



**Investigating business strategies and practices of small to medium size legal firms to
survive in Durban, South Africa**

Nonduduzo Samukelisiwe Khanyile

202521096

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Business Administration**

Graduate School of Business and Leadership

College of Law and Management Studies

Supervisor: Prof MacDonald Kanyangale

2024

Declaration

I, Nonduduzo Samukelisiwe Khanyile, declare that:

- The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
- This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
 - a) Their words have been re-written, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.
 - b) Where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks and referenced.
 - c) Where I have reproduced a publication of which I am author, co-author or editor, I have indicated in detail which part of the publication was actually written by myself alone and have fully referenced such publications.
 - d) This thesis does not contain text, graphs or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the Reference sections.

Signed:

Nonduduzo Samukelisiwe Khanyile

Date

Acknowledgements

To God be the Glory. Without the ever-abundant Grace of God, I would not have been in the position to tackle this study. By Faith that carried me, I truly confirm that everything is possible for one who believes in God's mercies and Grace.

I would like to acknowledge support of the following people in my journey to complete this study:

- To my Supervisor, Prof MacDonald Kanyangale, for the unwavering support and guidance throughout the writing of this study. Sometimes it felt as if he was too strict and unfair with his comments, however, now I truly believe he wanted to get the best out of me and this study. His guidance, prompting and critique has led me to be the best version of myself. I would forever be grateful to him.
- To my husband Motlatsi Molefe, thank you for believing in me even at times when I did not believe I could do this. You remained my number one champion and cheerleader throughout. Words indeed fail me to express my gratitude. Kea leboha Tau.
- To my children, thank you for the support and understanding of not having an ever-present mother throughout this study. I hope that I have set a good example of tenacity that you will also pass to your children. Whatever one starts, one must finish.
- It would be remiss of me to not extend my heartfelt gratitude to my friends, family, my business partners for the support and understanding throughout this journey. To my colleagues, Legal Practice Council and Black Lawyers Association, thank you for opening your doors whenever I knocked and participating in this research. Without you, this project would not have succeeded.

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the business strategies and practices employed by small to medium-sized legal firms to survive in Durban, South Africa. Utilising a qualitative methodology, the study used purposive sampling to select participants in leadership or management positions within firms with fewer than 50 employees based in Durban

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders, owners, and managers of selected legal firms to gather in-depth insights into business level strategies and how their businesses were surviving in the markets. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

The research identified 6 themes which depict business level strategies used by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. The business strategies identified are: (1) operational efficiency through technology adoption, (2) client engagement and retention via personalised services and transparent pricing, (3) adaptation to market changes by diversifying into niche legal areas, (4) strategic marketing efforts, (5) developing specialised market segments and (6) collaboration and partnerships.

For small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban to survive, they need to invest in targeted training for both firm leaders and their employees, enhance technology adoption, focus on client-centric pricing strategies, strengthen knowledge-sharing and cross-functional collaboration, leverage partnerships, and foster a sustainability-oriented organisational culture to compete and survive in the market. These recommendations are pivotal if small to medium-sized legal firms are to overcome challenges, enhance resilience, and achieve sustainable growth. The exclusive focus on firm leaders and use of interview data only are limitations of this study. Overall, this research contributes valuable insights to the discourse on business level strategies of small to medium-sized legal firms to survive in the market.

Keywords: Business strategies, sustainability, client engagement, Durban, operational efficiency, small to medium-sized legal firms, South Africa, succession planning, technology adoption,

Table of contents

No	Content	Page No
	SUPERVISOR APPROVAL FORM.....	i
	DECLARATION.....	ii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
	ABSTRACT.....	iv
	List of tables.....	ix
	List of figures	x
	List of appendices.....	xi
	CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY.....	1
1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Background of the study.....	2
1.1.1	Diverse Legal Services.....	3
1.1.2	Regulatory Environment.....	4
1.1.3	Economic Impact.....	4
1.1.4	Challenges and Opportunities.....	5
1.1.5	Defining Small and Medium-sized Legal Firms in South Africa: Strategic Implications and Official Classification.....	6
1.2	Business strategies for small to medium legal firms.....	7
1.2.1	Defining the Concept of SMEs in South Africa.....	7
1.3	Problem statement.....	7
1.4	Research objectives.....	8
1.5	Research questions.....	9
1.6	Motivation of the study.....	9
1.7	Significance of the study.....	10
1.8	Delimitations of the study.....	11
1.9	Research Structure.....	12
1.10	Chapter Summary.....	13
	CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
2	INTRODUCTION.....	14
2.1	Understanding the origin and meaning of strategy.....	14

2.1.1	Definitions of Strategy.....	14
2.1.2	Characteristics of Strategy.....	16
2.1.3	5 PS of strategy.....	18
2.1.4	Levels of strategy.....	20
2.1.5	Understanding Business Strategy and its Origin.....	22
2.1.6	Porter’s Generic Strategies	22
2.1.7	Criticism of Porter’s Generic Strategies	24
2.1.8	Application of Porter’s Generic Strategies to small and medium sized enterprises	25
2.1.9	Business Strategies for services Vs. Products.....	25
2.1.9.1	Intangibility.....	26
2.1.9.2	Inseparability.....	26
2.1.9.3	Heterogeneity (Variability).....	26
2.1.9.4	Perishability	27
2.1.9.5	High Degree of Customer Interaction	27
2.1.10	Differentiation Strategy	27
2.1.11	Potential basis for differentiation in small and medium business.....	28
2.1.12	Client Engagement and Retention	29
2.1.13	Operation Efficiency.....	30
2.1.14	Digital Presence and Marketing.....	31
2.1.15	Strategic Partnership.....	32
2.1.16	Staff Development and Firm Culture	34
2.1.17	Implementation and Evaluation.....	35
2.2	Organisation architecture.....	36
2.2.1	Concept of Organisation Architecture.....	36
2.2.2	Strategy Alignment.....	37
2.2.3	McKinsey 7S Model.....	37
2.2.4	The Higgins 8S Model.....	41
2.2.5	Justification for Using the Higgins 8S Model	43
2.3	Past research on small and medium-sized legal firms.....	46
2.3.1	Competitive Strategies of SME Legal Firms in South Africa.....	46
2.3.2	Competitive Strategies of SME Legal Firms Outside South Africa.....	48
2.4	Chapter Summary.....	51

	CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	53
3	INTRODUCTION.....	53
3.1	Research Philosophy.....	53
3.2	Research Approach	55
3.3	Methodological Choice.....	56
3.3.1	Justification for the Mono Method Qualitative Choice	57
3.3.2	Application of the Mono Method Qualitative Design	58
3.4	Research Strategy	58
3.5	Time Horizon	58
3.6	Research Techniques and Procedures	59
3.6.1	Data Collection	59
3.6.1.1	Data collection through Interviews	61
3.6.1.2	Data collection through Structured interviews.....	61
3.6.1.3	Data collection through Unstructured Interviews.....	62
3.6.1.4	Data collection through Semi Structured Interviews.....	62
3.6.2	Data Analysis.....	63
3.7	Research design.....	65
3.8	Exploratory research design.....	66
3.9	Study Area.....	66
3.10	Target Population.....	67
3.11	Sampling.....	67
3.12	Pre-testing of the interview Guide.....	70
3.13	Validity.....	72
3.14	Reliability.....	73
3.15	Ethical Consideration.....	73
3.16	Chapter Summary.....	75
	CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	76
4	INTRODUCTION.....	76
4.1	Presentation of Findings.....	76
4.2	Themes on Sustainable Business Strategies and Practices Demonstrate by Legal Firms.....	76
4.2.1	Operational Efficiency.....	77
4.2.2	Client Engagement and Retention.....	79

4.2.3	Adaptation to Market Changes.....	82
4.2.4	Strategic Use of Marketing.....	84
4.2.5	Development of niche markets.....	85
4.3	To examine the nature of challenges experienced by leaders and owner-managers of small to medium sized legal firms in implementing long-term survival strategies in Durban.....	86
4.3.1	Increased Competition.....	87
4.3.2	Client Cost Sensitivity.....	89
4.3.3	Limited Resources for Investing in New Technology and Training.....	91
4.3.4	Overregulation of Practice.....	94
4.4	Recommended strategies in mitigating the challenges experienced by small to medium legal firms.....	95
4.5	Chapter Summary.....	97
	CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	99
5	INTRODUCTION.....	99
5.1	Summary of findings.....	99
5.2	Business strategies and practices in relation to existing literature.....	100
5.2.1	Operational Efficiency.....	100
5.2.2	Client Engagement and Retention.....	101
5.2.3	Adaptation to Market Changes.....	102
5.2.4	Strategic Use of Marketing.....	103
5.2.5	Development of Niche Markets.....	105
5.3	Challenges faced by legal firms.....	106
5.3.1	Increased Competition.....	106
5.3.2	Client Cost Sensitivity.....	107
5.3.3	Limited Resources for Technology and Training.....	108
5.3.4	Role of Strategic Partnership in Mitigating Challenges for Small to Medium Legal Firms	108
5.3.5	Partnerships with Legal Professionals and Businesses.....	109
5.3.6	Community Engagement.....	109
5.4	Chapter Summary.....	110
	CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS.....	111
6	INTRODUCTION.....	111

6.1	Realisation of Objectives.....	112
6.2	Limitation of study.....	114
6.2.1	Enhance Succession Planning.....	115
6.2.2	Invest in Targeted Training and Technology Adoption.....	116
6.2.3	Develop Client-Centric Pricing Strategies.....	117
6.2.4	Strengthen Knowledge Sharing and Cross-Functional Collaboration.....	118
6.2.5	Leverage Partnerships and Collaborations.....	118
6.3	Contribution to knowledge.....	119
6.4	Areas for Future Research.....	120
6.5	Chapter Summary.....	120
7	Bibliography.....	121
	Appendix 1 : Ethical Clearance.....	134
	Appendix 2 : Gatekeeper’s Letter.....	135
	Appendix 3 : Introductory letter.....	137
	Appendix 4 : Informed consent.....	138
	Appendix 5 : Interview Schedule.....	142
	Appendix 6 : Turnitin Report.....	144

List of Tables

No		Page No
1	Classification of Small and Medium Enterprises in the Business Services Sector.....	7
2	Selected definitions of Strategy by Various Scholars.....	15
3	Hard and Soft Elements of the McKinsey 7-S Framework	39
4	Elements and definitions in the Higgins (2005) 8S Model	42
5	Overview of the status of law firms in Durban from 2019 to 2024 illustrating the trends in firm’s longevity and closures.....	69
6	Description of participants in this study.....	70
7	Themes on strategic Business Practices Demonstrated by Legal Firms....	77
8	Three challenges faced by small to medium sized legal firms in implementing long survival strategies in Durban	86
9	Role of Collaboration and Partnerships within SME’s.....	95
10	Summary of Findings.....	100

List of Figures

No		Page No
1	Key characteristics of strategy.....	16
2	5 PS of strategy.....	18
3	Levels of strategy.....	21
4	Porter's Generic Strategies.....	23
5	McKinsey 7S Model.....	38
6	The Higgins 8S Model of Strategy.....	44
7	The Research Onion.....	55

List of Appendices

No		Page No
Appendix 1	Ethical Clearance	134
Appendix 2	Gatekeeper's Letter	135
Appendix 3	Introductory letter	137
Appendix 4	Informed consent	138
Appendix 5	Interview Schedule	142
Appendix 6	Turnitin Report	144

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

1. INTRODUCTION

In many countries including South Africa, leaders and owner-managers of small to medium legal firms require a solid business level strategy before survival and growth in the highly competitive legal industry. From the business point of view, lawyers can distinguish themselves in the highly competitive legal industry in many ways, by understanding the competitive landscape, identifying target clients and markets, and developing a unique value proposition (Ngwenya, 2022). Implementing a marketing and branding strategy and effectively monitoring and adapting strategy to compete in a dynamic market, is pivotal to ensure long-term survival of small and medium size legal firms. Strategy scholars are clear that most strategy research addresses the strategy-performance relationship and some kind of performance outcome (Nsibande and Boshoff, 2017; van Scheers and Makhitha (2016).

However, there is very limited knowledge of how leaders and owner-managers of small and medium-sized legal firms make and execute business level strategies to compete in the market. It is important to note that strategy is not the panacea, it may not only fail to promote effective competition but also impede smaller firms from competing effectively against larger firms. Business level strategy is also key to influence how digital tools are being leveraged to extend market reach and operational efficiency in order to survive (Barker, 1990; Beesley, 1998). Reuters (2022) stated that legal firms of all sizes and across all practice areas face several challenges, including business development, meeting increasing client expectations managing price sensitivity, intensifying competition, technological advancements, and budget and resource constraints.

The strategy and process of expanding revenue streams by identifying and acting on strategic opportunities, such as building client relationships and strategic partnerships or expanding the practice areas and legal services of the firm in a competitive legal market, are key for the survival of a legal firm (Smith & Brown, 2023) Commonly, business strategy is crucial to inform leaders and owner- managers on how to win new work from new and existing clients, maximise referrals from contacts outside the firm, and explore other practice areas to drive growth (Moyo & Patel, 2022) However, the key question in terms of strategy in the law firm is what constitutes business strategy? From the competitive perspective, who is responsible for competitive and business development activities in a legal firm? How does marketing fit into

the legal firm? In South Africa, it is noteworthy that the rules relating to marketing law firms have been relaxed in the last decade. Legal technology has advanced and online consultations have increased in South Africa (Mupangavanhu & Kerchhoff, 2023). As with many industries, the legal field is shifting towards digitisation. Modern clients expect convenience and law firms adapting to these changes are ahead of the curve. More importantly, the digital era is opening up digital opportunities for law firms to capture the attention of a broader audience and achieve unparalleled success (Caserta, 2020). However, some rural areas in South Africa still lack consistent internet access. This bifurcation can impact the effectiveness of purely digital strategies (Statistics South Africa, 2023)

A well-developed strategy to ensure business development and marketing is needed, to generate a consistent flow of client revenue from both new and existing clients. This is critical for profitability and sustainable operations of both small independent practices and large global law firms.

In South Africa, small to medium-sized legal firms face a complex array of challenges (e.g. maintaining cash flow, retaining and growing a client base, keeping up to date with frequently changing legislation) as well as opportunities (e.g. expanding niche legal services, leveraging digital technology for client engagement, building strategic partnerships with other small firms and expanding outreach through online marketing). These challenges and opportunities stem from South Africa's unique operational context (Manyathi-Jele, 2015). The objective of this exploratory qualitative study is to examine the various strategies that small to medium-size legal firms in Durban, South Africa employ to navigate and survive in a dynamic and competitive environment. The urgency for these firms to adapt their businesses is not merely a function of staying competitive but is also driven by rapid changes in legislation and client expectations, which directly impact the feasibility and effectiveness of their services (Carrim & Singh, 1998; Beesley, 1998 and McKinsey & Company, 2023).

1.1. Background of the study

The legal industry in Durban is a significant component of the city's economic landscape, characterised by a vibrant mix of large multinational firms and smaller, specialised practices. This diversity in firm size and specialty allows the legal sector in Durban to offer a wide range of services, including maritime law, which is particularly relevant given Durban's status as a major port city (International Bar Association, 2020). The legal framework within which these

firms operate is influenced by both Roman-Dutch law and English common law, providing a unique regulatory environment for legal professionals (Chambers Global, 2023).

The strategic importance of the legal sector is further highlighted by its role in supporting not only local, but also national economic activities. Small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban contribute to the economy by facilitating business operations, ensuring compliance with South African laws, and driving employment (UNCTAD, 2024). Additionally, the sector faces challenges such as adapting to rapid technological changes and the need for increased diversity within the profession (OECD/ITF, 2014). However, these challenges also present opportunities for growth and innovation, particularly in emerging areas such as cyber, intellectual property, and environmental law (Chambers Global, 2023).

Moreover, Durban's legal industry must navigate the ongoing changes in the global legal market, where issues such as data protection and cybersecurity have become increasingly significant. The rise of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations is reshaping how businesses operate, and, by extension, how legal services are provided. Legal firms are increasingly expected to integrate these factors into their corporate decision-making processes (Legal 500, 2023).

Overall, the legal industry in Durban is well-positioned to adapt to these evolving demands, leveraging its strategic advantages to maintain and enhance its market position (Legal 500, 2023). The ongoing reforms in areas like ESG and cybersecurity are indicative of a sector that is dynamic and responsive to both local and global developments.

1.1.1. Diverse Legal Services

Durban's legal industry offers a wide array of services that cater for both local and international needs, reflecting the city's status as a major port and economic hub (UNCTAD, 2024). The legal services provided range from traditional areas such as family and criminal law to highly specialised sectors like maritime and environmental law. This specialisation is driven by the demands of Durban's port-related activities, which require expertise in maritime regulations, international trade, and shipping law (Chambers Global, 2023). Furthermore, as businesses in Durban continue to expand their global reach, there is an increasing demand for legal expertise in areas such as intellectual property, corporate finance, and cross-border litigation, ensuring that local firms must either expand their expertise or collaborate strategically to meet these complex demands (OECD/ITF, 2014).

Moreover, the legal landscape in Durban is enriched by its role in addressing significant economic and social issues, such as labour disputes and public law (International Bar Association, 2020). The small to medium legal firms in the city are thus not only involved in business and commercial dealings but also play a crucial role in social justice, providing services that range from pro bono work supporting underprivileged communities to high-profile cases that shape public policy (Legal 500, 2023). This dual focus on both commercial gain and social impact positions Durban's legal services as diverse and integral to the fabric of its societal structure, underscoring the need for legal practitioners to be adaptable and well-versed in a variety of legal disciplines, to effectively serve this dynamic community.

1.1.2. Regulatory Environment

The regulatory environment of the legal industry in Durban reflects the broader legislative and socio-economic landscape of South Africa. Influenced by a mix of Roman-Dutch and British Common Law, the legal framework requires firms to navigate complex legal doctrines and regulations that are continuously evolving to meet both local and international standards (World Bank, 2018). These adaptations often reflect broader changes in the legal system, such as the increasing focus on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors, which necessitate updates in corporate and environmental law (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2016)

Moreover, as part of its commitment to sustainable development, South Africa is seeing a significant legal pivot towards renewable energy, with new regulations aimed at promoting this sector (Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, 2021). The legal strategies include frameworks for increasing the use of renewable energies within the energy mix, indicative of a trend towards environmentally sustainable legal practices. This shift is part of a broader regulatory trend that also addresses the need for legal systems to support economic growth while ensuring environmental sustainability (Lyster & Bradbrook, 2024).

1.1.3. Economic Impact

The legal sector in Durban significantly contributes to the local economy by fostering a robust business environment and enabling commercial transactions. Small to Medium-sized legal firms in Durban play a vital role in facilitating international trade, especially due to the city's status as a major port hub (Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, 2021). Their involvement in maritime law, trade regulations, and corporate law ensures that local and international businesses operate smoothly and comply with applicable laws (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2016). Furthermore, legal services help in attracting foreign direct

investment, as investors seek legal expertise to navigate the regulatory landscape of South Africa. This economic activity not only boosts local business but also creates numerous jobs, ranging from legal professionals to administrative and support roles within law firms (World Bank, 2018).

Additionally, the legal industry's role extends beyond direct economic contributions; it also has a significant impact on societal development through its involvement in social justice and public policy issues (Lyster & Bradbrook, 2024). By addressing disputes, enforcing contracts, and ensuring justice, the legal sector helps maintain social order and promotes a business-friendly environment that is crucial for economic growth. This dual role of supporting both commerce and justice underscores the indispensable nature of legal services in Durban's socio-economic landscape. The strategic importance of these services amplifies their impact on both the immediate and long-term economic and social development of the region (Chambers Global, 2023).

1.1.4. Challenges and Opportunities

The legal industry in Durban faces several challenges, yet these also present significant opportunities for growth and innovation. One of the primary challenges is the need for legal firms to adapt to the rapid advancements in technology (Deloitte, 2021). As legal technologies evolve, firms in Durban must invest in and embrace these innovations to enhance efficiency and service quality. This adaptation requires not only financial investment but also a shift in traditional practices to incorporate digital workflows and virtual operations (De Rebus, 2020).

Concurrently, the opportunities arising from these challenges are considerable. The move towards digitalisation opens new avenues for service delivery, such as remote legal consultation and automated document processing, which can expand the reach of legal services to underserved populations (Legal Aid South Africa, 2019). Additionally, there is a growing demand for specialised legal expertise in areas such as cybersecurity, data protection, and environmental law, driven by global regulatory trends and local demands. This specialisation can enable firms to distinguish themselves in a competitive market and cater to niche sectors that are becoming increasingly relevant (Clio, 2023).

These shifts highlight the dynamic nature of the legal landscape in Durban, reflecting a sector that is both challenged and invigorated by the pace of change. To remain competitive and responsive, Small to Medium-sized legal firms will need to strategically harness these opportunities and navigate the challenges with innovative solutions.

1.1.5. Defining Small and Medium-Sized Legal Firms in South Africa: Strategic Implications and Official Classification

It is crucial to understand that the size of a legal firm has implications not only for how it addresses challenges in the legal sector but also for how it shapes its long-term direction. This encompasses determining which markets to compete in and what activities to pursue within those markets (scope), figuring out how the business can perform better than its competitors (advantage), identifying the resources required, considering external factors that affect the firm's ability to compete (environment), and acknowledging the values and expectations of powerful stakeholders within and around the business

For the purpose of this study, the focus is on small and medium-sized legal firms. Defining the enterprise size is essential to accurately categorise these firms and tailor strategies that suit their specific needs. We use the definition provided by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) because it is the official standard for classifying enterprises in South Africa. Utilising this definition ensures alignment with national policies, facilitates comparability with other studies and statistical data, and allows the findings to be relevant for policy implementation and support programs designed for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The National Small Enterprise Act No. 102 of 1996, as amended by Act No. 29 of 2004, provides the official definitions for micro, very small, small, and medium enterprises in South Africa. This classification is based on three key criteria: the number of employees, annual turnover, and total gross asset value (excluding fixed property). By utilising these criteria, the Act establishes a standardised framework for categorising enterprises, which is essential for policy implementation, resource allocation, and designing support programs tailored to the needs of small and medium-sized businesses. This definition is particularly relevant for this study's focus on small and medium-sized legal firms, as it ensures consistency with national standards and aids in accurately analysing the challenges and opportunities these firms face within the legal sector

Table 1: Classification of Small and Medium Enterprises in the Business Services Sector

Enterprise Size	Number of Employees	Annual Turnover (ZAR)	Total Gross Asset Value (ZAR)
Micro	0 – 5	≤ R0.15 million	≤ R0.10 million
Very Small	6 – 20	≤ R3 million	≤ R0.50 million
Small	21 – 50	≤ R13 million	≤ R3 million
Medium	51 – 200	≤ R51 million	≤ R18 million

Source: National Small Enterprise Amendment Act No. 29 of 2004

1.2. Business strategies for small to medium-sized legal firms

In the competitive landscape of the legal industry, small to medium-sized legal firms face unique challenges that require strategic planning to ensure survival and growth. Developing effective business strategies is crucial for these firms to distinguish themselves, attract and retain clients, and compete with larger firms.

1.2.1. Defining the Concept of SMEs in South Africa

To understand business strategies in the context of small to medium-sized legal firms, it is crucial to first define what constitutes an SME in South Africa. According to the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC), SMEs are classified based on the number of employees, annual turnover, and total assets. Typically, small enterprises in South Africa have fewer than 50 employees, while medium enterprises have up to 200 employees (DTIC, 2021). The classification also considers the industry in which the business operates, with different thresholds for sectors like manufacturing, services, and retail (Cant et al., 2014).

In this exploratory research, one will use the DTIC's definition as it provides a comprehensive framework that is widely accepted in the South African context (Abor & Quartey, 2010). This classification will help us understand the specific challenges and opportunities faced by legal firms within this category.

1.3. Problem statement

Despite the critical role that small to medium-sized legal firms play in Durban's legal sector, there is a noticeable gap in the existing research regarding the business strategies and practices that these firms employ to survive and thrive in a highly competitive environment (Mason & Leek, 2012). Durban's legal market is characterised by intense competition, rapidly evolving client expectations, and significant regulatory changes, all of which pose substantial challenges

to smaller legal firms, most of which are plagued with limited resources (Cant, Wiid, & Sephapo, 2016). Existing studies tend to focus on larger firms or generalise strategies across different sectors, leaving a significant gap in understanding the specific needs and strategic approaches of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban (Cant, Wiid, & Sephapo, 2016; Mason & Leek, 2012).

The lack of tailored research is problematic because these firms are essential to the local economy, providing accessible legal services and contributing to the legal profession's diversity. Without a clear understanding of the strategies that enable these firms to navigate their unique challenges and survive, there is a risk that they may struggle to maintain their competitiveness, leading to a decline in service quality and reduced legal access for the broader community. Therefore, this exploratory qualitative study seeks to address this research gap, by investigating the business strategies and practices that small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban employ to ensure their survival and success in a dynamic and challenging environment. This research will provide valuable insights into the strategic management of these firms, contributing to the broader discourse on sustainable business strategy practices in the legal sector in Durban, South Africa (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016; Creswell, 2013). Many of the owners of small and medium size legal firms who do not have any business background, are likely to get business strategy insights valuable for the survival of their legal firms not only in Durban, but also in similar contexts in South Africa.

1.4. Research objectives

The main objective of this exploratory qualitative study is to explore business strategies and practices of small to medium-size legal firms in Durban, South Africa to survive.

The specific research objectives of the exploratory qualitative study are:

1. To identify business strategies and practices used by leaders and owner-managers of small and medium legal firms in Durban to survive and more specifically, how these strategies and practices enhance operational efficiency through technology adoption.
2. To examine the nature of challenges experienced by leaders and owner-managers of small to medium-sized legal firms in implementing long-term survival strategies in Durban including client management, retention via personalised services, transparent pricing and adaption to market changes through diversification into various legal areas and sectors

3. To identify and recommend strategies which can be adopted by leaders and owner-managers to assist in mitigating challenges experienced by small to medium legal firms in Durban including assessing the effectiveness of their strategic marketing efforts in driving business growth, identification of the role of development of specialised market segments, collaboration and partnerships and competitive positioning in supporting long-term strategies.

1.5. Research questions

Aligned with the research objectives, the following research questions have been formulated to guide this study:

1. What business strategies and practices are leaders and owner-managers of small to medium legal firms in Durban using to survive?
2. What are the challenges experienced by leaders and owner-managers of the small to medium legal firms in implementing long-term survival strategies in Durban?
3. What strategies could be adopted by leaders and owner-managers to assist in mitigating the challenges experienced by small to medium legal firms in Durban?

These questions aim to explore the current practices, identify the obstacles faced, and propose potential solutions for small and medium-sized legal firms in Durban to enhance their sustainability and competitiveness.

1.6. Motivation of the study

This exploratory study is motivated by three critical factors that highlight the importance of investigating the business strategies and practices of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, South Africa. Firstly, there is a significant research gap in understanding the unique challenges and competitive strategies employed by these legal firms to remain competitive and sustainable. While existing literature often focuses on larger legal entities or general business strategies across various sectors, there is a lack of specific, qualitative research dedicated to the small to medium-sized legal firms operating within the dynamic and competitive legal environment of Durban. This exploratory study seeks to fill this gap by providing a detailed exploration of the business level strategies these firms employ, offering insights that can help leaders and owner managers of small to medium-sized legal firms navigate the challenges posed by market competition, evolving client expectations, and regulatory changes.

Secondly, the exploratory study is driven by an interest in understanding how small to medium-sized legal firms adapt their business practices to ensure survival and growth in a competitive environment. As alluded to earlier on, legal firms in Durban face numerous challenges, including limited resources, the need to maintain high service quality, and the pressures of complying with changing regulations. By exploring the specific strategies these firms use, this study contributes valuable insights on strategy knowledge and a variety of business practices that can support the survival and growth of small to medium-sized legal firms, as key players serving in the legal sector in Durban and beyond.

Lastly, the researcher's professional background and experience in the legal field have sparked a personal interest in examining the strategic management practices of small to medium-sized legal firms. The complex nature of the legal industry, coupled with the researcher's firsthand understanding of the operational challenges faced by these firms, has inspired a deeper exploration of how they can achieve long-term survival. This exploratory study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategies that contribute to the success of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, thereby offering practical recommendations that can be applied by legal practitioners and policymakers alike.

1.7. Significance of the study

This exploratory study is significant to leaders and owner managers of small and medium-sized legal firms, and scholars of business strategy in various ways.

Firstly, the exploratory study offers valuable insights to leaders and owner-managers of small and medium sized legal firms regarding the nature and variety of business level strategies that such legal firms use to navigate the competitive legal environment and survive in Durban. As many small and medium-sized business die in the first few years in South Africa, the findings of this exploratory study are key in offering and identifying challenges but also providing recommendations to guide current and future legal practitioners in making informed decisions that enhance their firms' sustainability and growth. The study provides practical recommendations on how these firms can adapt their business practices, which is crucial for maintaining competitiveness and ensuring long-term success in a dynamic market.

Secondly, this study is also valuable to students of law who may seek to open their own small and medium legal firms, as it brings forth the business and entrepreneurial side of practising

law. By focusing on the strategic management practices that contribute to the success of these firms, the research highlights the importance of tailored business strategies that align with the specific needs and circumstances of smaller legal entities. The findings will help prospective owner-managers of legal firms to understand the critical factors that influence their firms' survival and will offer actionable insights that can be applied to improve operational efficiency, client retention, and overall business performance.

Lastly, this exploratory study will contribute to the academic literature on business strategy and management within the legal sector in Durban, particularly in the context of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The research expands the existing knowledge base by exploring the intersection of business strategy, legal practice, and SME operations, offering a new perspective that integrates these areas. Scholars studying business strategies in the legal sector, especially in emerging markets, will find this study valuable as it provides empirical data and theoretical insights that can inform future research and contribute to a deeper understanding of how small to medium-sized legal firms can survive and thrive in competitive environment.

1.8.Delimitations of the study

The delimitations of this exploratory study focus on three key aspects. The first aspect is that this study is qualitative and exploratory in nature, concentrating on the perspectives of key leaders and owner- managers of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, South Africa. In this way, the study deliberately excludes those people working in these firms, but are not the owners. The study does not include other employees or stakeholders who are not directly involved in the strategic processes, as their perspectives may not align with the core objectives of the research. By narrowing the focus to strategic decision-makers, the study aims to capture the most relevant insights into the business strategies that influence the survival and success of these firms.

It is possible that future research may include employees, to get their views on business strategies employed by this type of business to survive and thrive in a competitive landscape.

The second delimitation pertains to the geographic focus of the exploratory study. While there are numerous legal firms across South Africa, this exploratory study is confined to those operating within the city of Durban. Durban has been selected due to its dynamic legal market, which presents unique challenges and opportunities for small to medium-sized legal firms. By

focusing on Durban, the study seeks to provide insights that are particularly relevant to legal practices within this specific urban context.

The third delimitation relates to the business size. This research focuses exclusively on small and medium- sized legal firms, deliberately excluding large and multinational legal firms.

1.9. Research Structure

This exploratory study consists of six chapters, which are as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This chapter introduces the research and provides a comprehensive overview of how the study will be conducted. It includes the study's background, problem statement, research questions, and objectives. Additionally, motivation, significance and delimitation of the study are discussed in this introductory chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the relevant literature for the study, defining key concepts related to business strategies and practices of small to medium-sized legal firms. It begins by discussing the concept and types of competitive strategies as proposed by Porter (1980), providing insight into how legal SMEs position themselves in a competitive market. Following this, the chapter focuses on organisational architecture, examining existing research and theories that inform the study. This offers a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework that underpins the research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the study. It provides a detailed description of the research design, the qualitative approach, and the specific instruments for data collection, including semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. The chapter also discusses the methods of data analysis, issues of research quality and ethics relevant to this exploratory study.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

This chapter presents the key findings of the study, focusing on the business strategies employed by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. It highlights the results derived from data analysis, emphasising how these firms adopt competitive strategies as per Porter's

(1980) framework supported by other writers such as Higgins (2005). The study found that these firms primarily utilise cost leadership, differentiation, and focus strategies, while also facing challenges such as limited resources and market saturation. These findings form the basis for the subsequent discussion and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

This chapter offers an in-depth discussion of the findings in relation to the existing literature and theoretical framework. It explores the implications of the results, examining how the findings contribute to the understanding of the business strategies and practices that enable small and medium-sized legal firms to survive and thrive in a competitive environment.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter concludes the research by summarising the key findings and providing a recap of the chapters. It offers recommendations based on the study's insights, which can be used to address the challenges faced by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. The chapter also suggests areas for future research to build on the study's findings.

1.10. Chapter Summary

This exploratory qualitative study examines the business strategies and practices that small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, South Africa, employ to survive and thrive in a highly competitive environment. Chapter 1 established the foundation by highlighting the critical role these firms play in the local legal sector and economy, despite facing unique challenges such as intense competition, evolving client expectations, limited resources, and significant regulatory changes. The chapter outlined the research problem, objectives, and questions, emphasising the noticeable gap in existing research concerning the strategic management practices of these smaller firms. It also detailed the motivation and significance of the study, as well as its delimitations and sets the stage for a focused exploration of how these firms navigate their complex operational landscape.

Concluding the chapter, the research structure was presented, providing a roadmap for the subsequent sections of the study. As the study transitions into Chapter 2: Literature Review, the next chapter will delve into existing theories and research related to business strategies and practices of small to medium-sized legal firms. This comprehensive review will establish the theoretical framework necessary to contextualise the findings and discussions in the later chapters, ensuring a cohesive and informed progression of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to review relevant literature on the concept of strategy in general and the business strategies employed by small to medium-sized legal firms particularly in Durban, focusing on how these firms navigate the challenges of a dynamic and competitive legal industry. The aim is to investigate the strategies these firms use to adapt to rapid legislative changes and evolving client expectations, ensuring their competitiveness and operational efficiency. The chapter begins by discussing the concept of strategy, including its origins and various definitions, to provide a foundation for understanding the strategic approaches relevant to small and medium-sized firms. It then examines the competitive nature of the legal sector, highlighting the importance of aligning with legislative changes and incorporating market research into strategic planning. Additionally, the chapter explores how these firms blend traditional marketing methods with innovative technologies to enhance client engagement and service delivery. Finally, the review considers the broader economic contributions of these firms, including job creation and local economic growth, while assessing the potential for growth and innovation within the sector.

2.1. Understanding the origin and meaning of strategy

The concept of strategy has deep historical roots, emerging from military contexts and evolving into a critical component of business and organisational theory. Historically, strategy originates from the Greek word "strategos," meaning the art of the general, reflecting its initial association with military planning and the orchestration of resources to achieve victory in war (Chandler, 1962). Over time, this military concept was adapted to business and management, where strategy became associated with long-term planning, resource allocation, and the pursuit of competitive advantage in a complex environment.

2.1.1. Definitions of Strategy

Understanding the concept of strategy is crucial for leaders and owner-managers of small and medium-sized legal firms as they navigate competitive environments. Strategy has been defined in various ways by different scholars, each offering a unique perspective that can inform business practices. The following table 2 provides a summary of selected definitions of

strategy from prominent scholars, illustrating its multidimensional nature and how it has evolved over time.

Table 2: Selected definitions of Strategy by Various Scholars

Scholar	Year	Definition of Strategy
Peter Drucker	1954	"Strategy is a firm's theory about how to compete successfully."
Michael Porter	1985	the creation of a unique and valuable position, involving a different set of activities" that enables a firm to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.
Richard Whittington, Patrick Regnér, Duncan Angwin, Gerry Johnson, Kevan Scholes	2017	Business strategy is about how to compete in a marketplace so that a restaurant for instance must decide a range of issues such as menus, décor, and prices in the light of local competition from other restaurants.
Richard Whittington Patrick Regnér Duncan Angwin Gerry Johnson Kevan Scholes	2020	Strategy encompasses the growth, success, and potential setbacks of various organisations, including multinational corporations, start-ups, charities, government bodies, and more. It addresses critical questions about how these entities expand, innovate, and adapt to change. Consequently, business leaders play an essential role in designing, implementing, and communicating these strategic approaches.

Researcher's own table, 2024

For this exploratory study, the definition of strategy chosen is that of Porter (1985), which emphasises the creation of a sustainable competitive advantage through unique activities. This definition is particularly relevant for small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, as it underscores the need to differentiate themselves in a competitive market by adopting strategies that are not only effective but also sustainable in the long term. The focus on competitive advantage aligns with the challenges these firms face, such as limited resources and the need to respond swiftly to changes in legislation and client expectations.

2.1.2. Characteristics of Strategy

Understanding the fundamental characteristics of strategy is essential for leaders and owner-managers of small and medium-sized legal firms. These characteristics collectively shape the strategic direction of a firm and are crucial for developing and implementing strategies that address immediate challenges while positioning the firm for sustainable success in a competitive environment.

Figure 1 highlights the various ways in which the concept of strategy has evolved, reflecting the diverse, interconnected elements that guide strategic direction. Understanding these definitions can help leaders and owner-managers of small and medium-sized legal firms navigate complexities, make informed strategic decisions, and create sustainable value in their respective markets.

Key characteristics of strategy include:

- i. Long-term Orientation: Strategy is primarily concerned with the long-term direction of an organisation. It involves setting objectives that may take years to achieve and requires a forward-looking perspective to ensure sustainable growth (Grant, 2016).

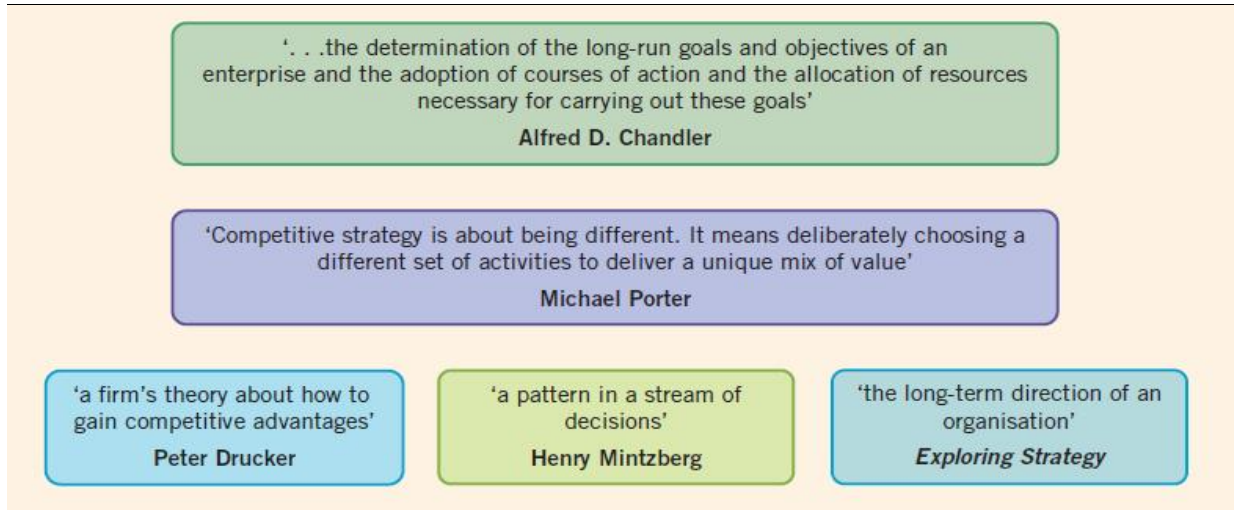


Figure 1: Key characteristics of strategy

(Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin, & Regnér, 2017, p10)

- ii. Resource Allocation: Effective strategy necessitates the strategic allocation of an organisation's resources, including financial, human, and technological assets, to achieve competitive advantage and organisational goals (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2017).

- iii. **Competitive Advantage:** A fundamental aim of strategy is to create and sustain a competitive advantage. This involves leveraging unique capabilities, market positioning, and innovation to outperform competitors and achieve superior performance (Barney & Hesterly, 2015).
- iv. **Adaptability and Flexibility:** In today's dynamic environment, strategies must be adaptable to change. Organisations need to be flexible enough to adjust their strategies in response to shifts in market conditions, technological advancements, and evolving customer needs (Teece, 2018).
- v. **Guidance for Decision-Making:** Strategy serves as a critical framework for decision-making across all levels of the organisation. It provides direction and coherence, ensuring that decisions are aligned with the overall goals and objectives of the organisation (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2017).
- vi. **Integration Across Functions:** A well-formulated strategy integrates various functions of the organisation, such as marketing, operations, and finance, ensuring that all parts work together towards the achievement of common goals (Clegg, Carter, Kornberger, & Schweitzer, 2016).
- vii. **Focus on External and Internal Environments:** Strategy formulation involves a thorough analysis of both the internal capabilities of the organisation and the external environment in which it operates. This analysis helps in identifying opportunities and threats, as well as strengths and weaknesses (Rothaermel, 2019).
- viii. **Proactive and Reactive Elements:** While strategy involves proactive planning, it also requires the ability to react and adapt to unforeseen challenges and opportunities. This dual approach allows organisations to be both prepared and responsive (Hill, Jones, & Schilling, 2016).
- ix. **Complexity and Uncertainty:** Strategic decisions often involve navigating through complexity and uncertainty. Effective strategy requires managing these complexities while making informed decisions that consider potential risks and future scenarios (De Wit & Meyer, 2017).
- x. **Strategic Fit:** Successful strategy depends on achieving a strategic fit between the organisation's internal capabilities and the external environment. This alignment ensures that the organisation's strengths are leveraged in ways that capitalise on external opportunities (Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, & Bamford, 2018).

These characteristics highlight the essential elements that define strategy as a crucial process for guiding organisations in a complex and competitive landscape.

2.1.3. 5 P's of strategy

The concept of the "5 P's of Strategy" was introduced by Henry Mintzberg (1987), a renowned management scholar, to provide a comprehensive understanding of what strategy entails. This framework presents five different perspectives—Plan, Ploy, Pattern, Position, and Perspective—that offer various ways to think about and implement strategy within organisations. By exploring these dimensions, leaders and managers can develop a more nuanced approach to strategic management.

Figure 3 below illustrates the 5 P's of Strategy, highlighting each component and its role in the strategic process. This figure serves to visually summarise Mintzberg's framework, making it easier for readers to grasp how each 'P' contributes to a holistic understanding of strategy.



Figure 2 : 5 P's of strategy

Source: Adapted from Mintzberg (1987, p11) and Prahalad & Hamel (1990, p12).

Plan: According to Ansoff (1965), planning is essential for the alignment of organisational resources with external opportunities, ensuring a structured approach to achieving long-term objectives. Strategy as a plan is the most traditional and widely recognised form of strategy. It refers to a deliberate course of action intended to achieve a set of objectives. A strategy as a plan involves setting goals and then developing a sequence of steps or actions to achieve those goals. It is a consciously intended course of action, crafted before any action is taken. This perspective emphasises the importance of foresight and preparation in the strategic process (Mintzberg, 1987).

Ploy: A strategy can also be viewed as a ploy, which is a specific manoeuvre intended to outwit or trick competitors. This perspective highlights the competitive nature of strategy, where organisations may take deliberate actions to mislead or disrupt the competition. A ploy might be a short-term action designed to gain an advantage, such as a bluff, a deceptive tactic, or a strategic move intended to prevent competitors from entering a market (Mintzberg, 1987). Rumelt (2011) adds that strategic ploys often involve exploiting weaknesses in competitors' positions, creating opportunities to gain a competitive edge.

Pattern: According to Pettigrew (1992), understanding the patterns in strategic behaviour helps in deciphering the long-term strategic orientation of an organisation, even in the absence of formal plans. Strategy as a pattern focuses on consistency in behaviour over time. Instead of being a planned or deliberate approach, strategy as a pattern emerges from the organisation's past actions and behaviours. This perspective recognises that strategy can be realised as a pattern of behaviour that emerges over time, even if it was not explicitly planned. In other words, strategies can sometimes be identified by looking at the patterns of decisions and actions that an organisation consistently follows (Mintzberg, 1987).

Position: According to Barney (1991), the organisation's resources and capabilities play a crucial role in determining its strategic position in the market, influencing its ability to sustain a competitive advantage. Strategy as a position refers to the way an organisation positions itself in the marketplace or within its environment. This perspective focuses on the external context of the organisation and how it chooses to position itself relative to competitors, customers, and other stakeholders. The positioning strategy involves finding a niche or a competitive space in the market where the organisation can effectively compete and serve its target audience (Porter, 1980).

Perspective: Strategy as a perspective involves looking at strategy from a broader, more abstract viewpoint. It is about the ingrained way of perceiving the world and the organisation's role in it. This perspective encompasses the shared values, culture, and mindset within the organisation that shapes how strategies are conceived and implemented. It is about the collective way of seeing the organisation and its environment, which influences how strategic decisions are made (Mintzberg, 1987). According to Prahalad and Hamel (1990), the core competencies of an organisation, which are deeply embedded in its culture and practices, form the foundation of its strategic perspective.

To illustrate the role of 'Perspective' in strategy formulation, Figure 3 below presents the interaction between organisational culture, core competencies, and strategic decision-making. This figure serves to highlight how deeply ingrained values and beliefs influence the way strategies are developed and implemented within an organisation.

2.1.4. Levels of strategy

In the strategic management of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, understanding the different levels of strategy is essential for aligning their operations with broader business objectives. The three primary levels of strategy—corporate, business, and functional provide a structured approach for these firms to manage their resources, market positioning, and operational effectiveness

Corporate-Level Strategy: According to Hill, Jones, and Schilling (2020), the ability to respond swiftly to industry changes and to realign corporate strategies accordingly is crucial for sustaining long-term growth. Corporate-level strategy is concerned with the overall scope and direction of the firm. For small to medium-sized legal firms, this level of strategy involves decisions about the firm's growth, diversification, and the markets or geographical areas in which it operates (Grant, 2016). Grant (2016) emphasised the importance of adaptability in corporate strategy, particularly in response to external changes such as new regulations or shifts in client expectations.

Business-Level Strategy: Business-level strategy focuses on how the firm competes in its chosen market. Business-level strategies are critical for establishing a firm's competitive advantage and can determine its success in a crowded market (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2017). Hitt, Ireland, and Hoskisson (2017) insist that organisations must continuously analyse their market position and adjust their strategies to meet client needs effectively and efficiently. More recent studies, such as those by Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2019), suggest that

business-level strategies must also integrate digital innovation and client-centric approaches to remain competitive.

Functional-Level Strategy: Functional-level strategy pertains to the specific functions within the firm, such as marketing, human resources, finance, and operations. According to David and David (2016), in small to medium-sized legal firms, this level of strategy involves optimising these functions to support the broader business and corporate strategies. Additionally, Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, and Bamford (2018) argue that functional strategies should be agile and responsive to technological advancements and changing client demands, ensuring alignment with overall strategic goals. To visualise these concepts, Figure 4 below illustrates the hierarchy of these strategic levels and how they interconnect within an organisation, highlighting the flow from corporate decisions to functional implementations.



Figure 3 illustrates the hierarchy of these strategic levels and how they interconnect within an organisation.

Source: Adapted from Grant (2016, p16).

By understanding and applying these levels of strategy, small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban can more effectively navigate their complex operational environments. Corporate-level strategies ensure the firm is on the right growth path, business-level strategies secure its market position, and functional-level strategies optimise internal processes to support overall objectives.

2.1.5. Understanding Business Strategy and Its Origins

The origins of competitive strategy as a formalised concept can be traced back to the late 20th century, particularly with the work of Michael E. Porter, a professor at Harvard Business School. In his seminal book *Competitive Strategy: “Techniques for Analysing Industries and Competitors”* (1980), Porter introduced the idea that firms could achieve competitive advantage by adopting one of three generic strategies: cost leadership, differentiation, or focus. These strategies were designed primarily with large organisations in mind, but their principles have been adapted over time to apply to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well.

The concept of business strategy refers to a company's plan for achieving specific goals, often related to gaining a competitive advantage in its market (Porter, 1980). It differs from corporate strategy, which addresses the overall scope and direction of an organisation, and operational strategy, which focuses on the day-to-day execution of business activities. Business strategy is positioned between these two levels, concentrating on how a company will compete within a particular industry or market segment (Johnson, Whittington, & Scholes, 2017). For the purpose of this study, the focus is at the business or competitive level strategies contextualised in small and medium-sized legal firms rather than corporate strategy. This resonates with the core of this study which is about how small and medium-sized legal firms in Durban compete to survive in a dynamic and competitive market.

2.1.6. Porter’s Generic Strategies

Understanding Porter's Generic Strategies is essential for small and medium-sized legal firms seeking to establish a competitive advantage in a competitive market like Durban. Figure 4 below illustrates the three generic strategies proposed by Michael Porter: Cost Leadership, Differentiation, and Focus.



Figure 4: Porter's Generic Strategies

Source: Porter (1980, p. 35).

Porter's Generic Strategies include:

Cost Leadership: The cost leadership strategy involves becoming the lowest-cost producer in an industry, allowing firms to offer products or services at a lower price than competitors. This strategy is particularly effective in industries where price competition is intense, and customers are price-sensitive (Porter, 1980). Firms pursuing cost leadership typically achieve this by optimising their production processes, reducing overhead costs, and leveraging economies of scale (Grant, 2021).

Cost leadership can lead to challenges such as reduced profit margins and the risk of initiating a "race to the bottom," where continuous price reductions can diminish the perceived value of products (Thompson et al., 2022). Moreover, this strategy requires a significant investment in cost-reducing technologies and processes, which might not be sustainable for all firms, particularly SMEs (Jones & Hill, 2019).

Differentiation: Firms that pursue a differentiation strategy aim to offer unique products or services that stand out from competitors (Porter, 1985). This uniqueness can justify a premium

price, which customers are willing to pay, for perceived value (Porter, 1985). According to Grant (2011) differentiation can be achieved through various means such as innovation, branding, superior customer service, or distinctive product features.

The main advantage of differentiation is the ability to create brand loyalty and reduce price sensitivity among customers (Johnson et al., 2020). However, maintaining differentiation requires continuous innovation and investment, which can be costly (Bryson & Alston, 2022). The risk also lies in the potential for competitors to imitate the differentiating factors, thereby eroding the firm's competitive advantage (Grant, 2021). Additionally, if the cost of maintaining uniqueness exceeds the price premium customers are willing to pay, the firm may face profitability issues (Bryson & Alston, 2022).

Focus: The focus strategy involves targeting a specific market niche, where the firm either offers the lowest cost within that niche (cost focus) or provides unique products or services tailored to the needs of that segment (differentiation focus) (Porter, 1980). This strategy allows firms to cater to the specific needs of a well-defined customer group, thereby achieving a strong competitive position within that niche (Porter, 1980).

However, while the focus strategy enables firms to serve a specific segment more effectively, it also limits market size and exposes the firm to risks associated with changes within that niche (Thompson et al., 2022). For instance, shifts in consumer preferences or economic downturns can significantly impact the niche market, making the firm vulnerable (Grant, 2021). Additionally, a narrow focus might limit the firm's ability to scale operations or diversify its product offerings (Jones & Hill, 2019).

2.1.7. Criticism of Porter's Generic Strategies

Porter's framework, while widely influential, has faced criticism over the years. One critique is that it assumes the strategies are mutually exclusive and that firms must choose one to avoid being "stuck in the middle," a position that Porter argued could lead to underperformance. Research has demonstrated that some companies successfully blend elements of cost leadership and differentiation, resulting in what are known as hybrid strategies. For instance, research by Acquaah and Yasai-Ardekani (2008) found that firms adopting a hybrid approach could achieve superior performance by leveraging the strengths of both strategies, particularly in dynamic markets where flexibility is crucial. Furthermore, Porter's model, originally developed with

large organisations in mind, has been scrutinised for its applicability to SMEs. Studies, such as those by O'Regan and Ghobadian (2004), have debated the scalability of these strategies in smaller, resource-constrained firms, highlighting the challenges SMEs face in implementing pure cost leadership or differentiation strategies due to their limited resources and market power.

2.1.8. Application of Porter's Generic Strategies to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises.

In the context of SMEs, especially within the legal sector, the application of Porter's Generic Strategies requires adaptation. Legal SMEs, which provide services rather than products, face unique challenges compared to large organisations. For example, cost leadership may be less feasible due to the high fixed costs associated with legal services, such as maintaining skilled personnel and ensuring compliance with regulations. Instead, SMEs in the legal sector may focus more on differentiation and niche marketing (focus strategy) to create a competitive advantage.

Studies, such as those conducted by Spanos, Zaralis, and Lioukas (2004), have shown that while Porter's strategies provide a useful framework, SMEs often adopt more flexible and hybrid strategies. In the legal sector, differentiation may be achieved through specialisation in certain areas of law, offering personalised client service, or leveraging technology to improve service delivery (Susskind, 2013). Studies by Ates and Bititci (2011) have also highlighted the importance of agility and adaptability in SMEs, as they are often more responsive to changes in the competitive environment than larger firms.

2.1.9. Business Strategies for Services vs. Products

The distinction between business strategies for services and products is significant, especially in the context of SMEs in the legal sector. Services, by nature, are characterised by intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity (variability), and perishability (Kotler & Keller, 2016). They also often involve a high degree of customer interaction. As a result, business strategies for service-based firms must account for factors such as service quality, customer experience, and the reputation of the service provider (Jones & Hill, 2019). For legal firms, this means that business strategies focusing on client relationships, expertise, and responsiveness are often more critical than cost-based competition.

2.1.9.1.Intangibility

Services are inherently intangible—they cannot be seen, touched, or stored before consumption (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2020). In the legal sector, clients cannot evaluate the quality of legal advice or representation prior to receiving it.

Implications for Business Strategies: Legal SMEs must build trust and credibility to mitigate the uncertainty associated with intangibility. Business strategies may include showcasing professional qualifications, obtaining certifications, sharing client testimonials, and highlighting successful case outcomes (Grönroos, 2015). Developing a strong brand presence and thought leadership through content marketing can also enhance perceived expertise (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

2.1.9.2.Inseparability

Services are produced and consumed simultaneously, and the service provider is often integral to the service itself (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2021). In legal services, the lawyer's interaction with the client is essential to delivering effective legal counsel.

Implications for Business Strategies: Business strategies should emphasise personalised client interactions and exceptional customer service. Legal firms need to invest in training their staff to ensure consistent, high-quality client engagement (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2019). Building strong client relationships can lead to increased client satisfaction, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth referrals (Zeithaml et al., 2020).

2.1.9.3.Heterogeneity (Variability)

Service quality can vary significantly depending on who provides the service, as well as when, where, and how it is provided (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In legal firms, different lawyers may deliver varying levels of service, and even the same lawyer may perform differently under different circumstances.

Implications for Business Strategies: To address variability, legal SMEs should implement standard operating procedures and quality control systems to ensure consistent service delivery (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Regular training and professional development can enhance the skills and consistency of service providers (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2021). Feedback mechanisms, such as client satisfaction surveys, can help identify areas for improvement and inform strategic business decisions (Grönroos, 2015).

2.1.9.4.Perishability

Services cannot be stored for later use; unutilised service capacity represents a lost opportunity (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Implications for Business Strategies: Effective capacity management and scheduling are critical. Legal SMEs can employ business strategies such as flexible appointment scheduling, offering services during non-traditional hours, and implementing retainer agreements to secure ongoing work (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2019). Utilising technology, such as online booking systems and automated reminders, can optimise resource utilisation (Zeithaml et al., 2020).

2.1.9.5.High Degree of Customer Interaction

Services often involve significant customer interaction, requiring active participation from clients (Bitner, Ostrom, & Morgan, 2008). In legal services, understanding the client's needs and circumstances is essential for providing tailored legal solutions.

Implications for Business Strategies: Business strategies should focus on enhancing client involvement and communication. Employing client relationship management systems can facilitate better information sharing and personalisation (Grönroos, 2015). Encouraging client feedback and fostering open communication channels can improve service delivery and client satisfaction (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2021).

In contrast, product-based firms can focus on aspects like production efficiency, distribution channels, and product innovation. While product differentiation often involves tangible features, service differentiation in the legal sector relies heavily on intangible factors such as trust, reliability, and the perceived expertise of the legal practitioners (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

2.1.10. Differentiation Strategy

A differentiation strategy in business is crucial for small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, particularly those aiming to distinguish themselves from competitors. This strategy involves identifying and promoting unique aspects of their service offerings, such as specialisation in niche areas like maritime law or environmental law, which are highly relevant given Durban's status as a major port city (Porter, 1980). This kind of specialisation can attract clients with specific legal needs, helping to establish the firm as a leader in these specialised areas. However, the strategy's strength lies in its ability to command higher fees due to perceived expertise, while its weakness may be the firm's over-reliance on a narrow client base, making it vulnerable to market changes in those niches (Thompson et al., 2022).

Moreover, differentiation can be achieved through exceptional client service, a significant advantage for smaller firms. By offering personalised attention, faster response times, and tailored solutions, small to medium-sized firms can create a competitive edge that larger firms might struggle to match due to their scale (Burke, 1997). This client-centric approach not only enhances client retention but also fosters strong referral networks, which are essential for growth in a competitive market. However, the downside is that maintaining high service levels can be resource-intensive, potentially limiting the firm's ability to scale (Jones & Hill, 2019).

Adopting advanced technology for client management and case handling further differentiates these firms by providing efficiency and transparency, which are increasingly valued by tech-savvy clients (Grant, 2021). The use of legal tech solutions can streamline operations and improve client satisfaction, but the initial investment and ongoing costs can be significant, potentially straining the resources of smaller firms. Additionally, the rapid pace of technological change means firms must continuously update their systems, which can be both a financial and operational challenge (Johnson et al., 2020).

Building a brand around community involvement and ethical practices also serves as a powerful differentiation strategy. Engaging in pro bono work, supporting local community projects, or leading initiatives on important social issues helps build a positive public image and strong community ties (Bradford & Wolk, 1991). This not only enhances the firm's reputation but also resonates with potential clients who value civic responsibility. However, the effectiveness of this strategy can be difficult to measure, and it may not always translate directly into financial gain (Bryson & Alston, 2022).

Finally, continuously adapting the differentiation strategy to meet evolving market conditions and client expectations is crucial. Regularly analysing market trends, client feedback, and competitive strategies allows firms to refine their offerings and maintain a competitive edge. However, the constant need for adaptation can be resource-intensive and may lead to strategic drift if not managed carefully (Thompson et al., 2022).

2.1.11. Potential basis for differentiation in small and medium businesses

Several studies have examined the application of differentiation strategies in SMEs, particularly in the legal sector. For example, a study by Abor and Quartey (2010) titled "Issues in SME Development in Ghana and South Africa" found that SMEs that adopted differentiation strategies, such as specialising in niche markets or offering exceptional client service, were more likely to achieve competitive advantages and sustain growth compared to those that did

not. The study highlighted the importance of continuous innovation and adaptation in maintaining these advantages.

In another study, Cant et al. (2014) titled "Business Survival: The Constraints Experienced by South African SMEs in the Financial Sector" focused on SMEs in South Africa's financial sector and found that differentiation through customer service and technological innovation significantly improved customer retention and satisfaction. However, the study also noted that the high costs associated with maintaining these strategies could be a barrier for smaller firms.

Further research by Grant (2021), in the study titled "Contemporary Strategy Analysis", focused on legal firms in the UK and found that differentiation strategies, particularly those focused on technology adoption and niche specialisation, were effective in enhancing competitive positioning. However, the study also pointed out the risks associated with over-specialisation, such as dependency on a limited client base, which could expose firms to market volatility. Below is a discussion of some of the ways through which small and medium businesses can pursue differentiation.

2.1.12. Client Engagement and Retention

The capability of effective client engagement and retention is crucial for survival of small business. According to Peck (2017) client engagement refers to the process of building a strong relationship with clients by deeply understanding their needs, anticipating future requirements, and consistently delivering value through meaningful interactions. It goes beyond basic communication to involve proactive strategies that ensure clients feel valued and understood. Effective client engagement often involves the use of technology, such as client management software, to streamline communication and service delivery (Peck, 2017). This technology can enhance interactions by providing timely and relevant information, thereby strengthening the client-firm relationship. However, small to medium-sized legal firms may face challenges in implementing these technologies due to resource constraints and a lack of technical expertise, which can limit their effectiveness (Jones et al., 2014).

Client retention on the other hand refers to a firm's ability to keep its clients over time, ensuring that they continue to use the firm's services rather than switching to competitors (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). It is a critical aspect of business sustainability, particularly in service industries like law, where client loyalty is paramount. Retention is closely tied to the quality-of-service delivery, with personalised services playing a significant role in keeping clients satisfied and loyal. Personalisation involves tailoring legal advice and services to the unique needs and

circumstances of each client, which significantly enhances client satisfaction and fosters long-term loyalty (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). This concept is supported by Gupta and Zeithaml (2006), who found that the ability to meet client expectations through personalised service is a key driver of retention in small service-oriented business. However, personalisation requires a deep understanding of client preferences and a commitment to ongoing service improvement, which can be resource-intensive for SMEs (Kowalkowski et al., 2015).

Moreover, fostering strong client relationships through regular updates, newsletters, and workshops is crucial for both engagement and retention. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler (2002) argue that such initiatives not only keep clients engaged but also reinforce the firm's reputation as a trustworthy and client-oriented business. This view is supported by Crosby et al. (2010), who found that firms that maintain high levels of communication and regularly engage with their clients tend to have higher retention rates and benefit from increased referrals. However, the challenge for SMEs lies in balancing the cost and time investment required for these activities with the tangible benefits they produce.

2.1.13. Operational Efficiency

As resources are scarce and inadequate in small and medium businesses, operational efficiency is a critical differentiator and way to enable survival. According to Jones (2018) operational efficiency can be referred to the ability of firms to maximise outputs with the minimum necessary inputs, which, in the context of legal practices, involves optimising the use of resources such as time, personnel, and technology to deliver client services effectively.

The concept of operational efficiency is not without its complexities. On the one hand, it promises cost savings, enhanced service delivery, and competitive advantage. On the other hand, achieving and maintaining such efficiency often requires significant investments in technology and human resources, which can be challenging for smaller firms with limited budgets. The literature suggests that while the implementation of technologies like automated document management systems and client databases can indeed streamline processes and reduce overhead costs (Jones, 2018), the initial investment and ongoing maintenance can be prohibitive, particularly for SMEs.

To critically discuss operational efficiency, it is essential to integrate findings from studies focusing on the SME sector. Research by Smith (2019) highlights that small to medium-sized legal firms that have adopted project management tools have seen improvements in case tracking and team collaboration. However, the study also notes that these benefits are

contingent on the firm's ability to adapt to new technologies, which is often hindered by a lack of technical expertise among staff. This aligns with broader theoretical frameworks on technology adoption, which emphasise the role of organisational readiness in realising the benefits of operational efficiency.

Further studies, particularly those conducted within the SME sector in South Africa, have explored the effectiveness of continuous staff training and development to sustain operational efficiency. Brown (2020) found that firms investing in regular training programs not only enhanced their operational efficiency but also improved staff retention and client satisfaction. However, this approach is not without its drawbacks, as the opportunity cost of time spent on training versus billable hours can be a significant consideration for smaller firms.

2.1.14. Digital Presence and Marketing

The digital presence and marketing strategies of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the legal sector have garnered significant attention in recent literature. Nguyen (2021) highlights that enhancing a firm's digital presence is critical for increasing visibility and client engagement, particularly in a competitive market. The study emphasises that for SMEs, establishing a strong online presence is not merely an option but a necessity to remain competitive.

One of the most impactful digital marketing strategies for SMEs is email marketing. Nguyen's research points out that email marketing allows firms to send targeted messages directly to potential and existing clients, making it a powerful tool for client retention and acquisition. The segmentation of email lists based on client interests and past engagements enables firms to deliver personalised content, increasing relevance and engagement rates (Nguyen, 2021).

However, while email marketing offers clear advantages, it is not without challenges. Taylor (2023) provides a critical perspective, noting that while email campaigns can keep clients informed and engaged, the effectiveness of these campaigns heavily depends on the firm's ability to maintain an updated and segmented email list. For SMEs, managing this data can be resource-intensive, particularly if they lack the technological infrastructure to automate these processes (Taylor, 2021). This challenge is further compounded by the need to comply with data protection regulations, which can be particularly burdensome for smaller firms.

In addition to email marketing, online advertising, such as pay-per-click (PPC) campaigns, has proven to be a highly effective strategy for legal SMEs. Taylor's (2023) study on the impact of

PPC in the legal sector found that firms using PPC to appear in search results for specific legal queries related to their expertise experienced a notable increase in client inquiries. This method ensures that the firm's advertisements are seen by those actively seeking legal assistance, enhancing the likelihood of attracting motivated clients.

Despite the potential benefits, the adoption of PPC campaigns is not without its challenges. Brown (2023) discusses the importance of continuously analysing and optimising these digital strategies based on data from web analytics and engagement metrics. For SMEs, this data-driven approach can be both a strength and a limitation. While it allows for the refinement of strategies and more effective budget allocation, it also requires a level of expertise in data analysis that many smaller firms may lack. The same study by Brown (2023) found that SMEs often struggle with the technical aspects of digital marketing, leading to suboptimal campaign performance and lower returns on investment.

2.1.15. Strategic Partnerships

The adoption of partnership by small and medium business is critical to differentiation on basis resource sharing, market expansion capability and operational efficiency via partner network. Strategic partnerships refer to formal agreements between two or more organisations to collaborate and achieve mutual goals while maintaining their independence (Gulati, 1998). These partnerships can take various forms, including joint ventures, alliances, or contractual collaborations, and are often pursued to combine strengths, share risks, and leverage complementary resources (Beamish and Lupton, 2009; Kale and Singh, 2009).

One of the primary advantages of strategic partnerships is resource sharing. These partnerships allow firms to pool resources, such as capital, technology, and expertise, which can lead to cost savings and increased operational efficiency (Hitt et al., 2000). Additionally, strategic partnerships facilitate market expansion. Through collaboration, firms can access new markets and customer bases that might be challenging to reach independently (Gulati, 1998).

Another significant advantage is the potential for innovation. Partnerships often foster innovation by bringing together diverse perspectives and expertise, leading to the development of new products, services, or processes (Dyer and Singh, 1998). Moreover, strategic partnerships can mitigate risks. By sharing risks, firms can undertake larger projects or enter new markets with reduced exposure to potential losses (Contractor and Lorange, 2002). Enhanced competitiveness is also a benefit, as strategic partnerships can provide a competitive

edge by combining the strengths of the partners, allowing them to better compete against larger or more established players in the market (Das and Teng, 2000).

However, strategic partnerships are not without their challenges. One of the key disadvantages is the complexity and coordination required. Managing a strategic partnership can be complex, requiring significant coordination and communication to ensure that all parties are aligned and working towards the same objectives (Doz and Hamel, 1998). Additionally, cultural and operational differences can present challenges. Differences in organisational culture, management styles, or operational practices can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts, potentially undermining the partnership (Parkhe, 1991).

A loss of autonomy is another potential downside. Firms may need to compromise on certain aspects of their operations or strategic direction to accommodate the partnership, which can lead to a loss of control over certain decisions (Inkpen and Beamish, 1997). Furthermore, there is a risk of dependency. Over-reliance on a partner for critical resources or market access can create vulnerabilities, particularly if the partnership dissolves or if the partner's performance declines (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). Lastly, there is a potential for conflict. Disagreements over the distribution of profits, decision-making authority, or strategic direction can lead to conflicts, which may be difficult to resolve and could jeopardise the partnership (Das and Teng, 2000).

Studies focusing on SMEs have shown mixed results regarding the effectiveness of strategic partnerships. For instance, Williams (2023) found that SMEs that engaged in strategic partnerships for marketing and professional development experienced significant growth in client acquisition and service quality. This study highlighted how collaborative marketing efforts and joint seminars allowed these firms to expand their visibility and attract a more diverse client base. However, Williams also noted that the success of these partnerships was heavily dependent on the formalisation of roles and expectations. SMEs that failed to establish clear agreements or lacked proper legal documentation often encountered conflicts that undermined the partnership's effectiveness (Taylor, 2022).

Similarly, Anderson (2024) conducted a study on SMEs in South Africa's broader professional services sector, finding that while strategic partnerships facilitated knowledge sharing and innovation, they also posed challenges related to cultural differences and coordination. Anderson emphasised that SMEs must carefully assess potential partners' compatibility and ensure that they have the capacity to manage the complexities of the partnership. This is

consistent with findings from Morris, Bessant, and Barnes (2006), who also noted the importance of clear communication and alignment in successful SME partnerships.

In another study, Taylor (2022) explored the role of strategic partnerships in helping SMEs access new markets. The research found that partnerships allowed SMEs to enter markets that would have been otherwise inaccessible due to resource limitations. However, Taylor cautioned that such partnerships often required significant compromises in terms of decision-making autonomy, which could be a deterrent for some SMEs. This aligns with the conclusions of earlier research by Barringer and Harrison (2000), which also emphasised the trade-offs involved in strategic partnerships, particularly for smaller firms.

2.1.16. Staff Development and Firm Culture

Competent and reliable human capital is key for a small and medium business to differentiate itself from competitors. Investing in staff development and cultivating a positive firm culture are essential strategies for small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. Training and development programs not only enhance the skills and knowledge of staff members but also contribute to higher job satisfaction and retention rates. By offering regular training workshops, mentorship programs, and opportunities for professional growth, firms can ensure that their team remains at the cutting edge of legal practices and regulations (Smith, 2022).

Implementing and evaluating business strategies in small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban involves several key stages. Initially, firms need to ensure that their strategic plans are clearly communicated to all stakeholders. This includes setting specific, measurable objectives and distributing resources accordingly to support these goals. Effective implementation also requires regular training sessions and updates to keep staff aligned with the firm's strategic direction (Thompson, 2022).

A firm's culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, and practices that shape the behaviour and attitudes of its employees (Schein, 2017). It encompasses the unwritten rules and norms that guide how work is done within the organisation, influencing everything from decision-making processes to interpersonal interactions (Johnson, 2021; Schein, 2017).

When transparency is prioritised, employees feel informed and included in the firm's direction, which can lead to greater trust and a more cohesive team environment (Johnson, 2021; Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Teamwork, as a cultural value, encourages collaboration and the

sharing of ideas, leading to more innovative solutions and a stronger sense of community within the firm (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

Encouraging open communication and feedback within the firm allows for the early identification of issues and fosters a collaborative approach to problem-solving (Pfeffer, 2018). This open culture ensures that problems are addressed before they escalate, promoting a proactive rather than reactive approach to challenges (Lee, 2023). Lee (2023) also states that recognition and reward systems can be implemented to acknowledge the hard work and achievements of staff. Such systems are crucial for motivating employees and reinforcing the firm's commitment to appreciating and valuing its workforce (Lee, 2023; Pfeffer, 2018).

According to Kennedy (2000) mentioned that when employees feel recognised and valued, they are more likely to remain loyal to the firm, leading to a lower turnover rate. This is particularly important for maintaining continuity and deepening expertise within the firm, as long-term employees contribute to a stable and knowledgeable workforce, which is critical for operational efficiency (Lee, 2023; Deal & Kennedy, 2000).

2.1.17. Implementation and Evaluation

A small and medium business can differentiate itself in the way it implements activities and used information from evaluations to improve its activities and products. Implementing and evaluating business strategies in small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban involves several key stages. Initially, firms need to ensure that their strategic plans are clearly communicated to all stakeholders. Stakeholders are defined as individuals or groups who have an interest in or are affected by the firm's activities and decisions. In the context of a legal firm, stakeholders can include employees, clients, partners, suppliers, regulatory bodies, and the local community. Each of these groups has a vested interest in the firm's success and plays a role in the implementation of its strategies (Freeman, 1984). This includes setting specific, measurable objectives and distributing resources accordingly to support these goals. Effective implementation also requires regular training sessions and updates to keep staff aligned with the firm's strategic direction (Thompson, 2022).

Once strategies are in motion, ongoing monitoring is crucial. This involves tracking performance against predetermined benchmarks and adjusting strategies as necessary. Utilising key performance indicators (KPIs) allows firms to measure aspects such as client satisfaction, case outcomes, and financial performance. This data-driven approach aids in objectively assessing the effectiveness of implemented strategies (Sullivan, 2021). Moreover, periodic

reviews of the strategy implementation process are essential. These reviews should involve all key personnel to discuss what is working and what is not, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Feedback mechanisms should be in place to capture insights from employees at all levels, which can provide valuable perspectives on potential improvements (Jackson, 2023).

2.2.Organisation architecture

This section explores the concept of organisation architecture and its significance for small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. Understanding organisation architecture is essential for aligning a firm's internal structures, processes, and culture with its strategic objectives. By examining how organisation architecture influences operational efficiency and adaptability, leaders and owner-managers can better position their firms to respond effectively to internal challenges and external environmental changes.

2.2.1. Concept of Organisation Architecture

According to Burton and Obel (2018) the concept of organisation architecture refers to the comprehensive framework that defines the structure, processes, culture, and systems within an organisation, guiding how it operates and achieves its strategic goals. It encompasses the formal and informal aspects of the organisation, including its hierarchical structure, communication patterns, decision-making processes, and the alignment of its resources and capabilities with its strategic objectives.

Galbraith (2014) also states that at its core, organisation architecture aims to create a coherent and efficient system that enables it to respond effectively to internal and external challenges. This involves designing structure to support its strategy, ensuring that all components, such as people, processes, and technology, are aligned and work together harmoniously. The architecture of an organisation also includes the development of a corporate culture that supports its strategic direction, promoting values and behaviours that drive performance and innovation (Galbraith, 2014).

Literature by Daft (2021) emphasises the dynamic nature of organisation architecture, recognising the need for flexibility and adaptability in a rapidly changing business environment. Modern organisations are increasingly adopting agile and network-based structures that allow for quick responses to market changes and technological advancements (Sinha, Jha, & Madhavan, 2016). These structures often involve flatter hierarchies,

decentralised decision-making, and the integration of digital technologies to enhance collaboration and efficiency (Daft, 2021).

2.2.2. Strategy Alignment

Strategy alignment according to Kaplan and Norton (2020) refers to the process of ensuring that an organisation's structure, resources, culture, and operations are consistently aligned with its strategic objectives. This alignment is crucial for translating strategic intent into effective action, enabling it to achieve their long-term goals. Effective strategy alignment involves synchronising the various elements of the organisational architecture, such as its people, processes, and technology, so that they collectively support the overarching strategy (Kaplan & Norton, 2020). This alignment ensures that every part of the organisation is working towards the same objectives, thereby enhancing efficiency, coherence, and competitive advantage.

Study by Pisano (2015) emphasise the importance of continuous alignment, particularly in dynamic and rapidly changing environments. This dynamic approach to strategy alignment is supported by flexible organisational structures and adaptive leadership, which allow for quick pivots and realignment in response to external shifts (Pisano, 2015). Moreover, effective communication across all levels of the organisation is essential to maintain alignment, ensuring that employees at every level understand the strategic objectives and how their roles contribute to achieving them (Beer & Eisenstat, 2021).

Pisano (2015) emphasises the importance of continuous alignment, particularly in dynamic and rapidly changing environments. To illustrate the key components of strategy alignment, Figure 4 below summarises the critical elements that need to be synchronised within an organisational architecture

2.2.3. McKinsey 7S Model

The McKinsey 7S Model is a widely recognised model for organisational analysis and improvement, developed by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman in the late 1970s. It provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the complex interplay between different elements of an organisation and how they contribute to overall effectiveness. The model identifies seven key elements; Strategy, Structure, Systems, Shared Values, Skills, Style, and Staff that must be aligned and mutually reinforcing for an organisation to achieve its goals (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

McKinsey's main claim with the 7S Model is that organisational effectiveness stems from the alignment and harmonious interaction of all seven elements. They argue that for an organisation to achieve its goals successfully, each element—Strategy, Structure, Systems, Shared Values, Skills, Style, and Staff—must not only be individually sound but also consistently aligned with one another (Peters & Waterman, 1982). This holistic approach suggests that changes in one area will inevitably affect the others, and therefore, organisations should consider all elements collectively when implementing improvements or transformations.

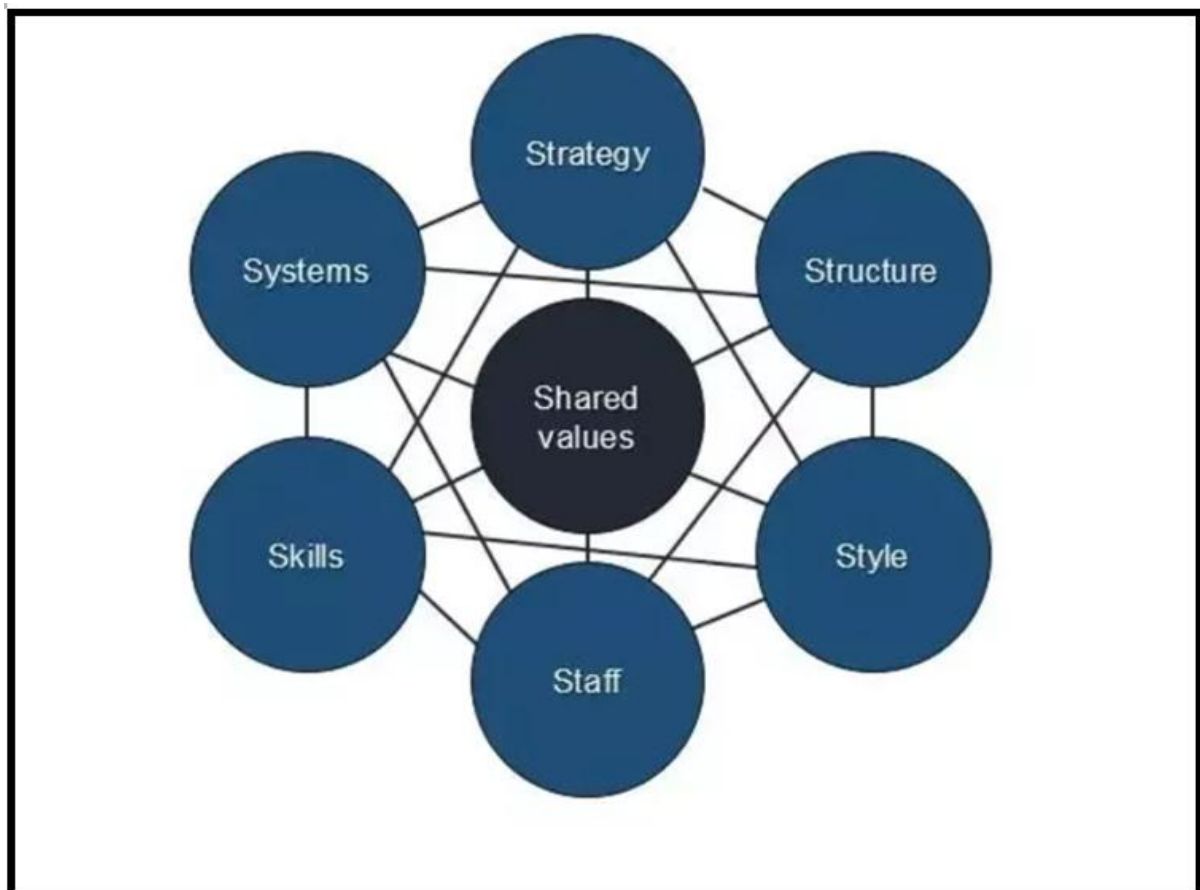


Figure 5 depicts the McKinsey 7S Model, which is a diagnostic tool used to assess and align the internal elements of an organisation for optimal effectiveness (Burton & Obel, 2018).

Source: Adapted from Peters and Waterman (1982, p. 10).

These elements are divided into "hard" and "soft" categories, where "hard" elements like Strategy, Structure, and Systems are more tangible and easier to manage, while "soft" elements such as Shared Values, Skills, Style, and Staff are more abstract and influenced by the

organisation’s culture. The following table provides a detailed description of each of these elements:

Table 3: Hard and Soft Elements of the McKinsey 7-S Framework

Hard Elements	Description
Strategy	overarching purpose of an organisation and represents a consistent pattern of actions aimed at achieving specific goals over time.
Structure	how tasks and personnel are specialised and organised, how authority is allocated, and how activities and reporting relationships are grouped into various organisational sub-units.
System	formal and informal processes and procedures employed to manage the organisation, such as management control systems, information systems, performance measurement and reward mechanisms, quality control processes, budgeting, and resource allocation practices.
Soft Elements	Description
Superordinate goals (shared value)	represent the organisation's long-term vision and core values that are broadly embraced. These guiding principles highlight what is fundamentally important to the organisation.
Skills	core competencies and unique capabilities that the organisation and its staff possess, essential for effectively implementing strategy
Staff	encompasses the quantity and types of employees within the organisation, including their backgrounds, competencies, and the methods used for recruitment and development.
Style	leadership approach of top management and the organisation’s general operating style, including its cultural aspects—such as dominant values, beliefs, norms, and symbolic actions—that shape its identity.

Source: Adapted from Kanyangale, M., & Dyasi, N. (2018), based on Waterman, Peters, and Phillips (1980,10).

Studies by (Ravanfar, 2015) have reaffirmed the relevance of the McKinsey 7S Model in contemporary organisational settings, particularly in the context of change management. For example, organisations undergoing digital transformation or restructuring can use the 7S

framework to ensure that all elements are aligned with new strategic goals. The model is particularly effective in diagnosing issues and guiding restructuring efforts because it emphasises the interdependence of the elements. A change in one element, such as the introduction of a new strategy, necessitates adjustments in other elements like structure and systems to maintain alignment and effectiveness (Singh & Singh, 2019). This holistic view helps avoid pitfalls that occur when changes are made in isolation, without considering their impact on the broader context.

The continued applicability of the McKinsey 7S Model is evident in its use across various industries and regions. For instance, in global organisations, the model is instrumental in ensuring that strategic objectives are consistently implemented across different functions and geographical areas, despite cultural and operational differences (Aithal, 2016). This makes the McKinsey 7S Model not only a tool for internal alignment but also a framework for managing complexity and ensuring that all parts of an organisation work together effectively to achieve strategic goals. The Model provides a valuable tool for our study by helping to identify areas where alignment between strategy, structure, systems, and culture can be optimised to improve performance.

Despite its widespread use and longevity, the McKinsey 7S Model has faced criticism from various scholars. Critics have raised several concerns:

Over-Simplicity: Critics argue that the model is too simplistic to address the complexities of modern organisations. By focusing on only seven internal elements, it may overlook other crucial factors that influence organisational effectiveness, such as external environmental forces. According to Peters and Waterman (1982), while the model provides a useful starting point, it does not capture the full spectrum of variables that impact organisational success.

Lack of Empirical Evidence: There is limited empirical research validating the model's effectiveness. The causal relationships between the seven elements and organisational performance are not definitively established. Bryan and Joyce (2007) highlight that while the model is conceptually appealing, empirical studies confirming its practical utility are scarce.

Static Framework: The McKinsey 7S Model is considered static and does not adequately address the dynamic nature of organisations and their environments. It fails to account for external factors like market volatility, technological advancements, or regulatory changes. Mintzberg et al. (2005) criticise such models for not reflecting the fluid and emergent nature of strategy formation within organisations.

Interdependence Complexity: While the model emphasises the interdependence of elements, this interconnectedness can make practical application challenging. Changes in one area may have unpredictable and cascading effects on others, complicating change management efforts. Ashkenas et al., (1995) note that the complexity of these relationships can make it difficult for managers to use the model as a clear guide for action.

2.2.4. The Higgins 8S Model

The Higgins 8S Model of Strategy builds upon the foundation of the McKinsey 7S framework by offering a more detailed and comprehensive approach to understanding and managing internal alignment within an organisation. Developed by Higgins in 2005, this model introduces "Strategic Performance" as an additional element, emphasising the importance of not only executing strategies but also measuring and evaluating their impact on organisational goals and objectives.

According to Higgins (2005), the 8S Model addresses the complexities of modern organisations by focusing on the intricate, web-like relationships among various components. These components include strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, resources (replacing "skills" from the original 7S model), shared values, and strategic performance. By replacing "skills" with "resources" and adding "strategic performance" as the eighth element, the Higgins 8S Model provides a more holistic understanding of the internal elements constituting an organisation.

Kanyangale and Dyasi (2018) emphasise that the internal alignment of these intertwined elements where each reinforces the others is crucial for achieving desired outcomes. They argue that managers are more effective when there is harmony among these interdependent components. Neglecting the "soft" aspects while focusing solely on "hard" elements can significantly hinder organisational performance (Kanyangale & Dyasi, 2018).

The model underscores the importance of aligning both "hard" elements (strategy, structure, systems) and "soft" elements (style, staff, shared values, resources) to achieve strategic objectives effectively. The inclusion of "Strategic Performance" ensures that organisations are not only implementing strategies but are also actively monitoring and assessing their outcomes to drive continuous improvement.

To better understand each component of the Higgins 8S Model, Table 4 below provides definitions and brief explanations of each element.

Table 4: Elements and Definitions in the Higgins (2005) 8S Model

Element	Brief Description
Hard Elements	
Strategy and Purpose	Encompasses strategic intent, vision, mission, goals, and strategic objectives, including corporate, business, functional, and process strategies. It defines the long-term direction and scope of the organisation.
Structure	Refers to the organisational configuration, including job roles, authority, grouping of jobs, managerial span of control, and coordination mechanisms. It determines how tasks and responsibilities are allocated and how information flows within the organisation.
Systems and Processes	Represents the formal and informal procedures used to manage the organisation, such as management control systems, information systems, performance measurement and reward systems, quality control systems, and budgeting and resource allocation processes. These support day-to-day operations.
Soft Elements	
Shared Values	The core values widely shared within the organisation that serve as guiding principles on what is important. Shared values influence culture, ethical standards, and priorities, aligning the organisation towards common goals.
Resources	All assets available to the organisation, including human, financial, technological, and material resources, used to achieve organisational objectives. This replaces "skills" from the original model to encompass a broader range of organisational assets.
Staff	The number and types of employees, their backgrounds, competencies, recruitment approaches, development, training, career management, and promotion practices. Staff management focuses on building a capable and motivated workforce.
Style	The behavioural patterns of leaders and managers when interacting with subordinates and other employees. It encompasses leadership approaches, management styles, and organisational culture.

Strategic Performance	A holistic and balanced view of organisational performance, considering effectiveness and efficiency, often measured using an expanded balanced scorecard approach. It emphasises monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of strategies to ensure objectives are met.
-----------------------	--

Source: Adapted from Kanyangale and Sibanda (2021) based on Higgins (2005)

2.2.5. Justification for Using the Higgins 8S Model

Firstly, it is noteworthy that the internal elements highlighted by the Higgins 8S Model are evident in many contemporary organisations in South Africa, including small and medium-sized legal firms in Durban. These firms possess internal elements such as business strategies, operational systems, and organisational structures, which constitute the hard elements of the organisation. They also have staff, leadership styles, organisational culture, and resources, forming the soft elements. The hard and soft elements of these legal firms are interdependent and interact in complex ways.

In essence, small and medium-sized legal firms exhibit spider web-like interrelationships between various elements, as suggested by the Higgins 8S Model. These elements reinforce each other positively or negatively, shaping the internal functioning and performance of the firms. The eight elements identified by the Higgins 8S Model strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, resources, shared values, and strategic performance are all relevant for understanding how these legal firms operate and survive in a competitive environment like Durban.

When all elements of the organisational architecture are aligned, they work cohesively towards achieving strategic objectives and enhancing overall performance (Bryson and Alston, 2022). This alignment is crucial for small and medium-sized legal firms aiming to navigate challenges such as market competition, regulatory changes, and client demands. The interconnectedness of these elements is illustrated in Figure 6 below.

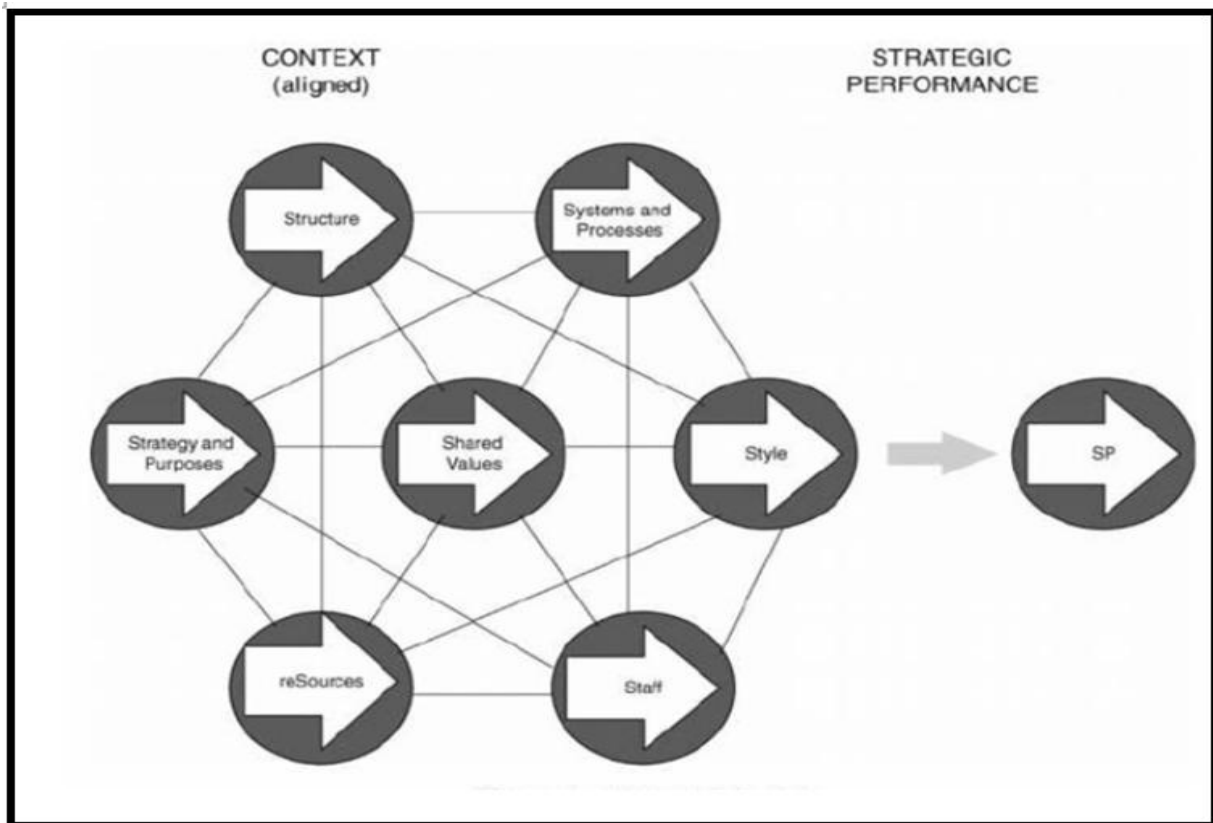


Figure 6: Internal Alignment and Interdependencies in an Organisation

Source: Higgins (2005, p. 6).

Secondly, it is important to note that scholars have used the Higgins 8S Model as a tool to understand alignment in various sectors. For instance, Van Donselaar (2012) applied the model to analyse alignment during strategy execution in the not-for-profit sector in the Netherlands. Within South Africa, Kanyangale and Dyasi (2018) used the Higgins 8S Model to assess the degree of alignment in a district municipality in the Eastern Cape Province during the implementation of a decentralised water services provision model.

Given these examples, applying the Higgins 8S Model to small and medium-sized legal firms in Durban is justified. The model provides a comprehensive framework to analyse the internal environment of these firms, identify areas where alignment may be lacking, and implement changes to improve overall strategic performance. As Higgins (2005) argues, misalignments among internal elements can lead to inefficiencies and hinder successful strategy implementation.

Furthermore, the dynamic and competitive nature of the legal industry in Durban necessitates a thorough understanding of internal organisational factors. By focusing on elements such as

strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, resources, shared values, and strategic performance, legal firms can identify strengths and weaknesses within their operations. This understanding enables them to implement targeted improvements, adapt to market changes, and enhance their competitiveness.

Applying the Higgins 8S Model allows these firms to systematically examine their internal structures and processes, ensuring that all aspects are aligned with their strategic goals. Bryson and Alston (2022) offer practical insights into how such models can achieve organisational coherence and success. Grant (2021) underscores the significance of continuous evaluation within these frameworks to achieve long-term objectives. Johnson et al. (2020) further discuss how identifying and rectifying misalignments can enhance strategic performance. However, while the Higgins 8S Model offers a comprehensive framework, it is not without its criticisms. Some scholars argue that the model is overly internally focused and does not sufficiently account for external environmental factors such as market dynamics, competition, and regulatory changes (Peters, 2015). This inward focus might limit an organisation's ability to adapt to external threats and opportunities effectively.

Furthermore, the model assumes that all elements can be perfectly aligned, which may not be practical in reality. Organisations, especially small and medium-sized firms with limited resources, may find it challenging to achieve and maintain such alignment (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The rigidity implied by the model's emphasis on alignment could stifle flexibility and innovation, which are essential for survival in competitive environments.

Another criticism is that the model may be too complex for smaller organisations. Implementing all eight elements requires significant time and effort, which small firms might lack (Johnson, 2017). The detailed analysis prescribed by the model could overwhelm managers and divert attention from more pressing operational issues.

Despite these criticisms, the Higgins 8S Model remains valuable for its holistic approach to organisational analysis. It encourages firms to consider a wide range of internal factors and their interdependencies, which can lead to more coherent and effective strategies. For small and medium-sized legal firms in Durban, the model can serve as a diagnostic tool to identify internal misalignments that hinder performance.

2.3.Past research on small and medium-sized legal firms

There is previous research on small and medium-sized legal firms which underscores the necessity for these firms to adopt distinct business strategies (e.g. niche specialisations, optimising operational efficiencies, and enhancing client relationships) to build a competitive advantage. The changing trend in the legal industry continues to evolve, driven by technological advancements and changing client expectations which calls for strategy informed activities and operations in small and medium legal firms.

This section synthesises a variety of past research on competitive strategies of SME Legal Firms within and outside South Africa to get an understanding of the current state of relevant research.

2.3.1. Competitive Strategies of SME Legal Firms in South Africa

Research on the competitive strategies of SME legal firms in South Africa has provided significant insights into the factors that contribute to their success in a challenging environment. For example, Smith and Brown (2021) conducted a study titled "Competitive Strategies for SME Legal Firms in the South African Market," aiming to investigate the strategic approaches adopted by small and medium-sized legal firms to remain competitive. The study was conducted in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, where data was collected from 50 SME legal firms through interviews and surveys.

The study revealed that firms that adopted niche specialisations, such as intellectual property law, were able to distinguish themselves from competitors. The adoption of technology, particularly legal tech solutions like case management software, was also identified as a key factor in enhancing operational efficiency and offering competitive pricing. Furthermore, the importance of building strong client relationships through personalised service was highlighted as a critical factor in client retention. The study emphasised that firms engaged in continuous professional development and those that adapted to regulatory changes were better positioned to anticipate and respond to market shifts. Future research was recommended to explore how legal SMEs could leverage digital marketing strategies to enhance their visibility and attract new clients. Additionally, the study suggested investigating the impact of collaborations between SME legal firms and other professional services to offer bundled services. While this study is similar to the current one, it is important that there are two key differences. The

previous study adopted a mixed method approach while the current study adopts an exclusively qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding from the leaders and owner-managers of these legal firms.

In another study, Jones and Mthembu (2020) focused on understanding how SME legal firms navigate the competitive landscape in South Africa. Their research, titled "Strategic Responses of SME Legal Firms to Market Challenges in South Africa," was conducted in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces, involving 35 legal firms. The study identified cost leadership strategies as a common approach among these firms, where minimising operational costs allowed them to offer lower prices to clients. However, this strategy often led to lower profit margins and increased strain on resources.

Firms that diversified their service offerings, such as adding mediation services or compliance consulting, were found to be more resilient during economic downturns. Additionally, the study highlighted the benefits of strategic alliances with larger law firms or corporate legal departments, which provided access to more resources and expertise, thereby enhancing competitiveness. Future research was recommended to analyse the long-term sustainability of cost leadership strategies in the legal sector and to explore potential strategic partnerships between SME legal firms and technology startups to innovate service delivery.

Building on these findings, Moloi (2018) examined "The Impact of Technology on SME Legal Firms in South Africa." The study found that firms embracing digital transformation, such as implementing online client portals and virtual consultations, improved operational efficiency and client satisfaction. This technological adoption not only reduced operational costs but also expanded the firms' reach to clients in remote areas, thus enhancing their competitive position.

Chikandiwa et al. (2013) conducted a study titled "The Adoption of E-Marketing by Small Law Firms in South Africa," which found that utilising digital marketing strategies enhances visibility and attracts new clients. The research indicated that firms active on social media platforms and those investing in search engine optimisation (SEO) were more likely to reach a broader audience, thereby gaining a competitive edge over firms relying solely on traditional marketing methods.

Naidoo and Wu (2014) explored "Strategic Alliances in the South African Legal Sector," concluding that SME legal firms forming partnerships with other professional services can

expand their service offerings and resources. Such alliances enable firms to provide comprehensive solutions to clients, integrating legal services with financial advisory, accounting, or consulting services, thus enhancing client value and firm competitiveness.

Rambe and Mokgosi (2016) investigated "The Role of Knowledge Management in SME Legal Firms," highlighting that firms investing in knowledge management practices can improve service quality and innovation. By effectively managing and sharing knowledge within the firm, legal practitioners can leverage collective expertise, stay updated on legal developments, and provide more informed advice to clients.

The Legal Resources Centre Report (2019) emphasised the importance of access to justice and how SME legal firms play a crucial role in providing legal services to underserved communities. The report suggests that firms focusing on social justice issues can gain a competitive advantage by fulfilling a critical need in the society, thereby enhancing their reputation and client base.

Finally, the Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) Reports (various years) provide ongoing analysis of the legal industry's trends, challenges, and opportunities. These reports emphasise the significance of continuous professional development and ethical practices as competitive strategies for SME legal firms. Firms that prioritise ethical standards and invest in the ongoing education of their staff are better equipped to adapt to legal changes and maintain client trust.

2.3.2. Competitive Strategies of SME Legal Firms Outside South Africa

Research on competitive strategies of SME legal firms outside South Africa provides a broader perspective on how these firms operate in different regulatory and market environments. Taylor and Lee (2019) conducted a study titled "Survival Strategies of SME Legal Firms in the United Kingdom," aiming to explore how small and medium-sized legal firms in the UK respond to market pressures, particularly from larger firms and alternative legal service providers. The study was carried out across London, Manchester, and Birmingham, involving 40 legal SMEs.

The study found that firms adopting flexible pricing models, such as offering fixed-fee services, were more successful in attracting cost-conscious clients. Additionally, firms that embraced remote working and digital tools, such as cloud-based document management systems, reported increased operational efficiency and client satisfaction. Reputation management

emerged as a crucial factor, with successful firms actively engaging in public relations and social media marketing to maintain a positive image. Future research was recommended to investigate the long-term effects of remote working on the culture and cohesion of legal firms, as well as the impact of regulatory changes, such as the introduction of alternative business structures, on the competitive strategies of SME legal firms.

Similarly, a study in Botswana examined the competitive strategies of SME legal firms in a different African context. This study, titled "Competitive Positioning of SME Legal Firms in Botswana," was conducted by Mokoena and Ncube (2021) and focused on how these firms navigate the unique challenges of operating in a smaller and less developed legal market. The study found that firms in Botswana often relied on a combination of cost leadership and differentiation strategies. By offering competitive pricing while also providing specialised legal services tailored to the local context, these firms were able to attract and retain clients despite the presence of larger, multinational firms. The research also emphasised the importance of building strong relationships with local businesses and government entities as a key component of their competitive strategy.

In Southeast Asia, Nguyen and Hoang (2021) conducted research on "Strategic Adaptation of SME Legal Firms in Southeast Asia," focusing on how small and medium-sized legal firms in Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia remain competitive in a rapidly changing legal environment. The study found that firms specialising in cross-border legal services, particularly in areas like intellectual property and international trade law, were better positioned to attract multinational clients and expand their market reach.

The study also emphasised the importance of continuous professional development in emerging areas of law, such as fintech and digital assets, as a means of staying ahead of the competition. Building strong local networks was identified as another key factor, with successful firms often collaborating with local businesses and legal professionals to offer tailored legal solutions. The study suggested further research into the impact of regional trade agreements, such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), on the competitive strategies of SME legal firms. Additionally, the study recommended exploring how legal SMEs in Southeast Asia can leverage technology to offer more innovative and cost-effective services.

Smith and Jones (2018) investigated the competitive strategies of SME legal firms in the United States in their study titled "Innovation and Competitiveness in U.S. SME Legal Firms." The

research highlighted that firms adopting innovative technologies, such as artificial intelligence for legal research and document review, gained a significant competitive advantage. The study found that embracing technology not only improved efficiency but also reduced costs, allowing firms to offer more competitive pricing. Additionally, firms that focused on client-centric services, such as offering personalised legal solutions and flexible communication channels, were more successful in retaining clients.

Kumar and Singh (2017) examined the strategies of SME legal firms in India in their study "Competitive Strategies in the Indian Legal Market: A Focus on SMEs." The study found that firms specialising in emerging areas of law, such as cyber law and intellectual property rights, were able to distinguish themselves in a crowded market. Additionally, the study emphasised the importance of networking and building relationships within the legal community and with corporate clients. Firms that engaged in pro bono work and corporate social responsibility initiatives also enhanced their reputation, leading to increased client trust and loyalty.

In Australia, Brown and Wilson (2016) conducted a study titled "Adaptation and Survival: Competitive Strategies of SME Legal Firms in Australia." The research highlighted that firms adopting flexible work arrangements, including part-time and remote working options, were more attractive to talented legal professionals, thereby enhancing the firm's human capital. The study also found that firms focusing on niche markets, such as environmental law and indigenous rights, were able to establish a strong market presence. Embracing alternative fee arrangements, such as contingency fees and value-based billing, was also identified as a key strategy for meeting client expectations and staying competitive.

Garcia and Martinez (2015) explored the competitive strategies of SME legal firms in Spain in their study "Navigating Economic Crisis: Strategies of SME Legal Firms in Spain." The study was conducted during the aftermath of the financial crisis and found that firms implementing cost reduction strategies, such as downsizing and outsourcing non-core functions, were able to survive the economic downturn. Additionally, diversification into related services, such as legal consulting and compliance training, provided alternative revenue streams. The study also emphasised the importance of maintaining high ethical standards and transparency to build client trust during challenging times.

Lee and Park (2014) studied the competitive strategies of SME legal firms in South Korea in their research titled "Competitive Dynamics of SME Legal Firms in South Korea's Legal

Market." The study found that firms investing in continuous education and specialisation in international law were better positioned to compete in an increasingly globalised market. Strategic alliances with foreign law firms allowed SMEs to offer cross-border services, enhancing their competitiveness. The research also highlighted the role of government support programs in providing resources and training for SME legal firms.

Lastly, Ogunleye and Adeyemi (2013) examined the strategies of SME legal firms in Nigeria in their study "Competitive Strategies and Performance of SME Legal Firms in Nigeria." The study found that firms adopting aggressive marketing strategies, including advertising and client outreach programs, were more successful in expanding their client base. Emphasis on quality service delivery and timely communication with clients also contributed to increased client satisfaction and referrals. The study recommended further research into the impact of regulatory changes on the competitiveness of SME legal firms in Nigeria.

2.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter offered a comprehensive review of literature on the concept of strategy, focusing on its relevance to small and medium-sized legal firms in Durban. It began by exploring the origins and various definitions of strategy, emphasising its evolution from military roots to a fundamental component in business management. Key characteristics of strategy were discussed, including long-term orientation, resource allocation, competitive advantage, and adaptability. Mintzberg's "5 Ps of Strategy" and the levels of strategy corporate, business, and functional were introduced to provide a multifaceted understanding of strategic planning and implementation within organisations.

The chapter then examined organisation architecture and its significance in aligning a firm's internal structures and culture with its strategic objectives. Models such as the McKinsey 7S and Higgins 8S frameworks were analysed to illustrate the importance of internal alignment in achieving organisational effectiveness. Specific business strategies for small and medium-sized legal firms were discussed, with an emphasis on differentiation strategies. Potential bases for differentiation included client engagement and retention, operational efficiency, digital presence and marketing, strategic partnerships, staff development, firm culture, and effective implementation and evaluation.

Finally, past research on competitive strategies of SME legal firms both within and outside South Africa was reviewed. These studies highlighted the necessity for these firms to adopt distinct strategies to build competitive advantage in a dynamic and competitive legal industry. The importance of agility, innovation, and strategic alignment was underscored as critical factors for survival and growth. The next chapter will detail the research methodology employed in this study, outlining the qualitative approach used to explore the business strategies of these firms in depth.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research methodology that was adopted for this exploratory qualitative study entitled "Investigating Business Strategies and Practices of Small to Medium-Sized Legal Firms to Survive in Durban, South Africa." The chapter begins by discussing the research philosophy, and design, which guided this qualitative study. Following this, it delves into sampling methods used, the process of selecting research participants, collection methods and data analysis. Thereafter the chapter focuses on research quality and research ethics before discussing the limitations of the study and provide a concluding summary.

3.1. Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the system of beliefs and assumptions that underlie the development of knowledge in research (Saunders et al.,2016). Saunders et al. (2016) define research philosophy as a “system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge in relation to research.” The choice of research philosophy is critical as it influences the research strategy, methods, and interpretation of findings. Within the field of business, several primary research philosophies are commonly utilised:

Positivism: Positivism is based on the belief that reality is stable and can be objectively observed and described through scientific evidence, such as experiments and statistics (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). It upholds the existence of objective and quantifiable reality which is independent of the researcher. As such it is important that an arms-length relationship between the researcher and participants is maintained in the research, to avoid bias.

Critical Realism: Critical realism combines positivism and postmodernism to understand social constructs by focusing on the underlying mechanisms that influence social phenomena and proposing solutions to social problems (Saunders et al., 2016).

Interpretivism: Interpretivism seeks to understand the subjective meaning of social phenomena by exploring how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences within specific contexts (Saunders et al., 2016). It upholds the existence of subjective and multiple realities

which require close interactions between the researcher and the researched to uncover these realities.

Postmodernism: Postmodernism challenges traditional ideas by emphasising the role of language and power dynamics, promoting diverse and often marginalised perspectives (Saunders et al., 2016).

Pragmatism: Pragmatism focuses on the practical outcomes of research, supporting the use of multiple methods and allowing flexibility in adapting research strategies to address real-world problems (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). It is based on the use of what works in the situation to conduct valid and credible research to understand a phenomenon.

Given the objectives of this exploratory qualitative study, which sought to investigate the business strategies and practices of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, an interpretivism philosophy was adopted. Interpretivism was well-suited to this research as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences and perspectives of the leaders and owner-managers of the small and medium-sized legal firms involved in this study in Durban. The research onion by Saunders (2009:129) was used to aid the presentation of the various aspects and layers of the research process in this exploratory qualitative study. Below is Figure 7 depicting the research onion by Saunders (2009), which asserted that the research needed to specify the research philosophy first, before clarifying the type of research approach, methodological choice, strategy, time, and finally techniques and procedures relevant to a particular study

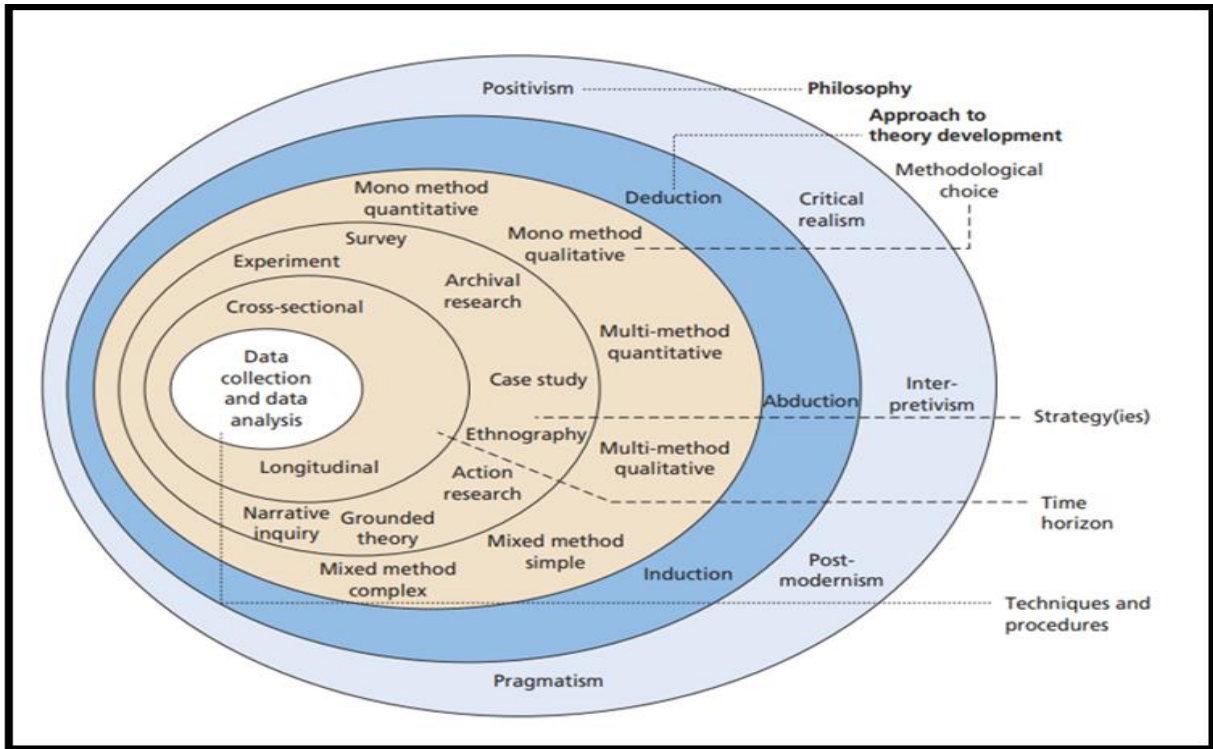


Figure 7: The Research Onion

Source: Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009, p. 129).

3.2. Research Approach

The research approach is a critical aspect of any study, as it outlines the reasoning and strategy behind the research design, guiding data collection and analysis processes. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill's (2016) "Research Onion" framework, the research approach sits beneath the research philosophy and involves choosing between inductive and deductive reasoning.

A deductive approach involves developing a hypothesis based on existing theory and then designing a research strategy to test the hypothesis. It moves from the general to the specific, aiming to confirm or refute preconceived theories through empirical observation (Creswell, 2014). This approach is often associated with quantitative research methods.

An inductive approach, conversely, involves collecting data and developing theory as a result of data analysis. It moves from specific observations to broader generalisations and theories, allowing patterns and themes to emerge from the data without imposing preconceived notions (Saunders et al., 2016). This approach is commonly linked with qualitative research methods

and is suitable for exploring new phenomena or gaining deeper understanding in areas where limited prior research exists.

Given the exploratory nature of this study investigating the business strategies and practices of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, South Africa an inductive research approach was deemed most appropriate. The study aims to understand how these firms develop survival tactics and adapt their strategies within a dynamic and competitive legal market.

By adopting an inductive approach, the research focuses on gathering rich, detailed qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the legal firms. This method allows for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and practices related to business strategy and operational survival. It facilitates the emergence of patterns, themes, and theoretical insights grounded in the empirical data collected.

The inductive approach aligns with the study's objectives by:

Allowing Flexibility: It enables the researcher to adjust the focus based on participants' responses, capturing the complexity of real-life contexts.

Generating New Insights: It supports the development of new theories or models that reflect the unique circumstances of small and medium-sized legal firms in Durban.

Understanding Contextual Factors: It emphasises the importance of the context in which these firms operate, considering cultural, economic, and regulatory influences.

This approach contrasts with a deductive method, which would test specific hypotheses derived from existing theories, potentially limiting the depth of understanding in an area where literature may be scarce.

3.3.Methodological Choice

In the context of research design, the methodological choice refers to the decision regarding the use of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods for data collection and analysis. This choice is a crucial layer in Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill's (2016) Research Onion model, which provides a systematic framework for developing a research methodology.

According to the Research Onion, the methodological choice sits between the research strategy and the time horizon layers. It guides how data will be collected and analysed, influencing the overall approach to addressing the research questions (Saunders et al., 2016). The main methodological choices include:

Mono Method: Using a single data collection technique and corresponding analysis procedures (either quantitative or qualitative).

Mixed Methods: Combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures.

Multi-Method: Using more than one data collection technique and analysis procedure, but within the same paradigm (either multiple quantitative methods or multiple qualitative methods).

For this study, a mono-method qualitative design was chosen. This means that only qualitative data collection and analysis techniques were utilised throughout the research. The decision to adopt a mono-method qualitative approach aligns with the inductive research approach discussed earlier, which seeks to generate theory from observed data rather than testing hypotheses derived from existing theory.

3.3.1. Justification for the Mono-Method Qualitative Choice

The mono-method qualitative choice was deemed most appropriate for several reasons:

Exploratory Nature of the Study: The research aims to explore the business strategies and survival practices of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. Since limited prior research exists on this specific topic, a qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2014).

Complex and Context-Specific Phenomena: The challenges and strategies of legal firms are complex and influenced by various contextual factors such as market dynamics, regulatory environments, and technological advancements. Qualitative methods are well-suited to capture these nuances (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Flexibility and Adaptability: Qualitative research offers the flexibility to adjust data collection methods as new insights emerge. For instance, if initial interview questions did not yield sufficient depth, they could be refined to better capture the realities of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Rich, Detailed Data: The use of qualitative methods facilitates the collection of rich, descriptive data that provides a comprehensive understanding of how business strategies contribute to the survival and success of these firms (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.3.2. Application of the Mono-Method Qualitative Design

The study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection technique. This method enabled the researcher to explore specific topics while allowing participants to express their thoughts freely, thus uncovering deeper insights into their strategic practices.

By focusing solely on qualitative methods, the research-maintained coherence in its methodological approach, ensuring that data collection and analysis were aligned with the study's objectives. This consistency is essential in a mono-method design, as it enhances the reliability and validity of the findings within the qualitative paradigm.

3.4. Research strategy

According to Saunders et al. (2016), a research strategy is a plan of action that guides the methods a researcher uses to answer their research questions. It assists the researcher in achieving the aims of their study by providing a structured approach to data collection and analysis. Common research strategies include surveys, action research, grounded theory, case studies, and narrative inquiries

This study adopted a phenomenological research strategy. Phenomenology focuses on exploring and understanding individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences. By employing this strategy, the study aimed to gain deep insights into the business strategies and practices of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. The phenomenological approach was particularly well-suited for this research as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of how these legal firms navigate their operational challenges and succeed in a competitive legal environment from the day-to-day lived experiences of leaders and owner-managers of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban.

3.5. Time Horizon

The time horizon is a fundamental component of Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill's (2016) Research Onion framework, situated just below the research strategy layer. It refers to the temporal dimension of the study, specifically the period over which data is collected and analysed. The choice between a cross-sectional and a longitudinal time horizon significantly impacts the research design and the nature of the insights that can be obtained. A cross-sectional study involves collecting data at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the current state of the phenomenon being investigated. In contrast, a longitudinal study collects data over an extended period, allowing researchers to observe changes and developments over time.

For this study, titled "Investigating Business Strategies and Practices of Small to Medium-Sized Legal Firms to Survive in Durban, South Africa," a cross-sectional time horizon was selected. This decision aligns with the exploratory and qualitative nature of the research, which aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the current strategies and practices employed by legal firms to navigate a competitive environment. Given the dynamic and fast-paced nature of the legal industry in Durban, capturing a timely and relevant snapshot of the firms' strategies provides immediate insights that can inform strategic decision-making. Additionally, a cross-sectional approach is more feasible within the constraints of time and resources typically available for academic research, allowing the study to be completed efficiently while still achieving its objectives.

However, the cross-sectional time horizon presents certain limitations that must be acknowledged. Primarily, it does not account for changes in strategies or performance over time, potentially overlooking how firms adapt to evolving market conditions or long-term trends. This limitation means that while the study can identify current strategies and their effectiveness, it cannot capture the dynamics of strategy evolution or causality between strategies and outcomes. To mitigate this, the study employs comprehensive and flexible qualitative data collection methods, such as semi-structured interviews, to gather rich, detailed information that provides depth and context to the findings. Furthermore, the research acknowledges the potential for future longitudinal studies to build upon these findings, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how business strategies develop and impact firm survival over time.

3.6. Research Techniques and Procedures

This section outlines the specific techniques and procedures employed in this study to collect and analyse data. By delineating the processes of data collection and data analysis, the study ensures a systematic and rigorous approach to investigating the business strategies and practices of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, South Africa.

3.6.1. Data Collection

Data collection is the “process of gathering information of interest in a systematic fashion that enables one to answer queries, research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes” (Datta, 2018). To ensure comprehensive and robust findings, some researchers employ multiple

methods of data collection, leveraging both primary and secondary sources to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. In the current exploratory study, only primary data from leaders and owner-managers were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews to gain clarity on the (1) business strategies and practices, (2) challenges and (3) recommendations for small to medium-sized legal firms to survive in Durban.

This method is chosen because it allows for a flexible, yet focused exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled the researcher to prepare specific questions while also allowing room for participants to discuss additional relevant topics that may arise during the conversation. This approach is particularly effective in capturing the nuances of the participants' strategies and practices, how they influenced competitive activities and outcomes which ultimately contributed to business survival of small and medium business in Durban (Longhurst, 2003). These interviews were designed to uncover detailed insights into the business strategies employed by these firms, focusing on how they developed and implemented strategies that contributed to their survival in Durban's competitive legal environment.

To ensure the success and professionalism of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher used a checklist provided by Saunders et al. (2016). These checklists offer comprehensive guidelines for preparing and conducting effective interviews, ensuring that the process is thorough and aligned with best practices in qualitative research.

The researcher took several preparatory steps, including booking venues for in-person interviews well in advance to ensure privacy and minimise distractions. These venues were chosen to provide a comfortable and confidential environment for participants, encouraging open and honest discussions. For participants who prefer or required remote participation, interviews were conducted via Microsoft teams conferencing. This flexibility was crucial in accommodating the schedules and preferences of busy legal professionals.

Prior to each interview, the researcher carefully inspected the voice recording equipment to ensure it was functioning correctly, avoiding any technical issues that could disrupt the data collection process. Audio recordings were essential for capturing detailed responses, allowing the researcher to fully engage in the conversation without the need to take extensive notes during the session. This method ensured that all nuances of the participants' responses were accurately captured for subsequent analysis.

By following these procedures, the researcher gathered high-quality data that provided a deep understanding of the business strategies and practices employed by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban.

3.6.1.1.Data collection through Interviews

Interviews are a conversational method of inquiry where questions are used to gather relevant information from participants in response to the key objectives of the research. One of the most common data collection methods in qualitative research is one-on-one (or face-to-face) interviews, where the researcher directly collects data from participants based on specific interests. These interviews can range from being informal, unstructured, and conversational to being semi-structured and standardised to some extent (Jovancic, 2019). This data collection technique is ideal for gathering highly personalised data, as interviews are more personal than questionnaires and can achieve higher response rates. Additionally, interviews offer greater control over the order and flow of questions. However, interviews can also present challenges, particularly when there is a large amount of qualitative data to analyse. There is also a risk of bias if the researcher becomes too involved with interviewees or experiences fatigue during the process. Interviews can be categorised into several types: structured interviews, unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group interviews (Abawi, 2014). This exploratory qualitative study used interviews, with the researcher closely engaging with participants in one-on-one conversations. This approach allowed for probing to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature and variety of business-level strategies that were used. It also explored how these strategies contributed to business survival.

3.6.1.2.Data collection through Structured Interviews

Structured interviews are a quantitative research method where the interviewer asks a specific set of predetermined closed-ended questions. In this format, the questions and their order are pre-scheduled, and the interviewer is not to deviate from them. Structured interviews follow a pattern or plan, making the process efficient and straightforward, as the interviewer does not need to formulate new questions on the spot. Since all participants answer the same questions, the data serve to triangulate the different views emerging from data to saturate perspectives and themes. A key feature of semi-structured interviews is the interview guide. This allows the interview to be a structured process while leaving room for follow-up initially included in the guide but key to get depth or variety of views when necessary. The interview guide contains

what the interview will cover (topics, questions, follow-up questions to probe) but also the order and depth of probing necessary during the interview

An interview guide gives structure to interviews and ensures they move in an intended direction and exhaust the coverage and depth necessary to provide relevant and usable data to answer the research question. While an interview guide provides structure to the process, it is flexible as it allows for more questions necessary to gain in-depth understanding and change in the sequence of questions whenever necessary. The current study used an interview guide to explore the nature of business strategies used to survive as a small or medium sized legal firm.

3.6.1.3.Data collection through Unstructured Interviews

Unstructured interviews involve the interviewer asking questions that are not prepared in advance, allowing for open-ended discussions based on a specific research topic. These interviews aim to make the conversation as natural as possible, with questions adapted to suit the interviewee's experiences. Often referred to as discovery or informal interviews, unstructured interviews are flexible, allowing the interviewer to explore topics in greater depth as they arise during the conversation. This flexibility enables the generation of rich qualitative data, as respondents can speak at length in their own words. However, unstructured interviews can be time-consuming, especially when it comes to analysing the data, which often involves methods such as thematic analysis (Williamson, 2018).

3.6.1.4.Data collection through Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, also known as in-depth interviews, use a predetermined set of carefully worded questions in an interview guide to ask questions from key informants. Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow for more of a discussion, as the interviewer is not strictly bound by a formalised list of questions. This flexibility enables the interviewer to explore additional points that arise during the conversation, providing a balance between structure and spontaneity. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for qualitative data collection, allowing for comparisons between previous and future data while encouraging two-way communication. This type of interview also provides respondents the opportunity to open up about sensitive issues, which may not be possible in more structured formats. However, the open-ended nature of the questions can make data analysis more challenging, and there is no guarantee that respondents will provide honest answers (Longhurst, 2003). This study used this form of interview, on a limited basis and purely to allow follow-up clarity when the interviewees were not particularly clear in answering the questions in a guide.

3.6.2. Data Analysis

This exploratory qualitative study employed thematic analysis to identify and interpret the (1) business strategies and practices, (2) challenges, and (3) recommendations for small to medium-sized legal firms to survive in Durban. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research, focusing on identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (or "themes") within qualitative data (Creswell, 2009). This method was particularly useful in understanding the recurring (1) business strategies and practices, (2) challenges, and (3) recommendations that contribute to the survival of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban.

The analysis followed the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves a systematic process of sorting and organising data into themes. This process includes familiarisation with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The researcher used Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to delve deeper into the underlying ideas and assumptions that inform the leader and owner-manager's responses. This approach uncovered the nature of the business-level strategies employed for survival. It also identified the challenges faced and provided recommendations for small to medium-sized legal firms to survive in Durban. The 15-point checklist provided by Braun and Clarke guided the analysis process, ensuring that the data was processed systematically and effectively for a thorough and insightful analysis. By using thematic analysis, the study has uncovered the key strategies, practices, and challenges. It has provided recommendations that contribute to the success and sustainability of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. These findings aim to support the growth and longevity of these firms.

The checklist covers the following aspects:

1. Transcription:

- Data have been transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts are checked against the recordings for accuracy.

2. Coding:

- Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
- Themes are generated through a thorough and inclusive coding process.

3. **Analysis:**

- All relevant extracts for each theme have been collated.
- Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
- Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.

4. **Overall Narrative:**

- The analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.
- There is a good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts.

5. **Interpretation:**

- The analysis goes beyond description to interpret and make sense of the data.
- The assumptions underlying the analysis are made explicit.

6. **Reflexivity:**

- The researcher has reflected on their own influence on the research.
- Potential biases and their impact on the analysis are acknowledged.

7. **Validity**

- The methodology is appropriate to the research questions.
- The analysis interprets the data with clearly stated assumptions rather than merely describing it

8. **Reliability:**

- The methodology is appropriate to the research questions.
- The process is clearly documented to allow for replication.

How the Checklist Was Used in This Study:

- **Transcription:** All interviews were transcribed verbatim to capture the exact words and meanings expressed by the participants. The researcher carefully reviewed the transcripts while listening to the recordings to ensure accuracy, correcting any discrepancies.
- **Coding:** Each transcript was read multiple times to ensure immersion in the data. The researcher assigned initial codes to meaningful segments of the text, ensuring that every data item received equal attention. This thorough coding process was inclusive, capturing all relevant aspects of the data related to business strategies, challenges, and recommendations for survival.

- **Theme Development:** Codes were organised into potential themes by identifying patterns and relationships among them. The researcher collated all relevant extracts for each theme, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of each thematic area.
- **Reviewing Themes:** Themes were rigorously reviewed and refined. They were checked against each other to ensure they were distinct and against the original data set to confirm that they accurately reflected the participants' perspectives. This step ensured that themes were internally coherent and consistent.
- **Defining and Naming Themes:** Each theme was clearly defined and named to encapsulate its essence. Sub-themes were identified where necessary to add depth and structure to the analysis. Definitions were precise, providing clarity on what each theme encompassed.
- **Producing the Report:** The final analysis presented a coherent and compelling narrative about the data, linking the themes back to the research questions regarding business strategies and survival. The report balanced analytic interpretations with illustrative quotes from participants, strengthening the credibility of the findings.
- **Interpretation and Reflexivity:** The researcher went beyond mere description, interpreting the data to uncover underlying meanings and implications for the survival of small to medium-sized legal firms. Throughout the analysis, the researcher reflected on their own assumptions and potential biases, acknowledging how these might influence the interpretation and taking steps to mitigate them.

3.7. Research design

A research design served as the blueprint for guiding how a research project was conducted, informing the procedures to obtain relevant information and structuring the approach used to solve research problems (Saunders et al., 2016). It could be understood as a procedural plan that researchers employed to provide detailed and accurate responses to the key questions and objectives of the exploratory qualitative study, ensuring the process was trustworthy (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), a research design was a primary plan that directed the activities of gathering relevant data.

There were primarily three types of research design: descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. Descriptive research design focused on answering questions about what was happening and how it happened. Explanatory design went a step further to explain why something happened, addressing what, why, and how. In contrast, exploratory research design was used to explore a

subject matter in depth, particularly when the research problem was not well understood or when there was limited existing research on the topic. It sought to uncover insights and generate ideas, answering questions about what and how. This exploratory qualitative study adopted an exploratory research design

3.8.Exploratory research design

Exploratory research was conducted to gain new insights and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of competitive strategy in the context of small and medium sized legal firms (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the exploratory research design will be instrumental in investigating the business strategies and practices of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, South Africa. Given the limited existing research on this specific topic, the exploratory design will enable the researcher to delve into the complexities and nuances of how these firms were competing to survive in a dynamic and competitive legal environment (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016).

The exploratory research design facilitated a thorough investigation into the various challenges and opportunities these firms face, particularly the business level strategies used in adapting and surviving in the changing market conditions and client expectations (Bryman, 2012). This approach allowed the researcher to gather rich, qualitative data from legal practitioners, uncovering new perspectives on the strategies that are employed or overlooked in their business practices. By focusing on the experiences and viewpoints of the participants, the study will be able to identify key themes and patterns that may not have been previously documented, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject (Yin, 2014).

Moreover, the exploratory design provides the flexibility to explore emerging issues as they arise during the research process, ensuring that the study remains responsive to the real-world context in which these legal firms operate and maintain focus on the research objectives. This in-depth exploration was crucial for identifying both successful competitive strategies and potential areas for improvement, offering valuable insights that can inform future research and practice which contributes to the survival and growth of small and medium sized legal firms (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

3.9.Study Area

This study was conducted in Durban, a coastal city located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Specifically, the research focused on small to medium-sized legal firms operating

within the city and its neighbouring suburbs. Durban was known for its vibrant economy, with a diverse range of industries, including legal services, contributing to its growth. As one of South Africa's major urban centres, Durban provided a dynamic and competitive environment for legal practitioners, making it an ideal location to explore the business strategies and practices that these firms employed to survive and thrive in the local market.

3.10. Target Population

Carrie and Kevin (2014) describe a target population as the group members most likely to participate in a study. The target population is the total group of individuals from which a sample might be drawn and represents the entire population that the researcher intends to examine. At the organisational level, the focus of this study is on enterprise size expressed in terms of fewer than 50 employees, which classify them within the small to medium-sized category.

Within the identified size of legal firms which qualify as small and medium-sized, there was need for clarity of the target population at the level of participants. Thus, the target included leaders and owner-managers of all small to medium-sized legal firms operating in Durban, South Africa. Additionally, the target population encompassed leaders within these firms who are known by titles such as, partners, and directors. These are leaders who are directly involved in strategic decision-making and management practices. These individuals are relevant to the study because their roles position them as key decision-makers responsible for the development and implementation of business strategies within their firms.

3.11. Sampling

Datta (2018) describes sampling as “selecting a portion of the population, in the research area, which will be a representation of the entire population.” Creswell and Miller (2000) further note that “sampling is the process of selecting individuals or objects that represent the entire population in a study.” The strategy used in sampling ensures that the sample selected for research accurately represents the population from which it is drawn. There are two main sampling methods: probability sampling and non-probability sampling.

According to Saunders et al. (2016), in non-probability sampling, the elements that make up the sample are selected by non-random methods, with three main approaches: convenience, quota, and purposive sampling. Other sampling methods include accidental, snowball, simple random sampling, and cluster sampling (Datta, 2018). For this exploratory qualitative study,

purposive sampling was used to select leaders and owner managers of small and medium sized legal firms in Durban.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics and criteria relevant to the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2016). The criteria for selecting participants in legal firms in this exploratory qualitative study include:

Firm Size: Lead or own a legal firm with fewer than 50 employees.

Location: Firms based in Durban.

Role of Participants: Individuals in leadership or management positions, such as partners, firm leaders, and senior associates.

Experience: Participants with at least three years of experience in the legal industry were selected: The rationale behind selecting participants with at least three years of experience in the legal industry was critical because the data showed that the survival rate of law firms improves significantly after the initial years of operation. Firms that are longer in operation have a 79.25% survival rate, demonstrating that those which manage to stay operational beyond three years are more likely to have developed resilience and effective strategies for survival. The three-year mark represents a point where firms have typically overcome early challenges such as establishing client bases, managing cash flow, and adapting to market demands (Legal Practice Council, 2024). This experience is crucial for providing valuable insights into the factors contributing to firm longevity, which is why participants with at least three years of experience are ideal for this study. Additionally, by the third year, firms are more likely to have faced and adapted to significant market changes, making their perspective particularly relevant for understanding long-term survival strategies.

Table 5 provides an overview of the status of law firms in Durban from 2019 to 2024, illustrating the trends in firm longevity and closures:

DURBAN LAW FIRMS						
Year Opened	Still Active Firms	Closed Firms	Total Firms Opened	% still Active/Total	%Closed/Total	Total period being active (Years)
2019	42	11	53	79,25%	20,75%	>5years
2020	40	12	52	76,92%	23,08%	>4years
2021	35	8	43	81,40%	18,60%	>3years
2022	44	5	49	89,80%	10,20%	>2years
2023	46	5	51	90,20%	9,80%	>1year
2024	41	2	43	95,35%	4,65%	<1year

Researcher's own table, 2024

A total of 14 individuals from different firms participated in the study. This sample size was sufficient to provide diverse insights while remaining manageable within the study's timeframe and resources. In qualitative research, data saturation is a commonly accepted point where the researcher observes that recurring themes, patterns, and insights are emerging consistently across participants, indicating that further interviews would likely yield repetitive information rather than novel perspectives.

The selected participants provided valuable insights into the business strategies and practices employed by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. This study encompassed a diverse group of fourteen professionals, including directors, partners, and sole practitioners, each bringing a unique blend of qualifications and extensive experience to the table as it is shown in table 6 below.

Table 6: Description of participants in this study

Title/Position	Qualification	Year of experience	Identity of participants
Director	B. Proc degree	5 years' experience	Participant 1
Partner	B. Proc, LLB degrees	29 years' experience	Participant 2
Director	B. Proc, LLB degrees	40 years' experience	Participant 3
Sole Proprietor	BA, LLB degrees	21 years' experience	Participant 4
Director	B. Proc, LLB, LLM degrees	27 years' experience	Participant 5
Partner	BA, LLB degrees	25 years' experience	Participant 6
Sole Practitioner	B. Proc degree	+30 years' experience	Participant 7
Partner	B. Soc Sc, LLB degrees	10 years' experience	Participant 8
Madoda	B. Proc degree	24 years' experience	Participant 9
Director	BA, LLB degrees	22 years' experience	Participant 10
Partner	BA, LLB degrees	20 years' experience	Participant 12
Sole Practitioner	BA, LLB degrees	28 years' experience	Participant 13
Sole Practitioner	BA, LLB degrees	24 years' experience	Participant 14

Researcher's own table, 2024

3.12. Pre-testing of the Interview Guide

An essential step in ensuring the effectiveness of the data collection instrument is the pre-testing, or pilot testing. In the current exploratory qualitative study, the researcher prepared a draft of the interview guide and conducted 2 pre-tests, which were conducted with selected key stakeholders from small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban.

The pre-test participants operated in firms that were representative of the target population in terms of size, scope of services, and market challenges. By engaging individuals who were similar to the main study participants, the researcher ensured that the interview guide was appropriately tailored to elicit relevant and insightful information. The feedback obtained from these pre-tests was instrumental in refining the interview questions, enhancing their clarity and

focus on the core aspects of business strategies and survival mechanisms employed by small to medium-sized legal firms. This process contributed significantly to the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument, aligning it closely with the study's objectives.

The first pre-test of the interview guide took place on September 12, 2024, allowing the researcher to identify and address any errors or issues with the interview questions. During this phase, the researcher revised and simplified questions related to the study's objectives to ensure they were easily understood by participants. To improve clarity, the questions were divided into several categories, each beginning with an introductory statement that helped participants grasp the context and focus of the questions. Additionally, feedback from the pre-test revealed that question number 4 was problematic, as it dealt with sustainable issues while the study looked into business strategies and did not effectively achieve its intended objective. As a result, this question was removed from the interview guide to better align with the study's overall goals.

Following these adjustments, a second pre-test was conducted on September 14, 2024, with a single participant (Participant 11) who met the sampling criteria. During this pre-test, the researcher and the participant reviewed all the interview questions together, identifying any potential sources of confusion and implementing further necessary changes based on the feedback received. Notably, the question addressing talent management strategy was removed during this second and final pre-test, as it did not align with the study's core objective of examining strategic objectives rather than operational objectives. This final pre-test enabled the researcher to gauge the approximate duration of the interviews and make any last-minute adjustments to the interview guide. The feedback from this session was instrumental in refining the guide before proceeding with the actual interviews. The final refinements related to enhancing question clarity and ensuring alignment with strategic objectives

After completing the pre-testing process and making all necessary adjustments, the researcher proceeded with the full set of interviews, which were conducted from September 19 to October 2, 2024. Confident that the interview guide was well-structured and effective, the researcher successfully gathered the required data on business-level strategies, challenges and recommended business strategies for the survival of small and medium-sized legal firms in Durban.

3.13. Validity

Ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research involves addressing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish credibility, this study employed member checking by assuring the availability of interview transcripts and preliminary findings unable participants to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the data if need be. Additionally, further engagement was undertaken through communication with each participant, allowing for a deeper understanding of their experiences and building trust, where necessary. All participants were assured that the research was for the stated purpose and not to duplicate and copy the participants strategies for personal use.

To enhance transferability, the study provided descriptions of the research context, including detailed information about the small and medium-sized legal firms in Durban, the participants' roles, and the specific challenges they face. This comprehensive contextual information enables other researchers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar settings. Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail, which included detailed records of all research decisions, data collection procedures, and data analysis processes. This documentation allows for the replication of the study's methodology, ensuring consistency and reliability in the research process. To ensure further dependability of the data, each participant was assured that they could have access to the transcript of their interviews and final outcome of the research.

Confirmability was achieved by employing reflexivity practices, where the researcher maintained a reflexive journal to document their own biases, assumptions, and the decision-making process throughout the study. This practice helped to ensure that the findings were grounded in the data rather than influenced by the researcher's perspectives. Ethical considerations were rigorously pursued by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality by anonymising data, and adhering to ethical guidelines set forth by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. These measures collectively ensured that the research was conducted with integrity, safeguarding the rights and well-being of the participants while providing reliable and trustworthy findings.

3.14. Reliability

Although reliability testing is more commonly associated with quantitative research, this study acknowledges the importance of consistency in the research process and the potential utility of reliability tests, such as the test-retest reliability method or Cronbach's alpha, where applicable. In qualitative research, reliability is often interpreted as the consistency of the research process over time. In this study, steps were taken to ensure reliability by: Maintaining a detailed audit trail of all research decisions and procedures, which provides transparency and the possibility for replication (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Offering participants the opportunity to review their interview transcripts and the preliminary findings, thereby ensuring that the data collection process is consistent and accurately represents their views.

3.15. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical procedures that prioritised the protection of participants, following the "do no harm principle" as outlined by Kuper, Lingard, and Levinson (2008). The following procedures were implemented to ensure that ethical standards were rigorously observed:

Gatekeeper's Letter (Appendix 2)

Permission for this study was obtained from the Legal Practice Council, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Black Lawyers Association. These approvals facilitated access to relevant participants and resources necessary to explore business strategies within Durban's small to medium-sized legal firms. By securing these permissions, the study ensured adherence to professional standards and maintained confidentiality throughout the research process.

Informed Consent (Appendix 4)

All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and the intended use of the data collected. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, which included permission to audio-record interviews. Participants were assured that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. This consent process ensured that participants were aware of their rights and the scope of their participation.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Participants were explicitly informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalties or consequences. It was emphasised that their decision to participate, or not, would have no impact on their relationships with the researcher or any affiliated institutions. By choosing to participate, participants confirmed their willingness to engage under these terms, ensuring that their involvement was based on informed and voluntary consent.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

The confidentiality of participants was strictly maintained throughout the study. Personal identifiers such as names, job titles, and other identifying information were excluded from the final report. Data was anonymised and stored securely to prevent unauthorised access. Access to the data was restricted to the researcher and the research supervisor only. These measures ensured that participants' privacy was protected and that their information remained confidential.

Minimising Harm

The study was carefully designed to minimise any potential harm or discomfort to participants. Interviews were conducted in comfortable settings, whether in person or via videoconferencing, at times convenient for the participants. The interview questions were meticulously framed to avoid causing any distress or discomfort. By creating a supportive and non-threatening environment, the study ensured that participants felt safe and respected during their involvement.

Ethical Approval (Appendix 1)

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal before data collection commenced. This approval ensured that all research activities were conducted in line with established ethical guidelines and that the welfare of participants was safeguarded throughout the research process. Adhering to these guidelines provided an additional layer of protection for participants and reinforced the study's commitment to ethical integrity.

Transparency

Participants were provided with the researcher's contact information and were encouraged to reach out if they had any questions or concerns about the study. The researcher explained the interview process and how the data would be used, ensuring that participants were fully informed at every stage. This transparency fostered trust and openness, allowing participants to feel confident in their involvement and the handling of their data.

Following these ethical procedures ensured the protection and respect of participants' rights, dignity, and well-being throughout the research. These actions upheld ethical standards and reinforced the research's overall integrity and credibility.

3.16. Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology adopted for the study titled "Investigating Business Strategies and Practices of Small to Medium-Sized Legal Firms to Survive in Durban, South Africa," structured according to Saunders et al.'s Research Onion framework. It began by establishing an interpretivist philosophy and an inductive approach to explore the subjective experiences of leaders and owner-managers within these firms. The phenomenological research strategy was employed to gain deep insights into their business strategies and survival practices. A cross-sectional time horizon was chosen to capture a comprehensive snapshot of current strategies over a two-year period, ensuring relevance and feasibility. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews. The quality and accuracy of collected documents were ensured through verification with interview data and sourcing from authorised representatives. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and minimising harm, were meticulously observed to protect participants and uphold research integrity. Additionally, the chapter addressed the study's limitations, providing a transparent overview of the methodological choices and their implications. The subsequent chapter will present the findings derived from this robust and ethically sound methodology, offering valuable insights into the strategies that enable small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban to thrive in a competitive environment.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the exploratory study on business strategies and practices that influence the survival of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, South Africa. The findings are organised according to the three research objectives outlined in Chapter 1. First, the chapter highlights the key business strategies and practices used by leaders and owner-managers to sustain their firms. This includes areas such as operational efficiency, adaptation strategies, client engagement, and marketing practices. Next, the chapter explores the challenges these legal firms face in implementing long-term survival strategies in Durban. Finally, the chapter provides recommendations on strategies that can help mitigate these challenges, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and partnerships. These findings aim to provide a clear understanding of how small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban navigate their business environment to remain competitive and sustainable.

4.1.Presentation of Findings

The findings of this study reveal various themes and sub-themes that highlight the business strategies and practices employed by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban to ensure their survival. Additionally, the study identifies the key challenges these firms face in implementing effective survival strategies.

4.2.Themes on business strategies and practices used by leaders and owner-managers of small to medium-sized legal firms to survive

The study reveals a variety of themes related to business strategies and practices among small to medium-sized legal firms to survive in a competitive market. The variety of the business level strategies identified by leaders and business owners include (1) operational efficiency, (2) client engagement and retention, (3) adaptation to market changes, (4) strategic use of marketing (5) and development of niche markets as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 7: Themes on Strategic business practices demonstrated by participants

Sustainable Practice	Frequency
Operational efficiency	6
Client engagement and retention	5
Adaptation to market changes	4
Strategic use of marketing	3
Niche markets	4

Researcher's own table, 2024

4.2.1. Operational Efficiency

The findings reveal that operational efficiency is a key area, where small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban focus their efforts in pursuit of business survival. Small and medium-sized legal firms emphasise adopting effective document management systems, reducing operational costs, and employing technology to streamline workflows. By focusing on operational efficiency, these small to medium enterprises (SMEs) aim to improve productivity, reduce administrative burdens, and enhance service delivery, all of which contribute to their long-term success.

Participants consistently highlighted that improving the management of administrative tasks and reducing reliance on physical documents were essential steps toward higher productivity. For instance, one participant noted:

"Our firm relies heavily on technology to manage our cases and ensure our documents are well-organised. This reduces our overheads and allows us to focus on the quality of service we provide to our clients" (Participant 3).

Another participant echoed similar sentiments by highlighting the importance of keeping their employees well-trained to effectively use technology. Participant 5 stated:

"We always ensure that our paralegals are well-trained in using the latest conveyancing software. This helps us keep the operational turnaround time to a minimum, which is crucial in maintaining our clients' satisfaction."

Similarly, Participant 6 shared, "Training our staff to use conveyancing software has significantly helped in reducing delays. It's an investment in both our people and our firm's efficiency."

The adoption of practice management software was mentioned as a critical tool in helping SME's track their time, manage billing, and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements. Participant 9 commented on the use of file management software in opening and maintaining files.

"It means that when clients call to inquire about their matters, the information can be sourced at the press of a button, even when the attorneys are not present."

He further noted, a file management tool also assists with proper billing, which directly impacts our fee recovery and the production of accurate invoices." SME's that were able to invest in such technology noted improved accuracy and efficiency in their operations.

"We've seen significant gains in efficiency since we implemented practice management software. It helps us track time more effectively, manage our billing processes, and ensures we stay compliant with legal regulations" (Participant 8).

Moreover, several participants described how their SME's have taken proactive steps to reduce operational costs by streamlining workflows and adopting digital tools. By minimising the reliance on physical documentation and shifting to electronic systems, SME's have reduced storage costs, made information more accessible, and improved overall workflow efficiency. As one respondent explained:

"We've implemented automated systems for client communication and document management, which has drastically cut down on the time we spend on routine tasks. This allows us to respond to clients faster and spend more time on the legal work that adds value" (Participant 5).

Another participant reflected on the importance of integrating technology with traditional practices to achieve operational efficiency:

"While we still maintain some traditional methods, especially for certain client preferences, the integration of digital tools like e-filing systems has helped us optimise

our processes. This balance ensures we maintain a personalised approach while being efficient" (Participant 12).

The adoption of technology, including document management systems and practice management software, was frequently mentioned by participants as a driver of efficiency. Participants noted that these tools not only help in organising documents and automating routine tasks but also enable better tracking of case progress and client interactions. These improvements in operational efficiency allow small to medium-sized firms to compete more effectively in a challenging legal market by offering higher-quality services while controlling costs.

4.2.2. Client Engagement and Retention

Client engagement and retention emerged as a key theme across multiple interviews. Participating SME's underscored the importance of maintaining strong relationships with clients, offering personalised services, and being responsive to client needs. Participants highlighted their focus on building trust with clients by keeping them informed throughout the process and demonstrating their commitment to resolving their cases. As noted by several participants, the emphasis on establishing long-term relationships is essential not only for retaining clients but also for encouraging positive word-of-mouth referrals, which are particularly valuable for smaller legal practices.

One participant explained:

"The personalised approach is very important to us. Our clients appreciate that they can speak directly to the attorney handling their case and be involved in the process. This has helped us retain many clients over the years" (Participant 5). Similarly, participant 10 stated, "Our clients value the one-on-one interaction. Being available for direct communication not only builds trust, but also ensures that they feel heard and involved, which contributes to client retention."

Another participant echoed these sentiments, emphasising the value of consistent communication:

"Our clients trust us because we make sure they understand every step of their legal journey. We keep them informed with timely updates, which not only reassures them but also builds their confidence in our services" (Participant 9).

The use of alternative fee arrangements, such as fixed pricing instead of hourly billing, was also highlighted as a way to enhance client satisfaction and retain clients in a competitive market. According to one participant:

"Clients often dislike the unpredictability of hourly billing. We have introduced fixed fees for certain services, which has made a significant difference. Clients appreciate knowing upfront what their costs will be, and it has helped us attract and retain more clients" (Participant 12).

Participants also emphasised that timely communication and regular updates play a crucial role in ensuring client satisfaction and loyalty. Participant 8 mentioned that his partner always engages clients with a full fee structure at the start of the matter, which helps set clear expectations and build trust. Participant 3 noted:

"We believe that one of the key factors in client retention is transparency. Regular updates, even if there's no significant change, make clients feel valued and involved. This helps to foster loyalty and reduces any anxiety they may have about their case."

In addition to communication, personalisation was repeatedly cited as a significant factor in client engagement. Participants 13 and 14 highlighted the importance of individualised attention to clients, which not only results in returning clients but also leads to referrals of new ones. Participant 13 stated,

"Providing individualised attention to each client has been crucial for us. Clients feel valued, and because of this personal touch, they not only come back to us but also recommend our services to others."

Participant 14 echoed similar sentiments but articulated them differently, focusing on the depth of client relationships:

“When we tailor our interactions to meet each client's specific needs, it builds a strong rapport. This not only ensures that clients return but also motivates them to refer new clients to our business.”

Participant 7 mentioned as well that:

"Understanding the unique needs of our clients and tailoring our services accordingly has set us apart. We take the time to understand their concerns and address them proactively, which has been instrumental in retaining our clients".

Moreover, leveraging technology to enhance client engagement was also discussed. Participants have implemented client portals and online communication tools to streamline the process of keeping clients informed.

Participant 10 shared:

"Technology has been a game-changer for us. The client portal allows our clients to access their case documents at any time, which gives them a sense of control and involvement. This transparency has positively impacted our retention rates."

Furthermore, demonstrating empathy and going beyond legal obligations was frequently mentioned as an engagement strategy.

Participant 8 noted:

"Sometimes, it's about more than just legal advice. Clients need to know that we care about them as individuals. Simple gestures like sending a follow-up message after a case is closed, or checking in to see how they're doing, go a long way in retaining clients."

These insights reveal that client engagement and retention in small to medium-sized legal firms are driven by a combination of personalised services, clear and consistent communication, innovative fee structures, and the strategic use of technology to enhance client relationships.

Participant 9 also highlighted the value of non-billable value adds, such as keeping clients informed about developments in their sector and offering training sessions. He emphasised that:

'We make it a point to keep our clients updated on relevant changes and offer training sessions. These efforts help clients feel supported and informed, and they ultimately contribute to client loyalty and satisfaction.'

Additionally, Participant 9 mentioned the firm's approach of offering non-billable value adds,

"Providing training sessions for our clients' staff has been instrumental in strengthening our relationships. These sessions not only add value beyond our billable services but also demonstrate our commitment to our clients' success."

He emphasised that these initiatives not only help retain clients but also provide a competitive edge.

4.2.3. Adaptation to Market Changes

The findings also reveal that adaptation to market changes is an essential aspect of ensuring that small to medium-sized legal firms survive on the market. Participants described how they have had to adapt to the changing expectations of clients, technological advancements, and increased competition in the legal sector. Adaptation involves integrating new tools, adjusting service offerings, and adopting flexible pricing models to attract clients.

One participant illustrated this by saying:

"We have had to adapt to changes in technology and find new ways to offer our services. For example, we now conduct consultations via video calls, which has allowed us to reach clients who might not have the time to come to the office" (Participant 2).

In addition to technological adaptation, firms also adapted by expanding their service offerings to include niche areas of law that were emerging as high demand, such as data privacy and compliance. This flexibility in service offerings allowed firms to capture new client segments and mitigate the risks associated with market fluctuations.

Another respondent emphasised the importance of diversification:

"To stay competitive, we had to diversify our practice areas. We noticed an increasing demand in areas like cyber law and environmental regulations, so we invested in

training our associates in these fields to position ourselves as leaders in these niche markets" (Participant 6).

Participants also spoke about adjusting their pricing models to better align with clients' financial constraints, particularly in the face of economic downturns. As one participant explained:

"Clients today are far more price-conscious, and we've had to adopt more flexible payment plans and even offer fixed-fee arrangements for certain services. This has helped us retain clients who might otherwise have gone elsewhere" (Participant 8).

Several participants pointed out that technology has played a crucial role in their adaptation efforts, particularly with regard to client communication and service delivery. One respondent shared:

"Integrating legal tech tools has been a game-changer for us. We've adopted software that allows clients to track the progress of their cases in real-time, which has improved transparency and increased client satisfaction" (Participant 12).

The competitive nature of the legal industry was another factor driving adaptation. One respondent highlighted how competition pushed their firm to be more proactive:

"The level of competition in the legal sector means that we cannot afford to be complacent. We are constantly reassessing our services and marketing strategies to ensure we are meeting clients' evolving needs. This includes everything from using social media to reach younger clients to offering after-hours consultations for busy professionals" (Participant 3).

Flexibility in service delivery was also a recurring theme, with several respondents mentioning how they adjusted their working hours and modes of consultation to better serve their clients. As one participant put it:

"We realised that our clients appreciate convenience. So, we extended our office hours and began offering weekend consultations. This adaptability has significantly improved client retention" (Participant 7).

Overall, the findings underscore that small to medium-sized legal firms must be agile and open to change in order to sustain themselves in a dynamic environment. Whether through embracing technology, expanding service offerings, or adjusting pricing models, the ability to adapt has been key to these firms' resilience.

4.2.4. Strategic Use of Marketing

Participants highlighted the importance of strategic marketing as an essential tool for small to medium-sized legal firms to attract clients and maintain visibility in a competitive market. Firms employed various marketing techniques, including social media, community engagement, and professional networking, to promote their services and build brand awareness.

Participant 14 explained:

"I attend property shows on weekends to provide conveyancing guidance during open houses. This has been effective in securing future business, as people often need legal advice right on the spot."

The participant further mentioned retaining a PR company to enhance her firm's marketing efforts, emphasising that:

"Investing in professional marketing has really helped us reach clients we wouldn't have reached otherwise." Participant 14 also noted, "While some firms actively use marketing strategies, I've seen many colleagues recognise the value of marketing but still neglect to implement it effectively. This hesitation keeps them from growing as they could."

This comment underscores the varying levels of engagement with marketing strategies across different small to medium-sized legal firms.

Social media emerged as a key marketing tool, with Participant 6 explaining,

"We use social media to create awareness about our services and showcase our expertise, which helps us stay top-of-mind for potential clients."

Participant 9 added that posting regular updates on legal developments helps maintain client engagement and establish thought leadership. Community outreach also played a significant

role, with firms participating in free legal clinics and seminars to build trust and credibility. Participant 9 noted,

"By offering free legal seminars, we not only provide valuable information but also build trust, leading to new client relationships."

Professional networking was emphasised as an effective strategy. Participant 4 on building relationships with other professionals mentioned that:

"Maintaining strong relationships with accountants and real estate agents has been pivotal for our firm. These connections lead to consistent referrals, which help us reach a broader client base."

Overall, strategic marketing, through social media, community engagement, professional networking, and niche market development, has proven crucial for small to medium-sized legal firms to enhance their visibility, attract clients, and maintain a competitive edge. Adapting to market changes, embracing technology, and diversifying services have all been key to these firms' resilience and growth.

4.2.5. Development of niche markets

The development of niche markets emerged as a prominent strategy among small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, driven by the need to differentiate themselves in a competitive environment. Several participants highlighted how focusing on niche areas of law allowed their firms to build specialised expertise and attract clients seeking specific legal services. Participant 9 shared,

"We realised that to compete effectively, we needed to specialise in areas like maritime law and intellectual property, rather than trying to be a generalist firm. This approach has brought us clients who value our deep knowledge in these areas".

Participants also discussed how niche development contributes to client retention and strengthens long-term client relationships. (Participant 2) explained,

“Clients come to us because we understand their unique industry needs. This understanding builds trust, and they are more likely to return to us for future legal services”.

However, challenges in developing niche markets were also noted. (Participant 4) pointed out,

“Specialising in a niche can sometimes mean that we have to invest significantly in training and certifications, which can be costly, especially for a smaller firm like ours”.

Overall, the findings from participants indicate that the development of niche markets has allowed small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban to carve out distinctive market positions, build client trust, and reduce the intensity of direct competition. These insights suggest that while niche development presents challenges, it remains a valuable strategy for achieving sustainable growth.

4.3.To examine the nature of challenges experienced by leaders and owner-managers of small to medium-sized legal firms in implementing long-term survival strategies in Durban.

The study identified four challenges that small to medium-sized legal firms were facing in implementing long term survival strategies. These challenges include (1) increased competition, (2) client cost sensitivity, (3) limited resources for investing in new technology and training, and (4) overregulation of practices

Table 8: Three challenges Faced by small to medium sized Legal Firms in implementing long term survival strategies in Durban.

Challenge	Frequency
Increased Competition	5
Client cost sensitivity	4
Limited resources for technology and training	3
Overregulation of Practice	2

Researcher’s own table, 2024

4.3.1. Increased Competition

A significant challenge highlighted by participants is the increased competition within the legal sector. Many firms mentioned that there is a growing number of new entrants, and these new firms often undercut established firms by offering lower fees. This trend makes it challenging for existing firms to retain clients while maintaining their operational costs.

"There is a lot of competition in Durban. Many new firms are opening, and they can offer lower fees because they don't have the same overheads. This means we have to find ways to add value that clients are willing to pay for" (Participant 4).

Participants also noted that the rise of alternative legal service providers, such as online platforms and freelance legal professionals, has intensified competition. These new players are often able to provide more affordable services, putting pressure on traditional law firms to innovate and rethink their pricing models.

One participant shared their perspective on the challenges posed by these alternative providers:

"The rise of online legal platforms has really changed the game. Clients now have more options, and many of these platforms are able to offer lower prices because they operate with much lower overheads. We've had to focus on providing personalised services and building strong client relationships to differentiate ourselves" (Participant 12).

Another participant emphasised the need for continuous innovation to stay competitive:

"We can't just rely on the same strategies that worked a decade ago. The market is evolving, and so must we. We are constantly looking for ways to streamline our processes and offer better value to our clients, whether through technology or more efficient service delivery" (Participant 9).

A respondent also highlighted the challenges of competing with freelance legal professionals:

"Freelancers have become a major source of competition because they can offer their services at a lower rate without the overhead costs that traditional firms have. This has forced us to rethink our pricing models and focus on the unique value we can provide, such as personalised attention and specialised expertise" (Participant 13).

Another participant mentioned the importance of client relationships in the face of growing competition:

"With so many new entrants, building strong client relationships has become more important than ever. Clients need to see the value in staying with us rather than moving to a cheaper alternative. We invest time in understanding their needs and providing tailored solutions" (Participant 6).

One participant discussed how competition has influenced their firm's strategic direction:

"The increased competition has forced us to become more niche-focused. We decided to specialise in certain areas of law where we have a competitive advantage, such as intellectual property and environmental law. This specialisation has helped us differentiate ourselves in a crowded market" (Participant 14).

Another participant added:

"We have noticed that the key to sustaining our practice is to keep improving the quality of our services. The competition is tough, but clients do appreciate expertise and reliability. We've invested in additional training for our team to ensure we maintain a high standard of service" (Participant 15).

Several respondents also mentioned that marketing efforts have become a crucial response to competition ie:

"We had to step up our marketing game significantly. We now have a dedicated team working on social media campaigns and client engagement activities to keep our brand visible. This has helped us stand out even as more firms enter the market" (Participant 14).

One participant highlighted the challenge of competing against larger, well-established firms:

"The larger firms have more resources, which gives them an edge in terms of technology and marketing. We've had to be very strategic in choosing our battles, focusing on niche markets where we can be more competitive" (Participant 14).

Overall, increased competition, both from new market entrants and alternative legal service providers, has forced small to medium-sized legal firms to innovate, adapt their pricing models, and find ways to add value that sets them apart from the competition.

4.3.2. Client Cost Sensitivity

Participants in the study highlighted that clients are becoming increasingly cost-sensitive, often shopping around for legal services based on price. This heightened price consciousness has created significant pressure on firms to reduce their fees, impacting profitability and long-term sustainability.

"Clients today want a fixed price or a reduced rate, and they are very conscious about costs. It can be difficult to find the balance between offering competitive rates and maintaining profitability" (Participant 1).

Participants noted that clients are now more informed and frequently compare prices across firms before making a decision. This behaviour has compelled firms not only to compete on price but also to emphasise the added value they offer, such as specialised expertise or personalised service.

"Clients are becoming very price-driven, and they have no hesitation in negotiating fees or asking for discounts. It's becoming more challenging to maintain a healthy profit margin" (Participant 2).

Another participant echoed this sentiment, stating,

"We are constantly being asked to justify our fees. Clients will come to us with quotes from multiple firms, and we have to explain why our services might be priced higher" (Participant 3).

In addition to client-driven cost sensitivity, participants also revealed the growing influence of banks on legal practitioners. Legal firms that are part of bank panels face significant pressure to offer steep discounts, sometimes up to 50%, on their fees. Banks make it clear that refusing to comply with these demands can result in the firm losing instructions entirely.

As Participant 3 explained,

"The banks we work with demand heavy discounts on fees, and if we don't agree, they'll simply stop giving us work. It's tough because these are major clients for us."

Participant 4 agreed, adding,

"We've had to lower our fees drastically just to remain on the panel. This level of discount is not sustainable, but we don't have a choice."

Participant 5 expressed the same concern:

"Offering discounts of up to 50% is becoming the norm if we want to keep getting instructions from banks."

This dual pressure from both individual clients and institutions like banks has forced firms to explore alternative fee arrangements. Participants shared that they have adopted more flexible pricing models, such as fixed or capped fees, to meet client expectations while trying to preserve operational sustainability.

"We've had to introduce pricing models like fixed fees or capped fees to accommodate clients' preferences while keeping our operations viable" (Participant 4).

Another participant added,

"We're even considering subscription-based pricing, which gives clients a sense of predictability in costs" (Participant 5).

The cost sensitivity of clients, coupled with the pricing demands from banks, has driven firms to improve their internal efficiencies.

"We've had to streamline our processes to cut costs without compromising the quality of our service. This has been essential to staying competitive" (Participant 8).

Another participant noted,

"Investing in technology has helped reduce operational costs, which allows us to offer more competitive pricing without sacrificing the quality of our legal services" (Participant 9).

Additionally, regional disparities in legal service fees present another challenge, particularly for practitioners in Durban. Despite having the same or greater experience, legal practitioners in Durban struggle to charge fees comparable to those of their counterparts in Gauteng. The market in Durban is much more price-sensitive, which makes it difficult for firms to maintain profitability.

"In Durban, we simply can't charge the same rates as firms in Johannesburg or Pretoria, even though we offer the same level of expertise and experience" (Participant 3).

Participant 4 shared their perspective on the challenges related to regional fee differences, specifically noting the disparities in how fees are set depending on the region. The participant explained:

"This regional difference in fees is a significant challenge for us. We often find ourselves in a position where we have to lower our rates to stay competitive, even though we are providing the same quality of service as firms in other areas. It's frustrating because, despite delivering high-quality work, clients in our region are more price-conscious, which directly affects our ability to charge competitive rates."

Overall, participants expressed concern about the long-term impact of price competition on the sustainability of legal practices.

"Lowering fees to win clients is not sustainable in the long run. We need to find a balance between being competitive on price and maintaining the quality of our services" (Participant 10).

This has made it essential for firms to differentiate themselves not only on cost but also on the unique value they provide to clients.

4.3.3. Limited Resources for Investing in New Technology and Training

Another challenge faced by small to medium-sized firms is the limited resources available to invest in new technologies and employee training. Many participants explained that while they understand the value of adopting advanced technology to improve efficiency, financial

constraints make it difficult to invest in these technologies or provide the necessary training for their employees.

"We know that technology can help us improve our services, but it's not always feasible to make those investments given our budget limitations" (Participant 8).

Participants emphasised that without sufficient funding, it becomes challenging to stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

"There are so many new tools that could really streamline our processes, but the initial costs are a big barrier for us. We need to be selective about where we allocate our limited resources" (Participant 9).

Participant 9 noted as well that:

"The problem is not just the cost of acquiring the technology, but also the ongoing expenses, such as maintenance and updates. It's a continuous investment that we can't always afford".

Limited resources also impact training efforts.

"Training is crucial if we want our staff to keep up with the latest changes, but specialised training programs are expensive, and we often don't have the funds to support that" (Participant 12).

Another participant added,

"We have to rely on internal, on-the-job training because sending our employees to formal training sessions is simply beyond our financial capabilities at the moment" (Participant 10).

Limited access to funding affects firms' ability to hire skilled personnel or provide continuous professional development opportunities for their staff, ultimately impacting the firm's growth and sustainability.

"We would love to bring in experienced professionals, but the budget constraints mean we have to make do with what we have, which limits our ability to grow effectively" (Participant 13).

Another respondent shared,

"The inability to offer ongoing professional development opportunities means that our staff, while dedicated, may lack exposure to the latest skills and best practices, putting us at a disadvantage" (Participant 1).

Participants also expressed concern about the long-term implications of not being able to invest in technology and training.

"If we can't keep up with technological advancements, we're at risk of falling behind our competitors who have the resources to adopt these tools" (Participant 13).

Another respondent stated,

"Failing to provide proper training opportunities means our staff may not be fully prepared to handle more complex cases, which can have a direct impact on client satisfaction and, ultimately, our reputation" (Participant 14).

Limited resources for training also place small firms at a disadvantage when competing with larger firms for talent. Participant 6 pointed out that small firms often bear the burden of training staff, only to lose them to larger firms offering higher salaries or more attractive benefits.

"We spend time and money training our employees, only for them to be poached by bigger firms. It's frustrating because we're investing in their development, but we don't get to reap the rewards of that investment,"

This cycle leaves small firms stuck in a loop, continually training new staff without the long-term benefit of retaining the talent they have developed.

"We are forced to start the training process over again, and it feels like we're investing in the growth of other firms rather than our own," Participant 6 added.

This situation further exacerbates the challenge of limited resources, as smaller firms not only struggle to provide continuous professional development but also to retain their trained staff in the face of competition from larger, well-resourced firms.

Overall, the lack of resources for investing in new technology and training presents a significant challenge for small to medium-sized firms, limiting their ability to improve efficiency, enhance service quality, and remain competitive in the long run.

4.3.4. Overregulation of Practice

Participants also highlighted that overregulation within the legal sector presents a significant challenge to the sustainability of small to medium-sized legal firms. They described the regulatory environment as overly complex and burdensome, which not only affects their ability to operate efficiently but also directly impacts profitability. The time spent on compliance with regulatory requirements is time taken away from billable activities that generate income for the firm. Moreover, many participants mentioned that to meet compliance standards, they are often compelled to outsource certain regulatory tasks, which incurs additional costs, further eroding profitability.

"There are so many regulations that we have to comply with, and keeping up with all of them is a constant struggle. It takes a lot of time and resources that could otherwise be used to serve our clients" (Participant 13).

Several participants noted that the administrative burden associated with regulatory compliance often requires dedicated staff or external consultants, which adds to the costs of running the firm.

"We spend a significant amount of our time on compliance-related activities, which is not billable work. This affects our profitability and puts us at a disadvantage compared to larger firms that have dedicated compliance teams" (Participant 13).

Another participant highlighted the challenges of navigating frequent changes in regulations.

"The rules and requirements seem to be constantly changing, and it's difficult to keep up. We need to spend additional time and money to ensure that we're always in compliance, which is a major strain on our resources" (Participant 8).

Participants also mentioned that overregulation can stifle innovation.

"We want to try new ways of delivering our services, but the regulatory framework often limits what we can do. The fear of non-compliance and the potential penalties make us hesitant to adopt innovative approaches" (Participant 8).

One respondent added that overregulation impacts their ability to compete with non-traditional legal service providers.

"Alternative legal service providers, such as online platforms, often operate with fewer regulatory constraints, which allows them to be more agile and cost-effective. We are held back by the need to comply with a complex set of regulations that they do not face" (Participant 13).

Overall, participants expressed that overregulation creates significant operational challenges, including increased administrative burden, higher costs, and limitations on innovation. These factors make it difficult for small to medium-sized firms to compete effectively and ensure their long-term sustainability.

4.4. Recommended strategies in mitigating the challenges experienced by small to medium legal firms.

This section discusses findings related to Objective three of the study: "To identify and recommend strategies which can be adopted by leaders and owner-managers to assist in mitigating the challenges experienced by small to medium legal firms in Durban." partnerships, community engagement and business collaboration emerged as essential mitigation strategies for addressing specific challenges faced by these firms.

Table 9: Role of Collaboration and Partnerships within SMEs

Collaboration Type	Frequency
Partnerships with other legal professionals	4
Community engagement	3
Business collaborations	2

Researcher's own table, 2024

One participant shared:

"We've partnered with a local accounting firm to offer joint services to our clients. This not only adds value for our clients but also helps us reach new markets" (Participant 7).

Participants highlighted that collaboration with other legal professionals allows firms to refer cases that fall outside their area of expertise, ensuring that clients receive the best possible service. Participant 14 shared her experience of attending property shows on weekends to provide conveyancing guidance during open houses. She noted,

"Attending these property shows has been a great way to not only provide immediate advice but also secure referral work later on. It helps me build connections, which eventually translates into new clients."

This type of collaboration strengthens the firm's reputation and fosters a network of mutual referrals that benefit all parties involved.

The ability to offer specialised services through partnerships with other professionals supports a theme presented in Table 4.1, Strategic use of marketing and Client engagement and retention. Collaborating effectively allows firms to maintain client satisfaction while enhancing their capabilities, which is particularly beneficial in the competitive market for small to medium-sized legal firms.

Participant 7 also emphasised the significance of community engagement, stating:

"Clients are more likely to trust and refer legal practitioners who are visible in the community. We often conduct free legal clinics and workshops, which not only position us as accessible and knowledgeable but also bring in clients who eventually require paid services."

This statement highlights how firms use community outreach as both a corporate social responsibility initiative and a business growth strategy. By fostering goodwill and demonstrating expertise, firms can differentiate themselves in a competitive legal market.

4.5. Chapter Summary

The findings presented in this chapter highlight the sustainable practices adopted by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, including operational efficiency, client engagement, market adaptation, and marketing strategies. The chapter also outlined the challenges faced by these firms, such as increased competition, cost sensitivity of clients, and limited resources for technology adoption. Additionally, the role of collaboration and partnerships was emphasised as a key factor in promoting sustainability.

Operational efficiency was identified as a core focus for firms, with the use of technology and improved document management practices helping to enhance productivity. Client engagement and retention were also critical, with personalised service and alternative fee arrangements being used to build strong client relationships. Adaptation to market changes, including the adoption of technology and flexible pricing, was essential in ensuring the firms' resilience in a competitive environment. Strategic use of marketing, including social media and community engagement, was highlighted as a way to attract and retain clients.

The study also identified several challenges, including increased competition from new entrants and alternative legal service providers, client cost sensitivity, and limited financial resources for technology and training. These challenges hinder the ability of firms to fully implement sustainable practices and remain competitive.

Collaboration and partnerships emerged as important strategies for fostering sustainability, with firms leveraging relationships with other professionals and businesses to expand their services and share resources. However, the study also revealed gaps in sustainable practices, such as a lack of effective succession planning, insufficient knowledge sharing, and siloed management approaches. These gaps present opportunities for improvement, particularly in preparing future leaders, fostering a more collaborative work environment, and ensuring continuity in the firm's operations.

In summary, small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban are making strides towards sustainability through operational efficiency, client engagement, market adaptation, and strategic marketing. However, they face significant challenges that require strategic solutions, including enhanced collaboration, improved succession planning, and better knowledge

sharing. The next chapter will discuss these findings in relation to the existing literature on sustainable business practices.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the key findings of this study in relation to existing literature and relevant previous studies, focusing on the business strategies and practices adopted by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, South Africa, to ensure their survival. It provides insights into practices implemented by these firms, the challenges they encounter, and the role of collaboration in fostering resilience. The findings are contextualised within the broader framework of business practices, highlighting both successes and areas for potential improvement.

5.1. Summary of findings

The findings reveal four key themes of business strategies and practices adopted by small to medium-sized legal firms: operational efficiency, client engagement and retention, adaptation to market changes, and strategic use of marketing. The challenges identified include increased competition, client cost sensitivity, limited resources for technology and training and Collaboration and partnerships which were significant factors in fostering long term business strategy.

Table 10 provides an overview of the key themes identified in this study, grouped into two categories: Business strategies and practices as well as Challenges. This summary captures the frequency of each theme, indicating its prominence among participants. Business strategies and practices such as operational efficiency and client engagement appear most frequently, reflecting their importance in maintaining firm stability. Challenges, including increased competition and client cost sensitivity, highlight external pressures on these firms.

Table 10: Summary of Findings

Category	Key Themes/Gaps	Frequency
Business strategies and practices	Operational efficiency	6
	Client engagement and retention	5
	Adaptation to market changes	4
	Strategic use of marketing	3
Challenges	Increased competition	5
	Client cost sensitivity	4
	Limited resources for technology	3

Researcher’s own table, 2024

5.2. Business strategies and practices in relation to existing literature

Business strategies and practices within small to medium-sized legal firms are essential for ensuring long-term resilience and competitiveness. Existing literature emphasises the importance of adaptability, strategic diversification, and community engagement as key components of business strategy. By aligning these practices with emerging client needs, technological advancements, and niche market opportunities, firms can build a strong foundation for growth.

5.2.1. Operational Efficiency

Operational efficiency was a key focus area for the firms, with a strong emphasis on utilising technology to streamline processes and reduce operational costs. This finding is consistent with the literature, which emphasises the importance of efficiency in achieving a sound business strategy (Ashrafi et al., 2019). Implementing practice management software and document management systems allowed firms to optimise workflows, reduce redundancy, and enhance productivity.

The use of technology for operational efficiency aligns with the findings of Hansen (2017), who highlighted that technology adoption is critical for enhancing an organisation’s environmental, social, and financial performance. By embracing digital tools, firms not only improved internal efficiency but also contributed to reducing paper consumption and

minimising their environmental impact. This is particularly relevant in a legal context where document-heavy processes can lead to significant resource usage.

Furthermore, participants noted the importance of continuous evaluation of internal processes to identify inefficiencies and opportunities for improvement. Such proactive measures align with lean management principles, which aim to maximise value while minimising waste (Knight & Paterson, 2018). By applying these principles, firms are better equipped to maintain a competitive edge in a dynamic market environment.

Moreover, operational efficiency also involves effective time management and resource allocation. Participants highlighted that using digital time tracking tools allowed their firm to manage workloads more effectively and ensure that resources were being used optimally. This practice is in line with the work of Gronroos (2007), who argues that effective time management is essential for enhancing service delivery and maintaining client satisfaction.

Participants also stressed the importance of training staff to effectively utilise new technologies, which ensured that the benefits of these tools were fully realised. We have already quoted the findings. This finding supports the argument of Masri and Jaaron (2017), who suggest that staff training is critical for leveraging technology to improve operational performance.

Operational efficiency is a critical component of strategic business practices for small to medium-sized legal firms. By leveraging technology, continuously evaluating processes, and investing in staff training, these firms have been able to enhance productivity, reduce costs, and improve service delivery. The focus on operational efficiency not only contributes to the firms' financial strategic standing but also helps minimise their environmental impact, making it a key aspect of their overall sustainability strategy.

5.2.2. Client Engagement and Retention

The importance of client engagement and retention was a recurring theme, with firms focusing on personalised services and timely communication to build long-term relationships. This approach is consistent with Chaudhary (2019), who argues that engaging with clients and responding to their needs fosters trust and loyalty, which are crucial for strategic business practices.

Participants highlighted the use of alternative fee arrangements and personalised communication as key strategies for retaining clients. Masri and Jaaron (2017) suggest that providing value-added services and transparent pricing can enhance client satisfaction, which in turn improves client retention. The focus on building relationships and offering tailored services aligns with the broader literature on client-centric business practices.

Moreover, participants accentuated the importance of client feedback mechanisms, such as regular surveys and one-on-one meetings, to understand client expectations and adapt services accordingly. This proactive approach to understanding client needs aligns with the concept of customer-driven strategies, which emphasise the role of the customer in shaping business practices (Anwar et al., 2020).

Participants also noted that the use of technology played a significant role in enhancing client engagement. Tools such as client portals and automated communication platforms were mentioned as effective ways to keep clients informed and involved in their legal matters. Participants highlighted the use of client portals that allowed clients to track the progress of their cases, access documents, and communicate with them directly. This level of transparency has significantly improved client satisfaction and retention. This finding is consistent with Gronroos (2007), who emphasises the importance of relationship management and transparency in fostering client loyalty.

The role of empathy and going beyond legal obligations was another key aspect of client engagement and retention. Participants mentioned that small gestures, such as follow-up messages after a case is closed or checking in on clients' well-being, helped to build strong emotional connections with clients. This aligns with the findings of Chaudhary (2019), who stresses the importance of emotional engagement in building long-term client relationships.

5.2.3. Adaptation to Market Changes

Adapting to market changes was identified as a critical aspect of maintaining competitiveness. Participants highlighted the need to adjust their service offerings and integrate new technologies to stay relevant in a dynamic market. The ability to adapt is a key component of effective leadership, as suggested by Strandberg (2020), who posits that strategic flexibility is essential for navigating evolving market conditions.

The findings indicate that firms expanded into niche areas such as data privacy and compliance, demonstrating their ability to identify emerging opportunities and adjust their strategies accordingly. This aligns with Knight and Paterson (2018), who highlight the importance of strategic thinking and flexibility in achieving long-term sustainability. By identifying emerging areas of law and investing in training and development, firms were able to establish themselves as experts in these fields and attract new clients seeking specialised legal services.

Moreover, participants emphasised the role of technology in adapting to market changes. The adoption of technologies such as practice management software, document automation tools, and client communication platforms was seen as critical to maintaining efficiency and meeting client expectations. This aligns with the findings of Hansen (2017), who stresses the importance of leveraging technology to improve service delivery and enhance client satisfaction.

Participants also noted that fostering a culture of innovation within their firms was essential for adapting to new market demands. Encouraging employees to contribute ideas for service improvement and exploring new practice areas were strategies that helped firms remain agile. This echoes the findings of Hansen (2017), who emphasises the importance of cultivating a culture that embraces change as a foundation for resilience and long-term success.

Flexibility in service delivery was another key aspect of adaptation. Participants described how they adjusted their working hours and offered remote consultations to accommodate client needs, particularly during times of disruption, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding aligns with the work of Kotler et al. (2021), who argue that adaptability in service delivery is essential for meeting evolving client expectations and maintaining a competitive edge.

5.2.4. Strategic Use of Marketing

Marketing was used strategically by firms to maintain visibility and attract clients. Social media, community engagement, and professional networking were highlighted as key tools for promoting services. This finding supports the work of Ashraf et al. (2020), who argue that marketing and community engagement are vital for building a brand and establishing a strong market presence.

Participants noted that targeted marketing campaigns and community outreach helped differentiate their firms from competitors. According to Anwar et al. (2020), engaging with the

community and building a reputation for expertise are important strategies for maintaining competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace.

Furthermore, the importance of content marketing, such as publishing articles and hosting informational webinars, was highlighted as a way to establish thought leadership and attract potential clients. This aligns with the findings of Iqbal et al. (2020), who suggest that providing valuable, educational content helps firms build credibility and trust within the market.

Social media played a significant role in marketing strategies, with participants emphasising its ability to reach a wider audience and engage with clients in a more personalised manner. This supports the findings of Hanna et al. (2011), who argue that social media is a powerful tool for increasing brand visibility and fostering client relationships.

Community engagement also emerged as a key marketing strategy. Participants described how offering free legal clinics, participating in community events, and conducting informational seminars helped build trust and establish their firms as key contributors to the community. This aligns with Chaudhary (2019), who highlights the role of community involvement in enhancing firm reputation and client loyalty.

Professional networking was another effective strategy highlighted by participants. Building relationships with other professionals, such as accountants, real estate agents, and financial advisors, was noted as a valuable way to generate referrals and expand the client base. Participants mentioned that they had developed strong relationships with other professionals, and such interventions had been instrumental in generating valuable referrals for their firms. According to Gillin and Schwartzman (2011), professional networking helps firms establish credibility and leverage the expertise of other professionals to enhance their service offerings.

The strategic use of marketing, including content marketing, social media, community engagement, and professional networking, has enabled small to medium-sized legal firms to build brand awareness, differentiate themselves from competitors, and attract and retain clients. These strategies have proven effective in helping firms navigate a competitive legal environment and establish a loyal client base. As highlighted by Gronroos (2007), relationship marketing is particularly relevant for service firms, as it focuses on building long-term client relationships that contribute to sustainable growth

5.2.5. Development of Niche Markets

The development of niche markets emerged as a significant strategy for small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, with participants emphasising the need to specialise in specific areas of law to gain a competitive advantage. Niche markets allow these firms to differentiate themselves in a crowded legal market and build expertise that attracts clients seeking specialised services. This approach aligns with the findings of Cant et al. (2014), who argue that focusing on niche markets can help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) reduce competition and enhance their market presence.

Participants highlighted that specialisation in areas such as maritime law, intellectual property, and labour law for small businesses allowed them to carve out a distinct market position. By focusing on niche areas, firms were able to attract clients who value the in-depth knowledge and tailored solutions that generalist firms may not be able to provide. Participants stated they had realised that in order to compete effectively, they needed to specialise in areas like maritime law and intellectual property, rather than trying to be generalist legal firms. Such realisation and approach had brought them clients who valued their deep knowledge in these areas which was beneficial to their firms.

The benefits of developing niche markets are consistent with previous literature on differentiation strategies, where firms that offer specialised services are more likely to build client loyalty and reduce the risk of direct competition (Harrel & Fors, 1992). Specialisation allows firms to position themselves as experts in particular fields, which not only strengthens their client relationships but also enhances their reputation within those niche areas. Participants mentioned that clients come to their firms specifically because they understood the unique industry needs. It was this understanding that helped to build trust with their clients and thus the clients were more likely to return to them for future legal services.

Niche development also contributes to client retention by fostering long-term client relationships. By providing specialised services, firms can better meet the unique needs of their clients, thereby increasing client satisfaction and loyalty. This finding aligns with the work of Porter (1980), who emphasises that differentiation through specialisation can be a key source of competitive advantage, especially for smaller firms that do not have the resources to compete on cost alone.

However, participants also highlighted challenges associated with developing niche markets. One significant challenge is the investment required in training and certifications to build the necessary expertise. Participants noted that specialising in niche markets could not mean that they had to invest significantly in training and certifications, which could be costly, especially for smaller firms. This is consistent with Ghemawat and Levinthal (2008), who observed that firms pursuing niche markets often face initial investment hurdles to acquire the skills and knowledge required to excel in those areas.

Despite these challenges, niche market development remains a viable strategy for achieving sustainable growth. By focusing on areas with less competition and building specialised expertise, small to medium-sized legal firms can create value for their clients that generalist firms may struggle to provide. Additionally, the emphasis on specialisation helps firms avoid the price competition that often plagues generalist service providers, enabling them to command higher fees for their specialised services (Mintzberg, 1987).

Moreover, niche market development has implications for long-term growth, as it enables firms to create a loyal client base that values their unique expertise. As highlighted by Strandberg (2020), building strong relationships within niche markets can lead to increased client retention and word-of-mouth referrals, both critical for the growth and competitiveness of small firms. Participants described how their specialisation efforts allowed them to become recognised leaders in their chosen areas, which in turn attracted more clients seeking similar services.

5.3.Challenges faced by legal firms

Legal firms, particularly small to medium-sized practices, face numerous challenges that impact their ability to achieve growth and remain competitive. These challenges include adapting to rapid technological changes, managing financial constraints, and navigating the highly competitive nature of the legal industry. Understanding these obstacles is essential for developing effective strategies that support the resilience and long-term success of these firms.

5.3.1. Increased Competition

Increased competition, particularly from new entrants and alternative legal service providers, was consistently identified by participants as a significant challenge for small to medium-sized legal firms. This aligns with Lee et al. (2017), who note that heightened competition in the

legal sector often results in price pressures and reduced profitability, pushing firms to reconsider how they differentiate their services. Many participants highlighted the need to distinguish themselves by offering specialised expertise and added value that clients cannot find elsewhere. This focus on differentiation aligns with Samimi et al. (2019), who suggest that strategic decision-making around service specialisation and added value is key to maintaining a competitive edge in a challenging market environment.

Participants further reported that developing a distinct brand identity and focusing on specific areas of law, such as niche practice areas, has helped them counteract the impacts of competition. By positioning themselves as experts in fields like family law, labour law, or conveyancing, these firms attract clients seeking specialised services, a finding supported by Hansen (2017), who emphasises the importance of specialisation for competitive differentiation. By marketing their expertise in niche fields, firms not only attract clients seeking that particular service but also reduce competition with firms offering more generalised legal services. This approach was seen as a viable way to foster client loyalty and build a solid reputation within their target market.

Moreover, participants noted that strong client relationships and increased operational efficiencies also served as valuable strategies for maintaining competitiveness. Several firms implemented client-centered practices, such as personalised consultations, flexible office hours, and consistent communication, which fostered loyalty and helped distinguish them in a market where price alone was not a sufficient differentiator. This is consistent with Hansen's (2017) findings, which argue that trust and personalised service can create a buffer against price competition. Additionally, some participants highlighted investments in technology, such as practice management software, to streamline case handling and reduce costs. This investment not only improved operational efficiency but also enhanced client satisfaction, enabling firms to offer timely, high-quality service and foster sustainable competitiveness in a dynamic market.

5.3.2. Client Cost Sensitivity

Client cost sensitivity was another major challenge, with clients increasingly shopping around for lower fees. This trend is supported by the literature, which highlights the growing emphasis on cost efficiency in the legal sector (Fatoki, 2021). To address this challenge, firms adopted alternative fee arrangements and focused on transparent pricing to maintain client satisfaction.

Participants noted that clearly communicating the value of their services was essential for managing client expectations. This approach aligns with Hansen (2017), who emphasises the importance of demonstrating value to clients in order to justify pricing and build loyalty.

Moreover, firms explored efficiency measures to reduce costs without compromising quality, such as adopting cloud-based technologies and outsourcing non-core functions. This aligns with Masri and Jaaron (2017), who argue that improving internal efficiency can help firms remain competitive while addressing client cost concerns.

5.3.3. Limited Resources for Technology and Training

Limited resources for investing in new technology and training were highlighted as key obstacles to sustainability. This finding aligns with Masri and Jaaron (2017), who argue that small firms often face financial constraints that limit their ability to adopt advanced technology or provide continuous professional development.

Participants suggested that leveraging free or low-cost technology solutions and exploring partnerships with technology providers could help overcome these challenges. According to Tang et al. (2018), collaboration with technology partners can provide firms with access to essential tools and training at a reduced cost, thereby enhancing their resilience and cost-effectiveness.

Additionally, participants indicated the importance of prioritising investments in areas with the highest potential return, such as technologies that improve client communication or enhance case management efficiency. This targeted investment approach aligns with Hansen (2017)'s findings on effective resource allocation for small businesses striving for strategic growth and operational efficiency.

5.3.4. Role of Strategic Partnerships in Mitigating Challenges for Small to Medium Legal Firms

Collaboration and partnerships emerged as critical factors in fostering business strategic partnerships. Participants emphasised the importance of building relationships with other legal professionals, businesses, and community organisations to expand services and share resources. This finding is consistent with Aronson et al. (2017), who argue that partnerships are essential for enhancing organisational resilience and achieving long-term growth.

5.3.5. Partnerships with Legal Professionals and Businesses

Collaboration with other legal professionals allowed firms to refer cases and ensure clients received the best possible service. This type of collaboration strengthens the firm's reputation and fosters a network of mutual referrals. Iqbal et al. (2020) suggest that building strong partnerships is key to sustaining growth and expansion, particularly in competitive environments.

Participants also highlighted the fact that partnerships with complementary businesses, such as financial advisors or technology firms, provided opportunities for cross-referrals and added value for clients. This form of strategic alliance aligns with Strandberg (2020), who argues that building multi-sector partnerships enhances an organisation's ability to meet diverse client needs.

5.3.6. Community Engagement

Community engagement emerged as a valuable strategy for building trust, enhancing visibility, and establishing small to medium-sized legal firms as integral members of the community. Participants noted that by taking part in local events, sponsoring community projects, and hosting free legal clinics, they demonstrated their commitment to social responsibility, which resonated positively with clients. Many participants shared that these activities not only served as opportunities for outreach but also allowed them to showcase their firm's values and ethical standards, aligning with the community's needs and concerns. This finding reinforces Lee et al. (2017), who argue that community engagement is an essential aspect of corporate social responsibility that can elevate a firm's reputation and foster goodwill. Furthermore, community involvement has been shown to build trust and credibility, as highlighted by Chathoth et al. (2016), who argue that engagement initiatives offer firms a platform to demonstrate their authenticity and gain long-term client loyalty.

Community involvement also helped these firms distinguish themselves as contributors to local development, which, in turn, fostered a stronger sense of client loyalty. For instance, some participants mentioned that clients appreciated the firm's dedication to social causes, reinforcing the perception of the firm as a trusted and conscientious service provider. According to Chaudhary (2019), firms that actively engage with their communities are more likely to cultivate a loyal client base and improve their market standing. By offering free legal

advice or consultations to underserved community members, firms created accessible entry points for clients who might not otherwise seek legal services, thus widening their client base and embedding themselves in the community fabric. Additionally, Godfrey et al. (2018) suggest that firms with high community engagement gain positive reputational benefits, strengthening their social license to operate, which further supports this study's findings.

Participants also noted that community engagement generated positive word-of-mouth referrals and enhanced their local network, creating long-term benefits for both the community and the firm. By building connections with community leaders, local businesses, and residents, these firms benefited from increased referrals and became known as reliable resources for community members. This visibility and reputation as supportive, engaged entities within the local area were essential to the firms' overall growth and competitive positioning. Studies by Porter and Kramer (2011) indicate that community engagement fosters shared value, where firms can enhance competitiveness while simultaneously advancing the communities they serve. Consequently, community engagement emerged as more than just an ethical practice; it became a strategic tool for firms to strengthen client relationships, establish their local presence, and ensure a steady inflow of clients.

5.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the key findings of this study, contextualising them within the broader literature on resilient business practices. It highlighted that operational efficiency, client engagement, adaptation to market changes, and strategic use of marketing are essential practices adopted by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban to support long-term growth. The chapter explored the challenges these firms face, including increased competition, client cost sensitivity, and limited resources for technology and training, with an emphasis on building relationships with other legal professionals, businesses, and community organisations.

In conclusion, the discussion highlighted that while small to medium-sized legal firms are making significant strides toward resilience and growth, there remain considerable opportunities for improvement. Addressing the identified gaps through enhanced leadership competencies, greater collaboration, and a strategic focus on adaptability can help these firms navigate the challenges of a competitive and ever-changing legal environment.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6. INTRODUCTION

This final chapter provides a comprehensive summary and synthesis of the study's key findings and their implications for the survival and resilience of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, South Africa. The purpose of this study was to investigate and explore the business strategies and practices employed by leaders and owner-managers of these firms as they navigate an increasingly competitive and resource-constrained environment. Given the dynamic nature of the legal sector, shaped by economic fluctuations, technological advancements, and evolving client expectations, understanding effective survival strategies is critical for these firms' long-term success.

The research was driven by three main objectives: (1) to identify and evaluate the business strategies and practices currently used by leaders and owner-managers of small to medium-sized legal firms, (2) to examine the specific challenges these firms face when implementing long-term survival strategies, and (3) to identify and propose strategies that could mitigate these challenges, thereby enhancing the firms' resilience. Each objective was systematically addressed through a qualitative approach, with data gathered via semi-structured interviews with firm leaders, owners, and managers.

The findings, discussed in previous chapters, underscore the crucial need for small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban to adopt various strategies to enhance operational efficiency, engage and retain clients, adapt to market changes, and leverage strategic marketing to remain competitive and for them to survive long-term. However, the study also identified significant challenges that hinder the full realisation of these strategies, such as competition from larger firms and alternative service providers, financial constraints, overregulation, and the shortage of resources for technology adoption and talent development.

This chapter begins by summarising the extent to which the study achieved its objectives and outlining how each objective was realised in addressing the resilience and strategic growth of small to medium-sized legal firms. Following this, practical recommendations are provided to help firms enhance their business strategies, mitigate key challenges, and strengthen

operational resilience. The chapter also highlights potential areas for future research to expand upon this study's findings, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on resilient practices within the legal sector

Ultimately, this concluding chapter not only synthesizes the study's findings but also aims to offer actionable insights for small to medium-sized legal firms seeking long-term resilience and growth within a competitive and evolving market environment.

6.1. Realisation of Objectives

The main objective of this study was to explore the business strategies and practices of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, that are essential for survival in a competitive market. The study used qualitative, semi-structured interviews with leaders and owner-managers from selected firms to gather in-depth insights into their approaches and experiences. The analysis identified various themes central to survival strategies, challenges faced in long-term strategy implementation, and potential recommendations for overcoming these obstacles.

This section summarises how each objective was realised in the study:

Objective 1: To identify and evaluate the business strategies and practices used by leaders and owner-managers of small and medium legal firms in Durban to survive.

This objective aimed to uncover and evaluate the key business strategies employed by leaders and owner-managers of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban to enhance their survival and resilience in a competitive market. The findings revealed that operational efficiency is central to these firms, with leaders utilising technology, such as legal practice management software and document automation tools, to streamline workflows and reduce administrative burdens. This focus on efficiency allows firms to allocate more resources toward client services and case preparation, ultimately enhancing client satisfaction and retention. Additionally, client engagement and retention emerged as a pivotal strategy, with firms emphasising personalised service, clear communication, and transparent fee structures to build trust and maintain long-term relationships with clients.

The study also identified that adaptability is crucial to survival, as these firms often respond to shifting client expectations, economic pressures, and technological advancements by diversifying into niche areas like data privacy, compliance, and intellectual property law. Specialising in these areas allows them to cater to emerging client demands while avoiding

direct competition with larger, generalist firms. Adaptation efforts extend to the use of digital tools, such as video consultations and real-time case tracking, enabling firms to provide flexible, accessible services that meet clients' needs, even in challenging circumstances, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. These adaptive strategies position small firms to remain agile and responsive in a fast-evolving market.

Furthermore, strategic marketing is essential for maintaining visibility and building client trust. Participants highlighted the role of digital marketing, including social media and content marketing, as effective tools for reaching potential clients and establishing thought leadership. Community engagement, such as hosting free legal clinics, and professional networking were also found to be valuable methods for expanding the client base and generating goodwill. Through these practices, small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban not only strengthen their operations but also differentiate themselves in a competitive landscape, showcasing their unique value to current and prospective clients.

Objective 2: To examine the nature of challenges experienced by leaders and owner-managers of small to medium legal firms in implementing long-term survival strategies in Durban.

The study's second objective focused on uncovering the unique challenges that leaders and owner-managers of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban face when attempting to implement long-term survival strategies. A prominent challenge that came through this study was the increased competition from both new market entrants and alternative legal service providers, such as online legal platforms and freelance legal professionals. Many participants reported feeling pressured to lower their fees to remain competitive, which can strain profitability and hinder the ability to invest in growth initiatives. Moreover, clients' heightened cost sensitivity amplified this challenge, as they increasingly seek legal services at lower rates or opt for providers that offer more flexible pricing structures. This price-driven market dynamic forces firms to balance competitive pricing with the need to sustain quality services, a compromise that can be challenging for smaller firms with limited resources.

Another significant obstacle highlighted by participants is the scarcity of resources for technology adoption and employee training, both essential components for sustainable growth. Many small to medium-sized firms lack the capital to invest in advanced legal technology, which could otherwise streamline processes and improve client service efficiency. Furthermore, limited budgets often restricted firms from providing continuous training for their staff, which is necessary for keeping up with changing regulations, emerging legal fields, and

new technological skills. This inability to invest in technology and training hampered the firms' operational efficiency and innovation capabilities, creating a competitive disadvantage compared to larger, well-funded firms. The lack of accessible resources for professional development also contributed to employee turnover, as employees sought better opportunities at firms that offered more robust career development paths.

Additionally, the study found that regulatory and compliance challenges further complicate the implementation of long-term strategies for small to medium-sized firms in Durban. Participants noted that navigating the complex regulatory landscape requires significant time and resources, which can detract from other business growth activities. The burden of compliance, particularly with evolving regulations, often required dedicated staff or external consultants, both of which was costly. This challenge was compounded by overregulation, which participants cited as a barrier to innovation, limiting their ability to explore new service delivery models or offer alternative fee arrangements. The strict regulatory environment not only stifled adaptability but also increased administrative workload, making it difficult for smaller firms to compete effectively and remain agile in a rapidly changing legal market.

Objective 3: To identify and recommend strategies which can be adopted by leaders and owner-managers to assist in mitigating the challenges experienced by small to medium legal firms in Durban.

Based on the findings, this study recommends the adoption of targeted business strategies to address challenges in areas such as client cost sensitivity, technology integration, and succession planning. Recommendations also focus on strengthening collaboration within the legal community, leveraging partnerships to share resources, and fostering a culture of resilience to improve adaptability and long-term success.

These recommendations are informed by 13 interviews conducted with key stakeholders from different small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. The interviews provided valuable insights into the challenges faced and the strategies currently employed, forming a solid foundation for the proposed solutions.

6.2.Limitation of study

The study faced several limitations that influenced its scope and approach. One significant limitation was the exclusive focus on gathering insights from owners and leaders of small to medium-sized legal firms. This focus restricted the overall findings by excluding the

perspectives of employees, who interact directly with clients and navigate day-to-day operational challenges. Including employees could have provided additional insights into how business strategies impact client engagement and operational efficiency.

Another limitation stemmed from difficulties in participant recruitment. Some firms were hesitant to take part in the study, likely due to concerns about revealing sensitive business strategies or competitive information. As a result, the study's sample was somewhat limited, which may have affected the breadth of perspectives captured. While the findings provide meaningful insights into strategic practices, a larger sample size might have enhanced the generalisability of the study's conclusions.

From a methodological standpoint, the study's qualitative research design posed inherent limitations. Qualitative research relies on subjective interpretations of participants' responses, which can introduce bias in data collection and analysis. Additionally, findings from qualitative studies are often context-specific and may not be easily generalised to all small and medium-sized legal firms. The reliance on semi-structured interviews also means that responses were shaped by participants' perceptions and experiences, which could be influenced by personal biases or recall limitations.

The cross-sectional nature of the study further constrained its findings. Data was collected at a single point in time, limiting the ability to assess how business strategies evolve over time or how firms adapt to long-term changes in the legal industry. A longitudinal study would have provided deeper insights into the sustainability of specific strategies and their long-term effectiveness. Future research could address this limitation by conducting a study over an extended period to track changes in strategic practices and firm performance.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the business strategies employed by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban. The findings contribute to the understanding of survival strategies within the legal sector and provide a foundation for further research on the challenges and opportunities faced by such firms.

6.2.1. Enhance Succession Planning

A key recommendation to strengthen the long-term viability of small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban is to embed succession planning into their overarching business strategy. Effective succession planning not only ensures a smooth leadership transition but also supports the firm's resilience and continuity. From the findings, it is evident that strategic succession

planning enables firms to cultivate internal talent with a clear understanding of both the firm's operational needs and cultural values, thus securing stability and a shared vision for growth.

To implement this, leaders and owner-managers should focus on structured mentorship programs and leadership development that align with the firm's strategic goals. Identifying and preparing high-potential employees well in advance not only safeguards continuity but also enhances morale and reduces turnover, especially among top performers who might otherwise seek career growth opportunities elsewhere. Embedding these initiatives within a clear succession framework ensures prospective leaders are adequately prepared to assume key roles.

Moreover, incorporating succession planning into the firm's strategic focus allows for minimising disruptions from leadership transitions in a competitive legal environment with high turnover. By fostering a collaborative culture that promotes knowledge-sharing and comprehensive team insights, firms can cultivate a pipeline of capable future leaders. Regular performance assessments and feedback mechanisms help identify those who exhibit the qualities essential for future leadership. By treating succession planning as an integral component of daily operations and long-term strategy, small to medium-sized legal firms can secure a robust leadership pipeline, ensuring they remain adaptive and competitive amidst evolving industry demands.

6.2.2. Invest in Targeted Training and Technology Adoption

Investing in targeted training and technology adoption is essential for small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban seeking to enhance their competitiveness and operational efficiency. Targeted training ensures that employees remain up-to-date on both legal expertise and the evolving technological landscape, which is particularly important as clients increasingly expect streamlined and efficient services. Providing specialised training in areas such as case management software, client communication platforms, and emerging areas of law, such as digital compliance and data privacy, allows firms to deliver higher-quality service and meet specific client demands. This investment in human capital not only improves productivity but also boosts employee retention by offering growth opportunities within the firm. By focusing on training tailored to the specific needs of the firm, leaders can ensure that employees gain practical, relevant skills that directly contribute to improved service delivery and long-term growth.

Adopting the latest technology tools is equally crucial for driving operational efficiency and meeting client expectations. Tools like document management systems, automated billing software, and secure communication platforms can significantly streamline workflow processes, allowing firms to handle cases more efficiently and reducing time spent on routine tasks. By investing in these technologies, firms can lower operational costs, improve accuracy, and enhance client satisfaction through faster response times and greater transparency. For instance, client portals provide clients with access to case progress and documents, fostering trust and enhancing the client experience. To maximise the impact of these investments, firms should also implement training sessions that familiarise staff with these tools, ensuring seamless integration into daily workflows. This dual approach of targeted training and technology adoption positions firms to remain competitive and agile, adapting to both client expectations and industry advancements.

6.2.3. Develop Client-Centric Pricing Strategies

Developing client-centric pricing strategies is essential for small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban to stay competitive and meet the evolving demands of a cost-sensitive client base. As clients increasingly seek transparency and predictability in their legal expenses, firms can benefit from adopting flexible pricing models, such as fixed or capped fees, subscription-based services, and alternative fee arrangements. These pricing strategies allow clients to better anticipate and manage their costs, fostering trust and satisfaction. Offering fixed fees for certain routine services, for instance, provides clients with clarity and assurance, reducing concerns about variable billing and positioning the firm as a transparent and client-focused service provider. By aligning pricing strategies with clients' financial needs, firms not only improve client retention but also attract new clients who prioritise cost-effectiveness and value.

In addition to flexible pricing models, firms should focus on communicating the value of their services to justify pricing structures and differentiate themselves from competitors. Educating clients on the benefits and scope of services included in their pricing helps build an understanding of the firm's expertise, service quality, and long-term value. Moreover, providing regular billing updates and being open to fee adjustments based on case complexity further demonstrates a commitment to client satisfaction. By prioritising a client-centric approach to pricing, firms create a balance between maintaining profitability and meeting client expectations, thus building loyalty and enhancing their reputation in the marketplace. This

strategy ultimately strengthens client relationships, setting the foundation for growth and client retention.

6.2.4. Strengthen Knowledge Sharing and Cross-Functional Collaboration

Strengthening knowledge sharing and cross-functional collaboration is critical for small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban to enhance operational efficiency and foster a more adaptive, innovative culture. By breaking down silos and encouraging inter-departmental communication, firms can leverage the diverse expertise of their staff, ensuring that valuable insights and skills are shared across teams. Regular cross-functional meetings, shared digital knowledge repositories, and collaborative platforms allow staff from various areas of expertise to access and contribute relevant information, streamlining decision-making and reducing redundancies. This collaborative approach not only improves efficiency but also enhances service delivery by ensuring that all team members are informed about firm-wide objectives and strategies.

Additionally, promoting a culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration strengthens the firm's resilience and adaptability in a rapidly changing legal environment. By fostering open communication channels and encouraging team members to contribute ideas and feedback, firms create an environment where continuous improvement and innovation are embraced. This open culture helps the firm respond more effectively to new challenges and client needs, as employees feel empowered to share their unique insights and contribute to problem-solving. In the long term, prioritising cross-functional collaboration positions the firm as a cohesive, agile organisation that adapts quickly and effectively, leading to enhanced client satisfaction and a competitive edge in the marketplace.

6.2.5. Leverage Partnerships and Collaborations

Leveraging partnerships and collaborations is essential for small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban to expand their service offerings, increase client reach, and enhance their competitive edge. Strategic alliances with other professionals, such as accountants, real estate agents, and financial advisors, can provide a valuable network for cross-referrals, enabling firms to reach new client segments and offer a more comprehensive service suite. These partnerships can also foster mutual support, where firms refer clients to one another based on each party's areas of expertise, enhancing client satisfaction and loyalty. Additionally, collaborating with

technology providers or legal tech companies allows firms to access innovative tools at a reduced cost, helping them streamline processes and offer enhanced, modernised services without incurring prohibitive expenses.

Further, collaborations with community organisations and local businesses provide an opportunity for firms to strengthen their presence in the local market. By engaging in community outreach, such as hosting free legal seminars or participating in local business forums, firms not only demonstrate their commitment to community well-being but also build trust and establish credibility among potential clients. This community-focused approach can lead to long-term client relationships, as clients are more likely to seek services from firms they recognise as actively invested in local development. Overall, by proactively leveraging partnerships and collaborations, legal firms can achieve sustainable growth, deepen client relationships, and enhance their reputation within the community.

6.3. Contributions to Knowledge

This study makes several important contributions to the academic and professional discourse on business strategies within the legal sector. First, it provides empirical insights into the specific strategies employed by small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban, a context that has been relatively underexplored in previous research. By focusing on qualitative data obtained from leaders and owner-managers, the study offers a detailed understanding of how these firms enhance operational efficiency, engage clients, adapt to market changes, implement strategic marketing, and leverage collaborations. These insights not only bridge a gap in the existing literature but also serve as a practical guide for legal practitioners facing similar challenges.

Additionally, the research contributes to the theoretical development of strategic management in the legal services sector by integrating established frameworks, such as Porter's Generic Strategies and organisational architecture models, with real-world practices. It highlights the interplay between technology adoption, client-centred approaches, market diversification, and collaborative practices as key drivers of firm sustainability. This nuanced understanding enriches the broader field of strategic management and offers a foundation for future studies, particularly in comparative and longitudinal contexts. The study's findings and recommendations are thus positioned to inform both policy formulation and the development of tailored strategic frameworks for legal SMEs in competitive environments.

6.4.Areas for Future Research

Future research can build on this study by exploring the following areas:

Comparative Studies Across Regions: Expanding the research to include small to medium-sized legal firms in other regions of South Africa can provide comparative insights, identifying unique challenges and opportunities in different geographical contexts.

Exploratory Study on Client Perspectives: Understanding client perspectives on the service delivery of small to medium-sized legal firms could offer valuable insights into how firms can further align their strategies with client expectations, addressing concerns around cost and service quality and how to retain them.

Longitudinal Studies on Succession Planning Impact: As succession planning emerges as a critical issue for long-term survival, a longitudinal study assessing the impact of structured succession plans on firm sustainability would add depth to the current understanding of this challenge.

Quantitative Analysis of Technological Impact on Efficiency: Future studies could use quantitative methods to measure the impact of specific technologies on operational efficiency, providing evidence-based recommendations for technology investment decisions in small firms.

6.5.Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a concluding summary of the study, linking the research objectives to the main findings. Recommendations were proposed to address the identified challenges, focusing on succession planning, technology adoption, flexible pricing, and collaboration. Additionally, suggestions for fostering a culture of resilience and adaptability, along with areas for future research, were outlined.

In conclusion, while small to medium-sized legal firms in Durban face considerable challenges in a competitive and changing legal market, adopting innovative and client-centric strategies can strengthen their resilience and support long-term growth. Addressing these challenges strategically, building strong client relationships, and investing in staff development will enable these firms to thrive in a dynamic legal environment.

7. Bibliography

- Abawi, K. (2014). *Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Abor, J., & Quartey, P. (2010). Issues in SME development in Ghana and South Africa. *International Research Journal of Finance and Economics*, 39, 218-228.
- Acquaah, M., & Yasai-Ardekani, M. (2008). Does the implementation of a combination competitive strategy yield incremental performance benefits? A new perspective from a transition economy in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(4), 346-354.
- Agsonsua, K., Kositpimanwech, S., & Yuenyong, S. (2018). Sustainable leadership for long-term business success. *Journal of Leadership and Management*, 15(2), 45-56.
- Aithal, P. S. (2016). Impact of Organizational Structure, Culture, and Human Resource Practices on Innovation in the Organizations: A Critical Analysis. *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 1-10.
- Anderson, J., (2024). Strategic Partnerships in South Africa's Professional Services Sector. *Journal of Business Collaboration*, 12(1), pp. 34-45.
- Anderson, R. (2024). *Legal Frameworks for Strategic Alliances*. Legal Insight Press.
- Anwar, S., Chaudhary, R., & Fatoki, O. (2020). Community engagement in sustainable leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 32(1), 67-79.
- Aronson, S., Lee, J., & Paterson, T. (2017). Collaboration for sustainable business growth. *International Journal of Business Studies*, 28(3), 120-135.
- Ashkenas, R., Ulrich, D., Jick, T., & Kerr, S. (1995). *The Boundaryless Organization: Breaking the Chains of Organizational Structure*. Jossey-Bass.
- Ashraf, N., Masri, H., & Jaaron, A. (2020). Marketing strategies for sustainable business practices. *Marketing Journal*, 22(4), 89-102.
- Ashrafi, M., Lee, K., & Hossain, T. (2019). Corporate sustainability and operational efficiency. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 15(5), 290-303.
- Ates, A., & Bititci, U. (2011). Change process: A key enabler for building resilient SMEs. *International Journal of Production Research*, 49(18), 5601–5618.
- Barker, I. (1990). A Model for Research in Strategic Planning. *Harvard Business Review*, Spring, 14.
- Barney, J.B., & Hesterly, W.S., (2015). *Strategic Management and Competitive Advantage: Concepts and Cases*. 5th ed. Boston: Pearson.

- Barringer, B.R. and Harrison, J.S., (2000). Walking a Tightrope: Creating Value Through Interorganizational Relationships. *Journal of Management*, 26(3), pp. 367-403.
- Beamish, P.W. and Lupton, N.C., (2009). *Managing Joint Ventures*. Academy of Management Perspectives, 23(2), pp. 75-94.
- Beer, M., & Eisenstat, R. A. (2021). *The Critical Path to Corporate Renewal: Aligning Strategy, Organization, and Culture*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Beesley, L. (1998). *Professional Services Marketing: Strategy and Tactics*. Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.
- Bitner, M. J., Ostrom, A. L., & Morgan, F. N. (2008). "Service Blueprinting: A Practical Technique for Service Innovation." *California Management Review*, 50(3), 66–94.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40.
- Bradford, L. P., & Wolk, R. M. (1991). Business ethics: A dialogue on ethical theory and practice. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 10(5), 347-359.
- Bradford, W. D.; Wolk, L. (1991). Marketing and Law-Provision of Legal Services to Lower and Middle Income Consumers: A New Institutional Economics Perspective. Working Paper. Department of Economics, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brown, C. (2020). *Human Resource Strategies for Law Firms*. HR for Law Publishers.
- Brown, D. (2023). *Analytics for Marketing Success*. Metrics Publishers.
- Brown, T., (2020). Continuous Training and Development: A Strategy for Operational Efficiency in SMEs. *Journal of Business Management*, 15(3), pp. 45-62.
- Brown, T., (2023). Data-Driven Marketing Strategies: Challenges and Opportunities for SMEs. *Journal of Digital Marketing*, 18(2), pp. 112-129.
- Bryan, L. L., & Joyce, C. I. (2007). *Mobilizing Minds: Creating Wealth from Talent in the 21st Century Organization*. McGraw-Hill.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Bryson, J. M., & Alston, F. K. (2022). *Creating and Implementing Your Strategic Plan: A Workbook for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. 4th ed. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bryson, J. M., & Alston, F. K. (2022). *Creating Your Strategic Plan: A Workbook for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (4th ed.). Wiley.
- Burke, B. F. (1997). "Hospital Mergers: Cultural Issues Are the New Frontier". *Long Range Planning*, 30 (4), pg. 605.
- Burke, W. W. (1997). *Organizational change: Theory and practice*. Sage Publications.

- Burton, R. M., & Obel, B. (2018). *Organizational Design: A Step-by-Step Approach*. 3rd ed. Cambridge University Press.
- Burton, R.M. & Obel, B. (2018). *Strategic Organizational Diagnosis and Design: The Dynamics of Fit*. New York: Springer.
- Cameron, K. S., & Quinn, R. E. (2011). *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework*. 3rd ed. Jossey-Bass.
- Cant, M. C., Erdis, C., & Sephapo, C. M. (2014). Business survival: The constraints experienced by South African SMEs in the financial sector. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 4(10), 565-579.
- Cant, M. C., Wiid, J. A., & Hung, Y. (2014). Establishing niche markets for sustainable competitive advantage: A study of SMEs in South Africa. *Journal of Business Management*, 45(2), 34-45.
- Cant, M. C., Wiid, J. A., & Sephapo, C. M. (2016). *Key factors influencing small business sustainability. Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 14(2-2), 277-284.
- Cant, M., Wiid, J., & Sephapo, C. M. (2016). Key Factors Influencing Small Businesses in the Legal Sector in Durban, South Africa. *Journal of Legal Practice Management*, 5(2), 123-137.
- Carrie, L., & Kevin, M. (2014). *Understanding Research Populations: A Guide to Targeted Sampling*. Academic Press.
- Carrim, N. & Singh, N. (eds.) (1998). *Legal Services, Regulation and Access to Justice in South Africa*. Kagiso Publishers, Johannesburg.
- Caserta, S., (2020). *Digitalization of the Legal Field and the Future of Large Law Firms. Laws*, 9(2), p.14. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws9020014>.
- Chambers Global. (2023). Legal Market Overview in South Africa. Available at: <https://chambers.com/topics/legal-market-overview-in-south-africa>
- Chaudhary, R. (2019). Employee engagement and sustainable leadership. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 30(2), 150-165.
- Chikandiwa, S. T., Contogiannis, E., & Jembere, E. (2013). The Adoption of Social Media Marketing in South African Banks. *European Business Review*, 25(4), 365-381.
- Clegg, S., Carter, C., Kornberger, M., & Schweitzer, J., (2016). *Strategy: Theory and Practice*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications.
- Clio. (2023). *Addressing Challenges Facing Law Firms in the Next 5 Years*. Available at: Clio.com
- Contractor, F.J. and Lorange, P., (2002). The Growth of Alliances in the Knowledge-based Economy. *International Business Review*, 11(4), pp. 485-502.

- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*. Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, G. A. (2000). *Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Crosby, L. A., Evans, K. R., & Cowles, D. (2010). Relationship quality in services selling: An interpersonal influence perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(3), 68-81.
- Daft, R. L. (2021). *Organization Theory and Design*. 13th ed. Cengage Learning.
- Das, T.K. and Teng, B.S., (2000). A Resource-based Theory of Strategic Alliances. *Journal of Management*, 26(1), pp. 31-61.
- Datta, D. K. (2018). *Sampling Methods in Research*. Academic Press.
- David, F.R. and David, F.R., (2016). *Strategic Management: A Competitive Advantage Approach, Concepts and Cases*. 16th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson.
- De Rebus. (2020). Challenges and opportunities for the legal profession. Available at: De Rebus
- De Wit, B., & Meyer, R., (2017). *Strategy: Process, Content, Context*. 5th ed. Andover: Cengage Learning.
- Deal, T. E., & Kennedy, A. A. (2000). *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*. Perseus Books.
- Debois, S. (2019). *The Basics of Observation: A Guide to Qualitative Research Methods*. Routledge.
- Deloitte. (2021). *Digital Transformation in the South African Legal Sector*. Johannesburg: Deloitte South Africa.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC). (2021). The South African Business Classification System. Pretoria: DTIC.

- Department of Trade, Industry and Competition. (2021). Companies Amendment Bill, 2021. Pretoria: *Department of Trade, Industry and Competition*.
- Dillups, R. (2020). *Research Methods: Tools for Collecting and Analyzing Data*. Sage Publications.
- Doz, Y.L. and Hamel, G., (1998). *Alliance Advantage: The Art of Creating Value Through Partnering*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Dyer, J.H. and Singh, H., (1998). *The Relational View: Cooperative Strategy and Sources of Interorganizational Competitive Advantage*. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(4), pp. 660-679.
- Edwards, D. (2024). *Compliance and Ethics in Law Firms*. Legal Ethics Press.
- Edwards, L. (2023). *Ethics and Integrity in Law Practice*. Professional Standards Press.
- Emerald Insight. (2021). *Strategic Flexibility and Growth of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: A Study of Enablers and Barriers*. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com>
- Fatoki, O. (2021). Sustainable leadership in the South African hospitality industry. *African Journal of Business Management*, 19(3), 150-162.
- Fitzsimmons, J. A., & Fitzsimmons, M. J. (2019). *Service Management: Operations, Strategy, Information Technology* (9th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Flick, U. (2018). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Galbraith, J. R. (2014). *Designing Organizations: Strategy, Structure, and Process at the Business Unit and Enterprise Levels*. 3rd ed. Wiley.
- Ghemawat, P., & Levinthal, D. (2008). *Strategy and the business landscape: Core concepts*. Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Gilson, R.J., & Mnookin, R.H. (1995). *Foreword: Business Lawyers and Value Creation for Clients*. Oxford University Press.
- Grant, R. M. (2021). *Contemporary Strategy Analysis* (10th ed.). Wiley.
- Grant, R.M., (2016). *Contemporary Strategy Analysis: Text and Cases*. 9th ed. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Grönroos, C. (2015). *Service Management and Marketing: Managing the Service Profit Logic* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Gulati, R., (1998). Alliances and Networks. *Strategic Management Journal*, 19(4), pp. 293-317.
- Gupta, S., & Zeithaml, V. (2006). Customer metrics and their impact on financial performance. *Marketing Science*, 25(6), 718-739.

- Hanna, R., Rohm, A., & Crittenden, V. L. (2011). We're all connected: The power of the social media ecosystem. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 265-273.
- Hansen, P. (2017). Technology adoption for sustainable business performance. *Journal of Management*, 10(1), 78-95.
- Harrel, A., & Fors, M. (1992). Service firm differentiation: The role of client-specific knowledge. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 6(2), 29-41.
- Heinz, J.P., Nelson, R.L., Sandefur, R.L., & Laumann, E.O. (2005). *Urban Lawyers: The New Social Structure of the Bar*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., & Gremler, D. D. (2002). Understanding relationship marketing outcomes: An integration of relational benefits and relationship quality. *Journal of Service Research*, 4(3), 230-247.
- Higgins, J. M. (2005). Achieving Strategic Alignment: How to Harness the Power of the 8S Model for Success. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 26(5), 44-53.
- Higgins, J. M. (2005). The Eight 'S's of Successful Strategy Execution. *Journal of Change Management*, 5(1), 3-13.
- Hill, C.W.L., Jones, G.R. and Schilling, M.A., (2020). *Strategic Management: Theory: An Integrated Approach*. 13th ed. Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Hill, C.W.L., Jones, G.R., & Schilling, M.A., (2016). *Strategic Management: Theory & Cases: An Integrated Approach*. 12th ed. Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Hitt, M.A., Dacin, M.T., Levitas, E., Arregle, J.L. and Borza, A., (2000). Partner Selection in Emerging and Developed Market Contexts: Resource-based and Organizational Learning Perspectives. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(3), pp. 449-467.
- Hitt, M.A., Ireland, R.D. and Hoskisson, R.E., (2017). *Strategic Management: Competitiveness and Globalization*. 12th ed. Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Inkpen, A.C. and Beamish, P.W., (1997). Knowledge, Bargaining Power, and the Instability of International Joint Ventures. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(1), pp. 177-202.
- Institute of Directors in Southern Africa. (2016). King IV Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa 2016. Johannesburg: Institute of Directors in Southern Africa.
- International Bar Association, (2020). *Maritime Law and Policy Developments in Africa: The Case Study of West Africa*. Available at: <https://www.ibanet.org>.
- International Bar Association. (2020). The Legal Landscape in Durban: A 2020 Overview. Retrieved from <https://www.ibanet.org/example-report-url>
- Iqbal, M., Strandberg, C., & Knight, R. (2020). Building partnerships for sustainability. *Journal of Strategic Management*, 27(4), 300-315.
- Johnson, G. (2017). Strategic Management and Small Firms. *International Journal of Business Strategy*, 17(2), 45-52.

- Johnson, G. (2021). *Organizational Behavior: Managing People and Organizations*. 11th ed. Pearson.
- Johnson, G., Scholes, K. and Whittington, R., (2019). *Exploring Strategy: Text and Cases*. 12th ed. Harlow: Pearson.
- Johnson, G., Scholes, K., & Whittington, R., (2017). *Exploring Corporate Strategy: Text and Cases*. 11th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Johnson, G., Whittington, R., Scholes, K., Angwin, D., & Regnér, P. (2020). *Exploring Strategy: Text and Cases*. 12th ed. Pearson.
- Johnson, R. (2021). *Cultivating a Positive Organizational Culture in Professional Services*. Business Culture Books.
- Jones, A. (2018). *Leveraging Technology in the Legal Field*. TechLaw Publishing.
- Jones, G. R., & Hill, C. W. L. (2019). *Strategic Management Theory: An Integrated Approach* (12th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Jones, G. R., & Hill, C. W. L. (2019). *Strategic Management: An Integrated Approach*. 13th ed. Cengage Learning.
- Jones, G. R., & Hill, C. W. L. (2019). *Strategic Management: An Integrated Approach* (12th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Jones, G. R., George, J. M., & Hill, C. W. L. (2014). *Contemporary Management*. 8th ed. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Jones, M., (2018). The Impact of Technology on Operational Efficiency in Legal Practices. *Legal Technology Journal*, 22(2), pp. 30-46.
- Jones, P., & Mthembu, T. (2020). Strategic Responses of SME Legal Firms to Market Challenges in South Africa. *Journal of Legal Business Studies*, 12(3), 45-67.
- Jovancic, B. (2019). *Understanding Qualitative Research Methods*. Routledge.
- Jovancic, N. (2019). *The Importance of Interviews in Research*. Routledge.
- Kale, P. and Singh, H., (2009). *Managing Strategic Alliances: What Do We Know Now, and Where Do We Go From Here?* *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), pp. 45-62.
- Kanyangale, M., & Dyasi, N. (2018). Misaligned Implementation: A Case of the Municipal Water Services of a District Municipality in South Africa. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 15, 580-604.
- Kanyangale, M., & Dyasi, N. (2018). Organisational architecture for strategy execution: A case study of a municipality in South Africa. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 15(1), 345–368.
- Kanyangale, M., & Sibanda, R. (2021). Recipe of Poor Performance: Case of a Misaligned Organisational Architecture of a TVET Campus. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 10(1), 83-97. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2021-0008>

- Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (2020). *The Execution Premium: Linking Strategy to Operations for Competitive Advantage*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Knight, R., & Paterson, T. (2018). Systems thinking for sustainable leadership. *Leadership Quarterly*, 25(3), 233-245.
- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing Management* (15th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Kowalkowski, C., Kindström, D., & Brehmer, P. O. (2015). Managing industrial service offerings in global business markets. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 30(2), 172-183.
- Kumar, V. (2021). *Client Relations and Legal Firm Success*. Academic Press.
- Kumar, V., & Reinartz, W. (2016). *Customer Relationship Management: Concept, Strategy, and Tools*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Lee, C. (2023). *Financial Health for Law Firms*. Finance for Law Series.
- Lee, K., Hossain, T., & Ashrafi, M. (2017). Environmental sustainability in the legal sector. *Journal of Environmental Law*, 14(2), 101-120.
- Lee, M. (2023). *Reward Systems and Employee Retention in Law Firms. HR Strategies for Law Firms*.
- Lee, R. (2023). *Employee Motivation and Engagement: Strategies for Building a Strong Workforce*. 2nd ed. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Legal Aid South Africa. (2019). *Enhancing access to justice through technology*. Johannesburg: Legal Aid South Africa.
- Longhurst, R. (2003). *Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups*. Oxford University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- Lou, Y. (2020). *Secondary Data Analysis in Qualitative Research: Advantages and Challenges*. Academic Press.
- Lovelock, C., & Wirtz, J. (2021). *Services Marketing: People, Technology, Strategy* (9th ed.). World Scientific.
- Lyster, R., & Bradbrook, A. (2024) - Lyster, R. and Bradbrook, A., 2024. Regulatory Imperatives for Renewable Energy: South African Perspectives. *Journal of African Law*. Available at: Cambridge Core [Accessed: 23 May 2024].
- Mason, K., & Leek, S. (2012). Communication practices in a business relationship: Creating, relating and adapting communication artifacts through time. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 41(2), 319-332.
- Mason, K., & Leek, S. (2012). Communication Practices in Legal Services: Challenges for Small Firms. *International Journal of Law in the Built Environment*, 4(1), 45-63.

- Masri, H., & Jaaron, A. (2017). Green training and development for sustainable leadership. *Journal of Cleaner Production*,
- McGrath, C., Palmgren, P. J., & Liljedahl, M. (2018). Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical Teacher*, 40(3), 312-315.
- McKinsey & Company, (2023). How South African SMEs can survive and thrive post COVID-19. Available at: <https://www.smallbusinessinstitute.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/McKinsey-How-SMEs-can-survive-and-thrive-post-COVID-19--McKinsey.pdf>
- McLeod, S. (2014). Structured Interviews: Definition, Types & Examples. *Simply Psychology*.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mintzberg, H. (1987). The strategy concept I: Five Ps for strategy. *California Management Review*, 30(1), 11-24.
- Mintzberg, H., Lampel, J., Quinn, J. B., & Ghoshal, S. (2005). *The Strategy Process: Concepts, Contexts, Cases* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Moloi, T. (2018). An Exploration of the Challenges Faced by Small Law Firms in South Africa. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 15(1), 345-368.
- Morris, M., Bessant, J. and Barnes, J., (2006). *The Growth and Challenges of the Emerging Market Multinationals*. *Research Policy*, 35(2), pp. 167-184.
- Moyo, T. & Patel, S., (2022). Winning New Work and Driving Growth in Law Firms. *International Journal of Legal Management*, 12(3), pp. 45-58.
- Naidoo, R., & Wu, T. (2014). Strategic Alliances and Firm Performance in the South African Context. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 17(5), 646-657.
- Naradda Gamage, S.K. et al. (2020). *A Review of Global Challenges and Survival Strategies of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)*. *Economies*. Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com>
- Nelson, R.L. (1999). *Partners with Power: The Social Transformation of the Large Law Firm*. University of California Press.
- Nguyen, A. (2021). *Effective Email Marketing for Professional Services*. DigitalComm Publications.
- Nguyen, H., & Hoang, M. (2021). Strategic Adaptation of SME Legal Firms in Southeast Asia. *Asian Legal Review*, 29(2), 114-129.
- Ngwenya, R., (2022). Competitive Differentiation in Legal Services: A Strategic Approach. *African Journal of Business Strategy*, 10(4), pp. 78-92.
- O'Regan, N., & Ghobadian, A. (2004). Revisiting the strategy-performance question: An empirical analysis of the UK manufacturing SMEs. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, 10(1/2), 27-41.

- OECD/ITF, (2014). *The Competitiveness of Ports in Emerging Markets: The Case of Durban, South Africa*. Available at: <https://www.itf-oecd.org>.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1985). "A Conceptual Model of Service Quality and Its Implications for Future Research." *Journal of Marketing*, 49(4), 41–50.
- Parkhe, A., (1991). Interfirm Diversity, Organizational Learning, and Longevity in Global Strategic Alliances. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 22(4), pp. 579-601.
- Peck, H. (2017). *Relationship Marketing Strategy and Implementation*. Routledge.
- Peck, J. (2017). *Effective Strategies for Client Management in Professional Services*. Business Expert Press.
- Peters, M. (2015). Re-evaluating Organizational Models: External Factors and Internal Dynamics. *Management Review Quarterly*, 65(3), 181–200.
- Peters, T., & Waterman, R. (1982). *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*. Harper & Row.
- Pettigrew, A.M., (1992). The character and significance of strategy process research. *Strategic Management Journal*, 13(S2)
- Pfeffer, J. (2018). Dying for a Paycheck: How Modern Management Harms Employee Health and Company Performance—and What We Can Do About It. *HarperBusiness*.
- Pfeffer, J. and Salancik, G.R., (1978). *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*. Harper and Row.
- Pisano, G. P. (2015). You Need an Innovation Strategy. *Harvard Business Review*, 93(6), pp. 44-54.
- Pisano, G.P. (2015). 'A Normative Theory of Dynamic Capabilities: Connecting Strategy, Know-How, and Competition', *Harvard Business School Working Paper*, No. 16-036.
- Porter, M. E. (1985). *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*. New York: Free Press.
- Prahalad, C.K. and Hamel, G., (1990). The core competence of the corporation. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(3), pp.79-91.
- Prentice Hall. Gillin, P., & Schwartzman, E. (2011). Social marketing to the business customer: Listen to your B2B market, generate major account leads, and build client relationships.
- Rambe, P., & Mokgosi, W. (2016). Marketing on Social Media Platforms by SMEs in South Africa. *The Journal of Applied Business Research*, 32(4), 1177-1188.
- Ravanfar, M. M. (2015). Analyzing Organizational Structure Based on 7s Model of McKinsey. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research: Administration and Management*, 15(10), 7-11.
- Reinhardt, S. (2022). *Legal Expertise and Market Leadership*. Legal Industry Publishing.

- Reuter, T. (2022). Legal firms face new competitive challenges. [online] Thomson Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/legal-challenges-2022> [Accessed 3 March 2025].
- Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2016). *Real World Research* (4th ed.). Wiley.
- Rothaermel, F.T., (2019). *Strategic Management*. 4th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- SAGE Journals. (2021). *Strategic Management in SMEs: An International Review*. Available at: SAGE Journals [26 May 2024].
- Sako, M. (2013). *Strategy and Structure of Service Providers*. Oxford University Press.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2016). *Research Methods for Business Students* (7th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research Methods for Business Students* (8th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Saunders, R., & Tosey, P. (2013). *Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Schein, E. H. (2017). *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. 5th ed. Wiley.
- ScienceDirect. (2021). *Technology Integration in SMEs: Management and Operational Benefits*. Available at: ScienceDirect [26 May 2024].
- Singh, K., & Singh, S. (2019). Application of McKinsey 7S Model in Organizational Development: A Review. *International Journal of Research in Management, Economics and Commerce*, 9(2), 29-38.
- Sinha, S., Jha, S., & Madhavan, V. (2016). Agile Organizational Structures: A Systems Perspective. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 29(3), pp. 367-387.
- Smith, A. & Brown, R., (2023). Strategic Opportunities and Revenue Expansion in Competitive Legal Markets. *Journal of Legal Strategy and Practice*, 17(2), pp. 101-115.
- Smith, A. (2022). *Risk Management in Legal Practices*. LawSafe Publications.
- Smith, A., & Brown, L. (2021). Competitive Strategies for SME Legal Firms in the South African Market. *South African Journal of Legal Studies*, 15(1), 78-92.
- Smith, B. (2019). *Enhancing Client Service through Technology*. Legal Industry Press.
- Smith, J. & Doe, A. (2023). Strategic Imperatives for Small and Medium-Sized Legal Firms: A Comprehensive Analysis of Past Research and Future Directions. *Journal of Legal Business Strategies*, 15(4), 112-130.
- Smith, J. (2020). *Community Engagement by Law Firms*. Community Press.
- Smith, J. (2022). *Innovative Strategies for Employee Development in Legal Firms*. Legal Industry Press.

- Smith, R., (2019). Project Management Tools in Small to Medium-Sized Legal Firms: A Path to Enhanced Collaboration and Efficiency. *International Journal of Legal Studies*, 14(4), pp. 77-89.
- Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2011). Toward a Theory of Paradox: A Dynamic Equilibrium Model of Organizing. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 381–403.
- Strandberg, C. (2020). *Sustainable leadership: Creating a culture of innovation and adaptability*. Wiley & Sons.
- Strategy+Business. (2021). *Strategies for Small-Business Survival*. Available at: <https://www.strategy-business.com>
- Street, C.T. and Cameron, A.F., (2007). External Relationships and the Small Business: A Review of Small Business Alliance and Network Research. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 45(2), pp. 239-266.
- Susskind, R. E. (2013). *Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future*. Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, J., & Lee, S. (2019). Survival Strategies of SME Legal Firms in the United Kingdom. *European Legal Practice Journal*, 11(4), 233-250.
- Taylor, L. (2020). *Artificial Intelligence in Law: The New Frontier*. Innovation in Law Studies.
- Taylor, L. (2022). *Marketing Synergies in Professional Services*. Service Industry Press.
- Taylor, L. (2023). *PPC Strategies for Service Industries*. AdTech Press.
- Taylor, M., (2022). Expanding Market Access through Strategic Partnerships: The SME Experience. *International Journal of Small Business Studies*, 9(3), pp. 58-70.
- Taylor, M., (2023). The Impact of Pay-Per-Click Advertising in the Legal Sector: A Focus on SMEs. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 19(3), pp. 85-101.
- Teece, D.J., (2018). *Dynamic Capabilities and Strategic Management: Organizing for Innovation and Growth*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Temkin, D. (2020). *Focus Group Interviews: The Basics*. Sage Publications.
- The Legal 500. (2023). *Legal Market Overview*. Available at: <https://www.legal500.com/c/south-africa/legal-market-overview/>
- Thompson, A. A., Peteraf, M. A., Gamble, J. E., & Strickland, A. J. (2022). *Crafting and Executing Strategy: The Quest for Competitive Advantage*. 23rd ed. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Thompson, A.A., Peteraf, M.A., Gamble, J.E., & Strickland, A.J., (2017). *Crafting and Executing Strategy: The Quest for Competitive Advantage: Concepts and Cases*. 21st ed. McGraw-Hill Education.
- UNCTAD, (2024). *International Maritime and Transport Law*. Available at: <https://unctad.org>.

- Van Donselaar, J. (2012). Alignment during Strategy Execution in the Not-for-Profit Sector. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 7(20), 90–102.
- Wheelen, T.L., Hunger, J.D., Hoffman, A.N. and Bamford, C.E., (2018). *Strategic Management and Business Policy: Globalization, Innovation, and Sustainability*. 15th ed. New York: Pearson.
- Wiley & Sons. Ashraf, N., Masri, H., & Jaaron, A. (2020). Marketing strategies for sustainable business practices. *Marketing Journal*, 22(4)
- Wiley. Gronroos, C. (2007). Service management and marketing: Customer management in service competition.
- Wiley. Harrel, A., & Fors, M. (1992). Service firm differentiation: The role of client-specific knowledge. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 6(2), 29-41.
- Williams, B. (2023). *Strategies for Knowledge Sharing among Business Partners*. Academic Publishing.
- Williamson, K. (2018). *Research Methods: Information, Systems, and Contexts* (2nd ed.). Elsevier.
- World Bank (2018) - World Bank. 2018. *Doing Business in South Africa 2018*. Available at: World Bank Publications [Accessed: 23 May 2024].
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Zeithaml, V. A., Bitner, M. J., & Gremler, D. D. (2020). *Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus Across the Firm* (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance



12 August 2024

Nonduduzo Samukelisiwe Khanyile (202521096)
Grad School of Bus & Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear NS Khanyile,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00007436/2024

Project title: Investigating business strategies and practices of small to medium size legal firms to survive in Durban, South Africa

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 26 July 2024 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 12 August 2025.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)
/nng

Appendix 2: Gatekeeper's letter 1 and 2

KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCIAL OFFICE

1ST Floor | 200 Hoosen Haffeeje Street | Pietermaritzburg | 3201
P O Box 1454 | Pietermaritzburg | 3200
Tel: +27 (0) 33 345 1304 | Fax: +27 (0) 33 345 3028
Docex 25 | Pietermaritzburg
E-mail: infokzn@lpc.org.za
Website: www.lpc.org.za



NATIONAL OFFICE

851 River View Park Street | Riverview Office Park | Halfway Gardens | MIDRAND | 1686
P O Box 537 | MIDRAND | 1685
Tel: +27 010 001 8500

Attention: Ms NS Khanyile
Email: muke@tkninc.co.za

YOUR REF:

OUR REF : Ms M Khanyile

Please Quote Our Reference

23 April 2024

Dear Ms Khanyile

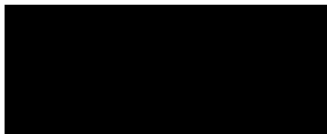
RE: INVESTIGATING BUSINESS STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES TO ENSURE THE SURVIVAL OF THE SMALL TO MEDIUM SIZE LEGAL FIRMS IN DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

I am writing to formally grant permission for the study mentioned above to be conducted as part of the requirements for the attainment of your MBA qualification.

It is noted that your study will entail amongst other things, the gathering and collation of data from legal practitioners regarding their practices. You are kindly requested to adhere to any applicable policies and guidelines to ensure a smooth and mutually beneficial collaboration.

We wish you the utmost success in your research and trust that your findings will be valuable to both academia and the legal fraternity.

Yours faithfully



**MRS P.D. ARNOLD MFUSI
PROVINCIAL DIRECTOR
LEGAL PRACTICE COUNCIL: KWAZULU-NATAL**

Executive Committee: Ms. Janine Myburgh – Chairperson, Adv. Kennedy Tsatsawane SC - Deputy Chairperson, Ms. Kathleen Matolo-Dlepu, Mr Miles Carter, Mr Priyesh Daya, Adv. Brenton Joseph SC, Mr Pritzman Busani Mabunda, Executive Officer: Ms. Charity Nzuza

KWAZULU-NATAL OFFICE - DIRECTOR: PEARL ARNOLD MFUSI



BLACK LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

KwaZulu-Natal Branch

Suite 602, Delta Towers, 300 Anton Lembede Street, Durban, 4001

Email: wenzile.zama@outlook.com (Secretary)

CC: julukaximba@gmail.com (Deputy Secretary)

Tel: [REDACTED] (Chairperson) / [REDACTED] (Deputy Chairperson)

23 APRIL 2024

MS. N.S. KHANYILE

TEMBE KHESWA NXUMALO INC.

Per email: muke@tkninc.co.za

Dear Madam,

RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT IN YOUR MBA RESEARCH TOPIC: INVESTIGATING BUSINESS STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES TO ENSURE THE SURVIVAL OF SMALL TO MEDIUM SIZE LEGAL FIRMS IN DURBAN

1. We have had the opportunity of perusing your letter requesting support and or permission for your MBA research study, more specifically to investigate business strategies and practices to ensure the survival of small to medium sized legal firms in Durban.
2. Having considered the objectives of your study, we are confident that it will assist members of the legal profession including members of our organization, who are predominately legal practitioners practicing in small and mediumsized law firms.
3. We note that your research may require, amongst other things, the collection and publication of information obtained from our organization and or our members. You are hereby requested to inform us in advance of details which you may require, to enable us to notify the possible participants accordingly.

We hope that you will find the above to be in order.

Yours sincerely,

W.P. ZAMA

(Branch Secretary)

Branch Executive Committee

Miss NokuPhiwa Duma (Chairperson); Adv. Mlami Magigaba (Deputy Chairperson); Wenzile Zama (Secretary); Juluka Ximba (Deputy Secretary); Mr. Neville Dwarika (Treasurer), Mr. Vikela Ntlokwana (Head: Policy & Legislation); Thembelihle Mathonsi (Head: Legal Education & Research); Phiwokuhle Mathenjwa (Head: Events and Campaigns).

Appendix 3: Introductory letter

Dear Participant

It is my request and pleasure to have your attention and time for you to participate in my MBA research. The information required will greatly assist my research and the legal profession in Durban.

My name is **Nonduduzo Samukelisiwe Khanyile** from Durban. I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal doing my Master of Business Administration with a student number 202521096. I am enrolled at the Graduate School of Business. My research topic is titled **“Investigating Business Strategies and Practices of Small to Medium size Legal Firms to survive in Durban South Africa”**.

You are being invited to consider participating in study that involves the legal firms on issues of survival and long-term sustainability. The study aims to explore and investigate business strategies that may be applied by these legal firms. This study is expected to interview leaders, owners or managers of legal firms such as yourselves. The expected duration of your participation, if you chooses to participate, is approximately one month, with each participant interviewed at best, not more than two hours.

Participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw participation at any point. Refusal or withdrawal will not carry any penalty.

Your confidentiality will be maintained at all times as your personal details will not be stored. Answers that you will provide will be untraceable and no name will or contact details will be required to participate.

The study has been approved by the Legal Practice Council and Black Lawyers Association, KZN as per attached gatekeeper letters.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher on [REDACTED] or 202521096@ukzn.ac.za or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 – Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Appendix 4: Informed Consent

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 10 March 2024

Dear

My name Nonduduzo Samukelisiwe Khanyile from the UKZN Graduate School of Business and Leadership. My contact details are as follows: [REDACTED] and muke@tkninc.co.za / 202521096@stu.ukza.ac.za.

UKZN Graduate School of Business and Leadership supervisor is:

Prof. Macdonald Kanyangale - kanyangalem@ukzn.ac.za

You are invited to consider participating in a study that involves the exploration of business strategies and practices employed by small to medium size legal firms Durban, South Africa in ensuring survival. The aim and purpose of this research is to understand challenges in the South African legal profession, how leaders in the profession have responded, and to develop an authentic contextualised framework that can be integrated into the South African legal profession to help alleviate a multitude of challenges within the legal industry including long term sustainability. The study is expected to interview leaders, owners and/or managers of these legal firms based in Durban. Interviews will continue until data saturation is reached. It will involve a semi-structured interview and a member check at the end of the process, where the transcript of the interview will be shared with you for your approval. The duration of your participation is expected to be for a period of one year.

I do not foresee the study having any risks or discomforts. I hope that the study will contribute to assist in building a framework for ensuring survival of small to medium legal firms which is currently missing in the existing literature, and that it will also

benefit the legal profession. Additional and secondary information may be obtained from the Legal Practice Council KwaZulu Natal and the Black Lawyers Association should a need arise.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: HSSREC/00007436/2024).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at [REDACTED]; 202521096@stu.ukzn.a.za and muke@tkninc.co.co.za or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Participation in the current research is voluntary and participants may withdraw participation at any stage. Should the participant wish to withdraw, the participants will not incur penalties or loss of treatment or other benefits to which they are normally entitled. The participant will be required to communicate their withdrawal either telephonically or through email. All data collected from the participant will remain part of the study so as not to delay or negatively impact the study.

The anonymity of the participant will be always ensured. All personal information, as well as data collected, will be saved on a password-protected computer to protect confidentiality. In addition, anonymisation will be utilised, and pseudonyms will be applied to research

participants. Signed consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet. Data storage will happen for a reasonable time of five years and then be destroyed.

CONSENT

I (Name) have been informed about the study entitled: Investigating business strategies and practices to ensure the survival of the small to medium size legal firms in Durban, South Africa by Nonduduzo Samukelisiwe Khanyile.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and 202521096@stu.ukzn.ac.za and muke@tkninc.co.za

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers, then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / Focus group discussion YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

(Where applicable)

Signature of Translator

Date

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Biographical information

UNIVERSITY	POSITION	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	AGE	GENDER

Interview Questions

Sub-research objective 1: What business strategies and practices are leaders and owner-managers of small and medium legal firms in Durban using to survive?

1. In your own words, explain what you understand by the term “business strategy” in a business like your legal firm? Give me some clear examples.
2. Would you please describe to me how operational efficiency practices are adopted and what measures are implemented in your legal firm to remain competitive in the current business environment?
3. Can you give me examples of what business strategies are applied by your legal firm to respond to issues of sustainability and profitability?
4. How does your legal firm respond to the ever-changing legal sector business environment and client’s needs?

Sub-research objective 2: What are the challenges experienced by leaders and owner-managers of the small to medium legal firms in implementing long-term survival strategies in Durban?

5. In your view what do you think are the key challenges faced by small to medium legal firms in ensuring survival and sustainability? Give me some clear examples.

6. Does your firm adopt business practices that ensure that it remains agile in the current legal sector business environment?
7. What kind of different strategies does your firm use/deploy to meet developing and diversified trends in legal services?

Sub-research objective 3: What strategies could be adopted by leaders and owner-managers to assist in mitigating the challenges experienced by small to medium legal firms in Durban?

8. Based on your experience and knowledge as a business leader in the legal sector, describe what you would consider key in ensuring survival of a legal firm in the current challenging business environment?
9. In your view what business strategies and practices did you display that ensured survival and sustainability of your business thus far? Give clear examples.
10. In your view what business strategies and practices have you noticed that other small to medium leaders display that you believe have contributed to their survival? Give clear examples.
11. Looking at the legal sector environment in Durban, what strategic business competencies would you say are important to successfully sustain small to medium legal firms. Could you please explain your answer?
12. What business strategies and practices would you advise other business leaders adopt in their legal firms to ensure survival, if you believe there is a gap in their approach?
13. What else do you have to say about business strategies and practices in the small and medium legal firms in Durban should think about, while sustaining their businesses?