



**REVIEW: K. BIGINAS, S. SINDAKIS, A. KOUMPROGLOU, V. SARANTINOS & P. WYER (EDITED BY), *SMALL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL OF THE UNCERTAIN EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT, ADVANCED STRATEGIES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP, EDUCATION AND ECOLOGY*, EMERALD PUBLISHING, 2022**

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**Abstract**

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*The book faces the topic of uncertainty that affects the economy. The social unrest, the pandemic, and the effects of climate change are features of this time when small businesses must operate. But how can small companies react and control external factors? It is the question that authors try to answer. This book distinguishes itself with a multi-disciplinary approach, combining research and practitioner perspectives.*

## Review

First of all, the Authors clarify the relevance of small firms in most economies, highlighting the necessity to understand their behavior better. The peculiarities of this type of firm make them different from large companies. Unfortunately, the shortage of knowledge, skills, and resources characterize the small size, it making difficult to overcome barriers determined by the uncertain business environment.

A unique definition of a small firm does not exist. The size criteria vary across jurisdictions (Australia, UK, Canada). The UK follows the EU definition of SMEs (European Commission, 2003) based on the number of employees, balance sheet value, and revenue. In 2019, there were 5.9 million private companies in the UK, of which more than 99% were SMEs.

External factors identified by the Authors as the main affecting SMEs are seven: political, economic conditions, social, technology, legal, environmental, and competitive forces. But the capacity to face the uncertain external environment depends on the internal business environment identified by the configuration of the following elements: organizational structure, management, human resources, organizational culture, physical assets, and financial strength.

The Authors highlight the differences between SMEs and large companies. Informality and the strength of personal relationships make SMEs diverse from large company. They suffer the shortage of financial resources, marketing problems, operational difficulties, incapacity to attract talent employees, and scarcity of physical assets. Thus, how can SMEs manage the uncertain environment?

The chapter 2 examines small business strategic management practices through a comparative perspective. The research, in fact, is based on the small business development within a developed country as UK, the emerging economies of Ghana and Malaysia, and the transitional economy context of Russia. The case studies allow to reveal some interesting processual dimensions of small business strategy formation. The following chapter examines in depth the strategic management, making explicit micro-level actions, activities and behaviors which compose the strategic process. The Authors want to accompany readers inside the “Black Box” of the small business strategy development process, using exciting case studies.

Then, the focus passes to the start-ups and to the resources, capabilities, and personal attributes which create a unique organizational context of start-ups. Despite the shortage of resources, start-ups grow and innovate thanks to members’ passion and conviction.

In the fourth chapter, the Author investigates the influence of Western paradigms on transnational education and the impact on small businesses. Universities and educational institutions, with their educational paths,

should support small business growth and development, upskilling the management and the employees.

The leader guides small business growth, and leadership style can determine the success or failure of SMEs. The leadership style should change taking into account each stage of an organization's lifecycle. Leaders need to create a corporate culture that fosters an inclusive environment, based on interactive communication, and trust. Leadership style impacts small business performance, so it deserves attention.

SMEs must face significant changes in the competitive environment. The uncertainty and volatility in the Covid-19 and Post-covid-19 era require SMEs to invest in customers' trust and loyalty, creating value for them and assessing the environmental volatility to adapt the organization to the changes promptly.

Skill shortages and talent mismatches can represent a severe problem for SMEs. The policy supports small businesses' digital inclusion and skills development. Governments must implement measures to foster STEM education paths and skills to solve the gender gap in this area. Additionally, knowledge sharing through business partnerships can help SMEs to overcome these difficulties.

"Small is beautiful?" The Author tries to answer the question that has tormented academics, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and managers for many years. The focus is on the consequences and challenges for SMEs determined by the exit of the UK from the European Union. The Author proposes some recommendations to support SMEs in the transition phase.

SMEs can win the challenge of uncertainty by improving employee engagement. The Author suggests six significant drivers of employee engagement: the work people do, the people they work with, opportunities, total rewards, company practices, and the quality of life.

Chapter 11 analyses the implications of Brexit for SMEs through a theoretical framework based on economics, political events, and human resource management. The study shows that SMEs have started opting for newer and innovative technologies to face the transitional phase. Chapter 13 examines in depth the benefits and disadvantages of E-business adoption by small firms. From the literature analysis, some factors influencing E-business adoption are identified: perceived relative advantage, perceived compatibility, CEO's innovativeness, information intensity, buyer/supplier pressure, support from technology vendors, and competition.

Chapter 12 focuses on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in Japanese SMEs to discover if these practices are the same or different from those used in the past. Western HRM practices would influence Japanese HR practices in SMEs.

One of the main obstacles for SMEs is securing funding. Chapter 14 considers the Greek environment and offers a comparison to other European

states. Findings report data about Greek SMEs' access to finance, and non-banking sources, such as the stock market, EU funding, investment laws, and venture funds.

The book offers an interesting point of view about the challenges SMEs must face in the uncertain external environment, thanks to a multidisciplinary approach. Protagonists are the UK SMEs, but not only them, with particular attention to the implications of Brexit for small firms. Small business success requires strategic management practices that allow SMEs to react and control uncertainty, a leadership style able to adapt itself to the lifecycle phase of the firm, and an essential investment in human resources to create an inclusive and trusting internal environment so that employee engagement could increase. Digital innovation is necessary to compete in a volatile context and this transitional phase caused by Brexit. It is an exciting reading I suggest to both academics and practitioners.