial sector accelerates financial inclusion, provides access to banking, credit, and investment opportunities for underserved populations. The use of ML models in the economic system helps predict market trends, enabling better financial decision-making, and a wide array of activities can become more efficient. AI is enabling small businesses to optimize operations, connect to global markets, and innovate new products or services, thereby helping the development of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) and startups. AI-powered digital platforms enable entrepreneurs to reach global markets and enhance entrepreneurship and innovation [8, 16]. These perspectives are much aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals by United Nations, as the number 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth and the number 9 – Industry, innovation, and infrastructure.

3.2 Social Impact

AI presents significant social impact opportunities for the Global South, helping nations address inequalities, improve education, healthcare, public services, and foster inclusive development. AI-powered adaptive learning platforms personalize education, enhance learning, and expand access to education for students in underserved regions, while AI-driven language translation tools help bridge communication gaps in multilingual communities. In the healthcare sector, integration of AI improves medical diagnostics, enabling early disease detection and better treatment outcomes, while AI-powered telemedicine solutions provide healthcare access to remote and rural populations with limited infrastructure. AI-driven data analytics help strengthen governance and public services, promote social inclusion and equity, and address poverty alleviation, disaster response, resource distribution, and other social issues to make informed policy decisions. AI-powered chatbots and automation, assistive technologies, and predictive analytics help to streamline public service delivery, reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies, support individuals with disabilities, improve accessibility, and address social welfare programs. AI supports climate resilience and sustainability, enhances disaster prediction and response, helping communities prepare for climate-related risks, while AI-powered smart agriculture solutions improve food security and resource efficiency [13, 16]. These advancements could be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals by United Nations concerning the number 1 – No poverty, the number 2 – Zero hunger, the number 3 – Good Health and Well-being and the number 4 – Quality Education.

3.3 Technological Empowerment

AI-driven technological empowerment presents transformative opportunities for the Global South, enabling to stablish cities and communities where above the minimum infrastructure there is also a clean and sustainable environment. The integration of AI helps to expand digital infrastructure, strengthen local innovation and collaborative research, enhance workforce development, improve public services and governance, and help to project geographical systems that embrace sustainable development. AI-driven smart grids and internet expansion projects optimize energy distribution, enhance connectivity, improve access to electricity, and bridge the digital divide. AI fosters homegrown tech startups, enhances e-governance, connects talent with opportunities, reduces unemployment, and equips workers with digital skills for emerging industries. AI-powered research platform accelerates scientific discoveries

in healthcare, agriculture, and climate resilience, while AI-driven predictive analytics help governments make data-informed decisions for infrastructure planning, streamline administrative processes, and improve service delivery [5, 13, 16]. These type of improvement could help BRICS to promote the Sustainable Development Goals by United Nations, especially focusing on that of the number 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy, 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities and 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

4 CHALLENGES OF AI IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

4.1 Infrastructural Deficits

Lack of high-speed internet, reliable electricity, advanced computing facilities, data storage capabilities, and poor cloud computing access, which might restrict AI deployment and deters AI scalability in the Global South. Inadequate infrastructure hinders the training and retention of AI-skilled professionals, limits research activities, and slows innovation and AI adoption. Governments and private sectors should invest in clean and affordable electricity generation, broadband expansion, cloud computing, and AI-ready data centers. Public-private partnerships can accelerate smart city initiatives to improve connectivity [7].

4.2 Digital Divide

Limited internet access, infrastructural deficiencies, high cost of AI implementation, inadequate AI research funding, lack of AI talent and education, inadequate public awareness, scepticism about AI's role in job displacement, etc., exacerbates inequalities, make AI adoption difficult, and hinders AI scalability. Expanding digital infrastructure, strengthening AI education and workforce development, encouraging local AI innovation, and building public awareness and trust reduces digital divide, improve inclusivity, and enhance trust and security [7].

4.3 Policy and Regulation Gaps

Policy and regulation gaps pose significant challenges to AI adoption in the Global South, affecting governance, ethical AI use, and equitable access. Lack of comprehensive AI policies, limited institutional capacity, ethical and social concerns, and especially biased perspectives on AI, pose significant policy and regulation gaps [17]. The development of AI-specific regulations, strengthening of institutional capacity, support for local AI innovation and collaboration, development of transparent AI governance, and enhancing public awareness and ethical AI use will ameliorate the challenges of policy and regulations gaps. In addition, governments should establish clear AI policies focusing on ethical AI use, data privacy, and security.

4.4 Ethical and Social Concerns

Challenges such as discrimination, job displacement and economic inequality, data privacy and security risks, and limited AI governance and regulation continue to militate against the adoption of AI in the Global South. The problem of digital divide and accessibility and lack of internet connectivity and AI literacy, are manifesting in the form of unequal access to AI-driven education, healthcare, and financial services continues to widen social gaps. Rural communities often lack internet connectivity and AI literacy, limiting participation. The government should develop ethical AI frameworks, promote inclusive AI policies, strengthen data privacy regulations, and expand AI access and digital literacy to resolve the ethical and social concerns. Countries in the Global South region should encourage South-South AI collaboration, share AI research and best practices, and encourage regional AI alliances to foster innovation and develop localized AI solutions for social challenges.

5 AI DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE BRICS MECHANISM

The BRICS nations are actively advancing AI to enhance economic growth, technological innovation, and global competitiveness. However, their AI development trajectories vary, with some nation leading while others need strategic interventions to catch up. Individual countries have invested in and developed their AI infrastructure and expanded the utilization avenues. China can be described as the AI powerhouse with massive investment in research, infrastructure, and talent development, and has applied AI initiatives in facial recognition, autonomous systems, and AI-driven governance. India is an emerging AI hub, with rapid applications in healthcare, finance, and agriculture, supported by a thriving tech ecosystem. The focus of Russia's AI development is the military, cybersecurity, and industrial automation, while Brazil is leveraging economic inclusion to integrate AI into agriculture, healthcare, and financial services. In South Africa, the focus of AI is education, governance, and financial inclusion to bridge the socio-economic gaps. The BRICS countries are working individually and along the South-South cooperation to address the challenges facing their AI development ecosystem [18]. Figure 4 summarizes the AI development and challenges in individual BRICS countries.

Figure 4: Summary of AI development in BRICS countries

Collectively, BRICS nations must strengthen AI collaboration, expand AI research partnerships, share expertise and resources, and execute joint AI projects in healthcare, climate resilience, and cybersecurity to accelerate development. Countries lagging, i.e., Brazil and South Africa, need stronger AI infrastructure, including data centers, cloud computing, and high-speed internet. Rapid investment in AI-ready data centers and computing power should be prioritized. To enhance AI talent development, AI education and workforce training must be scaled up across BRICS, especially in Russia, Brazil, and South Africa. AI-focused university programs and vocational training can bridge skill gaps and limit the digital divide. BRICS nations must invest in the development of AI governance and ethical frameworks to safeguard against abuse and ensure responsible AI use. Ethical AI policies and regulations should address bias, data privacy, and security concerns. To encourage AI-driven economic growth and upgrade the quality of life of the citizens, AI should be leveraged for trade, industrial

automation, and financial inclusion, while AI-powered startups and innovation hubs should be funded and encouraged to drive economic transformation [19].

6 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The role of AI in fostering sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. While the developed economies and the Global North have integrated AI technologies to improve their livelihood, upscale their citizens, and move their countries towards sustainable development, there is a need to adopt such to the Global South to bridge the digital gap. The current study interrogates the adoption of AI to fast-track common development of the Global South. Bearing in mind the history and trajectory of AI in the Global South, the integration of AI in the Global South presents a transformative opportunity for fostering inclusive economic growth, technological innovation, and sustainable development. While AI has shown potential in agriculture, healthcare, governance, and education, the region faces challenges such as infrastructural deficits, digital divides, policy gaps, and ethical concerns. This study concludes that AI is a potent catalyst for sustainable development, and AI-driven solutions can accelerate industrialization, improve financial inclusion, and enhance public services, reducing socio-economic disparities. By addressing infrastructure and digital divides, tackling regulatory and ethical issues, developing sustainable and inclusive AI models, and strengthening South-South innovations and collaborations, countries in the Global South can reshape development pathways for the Global South, ensuring technological equity, economic progress, and sustainable futures [20, 21].

Going forward, the outcome of this study on adoption of AI for common development of the Global South requires targeted research to maximize its benefits while addressing infrastructural, ethical, policy concerns, and other challenges. Future research should target the application of AI for sustainable development, including the development of home-grown AI-powered smart agriculture solutions to enhance food security, circular economy, and resource efficiency. A multidisciplinary research should be commissioned to assess AI's role in boosting industrialization and financial inclusion, study AI-driven entrepreneurship models to support small businesses and startups, and examine AI-powered trade and supply chain optimization for regional economic growth. For deeper insights, other research domains such as AI and economic transformation, AI for social equity and inclusion, AI Infrastructure and digital transformation, and AI governance and ethical frameworks can be sufficiently explored.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN AFRICA, BUILDING ON THE EXPERIENCE OF CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to drive significant socio-economic development in Africa, leveraging the continent's unique challenges and opportunities. By examining the successes and lessons learned from China's AI advancements, this paper aims to explore how African nations can effectively adopt and implement AI technologies for their common development. The study highlights key areas where AI can make a substantial impact, such as technology development, telecommunications, infrastructure, healthcare, education, agriculture, and governance. Additionally, it discusses the importance of building robust digital infrastructure and capacity, fostering AI literacy, and ensuring ethical and inclusive AI practices. By drawing on China's experience, African countries can develop tailored strategies to harness AI's transformative power, promoting sustainable growth and improving the quality of life for their populations. This paper underscores the need for collaboration between governments, the private sector, and international organizations to create an enabling environment for AI innovation in Africa.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, AI literacy, Digital Infrastructure, Africa, Development.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is at the forefront of recent global technological innovation and is noted for its ability to simulate human intelligence through algorithms and computing power. From healthcare, education, agriculture, security, governance, disaster risk management, and industrial development to other sectors, AI has become a great asset in ensuring significant advancements, changing the course of life in the most dramatic way. Globally, AI technologies hold enormous potential to address various challenges and opportunities across different sectors, thereby contributing to sustainable socioeconomic development. It is not surprising, therefore, that the global penetration of AI has increased tremendously from the USD 638.23 billion recorded in 2024 to USD 757.58 billion in 2025 and has been projected to reach USD 3,680.47 billion by 2034 (Figure 1a). North America is expected to contribute about 36.92 % of the expected growth (Figure 1b). The United States is expected to maintain its dominant position during the forecast, with a total market value of USD 851.46 billion by 2034 [1]. Africa's AI market size, which was USD 4.51 billion in 2025, has been projected to become USD 18.27 billion by 2031, provided there are concerted efforts to address some of the challenges confronting the sector [2]. Figure 1 shows the AI market size for the world, the United States, and Africa between 2024 and 2034 and the regional market share in 2024.

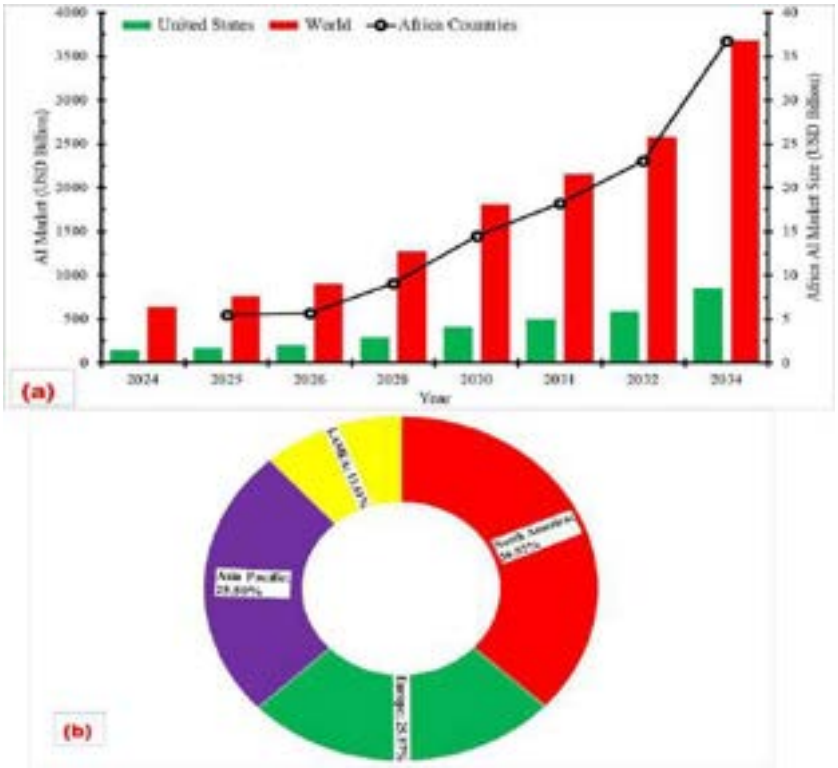

Figure 1: AI market size and regional market share. Data sourced from [1, 2]

The rising penetration and popularity of AI technologies are attributed to its increased deployment in life-saving measures such as medical services, self-driving cars, etc., across the globe. There have been consistent and heavy investments by organizations, industries, and governments in research and development and infrastructural upgrades, which are continuously fueling technological advancements, particularly in AI technologies. The development of novel deep learning, machine learning algorithms, natural language processing, machine vision, automated reasoning, and integrated cloud platforms has also contributed to the phenomenal growth of AI. Similarly, end-use industries, financial analysts, crime detectors, and others have integrated AI into their business processes to streamline

their operations, meet increasing customer needs, and gain more competitive advantage. In many jurisdictions, the government has formulated and implemented policies that favour the deployment of AI technologies in governance and other vital areas [3]. The increased investments by Google, Microsoft, IBM, Amazon, Apple, and other global tech giants in AI technologies are expected to positively impact the market growth and penetration of AI. The burgeoning demand for AI technologies among the youthful population and the emerging relevance of AI in various end-use verticals such as banking and finance, logistics, retail, automotive, security, etc., is expected to significantly drive the growth of the AI market in the immediate future.

Despite the increased penetration of AI at the planetary level, Africa has not been able to adequately harness the potential and opportunities in AI technologies despite the enormous skills and natural resources available in the continent. Similarly, the African region has not been able to harness the global reach of the AI supply chain like the giant Tech companies of the Global North and China. Though Africa's AI journey started in the mid-2010s, the expected benefits have not manifested due to poverty, deficit manpower, infrastructural deficiencies, lack of policy and operational frameworks, and other barriers. For example, as of 2022, only 2.7 % of Africans have access to 5G internet, a major requirement for AI deployment, compared to 45 % access to 5G in China. Also, Africa has only 140 data centers, while China had 449 data centers in 2022 [4]. These narratives show the level of growth of AI in Africa compared with China. Though the AI's potential in Africa is immense, the continent needs to draw lessons from China's phenomenal internet access and 5G growth by encouraging local and international participation and investments to develop its AI infrastructure.

Recently, Arakpogun et al. [5], Ade-Ibijola and Okonkwo [6], and Gwagwa et al. [7] dwelled on the benefits, opportunities, emerging challenges, and policy dimensions of effective design, development, adoption, and use of AI technologies in Africa. They were unanimous that AI holds enormous potential to aid economic growth, enhance productivity, improve medical services, education, transportation, agricultural and food security, and contribute to sustainable development of African countries. They, however, recommended the establishment of robust governance structures and infrastructures, capacity development, and collaboration with international communities in bridging the technological gaps. the comprehensive study of the development, utilization, and application of AI in various sectors of Africa's economy such as healthcare [8], agriculture [9], governance [10], transportation [11], supply chain [12], and sustainable development [13] revealed the for R&D, increased funding, and partnership with developed countries to upscale technological and infrastructural development in the sector. In a recent policy brief, Azaroual [14] suggested an inclusive and holistic approach by African countries to close the gap with other regions of the world in AI utilization. He recommended increased investment in digital infrastructure, specialized training, R&D, and collaboration among African countries and developed economies to overcome challenges and develop their AI to be able to contribute to sustainable development.

One of such collaboration is with China, whose remarkable journey in AI development serves as an inspiring model for African countries. Over the past two decades, China has leveraged AI to strengthen its industries, improve public services, and position itself as a global leader in technological innovation. This progress was achieved through strategic investments, robust policies, and a focus on talent development. Africa, with its youthful population, growing digital infrastructure, and diverse needs, stands at a critical juncture to emulate and adapt China's experience to its context. Understanding the parallels and distinctions between the two regions provides valuable insights into charting an AI-driven path for Africa's future. This is the motivation for this study. The study aims to interrogate how Africa can build on the amazing experience of China to build its AI capacity. The objective of the study is to analyze China's experience in AI development, identify opportunities for AI development in Africa,

and recommend actionable strategies for African nations to upscale and integrate AI in ways that align with their developmental goals and capacities. This study adopts a qualitative, comparative, and exploratory methodology, drawing primarily on information available on academic literature, policy documents, case studies, and other secondary sources. It utilizes thematic evaluation of key sectors and comparative analysis of China's AI development experience to identify applicable strategies for African nations. Sections such as China's AI developmental trajectory, potential benefits, opportunities, challenges, prospects, policy recommendations, and future research directions of AI in Africa, with particular focus on China's experience in AI development, are highlighted in this study. This study is essential for guiding Africa's strategic adoption of AI by learning from China's successful integration of AI into its development agenda. The findings of this study offer practical insights for policymakers, emphasizing inclusive, ethical, and locally adapted approaches to harness AI for sustainable growth. Also, the information provided will enrich existing literature with updated knowledge on the subject matter and contribute to efforts at improving AI development and penetration in Africa for sustainable socioeconomic development.

2 AI DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORY IN CHINA

Although the recognition of AI as an academic field began in the early 1950s, academic research on AI in China did not start until the late 1950s. Since then, AI in China has undergone decades of theoretical development, technological advancements, and applications, marked by both global recognitions in accolades and criticism. China has demonstrated significant strengths in the development of its AI technologies by aggressive investment in cutting-edge R&D, economic, and infrastructural upgrades, which has positioned it as a major AI powerhouse. AI development in China can be categorized into three main stages (Table 1). According to Zhou [15], the period between the 1950s and 1970s was marked by skepticism and criticism of AI in China, except for the efforts of a few individuals such as Xuesen Qian and Norbert Wiener, who, through their books, expressed their belief in AI. The formation of the Chinese Association of Automation (CAA) in 1961 and the selection of Xuesen Qian as the pioneer chairman of the administrative committee signaled a turning point and the beginning of AI China. By the mid-1970s, the government had recognized modernization of science and technology as a cornerstone of its economic reform. The formation of associations, conferences, journals, and manpower development in the field of AI and other advanced technologies has enhanced the development of AI. At the first annual conference in 1978, outcomes of AI research in topics such as theorem proving, natural Chinese language comprehension, biological control, pattern recognition, robots, etc., were presented.

Table 1: Stages in AI development in China

Stages	Duration	Notable development
The Silent Stage	1950s - 1970s	• China's skepticism about AI • AI was commonly perceived as a form of "pseudoscience" and "revisionism". • No research in the field • Formation of CAA in Beijing in June 1961, dedicated to AI development
Early Foundations	1970s - 2000s	• Xiaoping Deng's economic reform prioritized the development of science and technology, including AI • Establishment of associations (CAAI, CCF) and academic journals to advance academic collaboration in the AI research domain • Government established AI research initiatives and manpower development in advanced technologies. • AI research dedicated to theorem proving, pattern recognition, robots, etc.
Rapid Growth	2006 - present	• Formulation of policies and massive investment in AI developments • Launching of NGAIDP • Policy support and financial investment

	• Surge in AI startups and corporations • Opportunities for competition and collaborations • Significant strides in AI research and talent • Concerns about data privacy and security

CAA = Chinese Association of Automation; CAAI = Chinese Association for Artificial Intelligence; CCF = China Computer Federation; NGAIDP = New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan

Since 2006, China has implemented policies and provided funding to accelerate AI development. In 2017, China took another giant leap by launching the New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan (NGAIDP) to make China a global AI leader by 2030. This period has witnessed an increase in R&D, talent development, competition, international collaborations, and massive development of AI infrastructure. There have also been increased concerns about privacy and security. China has made giant strides in AI development, including massive scientific research output, enhanced innovative capacity building among enterprises, strong collaborative links between industry and academia, enhanced AI industrial sector, and rapid deployment of novel AI technologies [15]. This has been demonstrated in the market share of China's AI, which grew from about USD 15.7 million in 2023 to USD 32.9 million in 2025 and is expected to rise to USD 68.6 million by 2027 and USD 206.6 million by 2030 (Figure 2) [16]. Consequently, the global AI index in 2023 ranked China in the second position globally after the United States (Figure 3) [17].

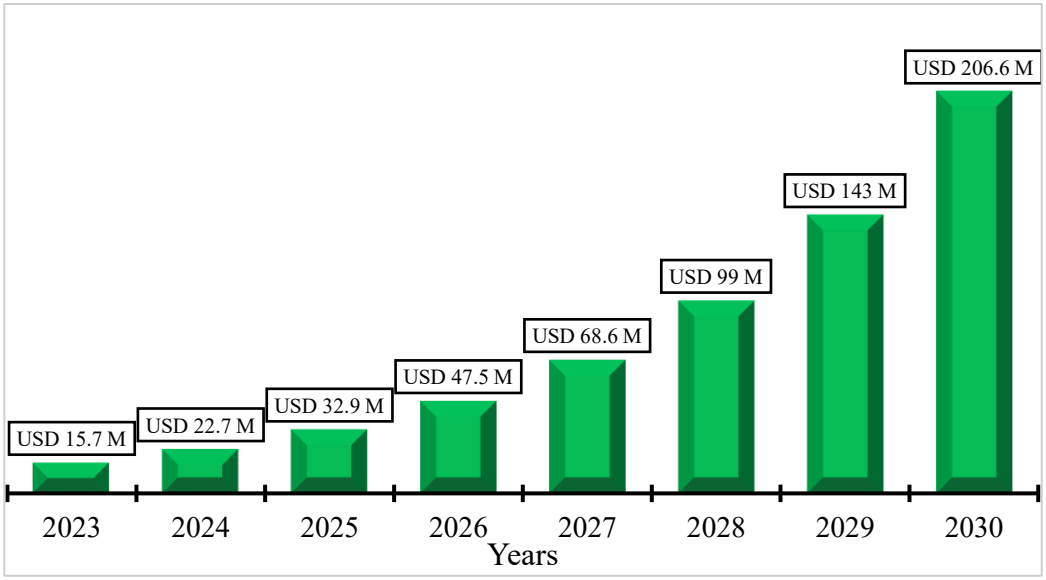

Figure 2: China's AI market share (USD million). Data sourced from [16]

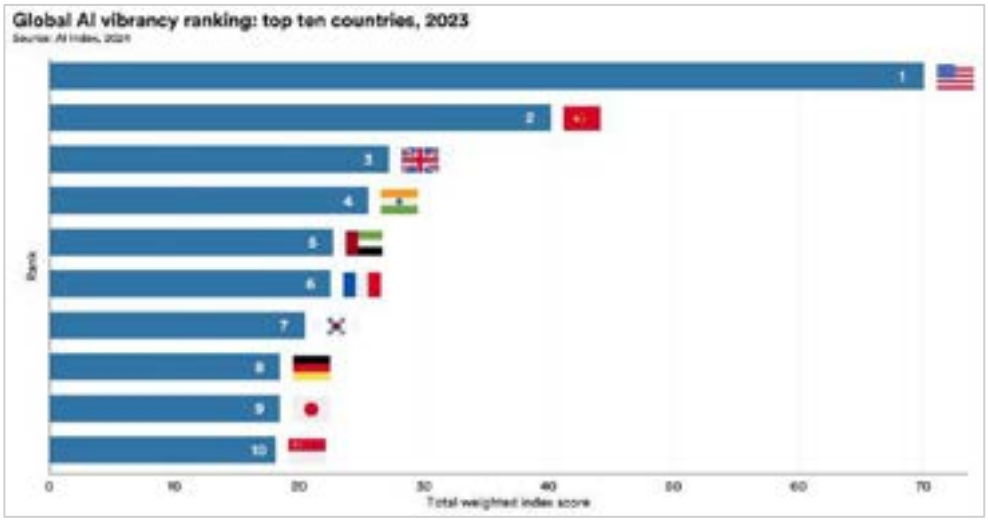

Figure 3: Top 10 countries in AI ranking in 2023

Due to innovations, collaborations, R&D, and AI have been rapidly adopted in education, healthcare, security, finance, and retail, leading to China exporting the technology to other countries. However, there have been myriad complex challenges and criticisms that cut across technological, ethical, societal, policy, and other AI spheres. The twin issues of ethical and privacy implications of AI remain the major challenges and worries, which have been heightened by the large-scale data collection practices, potential for misuse, and fears of privacy breaches by governments and private entities. China's reliance on foreign technology and advanced security exacerbates its strategic vulnerability in the global technology competition and international trade tensions. There are concerns among some China population about the ability of AI to handle complex, real-world scenarios without compromising safety and effectiveness, the fear of job displacement and workforce shifts, and the integration of AI into education and social life have continued to pose serious threats to China's AI developmental strides [18]. Figure 4 shows the major highlights of China's AI situation while Table 2 compiles the factors responsible for China's global leadership position.

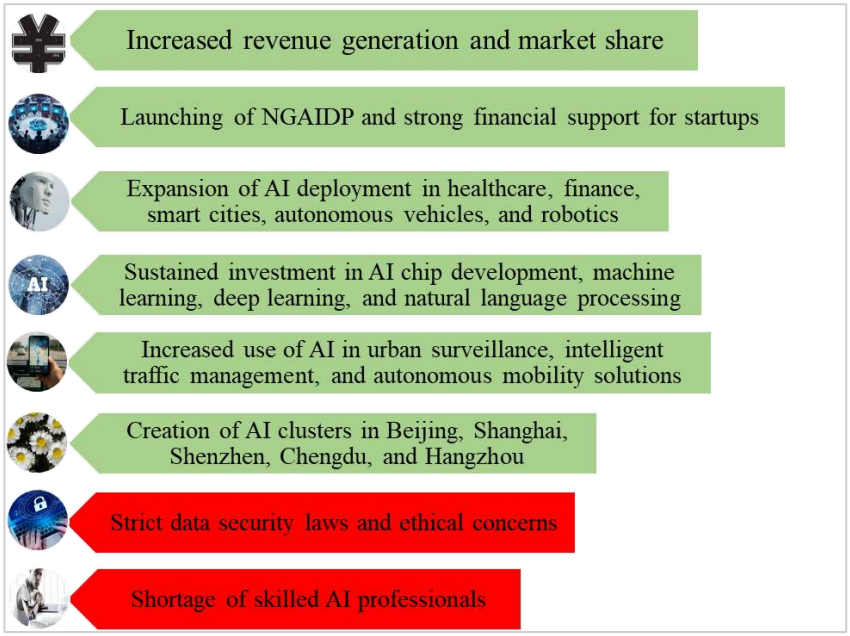

Figure 4: Highlights of China's AI development. Compiled from [19]

Table 2: Major drivers and implications of China's AI development

Major drivers	Implications
Strong government support and strategic policies	• Provision of grants, tax holidays, subsidies, and other incentives for AI startups and research institutions • Bank of China to provide 1 trillion Yuan (about USD 136 billion) for the AI sector over the next 5 years
Rapid digital transformation and industrial adoption	• Implementation of AI-powered automation and robotics • Establishment of 30,000 basic-level smart factories, 1,200 advanced-level, and 230 excellence-level smart factories
Advancements in AI Research and Innovation	• Growth in AI chip development, semiconductor manufacturing • Heavy investment in AI development by companies such as Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Huawei, etc.
Expansion of AI in Smart Cities and Autonomous Technologies	• Investment in AI-powered urban surveillance systems, traffic control and management, and security architecture • Testing and deployment of autonomous vehicles by companies such as WeRide, Baidu, Ponyai • Delivery of about 2.7 million parcels of drones in 2024

Compiled from [19]

3 STATUS AND PROSPECTS OF AI IN AFRICA

AI is increasingly recognized as a transformative force in global innovation and socio-economic advancement. Across Africa, there is a growing interest in harnessing AI to address developmental gaps and accelerate progress in key sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, education, and governance. Despite persistent infrastructural and economic constraints, the continent holds significant potential to bypass conventional development trajectories through strategic and context-sensitive AI integration. This section critically examines the evolving AI landscape in Africa, drawing comparative insights from China's experience to identify applicable models and collaborative opportunities. It also explores the continent's prospects for AI-driven growth while highlighting the structural and ethical challenges that must be navigated to foster inclusive and sustainable technological development.

3.1 Potential African Benefits from China's AI Experience

Drawing from China's developmental trajectory and experience in AI, Africa can benefit significantly in the key areas and fast-track sustainable development in the key areas. The following are some of the key areas of potential advantage.

3.1.1 *Digital Infrastructure Development*

China's success in AI has been underpinned by robust digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet, data centers, and cloud computing facilities. Africa can benefit by prioritizing similar investments to bridge the digital divide and enable widespread AI adoption. This infrastructure will support AI applications in critical sectors like agriculture, healthcare, and education.

3.1.2 Economic Growth and Innovation

AI can drive innovation in sectors like agriculture, healthcare, and education, fostering sustainable development and creating new economic opportunities. Leveraging China's experience, Africa can deploy AI-powered tools to optimize farming practices, predict weather patterns, and enhance crop yields, improve diagnostics, monitor epidemics, streamline healthcare delivery, personalize learning experiences, and bridge educational gaps. China's focus on AI-driven industrial automation and e-commerce has boosted its economy, and Africa can replicate these strategies to create new economic opportunities [20].

3.1.3 Public-Private Partnerships

China's AI advancements have been fueled by collaboration between the government and private enterprises. Africa can adopt this model to accelerate AI research, development, and deployment. Collaborations with proven tech companies can bring expertise and resources to the continent, fostering innovation and sustainable growth.

3.1.4 AI Talent Development

China has invested heavily in education and training programs to build a skilled workforce for AI. Africa can benefit by establishing AI-focused universities, research centers, and vocational training programs. This will equip the continent's youth with the skills needed to harness AI's potential and drive technological progress.

3.1.5 Localized Solutions

Africa can develop AI applications with the capability to tackle its peculiar challenges, such as improving food security, combating diseases, and enhancing access to education. For example, Africa, leaning on China’s experience, can deploy AI in areas such as data analysis to recommend optimal farming practices, energy management to support renewable energy initiatives, and the deployment of AI-powered chatbots to provide healthcare advice in local languages.

3.1.6 Global Competitiveness

By leveraging AI like China, Africa can position itself as a key player in the global tech ecosystem. Strategic investments in AI can attract international partnerships and investments, boosting the continent's competitiveness in the global market.

3.1.7 Ethical and Inclusive AI

China's experience highlights the importance of ethical AI practices. Africa can benefit by developing frameworks that ensure AI systems respect cultural diversity, promote inclusivity, and protect data privacy. This will build trust in AI technologies and encourage their adoption.

3.1.8 Regional Collaboration

China has demonstrated the value of regional collaboration in AI development. African nations can work together to share resources, expertise, and best practices, fostering a unified approach to AI adoption and governance.

3.2 Opportunities for AI Development in Africa

3.2.1 Economic Growth and Development

By enabling seamless financial and online payments, predicting credit and insurance to previously unbanked populations, and helping small business grows, AI can revolutionize access to financial services and other Fintech innovations. With rising urbanization in Africa, AI can be deployed in building and managing smart cities in areas such as traffic management improvement, power distribution and energy efficiency, and supporting infrastructure maintenance with predictive analytics.

3.2.2 Healthcare Innovations

AI-powered technologies such as telemedicine, chatbots, and predictive analytics offer solutions and improve Africa's overburdened healthcare systems. The deployment of these technologies provides remote diagnostics in underserved rural areas, helps in predicting and monitoring outbreaks of disease, and assists in the optimization of allocation and streamlining of hospital management.

3.2.3 Educational Advancements

AI-driven tools can transform education in Africa by personalizing learning for students through adaptive platforms, bridging language and accessibility gaps, and offering online courses and AI-skills training programs, thereby equipping Africans for future jobs.

3.2.4 Agriculture and Food Security

AI presents opportunities for economic growth and development across Africa by enhancing agricultural productivity by predicting weather patterns and extreme climate conditions. By optimizing crop planting schedules, identifying pests and diseases, and minimizing losses, AI can contribute to farm yields, boost food production, strengthen food security, and contribute to agricultural development, which is the backbone of African economies.

3.2.5 Governance and Public Services

The deployment of AI in Africa can help improve public service delivery by streamlining government operations, reducing bureaucracy, automating routine tasks, and ensuring transparency in public transactions. AI can promote inclusivity in governance through improved accessibility for people with disabilities and other underrepresented groups, bridging the digital divide in underserved areas, and translation of government policies and services into multiple local languages.

3.2.6 Art and Cultural Preservation

There are opportunities for AI to document, promote, and preserve Africa's rich cultural heritage through translation of language translation tools, generate art and music, and digitize historical archives for global access and preservation. AI can serve as a catalyst for innovation in various industries, including manufacturing, e-commerce, and startups, by lowering costs, offering personalized shopping experiences, and boosting entrepreneurial and industrial growth.

3.3 Challenges of AI Development in Africa

3.3.1 Building Digital Infrastructure

Building digital infrastructure for AI in Africa faces several challenges, including unreliable power supply, limited internet connectivity, and inadequate data storage facilities. Many rural areas lack broadband access, creating a digital divide that hinders equitable AI adoption. Additionally, the high cost of infrastructure development and maintenance, coupled with a shortage of skilled professionals, further complicates progress. Addressing these issues requires strategic investments, robust policies, and collaboration between governments, private sectors, and international organizations to ensure inclusive and sustainable digital transformation.

3.3.2 Fostering AI Literacy and Skills

Fostering AI literacy and skills in Africa faces several challenges, including limited access to quality education and training programs, especially in rural areas. The high cost of AI-related resources and tools further restricts learning opportunities. Additionally, there is a shortage of skilled educators and mentors to guide learners in AI fields. Language barriers and a lack of localized content also hinder effective learning. Addressing these challenges requires investments in affordable education, partnerships with global tech organizations, and the development of inclusive, culturally relevant AI training programs.

3.3.3 Ethical and Inclusive AI

Developing ethical and inclusive AI in Africa faces challenges such as addressing algorithmic biases that may perpetuate inequalities and ensuring AI systems respect cultural diversity and

societal values. Limited regulatory frameworks and data privacy protections further complicate efforts to create responsible AI. Additionally, the lack of representation in AI development and governance risks marginalizing African perspectives. Overcoming these challenges requires fostering collaboration, establishing ethical guidelines tailored to Africa's unique context, and prioritizing inclusivity in AI adoption and deployment.

3.3.4 AI for Sustainable Development

AI for sustainable development in Africa faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, unreliable energy supply, and limited access to high-speed internet. These issues hinder the deployment of AI solutions for critical areas like agriculture, healthcare, and education. Additionally, the lack of localized data and skilled professionals restricts the effectiveness of AI-driven initiatives. Addressing these challenges requires strategic investments, regional collaboration, and policies that prioritize inclusivity and long-term sustainability.

3.3.5 Collaboration and Innovation

Collaboration and innovation for AI in Africa face challenges such as limited cross-border partnerships, insufficient funding for research and development, and a lack of standardized frameworks for collaboration. Additionally, disparities in technological infrastructure and expertise across countries hinder seamless cooperation. Addressing these challenges requires fostering regional alliances, increasing investment in AI innovation, and creating platforms for knowledge sharing and joint projects to drive sustainable progress.

4 PROSPECTS, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The prospects for AI in Africa, drawing inspiration from China's experience, are promising. Africa can leverage AI to address critical challenges in agriculture, healthcare, and education, fostering sustainable development. By investing in digital infrastructure and AI talent development, the continent can unlock innovation and economic growth. Public-private partnerships and regional collaboration can accelerate AI adoption, while ethical frameworks tailored to Africa's socio-cultural context ensure inclusivity. With strategic planning and lessons from China's AI advancements, Africa has the potential to become a global player in AI-driven transformation.

For Africa to benefit from China’s experience and capabilities in AI development, appropriate policies which including strategic investments in digital infrastructure to support AI development and adoption, should be prioritized. Governments should establish national AI strategies that align with local socio-economic goals, similar to China's approach. Encouraging public-private partnerships can accelerate innovation and ensure sustainable growth. Additionally, fostering AI literacy and skills development through education programs is crucial for building a skilled workforce. Regulatory frameworks should emphasize ethical AI practices, data privacy, and inclusivity to address Africa's unique challenges and opportunities. Collaboration among African nations can further strengthen AI governance and drive regional progress.

Going forward, future research in Africa’s AI development, inspired by China's experience, could focus on developing localized AI solutions targeted to its peculiar challenges, such as food security, economic development, manufacturing, public security, social services, and human capital development. Emphasis should be placed on creating robust digital infrastructure, fostering public-private partnerships, and investing in AI talent development. Additionally, research could explore ethical AI frameworks that align with Africa's socio-cultural context, ensuring inclusivity and fairness. Collaboration among African nations and with global AI leaders can further accelerate innovation and drive sustainable development.

5 CONCLUSION

AI offers transformative potential for Africa, drawing lessons from China's experience in the global space in leveraging AI for development. By investing in digital infrastructure, fostering public-private partnerships, and prioritizing AI literacy, Africa can address its unique challenges and unlock innovation across sectors like agriculture, healthcare, and education. Ethical frameworks tailored to Africa's socio-cultural context will ensure inclusivity and fairness in AI adoption. With strategic planning and regional collaboration, Africa has the opportunity to harness AI as a catalyst for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

With strategic planning and regional collaboration, Africa has the opportunity to harness AI as a catalyst for sustainable development and global competitiveness. The practical implications of this study are far-reaching, and they include the provision of a workable blueprint for policymakers to craft responsive AI strategies, encouragement of investment in scalable digital infrastructure, and emphasizing the importance of building human capital through targeted education and training. By drawing on China’s experience, African nations can avoid common pitfalls and accelerate the responsible deployment of AI technologies. Moreover, the study offers guidance for establishing regulatory frameworks that promote innovation while safeguarding against abuse and ensuring that AI serves the public good. As Africa steps into the digital age, these insights can empower governments, businesses, and civil society to co-create an AI ecosystem that is inclusive, resilient, and uniquely African.

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A QUALITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL MANUFACTURERS USING A CAPABILITY MATURITY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Implementing a quality management system often requires major alterations to an organisation's methods, processes, and cultures. Consequently, small manufacturing organisations often operate without a structured quality management system. This research project focuses on quality management to provide a solution to the quality management gap in the management methodology of small manufacturers. Using Design Science Research, a manufacturing-oriented framework for total quality management was utilised in an industry survey to define a cross-sectional view of quality management among South African small manufacturers. This research project explored the Capability Maturity Model as a solution to make quality management more accessible and of systemic value to manufacturing SMEs. The validation relied on a cross-comparative literature analysis between the Capability Maturity Model and ISO 9001, as a globally recognised standard for quality management capability and one of the most prominent quality management paradigms among South African organisations.

Keywords: Quality, Capability Maturity, Manufacturing

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1 INTRODUCTION

Adopting a Quality Management System (QMS) more than often brings about profound organisational changes, requiring significant effort and resources [1]. As a result, many small manufacturing organisations select to operate without a structured quality management system. The reason is that motivation is limited mainly by the absence of a realistic roadmap towards comprehensive Total Quality Management (TQM). For high impact, such a roadmap towards TQM must be clear in terms of its objectives, incrementally achievable, and objectively measurable, as opposed to a make-or-break approach.

Capability Maturity Models (CMMs) are known for measuring an organisation's current status, identifying improvement areas, and supporting development. This research paper reports on the development of a roadmap in the form of a Manufacturing Capability Maturity Model (MCMM) that leans on the philosophy of the Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) [2] to address the need for objective measurement and visualised growth.

The primary research challenge is thus derived from the need for an MCMM that allows for visualised growth and objective measurement towards the final goal of TQM. The context of this research project is shown in the diagram below:

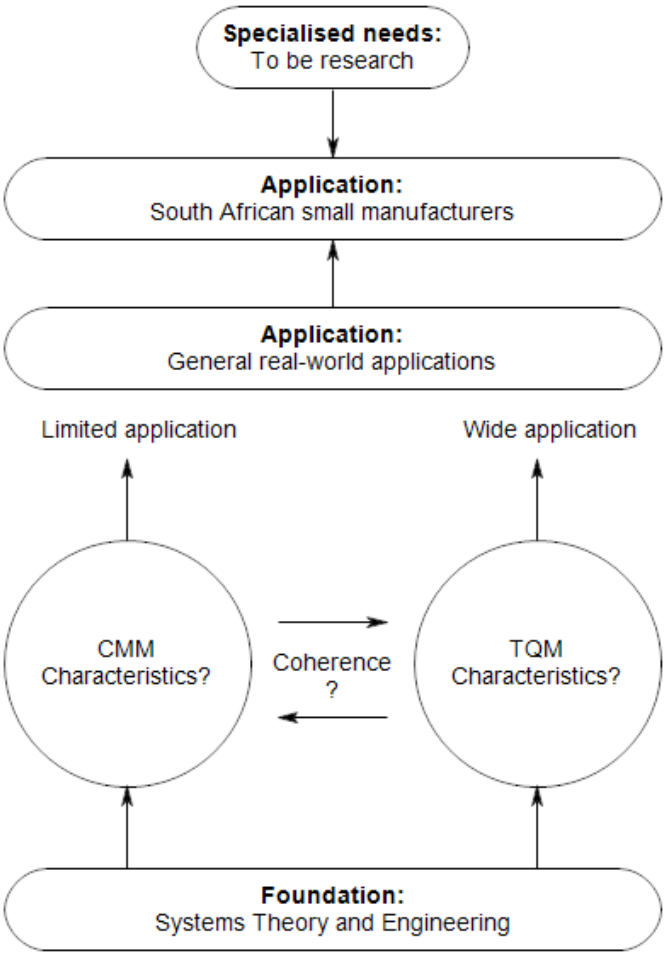

Figure 1 - Research context [1]

A number of focused research challenges were derived from the primary research challenge addressed in a Design Science Research (DSR) paradigm using an Action Design Research (ADR) method [3], [4]. Derived research challenges were defined using different sources, including

real-world observations (by a quality practitioner), informal interviews with industry experts, and an initial literature review [1]. Take note that ISO 9001, referred to below, is a standard that defines the requirements for a Quality Management System (QMS).

The **research challenges** include the following:

1) From the researcher's observation in practice, there is a need for Quality Management contextualisation among South African small manufacturers;
2) A detailed definition of need must be defined for small South African manufacturers in the context of Quality Management;
3) Questions that had to be answered are as follows:
    a) Could CMM be repurposed to general real-world applications other than information technology systems?
    b) Could CMM and QM be combined or integrated to meet the requirements of accepted standards (e.g. ISO 9001)?
    c) Would it be possible to define a progressive growth path, with feedback, to meet ISO 9001 compliance requirements realistically?
    d) Would a CMM framework specifically meet ISO 9001 requirements for small South African manufacturers?

As discussed in the sections below, the research challenges above were addressed in a research project. The paper is outlined as follows: Section 2 addresses the first two research challenges above, namely, to contextualise QM in the small South African manufacturing sector and to analyse the need of this sector in more detail; Section 3 discusses the road to quality using Capability Maturity as a reference and establishing its relevance in the ISO 9001 system; Section 4 shows how Process Areas were adapted or designed to align with needs in the manufacturing space; and Section 5 closes out with validation of this research.

2 DEFINING THE NEED FOR SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL MANUFACTURERS

The initial research challenge speaks to two important aspects, namely the contextualisation of QM in the small manufacturing space and an analysis of the need for it in the small manufacturing space in South Africa. To this end, the following was done:

1. Qualitative archival research: The literature review focused on QM philosophies and principles to define TQM in the small manufacturing space and to understand the characteristics of a relevant QMS. The history of QM and current interpretations were revisited, and desired characteristics and best practices were defined;
2. Industry survey: An exploratory mixed-method questionnaire survey was conducted in a cross-sectional way to better understand the current state of QM implementation in the South African small manufacturing environment. The cross-sectional view was used to define the TQM characteristics in this environment and ensure that the underlying need was analysed, defined, and understood.

2.1 Archival research on quality

The development of QM follows a path from the acknowledgement of artefact repeatability through the industrialisation of production processes to meet quality requirements, followed by the definition of Quality Management [5], [6] and Total Quality Management.

TQM focuses on achieving quality through total organisational involvement, an attribute it owes to its seminal theory: Deming's fourteen points, which can be summarised as follows [1].

1. Limit dependence on inspection activities and focus on the quality of the production process;
2. Adopt a new philosophy that supports QM in the broad sense, as opposed to the often-limited view of repeatability;
3. Institutionalise leadership and recognise the role of people in the overall QM effort and ensure organisational human development;
4. Create and sustain the focus on purpose and the principles and advantages of continuous improvement in QM;
5. Create a unanimous sense of accountability with the involvement of the entire workforce in the organisational transformation.

Further to this, the TQM philosophy stipulates eight primary elements that reflect the principles of QM, such as fundamental beliefs, values, and approaches. The eight primary elements, notably, include [7]:

1. Customer focus to include the need, expectations, and all requirements;
2. Employee involvement as a critical element for active involvement and commitment;
3. Process focus as the foundation for functions and capabilities;
4. Integrated systems to ensure comprehensive collaboration across resources;
5. Strategic approach to ensure appropriate direction and motivation;
6. Continual improvement to address changes and performance increase;
7. Fact-based decision-making to ensure an unbiased risk-based approach;
8. Communication to complement employee involvement and collaboration.

The role of Systems Thinking in the context of QM becomes evident when referring to the "unitary whole" [8]. This is important as it underscores the need for process and system analysis, performance management, validation and verification, and other essential considerations in systems. Systems Engineering and Thinking thus form part of the discussion as it provides common ground between QM and CMM.

The institutionalisation of QM principles is typically achieved through systems that provide frameworks for decisions, activities, and approaches that are typical of a QMS [9]. Lakhal *et al*. [10] provided an important researched and refined interpretation of the TQM framework to result in a TQM model that is particularly useful in the context of QM in SME manufacturing.

In the manufacturing environment, specifically, the best practices were extracted from further study by Doss *et al*. [11] to provide a set of **six high-level TQM facets**:

1. Customer focus with specific attention to requirements, quality objectives, market intelligence, customer satisfaction analysis, and integration of requirements;
2. Top management commitment is required for policy-level definitions, resource allocation to meet quality objectives and management availability;
3. Organisational commitment for comprehensive dissemination, employee contribution and motivation, supplier quality, assurance protocols, and product testing;
4. Employee training to establish an aligned training program, education in quality and QMS, succession management, and government assistance (where applicable);
5. Process management to ensure processes are defined, standardised procedures are followed, performance metrics are applied, and risk management is done;

6. Information and analyses for interpretable information from data, dissemination of information to relevant employees, and quantitative/factual decision-making.

The South African small manufacturing environment had to be defined in the context of the best practices facets– the questionnaire used in the industry survey was aligned with these facets.

2.2 Exploratory industry survey

As part of the initial needs analysis, the industry survey's primary focus was to contextualise the South African small manufacturing environment using a questionnaire to establish the presence of institutionalisation rather than a quantitative measurement. This survey was used to analyse and validate the research need, and to direct the in-depth study that followed.

2.2.1 Participants

South African manufacturers falling within the Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMME) definition [12] were considered, and 27 participants took part in the survey. The representatives of participating companies were selected to include owners, senior managers, or QM consultants who provide informative responses; using a questionnaire to acquire contributions from experienced practitioners is accepted in QM research [10].

2.2.2 Data collection

Using the 6 TQM facets above as focus areas in the questionnaire, the questionnaire measured the institutionalisation of QM within the participating organisations [1] using a Likert-type scale. Meta-data was used to organise the results according to industry type, ISO 9001 certification, and the presence of a quality manager. Questionnaires were answered using a web-based system called QuestionPro, which adhered to the constraints of ethical responsibility.

The data showed that 8 participants had been ISO 9001 certified, with 1 participant certified for less than 2 years (also without a dedicated quality manager). 26% of the participants were both ISO 9001 certified and managed by a dedicated quality manager/consultant. Among the 19 participants without certification, 6 had a dedicated quality manager.

The majority of participants were from the metal and mechanical industries, accounting for 66% of the responses. 11% were from the automotive industry, 8% from the food or medical industries and 15% from other industries.

Three groups were identified from the data:

1. Group 1: Certified companies that have both mature QMS certification (> 2 yrs) as well as a dedicated quality manager;
2. Group 2: Managed companies that have a dedicated quality manager but do not have any QMS certification;
3. Group 3: Unmanaged companies with no QM initiatives in the form of certification or a quality manager.

2.2.3 Results of the exploratory survey

Details of the results and their validity can be found in [1], with important findings reported. The independent t-test was used to ensure the results were valid from the survey, where sample means were used to test three null hypotheses relating to different groups [13].

The Cronbach Alpha test was used to validate the results for each of the six QM facets discussed, with all facets resulting in scores of 0.7 or above, showing their relevance in an exploratory survey [14].

The three null hypotheses are as follows:

1. **Ho1**: System certification does not offer any additional presence of TQM practices if there is a dedicated quality manager.
2. **Ho2**: A dedicated quality manager does not offer any additional presence of TQM practices when compared to a system without any QM initiatives.
3. **Ho3**: System certification does not offer any additional presence of TQM practices as compared to a system without any QM initiatives.

From the exploratory survey, it was found that [1]:

1. The null hypothesis is accepted for all six facets: "QMS certification did not offer a statistically significant difference in the presence of TQM facets when compared to managed, yet-to-be-certified systems."
2. The null hypothesis is rejected for four of six facets: "A quality manager thus significantly influences the presence of TQM facets in a manufacturing QMS."
3. The null hypothesis was rejected for all six facets: "This suggests a significantly larger presence of TQM-aligned practices within a mature certified QMS than in an unmanaged QMS."

The results provided evidence that QMS adoption would add significant value in terms of TQM-aligned practices, with evidence showing that almost 50% lacked active quality management, while around 70% of the participants lacked a formal quality system. Hence, a much-needed improvement is possible, but mostly absent, in the SMME manufacturing space as sampled in this survey.

It is important to note that formal certification (e.g. ISO 9001, providing both validation and certification value) is not the definitive consideration when considering quality, but rather the value of implementing QM principles in the small manufacturing space. Formal ISO 9001 adoption is often limited due to its costs and the high rate of implementation failures [15, 16].

The real value of QM becomes evident when a systemic embedment is done. That is, to truly transform the organisational culture to become inherently quality-managed, for which true organisational commitment is required. In addition to the findings from the survey, it is thus prudent to understand the need for a roadmap towards formal QMS adoption that is clear in its goals, time, process, and cost. This is necessary to both motivate and support small manufacturers on this important journey.

3 THE ROAD TOWARDS QUALITY – A CAPABILITY MATURITY PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Overview

Maturity models (MMs) allow organisations to measure maturity on a standardised scale with the ability to sustain their operations in a changing techno-economic landscape [17]. Mature organisations manage their operations, risks, opportunities, and requirements to meet the expectations of all stakeholders by being conscious of their own capability and maturity.

Maturity modelling is not a new concept in the QM environment, with Crosby's maturity grid being an early example of this concept [17]. However, there is still a lack of attention to MM integration in the TQM and ISO 9001 spaces.

A specific example of a comprehensive Capability Maturity Model is found in the Carnegie Melon CMMI framework [18], defined as follows: "The CMM is a framework representing a path of improvements recommended for software organisations that want to increase their software process capability". This demonstrates the mission of a CMM as a means to improve

process capability along a structured path, albeit for IT systems - this framework thus aligns with the need identified for South African small manufacturers.

CMMI process areas provide focus on specific aspects of an organisation, with a capability maturity scale from levels 1 to 5 [1], [18]:

Level 1: The initial level describes an organisation as being unpredictable with poorly defined processes, and the consistency of outcomes is mainly achieved through individual heroics and experienced managers.

Level 2: The managed level implements basic project management to achieve repeatability of outcomes in a foundational structure for governance, such as the definition of policy and standard operating procedures.

Level 3: A defined level is characterised by standards with documented core business processes and integrated functional areas, with the operation of processes according to organisational definition rather than individual discretion.

Level 4: Quantitatively managed levels use defined processes to affect control, where the quality and performance of processes and products become measurable metrics used to classify various system characteristics.

Level 5: An optimising level focuses on continuous improvement using best engineering practices to exploit system information to identify opportunities, weaknesses, and risks.

Evidence of the applicability of CMMI in other areas (as a CMM) is given in Wendler [19], where more than 20 application domains were identifiable by 2010. This implied that CMM has applications in other domains, which warranted further investigation into the application of CMM in small manufacturing spaces.

In the period 2017 to 2023, additional instances were identified in the manufacturing domain with applications including optimisation of a remanufacturing process, continuous process improvement, and intelligent manufacturing [20], [21].

The area in which a gap was identified early in the research specifically relates to the “as is” transferability of CMM to a manufacturing domain. Researchers who achieved the most success used informed reasoning to select or discard process areas and specific and generic practices [20], [21], [22], [23].

CMM uses 23 Process Areas to define its high-level functions, with Process Management, Project Management, Engineering, and Support as the categories inside which Process Areas are hosted. The use of Process Areas allows for the focus on relevant aspects of an organisation and simplifies the application of CMM as a measurement framework.

The following table was obtained from the CMMI Product Team [24] to show the different categories and Process Areas of CMMI:

Table 1 - CMMI Categories and Process Areas with maturity levels.

	Common Features			
	Process Management	***Project Management***	***Engineering***	***Support***
Maturity Level	**Process Area Mapping**			
5. Optimising				**CAR** *Causal Analysis & Resolution*
4. Quantitative	**OPP** *Organisation Process Performance*	**QPM** *Quantitative Project Management*		
3. Defined	**OPF** *Organisation Process Focus* **OPD** *Organisation Process Definition* **OT** *Organisation Training*	**IPM** *Integrated Process Management* **RSKM** *Risk Management* **IT** *Integrated Teaming* **ISM** *Integrated Supplier Management*	**REQD** *Requirements Development* **TS** *Technical Solution* **PI** *Product Integration* **VER** *Verification* **VAL** *Validation*	**DAR** *Discission Analysis & Resolution*
2. Managed		**PP** *Project Planning* **PMC** *Project Monitoring & Control* **SAM** *Supplier Agreement Management*	**REQM** *Requirements Management*	**MA** *Measurement and Analysis* **PQA** *Process Quality Assurance* **CM** *Configuration Management*
1. Initial				

3.2 Alignment of CMMI with ISO 9001

Upon first inspection, CMMI appears to be more comprehensive than ISO 9001 regarding its scope and depth, which had to be investigated to use CMMI as a base for deriving a QMS that supports incremental growth, measurement, and minimum performance levels. At the time, this was a subjective opinion that had to be investigated and validated.

Considering the 10 ISO 9001 clauses in conjunction with the CMMI Process Areas is imperative to form a complete picture of the alignment between the two domains. The ISO 9001 clauses are as follows [1]:

Table 2 - ISO 9001 clauses.

Nomenclature	**Clause 1:** *Scope*	Describes the scope of the International Standard as well as the expectations for certification.
	Clause 2: *Normative References*	References the normative documents that describe the fundamentals and vocabulary used in the International Standard.
	Clause 3: *Terms and Definitions*	References the normative documents that describe the terms and definitions used in the International Standard.
QM Requirements	**Clause 4:** *Context of the organisation*	Requirements detail the alignment of the organisation's business environment with the QMS.
	Clause 5: *Leadership*	Involvement of top management and integration of ISO requirements into operational processes. Alignment of policy and objectives with strategic direction.
	Clause 6: *Planning*	It focuses on planning and incorporates risk-based thinking to establish quality objectives that can be measured and/or evaluated.
	Clause 7: *Support*	Focuses on establishing support functions through resources, competence, and communication.
	Clause 8: *Operation*	Details requirements that enable processes to achieve quality objectives, customer expectations, and organisational requirements.
	Clause 9: *Performance evaluation*	Incorporation of both quantitative performance measures (process measurements, data analysis) and qualitative performance reviews (management reviews, internal audits).
	Clause 10: *Improvement*	Harness system information, management reviews, and risk-based thinking to identify and realise opportunities for improvement.

In the table, only clauses 4 to 10 apply and must be aligned with CMMI's Process Areas. Researchers attempting to compare or align CMMI and ISO 9001 found that a CMMI approach aligns with ISO 9001 in the following ways [1]:

- CMMI and ISO 9001 are complementary, and an integrated implementation reduces the overall risks and cost of QMS development rather than straining it;
- CMMI is a much more comprehensive and detailed representation of QM that encapsulates the requirements of the standard [25], [26];

- Comparing CMMI to the requirements of ISO 9001 suggests that CMMI level 2 already aligns the organisation with most of the ISO 9001 requirements [27], [25];
- CMMI offers significantly more depth in terms of quantitative management, process definition and control, as well as organisational enablement [26], [28];
- The ISO 9001 standard emphasises customer focus, specific documentation requirements, and the establishment of QM authority within the organisation [27].

A systematic comparison of CMMI and ISO 9001 supports the findings from other researchers ([25], [26], [27], [28]) with the following diagram (as an original contribution) showing the synergy between CMM and ISO 9001:

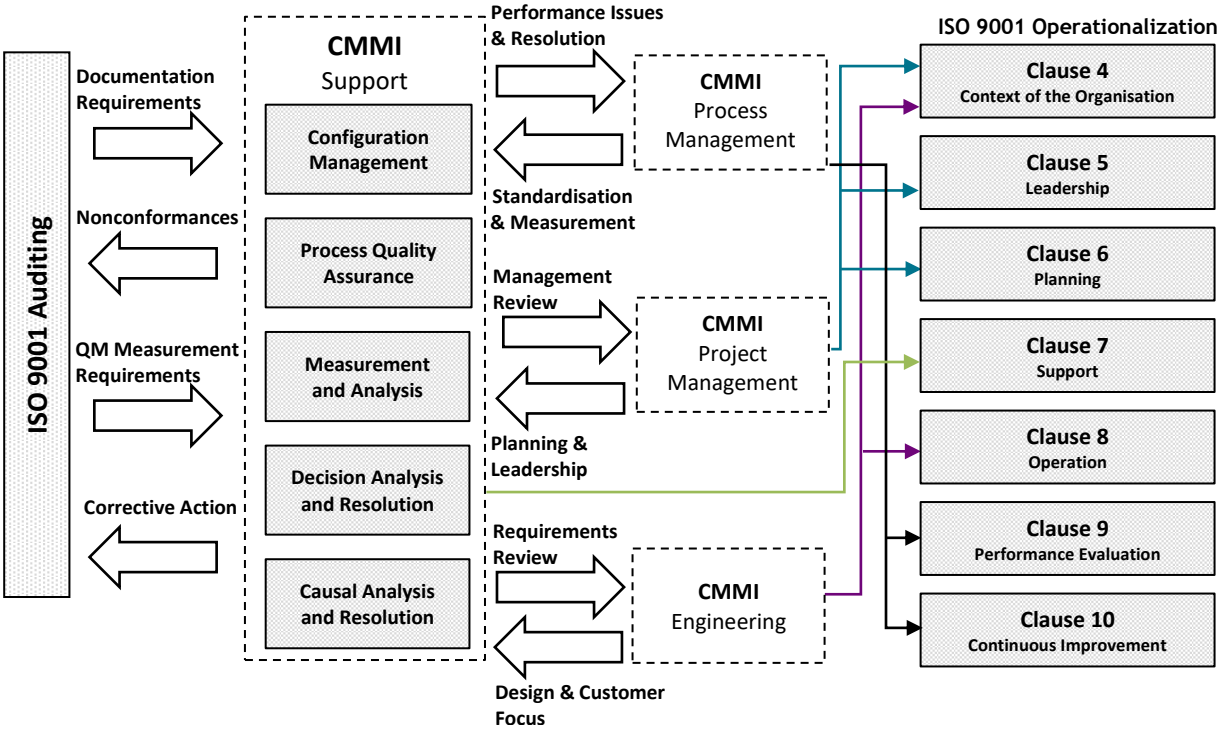

Figure 2 - Synergy between CMMI and ISO 9001:2015 [1]

The diagram shows that there is significant synergy between ISO 9001 and CMMI, with the understanding that ISO 9001 would provide an explicit set of requirements, as shown on the left of the diagram. The implementer and auditor subjectively determine implementation specifics and certifiability. CMMI lends itself to implementing operational systems (processes, procedures, resources, etc.) to meet the ISO 9001 operationalisation requirements, shown on the right of the diagram.

Most notably, the link between ISO 9001 Auditing and CMMI relies mainly on the CMMI Support Process Areas, with Engineering, Project Management, and Process Management providing the link to ISO 9001 Operationalisation. This result was not apparent at the onset of this research and required careful consideration and reflection.

Therefore, if CMM could align with ISO 9001 requirements on both ends (that is, the audit side and the operationalisation requirements), this integrated method would achieve the end goal of providing a roadmap for measurable progress. This was the focus of the last research challenges, as listed in Section 1.

The adapted CMM requirements, from a QM perspective, are addressed as follows [1]:

Table 3 - Adapted CMM requirements.

Requirements	CMM	TQM	ISO 9001
Provide a structured framework	X	X	X
Be progressive for incremental growth	X		
Be pragmatic and systematic	X		
Be measurable to allow feedback	X		X
Based on TQM and ISO 9001 principles		X	X
Verified to meet ISO 9001 comprehensively	X		X
Institutionalise QM best practices sourced from TQM, ISO 9001, and CMM	X	X	X

With the ISO 9001 alignment evident, additional requirements to be addressed relate to small manufacturing in South Africa. The research challenges can be successfully addressed if CMM can be adapted to meet the South African small manufacturing ontology by testing and retaining CMMI Process Areas relevant to a manufacturing application.

Some Process Areas had to be adapted to meet the terminology of the manufacturing domain, while other Process Areas had to be redefined in a novel manner to meet manufacturing characteristics not sufficiently addressed in the existing CMMI.

4 THE MANUFACTURING CAPABILITY MATURITY MODEL

To align the CMMI framework with the characteristics and requirements of a manufacturing environment in the South African context (the scope was limited to the survey and thus only to South Africa – further studies may test the adjusted model in different environments). Such a model is called a Manufacturing Capability Maturity Model (MCMM), as shown below:

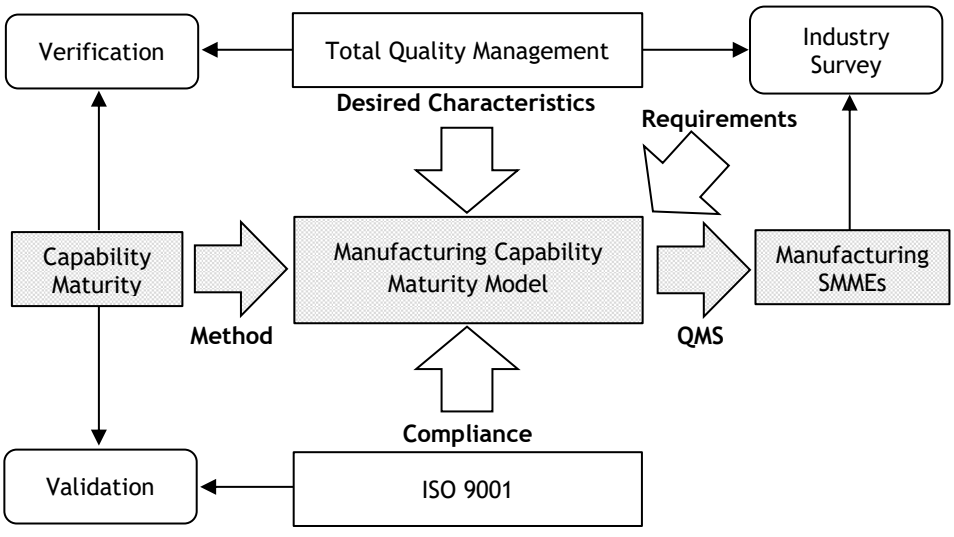

Figure 3 - Solution design validation, requirements, and constraints [1].

The diagram shows how different inputs and constraints were considered in the design of the MCMM, specifically focused on manufacturing. In line with CMMI, the MCMM model defines manufacturing categories that align with the manufacturing environment's capability

characteristics, as verified from personal participation in the SMME manufacturing space in the spirit of Action Research (refer to Table 4):

Table 4 - Manufacturing CMM Capability Categories.

CMM Categories	*Manufacturing Capability Categories*
Project Management	**Objectives**
	Institutionalisation
	Reflection
Support	**Infrastructure**
	Enablement
Engineering	**Engineering**
Process Management	**Process Management**

For each of the Manufacturing CMM categories, Process Areas were derived (adopted) or Novel (designed) based on experience in the South African manufacturing space. For brevity's sake, the following list contains the novel Process Areas:

1) **Objectives**
   a) Strategic Direction – Used to inform the organisation at all levels, from top-level policies to lower levels, using leadership inspired by commitment of time and effort;
2) **Institutionalisation**
   a) System Implementation – To ensure principles of Systems Engineering are used for the successful implementation of new systems, including the actual QMS to be implemented;
   b) Organisational Commitment – Aligned with the Process Focus Area of CMMI, this Process Area focuses on the primary use of a process-driven system for manufacturing;
   c) Resource Management – To ensure best practices for the systematic allocation of resources to meet requirements in a way that supports effective use of resources;
   d) Knowledge Management – This focus allows the management of information and knowledge necessary to execute core organisational processes with a business continuity focus;
3) **Engineering**
   a) Manufacturing Processes – Used to clearly define, document, and disseminate manufacturing processes and other requirements for successful process implementation in the manufacturing space;

4) **Process Management**

   a) Information and Analysis – To develop and establish methods for gathering, analysing, and disseminating organisational process data and information;

5) **Enablement**

   a) Asset Management – To establish, develop, and maintain a full life cycle asset management capability that preserves all process, physical, and people-related assets;

6) **Reflection**

   a) Sustained Customer Focus – For a sustainable customer-oriented approach to ensure the customer is managed in a customer relationship management manner;

   b) Organisational Decision Making – A recursive capability for utilising information from the QMS to make informed decisions;

The maturity levels were revisited to align with the ISO 9001 framework as follows:

1) **Level 1: Initial** – Assuring product quality unknowingly or on an ad hoc and reactive basis, with the need for more advanced methods present at higher levels;
2) **Level 2: Managed / Repeatable** – Performing processes in a repeatable manner without the presence of a formally managed baseline but under management control;
3) **Level 3: Defined / Baselined** – Standardised manufacturing processes are placed on record/configuration management, implemented, and controlled;
4) **Level 4: Measured / Auditable** – Manufacturing processes are performance measured and used to analyse variance as well as efficacy and to direct decisions;
5) **Level 5: Optimising / Improving** – Manufacturing is done only according to established processes, controls, and measurements and used to improve efficacy.

A comprehensive analysis is available in [1] with each CMMI Process Area and its corresponding Manufacturing CMM Process Area aligned, and novel Process Areas defined in broad detail.

5 VALIDATION AND CONCLUSION

The research challenges were *validated* from the initial literature survey to agree with the perspectives of other researchers. The research challenges were successfully addressed as follows:

- There is a need for Quality Management contextualisation among South African small manufacturers – *Addressed by means of a questionnaire survey that provided more detailed needs for the South African small manufacturing environment*;
- A detailed definition of need must be defined for small South African manufacturers in the context of Quality Management – *A valid TQM interpretation was obtained from research and used in a questionnaire survey*;
- Could CMM be repurposed for general real-world applications other than information technology systems? – *Answered from a literature study to show relevance in applications other than Information Technology environments*;
- Could CMM and QM be combined or integrated to meet the requirements of accepted standards (e.g. ISO 9001)? – *A systematic comparison and subsequent alignment were done to show how CMMI fits into the ISO 9001 framework (original contribution)*;

- Would it be possible to define a progressive growth path, with feedback, to meet ISO 9001 compliance requirements – A Manufacturing CMM realistically *was defined with its own categories and Process Areas (original contribution)*;
- Would a CMM framework specifically meet ISO 9001 requirements for small South African manufacturers? – *A pragmatic approach was followed to synthesise an ISO 9001-aligned manufacturing practices framework within an appropriate SMME context (original contribution)*.

It is thus *concluded*:

- From the exploratory industry survey that there is a need for a simplistic, measurable path towards TQM;
- A CMM provides sensible measures in the form of CM levels for incrementally improving quality practices, which simplifies the implementation of QM;
- A cross-validated customised CMM for small manufacturers was developed and is available for use in the small manufacturing space.

The main research challenge, namely, to provide a roadmap towards TQM, was addressed by synthesising a Manufacturing Capability Maturity Model that is tailored to the South African small manufacturing environment.

The following limitations are acknowledged:

- The study and design focused on *specific constraints and requirements from South African SMME manufacturers* using the best TQM characteristics from literature, the requirements for ISO 9001 certification, and the methods of a Capability Maturity framework;
- The model is validated as it meets requirements when cross-validated against literature, requirements, and existing standards, but it *has to be fully implemented and refined in an Action Design Research environment in future studies*.

Future work should focus on the refinement of the developed MCMM by physically implementing the model and learning from its guided emergence. Small manufacturers would benefit from the MCMM as it is relevant and instructive.

The insight obtained from the research and development conducted in this study will affect studies in other disciplines, adding value to the methodology used for Capability Maturity Model development that aligns with Quality Management for its inherent value.

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EVOLUTION OF MANUFACTURING TOOLING TECHNIQUES IN A CHANGING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Tooling refers to the process whereby a manufacturer acquires, makes and use the appropriate equipment to produce a component or product. It is important in product design and industrialization and must minimize defects from variation in dimensions and tolerances, shapes, and forms. Using a concurrent approach, product design, prototype development and manufacture of a product is an integrated with tooling and process design. Injection moulding, casting and metal forming requires tooling for each component. In this paper processes to manufacture parts, tools such as dies, moulds, and inserts and parts using machining, rapid prototyping and newer techniques such as 3D-Keltool are explained and how tool making have evolved from traditional tooling was made from alloys such as tool steels to other materials such as powders based on advances in technology. Direct and indirect tooling are discussed. Benefits of and factors affecting the uptake of rapid tooling and limitations are discussed.

Keywords: Tooling, Tool making, rapid prototyping, rapid tooling, direct tooling, indirect tooling

1 INTRODUCTION

Industrialists refer to tooling as the acquiring of manufacturing equipment and accessories and components to enable production of goods [1] while in manufacturing technology it is devices directly used to produce a part which include dies and moulds. Tool making is practice or task of fabricating or manufacturing of the mould and dies which are often used to mass produce consistent quality components using injection moulding, casting and forming operations [2]. Mould and tooling are interchangeably used terms [3, 4]. Traditionally, machining has been used to fabricated moulds out of a block of metal alloys such as steel and non-ferrous alloys. To improve properties of moulds and dies, such as hardness and wear resistance they are heat-treated and, in some cases, coated after machining [3]. A typical mould design comprises a female (negative cavity) into which a material fills to produce a part by flowing inside under gravity or applied pressure. Injection moulding forces a molten material into the die e.g., molten plastic or metal to form a consolidated part. In forming operations such as forging or drawing sheet, solid or a heated metal blank is formed into shape by a huge forcing it into a die [5]. The temperature and pressure at which forming and moulding is conducted depends on material properties of the blank and the final product properties [4]. The total cost of tooling which include the design, development, fabrication and maintenance are important in manufacturing costing and estimation [6, 7]. Tooling costs are distributed across the part production volume throughout its lifespan and are allocated to part per-unit cost [6, 7]. The demand for cost effective products from a manufacturer's perspective and cheap products by the customers have been the main drivers of tooling technology [8, 7]. Advances in manufacturing technology, integration of physics and chemistry as well as material science have fuelled innovation in new machining methods, non-traditional manufacturing and materials for tooling. With emerging economies there is a rise in global manufacturing competition, while increasing customer standards of living and aware is fueling demand for mass customization to suit individual tastes, shorter product life cycles leading to accelerated product obsolescence and continued demands for cheaper easily replaceable products [8, 7].

Traditional machining processes are a mature technology using machine tools lathes, milling and grinding machines, electrode discharge machining and more recently chemical methods to produce dies and moulds [4, 9]. In die cast and plastic injection mould tooling, Computer numerical controlled (CNC) machining is now standard mould and die manufacturing methods since the 1990's [10]. They are used in most toolrooms to manufacture metal working tooling for stampings, forgings and include moulds, dies, mandrels, jigs, fixtures, punch dies, perforated forms [5]. However, machining methods are subtractive manufacturing methods requiring solid substrate material on which the tool is carved leading to material loss. Highly skilled artisans such tool and die makers are required for process set up and operation of the machine tools. The machine set up procedures are often complex and time-consuming and require fixtures for accurately holding the workpiece during fabrication [10]. In the last few decades methods of rapid manufacturing of tools and dies have been developed and are report in many research papers to potentially reduce cost and lead times of tool manufacture [11, 9, 12, 7]. These may be divided broadly into those involving material addition or the removal of material [11, 9, 7]. High-speed CNC machining is now the most efficient machining method for milling, turning, drilling and grinding among other subtractive methods. Additive manufacturing techniques based on layer-by-layer manufacturing of metallic composites and ceramic alloy parts show enormous potential in tool making [13]. Rapid prototyping is a key part of the new industrial movement [13] or Fourth industrial revolution which focuses future manufacturing on advanced manufacturing technologies to improvement of efficiency and reduce production lead times, product innovation, automation and integration with information technology creating cyber physical systems [13, 14]. Manufacturing sustainability aims to reduce energy consumption, waste production and maximize process efficiency [15, 16]. This paper discusses how tool making has evolved over the decades from traditional and

nontraditional machining methods right through to rapid prototyping and rapid tooling technologies. Their present and future applications are also discussed and how their adoption can impact productivity, efficiency, quality and market competitiveness.

1.1 Aim of this paper

The aim of this paper is to discusses advances in tooling technology from traditional machining processes to present day additive manufacturing. Traditional tooling methods are discussed, their technology and weakness that justify adoption of innovative tooling methods. Direct and indirect tooling methods are explained as part of rapid tooling techniques. Different applications and materials used in rapid tooling are explored together with their design considerations, merits, and limitations. The importance of rapid tooling and factors affecting its adoption of rapid tooling by industry are explored. Applications of novel materials and additive manufacturing as the future for tooling, with their design considerations, merits, and limitations are explored.

2 METHODOLOGY

This paper is a literature study from journals, books and other online sources to review the evolution of tooling used in manufacturing. The key drivers of innovation of tooling are investigated by studying appropriate tooling for different manufacturing processes and products. Factors affecting the selection and cost implications of different dies are studied as well as material selection considerations for tool making. Different traditional, nontraditional and rapid tooling materials and tool making techniques and their different applications are discussed.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The design of a product, manufacturing selection and tooling design, today occurs in a virtual design environment [17]. Feasibility and functionality of distinctive design concepts as well as the selected or design manufacturing process and tooling can be tested [18]. Once validated the physical tooling and other accessories are then manufactured and deployed [17]. Prototyping a product during development allows different stakeholders like engineering, sales and marketing, manufacturing, parts suppliers, and subcontractors to understand its functionality. This has been enabled using computer simulation with can create a virtual prototype. By creating a virtual prototype preliminary studies of the physical prototype can be done reducing cost. Techniques of virtual prototyping include CFD (computational fluid dynamics) which replicates a wind tunnel and assess fluid flow and FEA (finite element analysis) to determine load-carrying capacity. Other simulation tools can be applied to manufacturing and assembly processes [19]. Figure 1 shows a schematic of traditional prototyping [19].

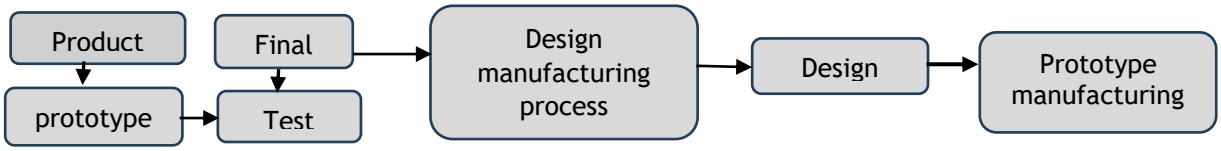

Figure 1. Traditional tooling development

The modern approach using virtual prototyping follows a concurrent engineering approach to both product and manufacturing and tooling design as illustrated in Figure 2.

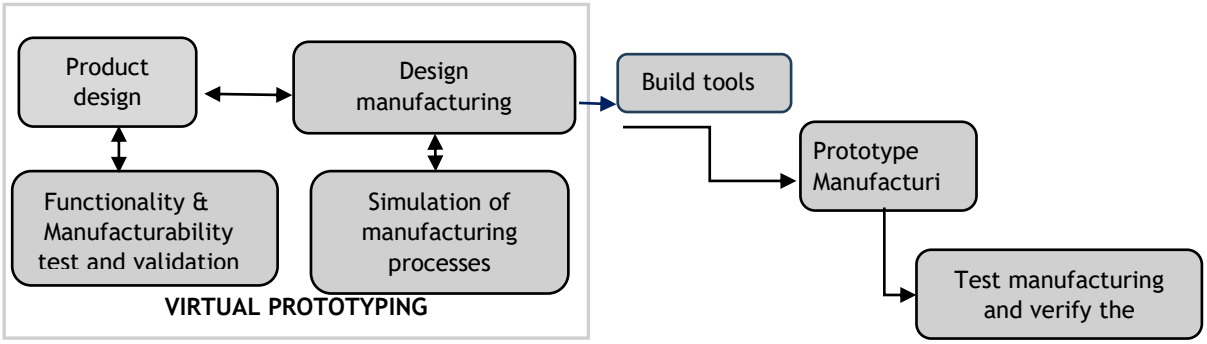

Figure 2. Modern tooling developing involving virtual prototyping

3.1 Mould material and components

Material selected for a tool material and the manufacturing techniques selected depend on component design and application requirements. For die casting permanent dies zinc alloys, aluminium, magnesium, and copper alloys are often used [20]. Moulds comprise fixtures that guide material flow during plastic moulding, sintering or die casting processes [19, 21]. Different mould designs include those consisting of two-plate and three-plate molds with or without stripper or rotary plates [22]. Insert molds incorporate metal inserts into the plastic mould before injection [23]. Other types of moulds include tandem or stack molds [24], parting line molds, hot runner molds, multicavity molds, cam action and multislide molds, lost core molds, and collapsible core molds [20]. These moulds require several inserts to control the filling and solidification process which can be fabricated using rapid prototyping [20]. Machining is used for high quality and precision components and involves machining, polishing, hardening, and heat treatment [1].

3.2 Traditional and nontraditional tool making

Traditional mould and die making uses conventional machine tools such as turning and milling to cut profiles and cavities. Their problem is limited quality and accuracy in reproducing profiles due to their mechanical spindles which produce unstable spindle speeds depending on operating conditions. Their drives cause mechanical impedance in gears, and thermal stress affect cutting forces, part surface quality and tolerances [25]. CNC machines have improved performance compared to conventional ones. One such type is a 5-axis CNC machine which is able to machine complex profile required for integral cavities on moulds due to the ability to manipulate the cutting tool and work piece [26]. An Illustrations of a 5-axis milling machine tool is in Figure 3(a) and a 5-axis lathe machine in Figure 3(b). Machining accuracy depends on spindle speeds and operating conditions, e.g., thermal stress affects cutting forces [25].

Other nontraditional tool making methods use different forms of thermal energy, such as electric discharge spark and plasma arc [27]. Electro discharge machining (EDM) is one method using spark discharges to machine electrically conducting materials regardless of its mechanical properties [27]. The metal workpiece is formed by discharges which take place in the gap between the tool, which serves as an electrode, and the workpiece [28].

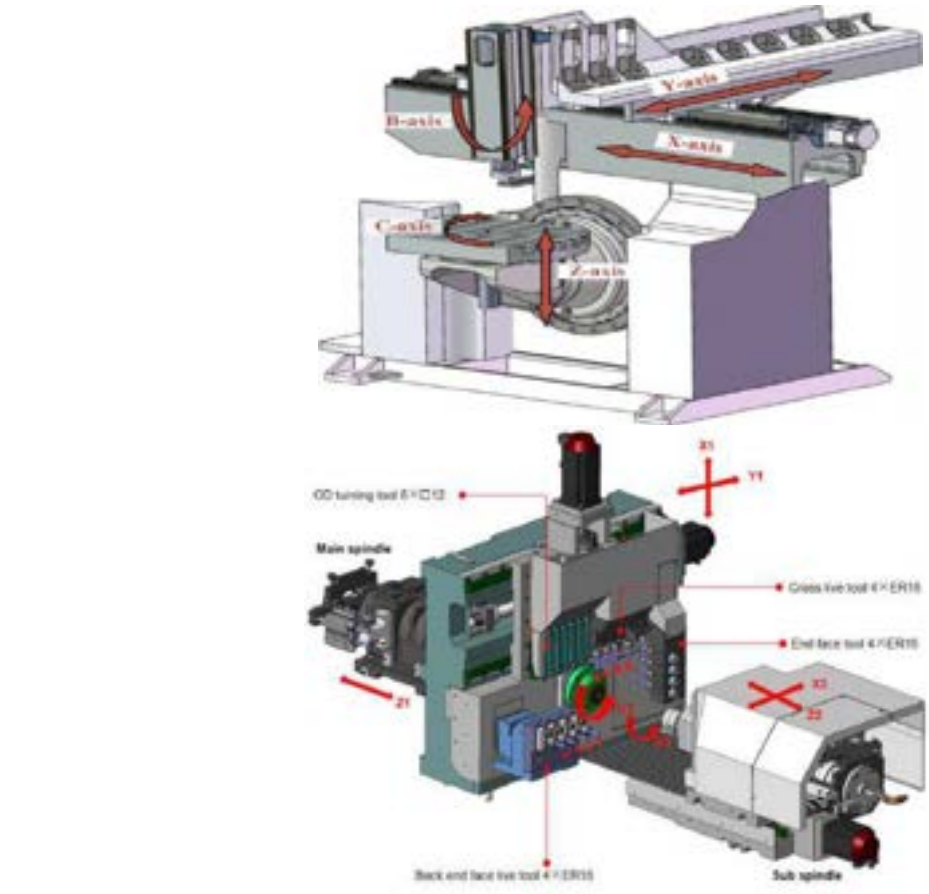

Figure 3 (a) five-axis CNC Milling machine (Jiang, et al., 2020) (b) 5-axis Lathe [29]

A variant of electrode discharge machining is Wire Electro Discharge Machining (WEDM) which uses a wire to cut a profile in conductive hard materials. Plasma arc manufacturing (PAM) uses plasma from a high energy electrical source to cut material and technology available today include High Tolerance Plasma Arc Cutting, Hydro-magnetically confined plasma arc cutting, Plasma Arc Machining using Hybrid plasma torch, CNC plasma arc cutting and underwater plasma cutting [27]. Principle of electro discharge machining is shown in Figure 4(a) and plasma cutting in Figure 4(b).

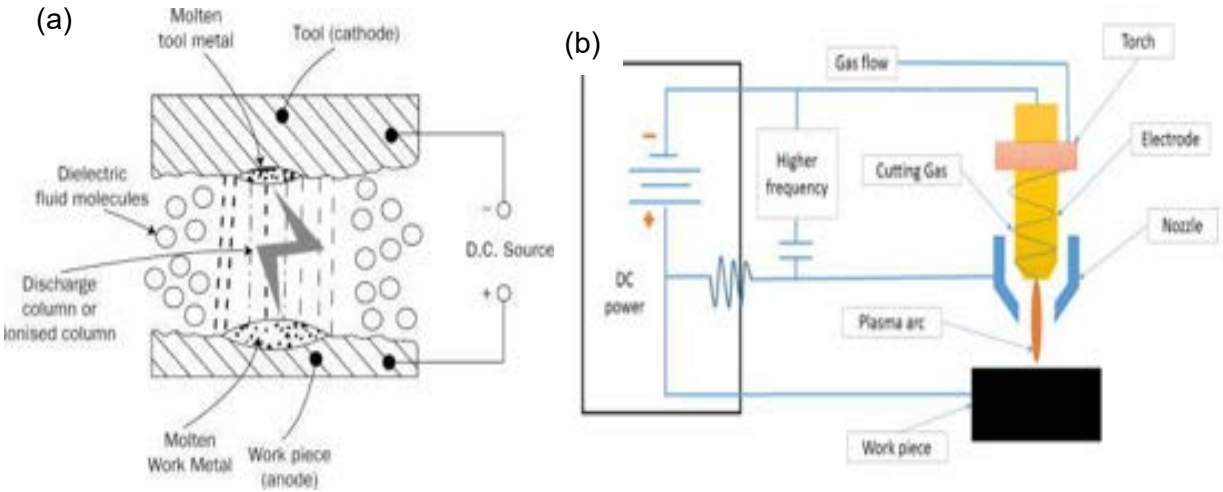

Figure 4. (a) Electro discharge machining [28] (b) Plasma discharge machining [30]

For non-conductive materials lasers can be applied for machining [31, 32]. Fundamentals of laser generation for five distinct types of lasers such as Nd: YAG Laser, Fibre Laser, CO2 Laser, Excimer Laser, and Diode Laser [27, 32]. Lasers in principle convert or process electrical energy first into light energy which then transformed into thermal energy. When controlled and directed onto a workpiece it melts and evaporates material effecting the machining process [31, 32]. During a laser machining (LM) process, the substrate material interacts with a laser beam resulting in its melting and material removal form the focus area [19, 32]. It can accurately cut titanium [19], and nickel alloys such as hardened Inconel 718 [32] and hard materials, such as advanced ceramics and composites, into intricate shapes and geometries with greater precision and minimal damage, vibration, and stresses [27].

The arrangement of laser machining process is shown in Figure 5.

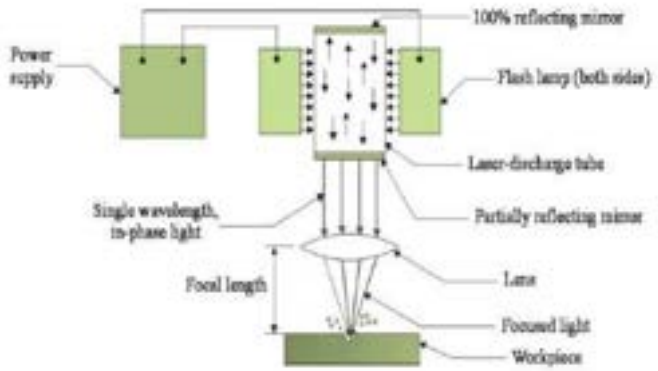

Figure 5. Arrangement of Laser beam machining [31]

3.2 Rapid prototyping and additive manufacturing

Rapid prototyping can be achieved using high speed machining using advanced CNC machines such as 5 axis machines [25]. However, additive manufacturing or 3D printing emerges as a fast way to develop a finished part directly from a design [8, 33]. It is also referred to as additive fabrication, processes, techniques, layer manufacturing, layer manufacturing [34], solid freeform fabrication [33] and freeform fabrication [34]. It is also applied in manufacture functional prototypes for product designs and small production batches of real component parts for use in a product [7, 35, 36]. Additive manufacturing transforms a digital computer aided design (CAD) model stored on a computer into a physical object form using a 3D printer to which the digital model is directly sent. The CAD model contains the part design information saved in STL file format after drafting which is readable to the 3D printer [7]. A number of 3D printing machines have been developed by different manufacturers and are classified into different categories by ISO/ASTM 52900:2021 based on their processing mechanisms [34]. The CAD model communicates model data including a description of the 3D surface geometry with native support for colour, materials, lattices, textures, constellations and metadata and shows surface geometry as a triangular mesh, flat or curved [37]. In 3D printing the layer is the basic building block of this technology, and their formation and interactions in the building process depends on materials used and techniques employed [38, 7]. A flow chart of rapid prototyping process is shown in Figure 1.

Additive manufacturing can be applied for rapid manufacturing (RM) where it delivers a significant increase in speed and reduction in cost, for small production runs or finished components and rapid tooling to produce complex tooling as a substitute for machining processes [40, 41, 33]. When applied for RM additive manufacturing techniques can produce high quality end user parts manufacturing direct from digital designs without elaborate process

set up and complex tool and work piece holders required for machining [12, 40]. Rapid manufacturing is already used for making parts in industries such as aerospace, aeronautics, automotive, home appliances, industrial equipment, and electronic devices [10, 40, 42, 7]. Advances in technology are key drivers in additive manufacturing the structural integrity and strength of the parts and the performance parameters of cost, quality and time of manufacturing also depend on layer properties [19, 7].

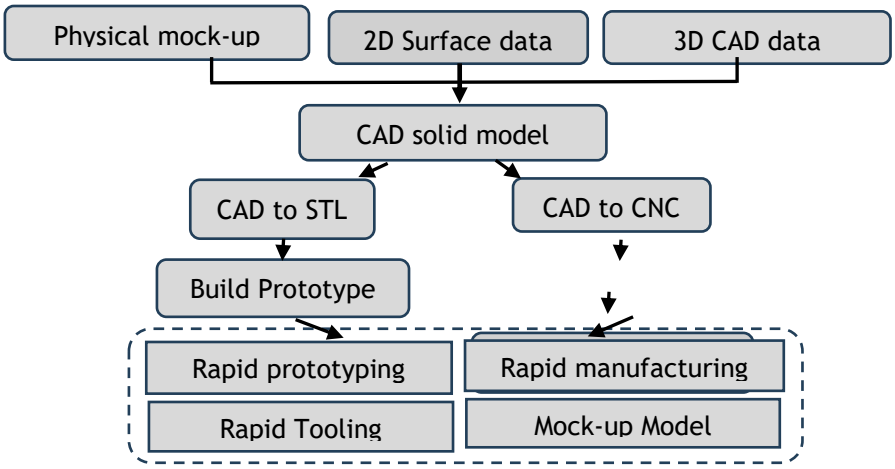

Figure 1. Rapid prototyping process [39]

3.3 Rapid prototyping techniques

Rapid prototyping methods based on additive manufacturing are categorized by the state of the prototype material before part formation, namely liquid, powder or solid sheets [8, 12, 42]. They can be classified according to the transferring data from the sliced three-dimensional models into physical structures [36, 43]. These are one-dimensional channels where a laser beam or material jet is employed, they use both polymer manufacturing, discrete particles solid particles and molten metal [35, 42]. Selective laser sintering, laminated object manufacturing and 3D welding are examples of these processes [36]. Multiple one-dimensional channels where two beams are independently controlled in a process such as laser sintering technology [7]. Two dimensional channels using masks in processes such as shape deposition manufacturing and direct photo shaping [8]. Liquid-based processes involve the solidification of a resin on contact with a laser, the solidification of an electro setting fluid [7]. Powder based processes aggregate substrate particles with a laser melting or by the selective application of binding agents [8, 4]. Processes involving melting and subsequent solidification of substrate material [7] include Ballistic particle manufacturing (BPM), MultiJet modelling (MJM), Fused deposition modelling (FMD), 3D welding, precision droplet-based net-form manufacturing (PDM) and Shape deposition manufacturing (SDM) [7, 42]. BPM builds parts by ejecting a stream of molten material from a nozzle whose stream separates into droplets that hit the substrate and immediately cold-weld to form the part [19, 42]. MJM builds models using techniques like inkjet or phase change printing but applied in three dimensions [19, 7]. FDM equipment comprises two movable heads, one of which deposits the material through a nozzle while the another supports the substrate [35, 42]. PDM uses a droplet-based net-forming manufacturing technique by exploiting capillary instability phenomenon of liquid jets which results in uniform liquid metal droplets [19, 7, 42]. By controlling the thermal state and mass of the droplets the desired microstructure develops [19, 7]. Powder bed fusion techniques involve locally melting metal powder using a leaser on a substrate to create layers and after a layer is formed, a new layer of powder is distributed by means of a roller [7, 42]. 3DW system uses an arc-welding robot to deposit material onto platform build complex structures [36]. Selective deposition modelling involves spraying molten metal in a near-net shape on to a

substrate and then removing unwanted material via numerically controlled (NC) operations [19, 7]. Liquid thermal polymerization (LTP) can form layers of thermosets instead of photo-curable materials. jetting heads feed the materials in liquid form on the surface [44, 42]. The liquid polymer and use a UV light to cure successive layers droplets form a deposition layer [36, 44]. Stereolithography is a method using curing of a liquid polymer in a vat using a UV light passed through its bottom causing successive solidification [45]. The laser engineering net shaping (LENS) is a process that feeds powder through a nozzle on to the part bed while simultaneously fusing it with a laser on one side of the bed or coaxial with the laser [19, 7]. Coaxial powder feeders often cause inaccuracies in the geometry of the part and the layer thickness due to beam and the powder misalignment [46, 42, 7]. Selective laser sintering (SLS) uses an infrared laser to trace a component onto a powder material [7]. Direct metal laser sintering (DMLS) is another powder sintering technique that shapes and solidifies metal powders using a fibre laser [35, 42].

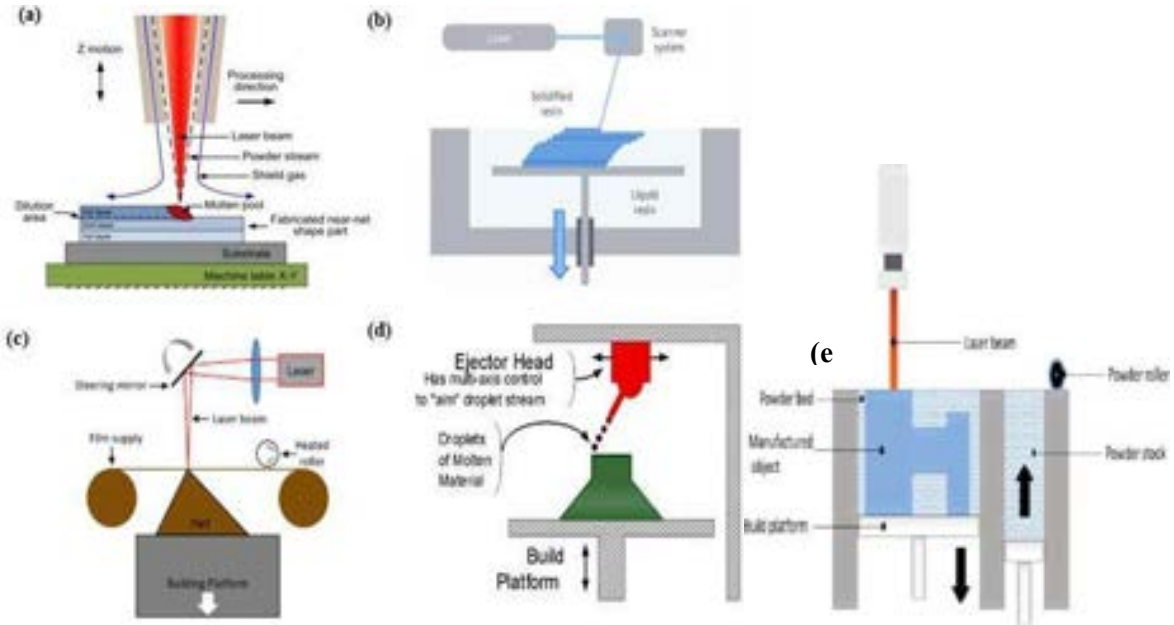

Figure 4. (a) Laser engineered net shaping [47] (b) (c) Liquid thermal polymerization [48] (d) Ballistic particle manufacturing [48] Stereolithography [44] (e) Powder bed fusion technique [49]

4 DISCUSSION

Rapid prototyping technologies are now evolving toward rapid tooling RP devices generally build up a tooling prototype layer by layer, rapidly generating a fully three-dimensional free form, requiring no part-specific tooling [33, 36]. Rapid tooling refers to a process that allows a tool or mould to be manufactured in a short amount of time thereby shortening the duration execution of a product development project from design conception, creation to the fabricated product [5, 50]. Using rapid tooling evaluation of the tool's or product's processing performances before going into production is facilitated [5]. Multiple prototypes can be made in a given timeframe compared to conventional methods. Rapid tooling can be classified into direct whereby the design is directly send to a machine for additive such as 3D printing or subtractive manufacture such as CNC machining of stock material to produce a tool [50] and indirect methods involving creation of a pattern used to create the die through casting or other moulding methods [50].

4.1 Rapid tooling

Rapid tooling and rapid manufacturing facilitate production of test prototypes, and production of tooling and end-use parts even with complex geometries. Its flexibility allows easy personalization and customization of product design. In cases where blueprints of a machine part or equipment are missing a part can be printed for use as a replacement part needed for repairs [40, 7, 42]. Rapid tooling is based on the adaptation of ceramic, composites, polymer and metal alloy to create mould and other tooling components such as inserts and cores. When fabricating tooling, rapid prototyping techniques direct and indirect tooling can be produced [10]. To make direct tooling, additive manufacturing methods produce a mould directly form the design in one step [51]. Methods used include selective laser sintering [7], 3D printing tooling [4, 36], laser-engineered net shaping (LENS) tooling [7], direct metal laser sintering (DMLS) tooling [41], and electron beam melting (EBM) tooling [52].

4.1.1 Indirect tooling techniques

Indirect tooling involves the making of moulds and dies by first producing patterns, whose imprint undergoes further steps to create a mould cavity e.g., pattern making for sand casting around which sand is covered and compacted before the pattern is removed leaving a mould cavity [53]. In casting processes additive manufacturing methods using metals, polymers and composites reduce the time required for pattern making, reducing lead time for casting production. Other indirect tooling techniques which will be discussed in this paper are used for prototypes or short-run production tooling [54]. These methods include 3D Keltool [7], Polysteel [54], the ExpressTool process [55], and silicone room temperature vulcanization (RTV) tooling [51]. Indirect tooling is when the mold is made through more than one intermediary step, by using AM model as the first step [10]. Table 1 explains these methods including the materials used, principles and applications of each one.

Table 1.

Process	Description
3D Keltool	Core and cavity patterns with stereolithography or some other rapid prototyping process. After finishing core and cavity patterns silicone rubber is cast against them to create moulds into which a mixture of metal powder and binder is poured, packed, and cured [9, 54, 56].
Metal copy	Metal copying involves creating a master pattern or mold. Selective laser sintering (SLS) is used to fuse powdered pattern material together, creating solid patterns. However, it uses a binder that is less viscous, making it suitable for small features such as narrow, deep slots. It makes patterns for high volume production runs [9].
Polysteel	A 3D-printed model made of PolySteel is used as a master pattern to create a mold, rather than directly forming the mold cavity. Polysteel is a polymer filles material comprising of 90% steel and can be molded by deposition modelling to the right shape [9, 57]. The polymer reduces porosity [55, 57].
ExpressTool process	Powder-based additive manufacturing and electroforming techniques are used to create injection moulding tools. It uses chromium carbide and tungsten powder to create core and cavity mold inserts [55].
Silicone room temperature vulcanization (RTV)	An accurate master pattern is made by additive manufacturing SLA or SLS or even CNC machining or direct metal laser sintering and finished it to the desired appearance before silicone rubber is then cast around the pattern to form the mould. Moulds are used for thermoset materials such as urethane and epoxy materials are unsuitable for high-volume manufacturing and have life of less than 50 parts [54].
Spray metal tooling	Metal such as zinc-aluminum alloy (Kirksite), Nickel, or steel is applied by a gas arc or metal arc spraying on a pattern to create a mould [9]. A rubber or urethane material is then cast onto it as back up. Typical runs are 50–1,000 pieces, although some Kirksite molds have produced up to 200,000 pieces [54].
Rapid Solidification Process Tooling	A ceramic pattern is made of a component. To make the mould a 5-axis manual gripper holds the ceramic pattern as a spray system deposits in a vacuum chamber. The heated metal spray from a fixed nozzle directed onto the ceramic pattern onto which it coats

	form the mould [54, 58].After the spray is solidified over the pattern, the ceramic material is sand blasting leaving the metallic mould. It is applied to hard-to-machine alloys [54, 58].
Ford Sprayform	Special freeze-casting process is used to produce a ceramic pattern which is sprayed with a metal to form a shell about 19 mm thick. The shell backed up with epoxy fill. It is applied for producing stamping tools [54].
PHAST (Prototype Hard and Soft Tooling)	A pattern used for a mould master pattern in a soft, accurate, and reusable material. From the master pattern , ceramic moulds inserts are produced and used to cast wear-resistant Metal Matrix Composite of tungsten and bronze [54, 59].
Epoxy-based composite tooling	Epoxy-based composite tooling requires a master pattern created using AM process. Used for wax and polymer materials injection [53]. The pattern is finished and then embedded in a parting line block to create the parting line of the mould and metal inserts in high pressure areas during the injection molding process [54, 60].
Aluminum-filled epoxy tools.	Can be formed and machined to the ASTM standard according to cold stir casting [60]. Cold stir casting is a process used to create metal matrix composites (MMCs) by mechanically stirring reinforcement particles into a molten metal matrix. monolithic counterparts. Apply surface coats of epoxy to the pattern and run-off consisting of 35% epoxy and 65% aluminum composite material to complete the mold [54, 61].

4.2 Application of rapid tooling techniques

Today it is widely used in automotive, mechanical designs, consumer products, software engineering, entertainment, microchips, chemicals, and electronics [39].Its steps involve data capture using a scanning process, data segmentation and then 3D model development using modelling software [38]. After creating an STL file, various rapid prototyping methods fabricate the physical model [35] [47]. Computer aided engineering (CAE) analysis in the development of tooling for manufacturing facilitates concurrent engineering and time-compression technologies during the industrialization process [39]. Virtual prototyping employs computer models, from which design options are tested and analysed [47]. Software tools based on finite element analysis (FEA), are employed in the initiating visual presentation and design optimization of tooling and products under development [19]. After detailed design of products or tools, rapid prototyping can be used for producing prototypes for testing their behaviour, visualizing appearance, and mechanical strength [35] [50]. Functional tests use selective laser sintered polyamide-based models [8]. SLS production of polyamide parts is a cost-effective method for small number of parts [58]. Another growing application is in art and design allowing artists and other designers to experiment and visualize with complex artworks [19]. Rapid prototyping technologies quickly build patterns for foundry applications. For investment and vacuum casting patterns, selective laser sintering and fused deposition modelling are applicable [59]. In the medical/surgical domain, rapid prototyping technologies can build models that provide visual and tactile information [19]. These models can assist in operation planning, surgery rehearsal and training [62]. Unusual medical deformities once modelled facilitate surgery and training. The procedure of data acquisition involves making a CT scan whose data can be exported to an STL file format exported to the rapid prototyping machine [36] [38]. A model for medical applications, rapid prototyping methods such as stereolithography, fused deposition modelling print the model [38].

4.3 Future of rapid tooling

Quality, cost, and lead times of dies and moulds determine the economics of producing a very large number of components, subassemblies, and assemblies in industries such as automotive and aerospace [4, 63]. Creating tooling for prototype and production components is one of the most time consuming and costly phases in new product development [46, 64]. Cost depends on the complexity of the design, material selection, production volume and customization needs [6, 65]. Complexity and customisation of design result in higher costs of tool making compared to standard tooling and such an expense is justified by the profitability of an intended manufactured final product and its demand [6]. With the advent of industry 4.0 (4IR) which is

revolutionising manufacturing through automation linked to cyber physical systems and advanced manufacturing such as rapid prototyping rapid tooling will play a key role in improving efficiency [13, 66]. Incorporating 3D printing into pattern and mould making will time to market and increase customisation in a market where product life cycles are shortening, and customers are demanding innovative products [67]. There are also broader applications of 3D printing for tooling required for highly specialised applications such as biomedical engineering [68]. Adoption of rapid tooling in companies where tooling has been produced by conventional machining methods requires a technology focus, management that is informed and committed to research and innovation and capital expenditure. However, the adoption of rapid tooling in traditional manufacturing environments is influenced by the financial resources, investment in product and process technology development within the individual companies as well as the existing infrastructure.

4.4 Comparison of different tooling

In manufacturing, tooling is compared in terms of cost, ease of manufacture, pressure it can with stand, mould life, part material. and accuracy [61]. Table 2 shows a comparison of the different rapid tooling techniques and their associated attributes.

Table 2. Comparison of 3D printing, CNC machining, and conventional hard tooling [69]

	Additive manufacturing (such as 3D printing)	CNC machining	Silicone rubber	Aluminum alloy	Soft steel	Hybrid of aluminum & soft steel	Hard tooling
Mold Cost	N/A	N/A	$1000	$4000	$3000	$3500	$5000+
Speed to first part	< 1 day	2-3 days	5 days	25 days	40 days	32 days	60 days
Mold life	1 to 5 shots	1 to 5 shots	20 shots	10000 shots	50,000 shots	35,000 shots	up to 1m shots
Texture	Limited	Limited	Very good	Limited	Very good	Very good	Very good
Accuracy	Medium	High	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Clamp pressure	N/A	N/A	N/A	Up to 100 tons	Up to 600 tons	Up to 100 tons	Up to 2,000 tons
Part material	Filament/resin	Stock	Silicone	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual
Cycle time	5-24h	5-24h	24h	Seconds or mins	Seconds or mins	Seconds or mins	Seconds or mins

5 CONCLUSION

Moulds, dies, mandrels, jigs, fixtures, punch dies are among the commonly used tools in manufacture of component parts that are assembled into final products. Quality, cost, and lead times of dies and moulds determine the economics of producing a very large number of components. Traditional manufacturing methods such as conventional machining, electrode discharge machining have over the decades been replaced by 3-axis CNC machining. However, the two techniques do not produce complex profiles on one machine easily. To overcome this problem 5-axis CNC machines have been developed able to machine complex profiles on one machine. This reduced process time and productivity in tool making. Machine tools still require highly skilled operators, and the processes are subtractive leading to high material loss and ultimately the tool cost. Laser machining, plasma cutting and electrode discharge machining methods are subtractive, and energy intensive. Where subtractive methods are used for tooling manufacture stock material must have high quality and free of internal defects.Intricate, and narrow shapes, with high accuracy present challenges to die makers. This is often solved by multi component die assemblies leading to high cost of the tool assembly. Additive manufacturing or 3D printing is a fairly new method developed in the last 4 decades and by producing diverse materials such as metal alloys, ceramics and composites are replacing machining in component manufacturing. Techniques such as direct metal laser sintering are being utilised in tool manufacturing. Manufacturing is moving towards direct

tooling as opposes to indirect tooling to minimise lead times, tooling costs and increase productivity. 3D printing technology for fabrication of hard materials, and tooling of complex geometries without the need for expensive jigs and fixtures is the future of tool making industry.

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APPLYING LEAN AND CLEAN MANUFACTURING TO IMPROVE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY IN MEDIUM SIZED RECYCLED STEEL MAKING OPERATION

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ABSTRACT

Steel is a key industrial product in any economy impacting industrialisation, survival of other downstream and upstream businesses. While primary large scale producers use iron ore as a raw material, small to medium scale producers use scrap metal and other ingredients to produce mostly produce such as channels, reinforcing, columns, and beams. Steel manufacturing involves collected, sorted, and fed into furnaces, continuous cast and drawn to the required profile and sawmilled to size. Material handling equipment like cranes, cooling beds, stackers, oxygen plant, cooling water purification and cooling plant, air pollution control systems and machine tools are ancillary equipment in the operation. Steel manufacturing faces high defects, high down time, breakdowns, high idle time due to material shortage, low labour productivity and excessive material handling. This paper investigates how lean principles can be applied to eliminate the problems faced in medium scale steel manufacturing and how to sustain continuous improvement.

Keywords: recycled steel, operational efficiency, productivity, quality

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1 INTRODUCTION

Steel is an important raw material in the manufacture of consumer products, farming, mining, manufacturing, construction machinery and automotive components [1, 2, 3]. It is key in infrastructural development which accounted for nearly half of the total steel usage in the last decade [4]. Global steel production and export market is dominated by China and India where producers are subsidized their governments allowing their steel to be cheaper on the saturated market [3]. In developing countries such as South Africa, a surge in imports of primary carbon and alloy steel products is creating the potential market overstocking [3]. Steel industry is facing escalating operational costs, and uncertainty due to recently introduced US tariffs on steel [5]. A report by South African Iron and Steel Institute reports decline in the total national production for Q3 2024 was 1,292,700 tonnes from 1,359,900 tonnes in Q3 2023 [6] due to declining demand and decreased economies of scale and uncompetitive prices [5, 7, 3], power shortages interrupt production schedules, forcing plants to use expensive alternative energy sources leading to increased production costs [5, 7]. The continuing export of steel scrap limits available scrap for local industries and reimported finished products leading to increased competition [2] which limits availability of raw materials for local industries [2]. Logistics bottlenecks due to poor rail and port infrastructure cause forcing companies to resort to road transportation of material and finished products [5, 7]. For steel producers there is growing pressure for local steel producers offer competitive responsiveness, price and quality and to deliver the products on time to their customers [3]. However, small scale producers face high production costs, low efficiency in production and quality challenges [4] as well as poor environmental compliance due to poor emission control during scrap handling, storage, smelting and forming operations [8, 9]. Measures are required to systematically identify and quantify the challenges faced particularly by small scale steel producers using scrap steel as raw materials. In this study lean manufacturing principles, quality assurance and cleaner production principles are chosen as tools to develop manufacturing best industry practices using a case study of a medium scale recycled steel manufacturer to improve production and quality processes, and shop floor management as well as logistics operations. Lean manufacturing is a production philosophy focused on maximizing productivity and value for the customer while minimizing waste or any activities that does not add value to operations [10, 11]. Quality control is a system of maintaining standards in manufactured products by testing a sample of the output against the specification according to Oxford dictionary. Quality assurance focuses on building quality into the production process itself to prevent defects from occurring in the first place, rather than relying solely on inspection to catch them [12]. Cleaner production principles aim to identify waste and implementing ways to prevent its production during manufacturing while improving efficiency in resources utilisation efficiency [13, 14].

1.2 Aim and objectives of study

The investigates current procedures equipment and procedures in material handling, manufacturing practice as well as quality control and logistics in a medium sized steel manufacturing plant to identify challenges which are hampering process and operational efficiency. Lean management and cleaner production principles are then applied to improve operational efficiency, reduce pollution and environmental compliance in the steel making operations of the plant. The objectives are to achieve increased operational efficiency through improvement of material handling, quality assurance and achieve standardization of operations. Another objective is to reduce in occurrence of defects, and product returns, and subsequently financial losses due to quality failures. The last objective is to identify sources of pollution during processing and finding ways of mitigating harm to employees and the environment.

2 METHODS

The study was conducted using a field study on the shop flow by observing production processes and actively participating in operations. Studies were conducted on the current and documented processes to identify the factors affecting operational efficiency of s equipment and material movement. Quality management and control activities and processes throughout production was studied as well. Costs of production was evaluated to identify opportunities for cost saving. Quality measurements. were contacted experimentally in the Quality Control department. Problem solving techniques including fish bone analysis, failure mode and effect analysis and plan-do check act were applied to tackle challenges in production. The advantage of a field study on the shopfloor is to investigate production in real time in its natural setting. Lean principles were applied to improve productivity and eliminate waste while cleaner production methods were applied to identify physical waste reduction handling and treatment. Top management practices by managers were not studied as part of this research.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Steel is primarily made of iron and carbon with other elements as chromium, nickel, manganese, carbon, silicon and zinc are added to achieve required properties [8]. It is durable, ductile, workable, corrosion resistant and versatile in its applications [8]. Virgin steel manufactured from iron ore by primary producers accounts for the bulk of global steel production [9, 10] while recycled steel produced by secondary producers from collected ferrous scrap accounts for about 25% of steel produced but its share is growing [11, 9, 10]. However, globally recycled steel demand is growing at a faster rate than scrap which is fixed in the way it is being released from steel in use [10]. The steel industry produces steel billets, further rolled into sections and sheets [12]. Depending on use the quality requirements for steel products are varied and are determined by manufacturing industry standards [8].

3.1 Recycled steel production process

The input for recycling steel processing is heavy melting steel (HMS) [13]. HMS 1 is recyclable steel and wrought iron with less than 0.05% carbon recovered from items demolished or dismantled at the end of their life [13, 14]. HMS 2 contain galvanized and blackened steel [13]. Induction Furnaces use steel melting scrap, sponge iron & Pig Iron/Cast Irons at an average the ratio of 40% sponge Iron + 10% Cast Irons or Pig Iron [14]. Collected and sorted scrap is charged into an induction furnace which uses electrical induction heating of the metal until molten [9]. Steel impurities such as copper can be diluted during melting since it leads to a loss of ductility and resulting surface defects [15]. Induction heating is a clean, energy-efficient and is well controlled melting process as compared to other metal melting such as coke blast furnaces [11]. Induction furnace does not require an arc like electric arc furnace [14]. Electric Arc Furnace Process uses an electrode dipped into the furnace which melts the scrap through arcing [16, 9]. Charging is done as per scrap availability and impurities are removed as slag [14]. The metallic charge melts to form liquid steel and as soon as the liquid bath achieves a temperature of around 1650°C tapping starts in the ladle for further processing [9]. The scrap melting process using arc melting is shown in Figure 1.

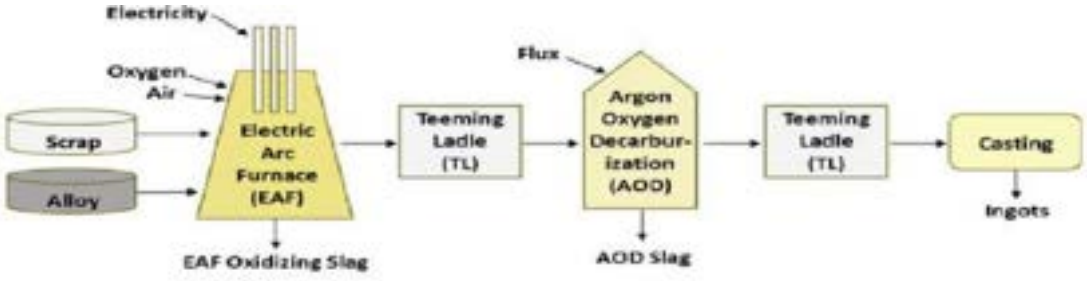

Figure 1. Melting of scrap and processing into billets [9]

Continuous casting is the process metal is poured continuously from a tundish or molten metal reservoir into a water-cooled metallic mould and solidified while being continuously withdrawn into a billet [17] . Steps in steel processing in Figure 1.Rolling is the metal forming process in cast billets are converted to the finished product by passing through rolls to reduce the thickness and make it uniform [12]. After rolling the product range sections produced includes reinforcing steel bar, IPE sections, angles, and channels [18]. Before rolling, billets are heated or soaked, in furnaces soaking pits util they achieve a uniform temperature of 1200°C [19]. Semi-finished billets are subsequently processed into final sections using cold rolling below recrystallisation temperature which is 650 to 700°C [12, 20, 18] or hot rolling mills above 930°C [21, 22, 23]. After rolling, scarfing is done to slab surface through a thermochemical process to remove a 2-6 mm layer with the aim of eliminating surface defects, like inclusions, pitting and cracks. Heating and blowing oxygen allow the melting of the metal layer [24] . The steel billet finishing process into sections is in Figure 2.

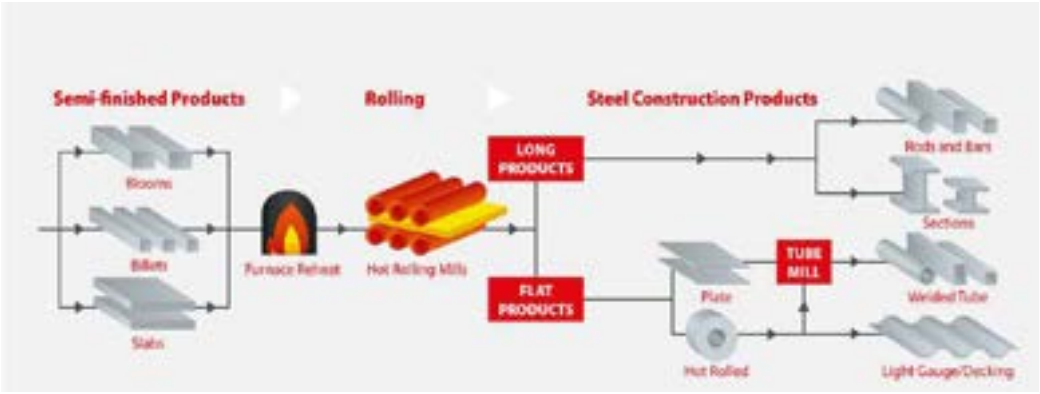

Figure 2. Finishing of continuous cast steel into final products [23]

A hot and cold sawmill, cooling beds, stackers, bundling machines and conventional and computer numerical controlled (CNC) lathes to maintain the many rolls used in the processing of steel into various shapes and sizes are also included in the capital equipment. Ancillary equipment in steel production includes an oxygen plant for onsite generation of oxygen used in steel scarfing [24], cooling water purification and cooling plant, air pollution control systems and a coal gasifier as well as material handling & lifting equipment (cranes). Material handling includes grabs for scrap handling, scrap and billet handling magnets, scrap pusher for induction melting furnaces, ladle and tundish pre-heating systems, tundish tilting and deskulling [25].

3.2 Lean manufacturing concepts and tools

The lean production concept seeks to improve efficiency by eliminating waste and has its origin in automotive assembly industry although it is widely used in the manufacturing sector [26, 27, 28, 29]. According to lean manufacturing philosophy waste includes excessive procedure (overproduction); delays/ waiting time; transportation that is not necessary;

excessive processing (inappropriate processes); excess inventory; excessive movement; and defective products [26, 30, 31]. Lean views manufacturing operations as a value stream [26, 28, 18] encompassing all the activities (both value-added, and non-value added). These activities bring materials through the production flow through to the customer [32]. Other sectors and industries such as mining and metallurgy also face similar challenges due to physical and lean waste generated during processing [18, 26]. In metal processing physical material waste includes emissions, and by products from extraction processes, while lean waste comes from excessive handling, idle time during processes, defects in products, excess inventory, and overproduction [31, 5]. Lean manufacturing systematically identifies and eliminates waste through process improvement and creating a smooth flow of production processes with fast lead times and little waste [32]. Central to lean manufacturing is problem solving. A problem exists when there is deviation from a standard in process performance, efficiency, and product quality [33]. A number of tools are available for problem solving. Root cause analysis , fishbone or cause and effect diagrams identify and trace the origins of a problem [33]. ABC analysis classifies the impact of identified problems to quantify their contribution and cluster them as the vital few or those with highest impact and important many as less impactful ones which still warrant solving to improve performance. These techniques are useful for preliminary evaluation of the impact of a problem [34]. For more detailed examination of a problem tools such as Failure Mode and Effect Analysis (FMEA) [35] and DMIAC (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, and Control) [33, 34]. FMEA defines each possible failure mode, its effect, criticality and ranks it using weighted scoring [35]. DMIAC methodology defines a problem, systematically analyse it to identify its main causes, and develop a feasible solution and implementation for sustainable continuous improvement [33, 34]. Collaboration between functional teams and teamwork within function departments is important in brainstorming and solving problems encountered within an organisation. Upskilling and training of equipment operators and staff creates awareness of lean management initiatives and technical skills which are key to achieving continuous improvement and a learning organisation. Upper and lower management must drive and be committed to sustain improvements [35]. They support and implement plans through budgeting for process redesign and acquiring of new equipment and enlisting shareholder approval for such initiatives for funding [34]. Through lean improvements production costs can be reduced, while product quality, material handling, and overall equipment and manpower utilisation improved together with process output waste management by tackling it at source and its handling [32].

3.3 Foundry quality control

Quality assurance of steel manufacturing ensures processes adhere to the standard manufacturing procedures during the entire process from scrap to the final rolled form. The melting temperature in the electrical arc furnace is up to 1600^{o}C, depending on iron compositions as determined by the Iron-Carbon diagram [43]. Hot rolling is at done at 800^{o}C to 1200^{o}C.The metallurgy of steel is charecterised by resultant phases with distinct properties namely austenite which gives high ductility and toughness [44], cementite consisting of carbides which gives hardness [45], and ferrite which gives ferromagnetic properties [46]. Properties are modified by adding alloying elements such as chromium, vanadium and silicon among others [47]. Non-alloy steels are low alloying addition content, for general use or for heat treatment, welding or forging. Stainless steels contain up to 1.25 carbon and up to 10.5% chromium for corrosion resistance [48]. Alloy steels have higher alloying element composition. During melting the molten steel is sampled at regular intervals and tested for elemental composition using spectrometry whose principle is derivation of masses within a chemical sample through their mass-to-charge ratio [49]. The phases can be modified by adding alloying elements to modify properties. After casting, billets and rolled steels are cut to produce samples which are ground polished etched and tested through micrography to identify phases

present [44, 45]. Some samples are machined and finished then tested for tensile strength [52], microhardness [53], impact strength, bending strength wear [54] and corrosion resistance [48].

3.4 Cleaner production and waste management

Cleaner production (CP) is a preventive environmental protection initiative focussing on reducing waste and emissions at the source rather than managing them after they are emitted [14]. The foundry industry faces environmental constraints due to requirements for waste management and hazardous waste disposal and compliance to minimum requirements for the handling, classification, and disposal of hazardous waste [55]. Different emissions from smelting operations include (a) dust furnace loading (b) dust and gases such as carbon and sulphur dioxide pouring emissions (c) gaseous furnace emissions (d) storm water runoff (e) dust from shotblast and baghouse dust (f) discharged control water. Burning loss is the proportion of the material loss to that charged into a furnace due to chemical reactions and volatilisation [55]. Solid waste such as slag is discharged as a byproduct of the smelting process (Beyerstedt, 2021; Adegoloye, et al., 2015; Gurumoorthy & Arunachalam, 2016). Life cycle analysis (LCA) is used to evaluate environmental impact of any product and in practice standards such as ISO14040 can be applied to study effects of smelting operations [61, 62]. Principles of cleaner production include (a) Prevention over end-of-pipe treatment (b) Integrated approach of entire production cycle (c) Resource efficiency or material, energy and water (d) Pollution prevention (f) continuous improvement (g) Stakeholder involvement including employees, management, customers and suppliers [63, 62]

3.5 Operational logistics

During steel processing there is considerable material handling throughout the process or manufacturing logistics [64]. It involves the planning, implementation, and control of the movement and storage of materials and finished goods within a manufacturing environment [65]. Material handling efficiency determines overall productivity and safety of workers [66]. Reverse logistics is also important in operations and is the process of managing the flow of goods from the point of consumption back to the point of origin. It includes returning products, such as for repair, refurbishment, recycling, or disposal [64].

4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A medium scale recycled steel manufacturing company was studied. Its raw material is recycled steel from one supplier who does the collection and sorting before delivery to the plant. The steel is stored onsite, before loading into electric arc furnaces for melting before secondary metallurgy i.e., modification of alloy compositions to ensure quality compliance. Once the quality is passed the molten still undergoes continuous casting into semi-finished steel billets. The billets are rolled before rolling into sections of different sections before finishing. Finishing involves cutting to size and straightening of the steel sections. Main products include reinforcement steel (rebar) and other sections such as angle iron and channel iron produced according to customer orders. The steel quantity, length, and type depend on its intended applications from customer orders. Production is based on make to stock or make to order. The value chain of the operation is below in Figure 4.

To support production a number of functional departments ensure smooth coordination and running of the business. The marketing and sales department communicates with customers to collect customer orders and demand forecast information based on historical demand trends. This information is sent to the Planning and Scheduling department where production schedules and lead times are generated for production and communicated to the sales team who liaise with customers. Planning and Scheduling does production capacity planning and identifies what raw materials and bill of materials based on product sizes ordered. It is done

for the sequencing the order of production tasks by ensuring to deliver products on expected due date as per customers' orders. Currently, scrap metal availability determines if orders are put onto the production schedule. Additional customer orders are accepted only if they can be accommodated into the already planned production. Production plans are checked against the availability of raw materials in inventory records in the Stores Department and this impacts production flow and order fulfilment. Planning is done on Excel spread sheets.

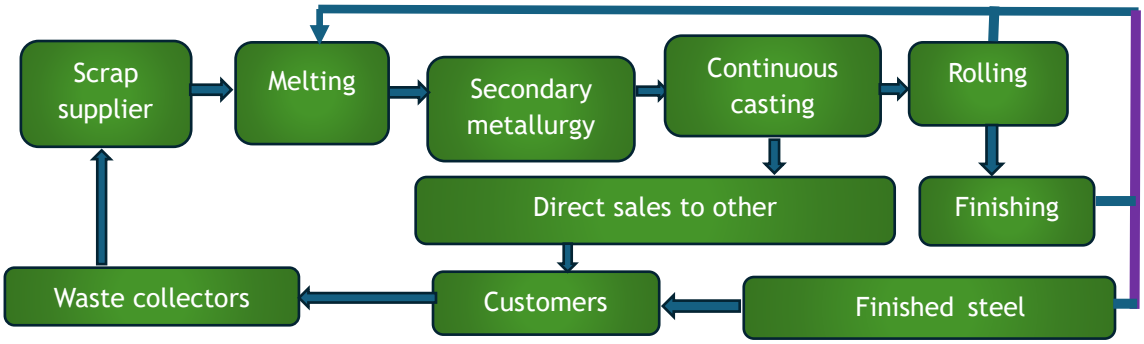

Figure 3. The steel production value chain and functional

The core business unit is the Production Department through which the scrap undergoes smelting, casting and rolling to the final product. Quality control and certification department ensures quality control of the process steps and the final steel sections. Plant maintenance ensures equipment functions optimally dealing with electrical and mechanical engineering. Other functional departments include Accounting, Human resources and admin, Logistics and transport, Stores and Inventory management and Safety department. The stores department through stock controllers keeps records of the material that includes scrap material, steel quantity, dimension sizes, and weights. Stock controllers colour code the finished material according to type, grade, section sizes and keeps the records of material section sizes, lengths calculated weights before loading truck and logistics department dispatches in trucks to customers.

4.1 Production facility and material handling

The plant has an external yard for scrap storage which received incoming scrap from trucks. Transfer to storage areas using overhead cranes, transfer trolleys and shutting trucks. The steel production process begins at the scrap yard where the scrap metal arrives for smelting. Cranes are also the main material handling equipment from the time raw materials (scrap) enters the company and gets dispatched from the company in the form of finished products. A crane is required to unload this scrap at the plant as they arrive in tonnage and in different shapes and sizes. Electric overhead cranes are used for scrap handling, and a host of cranes are used during smelting of scrap metals. The smelting area of the plant is exposed to extreme temperatures, hot liquid metal and flames. Cranes used during smelting are made to lift and carry buckets of liquid metals safely. Overhead, tundish, and ladle cranes are attached with additional equipment to lift ladles with liquid metal. The billets that come out of the smelters are hot and malleable and are moved to the rolling mill for rolling. As the steel is hot for shaping, the cranes used for lifting needs to be equipped with additional load handling capabilities like detachable magnets and tongs. Rotating trolleys or rotating beam cranes are used to move billets to storage areas. Electric Overhead cranes are used to move around steel sections and rebars to the storage bays. Forklifts are also used to stack steel products on the high storage racks. It gives the ability to reach anywhere around the rack, where crane and the operator cannot go through. There is a lot of material handling during steel processing and often accounts for roughly 30 to 60% of the production cost. The layout of the

manufacturing plant is in Figure 4 and shows the relative positing of different production and support departments.

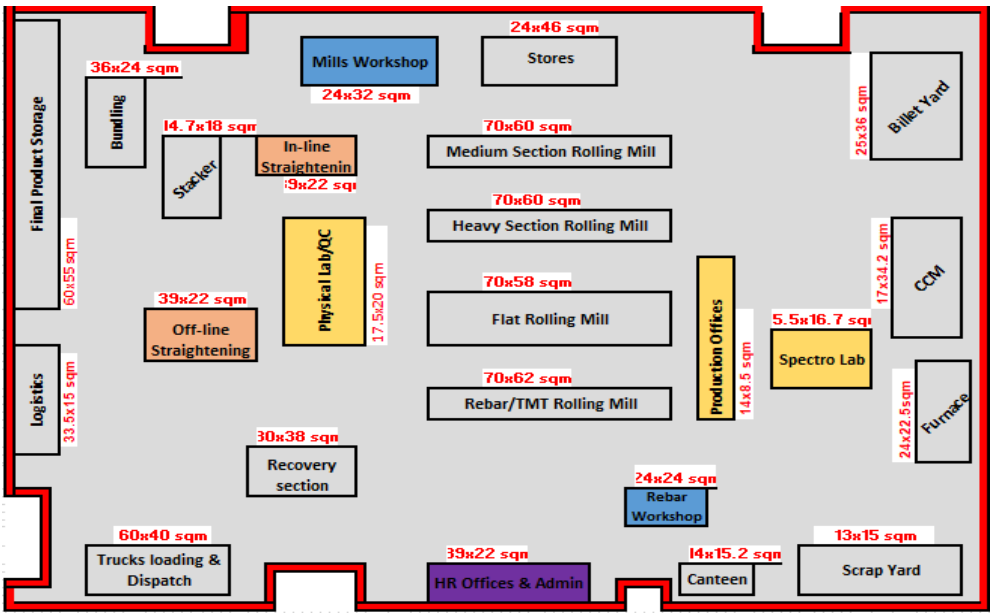

Figure 4. Steel production facility layout

4.2 Activities in quality department

In collaboration with production departments, they conduct research and investigations on material and heat balances, calculating total tonnage and scrap tonnage and chemical analysis of different furnace outputs and steel alloy produced, composition , properties and charge calculations. Charge calculations are the relative composition of ingredients fed into a furnace for melting [9]. Quality Control Department conducts sample collection, preparation and testing. Samples are cut, ground and polished if hardness tests are required. Where tensile testing on the Universal Testing Machine is required, they are cut and machined to the required shapes and sizes. The quality department also manages laboratory facilities and ensures testing instruments are calibrated to standard. Inspection, documentation and testing of products is done according to the ISO Standards and ASTM standards [68]. The Quality standards used to ensure steel produced meets minimum quality and safety standards by specifying (a) Chemical composition (b) Mechanical properties (c) Test methods and (d) Product dimensions [68]. Quality check of the final product includes conduct visual inspection of finished steel and calculate weight per meter of channels, angles, and reinforcing bars.

Spectro laboratory is responsible chemical composition analysis during the melting and casting of the steel to correct amount of alloying elements or scrap is added. The tests ensure cast billets are of correct quality prior to reheating and rolling processes. Physical Laboratory is tasked with ensuring that rolled products from mills conforms to the specification and meets what the customer ordered. This is established by destructive tests using tensile tests on a Universal Testing Machine, bend tests to measure the ductility and resistance to bending forces [33], impact strength tests using Charpy-V-notch Testing Machine [68] and hardness tests Rockwell, Vickers and Brinell [35, 36, 37]. Universal Testing Machine which determines the yield point, ultimate tensile strength, and percentage elongation of the sample [38]. Rolling quality inspection involves verifying the steel is of correct quality; comply with specification and dimensions during rolling. Should dimension discrepancies be observed on the hot rolled steel, rolling will stop, and adjustments made before rolling can resume. This

is a continuous check done on 30 minutes intervals during rolling. Finishing quality inspection checks are done by a quality inspector who checks if the products are free of any defects, product is straight.

4.3 Problems encountered in the steel making operation

A number of factors were observed to affect the steel making operations often leading to disruption of production, idle time, and low productivity. The problems encountered and their recurrence were recorded through study of production records, direct observation over a 12 month period. The results are tabulated in Table 1 and were categorised in terms of priority using ABC analysis.

Table 1. ABC analysis of production problems in the plant

Item category	Overall value	Classification	Action
Lack of resources for production	60%	A	Material requirements planning
Insufficient budget for production resources			Accurate medium range planning
Poor teamwork			Automation of processes
Unrealistic deadlines	30%	B	Regular review of production schedules
Overloading of workers			Use of standard operating procedures
Poor communication			Line balancing of production line
Lack of accountability	10%	C	Team building
Poor coordination of tasks			Effective delegation and communication

4.3.1 Quality problems in production

Customer complaints were often received on finished products come from the shopfloor or from external customers. They include material cracking and bending for sectional universal structural beams lengths after rolling. Some beams were returned from customers. Visual inspection of returns was conducted on the material, and it was found that the material showed cracking, and materials and claim was accepted. Some quality defects identified in rolled steel produced after rolling are in Figure 5. Root cause of the cracking and bend materials was investigated and found that it was due to the steel beam straightening machine [39] having wrong settings. It was found that the force pressure applied on the top and bottom machine rollers were too high and after reducing them the material showed no sign of cracking and bend/twist of material. Cracking was further confirmed through a non-destructive testing method called penetrant dye test, and there were no traces of cracks observed.

Cracking rebar material during bend test and investigation revealed it was due to high Silicon content added during casting and the team was informed to reduce and monitor Silicon content during casting and melting. Work instructions were created for improvement on operations and in the process of developing the standard operating procedures (SOP).

Figure 5.(a) Rejected beams due to non-conformance (b) Beam material showing cracks (c) rebar cracking and bending

4.3.2 Cost of rejected returns

Customer returns were often observed on some finished products. Reverse logistics is costly to the operation. Quality control sampling is used for quality certification of a batch. Although the sample may pass the test a batch may contain defective products. For example, rebar steel was tested using the non-destructive tests before a batch is supplied to a customer. One bundle is worth R40, 000 while a batch of 6 bundles is sold for R240, 000. Transport costs currently amount to R8000 per bundle. If a bundle is returned die to poor quality the company bears the transportation is cost amounts to about R8,000 when transportation and labour overtime are considered. Returns cost the company in terms of money and lack of customers reputation.

4.3.3 Inconsistent quality

A study of the defect rate of rebar on a month to month (MTM) basis from January to April 2023 was conducted from quality reports. During the 4 month period, variation of defective bars according to diameter are shown in shown in Figure 6.

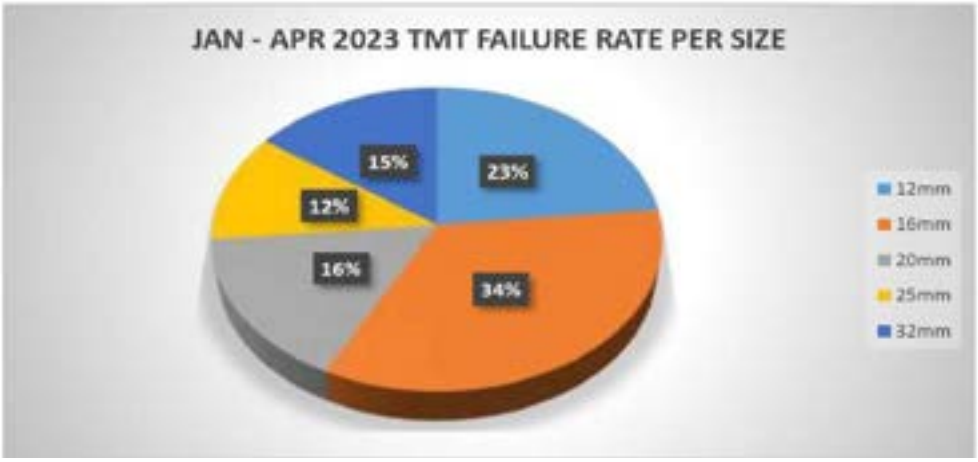

Figure 6. Failure rate of rebar based on diameter

The highest defect rate was observed in the 16mm rebar which can be attributed to the tooling used. From studying the tensile strength of different steel sections produced there was inconsistency of tensile strength test results of different batches tested from October 2022 to July 2023. The trend is depicted in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Mechanical strength test results trend from Oct 2022- Jul 2023

4.3.4 Costing

A study of distribution of costs in relation to steel making operation was conducted. Fixed and variable costs were evaluated including regular and overtime costs. Regular and overtime labour rates are in Table 2. These costs were used to estimate product costs. The distribution of fixed and variable costs is in Table 4.

Table 2.Labour rates for overtime for operators of different equipment

Description	Labour used - Hrs	Rate/Hour	Applied cost
Laser cutting	2.5	R40	R160
Machining	4	R66	R528
Welding	1.5	R70	R210
Fabrication	1	R68	R136
Sample preparation	2.5	R58	R290

Table 3. Distribution of variable and fixed costs.

	Section Mill Cost Structure		Accumulated Total
Fixed Costs	Direct Labour	8.96%	20.58%
	Depreciation	2.62%	
	Other	1.10%	
	Information Technology Services	0.09%	
	Maintenance Repair Services	2.52%	
	Maintenance Spare Parts	1.47%	
	Subcontracting	3.82%	
Variable Costs	Raw Materials	71.10%	79.42%
	Refractories	0.25%	
	Electricity	2.43%	
	Other Utilities and field operations	0.08%	
	Water	2.87%	
	Transport cost	1.09%	
	Other Consumables	0.33%	
	Petroleum products	1.27%	
	Total	**100%**	

4.4 Waste management in foundry and mill operations

Workers in plant face safety risks which include burns, cuts respiratory problems due to dust, hearing loss, trip and fall, or explosion of gases. The risks the operators were observed and documented in the table 4.

Table 5. Foundry and rolling mill waste and mitigation

Division	Solid/Liquid wasyes from process	Solid wastes from pollution control	Disposal method
Electric Arc Furnace	-Slag	-Flu dust	-
Steel making shop	-Slag -Broken refractory	-SMS dust	-
Rolling mills	-Random (End cutting) -Broken refractory	-Mill scale -Oily sludge	Designated steel bins & back to scrap
Raw material handling	-Fines	-Dust	-
Finishing & stacker	-Offcuts -Randoms	-Mill scale	-
Quality	-Acids & chemicals -Tested material	-Smoke -Dust	Tested material in designated steel bins & back to scrap

5 DISCUSSION

The plant was observed to be a traditional manufacturing environment with limited automation, high inefficiencies in planning, production and safety and environmental compliance.it can benefit by implementing principles of lean manufacturing and cleaner production.

5.1 Teamwork

Teamwork between various department and the production quality engineer was observed to be an essential approach to solving problems in product quality and meeting customer demand. Team building must be implemented, and management must understand team dynamics as a tool for team satisfaction influences how workers exert their effort in the work [47, 46, 40]. Studies have shown that through teamwork cause analysis in any production process can use collaboration in problem identification, root cause analysis and planning and implementing solutions [40, 41, 31]. On the shopfloor it was observed that long working hours/days were observed to lead to exhaustion absenteeism and unavailability of employees due to fatigue. Teams bring synergy between departments through information sharing and cross functional teams will ensure the company is effective in tackling production and quality problems. Top management commitment is essential in tackling budgeting shortfalls, quality projects and long term competitive strategy.

5.2 Standard operating procedures

Standard operating procedures in production and quality control specifications must be followed strictly to eliminate defects and to ensure productivity. Internal reporting and documentation can identify deviations from standards and recurring trends in production [42, 43]. Standard work scheduling, management of takt time i.e., daily demand/production capacity [48] and cycle time or the duration of time to process or produce a product from start to finish [49] using such techniques as line balancing to smooth production will distribute the workload evenly between workstations [32, 49]. Workflow can also be improved through efficient planning of material movement through sequencing, and scheduling procedures [30] and use of material handling devices such as cranes [50, 25]. In order to ensure standard operating procedures are followed, regular internal self-audits and strong organizing capability must be implemented [26, 31, 28].

5.3 Safety and material handling

Supervisors must be tasked with ensuring that the workplace is organised and tidy at all times applying the 5S principles [28] which will ensure improved workflow as well as easy access to materials and tools [26, 28]. The 5S principles (a) Sort reduces clutter and improves efficiency and safety (b) set in order organises tools and information to reduce unnecessary movement (c) Shine emphasizes good housekeeping of workstations (d) standardise emphasises standard operating procedures, process time and steps to reduce delays and improve productivity (e) Sustain through promoting training and discipline to ensure quality, productivity and 5S practices are a habitual part of the workplace culture. Compliance to health and safety, maintain ISO Accreditation as well as security procedures are also important in maintaining competitiveness of operations, safety and access to markets of the steel produced [44]. Lean principles can be applied to limit unnecessary handling and applying Kanban visual signals [51, 30, 29] to prioritise production of steel sections that are needed as per orders when they are needed leading to reduction of work in progress and inventory of semi-finished and finished steel.

A detailed study is also required to ensure handling of materials is be performed safely, efficiently, at low cost and in a timeously manner. Guidelines for improving material handling processes include analysing weight load, size and distance to minimise ergonomic risk factors,

optimize space and workflow, identifying required safety gear and processes, upgrading technology compatible with operations, providing correct training and getting employee feedback [52, 30]. It is recommended that in the foundry, overhead cranes should have sirens when moving so people around can be cautious at all times [53]. Visual signal in the mill section with the rolling process speed is exceedingly high. Interlocks can prevent equipment from starting and warning signals such as lights can flash red when material is coming and when green it is safe to cross over [53]. Process automation should be integrated to production and material handling to improve productivity and safety by reduce repetitive and unnecessary tasks, reducing operator error, increasing productivity with less manpower [54, 26, 47, 53].

5.4 Job design and reward management

Work environment and staffing matters such as reward management and amenities affect employee wellbeing and motivation [45, 46]. As a result, required staffing levels per workstation can be determined, efficiency improved and overtime .requests minimised [47, 46, 49].

5.5 Problem solving in quality control

Active use of problem identification and solving can assist in eliminating defective products and assist in root cause analysis. Product quality of semi-finished and finished products was studied, and a cause and effect of fishbone diagram was used for analysis . Problem solving techniques and charting as shown in Figure 8 can be employed to address all production problems. To improve quality control processes the following quality tools can be applied as ways of problem solving. Finished products must be colour coded according to the specifications or test results and ingots identified correctly. Correct scrap ratings must be available and high carbon steel separated. Material and heat balances according to total tonnage of scrap to optimise energy consumption. To improve product quantity in the short and long term the steel mill must commit to:

- Proper training is required especially for new employees and the risks, hazards and how to operate the machines they are to use.
- The lab efficiency can be improved by gin going digital as currently most things are done manually e.g. Reports are not automatically generated, one must sit and type them including the tested results are captured manually.
- Invest in quality suitable equipment for process efficiency to improve.

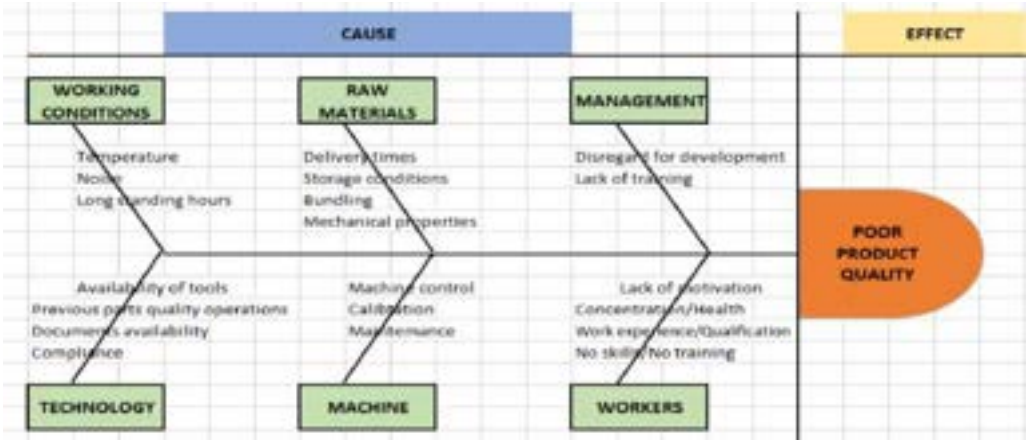

Figure 8. Root cause analysis of production problems

5.5.1 Cracking of steel samples

Other projects involved macro etching on the billet material prior to charging in the furnace to check for defects which can cause more problem during hot rolling, defective materials were isolated and not charged, sent back for rework. Material chemical composition and other parameters are important in quality control and resources must be given to the further research. The current rolling samples for laboratory testing are cut using Oxyacetylene torch after the sample beams are marked. The oxyacetylene torch is dangerous if gas leaks occur and heating the sample affects its properties changing microstructural properties [55, 56]. Sample collection may lead to weakening of the beam from which samples are collected causing it to be scrapping. The time for sample collection needs to be standardised because often oxygen is finished, and the gas cutter have to go collect one and this can take up to 1hr 30min. To improve sample collection, an automated blade sawmill machine to be purchased and the process will be faster and cheaper. This is easy to operate, safe and accurate than flame cutting. Grinding process will be reduced thus saving time and costs.

5.5.2 Maintaining accuracy of quality control equipment and processes

Adequate sampling for quality testing must be conducted to ensure quality assurance. All inspection, documentation and testing of products according to the ISO Standards and quality research must be done to improve quality. All quality equipment must be calibrated cleaned and be of good working order through routine maintenance. Test instruments can be contaminated by oxide films . dirt, be scratched and chipped on the indenters or improperly secured during testing leading to inconsistency of results. Replacement of chipped indenters, worn anvils, and use of proper standards and testing procedures can improve the performance of quality control. Quality controllers also require training on their daily tasks problem solving skills and documentation. They must also be experienced in production processes and equipment as well as their set up. They must be able to work in production teams and understand the formulation of different alloys produced in the plant.

5.5.3 Use of DMAIC methodology

The problem solving technique of DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, and Control) methodology was implemented to research on the quality problems of rolled steel. The documentation of the study is in Table 7.

Table 7. Investigation of rolled steel quality using DMAIC methodology

PROJECT	DETERMINING THE CAUSE OF MATERIAL CRACKING ON FLANGE AND WEB CENTRE	
Definition of Terms		
Steel Melting Process	Industrial plant for the manufacture of steel	
Billet Process	Billets are produced by continuous casting or hot rolling processes	
Rolling Mill	machines used to roll hot or cold ferrous or non-ferrous strips, rods, wires, etc.	
Section	Standard dimensional properties of steel	
Chemical Composition	Identity and arrange chemical elements for easy traceability	
Test Certificate	Document verifying chemical and mechanical properties of material conforming to the standards and customers specific requirements	
Heat Treatment	Heating of steel to high temperatures to obtain desired results like hardening or softening of the material	
Normalising	Heating of steel to temperature below melting point and cool in air to relieve stress	
Straightening Machine	machine to make bar perfectly straight and removing any imperfections	
DMAIC	PROBLEM	DESCRIPTION
DEFINE	UB 254x146 rolled material cracking at straightening machine	After UB 254 x146 steel section material is rolled and cooled at cooling bed, the material will be in bend form. It is then passed through the Straightening Machine, where it is straight aligned.
MEASURE	Recording the activities as part of process	Analyse the frequency of problems and causes
ANALYZE	Root Cause Analyse to uncover causes	Chemical & Tensile test
		Penetrant testing
		Reduce high chemical elements e.g S & P
		Ensure straightening rolls are well aligned
IMPROVE	Using ideas to motivate people to work	Congratulate people when they are doing good work
CONTROL	SOP & 5S	

5.6 Waste management

The waste stream, disposal and recycling methods are important in pollution prevention in the plant and to the environment. Compliance to occupational health and safety standards such as OHSAS 18001 is legislated and mandatory in factory operations [44]. It demands routine protective equipment to people entering the plant, inspections and frequent audits [44]. Plant induction trainings alert new employees to risks and hazards in the plant. Waste management practices can be implemented to identify and mitigate the effects as shown in

Table 6.

Table 6. Waste streams, disposal and mitigation of pollution

Waste Stream	Disposal & Recycling Method	How can be reduced
Slag	West deposits sites & recycled for manufacturing cement and building materials industries, aggregates for road construction, fertilizers and landfilling	Use pneumatic slag stppers, slag darts, slide gates and eccentric bottom tapping for EAF
EAF dust	Collected by bag filters & recycled by processing it to recover metallic zinc element	By dust suppression
Mill scale	At waste plant	-
End cuts	Red bin & reused as scrap	Produce & Cut to exact length
Defects	Separate and sort from prime materials and sold at lower grade. If extreme scrap them	Reuse as scrap
Not Utilising talent	Use skills and talent in positions its suitable	Proper positions appointment

6 CONCLUSION

Increasing competition, logistics bottlenecks, rising production costs and outdated technology and practices are affecting small scale steel manufacturing operational efficiency and competitiveness. The steel industry is equipment and labour intensive suffering from a lot of lean waste. Lean manufacturing practices can be applied to investigate and eliminate physical wate and lean waste, Management of materials handling, individual processes and equipment as well as labour can reduce manufacturing costs. Steel production generates vast amounts of carbon and other types of pollution such as slag and requirement for environmental regulatory compliance. Steel making operations thus has to embrace more innovative and sustainable methods by investing in new technologies while adopting green manufacturing practices. Through understanding the metallurgy of steel, charge calculations, processing methods and equipment common defects such as bending, warping, inclusions, poor hardness and strength can be measured, tracked and eliminated in long term operations. Techniques such as cause and effect diagrams and DMAIC methodology which are simple problem techniques can be used to identify, document and manage production problems. Proper scheduling and production management can optimise material handling, reduce furnace and mill idle time and reduce unnecessary overtime in operations.

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ANALYSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RETENTION STRATEGIES IN NC(V) ENGINEERING PROGRAMMES: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH AFRICAN TVET COLLEGES IN GAUTENG PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

Student retention remains a significant challenge in South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, particularly within the National Certificate (Vocational) [NC(V)] engineering programmes. Despite various interventions, dropout rates remain high, raising concerns about the effectiveness of current retention strategies. This study explored the student retention strategies implemented in selected public TVET colleges in Gauteng Province. A qualitative research design was adopted, with data collected through individual oral interviews with college management and senior academic staff across four college campuses. Data were analysed thematically using ATLAS.ti. Findings revealed that while some strategies, such as college support, financial aid and DHET attendance policy, are in place, their effectiveness is often limited by inconsistent implementation processes, under-resourced support systems and weak stakeholder engagement. The study highlights institutional gaps and operational challenges that limit the effectiveness of existing retention efforts, while offering guidance for optimising student support and improving persistence in NC(V) engineering programmes within the TVET college sector.

Keywords: TVET colleges, NC(V) engineering programmes, Retention strategies

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1 INTRODUCTION

Student retention remains one of the most pressing challenges in South Africa's public Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, particularly within the National Certificate (Vocational) [NC(V)] engineering programmes. Despite several interventions to improve student success, dropout rates remain high [1]. This disrupts students' learning pathways and undermines the primary goal of vocational education: to produce vocationally trained graduates who can contribute to the country's economy.

Although several retention strategies, such as academic support and attendance monitoring, are currently in place, their effectiveness is often limited by inconsistent implementation and weak coordination across TVET college campuses [2;3]. This suggests that interventions exist in name but lack the structural and resource alignment required for consistent impact within the NC(V) programmes. Adding to these challenges, delays and administrative inefficiencies in the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) have further strained student well-being and retention, placing a disproportionate burden on low-income and rural students [4]. As a result, student support remains limited across TVET college campuses, with many NC(V) students navigating significant academic and personal challenges with minimal institutional assistance.

From an Industrial Engineering perspective, student retention can be seen as a process within the educational system, where inputs are student enrolments, processes are academic and college support interventions and outputs are successful completion of NC(V) engineering programmes. Inefficiencies such as inconsistent attendance monitoring and limited student support services reduce throughput and overall system performance [5]. Badroodien and Garisch [5] further note that strengthening support processes, including comprehensive orientation and ongoing academic and psychosocial support, can optimise resource use and improve workflow reliability, leading to more students completing their NC(V) programmes.

Given the practical and operational nature of vocational education, improving student retention in NC(V) engineering programmes requires targeted, efficient, and scalable strategies that can respond to the everyday realities faced by students and TVET colleges [6]. Assessing which retention strategies are currently in place and how effectively they are implemented is a necessary first step. This paper responds to that need by exploring existing retention strategies from the perspectives of TVET college management and senior academic staff. By doing so, this study contributes to ongoing conversations about institutional responsiveness, student success and educational equity within the vocational education system.

In line with the conference theme "Making Waves," this study presents a systematic, process-oriented analysis of student retention strategies, identifying operational inefficiencies and providing evidence-based insights to guide more responsive and coordinated retention practices in NC(V) engineering programmes. Specifically, it explores and analyses the retention strategies implemented at selected public TVET colleges in South Africa, focusing on their effectiveness and highlighting gaps based on the experiences of college management and senior academic staff.

1.1 Research question

What student retention strategies are currently implemented in NC(V) engineering programmes at public TVET colleges, and how effective are they in supporting student persistence?

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of retention strategies implemented in NC(V) engineering programmes at public TVET colleges in South Africa. By exploring the perspectives of college management and senior academic staff, the study aimed to assess the effectiveness of these retention strategies, identify gaps and provide insights that can inform more effective institutional practices for improving student persistence in the TVET sector.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review outlines the theoretical framework that guided the study and examines existing research on student retention strategies within higher education institutions.

2.1 Theoretical framework: Bean and Metzner's model of Non-Traditional Student Attrition

This study is grounded in Bean and Metzner's Model of Non-Traditional Student Attrition, as it aligns closely with the profile of NC(V) engineering students in public TVET colleges. These students often face financial hardship, limited academic preparation, family responsibilities, and minimal social integration opportunities, which are central to Bean and Metzner's theory. The model emphasises how external environmental variables (such as finances, family support, and work obligations) significantly influence students' decisions to persist or drop out [6]. Many NC(V) students are non-traditional because they commute, may have dependents and have limited access to campus-based academic or social support. Therefore, Bean and Metzner's theory provides a useful lens for understanding the challenges faced by TVET students and examining how institutional retention strategies respond to these challenges. Focusing on external and institutional factors makes this theory especially useful for assessing retention interventions and informing future retention practices in vocational education.

2.2 Retention challenges in higher education institutions

Retention challenges in higher education institutions often stem from personal and institutional factors. According to Dunn [7], personal challenges include physical and mental health struggles and the need to balance multiple life roles, such as studying, working, and fulfilling family responsibilities. On the institutional side, Dunn identifies inadequate academic support, low awareness of support services, challenges with learning technologies, and feelings of isolation or disconnection from the institution as key barriers to student persistence [7].

Nkutu and Seekoe [8] reinforce this by emphasising that students need sufficient academic and emotional support to complete their programmes successfully. Their research indicates that limited access to lecturers, facilitators and academic mentors can negatively affect student retention. Dlungwane et al. [9] identified key contributors to student attrition, including academic difficulty, heavy workloads, family pressures, and lack of support from dependents.

Further, Nkutu and Seekoe [8] point out that financial pressures, unfamiliar academic environments, family responsibilities, and career uncertainty contribute to student dropout. These issues are likely to be prevalent in the TVET college context, particularly within NC(V) programmes, where students frequently face academic and financial hardships that threaten their ability to persist. Badroodien and Garisch [5] highlight that engineering students are particularly at risk, with mathematics being a persistent barrier and many students dropping out before reaching Level 4. They also observe that many NC(V) students lack self-discipline and accountability, often finding it difficult to adjust to college life due to their socio-economic backgrounds [5].

Muchineripi et al. [10] identify additional institutional barriers affecting retention, including limited student accommodation, inadequate infrastructure for academic and non-academic purposes, and insufficient access to information about support services. These factors, combined with disparities in socio-economic status, further impede student integration, persistence, and academic success in TVET colleges [10].

The high dropout and low success rates among engineering vocational students call for an urgent review of current retention strategies and a deeper understanding of student perspectives in vocational education. Low throughput affects individual students and has institutional consequences, including reduced government funding, which limits the capacity of TVET colleges to invest in resources and student support [11].

Joja [12] stresses that student success should not be viewed solely as the institution's responsibility. Instead, a collaborative effort is required, including students, families, educators, communities, policymakers, and industry. Addressing these multidimensional factors is essential for developing sustainable retention interventions that enhance student success in higher education and TVET contexts.

2.3 Academic engagement through attendance

Class attendance is vital to student retention, especially in structured programmes such as NC(V) engineering. Nzembe [13] describes class attendance as a source of conflict in TVET colleges, noting that students frequently miss classes despite DHET policies requiring regular attendance. The Department of Higher Education and Training's Attendance and Punctuality Policy [14] mandates 80% attendance per subject for students to be eligible to sit for final examinations.

Although the policy aims to improve academic engagement and foster a professional culture, its implementation is inconsistent. Myataza and Mokoena [2] found that many colleges allow students with low attendance to write exams, weakening the policy's intended impact. Seroka and Sepeng [15] further reveal that violations of the DHET attendance policy often encourage unruly and disruptive behaviour, which undermines teaching and learning environments in TVET colleges.

The DHET policy draws a strong link between attendance, retention and academic performance, supported by Klein et al. [16], who found that chronic absenteeism correlates with lower academic achievement and reduced school completion rates. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing at least 18 days in an academic year [17]. Gottfried [17] further highlights that chronically absent students not only fall behind academically but may also negatively influence the performance of their peers. Kirksey [18] and Nthako [19] further support this, highlighting that absenteeism hampers educational and social engagement and leads to long-term academic difficulties.

Therefore, TVET colleges must recognise the serious implications of absenteeism and take proactive steps to monitor and support student attendance. Doing so may improve performance, student engagement and retention outcomes.

2.4 Student support services and accessibility

Effective student support services are critical in promoting academic success and retention. However, several studies highlight significant challenges in the utilisation and visibility of these services within South African TVET colleges. Badenhorst and Radile [3] note that many students enrolled in NC(V) programmes are either unaware of available support services or fail to recognise their relevance in addressing academic and personal challenges. As a result, these services are often underutilised or viewed as inaccessible. Makibinyane and Khumalo [11] add that poor student understanding of the purpose and function of support services further limits their use, while operational inefficiencies make services less effective.

In addition, Cook and Rushton [20] found that students often perceive institutional support structures, such as lecturer consultation or academic counselling, as invisible or difficult to access. Creating a supportive college environment where students feel welcome, acknowledged, and actively engaged can significantly improve help-seeking behaviour and academic outcomes [21]. This suggests that support structures must be visible and student-friendly to contribute to TVET colleges' retention goals effectively.

Buthelezi [22] suggests that psychological support services such as counselling, peer tutoring, and interventions addressing socioeconomic difficulties improve both academic success and general well-being in TVET students. Students also advocate for more tutoring and the appointment of assistant lecturers, particularly in engineering departments, to improve performance and reduce dropout rates [15]. Additionally, Ramuthivheli [23] emphasises the

significance of enhancing teaching, mentorship, and institutional responsiveness to suit student requirements, highlighting the direct relationship between perceived academic service quality and student satisfaction and loyalty.

The reviewed literature highlights a combination of theoretical, institutional and practical factors influencing student retention in vocational education. Bean and Metzner's model offers a fitting framework for understanding the realities of NC(V) engineering students, particularly regarding financial and environmental barriers. Evidence also points to high dropout rates driven by poor attendance, limited access to support services, and inconsistent policy implementation. Addressing these issues through targeted, context-specific retention strategies can significantly enhance student persistence and institutional performance within the TVET sector.

3 METHODOLOGY

According to Creswell [24], qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In line with this definition, this study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore and analyse the effectiveness of current retention strategies in TVET colleges in Gauteng province. This qualitative component forms part of a broader mixed-methods doctoral study involving students and senior academic staff. This paper presents a stand-alone inquiry focusing specifically on college-level retention strategies from college management perspectives.

3.1 Population and Sampling

The study was conducted across four public TVET colleges in Gauteng province. The target population included campus managers, Heads of Department (HODs), or senior lecturers responsible for academic and student support processes in NC(V) engineering programmes. Participants were purposively selected based on their strategic roles, operational responsibilities, and in-depth knowledge of retention strategies, challenges, and interventions implemented in TVET colleges. Purposive sampling is a technique used to identify cases or experts who have a wealth of knowledge that may be used to shed light on the research issues [25]. Four public TVET college campuses offering NC(V) engineering programmes were purposively selected, with two participants interviewed at each campus. Their insights were instrumental in understanding the effectiveness of existing retention strategies, institutional barriers, and areas that need improvement.

This paper focuses on the qualitative component of the broader doctoral study, which employed a mixed-methods design incorporating student and academic staff perspectives. Although quantitative survey findings from the wider study are not presented here, they provided complementary background during interpretation, helping to contextualise the management perspectives discussed in this study within the broader institutional and student context.

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions, enabling in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives on existing retention strategies and their effectiveness in TVET colleges. Interviews lasted an average of 35 minutes and were conducted in person at each college campus. The study engaged TVET college management staff to enhance the rigour of expert input by incorporating elements of the Delphi method. These participants were considered knowledgeable informants in student retention within TVET colleges, and their insights contributed to a deeper understanding of college retention strategies, implementation gaps and areas requiring intervention.

3.3 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns in the interview data. ATLAS.ti software was used to support the coding and organisation of themes, ensuring that findings were directly

grounded in participants' narratives and closely aligned with this study's objective of analysing the effectiveness of retention strategies in TVET colleges.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the university's research ethics committee. The four participating TVET colleges also granted permission. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained for individuals and TVET institutions.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Participants' profile

The study engaged eight participants across four public TVET college campuses in Gauteng province. These participants held strategic roles in delivering and managing NC(V) engineering programmes. Their professional experience ranged from one to fifteen years. The participant group included campus managers and HODs or senior lecturers. Most participants held education-related qualifications at diploma, degree, or postgraduate level, including master's and honours qualifications. This diversity allowed for informed perspectives on student retention strategies, challenges, and institutional dynamics.

4.2 Retention strategies in practice

The analysis of existing retention strategies in NC(V) engineering programmes was structured using three approaches: (1) a word cloud analysis to visualise the most frequently mentioned terms; (2) a thematic concept map to categorise key strategies and their relationships; and (3) an analysis of selected participant quotes to deepen the understanding of college retention practices and their effectiveness. These approaches provided a comprehensive picture of how retention strategies are perceived, implemented and experienced within TVET college settings.

4.2.1 Analysis of findings from the word cloud on student retention strategies

Figure 1 presents a word cloud highlighting the most commonly mentioned terms from interview responses, including 'students', 'lecturers', 'attendance', 'support', 'financial', 'policy', and 'assist'. These terms indicate a dominant focus on academic support, student monitoring, and institutional assistance. The prominence of 'financial' and 'support' highlights their importance as retention strategies, addressing immediate needs and long-term student support. This finding aligns with Xu and Webber [26], who identified financial stress as a significant barrier to student persistence in higher education. The word cloud suggests that effective retention strategies in NC(V) engineering programmes require a combination of classroom-level interventions, such as lecturer engagement and attendance monitoring, and institutional measures such as policy enforcement and financial assistance.

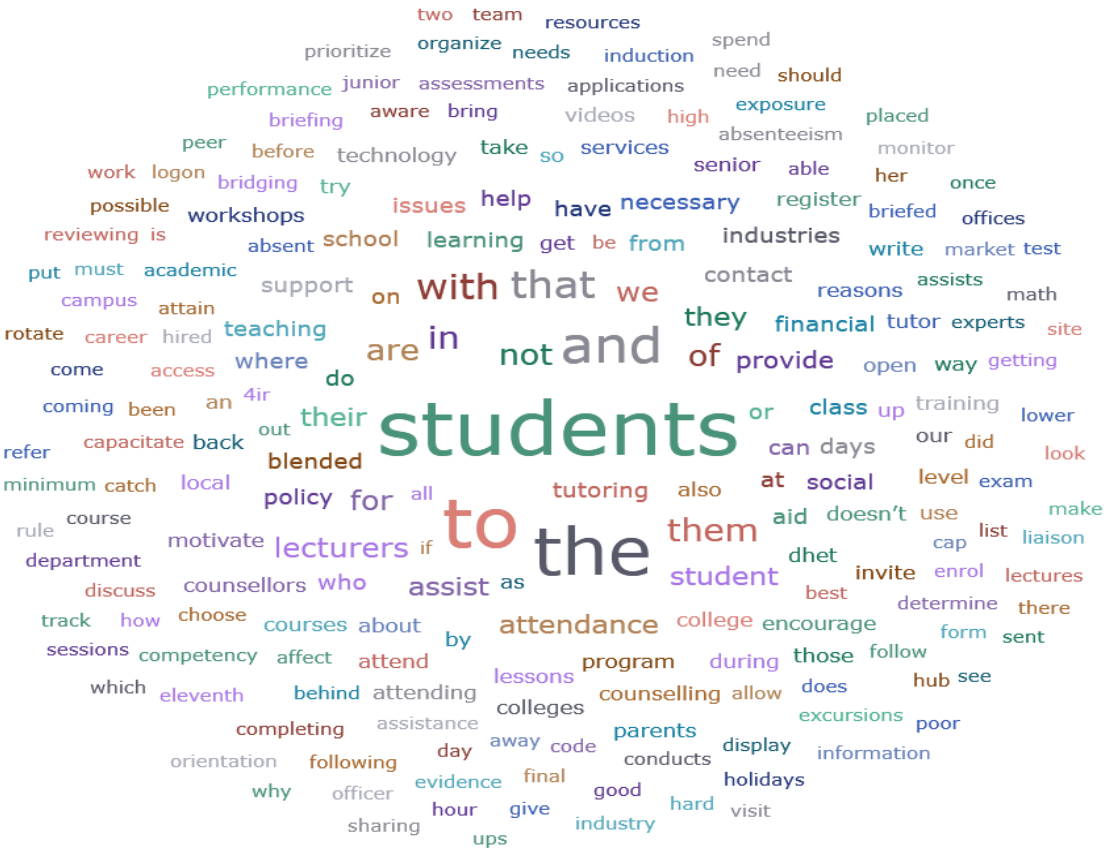

Figure 1: Key themes on existing retention strategies in TVET colleges

4.2.2 Analysis of the concept map for student retention strategies in TVET colleges

Figure 2 presents an overview of key retention strategies currently implemented or under discussion in TVET colleges. These include college-level interventions such as attendance monitoring, tutoring, counselling, financial aid, career day sessions, industry visits, technology integration, selective admissions, and the 80% attendance policy. The map shows how these strategies are interconnected, showing that student retention in NC(V) engineering programmes results from coordinated actions rather than isolated interventions. The findings suggest that attendance monitoring supports policy enforcement, while tutoring and counselling address academic and personal challenges that may lead to student dropout. The concept map also highlights that effective retention requires alignment between academic, personal, and institutional support and coordination between national policies and college initiatives to address the realities faced by NC(V) engineering students.

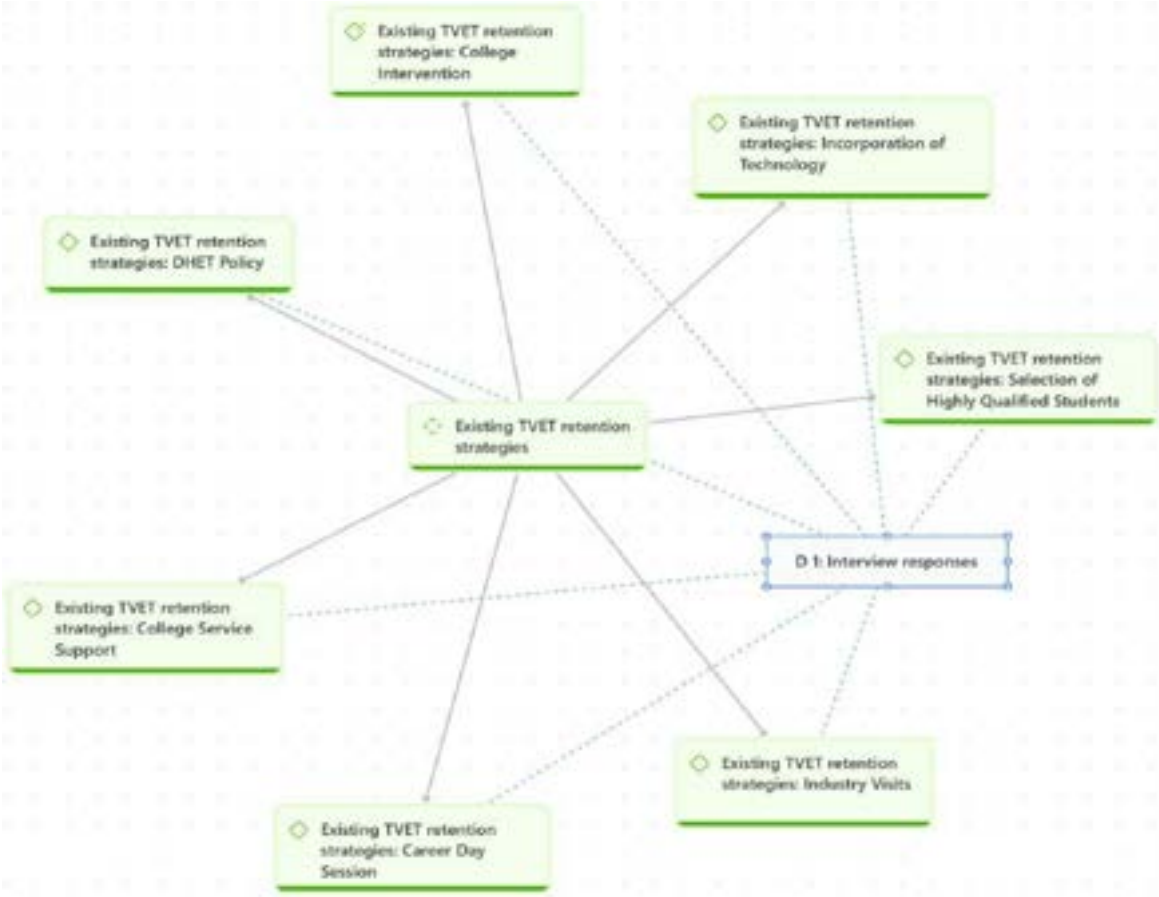

Figure 2: Thematic map for existing retention strategies in TVET colleges

4.2.3 Analysis of participants' quotes on retention strategies

A thematic analysis of participant quotes revealed key strategies and limitations shaping student retention in NC(V) engineering programmes in public TVET colleges. Eight key themes were identified and are discussed below, supported by selected participant quotes and relevant literature.

I. Career day sessions

Career day events were noted as a proactive but underutilised strategy for improving student awareness about NC(V) programmes and related career prospects. Participants emphasised the value of these sessions in helping students make informed study choices. Participant 3 stated, *"A career day would assist with sharing information about TVET colleges in high schools. We visit neighbouring schools once a year and conduct briefing sessions."*

However, the infrequency of these events was raised as a limitation. Participant 8 noted, *"Currently, we only have speakers from industry once every two years, but this should happen annually, or even twice a year."*. This suggests a need for consistent outreach activities to align student expectations with the realities of NC(V) engineering programmes. This is supported by Garcia [27], who notes that students need guidance and support from administrators, lecturers and support staff to navigate the new college environment and achieve their academic goals.

II. Financial support and NSFAS funding

Financial aid was consistently identified as a key retention strategy; however, delays in NSFAS payments and a lack of alternative funding were reported as significant concerns. One participant stated, *"NSFAS must pay students timeously, because most students come from households*

where parents are not working.". Such delays contribute to financial instability, absenteeism and dropout risk. These challenges are consistent with Bean and Metzner's student attrition model, highlighting the impact of external factors such as financial hardship on student persistence [28]. Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh and Susuman [29] also report that 35% of students fail to complete their qualifications due to financial difficulties. These findings highlight a need for DHET and TVET colleges to ensure timely and reliable NSFAS disbursements, particularly for transport, food and accommodation support.

III. College-level interventions

Participants described a range of interventions such as attendance tracking, academic support, tutoring and bridging programmes as potential retention strategies, but they suffered from inconsistent implementation. For attendance, class registers are used to monitor attendance of NC(V) engineering students; however, effective communication with parents remains a challenge due to students providing their own contact details during registration. Tutoring initiatives exist on some TVET college campuses, particularly in subjects like mathematics and drawing, but they are underutilised by students who need them most. Bridging programmes were also mentioned to have been implemented by some TVET colleges to support students transitioning from high schools into the NC(V) engineering programmes. However, opinions on their effectiveness differed, with some participants questioning whether they provide sufficient support or prolong the NC(V) study period.

IV. College support services

Support services were reported as an essential retention strategy for addressing both academic and personal challenges faced by NC(V) students. Participant 2 shared, *"We have a student support services department, where we have social workers to assist with their social issues, and we have financial aid offices that help students with their financial aid issues."*. Participant 3 added, *"We refer students experiencing personal difficulties, such as family instability, to counsellors hired by DHET and placed in colleges"*. However, the limited availability of these services and staff shortages hinder the effectiveness of this retention strategy. Another participant noted, *"We have a learner support department that can assist, but it takes time to respond to the needs of students. I think the challenge is that the learner support department is understaffed"*. These findings echo Badenhorst and Radile's [3] earlier research, which found that support services in TVET colleges may be dysfunctional, underused or poorly marketed. Dunn [7] similarly points to institutional issues such as poor support from academic staff, feelings of isolation and limited awareness of support services as key barriers to retention.

V. DHET policy implementation

The DHET 80% punctuality and attendance policy is recognised as a retention strategy that promotes student accountability, but implementation was described as inconsistent. Participant 8 shared, *"Students who fail to meet attendance requirements are given a chance to explain their absence, and in most cases, they are eventually allowed to write exams."* This suggests that while DHET policies exist to promote student engagement, their impact depends heavily on how consistently they are implemented at the TVET campus level. The literature supports these findings. Nzembe [13] found that although the policy clearly states that the minimum attendance requirement is 80%, students still attend irregularly, often without any consequences. Myataza and Mokoena [2] similarly reported inconsistent policy implementation, where students with poor attendance are still allowed to write the final exams

VI. Integration of technology in teaching and learning

Technology-enhanced learning was identified as an emerging retention strategy by one participant. Participant 7 remarked, *"Management encourages the use of technology in teaching to keep students engaged. However, some lecturers resist due to age or a lack of motivation.*

Resources like laptops and monthly data are available, but adoption remains slow". Resistance to technology use and infrastructural constraints hinder efforts to make blended learning a reliable support strategy for retention. These challenges are echoed by Dunn [7], who identified limited learning technology as a significant obstacle in student retention and institutional innovation.

VII. Industry visits

Industry exposure was highlighted by one participant as a valuable engagement strategy for motivating students and demonstrating the relevance of their NC(V) engineering studies. Participant 2 explained, *"We organise academic excursions, allowing students to visit industries. Senior students are also placed in industries for short-term exposure"*. Although this strategy can potentially motivate students, it appears limited or underdeveloped in TVET colleges. There is a need for TVET colleges to strengthen their partnerships with the industry to improve relevance and student motivation.

VIII. Student admission practices

Only one participant mentioned adopting stricter student admission criteria for NC(V) engineering programmes as another strategy to improve retention. Participant 9 stated, *"We try to admit students who have performed well in Grade 10 or 11, as previous data shows that they perform better than those with only Grade 9 qualifications"*. This approach may improve academic outcomes; however, it risks excluding underprepared students who might succeed with adequate support. Badenhorst and Radile [3] observed that academically weaker students often struggle in mixed-level classes, highlighting the need for inclusive support strategies.

5 CONCLUSION

This study explored existing retention strategies in NC(V) engineering programmes across selected public TVET colleges. The findings revealed that interventions such as attendance monitoring, academic support, NSFAS funding, career day sessions, and DHET policy enforcement are in place; however, their effectiveness is limited by fragmented implementation, inconsistent monitoring, and operational inefficiencies. In most cases, these interventions exist only on paper, remain informal or are unevenly implemented, which reduces their ability to meaningfully support student persistence in NC(V) engineering programmes.

Insights from campus managers and senior academic staff highlighted operational gaps, including delays in financial aid disbursements, under-resourced support services and inconsistent enforcement of the 80% attendance policy. Although initiatives such as industry exposure and technology integration in some TVET colleges reflect emerging innovation, their limited implementation has yet to produce a broader impact across TVET campuses.

Viewing retention as a process system highlights how inefficiencies in attendance monitoring and student support services reduce throughput and compromise NC(V) programme completion. Strengthening these processes through comprehensive academic support systems and psychosocial interventions can improve resource utilisation and successful student outcomes within the TVET sector.

The findings suggest that most current strategies lack the scale, structure and coordination required for lasting retention improvement. To truly *make waves* and achieve sustainable impact in the TVET sector, retention strategies must be formalised, aligned across campuses and continuously reviewed and improved. A more structured, student-centred and efficient retention system grounded in continuous improvement and process integration can enhance student outcomes and build long-term stability in NC(V) engineering programmes.

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SAIIE35 Proceedings, 20–22 October 2025, Cape Town, South Africa © 2025 SAIIE

RAILWAY CAPACITY IN TRANSITION: A REVIEW OF INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES AND DATA-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This review investigates the evolving challenges and solutions related to railway capacity, with a particular focus on infrastructure-related constraints and the application of data-driven technologies. By analyzing literature from 2017 to 2025, the study identifies four core infrastructure domains, telecommunications, signaling, electrification, and permanent way-as central to capacity optimization. It highlights the impacts of defects, maintenance inefficiencies, cyber threats, and climate-related disruptions on system performance. The paper evaluates the role of smart maintenance approaches, including predictive analytics and digital twins, in enhancing resilience and reliability. It further explores emerging paradigms such as dynamic capacity modelling, intelligent routing, and the integration of real-time data into operational planning. The study concludes that a shift from reactive infrastructure expansion to proactive digital management offers a sustainable path to capacity optimization. Insights provided aim to support infrastructure managers, policymakers, and researchers in the transition to smarter and more resilient railway systems.

Keywords: Railway capacity, Infrastructure optimization, Predictive maintenance.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Railway infrastructure plays a pivotal role in supporting national and regional economies through the efficient movement of goods and passengers. As demand for rail services continues to grow, optimizing infrastructure utilization has become a critical concern. Infrastructure utilization refers to the effective use of railway assets, such as tracks, platforms, and rolling stock, often measured by the ratio of train paths operated to the maximum capacity the infrastructure can accommodate. Inadequate utilization not only represents inefficiencies in resource deployment but also results in significant economic losses, particularly in countries heavily reliant on rail freight. In South Africa, this inefficiency is clearly reflected in the sharp decline in rail freight volumes, which dropped from 226 million tonnes in 2017 to just over 150 million tonnes by 2023, largely due to infrastructure failures, maintenance backlogs, and operational disruptions [1]. Globally, similar issues have been reported. For instance, in Sweden, a study of over 225,000 scheduled maintenance activities revealed that frequent but inconsistently documented trackwork had a considerable impact on capacity availability and scheduling reliability [2]. The lack of integrated digital maintenance records was highlighted as a key barrier to effective capacity planning. Railway capacity utilization is essential not only for minimizing delays but also for enhancing the resilience and service quality of rail systems. Emerging research has demonstrated that well-managed infrastructure utilization can lead to more stable network operations, improved safety outcomes, and better long-term cost efficiency [3]; [4]. Conversely, infrastructure-related failures, whether due to outdated signaling systems, telecommunications outages, electrical faults, or permanent way degradation, undermine operational efficiency and compromise system robustness [5].

Recognizing these challenges, the present review seeks to investigate the factors within railway infrastructure that influence capacity utilization, with a specific focus on four interdependent disciplines: telecommunications, electrical systems, signalling, and the permanent way (track). These infrastructure elements form the backbone of railway operations, collectively determining the reliability, safety, and throughput of the network. The objectives of this review are fourfold. First, it aims to identify the critical infrastructure components that directly impact railway capacity utilization. Second, it examines the common failure modes associated with these components and assesses their operational consequences. Third, it evaluates the effectiveness of various maintenance strategies specifically, reactive, preventive, and predictive maintenance in mitigating infrastructure-related disruptions. Lastly, the review synthesizes recent literature concerning the definitions of capacity, the role of digital transformation, and the adoption of system-level management approaches that enable data-driven decision-making and long-term capacity optimization.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a structured literature review to explore current trends, challenges, and innovations in railway capacity and infrastructure management, focusing on publications from 2017 to 2025. Academic databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, IEEE Xplore, and Google Scholar were searched using Boolean operators to refine the results. Key search strings included combinations like "railway capacity" AND "infrastructure," which yielded 95 records; "railway maintenance" AND ("predictive" OR "preventive"), with 62 records; 54 records for "railway digitalization" AND "smart systems"; and 39 records for "railway signaling" AND "telecommunications." Inclusion criteria encompassed English-language peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers addressing railway capacity, technological advancements, or smart maintenance strategies. Exclusion criteria excluded non-academic sources, non-English texts, and studies not focused on the railway sector. From an initial yield of approximately 250 records, 120 were shortlisted after title and abstract screening, with 42 selected through full-text review based on thematic relevance and methodological rigor.

Extracted data included author, publication year, geographic focus, rail type (passenger, freight, or mixed), infrastructure domain (track, signaling, telecoms, or electrification), and the nature of the capacity or maintenance approach discussed. The final selection was subjected to thematic analysis to synthesize patterns, draw comparative insights, and identify emerging strategies aimed at enhancing rail system performance and resilience

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Railway Capacity

Railway capacity, a critical determinant of operational efficiency and service reliability, refers to the number of train paths that can be scheduled over a defined rail infrastructure segment within a specific time frame. Capacity is inherently dependent on a variety of factors, including train heterogeneity, route design, operational headways, and the desired level of robustness within the system [4]. Rather than a fixed value, capacity is dynamic and context-sensitive, influenced by technical, organizational, and environmental conditions. [4] emphasize that capacity is best understood as a function of how infrastructure is used, rather than a singular, static metric. This aligns with contemporary approaches that define capacity in multiple layers: theoretical, maximum, and practical. Theoretical capacity refers to the ideal scenario of uninterrupted and homogeneous train operations, while maximum capacity introduces real-world diversity in train types and operations, albeit without including buffer times. Practical capacity, on the other hand, incorporates scheduled buffers, dwell time, and allowances for disruptions, making it the most realistic and usable form of capacity in modern operations [6].

Recent research prioritizes real-time and data-driven models to redefine capacity estimation. For instance, [7] demonstrate how reinforcement learning algorithms can dynamically adjust train schedules to improve network fluidity, thereby increasing practical capacity without major infrastructure upgrades. This reflects a paradigm shift from infrastructure-heavy expansion to intelligent network optimization. Similarly, [8] propose a data-driven framework to identify bottlenecks and evaluate station-line capacity interactions using transit performance datasets. Their work reveals that digital models can identify systemic inefficiencies invisible to traditional planning methods. In parallel, digital twin's virtual simulations of railway systems are gaining traction for capacity scenario testing and resilience modeling [9] These tools allow for predictive responses to demand variability and disruptions, enhancing overall network agility.

Smart maintenance strategies further support practical capacity enhancement. Predictive maintenance, underpinned by Internet of Things (IoT) sensors and machine learning, allows railway operators to anticipate and prevent failures before they impact scheduling [10] [11], This reduces unplanned downtime and preserves the buffer allowances built into practical capacity models. Moreover, capacity utilization metrics are increasingly framed within safety and service quality thresholds. [12] emphasize that overutilization exceeding 85% may compromise schedule reliability, while underutilization signals inefficiencies. Their study found that coordinated routing strategies can reduce overutilization risks by balancing train flow across alternative paths and time windows, maintaining capacity within optimal thresholds. Advanced signaling and control systems also play a crucial role. Modern implementations of Communication-Based Train Control (CBTC) and European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) have proven effective in reducing headways, increasing line throughput, and improving responsiveness to demand changes [13]. These systems enhance the interoperability of trains and infrastructure, contributing directly to the flexible management of capacity. Furthermore, capacity planning now incorporates multimodal integration and climate resilience. According to [14], climate-induced disruptions such as extreme heat or flooding must be included in capacity planning algorithms to ensure long-term sustainability

and robustness.

In summary, recent literature frames railway capacity not only as a physical constraint but as an outcome of real-time data integration, smart maintenance, and digital control. The focus is shifting from adding new infrastructure to optimizing existing assets through intelligent systems and predictive analytics. This evolution reflects a broader transition toward smart mobility and sustainable railway operations.

3.2 Railway Capacity Challenges

While the theoretical and practical frameworks of railway capacity provide essential benchmarks for network planning, real-world operations are often constrained by a range of persistent and emerging challenges. These challenges, both technical and systemic, have a direct and measurable impact on the ability of rail infrastructure to operate at or near its designed capacity. This section presents a categorized summary of the most pressing capacity challenges currently facing the railway sector, with emphasis on recent findings from international and regional studies published between 2017 and 2025. The table synthesizes five primary challenge areas track defects, maintenance scheduling instability, security-related disruptions, overutilization thresholds, and environmental factors highlighting their descriptions, impacts on capacity, and supporting literature. Understanding these barriers is critical for developing more robust, adaptive, and data-informed strategies for capacity optimization.

Table 1: Key Railway Capacity Challenges and Their Specific Impacts (2017–2025)

Challenge Area	Description	Impact on Capacity
Track Defects [15]	Structural failures, such as inadequate strength and rail buckling, reduce track integrity and require temporary speed restrictions or line closures	Reduces operational speed, introduces delays, and limits train throughput.
Maintenance Scheduling Instability [16]	Frequent last-minute changes to schedule maintenance activities lead to reduced capacity and train delays.	Decreases available train paths and increases operational unpredictability.
Security Breaches and Vandalism [17]	Theft, vandalism, and signal tampering result in derailments, collisions, and service disruptions	Interrupts service delivery and lengthens repair response times.
Overutilization of Capacity [12]	Utilization beyond 85-90% reduces network flexibility and increases the risk of cascading delays.	Strains network reliability and reduce the ability to absorb minor disturbances
Environmental Disruptions [14]	Extreme weather events such as heat waves and floods degrade infrastructure and disrupt planned operations.	Forces reactive rerouting and increases the need for buffer time in timetables.

As table 1 illustrates, railway capacity limitations stem from a multifaceted combination of infrastructure degradation, operational inefficiencies, and external threats. Technical failures such as track defects and unstable maintenance scheduling remain fundamental obstacles to maintaining reliable throughput. Meanwhile, socio-economic challenges, including theft and vandalism, continue to disproportionately affect networks in regions such as South Africa. Moreover, the risks associated with both under- and overutilization of capacity underscore the need for dynamic and context-sensitive management frameworks. Climate-related disruptions further compound these issues, signaling a need for resilience-based planning.

Addressing these challenges requires an integrated approach that combines predictive maintenance, real-time monitoring, digital planning tools, and investment in system-wide resilience. Informed by current evidence, these insights should guide infrastructure managers and policymakers in their pursuit of a more reliable and high-capacity rail system.

3.3 Railway Infrastructure

Following the discussion on capacity challenges, it is essential to examine the core infrastructure systems that directly influence railway performance.

Railway infrastructure comprises several interdependent components that enable safe, efficient, and high-capacity operations. Railway infrastructure is a complex system that integrates physical and digital components to support the safe and efficient movement of trains. As demand for speed and capacity grows, modern networks rely on interconnected subsystems such as track (permanent way), signaling, electrical systems, and telecommunications to maintain reliability and performance [4]; [18]. The permanent way includes rails, sleepers, ballast, and switches, forming the structural backbone that guides train movement [19]. Signalling systems manage train separation, enforce safety, and optimize track utilization [20]. Electrical systems, including overhead traction and substations, supply power and are increasingly supported by smart monitoring technologies to enhance reliability [21]; [1] Meanwhile, telecommunications infrastructure now evolving to 5G and FRMCS enables real-time communication, control, and diagnostics essential to modern operations [22]. Because these systems are interdependent, a failure in one can disrupt the entire network. Holistic infrastructure management through integrated planning, digital systems, and predictive maintenance is therefore essential to sustaining capacity and service delivery [9].

3.3.1Telecommunications (Telecoms)

Telecommunications systems are essential to modern railway operations, enabling real-time communication between control centers, trackside equipment, and rolling stock. The transition from legacy systems such as GSM-R to advanced platforms like 5G and the Future Railway Mobile Communication System (FRMCS) reflects a shift toward more intelligent, high-capacity, and latency-reduced networks [23]. These systems support operational efficiency, safety signalling, passenger information, and data-driven maintenance protocols. However, increased reliance on digital infrastructure introduces new risks, particularly cyber threats. Recent studies highlight vulnerabilities to ransomware attacks, signal jamming, and communication failures that can lead to train delays or system-wide shutdowns [22]. Telecom failure not only disrupts train control but also undermines the performance of automated signalling and traffic management systems, thereby reducing network reliability and capacity.

3.3.2 Permanent Way (Perway)

The permanent way comprises the physical track infrastructure, including rails, sleepers, fastenings, ballast, switches, and crossings, that ensure the structural stability and alignment required for safe and efficient train operations [24]. Defects such as rail breaks, fastening fatigue, or misaligned sleepers significantly reduce permissible speeds and can cause derailments, resulting in capacity loss and safety concerns. Studies show that broken rails account for a substantial proportion of derailments in freight operations, with over 15% of such incidents linked to these defects [25].

Ballast degradation, caused by abrasion and fouling, leads to poor drainage and track instability. The mechanical properties of ballast are influenced by particle size, shape, and composition, directly affecting performance under dynamic loads [26]. Sleepers, when damaged, can lead to rail misalignment and necessitate temporary speed restrictions [27]. Similarly, turnouts (track switches) critical for train routing are susceptible to mechanical wear, especially under high-frequency traffic and complex vehicle dynamics [28]. Turnout failures in high-density networks can cause major operational delays; thus, redundancy and regular maintenance are essential for capacity assurance [29].

3.3.3 Signaling

Signaling systems maintain safe train separation and coordinate train movement across the network. Modern signalling uses both fixed-block and moving-block principles, with technologies such as centralized train control, interlocking, and automated route setting. Excessive headways, often resulting from conservative signal placement or system failures, limit throughput and degrade capacity [30]. Interlocking systems, whether relay-based or computer-based, manage routing logic and safe track occupancy by integrating data from signals, axle counters, and track circuits [31].

Failures in signaling systems due to equipment degradation, cybersecurity breaches, or software errors often lead to manual overrides, increasing response times and reducing line efficiency. For example, signalling failures in South Africa have been linked to chronic underfunding and inadequate spares and staffing, posing a threat to operational continuity [1]; [32] further emphasized that enhancing the reliability of sub-systems like axle counters and track circuits is crucial for improving train detection accuracy and, by extension, capacity reliability. Interoperability among subsystems remains a key technical challenge, requiring integrated systems engineering to ensure resilience and seamless operation.

3.3.4 Electrical Systems

Electrical systems are a critical backbone of railway operations, ensuring the uninterrupted supply of power for train propulsion and auxiliary systems. Core components such as overhead line equipment (OLE), catenary systems (OCS), pantographs, and traction substations work together to deliver consistent electrical current to moving trains. The OLE and OCS transmit power through contact wires, which must maintain mechanical and electrical integrity despite variable speeds, environmental stress, and vibration. Factors like wire tension, pre-sag, and gradient play crucial roles in performance [21]. Pantographs, mounted on trains, dynamically collect current, and their interaction with the catenary affects energy transfer efficiency. Failures in these systems due to wear, weather damage, or poor design can result in arcing, contact loss, and service delays [33]. Traction substations convert and regulate high-voltage grid electricity into usable power for trains. Substation failures can cause cascading delays across entire corridors, particularly in high-density urban systems [34]. While diesel locomotives can serve as backup during outages, electric traction remains more energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable, making its reliability a top priority [1] to enhance system resilience, smart monitoring systems are increasingly deployed to track load behavior, detect anomalies, and guide predictive interventions.

3.4 Railway Infrastructure Maintenance Management

Maintenance is essential for ensuring rail infrastructure reliability, minimizing downtime, and sustaining capacity. Poor maintenance leads to service disruptions, increased safety risks, and higher lifecycle costs. [35] established a direct link between high-capacity utilization and elevated maintenance demands, as heavily used infrastructure experiences accelerated wear. Proactive maintenance planning is therefore vital to preventing failures and preserving operational efficiency. Railway maintenance typically follows three approaches: reactive, preventive, and predictive.

3.4.1 Reactive Maintenance

Reactive maintenance, or run-to-failure, involves addressing faults only after breakdowns occur. While it reduces immediate staffing and planning demands, it increases the likelihood of sudden service interruptions and expensive emergency repairs. It is often associated with lower reliability and reduced capacity in the long term [36];[37].

3.4.2 Preventive Maintenance

Preventive maintenance (PM) adopts a scheduled, time-based approach to inspections and repairs, reducing the risk of unexpected failures. It improves asset longevity, ensures schedule reliability, and supports optimal capacity utilization [38]; [39]. However, PM must be carefully planned; overly frequent interventions can become costly, while poor scheduling may miss critical failure points [40; 41]

3.4 3 Predictive Maintenance

Predictive maintenance (PdM) represents the most advanced strategy, using data analytics, sensors, and machine learning to anticipate failures before they occur. By monitoring the condition of tracks, rolling stock, and components in real time, PdM enables timely intervention, reducing unplanned downtime and enhancing system reliability [10];[11].PdM not only improves asset performance but also contributes significantly to capacity optimization by minimizing operational disruptions [42].

This review demonstrates that railway capacity is a multifaceted and dynamic concept shaped by infrastructure design, operational strategies, and technological integration. Emerging digital tools such as predictive maintenance, data-driven scheduling, and advanced signaling significantly enhance practical capacity without expanding physical assets. Persistent challenges, including infrastructure failures, cyber threats, and environmental disruptions, necessitate resilience-based and intelligent planning. A shift from reactive to proactive management underpins sustainable railway efficiency. Ultimately, optimizing capacity requires systemic coordination across disciplines to ensure reliable, high-performance rail networks.

4 CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed the multifaceted nature of railway capacity, highlighting the integral role of infrastructure systems, namely telecommunications, signalling, electrification, and permanent way, in shaping operational performance. It has been shown that capacity is not a static metric, but a dynamic outcome influenced by technical reliability, maintenance strategies, and real-time operational responsiveness. Challenges such as infrastructure degradation, overutilization, cyber vulnerabilities, and climate-related disruptions continue to constrain system reliability and throughput. However, advancements in predictive maintenance, digital modelling, and intelligent control systems offer promising avenues for enhancing capacity without the need for extensive infrastructure expansion. The study underscores the necessity for integrated, data-driven approaches that enable adaptive planning and resilience across the rail network. Moving forward, stakeholders must prioritize investment in digital infrastructure, robust maintenance regimes, and cross-disciplinary collaboration to unlock the full potential of modern railway systems. Such efforts are essential for creating agile, sustainable, and high-capacity railways suited for 21st-century demands.

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ANALYSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF OPERATIONAL INEFFICIENCIES IN FILLING STATIONS OF A YOGHURT MANUFACTURING PLANT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Operational inefficiencies in the filling stations of a yoghurt manufacturing plant have resulted in production delays, product inconsistencies, and rising operational costs. Although filling stations play a critical role in dairy production, limited research has focused on their specific inefficiencies, particularly within yoghurt manufacturing. This study aimed to identify the root causes of these inefficiencies and propose practical solutions. A qualitative observational approach was employed to assess the plant's filling station processes. Findings revealed that key inefficiencies stemmed from inconsistent raw material flow, frequent machine calibration errors and inadequate maintenance practices. To address these challenges, the study recommends enhanced machine calibration, predictive maintenance scheduling, and integration of real-time monitoring systems. Implementing these strategies could improve productivity, reduce waste, and ensure consistent product quality. This research contributes to improving operational efficiency in dairy manufacturing and offers practical strategies for similar food production industries.

Keywords: Yoghurt manufacturing, Operational inefficiencies, Filling station

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive and quality-driven food industry, optimizing business systems to enhance productivity is critical for maintaining both competitiveness and profitability [1],[2]. The yoghurt manufacturing sector faces unique operational challenges, such as the need for precise process control to ensure product consistency and compliance with food safety standards [3]. Industry studies have shown that inefficiencies in daily production, including outdated machinery, inconsistent quality control, and prolonged equipment downtime, can lead to increased costs, reduced output, and lower productivity [4], [5].

Operational inefficiencies are especially apparent at the filling stage of yoghurt production, where the final product is packaged for distribution. Inefficiencies reported globally in similar settings include prolonged machine downtime, low employee efficiency, and a high proportion of off-specification products, all of which result in extended production cycles, material waste, and elevated costs [6],[7]. Although inefficiencies in food manufacturing have been the subject of several studies, there is limited research focused specifically on yoghurt plant filling stations, even though these stations are crucial for determining throughput, product quality, and overall profitability.

Addressing these challenges requires a systematic, holistic approach using industrial engineering techniques, such as preventive maintenance, workflow optimization, and real-time quality monitoring, to improve resource utilization, enhance productivity, and reduce waste [8]. Therefore, it is evident that inefficiencies in filling stations not only represent a considerable economic loss, but also reduce the operational profitability, resource utilization and the overall production efficiency. This study responds to the gap by analysing the root causes of inefficiencies at yoghurt filling stations and proposing strategies to improve performance.

1.2 Aim of the research

This research aimed to analyse the root causes of operational inefficiencies in the filling station of a yoghurt manufacturing plant in South Africa and to propose strategies for improving overall efficiency. By addressing these inefficiencies, the study seeks to enhance productivity, minimize waste and improve profitability within the dairy production sector.

1.3 Research Question

In the filling station of the yoghurt manufacturing plant under study, operational inefficiencies such as prolonged machine downtime, inconsistent product quality have been observed to cause delays, increased waste and higher operational costs. These challenges reduce overall productivity and negatively impact the plant's profitability and resource utilization. To investigate these issues and identify solutions, this study was guided by the following research questions:

What are the root causes of operational inefficiencies in the filling station of the yoghurt manufacturing plant in South Africa, and how can these inefficiencies be addressed to improve production efficiency?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Understanding Operational Efficiency in Production Processes

Operational efficiency refers to the optimization of organizational processes to achieve higher productivity while minimizing costs and sustaining quality performance. According to Araujo [9], operational efficiency is an organization's ability to produce goods and provide services in the most economical way, while maintaining high standards of excellence and customer satisfaction. Operational efficiency is fundamental, as it enables output-to-input assessments that determine productivity and profitability [10]. According to Chen et al. [11], in today's

manufacturing environment, technological innovation and the adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies are recognized as major drivers of efficiency, enabling real-time monitoring, automation, and data-driven decision-making.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks of Operational Efficiency

Theoretical frameworks provide the foundation for understanding and improving operational efficiency. Cagliano, Grimaldi, and Rafele [12] emphasize that selecting appropriate management models and tools is essential for sustaining improvements in organizational processes. These frameworks often draw from methodologies such as Lean Manufacturing (LM), Total Quality Management (TQM), and Six Sigma, which are widely acknowledged as proven approaches for enhancing efficiency and eliminating waste in production systems [13].

2.2.1 Overview of Lean Manufacturing and Its Principles

Lean manufacturing (LM) is a production philosophy centred on doing more with less by reducing waste and maximizing value creation [14]. Womack and Jones [15] define LM as a systematic approach to eliminating non-value-added activities while improving responsiveness to customer demand. Dhiravidamani et al. [16] note that the primary goal of LM is to deliver high-quality products with minimal waste in terms of resources, time, and effort. Waste reduction is considered the cornerstone of LM, targeting excess inventory, unnecessary motion, waiting times, overproduction, and defects [17].

Practical tools within LM include pull production systems, 5S workplace organization, Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), Just-In-Time (JIT), Standard Work, Value Stream Mapping (VSM), Kanban, and Kaizen [18]. These methods not only reduce inefficiencies but also foster a culture of continuous improvement.

According to Moen & Norman [19], The Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, originally developed by Shewhart and later refined by Deming, is often integrated into lean thinking to support iterative, evidence-based improvements. According to Deming [20] PDCA emphasizes continuous problem identification, experimentation, and refinement, making it highly relevant for qualitative research focused on uncovering root causes of inefficiencies. By combining LM tools with the PDCA cycle, organizations can systematically identify, analyse, and eliminate sources of waste, leading to sustained operational efficiency.

2.2.2 Utilizing Total Quality Management (TQM) and Root Cause Identification

Before proposing any solution, it is necessary to understand the primary issue and its causes. To make the task simpler, a systematic approach should be used to identify and eliminate the root source of the issue. Another key framework in addressing operational inefficiencies is Total Quality Management (TQM), which emphasizes continuous improvement and customer satisfaction through systematic quality control. Rehman et al. [21] highlight that TQM incorporates seven fundamental quality control tools: check sheets, cause-and-effect diagrams, flowcharts, histograms, control charts, Pareto charts, and scatter diagrams. These tools provide a structured means of identifying and addressing the root causes of inefficiencies at all stages of the production process.

By applying TQM principles, manufacturers can eliminate non-value-added activities, reduce variability, and improve process stability, thereby enhancing both productivity and quality [22]. TQM therefore complements lean approaches by focusing not only on waste reduction but also on fostering an organization-wide culture of problem-solving and continuous improvement.

2.3 Factors Contributing to Operational Inefficiency in Production Processes

Identifying the drivers of inefficiencies is critical for designing effective improvement solutions. Research shows that factors such as lack of a continuous improvement culture,

frequent changeovers, inadequate decision-support systems, and resistance to adopting new technologies significantly undermine productivity [23], [24]. Moreover, Cai & Yang [25] added that the absence of structured methodologies for root cause analysis often results in recurring operational bottlenecks.

Therefore, early identification and mitigation of these factors are essential for sustaining efficient operations. If left unresolved, inefficiencies accumulate into systemic problems that erode long-term sustainability and competitiveness [26], [27]. A structured approach to analysing and managing these contributing factors is critical for maintaining operational excellence in manufacturing environments.

2.4 Impacts of Operational Inefficiencies and Mitigation Strategies

Operational inefficiencies have wide-ranging consequences for production processes, including excessive downtime, quality defects, increased waste, and higher costs, all of which reduce profitability and competitiveness [28], [29]). Choomlucksana et al. [30] specifically identify motion and process wastes as critical obstacles, highlighting the importance of adopting comprehensive strategies to minimize waste and optimize processes.

Research indicates that Lean manufacturing, particularly when integrated with Industry 4.0 technologies, is highly effective in mitigating inefficiencies by reducing cycle times, enhancing resource utilization, and improving quality control [31], [32]. Similarly, continuous improvement methodologies such as Kaizen and PDCA provide the structured mechanisms for sustaining long-term operational efficiency [33]. These approaches demonstrate that sustainable improvements require both technical interventions and human factors, including employee engagement and organizational culture [34].

2.5 Conclusion of Literature Review

The reviewed literature demonstrates that operational efficiency in production processes is a multidimensional concept that combines technological, managerial, and cultural factors. Lean manufacturing and TQM frameworks offer structured methodologies for eliminating waste and identifying root causes of inefficiencies, while the PDCA cycle reinforces continuous and iterative improvement. Factors contributing to inefficiencies, such as a lack of a continuous improvement culture, frequent changeovers, and weak decision-support systems, must be systematically identified and resolved to prevent long-term performance declines. Finally, adopting mitigation strategies grounded in lean principles, TQM tools, and continuous improvement philosophies ensures not only cost reduction but also sustainable competitiveness in manufacturing environments such as yoghurt production.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Setting

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the root causes of operational inefficiencies in the filling stations of a yoghurt manufacturing plant. The qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to provide in-depth insights into complex operational dynamics, human factors, and technological challenges that contribute to inefficiencies [35]. A case study design was adopted to facilitate a focused investigation within a real-life industrial context, allowing for rich, contextualized understanding of the production environment [36].

Observations were conducted over a twelve-week period (three months), five days a week, across three production shifts (morning, afternoon, and night). This duration provided sufficient time to capture variations in production processes and operational patterns.

3.2 Focus Areas and Variables

The focus areas were derived from the operational efficiency framework discussed in Section 2 below and represent critical determinants of production efficiency:

1. Machine Performance: Variables included downtime frequency, maintenance requirements, and cycle times. Machine efficiency affects throughput and overall operational effectiveness [37].
2. Employee Efficiency: Variables included task completion rates, adherence to procedures, and coordination/communication issues. Human factors play a crucial role in workflow consistency and productivity [38].
3. Product Quality: Variables included the occurrence of off-specification products, rework frequency, and deviations from quality standards. According to Choomlucksana [39]. Product quality impacts both customer satisfaction and operational profitability.

Focusing on these areas enabled the study to systematically investigate inefficiencies in the filling station and establish a basis for root cause analysis.

3.3 Population

The target population comprised the machinery operations and production workflows at the filling stations of a major yoghurt-producing plant in South Africa. This included all mechanical functions, human interactions, and system-level processes that directly influence operational efficiency, productivity, and product consistency.

3.4 Sampling Method

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select operational settings most likely to reveal critical data on inefficiencies. Observations were conducted across all three shifts to capture variations in machine performance, workflow patterns, and process consistency. Purposive sampling is widely recognized as suitable for qualitative industrial research because it targets the most relevant operational areas [40].

3.5 Data Collection

Data were collected through non-participant direct observation using structured observation sheets and checklists. Observation data included the following variables:

- Machine performance: downtime, maintenance activities, and cycle times
- Employee efficiency: task completion rates, adherence to procedures, coordination, and communication issues
- Product quality: off-specification incidents, rework frequency, and deviations from standards

Secondary data sources, such as maintenance logs, production reports, and quality control records, were used to validate observations and strengthen data reliability. This combination ensures comprehensive coverage of variables and aligns with best practices in qualitative manufacturing research [41].

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to code observation notes systematically, identifying recurring patterns and inefficiencies. The themes were categorized into technological, human, and process-related causes, which were derived from the focus areas described above, ensuring a clear link between observations and analytical categories.

The analysis also applied the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle as a framework for iterative assessment and continuous process improvement. The PDCA cycle supports root cause analysis by enabling systematic identification, testing, and refinement of corrective actions [8].

Data triangulation was performed by comparing findings across shifts and cross-referencing secondary data (maintenance logs, quality reports), enhancing validity and reducing observer bias.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical research principles were strictly adhered to. Permission to conduct observations was obtained from plant management. Observations were conducted without interfering with daily operations. Confidential information unrelated to the study's focus was excluded from analysis.

3.8 Methodology Flowchart

Figure 1 illustrates a flowchart summarizing the research design and methodology employed in this study.

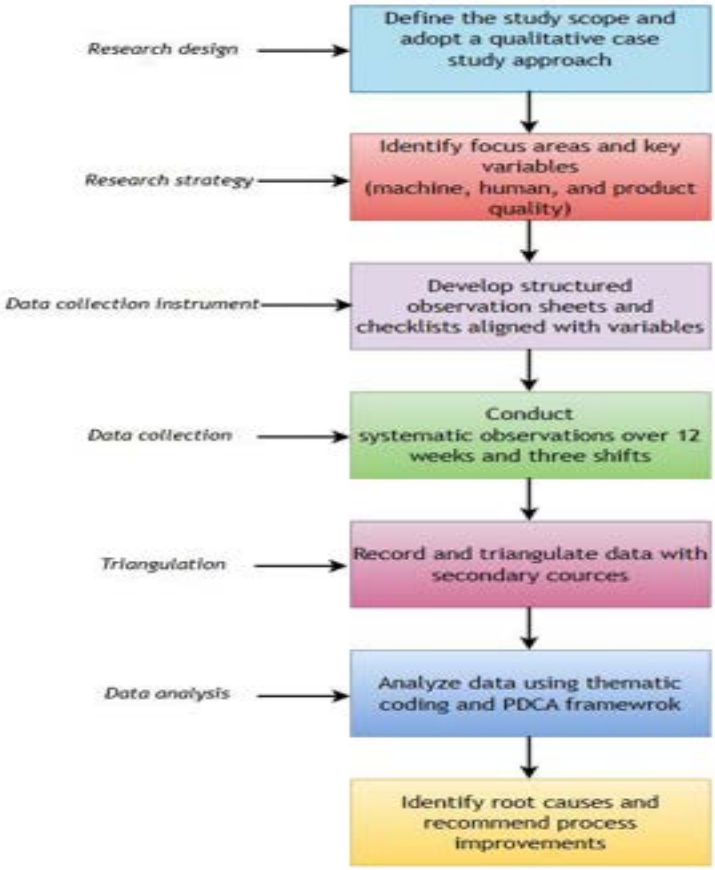

Figure 1: Flowchart of research design and strategy

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

The study conducted a comprehensive analysis of the observational data collected over a 12-week period (three months) at the filling stations of a yogurt manufacturing plant in South Africa. Observations were conducted five days a week across three production shifts (morning, afternoon, and night) to capture variability in operational performance. The primary focus

was on machine performance, employee efficiency, and product quality, as these factors were identified through the literature review and research objectives as the key determinants of operational efficiency [9],[6].

The PDCA root cause analysis approach, combined with thematic coding, was used to systematically identify patterns and factors contributing to inefficiencies. Themes were categorized into technological, human, and process-related factors, reflecting the interdependence of equipment, workforce, and workflows in the production process [12].

4.2 Summary of Observational Data

Although observations were carried out over three months, five representative days were selected for presentation in Table 1. These days were chosen because they reflect typical operational patterns, including examples of high and low efficiency, ensuring that the sample captured the variability of operations, and the table remains concise.

Table 1: Summary of observational data

Day	Machine Downtime (Minutes)	Employee Efficiency (% of tasks completed on time)	Off-Spec Products (%)	Detailed observations of machine issues, employee performance, and their impact on production quality for each shift.
Day 1	45	85%	25%	Machine breakdown occurred early in the shift; employees had to wait for maintenance to fix the issue.
Day 2	30	78%	22%	Minor machine issue, leading to a delay in filling operations; some confusion during shift change caused miscommunication between operators.
Day 3	50	80%	28%	Major machine downtime due to an equipment malfunction; operators struggled to maintain quality during the restart phase.
Day 4	20	90%	18%	Fewer issues with machines, but some employees were slow to adapt to a change in product specifications, leading to higher off-spec rates.
Day 5	35	88%	20%	Maintenance resolved most machine issues, but there were still some qualities control challenges during peak production hours.

From Table 1, the machine downtown throughout the five days averaged 36 minutes per day with the highest being 50 minutes on day three and resulted in decrease in both productivity and product quality. The machine experienced the lowest downtime of 20 minutes on day four, which coincides with the highest employee efficiency. The worker's efficiency is, therefore, linked to machine performance and communication. Proper coordination and reduction of equipment downtown time are the essential ingredients of maintenance of high levels of workers' productivity.

For employee efficiency, the average completion of a task / order on time over the five days was 84.2%, The best efficiency observed was in day four at 90% of the days had the lowest machine downtime, which suggests that equipment reliability positively affects worker efficiency. The lowest efficiency observed was on day two at 78%; this justifies the point made above that proper co-ordination along with minimizing equipment downtimes are essential to maintain high levels of worker productivity.

On the plot of days against off-spec, there is a clear correlation between machine downtime and product quality; the highest off-spec rate is on day two with 28% due to major machine downtime. This clearly shows that the performance of the machines affects product quality.

From this observational study, it can be concluded that machine performance is related to employee efficiency and product quality. For instance, machine downtimes mostly affect

production, since both worker efficiency and product quality will be low, meaning more rework. The enhancement of operational efficiency at the filling station can be pursued by minimizing machine downtime through better maintenance practices and improving communication at shift changes. The implementation of real-time quality control systems is anticipated to minimize off-spec products, improving production efficiency while delivering significant cost savings.

4.3 Discussion of findings

Observations from the filling station were used in gathering qualitative data to understand the root causes of the operational inefficiencies. These observational data showed that machine downtime, employee efficiency, and product quality are indeed interrelated in such a way that production output and quality are being much affected by machine downtime. This finding aligns with the literature, which emphasizes that inefficient equipment utilization and frequent downtime are major contributors to production delays and quality defects in manufacturing systems [28], [30].

High machine downtime on day one and three directly impacted employee efficiency, leading to increased rates of off-spec products and rework products. These results highlight the importance of effective preventative maintenance and better communication during shift changeovers. This is consistent with Lean manufacturing principles, which advocate for Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) and workflow standardization to minimize waste and variability [17], [18]. Furthermore, real-time quality monitoring systems can also come in handy to improve processes through issuing early warnings for quality issues that will, in turn, reduce rework and wastes. The integration of real-time quality monitoring aligns with Industry 4.0 approaches, which enable early detection of deviations, reduce rework, and enhance overall product quality [11], [31].

Frequent machine downtimes were also associated with reactive maintenance practices, poor raw material quality, and breakdowns in communications during shift changeovers. These qualitative insights support the adoption of proactive strategies, including structured maintenance schedules, improved quality monitoring, and robust communication systems to greatly enhance productivity while reducing waste. Ergonomic improvements and workflow design, as observed, may ease operator strain and increase process efficiency, Lean principles that target both technical and human factors to optimize productivity [14], [34].

The production process observed was not always operating within the required specifications, particularly during the initial stages of the production run. This highlights a critical need to refine operational processes within the filling station to maintain high quality and minimize financial losses. Such process refinement is supported by Lean and TQM methodologies, which emphasize reducing process variability and eliminating non-value-added activities to enhance both operational performance and financial outcomes [16], [22], [17].

The analysis demonstrates that operational inefficiencies at the yoghurt filling station can be addressed through proactive strategies that include preventive maintenance, real-time quality control, improved communications, and ergonomic improvements. These strategies are consistent with established frameworks in Lean manufacturing, TQM and continuous improvement philosophies, including PDCA cycles, which collectively emphasize the systemic elimination of inefficiencies to improve productivity and reduce operational costs [19], [33].

5 CONCLUSION

This study identified the root causes of inefficiencies in the filling stations of a yoghurt factory in South Africa. Using qualitative observations, it was found that the main contributors to inefficiencies were inconsistent raw material flow, machine calibration issues and lack of

preventative maintenance. These inefficiencies resulted in machine downtime, product rework and resource wastage, directly impacting operational performance.

To address these challenges, the study proposed three integrated solutions: a preventative maintenance program, real-time quality monitoring and redesigned workflow communication structures. Implementing these strategies is expected to increase productivity by minimizing machine downtime and streamlining workflows, reduce costs through waste elimination and optimized resource utilization, and support continuous improvement by creating a data-driven feedback loop that identifies and addresses inefficiencies in real time.

The study demonstrates how targeted interventions can enhance efficiency and profitability in dairy production. The findings provide practical guidance for the studied plant; however, it also contributes to the broader understanding of managing operational inefficiencies in yoghurt manufacturing and similar environments. Future studies could evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed strategies and explore their applicability across other production stages.

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CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF 3D PRINTING

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ABSTRACT

Three-dimensional (3D) printing has revolutionized the manufacturing landscape, offering unparalleled flexibility, customization, and speed. However, despite its vast potential, 3D printing is not without its challenges and limitations. This paper explores the technical, material, design, economic, environmental, and regulatory hurdles that hinder the widespread adoption of 3D printing. We discuss the limitations of current 3D printing technologies, including resolution, accuracy, and speed, as well as the restricted range of available materials and their inherent properties. Furthermore, we examine the economic and environmental implications of 3D printing, including high upfront costs, energy consumption, and material wastage. Finally, we highlight the need for standardized regulations and guidelines to ensure the safe and responsible development of 3D printing technologies. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, we can unlock the full potential of 3D printing and usher in a new era of innovation and technological advancement.

Keywords: 3D Printing, Technology, Manufacturing, Challenges, Limitations.

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1 INTRODUCTION

3D printing technology has revolutionized various industries, enabling the production of complex designs and shapes. However, despite its advancements, the technology still faces significant challenges and limitations [1]. These include high costs, low printing speeds, limited part sizes, and strength issues ([1]. One of the primary challenges in 3D printing is the need for continuous innovation and refinement to overcome current limitations and facilitate patient-specific healthcare with on-demand tailored medications [2]. The customizability of 3D-printed devices introduces new complexities when drafting a design control model for FDA consideration of market approval [3]. Additionally, maintaining consistent material powder properties and optimal printing parameters such as build orientation and laser power is crucial for ensuring quality builds [3]. In conclusion, while 3D printing offers tremendous potential, several challenges must be addressed to advance the technology further. These include improving material properties, increasing printing speeds, expanding part sizes, and addressing regulatory hurdles ([1] [3] [2]). Overcoming these limitations will be essential for the widespread adoption of 3D printing across various industries and applications.

Recent advancements in 3D printing materials have significantly expanded the technology's applications and capabilities. Plastics remain the most widely used material due to their low cost and ease of printing, while metals are gaining popularity for their superior mechanical properties [4]. However, research is now focusing on developing new materials to overcome existing limitations such as high costs, low printing speeds, limited part sizes, and strength [1]. Ceramics and biomaterials have emerged as promising materials for 3D printing, opening up new possibilities in industries like aerospace, healthcare, and electronics [4]. The development of 4D printing technology, which allows for the fabrication of self-transforming materials in response to external stimuli, has garnered significant attention in biomedical engineering [5]. Additionally, advancements in vat photopolymerization have enabled the creation of complex multi-material geometries with excellent printing resolution and high dimensional accuracy [6]. In conclusion, the research on 3D printing materials is focused on expanding the range of printable materials, improving their properties, and developing novel technologies like 4D printing. These advancements aim to address the current limitations of 3D printing technology and unlock its full potential across various industries. As materials continue to evolve, the prospects for 3D printing to revolutionize manufacturing and other sectors remain promising [6].

There has been a significant increase in the acceptance and usage of AM technology is the global space in recent years. The number of 3D-printed devices increased from 665 000 in 2020 to about 1248 000 in 2023 and has been estimated to rise to 2837 000 by 2030, worldwide. In the manufacturing sector alone, the number of 3D-printed devices rose from 102 000 in 2020 to 206 000 in 2023 and is expected to increase to 644 000 by 2033, globally (Figure 1) [7].

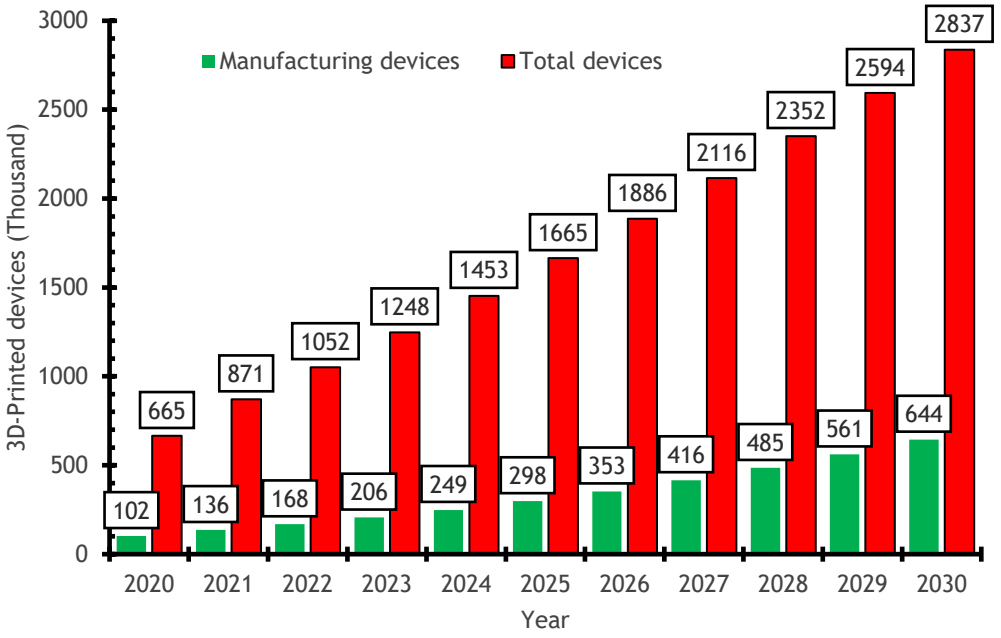

Figure 1: Global 3D-printed devices 2020 – 2030. Adapted from *[7]*

2 3D PRINTING TECHNOLOGY IN THE ERA OF 4IR

The advent of 3D printing technology has transformed the manufacturing sector and allows cutting-edge production of parts and substructures thereby advancing the course of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in the following ways.

2.1. Reduction of Production Costs and Material Waste

By adopting 3D printing technology, there is a significant reduction in the setup time, production costs, and assembly requirements in the manufacturing of parts and substructures. This is due to the elimination of complex supply chains, greater customization, better design, and improved flexibility, resulting in a faster and cheaper production process when compared with the traditional subtractive manufacturing process. Since there is adequate product design, optimization of production parameters, innovative product design, material waste, and product rejection are significantly reduced in the era of 4IR. The process of 3D printing gives opportunities for iterative product and process design, reduction in scraps, elimination of overstock, efficient materials handling, effective material recycling and conversion, reduction in waste generation, and reduction of the environmental impact of manufacturing processes [8].

2.2. Customization and Flexibility

Manufacturers can eliminate the high cost, material wastage, expensive tooling, and other challenges associated with the fabrication of small quantities of complex and customized products when they adopt 3D printing technology in the wastewater treatment sector. With adequate product design, it is easier and cheaper to accommodate and respond to customer needs and preferences regarding size, shapes, material selection, etc. when working with 3D printing technology. Unlike traditional manufacturing techniques, 3D printing technology gives room for improved responsiveness, creativity, and flexibility [9]

2.3. Innovation and Product Design

3D printing technology allows manufacturers to deploy innovative technology to achieve variety in product design. This motivates innovative prototype creation and customization that fits existing pipelines or treatment systems, allows process expansion, and ensures reliability and safety. Also, the deployment of 3D printing technology encourages innovation and product design which facilitates the production of complex geometries, cost reduction, and timely response times which ultimately eliminates long production time associated with traditional subtractive manufacturing plants. Greater flexibility and optimization of wastewater treatment plant and operation [10]

Notwithstanding the undeniable advantages of 3D printing, the layer-by-layer deposition of materials takes a longer time, especially for products with complex geometries when compared with traditional manufacturing techniques. The huge initial financial investment required for 3D printing technology including printers, materials, and other infrastructural requirements results in high cost per part, particularly for complex objects remains a major drawback. Though 3D printing allows a wide range of materials, certain specialized alloys and composites are not readily workable with 3D thereby limiting the application of the technology [11]. Some of the post-production processes like polishing, painting, etc., to achieve the required surface finish, accuracy, quality, and other specifications add to the production costs and duration. Unlike traditional manufacturing methods, there are size and structural limitations associated with 3D printing, particularly at the industrial stage. The strength, porosity, durability, and other mechanical properties of 3D printed products might be different from those manufactured through traditional methods. This often affects the performance of such products in specialized applications. The advent of 3D printing technology has led to a surge in the circulation of fake and counterfeit products and copyright infringements [12] [13].

The operation of advanced manufacturing is governed by information, automation, computation, software, sensing, and networking. The main goal of the advanced manufacturing process is to boost value, enhance flexibility, improve responsiveness to the market, and reduce time to market [14]. The upgrading of the conventional manufacturing process to an advanced manufacturing process leads to lower scrap generation, a reduction in inventory and material content, and an increase in added value [15]. Consequently, advanced manufacturing process leads to health competitiveness, quality improvement, and significant workforce development. Common examples of advanced manufacturing processes include additive manufacturing, cloud computing, smart manufacturing, the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, digital manufacturing, robotics, virtual reality, nanotechnology, laser machining/welding, and advanced/composite materials [16]. Table 1 compiles the benefits and challenges of the advanced manufacturing process.

Table 1: Benefits and challenges of advanced manufacturing process *[17]*

Benefits of advanced manufacturing process	Challenges of advanced manufacturing process
• Eco-friendly • Cost effective • Improvement in quality standards • Reduction work in process inventories • Reduction in waste generation • Increased productivity • Scalable • Innovative and strategic process • Stimulated the production process • Reduction in downtime • Reduced scraps and defective products • Nearly error-free process • Improvement in the work environment	• High initial cost of investment technology • High cost of training and retraining of personnel • Require integration of advanced manufacturing techniques • Tedious methods of organization and management • Likelihood of breach of data security • Privacy and security concerns • High cost of technology to ensure relevance and sustainability • Need for constant adapting to technological changes • Process is mostly industry-specific • Improving manufacturing plant efficiency. • Limited flexibility and adaptability

• Better accuracy • Customization • Improvement in the response to the variability of the product mix • Optimized supply chain • Improvement in management control • Part reliability	• Skilled labour shortage • Supply chain disruption • Material selection • Regulatory compliance • Design complexity

Notable areas of application of 3D printing technology in South Africa include medical, sport, pharmaceutical, manufacturing, etc. South Africa has developed and manufactured a 3D printer, under a monitored homegrown solution to reduce the country's reliance on imported 3D printers and accessories.

Without a doubt, 3D printing is a promising technology in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and will continue to transform manufacturing in the coming decades. As the technology advances, the materials that can be used to create objects are also expanding, from plastics and metals to biodegradable materials and even living cells. Overall, AM is a transformative technology that has the potential to revolutionize the manufacturing industry [18].

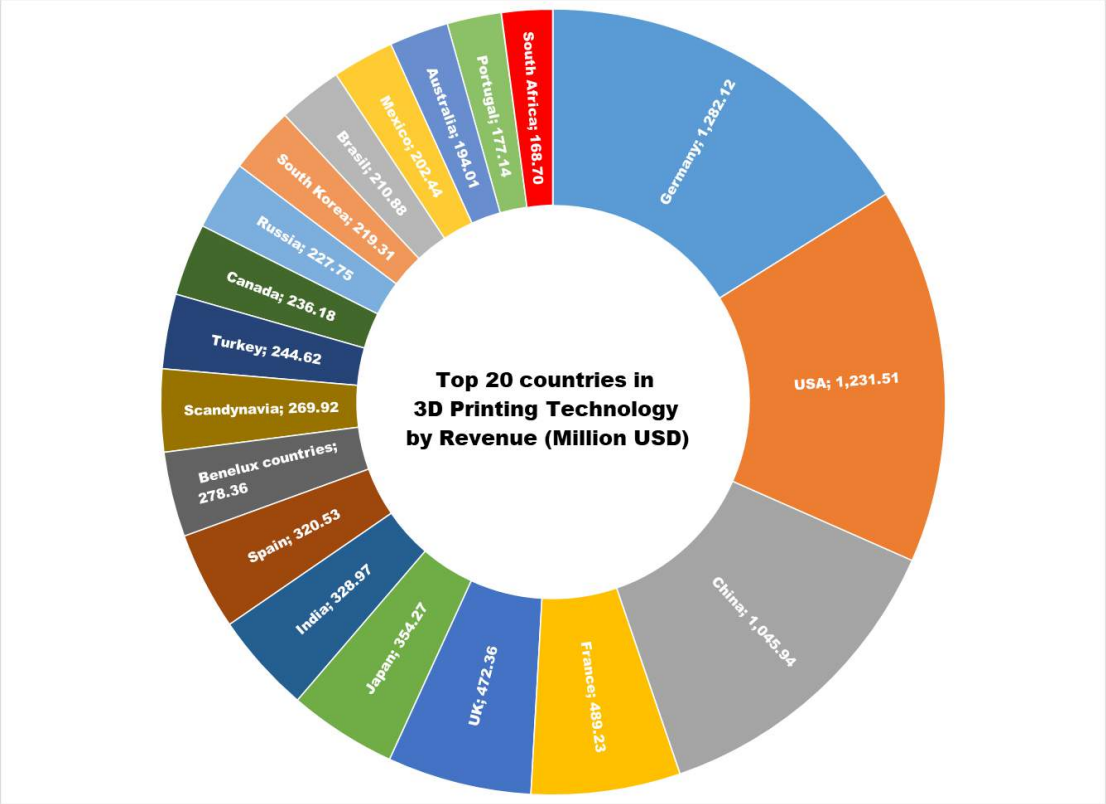

Figure 2: Top 20 countries in 3D printing technology by revenues (Million USD). Data from [151].

3 TECHNICAL LIMITATIONS OF 3D PRINTING

3D printing is promising an uprising manufacturing process, with many benefits, however it is important to be aware of its technical constraints. It is noted that 3D printing is slower in production rate when compared to traditional manufacturing such as injection moulding, this limitation is a big challenge to industries that rely in high volumes of production. [19] . The traditional manufacturing has mastered the use of different types of materials. The range of materials available for 3D printing is limited [20]. Furthermore, the cost of 3D material remains high, for any development the industries concern is always focusing on reducing the

cost, this makes it difficult to adopt 3D printing material because of its increased cost [21]. The 3D printing machines are required to be calibrated, if not calibrated properly it may affect the quality of final product or can cause inconsistency in production. This is very critical in industries that requires high accuracy such as Aerospace and medicine. The manufacturing of big sizes is already accounted for in traditional manufacturing, however with 3D printing the big printers are not easily accessible and they are highly expensive. 3D printing is perfect for small scale production.

Table 2: Summary and limitations of recent work. *[22]*

Focus	Technical Adopted	Limitations
Metals made using lasers and 3D printing are resistant to bending.	Analysis of the metal materials' data	The bending behaviour may limit the strength and durability of 3D-printed metal items during manufacture.
Heat transfer pipes made of 3D-printed metal filaments are being tested.	Stainless steel porous structures are made using additive manufacturing, and the time is measured by passing liquid through the pores.	Insufficient sample size and inability to generalize to different materials.
dental crowns that resemble the multi-scale structure of natural tooth enamel in terms of structure.	Direct ink writing and 3D printing.	restricted to various materials.
Composite microstructure and 3D-printed material performance.	Toughened semi-interpenetrating polymer network—thermoplastic polymer bi-matrix composite fused filament fabrication technology.	Experimental approach
Configuration of several 3D printing techniques that impact the characteristics.	3D printing and tensile testing.	Microstructure and chemical composition were not taken into account.

4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Features and limitations of conventional manufacturing technology that necessitated the introduction, development, and adoption of AM techniques are important. The current status, trend, research activity, and utilization of 3D printing techniques globally and in Africa are necessary and further detailed studies need to be conducted. The benefits of 3D printing technology will continue to be evident through the ongoing research efforts that must be undertaken to understand and address the limitations that hinder the use of this technology. Key aspects that need to be addressed include life cycle cost design tools, Additive manufacturing-oriented Computer Aided Design (CAD) systems with more user-friendly and advanced simulation capabilities. An obvious advantage of 3D printing is mass customization. This means it produces a range of bespoke goods, allowing each product to be different whilst keeping the price low through mass production.

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EVALUATION OF MOBILE MONEY (FINTECH) ADOPTION IN NIGER

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of financial technology (Fintech) has significantly transformed the global financial landscape, enhanced accessibility and promoting financial inclusion, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and notably in Niger. Thus, a resilient Fintech is supported by strong adoption. This study aims to develop a new conceptional model contextualised to foster the adoption of mobile money in Niger. A systematic literature review of Fintech adoption was conducted, evaluating various adoption theories using the PRISMA method. These theoretical foundations further aid in framing the hypotheses and suggesting the conceptual model based on select determinants. The literature review highlights the importance of understanding various theoretical frameworks and their determinants, which are crucial in shaping user behaviour and adoption intentions to influence mobile money adoption in Niger positively.

Keywords: Mobile Money Niger, Fintech, Innovation, Adoption

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1 INTRODUCTION

Adoption is critical to the sustainable growth of the Fintech sector. Hence, the evolution of Fintech has transformed the global financial landscape, offered innovative services and improved accessibility for consumers. According to [1], only 40% of the adult population in sub-Saharan Africa uses cash instead of formal financial services. Mobile phones provide people, including those in rural areas, access to financial services. Thus, the rapid growth of financial technology promotes financial inclusion, enabling individuals without bank accounts to access banking services through mobile applications.

Nevertheless, according to [2], adoption remains low in most West African countries, such as Niger. Similarly, a comparative analysis revealed that Kenya, Lesotho, and Botswana saw improvements in their digital financial inclusion rankings. In contrast, [3] stated that Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, and Niger experienced declines, signifying restricted access. Hence, these challenges are mainly due to restricted access to mobile phones, inadequate financial resources, and the high costs of digital financial services [3]. According to [4], people generally use mobile money accounts to make or receive payments, send money to family and friends, and pay bills.

The literature review focuses on mobile Fintech services, considering that most of the unbanked population in West Africa owns mobile phones, which have become the primary platform for financial services, and particularly mobile money. It encompasses money transfer, bill payment, e-wallets, savings, and loans. In Niger, [5] reported that the adoption of the first mobile transfer application (m-transfer) in 2010 resulted in a 20% reduction in transfer costs compared to manual cash distribution. Thus, households in the Zap m-transfer group were more likely to use cash to purchase goods such as protein- and energy-rich foods. However, [5] suggested that the increased adoption of m-transfer and other Fintech services faces challenges, including limited infrastructure, weak mobile networks and mobile money agents, and lower financial literacy. According to [6], the advancement of mobile Fintech also introduces new challenges, such as outdated and complex regulatory frameworks, cybersecurity risks and data privacy concerns. Using the PRISMA guidelines helped assess the determinants of mobile money adoption in Niger through a theoretical framework. By synthesising the findings from 14 theoretical articles and 20 relevant studies, the proposed mobile money adoption framework includes analysing the barriers and theorising the adoption drivers for Mobile Money in Niger. Thus, the findings emphasised that most of the determinants in [7]'s TAM's [8] UTAUT2, [9] Frugal Innovation, [10] Institutional Theory, and [11] integrated financial services offerings drive mobile money adoption. Hence, considering the similarities between the key determinants in UTAUT2 and those in the abovementioned theoretical frameworks, we defined the following conceptual framework based on UTAUT2: Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Facilitating Conditions, Social Influence, and Price Value. Finally, the study is expected to contribute to the work of researchers, policymakers, and the private sector in promoting a more significant and sustainable adoption of Mobile Money in Niger, thereby leading to enhanced financial inclusion, increased efficiency, and economic growth.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Behavioural research in information systems has created numerous theories about technology adoption. The assessment of the studies focusing on the adoption characteristics can help understand the determinants influencing the adoption and use of mobile money. It will also shed light on the rationale for contextualising these theories based on geographical location, demography, and socioeconomics. Considering the scarcity of research on mobile fintech adoption in Sub-Saharan Africa and a singular publication about Niger, the literature study encompassed 34 articles, including 14 related to adoption theory. The 17 analysed publications

primarily focus on mobile uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa, while the remainder concern research on emerging nations. The pertinent articles represent a diverse array of research agendas and methodologies. Those studies primarily relied on the following adoption theories: the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2), the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Frugal Innovation (FI), and Institutional Theory (IT). Since UTAUT2 [8] encompasses key determinants from behavioural, frugal innovation, institutional, and socio-economic theories, we formulated our hypotheses based on key constructs in UTAUT2, including insights from other theories in the literature review for mobile money adoption in Niger as follows: (A) "Performance Expectancy", (B) Effort Expectancy", (C) Facilitating Conditions", (D) "Social Influence", and (E) "Price Value".

2.1 Theorical frameworks

The following section describes the key determinants of technology adoption in the following streams: behavioural, Frugal, and institutional.

Behavioural

2.1.1 Technology acceptance model (TAM) – related determinants (Behavioural)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) [7] aims to explain how users adopt and use new technologies. It is based on Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU).

Perceived Usefulness (PU): Various research avenues support the theoretical significance of TAM's [7] "perceived usefulness" and "perceived ease" of use as factors that impact Individuals' intention to use technology. However, Davis [7] also acknowledged the need to enhance metrics to gain a deeper understanding of the TAM determinants and their functions as predictors of computer use. He states that perception, usefulness, usability, and user innovation can influence technology adoption. The same factors can influence consumer adoption of Fintech solutions in general, including in the context of Mobile Money in West Africa. For example, in Niger, Aker et al. [5] found that the mobile money cash transfer (Zap) experiment in rural areas demonstrated easier and less costly mobile transfer (m-transfer) for recipients to collect their transfers, despite having fewer Zap agents. Hence, program customers went shorter distances to receive their transfers than their manual cash counterparts [5].

Perceived Ease of Use (PEU): The more consumers perceive how easy a Fintech service is, the more likely they will trust that service and continue using it. In contrast, system complexity will discourage its usage. Ultimately, simplicity and ease enhance the user experience, leading to increased Fintech adoption [5] .

These findings [5] support TAM's [7] Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use. Thus, Akinyemi and Mushunje [12] examined the adoption of mobile money in rural regions of Africa where the population lacks access to traditional financial services. The data was collected through random sampling of individual census data from ten African nations: Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. They performed an empirical investigation using the determinants of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Two-Part Model [13], a statistical approach that examines datasets containing numerous zero values alongside nonzero values that are either discrete or significantly skewed. They concluded that mobile money users find it easy, safe, trustworthy, convenient, rapid, and cost-effective compared to alternative payment methods in rural Africa [12]. The findings support [7] theories on Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) within the Technology Adoption Model (TAM).

Finally, studies (5) across several countries have leveraged TAM to analyse the determinants which influence the use of mobile Fintech. With the adoption of mobile money, both studies

[4] and [5] used, respectively, randomised experiments and empirical studies to conclude that the TAM's determinants, "perceived ease of use" and "perceived usefulness" [7], positively influence the adoption of mobile money. These findings are corroborated by [14] and [15] in the context of mobile banking adoption. Similarly, following a quantitative analysis, the study in [16] concluded that the same determinants positively influence the adoption of e-wallets. In conclusion, "perceived usefulness" and "perceived ease of use" can positively influence adoption. In the context of Niger [4]"Perceived ease of use" and "perceived usefulness" can be key drivers for money adoption.

2.1.2 Diffusion of innovation (DOI) – related determinants (Behavioural)

According to the research [17], "Diffusion of Innovations" refers to the process by which new ideas or technologies spread across different population segments. The diffusion of innovations encompasses innovation, communication channels, time, and the social system. The Diffusion of Innovation theory explains how Fintech innovations spread within communities. Accordingly, the study [18] leveraged the diffusion of innovation to examine how the adoption of Fintech can help enhance financial inclusion in rural and remote areas of emerging economies. The research utilised a quantitative design and the drop-and-pick approach to collect 275 valid and reliable responses. It used structural equation modelling to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The findings indicate that compatibility, agent trust, perceived risk, and facilitation have a significant impact on Fintech adoption [18]. The research also determined that effective use of communication channels (awareness) influences the correlation between observability, Fintech adoption, and trialability. Following stratified and simple random sampling, they finally determined that compatibility, agent trust, perceived risk, and facilitation — the means through which information about the innovation spreads — significantly drive the adoption of mobile money [18] .

2.1.3 Technology planned behaviour (TPB) – related determinants (Behavioural)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) [19] is a psychological framework that incorporates subjective norms, attitudes, and perceived behavioural control, influencing human behaviour. The application of TPB to technology adoption encompasses (i) individual attitudes towards the technology, (ii) subjective norms or perceived social pressure influencing adoption, and (iii) individuals' perception of their control over adopting the technology [19]. The study [20] examined the impact of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) on the behavioural intentions of Fintech usage. The model includes perceived behavioural control, attitude, subjective norms, perceived risk, and perceived trust. The research examined the factors affecting Jordanian attitudes towards FinTech among 158 respondents, emphasising the TPB constructs of subjective norm, perceived behaviour control, perceived risk, and perceived trust. Their findings indicated that those constructs positively affect behavioural intention [20]. Thus, the study [12] employed empirical analysis to investigate the adoption of mobile money based on the determinants of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). They concluded that determinants such as an individual's perceived behavioural control and attitude, as well as factors like ease, safety, trustworthiness, convenience, speed, and cost-effectiveness compared to other means of sending or receiving payment in rural areas of Africa, strongly impact adoption. Similarly, the same determination was made [15] while conducting a convenience sampling analysis of mobile banking adoption. Thus, the study [16] on e-wallet adoption concluded that individuals' adoption of mobile technologies facilitates their participation in relevant programs and alignment with changes in the agricultural system. Therefore, the TPB's determinants [19] — attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control — positively impact e-wallet adoption.

Frugal

2.1.4 Frugal innovation (FI) – related determinants (Frugal)

Frugal principles emerged in developing markets to create affordable products and services for low-income consumers. Accordingly, Frugal Innovation is defined by cost reduction, functionality, and performance [9]. It significantly saves costs while prioritising essential features and enhancing performance. The characteristics of frugal innovation can differ based on context, requiring different criteria for emerging nations compared to developed markets due to varying infrastructure, environmental, and consumer behaviour factors. In emerging economies, attributes such as resilience and the ability to cope with frequent power outages are critical in specific markets [9]. Thus, the case study [21] on frugal innovation, focused on societal issues, resource limitations, and institutional gaps in the adoption of mobile money in sub-Saharan Africa. Their research, which included both quantitative and qualitative analyses, found that mobile money addresses cost and resource constraints while reducing institutional gaps [21]. Similarly, the study [5] surveyed nearly 100 villagers, using randomised data to demonstrate that mobile transfer (m-transfer) systems are easier and less costly for recipients to collect their transfers.

Finally, similarly to [5], the research [21] used both quantitative and qualitative analyses to determine that mobile money, as a frugal innovation, alleviates cost and resource constraints while reducing institutional gaps in resource-limited environments, utilising the frugal innovation framework. Accordingly, simplicity, affordability, and resourcefulness have a positive impact on the adoption of mobile money.

2.1.5 Unified theory of acceptance and use of technology 2 (UTAUT2) -

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) [8] builds upon the previous theory - UTAUT [22]. UTAUT2 is contextualised through (i) three fundamental dimensions from previous research on both general and consumer technology adoption and usage, (ii) an update of some relationships in the original UTAUT framework, and (iii) the addition of new relationships. Integrating hedonic motivation enhances UTAUT's primary predictor, which focuses on utility [8]. Furthermore, this indicates that UTAUT2 incorporates the fundamental linkages of UTAUT while offering additional constructs and interactions that expand the framework's applicability to the consumer context. The framework (UTAUT2) includes performance and effort expectancies, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value, and habit. In the context of the agrarian economy, the research [23] involved 40 participants to assess the robustness of extending UTAUT 2 to the agricultural economy of developing countries, based on statistical analysis. The findings demonstrated a significant positive correlation between social influence (SI), which entails the impact of others on an individual's decision to use technology and the prevalence of behavioural intention to adopt agricultural Fintech products and services (BIAFPS) among Indian farmers [23]. The study also indicated that farmers are more likely to adopt technology based on the influence of others in their social settings. Accordingly, this social engagement should concentrate on rural regions of the country where social media remains an elusive concept, particularly in the lives of farmers [23]. Similarly, in Egypt, there was research [24] on e-payment products and services, such as mobile wallets, virtual cards, and mobile and online banking. It used convenience sampling to collect and perform quantitative analysis on 399 questionnaires to examine the applicability of the UTAUT2 theory regarding consumers' intentions to accept e-payment [24]. The findings indicated that performance expectancy, facilitating conditions, effort expectancy, and social influence affect customers' intentions to accept e-payments [24]. Accordingly, these factors contribute to the growing number of individuals using e-payments to the extent that e-payment eventually becomes a preferred medium for economic transactions [24]. Furthermore, the study [24] assessed that Hedonic

motivation, price value and habit are insignificant in encouraging consumers' e-payment acceptance. Thus, the research [25] conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 67 relevant studies on mobile Fintech, finding that, among the UTAUT2 determinants, social influence is crucial for adopting mobile money in Sub-Saharan Africa. Hence, the facilitating conditions are crucial as mobile money relies on agents' networks to provide cash-in and cash-out services [25]. Similarly, the study [26] investigated the effects of the Ghanaian government's charge (levy) on electronic transactions, incorporating Venkatesh et al.'s (2012) UTAUT2 factors for validation. The data (417 replies) was obtained via research questionnaires distributed among several segments of Ghanaian residents. The study used the structural equation modelling (SEM) technique to demonstrate that the current fee structure for mobile money transactions does not encourage sustained adoption [8]. Although effort expectancy did not significantly affect the sustained adoption of mobile money transactions, performance expectancy and enabling variables were key determinants of this ongoing adoption [8]. Ultimately, the findings [26] provide strong evidence for policymakers and the government to incorporate a comprehensive tax policy into mobile money systems, thereby achieving widespread usage and enduring acceptance of mobile money transactions.

Finally, the studies [24], [26], [25] examined the adoption of mobile money based on the UTAUT2 determinants and determined that Social Influence impacts individuals' behaviour towards adopting mobile money. Thus, they concluded that Performance Expectancy (PE), Social Influence (SI), and Facilitating Conditions (FC) have a positive effect on the utilisation of mobile money services. Similarly, in Niger, the proximity of agent networks has a significant impact on mobile money adoption [5].

Institutional

2.1.6 Institutional theory – related determinants (Institutional)

The study [10] examines how institutional mechanisms foster trust during the early phase of industrial development in the United States. Institutional Theory focuses on rational bureaucratic organisations, professional credentialing, the service economy, and regulatory frameworks [10]. The paper identifies three trust generation methods: process-based, characteristic-based (linked to individual traits), and institutional-based (tied to social frameworks). Consequently, the institutional trust theory characterises public institutions as the trustee and citizens as the truster [10]. The research [10] further emphasised that normative pressures from external entities, such as the state, or internal dynamics, shape organisations. The study [27] employed institutional theory and Fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis to examine the interactions between enterprises and institutions regarding mobile money services across 110 services in 46 emerging countries. Their findings indicated that mobile money services, with a significant market share, could achieve high adoption rates regardless of the level of institutional support [27]. However, many depend on favourable conditions, such as regulations and adequate infrastructure. Moreover, advanced Fintech companies are better positioned to implement mobile money solutions in countries with developed financial markets [27]. In such environments, consumers are becoming more aware of security concerns in the digital realm, causing many to avoid electronic transactions. Hence, lots of potential digital payment users do not understand how transactions work and their implications, such as the sharing of data with third parties. Accordingly, [27] National Cybersecurity Commitment (NCC) influences digital payment use, with national culture as a moderating factor. Countries with collectivist cultures, strong governmental cybersecurity commitment, and low uncertainty avoidance tend to adopt digital payments despite risks. However, certain demographic groups, especially women, the elderly, and rural residents, are less likely to adopt these methods [28]. Thus, the modern global financial services sector is increasingly vulnerable to cybercrime, putting consumers' sensitive data at risk [29]. This rise in cyber threats has prompted regulators to implement new laws protecting personal data. In

South Africa, a key piece of legislation is the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPIA), which requires assessment for its alignment with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) standards [30] and [29] argue that POPIA represents a significant advancement in privacy and data protection in South Africa, which is expected to enhance personal data security in the financial sector. Thus, it offers the potential to reduce cyberattacks and foster Fintech adoption. Similarly, the study [31] assessed the legal and regulatory framework for mobile banking (M-banking) in Tanzania to identify and address legal gaps. Using a doctrinal legal methodology and comparative analysis with countries such as Kenya and the Philippines, the study found that compatibility, complexity, agent trust, perceived risk, and facilitation significantly influence the adoption of Fintech. Thus, favourable conditions enhanced the relationship between technological attributes and Fintech adoption [31]. Finally, the research [27], using fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis, determined that cognitive institutionalisation, normative institutionalisation, and regulative institutionalisation significantly influence the adoption of mobile money. Their study [28] on mobile also concluded that regulatory institutionalisation positively influences the adoption of mobile money. Similarly, the respective studies [29] and [31] also concluded that regulative Institutionalisation is a significant factor driving mobile money adoption.

2.1.7 Socio-economic factors

Socio-economic characteristics can also influence the adoption of mobile Fintech [11] conducted a study in nations under the Western African Economic and Monetary Union, including Niger, which found that obstacles such as cost, lack of trust, formal documentation, and religious considerations hinder the adoption of mobile money. Thus, the most marginalised demographic includes women, teenagers, the underprivileged, and persons with limited educational qualifications. These findings suggest that integrating mobile Fintech into banking services and enhancing financial literacy will accelerate adoption. The analysis of fifteen research studies of socio-economic factors to elucidate the utilisation of mobile Fintech in Sub-Saharan Africa [25]. Their findings suggest that education, female gender, high income, employment, marital status, and residence in rural areas can enhance the likelihood of adopting mobile Fintech services in Sub-Saharan Africa. Factors such as youth, female gender, divorce status, economic level, and household size may adversely affect mobile Fintech adoption in Sub-Saharan Africa [25].

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data

The literature analysis examines the determinants of Fintech adoption in Africa, particularly in West Africa and Niger, with a focus on Mobile Money. This study develops a theoretical framework to enhance consumers' mobile Fintech adoption behaviour based on a systematic literature review (SLR) based on the PRISMA guidelines [32]. The findings from the systematic literature review (SLR) and related research contributed to a proposed conceptual model aimed at increasing mobile money adoption in Niger. A summary of the research methodology is presented in Figure 1, with further details in the following section. The review process is continuous, with outputs from one stage informing the next.

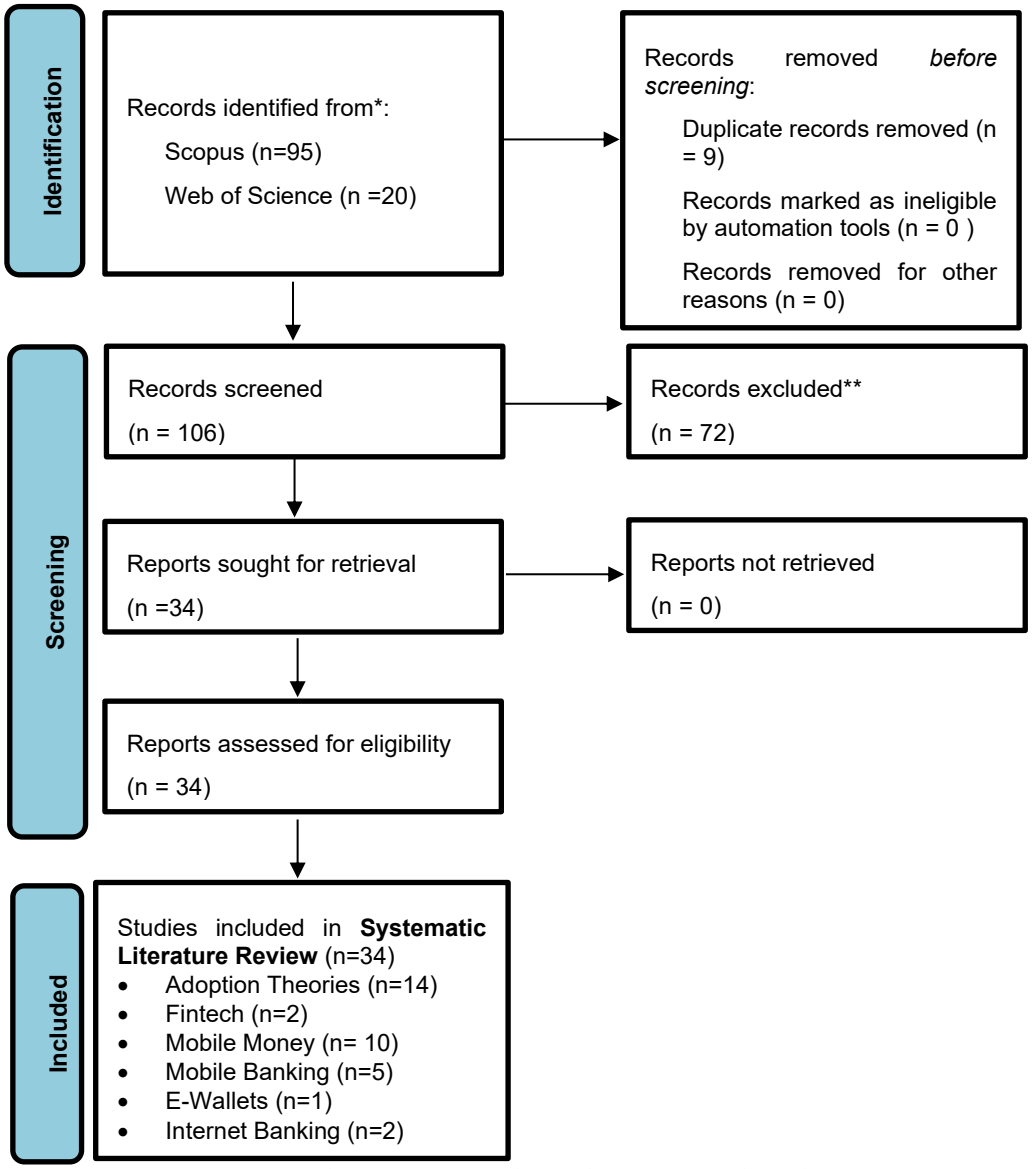

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram, based on a template by [NO_PRINTED_FORM] [32].

3.2 Method

We used the theorical method [33] for the systematic literature review. This includes defining core terms, establishing boundaries, identifying constructs (determinants), and making predictions that lead to a new conceptual theoretical model. The literature review's perspective encompasses the use of technology adoption theories (TAM, UTAUT, DOI, TPB, FI, and IT) as core terms. The study's boundaries pertain to Mobile Money, Mobile Banking, E-Wallets, and Internet Banking. The analysis identified key determinants (constructs) that were assessed against the pertaining adoption theories. Following the review of the determinants based on each theorical group, the objective is to draw hypotheses (predictions). Furthermore, the analysis leads to the formation of the conceptual framework for positively influencing mobile Fintech adoption in Niger. The theorical method provides a strong foundation of knowledge leading to the formulation of a conceptual framework. However, its findings cannot be observed or compared to outcomes from empirical research. Notwithstanding, the theorical findings can pave the way for empirical validation, leading to stronger evidence-based research.

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

The systematic literature review of 20 studies in Fintech, Mobile Money, Mobile Banking, E-Wallets, and Internet Banking emphasises key determinants that positively influence Fintech adoption. Thus, the findings suggest that key determinants in TAM, UTAUT2, DOI, TPB, FI, IT, and Socioeconomics collectively contribute to creating a conducive environment for mobile money adoption. The following table summarises the determinants of the findings about Mobile money:

Table 1: Summary of key determinants for Mobile Money adoption

Mobile Money Adoption Models	Key determinants	References
TAM	Perceived usefulness	[5], [12], [16]
	Perceived ease of use	
UTAUT2	Performance Expectancy	[24], [26],[25] [23]
	Effort Expectancy	
	Facilitating conditions	
DOI	Complexity	[17]
	Compatibility	
TPB	Attitude	[12], [15], [16], [20]
	Subjective Norms	
	Perceived behavioural control	
FI	Affordability	[5], [21], [34]
	Simplicity	
IT	Regulatory Forces	[27], [28]
	Isomorphism	
Socioeconomics	Consideration of socio-economic factors such as age, gender, and income	[11], [25]
	Integrated financial services offerings	

Table 1 summarises 11 studies on Mobile Money, with most of the research conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa. The analysis demonstrated that the drivers for adoption are almost the same across various Fintech solutions (Mobile Money, Mobile Banking, E-Wallet, and Internet Banking). From the consumers' perspective, determinants in TAM, UTAUT2, DOI, and TPB seem more relevant. However, most unbanked populations [12] reside in rural areas, and mobile money is often the primary means of accessing Fintech services. Therefore, they are more prone to the TAM, UTAUT2, FI, TPB, IT, and socio-economic determinants. Thus, in emerging markets (Table 1) [27], the factors influencing the adoption of mobile Fintech services are slightly nuanced. Hence, the determinants in IT seem important, followed by TAM, UTAUT2, and TPB, considering the presence of the facilitating conditions (UTAUT2) and the regulatory forces (IT).

It is also important to emphasise that the key constructs in UTAUT2 include similar determinants as compared to those in the other theoretical frameworks, as analysed in the literature review, as follows:

Table 2: UTAUT2 Comparison with the other theoretical frameworks

UTAUT2	TAM	DOI	FI	TPB	IT	Socioeconomics
Performance Expectancy (Belief that using a technology will improve performance)	**Perceived Usefulness (PU)**		Optimised Performance Level			
Effort Expectancy (Perceived ease of using the technology)	**Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)**		**Core Functionalities Focus**			
Social Influence – (Impact of others on an individual's decision to use technology.)		**Social System** (Community or group influencing adoption decision)		**Subjective Norms** – Influence of social pressure		**Consideration of socio-economic factors**
Facilitating Conditions: Availability of resources and support for technology use, including regulations		Means through which information about the innovation spreads			**Regulatory forces Standardisation & Isomorphism**	
Hedonic Motivation: Enjoyment or pleasure derived from using the technology.						
Price Value: Perceived cost-benefit of using technology.			**Substantial Cost Reduction**			
Habit: The extent to which past behaviour influences future technology use.						

Considering that UTAUT2 encompasses most of the determinants of the behavioural, frugal innovation, institutional, and socio-economic theories, we drew the following hypotheses for mobile money adoption in Niger based on the UTAUT constructs in correlation with the findings from the other theories in the literature review:

Table 3: Hypotheses based on the UTAUT2 determinants

UTAUT2 (Constructs)	Hypotheses
Performance Expectancy	**(A)** The perceived performance improvement will increase user adoption of mobile money
Effort Expectancy	**(B)** The perceived ease of use will improve user adoption of mobile money
Facilitating Conditions	**(C)** The Availability of resources and support, including regulations, can increase the adoption of mobile money
Social Influence	**(D)** The Influence of social pressure can impact an individual's decision to use mobile money
Price Value	**(E)** Perceived cost-benefit can positively impact the adoption of mobile money

In summary, all the determinants in UTAUT2, except "habit", based on hypotheses (A), (B), (C), (D), and (E), can positively promote Mobile Money adoption in Niger.

5 MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Mobile money is an excellent case for integrated digital and financial innovation, positively influencing financial inclusion and reducing poverty. However, its adoption rate remains low, especially in peripheral sub-Saharan Africa and particularly in Niger.

The study critically evaluates current adoption theories and research on mobile money, as well as other mobile Fintech services, including mobile banking and Internet banking, with a specific focus on Sub-Saharan Africa and Niger. Utilising PRISMA principles for a systematic literature review of 34 pertinent studies on mobile money, e-wallets, mobile banking, and internet banking in Sub-Saharan Africa and Niger, identified the key factors that can facilitate the adoption of mobile Fintech in general and mobile money in particular within Niger. Accordingly, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (TAM) [7], facilitating conditions (UTAUT2) [8], attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control (TPB) [19], and regulatory forces (IT) [10] can foster the sustainable adoption of mobile money in Niger. The literature review's findings should assist scholars, policymakers, and the business sector in promoting the adoption and sustainable use of Mobile Money in Niger, thereby enhancing financial inclusion, efficiency, and economic growth. Thus, it is essential to investigate further the impact of other socio-economic factors such as income level, age, and gender. Nevertheless, the literature review had limitations due to the low number of studies available on mobile money in West Africa, particularly in Niger. Thus, the analysis is limited to a systematic literature review, lacking a meta-analysis. Future research should consider conducting rigorous field experiments, including a quantitative study, as part of the systematic review process. Finally, it is essential to note that using Moher et al.'s [32] the PRISMA method to conduct a systematic literature review helped contextualise the determinants for Fintech adoption based on characteristics such as regions (emerging versus developing countries), context (infrastructure and social), and type of Fintech services (mobile money versus internet banking, for example). Despite the continuous growth of mobile money across regions, its adoption is still low in the peripheral areas of the African continent [12]. Hence, in the context

of Niger, the determinants of hypotheses (A), (B), (C), (D), and (E) can help form a conceptual model for influencing mobile money adoption.

6 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The suggested conceptual model includes the following determinants, based on UTAUT2 [8]: "Performance Expectancy," which suggests that mobile Fintech can help increase user adoption in Niger. (hypothesis A). "Effort Expectancy" through perceived simplicity and ease of use can help increase adoption in Niger, where the adult literacy rate is only 38% [35] (hypothesis B). "Facilitating Conditions" through the availability of resources, support, and regulatory frameworks can help foster Fintech trust and adoption in Niger (hypothesis C). "Social Influence" can influence an individual's behaviour towards adopting mobile money in the context of Niger (hypothesis D). Finally, "Price Value" can be a good incentive for increasing Fintech adoption in Niger (hypothesis D).

The following diagram provides the conceptual model based on the hypothesis and determinants.

Figure 2: Mobile Money Adoption (Niger) – Conceptual Model

The suggested conceptual model is based on key determinants in UTAUT2. Accordingly, studies indicate that factors such as education, female gender, high income, employment, marital status, and rural residency can increase the probability of using mobile Fintech services in Sub-Saharan Africa. Youth, female gender, divorce status, economic status, and household size may negatively influence mobile Fintech adoption in Sub-Saharan Africa [25]. Additionally, religious beliefs can hinder the adoption of mobile money [11].

7 CONCLUSION

Mobile money is an excellent case for integrated digital and financial innovation, positively influencing financial inclusion and reducing poverty. However, its adoption rate remains low, especially in peripheral sub-Saharan Africa and particularly in Niger.

The study aimed to critically evaluate current adoption theories and research on mobile money, as well as other mobile Fintech services, including mobile banking and Internet banking, mainly in Africa, with a specific focus on Niger. Utilising PRISMA principles for a systematic literature review of 34 pertinent studies on mobile money, e-wallets, mobile

banking, and internet banking in Sub-Saharan Africa and Niger identified the key factors that can facilitate the adoption of mobile Fintech in general and mobile money in particular in Niger. Accordingly, the "Performance Expectancy", "Effort Expectancy", "Facilitating Conditions", "Social Influence", and "Price Value" of UTAUT2 [8] can foster sustainable adoption of mobile money in Niger. The findings of the literature review can assist scholars, policymakers, and the business sector in promoting the adoption and sustainable use of Mobile Money in Niger, thereby enhancing financial inclusion, efficiency, and economic growth. Thus, it is important to investigate further the impact of other socio-economic factors such as income level, age, and gender.

This literature review is limited by the scarcity of studies on mobile money in West Africa, particularly in Niger. The analysis is confined to a systematic literature review and does not include a meta-analysis. Future research should conduct rigorous field experiments and incorporate quantitative analysis into the systematic review process.

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A SURVEY OF LOGISTICS SKILLS IN SOUTH AFRICA: IDENTIFYING LOGISTICIANS OF THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

South Africa faces major structural challenges, including an unemployment rate of 27%, which rises to 55% among youth. Although Africa's most advanced economy, it has underperformed compared to other middle-income countries, leading to a critical skills shortage, particularly in logistics. Results of this study show that while there are adequate traditional logistics skills, there is an increasing need for technologically adept logisticians due to rapid advancements, requiring expertise in data analytics, telecommunications, and environmental management. Future logisticians must understand value creation, identify market opportunities, and possess both technical and soft skills to succeed in the evolving logistics landscape.

Keywords: Logistics skills, Skills survey, Future logistician

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1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa is facing significant structural challenges, including the delivery of quality education, a high crime rate, corruption, a high unemployment rate, and labour market rigidity. The large number of young people requiring training and the slow pace of expansion of educational institutions contribute to the high unemployment rate and difficulty in entering the labour market [1]. Despite being the most advanced economy on the African continent, South Africa has underperformed compared to its peers and currently lags behind other middle-income countries in these critical areas. As a result, the country is facing a significant skills shortage. According to Stats SA, the unemployment rate is 27%, with a youth unemployment rate of 55%. Various economic sectors need experienced technicians with relevant skills. According to the Logistics Barometer (2016) [2] and the Barloworld Supply Chain Foresight (2018)[3] , the shortage of skilled workers is a major constraint to supply chain efficiency in South Africa.

These inefficiencies result in a high cost of logistics that equals approximately 11.7% of South Africa's GDP, which is higher when compared to the USA and Germany, where it is estimated to account for 7% and 8.6%, respectively [2]. South Africa has a unique transport-intensive economy that is characterised by long distances between ports and economic centres [2]. This highlights the increased importance of efficient supply chain management. Efficient logistics and supply chain performance are critical for the smooth functioning of the economy and the Reserve Bank SARB has identified dysfunctional supply chains as one risk to economic growth [4].

The relationship between sector skills and sector performance has been widely recognised in academic literature and by numerous scholars [5], [6]. This study is part of a national initiative aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of South Africa's logistics network. This study assessed the current skills landscape and identified skills necessary for future logisticians in South African context.

Clarke (2018) [7] identifies the causes of the skills shortage as 1) an industry growing faster than workforce qualifications, 2) a shortage of educators, and 3) businesses struggling to identify competent individuals. The supply chain landscape is changing rapidly and, as a result, professionals need to acquire new skills to stay relevant. Despite having the most advanced economy on the African continent, South Africa has performed poorly relative to its peers and currently lags behind other middle-income countries in these critical areas hence the country experienced an amplified skills shortage. WEF has indicated that these skills cannot be developed through training alone, but require a combination of various approaches, including practical experience [8]. The aim of this study is to understand the skills gap in the logistics sector of South Africa. To achieve this goal satisfactorily, the following objectives will be met:

- Outline the skills gap within the logistics sector in South Africa.
- Identify the relevant skills for the future logistician; and
- Identify skills that are not easy to fill in the sector.

The skills gap can be defined as the discrepancy between the abilities that job seekers possess and the skills that employers need [7], [9]. The logistics skills gap refers to the shortage of trained people who can oversee intricate logistics operations and use technology to maximize productivity. Reasons for the logistics skills gap include the emergence of disruptive technologies such as the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, and Blockchain, which has created a demand for unique skill sets. The competencies required to utilize these skills extend beyond traditional logistics and supply chain skills [7], [9].

2 BRIEF REVIEW ON LOGISTICS SKILLS AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

This literature review focuses on the definitions and categorisations of logistics skills. The section concludes with an examination of the significance of talent management in the context of skills development and retention.

There are different supply chain skills categorisations in the literature, for example, Dubey et al (2017) [10] group logistics skills based on where they are applied within the logistics chain. The study classifies them as purchasing skills and management skills, whilst Lutz and Birou (2013) [11] distinguish skills based on core competencies being applied. In the study by Lutz and Birou [11], in logistics, there are social skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, time management skills, and general knowledge skills. Social skills include oral communication skills, the ability to manage relationships, listening skills, and other related skills. Decision-making skills include cross-functional coordination, globalisation of transport and logistics, material handling, material sourcing, warehouse design, and warehouse management. Problem-solving skills are applied in inventory management, maintenance and repair, tracking and tracing, and the ability to learn quickly. More recent studies have now focused mainly on digitisation skills, which is a paradigm shift from the traditional logistics skills in response to advances in information technology systems [12]. However, this classification of skills is consistent with the competence approach used by [11]. In this survey study, both paradigms of logistics skills definition have been used.

It is also important to understand the talent management strategies employed in the logistics sector. Identifying and acquiring talent with the necessary skills to perform essential job functions is fundamental to the competitiveness of the logistics sector in South Africa. Employees who lack the requisite skills may face a high level of incompatibility within organisations, leading to increased employee turnover and negative performance appraisals [6]. Failure to manage talent within the sector from acquisition to retention is akin to failing to manage the logistics sector effectively. A well-managed sector should be backed by skilled human resources that enhance performance and improve sector competitiveness.

Talent management is defined as the sum of experience, knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed and utilised by each employee in an organisation [6][5]. This encompasses various processes for identifying roles, responsibilities, and necessary skills, as well as establishing qualified resources for each position [5]. Talent management includes efforts to attract, onboard, develop, retain, and replace talent to achieve top performance emphasize the importance of establishing talent forecasts, roles, responsibilities, and critical capabilities and skills, as these foundational activities ensure that subsequent acquisition processes (such as onboarding, mentoring, and training) focus on the organizational needs vital for an effective talent management program [5], [6].

3 METHODOLOGY

The first step was to comply with the CSIR's research ethics requirements. Once the requirements were met, a questionnaire was developed and reviewed internally within the Smart Logistics Management research unit and externally with the South African Association of Freight Forwarders (SAAFF). After completing the review phase, the questionnaire was uploaded to Google Forms, and a test survey was conducted. After successfully conducting a test survey, a final questionnaire was distributed through various channels, including the SAAFF emailing list, LinkedIn, personal networks, and Transport Forum networks. Survey responses were analyzed using the tools provided by Google Forms and Google Analytics.

The steps followed in this study are summarised below:

- Research ethics application;

- Questionnaire development;
- Online survey distribution; and
- Response analysis.

3.1 Questionnaire development

When conducting a survey, it is essential to ensure validity and reliability. Validity refers to the accuracy of the survey and is determined by assessing the representativeness of the sample and the precision of the questions being asked [13]. This helps to ensure that the survey accurately measures what it is intended to measure. Questionnaire reliability refers to the consistency of questions and their ability to elicit information from respondents, regardless of changes to the structure of the wording [13]. To ensure validity and reliability, the developed questions were first discussed internally and were then sent for external review to industry experts and this aids reliability as a form of triangulation.

When distributing survey questionnaires, sampling bias must be considered. To ensure a diverse pool of respondents, the questionnaire was distributed through various channels, including email lists, professional networks like LinkedIn, and personal networks. SAAFF and Transport Forum emailed the questionnaire to their members and shared the questionnaire on their LinkedIn profiles. SAAFF members account for 80% of South Africa's international trade and Transport Forum indicated that they have more than 2400 active subscribers. The survey was open from the 6th of February to 25th of March 2024

The questionnaire was designed to gather information on the experience and exposure of the respondents. It consisted of questions that aimed to understand the availability of skills, as well as the talent management methods used. The final section of the questionnaire focused on the skills required for the future.

3.2 Sample size and its limitations

Surveys are structured to gather information about a specific population, surveys intend to draw a sample that can provide insights about the entire population based on the data collected. To achieve reliable results, the sample must be selected in a manner that ensures it is representative of the population. This is not always achievable, particularly when there is limited knowledge of the entire population. Consequently, studies may encounter challenges such as coverage errors and nonresponse errors which is a limitation acknowledged in this research project.

4 SURVEY RESULTS

While the number of responses was low (17 responses), several logistics sub-sectors were represented which include: transportation, warehousing & distribution, cold chain solutions, courier & express industry, freight forwarding, procurement, and manufacturing as shown in Table 1. Respondents in our study had varying levels of experience and authority, ranging from entry-level to executive management. Table 1 also shows the years of experience ranging from entry-level to more than 10 years of experience in the sector.

Table 1: Respondents profile

Respondent ID	Logistics subsector	Role	Years of experience	Organization number of employees
1	Transportation, Warehousing & Distribution, Freight forwarding, Cold chain solutions.	Executive management	More than 10 years	more than 100 employees
2	Courier & Express industry	Executive management	4 -10 years	more than 100 employees
3	Freight forwarding	Middle-level management / Operations managers	0 - 3 years	more than 100 employees
4	Transportation, Courier & Express industry	Logistics Administration & Finance	0 - 3 years	more than 100 employees
5	Transportation, Freight forwarding	Executive management	More than 10 years	1 to 5 employees
6	Transportation, Freight forwarding, Courier & Express industry	Entry level	4 -10 years	more than 100 employees
7	Warehousing & Distribution	Supervisor	4 -10 years	16-50 employees
8	Manufacturing	Technician/ operators	More than 10 years	more than 100 employees
9	Freight forwarding	Entry level	4 -10 years	16-50 employees
10	Transportation, Warehousing & Distribution	Logistics Administration & Finance	0 - 3 years	more than 100 employees
11	Procurement	Middle-level management / Operations managers	4 -10 years	more than 100 employees
12	Warehousing & Distribution	Logistics Administration & Finance	0 - 3 years	more than 100 employees
13	Manufacturing	Middle-level management / Operations managers	More than 10 years	more than 100 employees
14	Warehousing & Distribution	Supervisor	0 - 3 years	more than 100 employees
15	Transportation	Entry level	0 - 3 years	more than 100 employees
16	Freight forwarding	Logistics Administration & Finance	4 -10 years	more than 100 employees
17	Warehousing & Distribution	Executive management	More than 10 years	1 to 5 employees

Figure 1: Logistics skills survey respondents profile

Table 2 shows the results of the respondents on the skills that they think are abundant and enough in the sector. The following skill sets scored above 60% (when combined currently abundant and enough): forecasting and material handling, logistics financial management, facilities planning, project management, international logistics, reverse logistics, customer service, and telecommunication.

Table 2: Availability of skills in the sector

Logistics skills	Currently abundant	Enough	Lacking
Forecasting	35%	35%	29%
Inventory Management	35%	18%	47%
Material Handling	53%	18%	29%
Logistics financial management	24%	32%	39%
Production planning	35%	18%	47%
Facilities planning	59%	6%	35%
Procurement and purchasing management	35%	18%	47%
Project management	35%	24%	41%
International logistics	41%	18%	41%
Reverse logistics	29%	29%	41%
Green logistics	29%	29%	41%
Data analytics	35%	18%	47%
Business process improvement	41%	12%	47%
Customer service	47%	18%	35%
Traffic and transport management	53%	12%	35%
Telecommunication and information systems	35%	29%	35%
Community engagement	29%	29%	41%
Talent management	35%	24%	41%
Research and technology application	29%	24%	47%
Employee management	24%	29%	47%

According to the survey, over 40% of the participants stated that there are skill shortages in the following areas employee management, research and technology application, talent management, community engagement, business process improvement, production planning, data analytics, green logistics, reverse logistics, and international logistics.

Forty-seven percent (47%) of respondents indicated that onboarding and career development are poorly implemented in the sector. In addition, 41% of respondents indicated that leadership development, diversity and inclusion, talent analytics, and employee engagement are also poorly implemented in the sector.

Table 3: Talent management strategies application in the sector

Talent management strategies	Poor	Good	Excellent
Talent acquisitions	29%	41%	29%
Onboarding	47%	24%	29%
Performance management	24%	47%	29%
Learning and development	35%	41%	24%
Succession planning	29%	18%	53%
Career development	47%	18%	35%
Employee engagement	41%	29%	29%
Retention strategies	35%	41%	24%
Talent analytics	41%	29%	29%
Diversity and inclusion	41%	35%	24%
Feedback	35%	24%	41%
Continuous improvement	24%	41%	35%
Leadership development	41%	12%	47%

More than 60% of respondents reported effective implementation of the following strategies; talent acquisition, performance management, learning and development, succession planning, retention strategies, feedback management, and continuous improvement.

Respondents further indicated that future logisticians should possess skills in:

- Logistics value chain comprehension;
- Logistics finance;
- Opportunity identification in the market;
- Efficiency, sustainability, and innovation methods;
- Technology adoption and implementation;
- Entrepreneurship;
- Closed-loop logistics;
- Use of real-time data and live feeds;
- Benchmarking;
- Data analytics;
- Blockchain and Internet of Things;
- Automation;
- Sustainability practices; and
- Timelessly process shipments.

The respondents identified the following important emerging technical skills in the sector:

- Digitization and analytical skills;
- Data analysis, route planning, network optimization;

- Reporting and programming capabilities, as well as additional forecasting and data analytics tools;
- Management skills and planning skills;
- International trade;
- Research and Technology application;
- International logistics and data analytics;
- Artificial intelligence;
- Project management;
- Transport Management and task balancing;
- Automated documentation management; and
- Environmental management.

Respondents indicated that logisticians of the future require the following soft skills:

- Empathy, attentive listening, talent management;
- Time management;
- Situational awareness;
- Communication;
- Problem-solving;
- Leadership;
- Negotiation skills;
- Transparency;
- Adaptability;
- Critical thinking;
- Creativity; and
- People management.

The 4th industrial revolution is making certain tasks obsolete. Respondents indicated that the following skills will become less critical:

- Inventory management and warehouse management;
- Repetitive tasks that do not require logical decision-making;
- Administrative functions;
- Personnel management;
- Paperwork;
- Manual ordering;
- Fleet route monitoring; and
- Data capturing.

Respondents identified the following skills as being or becoming in demand due to the 4th industrial revolution:

- Data analysis;
- Clearance management;
- Creativity;
- Complex problem-solving;
- Communication;
- Planning;
- Fleet management;
- Cost management;
- Transport management;
- Project management;
- Inventory diagnostic;

- Effective collection of data;
- Cleaning and preparing data for analysis;
- Programming; and
- Data sciences, data engineering, robotics coding.

5 DISCUSSION

The survey responses are interpreted and discussed below. Note that the discussion represents responses from individuals in the subsectors indicated in Section 4. The framework in Figure 2, shows that the sector does not struggle with forecasting, material handling, facilities planning, customer service, traffic and transport management, telecommunication and information systems, procurement, purchasing and supply, and international logistics skills. Forecasting, material handling, facilities planning, customer service, traffic and transport management, procurement, purchasing and supply, and international logistics skills have long been recognised as traditional logistics sector skills, hence, it can be inferred that skills have been fully integrated into the sector. The positive trend can be attributed to initiatives between industry and skills development organisations that include vocational training, internships, apprenticeships, and collaborations between industry and educational institutions [1].

Figure 2: Logistics future skills framework

Vocational training is aimed at providing practical skills to job seekers. It covers a wide range of competencies required by the logistics and supply chain industry, such as inventory management, purchasing, distribution, and transportation. This has equipped more people with the necessary skills to enter the workforce and contribute to the industry's growth.

Promoting internships and apprenticeships has also aided in closing the skills gap in the logistics and supply chain industries. Young people have received on-the-job training and developed their experience in supply chain and logistics through internships and apprenticeships offered by businesses [14]. Collaborations between educational institutions and South African businesses have worked well, with schools developing logistics and supply chain curricula that are appropriate for the classroom and prepare students for the workplace. Various educational departments have been appointing industry-experienced individuals as course moderators to align institutional offerings with industry needs and trends.

The logistics industry still needs to adapt to the emerging trends of green logistics. The demand for these practices is primarily driven by the regulations and requirements of the European markets. By 2026, the European Union will implement the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which will require logistics companies to prioritize green logistics skills and comply with carbon emissions measurement standards for all transport and logistics-related activities [15].

The skills gap within the logistics sector has partly been driven by the rapid pace of technological advancements. It has been highlighted that the future of logistics will require logisticians who are agile and technologically astute. To keep up with the demands of the future, logisticians will need to upgrade their skills and improve their competencies in areas such as data analytics, telecommunications and information systems, and logistics financial services.

Various stakeholders in the national logistics system are emphasizing efficiency and value maximization [16]. Therefore, the logistician of the future should possess key attributes of understanding value in the logistics value creation ecosystem. Additionally, the individual should be able to identify market opportunities and unprofitable relationships with stakeholders, including transporters, shipping lines, and other clients. The logistician of the future should also be an environmental steward and technology adopter.

The emerging skills trends in the sector are aligned with future demands. Respondents frequently mentioned skills associated with digitization, data analytics, environmental management, artificial intelligence, and international trade. Along with other technical skills, the logistician of the future should also possess soft skills such as people management, critical thinking, transparency, negotiating skills, and communication skills.

The adoption of the 4th industrial revolution is evident through the adoption of more efficient technologies. As a result, manual warehouse management activities, administrative functions, and data-capturing skills are becoming obsolete. However, it is important to note that technology is developed to augment humanity and not replace it. Therefore, skills associated with technology augmentation are in demand, as indicated by respondents.

The requirements for future logisticians, as illustrated in Figure 2, also encompass a diverse range of skills that align with the technologies currently being adopted in the sector. This diversity positions logistics as a competitor for talent alongside sectors that it previously did not compete with. For instance, the logistics sector will need to compete with the fintech industry for expertise in data analytics, blockchain technology, and the Internet of Things. The growing demand for these skills in logistics is also highlighted by emerging competencies. To attract and retain talent, organisations will need to implement various talent management strategies. This should include reskilling existing personnel who possess knowledge in areas that are becoming obsolete due to advancements in technology. The sector should strengthen some of its talent management strategies that include onboarding, career development, employee engagement, talent analytics, diversity and inclusion, and leadership development.

6 CONCLUSION

The sample size of this study was small compared to other skills surveys; however, respondents represented all sub-sectors of the logistics industry in South Africa. It is important to note that the conclusions of this study are anchored in the experience and authority of the respondents (respondents' profiles are shown in Table 1). The limitation of this study was the response rate, and this impacted the ability to draw statistical conclusions with an acceptable level of confidence. For future research, we will explore other data collection mechanisms beyond questionnaires. However, this limitation should not overshadow the findings of this study, as it represents a significant step in understanding the logistics skills landscape in South Africa.

The survey responses indicate that the logistics sector possesses adequate traditional skills in areas such as forecasting, material handling, and logistics management, largely due to initiatives like vocational training, internships, and industry collaborations. While these efforts have helped bridge the skills gap, the industry must adapt to emerging trends in green logistics, especially with upcoming regulations from the European Union. The demand for technologically savvy logisticians is increasing as the sector encounters rapid advancements, requiring skills in data analytics, telecommunications, and environmental management. Key attributes for future logisticians will include understanding value creation, identifying market opportunities, and possessing both technical and soft skills to navigate the evolving landscape of logistics and supply chain management.

Despite implementing most talent management strategies, the logistics industry is still struggling with employee retention, engagement, leadership development, and diversity and inclusion. In conclusion, respondents agreed that the logistician of the future should be familiar with new technology trends, be astute in terms of the management of green logistics and be able to identify opportunities in the ecosystem.

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