

Technology and innovation at work: Shaping the future of business performance



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The 21st century has witnessed an accelerating convergence of technology, innovation and human creativity reshaping not only how businesses operate but also how they define performance and success. Digitalisation, artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics and interconnected systems are now integral to business processes, enabling more efficient decision-making, customer engagement and organisational agility. Yet, these advances also raise critical questions about inclusivity, adaptability and institutional readiness, particularly in developing contexts where structural challenges persist.

The selected articles represent diverse methodological approaches including conceptual analyses and empirical investigations that collectively demonstrate how technology and innovation are transforming business landscapes in Africa and beyond.

Overview of contributions in this special collection

The opening article, *'Harnessing AI, Internet of Things, and Big Data for Social and Economic Growth in Africa: A Bibliometric Review'*, by Ismaila and Beneke (2025), provides a conceptual and systematic overview of how digital technologies intersect with Africa's developmental agenda. Through an analysis of research trends and thematic patterns, the article reveals that AI, Internet of Things (IoT) and Big Data possess immense potential to accelerate the attainment of several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The article highlights that while these technologies offer transformative opportunities, they also present implementation challenges related to infrastructure, governance and policy alignment. Its conceptual framing sets the intellectual foundation for the special issue by positioning technology as both a catalyst and a challenge for inclusive, sustainable growth in Africa.

Extending the conversation from potential to practice, *'Applying Blockchain to Improve Supply Chain Transparency, Visibility and Traceability in the South African Manufacturing Sector'* by Langton, Mafini and Tlale (2025), presents empirical evidence of how digital technologies can enhance operational efficiency and stakeholder trust. This article demonstrates that blockchain's key characteristics, namely immutability and provenance, significantly improve transparency and traceability within manufacturing supply chains, although security aspects require further refinement. The article underscores the importance of collaboration and governance frameworks for successful blockchain implementation. It advocates consortium-based engagement among suppliers, regulators and customers to ensure shared accountability. In doing so, the article provides a practical illustration of how innovation at work depends on coordinated leadership and institutional readiness, not merely technological capability.

The human dimension of innovation is vividly captured in *'Enhancing Tax Literacy among South African Small Business Owners'* by Cheteni, Lappeman and Matsongoni (2025). Drawing on empirical insights, the study examines how knowledge and attitudes towards taxation influence compliance and sustainability in small enterprises. The article reveals that many small business owners face challenges linked to legislative complexity, administrative burden and limited access to professional support. Yet, adaptive strategies such as peer learning, consulting experts and tax planning demonstrate the sector's resilience and willingness to innovate. This article's contribution foregrounds the role of literacy, both financial and regulatory, as a driver of business performance. It highlights that technological innovation must be matched by institutional and educational support to empower entrepreneurs to navigate evolving business environments effectively. The study's implications for policy and management align closely with broader debates on inclusive innovation and economic participation.

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled 'Technology and Innovation at Work: Shaping the Future of Business Performance', under the expert guidance of guest editors Dr Mamorena Lucia Matsoso and Prof. Nkosivile Madinga.

Innovation in the world of work also demands innovation within the institutions that prepare future business leaders. Two complementary studies, 'Enhancing University Entrepreneurship Programmes for Postgraduate Students: A Case Study in One University in the Eastern Cape' by Chagi and Ncanywa (2025) and 'Investigating the Efficacy of University-Led Business Incubators on Graduate Unemployment' by Mcolisi, Melody, Ashley, Lethabo and Kanayo (2025), explore how universities can act as catalysts for entrepreneurial development and employability. The first article identifies significant gaps in experiential learning, mentorship and resource accessibility within postgraduate entrepreneurship education. It calls for the establishment of innovation hubs, mentorship networks and digital support systems that bridge the divide between academic theory and real-world practice. The second article examines the structural and cultural limitations affecting university-led business incubators (ULBIs), highlighting issues such as weak industry linkages, financial constraints and misaligned institutional missions.

Together, these studies advance a critical conversation about universities as innovation ecosystems. They argue that effective entrepreneurship education requires not only curricular reform but also institutional transformation embedding incubation, funding and monitoring mechanisms into university structures to cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets and pathways for graduate employability.

Concluding remarks

Collectively, the articles in this special collection demonstrate that technological innovation, institutional readiness and

human capability are mutually reinforcing dimensions of business performance. In essence, this special collection contributes to the ongoing discourse on the *future of work and innovation in Africa*, positioning technology not as a distant frontier but as a lived, context-specific reality that must be managed strategically and inclusively.

The editors extend appreciation to the authors, reviewers and conference participants whose efforts have shaped this collection. Gratitude is also extended to the *Acta Commercii* for offering a platform to showcase research from the 2nd International Conference on Business Innovation and Incubation (ICBII) in a special issue, our partner institutions and the ICBII organising committee for fostering an environment of collaboration between academia and industry, where ideas are tested, debated and refined.

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