14. Are South African Manufacturing Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise Businesses (SMMEs) Ready for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)?

(Lizzie L. Mabotja)

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is unquestionably resulting in significant changes in the workforce landscape, technological advancements, industry relations and it affects all aspects of society and the economy. This research paper is based on results from an earlier study focused on the challenges faced by Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), sharing results from survey data and in-depth interview analyses conducted. A sample of 66 SMMEs was selected purposefully from the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA)’s database where manufacturing SMMEs alluded to some of the critical challenges they are facing. A key finding from the research was that technological advancement and digital manufacturing are significant challenges for manufacturing SMMEs in South Africa. Small businesses are critical to South Africa’s ability to participate profitably in the 4IR. The research shows that there are significant challenges for manufacturing SMMEs and that should be urgently addressed if South Africa is to participate advantageously in the 4IR. This study recommends embedding technology into education and embracing new advancements and machinery within the education system. A change in the education system will help create a supply for future skills needed in the manufacturing sector. Manufacturing SMMEs contribute to a stronger economy and should embrace automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI); this requires determined and collaborative efforts from government, its agencies and private sector through broader information sharing, planning for future skills and a dedicated fund for technology and modern machinery funding across various industries, particularly manufacturing.

The full paper is available on the following link:

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