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## Article

# Egotism and female managerial performance in South Africa: Evidence from SMEs in the agricultural sector

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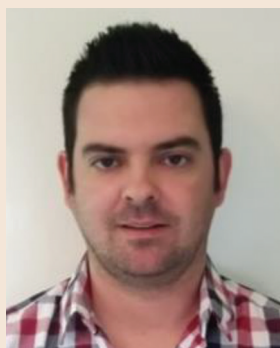
## MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Egotism and female managerial performance in South Africa: Evidence from SMEs in the agricultural sector

Nico van Rensburg<sup>1\*</sup> and Ogujiuba Kanayo<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** This study sets out to address the perceived pitfalls of egotism among female entrepreneurs in South Africa. This study further ascertains a unique strategy and group of accustomed performance factors that are believed to serve as a cognitive antidote for female entrepreneurs to consistently out-manoeuvre the dangers of egotism. This study adopted a qualitative approach in which 16 achieving female entrepreneurs were purposively selected. The primary data was collected through the application of professionally conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) served as the primary method of data analysis. Findings from this study prove the significant impact the effects of egotism are believed to have on entrepreneurship and managerial performance as a whole. Aspects such as continuous self-study and the establishment of a disciplined mind both surfaced as invaluable assets. Finally, results also

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Dr. van Rensburg is an experienced business professional and avid academic researcher focused on finance, performance, management, and entrepreneurship study. Dr. van Rensburg completed his Ph.D. degree in management at the University of the Western Cape, in Cape Town, South Africa. Dr. van Rensburg currently serves in several senior directory and mentorship positions for internationally recognised agricultural companies.

Dr. Kanayo is an experienced lecturer and a senior academic researcher at the University of Mpumalanga, in Mbombela, South Africa. Dr. Kanayo holds two Ph.D. degrees, one in economics from the University of Nigeria, and the other in statistics from the University of the Western Cape, in Cape Town, South Africa. Up to date, Dr. Kanayo published over 40 scientific articles and his research continues to find its way into high impact-journals. Dr. Kanayo's long tenure with academia and the general business sector leads him to economics, statistics, management, and entrepreneurship study.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

One of the biggest challenges faced by female entrepreneurs, in general, is how to consistently out-manoeuvre the associated pitfalls of egotism. Since many entrepreneurship studies only focus on practical business aspects, this paper aims to develop and explore the cognitive aspects involved. Moreover, this paper brings to life a unique strategy and group of accustomed performance factors that can be cognitively applied to approach egotism more effectively. The results find that the purposeful adaptation of a neutralised mental approach to events broadly counters egotism's falsity. Apart from entrepreneurship, the findings widely contribute to the public concerned with physical and mental performance in general. It remains vital that entrepreneurs continue to transform their first-hand cognitive approach to egotism, primarily to grow awareness and to enhance both personal and business success moving forward continually.

prove that the adaptation of a neutralised mental approach to events proves to eliminate egotism as a falsely imposed performance mechanism within entrepreneurship undertaking as a whole.

**Subjects:** Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management; Small Business Management; Agriculture & Related Industries

**Keywords:** Egotism; entrepreneurship; female; managerial performance; South Africa; success

## 1. Introduction

Globally, the role and empowerment of females' active involvement in entrepreneurship undertaking continue to be an area of great debate (Kamberidou, 2020). For years, the male-centred business model was considered the natural model of doing business, specifically in South Africa (Solevik et al., 2019). However, researchers Sarfaraz et al. (2014) and Dos Santos et al. (2019) posit that this formality has changed, as there is a rapid increase in female-owned businesses in the country. Several high-profile local and internationally recognised companies are now shifting toward promoting more women into leadership and authoritative positions to create organisational equality (Alan et al., 2019; Cook & Glass, 2014). Likewise, statistics prove that more and more women are now taking matters into their own hands and start their own businesses (Smith, 2020). Considering the vast array of pressures that often comes with wanting to excel as an entrepreneur, specifically for females, it is critical to identify specifics that can help them succeed. Also, the fact that entrepreneurship involves a lot of risk and uncertainty to achieve results, profit, and growth (Zimmerer & Scarborough, 2005) highlight the process's complexity. In the context of South Africa, added stressors such as high crime rates, poverty, racial discrimination, and a lack of access to obtaining adequate start-up capital, finance, and quality education, have been identified as detrimental entrepreneurial stumbling-blocks for years (SEDA, 2016).

With the focus being on female entrepreneurs operating in the agricultural sector specifically, these challenges' scope is further magnified and much greater concern. Khapayi and Celliers (2016) state that South Africa's agricultural sector remains one of the most complex and challenging sectors of all business sectors in the country. Thus, it is evident that cognitively, female entrepreneurs are required to become more aware, mentally adjust, and educate themselves on the factors that can either boost or potentially harm their daily performances moving forward. Kamberidou (2020) states that it is easy to lose track of what it really involves to climb the ladder on route to obtaining ultimate performance in entrepreneurship. Thus, in the scope of this study's background, cognitively, the adaptation of an advanced mental approach is critical for female entrepreneurs to get out of their own way and rise to the occasion. Researchers Debeljak and Krkac (2008) and Holiday (2016) identified the concept of egotism as one of the biggest singular most cognitive challenges facing rising entrepreneurs. Debeljak and Krkac (2008) and Holiday (2016) continue and state that egotism remains one of the biggest dangers preventing optimistic entrepreneurs from reaching the top in their respective fields if not approached correctly. Holiday (2016) adds and states that the need to be "better than, more than, recognised for, far past any reasonable utility" towards competition, business procedures, and/or employees often gets in the way of what truly matters and preventing entrepreneurs from reaching their full potential.

In the context of South Africa, studies on egotism and how it is believed to impact managerial performance remain relatively unexplored, specifically among female entrepreneurs (Makhubela, 2015). As a result, this paper aims to explore the current gap in addressing the influential factors of egotism and the significant impact these factors are believed to have on female entrepreneurs' psychological, personal, managerial, and business performance. Considering that South Africa's current SME failure rate summons at 75 percent, it constitutes the fact that the fundamental approach of many native entrepreneurs, still, remains in error (Fatoki, 2014). This paper provides a fresh overview that unlocks the strategies behind South African female entrepreneurs'

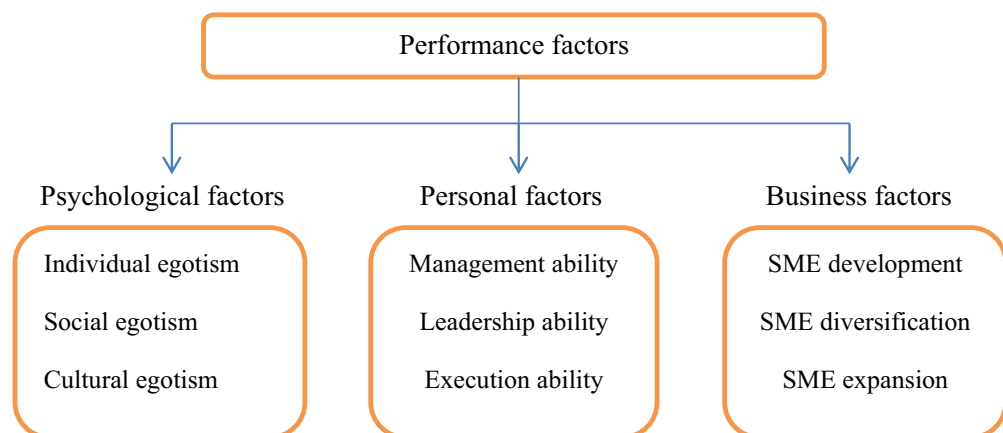
approaches that transform them into becoming successful authoritative managers. Secondly, the paper examines the influence of individual, social, and cultural egotism on managerial performance and unlocks how these elements impact managerial, leadership, and task-execution abilities among female entrepreneurs. Thirdly, it combines the overall effects and investigates the impact these factors have on the development, expansion, and diversification of female-owned SMEs in South Africa. The paper starts out by providing a systematic theoretical overview of the study followed by a detailed literature review section addressing the concepts and subject areas involved, further supported by the methods, results, discussion, and a detailed conclusion section to conclude the paper's findings.

### 1.1. Theoretical framework

This paper is premised on the self-efficacy theory, which is closely connected with individuals' personal experience, behaviour, psychological, and motivational processes that encourages performance (Yusuf, 2011). In this study, we adopted the view that female entrepreneurs who excel in managerial performance consist of unique psychological abilities that neutralises the negative effects of egotism in individual behaviour. Bandura (1993) conceptualise the self-efficacy theory as a set of cognitive elements that are strategically aligned with one another. Thus, efficacy-activated processes such as motivation, cognitive processes, affective processes, and selective processes are all inter-connected, specifically in entrepreneurship (Newman et al., 2019). Scientifically, every individual consists of a mind that holds accustomed psychological powers that can neutralise and transform any event, circumstance, or type of performance to a particular individual's advantage (Kehoe, 2007). Overreaching aspects such as psychological, personal, and business performance, therefore, remains closely connected. It serves as influential actors that encourage both ground-level and managerial performance in entrepreneurship convincingly (Kehoe, 2007). Drawing from Bandura's self-efficacy theory and the psychological nature of human performance, we strongly contend that the nature of the influence of egotism on managerial performance and how it is approached in entrepreneurship remains critical for success. Figure 1 below provides a conceptual overview of the unique relationships among the performance factors addressed in this study.

**Figure 1. Conceptual model: Relationships among female managerial performance factors.**

Source: Authors' own conception



## 2. Literature review: Performance factors in context

### 2.1. Egotism in entrepreneurship

Egotism remains one of the biggest stumbling blocks for both individuals and entrepreneurs across all stages, cultures, and industries around the world (Debeljak & Krkac, 2008). Derived from the word "ego," Kowalski (1997, p. 112) classifies egotism as "the inflated opinion of one's personal features and importance." Ollerton (2020) adds and defines egotism as a psychological element

that causes a particular individual feeling overly superior to others. Therefore, egotism in entrepreneurship appears as a cognitive substance executed by an entrepreneur seeking constant validation for his or her efforts, causing arrogance and self-upheaval (Kowalski, 1997). Thus, cognitively, egotism can either serve as an advantage when channelled correctly or be of great harm when wrongly applied (Debeljak & Krkac, 2008). Hence, this also explains egotism's close connection to egoism; however, egoism appears far less demanding when engaged in external circumstances, specifically in entrepreneurship (Holiday, 2016). Ollerton (2020) adds and resonates that this is why numerous successful entrepreneurs continue to fall prey to egotism's adverse effects because, in general, the concept and its diverse effects remain understudied. Schmitt and Husson (2017) believe that since the process of entrepreneurship continues to be a strategic and complicated task, it calls for entrepreneurs to adapt and apply a transformed cognitive approach to lead and manage more effectively (Holiday, 2016; Ollerton, 2020). Mukherjee (2016) adds and states that psychologically, the effects of egotism and how it is managed remains one of an entrepreneur's greatest opponents on route to obtaining lasting success.

## **2.2. Egotism and performance in entrepreneurship**

To properly understand entrepreneurship performance requires the concepts of success and failure to be critically investigated (Deniz et al., 2011). Deniz et al. (2011) continues and states that various aspects play a role in achieving a certain level of entrepreneurship performance. Such elements can include psychological, personal, and business-related factors (Deniz et al., 2011). It is, therefore, evident that to progress as an entrepreneur within an authoritative or managerial position, in this case, requires both an innovative and robust psychological approach consistently (Xie & Huang, 2012). Since entrepreneurial success and failure are so closely connected, an entrepreneur's approach to managing both these outcomes remains critical. Holiday (2016) continues and states that entrepreneurial performance is about doing and not about obtaining recognition. It, therefore, illustrates the fact that to counter egotism effectively, an entrepreneur must keep focusing on the process rather than chasing the feeling of self-fulfilment the whole time. Mukherjee (2016) and Ollerton (2020) add and state that many entrepreneurs, specifically during the start-up phase, often misinterpret the feeling of success with real success. Thus, an entrepreneur's perception of success and interpretation and the impact of egotism will determine how influential an entrepreneur's efforts ultimately impact business and managerial performance all-round (Holiday, 2016; Mukherjee, 2016; Ollerton, 2020). Simmons (2020) posits that the chase for entitlement and superiority in entrepreneurship should be eradicated as far as possible—it hinders performance and will ultimately lead to any entrepreneur's downfall.

## **2.3. Female entrepreneurship, egotism, and performance in South Africa**

In South Africa, female entrepreneurship is on the rise (Kamberidou, 2020). Although small in number compared to male entrepreneurs operating businesses in the country, it proves that women are now categorizing themselves as promising wage earners and not the usual wage takers like in the past (Kelley et al., 2011). Many South African female entrepreneurs are now stepping up to the challenge, taking advantage of the various women empowerment campaigns and taking matters into their own hands (Alaofe et al., 2018). However, many now realise that entrepreneurship undertaking is not for the faint-hearted—it remains a complicated task that requires significant risks at times (Macko, 2009). As a result, it is evident that cognitively, a transformed mental approach is required to execute events successfully (Ollerton, 2020). The entrepreneurial perception of attaining instant success or the mere feeling of wanting to own the feeling of being successful often causes many female entrepreneurs to fail (Holiday, 2016). Although many female entrepreneurs might argue that they understand self-confidence, Ollerton (2020) states that it is critical to executing a learning approach to events rather than just being accomplishment-driven. A learning approach will ensure consistent progression independent of any prideful feelings regardless of achievements (Holiday, 2016). Thus, to encourage healthy performance among female entrepreneurs, the dangers of egotism should, firstly, be better approached and, secondly, be strategically applied by entrepreneurs to lead and manage more effectively moving forward. Bernardo and Welch (2001) and Baum and Locke (2004) adds



and states that entrepreneurs, in general, are each unique, resulting in that the interpretation and impact of egotism will continue to differ among individuals depending on the particular stage they are at in the entrepreneurial life-cycle. Below, follows an overview of the psychological, personal, and business factors that are believed to be interconnected with egotism:

## **2.4. Psychological factors**

### **2.4.1. Individual egotism**

In entrepreneurship, individual egotism refers to doing whatever one can do to reach a specific goal, often to others' disadvantage (Debeljak & Krkac, 2008). Individual egotism, therefore, appears as the centre-point in developing a self-proclaimed psychological perspective that all accomplishments, whether in life or business, can only be credited to one's self-effort and ability (Burgess-Jackson, 2013). Holiday (2016), states that this very issue augments self-acknowledgement that often blocks entrepreneurial progression. Thus, for entrepreneurs to manage and lead successfully, a neutralised psychological approach is required, in which achievements are viewed as mutual and shared across organisational segments (Burgess-Jackson, 2013).

### **2.4.2. Social egotism**

Pelham et al. (2005) posit that social egotism is triggered by the belief of rising above or standing out from one's social upbringing. Penetrating social status, therefore, remains one of the major obstacles of rising entrepreneurs at all levels (Pelham et al., 2005). It results in that entrepreneurs often place themselves above society's known ethics to prove superiority and that they ought to belong to a higher social status (Pelham et al., 2005). This approach can ruin valuable relationships within an entrepreneurial society, as personal judgment can be negatively influenced (Smeets, 2009). Humility, therefore, remains critical for entrepreneurs to apply, as it will ensure equality and ultimately better results in return (Smeets, 2009).

### **2.4.3. Cultural egotism**

Holiday (2016) describes cultural egotism to be closely connected to an individual's cultural values. In entrepreneurship, these cultural values can be dependent on seeking validation and are often governed by an entrepreneur's motivations. Thus, cultural egotism can result that an entrepreneur stresses the thought that he or she is distinct from others from different cultural groups, and so forth feel entitled and superior in terms of achievement and performance (Corse, 1999). If not approached correctly, this can lead to entrepreneurs losing balance in developing concrete internal and external organizational relationships (Corse, 1999). With culture comes relationships and with relationships comes opportunities; thus, valuing others' cultural status remains critical to ensure performance in entrepreneurship (Simon et al., 2017).

## **2.5. Personal factors**

### **2.5.1. Management ability**

Algahtani (2014) posits that management ability in entrepreneurship involves executing strategized organisation-related activities, operations, and functions. Aspects such as demographics, geographic-location, training, and education, therefore, play a critical role in the approach of effective managers (Algahtani, 2014). Hoffman and Shipper (2012) believe that a particular management style can be strongly influenced by an entrepreneur's environment, beliefs, and motivations. As a result, the quest for self-recognition and respect from counterparts searching for accomplishment often exalts egotism, which will derail valuable relationships if not approached correctly (Hoffman & Shipper, 2012). Keeping focused on creating healthy relationships and a team environment through management, free from self-exaltation, remains critical to progress (Algahtani, 2014).

### **2.5.2. Leadership ability**

Harrison et al. (2019) state that leadership and management ability in entrepreneurship appears quite similar in nature; however, both conceptual and operative differences continue to emerge

across cultures (Harrison et al., 2019). Unlike managerial ability, which is focused on executing protocols to meet targets, leadership ability focuses on distributing to others how to mutually accomplish specific protocols to obtain the desired result (Harrison et al., 2019). Since ego is artificially created in the natural, true confidence in executing quality leadership styles as entrepreneurs, carries greater weight to ensure continuous progression (Holiday, 2016). As leaders, it remains critical that entrepreneurs should not be fooled by egotism—purpose should always overpower passion in the quest for obtaining ultimate performance (Holiday, 2016).

#### *2.5.3. Execution ability*

Machado (2018) posits that effective execution in entrepreneurship is when effective management and effective leadership ability strategically combine with one another. Since entrepreneurship involves a risk-orientated and organised procedure, task-execution ability plays a critical role in obtaining lasting results (Yang et al., 2019). As an entrepreneur, it is crucial to know who you are competing with and why, to remain intact with where you are going (Holiday, 2016). When it comes to execution in entrepreneurship, it is critical to creating a culture that always acts in the best interest of those involved—always (Holiday, 2016). If not approached correctly, egotism can cause management and leadership ability to override one another often when self-exaltation in search of self-recognition gets in the way of obtaining organisational performance (Machado, 2018).

### **2.6. Business factors**

#### *2.6.1. SME development*

Massey (2006) posits that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play a major role in most world economies, particularly in developing countries. In South Africa, SMEs largely contribute to ongoing job creation and economic development specifically (Oyelana, 2014). Therefore, it remains critical to absorb, develop, and execute high standards as an entrepreneur to stay competitive in an already competitive environment (Oyelana, 2014). Considering that both financial and economic challenges continue to restrict SME development in South Africa, it requires native entrepreneurs to search for something deeper and develop the correct mental approach to deal with these aspects successfully (Van Rensburg & Kanayo, 2020). Immediate entrepreneurship results can be misleading and won't always aid SME development, as setbacks remains a formality. Egotism, therefore, should not be misinterpreted as self-confidence, as arrogance and pride can lead to severely damaging both SME and organisational development (Machado, 2018).

#### *2.6.2. SME diversification*

Diversification within SMEs plays a crucial role in remaining competitive in entrepreneurship all-round (Bachtiar, 2020). With competition on the rise, entrepreneurs must continuously adapt to both expected and unexpected changes (Bachtiar, 2020). Aspects such as new technology, product and service development, and employee training have brought a whole new dimension to entrepreneurs' approach in general (Fernandez & Ali, 2015). In South Africa, however, most upcoming entrepreneurs still have limited access to professional support systems, thus, making it difficult to diversify their businesses effectively (Robinson, 2020). Change, therefore, remains an aspect that will continue to emerge; thus, requiring entrepreneurs to develop structures, whether personal, psychological, or organisational, that focus on approaching growth as both a short and long-term asset—bolstering SME diversification.

#### *2.6.3. SME expansion*

SME expansion remains a goal that most entrepreneurs strive to obtain throughout their careers consistently. Gupta et al. (2013), state that many factors can be associated with business expansion. Bachtiar (2020) believes that numerous entrepreneurs fail since they try to expand their businesses too quickly. Therefore, it is critical for entrepreneurs to do validated risk-analyses' continually and to budget strategically, to prevent the unnecessary pitfalls of over-expansion (Bachtiar, 2020). Although the lack of education, expertise, and access to adequate finance



leads to higher failure rates among entrepreneurs in South Africa, greed has also been classified as a determining issue (Haynes et al., 2017). Thus, it remains important that entrepreneurs understand the dangers of greed and wanting to expand too quickly without the proper planning—strategy is crucial.

### 3. Methods

For the purpose of this study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) served as the main methodological foundation. According to Eddles-Hirsch (2015), the goal of phenomenology in applied research is mainly to get behind the true facts on what specifics exactly separate one individual from another. Bacon et al. (2018) continues and states that IPA research, however, takes a more in-depth approach, allowing the researcher to get much closer to the research participant to collect, interpret, and analyse the exact life experiences of the particular individual. Researchers Smith et al. (2009) expands and states that IPA as a method also allows for much greater flexibility and research responsiveness. IPA encourages a continuous flow of questioning, interpretation, and critical sense-making of the meaning of the particular subject under investigation, for both the participant and the researcher (Smith et al., 2009) Thus, by attempting to make meaning of how selected participants view egotism, and how it affects their managerial performance levels as entrepreneurs at large, makes the implementation of IPA as the primary method of data analysis most relevant.

#### 3.1. Characteristics of participants

In this study, the key participants included were 16 successful female entrepreneurs who currently operate SMEs within the Western Cape's agricultural sector in South Africa. Smith et al. (2009) indicate that the inclusion of 16 participants within an IPA study is more than adequate. Each of the 16 participants was purposively selected based on their current level of managerial experience and overall SME performance. For the purpose of this study, entrepreneurs whose SME turnover exceeded ZAR5,000,000.00 annually, employ a workforce exceeding 75-employees, hold a university degree of 3 to 4-years or beyond, along with conducting uninterrupted business for more than 8-years straight, were classified as successful, and vice versa. In terms of maturity levels, participant ages ranged from 28 to 45 years. From the 16 participants, 4 were soft-fruit farmers, 4 were stone-fruit farmers, and 4 were vegetable farmers, with the remaining 4 being livestock farmers, respectively. In terms of ethnicity, 8 were black females, 4 were white females, whereas the remainder 4 were 2 Indian females and 2 Chinese females. To the researcher's advantage, each of the 16 participants conducted business exceeding 8-years uninterruptedly. A more detailed overview of the participants' characteristics appears in Table 1 below:

#### 3.2. Instruments

Apart from the two overarching research questions guiding the research output: *"What are the effects of egotism on entrepreneurial approach and SME performance among succeeding female entrepreneurs in South Africa?"* and *"How does egotism affect and impact managerial performance within the workplace among succeeding female entrepreneurs in South Africa?"* this study employed a one-on-one interview guideline. A strategically constructed interview schedule served as the foundation during the data collection procedure, which contained a variety of closed and open-ended questions addressing the subject under investigation. A sample of the research questions included in the questionnaire can be viewed in the procedure section below. To ensure content validity and proper structure, the researcher appointed two experts to examine and cross-check the research guideline. The results that came back proved to be positive, thus, allowing the researcher to proceed with confidence.

#### 3.3. Procedure

##### 3.3.1. Ethical clearance and informed consent

After receiving clearance from the University of the Western Cape's Research Ethics Committee (Reference Number: HS18/6/13), the researcher was in a position to contact and engage with each

**Table 1. Overview of participants' characteristics**

Participant	Age (yrs)	Gender	Ethnicity	University degree (3 to 4-years or beyond)	In business (yrs)	Annual turnover	Industry sector
01	28	Female	White	Yes	8	ZAR5,000,000 +	Soft fruit
02	32	Female	Black	Yes	8	ZAR5,000,000 +	Stone fruit
03	38	Female	Black	Yes	12	ZAR5,000,000 +	Livestock
04	29	Female	Indian	Yes	8	ZAR5,000,000 +	Vegetable
05	40	Female	White	Yes	15	ZAR5,000,000 +	Stone fruit
06	36	Female	White	Yes	10	ZAR5,000,000 +	Soft fruit
07	43	Female	Black	Yes	13	ZAR5,000,000 +	Stone fruit
08	30	Female	Black	Yes	8	ZAR5,000,000 +	Vegetable
09	39	Female	Chinese	Yes	11	ZAR5,000,000 +	Soft fruit
10	44	Female	Black	Yes	20	ZAR5,000,000 +	Livestock
11	41	Female	White	Yes	15	ZAR5,000,000 +	Livestock
12	31	Female	Chinese	Yes	9	ZAR5,000,000 +	Soft fruit
13	37	Female	Black	Yes	13	ZAR5,000,000 +	Vegetable
14	45	Female	Indian	Yes	16	ZAR5,000,000 +	Livestock
15	35	Female	Black	Yes	12	ZAR5,000,000 +	Vegetable
16	33	Female	Black	Yes	10	ZAR5,000,000 +	Stone fruit

**Source:** Authors' own conception

of the selected participants, personally. Supporting the study's selection criteria, the researcher legally obtained additional participant information from various accredited agricultural bodies governing the Western Cape Province area. This allowed the researcher to further strengthen the legitimacy and accuracy of the selection criteria regarding the participants. The interviews were conducted over a period of 4 months, ranging from April 2020 to July 2020. To ensure proper consent, the researcher presented each participant with an easy to understand consent form and information sheet electronically, highlighting the study protocols. Each participant was informed of the reason for their inclusion in the study, personal confidentiality protection measures, and their rights to withdraw from the study at any time if they chose to do so. To the researcher's advantage, all participants approved their consent after which the researcher proceeded with each interview individually.

### 3.3.2. Research questions

In the interview, the researcher asked each of the participants to respond to the following questions: "What does egotism mean to you?—Please explain." "What effect does egotism have on you personally?—Please explain" "How do you view egotism in entrepreneurship?" "Do you feel egotism boosts performance in entrepreneurship?—Why or Why not?" "Do you believe that your approach to egotism adds to your managerial performance?—Why or Why not?" "What advice do you have for upcoming entrepreneurs on the impact of egotism on all-round performance?—Please explain." Regarding the subject under investigation, each of the above research questions allowed the researcher to unlock the true lived experiences of each participant in great depth.

### 3.3.3. Interview schedule

The researcher ensured that all interviews were conducted on time, smoothly, and with the utmost confidentiality. Each of the research questions allowed participants to answer freely and to provide add-on information whenever it was deemed necessary. All interviews were conducted behind closed doors and in the most relaxed setting possible to obtain only the most accurate and trusted results. Each interview lasted for approximately 45–60 minutes, respectively.

### 3.3.4. Data analysis

IPA served as the main mode of data analysis. Researchers Smith et al. (2009) states that IPA involves both an intensive and systematic process that includes 3 separate phases to ensure the proper interpretation and accuracy of results. Considering that IPA involves the researcher getting as close as possible to each participant's exact lived experiences, feelings, and beliefs, it further supports the uniqueness of this study. As supported by Smith et al. (2009) the researcher strictly applied the following 3 IPA measures:

### 3.3.5. Recording of data

Throughout each interview, written notes and audio-recording were thoroughly conducted. The collected information was analysed, transcribed verbatim, and safely stored to protect each participant's confidentiality at all times. Each transcript was re-read and re-edited multiple times to encrypt only the most accurate and true lived experiences of each participant.

### 3.3.6. Formulation of themes

For the purpose of this study, only the most significant statements were extracted from the bulk of the data collected. The formulated meanings of the statements were then strategically categorised into clusters of themes. The findings were then strategically integrated into thorough narrative descriptions of each participant.

### 3.3.7. Validity of data

As required in IPA studies, the researcher applied both bracketing and bridling techniques to ensure proper interpretation of the results. In addition, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability measures were strategically applied to ensure that the data collected was correctly interpreted and truthful.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Results

All participants provided tremendous input on their true lived experiences, feelings, and beliefs regarding the effects of egotism on their personal, entrepreneurial, and managerial performance levels. Upon the completion of each interview and the data collection phase, 4 major themes emerged. Each of the 4 major themes is categorised underneath 2 sub-sections, with each sub-section containing supporting excerpts derived from each of the interviews. The supporting excerpts illustrate the following themes: personality, approach, managerial performance, entrepreneurial performance.

#### 4.1.1. Personal factors

**4.1.1.1. Identification.** Each of the participants consisted of unique abilities. Personal aspects such as humility, positivity, and the opportunistic approach to things stood out significantly. Each participant responded fondly about their understanding of egotism and how this phenomenon is believed to impact themselves as both individuals and entrepreneurs:

To me, egotism remains a sensitive subject. I believe it forms part of a self-generated, ego-driven mental substance, aimed at falsely boosting one's self-image. Egotism, therefore, breeds arrogance and it has certainly played its part in my life, especially in the earlier years. Strict attention should apply to the presence of egotism in one's life at all times; the impact thereof is invaluable (Participant 15, 35 years of age).

Egotism to me is similar to false evidence appearing real. Cognitively, egotism plays a major role in personality. Unknowingly, one can place yourself above others in terms of accomplishment, which can lead to your downfall. Egotism, therefore, should be out-manoeuvred and applied correctly to ensure positive and continuous progression (Participant 06, 36 years of age).

**4.1.1.2. Personality.** Each participant had their own accustomed view on the effects of egotism on their inner being. Individual aspects such as self-confidence, being overly self-confident, and arrogance, appeared frequently. Each participant as entrepreneurs expressed their honest view on how to go about egotism both internally and externally:

I have always been a positive and result-orientated person; however, I found that egotism results in me becoming too overconfident at times. I found myself being hard-headed and following my own advice. I learned from my mistakes, however, and today I am a much more rounded individual (Participant 01, 28 years of age).

My interest in psychology helps me to eliminate the day-to-day challenges associated with egotism. Egotism has played its part in my life, both positive and negative. I have learned how to eliminate self-upheaval when it comes to results, and this has helped me to become a more approachable person (Participant 09, 39 years of age).

**4.1.1.3. Approach.** Each of the participants had pretty similar views on the effects of egotism and its relation to individual approach. Although often differently applied, each participant's views on the impact it is believed to have in entrepreneurship as a whole contained valuable insight. The approach to egotism, therefore, plays a significant part to achieve positive progress:

For me, the approach to egotism requires both specific and strategic attention. Considering that extensive evidence exists on how egotism has destroyed numerous entrepreneurial icons over the years, it should not be taken lightly. I believe self-study is critical, to purposefully identify areas that might possibly contaminate one's internal and external entrepreneurial belief system (Participant 03, 38 years of age).

The recognition as an achieving entrepreneur can bring forth a lot of praise from those in your inner circle. Any type of praise should be channelled correctly, otherwise ego will creep in. Egotism

should, therefore, be dissected and approached as a rather advantage, focusing on the aspects and dangers on what should not be done, or how not to be (Participant 12, 31 years of age).

**4.1.1.4. Performance.** Each of the participants gave valuable input regarding their beliefs surrounding the impact of egotism and the effects it has on their personal performance levels. Although performance is measured differently by each participant, each participant acknowledged the role egotism plays in their pursuit of obtaining lasting entrepreneurial performance:

Personally, I believe egotism holds both advantages and disadvantages in entrepreneurship. Mentally, entrepreneurs should be alert and remain disciplined in their thought processes at all times. Success can trigger self-upliftment whereas set-backs or failure can trigger humility. Thus, a combination should be found between these two factors, which will allow an entrepreneur to out-manoeuvre the pitfalls associated with egotism and boost performance (Participant 16, 33 years of age).

Honestly, I feel egotism often gets misplaced through the practice of obtaining self-confidence as an entrepreneur. Although the process can be viewed as self-driven, entrepreneurship remains a team effort at large. Thus, egotism will play its role in terms of performance; however, it should be approached in a way that focusses on deriving from the positives and not the negatives associated thereto (Participant 13, 37 years of age).

#### **4.1.2. Business factors**

**4.1.2.1. Management.** Each of the participants consists of superior managerial skills. Considering the high level of professionalism required for each of the participants to operate effectively within their environments, shaped them into becoming people of influence. Effective daily management, therefore, plays a critical role that allows these individuals to approach the impact of egotism more strategically:

To me, personal self-management is absolutely crucial. The same counts for business management. The 2 forms of management need to interlink with one another to achieve lasting success as an entrepreneur. I see myself as a leader both internally and externally. As an entrepreneur, I try to keep alert of my reaction to events and how I treat and lead those around me—humility and positivity are key (Participant 08, 30 years of age).

Throughout my career, I have seen various entrepreneurs acting in management roles stumble due to arrogance. As an entrepreneur, relationship building and humility play a valuable role. It is important to view accomplishment as part of a team effort, although it might be that you have done most of the work. This creates a supportive culture and mind-set, which I feel eliminates the harshness of ego-centric behaviour creeping in (Participant 11, 41 years of age).

**4.1.2.2. Entrepreneurship.** Each of the participants made it clear that entrepreneurship is not an easy task. The operational aspect thereof is challenging enough; thus, leaving no place for pride and arrogance. Considering the wide array of aspects involved in achieving success in entrepreneurship, the role of egotism and the effects thereof should not be taken lightly:

To me, the self-fulfilling goal of achieving what you want in entrepreneurship brings forth an enlightening feeling. The sense of accomplishment and proving the critics wrong is what keeps me going. Self-motivation is important in entrepreneurship, but what is as important, is to remain focused on task and process completion. You should never get ahead of yourself in any situation as an entrepreneur, as this is where one's ego causes the most harm (Participant 14, 45 years of age).

Entrepreneurship remains a complex task, no matter how experienced you are or get throughout your career. Unexpected setbacks and failures remain a formality no matter how successful you think you are. Thus, I believe it is critical to stay focused on the job at hand and treating others

with respect, as you never know what challenges tomorrow holds. Being confident is good, but developing an ego in entrepreneurship won't take you very far (Participant 04, 29 years of age).

**4.1.2.3. Future advice.** Egotism and its relationship to entrepreneurship contribute to some valuable aspects. Each of the participants aims to achieve some level of success in life; however, it is what they do with those successes that define how successful they will eventually become as entrepreneurs. Apart from being a lifelong journey, entrepreneurship, therefore, remains a skill that needs to be managed to prevent the influential dangers of egotism:

Today, it seems that entrepreneurship appears to many people like the easy way out to obtain financial freedom. Believe me, it is not. It is important to not put yourself on a pedestal and to view yourself and your achievements as superior to others. Ego—centric behaviour ruins valuable relationships and will lead to your downfall. The effects of egotism are real and should be studied, addressed, and the strategies thereto mentally applied (Participant 10, 44 years of age).

Over the years, entrepreneurship has taught me valuable aspects of life. I have learned the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, quality focus, and a sound mind. The challenges and temptations in entrepreneurship remain constant, and one should constantly develop strategies on how to manage them. Results will come, it all depends on how strong and disciplined you become internally, free from pride and arrogance of wanting to become someone holding a title in life (Participant 05, 40 years of age).

## **4.2. Discussion**

### **4.2.1. Overview**

As derived from the results section above, it is clear that each of the participants acknowledges the presence and vital role that egotism plays in their daily lives as entrepreneurs. A combination of personal and business factors emerged that play a significant part in strategically outmanoeuvring the dangers of egotism. Aspects such as understanding egotism's roots, its impact on personality, approach, and its effects on generating ultimate managerial and entrepreneurial performance, prove invaluable. For most of these participants, the effects of egotism were introduced from an early age and stage in their entrepreneurial life cycles. As entrepreneurship pressures began to rise and maturity levels started to grow in their daily business endeavours, each participant began to approach egotism more purposefully. Also, as competition became stronger for these participants, so did the dangers of wanting to progress in those challenging environments. Aspects such as pride, arrogance, self-fulfilment, and self-upheaval were all introduced; however, the dangers thereto had to be experienced first-hand to understand the true impact thereof. The results confirm that each of the participants took the role of egotism in entrepreneurship both seriously and into their own hands to navigate the associated pitfalls. Findings prove that each of the participants adopted a specific and strategised cognitive approach to egotism. The personalised ability to be constantly aware of egotism's effects on entrepreneurship and managerial performance, both positive and negative, surfaced as a determining factor.

### **4.2.2. Findings supported by the literature**

The literature supports the unique connection between the approach to egotism and its impact on entrepreneurship and managerial performance. Researchers Debeljak and Krkac (2008) describe egotism as a cognitive substance that can serve a positive or negative role—it strictly depends on how a particular individual channels it. Debeljak and Krkac (2008) also theorise the importance of entrepreneurs applying a transformed mental approach to egotism. Both these statements correlate perfectly with the results obtained from this study. Several of the participants acknowledged the vital role psychology play within their daily endeavours. Przepiorka (2017) agrees with this fact, stating that entrepreneurs' psychological influences vastly impact business performance levels. Aspects such as individual, social, and cultural egotism, therefore, will continue to play a major part in how certain individuals choose to engage and operate as entrepreneurs (Holiday, 2016).



Thus, valuable evidence arose, pinpointing unique strategies for approaching and applying a transformed mind-set towards the dangers of egotism (Ollerton, 2020). These strategies resulted that these participants each became better managers, leaders, and task executors over time. Aspects such as pride, arrogance, self-fulfilment, self-upheaval, and humility (Holiday, 2016) were frequently brought up throughout the study. Continuous self-study, therefore, appears as a valuable antidote to manage the effects of egotism to the participants' advantage and not vice versa.

#### *4.2.3. Justification of the study's methodology*

The results obtained perfectly integrate with the chosen methodology and theoretical framework applied in this study. IPA established a strategic pathway to retrieve only the most accurate and true lived experiences of each participant regarding their beliefs of the effects of egotism. Each of the participants felt open and provided thoughtful, precise, and heartfelt answers. Bandura's self-efficacy theory also vastly supports the bulk of the findings, highlighting the importance of the impact of cognitive elements in the approach to egotism. The efficacy-activated elements: motivation, cognitive processes, affective processes, and selective processes, strongly emerged within the results. Therefore, the nature of the influence of egotism on both entrepreneurship and managerial performance and how it is approached remains critical to obtaining lasting success. Findings also stipulate that as one grows as an entrepreneur over time, the realities of egotism will be introduced. A combination of psychological, personal, and business factors will surely play its part; however, it always comes back to how the particular individual or entrepreneur chooses to approach egotism in this regard. This approach will primarily affect SME development, diversification, and expansion over time. Holiday (2016) clarifies that entrepreneurial performance is about doing and not about obtaining recognition. It is, therefore, evident that the process of entrepreneurship never reaches a final stage; it forms part of a continuous learning curve that needs to refrain from having false ideas about oneself (Holiday, 2016). The effects of egotism are real and should be critically studied, addressed, and strategies mentally applied thereto to ensure positive progress continually. The chosen methodology served its purposes very well in this case and is believed to continue to do so in potential future studies that focus on similar or additional effects of egotism in entrepreneurship and managerial performance.

#### *4.2.4. Study contributions*

*4.2.4.1. Human and entrepreneurship psychology.* Egotism remains a cognitive aspect that can widely affect human and entrepreneurship performance all-round—findings from this study highlight numerous aspects that can either boost or eliminate the effects of egotism. Since the concept is still believed to be fairly understudied in entrepreneurship (Ollerton, 2020), the results of this study contribute valuable information to build on the subject. The power of the human mind will continue to impact how individuals view events, feelings, and performance, thus affecting the ego. This study identifies unique and practical ways on how to mentally approach, neutralise, and channel the effects of egotism to a particular entrepreneur's advantage.

*4.2.4.2. Entrepreneurship study.* Since this study focuses on female entrepreneurs operating in the agricultural sector, the results confirm that egotism plays a much bigger role in workplace performance than anticipated. Considering the risk involved in agriculture on a daily basis, it affirms that each of the participants in this study is unique and not afraid of challenges. Over time, each participant learned from egocentric mistakes and developed their own unique plan to go about the temptations to bolster and not hinder their performance. This approach breaks new ground and proves that female entrepreneurs hold great power within themselves to match their male counterparts moving forward. Findings from this study expose valuable evidence that widely contributes to both entrepreneurship undertaking and research as a whole.

*4.2.4.3. Entrepreneurship and managerial performance.* The results of this study prove that entrepreneurship in itself remains a highly complicated task. Various elements play a role in the daily lives of entrepreneurs and managers to obtain maximum performance. Findings from this study

points out multiple factors that can assist rising entrepreneurs on how to eliminate the adverse effects of egotism. Mentally, egotism should be approached to serve as a strategic advantage and not vice versa. Therefore, the development and execution of a neutralised cognitive approach are critical. The findings also pinpoint various aspects that can be further investigated, adopted, and mentally applied by researchers, entrepreneurs, and managers from diverse sectors and demographic backgrounds to boost personal and business performance.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Summary

In this study, the researcher explored various elements involving egotism and the role it is believed to play in entrepreneurship. All participants provided significant input, sharing only their true lived experiences, feeling, and beliefs regarding the phenomenon under investigation. The results proved valuable evidence concerning the impact of egotism on the 3 overreaching performance factors addressed. Each of the underlying elements thereto also proved to hold valuable relationships regarding its effects on egotism and its role in ensuring continuous entrepreneurship progress. Results further proved that participants recognised the impact and applied an effective strategy to prevent egotism from getting the better of them strategically. These approaches and strategies lead to a transformed mind-set, which transformed these participants into becoming recognised leaders and powerful managers in their positions. The selection of IPA as method also allowed the researcher to obtain, explore, and critically analyse participant responses to the utmost accuracy. This study, therefore, creates a solidified platform for existing as well as young-up-and-coming female entrepreneurs to both recognise and study the effects of egotism in their lives. The diverse selection of participants included also proves that egotism broadly exists. The results also demonstrate that every participant, indefinite of age, race, gender, or experience, consists of the psychological ability to both discipline and transform the mind to such a state that it refrains from egotism controlling them, but rather use the effects thereof to their advantage.

### 5.2. Limitations

John (2007), states that the majority of research studies consist of limitations. In this study, 4 main limitations were encountered. Firstly, although perfectly normal within IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009), this study contained a relatively small sample size. Secondly, although widely recognised, the subject under investigation is relatively new to entrepreneurship research, limiting the access to obtaining supporting information from existing studies. Thirdly, the study addressed a specific group of performance factors that required the researcher to remain within the study's chosen context. Fourthly, due to the study's qualitative and phenomenological nature, the researcher's interpretation of the results needs to be regarded as the truth. John (2007) and Smith et al. (2009) posit that each of the 4 limitations encountered is quite common in IPA and qualitative studies in general. Thus, the 4 existing limitations do not impact the paper's overall findings and conclusions negatively. Besides, the overall results and findings are believed to be very specific and unique to the study's particular population, industry, and method of choice.

### 5.3. Practical implications

This study, undoubtedly, provides new and valuable practical guidance to both existing and young-up-and-coming entrepreneurs. The performance factors addressed, and their connection with egotism addresses critical areas that cannot be overlooked. Results from this study highlight the importance of developing a sound mind and taking on a neutralised approach in search of ultimate performance. It also provides guidance on the importance of relationships and how egotism should be approached and managed within and outside the workplace. In addition to female entrepreneurs operating within South Africa's agricultural sector, evidence derived from this study can also count and be applied to entrepreneurs operating in other industries. Likewise, this study is also believed to add tremendous value to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, proving the importance of, and for entrepreneurs can psychologically overpower any possible event of circumstance if they put their mind to it.

#### **5.4. Managerial implications**

Entrepreneurship remains to be a complex task. The pressures of wanting to be successful and moving up the ladder to obtain managerial seniority will continue to test entrepreneurs at all levels. Entrepreneurs should, therefore, continue to investigate the ongoing effects of egotism. Improved self-investigation is critical; to identify psychological areas that require critical attention. Improved mental structures should be adapted, put in place, and executed on a daily basis. The aspects of pride, arrogance, self-fulfilment, self-recognition, and self-upheaval should be mentally neutralised by entrepreneurs as far as possible. Entrepreneurs should also familiarise themselves with viewing egotism as a substance to learn from and not a substance to use as a mode to alter success. This approach can and will ultimately lead to the unexpected destruction of entrepreneurial dreams and desires. Effective management free from ego-centric behaviour, therefore, plays a vital role. The cognitive benefits thereof should be used to train, lead, build, and manage an organisation to progress consistently no matter the challenge.

#### **5.5. Theoretical implications**

Theoretically, this study undeniably creates a fresh platform that adds superior value to Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Results from this study highlight several different aspects and approaches on how egotism can be transformed, and secondly, be applied as a strategy to enhance both personal and organisational performance in entrepreneurship as a whole. Furthermore, in collaboration with Bandura's 4 existing efficacy activated processes, results from this study break new ground that deepens the understanding behind what causes egocentric behaviour in entrepreneurship, and the psychological and physical dangers it can hold. Considering that self-belief plays an integral part in obtaining ultimate performance in entrepreneurship, the relationship between experiencing hardship and success and how it affects the entrepreneurial mind-set can introduce several new angles of cognitive investigation. This study, therefore, introduces an ideal platform for researchers, both in business and academia, to not only build but also explore and possibly add additional concepts to Bandura's 4 existing efficacy-activated processes. Also, IPA as applied in this study can be further explored and potentially expanded to encourage additional studies of similar nature.

#### **5.6. Academic implications**

Globally, entrepreneurship research and education are on the rise. Results from this study indicate that both these areas require a much more diverse and focused approach. The psychological impact of egotism and how it affects a particular entrepreneur's view on success and failure significantly impacts both short and long-term performance. The results also expose valuable aspects for academics to further explore, evaluate, and potentially integrate findings within existing and future scholarly systems and materials. Psychologically, the ego's tricks on the human mind in search of personal or organisational recognition and accomplishment are inevitable. It is, therefore, absolutely critical that a universal and scholarly platform be created for individuals to learn about how to correctly approach and neutralise the effects of egotism within managerial positions and entrepreneurship undertaking as a whole.

#### **5.7. Enterprise implications**

Findings from this study indicate that entrepreneurship undertaking remains a highly complicated task involving numerous elements and aspects that need to be faced daily. Physically, it is known that significant effort is required to stay competitive; however, mentally, it is equally important to ensure lasting enterprise performance. This study exposes valuable cognitive elements that other researchers and entrepreneurs can further investigate and potentially refine. The true impact of egotism on an enterprise's culture and approach to accomplishment is truly inevitable. There is much more to enterprise performance than just obtaining mere results. Findings from this study provide new direction on the various factors that entrepreneurs can apply to develop more solidified systems to better neutralise the effects of egotism and understand the impact it can have on enterprise performance moving forward.

## 5.8. Recommendations

This study addressed various aspects that can add tremendous value to both entrepreneurship and managerial performance research, respectively. Considering the vast amount of existing challenges in South Africa, rising entrepreneurs should be educated on the dangers of unwittingly adopting ego-centric behaviour as a mode to potentially overpower obstacles with the goal to obtain a certain level of success. Although personal, it remains critical that entrepreneurship is viewed as an absolute team effort. It is, therefore, recommended that further studies be conducted in the area of egotism and the impact it is believed to have on entrepreneurship and managerial performance in general. Greater depth is required on the psychological relationships that exist between entrepreneurial success and the mental capacity it takes to reach the desire without damaging the managerial structures and people around you. Additionally, it is recommended that policy-makers gather additional and integrate the findings from this study into existing political and educational curriculums and structures. This approach will, undoubtedly, impact and strengthen the current psychological shortcomings within South Africa's political leadership, government, business, and youth development systems in search of improved managerial performance and entrepreneurial success.

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### Notes on contributions

N.V.R. coordinated the data collection process and conducted the data analysis. O.K. made contributions regarding the conceptualization of the article, as well as writing and editing.

### Data availability statement

Only the primary researchers have access to the primary data as approved by the ethics committee.

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