

Navigating the Institutional Landscape

A Qualitative Analysis of Business Challenges and Prospects in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The post-apartheid era presented a complex institutional environment for enterprises, characterised by evolving regulatory frameworks and socio-economic transformation. Understanding how firms navigate this landscape is critical for assessing sustainable business development. This study aimed to explore the specific institutional challenges and strategic opportunities perceived by business leaders operating within the contemporary South African economy, focusing on their adaptive strategies. A qualitative, interpretive design was employed, using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 24 senior executives from diverse sectors. Data were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis. A dominant theme was the perceived tension between progressive broad-based black economic empowerment (B-BBEE) policies and operational agility, with over two-thirds of participants describing compliance as a significant, dual-edged strategic burden. Concurrently, firms developed nuanced relational strategies to engage with state institutions. Business adaptation is fundamentally shaped by a negotiated engagement with institutional pressures, where regulatory compliance is simultaneously a constraint and a catalyst for innovative local partnership models. Policymakers should consider streamlining B-BBEE verification processes to reduce administrative burdens. Firms are advised to develop dedicated institutional capabilities for stakeholder engagement and long-term relationship management. institutional theory, qualitative research, business environment, corporate strategy, economic transformation This paper provides novel empirical evidence of the micro-level strategic behaviours firms employ to manage macro-institutional pressures, contributing a nuanced behavioural perspective to institutional analysis in emerging markets.

Keywords: *Institutional theory, Emerging markets, Post-apartheid South Africa, Qualitative case study, Business environment, Socio-economic transformation*

Article Highlights

- Explores the tension between B-BBEE policies and operational agility through executive interviews.
- Identifies relational strategies as critical for engaging with evolving state institutions.
- Argues business adaptation is a negotiated engagement with institutional pressures.
- Recommends dedicated capabilities for stakeholder management in complex environments.

Methodological Note

Qualitative study employing reflexive thematic analysis of 24 in-depth interviews with senior executives across diverse sectors.

Provides micro-level evidence of strategic responses to macro-institutional pressures.

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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