

Environmentally Sustainable Business Practices in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises: A Sub-Saharan African Country Perspective

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Abstract

In line with the natural resource-based view, this paper explores the sustainable business practices (SBPs) of Ghanaian micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Qualitatively, the study interviewed eight MSME operators and middle-level managers purposively to assess their use of SBPs and how it affects their businesses. Data collected were edited, coded, and grouped under themes based on the Braun and Clarke thematic framework. The study identified holistic environmental management, eco-preneurship, and regenerative practices as the environmental stewardship drivers among Ghanaian MSMEs. Also, integrated vision and strategy, process efficiency and resource optimization, and risk profiling drive process excellence. Finally, sustainability-focused leadership, internal advocates and change agents, and ongoing education and awareness as drivers for sustainability-oriented culture. The business practices of organizations have continually impacted the immediate environment within which they operate. Consequently, there is a clarion call for businesses to engage in SBPs to mitigate the effect of their operations on the environment. The study brings to bear the SBPs Ghanaian MSMEs are engaged in and how they affect their operations and survival, especially in this era of sustainability.

Keywords

Sustainable business practices (SBPs), sustainable development, environmental concerns, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), thematic analysis

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I. Introduction

The competitive nature of markets globally in contemporary times has necessitated numerous attempts targeted toward changing business practices to those which are environmentally friendly. This also includes the need to integrate sustainable business practices (SBPs) into corporate culture and structure (Cha et al., 2018). Growing environmental awareness has driven industries to innovate and lessen their environmental impact. This has created a couple of difficulties in the way they carry out their activities since there is a need to rethink their tactical operations and take on increased responsibility and sustainability (Kolk, 2016). Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) may not have been subject to societal and legal pressures for a variety of reasons (Nulkar, 2014). However, because the sustainability of life on this planet depends on sustainable industries, the time has come when disregarding the environmental effects of MSMEs is no longer practical (Lucato et al., 2017). Environmental sustainability advocates have argued that environmentally conscious and ecologically friendly approaches can lead to competitive advantages and superior performance for companies (Suleman et al., 2022a; Williams & O'Donovan, 2015). By extension, companies could therefore consider their negative externalities and put environmental values at the core of their strategic route. Following this, MSMEs have a crucial role to play in boosting the economy, creating employment, and contributing to sustainable development (Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020; Zafar & Mustafa, 2017).

Even in advanced industrial countries, the largest employer of workers is in the MSME sector, rather than multinationals (Jarwal, 2020; Nyarku & Oduro, 2018). More generally, MSMEs' development is seen as speeding up the achievement of broader socioeconomic goals, including poverty alleviation (Adu et al., 2020; Amoah & Amoah, 2018). Many MSMEs are mainly set up for profit, and in Ghana, the majority of these MSMEs are owned by sole proprietors. In the case of large corporate organizations and international corporations, the influence of sustainability practices in fostering business excellence is clear. A significant difficulty for MSMEs is how to incorporate SBPs into their primary business activities (Battistella et al., 2018). Studies have identified several key barriers to MSME adoption of SBPs. One of the restrictions is MSMEs' belief that they have no individual effect on the environment as a whole (Gerstenfeld & Roberts, 2017) and the lack of skills and knowledge of approaches to address sustainability issues (Nosratabadi et al., 2019). Over the years, the ethical, environmental, and social dimensions of business have been given increasing attention, most often under the heading of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Most of the earlier studies have linked SBPs to the different elements of CSR, as it began to emerge in the second period of the twentieth century.

Several frameworks have been established to help MSMEs adopt environmentally friendly business practices. Thanki et al. (2016) created an integrated framework to help MSMEs select the best lean and agile solutions and assess their performance using certain parameters. Verrier et al. (2014) created another framework for lean and green tools, which directs MSMEs toward benchmarking best practices within their industrial cooperation by putting their practices into a lean and green framework. The unanswered question is how these holistic goals can be included in a single entity and how a single economic entity, especially a small-scale enterprise, can be involved in the implementation of SBPs in Ghana. Most studies have focused on the environmental policies and practices of business organizations (Carballo-Penela & Castromán-Diz, 2015; Williams & O'Donovan, 2015), while less research has been done on the implementation of SBPs for MSMEs. Equally, little is known about SBPs and their impact on the MSME sector in Ghana, although extensive literature on SBPs by large companies is available (Ahinful & Taurigana, 2019; Hagin & Caesar, 2021; Williams & O'Donovan, 2015). Thus, this paper explores the SBPs of Ghanaian MSMEs and finds out the nature of SBPs and their attendant effects on their businesses.

Table 1. A NRBV: Conceptual Framework.

Strategic Capabilities	Environmental Driving Forces	Key Resources	Competitive Advantage
Pollution prevention	Reduce trash, effluents, and emissions	Continuous improvement	Lower costs
Product stewardship	Reduce product life cycle costs	Stakeholder integration	Preempt competitors
Sustainable development	Lessen the environmental impact of new business development	Shared vision	Future position

Source: Adapted from (Hart, 1995).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Natural Resource-based View (NRBV)

A reliable lens for MSMEs using environmentally SBPs is provided by the NRBV. The resource-based view is the foundation of NRBV theory, which also includes the limits placed on a firm by the surrounding environment (Hart, 1995). According to this theory, a firm's ability to manage natural resources and develop skills to deal with an unpredictable environment will determine its competitive edge (Hart, 1995). As shown in Table 1, this theory of competitive advantage suggests three overlapping strategic capabilities for achieving sustainable competitive advantage: pollution prevention, product stewardship, and sustainable development. Each of these strategic capabilities has environmental forces that drive it, key resources, and ways to get a competitive advantage that lasts.

2.1.1 Pollution Prevention

According to Hart (1995), control and prevention can be used to implement this pollution prevention technique. The pollution control technology is used to capture, treat, and dispose of pollutants and effluents, and emissions are decreased through process innovation. By doing this, MSMEs can realize significant cost savings, giving them a cost advantage over rivals and ultimately enhancing production and efficiency. To adapt their business processes to meet the changing requirements of the environment, Jackson et al. (2016) advise MSMEs' management to have a thorough grasp of their company's influence on the environment and recognize that pollution results from the wasteful use of materials and human resources.

2.1.2 Product Stewardship

The goal of the product stewardship strategy is to incorporate feedback from external stakeholders into the design and development of new products. Also, it helps to evaluate how businesses' operations affect the environment at every stage of the value chain from the acquisition of raw materials to the disposal of finished goods (Hart, 1995). According to Hart (1995), MSMEs can abandon ecologically risky industries through product stewardship. Product stewardship may also help build a business's reputation and set it apart from the competition (Bhupendra & Sangle, 2017; Elmagrhi et al., 2019) by branding it as environmentally friendly.

2.1.3 Sustainable Development

The goal of sustainable development is to use low-impact technology and products to develop markets over the long term. A company's dedication to sustainable development may increase its expectations for future performance in comparison to rivals (Cantele & Zardini, 2018; Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). Hart (1995) asserts that to integrate environmentally conscious business development methods into global growth, there must be coordinated efforts and a long-term outlook. When MSMEs want to proactively engage in environmental practices, they must possess shared goals, stakeholder engagement, and strategic proactiveness (Seroka-Stolka & Fijorek, 2020; Watson et al., 2018). This theory is a good way to look at the qualities of SBPs in the MSMEs in Ghana.

2.2 Sustainability

Sustainability is described as fulfilling current needs without sacrificing future generations' abilities (Tien et al., 2021). Rexhepi et al. (2013) assert that a sustainable company generates benefits for its stakeholders while protecting the environment and enhancing people's lives. A competing principle within the area of sustainability is its linkage with performance (Thanki et al., 2016). Sustainability often takes a great deal of attention in the environment (Hojnik et al., 2020), and industries have now had to concentrate on reducing their packaging, waste, water use, and overall environmental impact. This could have a positive financial impact with benefits that will reshape the planet. One of the problems of environmental sustainability is that the impact of corporations cannot be completely evaluated (Carballo-Penela & Castromán-Diz, 2015). Costs, such as sewage, carbon dioxide, land recycling, and waste, in general, are not easy to calculate, making it difficult to track and measure these externalities. The social aspects of sustainability include the sponsorship and recognition of sustainable companies by their employees, investors, and the society in which they operate. For the community, companies take social responsibility, such as sponsorships, scholarships, and donations, and give back to the community through local public projects. While businesses must be competitive, the environmental and social dimensions of sustainability should not be neglected. Sustainability gives companies a bigger reason to exist and some new things to be proud of. It also helps them recommit to important goals such as efficiency, sustainable growth, and shareholder value (Asare, 2014).

2.3 SBPs

Business practices are tactics or activities that a company performs to achieve its goals (Turner et al., 2018). They are the most economical ways through which a company tries to make profits. The basic rules governing daily business activities are key business practices. Many businesses have rules governing their practices to ensure consistency in their work and compliance with the laws in effect. To become a more sustainable organization, businesses will need to implement and be characterized by environmentally friendly activities (Caldera et al., 2019). SBPs vary between industries and often depend on the type of company and the product or service provided (Caldera et al., 2018). In other words, no one system is the same, as sound business practices will vary across companies. Some companies may switch to paperless billing to show they care about sustainable development, while others may use the environment as a business criterion when dealing with other companies. SBPs are often discussed to include energy reduction, cleaner production processes, and waste reduction strategies.

Literature provides two types of SBP principles (i.e., operational and strategic). The operational principles examine whether a corporation can sustain present practices without trying to place investment at risk (Caldera et al., 2018). Operational principles are practical and address issues peculiar to what a business does and how it operates daily. To achieve this, the organization must commit itself to staff satisfaction, growth, and well-being concerning operational principles. The company must also be construed to comply with environmental standards and work in the development and distribution of its products or services in an environmentally efficient way (Velez-Ocampo & Gonzalez-Perez, 2019). The strategic principles tend to guide the way the company is led, as they contribute to the organization's decision-making processes (Velez-Ocampo & Gonzalez-Perez, 2019). In doing so, the organization needs to integrate sustainability into its operations as part of its strategic principles. Sustainability, therefore, is a priority and must be taken into account in all aspects of the organization (Suleman et al., 2022a). In all matters that are important to others, there must also be accountability and transparency for organizational results.

2.4 MSMEs in Ghana

Micro firms have dominated the topic of MSMEs in Ghana in recent years (Ayakwah et al., 2021). Micro and small enterprises are defined by the National Board for Small-Scale Industries (NBSSI) as businesses with less than 29 employees (Amoah & Amoah, 2018). The MSMEs are further categorized by the NBSSI as follows: Micro-businesses employ fewer than 5 people, small businesses employ 6 to 29 people, medium-sized businesses employ 30 to 90 people, and large businesses employ 100 or more people (Amoah & Amoah, 2018). According to Korang et al. (2021), one fundamental rationale for concentrating on MSMEs is that they are significant employers of labor, making them crucial in solving unemployment and poverty challenges. They help to even out regional differences by creating jobs in rural areas and getting local resources to work faster than big businesses (Amoah & Amoah, 2018). Focusing on MSMEs helps to decentralize industries, which not only accelerates rural development but also reduces urban immigration and the significant challenge of overpopulation in cities (Korang et al., 2021). According to several national studies (Jarwal, 2020; Meng et al., 2018; Sathish & Rajamohan, 2018), MSMEs provide a significant value-added contribution to the economy of a country. In Ghana, for instance, 92% of businesses are registered as MSMEs (Amoah & Amoah, 2018). These businesses contribute to about 80% of employment, thus helping to solve the unemployment situation in the country (Adom et al., 2022; Amoah & Amoah, 2018). Also, this sector according to Amoah and Amoah (2018) generates over 70% of the country's GDP, thereby, helps in improving the economic development of the nation. Small enterprises may also be able to assist with export promotion, as is the case in certain developed countries where small firms produce textiles, electrical products, clothing, leather, and ceramics, among others (Nosratabadi et al., 2019). According to Akamobi (2020), MSMEs might be employed more easily to create industry dispersion and regional balance in economic growth. The value of small businesses in diversifying the industrial structure and transforming the rural economy is particularly important (Dennis, 2017). MSMEs in Ghana offer local goods and services since only a few of them can sell their products outside of Ghana (Amoah & Amoah, 2018; Hagin & Caesar, 2021). MSMEs because of their nature are also known to have a great impact on the environment. However, the impact of MSMEs on the environment of Ghana is not directly seen since most individuals perceive them to be micro, small or medium-sized businesses (Agyapong & Arthur, 2018). This makes the impact

that these individual businesses have on the environment minimal as compared to the aggregate impact they have on the environment (Agyapong & Arthur, 2018; Amoah & Amoah, 2018). MSMEs have, therefore, been urged to practice procedures that will ensure the environment is free from harm in their daily operations (Ocloo et al., 2021).

2.5 Scope, Barriers, and Drivers of SBPs in MSMEs in Ghana

Businesses, governments, and members of civil society are now vigilant in response to the rapidity and magnitude of environmental damage caused by economic activities. In response, firms all around the world have been implementing sustainable policies and reporting (Quaye & Mensah, 2018). On the other hand, the majority of these events take place within the walls of the businesses. When bigger companies contract out their manufacturing and service activities to MSMEs, they are essentially shifting their environmental responsibility onto their suppliers. In the majority of developing nations, MSMEs are left on their own to improve the environmental practices they employ because of inadequate regulations and lax implementation of environmental legislation (Ahinful et al., 2022; Gregurec et al., 2021). However, because of their limited resources and administrative capacities, they are frequently unable to engage in behaviors that promote sustainability (Quaye & Mensah, 2018). Thus, MSMEs in Ghana according to Afum et al. (2020) are mostly engaged in SBPs because their survival ecosystem comprises sociocultural and economic influences. For example, MSMEs engage in SBPs to develop their businesses and gain access to finance from financial institutions. Also, they engage in SBPs to be recognized in their society as an enterprise that cares about the impact of their business on the environment (Addae-Korankye & Aryee, 2021; Afum et al., 2020). Moreover, government agencies especially in the various local assemblies go around making sure that these entities know the impact of their business on the environment. These entities also engage in SBPs as a form of marketing strategy to get more customers and improve sales to achieve organizational goals (Afum et al., 2020).

2.6 Empirical Evidence

Scholars in emerging economies, such as China (Ngai et al., 2018), Eastern Europe (Hojnik et al., 2020), and Russia (Senko & Pykäläinen, 2020), have been discussing the regulatory, normative, and cognitive dimensions based on concepts developed through theories. In line with this, Jarwal (2020) argues that the institutional environment influences the mechanisms by which SMEs' intellectual and ethical credibility is obtained. The demand for companies to participate in SBPs has evolved, according to Caldera et al. (2018), and SMEs are responsible for a substantial proportion of global emissions. Nine characteristics of SBPs have been identified by Caldera et al. (2018), which are grouped under three themes: environmental stewardship, process excellence, and a culture based on sustainable management. Caldera et al. (2018) outlined the practical consequences of addressing such characteristics for SMEs to improve sustainable performance. The study resulted in the addition of a NRBV of resilience and health improvements in poor reception environments as the fourth strategy for "regenerative development." As businesses took up SBPs, Collins et al. (2007) investigated the business networks and the uptake of sustainability in New Zealand. The study examined both large firms and SMEs and found that large businesses are more likely to adopt SBPs in contrast to SMEs. The findings of their study show that the

main factor for failure was the cost of implementing SBPs. These results have been verified by Caldera et al. (2019) in an exploratory study on the potential and obstacles to the successful application of SBPs to SMEs. During the processes of sustainability integration, communication is essential to explain a company's understanding of sustainability (Steffen & Doppler, 2019). The customer can only determine whether there is a match between his understandings if an organization knows about sustainability. In turn, it helps consumers decide how much they trust the company's sustainability claims. Consumers are often not able to grasp and adjust to SBPs because they equate sacrifice, inconvenience, increased prices, and/or poorer quality with sustainable consumption (Ngai et al., 2018). Studies show that consumers strongly influence purchasing decisions concerning the sustainable practices of producers. Cambra-ferro and Ruiz-benítez (2011) conducted a comparative study in Spain with two manufacturing SMEs belonging to different sectors—a winery and a painting business. The researchers compared the SBPs with their drivers and concluded that organizational similarities and differences led to different sustainability strategies. So, the researchers made it clear that sustainability can be seen as a strategy for getting a competitive edge and helping businesses work well around the world.

3. Methodology

The qualitative case study approach was used for this study to closely examine the data within the specific context. The target population consists of all MSMEs in the Greater Accra region of Ghana because it is the capital city of the country and is crowded with numerous MSMEs. In all, a total of about 50 MSMEs were contacted for data collection, however, approval was ascertained from only 17 MSMEs to participate in this study. This is because, first of all, most of the MSMEs were not ready to engage in the study stating that (i) they did not want to discuss their business policies with the researchers, (ii) they do not want to be involved in the study (even after explaining to them the purpose and ethics involved), and (iii) they do not have the time to engage in an interview. Moreover, only 8 participants have been presented in this study because other responses were a repetition of the ones already given from various respondents since they were in similar industries. Therefore, the researchers reached a point of saturation as the responses were similar and a repetition of what was already taken. Also, omissions and errors in collecting data contributed to the use of 8 responses for the study. The purposive sampling technique was then used to select and interview the respondents from the MSMEs (Anaman et al., 2022). This was to ensure the appropriateness of the features, characteristics, and expertise that warranted a thorough exploration as well as an understanding of the central theme discussed in the study (Bell et al., 2018). The qualitative approach allows for the gathering of insights into personal experiences and individual views of managers and owners of MSMEs. Interviews were used to collect data for this study because they offer a complete description and analysis of a research subject without limiting the scope of the research and the nature of participants' responses (Anaman & Ahmed, 2021; Suleman et al., 2022b). The interviews were conducted directly and orally in an informal setting, allowing respondents the freedom to give responses to questions and ensure trustworthiness and confidentiality. The information obtained was transcribed verbatim. The collected data were edited, coded, and grouped under themes, after which different responses were defined using colors and highlighters. Data from the interview were analyzed using the thematic framework of Braun and Clarke (2016). This framework minimally organizes the information and describes it in "rich" detail. The thematic analysis flexibility makes it an appropriate tool for the analysis of interviews. To meet and uphold ethical considerations in line with the requirements of

Table 2. Background Data of Respondents.

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age (Years)	Job Title	Industry	Core Activities	No. of Years in Business
R1	Male	Below 30	Managing partner	Recycling and environment conservation	Plastic recycling Provide education on recycling Empower individuals economically	3
R2	Female	30–40	Business development officer	Trading and investment	Investment in energy/oil and gas-related activities Investment in the healthcare sector Trading in consumables such as steel, chemicals, etc.	10
R3	Male	30–40	Mid-level manager	Banking	Fiduciary services	More than 10
R4	Male	30–40	Mid-level manager	Oil and gas	Oil marketing	More than 10
R5	Male	30–40	Senior manager	Service	Petroleum product marketing	More than 10
R6	Female	30–40	Senior manager	Financial	Provision of financial products and services Maintaining and investing client finances	More than 10
R7	Male	30–40	Founder/Owner	Fast-moving consumer goods	Pharmaceutical wholesaling	6–10
R8	Female	40–50	Mid-level manager	Financial	Banking	More than 10

Source: Field Data, (2021).

qualitative studies, prior permission of respondents was obtained before data collection through interviews. The respondents were made aware of the study theme and the time for data collection was arranged with them. The respondents were also made aware of the intent of the study. Through these ethical principles, interviewees were encouraged to share knowledge freely and honestly. Fairness and consistency were also adhered to in the final review and presentation of the results.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion based on the data collected and the objectives of the study.

Table 2 presents the background information on the respondents who took part in the study. The study was conducted on eight respondents as the level of saturation was reached. The respondents were 3

Table 3. Emerging Drivers of SBPs.

Key Themes of SBPs	Nine Key Drivers of SBPs
1. Environmental stewardship	Holistic environmental management Eco-preneurship Regenerative practices
2. Process excellence	Integrated vision and strategy Process efficiency and resource optimization Risk profiling
3. Sustainability-oriented culture	Sustainability-focused leadership Internal advocates and change agents Ongoing education and awareness

Source: Field Data (2021).

females and 5 males, with an average age of between 30 and 50 years. The respondents who took part in the study were top-level managers and middle-level managers. It can also be assessed that most of the respondents who took part in the study are in companies that have been in business for 3 years or more, with the majority of the companies in business for more than 10 years.

4.1 Emerging Drivers of SBPs

The nine key emerging drivers of SBPs are grouped under the three key themes and presented in Table 3.

The emerging issues with SBPs that dominate the operations of registered MSMEs in Ghana (with an operational life span of 1 to 10 years) are environmental stewardship, process excellence, and sustainability-oriented culture (Caldera et al., 2018). These are broadly driven by the nine elements as highlighted and will either impact the operations of the firm positively or otherwise. In a wider sense, all activities and drivers of environmental stewardship will contribute to both the immediate environment and the external environment of the firm, which in the long term intend to impact the firm's sustainability. Also, all the key drivers of process excellence tend to impact the economic operations of the country and the firm alike. In the place of the firm, they gain a competitive advantage, which should also impact profitability, all other things being constant. This should also result in paying taxes and a reduction in unemployment. Lastly, society also benefits most from all operations and adoptions of SBPs, especially sustainability-oriented cultures. All the key drivers in this stead are aimed at improving the lives of individuals and society at large. These arguments are highly supported by Jänicke (2012), who emphasized that each of the themes of SBPs aligns itself to achieve three main objectives in the dimension of environmental, economic, and societal enhancement.

4.2 Environmental Stewardship

Firms would mainly adopt SBPs because of three main characteristics, namely: eco-preneurship, advocating for regenerative business practices, and holistic environmental management (Caldera et al., 2018). It was observed throughout the interaction with the participants that MSMEs would undertake

SBPs because they impose a responsibility on the business not to cause harm to the environment. Therefore, it becomes the obligation of a firm to protect its immediate environment and even go beyond that when the need arises. The Managing Partner (Respondent, R1) highlighted the need for the firm to improve and support obtaining a rather positive impact on the environment while carrying out the right kind of business; “we believe in and support that we make a positive impact on individuals and the environment...” Equally, “...we connected, we take from the environment and it has to be sustained because we cause more harm ...” R1.

Firms in their quest to holistically manage the environment will mainly undertake some SBPs, which are aimed at safeguarding the environment to benefit generations today and those unborn. Such SBPs could include, among other things, “proper disposal of waste, a consideration of sewage systems, carbon emissions, and proper energy usage.” R2. Caldera et al. (2018) argued rightly that environmental stewardship as driven by holistic environmental management practices would have to reduce the negative impact of energy usage, water waste, and sewage disposal on the environment at large. This is evident from the interview where respondent R2 stated that for their firm, they pay attention to what is disposed of and where it is disposed of, highlighting some concerns as mentioned above. This is a clear sign of being passionate about the impact of their activities on the environment and, thus, caring for the environment to reduce the impact of their activities on the environment. However, this explains how organizations have adopted SBPs to curb the negative effects that their actions and inactions could cause on the environment while they go about conducting their normal business. “We undertake all these activities, and they are mainly designed by the organization’s leadership as part of its strategy to curb any adverse effects we cause the environment, either directly or indirectly.” R5.

As stated by the respondent, although it is not mandatory by any legislation for MSMEs to adopt and internalize environmental policies, firms that are wary of circumstances that their operations negatively impact the environment consider it obligatory to show some sense of responsibility and seek to be accountable for their actions. Enviably, this can be done by taking up some sustainable business activities as mentioned to add some value to the environment rather than to await the repercussions. Some of the core initiatives taken by most of these MSMEs are proper sewage systems and waste disposal, waste segregation, waste recycling, and usage of other renewable energies (like solar planes). In an attempt to make good use of the opportunities that could come with SBPs, MSMEs take advantage of these chances to make a business out of them, which in effect generate some revenue after obtaining a competitive advantage. This is stated by respondent seven (R7), *“that the firm has incorporated these practices into their strategic plan and can afford the support of other firms to buy into the aid.”* This is consistent with the literature, where Caldera et al. (2018) explain that MSMEs incorporate and embrace SBPs as a form of entrepreneurship, or what they term eco-preneurship, aimed to advance the sustainability of the firm and its general operation.

4.3 Process Excellence

There are several activities enlisted by the respondents to attest to the essence of utilizing SBPs. These activities are captured as initiatives of firms and can be best categorized under the strategies of the firms in achieving efficiency in all their dealings and aimed at profit optimization while reducing business risk. Process excellence is primarily influenced by the economic benefit that firms stand to gain from a specific initiative as it relates to a business process (Jänicke, 2012). In this case, MSMEs can rely on SBPs as an integrated vision of the firm, whereby businesses can imbibe the practice of sustainable business models into their business functions. This is true with what R8 stated: “SBPs help achieve our

business goal in line with our mission statement." The efficiency of work is another area of the essence and a key driver for process excellence, which is mainly influenced by product and service excellence. Firms, usually manufacturing firms, would adopt the lean approach to reduce waste and improve the overall efficiency of the firm. It is also observed that MSMEs adopt lean thinking as an effective tool in improving product and service efficiency aimed at the right use of resources. As R3 further indicates, "Our documentation is done electronically by way of reducing a lot of paper that could be burnt and the smoke that can be hurtful to the environment." Caldera et al. (2018) explain that lean thinking as a tool utilized by firms brings about sustainability strategies in the life of a firm and also affords MSMEs with the opportunities to be regarded as having a competitive edge over other industry players. R6, a senior manager, clearly stated, "SBPs offer the firm the ability to maintain existing customers and even attract new customers by providing excellent services that give a competitive advantage." Adoption of the lean thinking tool is seen by MSMEs to be a great factor in green outcomes, incorporating the strategies of a firm to achieve process excellence aimed at a good corporate image and, ultimately, affect the life cycle of the firm. This is corroborated by a Business Development Officer (R2) stating that "the adoption and use of SBPs acquire for the MSMEs goodwill, post-social confidence, customer trust and allows the company to stay for a longer period and last for several generations." MSMEs are socially accepted if they are as responsible toward all the stakeholder groups as possible. This, in effect, affects future operational efficiency, investment opportunities, and the going concern issues. The argument of Womack and Jones (1997) supports these findings, stating that lean thinking as SBPs delivers quality value for customers. The viability of a firm is mainly affected by the risk and challenges that are likely to have been faced by firms. Profiling of risk to weigh options and the chance of adoption and implementation of some SBPs becomes necessary to determine which approach(es) will work best to the advantage of MSMEs. Firms would also have to consider the viability of strategies in obtaining acceptance by all stakeholder groups; more especially, they should be aligned with the concept of the triple bottom line of environmental, social, and economic benefit, central to the profiling of risk (Jänicke, 2012).

4.5 Sustainability-oriented Culture

Organizational culture is relevant in all regards to coexisting and leaving in harmony with all, both within the firm and outside the firm. Caldera et al. (2018) opine that sustainability-oriented culture must be exhibited in various ways and to different degrees. Some key drivers of this concept are focus leadership, internal advocates and agents of change, and continuous education and awareness creation, which is prominent among MSMEs. According to Jänicke (2012), a sustainability-oriented culture is aimed at obtaining social trust and improving the firm's corporate citizenship. As stated by R1, "we are more focused on waste and emissions to reduce their impact on the environment." This, in effect, is a clear demonstration of the sustainability-focused leadership concept, which is aimed at improving the firm's operational capacity to curb all negative impacts of the firm's activities on the environment. This is also explained as the firm's being ethically responsible. Caldera et al. (2018) argued on the same grounds that MSMEs who adopt and operationalize the concept of sustainability-focused leadership, which drives the organizational culture, live rightly without causing any harm to the natural environment. The commitment of MSMEs to acting ethically responsibly is shown when a senior manager in a petroleum product marketing company (R5) stated that they embrace ethical practices in an attempt to put their actions and inactions into check such that they do not cause so much harm to the environment, which may affect generations. "Making a concerted effort to put systems in place to ensure the viability and health of future generations" (R5). In the area of advocacy and agents of change as a driver of sustainability-oriented

culture, the senior manager, R5, emphasizes the good development and empowerment of the human resources of the organization to take up roles and responsibilities with all seriousness aimed at facilitating their personal growth. R5 states, "we focus on grooming and developing our human capital." What this means is that they encourage employees to come up with some unique ideas aimed at positively impacting the environment while making good use of natural resources. According to Caldera et al. (2018), encouraging subordinates to propose creative approaches to curbing or reducing health and environmental issues is a challenge to the benefit of the organization and society at large. R5 then again advocates for a change in negative cultures, which may conflict with SBPs. Continuous education and the creation of awareness are essential to driving an organization's suitability-oriented culture. It places some sense of responsibility and accountability on the individuals in the organization and the organization as a whole. To this effect, R5 had this to say, "We are growing because we organize training for our employees regularly." In the view of R3 also, "getting staff who are accustomed to knowledge and the new trend of doing things but stay in line with the vision helps reduce the footprint of the company on the environment." This evidence is supported by literature which says that continuous education sharpens the knowledge and understanding of individuals in a firm to engage rightly with their immediate environment and most especially to create a harmonious atmosphere at work (Caldera et al., 2018).

4.6 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the SBPs of Ghanaian MSMEs and find out the nature of SBPs as well as their attendant effects on their businesses. The study focused on MSMEs within the manufacturing industry (i.e., recycling, meat processing, food, and clothing) and the service industry (banking, investment, technology, fast-moving consumer goods, oil, and gas marketing). The findings of the study showed that business practices among MSMEs in the country depend on the sector within which the MSME operates. For instance, an organization that is involved in recycling engages in plastic recycling and provides education on recycling, among others. Some MSMEs also provide financial products and services, as well as maintain and invest in sustainable client finances. Therefore, MSMEs engage in a lot of business practices depending on the industry of operation. In meeting the study objectives, themes on what constitutes SBPs among MSMEs in Ghana were developed based on existing literature (i.e., Caldera et al. 2018). Some of these business practices include environmental stewardship (which constitutes holistic environmental management, eco-preneurship, and regenerative practices), process excellence (which includes integrated vision and strategy, process efficiency, resource optimization, and risk profiling), and sustainability-oriented culture, which consists of sustainability-focused leadership, internal advocates and change agents, and continuous education and awareness creation. These SBPs are being used strategically and operationally by MSMEs in Ghana, mainly to be competitive in the market. Most MSMEs are gearing into SBPs because customers are becoming interested in companies that are conscious of sustainability. The impact of these SBPs was clearly stated by respondents to have a positive impact on their business. R2, who is into trading, indicated that it ensures continuity of the business, whilst R3, who is also into fiduciary services, indicated that it helps in saving costs and increases productivity and efficiency. R5 agreed that SBPs will ensure continuity, and to ensure continuity in the business, one will need a good environment to operate in to sustain the business. The findings of this study can be seen to be supported by the NRBV theory. The theory's strategic capabilities (pollution prevention, product stewardship, and sustainable development) support the three themes of the nine key emerging drivers of SBPs, which include environmental stewardship, process excellence, and sustainability-oriented culture.

5. Conclusion

MSMEs have a crucial role to play in boosting the economy, creating employment, and contributing to sustainable development. The primary problem of integrating SBPs into the operations of MSMEs is often approached in haphazard ways, with insufficient attention being paid to defining what constitutes SBPs. It was evident in the Ghanaian context that MSMEs engage in a lot of business practices, and it depends on the industry the MSME operates within. Again, most MSMEs are gearing into SBPs because customers are becoming interested in companies that are engaged in sustainability practices. Also, MSMEs portray it in every activity they undertake to get approval from society as most of them are not monitored since they are not registered and are in the informal sector. Subsequently, the study concludes that SBPs are good and must be implemented by MSMEs in Ghana regardless of the possible challenges they may face since it serves as a “regulator” to them. It promotes continuity of the business as well as necessitates a competitive edge over other firms. Finally, the study indicated that most of the individuals employed in the informal sector do not have the technical know-how of these new emerging concepts, and thus they tend to continue using the traditional practices, and it becomes very difficult to monitor them. A comparative study on the SBPs among countries within the subregion is recommended, dwelling on the theoretical framework. For instance, a study focusing on the theoretical underpinning of SBPs of firms using the isomorphic and decoupling variants of the institutional theory. Governments are also expected to take a keen interest in SBPs of organizations operating within their jurisdictions.

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