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Leadership Strategies for Success of Small to Medium Urban Enterprises

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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Gregory R. Jackson

MS, Webster University, 2012

BS, University of Phoenix, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Despite the important role small businesses play in economic success, 50% of small businesses fail within 5 years of startup. Some small-to-medium enterprise (SME) owners cannot sustain operations and face closure because of a lack of leadership strategies to operate their business successfully. Grounded in the transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas to sustain their business more than 5 years. The participants were 3 SME owners in urban areas of Atlanta, Georgia, who have been in business for more than 5 years. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and an analysis of researcher notes along with a review of each SME owner's response to obtain information about successful leadership strategies. A thematic analysis process was used to analyze data; 3 themes emerged: focus on employees through training to improve performance, maintain the business by developing strategies for efficient operations and relate to the industry in which the business is operating. Key recommendations for SME owners include implementing employee performance training and developing strategic planning. The implications for positive social change include the potential for community enhancement opportunities through sustained employment and the leveraging of goods and services financed by SMEs increased and sustained presence.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my late Grandmother, Evadney Newton, my late mother Eleanor Jackson, my late stepfather, John Stapleton, and my late father, Herbert Fleming, all of whom encouraged me and poured into me as a young man growing up in the Bronx New York. Most important, I dedicate this study to my family, all of my brothers and sisters, and especially my children, Jasmine (deceased), Stefon, Stephen, John-Paul, Courtney, and Daeja for being more than my motivation and inspiration but my pillars of strength to complete this daunting journey. All things I do, are done so in your honor. An extra special note to Leontyne (deceased), Gwendolyn (deceased), Monique (deceased), and my Aunts, Uncles, and Cousins, with whom I am indebted to for their unwavering love and support through the years. To my Phi Beta Sigma, Notorious Lambda Phi Chapter Brothers, your support and inspiration was instrumental in my progress as well. The love and support by all of you, enabled me to reach such a wonderful milestone. I love you all beyond measure.

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Section 1: Leadership Strategies for Success of Small to Medium Urban Enterprises

Background of the Problem

Georgia small businesses employed 1.6 million people or 43.2% of the private workforce and firms with fewer than 100 employees have the largest share of small business employment (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2018). Small businesses play a crucial economic role worldwide and are the drivers of economic growth and development (Blankson, Cowan, & Darley, 2017; Cumming, Guariglia, Hou, Lee, & Newman, 2014). Small businesses create wealth, economic growth, and development in the world (Blankson et al., 2017). However, 50% of small businesses fail within 5 years of startup (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2016). Additionally, small business leaders struggle to make profit and compete over a period during start up (Wang, Hawkins, & Berman, 2014).

According to Dalpiaz, Tracey, and Phillips (2017), small-to-medium (SME) leaders lack the ability to develop and implement succession plan strategies. Leaders should construct succession planning strategies as part of their organizational framework (Dalpiaz et al., 2017). Existing literature reflect various perspectives on leadership performance and sustainability of small businesses. SME Leadership is relevant in the success of small business in urban areas.

Problem Statement

Typically, owners of small companies have limited formal organizational routines to provide guidance for sustaining their business (Glaub, Frese, Fischer, & Hoppe, 2015). Small businesses are responsible for 8.4 million of the 12.8 million new jobs created from 2000 to 2017; conversely, approximately 50% of small business owners close within 5 years of beginning operations (Small Business Administration, 2018). The general business problem is some owners of SMEs located in densely populated areas struggle to operate due to leadership shortfalls. The specific business problem is some SME owners in urban areas lack strategies for leadership necessary to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The research population consisted of three SME owners in Georgia, who have been in business beyond 5 years. The findings of this study serve as ideal business models identifying leadership strategies required for SME success. SME owners using successful leadership strategies discovered in this study may extend SMEs' business beyond 5 years. Social change may occur through the availability of jobs created from SMEs in business beyond 5 years and increased tax revenue in urban areas due to SMEs staying in business to provide funds for poverty alleviation and the expansion and improvement of city facilities such as parks and schools.

Nature of the Study

Three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Researchers in the field of qualitative inquiry collect unstructured data through interviews, participants, notes, and reflections to understand the social world by discerning its patterns (Luther, 2017). Qualitative research is applied to obtain existing information about a subject (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014). Qualitative research is appropriate when the researcher's goal is to explore in-depth social phenomena and to gain knowledge about individuals' experiences (Fu, 2019). I chose a qualitative research methodology because I collected data through inquiries from interviews, participants, notes and reflections to explore in-depth social phenomena and obtain existing information about leadership strategies to help SME owners to sustain operations beyond 5 years. A quantitative research method is the testing of theories, examining cause and effects, and making deductive conclusions (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). I did not select quantitative research method for this study because there were no theories to test, there were no examination of cause and effect and no deductive conclusions made. Mixed research blends quantitative research and qualitative research techniques to provide a comprehensive review of the circumstance (Zhang & Watanabe-Galloway, 2014). I did not utilize mixed research because there is no quantitative portion of this study.

In qualitative research methodology, there are three designs I considered: case study, phenomenological and ethnographical. A case study entails methodological flexibility through the integration of diverse paradigms, study designs and methods, as well as, exploring a contemporary phenomenon in depth within real-life context (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014; Yin, 2018). Researchers use case study design to provide a comprehensive investigation that allows for the review of multiple perspectives provided in the case study design (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). I selected a case study research design for this study because I relied on diverse paradigms, study designs of understanding SME owners' experiences in real-life context that have sustained their business beyond 5 years, from multiple data sources for evidence to study a phenomenon.

Researchers use phenomenological research design to demonstrate how participants experience and perceive phenomena (Zanarini, Frankenburg, Hennen, & Silk, 2014). I did not select phenomenological research design for this study because the information in this study is not derived from participant experiences or participant perceived phenomena. Ethnography is the study of an orderly observation and recording of human cultures (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). I did not select ethnographic research design because I did not consider human cultures for this study.

Research Question

What leadership strategies do SME owners in urban areas use to sustain their business beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

The following interview questions support the central research question:

1. What leadership strategies have you used to manage your SME toward sustaining the business beyond 5 years?
2. What leadership strategies have you found most effective for sustaining your business past 5 years?
3. How did you judge the effectiveness of strategies sustaining your business past 5 years?
4. What barriers have you encountered implementing leadership strategies to sustain your business past 5 years?
5. What did you do to manage those barriers?
6. What additional comments would you like to add about your strategies to

sustain your business beyond 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

This research study conceptual framework consists of the transformational leadership theory. According to Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), transformational leadership theory was originally introduced by Burns (1978) and then refined by Bass in 1985. The basic premise of transformational leadership theory is that leaders use skills to influence others to work toward common goals (M. Harvey, 2015). Burns (1978) and Bass explained how effective leaders use transformational leadership to sustain their organizations. Although Burns never wrote about business and rarely about formal organizational structures, he clarified the reflexive relationship between leaders and their followers (M. Harvey, 2015). Transformational leaders may use the soft power of inspirational vision and communications to achieve transformational goals to reform and transform the views of followers and the organizational culture to meet the leader's goals and objectives (Nye, 2014). Key components characterizing transformational leadership that Burns defined are knowledge, problem-solving skills, solution construction skills and social judgment (Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly, & Marks, 2000) as compared to the four aspects of transformational leadership as stated by Bass charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and consideration.

The intent of this study is not to measure or predict the influence of transformational leadership behaviors on employees. Transformational leadership occurs when leaders expand and uplift the interests of their staff, encourage mindfulness and acceptance of the organizational or team mission and encourage the focus to be on the good of the whole (Bass, 1990). Transformational leaders enhance the ability of their followers to meet the demands of an organization (Kovjanic, Schuh, Jonas, Quaquebeke, & van Dick, 2012). Transformational leadership theory is appropriate for this study, through the lens of a review of literature and a framework for data analysis, to gather information on strategies of leadership enabling SME owners to sustain their businesses successfully beyond the first 5 years.

Operational Definitions

Business capital. Business capital involves the resources available for entrepreneurs to use to create a business and to generate income (Sundararajan & Sundararajan, 2015). The capital includes human capital, social capital, cultural capital and the economic capital.

Business practices. Business practices include all operational activities that promote the desired results to output (Byrne, 2014).

Business strategies. Business strategies are a set of vision, mission, values, practices, approaches and technologies that confer a firm a competitive advantage on a market (Pattinson, 2016).

Ethical leadership. Defined as behaving normatively appropriately (Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014). The demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making (Munro & Thanem, 2018; Brown, Treviño, & Harrison 2005).

Paradox-savvy leader. An example of a different leadership style with categorized paradoxes inherent in leadership behavior and increasingly common in organizations. Four key paradoxes exist within a paradox-savvy leader: maintaining a strong sense of self while simultaneously maintaining humility, maintaining control while simultaneously letting go of control, stressing continuity while simultaneously stressing change and pursuing corporate social responsibility (Waldman & Bowen, 2016).

Succession planning. A future-focused business process that provides an avenue for leaders to identify and prepare likely successors to assume new roles with minimal disruption to the organization's operations (Manning, Jones, Jones, & Fernandez, 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs related to the study a researcher believes to be true or valid (Valentin, 2014), as well as, facts considered correct but unverified (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I considered three assumptions associated with this study. The initial assumption is that the participants of the study have familiarity with strategic leadership and whether the participants in the study possess the strategic leadership background suitable for SME success. The research question is posed to gather information regarding leadership strategies to benefit SMEs. The second assumption is the use of a qualitative case study is appropriate to explore leadership strategies for SMEs to sustain business beyond 5 years. The final assumption is the participants possess information regarding the research questions and participants in the study did not allow personal bias to impact responses provided during the interview session.

Limitations

Limitations are possible weaknesses of the study beyond control of the researcher (Morgado, Meireles, Neves, Amaral, & Ferreira, 2018) as well as vulnerabilities in research usually derived from the study of one region geographically, small sample sizes, or narrow data availability (Dowling, Brown, Legg, & Beacom, 2018). Limitations are factors in the design or methodology of a study that affect the application or interpretation of the results of the study (Merriam, 2014). Limitations affect the validity of the study based on the findings determined by the manner the design and methodology are implemented (Merriam, 2014). The SME sample size and urban location of Atlanta Ga. present limitations to the study. Given the specific location of the sampling, the findings are limited based on Atlanta Georgia generalizations; e.g., SME participant business leadership experience is a limitation of the study. The difference in leadership styles and strategies influence growth and sustainability. A final limitation is the diverse paradigm of SME experiences shaping the study phenomenon. The real-life experiences of SMEs relate to the leadership phenomena; however, the real-life experiences may be limited depending on the SME operating time in business.

Delimitations

Lewis (2015) defined delimitations as characteristics setting boundaries of the researcher that limit the scope of the study. The focus of this study is on SMEs in urban areas who have sustained business beyond 5 years; therefore, larger enterprises and SMEs who have not sustained their business beyond 5 years were not within the boundaries of the study. The scope of this study is confined to SMEs in the Atlanta, Ga.

area. Successful SMEs in the urban areas not located in Atlanta Ga. are not in the scope of this study.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

This study's findings could be of value to SME owners in urban areas because the findings can be useful for formulating a narrative regarding SME success through purposeful leadership strategies. SME owners may utilize the narrative to improve leadership strategies, enhance employee morale, increase productivity and to achieve and maintain profit gains. By using results of the study, SME owners in urban areas may develop greater strategic and leadership skills to remain sustainable, while increasing market shares, talent, stakeholder benefits and lower operational cost and employee turnover (Banker, Mashruwala, & Tripathy, 2014). Furthermore, by using or adapting the study's findings, the pool of talented business owners might improve their economic prosperity (Boyd, 2015).

Implications for Social Change

Using the results of this study, reductions in SME failures may result in increasing job opportunities in the urban environment and a decrease in neighborhood crime. The implications for positive social change include the potential for the enhancement of community standards through sustained employment and the leveraging of goods and services financed by increased SMEs sustained presence. Also, the socio-economic landscape of the urban communities may improve due to SMEs success.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The objective of this review of the professional and academic literature is to review the literature that relates to entrepreneur leadership and SMEs in urban areas that are successful. Researchers conduct literature reviews to summarize and evaluate a body of writings subject to a specific topic. Researchers also conduct literature reviews to assess what others have researched to garner new ideas on a subject and to expand upon existing research. A well-organized literature review is either chronological or thematic (Speziale & Klovienė, 2014). This thematic literature review has nine themes: transformational leadership, entrepreneurship, entrepreneur leadership, leadership and leadership skills, leadership training and development, small to medium enterprise, strategic planning, sustainable practices and employee performance.

Included in the following literature review are scholarly peer-review journals and research studies relating to transformational leadership theory. The information from the practitioners lead to information involving entrepreneur leadership and leadership strategies appropriate for SMEs in urban areas. The purpose of this qualitative, case study is to explore strategies for leadership that SME owners in urban areas need to sustain their business beyond five years. The research population consisted of SME owners located in Atlanta Georgia, who have been in business beyond five years. In the literature review, I referenced 191 peer-reviewed scholarly journals, articles, dissertations, books and web pages. The literature review conformed to the Walden University 85% rule consisting of 191 sources of which 174 references composed of current peer-reviewed scholarly journals, articles, dissertations, books and web pages from 2014 to 2019.

Ninety-one percent of the literature review references were published from 2014 to 2019 with the remaining 9% out of that spectrum. Nine percent of referenced sources range from 1978 to 2013.

The following Walden library databases are primary resources in information research: ABI/INFORM Collection, Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, SAGE Journals, and Science Direct. Additional information research resources were Google Scholar, Government websites, and Ulrich's Periodical Directory. Key terms used in the search criteria in singular and combinations are *leadership, entrepreneurship, leadership skills, SME success, small business failure, sustainability, business strategies, Strategic planning, employee performance, small business performance, Small Business Administration (SBA), entrepreneurial skills, and business sustainability*. The researched articles and peer-reviewed journals published before 2014 resulted in the context and support of the conceptual framework for this study.

Transformational Leadership

The role of a transformational leader is to motivate, create a vision and influence the attitudes of followers (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015). Transformational leadership is an approach where the concentration of power is in the hands of leaders who see their mission as being that of transforming other people and leaders that use this style of leadership intend to change and transform people (Northouse, 2015). Frieder, Wang, and Oh (2018) defined transformational leadership as a social process where members of a group or organization influence the understanding of internal and external events, the choice of goals or desired outcomes, the organization of work activities and the individual motivation and abilities. Leaders use management style to transform others during the process of change; as such, leaders with this style increase creativity and innovation (Pardo-del-Val, Fuentes, & Dobón, 2012). Pardo-del-Val et al. posited that leaders influence resistance to change and increase change results. Leaders who use transformational leadership style allow members outside the leadership circle influence in the decision-making process facilitating and increasing the success of change (Pardo-del-Val et al., 2012). According to Shurbagi (2014), transformational leadership style is a central feature of organizational performance while job satisfaction and organizational commitment parallels hypothetically and empirically to organizational effectiveness.

Transforming leadership became transformational leadership in the mid-1970s (Burns, 1978). Burns (1978) introduced the idea of transforming leadership through his research on political leaders. Transformational leaders set a moral example to benefit the team, organization and community, as well as change an organizational culture (Burns, 1978). In 1985, Bass expanded the research to consider the psychological mechanisms that trigger transformational leadership, ways to measure it and how transformational leaders effect follower motivation and performance. Bass also suggested that followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty and respect for transformational leaders because transformational leaders provide followers with an inspiring mission, vision and identity.

A key maxim of transformational leadership is organizational and individual goal alignment. Mom, van Neerijnen, Reinmoeller, and Verwaal (2015) asserted that leaders who align goals execute effective business practices and gain employee trust that leads to cohesion within the organization. Transformational leaders focus on employee values and goals (Choi, Lim, & Tan, 2016). Transformational leadership is also the main means by which the environmental changes of the organizations become coordinated (Veiseh, Mohammadi, Pirzadian, & Sharafi, 2014). Transformational leadership centers on the assumption that leaders can alter followers' assumptions, behavior and beliefs by appealing to the importance of the organization's collective outcomes (Veiseh et al., 2014).

Mesu, Sanders, and Riemsdijk (2015) described transformational leadership as visionary leadership and development stimulation positively related to organizational commitment and performance when leaders combine its practice and application with the participative and directive leadership styles. Mesu et al. demonstrated that transformational leader behavior could be successful in both production and service organizations. However, in production or manufacturing companies, this success is only possible and realistic when transformational leadership is combined with participative and directive leader decision styles (Mesu et al., 2015). Lamiaa (2015) identified the key constructs of the transformational leadership theory as inspirational motivation, idealized influence (consisting of two dimensions: individualized behavior and idealized attributes), individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation.

Compared to transformational leadership, systems theory is a concept viewed by researchers as a conceptual framework. von Bertalanffy (1968) introduced systems theory in 1968, underlying sets of ideas and principles for the holistic study of complicated situations. Systems theory is one of the most prominent theories applied to modern business management research (von Bertalanffy, 1968). A system is a representation of a situation or an assembly of elements joined onto one another in an organized whole (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The founder of systems theory emphasized holism over reductionism and organism over mechanism (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Small businesses at formation involve the integration of different processes and components; new properties emerge as they interact with the environment in a state of continual evolution (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Small business enterprises encounter continuing challenges as they interact with their environments that are in a state of continual change; therefore, systems theory aligns well with this study. Systems theory applies to this study because SME organizations have subsystems in the form of departments as part of the larger system (the organization). Although systems theory applies to this study, I did not select systems theory as the conceptual framework. I did not select systems theory because this study is focused on successful leadership strategies, not systems or subsystems for successful SME owners in urban areas to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

SMEs are dependent on the environment in which they operate. As such, relationships exist between both SME and the environment where they exist. Successful SME leadership appropriately adjusts daily operations based upon environmental changes. Successes or failures of small businesses depend on the flexibility and self-correction of their leaders as they interact with each other and their environments (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Whether utilized in public or private sector, transformational leadership is one of many varied theories of leadership styles.

Valero (2015) ascertained leadership style within the public sector, where there are numerous instances where poor or inappropriate leadership led to economic losses and disasters. Valero perceived the transactional leadership style to be a leader who rewards employees at task completion in contrast to transformational leaders who let their employees know that the work they do matters and when their job is done well, they are making a significant contribution to the organization's change. According Valero (2015), followers indicated that they were most successful when working with transformational leaders.

To further support the conceptual framework of transformational leadership Ghasabeh, Soosay, and Reaiche (2015) defined transformational leadership as a leadership characteristic comprised of idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. Birasnav (2014) examined a comparative model applying the knowledge management process (KM) regarding the various relationships between transformational and transactional leadership, using exploratory factor analysis and hierarchical regression analysis to analyze some proposed hypotheses. According to Birasnav, transformational leadership has strong and positive effects on the KM process and organizational performance. Birasnav concluded the KM process is a partial mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance if there is an effective control over the effects of transactional leadership.

Posner (2016) explained the origins of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) as empirical instrument to measure The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership framework, a major transformational leadership model. The essential psychometric properties of the LPI are both the LPI normative database, with nearly 2.8 million respondents, as well as pertinent findings of several hundred studies conducted worldwide by scholars utilizing the LPI in their research. Issues of both reliability and validity are with the conclusion that the LPI is quite robust and applicable across a variety of settings and populations.

Results of the scores from the LPI show construct and predict validity, with the underlying factor being structure sustained across a variety of studies and settings (Posner, 2016). Posner noted the internal reliabilities for the five leadership practice scales are very good and are consistently strong across a variety of sample populations and situations. Posner concluded the Leadership Practices Inventory has sound psychometric properties and the findings are relatively consistent between constituent groups, genders, ethnicity, cultural backgrounds and national boundaries, as well as across various contextual characteristics (e.g., positions and industry).

Kellis and Ran (2013) argued for the establishment of a public leadership theory that supports three tenets: the principles of authentic, transformational and distributed leadership. They supported this theory to better equip public managers to function in a crisis-laden complex constitutional democracy (Kellis & Ran, 2013). Data from the Federal Human Capital Survey was used to examine outcomes of effective leadership relating to the principles of authentic, transformational and distributed leadership (Kellis & Ran, 2013). Kellis and Ran maintained a leadership theory constituted by these three tenets of leadership approaches provide a strong foundation for developing leadership roles and expectations in the public service. Kellis and Ran called for further investigation into the association of the principles with the performance of public organizations at federal, state and local levels and their usefulness in predicting changes in measurable departmental outcomes.

The chest of information regarding transformational leadership theory is bountiful. Weiss and Suss (2016) highlighted the focus of transformational leadership theory is a connection and working relationship between the leaders and followers that ensure coexistence and cooperation. Chen, Zheng, Yang, and Bai (2016) examined the required skills aspect of transformational leadership theory for an organization's transformation that includes interpersonal skills, conceptual skills and human skills. Chen et al. revealed political skills as relevant to transformational leadership and leaders' job satisfaction. Chen et al. also alluded that transformational leadership is concerned with the management of human skills in organizations.

Mencl, Wefald, and Ittersum (2016) examined how transformational leadership style influence the emotional and political skills of a leader and work engagement in an organization. Mencl et al. revealed that emotional skills, political skills, and work contribution enhance job satisfaction among managers. Transformational leadership is also described as maintaining positive humor with employees' work engagement, job performance, friendliness and organizational citizenship of employees (Goswami, Nair, Beehr, & Grossenbacher, 2016). Goswami et al. (2016) noted that creating positive humor in the office has a positive impact on staff performance and attitude at work resulting in increased output. Ethics are relatable to transformational leadership theory. Effective leadership is ethical as evident in transformational leadership (Adanri & Singh, 2016). Transformational leadership is instrumental in the reduction of organizational crises and uncertainties (Adanri & Singh, 2016).

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a business owner's opportunistic pursuit to provide future products, processes and services, leveraging personal strengths to mobilize business capabilities. Entrepreneurs create opportunities for innovation in products, services, processes and business models with entrepreneurship education as a key beneficiary of entrepreneurial design thinking (Groth, Esposito, & Tse, 2015). Hundera (2014) emphasized the importance to develop an integrated conceptual framework in the field of entrepreneurship. The diversification of the field of entrepreneurship and SMEs reflects the various theoretical perspectives (Rauch, Doorn, & Hulsink, 2014).

Entrepreneurship is associated with individual characteristics and attitudes toward business, while other researchers relate entrepreneurship to cultural conditioning (Hulbert, Gilmore, & Carson, 2015). Sahut and Peris-Ortiz (2014) identified how SMEs operate in an ecosystem suitable for entrepreneurship that necessitates commitment and close collaboration between employees. Sahut and Peris-Ortiz highlighted a psychological progression toward entrepreneurship by family and institutions indicative of the collaborative shift in entrepreneurial advancement. People who are entrepreneurially minded start small firms because they recognize opportunities larger firms overlook (Hulbert et al., 2015). Entrepreneurs with entrepreneurship education approach the world with fresh ideas to create desired futures and adopt cognitive acts to reduce uncertainty associated with ambiguous situations (Garbuio, Lovallo, Dong, Lin, & Tschang, 2018).

Zhai et al. (2018) conducted research of 324 SMEs showing the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation, absorptive capacity, environmental dynamism and corporate technological innovation performance. The relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and innovation performance is significantly positive (Zhai et al., 2018). SME owners have contributed immensely to the nurturing of entrepreneurship (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017) and according to Bartos, Rahman, Horak, and Jacova, (2015), SME owners' entrepreneurial knowledge is a perfect remedy to economic issues. Entrepreneurship facilitates creativity and innovativeness resulting in the development of business approaches and business decision-making (Haviernikovah, Lemanska-Majdzik, & Mura, 2017). Through entrepreneurship, businesses grow out of the passion and desire of individuals to multiply their profits (Ismail, Husin, Rahim, Kamal, & Mat, 2016). Individuals have different perspectives regarding business in comparison to entrepreneurial perspectives (Aslam & Hasnu, 2016). Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial perspectives allow the business leaders to be flexible and adopt the best strategies for the unique needs of the business (Qureshi, Aziz, & Mian, 2017).

Leadership is relevant to entrepreneurship (Balven, Fenters, Siegel, & Waldman, 2018). Entrepreneurs must understand SME dynamics and learn to develop appropriate strategies that suit their circumstances in order to manage SMEs effectively (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). Balven et al. (2018) categorized leadership as a micro process at the relational level and it captures the interplay between the faculty member and other individual technological transfers. Entrepreneurs who participate in coordinated entrepreneurship programs develop core competencies to help them develop the capacity to identify potential opportunities to gain a competitive advantage (Chang, Liu, & Chiang, 2014).

Leadership may be relevant at different organizational levels. According to Balven, et al. (2018), not all cases of entrepreneurship are beneficial or positively impact leadership. With entrepreneurship, the opportunity to venture is not tantamount to the opportunity to succeed (Morse, 2015; Ramoglou & Tsang, 2017). Ramoglou and Tsang (2017) added entrepreneurs might habitually talk about opportunities as something immediately observable and knowable; yet they also know that opportunities do not exist as such. Entrepreneurship is (quasi-superstitiously) treated as “worldmaking” and successful entrepreneurs emerge as the absolute masters of the economic universe (Ramoglou & Tsang, 2017).

In contrast, the acknowledgment of independently existing opportunities relaxes the disposition to idolize highly successful entrepreneurs by recognizing that they might have simply actualized a pre-existing market opportunity (Ramoglou & Tsang, 2017). Entrepreneurs and other small business owners use their networks, experience and better judgment to obtain collaborative support to identify market risk and capitalize on the rapidly changing technology to benefit their businesses (Kim & Vonortas, 2014). Entrepreneurs discover unsatisfied needs in the community and create an organization to make a profit or for a philanthropic goal (Pontikes & Barnett, 2017). Chinyamurindi (2016) noted that individuals motivated to become an entrepreneur are framed through a broad theme of opportunity. Three main sub-themes emerge under this main theme of opportunity: entrepreneurship: an opportunity out of struggle; entrepreneurship: an opportunity for individual self-development and entrepreneurship: an opportunity for service (Chinyamurindi, 2016).

Entrepreneurs within the culture of entrepreneurship can affect regional development in several ways according to Agung and Wijijayanti (2018). Agung and Wijijayanti highlighted the three ways regional development is impacted by entrepreneurial culture. First, the degree of entrepreneurship encourages innovation of business. Second, the passion of entrepreneurial spirit within the individual including the employees (intrapreneurship), enhance a company's profit. Third, social structure's tendency to entrepreneurship possibly affects the ability of country in adopting brand new technologies (Agung & Wijijayanti, 2018).

Entrepreneur Leadership

Entrepreneurial leadership serves as the guiding ship directing SME owners in the success of respective business ventures with ethical leadership filling the moral compass as a foundation for continued business practices. Entrepreneurial leadership is emerging as a critical issue in an understanding of the dynamics of economic development in the 21st century (Leitch, McMullan, & Harrison, 2013). In comparison, ethical leadership has become a thriving research field with focus directed at leader behavior towards employees under the influence of leadership (Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014). According to Naipaul and Youcheng (2009), within the nature of the business environment, a different set of management qualities is needed. The vital components of management qualities are entrepreneurship, leadership, adaptability, risk-taking, and creativity (thinking out of the box) must be the vital components (Naipaul & Youcheng, 2009). Indeed, such entrepreneurial people will be highly sought after because they are likely best suited for the turbulent economic conditions of today and tomorrow. To survive, the new global economy must be an entrepreneurial economy where entrepreneurial leadership will take center stage (Naipaul & Youcheng, 2009).

Min, Ugaddan, and Park (2016) presented a study aimed at determining whether employee empowerment is a motivating mechanism that can explain the relationship between organizational leadership (specifically, senior leaders, middle managers, and frontline leaders) and the tendency of the employees' creativity. Min et al. based their model on relevant theory and research. Min et al. addressed the following questions: How are supervisory status and levels of leadership related to employee empowerment and creativity? and Does employee empowerment mediate the effects of leadership levels on creativity? Min et al. aimed to foster public sector creativity by examining the influence of leadership factors (characterized by supervisory status) and employee empowerment on employees' creative tendencies.

A supervisor is a source of leadership power. As a result, individuals in supervisory status embody formal authority and influence, which might influence the tendency for employees' creativity (Van Wart, 2015). The implication is that dimensions of employee empowerment cultivate individual employees' creative behaviors (Min et al., 2016). Leaders must have power and influence and responsibility for others. Because of this, the stakes of their actions are higher and the challenges to self-are greater (Ciulla, Knights, Mabey, & Tomkins, 2018).

According to Naipaul and Youcheng (2009), within the nature of the business environment, a different set of management qualities is called for; of which entrepreneurship, leadership, adaptability, risk-taking and creativity (thinking out of the box) must be the vital components. Naipaul and Youcheng posited that entrepreneurial-type people are highly sought after because entrepreneurial-type people are best suited for the turbulent economic conditions of today and tomorrow. To survive, the new global economy must be an entrepreneurial economy where entrepreneurial leadership will take center stage (Naipaul & Youcheng, 2009).

Leadership and Leadership Skills

Leadership researchers have devoted much attention to factors that affect business performance (Arasti, Zandi, & Bahmani, 2014). Leadership is a key component in organizational success (Van Dick & Schuh, 2010). Leadership requires a high-level of concentration on inspiration and strategy (Moynihan, Pandey, & Wright, 2012). A leader’s role is to serve the interests of a group, organization, country, or cause and leaders who are unethical are not doing their jobs as leaders (Ciulla et al., 2018). Leadership is consistent organizational performances and successful leaders must act in ways that will inspire, encourage and motivate their followers to act accordingly (Bottomley, Burgess, & Fox, 2014). Leaders motivate employees providing opportunities with financial incentives (Delery & Roumpi, 2017).

Leadership is the capability to motivate employees to use their skills and resources to execute tasks and the practice in which one person affects a group of people to accomplish a mutual goal (Peachey, Zhou, Damon, & Burton, 2015). Leader goals and values are manifested through leader vision that aligns with an organization's vision (Northouse, 2015). According to Simonin (2017), a leader's vision is developed and starts with a leader's knowledge to deploy strategic alliances. This consideration of leadership is in alignment with Solomon, Costea and Nita' (2016)'s description of leadership as the ability to inspire and guide others toward building and achieving a common objective or shared vision and involves the art of working with people. Leaders perceive humility coupled with an appropriate leadership style positively impacts the efficacy of their teams (Rego, Cunha, & Simpson, 2016).

Leadership skills and leader development are important for effective performance because leadership skills have a direct effect on the global performance (Jaoua & Radouche, 2014). The lack of leadership skills among SME owners may result in failure (Koledoye & Adeola, 2014). When managers lack education and management experience, the likelihood of small business failure rises (Radipere & Van Scheers, 2014). To be successful in the global market, SME owners need to have skills capable of leading in both local and global levels (Hayat, 2014). When owners possess marketing training for example, new venture launch and small business performance improves (Alasadi & Al Sabbagh, 2015). Regarding leadership, versions of rational decision making suggest that individuals who commit to leading will be those who positively assess the expected consequences of their leadership (Newark, 2018).

Researchers have described various groupings of leadership styles. There are six leadership styles according to Jago (1982): autocratic leadership, bureaucratic leadership, democratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership, transformational leadership and transactional leadership. Rehman, Shareef, Mahmood, and Ishaque (2012) added there are five leadership styles common in organizations: transformational, transactional, authoritarian or autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. Leadership styles depend on the environment or nature of work in which leaders thrive (Rehman et al., 2012).

The description of leadership has changed from specific traits of leadership to implying that leaders are born and not made (Northouse, 2015). Leadership is a critical element in defining a problem to improve performance (Valmohammadi & Roshanzamir, 2015). Conversely, ineffective leadership is a key constraint in problem-solving methods (Shaaban & Awni, 2014). Van Wart (2015) supported this perspective, indicating at times leaders may correctly exhibit a laissez-faire style, given a particular situation. The logic of consequence and appropriateness is a useful tool for conceptually integrating and categorizing existing theories of what drives the decision to lead (Newark, 2018). Leadership skills are both fundamental and necessary for any organization to succeed (Bruyere, 2015).

Leadership teams show commitment to fulfilling and meeting different strategies of innovations (Ruiz-Jiménez & Fuentes-Fuentes, 2016). Leadership within an organization may include first-line managers, middle managers, executive directors and leaders of enterprises who encourage innovation in SMEs (Brunswicker & Vanhaverbeke, 2015). Leadership must have considerable weight and influence to overcome the barriers and resistance to changes (Ruiz-Jiménez & Fuentes-Fuentes, 2016).

The paradox-savvy leader is an example of a different leadership style as indicated by Waldman and Bowen (2016). Waldman and Bowne outlined the nature of paradox-savvy leader behavior by first considering an environmental context that demands increasing attention to the paradoxes that are relevant to leaders. Waldman and Bowen categorized the paradoxes as those that are inherent in leadership behavior per se and those that are increasingly common in organizations. Based on this categorization, Waldman and Bowen outlined four key paradoxes: maintaining a strong sense of self while simultaneously maintaining humility, maintaining control while simultaneously letting go of control, stressing continuity while simultaneously stressing change and pursuing corporate social responsibility (CSR) for the strategic purpose of enhancing profits while simultaneously pursuing CSR for morally based purposes. Waldman and Bowen (2016) expounded on the environmental context driving the relevance of four key paradoxes that leaders increasingly face, as well as specific ways that they can show and become more paradox-savvy.

Compared to Waldman and Bowen (2016) paradox-savvy leader, Aleksic, (2016) suggested the process of leadership involves a two-way mutual influence of the leader on his/her followers and the one the followers have on their leader. Aleksic argued that the leadership process is an inseparable unity of its most important segments and thereby the function of the three essential variables: the leader, the followers, and the situation. A consequentialist leader will remain committed only so long as the expected consequences of doing so appear more attractive than the expected consequences of not doing so (Newark, 2018). Aleksic highlighted the importance of the role of the followers in the leadership process. Aleksic noted that the quality of leadership, in addition to the characteristics of the leader, is significantly conditioned by the characteristics of the followers, who are not just passive participants in this process, but have an active role (and sometimes the key role) in quality leadership' creation and functioning. Conversely, a dependence on individual leadership, no matter how virtuous, may undermine rather than enhance people's freedom and collective power to exercise capacities to act and be acted upon (Munro & Thanem, 2018).

The leadership process, according to Aleksic (2016), is conditioned by various factors, including the leader's characteristics, the power structure, the requirements of the specific situation, the follower's characteristics, as well as feedback on the impact of various styles of the leader's behavior on the follower's performance. Aleksic posited that creativity, initiative, a tendency to change, willingness to take responsibility and contribute to the development of the organization are all desirable traits of the followers, who make up an important part of the leadership process and are necessary for the realization of the concept of shared leadership. In modern organizational circumstances, the important feature of the effective follower is related to his or her willingness and ability to abandon the leader-member relations (Aleksic, 2016). If the follower is not satisfied with his or her status in the leadership process, or if he or she is not able to meet the demands imposed by the leader, then the follower may abandon the relationship with that leader (Aleksic, 2016). This means that no leadership process should be regarded as a permanent structure, but only as a temporary balance of power, always connected with specific situational circumstances, implying the rotational nature of the leader's and the follower's roles (Aleksic, 2016). People pay attention to the ethics of leaders because leadership greatly benefits or harms the well-being of people (Ciulla et al., 2018). Moral action in groups, organizations, and societies is difficult unless a person or group of people exercise leadership (Ciulla et al., 2018).

Grisaffe, VanMeter, and Chonko, (2016) applied the Guttman scaling to demonstrate that leadership can produce incremental gains in employee satisfaction, employee performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, and corporate social responsibility. Grisaffe et al. argued servant leadership, while distinct, is built on transactional and transformational leadership characteristics. Grisaffe et al. demonstrated that behaviors such as humility and providing direction to followers are common in different leadership styles such as servant leadership, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership styles. Transformational leaders utilize social processes where members of an organization influence the understanding of internal and external events, goals or desired outcomes, organizational activities, and individual motivational abilities (Frieder et al., 2018).

Leadership Training and Development

The importance of phronesis for leadership has not escaped the attention of contemporary leadership scholars (Lindebaum, Al-Amoudi, & Brown, 2018). Leadership is identified as the ability to inspire and guide others toward building and achieving a common objective or shared vision and involves the art of working with people (Solomon et al., 2016). Leader development, on the other hand, needs to become clearer and more transparent about the ethical ramifications that ensue from leader practical interventions

(Lindebaum et al., 2018). As effective leadership involves people in relations of power that affect what they can and cannot do, the ethics of effective leadership is not primarily a matter of how leaders relate to followers, but how people relate to each other regardless of hierarchical status (Munro & Thanem, 2018).

Sixty percent of unsuccessful SME's in urban areas fail due to poor management operations and without leadership development for employees (López, & Hiebl, 2015). The leadership and management components of businesses address many daily considerations. Small firm owners can increase their chances of survival by developing firm-specific competitive strategies to outperform rivals (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). Business owners who design firm strategies search for profitable products, carefully monitor costs, and avoid intense price wars, witness growth, even in hostile markets (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). Bamiatzi and Kirchmaier (2014) concluded that an effective competitive strategy involves delivering a specific product to meet the needs of a certain targeted group resulting in a demand in the market; thus, it is possible to charge a slightly higher price to buy the product (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014).

Ethics is a critical aspect reflecting both the leadership dedication and commitment to acceptable business practices (Langlois, Lapointe, Valois, & de Leeuw, 2014). Ethics is a critical aspect reflecting both the leadership dedication and commitment to acceptable business practices and often conflicts with ethical practices, as the interest of pleasing shareholders circumvents the better judgment of some on leadership (Langlois et al., 2014). Leaders routinely invest considerable resources developing and training other leaders. Instrumental to this development is the inclusion of ethics and ethical leadership, as part of the strategic and tactical aspects of the organization's sustainability plan. Creative leadership stimulates, encourages, and guides the process of innovation from the start to the end (Lesakova, 2014). Lesakova (2014) focused on training programs developing employee potential and deduced that an organizational culture needs well-trained and adequately educated workforce.

Leaders in the field of leadership ethics develop and contribute to our understanding of leadership and leaders must develop a healthy mix of philosophical and empirical literature (Ciulla et al., 2018). Beyond the field of ethics as a developmental factor for leadership, training is required to enhance employee and management skills. Leaders should consider providing training programs for supervisors and employees to enhance their reciprocal relationships with their followers, as well as establish reward mechanisms to encourage the development of more creative services within teams at the workplace (Wang, 2016). It is imperative that leadership training contain orientation to the practice and reinforce an organization's mission (Morrison, Greenshaw, & Pigg, 2019). The benefit of identifying and planning opportunities for employee growth through training and development, as well as recognizing the importance of personally engaging with employees through communication is instrumental to improved employee performance (Thompson & Webber, 2016).

Through the development and training of employees, innovative behaviors in employees increase. Molodchik, Krutova, and Molodchik (2016) explored certain attributes of leadership, learning, organizational culture, innovative behavior among employees and presented empirical evidence that leadership, learning, and organizational culture are antecedents for innovative behavior. Leaders and managers facilitate innovative behaviors among employees to stimulate learning processes and exhibit transformational leadership characteristics to enhance the learning process while yielding a desired organizational culture (Molodchik et al., 2016).

Ladegard and Gjerde (2014) utilized qualitative and quantitative exploratory design in their assessment of leadership coaching as a development tool for leaders. Ladegard and Gjerde focused on two aspects, leader role-efficacy (LRE) and leader's trust in subordinates (LTS) in part of their group study reviewing hypothesized coaching theories. Study results produced evidence that LRE and LTS increased in the coaching group but not in the control group with a hypothesized perspective of increased trust in subordinates related to subordinate's psychological empowerment and turnover intentions. Ladegard and Gjerde concluded the coach's degree of facilitative behavior affects changes in both leader role efficacy and trust in subordinates and further supports claims that coaching represents a promising leadership development tool. Mijatovic (2014) urged standards are a significant factor in who wins and who loses in the global marketplace and it is hard to win if the game is not known. According to Mijatovic (2014), the standardization strategy for developing countries is to adopt standards and improve capabilities.

Small-to-Medium Enterprise

The SME sector has been described as an essential factor in sustaining the economic growth and development of most economies due to adjustments to environmental changes and technological orientation (Pooe, Mafini, & Loury-Okoumba, 2015). Although 50% of small businesses fail within 5 years of startup (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2016), small businesses create wealth, economic growth, and development in the world (Blankson et al., 2017). David and Rowe (2016) described SMEs as companies characterized by criteria that do not exceed certain quantitative limits, varying by location. Small business owners are owners of small businesses (Weber, Geneste, & Connell, 2015) with most SMEs employing fewer than 500 employees (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2017). Small firm owners were responsible for providing 61.8% of new jobs from 1993 to 2016 (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016).

Pooe et al. (2015) conceptualized SME performance in terms of its ability to increase or improve its overall outcomes in terms of cash flow, profitability, customer satisfaction, sales growth and employee growth. Small businesses create reward systems to nurture employees (Kuczmarski & Kuczmarski, 2019). Small business owners are essential to the growth and health of the U.S. economy (Jeger, Sarlija, & Bilandzic, 2016) and strengthen local and national economies (Neagu, 2016). Many minority small entrepreneurs fail to optimize the benefits resulting from the implementation of strategic management theories (Popa & Miricescu, 2015). Pooe et al. (2015) posited that because there is usually little separation between ownership and control of operational activities in SMEs, the success of SMEs is related to the abilities of their owners to make the best use of their managerial skills, experience and expertise.

Small business is an influential source of economic growth and innovation in the United States (Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). Economic support, by way of new job growth, is derived from the small business sector (SBA, 2016). Communities survive and thrive from small business success. Job creation, employee benefits, the supplying of products or services for customers, business-to-business commerce and tax revenues are the results of successful small businesses (Taneja et al., 2016). Mashahadi, Ahmad, and Mohamad (2016) characterized SMEs with limited human capital (people, knowledge, and capability) as firms with limited resources. Many countries nowadays organize trade investment missions and trade fairs to provide appropriate access particularly for SMEs in marketing and promoting their products in the foreign market (Mashahadi, et al., 2016). Doing business internationally requires SMEs to allocate some amount of distinctive resources in order to sustain competitiveness and to generate superior return for the business (Mashahadi et al., 2016).

The assessment of supplier performance is an important activity for SMEs as they adopt and implement plans and policies aimed at enhancing their performance in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantages (Pooe et al., 2015). Agung and Wijijayanti (2018) suggested transferring knowledge obtained from counseling, socialization, training and any other channel to the SME to create a continuity of the business. Agung and Wijijayanti (2018) suggested that leaders transfer the knowledge obtained from counseling, socialization, training and any other channel to the SME to create a continuity of the business. In contrast, Agung and Wijijayanti (2018) asserted if SME business leaders possess knowledge regarding business and entrepreneurship, the knowledge does not automatically guarantee success or failure of the business. The authors identified knowledge transfer as an obstacle to operational progress. The insufficient understanding regarding management, innovation, and conflict management will further affect the profit obtained (Agung & Wijijayanti, 2018).

Strategic Planning

SMEs and organizational leaders must consider leadership traits as integrated constellations of attributes that influence performance (Ziek & Smulowitz, 2014). Small business owners grow their business by being strategic (McDowell, Gibson, Aaron, Harris, & Lester, 2014). Business success is dependent upon the decision-making ability as well as the development and implementation of strategies by business leaders (Myškova & Doupalova, 2015). Business strategies are a set of vision, mission, values, practices, approaches and technologies that confer a firm a competitive advantage on a market (Pattinson, 2016). The intention may serve as the key to growth and success in every business enterprise (Neneh & Vanzyl, 2014).

Business owners who do not strategically plan to develop the business' risk failure (Neneh & Vanzyl, 2014). SMEs struggle to overcome both internal and external factors that hinder their growth (Lofti, Nayebzadeh, & Debnavi, 2014). Small business owners may acquire strategies that lead to an increased business performance in the long term (Taneja et al., 2016). Neis, Pereira, and Maccari (2017) posited that strategic planning as the way small firm owners balance the external environment and the internal capabilities of their business. According to Surma (2015), leaders of successful organizations develop and implement distinctive strategies. SME owners must employ defined strategies (Al-Ansaari, Bederr, & Chen, 2015). When companies identify opportunities for expansion, they develop strategies to push the business towards realistic goals (Koledoye & Adeola, 2014). SMEs can increase their chances of survival by developing firm-specific competitive strategies to outperform rivals (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). The success of a SME owner relies on their ability to react to changes and competition (Ejdys, 2014).

Small firm owners can increase their chances of survival by developing firm-specific, competitive strategies to outperform rivals (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). An effective best practice strategy can help business leaders to become more competitive, develop new markets, reduce costs, and become more efficient (Reynolds, 2019). Business owners who design firm strategies search for profitable products, carefully monitor costs, and avoid intense price wars, witness growth, even in hostile markets (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). Bamiatzi and Kirchmaier (2014) concluded that an effective competitive strategy involves delivering a specific product to meet the needs of a certain targeted group. This creates a reputation in the market; thus, it is possible to charge a slightly higher price to buy the product.

Many small business owners do not understand the importance of strategy (Alstete, 2014). Strategies help small business owners assess how sustainable their businesses are in competitive environments (Chryssochoidis, Dousios, & Tzokas, 2016). SMEs and organizational leaders could increase business performance by implementing strategic thinking concepts and strategic planning (Alstete, 2014). Gholston, Kuofie, and Hakim (2016) found that the strategies small business owners benefit from most are creating relationships, increasing brand exposure, and increasing sales by focusing on relationship building more than sales. Small business owners use social media by frequently posting, connecting with their audience, listening to feedback, and listening to their customer conversations about other brands (Gholston et al., 2016)

A future-focused business process provides an avenue for leaders to identify and prepare likely successors to assume new roles with minimal disruption to the organization's operations (Manning et al., 2015). Organizations and their leaders must be more responsive and malleable than ever before, and managers and leaders must act quickly and manage change at a fast pace (Bottomley et al., 2014). One such means of managing change is the use of strategy maps. Strategy maps are cause and effect diagrams illustrating strategic actions enabling desired outcomes in clear and simple terms (De Salas & Huxley, 2014). De Salas and Huxley (2014) posited the strategic map is a tool uncovering inefficiency in the organization, revealing hindrances to successful change. Leaders display strategy maps to provide a visual representation to communicate organizational change strategy. Thus, SME owners who use strategy maps have a clear understanding of change goals, objectives, and influence (De Salas & Huxley, 2014).

Shurbagi (2014) investigated the relationship among transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, indicating the transformational leadership style has been a central feature of organizational performance while job satisfaction and organizational commitment link hypothetically and empirically to organizational effectiveness. Shurbagi concluded that organizational commitment has a positive effect on the relationship between transformational leadership style and job satisfaction. Transformational leaders provide an opportunity for business growth (Shurbagi, 2014). Antonakis and House (2014) characterized transformational leadership strategy as a subset of instrumental leadership function dictating that leaders must scan the internal and external environment, chart strategic and task objectives, and provide performance feedback. The instrumental leadership approach was highly prototypical of effective leadership and the influence of transformational leadership was immensely overstated when one omits instrumental leadership from the comprehensive leadership model (Antonakis & House, 2014). The authors concluded instrumental leadership functions exceed the motivational and quid-pro-quo leader behaviors that comprise the full-range leadership styles of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership behaviors (Antonakis & House, 2014).

Sustainable Practices

Peterlin (2016) based the value of transformative leadership theory on the value of sustainability and authentic leadership. Leaders and SME owners with comprehensive business plans accomplish business sustainability (Oncioiu, 2014). Organizations include sustainability in leadership development (Oncioiu, 2014). Transformative leaders demonstrate authenticity in their care and dedication to individuals, organizations, and social concerns, as well as train followers in the context of sustainability (Peterlin, 2016). Sustainability is instrumental in organizational culture change and transformation with an integrated approach utilizing teaching, learning, research, sharing and operations (Warwick, 2016). Warwick noted that leaders in organizations view sustainability as an internal catalyst for change. Sustainability is an important aspect from the top-down and down-up within an organization (Warwick, 2016).

DesJardins, (2016) characterized the original concept of sustainable development was developed to guide business practice. As a result, the concept of sustainability is etched into the fabric of society not only through business decisions and applications but also through the gradual transformation in how higher educational courses, degree programs, structures, operations, systems, processes and objectives in the context of the business (Lee & Schaltegger, 2014). Modeling developed by sustainability researchers produce understanding of how businesses can meet existing and future needs as well as provide information of what specific standards better serve to create a positive difference (DesJardins, 2016). Christensen, Morsing, and Thyssen (2017) described the standards for sustainability as tools for regulating social and environmental tasks that managers implement as shared, authoritative and recognized reference points at local and global operational levels.

Sustainability is an institutional commitment reflected throughout the entire organization's engagement activities and embedded in the governance and decision-making processes (Lee & Schaltegger, 2014). Small business managers must seek solutions to the challenges they may face to remain sustainable (Summers, 2015). Hashiba and Paiva (2016) accentuated the importance of sustainability pointing out that when sustainability is present in the corporate strategy then new product development (NPD) processes are arranged. Small business owners who engaged their companies on the sustainability pathway inspire other entrepreneurs to follow (Kerr, Kerr, Özden, & Parsons, 2016). The challenge of leadership in the context of sustainability is to ensure employees attain the skills necessary to function as an executive officer or executive support staff in today's global and fluid marketplace (Dyllick, 2015). Metaxas, Duquenne, and Kallioras (2016) noted that a firm owner's external and internal dynamics and environment determines their competitiveness and ability to design strategies that increase sustainability and viability in local and global markets.

Collaboration is crucial to sustaining continuous operations (Kim & Vonortas, 2014). Galpin and Hebard (2015) compared founders and business owner views regarding sustainable business practices to described business models. The content analysis of the business plans revealed a marked disconnect between the value founders place on sustainability and their business models (Galpin & Hebard, 2015). Galpin and Hebard noted that the findings suggest that prospective business founders do value sustainable business practices. However, the content of their business models does not reflect their espoused importance of sustainability (Galpin & Hebard, 2015). Prospective business start-ups founders' value sustainable business practices and according to Galpin and Hebard, the founders create a disconnect between their views and what they say regarding sustainability.

Christensen et al. (2017) presented a managerial philosophy designed to involve managers and employees, mobilize and develop their knowledge about sustainability and bring it forward for the benefit of both the organization and the environment. While acknowledging that all standards combine elements of openness and closure, both of which are necessary to keep the sustainability agenda relevant and adaptive to new situations, Christensen et al. pointed out that sustainability standards often operate in contexts that favor closure. Additionally, the authors draw on a research tradition that regards communication as constitutive for the organization, arguing that ongoing talk about sustainability, including critique and contestation of standards, are vital dimensions in processes of adopting, fine-tuning and developing sustainability standards to fit changing social and environmental problems. Christensen et al. contributed to the emergent literature on sustainability standards that focus on how standards are influencing and influenced by organizational members. Organizational management uses change and transformational activities to improve organizational performance and achieve sustainable competitive advantages (Haffar, Al-Karaghouli, & Ghoneim, 2014).

Despite being viewed as a complex concept (Aragon-Correa, Marcus, Rivera, & Kenworthy, 2017), sustainability also provides balance between the economic, social, and environmental goals of an organization (Hansen & Schaltegger, 2016). Sustainability is referred to something long term (Aragon-Correa et al., 2017). Sustainability also involves profitability, long-term growth, innovation and creativity, competitive advantage, and every strategy should involve the equilibrium between the three interrelated elements of economy, social, and environment (Krauss, 2017).

Hyo Jin and Gleiberman (2017) addressed the gap in the understanding of corporate social responsibility (CSR) by including visibility indicators and conduct their investigation within a context of franchise systems. Hyo Jin and Gleiberman specifically chose the contextual setting of the franchise system for their investigation for the two reasons: First, the franchise systems play a critical and often underappreciated role in the economy. Secondly, they chose the franchise context for its already rich, yet still expandable theoretical applications and overlaps. The study of franchising lends itself well to many of the major theories in management, such as agency theory and resource theories. Last, Hyo Jin and Gleiberman employed a franchising lens through which to evaluate our conjectures of CSR. One particularly attractive aspect of franchising from a CSR standpoint again goes back to the mixed results other CSR studies have found.

Employee Performance

Small businesses depend on human capital resources to operate from a different perspective of human capital resources such as economics, strategy, human resources and psychology to develop an incorporated and holistic framework for success (Ployhart, Nyberg, Reilly, & Maltarich, 2014). Business capital involves the resources available for entrepreneurs to use to create a business and to generate income (Sundararajan & Sundararajan, 2015). The capital includes human capital, social capital, cultural capital and the economic capital. The quality of human capital is essential for owners of SMEs because SME owners depend more on human capital than other capitals (Ployhart et al., 2014). Ployhart et al. noted that human capital is a useful asset for business success, and human capital must have the required skills to be productive. Managing employee job motivation is an important element of an organization's human capital strategy (Campbell, Im, & Jisu, 2014).

In addition to human capital, consideration should be given to the importance of knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer is the acquisition of knowledge and the application of knowledge for better efficiency and effectiveness of an organization (Tangaraja, Rasdi, Samah, & Ismail, 2016). Sundararajan and Sundararajan (2015) recognized capital as assets available for entrepreneurs to use to create businesses to generate income. The transfer of knowledge from an expert to a mentee or employee improves learning and performance (Prince, Burns, Lu, & Winsor, 2015). Knowledge transfer takes place in urban SME through communication between leaders, organizations and employees (Prince et al., 2015). There is a need to understand the process of knowledge transfer as a strategic tool (Boyd, Rover, Pei & Zhang, 2015). Longevity and sustainability are fostered through education and socialization resulting from effective knowledge transfer (Boyd, Rover, Pei, & Zhang, 2015). Knowledge transfer is a useful tool enhancing employee performance (Boyd et al., 2015).

Research findings indicated that engaged employees were more productive than disengaged employees (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Organizational culture has an influence on employee engagement (Campbell & Goritz, 2014). According to Sabharwal, M., Levine, H., D'Agostino, M., and Nguyen, T. (2019), employees are empowered in an inclusive, open and fair culture. Cultures where employees share ideas and experience greater inclusion are less likely to express turnover intentions (Sabharwal et al., 2019). If employees are not engaged and do not associate with organizational culture, high employee turnover is the result (Campbell & Goritz, 2014). Employee disengagement is associated with higher costs and reduced productivity (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015). Business leaders understand the skills and strategies leaders use to engage employees that lead to improved employee performance and organizational competitiveness (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015). The benefits of understanding the skills and strategies needed to facilitate engagement result in improved productivity, increased profit, and an engaged workforce (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).

Engaged employees manifest their engagement through performance and alignment with organizational objectives (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Lack of employee engagement can negatively impact SME success. Various research findings revealed more than 80% of employees worldwide do not experience engagement at work leading to negative implications for profitability, productivity, and ultimately competitiveness (Kaliannan & Adjovu, 2015; Rana, Ardichvili, & Tkachenko, 2014; Valentin, 2014). The outcomes of an engaged workforce include more satisfied and fulfilled employees and an overall improvement in productivity (Kaliannan & Adjovu, 2015). Communication is an important aspect of developing engagement among employees (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). Mishra et al. (2014) highlighted internal communication as an important part of building a relationship between the employer and the employee.

Five effective employee engagement strategies are work environment, human resource management practices, employee-supervisor relationship, job satisfaction and organizational culture (Kaliannan & Adjovu, 2015). The five effective strategies are coupled with additional strategies identified by Shuck and Reio (2014) as work-life balance and meaningful work or intrinsic motivators that signify dual strategies effective for organizational improvement. Tse and Chiu (2014) confirmed the idea that transformational leadership style is crucial to employee performance and the organizational culture of the nonprofit organization.

García-Cabrera and García-Barba Hernández (2014) presented the three dimensions of resistance to change in employees. According García-Cabrera and García-Barba Hernández (2014), the three dimensions are resistant thought, resistant feeling, and resistant behavior. The authors suggested that resistance is a part of the change process and should be embraced by managers as such. García-Cabrera and García-Barba Hernández explained that resistance to change is psychological. Stressing that resistance to change could come from the self-esteem of the employees, García-Cabrera and García-Barba Hernández asserted managers must handle change in such a way that every member of the organization is given an opportunity to participate in the change or else the resistance will become negative.

Birkinshaw, Zimmermann, and Raisch (2016) developed a conceptual integration of capabilities and perspectives to understand how firms adapt to discontinuous change. Based on three illustrative case studies, the authors demonstrated that it is not possible to identify a universal set of dynamic capabilities. Rather, the distinct set of capabilities required depends on which of three modes of adaptation (structural separation, behavioral integration, or sequential alternation) have been prioritized. Birkinshaw et al. aimed at contributing to dynamic capability research by shedding light on how sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capabilities become effective in practice and how they may differ depending on the firm's selected mode of adaptation to discontinuities. They also strongly encouraged researchers and practitioners alike to think more carefully about what capabilities are in different settings, whereabouts in the organization these capabilities are held, and how they might have to change over time.

Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse, and Sassenberg (2014) determined whether the leadership style of management could predict the degree of success of the employees. The authors noted leadership style has an important influence on the goals that employees adopt within the organization. According to Hamstra et al., when organizations want employees to outperform others, a transactional style would be preferable whereas a transformational style would achieve better results when learning and growth are the desired results. Job demands typically referred to aspects of the job that require physical, psychological, social, or organizational input from employees result in work overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Conversely, job resources initiated by organizations, supervisors or peers, participative leadership, and autonomy assist the employee to reach work goals (Rana et al., 2014).

Sahin, Cubuk, and Uslu (2014) noted that transformational leadership styles have a positive effect on employees and organizational performance. Factors such as pay, leadership, environment, self-efficacy, reward, and recognition can all increase or decrease employee job performance (Lin, Yu, & Yi, 2014). When employees receive monetary motivators, they give extra time and effort to their occupations because the cash rewards are an attestation of their inspiration (Kuang, Huang, Hong, & Yan, 2019). Monetary domains are effective in improving employee motivation, moving them to contribute more (Kuang et al., 2019). Organizational performance can improve through transformational leadership characteristics including the encouragement and support of employees (Tavitiyaman, Weerakit, & Ryan, 2014). Employees are inspired and support the goals of the leader as a result of transformational leadership (Mahdinezhad, Suandi, Bin-Silong, & Omar, 2013). According to Liang and Chi (2013), transformational leaders provide employees with a clear sense of guidance and aspiration, building employee commitment and trust that results in overall success of the organization (Bayram & Dinç, 2015).

Summary and Transition

In Section 1 the primary focus was on the foundation of the research study related to entrepreneur leadership and SMEs sustaining business beyond 5 years. Background of the problem, the problem and purpose statement, nature of the study, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, operational definitions and significance of the study are also included. Additional focus centered on information involving entrepreneur leadership appropriate for SME success. This study may serve urban SMEs identifying leadership strategies required for efficient business practices. Exploration of transformational leadership theories in the conceptual framework erudite the study resulting in added credence to the findings.

The focus in Section 2 is on the project of the study detailing the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants in the study, research method and research design, population sampling, ethical research and multiple data collection variables. The multiple data collection variables include data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization techniques and data analysis. The final part of Section 2 is study reliability and validity.

In Section 3 the focus is on the application for professional practice, and implications for social change. Included also in Section 3 an introduction to the section, a presentation of findings, and a discussion of recommendations for action and recommendations for further research. For closure, I provide my reflections on the process and a conclusion to the project.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I addressed the purpose of the study, provided information on my role as researcher, participants in the study, and the research method and design. I also discussed the study population and sampling techniques, and ethical considerations for research. I concluded Section 2 with the data collection process, data analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The research population consisted of three SME owners in Georgia, who have been in business beyond 5 years. The findings of this study serve as ideal business models identifying leadership strategies required for SME success. SME owners using successful leadership strategies discovered in this study may extend SMEs' business beyond 5 years. Social change may occur through the availability of jobs created from SMEs in business beyond 5 years and increased tax revenue in urban areas due to SMEs staying in business to provide funds for poverty alleviation and the expansion and improvement of city facilities such as parks and schools.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher of this study, I controlled the process, research method and design, data collection and analysis, as well as the reliability and validity. Warwick-

Booth (2014) noted the role of the researcher requires understanding the aspects of the research study. I conducted the interviews and served as the primary data collection instrument for this study. Baškarada (2014) described the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection in a qualitative study and that the researcher must facilitate the collection of reliable and valid information from participant interviews, documents, and observations.

I have not had a prior relationship with this study topic or the participants. This study topic is interesting to me because I will become a SME owner in an urban area. My interest in the subject of successful leadership strategies for SMEs in urban areas is the primary factor for me to conduct this study. My interest extended to conducting research to find information regarding the subject and finding suitable SME owners to participate in the study. I ensured the process, research method and design, data collection and analysis, as well as the reliability and validity were constructed and performed adequately to reduce or mitigate researcher and participant bias and that the work honors ethical practices. Roulston and Shelton (2015) described the role of the researcher is to ensure adherence to the research guidelines and principles of ethics during the data collection process, recognize personal biases, and reduce threats that could affect the study findings.

To reduce and mitigate researcher and participant bias I constructed my semistructured interview questions in accordance with *The Belmont Report*. I followed the *Belmont Report*'s guidelines for research involving human subjects that include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The general principles outlined in the *Belmont Report* include respect for persons, which applies to informed consent, beneficence, which relates to assessing the risk vs. benefit, and justice, associated with the selection of research participants (Miracle, 2016). The *Belmont Report* protocol outlined research requirements grounded in the moral principles relating to conducting research involving human subjects and acts as a guiding framework for analyzing ethical issues associated with research (Miracle, 2016).

Pearce, Ensafi, Li, Feamster, and Paxson (2018) noted that the *Belmont Report* summarizes ethical principles and guidelines for research involving human subjects. I have completed the training for protecting human research participants and I adhered to and support the principles of ethical conduct noted in *The Belmont Report*, to ensure participants entered the research freely and guaranteed the participants fully understood their role in the research. Researchers prepare, plan, listen intently, ensure interview accuracy via audio recording and take notes when conducting qualitative interviews (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I conducted the semistructured interview in accordance with *The Belmont Report*. Researchers obtain information from the participants, prepare, and adapt to unforeseen circumstances (Singh, 2015). Researchers use semistructured interviews to collect reliable data (Agran, MacLean, & Andren, 2016). I adhered to the *Belmont Report* by respecting the participants, minimized risk, mitigated bias and avoided viewing data through a personal lens/or perspective.

For the semistructured interviews, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to cover the data collection process and data analysis. During the semistructured interview (see Appendix B), I took interview notes, I maintained an audio recording of each participant's interview using the Otter.ai application, and I developed a verbatim transcript to minimize personal bias using *bracketing*. Bracketing is the process of minimizing personal bias and influence (Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2015). Bracketing enables researchers to mitigate assumptions about the focus of the research through subjective engagement with the study data (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). To ensure the ethical protection of participants and for the protection of participant privacy and confidentiality, I used alphanumeric identification codes for their identities. I used SME-1, SME-2, and SME-3 instead of the names of participants and their organizations. I reviewed the audio and verbatim transcript to start the analysis. L. Harvey (2015) noted that developing a verbatim transcript after each interview is instrumental when developing themes. I coded the interview data highlighting the identified themes of successful leadership strategies discovered to extend SMEs' business beyond 5 years.

Participants

In qualitative research, sampling depends on a small number of interviewees to obtain in-depth and detailed responses pertinent to the lived experiences of the participants (Yin, 2018). The selection of research participants is critical to data outcomes (Gelling, 2015). Participants of this study were determined via the purposeful sampling method. Researchers use purposeful sampling to gather data when participants are in their natural environment and comfortable during the interview (Duan, Bhaumik, Palinkas, & Hoagwood, 2015).

To access participants for this study, I conducted an online search of SMEs in the Atlanta Georgia area that have been in business for more than 5 years. I reviewed SME websites to get additional information helpful with the participant selection. During the sampling determination process, I provided my contact information for feedback purposes. The research participant sample consisted of three SME owners in urban areas in Atlanta Georgia, who have been in business beyond 5 years. The sampling of three to eight participants in a case study is suitable to amass enough data necessary to understand an occurrence's context and two to three participants is the lowest acceptable sample size in multiple case studies (Andersson & Evers, 2015; Yin, 2018). I emailed potential SMEs requesting their participation in my research study (see Appendix C). Selected participants were asked to complete an emailed participant informed consent form at the time of interview. The informed consent entailed the study background and purpose of the study, the procedures, the voluntary nature of the study, the risks and benefits of being in the study, presence of no incentives, confidentiality of participants and organizations, contact information, and information on how to get questions answered, and obtaining consent. Participant protection, confidentiality, and general welfare were protected (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015).

Selected participants were informed of the interview protocol (see Appendix A) and provided a copy of the interview questions during the interview (see Appendix B). As researcher, I selected SME owners in urban areas who have been in business beyond 5 years. To ensure the ethical protection of participants and for the protection of participant confidentiality, I used alphanumeric identification codes for their identities. I used SME-1, SME-2, and SME-3 instead of the names of participants and their organizations. A list of the codes related to the real organizations were kept in a locked file cabinet along with the informed consent, documents from participants, journal notes, and flash-drive for 5 years. I did not report the names of the participants or organizations. All recorded and transcribed data and information obtained in the study research were collected and maintained on a password-protected personal flash drive that is stored in a locked file cabinet for 5 years. At the end of the 5-year protection period, all paper-maintained data related to this study will be shredded, all data on the flash drive will be deleted, and the flash drive will be destroyed.

Research Method and Design

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas to sustain their business beyond 5 years. I selected a qualitative research methodology to collect data through inquiries from interviews, participant notes, and participant reflections to obtain existing information about leadership strategies to help SME owners to sustain operations beyond 5 years.

Research Method

Three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. In qualitative research, the researcher explores a study topic and participant opinions, focusing on how they think (Hampshire, Iqbal, Blell, & Simpson, 2014). Qualitative methods obtain thorough perspectives of expert practitioners (Barnham, 2015). Qualitative research is appropriate when little information exists about a subject (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014) and researchers use qualitative methods to explore how people cope in their real-world settings, using open-ended questions when predetermined answers do not exist (Yin, 2016). Qualitative research methods are effective when researchers need to investigate complex topics including topics related to human behavior (Isaacs, 2014). I chose a qualitative research methodology to explore human experiences related to leadership strategies and to obtain information about known leadership strategies to help SME owners to sustain operations beyond 5 years.

A quantitative research method is the testing of theories, examining cause and effects, and making deductive conclusions (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Quantitative researchers focus is on observable and objective data and facts that can be quantified to examine variables' relationships or causality (Gunasekara & Zheng, 2019). Anderson, Leahy, Delvalle, Sherman, and Tansey (2014) asserted that researchers use the quantitative method to focus on answering *how many* and *how much* questions. Quantitative researchers explore data analysis and not people (Runfola, Perna, Baraldi, & Gregori, 2017). Goertzen (2017) posited that quantitative research is suitable when the researcher's goal is to examine the relationship amongst variables using statistical procedures. Contrastingly, a quantitative approach is not suitable when measuring smaller participant groups (Robinson, 2014). The quantitative research method was not selected for this study because there were no theories to test, there were no examination of cause and effect, and no deductive conclusions drawn. I looked at a small sample size. I also did not ask *how many* and *how much* questions or used statistical procedures to analyze data.

Mixed research is the use of quantitative research and qualitative research techniques to provide a comprehensive review of the circumstance (Zhang & Watanabe-

Galloway, 2014). Hong, Pluye, and Hong (2014) noted that mixed methods are used for exploratory and explanatory purposes with findings supported by surveys. According to Fawcett (2015), researchers use the mixed methodology to implement both quantitative and qualitative approaches when single methods do not offer satisfactory insights to understand a phenomenon. A mixed approach is used to combine data collection and analyze closed-ended quantitative facts and open-ended qualitative facts (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015) and mixed researchers can take a back-and-forth approach to qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Green et al., 2015). The quantitative aspect of a mixed method approach made the mixed method inappropriate to this study (Borrelli, Chao, & Su, 2019). Therefore, I did not utilize mixed research because there was no quantitative portion of this study. Methods used to access, understand and analyze textual qualitative data are often based on relational links the researcher makes between a specific quote taken from the unstructured data and a memo, a related quote or a concept (Luther, 2017).

Research Design

In qualitative research methodology, I considered three designs: case study, phenomenological, and ethnographical. A case study entails methodological flexibility through the integration of diverse paradigms, study designs, and methods, as well as, exploring a contemporary phenomenon in depth within real-life context (Hyett et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). A case study design is viewed as an adaptable approach when analyzing societal and developmental disciplines (Gottfert, 2015). Dasgupta (2015) explained that researchers use a case study research strategy to gather information from individuals and groups to describe an understanding of an occurrence. De Massis and

Kotlar (2014) explained that researchers use case study design to provide a comprehensive investigation that allows for the review of multiple perspectives provided in the case study design. I did not choose to do a single case study because a single case study collects data from one source, e.g., one organization, one team, or one department (Yin, 2018). A multiple case study is used to collect data from more than one source, e.g., two organizations, three sports teams, or ten departments (Yin, 2018). I selected a multiple case study research design for this study because I relied on diverse paradigms, study designs of understanding SME owners' experiences in a real-life context that have sustained their business beyond 5 years, from multiple data sources for evidence to study a phenomenon.

Researchers use a phenomenological research design to demonstrate how participants experience and perceive phenomena (Zanarini et al., 2014). Berglund (2015) noted phenomenological design is useful for uncovering and comprehending the meaning of peoples' lived experiences. According to van Manen (2017), researchers concentrate on the lived experiences of study participants when using a phenomenological design. Yin (2018) noted that researchers explore the lived experiences of people about a phenomenon. Phenomenological researchers describe a process and seek to understand how participants interact with others and their environments (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). I did not select a phenomenological research design for this study because the information in this study was not derived from participant experiences or participant perceived phenomena.

Ethnography is the study of an orderly observation and recording of human cultures (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). Sharman (2017) explained that ethnographic design researchers observe participants advance their understanding of a cultural group through the extensive observation of study participants. Researchers use the ethnographic design to explore patterns of behavior or language related to distinct cultures, as well as, to investigate the shared patterns within cultural groups by engaging with the participants using interviews and observations (Ellis, 2015; Starr, 2014). Ethnography is viewed as an ongoing developing learning process and not a rigid researcher-controlled study (Marion, Eddleston, Friar, & Deeds, 2015). I did not select an ethnographic research design because I did not consider human cultures for this study and I used a researcher-controlled study.

Population and Sampling

The research participant sample consisted of three SME owners in urban areas located in Atlanta Georgia, who have been in business beyond 5 years. The intent in the selection of the desired sample was to identify those SMEs who have applied leadership strategies resulting in the sustained success of the business for more than 5 years. The criteria for selecting the SME owners are SME is located in an urban area, SME owner is in leadership position, SME owner has had the business for more than 5 years and SME owner has a willingness to share success experiences and leadership strategies.

The selection of research participants is critical to data outcomes and equally critical is the sampling technique in selecting participants (Gelling, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Participants of this study were determined via the purposeful sampling method. Researchers use purposeful sampling to gather data when participants are in their natural environment and comfortable during the interview (Duan et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling is one of the pioneer techniques for qualitative research (Bryman, 2015). The purposeful sampling technique facilitates researcher confidence when obtaining valuable information from knowledgeable participants relating to a phenomenon and the phenomenon will become clearer and more understandable only when data saturation is achieved (Duan et al., 2015; Morse, 2015a). Purposeful sampling entails the selection of participants who will provide rich, practical knowledge of the occurrence (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Williams and Needham (2016) described purposeful sampling as a qualitative sampling technique used to choose participants who possess the knowledge, experiences, and characteristics of the study subject.

Researchers consider the amount of information needed to serve the purpose and credibility of a study when selecting a sample size (McShane & Böckenholt, 2017). The sample size of three successful SMEs in urban areas who have sustained their business beyond 5 years is adequate for this study. The sampling of three to eight participants in a case study is suitable to amass enough data necessary to understand an occurrence's context and two to three participants is the lowest acceptable sample size in multiple case studies (Andersson & Evers, (2015); Yin, 2018). An essential element of multiple case study research according to Watson (2014), is to ensure data saturation.

The three SMEs selected were asked to participate in semistructured interviews to reach data saturation (see Appendix B). Data saturation is a systematical guideline to ensure researchers have collected sufficient data, understood the meaning participants give to their statements, coded all the information appropriately, and analyzes themes faithfully (Gibbins, Bhatia, Forbes, & Reid, 2014). Data saturation is the evidence of rigor in qualitative research and occurs when no new themes are emerging from the data (Constantinou, Georgiou, & Perdikogianni, 2017; Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2017). Moser and Korstjens (2018) posited that data saturation is when no new data or information is needed. Watson (2014) noted that one way to ensure data saturation is to ensure that the selected participants possess the successful experience and knowledge relevant to the research topic. Researchers can cease the interviews and justify the selected sample when data saturation is achieved (Morse, 2015a). I continued the semistructured interview with open ended questions until data saturation was achieved where no additional was required for the study. Based on the use of the purposeful sampling method and ensuring data saturation I selected the three SMEs to accomplish the objectives of this research study.

Ethical Research

Researchers must adhere to ethical research guidelines, codes, and regulations (Mealer, Flynn, Ironside, & Spurlock, 2017). Circumventing personal bias is necessary to ensure ethical research (Yin, 2018). Researchers request permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before contacting potential participants (Morris & Morris, 2016). I obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure compliance with university policies and federal regulations before collecting data related to this study and research with human participants. Walden University’s approval number for this study is 04-09-20-0585759 and it expires on April 8, 2021.

I ensured the process, research method and design, data collection and analysis, as well as the reliability and validity were constructed and performed adequately to reduce or mitigate researcher and participant bias. I followed the *Belmont Report*'s guidelines for research involving human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The general principles outlined in the *Belmont Report* included respect for persons, which applied to informed consent, establishing trustworthy environment, and confidentiality; beneficence, which relates to assessing the risk vs. benefit; and justice, associated with the selection of research participants (Miracle, 2016).

Participant protection, confidentiality, and general welfare are to be protected (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). I adhered to and supported the principles of ethical conduct noted in *The Belmont Report* to ensure participants participate in the study freely and to guarantee the participants fully understood their role in the research. Participants who agreed to participate in this study were asked to complete an informed consent form. Participants were informed of the interview protocol (see Appendix A) and informed they have the decision to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or reprisal of any kind. Participants were informed of the value their participation provided in the completion of this study and may find personal incentives by participating in the study, but no other incentives were provided.

To ensure the ethical protection of participants and for the protection of participant privacy, I used alphanumeric identification codes for their identities. I used SME-1, SME-2, and SME-3 instead of the names of participants and their organizations.

A list of the codes related to the real organizations were kept in a locked file cabinet along with the informed consent, documents from participants, journal notes and flash-drive for 5 years. I did not report the names of the participants or organizations. All recorded data, emails saved, transcribed data and information obtained in the study research were collected and maintained on a password-protected personal flash drive that is stored in a locked file cabinet for 5 years. At the end of the 5-year protection period, all paper-maintained data related to this study will be shredded, all data on the flash drive will be deleted, and the flash drive will be destroyed.

Data Collection Instruments

As the researcher and primary data collection instrument in this qualitative multiple case study, I collected data via semistructured interviews. Qualitative researchers serve as primary instruments when conducting interviews (Kornbluh, 2015). In qualitative research, the interview process is a conventional method used to collect descriptive rich text data and participants' share their ideas through responding to semistructured interview questions, playing an active role in the data collection process (Starr, 2014; Yin, 2018). Wilson (2014) portends researchers recommend semistructured interviews in qualitative research because participants are meaningfully involved and have more room for expressing their perceptions and experiences. Participants were informed of the interview protocol (see Appendix A) and provided a copy of the interview questions (see Appendix B). The interview protocol (see Appendix A) entailed an overview of the study, introduction of the research question, description of data collection procedures and data analysis. Using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) helps increase the reliability of case study research (Yin, 2018).

According to Yin (2018), a case study should encompass at least two evidentiary sources for data collection. Case study designs require researchers to collect data from two or more sources (Gog, 2015). I used member checking to ensure appropriate interpretation of the data and accuracy of the data collected. Yin (2018) described member checking as summarizing information obtained from the participants and researchers help to avoid bias by including member checking in their research design. Member checking enables participants to review the researchers' description of the participant's experiences (Galdas, 2017; Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) recommended researchers to use member checking techniques to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation of the information from the interview. Galdas (2017) noted that researchers have recommended the use of member checking to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected from the semistructured interviews.

Galdas (2017) and Yin (2018) posited that researchers recommended semistructured interviews to allow better interaction with participants and create a rich dialogue with participants by asking questions that encourage participants to share their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions. The information obtained during the interview process were audio-recorded using Otter.ai application and to ensure data collection accuracy I performed member checking. According to Seidman (2015), researchers commonly record interviews and later transcribe the data because these actions protect the interview's full content and facilitate categorization and analysis of the data. The data collection instruments designated for this study were appropriate for the sample size of SMEs and participants as the interviews were aligned with open-ended questions that were not suggestive or leading (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique selected for this study is semistructured interviews. Researchers can choose three ways to conduct interviews: structured, unstructured, and semistructured (Bond et al., 2014). Structured interviews reach a broader sample of participants to collect quantifiable data, but participants do not have the freedom to explore questions in detail as they do in semistructured interviews (Doll, 2017). An unstructured interview is an open-end interview in an informal approach without a format or style questions (McTat & Leffler, 2017). Semistructured interviews provide researchers the flexibility to probe participants for details of their experiences and a framework to gain an understanding of participants' attitude (McTat & Leffler, 2017; Seidman, 2015). The semistructured interview process allows the researcher to use open-ended inquiries to extract the perspectives and experiences of participants regarding a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used a semistructured interview to support the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study, to explore leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Data collection consisted of information gathered from the participants (Yin, 2018). Morse (2015a) recommended that researchers start their interview process by selecting a small sample (initial analysis sample), collect and analyze data to find themes, and then conduct more interviews until no new themes or data are available. I requested eight participants' agreement via email to obtain their permission to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Out of the eight participants solicited to participate in the study, four responded. Of the four who responded, one decided they were no longer interested in participating. I worked with three participants who provided a response to the email invitation and agreed to participate in the study to schedule a time to conduct the semistructured interview via phone call. Interviews should be conducted in an environment that would encourage participants' openness to express their experiences (Cope, 2014). Due to COVID-19 face to face restrictions, I conducted the semistructured interview via phone call at a mutually agreed upon time. Data were collected via the recorded interviews from participants. The semistructured interview was recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai application. An interview is crucial to engaging participants in the audio-recording process and establishing trust with participants (Andreae et al., 2017). The semistructured interviews and audio-recordings allowed me, as the researcher, to gain an understanding of the leadership strategies SME owners used to sustain business beyond 5 years.

Data were collected in the form of semistructured interviews with a prepared interview protocol (see Appendix A) for the study (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). I performed a review of information received from participants and from online websites, including policies and procedures to gather information about the research topic. I performed member checking validation by reviewing the Otter.ai transcription of the audio-recorded interview data and documented the data in word documents for participant observation and response regarding data accuracy and to avoid misrepresentation of data collected. Nordstrom (2015) noted that an audio-recorded interview allows the researcher to capture the information they might miss during notetaking. I provided the three participants with a summary of the transcribed data for participant observation and response regarding data accuracy and to obtain affirmation of the accuracy of the analyzed data. For member checking, I performed a follow-up interview via email and telephone call with participants.

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) helps to increase the reliability of case study research (Yin, 2018). Disadvantages of using the semistructured interview in data collection include the bias of the researcher resulting in poor articulation of interview questions and inaccurate response to interview question as a result of poor capability of participants to recall from memory (Yin, 2018). Disadvantages of the semistructured interview include the possibility of high cost and are time consuming to reach out to the participants for onsite interviews and mitigating the potential biases of data collection due to the influence of the researcher (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Shirani, 2015). Gelling (2015) identified a disadvantage of conducting interviews is that they require time to plan, conduct, and analyze.

Advantages of using the semistructured interview in data collection are the interview process allows the researcher to use open-ended inquiries to extract the perspectives and experiences of participants regarding an occurrence (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Ranney et al. (2015) found that the semistructured interview method gives researchers an ideal way to concentrate on addressing the central research question. Semistructured interviews allow replication and in-depth questions with more detail information and participants may feel more comfortable to answer questions with a well-designed protocol (Bond et al., 2014). To avoid the disadvantages of the semistructured interview I performed member checking to obtain an accurate interpretation and accuracy of data collected. Researchers avoid bias by including member checking in their research design (Galdas, 2017). Researchers achieve rigor, reliability, generalizability and avoid bias by including member checking in their research design (Galdas, 2017; Morse (2015b). Member checking renders participants the opportunity to review the researcher's description of the participant's experiences (Varpio et al., 2017).

Data Organization Technique

Participant information must be kept confidential and identities should not appear in the study (Harriss & Atkinson, 2015). Participant protection, confidentiality, and general welfare shall be protected (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). To ensure the ethical protection of participants and for the protection of participant privacy, I used alphanumeric identification codes for their identities. I used SME-1, SME-2, and SME-3 instead of the names of participants and their organizations. I did not report the names of the participants or organizations. A list of the codes related to the real organizations was kept in a locked file cabinet along with the informed consent, documents from participants, journal notes, and flash-drive. All recorded data, emails saved, transcribed data and information obtained in the study research were collected and maintained on a password-protected personal flash drive that is stored in a locked file cabinet for 5 years.

At the end of the 5-year protection period, all paper-maintained data related to this study will be shredded, all data on the flash drive will be deleted, and the flash drive will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process where the researcher interprets the collected data and forms an understanding of the concepts discovered during the investigation (Graue, 2015). Researchers analyze data to develop meaning and follow a consistent set of propositions to create meaning from the experiences of participants (Graue, 2015; Mayer, 2015). Various techniques exist for conducting the analysis process that includes the deconstruction and reconstruction of data collected to identify codes and themes to facilitate interpretation and understanding of the participants' views and experiences (Bengtsson, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2014). The data analysis process of a qualitative study involves four steps: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusions (Yin, 2018). Bengtsson's (2016) 4-stage data analysis process includes decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization, and compilation. In this study, I used the data analysis approach by Elo et al. (2014) of preparing the data for analysis, coding and organizing the data to identify themes and patterns and interpreting and reporting the results. Using the stages of analysis described by Elo et al., I performed a content analysis of the data collected via the recorded semistructured interviews of the research participants.

I prepared the data for analysis beginning with the collection process. Data were collected via semistructured interview. In qualitative research, the interview process is a conventional method used to collect descriptive rich text data and participants' share their experiences through responding to semistructured interview questions, playing an active role in the data collection process (Starr, 2014; Yin, 2018). A researcher using an interview protocol helps increase the reliability of case study research (Yin, 2018).

The information obtained during the interview process was audio-recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai application. Advantages of using the semistructured interview in data collection are the interview process that provides structure and allows the researcher to use open-ended inquiries to extract the perspectives and experiences of participants regarding a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Seidman (2015), researchers commonly record interviews and later transcribe the data because these actions protect the interview’s full content and facilitate categorization and analysis of the data. In qualitative studies, researchers generate data from narrative materials transcribed verbatim from the in-depth interview (Chang, Liu, & Chiang, 2014).

The organizing and coding of the data were used to identify themes and patterns. I organized the data by starting with transcribing the interviews into MS Word©. NVivo™ 12 software, the latest version of NVivo™, was used for organizing and coding the data collected. NVivo™ is a commonly used qualitative data analysis tool (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). Researchers use NVivo™ to store, organize and manage qualitative data (Jackson, Paulus, & Woolf, 2018). I used NVivo™ 12 for my study because of its ease of use and to import documents directly via the word processing software (Zamawe, 2015). I imported the transcription from MS Word© into NVivo™ 12 and began coding the transcribed data. Coding identifies keywords grouped to find phrases or common themes reoccurring in the data and aids in the identification of repeated themes and words (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Data interpretation and reporting of the results were performed via the coded themes. Researchers apply coding stripes, which make it easy for the researcher to see the codes and connect the emerging themes (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). Data content analysis were performed to correlate the key themes emerging from the research data with the literature review, research question, and the conceptual framework of the study (Graue, 2015). Participant information must be kept confidential and identities should not appear in the study (Harriss & Atkinson, 2015). Participant protection, confidentiality, and general welfare shall be protected (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015).

Researchers recommend triangulation to analyze data in multiple case study research (Yin, 2018). Triangulation is described as the cross-examining of data from different sources to achieve a more accurate and valid estimate of a specific construct (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Yin, 2018). Triangulation involves the use of various methods of data collection that ensures richness, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study (Fusch et al., 2017). Data can be triangulated via data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation (Carter et al., 2014). I performed methodological triangulation to triangulate the interview data with SME participant responses, SME website information, and interview notes to assure validity during the data analysis. I applied methodological triangulation to analyze and identify data about leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas in Georgia to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Researchers use methodological triangulation to help interpret and understand the data according to Carter et al. (2014).

All recorded and transcribed data were maintained and documented on completed transcripts. Study participants received a 1-2-page summary of results of this study upon completion of data analysis. From the complete transcripts, I identified short phrases to link regularities and patterns in the overall data (Miles et al., 2014). All recorded data, emails saved, transcribed data and information obtained in the study research were collected and maintained on a password-protected personal flash drive that is stored in a locked file cabinet for 5 years. At the end of the 5-year protection period, all maintained data and information related to this study will be shredded and electronically destroyed.

Reliability and Validity

Researchers in a qualitative study assess the reliability and validity of the findings using appropriate designs and methods (Leung, 2015). Reliability and validity are terms related to the accuracy and precision of research and intended to make qualitative research rigorous (Morse, 2015b; Stanton, 2016). In a multiple case study, the use of several relevant data sources is a vital approach to achieve conclusive findings and to ensure the reliability and validity of the study (Yin, 2018). Criteria used to determine the rigor of qualitative research includes dependability, credibility, confirmability and transferability (Houghton et al., 2013). Birt et al. (2016) stated that member checking is appropriate in the case study for credibility, reliability, validity and transferability of data collected and the trustworthiness of the results. The higher the levels of validity, credibility, and reliability, the more trustworthy a study is, and the more future researchers can use the findings as a basis for their related studies (Cope, 2014).

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency within analytical procedures employed in deriving the findings of the study (Shayestefar & Abedi, 2017). Use of multiple data collection sources or evidence enhances case study reliability (Ridder, 2017). Elo et al. (2014) noted that reliability is analogous to dependability and transferability. In this study, I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure study reliability. Participants were informed of the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Yin (2018) maintained that the interview protocol helps increase the reliability of case study research.

Triangulation is a means for confirming the reliability of the data collected during the interviews by comparing the data with other sources (Mayer, 2015). Carter et al. (2014) described four types of triangulation as investigator triangulation, data triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. Researchers perform investigator triangulation when gathering and analyzing data (Carter et al., 2014). According to Burau and Andersen (2014), researchers use several data sources and sampling methods in data triangulation. Burau and Andersen (2014) noted that researchers employ theory triangulation to explore various theoretical frameworks and interpret a phenomenon. Researchers apply methodological triangulation to implement more than one technique to ensure the data is both valid and reliable (Fusch et al., 2017). I applied methodological triangulation to help to ensure reliability.

Dependability

Zhang and Wildemuth (2016) defined dependability as the steps, in a process, researchers perform to ensure quality within the study phenomenon. A major technique for ensuring dependability is using audits utilized to check findings against the interpretation and recommendations (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). Dependability of a study is viewed in terms of the stability of the study data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2013) noted that the quality of a qualitative study is relative to dependability. To ensure the dependability of this study I applied consistency in the data collection, organization, and analysis methods during the research. I adhered to the interview protocol, ensured each research participant was provided the same interview questions, I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews and reviewed the transcripts. Last, I triangulated the data and used member checking to enhance the dependability of results.

Validity

Qualitative researchers conduct valid analysis by incorporating credibility, confirmability, and transferability in their studies (Amankwaa, 2016). The accuracy and the truthfulness of the data demonstrate the validity of the research study (Fusch et al., 2017). Validity refers to the integrity of the research data and how accurately the findings reflect the research data (Shayestefar & Abedi, 2017). According to Leung (2015), validity in qualitative research refers to the suitability of the tools, processes, and data. I employed methodological triangulation to help to ensure validity. In the data analysis processed from the semistructured interviews, SME documentation, and notes taken during the interview, I disassembled, compartmentalized, and reassembled the data to establish themes and draw inferences (Sotiriadou et al., 2014).

Credibility

Polit and Beck (2016) defined credibility as the truth of the data through the lens of the respondents' interpretation or perspective combined with the researcher's explanation of these interpretations and perceptions. Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, and Blackman (2016) referred to credibility as the degree to which the research represents the actual meanings from the perspective of the research participant. Credibility is applied toward the research design, instrumentation, and data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers indicate that member checking is a widely used tool for increasing credibility (Quick & Hall, 2015). To ensure this study's credibility, each participant was provided a transcript of transcribed data and I performed member checking during the transcript review with participants for data accuracy. Member checking facilitates the trustworthiness of a research tool (Kornbluh, 2015). Methodological triangulation is applied to locate evidence from various sources to validate and support the same finding and crucial to strengthen the validity and ensure the credibility of a study (Turner, Cardinal, & Burton (2017).

Transferability

Holloway and Galvin (2017) defined transferability in data collection as the ability of findings to become generalized beyond that of the specific research case. Anney (2014) described transferability as the degree to which study results apply to similar contexts, situations, times and populations. Transferability is applicable to larger contexts outside of the study focus while still maintaining the integrity of the study-specific data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transferability establishes how the research is beneficial to others with related questions and relates to the applicability of research results to other contexts (Cope, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Yilmaz (2013) described transferability as the degree to which a researcher can transfer findings from a qualitative study to another context with different respondents. Yin (2018) characterized elements of transferability in qualitative data as other situations and circumstances that may not occur directly to a larger population.

Confirmability

Billups (2015) noted that confirmability advances the audit trail and includes using the field and personal notes, and a journal. Confirmability is the capacity to adapt to the changing degree of stability in the research project (Wahyuni, 2012). The concept of confirmability measures the stability within the collected data and aligns with existing data of other resources (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers demonstrate confirmability by describing how they developed their findings and conclusions, so readers are assured that the findings are bias-free and represent actual participants' experiences (Cope, 2014). Researchers must disregard personal bias to ensure the research is unaffected by it (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Data Saturation

Data saturation is a systematical guideline to ensure researchers have collected sufficient data, understand the meaning participants give to their statements, coded all the information appropriately, and analyzed themes faithfully (Gibbins et al., 2014). Data saturation is the evidence of rigor in qualitative research and occurs when no new themes are emerging from the data (Constantinou et al., 2017; Fusch et al., 2017). Researchers consider the amount of information needed to serve the purpose and credibility of a study when selecting a sample size (McShane & Böckenholt, 2017). The three SME participants participated in the semistructured interview to obtain data saturation. The sample size of three successful SMEs in urban areas who have sustained their business beyond 5 years is adequate for this study. An essential element of multiple case study research is to ensure data saturation (Watson, 2014).

Summary and Transition

In Section 2 I described the purpose of the study, my role as the researcher, the participants in the study, and the research method and design. I also described the study population and sampling techniques, and ethical considerations for research. Section 2 ends with the data collection process, data analysis, reliability, and validity.

In section 3 I re-introduced the purpose of the study; I discussed the presentation of the findings and the implications for social change. I also addressed recommendations for action, recommendations for further research. For closure, I provided my reflections on the process and a conclusion to the project.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Exploration of leadership strategies was performed through research population consisting of three SME owners located in Georgia, who have been in business beyond 5 years. To ensure the ethical protection of SME participants and to maintain participant confidentiality, I used alphanumeric identification codes SME-1, SME-2, and SME-3 for their identities. SME participants received six interview questions (See Appendix B). I conducted semistructured interviews to obtain information from the SME participants, according to an interview protocol (see Appendix A), and to collect reliable data (Agran, MacLean, & Andren, 2016). Researchers can cease the interviews when data saturation is achieved (Morse, 2015a). I continued the semistructured interviews with open ended questions until participants' answers became repetitive and data saturation was achieved where no additional information or insights added to data collected (Nelson, 2017).

Data was collected and organized by transcribing the semistructured interviews into MS Word©. I uploaded the data into NVivo™ 12 software for organizing and coding the data collected. I performed member checking during the transcript review to allow for participant observation and response regarding data accuracy and to avoid misrepresentation of data collected. I applied methodological triangulation of data collected from participant interviews, to analyze and identify leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas in Georgia to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The identified leadership strategies are outlined to address the research question.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this qualitative multiple case study was: What leadership strategies do SME owners in urban areas use to sustain their business beyond 5 years? To answer the research question data were collected through semistructured interviews with SME owners. Data collection consisted of information gathered from the participants. Each participant's semistructured interview lasted about 60 minutes. I used SME-1, SME-2, and SME-3 instead of the names of participants to ensure confidentiality. I used methodological triangulation by reviewing participant websites and crosschecking participant response' to ensure data was dependable and credible. Transformational leadership theory was the conceptual framework for this study. The role of a transformational leader is to motivate, create a vision and influence the attitudes of followers (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015). Transformational leadership as a social process is where members of a group or organization influence the understanding of internal and external events, the choice of goals or desired outcomes, the organization of work activities, and the individual motivation and abilities (Frieder, Wang, & Oh, 2018).

Based upon the data analysis of the SME interviews, three themes were identified that participant SME owners focused on as leadership strategies to sustain their business. The three themes derived from the completion of coding, methodological triangulation, and member checking SME participant response. The themes that emanated from data analysis were the following:

- Theme 1: Focus on employees
- Theme 2: Maintain the business
- Theme 3: Relate to industry

Each theme is described in the sections below. The themes, focus on employees, maintain the business, and relate to industry are relevant because of the applicability, relatability, and frequency of occurrence analyzed from participants. The themes are also construed as ingredients for strategic planning and success and they align as a focus with the research question and conceptual framework. The results indicate that the use of all themes or a combination of each theme may result in SME success. The data analysis also revealed participant SME owners highlighted the themes during the operation of their respective business. The three themes were identified to shape the successful leadership strategies and are recommended for SME owners in urban areas to concert their focus on for SME success. The results are inconsistent: however, as SME owners in urban areas are not absolved from considering or applying additional strategies or practices relating to leadership, entrepreneurship, leadership skills and strategic planning. Further, the results indicate the application of additional considerations relating to leadership, entrepreneurship, leadership skills and strategic planning also serve as successful leadership strategies, but they do not guarantee SME total success.

Theme 1: Focus on employees

All study participants referenced employees as a critical aspect and focus as a leadership strategy. Each participant SME owner confirmed the research of Ployhart et al. (2014) that small businesses depend on human capital resources to operate from a different perspective of human capital resources such as economics, strategy, human resources, and psychology to develop an incorporated and holistic framework for success. Ployhart et al. noted that human capital is a useful asset for business success, and human capital must have the required skills to be productive. Managing employee job motivation is an important element of an organization's human capital strategy (Campbell, Im, & Jisu, 2014). The quality of human capital is essential for owners of SMEs because SME owners depend more on human capital than other capitals (Ployhart et al., 2014).

Study participants agreed there is a reliance of employee function for the success of their business. SME-1 articulated, "We are working with people: we want the people as employees that we work with to be at their best." SME-1 continued that, "leaders must be positive and have positive employees that believe in your vision." When questioned regarding leadership strategies to manage employees, SME-2 noted that when it comes to being in charge of employees, leaders should be more of a coach than a boss. SME-2 asserted the importance of treating employees as if leaders and employees are like a team, highlighting the importance of leadership to present themselves more like a coach or like a team leader and see the value of building relationships with people/employees. I reviewed SME-2's website during methodological triangulation to verify the interview response and found as part of the mission statement, their goal is to support their staff and their clients in operating securely and efficiently, in making informed, educated decisions and in reducing overall risks. SME-3 stated, “owners know what employees need from the organization. They know what is going on.” SME-3 provided the example that in urban areas, employees look toward being paid, learning more about the organization, personal development and over time they become interested in a career. SME-2 and SME-3 recommend when confronting or dealing with employees to stay away from being an autocratic leader. SME-3 shared “the goal of a leader is to motivate and lead in order to maximize employee performance and production to maximize income.” SME-1 shared “employees can be there just for the paycheck” but believes that is not a formula to be successful in any business.

Tse and Chiu (2014) confirmed the idea that transformational leadership style is crucial to employee performance and the organizational culture of the organization. Leadership skills are both fundamental and necessary for any organization to succeed (Bruyere, 2015). SME-1 posited that it is helpful to develop a group or core team of employees to help work in direction of the vision. The participants agreed they had to inspire and motivate their employees at some point during their journey to improve their business. The transfer of knowledge from an expert to a mentee or employee improves learning and performance (Prince, Burns, Lu, & Winsor, 2015). Knowledge transfer takes place in urban SME through communication between leaders, organizations and employees (Prince et al., 2015).

Research findings indicated that engaged employees were more productive than disengaged employees (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). According to Campbell and Goritz (2014), organizational culture has an influence on employee engagement. SME-2 shared “the biggest value that I've brought to my company that allows me to sustain this is to be able to have great and good alliances to build relationships with the people that I work with.” If employees are not engaged and do not associate with organizational culture, high employee turnover is the result (Campbell & Goritz, 2014). Employee disengagement is associated with higher costs and reduced productivity (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015).

The study results indicated the importance of employees and the impact employees play in the direct relation of SME owner’s success. As an effective strategy for SME success in urban areas, it is imperative to focus on employees. This finding confirms the research by Choi, Tran and Park (2015) that business leaders understand the skills and strategies leaders use to engage employees that lead to improved employee performance and organizational competitiveness. Operational efficiency is the ability of a company to combine the right people, technologies, materials, and processes to optimize business performance (Godha & Jain, 2015). Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) noted the benefits of understanding the skills and strategies needed to facilitate engagement result in improved productivity, increased profit, and an engaged workforce.

A recurring theme from the participants responses was the reliance on their employees. SME-1 admitted that a reliance on the workers provided comfort and overwhelming trust. All the participants conveyed that they used their leadership skills to motivate employees to get better production and output that resulted in their SME success. Sahin, Cubuk, and Uslu (2014) noted that transformational leadership styles have a positive effect on employees and organizational performance. Factors such as pay, leadership, environment, self-efficacy, reward and recognition can all increase or decrease employee job performance (Lin, Yu, & Yi, 2014). SME owners, as transformational leaders, provide employees with a clear sense of guidance and aspiration, building employee commitment and trust that results in overall success of the organization (Bayram & Dinç, 2015).

Theme 2: Maintain the business

The importance of understanding business was referenced by study participants to be an additional critical aspect and focus as a leadership strategy. Researchers have indicated the relation of business and strategy as instrumental ingredients to SME success. Entrepreneurial experience is essential to ensure business sustainability (Jayawarna et al., 2014). Small business owners grow their business by being strategic (McDowell, Gibson, Aaron, Harris, & Lester, 2014). Business success is dependent upon the decision-making ability as well as the development and implementation of strategies by business leaders (Myškova & Doupalova, 2015).

SME owners may benefit by incorporating strategies to build their business platforms (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015). SME-1 shared a story relating to the research of Choi, Tran, and Park (2015) incorporating strategies to build business platforms. SME-1 stated, “the business struggled because there was no existing strategy to move the business forward. I had to come up with a strategy to incorporate my vision and my mission to get my business to the next level. Without a strategy, the business would have failed.” SME-2 stated, “above all things, you have to be strategic and plan to keep your business going. It, maintaining the business, must be done. It has to be done no matter what."

Business strategies are a set of vision, mission, values, practices, approaches and technologies that confer a firm a competitive advantage on a market (Pattinson, 2016). Small business owners may acquire strategies that lead to an increased business performance in the long term (Taneja et al., 2016). SME-3 stated, "I was forced to come with a darn plan. My wife was the one who mentioned that there was a need to. I had to do better." SME-3 added, "All I knew as was I had to maintain my company or else. I had to do what was necessary to maintain my trucks, keep maintenance up and keep everything going." Neis, Pereira, and Maccari (2017) posited that strategic planning as the way small firm owners balance the external environment and the internal capabilities of their business. Business owners who design firm strategies search for profitable products, carefully monitor costs, and avoid intense price wars, witness growth, even in hostile markets (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). Leaders and SME owners with comprehensive business plans accomplish business sustainability (Oncioiu, 2014).

Business leaders understand the skills and strategies leaders use to engage employees that lead to improved employee performance and organizational competitiveness (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015). The benefits of understanding the skills and strategies needed to facilitate engagement result in improved productivity, increased profit, and an engaged workforce (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). SME-1 and SME-3 noted that using strategies have allowed their business to grow every year since they have been in business. SME-1 commented, "having strategies also allowed me to stay competitive in the business that I'm in.” Relating to business, SME-2 stated “owners should recognize there are different compartments of the business. There's the client focus and then there's the staff focus.” SME-2 added, “Owners are to compartmentalize all of the important aspects of the company and then identify all of the resources that is needed for each compartment. The last thing is to apply all of the necessary tools and resources to accommodate the needs of each compartment.” SME-3 commented “focus on being efficient. Manage the staff. Manage the maintenance and manage the vision for building the business.”

A key maxim of transformational leadership is organizational and individual goal alignment. It is imperative that leadership training contain orientation to the practice and reinforce an organization’s mission (Morrison, Greenshaw, & Pigg, 2019). Mom, van Neerijnen, Reinmoeller, and Verwaal (2015) asserted that leaders who align goals execute effective business practices and gain employee trust that leads to cohesion within the organization. SME-1 supported the research by Mom et al., (2015) stating “I had to go against my administrative team and everybody else and help them to understand that we're going to do this, whether you believe in it or not. And I actually had to really go head to head with my own staff. And today, they are so loyal and so appreciative that I did that.” I reviewed SME-1’s website during methodological triangulation to validate how they maintain their business, noting a statement how through business they provide preventive strategies through its range of family-based programs. They also learned to negotiate and develop solutions by communicating, compromising and using diplomacy, which resulted in appropriate resolutions to problems. SME-1 noted, “my website is our way of offering potential clients an introduction to our services and what we do for our community." SME-2 shared, "put yourself in a position to have the same level of success. Based on the assessment of other companies, have a little bit of a blueprint to follow." Similarly, SME-3 shared, "put yourself in position to be successful. It is always good practice to be in the right position at the right time." SME-3 added,

> having mentors, business mentors that basically lay a formula out. Now they might have their own specific formula, but it might take a little bit of their information, a little bit of a couple of other guys or other companies. And then formulate your own formula.

SME-3 also commented, "it is all determined by the market and it is also determined by a lot of business being seasonal. Seasonal rotation understanding is important."

The study results indicated the importance of maintaining the business as an effective strategy by participants. A recurring theme by the participants equally was by all means necessary to" Maintain the Business". The posturing to maintain the business parallels the research by Qureshi, Aziz, and Mian (2017) that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial perspectives allow the business leaders to be flexible and adopt the best strategies for the unique needs of the business. SME-2 stated, "try to make an emotional connection with the clients. Connect to what to their system is, making them feel safe. Engage them to connect to their emotions. SME-2 added, "listen to the customer and understand what they want, not necessarily what I offer."

Kornberger (2017) noted that a business plan is essential to clarify the business mission and values, set clear goals, define resources, understand the actors in the market, and to remain competitive. Sustainable strategic planning is a cycle process that consists of defining the firm's mission and assessing the firm's competitive position (Kornberger, 2017). In each respective participant perspective, they agreed it is imperative to maintain the business, no matter the challenges or obstacles encountered, especially during the first few years of start-up. The determination and diligence displayed by maintaining the business posture, along with implementing strategies to support the vision and mission, is certain to yield positive sustainable and maintainable results.

Theme 3: Relate to industry

Study participants identified the importance of having the business be relatable to the industry SME owners are operating within, regardless of the product, the service or the medium that either will be delivered. Small businesses operate in a rapidly dynamic and active market and are dependent on the environment in which they operate (Mustafa, 2015). As such, relationships exist between both SME and the environment where they exist. Entrepreneurs and other small business owners use their networks, experience, and better judgment to obtain collaborative support to identify market risk and capitalize on the rapidly changing technology to benefit their businesses (Kim & Vonortas, 2014). Entrepreneurs discover unsatisfied needs in the community and create an organization to make a profit or for a philanthropic goal (Pontikes & Barnett, 2017).

SMEs struggle to overcome both internal and external factors that hinder their growth (Lofti, Nayebzadeh, & Debnavi, 2014). To defeat this, small business owners may acquire strategies that lead to an increased business performance in the long term (Taneja et al., 2016). SME-1 commented, "the key to survive in business is to learn the ins and outs of business and what we were trying to do. The small office space and minimal staff was a challenge we had to overcome." SME-2 stated, "I decided to run my security business different from other security businesses in the area to set ourselves apart. I learned this from watching and speaking with others in the industry." SME-2 added, "it was so hard to change in the beginning, we noticed we were feeling better and getting better as a business."

When companies identify opportunities for expansion, they develop strategies to push the business towards realistic goals resulting in contributions to eliminate waste, lower costs, reduce the turnover, build a strong brand name, increase the corporate goodwill and maximize value creation to consumers (Godha & Jain, 2015; Koledoye & Adeola, 2014). SMEs can increase their chances of survival by developing firm-specific competitive strategies to outperform rivals (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). The success of a SME owner relies on their ability to react to changes and competition as well as maintaining their relativity and relevance to industry (Ejdys, 2014).

Each participant is a successful SME operating in their respective industry. SME-3 acknowledged the ability to predict strategies towards anticipating movement in the industry. SME-3 noted to be relatable in industry the recommendation is to "become a member of an owner operator organization. A bunch of small companies, some even larger companies that are owner operator friendly." SME-3 added, "Through this relationship, with our membership, we are kept abreast of the new up and coming rules and regulations. We remain connected to industry and industry standards."

I reviewed SME-3's website during methodological triangulation to validate how they relate to the transportation trucking industry and found that SME-3 was viewed as having one of the lowest driver turnover rates in the industry; with drivers staying with them three times longer than they do competitors. Their professional drivers are among the best on the highways, meeting standards far exceeding those required by the U.S. Department of Transportation. When providing response regarding relate to industry, SME-1 stated, "within the first 5 years, you are getting your name out and you're building your brand, creating your industry niche'." SME-1 added, "Once you start developing your brand and you start developing who you are, then people, and other organizations start to give you the credit or give you the contract or give you the opportunity to make it to the next level." SME-2 stated, "as it pertains to relating to industry to be very strategic and methodical about business practices, especially when it when it comes to the face to face, day to day work." SME-2 continued to say, "you must understand how to move forward and avoid making the mistakes and errors that can potentially cause your downfall. You must know how to navigate in your business with industry."

A key maxim of transformational leadership is organizational and individual goal alignment. SME goal alignment should entail the relation with industry and the familiarity with operational performance that facilitates being and remaining in business. The alignment of sustainability strategies that participants use to ensure profitability and long-term growth include efficient business establishment planning, commitment to strong customer service, employee satisfaction, community engagement and regulations compliance (Kim, Kim, & Qian, 2018). Transformational leadership centers on the assumption that leaders can alter followers' assumptions, behavior, and beliefs by appealing to the importance of the organization's collective outcomes (Veiseh et al., 2014). SME-1 and SME-2 acknowledged that transformative leaders remain in a state of transformation and advocate for the ideals and concepts to relate to industry.

The study results indicate that it is prudent upon SME owners to ensure their business relates to industry. More specific, relating to the industry that the business will be operated within. All three participants agreed that to become successful and remain sustainable within the industry you operate within you must rely on what you know to stay afloat. Participants reinforced Shurbagi (2014) assertion that transformational leadership style is a central feature of organizational performance and organizational commitment parallels hypothetically and empirically to organizational effectiveness.

Overall, this study revealed SME owners aforementioned themes during the operation of their respective business. The three themes considered, shape the successful leadership strategies, and are recommended for SME owners to concert focus for SME success. The results also suggest that SME owners are not absolved from considering or applying additional strategies relating to leadership, entrepreneurship, leadership skills, and strategic planning as provided within the literature review. The results indicate that a combined strategic leader focus on employees, business, and industry, and the application of additional considerations relating to leadership, entrepreneurship, leadership skills, and strategic planning also serve as successful leadership strategies. SME owners in urban areas may use these strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Applications to Professional Practice

Effective leaders in business rely on the experience and knowledge of subject matter experts, professional colleagues, and consultants to gain the support needed to be successful (Gholston et al., 2016). I conducted this qualitative multiple case study to explore leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The findings of this study support the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory as the medium through which SME owners, as leaders, use to sustain and maintain their business beyond 5 years. I found that successful SME owners in urban areas in Atlanta Ga. used strategies involving the focus on employees, maintaining the business and relating to industry to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The strategies and themes gathered from SME owners may be helpful to future and current SMEs located in other urban areas to avoid operational obstacles, overcome sustainability challenges and adjust from maintainability shortfalls. The themes are also construed as ingredients for strategic planning and success and they align as a focus with the research question and conceptual framework.

Sixty percent of unsuccessful SME's in urban areas fail due to poor management operations and without leadership development for employees (López, & Hiebl, 2015). Although 60% of small businesses fail within 5 years of startup (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2016), small businesses create wealth, economic growth, and development in the world (Blankson et al., 2017). SMEs can increase their chances of survival by developing firm-specific competitive strategies to outperform rivals (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). Andrews (2015) identified that embarking on the sustainability pathway is vital for small businesses in fast-paced business environments. Bamiatzi and Kirchmaier (2014) asserted that business owners who design firm strategies search for profitable products, carefully monitor costs, and avoid intense price wars, witness growth, even in hostile markets.

The findings of this study confirmed researchers' assertion that leadership is an important factor for SME success. Leadership is the capability to motivate employees to use their skills and resources to execute tasks and the practice in which one person affects a group of people to accomplish a mutual goal (Peachey, Zhou, Damon, & Burton, 2015). Entrepreneurial leadership serves as the guiding ship directing SME owners in the success of respective business ventures with ethical leadership filling the moral compass as a foundation for continued business practices. SME owners have contributed immensely to the nurturing of entrepreneurship (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017) and according to Bartos, Rahman, Horak, and Jacova, (2015), SME owners' entrepreneurial knowledge is a perfect remedy to economic issues. Leadership is relevant to entrepreneurship (Balven et al., 2018) and entrepreneurs must understand SME dynamics and learn to develop appropriate strategies that suit their circumstances in order to manage SMEs effectively (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). Entrepreneurs and other small business owners use their networks, experience, and better judgment to obtain collaborative support to identify market risk and capitalize on the rapidly changing technology to benefit their businesses (Kim & Vonortas, 2014).

Furthermore, the findings may help SME owners grasp the value of transformative leadership. The value of transformative leadership theory is based on the value of sustainability and authentic leadership (Peterlin, 2016). Leaders and SME owners with comprehensive business plans accomplish business sustainability (Oncioiu, 2014). Sustainability is an institutional commitment reflected throughout the entire organization's engagement activities and embedded in the governance and decision-making processes (Lee & Schaltegger, 2014). Small business managers must seek solutions to the challenges they may face to remain sustainable (Summers, 2015). Although viewed as a complex concept according to Aragon-Correa et al. (2017) sustainability provides balance between the economic, social, and environmental goals of an organization (Hansen & Schaltegger, 2016). Sustainability is referred to something long term (Aragon-Correa et al., 2017) and also involves profitability, long-term growth, innovation and creativity, competitive advantage, and every strategy should involve the equilibrium between the three interrelated elements of economy, social, and environment (Krauss, 2017).

Implications for Social Change

SME owners may use the findings of this study to increase their chance for business success as well as to effect positive social change within the urban communities they thrive. The implications for social change include sustained or increased job opportunities, an increase in city, and county tax revenues obtained from sustained employment, a reduction in SME failures and community enhancements provided through improved services and resources. The findings of the study through the three themes suggest that successful leadership strategies are beneficial to SMEs and the surrounding communities. The implications for positive social change include the potential for the enhancement of community standards through sustained employment and the leveraging of goods and services financed by increased SMEs sustained presence.

An effective leadership strategy identified in theme 1: Focus on employees. Transformational leaders focus on employee values and goals (Choi, Lim, & Tan, 2016) and transformational leadership is the main means by which the environmental changes of the organizations become coordinated (Veiseh, Mohammadi, Pirzadian, & Sharafi, 2014). SME owners have contributed immensely to the nurturing of entrepreneurship (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017) and SME owners' entrepreneurial knowledge is a perfect remedy to economic issues (Bartos, Rahman, Horak, and Jacova, 2015). Improved economic issues is synonymous with having available jobs and increased job opportunities which spurs spending.

An effective leadership strategy identified in theme 2: Maintain the business. Entrepreneurship facilitates creativity and innovativeness resulting in the development of business approaches and business decision-making (Haviernikovah, Lemanska-Majdzik, & Mura, 2017). Through entrepreneurship, businesses grow out of the passion and desire of individuals to multiply their profits (Ismail, Husin, Rahim, Kamal, & Mat, 2016). Small business is an influential source of economic growth and innovation in the United States (Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). Economic support, by way of new job growth, is derived from the small business sector (SBA, 2016). Communities survive and thrive from small business success. Tse and Chiu (2014) confirmed the idea that transformational leadership style is crucial to employee performance and the organizational culture of the organization. Cultures where employees share ideas and experience greater inclusion are less likely to express turnover intentions and within cultures that are inclusive, open and fair employees feel empowered (Sabharwal et al., 2019).

An effective leadership strategy identified in theme 3: Relate to industry. Business success is dependent upon the decision-making ability as well as the development and implementation of strategies by business leaders (Myškova & Doupalova, 2015). Job creation, employee benefits, the supplying of products or services for customers, business-to-business commerce, and tax revenues are the results of successful small businesses (Taneja et al., 2016). Mashahadi, Ahmad, and Mohamad (2016) characterized SMEs with limited human capital (people, knowledge, and capability) as firms with limited resources. Neis, Pereira, and Maccari (2017) posited that strategic planning as the way small firm owners balance the external environment and the internal capabilities of their business. An effective best practice strategy can help business leaders to become more competitive, develop new markets, reduce costs, and become more efficient (Reynolds, 2019). Strategies help small business owners assess how sustainable their businesses are in competitive environments (Chryssochoidis, Dousios, & Tzokas, 2016). Organizations and their leaders must be more responsive and malleable than ever before, and managers and leaders must act quickly and manage change at a fast pace (Bottomley et al., 2014).

Recommendations for Action

SME owners may find the study findings significant and implement strategies and considered themes to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The study results indicated the importance of employees and the impact employees play in the direct relation of SME owner's success. The study results also indicated the importance of maintaining the business as an effective strategy by participants. Study participants identified the importance of having the business be relatable to the industry SME owners are operating within, regardless of the product, the service or the medium that either will be delivered. As an effective strategy for SME success in urban areas, it is imperative to focus on employees. A recurring theme by the participants equally was by all means necessary to" Maintain the Business". The posturing to maintain the business parallels the research by Qureshi, Aziz, and Mian, (2017) that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial perspectives allow the business leaders to be flexible and adopt the best strategies for the unique needs of the business. SMEs are dependent on the environment in which they operate. As such, relationships exist between SMEs and the environments where they exist.

I intend to make the study available to SMEs in urban areas throughout the United States and abroad. My desire is to share study results with SME owners in urban, rural and outlying areas as a means of assisting growth and I recommend that SME owners seek cost-efficient programs to secure their business. The findings will be distributed to nascent and existing SME owners and other interested groups through conferences, seminars, and training.

Recommendations for Further Research

Gholston et al. (2016) found that the strategies SME owners benefit from the most are creating durable relationships with customers and contemporaries, obtaining the necessary financial and human support, and maintaining the will to succeed and survive in business.

The findings of this study warrant additional exploration of leadership strategies utilized by SME owners in various urban locations. The SME sample size and urban location of Atlanta Ga. presented limitations to this study. The real-life experiences of SMEs relate to the leadership phenomena; however, the real-life experiences presented have limitations of location and operating time in business. The study was limited to three participants in Atlanta Georgia. Future studies in different locations and more participants may yield additional successful strategies.

Recommendations for further study include the collection of data from SME owners in various urban settings and locations. An additional recommendation is data collection with SME participants within rural locations. Data collection and data analysis performed with other research methodologies and research designs may benefit SME owners and future researchers as well.

Reflections

This doctoral study journey began as a twinkling thought on the importance of leadership in the success of local businesses. During this research, I learned through examination of each SME participant that varied experiences, motivational techniques, and leadership styles are significant factors in SME success. Regardless of the varied urban settings, SME owners apply those leadership strategies necessary to make the SME work and stay in operation to meet individual and community needs. I was amazed at the determination, commitment, and sacrifice made by SME owners and their families who remained in support of the communities they served. Moreover, I learned that financial gain was not the driving factor SME owners deemed the primary measure of success but that continued contributions and support of the community is.

The fruit of this doctoral journey is my learning through expansion of professional and academic growth. I am now familiar with how to conduct scholarly research, search peer-reviewed journals, script literature reviews, and perform data collection and data analysis. I invested in myself, made sacrifices, many sacrifices not considered before-hand, and remained dedicated until completion of this study. Reflecting back, I am humbled and grateful to meet and overcome every challenge encountered but would not change this experience for anything in the world.

Conclusion

Within any small to medium enterprise structure it is imperative to consider leadership strategies to facilitate business success. This qualitative multiple case study was directed to explore successful leadership strategies for SME owners in urban areas to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The conceptual leadership theory of transformational leadership is relevant in SME success in urban areas specifically to overcome those challenges that hinder success. Transformational leaders start with the development of a vision, a view of the future that will excite, motivate, and encourage employees and followers.

The research participant sample consisted of three SME owners in urban areas located in Atlanta Georgia, who have been in business beyond 5 years. SME owners may use the findings of this study to increase their chance for business success as well as effect positive social change in the urban communities they thrive in. The implications for social change include sustained or increased job opportunities, an increase in city, and county tax revenues obtained from sustained employment, a reduction in SME failures and community enhancements provided through improved services and resources. The findings of the study through the three themes suggest that successful leadership strategies are beneficial to SMEs and the surrounding communities. The themes, focus on employees, maintain the business and relate to industry are relevant because of the applicability, relatability and frequency of occurrence analyzed from participants. The themes are also construed as ingredients for strategic planning and success and the results indicate that the combination of each theme may result in SME success.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Overview of the research

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The research population consists of three SME owners in Georgia, who have been in business beyond 5 years. The findings of this study may serve as ideal business models identifying leadership strategies required for SME success. SME owners using successful leadership strategies discovered in this study may extend SMEs' business beyond 5 years. Social change may occur through the availability of jobs created from SME in business beyond 5 years, increased tax revenue in urban areas due to SMEs staying in business, thus providing funds for poverty alleviation, and the expansion and improvement of city facilities such as parks and schools.

Research Question

What leadership strategies do SME owners in urban areas use to sustain their business beyond 5 years?

Data collection procedures

- I will assign a code to identify participants instead names to ensure protection confidentiality of participants' information.
- I will collect data using semistructured interviews and document reviews.
- I will use semistructured interview questions to explore leadership strategies that have been successful for SME owners in urban areas.
- The research participant will not be named in the final research

manuscript.

- I will not use participants' personal information for any purpose outside of this research project.
- Electronic data will be kept secure on a password-protected computer and written documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet accessible only by myself.
- The data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by Walden's Institutional Review Board.

Data analysis

- I will transcribe the interview recordings, cross checking the audio for accuracy; and reviewing the data collected from the written reports and protocols.
- A member checking method will be used to verify the accuracy of the data findings in which participants will be asked to review the transcribed data to verify the correctness of the information the participants provided.
- Data will be analyzed using the NVivo™ 12 computer software to identify recurring themes.
- I will develop a coding scheme based on the identified themes and organize the data utilizing the NVivo™ 12 software.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What leadership strategies have you used to manage your SME toward sustaining the business beyond 5 years?
2. What leadership strategies have you found most effective for sustaining your business past 5 years?
3. How did you judge the effectiveness of strategies sustaining your business past 5 years?
4. What barriers have you encountered implementing leadership strategies to sustain your business past 5 years?
5. What did you do to manage those barriers?
6. What additional comments would you like to add about your strategies to sustain your business beyond 5 years?

Appendix C: Participant Study Recruitment Message

My name is Gregory Jackson, a doctoral student at Walden University and I am the researcher conducting this study.

I request your participation in my research study about Leadership Strategies for Success of Small to Medium Enterprises (SME) Urban Enterprises. I seek to recruit three SME owners located in Atlanta Georgia, who have been in business beyond 5 years. I noticed on the internet you have been in business for more than 5 years. I invite you to participate in this study and tell me strategies you have used to stay in business for more than 5 years. If you agree to participate in a one-hour interview via phone call, at a time that is mutually agreed upon, please respond to this email.

For further information, I can be reached via email (Gregory.jackson5@waldenu.edu) and telephone (240-210-3027).