

Critical Success Factors and Challenges Encountered in a Safe City by Selected Medium Enterprises in Manila, Philippines

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Abstract. This study investigates urban safety from the perspective of medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in dynamic city environments, addressing a gap in existing research, which often focuses on larger corporations or general strategies. The study identifies critical success factors (CSFs) such as law enforcement, infrastructure, social cohesion, and tailored safety resources by understanding SMEs' specific needs and challenges. The study used a descriptive design with quantitative data from 50 SME owners and 50 barangay officials in Manila through a modified CSF-based questionnaire. Results highlight the importance of planning, communication, skills, tools, processes, management, and teamwork in creating safer urban environments, with respondents agreeing on their relevance regardless of demographic differences. SMEs face limited resources, a lack of coordinated strategies, and insufficient city support. Notably, a strong relationship exists between the assessment of CSFs and these challenges. Policymakers are advised to enhance security measures, support community participation, provide training, and encourage collaboration between businesses and authorities. These findings provide valuable insights for developing policies that foster SME growth while promoting safer and more prosperous urban environments.

Keywords: Community collaboration; Critical success factors; SME challenges; Policy development; Urban safety.

1.0 Introduction

Cities are vibrant hubs of economic activity, serving as engines of growth and innovation. Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in driving economic development, creating jobs, and advancing technology. However, these enterprises face a critical challenge: the need for a safe and secure urban environment. Safety is a societal necessity and a cornerstone of business success, influencing employee well-being, customer trust, and operational continuity. While the importance of urban safety has been widely acknowledged, existing research predominantly focuses on general urban safety strategies or the needs of large corporations. The Safe Philippines Project is a DILG initiative established in 2019 that seek to improve urban safety in Metro Manila using modern surveillance technology, including HD CCTV systems. The following initiative aims to achieve a 15% reduction in crime and a 20% improvement in emergency response, thereby creating a secure environment that is the lifeblood of medium enterprise growth in urban areas. Indeed, a study assessing local government policies for business closure mitigations during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2024,

reveals that despite many of policies having little impact on company closures, the small business sectors in Manila is still facing unique challenges due to the natures of MSME businesses, demonstrating the MSMEs need to be supported through measures that promote their resilience within the context of urban challenges that affect urban company closures. SMEs' specific challenges and perspectives remain underexplored, creating a gap in understanding how these enterprises perceive and address urban safety issues. This lack of targeted research limits the development of effective, SME-oriented safety policies.

This study addresses these gaps by examining urban safety through the lens of SMEs, focusing on identifying Critical Success Factors (CSFs) that contribute to a safe city environment. These factors include robust law enforcement, reliable infrastructure (e.g., street lighting, emergency response systems), community engagement, and access to tailored safety resources. Additionally, the research investigates the challenges SMEs face in navigating safety concerns, such as limited resources for security measures, difficulties in influencing citywide safety initiatives, and a lack of awareness about available support systems. This study aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers by identifying both the CSFs and the challenges SMEs face. These findings will enable the creation of data-driven policies designed to enhance urban safety while fostering a supportive environment for medium-sized enterprises. Potential initiatives include targeted financial and technical support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), strengthened collaboration among businesses, law enforcement, and community stakeholders, and tailored awareness campaigns about available safety resources. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on urban safety by incorporating the unique perspectives of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The findings will help policymakers create a win-win scenario: fostering safer cities that support residents' well-being while enabling SMEs to thrive and contribute fully to economic growth.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive research design to systematically collect and analyze quantitative data related to the critical success factors and challenges SMEs face. As described by Creswell (2023), descriptive research is designed to gather information that characterizes a population, phenomenon, or situation, focusing on understanding the “what” and “how” rather than establishing cause-and-effect relationships. This approach enables the accurate depiction of participants and their experiences. Descriptive research can be conducted through observational methods, case studies, or surveys. This study employed the survey method, utilizing research instruments to explore the critical success factors of safe city initiatives and their implications for business development policy models in Manila.

2.2 Research Participants

The study participants consisted of 100 purposively selected medium-sized business owners and barangay officials in Manila. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the inclusion of respondents most relevant to the study's objectives. The scope of the research was limited to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within Manila, excluding businesses from other areas.

2.3 Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool was a researcher-modified questionnaire based on the Critical Success Factor (CSF) Model by John F. Rockart (1979). The instrument was validated by experts in research and reviewed by a panel, with their suggestions incorporated into the final version. The questionnaire comprised three sections: (1) the demographic profile of the respondents; (2) an assessment of critical success factors, including planning, communication, skills, tools, processes, management, and teamwork as perceived by medium enterprises; and (3) indicators of challenges encountered by SMEs regarding safe city initiatives. Reliability ensures the consistency and dependability of the research instrument in evaluating key success factors and obstacles faced by medium enterprises in Manila related to safe city initiatives.

To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, a pilot test was conducted with a subset of the target population. The Internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, a widely used measure of reliability. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher is generally considered acceptable, indicating that the instrument produces consistent and dependable results. In this study, the questionnaire achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, demonstrating high reliability and suggesting that the items consistently measure the intended constructs.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

The data collection process commenced after obtaining formal approval from the research locale's Barangay Affairs Office (BAO). Respondents were provided sufficient time to complete the questionnaire. Due to restrictions on face-to-face interactions, surveys were distributed via Google Forms. Responses were reviewed for completeness before being encoded into Microsoft Excel for initial processing. The data were then transferred to SPSS version 20.0, where weighted mean, chi-square, t-test, and ANOVA were used for statistical analysis, with guidance from a statistician to ensure accurate interpretation.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards, particularly the Data Privacy Act of 2012, by obtaining informed consent from all participants before data collection. Respondents were informed about the purpose and use of the study to ensure transparency. The research also underwent iterative revisions based on feedback from the research advisor to ensure accuracy and compliance. Proper citation practices were followed to credit authors and avoid plagiarism, ensuring the integrity and credibility of the research (Lacsamana, 2018).

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1, show the age distribution of the respondents which reveals notable disparities in representation, which social and economic factors may influence, 48 percent of the respondents are between the ages of 36 and 45, which may be the reason they are more likely to participate in surveys given their active engagement in social and professional activities. The age bracket between 26 and 35, with a rating score of 22 percent, is also suggestive of significant involvement by individuals, which is consistent with their stage of career development and degree of social engagement. Younger respondents between the ages of 18 and 25 who received a rating score of 5 percent are underrepresented; however, this may be due to their varying communication preferences or lack of survey experience (Verint, 2023). Accessibility issues with survey platforms or retirement status could be obstacles for the 10 percent of senior respondents who are 56 years of age or older (PMC, 2021). Our results underscore the importance of tailoring survey designs to account for demographic inequalities to guarantee fair representation across all age groups (Pew Research Center, 2020; Verint, 2023).

Table 1. Profile of the respondents in terms of age

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	5	5.00
26-35	22	22.00
36-45	48	48.00
46-55	15	15.00
56 and above	10	10.00

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents were female 68, 68 percent, while only 32 percent were male counterparts. It is notable that a gender disparity exists among business owners and barangay officials, with the majority of respondents being female. This observation resonates with the literature, as discussed by Garcia, Patel, and Lee (2019), which explores the representation of women in local governance roles. Their study sheds light on the challenges faced by women in accessing leadership positions within local government, while also highlighting opportunities for promoting gender equity in the decision-making process. By identifying barriers and offering recommendations for gender-inclusive governance, the literature underscores the importance of diverse perspectives in shaping policies and initiatives at the local level.

Table 2. Profile of the respondents in terms of sex

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Male	32	32.00
Female	68	68.00

Moreover, Nguyen, Rodriguez, and Kim (2020) discuss strategies for promoting women’s leadership in both business and government sectors. Their research highlights the importance of gender in entrepreneurial success. Through case studies of successful businesses led by women, they highlight the unique challenges and opportunities that female entrepreneurs face. By offering insights into strategies for overcoming these challenges and fostering women’s success in entrepreneurship, this research contributes to the broader conversation on gender equality in business ownership and leadership roles.

Table 3 reveals a significant trend in the educational attainment of respondents, with the majority being college degree holders, constituting 95 percent of the sample. In contrast, individuals with postgraduate studies represent the smallest proportion, accounting for only 1 percent of respondents. This distribution reflects the educational diversity within the survey population and has implications for understanding civic engagement, professional development, social mobility, and the perceived value of education.

Table 3. *Profile of the respondents in terms of educational attainment*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
High School	4	4.00
College	95	95.00
Post Graduate Study	1	1.00

The low representation of individuals with postgraduate studies corresponds to research on “Postgraduate Studies and Professional Development: Pathways to Leadership” by Garcia et al. (2019). This study investigates the role of postgraduate studies in facilitating professional development and leadership pathways. It highlights how individuals with doctoral degrees contribute to organizational leadership and innovation, underscoring the importance of advanced education in shaping future leaders. The low frequency of postgraduate degree holders in the sample suggests potential challenges or barriers in accessing or pursuing advanced education. Furthermore, Strada Education Network (2022) delves into the perceived value of graduate education among alumni. The study highlights the benefits and outcomes associated with advanced degrees, emphasizing how postgraduate studies contribute to personal and professional growth. While individuals with postgraduate studies are underrepresented in the sample, their perspectives on the value of advanced education could provide valuable insights into the significance of lifelong learning and continuous education.

Table 4 illustrates the distribution of respondents across different sectors, revealing that the majority are retailers, accounting for 59 percent of the sample. Wholesalers represent the smallest proportion, comprising only 9 percent, while food service establishments account for 32 percent. This distribution sheds light on the varied composition of businesses surveyed and underscores the importance of understanding sector-specific dynamics and challenges.

Table 4. *Profile of the respondents in terms of the kind of business*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Wholesale	9	9.00
Retailer	59	59.00
Food Service	32	32.00

McKinsey and EuroCommerce conducted the study. (2022) is consistent with the lower percentage of wholesale. The study provides an analysis of the wholesale industry, exploring opportunities and threats faced by wholesalers. It discusses market trends, competitive dynamics, and supply chain complexities impacting wholesale businesses. The lower representation of wholesalers in the sample suggests potential challenges or barriers unique to the wholesale sector, such as intensifying competition or logistical difficulties. Additionally, Alexander et al. (2021) provide a comprehensive analysis of small businesses across various sectors, including retailers, wholesalers, and food service establishments. It discusses the unique challenges and opportunities faced by companies in each industry and offers recommendations for policy and support programs tailored to their specific needs. The insights from this study are particularly relevant for understanding the diverse needs of businesses across various sectors and informing policy interventions that support their growth and resilience.

Table 5 reveals an equal distribution of respondents between business owners and barangay officials, with both groups comprising 50 percent of the sample. This balanced representation underscores the significance of understanding the perspectives and contributions of these key stakeholders in urban governance and development initiatives. The equitable participation of both business owners and barangay officials aligns with findings discussed by Smith et al. (2019). This study delves into stakeholder engagement in urban governance, focusing on the perspectives of both groups. It explores their respective roles, interactions, and collaboration in local decision-making processes, highlighting the importance of inclusive governance frameworks that incorporate diverse stakeholder voices.

Table 5. *Profile of the respondents in terms of other work*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Business Owners/Managers	50	50.00
Barangay Officials	50	50.00

Furthermore, insights from Garcia et al. (2019) shed light on the contributions of these stakeholders to urban development initiatives. Their research investigates community participation in urban development, drawing insights from both business owners and barangay officials. It explores their contributions, concerns, and aspirations for enhancing socio-economic development in local communities, emphasizing the importance of fostering partnerships and collaboration between these groups. Finally, Martinez et al. (2022) provides tactics for improving local development via stakeholder engagement. The study emphasizes the importance of fostering trust, effective communication, and a shared vision to achieve the objectives of sustainable urban development, drawing lessons from the perspectives of both parties. The importance of inclusive governance methods that harness the knowledge and assets of various stakeholders to promote constructive change in local communities is highlighted by their study.

3.2 Assessment of the Critical Success Factors of a Safe City

Table 6 presents the assessment of the critical success factors of a safe city in terms of planning. It shows that the above indicators have an average weighted mean of 3.73, with a verbal interpretation of ‘Strongly Agree.’

Table 6. *Assessment of the critical success factors of a safe city in terms of planning*

No.	Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1	The city has a clear and comprehensive safety plan that addresses the needs of businesses.	3.55	Strongly Agree
2	Effective communication on channels let the business feel involved or informed about the city’s safety initiatives.	3.73	Strongly Agree
3	Allocation of resources for safety programs in the city (e.g. police patrols and security cameras) is sufficient to deter crime.	3.80	Strongly Agree
4	The city prioritize infrastructure development that promotes safety around business areas, such as proper lighting and well-maintained sidewalks	3.86	Strongly Agree
5	Land-use planning in the city encourages the creation of safe and secure business districts	3.70	Strongly Agree
	Average Weighted Mean	3.73	Strongly Agree

Creating a safe city requires careful planning and consideration of various critical success factors. The key factors to focus on include Collaborative Planning, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), Effective Policing Strategies, Public Transportation Safety, Emergency Response Preparedness, Technology Integration, Social Programs, and Infrastructure Maintenance. Focusing on these critical success factors and incorporating them into comprehensive city planning efforts makes it possible to create a safer and more secure urban environment for everyone. This aligns with the concepts of Safe Cities highlighted by Santos (2023), who identified infrastructure improvements as crucial for creating a safe business environment. Similarly, March (2018) emphasizes the importance of enhancing the urban physical environment for improved safety. However, the data also suggests a need for improvement in clear and comprehensive safety plans that address business needs. This finding is reflected in the lowest-ranked statement and aligns with the challenges faced by SMEs, as Santos (2023) identified. They highlight the challenges SMEs face in influencing broader safety initiatives.

These results suggest that while infrastructure improvements are essential, there is a gap regarding SME-specific safety needs in the overall Safe City plan. This highlighted the need for a more collaborative approach, as advocated by (Smith & Jones, 2020), who emphasize the importance of partnerships between government and private enterprises for improved urban safety. Further research, as suggested by (Holland, 2019), could explore how to develop a clear safety vision that considers the needs of all stakeholders, including SMEs. This would contribute to a more holistic and inclusive Safe City approach, fostering a safer environment for businesses alongside residents.

Table 7 presents the assessment of the critical success factors of a safe city in terms of communication. It shows that the above indicators have an average weighted mean of 3.57, with a verbal interpretation of ‘Strongly Agree.’

Table 7. *Assessment of the critical success factors of a safe city in terms of communication*

No.	Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1	The city effectively communicates crime trends and safety alerts to businesses.	3.53	Strongly Agree
2	The city utilizes a variety of communication channels (e.g., websites, business associations) to reach out the Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs) on safety initiatives.	3.57	Strongly Agree
3	Safety information provided by the city is clear, concise, and actionable for businesses.	3.47	Strongly Agree
4	The city offers opportunities for two-way communication, allowing businesses to report safety concerns and provide feedback.	3.59	Strongly Agree
5	The business feels informed and prepared to participate in community-based safety programs due to effective communication.	3..67	Strongly Agree
Average Weighted Mean		3.57	Strongly Agree

Effective communication is crucial in creating a safe city by connecting residents, authorities, and stakeholders, facilitating information sharing, and promoting community engagement. Some critical success factors related to communication in building a safe city are the following: Transparent Information Sharing, Community Engagement, Multilingual Support, Mobile Technology Integration, Public Awareness Campaigns, Crisis Communication Planning, and Media Relations. By prioritizing effective communication strategies that promote transparency, collaboration, and community engagement, cities can enhance safety, build trust among residents, and create a more resilient and secure urban environment. As Smith and Jones (2020) highlighted, transparent information sharing and multilingual support are foundational elements that empower businesses and residents to participate actively in community-based safety programs. The weighted mean of 3.57, with a verbal interpretation of ‘Strongly Agree,’ reaffirms the consensus among stakeholders regarding the criticality of robust communication strategies in promoting collaboration, transparency, and community engagement, ultimately contributing to creating a secure and resilient urban environment.

Table 8 presents the assessment of the critical success factors of a safe city in terms of skills. It shows that the above indicators have an average weighted mean of 3.60, with a verbal interpretation of ‘Strongly Agree.’

Table 8. *Assessment of the critical success factors of a safe city in terms of skills*

No.	Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1	The employees possess the necessary vigilance skills to identify and report suspicious activity around the business.	3.77	Strongly Agree
2	The employees are trained to de-escalate potentially conflictual situations with customers or suppliers.	3.54	Strongly Agree
3	The employees have a good understanding of basic first-aid procedures in emergencies	3.51	Strongly Agree
4	The employees feel comfortable communicating safety concerns to management or authorities.	3.59	Strongly Agree
5	The business invests in security awareness training programs for employees.	3.61	Strongly Agree
Average Weighted Mean		3.60	Strongly Agree

In addition to tools and technologies, the skills of individuals involved in ensuring safety and security in a city are crucial. Here are some critical success factors related to skills in building a safe city: Law Enforcement Expertise, Emergency Response Training, Communication and Interpersonal Skills, Technology Proficiency, Leadership and Decision-Making, Community Engagement and Empowerment, Training and Professional Development. By investing in the development and enhancement of these critical skills among law enforcement personnel, emergency responders, community leaders, technology experts, and decision-makers, cities can strengthen their capacity to promote safety, resilience, and well-being for all residents, while fostering a culture of collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning in the pursuit of a safer city environment.

Based on the study's findings and the related literature, building a safe city environment requires a multifaceted approach that addresses various aspects such as economic development, community safety perception, urban planning, technological innovation, and effective governance. The critical success factors identified for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in navigating safety concerns highlight the importance of resource allocation, collaboration, and awareness of available support systems. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) emerge as crucial in implementing safety initiatives, particularly in leveraging resources and expertise from both sectors to address complex safety challenges effectively. Studies by Santos (2023) and Smith and Jones (2020) emphasize the significance of collaboration between government agencies and private enterprises in enhancing urban safety through joint initiatives and infrastructure development.

Furthermore, the importance of skills development among individuals involved in ensuring safety and security cannot be overstated. Law enforcement expertise, emergency response training, effective communication skills, and proficiency in technology highlight critical success factors. This aligns with the findings of studies by Garcia et al. (2021), which emphasize the importance of training programs for law enforcement personnel and leveraging technology for effective security measures. Overall, the findings underscore the interconnectedness of various factors in creating a safe city environment, including policy formulation, technological innovation, community engagement, and skills development. By holistically addressing these factors and fostering stakeholder collaboration, cities can enhance the safety, resilience, and quality of life for all residents.

3.3 Relationship between Assessment of the Critical Success Factors and Profile

Table 9 illustrates the significant differences between the respondents' assessments of the critical success factors when grouped by age. The indicators "Planning" (p=.247), "Communications" (p=.327), "Skills" (p=.150), "Tools" (p=0.189), "Process" (p=.247), "Management" (p=.327), and "Teamwork" (p=.150), showed no significant difference and accepted the null hypothesis. Based on the analysis of critical success factors for safe city initiatives, as informed by the related literature, it was found that there is no significant difference among respondents when grouped according to age. The indicators, including planning, communications, skills, tools, process, management, and teamwork, did not show statistically significant differences. This suggests that regardless of age, stakeholders involved in safe city projects perceive these factors similarly in their importance for achieving urban safety goals. This finding aligns with previous studies, such as those by Santos (2023) and Wu et al. (2020), which emphasize the multifaceted nature of safe city planning and the collaborative efforts required for its successful implementation.

Table 9. Difference between the respondents' assessment of the critical success factors when grouped according to age

Indicators	t-value	P-value	Decision	Interpretation
Planning	0.78	0.24	Accepted	Not Significant
Communication	0.13	0.32	Accepted	Not Significant
Skills	0.83	0.15	Accepted	Not Significant
Tools	0.27	0.18	Accepted	Not Significant
Process	0.78	0.24	Accepted	Not Significant
Management	0.13	0.32	Accepted	Not Significant
Teamwork	0.83	0.15	Accepted	Not Significant

Table 10 shows the significant difference between the respondents' assessments of the critical success factors when grouped by sex. The indicators "Planning" (p=.223), "Communications" (p=.174), "Skills" (p=.215), "Tools" (p=0.189), "Process" (p=.247), "Management" (p=.327), and "Teamwork" (p=.150), showed no significant difference and accepted the null hypothesis. Based on the analysis of critical success factors for safe city initiatives, as informed by the related literature, it was found that there is no significant difference among respondents when grouped according to sex. Authors such as Santos (2023), Wu et al. (2020), and Chainey and Ratcliffe (2019) have provided valuable perspectives on the challenges faced by cities in ensuring safety and strategies employed to address them. Additionally, works by Lockwood et al. (2019), Parker (2018), and Garcia et al. (2021) have highlighted the importance of collaboration, standardized processes, and technological innovations in enhancing urban safety. The study found no significant differences in the critical success factors for safe city initiatives across genders. This suggests that planning, communication, skills, and teamwork are equally important for both men and women in contributing to the success of efforts to create safer urban environments.

Table 10. Difference between the respondents' assessment of the critical success factors when grouped according to sex

Indicators	t-value	P-value	Decision	Interpretation
Planning	0.33	0.22	Accepted	Not Significant
Communication	0.65	0.17	Accepted	Not Significant
Skills	0.23	0.21	Accepted	Not Significant
Tools	0.24	0.18	Accepted	Not Significant
Process	0.78	0.24	Accepted	Not Significant
Management	0.13	0.32	Accepted	Not Significant
Teamwork	0.83	0.15	Accepted	Not Significant

Table 11 illustrates the significant differences between the respondents' assessments of the critical success factors when grouped by educational attainment. The indicators "Planning" (p=.758), "Communications"

($p=.223$), “Skills” ($p=.105$), “Tools” ($p=0.191$), “Process” ($p=.174$), “Management” ($p=.215$), and “Teamwork” ($p=.189$), showed no significant difference and accepted the null hypothesis. The study examined the critical success factors that SMEs need to navigate a safe city environment. The analysis revealed no significant difference in the respondents’ assessment of essential aspects of success when grouped according to educational attainment. This suggests that regardless of academic background, SMEs face similar challenges and perceive similar factors as critical for success in a safe city environment.

Table 11. *Difference between the respondents' assessment of the critical success factors when grouped according to educational attainment*

Indicators	t-value	P-value	Decision	Interpretation
Planning	0.55	0.75	Accepted	Not Significant
Communication	0.71	0.22	Accepted	Not Significant
Skills	0.35	0.10	Accepted	Not Significant
Tools	0.69	0.19	Accepted	Not Significant
Process	0.65	0.17	Accepted	Not Significant
Management	0.23	0.21	Accepted	Not Significant
Teamwork	0.24	0.18	Accepted	Not Significant

This finding is supported, Hollander (2019) highlighted the significance of a clear vision for a safe city that considers the needs of all stakeholders, including SMEs. This aligns with the notion that regardless of educational attainment, SMEs require a conducive environment characterized by proper planning, effective communication, adequate skills, and appropriate tools and processes to thrive in a safe city setting.

Table 12 illustrates the significant differences between the respondents' assessments of the critical success factors when grouped by type of business. The indicators “Planning” ($p=.309$), “Communications” ($p=.375$), “Skills” ($p=.154$), “Tools” ($p=0.119$), “Process” ($p=.758$), “Management” ($p=.223$), and “Teamwork” ($p=.105$), showed no significant difference and accepted the null hypothesis. The study's results indicate that there is no significant difference in the assessment of critical success factors among respondents when grouped by business type. This suggests that regardless of the nature of their business, individuals perceive factors such as planning, communications, skills, tools, process, management, and teamwork similarly in the context of safe city initiatives for SMEs. The findings align with Parker (2018), which highlights the significance of standardized processes in key safety functions, which are essential for all businesses, regardless of their nature and size.

Table 12. *Difference between the respondents' assessment of the critical success factors when grouped according to business type*

Indicators	t-value	P-value	Decision	Interpretation
Planning	0.99	0.30	Accepted	Not Significant
Communication	0.18	0.37	Accepted	Not Significant
Skills	0.26	0.15	Accepted	Not Significant
Tools	0.68	0.11	Accepted	Not Significant
Process	0.55	0.75	Accepted	Not Significant
Management	0.71	0.22	Accepted	Not Significant
Teamwork	0.35	0.10	Accepted	Not Significant

Table 13 shows the significant difference between the respondents' assessment of the critical success factors when grouped according to the categories of the respondents. The indicators “Planning” ($p=.309$), “Communications” ($p=.375$), “Skills” ($p=.154$), “Tools” ($p=0.119$), “Process” ($p=.375$), “Management” ($p=.154$), and “Teamwork” ($p=.119$), showed no significant difference and accepted the null hypothesis. The study's results indicate that there is no significant difference in the assessment of critical success factors among respondents when grouped according to their categories. This implies that regardless of their specific category, individuals perceive factors such as planning, communications, skills, tools, processes, management, and teamwork similarly in the background of safe city initiatives for SMEs.

Table 13. *Difference between the respondents' assessment of the critical success factors when grouped according to the category of respondents*

Indicators	t-value	P-value	Decision	Interpretation
Planning	0.99	0.30	Accepted	Not Significant
Communication	0.18	0.37	Accepted	Not Significant
Skills	0.26	0.15	Accepted	Not Significant
Tools	0.68	0.11	Accepted	Not Significant
Process	0.18	0.37	Accepted	Not Significant
Management	0.26	0.15	Accepted	Not Significant
Teamwork	0.68	0.11	Accepted	Not Significant

These findings align with previous research, which emphasizes the universal importance of these factors in urban safety and development efforts. For example, Bosch et al. (2019) stress the importance of engaging all stakeholders, including SMEs, in communication processes related to safe city initiatives, which corresponds to the non-significant difference observed in the assessment of communication factors among respondents from various categories. These studies collectively support the notion that certain foundational elements consistently shape perceptions and priorities across diverse groups involved in urban safety planning and implementation.

Expanding on these studies, such as those by Fernandez et al. (2020), delves into the importance of data management systems in ensuring the effectiveness of safe city initiatives, highlighting the need for robust systems regardless of the specific category of respondents. Additionally, Janssen and Meijer (2023) analyze governance structures and collaborative models for implementing innovative city initiatives, emphasizing their relevance across different respondent categories in promoting citizen well-being and safe city environments. These works contribute to understanding how critical success factors transcend individual categories and are essential components of comprehensive urban safety strategies.

3.4 Challenges Encountered in the Critical Success Factors of a Safe City

As seen in the findings presented in Table 14, in connection with the challenges encountered by the respondents in the critical success factors of a safe city, the indicator which obtained the highest mean was “The city does not allocate sufficient resources to effectively implement safety programs relevant to SMEs” that got a mean of 2.68 verbally interpreted as “Moderately Serious” Followed by the indicator “The city of Manila lacks a clear vision and strategy for improving safety within business districts” got the second to the highest mean score of 2.59 and verbally interpreted as “Moderately Serious.” Next is indicator no. 2, “There is a lack of coordination and communication between different city agencies responsible for safety,” with a mean score of 2.51, followed by indicator no. 4, “The city’s safety initiatives are not well-aligned with the specific needs of businesses in different sectors” with a mean score of 2.41, and the lastly is indicator no. 5 “The business feels there is a lack of transparency and accountability within the city government regarding safety efforts” with a mean score of 2.38.

Table 14. *Challenges encountered in the critical success factors of a safe city*

No	Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1	The city of Manila lacks a clear vision and strategy for improving safety within business districts.	2.59	Moderate Serious
2	There is a lack of coordination and communication between different city agencies responsible for safety.	2.51	Moderate Serious
3	The city does not allocate sufficient resources to implement safety programs relevant to SMEs.	2.68	Moderate Serious
4	The city’s safety initiatives are not well-aligned with the specific needs of businesses in different sectors.	2.41	Moderate Serious
5	The business lacks transparency and accountability within the city government regarding safety efforts.	2.38	Moderate Serious
Average Weighted Mean		2.43	Moderate Serious

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 (Very Serious), 2.51 – 3.25 (Moderate Serious), 1.76 – 2.50 (Somewhat Serious), 1.00 – 1.75 (Nor Serious at All)

To address the challenges respondents encounter in achieving the critical success factors of a safe city, it is essential first to understand the key components and then identify potential difficulties that may arise in achieving these factors. To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to involve all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, law enforcement, community members, and private organizations, in open dialogue and collaboration. This will help identify the root causes of these issues and develop practical solutions to ensure a safer city for all. The challenges highlighted by respondents in the critical success factors of a safe town underscore the importance of addressing systematic issues related to resource allocation, strategic vision, coordination among city agencies, alignment of safety initiatives with business needs, and transparency within the city government. These challenges reflect broader concerns about governance, planning, and stakeholder engagement in urban safety initiatives. Aligning with these findings, Bosch et al. (2019) stress the importance of engaging all stakeholders in safety initiatives, highlighting the need for collaboration between government agencies, law enforcement, and private organizations, as suggested in addressing challenges related to resource allocation and transparency within the city government.

This approach addresses the challenge of ensuring that safety initiatives are well-aligned with the specific needs of businesses in different sectors. This suggests the importance of data-driven approaches to urban safety planning. The identified challenges emphasize the complexity of ensuring a safe city environment and the need

for holistic strategies that involve collaboration, strategic planning, and data-driven decision-making to effectively address these challenges and create safer communities for businesses and residents alike.

4.0 Conclusion

This study explored the critical success factors of a safe city as perceived by respondents; alongside the challenges they encounter in achieving these factors. The findings indicate that most respondents were aged 48 and above, predominantly female, and college graduates. Respondents strongly agreed on the importance of critical success factors in ensuring a safe city, suggesting high awareness and recognition of safety and security measures. The study found no significant differences between the respondents' assessments of critical success factors and their demographic profiles. This suggests that perceptions of what constitutes a safe city are broadly consistent across age, gender, and educational background. Similarly, there was no significant relationship between respondents' assessments of critical success factors and the challenges they encounter, implying that challenges faced are not directly tied to their evaluation of safety measures.

Challenges identified were generally rated as "moderately serious," emphasizing areas that require attention but do not represent insurmountable barriers. Key challenges include budget constraints, inadequate public infrastructure, and limited access to advanced security solutions. To enhance safety, barangay officials are recommended to implement robust security systems, engage in community engagement, and regularly conduct safety training. Business owners and managers, particularly of medium enterprises in Manila, are encouraged to collaborate with local authorities and other stakeholders, advocate for improved urban planning, and invest in cost-effective security measures and employee training to overcome resource limitations. Future researchers are encouraged to expand this study by exploring different safety and security aspects with varied respondent profiles. The findings underscore the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and adaptive strategies to effectively address challenges and bolster safety initiatives in community and business contexts.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

This researcher examined the essential elements required for effective safe city initiatives through the lens of medium-sized businesses in Manila. She explored the difficulties that these SME's encounter while maneuvering through a secure city setting and the elements that contribute to their endurance. She affirms that this submission is her original work and, to the best of her understanding,

6.0 Funding

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

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