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ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Navigating Institutional Voids and Entrepreneurial Agency

An Ethnography of Mauritian Business Resilience and Growth, 2000–2026

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ABSTRACT

Institutional voids present significant challenges for business growth in emerging economies. Mauritius, while often cited as an African success story, exhibits unique structural gaps that shape entrepreneurial behaviour, yet the lived experience of navigating these voids remains under-researched. This study aims to elucidate how entrepreneurial agency is enacted to overcome institutional voids, thereby fostering business resilience and growth. It seeks to document the specific strategies and cognitive frameworks Mauritian business leaders employ within this context. A longitudinal, immersive ethnography was conducted, involving participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis within a purposively selected cohort of small and medium-sized enterprises. A dominant theme was the strategic hybridisation of formal and informal governance mechanisms to secure resources and legitimacy. Specifically, over two-thirds of observed firms developed parallel operational structures—one for regulatory compliance and another, more flexible network-based system for actual execution. Entrepreneurial agency in Mauritius is characterised by adaptive institutional bricolage, which transforms voids from constraints into spaces for strategic manoeuvre, fundamentally underpinning the documented resilience. Policymakers should focus on recognising and formally integrating effective informal practices. Support programmes should move beyond generic models to foster the development of context-specific hybrid capabilities. institutional voids, entrepreneurial agency, business resilience, ethnography, Mauritius, hybrid governance This paper provides a novel, empirically rich mechanism of 'institutional hybridisation' as a core driver of growth, derived from long-term ethnographic data rarely captured in African business studies.

Keywords: *Institutional voids, Entrepreneurial agency, Sub-Saharan Africa, Business ethnography, Emerging economies, Organisational resilience*

Article Highlights

- Longitudinal ethnography reveals how Mauritian SMEs build parallel formal and informal operational structures.
- Over two-thirds of observed firms employ strategic hybridisation to secure resources and legitimacy.
- The study identifies 'institutional hybridisation' as a novel, core mechanism for growth and resilience.
- Findings challenge generic policy models, advocating for context-specific support of hybrid capabilities.

Policy Implication

Formal recognition and integration of effective informal practices could enhance institutional support for entrepreneurial resilience in similar emerging economies.

This article presents findings from a longitudinal, immersive ethnography of Mauritian SMEs.

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

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