

# Successor and Organizational Factors on Continuity of Small and Medium Enterprises at Ariwara Commercial Center, Democratic Republic of Congo

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## Abstract

Given the high failure rate of family businesses after the retirement or death of founders, which negatively affects local communities, families, and broader stakeholders such as governments and policymakers, this study addresses the urgent challenge of ensuring business resilience and generational continuity. The paper examines the influence of successor-related factors (age, gender, education, networking capabilities, and managerial competencies) and organizational factors (firm age, structure, and management practices) on the continuity of SMEs in the Ariwara Commercial Center, Aru Territory, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Using a cross-sectional design within a positivist paradigm, the study employed a quantitative approach with data collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire from 30 SME successors selected with support from the Federation of Congolese Enterprises in Aru. Data analysis, conducted using Pearson correlation, ANOVA, and regression in SPSS 25, showed that managerial competencies ( $r=0.722$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and networking capabilities ( $r=0.434$ ;  $p<0.016$ ) are the only significant successor factors linked to SME continuity. Additionally, firm age, organizational structure, and management practices demonstrated significant positive effects. Regression analysis highlighted managerial competencies ( $\beta=0.648$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) as the strongest predictor. The study concludes that strengthening successors' managerial competencies is essential to improving SME sustainability and recommends focusing on this factor for long-term continuity. The SME owners should also take cognizance of business age, organization structure, and managerial practices as predictors of SME continuity despite their insignificant effect.

**Key words:** Successor, Organization, Factors, Continuity, and SMEs.

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## INTRODUCTION

The importance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is widely recognized for contributing to economic growth, employment, tax revenue, income generation, and improving living standards. For example, Saan et al. (2018) stated that Micro, Medium, Small, and Medium Enterprises account for over 55% of GDP and more than 65% of total employment in high-income countries. Additionally, about 70% of GDP in middle-income countries is generated by SMEs. Meanwhile, in low-income countries, SMEs and informal enterprises make up over 60% of GDP and over 70% of total employment, contributing more than 95% of all employment. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, approximately 90% of businesses are micro and small enterprises (1 to 9 employees), with half of them operating for around five years (World Bank, 2019). The same source notes that these businesses are highly dynamic in creating jobs compared to large companies. Data shows that 11.2% of annual employment growth is due to SMEs, compared to only 1.3% for large companies (World Bank, 2019). Furthermore, Birindwa (2019) and the World Bank (2019) report that over 3,730 SMEs affiliated with OPEC in the DRC are either privately or family-owned, contributing roughly 35% to employment in new firms and 60% in older enterprises.

Despite this impressive evidence, a paradox persists: the DRC, rich in mineral resources, still faces high poverty levels among its population. With a large, growing population, the country struggles with weak public governance, which hampers its ability to create enough jobs and provide a decent standard of living (Ruba, 2022). In this difficult context, the SME sector plays a crucial role in supporting economic activity and fighting poverty (World Bank, 2019). However, the DRC's economy remains largely import-dependent due to an underdeveloped manufacturing sector. Ruba (2022) notes that the country's manufacturing industry is still young and uncompetitive, providing less than 5% of direct employment, and its contribution to GDP growth from 2013 to 2017 averaged only 19%, which is relatively small. A study by Ariaka and Miencha (2021) in Bunia, Ituri Province, found that

only 4.4% of SMEs are involved in manufacturing, compared to 54.2% in trade and 41.6% in services. These figures highlight the low level of industrialization and emphasize the need for targeted development in this sector. Consequently, the country relies heavily on imports for manufactured goods, especially in northern rural regions like the Ariwara Commercial Center in Aru Territory, where economic activity mainly depends on neighboring East African countries (Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania) and Asian nations (notably China, Dubai, Japan). Moreover, the issue of intergenerational transfer of ownership, management, and leadership due to founders' death or retirement poses a high risk of business failure (FEC, 2024). Consequently, the livelihood of local communities, families, and other stakeholders is drastically affected in the region.

This study suggests that reversing this trend requires: (1) creating strong policies to promote manufacturing sectoral development, and (2) increasing awareness among existing SMEs about the importance of early succession planning and identifying key factors that influence business continuity beyond the founding generation. Without understanding the specific successor and organizational factors that determine whether SMEs in Ariwara can survive or not after the founders leave, it will be difficult to design practical strategies to keep these family businesses operational beyond the founding generation. The existing research, focused on the Kivu region (Birindwa, 2019; Milingita, 2013), is geographically limited. Another more recent study on the intergenerational transfer of Congolese family SMEs, analyzing failure factors, was conducted in Kongo Central (Mvunda, 2025). The study revealed that few founders plan their departure from managing companies. Often, they only step down following dramatic events such as sudden illness or death. The union of a founder with more than one wife often causes issues after the founder's death, especially if no will has been made. Additionally, neglecting the family members of the deceased founder by the successor can destabilize the economic inheritance or lead to its liquidation. The major limitation of the study was that methodologically, it only used descriptive analysis to reveal findings, and it failed to perform correlation analysis, regression analysis, and ANOVA tests, showing the lack of rigor in statistical conclusions. In addition, since it focused on urban and peri-urban areas in the Western Province of DRC, it overlooked how successor-related and organizational factors influence SME continuity, specifically in rural areas like Ariwara Commercial Center in Ituri Province, a Northeastern region, leaving a gap in both geographic and scholarly coverage.

This paper aims to fill these gaps by examining how individual or successor-related factors, such as age, education, gender, networking capabilities, and managerial skills, and organizational factors, including firm age, structure, and management practices, affect the continuity of SMEs in Ariwara after their founders depart. Specifically, the study seeks to assess: (1) the influence of successor-related factors on SME continuity, and (2) the impact of organizational factors on SME continuity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Successor-Related Factors and the Continuity of SME

The impact of the chosen individual (successor-related) factors on business performance, growth, survival, and continuity has been extensively studied. However, researchers have found conflicting results across various studies and contexts. For instance, Magasi (2016) investigated factors influencing business succession planning among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Tanzania. The findings indicated that older SME owners are more likely to prepare successors. Conversely, Esteve-Pérez (2017) examined how firm age and productivity affect firm survival through three stages of the lifecycle in forty-seven manufacturing sectors. The results were inconsistent; in the "early" stage, firm age was negatively associated with hazard rates, while productivity had no impact.

In the "mature" stage, higher productivity correlated with lower hazard rates, especially in competition driven by efficiency, but firm age was not significant. During the "intermediate" stage, both age and productivity contributed to reducing hazard rates. These findings demonstrate conflicting results among scholars regarding the relationship between business age and organizational factors, highlighting the need for future research. Concerning gender, Magasi (2016) found that men are more involved in succession planning, with males more likely to become successors. Additionally, higher education levels among SME owners positively influence successor preparation (Magasi, 2016). However, these studies did not consider successor-related factors such as networking skills and managerial competencies, which are vital for organizational continuity. This gap in the literature opens avenues for further research in other regions, such as the Ariwara Commercial Center, Aru Territory, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### Organization-Related Factors and the Continuity of SME

A substantial body of literature has examined the impact of organizational factors on the development, performance, and continuity of SMEs. For instance, business size positively influences business succession planning, with larger businesses receiving priority (Magasi, 2016b). However, this study did not include the firm's structure or managerial practices in the model. Similarly, Zuraina (2021) studied the moderating effect of company age on the relationship between factors related to successors and business continuity in agrobased SMEs in Malaysia, using SEM-AMOS for analysis. The findings indicated that succession planning has a positive, significant impact on business sustainability, while company age does not moderate the relationship between succession planning and business sustainability. This study also did not show how firm age independently affects business continuity in Malaysia. Furthermore, Agbim (2019) found that the factors contributing to successful succession include the characteristics of succession planning, the incumbent, the potential successor, and family-owned SMEs. The study failed to evaluate explicitly the characteristics of family-owned SMEs that influence the continuity in the South-Eastern Nigerian context. Factors such as firm structure and managerial practices, which are crucial for organizational continuity, were overlooked in the analysis. This gap in the literature highlights the need for further research in other geographic settings, such as the Ariwara Commercial Center in Aru Territory, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In Northeastern DRC, the observed socio-economic development is mainly driven by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which employ skilled youth and provide essential services such as transportation, education, healthcare, and infrastructure (Ruba, 2022). However, the continuity of these businesses after their founders' death or retirement remains very uncertain as far as profitability is concerned. According to the FEC (2020), many SMEs fail to survive the transition to the next generation due to several key challenges. The collapse of these enterprises has serious consequences for the families and communities that rely on them (Ruba, 2022). The lack of a study understanding of the successor and organizational-related factors that determine whether SMEs in Ariwara can continue operating or not after the founders exit the business constituted the core concern addressed by this study. Without such understanding, it becomes difficult to propose effective, actionable solutions for sustainability and succession planning in the region. Existing studies conducted in the field of SME in Ituri Province failed to investigate or explore the specific successor-related and organizational factors that influence SME continuity, particularly in Ariwara Commercial Center. They, however, analyzed independently or collectively areas such as investment decision, capital structure, risk management, employee motivation, entrepreneurial orientation, and financial performance (Ariaka & Basandja, 2020; Ariaka & Miencha, 2021; Ariaka & Okudra, 2021; Ruba, 2022). This constitutes a major gap in the literature that this paper sought to fill. Therefore, this paper investigated the influence of individual (successor-related) and organizational factors on the continuity of SME

in Ariwara Commercial Center, Aru Territory, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The literature review reveals that numerous studies have been conducted to investigate how individual and organizational factors influence the continuity of SMEs in various settings and contexts (Agbim, 2019; Esteve-pérez, 2017; Magasi, 2016a; Mvunda, 2025; Zuraina, 2021). However, there still exists a gap in the literature as none of the studies have been able to incorporate variables such as successor-related factors (age, gender, education, networking capabilities, and managerial competencies) and organizational factors (firm age, structure, and management practices) on the continuity of SMEs in the Ariwara Commercial Center, Aru Territory, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, existing studies have yielded mixed results due to the context, sample size, sampling method, choice of individual and organizational factors, data sources, and statistical methodology, sometimes with the lack of rigor in statistical conclusions. These gaps in the literature have opened paths for further research in other regions and contexts. From the foregoing discussions, there was a need to carry out further study to bridge the gaps identified in previous studies. Therefore, the principal motivation behind the present study was to fill the gap in the literature by examining how individual or successor-related factors, such as age, education, gender, networking capabilities, and managerial skills, and organizational factors, including firm age, structure, and management practices, affect the continuity of SMEs in Ariwara after their founders depart.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design (Bengesi & Roux, 2014; Luqman & Fatima, 2020). This design was suitable for this study as its data collection was conducted considering various organizations. It allowed the researcher to collect data from many organizations that were SMEs in the study area from different locations at the same time in a short time frame. In addition, the study employed a quantitative approach within the positivist research philosophy (Ariaka & Miencha, 2021; Luqman & Fatima, 2020). The quantitative method was chosen due to its vigor in providing an adequate quality of findings. The survey method was adopted as a data collection method, as it allows the use of questionnaires as a tool of data collection (Ariaka & Miencha, 2021; Bengesi & Roux, 2014; Luqman & Fatima, 2020). The target population was all successors currently managing SMEs in Ariwara Commercial Center in Aru Territory, Democratic Republic of the Congo. A sample of 30 SMEs was selected quickly through a convenience sampling technique with the help of the Federation of Congolese Enterprises of Aru (FEC, 2020). A single respondent by firm consisted of a designated active successor who was included in the sample. Convenience sampling involves collecting data from a research population that is easily accessible to the researcher (Rahi, 2017, cited in Sullivan, 2012). This technique was chosen because convenience sampling means the researchers utilize a sample that is readily available and accessible, making it applicable in many types of research (Sullivan, 2012). However, the term is typically used when the availability of participants is the primary concern in selecting a sample, especially when alternative populations or research sites are limited. This method allows for cost-effective data collection but may be criticized for selection bias due to differences within the target population (Sullivan, 2012). For this study, data were gathered through a structured questionnaire constructed using a Likert scale with 5 points ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree (Bengesi & Roux, 2014; Luqman & Fatima, 2020). The response rate was 100%. Statistical analyses, including correlation, ANOVA, and regression analysis, were performed using SPSS V25 to produce the study results (Taherdoost, 2020).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper presents the key findings of the study as per the objectives discussed in the literature review section. It presents findings of the correlations between study variables, the ANOVA test, and regression analysis. In sub-section one, findings related to the influence of the successor's factors on the SME's continuity are presented. In Subsection 2, results related to the influence of organizational factors on the SME's continuity are presented.

### Influence of Successor-Related Factors on the SMEs' Continuity

#### *Influence of Successor-Related Factors on the SMEs' Continuity*

Table 1: Correlation Matrixes

Correlations		Age	Educ.	Gender	Networking Capabilities	Managerial Competencies	DV
DV	Pearson Correlation	.077	.219	.118	.434*	.722**	1
	Sig.	.685	.244	.535	.016	.000	
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30
*. Results are significant at 5% level of significance.							
**. Results are significant at 1% level of significance.							

Source: Primary data, 2025

From the above table, it can be seen that the age of the successor has a weak but insignificant positive relationship with the SME continuity at a Pearson correlation coefficient of ( $r=.077$ ;  $P$  value =  $0.685 > 0.05$ ). This result contradicts the empirical study of Magasi (2016), which suggested that older business owners are more inclined to engage in succession planning, implying that successor age plays a critical role in ensuring business continuity. This implies that any effort made by the business owners in choosing a successor in the study area needs to consider the weak but significant positive relationship between successor age and SMEs continuity.

While the education level of the successor has a weak but insignificant positive relationship with the SME continuity at a Pearson correlation coefficient of ( $r=0.219$ ;  $P$  value =  $0.244 > 0.05$ ). This result is supported by the findings of Museta and Mwanza (2023) about the successor's education level, in that a less educated successor might not have the fundamental knowledge needed to manage the company. This implies that any effort made by the business owners in seeking to ensure their business continuity in the study area needs to consider the weak but significant positive relationship between the successor's level of education and SMEs' continuity.

Furthermore, the gender of the successor has a weak but insignificant positive relationship with the SME continuity at a Pearson correlation coefficient of ( $r=0.118$ ;  $P$  value =  $0.535 > 0.05$ ). This result contradicts the findings of a previous study by Magasi (2016), who found that male SME owners are more likely to engage in succession planning than their female counterparts. This implies that any effort made by the business owners in seeking to ensure their business continuity in the study area needs to consider the weak but significant positive relationship between the successor's gender and SMEs' continuity. This opens the way to consider the chance to be given to both the female and male when designating the potential successor in charge to continue the business.

However, a positive significant relationship was found between successors' networking ( $r=0.434$ ;  $P$  value =  $0.016 < 0.05$ ) and the continuity of SME. This result is in accordance with Bengesi & Roux (2014) who considered the networking capabilities as the successor's ability to build, maintain, and strategically leverage relationships with internal and external stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, financial institutions, local authorities, and industry peers to access resources, information, support, and market opportunities that enhance the continuity and competitiveness of the business after the founder's departure. Thus, any effort made by the SME owners, when still alive, to enhance their potential successors' networking will improve in a significant positive manner the continuity of SMEs in the study area.

Lastly, the managerial competencies correlated strongly in a positive and significant manner with the Continuity of SME ( $r=0.722$ ;  $P$  value =  $0.000 < 0.01$ ). A result that agreed with the findings of a previous study carried out outside the country by Museta & Getrude Mwanza (2023), emphasizing the central role of successors' competencies in succession success and business sustainability. Thus, any step taken by the SME owners, when still alive, to enhance the managerial competencies of the potential successors through offering them the chance to access academic or professional training, involving them in business day-to-day management and leadership, and assigning them a project to work on independently, in a certain manner, significantly improves the continuity of SMEs in the study area.

## Analysis of the Variance

Table 2: ANOVA Test

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	266.412	5	53.282	5.851	.001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	218.555	24	9.106		
	Total	484.967	29			
a. Dependent Variable : SMEs' Continuity						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Managerial Competencies, Age, Gender, Education Level, Networking Capabilities						

Source: Primary data, 2025

The table of ANOVA shows that the value of F is statistically significant ( $F=5.851$ ;  $P$  Value=  $0.001 < 0.05$ ). This implies that the model is globally and statistically good.

## Regression Analysis Model

Table 3: Regression model for successors' related factors on SMEs Continuity.

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
		B	Std Error		
1	(Constant)	6.363	3.545	1.795	.085
	Age	.035	.208	.027	.866
	Education	.079	.250	.053	.755
	Gender	-.255	.412	-.101	.542
	Networking Capabilities	.217	.200	.184	.289
	Managerial Competencies	.825	.198	.648	.000
a. Dependent Variable : SMEs' Continuity					

Source: Primary data, 2025

The analysis of the individual contribution of the independent variables shows that age contributes to ( $\beta=0.27$ ;  $P$  Value= $0.866 > 0.05$ ), meanwhile, education contributes to ( $\beta=0.53$ ;  $P$  Value= $0.755 > 0.05$ ). However, the gender contributes negatively up to ( $\beta= - 0.101$ ;  $P$  Value= $0.542 > 0.05$ ).

The networking of successors in turn contributes up to ( $\beta= 0.184$ ;  $P$  Value= $0.249 > 0.05$ ) and lastly, managerial competencies contribute up to ( $\beta= 0.648$ ;  $P$  Value= $0.000 < 0.05$ ).

The most influential predictor of the continuity was the managerial competencies ( $\beta= 0.648$ ;  $P$  Value= $0.000 < 0.05$ ), followed respectively by the successors' education ( $\beta=0.53$ ;  $P$  Value= $0.755 > 0.05$ ), the networking capabilities ( $\beta= 0.184$ ;  $P$  Value= $0.249 > 0.05$ ), the successors' age ( $\beta=0.27$ ;  $P$  Value= $0.866 > 0.05$ ), and lastly the gender of successors ( $\beta= - 0.101$ ;  $P$  Value= $0.542 > 0.05$ ). The results revealed that among the variables studied, only managerial competencies are statistically significant at a 95% confidence interval ( $P$  Values =  $0.000 < 0.05$ ). However, successors' education ( $P$  Value =  $0.755 > 0.05$ ), networking capabilities ( $P$  Value =  $0.249 > 0.05$ ), successors' age ( $P$  Value =  $0.866 > 0.05$ ), and successors' gender ( $P$  Value =  $0.543 > 0.05$ ), respectively, are not statistically significant at a 95% confidence interval. These findings partly agreed and partly disagreed with (Magasi, 2016), who indicated that older business owners are more likely to engage in succession planning, suggesting that the successor's age is crucial for business continuity. Additionally, Magasi (2016) found that male SME owners are more likely to pursue succession planning than their female counterparts.

These findings imply that an increase of one unit in the age of successors will contribute to an increase of 0.27 variance in SME continuity. In addition, an increase of one unit in the education level of successors will contribute to an increase of 0.53 units of variance in SME continuity. However, an increase of a unit in the gender of successors will contribute to a decrease of - 0.101 in variance in SME continuity and an increase of a unit in the network of successors will contribute to an increase of 0.184 in variance in SME continuity and lastly an increase of a unit in the managerial competences of successors will contribute to an increase of 0.684 of variance in SMEs continuity.

The following equation can be derived from the regression analysis:

$$Y = 0.27X_1 + 0.53X_2 - 0.101X_3 + 0.184X_4 + 0.648X_5$$

Where :

Y= SMEs Continuity

X1 times the age of the successor

X2 = the education level of the successor

X3 =Gender of successor

X4 =the Network capabilities of the successor

X5= Managerial competencies of the successor

## Influence of Organisation Factors on the SMEs' Continuity

Table 4 Correlation matrixes

Correlation matrixes		Age of the Firm	Structure of the Firm	Managerial Practices	VD
Age of the Firm	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig.				
	N	30			
Structure of the Firm	Pearson Correlation	.535**	1		
	Sig.	.002			
	N	30	30		
Managerial Practices	Pearson Correlation	.587**	.709**	1	
	Sig.	.001	.000		
	N	30	30	30	
DV	Pearson Correlation	.621**	.609**	.650**	1
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	
	N	30	30	30	30
** Results are significant at 1% level of significance.					

Source: Primary data, 2025

From the above table, it can be seen that the age of the age of firm has a strongly significant positive relationship with the SME continuity at a Pearson correlation coefficient of ( $r=.621$ ;  $P$  value =  $0.000 < 0.01$ ).

This result confirms the statement that business age reflects organizational maturity, stability, and accumulated market experience, all of which can influence business resilience and continuity. The results agreed with the multiple regression tests by Hastuti et al. (2019), showing that business age and potential investment significantly influence the company's financial performance, an important factor in ensuring business continuity. This result implies that any effort made by the business owners in seeking to ensure their business continuity in the study area needs to consider the strongly significant positive relationship between firm age and SMEs continuity.

In addition, the structure of the firm has a strong, significant positive influence on the SME continuity, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of ( $r=0.609$ ;  $P \text{ value} = 0.000 < 0.01$ ). The result contradicts Nene and Pillay (2019), who warn that a rigid structure may harm morale and effectiveness. However, it is in accordance with Onyuma (2020), who found that the group organization structure dimensions had a significant positive effect on group financial performance, were organization form, financial management, accounting, and auditing, are significant areas in ensuring business continuity. This implies that any effort made by the business owners in seeking to ensure the business continuity after their exit in the study area needs to consider the strong, significant, positive relationship between the structure of the firm and SMEs' continuity. This opens the way for them to understand the urgency of implementing a formal and well-structured business during their leadership stance. This is because the formal structure is likely to help the firm to survive as compared to non-formal structures.

Lastly, the managerial practices have a strong, significant positive relationship with the SME continuity at a Pearson correlation coefficient of ( $r=.650$ ;  $P \text{ value} = 0.000 < 0.01$ ). These results comply with the assumption that the effective organizational practices, including planning, leadership, and risk management, are essential in navigating disruptions and maintaining continuity. The result matches the findings of a study by lyobhebe (2024), which demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between strategic management practices (strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation) and organizational performance (profitability, productivity, and operational performance), which plays a central role in ensuring business continuity. This result implies that any effort made by the business owners in pursuing their business continuity after their exit in the study area should consider the strongly significant positive relationship between good managerial practices within their businesses and SMEs' continuity.

## Analysis of the Variance

Table 5: ANOVA Test

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of squared	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	258.486	3	86.162	9.891	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	226.481	26	8.711		
	Total	484.967	29			
a. Dependent Variable : SME Continuity						
b. Predictors: (Constante), Managerial practices, Age of the Firm, Structure of the Firm						

Source: Primary data, 2025

The table of ANOVA shows that the value of F is statistically significant ( $F=9.891$ ;  $P \text{ Value} = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). This implies that the model is globally and statistically good.

## Regression Analysis Model

Table 6: Regression model for organization-related factors on SMEs Continuity

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Standard Error	Bêta		
1	(Constante)	4.245	2.475		1.715	.098
	Age of the Firm	.473	.247	.325	1.918	.066
	Structure of the Firm	.330	.293	.219	1.129	.269
	Managerial Practices	.342	.228	-.304	1.500	.146
a. Dependent Variable : SME Continuity						

Source: Primary data, 2025

The analysis of the individual contribution of the independent variables shows that the age of the SMEs contributes to ( $\beta=0.365$ ;  $P \text{ Value}=0.066 > 0.05$ ), meanwhile, the organization structure contributes up to ( $\beta=0.219$ ;  $P \text{ Value}=0.269 > 0.05$ ), and the managerial practices contribute up to ( $\beta= -0.304$ ;  $P \text{ Value}=0.146 > 0.05$ ). The results revealed that, the biggest predictor of SME continuity among the organizational factors studies in the area is the business age ( $\beta= 0.325$ ;  $P \text{ Value}=0.000 < 0.05$ ), followed by the organizational structure ( $\beta= 0.219$ ;  $P \text{ Value}= 0.269 > 0.05$ ), and lastly, managerial practices ( $\beta= -0.304$ ;  $P \text{ Value}= 0.146 > 0.05$ ). However, all these organisation-related factors assessed predict from a statistical standpoint an insignificant effect on the SME continuity in Ariwara Commercial Center, DRC. A result that contradicts the findings of previous studies carried out outside the country. For instance, the results of multiple regression tests by (Hastuti et al., 2019) have shown that business age and potential investment significantly influence the company's financial performance, thus the continuity. The findings imply that an increase of one unit in the age of the SMEs will contribute insignificantly to an increase of 0.365 units of variance in SME continuity. In addition, an increase of a unit in the organization structure will contribute insignificantly to an increase of 0.219 units of variance in SME continuity. However, an increase of one unit in the managerial practices will contribute insignificantly to a decrease of -0.304 in variance in SME continuity.

The following equation can be derived from the regression analysis:

$$Y = 0.325 X_1 + 0.219 X_2 - 0.304 X_3$$

Where :

Y= SMEs Continuity

X1= times the age of the firm

X2 = The structure of the firm

X3= Managerial practices

## METHODOLOGY

### Conclusions

This quantitative study has, through empirical research, examined the influence of successor and organization-related factors on the SME continuity in Ariwara Commercial Center, DRC. The main concern in this study was to investigate how individual (successor-related) and organizational factors correlate and predict the continuity of Small and Medium Enterprises after the demise or retirement of the founders in Ariwara Commercial Center, Aru Territory. The study has reached to following main conclusions:

## Successor-Related Factors and the Continuity of SME

The correlation analysis on successor-related factors revealed that the age, the education level, and the gender of the successor have a weak, insignificant positive relationship with the SMEs' continuity. However, a positive and significant relationship was found between successors' networking capabilities, managerial competencies, and the SMEs' continuity. Moreover, the regression analysis has shown that among successors individual factors, the biggest predictor of the SMEs' continuity is managerial competencies, showing a significant positive contribution. However, the successors' age, education level, and network all positively predict, but in an insignificant manner, the continuity, while the gender alone negatively and insignificantly predicts the SMEs.

## Successor-Related Factors and the Continuity of SME

In regard to the organizational factors, the correlation analysis further revealed that the age of the firm, the structure of the firm, and the managerial practices have a strongly significant positive influence on the SME continuity. While the regression analysis showed that the biggest predictor of the SMEs' continuity is the business age, followed by the structure, and lastly managerial practices, however, they all have shown insignificant effects from a statistical standpoint, with a negative contribution of managerial practices in the model.

## Recommendations

The study concluded that ignoring key successors and organizational factors, particularly managerial competencies, may hinder SME continuity following the departure or death of founders in Ariwara Commercial Center, DRC. It recommends that:

SME owners and successors give more attention, particularly to the successors' managerial competencies (the strongest predictor), to enhance business continuity. Similarly, there is a need for interventions in the areas with weaknesses, as per the findings.

Although from a statistical standpoint, there was an insignificant effect, the SME owners should take cognizance of business age, organization structure, and managerial practices as predictors of SME continuity.

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