

Empowering the Innovative Entrepreneurship Culture: Understanding the Key Factors and Government Supports from the Perspective of Senior Omani SMEs

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Abstract

With the Sultanate of Oman promoting innovation-driven entrepreneurship and enacting legislation to facilitate the rapid expansion of creative start-ups, this study found a need to explore both types of innovative entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial innovation. Following that, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the key factors involved in becoming an innovative entrepreneur from the perspective of fifteen senior Omani SMEs and to understand the support received by them in promoting entrepreneurial innovation. They were selected and interviewed using the purposive sampling technique. The study's findings revealed five key factors involved in becoming an innovative entrepreneur, including (i) technology adoption; (ii) knowledge of the business environment and rivals as well as resilient; (iii) positive attitudes; (iv) financial management; and (v) focusing on customers.

However, only some of them received government support, such as lectures, workshops, and financial assistance or loans. This paper believes that identifying these key factors allows other SMEs to imitate similar factors, thus embarking on an innovative culture in their businesses. The understanding of the support given by the government allows this study to track the efforts made by the government in their effort to encourage innovation-driven entrepreneurship.

Keywords: innovative entrepreneurship, key factors, government supports, Omani small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

1. Introduction

According to Crudu (2019), corporate and government development programmes have made entrepreneurship and innovation central tenets in recent decades, especially after the 2008 financial crisis. Entrepreneurs who can turn their ideas into in-demand, marketable products, services, or technology are what he calls "innovative," and they are the ones that benefit most from innovations in terms of financial success. Its significance has increased as the concept of entrepreneurship has come to mean the introduction of novel goods and services.

Open Innovation Theory, as described by Chesbrough (2003), demonstrates the importance of diversity and openness in the innovation process. Based on this theory, open innovation has been defined in terms of inside-out or outside-in innovation whereby both external and internal knowledge are needed. As explained by Vanhaverbeke and Roijakkers (2013), external knowledge is sourced to develop new products or businesses, and internal knowledge is sold to other firms, which deploy it for their new product development. In a similar vein, Bradley et al. (2021) clarified that innovation can come in a variety of forms, from massive technological breakthroughs with far-reaching societal benefits to more modest, incremental inventions that benefit underprivileged individuals in local communities, the purview of social entrepreneurship. Due to the product life cycle being reduced, and the constantly changing of the external environment, business flexibility is crucial (Orlova, 2020).

Researchers have come to agree that innovative entrepreneurship is a key component of the modern economy and a key growth driver (Bradley et al., 2021; Crudu, 2019; Acs et al., 2016; Audretsch, Bönte, & Keilbach, 2008; van Praag & Versloot, 2007; Audretsch & Thurik, 2001; Wennekers & Thurik, 1999). The Europe 2020 strategy for European Union development places a particular emphasis on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and innovation (Crudu, 2019). To guarantee widespread interest is not a goal of Europe's innovative business development.

Baldi and Bodmer (2018) and Amoroso, Auresch, and Link (2018) say that it has changed in the high-tech sector, making sure that the money put into innovative entrepreneurship works through company capitalization and making the difference between getting scientific results and making money as an entrepreneur bigger. Thus, according to Sciarelli, Gheith, and Tani (2020), creative organisations will need to commit significant performance to management

through true, authentic innovation in terms of soft innovations to gain financial benefits.

Furthermore, Bradley et al. (2021) agreed that creative entrepreneurship improves society's welfare in the long run. Crudu (2019) argues that entrepreneurship is crucial for promoting both innovation and economic growth. Businesses can gain a competitive edge through innovation and innovation-driven entrepreneurship has a greater impact on job creation than SME entrepreneurship. High-growth, highly inventive businesses provide the vast majority of new jobs, and innovative startups have the best chance of rapid expansion (Bravo-Biosca & Westlake, 2009; Eberhart, Eesley, & Eisenhardt, 2017; Stangler, 2010). Many earlier academics (e.g., Acs et al., 2016; Audretsch, Bönte, & Keilbach, 2008; van Praag & Versloot, 2007; Audretsch & Thurik, 2001; Wennekers & Thurik, 1999) viewed entrepreneurship as a vital mechanism for welfare because of its ability to foster innovation and, by extension, create jobs (Crudu, 2019).

In addition, Bradley et al. (2021) argued that discoveries benefit society as a whole, with many benefits attributable to the efforts of entrepreneurs who successfully introduce novel technology despite the obstacles they inevitably encounter. Entrepreneurship is critical because it has the potential to improve people's standard of living and make money for startups and related businesses. Change is also facilitated by innovative entrepreneurs, who create new markets by creating better products. Entrepreneurs have the power to revolutionise our daily routines. If the uprisings gain momentum, it could improve people's standard of living. Entrepreneurial innovation, as argued by Bryan, Lemus, and Marshall (2020) and Leach et al. (2012), can be useful in addressing unforeseen social problems like the COVID-19 crisis. Entrepreneurial innovation, according to Bryan, Lemus, and Marshall (2020), can be a key factor in addressing "big challenges" in economics and society, such as poverty alleviation and environmental protection.

According to Rubio-Mozos, Garca-Muia, and Fuentes-Moraleda (2019), a subset of young, innovative SMEs is actively tackling and making the switch to a sustainable business model in service of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Establishing agreeable conditions and a good business environment for start-ups is essential in today's volatile global market (Fila et al., 2020). More efficient and productive results are shown in regions with a high concentration of entrepreneurial capital, while less entrepreneurial regions yield fewer effective results (Al-Awlaqi et al., 2021). Ilyas, Hu, and Wiwattanakornwong (2020) claim that this trend is due to the desire to lessen the gap between the rich and the poor by having governments provide more resources to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), such as money and resources for research and development. As a result, developed nations have focused on policies and programmes that support the growth of innovative startups, particularly those that reward those who create new products and services.

Like many other states, the Sultanate of Oman wants to increase its business activity. The Authority for SME Development was established by Royal Decree 107/2020 on August 18, 2020, according to Al Shukaili et al. (2019). The Authority for SMEs Development, which has

a broad range of skills outlined by the Royal Decree, is the Sultanate of Oman's agency for promoting SMEs and enhancing their contribution to the local economy. Its board of directors decided that it would have financial and administrative autonomy, as well as the option to build branches in other governorates. The Sultanate has a pressing desire to lessen its reliance on the oil industry, liberalise and privatise the economy, and become self-sufficient. The purpose of entrepreneurship is to increase the country's annual revenue contribution and spur economic growth through calculated risk-taking and a shift in income dependence. Based on the Institutional Theory, which can be used to look into the boundaries between companies and communities that have shaped SMEs in different ways to ensure their continued growth, this study seeks to comprehend the rise of innovative entrepreneurship in Oman.

2. Aim

While the Sultanate of Oman encouraged innovation-driven entrepreneurship or enacted regulations to help innovative start-ups grow faster, this study believed the exploration of both innovative entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial innovation was crucial. Therefore, this study aims to explore the key factors involved in becoming an innovative entrepreneur from the perspective of senior Omani SMEs. By understanding these key factors, other SMEs can imitate similar factors, thus embarking on an innovative culture in their businesses. Other than that, this study also intends to understand the support received by these senior Omani SMEs in promoting entrepreneurial innovation. Understanding the support given by the government allows this study to track the effort made by the government in its effort to encourage innovation-driven entrepreneurship.

3. Methodology

The data for this study came from qualitative research conducted over five months, from January 2022 to May 2022. This study performed semi-structured interviews with fifteen registered Omani SMEs from various industries. Two questions asked to the informants were, *“In your opinion, what are the key factors in becoming an innovative entrepreneur?”* and *“To your best knowledge, is there any government support for promoting entrepreneurial innovation?”* To secure the anonymity of these informants, the "nth root" was used in addressing them (i.e., SME 1, SME 2, and SME 10). Thematic analysis has been conducted with the assistance of Nvivo 11 Pro, which was used in managing the data.

Purposive sampling is used to reach Omani SME informants for this study. Patton (1987) argues that it is crucial to actively seek out key informants with excellent expertise since they will be able to supply the best solutions for each sort of inquiry. According to Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer (2011), the term "purposeful sampling" refers to the process of actively seeking out a large quantity of data. You can use purposive sampling for one of two reasons. For starters, it saves money and time, which is a powerful combination (Tongco, 2007). The second justification is that this method allows for the justification of theoretical, analytic, and logical generalisations based on the sample research (Sharma, 2017).

4. Findings and Discussion

Organisational Profile of the Omani SMEs

The organisational profile of all SMEs in the Sultanate of Oman is summarised in Table 1. These small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operate in many different industries, including IT, marketing, oil and gas, construction, agriculture, food and beverage, electrical, commercial, and law. Only one of them dates back to 2009, while the others all opened between 2011 and 2018. Aside from a certificate of appreciation or gratitude and an invitation to a local exhibition, the vast majority of these SMEs did not get any prizes or honours. SME 9 in the electrical industry was the only one to make a million dollars in revenue. Some of them are also reluctant to disclose their revenue. The maximum number of employees hired by them is 22, which is SME 15.

Table 1. Organisational Profile of the Omani SMEs

Informant	Sector	Year of Establishment	Services Provided	Award/ Accolades Received	Revenue	No. Of Employees	Recruiting Period
SME 1	Mobile Phone Accessories	2013	Selling phone and laptops accessories.	Nil	5000 OMR	0 employees (previously 4 employees)	2013 - 2018
SME 2	Mint Marketing	2013	Working with creativity community in Marketing and visual services, visual identity for branding, website, company profile, videos talking about company products and services. Besides, prepare consultancy for strategic marketing, budgets and balance sheet in Muscat, Azaiba	Only appreciation and participation certificates	30000 OMR	0 employees	No, only freelances with profit and commission pace.
SME 3	Company is Smart ways for investments for environmental	2014	Services like counseling, recycling environmental waste, exports chemical	Company got no rewards, only appreciation certificates.	300K OMR	Employees around 6 that 4 of them are Omanis.	2014 - 2022

	and oil and gas field.		products, inspections and chemical solutions for environmental issues. Muscat and Oman				
SME 4	Construction company	2012	Service providing for maintenance, constructions, refurbishment. Muscat and Al Batinah North.	Nil	8000 OMR	Before Covid 19, we were 39, now I have 2 employees.	2012 - 2018
SME 5	Agriculture sector	2017	Trading of flowers, plants, agricultural tools, garden design, implementation and related works. All over Oman.	Sponsorship appreciation certificates to some governments and private sector.	2000 OMR	Recruiting freelancers based on commission base, and working per hours so there is no fixed number of employees. It differs as per non-permanent contracts.	2017 - 2022
SME 6	Food and Beverages.	2017	Providing coffee (Cafes)	Nil	300K OMR	7 employees	2017 - 2022
SME 7	Manufacture of cakes, brioche and tarts	2018	Cake and sweets from Home	Nil	Do not wish to disclose	1 employee (himself)	2018 - 2022
SME 8	Tire Retailer from China to be sold as whole and retail, delivery	2014	Shipping, selling heavy vehicle tires. Oil and gas companies	Nil	20000 OMR	0 employees	No
SME 9	Electrical sector	2018	Providing connection to electrical projects with electrical distributor in Oman, Riyaada Company in Oman No rewards	Nil	1 million OMR	Around 27 employees from all nationalities	2018 - 2022
SME 10	SME 10 commercial	2018	Design services,	Certificates of gratitude	Do not wish to	12 employees	2019 - 2022

			property management, real estate, F&B providing services in the Oman and GCC region		disclose		
SME 11	Legal firms	2009	Legal consultancy muscat and all-around Oman	Nil	30000 OMR	6 employees	5 years
SME 12	SPACE and Rehab Consultancy	2012	Training services, staff development programs. Soft skills. Consultancy and training.	Online workshops Muscat alro`ya Newspaper Appreciation in 2021	10000 OMR	Solo	Not applicable
SME 13	Electrical services	2011	Facilitating the process to all citizens for finish their essential governmental documents easily. We have legal access from the omani governments to finish and ease the process of governmental documents from Oman royal police, all ministries. All over Oman, mainly in Muscat	Appreciation certificates.	10000 OMR	Annually 15 employees working in and out as we do not have financial stabilities. Open working contracts, mostly job seekers.	2011 - 2022
SME 14	SME 14 Gym Hall	2015	Hall to let sports practice and exercise. Muscat, Al Amerat	Nil	No Zero, Lost all tools and equipment	1 employee	2019 - 2022
SME 15	SME 15 Industrial sector	2018	Design, manufacture for labs, dentist clinic for tooth refabrication. We are working also in	Invited to SME entrepreneurship in KSA exhibition. We are incubated at SME Reyyada.	200K OMR	22 employees	2018 - 2022

			jewellery manufactures. Gala, Oman. We are expanding our products to Sudan, UAE, KSA, Bahrain.				
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Key Factors to Become an Innovative Entrepreneur

As mentioned earlier, the informants in this study are fifteen registered Omani SMEs from various industries. The question asked to the informants is, “*In your opinion, what is(are) the key factor(s) in becoming an innovative entrepreneur?*” By referring to the feedback from the informants, who are the Omani SMEs, their opinion on the key factors to becoming an innovative entrepreneur can be classified into five themes, as illustrated in Figure 1. These themes are (i) technology adoption, (ii) knowledge of the business environment and rivals as well as resilience, (iii) positive attitudes, (iv) financial management, and (v) focus on customers. These five key factors support the Open Innovation Theory introduced by Chesbrough (2003) as this theory also upholds any key factors that can accelerate innovation in business.

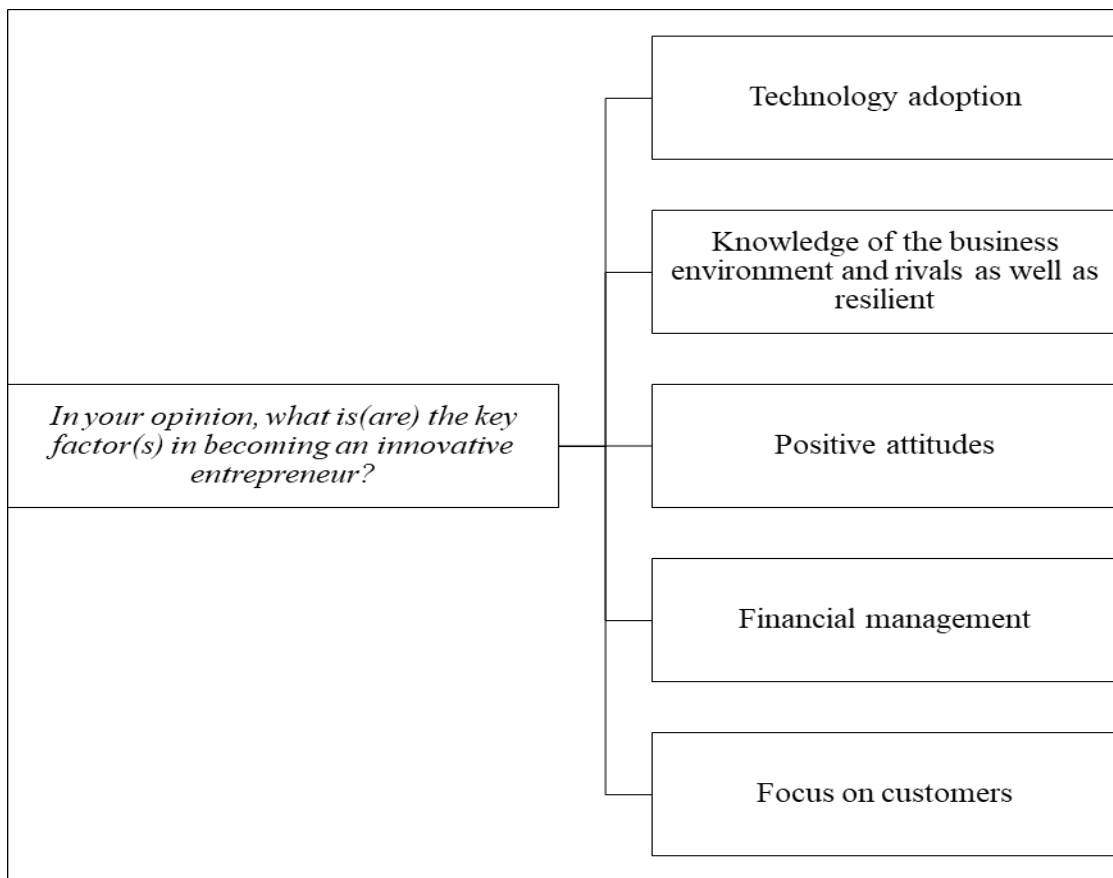


Figure 1. Key Factors to Become an Innovative Entrepreneur

Technology Adoption

According to four informants in this study, SMEs can better prepare themselves to be innovative entrepreneurs by adopting technology. New technologies enable the vast majority of innovations, including fresh approaches to doing business and radical shifts in consumer habits. Markets and businesses alike are adapting to the new realities brought on by technological advancements. In this sense, being able to constantly generate new ideas demands familiarity with cutting-edge technological processes and applications. Omani SMEs 1, 3, 4, and 15 explained the importance of technology in their businesses. They stated that:

Should be more updated with new technology. (Omani SME 1)

Also, travelling abroad to experience up-to-date technology in IE is available. We are trying to filter different types of experiments and see which one is applicable to be implemented in my company in the Omani Market. We are also trying to prototype different innovative solutions. (Omani SME 3)

We have to make sure that innovative entrepreneurs are up-to-date with new technology. (Omani SME 4)

Establish quarterly meetings to develop and look at new technology in the Omani market and globally. (Omani SME 15)

Knowledge of the Business Environment and Rivals as well as Resilient

Knowledge of the business environment and rivals is the second factor that allows SMEs to be innovative businesses. The business climate today is much more dynamic and complex than the one that companies faced even just 20 years ago. Whereas complexity refers to the number of inputs and outputs, dynamism refers to the amount and rate of change in the environment. The accomplishment of the plan, including the implementation of the innovation, can be linked to the importance of understanding the surroundings.

In addition, SMEs thought that they needed to be resilient. Resilience in business is defined as the ability to withstand and recover from external stresses while maintaining normal business operations and safeguarding personnel, property, and reputation. Meeting client expectations requires organisations to make adjustments to their organisational structure, technology, required skill set, materials, and methods of collaboration. Omani SMEs stated that:

[...] knowledgeable of his specializations, visiting workshops and different conferences locally, and globally that are related to his profession [...] aware of the fourth industrial revolution. (Omani SME 4)

The biggest factor is knowing about your business by reading about it and fully understanding it. For me, I didn't know much information about coffee, so my first step was to search for it on the internet. Then you can expand your knowledge about your business by attending conferences, webinars, and other sessions. The second factor is

studying your environmental investment by identifying who will be your customers to target in your business. Also, you need to have an idea of the regulations of the country regarding your business. In addition, it is very important to know your rivals and understand what you are providing to your customers and what values you are presenting to them that are not presented by your rivals in the market. Eventually, you will take the path without any sort of fear or threat. Bear in mind that you don't let your rivals become your enemies; otherwise, this will destroy your business because you won't achieve your goals and you will only try to compete with your rivals because you are afraid that they will become better than you [...] Another point is to believe that you are not perfect at everything, and you must understand that you have some flaws and blanks to fill. Also, try not to hide your thoughts and ideas because many in this world have the same ideas. For example, there are scientists in China who work on nuclear weapons, and there are other scientists who work in the same field in Russia, the USA, and other countries. (Omani SME 6)

[...] actual data, data analysis, creating new and updated work, market analysis, and SWOT analysis. Accepting fears [...] Yes, I encouraged my team to do a SWOT analysis [...] (Omani SME 9)

The ability to adapt to change and constant search for growth [...] (Omani SME 10)

[...] decent knowledge (Omani SME 11)

Knowledgeable [...] (Omani SME 12)

Knowledgeable [...] (Omani SME 14)

[...] knowledgeable [...] (Omani SME 15)

Positive Attitudes

The third factor cited by the informants as having the power to inspire innovative businesspeople is a positive attitude. Everyone a business owner interacts with is impacted by their attitude, including clients and potential clients, as well as present and potential customers, suppliers, investors, and personnel. They will spread a positive outlook if they maintain their contagious joy. Everyone in their company will be content, and clients will want to work with them. Then, they'll be able to manage their business as efficiently as possible. If individuals continue to have a negative outlook, they are more likely to encounter the reverse. Their workforce wouldn't be motivated, and neither would their customers want to buy from them or be around them. Performance for their company will consequently suffer.

Thus, a positive outlook will help them feel in control and confident and will enable them to perform at their best, including maximising the efficiency of their business by engaging in innovation. In contrast, a negative outlook can undermine their confidence, hinder performance, and paralyse their mental faculties. They narrated that it said:

Smart, positive thinker, problem solver, enthusiast, optimistic, visionary [...] no, I lost and closed my company in 2020 because of the pandemic, as labourers were freely asked to leave Oman. We had no work at that time, and all workers in construction were not permitted to work as requested by government law. (Omani SME 4)

Planning, right thinking, and passion to work as a successful entrepreneur [...] because we have a determination and a passion that does not stop to remove any barriers, adapt to the worst conditions, and exploit opportunities. (Omani SME 5)

Working smart, networking, and learning [...] not all of them at the moment. (Omani SME 7)

[...] work hard to achieve their tasks on time with smooth transaction. (Omani SME 9)

Keep trying [...] Never give up. Be more responsible and involve yourself in your daily work with your employees. We have to be at the upper level and work harder and harder. Most failures rely only on investors and neglect daily customers [...] Yes, I do. I like to team up with my employees without boundaries. I always encourage and motivate them to work harder, even if they fail or work wrongly. I do accept failures, as they can learn and change for the better. (Omani SME 11)

Smart, patient, utilize opportunities, risk taker [...] Yes (these factors exist in our company now). (Omani SME 12)

Entrepreneurs should be more risk-takers, smarter, and eager to work more to gain more money. [...] We should recruit employees and give them more freedom to work online and have more working stability. I have employees who have worked with me for three years, and I do trust them. So, I can travel more and have more [...] I am always a self-motivated fellow. (Omani SME 13)

[...] risk taker [...]. (Omani SME 14)

Smart, patient, dedicated, open-minded, accepting challenges, a fighter, measuring success, and having a clear path and focus We didn't have an entrepreneurship culture five years ago, but now we have it to encourage our kids to be innovative entrepreneurs. The USA as an example, has the most successful entrepreneurship culture, as they are ready to accept failures. We are here in Oman, which is considered a shame, and Omani cultures do not accept failures. [...] Some of them exist. I am looking at each reinforcement as some of them do like money, media shows, etc. I do consider all employees as ATUM teamwork, not employees. Establish quarterly meetings to develop and look at new technology in the Omani market and globally. I didn't interfere with employees' operations; I gave them the freedom to finish it while I looked at work quality and results. (Omani SME 15)

Financial Management

One of the informants, Omani SME 8, also identified financial management as a factor. Making a business plan and ensuring that it is followed by all departments are both steps in financial management. Its primary objective is to manage short-term working capital with an emphasis on current assets and current liabilities, as well as fluctuations in foreign exchange rates and product cycles, which is frequently accomplished through hedging. The position entails managing the treasury as well as handling money effectively and efficiently daily.

It is also responsible for long-term strategic financial management, which includes dividend policy, capital structure management, and capital budgeting (the process of allocating funds among various business units or goods). In reality, SMEs can concentrate more on other sustainability initiatives, such as developing fresh concepts or breakthroughs, when they have sound financial management. Omani SME 8 stated that:

How do you handle your money? How do you spend money? easy to get money [...] wise to spend money. (Omani SME 8)

Focus on Customers

Omani SMEs 1, 5, 10, and 11 emphasised how crucial it is for SMEs to focus on their consumers if they want to be innovative business owners. A person or organisation that purchases goods or services from a business is known as a "customer." Customers are necessary because they generate income. The consumer is revered as the king of commerce. The customer is considered in every business decision. Customers are a company's main source of income. Businesses would not survive without customers. Every company offers its goods and services in response to the requirements and preferences of its customers. The company's sales increase as more people buy the products.

As a result, the company spent a lot of money on advertising to draw customers to its goods and services. The goal is to maximise the value of the customer's life cycle, so they must keep the client happy and satisfied at all times. Omani SMEs 1, 5, 10, and 11 explained their opinion that:

Focus more on actual and potential customers, giving offers, and being flexible in payments. [...] (Omani SME 1)

Yes, it exists, taking care to display one of the products and provide the best modern services, including the preparation of a high-speed network to communicate with customers 24 hours a day. (Omani SME 5)

Yes, for instance, a hotel property that we manage has been majorly renovated recently to adapt to consumers' needs and new trends, such as introducing a trendy café in the hotel and upgrading rooms and hotel spaces according to their recommendations and preferences. (Omani SME 10)

The only way to succeed and be unique in the Omani market is we have to go beyond customer expectations. (Omani SME 11)

Government Supports in Promoting Entrepreneurial Innovation

Other than asking the senior Omani SMEs for their perspective on key factors for becoming innovative entrepreneurs, this study also asked for their experience with government support: “To your best knowledge, is there any government support for promoting entrepreneurial innovation?” Referring to the feedback from the informants, who are Omani SMEs, their opinions on entrepreneurship can be classified into two themes, as illustrated in Figure 2. These themes are (i) received government support (lectures, workshops, and financial assistance or loans), and (ii) no government support.

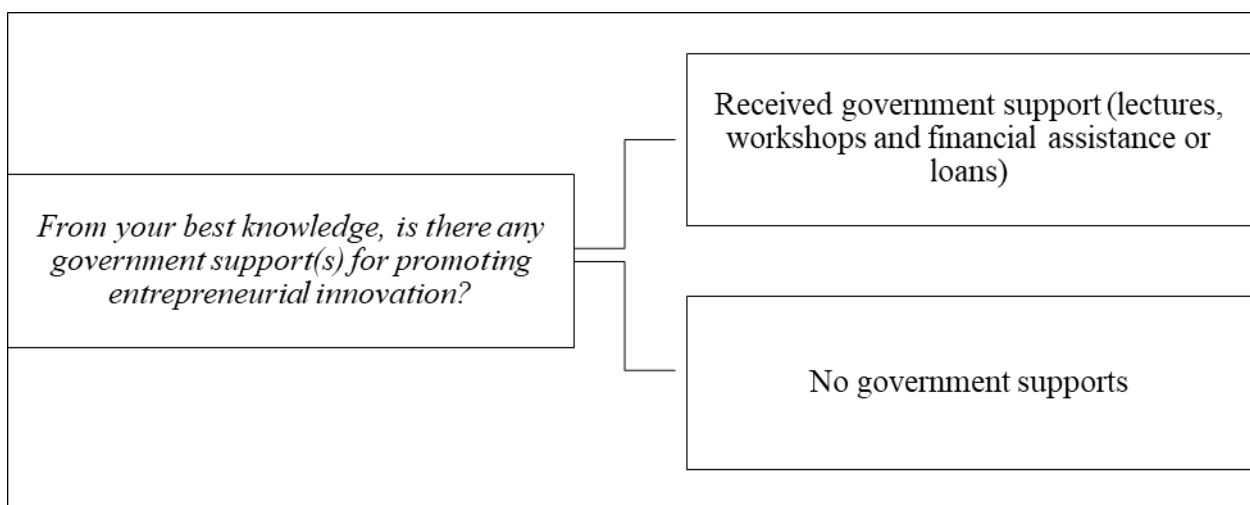


Figure 2. Government Support for Promoting Entrepreneurial Innovation

Received Government Supports (Lectures, Workshops, Program, and Financial Assistance or Loans)

The informants discuss some of the government support they received in establishing an innovative culture in their organisations. They are Omani SMEs numbers 5, 6, 8, 10, and 15. These assistance measures include giving SMEs access to lectures, workshops, and other programmes that might increase their business expertise and their capacity for creativity. Additionally, they receive financial support or loans from organisations like Sanad, Rafd, and Riyada, which help lessen their financial burden during the start-up and growth phases of their businesses. The government also offers a lower office rental. These informants explained that:

Yes, there are lectures and workshops from a theoretical point of view, and there is actual support from the Ministry of Agriculture for our activity. They are supporting us by expanding our knowledge of more creative ideas for overcoming natural disasters. The Ministry of Agriculture is providing real and remarkable support. (Omani SME 5)

Yes, there is government support, and yes, we received government assistance. Its

support is generous. For example, "Sanad," and there is a big amount of money specified for this project. Also, "Rafd" has been initiated, and it has helped Omanis start their own businesses. In our current era, Sultan Haithem has emphasised small and medium businesses, and Bank al-Tanmiyah has given money to Omanis. Moreover, the Omani Academy for Industrial Innovation has launched. I myself have a training programme in Greece funded by the government titled "Building and Changing Entrepreneurial Culture," and our leadership totally supports us because it believes that these businesses contribute to the growth of the country's economy. (Omani SME 6)

Rafd loans for SME start-ups. Yes, we received government assistance. (Omani SME 8)

Riyada is a great start to incubating and supporting local businesses. (Omani SME 10)

We need more financial culture and awareness. The government is making a programme to prepare entrepreneurs for 360-degree care (6 months), starting with marketing strategies, feasibility studies, etc. After completion of this course, you are eligible to take a bank loan (in terms of assistance), only incubated at the SME's centre, and rent an office for a cheap price only. (Omani SME 15)

No Government Supports (No Financial Assistance, Not Providing Knowledge on Innovation and No Mentoring)

The other informants stated that they did not receive any support, even though five informants (Omani SMEs 5, 6, 8, 10, and 15) noted that they had received some assistance from the government. Financial support, information about innovation, and mentors in innovation are some of the kinds of help they are looking for but have not been successful in obtaining. These unfortunate informants reported what is listed here.

No, I didn't receive any government assistance; my dad helped me. (Omani SME 1)

No, entrepreneurs are neglected because we waste our time and have no automation. No (I didn't receive any government assistance) [...] only SMEs have a project quota. (Omani SME 2)

There is no fund for innovative entrepreneurship by the Omani government, as it is not clear to every entrepreneur. We have a research and innovation council at Sultan Qaboos University, and we don't know if it's funding projects for the public as it doesn't have public awareness. Innovative entrepreneurs have no idea where to go to implement and commercialise their services or products. So, we need more guidance in this regard. Besides that, we don't have a solid background for all these parties to pay for and fund innovative entrepreneurship effectively. We haven't received any funding from the Omani government as innovative solution providers. (Omani SME 3).

There is no support or assistance from the government. (Omani SME 4)

We have not received government (financial) assistance [...] (Omani SME 5)

Very limited government support and not for home businesses. No, we didn't receive any government assistance. (Omani SME 7)

No, unfortunately, we didn't receive government support or assistance from them. The government is working as we are separating people from their tenders. (Omani SME 9)

Riyada is a great start to incubating and supporting local businesses, but it doesn't solve the lack of knowledge of the market, the supporting data, or the expertise to run it. There is no other assistance from the government. (Omani SME 10)

Yes, especially these days with young entrepreneurs finding more contracts from government projects and funding their projects financially. I did not receive any assistance from the government at all; I built my company alone. (Omani SME 11)

Not aware of any. They are in the news, not reality. (Omani SME 12)

No. Only once did we pay 1000 OMR to change décor and company logos. (Omani SME 13).

No, unfortunately. (Omani SME 14)

No, there is no mentoring pathway for entrepreneurs' next steps. [...] No tangible support. (Omani SME 15)

In contrast, three informants—Omani SMEs 5, 10, and 15—were categorised as both non-support recipients and support recipients. It is evident from the details that although they claimed to have received assistance from the government in one area, they did not in another. As an illustration, Omani SME 5 received support in the form of innovation lectures and workshops but not in the financial sense. However, they did not receive any other kind of support, according to Omani SMEs 10 and 15, who indicated that they had gotten a financial loan called a "Riyada" to help them incubate and support their regional enterprises.

5. Conclusion

In the Sultanate of Oman, innovation and entrepreneurship have been identified as two possible key drivers of economic growth. While entrepreneurship can greatly promote economic progress, one way it does so is through innovation, as practised by the Sultanate of Oman. Based on the perspective of the senior Omani SMEs, this study found five key factors involved in becoming an innovative entrepreneur, including (i) technology adoption; (ii) knowledge of the business environment and rivals as well as resilient; (iii) positive attitudes; (iv) financial management; and (v) focusing on customers. Thus, similar factors should be considered for adoption by other SMEs in becoming innovative entrepreneurs. Besides, the government also needs to provide some assistance in ensuring the SMEs have these factors that also can be considered as the key elements to be innovative.

In the meantime, while the Sultanate of Oman actively encouraged innovation-driven entrepreneurship and passed legislation to encourage the rapid growth of creative start-ups, only a subset of these businesses received government support in the form of lectures, workshops, financial assistance, or loans. The government needs to make extra efforts to ensure that more SMEs get the benefits of its continuous programmes. The government needs to reach out to all SMEs and ensure none of them is excluded from any support provided. Besides, the SMEs also need to be active to be innovative. In other words, they need to be on the lookout for government assistance programmes and submit complete applications.

Based on the strengthened evidence acquired from the informants, this study contributes to the body of knowledge particularly related to the innovative entrepreneurship culture, specifically from the perspective of senior SMEs in Oman. In other words, this study provides valuable qualitative information to the existing body of knowledge about Omani SMEs by elucidating the essential variables and government support for becoming innovative entrepreneurs to optimise the long-term performance of SMEs and Oman's economic growth as a whole. This study also supports the Open Innovation Theory introduced by Chesbrough (2003) as this theory also promotes business innovation.

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Authors contributions

Khalid Suraid Salim Alhattali was responsible for the study design, data collection, and drafted the manuscript. The other authors (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rosmini Omar, Sulaiyam Aziz Alrumaidhi, and Dr. Aslinda Ramely) revised and approved the final manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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