

The Strategic Choices of Small Medium-Sized Enterprises Integration: Evidence from Specific Economic Territory

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Abstract: The emergence of SMEs was conditioned by institutional and economic factors. These factors, as well as other internal promoted the integration of strategic thinking within this type of business, by adopting suitable strategies. Indeed, our research objective is to determine the extent of adoption of the approach and the strategic decision by the Algerian SMEs, and highlight the characteristics of its strategies through a survey on a sample of SMEs located in the West of the Algeria. The analysis of this empirical study will be preceded by a theoretical overview that aims to show the different concepts of business strategy, and more specifically those of the SMEs, and then to identify the specifics of strategic management within the SME. Finally, we will analyze the survey data basing on graphics to determine the different strategic options available to these SMEs from the sample according to this specific economic territory.

Keywords: SMEs; integration; strategic approach; survey; business strategy; strategic options

JEL Classification: L21; L53; P25; M13

1. Introduction

In recent years the emergence of SMEs to global was favored by the failure of most large companies, on the one hand, and on the other hand, by changing relationships between big business and small business. For the Algeria this type of business is a large part of the economic fabric, where its importance which is increases more and more because of its role in the socio-economic development.

Its emergence was conditioned by institutional and economic factors that were synchronized by the economic opening of our country on the international environment. These changes have intensified competition by putting this type of business in vulnerable situations. Thus, Algerian SMEs underwent changes in its mode of operation, especially with the advent of new entrepreneurs that use all the

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modern techniques of management.

However, these internal and external factors have promoted the integration of strategic thinking within the Algerian SMEs. By adopting suitable strategies, SMEs can achieve goals in a changing environment and evolving, so these strategies will foster the SMEs to have competitive advantages. Of the foregoing, we can ask the following question: “what kinds of strategies are adopted by SMEs. And what is the reality of this approach for SMEs in Western Algeria? ». This paper is structured as follows:

To answer our question, it conducted an empirical study on a sample of Small medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) located in the West of the Algeria to show the characteristics of strategic management in this type of business, developing a typology of SME according to strategic management adopted. This study is preceded by a presentation of the theoretical approaches of the strategy and the SMEs.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of the Firm's Strategy

It is difficult to give a unique and universal corporate strategy definition, as each author has a definition that own according to his approach to research. For Igor (Ansoff, 1989, p. 52), “the strategy is one of decision criteria that guide the behavior of an organization” (Ansoff, 1989), and according to wear (Porter, 1989, p. 21) the company's strategy is: “the combination of the purposes (objects) that strives to reach Firms and of the (measures) means by which it seeks to achieve. (Porter, 1982)

2.2. The SMEs

For the definition of SMEs, there are two approaches, definitions using qualitative criteria and those using quantitative criteria. According to the General confederation of small and medium-sized enterprises, the SMEs is “a unit of production or distribution, a unit of direction and management, under the authority of an entirely accountable Manager for the company, which is often owner and which is directly related to the life of the Enterprise”¹ (GCSME, 1983, p. 1).

Through this definition, we can say that the qualitative definition is based on the characteristics of the SME and its leader, the relationship between the latter and the Enterprise. Concerning our research we are based on the definition adopted in

¹ General Confederation of Small and Medium-sized Firms, service of documentation, 1983.

Algeria considers that:

- The SME is an enterprise of production of goods and/or services;
- From (1) to (249) employees;
- Whose annual turnover does not exceed 2 billion dinars or who's annual balance sheet total does not exceed 500 million dinars.

2.3. The Main SMEs Strategy

According to other authors (i.e. Horovitz, & Pitol-Belin, 1997, p. 187) give a definition of the SME strategy which is a “Basic Concept of general policy, the strategy has two goals: (I) choose among the alternatives, the guidelines that the company wants to take for its future; (ii) ensure the consistency of agreed actions¹. Indeed, according to (Chaillot, 1995, pp. 57-58) the notion of the SME strategy translates into: “the resumption of ideas - aims - strongly implanted.

Where the main idea is to be the market leader, this translates concretely by growth of turnover objectives, increase its market share, and the second idea is the need to innovate to win, thus, the strategy developed by the leader in this type of enterprise, is limited to a process of decision often not formalized and not communicated”, but rarely used as a management tool. So, the strategy of SMEs does not differ from that of big business, but it has characteristics, such as non-formalization in its formulation.

2.4. The Pillars of the Strategy for Small Business

According to (Marchesnay & Fourcade, 1997, p. 80), the strategy of the SMEs can be grasped by four-dimensional (Figure 1) which are:

¹ Quoted by: Marchesnay, Strategic Management, the publishing (Edi) of organizations, 1997.

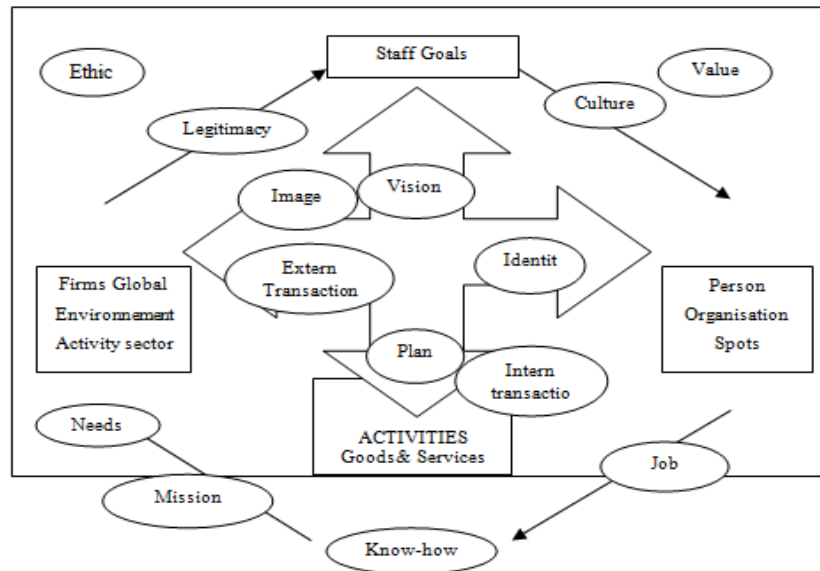


Figure1. The SMEs strategic system

(Source: Marchesnay & Fourcade, *Management of SMEs/SMLs*, Nathan, 1997, p. 80)

The objectives According (Thietart, & Xuereb, 1984, p. 38) to the lens give a direction to follow and influence the type of actions to be undertaken, it constitutes a step of its evolution, and then it is used to assess and monitor the company. For a goal to be useful for the Organization, it must be clear, specific, realistic, consistent understandable, acceptable and controllable. (Thietart, & Xuereb, 2005) The setting of objectives is shared between two schools, advocates a normative search methods to determine targets, one more descriptive, merely to observe the various practices (Helfer, Kalika & Orsoni, 2006, p. 57) which vary according to the circumstances. Concerning SMEs, there is a strong articulation between its objectives and those of its leader.

However understanding of management style (Gervais, 2003, p. 40) and goals of the SMEs, are carried out through the knowledge of the profile of the entrepreneur. Looking for independence managerial and financial, is one of the main concerns of the contractor, and next to these objectives, others can be searched for example: the desire to ensure an income, or a job for his family, the desire to produce products of quality, creativity, power, status, self-realization, the sustainability of the enterprise, the continuity of family traditions.

The objectives of each contractor are often multiple (Janssen, 2009, p. 95) and are likely to vary with the wire of time and the development of Enterprise. Julien & Marchesnay (1992, pp. 58-59) offer two types of entrepreneur according to their

objectives, where this typology is based on three major socio-economic aspirations, with the contractor, which are: the sustainability of the company, involving in particular, hoping to transmit it to a member of the family, independence and growth.

2.4.1. The Organization

On the one hand, the organization is a community of people together to achieve the objectives set, and one on the other hand the Organization refers to action to organize which consists to assign tasks to each worker, distribute responsibilities, delegating authority, and develop a communication system. However, these two approaches are complementary, for example: the increase in the size of the organization needs to recruit more workers, implying a reorganization of tasks, authority, and communication system (Marchesnay & Fourcade, 1997, p. 89). Indeed, the Organization as a structure, characterized by several parameters which are specific in SMEs, citing (Marchesnay & Fourcade, 1997, pp.190-191) among other things:

- A low specialization of tasks: resulting from the lack of formalization and the definition clarifies workstations that, often, workers have a variety of different tasks, and have no well-defined position;
- A strong centralization: because the powers are in the hands of the leader of SMEs, where the latter is a key player in the Organization, but it does not some leaders to delegate a part of their authority to officials, and even some other, develop a team spirit in their business, all this depends on the profile and skills of the members of the company;
- A low degree of formalization: the structure is informal, because usually the leader of the SME assigns no rules, procedures, and methods of written communications, but it may expand them in the case of recruitment of an officer, or when an SME is embarking on an operation of certification;
- A flat structure: which results from the reduction of hierarchical levels, as a result, a large number of employees are placed under the control of a same supervisor, and when the range of control becomes very large, the leader of the company delegates some of its functions to a Deputy. But this type of structure is not the case of all SMEs, where according to (Marchesnay, 1998, p.73), the organizational configurations for SMEs are very diverse, and range from crafts to the most sophisticated structures.

1.4.2. The environment Factor

It can be decomposed (Porter, 1989, p. 4) into two levels: the first is societal which includes communities and local institutions of all types, as well as the network of personal relationships woven by the leader, and the second is industry

which can be divided into several levels:

- The industry which includes the activities in which operate the business, this level according to Porter is limited by the following actors: direct competitors, indirect (incoming potentials and substitutes) customers and suppliers (Porter, 1989, p. 4) so the institutions that have a role in the regulation and the regulation of the industry. For SMEs, this level includes an assessment of vulnerability.
- The sector includes all of the actors who provide the chain of processing and adding values to a product, or a set of related or interconnected products, since the initial stages until the final stage, with dependency in terms of concentration, substitutability and essentiality analysis. This dependence is analyzed as the degree of reduction of strategic freedom due to a relationship with a partner: highly concentrated in the stream, hardly substitutable and essential for the activity of the Enterprise.
- The market, on which is exerted direct competition, which may prove more to the less aggressive.

2.4.3. Activity Stage

The activity basis corresponds to goods and services offered by the company to its customers. (Marchesnay, 1991, p. 53), can see that small business can develop activities where it has a competitive advantage over big business. Contrast of big business who is looking for a size higher, in relying on three elements which are: the economy of learning and experience, economy of scale and scope economy, small business is a breeding ground, so far as it remains small in the following activities: economies of experience (innovative and creative activities), economies of scale (high load in services activities), savings of field (strongly segmented niche).

2.5. The SME strategic approach

For (Helfer, Kalika, & Orsoni, pp. 429-430), “whatever the status of the small business, it adopts the strategic management, and its head has a preliminary view on the future of the Organization in the relatively distant future, but this view is not written, formalized, as it is in big business, so the managerial small business diagnosis has singularities”.

Thus, (Saporta, 1998, p. 108), who sees that the choice of a strategic option, goes through a planning process, and after that it examined the attitudes of the leaders, said that these behaviors are not combined with the approach, where 'the drafting of a written strategic plan always seems to be the exception rather than the rule among leaders of SMEs'.

In the same vein (Thurston, 2001, p. 99), stipulates that: “planning, for some

SMEs, is not explicit, where leader simply has it in his head, for others, it is formal and takes the form of texts carefully prepared objectives, specific actions, and corresponding budgets”. Indeed, the same author said that the adoption of a method or the other depends on the following factors:

- Style and abilities the boss;
- The degree of involvement of other people in management decisions;
- The complexity and uncertainty of the activity, indeed, according GERVASIS the union of these factors favor (Gervais, 2003, pp.414-416) the establishment of planning in an SME as a system of formal planning, can not be necessarily a guarantee of success for this type of business.

Despite that there are difficulties in the implementation of the planner approach in SMEs, (Saporta, 1997, pp. 24-31) has some suggestions for the strategic approach will be adapted, which revolve around: minimizing resource consumption, including available time officer; consistency with the 'strategic style “intuitive, sometimes dazzling, officers involved, particularly in the context of the opportunities as they come in; assistance given to the leader to have a long-term business and design options to steer it in the context of this vision.

Indeed, the strategic process in SMEs is not always planned, and is described (Mintzberg, 1998, p. 24) as follows, “the policy process in an entrepreneurial¹ organization, often visionary type largely deliberate, but emerging and flexible details, as is intuitive and often facing an aggressive looking for opportunities”. So, we can say that the strategic approach of the SME is related to the character of its leader.

2.6. The SME Strategic Options

In terms of strategic options (Saporta, 1997, p.6) ordered sequentially the various options available to SMEs, which are designed to maximize the chances of survival.

2.6.1. Innovation Strategy

The purpose of business survival, (Thietart & Xuereb, 2005, p. 124), stipulate that a strategy of innovation is probably the option for organic growth, the external effects are most important include: the structure of competition - the emergence of new competitors - the growth and creation of new business segments.

The small Enterprise often innovates through a pragmatic and non-systemic

¹ As we have said before, most SMEs have an entrepreneurial structure.

application. In other words, SMEs will innovate when driven by its dynamism, facing opportunities or new market needs, with constraints to reduce manufacturing costs, or face heightened competition. Also, the resulting new technology innovation is a productivity improvement factor and they can maintain or increase competitiveness especially in little or unprotected industrial branches.

The innovations of SME experiments show that their efforts are comparable to those tinkerers, facing the approach of the engineer, who would be one of the big Enterprise, they innovate sometimes unknowingly, because they are faced with a challenge, in fact, several surveys have shown that innovation is often a specific action in SMEs, it is usually conducted in a reactive way.

2.6.2. The Specialize Strategy

Specialization “is a simple approach that aims to focus the efforts of the firm in a market and on the same type of product. Often it is the only option available to a small business's success will be an advantage in terms of cost, or differentiation attributes or services”. So, according to this definition the company that specializes to choose one of the generic strategies. Specialization according (Marmuse, 1996, p. 514) begins when the products and current missions allow the business to grow in line with its objectives.

Thus, according (Janssen, 2009, p. 61) “[...] A small company that seeks growth should focus on a limited number of products or services and fill gaps unoccupied by large companies”, so, a strategy of specialization, may even go further than survival, and is used to achieve the goal of growth of small business.

2.6.3. Dependence Governance Strategy: Risk

Dependence is for SME strategic risk, which may occur when the small company carries the largest share of sales with a single customer, or by a single supplier. The head of the SME can take this problem by seeking an alliance, in fact, before setting the strategic alliance, it should highlight the concepts of each of cooperation and partnership, which seem to have the same meaning that the alliance.

- Cooperation is the fact performs an action together, treated as a common generic form of action which can range from simple exchanges of information at very advanced forms of collaboration between firms, including contractual terms. In this definition, integrates outsourcing, which is considered as (Montmorillon, 1997, p. 859) “one of the oldest form of business cooperation, it is a donor-order business, and another sub-contractor, where the second produces goods or services to the benefit of the first”. And in this case the head of the SME needs to know to make himself indispensable to his client or principal.

- Partnership is practical collaborations that are most often implemented in a

production chain, from upstream to downstream, by staging legally independent but economically dependent firms in the under a special agreement.

Regarding the alliance, according (Marchesnay, 1997, p. 126) it is a strategy that enables both companies (groups) or more to agree to set up joint units, taking a share of the capital in order to:

Develop new products, changing, and expertise; use the product produced in the site; strengthening distribution relationships, when some are suppliers of other distributors; penetrate protected international markets. Another reason that can lead companies to enter these agreements is for them to share the costs and development risks, which can not be handled alone.

For the team of (Strategor, 1997, p.140) strategic alliances can be defined as associations between several competitors, or potential competitors who choose to complete a project or specific activity by coordinating skills, means and resources rather than:

- To compete with each other on the activity;
- To merge them or to make acquisitions or disposals of activity.

So, according to this definition, alliances are essentially based on two principles, cooperation and a certain level of competition. In the context of SMEs, (Puthod, 1998, p. 95) said that this type of Firm, suffers from structural lack of resources, which may be the result of an alliance policy based on complementarity. Moreover, this strategy helps the company that wants to establish itself internationally and create the necessary means for this implementation, and this pathway may be a development accelerator.

2.6.4. The Diversification Strategy

Diversification than simply expands the business scope of the company. While specialization is based on the implementation of a set of scarce skills, diversification requires the use of a new set of skills required by the new competitive environment in which the Enterprise enters. According to (Janssen, 2009, p. 141) “Diversification is the preferred means of development for medium enterprises, where it should, however, be related to the existing activities of the Enterprise”. So, for Ansoff I., among the causes that lead the SME to diversify is when the size of their business portfolio is insufficient to achieve their goal.

2.6.5. The Internationalization Strategy

In the context of globalization, economics and competition, companies are to internationalization strategies to greater or lesser degrees pushed. Exporting is the first stage of internationalization, which is the result of finding new customers overseas; in this case, it is advisable for smaller companies to master the local and

national market before venturing into foreign markets.

In the second stage, the company will establish overseas sales office, where she can continue with the installation or acquisition, alone or in joint venture, a production unit. In this approach, an SME can be supported by a large national company already set (portage or piggy back). The third stage is that of internationalization. The operating abroad units, whether subsidiaries or full, acquire a certain autonomy, and develop key functions needed to acquire appropriate skills distinctive to the host country. (Marchesnay, 1997, p. 34)

3. Empirical Study: Analyze and Interpretation of the Survey

We recall that our objective was to determine the characteristics of the strategic management of Algerian SMEs. In such an embodiment, and for reasons of proximity, the survey covered 43 companies, some located in the province of Mostaganem State, and some others in Oran state, where the majority of questionnaires were administered face to face. Analysis of the data collected is increased by the steps of:

- Encoding the data with the transformation of those qualitative to quantitative,
- Data entry using the SPSS 20.0,
- Tabulation of data in single or cross-tables,
- The tabulated data, which is the most important step in translating statistics to analyze the results.

3.1. Presentation of Data Response

The treatment of the data allowed us to synthesize the results in Table 1, which indicates that the rate of return is 51%, the number of rejected questionnaires is 2, and the number of usable questionnaires is 20, while, the response rate is 46%.

Table1. Data response of the SMEs sample

Distributed questionnaires number (1)	Number of questionnaires returned (2)	Return rate % (2 /1)	Number of questionnaires rejected (3)	Number of usable questionnaires (5)= (2-3)	Response rate % (6) = (5/ 1)
43	22	51%	2	20	46%

Source: Data of survey (2014), Authors contribution.

The return rate by sector of activity varies from one sector to another, where the highest (100%) response rate was recorded by the sector of building materials,

ceramics and glass, and the industries textile industry, hosiery, garments, while the lowest rate (25%) relates to various industries. Noting that, the sector of the industry, leather and footwear, the response rate is null.

3.2. The Sample: SMEs

The Figure 1 shows that SMEs are divided between the different legal statuses, including the LLC is the rating form (40% of SMEs), in the second place comes the EURL form with 30%, and on the SPA and individual account for each 15% of the sample.

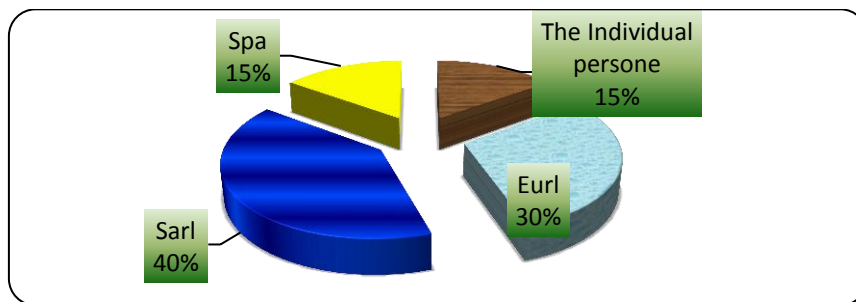


Figure 1. The legal form distribution of SMEs

Source: Data of survey (2014) (Authors contribution.)

According to Figure 2, the majority of SMEs in the sample just 60% meadows were created from 2001 because that date has been the promulgation of the Ordinance on the Investment Development (Ordinance No. 01 / 03 of 20/08/2001) and the framework law on the promotion of SMEs (law No. 01/18 of 12/12/2001), while 20% had between eleven and twenty four years, the remaining SMEs were created before 1988, the majority of family businesses.

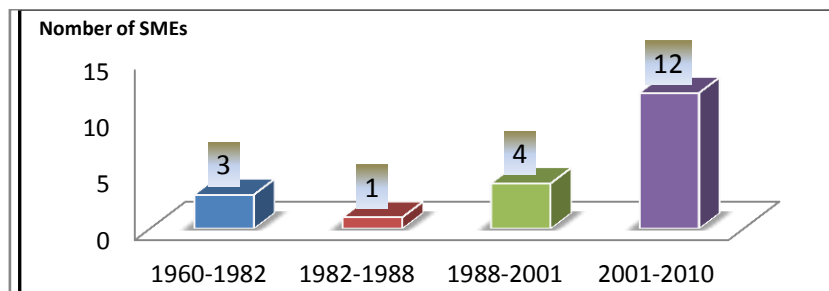


Figure 2. The distribution of SMEs by size

Source: Data of survey (2014) (Authors contribution)

In the next figure 3, our sample is composed of 8 Medium Enterprises, 6 Small Businesses and 6 Very Small Businesses.

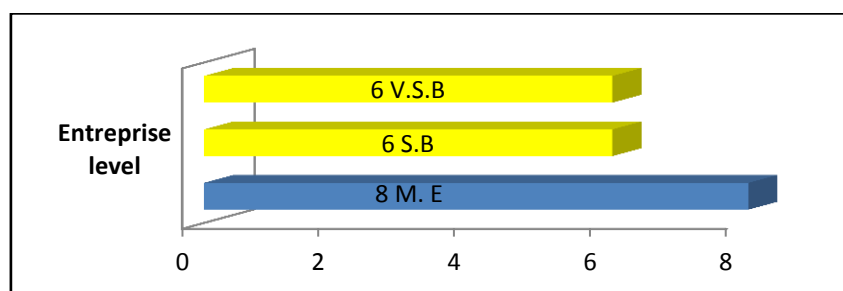


Figure 3. The distribution of SMEs by size

Source: Data of survey (2014) (Authors contribution)

3.3. Analyze and data discussion

The results of the survey were mined and analyzed to determine the characteristics of the Algerian SMEs. From Table 2, the majority of SMEs (17) responded that they have a strategy, while just 3 of them have no strategy.

Table 2. Cross-table strategy*aim

The aim type	Strategy		
	Yes	No	Total
Write	7	0	7
Inside the mind of the leader	10	3	13
Total	17	3	20

Source: Data of survey (2014) (Authors contribution)

If a cross is made between planning objectives and a strategy, we find that among the companies that have a strategy that 07 firms (or 41.18%) make a plan, so their strategy is developed and explicit and that 10 companies (or 58.82% of companies with a strategy) their goals are in the heads of the leaders, their strategies are implicit and emerging over time.

3.3.1. The Strategic Vision: Governance strategy and Aim Type

Among the surveyed SMEs that are raised and the number of 17 and having a strategy, we note that these 16, a rate of 94% say they have a strategic vision

against one said companies do not have a vision for this last, this seems contradictory because there is no strategy without vision.

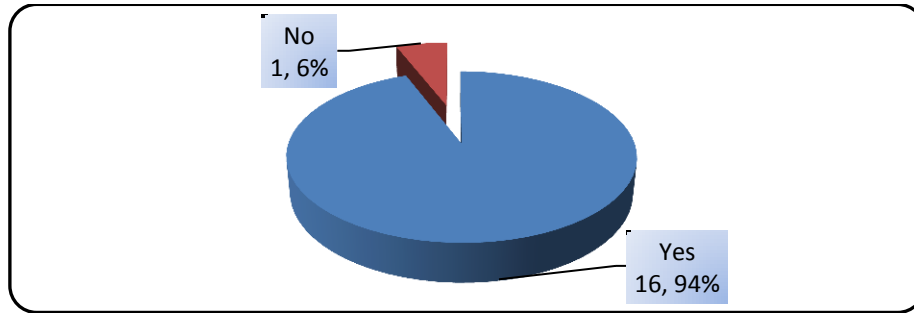


Figure 5. the strategic vision adopted by SMEs

Source: Data of survey (2014) (Authors contribution)

3.3.2. Environment Analyze

Concerning the analysis of the external environment, we find that 14 companies (82 companies with a strategy), are interested in analyzing their environment in terms of opportunities and threats, while 03 SMEs (18% of SMEs have responded strategy) does not take into account the external analysis.

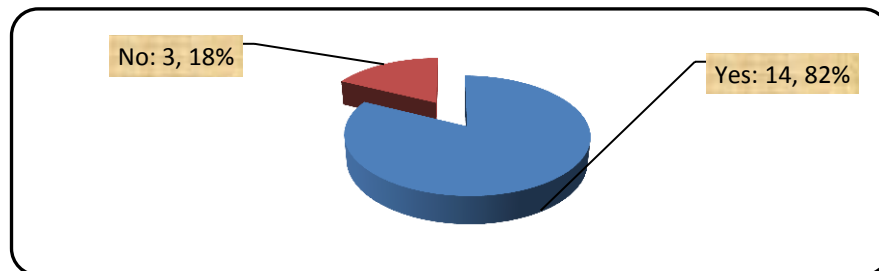


Figure 6. Environment structure of the SMEs

Source: Data of survey (2014) (Authors contribution)

3.3.3. Translating Goal into Numbers

The SMEs that adopt strategies have to translate into measurable actions assigned objectives. According to Figure 7, this approach exists in 12 SMEs 71% against 5, a rate of 29%.

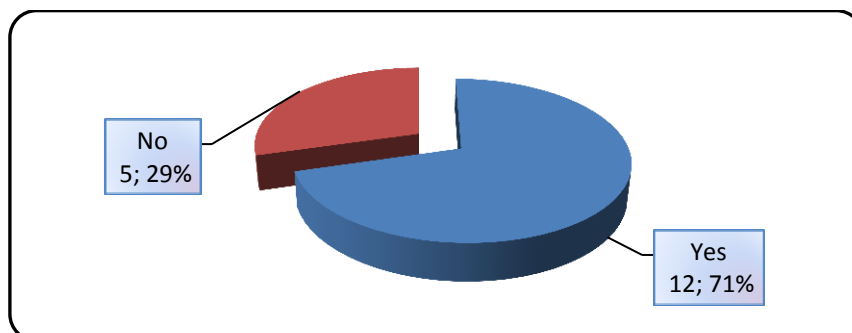


Figure 7. Environment structure of the SMEs

Source: Data of survey (2014) (Authors contribution)

3.3.4. The Formulation of the Strategy

The figure 8, show that 10 Enterprises of those respondents who adopted a strategy, do not set up, it is only in the heads of their leaders, while seven companies have deliberate strategies into plans.

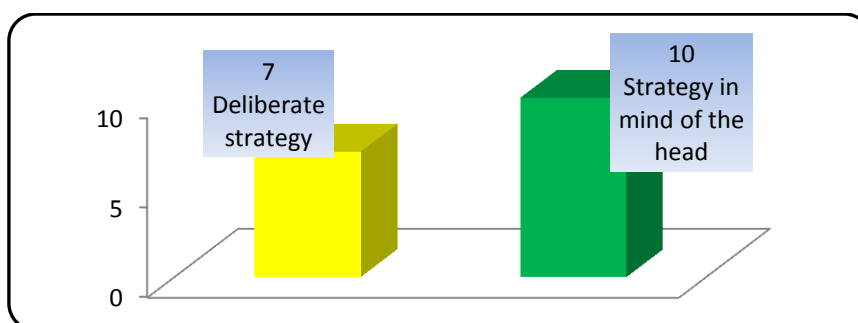


Figure 8. The SMEs Strategy formulating

Source: Data of survey (2014) (Authors contribution)

3.3.5. The Option Strategies

According to Figure 9, the majority of SME managers (82%) take the specialization strategies, while 18% of companies that responded have adopted a business strategy, trying to turn in another area of their different primary domain.

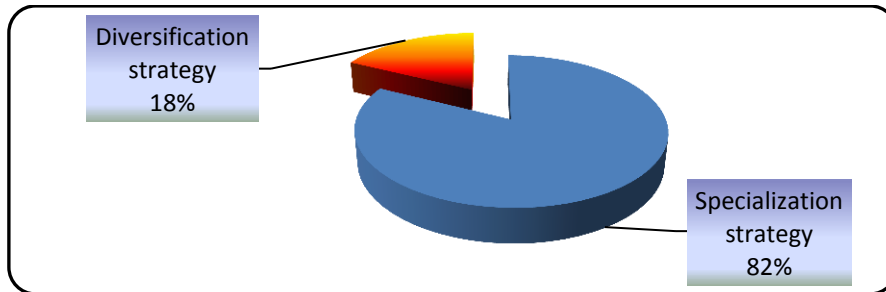


Figure 9. The SMEs option strategies

Source: Data of survey (2014) (Authors contribution)

3.3.6. The Alliance Strategy

Research collaboration and alliance with other partners from the same industry (cf. Figure 10), involves 9 SMEs (53% of companies surveyed), in contrast, 8 Enterprises (47%) are not interested in this type of strategy. So for these results, we can state that the Algerian SMEs have integrated new strategic practices including how external organization, based on changing business linkages to achieve their goals.

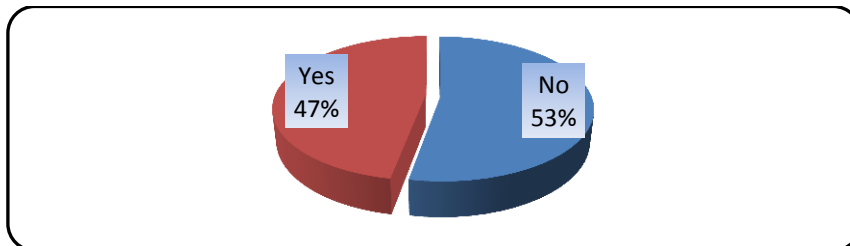


Figure10. The SMEs partnership and joint-venture

Source: Data of survey (2014) (Authors contribution)

3.3.7. The Internationalization Strategy

International development (cf. Figure 11) is difficult for Algerian SMEs because it is conditioned by internal and external (Toubache, 1998, p. 98) factors, but despite this we find that 29% of SMEs that responded have developed a strategy, adopt internationalization strategies, while 71% of SMEs do not choose their management practices, where the export is the most practiced strategy.

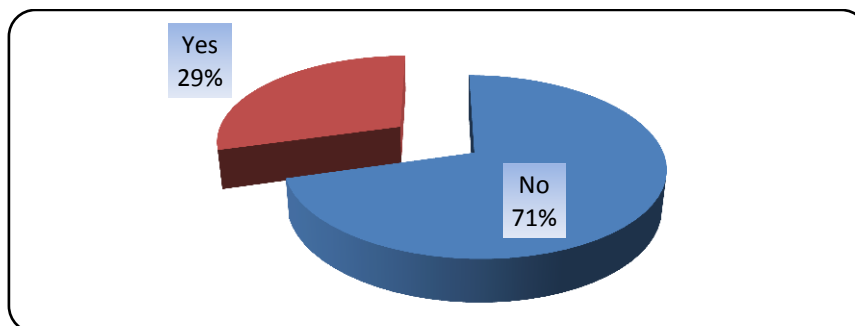


Figure 11. The SMEs internationalization strategy adopted

3.3.8. The Innovation Strategy and ICT

The following figure 12 shows that the majority of companies 59% are trying to innovate frequently, and by the creation of new products or the development of processes for production and marketing, while 41% of SMEs do not.

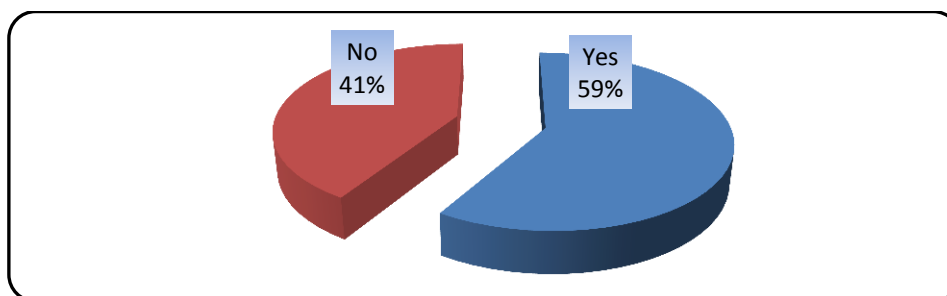


Figure 12. The SMEs innovation strategy adopted

But examination of responding companies have innovated indicates those only four Enterprises or 40% of those respondents who have an innovation strategy based on a research and development.

3.3.9. Governance Strategy: Typology

Through the different results we were able to develop a typology of SMEs (*cf.* Table 3) depending on the characteristics of their strategy, strategic approach, and their most strategic option adopted.

Table 3. Typology of the SMEs and management strategy

Type	Size	Strategic system	Strategic method	Option strategy	Observations
Type 1	50% of SMEs in the sample	Includes all strategic pillars	Mostly implicit (60% of such companies).	80% adopted the strategy of specialization	20% adopte new management techniques
Type 2	35% of SMEs in the sample	lack of a strategic pillar or more	Mostly implicit (71.43% of Firms)	71.43% of SMEs. adopt the strategy of specialization	28.57% practice new management techniques

Source: Survey data. (Authors contribution)

4. Conclusion

The purpose of our research was to examine the strategic management in SMEs, under the theme “Strategies for SMEs: the case of SMEs in western Algeria.” Indeed, the empirical study of a sample of 20 SMEs, found that generally, the strategy of the Algerian SMEs, is between an implicit strategy and implicit strategic practices, development of the company relies mainly on the strategy of specialization. The various analyzes of the survey yielded the following results:

- 85%, the majority of companies respond that they have a strategy, but in reality 50% of companies in the sample have a strategy.
- 60% of companies actually have a strategy, it is implicit and emerges over time, because the leaders of these companies do not use strategic planning, but their strategy is in their heads.
- The strategic choice shows that the most widely adopted by SMEs in our sample policy option is the strategy of specialization, which is 80%, compared with the diversification strategy that is adopted by only 20% of SMEs in sample.

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