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## Leadership Styles for Creating Shared Value in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Joshua Oisedebame Ilevbare  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Joshua Ilevbare

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Leadership Styles for Creating Shared Value in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

by

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MBA, University of Liverpool, 2017

MS, University of Lagos, 2010

BS, University of Ibadan, 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2021

## Abstract

Lack of alignment between leadership style and strategy contributes to the failure of many small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) leaders to realize their potential for creating shared value (CSV). Aligning leadership styles with CSV strategies improves the ability of Nigerian SME leaders to create economic and social value for all stakeholders of their enterprise. Using four contingency theories of leadership as a conceptual framework, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies SME leaders use for aligning leadership style and business strategy for CSV. The participants comprised 11 owners or senior managers from four SMEs in the retail industry in southwest Nigeria with over 5 years of operation and CSV evidence. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews, company documents, company websites, newspaper articles, customer review websites, and analyzed using content and thematic analysis. Five major themes emerged from the data: SME leaders set the tone or lead by example, adapt leadership style based on situational factors, deploy organizational systems and procedures, obtain feedback and evaluate performance metrics, and have good communication skills. A key recommendation is for SME leaders to develop a wide variety of leadership skills to improve alignment strategies and leadership effectiveness. The implications for positive social change include the potential for SMEs to contribute more to the local communities' sustainable development through job creation, employee retention, tax payments, and products or initiatives that address customer needs and social challenges.

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## Dedication

To everyone committed to *learning, leading, and living* a legacy. To *long-term leaders* who are *life-long learners* and *long-life facilitators*.

## Acknowledgments

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Leadership and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are important for sustainable development of countries (Ng et al., 2019; Szczepanska-Woszczyna & Kurowska-Pysz, 2016). Leadership is a major factor hindering the growth, effectiveness, and success of organizations in Africa (Deloitte, 2015; Zoogah et al., 2015). SMEs constitute about 97% of business enterprises in Nigeria (Agwu, 2018). At the end of 2017, Nigeria had over 41 million SMEs employing over 86% of the national workforce (Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics [NNBS], 2019). This study is about the role of leadership in how SMEs create sustainable development in the form of shared value in Nigeria. In Section 1, I lay the foundation for the study by identifying the problem and its background, my approach to conducting the study, and the significance of the study. In addition, I provide definitions of important terms and concepts, and a detailed review of existing literature related to the study.

### **Background of the Problem**

SMEs are major drivers of economic growth in developing economies such as Nigeria in terms of wealth creation, poverty eradication, and job creation (Agwu, 2018). As of 2017, SMEs contributed 49.8% of GDP and employed 86.3% of the nation's workforce, but 89% of SMEs operated in the informal sector and contributed marginally to economic growth in Nigeria (NNBS, 2019). Within the formal sector, the number of medium size enterprises dropped by 61.6% between 2013 and 2017 (NNBS, 2019). These statistics show many enterprises fail to grow from micro or small businesses to medium-size enterprises, and the few that succeed find it difficult to survive. Thus, the

majority of SMEs fail to realize their potential for greater economic growth and social impact due to problems confronting SME leaders.

Many SME leaders lack leadership and strategic management skills. Asikhia (2016) found owner expertise was the most important factor contributing to wealth creation in Nigerian SMEs. Agwu (2018) attributed failure of SMEs in Nigeria to lack of strategic planning and decision-making skills of leaders. The narrow focus on wealth creation for owners, with little attention to economic, social, and environmental impacts on all stakeholders, could negatively affect sustainable development of SMEs. Effective leadership styles that encourage a shared vision with stakeholders such as employees, customers, host communities, and government usually results in greater success of SME owners (Howard et al., 2019). Limited research on leadership in small businesses might hinder improving the effectiveness of leadership in SMEs (Howard et al., 2019). Hence, there is a need for studies to bridge the gap in knowledge on SME leadership. This study contributes to developing SME leaders by exploring how successful SME leaders align leadership style with strategies for creating shared value (CSV).

### **Problem Statement**

Lack of alignment between leadership styles and strategies used by business leaders for creating economic and social value can result in lack of growth and failure of enterprises (Chen et al., 2017; Stock et al., 2017). As of 2017, the number of medium-sized enterprises had dropped from the 2013 figures by 61.6%, while 89.1% of the 41.5 million SMEs in Nigeria were one-person businesses operating in the informal sector not offering paid employment (NNBS, 2019). The general business problem is poor

alignment between leadership style and strategy hinders the creation of economic and social value in enterprises. The specific business problem is some SME leaders lack strategies for ensuring leadership style aligns with business strategy for CSV resulting in failure of enterprises and the lack of growth.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SME leaders use for ensuring leadership style aligns with business strategy for CSV. The target population were owners and senior managers of SMEs in specialty and general consumer goods retail industries in southwest Nigeria that were at least 5 years old and grew in sales revenue and number of employees since inception. Shared value refers to economic and social value for all major stakeholders of an enterprise (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Through this study, business leaders and scholars can gain insight into how strategic fit between business strategy and leadership style affects shared value creation. Implications for positive social change include sustainable economic and social wellbeing of host communities of SMEs through regular payment of taxes, creation of jobs, and creation of services and products that benefit society.

### **Nature of the Study**

The methodology for this study was the qualitative research method rather than quantitative or mixed method research methods. The qualitative research method is an inductive, interpretive, and naturalistic approach to studying people, cases, phenomena, social situations, and processes in order to obtain descriptive accounts of the meanings people give to their experiences and reality, which are socially constructed (Saunders et



al., 2019; Yilmaz, 2013). Quantitative and mixed-methods research methods usually involve a positivist epistemology based on the philosophy that reality is static and independent of participants and the researcher (Yilmaz, 2013). When using quantitative methods, the focus is usually on results of a social phenomenon rather than the processes that led to the results (Dasgupta, 2015). Since the purpose of this study is to obtain in-depth understanding of experiences and behaviors of business leaders that led to desired results, and not to confirm existing theories, the use of the qualitative method better aligned with the goal of the study than the use of quantitative and mixed methods.

The multiple case study design entails conducting in-depth and holistic inquiry into broad, complex, and context-dependent social phenomena involving a small number of persons or organizations referred to as cases (Dasgupta, 2015; Yin, 2018). I chose the multiple case study design because it allows for a robust exploration of the research question and contextual factors across more than one enterprise. Other qualitative designs include ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative research (Mohajan, 2018). Ethnography involves the researcher taking the role of a participant-observer for long periods to collect data focusing more on culture than other types of context (Mohajan, 2018). Narrative enquiry usually entails stories of people about themselves or events, preserving the chronological order and connections (Mohajan, 2018). Phenomenological research usually involves exploring and examining everyday life experiences of people to understand how they make sense of such experiences (Gill, 2014). I did not choose the ethnographic, narrative, or phenomenological designs because I did not intend to focus primarily on culture, chronological order, or philosophical meanings of life experiences

of people.

### **Research Question**

The overarching research questions for this study was: How do SME leaders ensure alignment between leadership style and business strategy for CSV?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What is your business strategy for creating shared value?
2. How would you describe your leadership style?
3. How does situation or context affect your leadership style?
4. How does your leadership style affect your strategy for creating shared value?
5. What determines your leadership style when implementing strategy for creating shared value?
6. How did you ensure alignment between your leadership style and strategy for creating shared value?
7. How did you assess the effectiveness of your alignment strategies to achieve the desired outcomes of creating shared value?
8. What other information would you like to share about how you align leadership style and shared value creation strategies?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was a combination of several contingency theories of leadership. Fiedler (1967) pioneered the contingency theory of leadership. The conceptual framework includes Fiedler's contingency model; House's (1971) path-goal theory; Vroom, Yetton, and Jago's decision-making models introduced

by Vroom (1973); and the situational leadership model introduced in 1972 by Hersey and Blanchard. Fiedler introduced the contingency theory of leadership because the behavioral and trait theories could not explain why a leader was not effective in all situations (Debebe, 2017).

The basic premise of these contingency theories is the effectiveness of organizational leadership is contingent on the interaction between leadership style and the favorability of the situation or organizational context (Mitchell et al., 1970). Scholars of contingency theories agree there is no one best leadership style for every situation and a leader or leadership style that is effective in one situation may be ineffective in a different situation (Shao, 2019; Vidal et al., 2017). The context, and the natural disposition and adaptability of a leader, play important roles in determining the effectiveness of business leaders and success of their enterprises.

The contingency theories of leadership are an appropriate conceptual framework for this study because they allowed exploration of the effectiveness of different leadership styles in different organizational contexts. Håkonsson et al. (2012) and Vidal et al. (2017) used the contingency theories as a conceptual or theoretical framework. Håkonsson et al. and Vidal et al. examined the impact of leadership style on SME performance in Denmark and Ecuador, respectively.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Business strategy*: A coherent set of analyses, concepts, policies, arguments, and actions that define how a business organization will deploy its resources to compete in the marketplace and pursue its goals (Teece, 2018).

*Creating shared value (CSV):* Creating economic value in a way that also creates social value by addressing the needs and challenges of society through the business or business model (Alberti & Belfanti, 2019; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

*Economic value:* Profit-generation or profit-maximization of business firms (Dembek et al., 2016; Lankoski & Smith, 2018; Moon & Parc, 2019; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

*Leadership style:* Intentional behaviors by which a leader influences a group of people to achieve a shared vision and/or organizational goals and objectives (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018).

*Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs):* Businesses employing less than 200 workers and usually having total assets, excluding land and buildings, less than one billion naira (Masocha, 2019; NNBS, 2019).

*Social value:* Societal benefits or improvements to social welfare derived from the activities of an organization or business firm, which include provision of jobs, housing, food, clean water, quality healthcare, education, and equality at work (Dembek et al., 2016; Fraser, 2019; Lankoski & Smith, 2018; Moon & Parc, 2019; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are the foundations and boundaries of a study that help readers interpret and understand the research process and findings (Ellis & Levy, 2009). Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018) defined assumptions as issues, ideas, or positions at any stage of the study the researcher takes for granted without concrete

proof, or views as reasonable and widely accepted. Limitations are any potential weaknesses or constraints of the study outside the control of the researcher that can constitute a threat to the validity of the study (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Delimitations are the limitations consciously set by the researcher, which include definitions of research boundaries that make the research achievable within available resources and time (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

### **Assumptions**

In this study, I assumed I would find and gain access to an adequate number of SME leaders in southwest Nigeria whose businesses created shared value over a period of 5 years. In addition, I assumed I would reach data saturation during the interviews and participants would share their company documentation as a secondary source of data. Furthermore, I assumed the participants would provide valuable insights that addressed the research problem. Finally, I assumed all participants answered truthfully during the interview process and the company documents they shared with me are accurate and valid.

### **Limitations**

An important limitation of this study was all participants of the study were volunteers who could withdraw at any time; hence, the participants who completed the study may not fully represent the targeted population. Another limitation was participant biases that are difficult to eliminate such as participants representing themselves favorably or refusing to discuss unfavorable experiences (Bucic et al., 2010). A limitation of the case study research design is it does not allow generalization to other

organizations outside the context of organizations constituting the cases due to the small sample size, the use of non-representative sampling, and limiting the study to a geographic region or country (Franco & Matos, 2015).

### **Delimitations**

I delimited participation in the study to leaders of SMEs in specialty and general consumer goods retail industries in southwest Nigeria that were at least 5 years old and had grown in sales revenue and employee headcount since inception; hence, generalizations to large organizations in any industry and location, or SMEs in other industries and locations may not be appropriate. In addition, the choice of using purposive sampling and conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with between six and 15 participants from a minimum of three SMEs delimited the study. Boddy (2016) found case studies reach data saturation with a sample size of between six and 12 participants in studies with homogeneous populations.

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study can add value to SME leaders by improving their capacity to create shared value that ensures survival and growth of their businesses. Porter and Kramer (2011) argued CSV is the best way for businesses to gain legitimacy, benefit economically, and sustain commitment to stakeholders over time. Identifying strategies that ensure the use of an effective leadership style for CSV could facilitate developing business practices, products, and services in SMEs that can result in sustainable growth of enterprises and have positive social change implications.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

This study can contribute to business practice in ways such as: (a) generating a set of best practices that leaders can use during their strategic management process and (b) providing a proactive and sustainable approach to social impact that aligns with profit maximization. Findings of studies on leadership style in SMEs fill knowledge gaps in the field of leadership and provide new information that improves the effectiveness of SME leaders (Franco & Matos, 2015). Similarly, findings of studies highlighting benefits of CSV may motivate business leaders to assess their current business models, identify new opportunities, and develop new business models that enhance their competitive advantage (Fernández-Gómez et al., 2019). In addition, academic scholars can use the findings of this study as a basis for further research on SME leadership style and value creation strategy.

### **Implications for Social Change**

SME leaders may determine the findings of this study are beneficial in CSV that contributes to positive social change in several ways. First, such leaders can grow the capacity of their businesses to create more jobs and pay more taxes to host communities (Yazdanfar & Ohman, 2018). Second, businesses that create shared value can contribute more towards achieving sustainable development goals such as: eliminating poverty and hunger, providing access to quality education and healthcare, and building infrastructure (Barnett et al., 2018). The survival, growth, and contribution of SMEs to the local economy create a cycle of wealth creation that benefits all stakeholders.

### A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

I reviewed literature about performance, leadership styles, and strategies of SME leaders, especially those in Nigeria, published in various scholarly journals and databases. I accessed the literature review publications using the Walden University Library resources, Google Scholar, and the websites of scholarly journals. I retrieved articles from databases such as ABI/INFORM Collection, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, ProQuest Central, Sage Journals, and ScienceDirect. The key words and terms I used to search the databases included: contingency theory, situational leadership, CSV, SME or small business performance, SME in Nigeria, SME strategy, SME leadership style, strategy alignment in SME, and strategic fit.

**Table 1**

*Details of Literature Reviewed by Year of Publication*

	Before 2016	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Books	3	2					5
Peer-reviewed journal articles	18	12	17	21	23	8	99
Dissertations				3			3
Magazine (HBR)	1						1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>108</b>

*Note.* HBR = Harvard Business Review. Table created by author.

The literature review contains 108 scholarly sources. Table 1 shows details of literature reviewed by year of publication. The publication date of 86 (80%) sources is



between 2016 and 2020, while 15 (14%) sources are seminal publications before 2016. The literature review includes 99 (92%) peer-reviewed journal articles, five books, and three dissertations. I used the Ulrich's Periodicals Directory to verify journal articles were peer-reviewed. At the beginning of the literature review, I discussed the contingency theory of leadership and the concepts of leadership and leadership style. Afterwards, I reviewed current literature on leadership in SMEs, strategies of SMEs, performance of SMEs, and finally, CSV.

### **Contingency Theory of Leadership**

The contingency theories of leadership include Fiedler's contingency model; House's path-goal theory; Vroom, Yetton and Jago's decision-making models; and Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership model (Stewart & Gapp, 2017; Vroom & Jago, 2007). In the 1950s, the Ohio State University leadership studies led by Stogdill and the University of Michigan leadership studies led by Likert identified constructs of leadership behavior such as initiating structure and consideration, and production-orientation and employee-orientation, respectively, which were fundamental to developing the contingency theories of leadership and determining leadership effectiveness in different situations (Debebe, 2017; Vroom & Jago, 2007). The basic premise of the contingency theories is the effectiveness of organizational leadership is contingent on the interaction between leadership style and the favorability of the situation or organizational context (Mitchell et al., 1970). Contingency theorists such as Fiedler opine leadership style is a stable disposition and leadership effectiveness depends on matching the right leader to a situation, while situational leadership theorists such as

Hersey and Blanchard opine leadership style is flexible and effective leaders adapt their style to the situation (Debebe, 2017). Hornstein et al. (1987) classified Fiedler's contingency theory of leadership as a trait/situation match contingency theory but classified House's path-goal theory, Vroom and Yetton's decision making model, and Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership model as leadership style/situation match contingency theories. However, contingency theorists agree one leadership style cannot be effective in every situation. Apart from focusing on different contingency factors, the differences in opinion of contingency theorists usually concern how to achieve leadership effectiveness: whether leaders can adapt their leadership style to fit the situation or replace the leader with another having an appropriate style for the situation.

### **Fiedler's Contingency Theory of Leadership**

Fiedler introduced the contingency theory of leadership to address the failure of trait and behavioral theories in explaining why leader behavior failed to predict leadership effectiveness in all situations (Debebe, 2017). Fiedler focused on identifying factors that determine leadership effectiveness, arguing the research on leader traits or attributes such as intelligence or social competence showed differences in such traits were not significant to explain for differences in effectiveness of leaders (Fiedler, 1981). In addition, Fiedler argued leaders' behaviors typified by constructs of structuring and consideration from the Ohio State leadership studies of the 1950s did not provide adequate explanations for leadership effectiveness since ineffective leaders are likely as considerate and structuring as effective leaders; hence, situational factors influence leadership effectiveness (Fiedler, 1981).

According to Fiedler (1981), leaders are effective when their personality and style fits the needs of a task and not just because they desire to be effective. This approach to leadership effectiveness highlights Fiedler's disagreement with the notion leaders can easily change or adapt ingrained behaviors learned over time to more appropriate behaviors for different situations, even if they wanted to do so (Fiedler, 1981). Fiedler argued many leaders lack self-awareness and a good understanding of followers' perception of leadership behaviors, making changing or adapting leadership behavior difficult. Hence, Fiedler opined that leadership style is a stable disposition based on personality rather than adaptable behaviors leaders can learn and change at will (Debebe, 2017). Fiedler attempted to answer questions about the kind of people, rather than the kind of behaviors or characteristics, required for successful leadership performance in certain situations (Fiedler, 1981).

Fiedler (1981) found the contingency model of leadership effectiveness shows the importance of situational factors in determining leadership effectiveness. According to Fiedler's model, the effectiveness of a leader, or the organization, depends on two factors: the leader's personality or style and situational control or favorableness of the situation (Fiedler, 1981; Mitchell et al., 1970; Popp & Hadwich, 2018). The leader's personality is the degree to which the leader is task-oriented or relationship-oriented, while the dimensions of situational control are the relationship between the group and the leader, the structure of the task, and the leader's position power (Blanchard et al., 1993; Fiedler, 1981; Mitchell et al., 1970). The score on the least preferred co-worker (LPC) scale developed by Fiedler depicts leader personality or leadership style; high LPC

leaders are relationship-oriented while low LPC leaders are task-oriented (Mitchell et al., 1970). The combination of dimensions of situational control produces eight different situations, ranging from high control or favorability to low control or favorability, depicting the degree to which a leader can influence or control group members (Mitchell et al., 1970; Popp & Hadwich, 2018). The contingency theory of leadership predicts task-oriented leaders will be effective in situations of relatively high or low control, while relationship-oriented leaders will be effective in situations of moderate control (Fiedler, 1981; Mitchell et al., 1970). Fiedler opined training should focus on increasing a leader's situational control by clarifying the nature and goal of tasks, which is easier than the difficult task of changing a leader's behavior or style (Fiedler, 1981). Fiedler's theory suggests the only way to rectify a mismatch between a leader and situation is to change the leader or modify the situation to suit the leader, which has limited appeal in organizational practice (Hornstein et al., 1987).

### **House's Path-Goal Theory**

House (1971) presented a theory of leader behavior building on the path-goal hypothesis and previous research on expectancy theory of motivation. Evans (1970) studied leadership and motivation using the Ohio State leadership studies constructs of leader consideration and initiating structure and found differences in the relationships between leader behavior and follower path-goal in different organizations, which laid the foundation for the path-goal theory (House, 1996). Using existing trait and behavioral theories, House found it difficult to reconcile why the same leaders' behaviors had different effects on different follower samples. House developed the path-goal theory to

explain conflicting results from previous studies on how leader behavior affects subordinate satisfaction, motivation, and performance, suggesting the effectiveness of leadership behavior is likely contingent on organizational context. According to path-goal theory, dimensions of leader behavior such as initiating structure and consideration, contingent on factors such as nature of task and the environment, influenced the effectiveness of the leader's efforts in clarifying path-goals (House, 1971, 1996). The nature of tasks or task structure is whether tasks are routine, satisfying, or ambiguous (House, 1971, 1996; Rana et al., 2019). In other words, the leader's ability to clarify path-goals and positively motivate subordinates depend on how well the leader reduces role ambiguity and exercises control over rewards that meet the needs of subordinates.

House (1996) presented a reformulated path-goal theory of leadership effectiveness for work units. According to House, the path-goal theory is a dyadic theory of supervision addressing how formally appointed superiors affect motivation and satisfaction of individual subordinates rather than work groups or units; hence, the theory addresses task and relationship oriented leadership behaviors at the micro and individual level rather than at the group, organizational, and macro levels of leadership. The path-goal theory suggests leadership effectiveness depends on the extent to which leaders can add value to subordinates outside those the organization and environment provide to support achievement of work goals (House, 1996; Karnopp, 2019). The motivational function of the leader involves ensuring subordinates are able to achieve their work-goals by clarifying the path, reducing roadblocks and pitfalls, and facilitating personal satisfaction (Bickle, 2017; House, 1971; Karnopp, 2019). Leaders are effective when

they are able to clarify linkages between effort, goal attainment and extrinsic rewards, and provide necessary resources and support for achieving work goals (House, 1996).

In the initial theory, House (1971) identified two leader behaviors: path-goal clarifying behavior and behavior directed towards satisfying subordinate needs, representing the 1950s Ohio State leadership studies measures of initiating structure and consideration, respectively. In 1974, House and Mitchell identified more specific leadership behaviors, namely: directive path-goal clarifying, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leader behaviors (as cited in House, 1996; Phillips & Phillips, 2016; Rana et al., 2019). In proposing the reformulated path-goal theory for work groups and units, House (1996) identified eight leadership behaviors; directive path-goal clarifying, supportive, achievement-oriented, work facilitation, interaction facilitation, group-oriented decision process, representation and networking, and value-based leader behaviors. House (1996) stressed the importance of shared leadership since formal leaders may not always be able to demonstrate all the leader behaviors the group requires and effective leadership entails delegating or sharing such responsibilities to capable work group/unit members.

A major difference between House's and Fiedler's approach to leadership effectiveness is the notion leadership style is flexible and adaptable (Fiedler, 1981). Interestingly, Fiedler (1981) acknowledged the importance of the path-goal theory for identifying conditions under which consideration and structuring behaviors of leaders are effective but disagreed with the notion leaders could easily change their style. House's focus on leadership behaviors rather than personality presumes leaders can change or

adapt their behavior or style to suit the situation (Rana et al., 2019). Leadership training programs and research should focus on learning skills that improve flexible and adaptive leadership (Yukl et al., 2019). The path-goal theory allows leaders learn skills such as setting and clarifying work goals and priorities, and supporting subordinates to achieve work goals (Bickle, 2017).

### **Vroom, Yetton, and Jago's Decision Making Model**

Vroom and Yetton introduced the normative and descriptive models of leadership and decision-making in 1973 based on a behavioral perspective similar to the path-goal theory but focused specifically on how leaders involve subordinates in the decision making process (Vroom & Jago, 2007). Vroom and Yetton presented the initial model in 1973, while Vroom and Jago presented the improved model in 1988 (Lührs et al., 2018; Vroom & Jago, 1995). Vroom and Yetton were motivated to develop a set of rules for matching leader behaviors to situational demands because they considered explanations using McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y too general and inadequate to address complexities of decision making in different situations (Vroom, 1973). Vroom and Jago argued the heroic model, trait theory, and behavioral theories of leadership neither provide adequate empirical evidence to guide practice nor explain inconsistencies between findings of studies on leadership effectiveness because they do not consider the effect of context and situational variables on the process of leadership. Hence, contingency theories, which explore differences in situations and leaders, provide a good approach to studying leadership effectiveness in different situations. A criticism of the model is its narrow focus on one aspect of leadership behavior (Field, 1979).

The initial normative and prescriptive model by Vroom and Yetton consisted of five decision processes, seven situational variables, and prescriptive decision rules, usually presented in the form of a decision tree with branches addressing decision-making in specific situations (Vroom, 1973; Vroom & Jago, 2007). Vroom (1973) distinguished between three dimensions depicting the effectiveness of decisions: (a) the quality and rationale of the decision, (b) how well subordinates accepted and committed to executing the decision, and (c) the time taken to make the decision. Vroom and Yetton derived the situational variables, also called problem attributes, from the dimensions of effective decisions. In the improved model, Vroom and Jago added development of subordinates and geographical dispersion of the group to the dimensions of effective decisions, increased the situational variables of the model to 12, and replaced the decision rules with linear equations (Vroom & Jago, 1995, 2007). The set of five decision processes are AI, AII, CI, CII, and GII, which are variants of autocratic and participative leadership behavior or styles (Vroom & Jago, 1995). AI and AII stand for autocratic processes where the manager makes the decision himself with and without information from subordinates, respectively; CI and CII represent consultative processes where the manager decides after consulting with individual subordinates and the group, respectively; and GII stands for a fully participative process in which the group deliberates and arrives at a decision together (Lühns et al., 2018; Vroom & Jago, 1995). GI is not included in the model. The 12 problem attributes of the model, which the model uses to recommend decision processes after calculating effectiveness values for different options, each represent a diagnostic question about the decision context (Lühns et al.,



2018; Vroom & Jago, 1995). The problem attributes and codes are subordinate conflict (CO), problem structure (ST), commitment requirement (CR), commitment probability (CP), leader information (LI), goal congruence (GC), subordinate information (SI), motivation time (MT), motivation development (MD), time constraints (TC), geographical dispersion (GD), and quality requirement (QR) (Lührs et al., 2018; Vroom & Jago, 1995).

Vroom and Jago (2007) found few differences in overall levels of participation of people but significant differences in the way leaders apply decision rules in different situations. For example, in a study with over 1000 managers, 58% of managers avoided conflict by becoming more autocratic than participative in high-conflict situations, whereas 38% of managers confronted conflict by becoming more participative in making decisions (Vroom & Jago, 2007). According to Vroom (1973), it makes more sense to talk about participative and authoritative situations rather than participative and authoritative leaders when it comes to effective decision-making. Instead of categorizing leaders based on leadership style depicting average behavior or natural predispositions, Vroom and Jago (1995) concluded factors such as person effects, situational effects, and the interaction between the person, group, and situation, govern leadership behavior or style. Vroom and Jago (2007) also concluded situations outside the control of the leader influence organizational effectiveness, shape how leaders behave, and influence consequences of leader behavior. Therefore, taking a purely dispositional, behavioral, or situational approach to leadership will not capture the full essence of leadership, and researchers should base findings on specific types of situations and avoid wide

generalizations about leadership using the situational or contingency theories (Vroom & Jago, 2007). Lührs et al. (2018) found the Vroom-Yetton-Jago model improved decision-making effectiveness in public environmental governance in terms of acceptance, developmental benefits, social equity, and environmental quality but not in terms of time. Although the model may not provide an adequate spread of recommendations, it helps decision-makers focus on important attributes of the issue and situation in a systematic manner, improving the decision making process.

### **Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Model**

In an effort to remove normative labels from leadership behavior, Hersey and Blanchard introduced the life cycle model of leadership in 1969, which developed into the situational leadership (SL) model in 1972 (Blanchard et al., 1993; Thompson & Glasø, 2018). Since then, the SL model has become one of the most popular models among leadership practitioners and scholars (Thompson & Glasø, 2018; Wright, 2017). The primary objective of Hersey and Blanchard was to develop a practical model anyone can use for making decisions that effectively influences other people (Hersey et al., 2013). The main idea of the SL model is the need to adapt leaders' behaviors or styles to fit the needs or maturity of followers in different situations for leadership effectiveness (Cote, 2017; Stewart & Gapp, 2017; Wright, 2017). Implicit in the SL model is the ability of the leader to accurately diagnose the needs or maturity level of the follower and support the development of the follower (Hersey et al., 2013; Raza & Sikandar, 2018).

Situational leadership is not a theory but a model consisting of three dimensions: (a) the amount of direction a leader gives labelled task behavior; (b) the amount of socio-

emotional support a leader provides labelled relationship behavior; and (c) the readiness of followers in terms of ability and willingness to perform a specific task ranging from R1 to R4 (Hersey et al., 2013). Hersey and Blanchard derived task behavior and relationship behavior dimensions from the 1950s Ohio State leadership studies constructs of initiating structure and consideration, respectively (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). To reduce confusion about the dimensions of the model, Blanchard et al. (1993) modified the model by relabeling the dimensions and leadership styles of the model. Task behavior became directive behavior, relationship behavior became supportive behavior, and follower readiness became follower development level ranging from D1 representing low development level to D4 representing high development level depending on follower levels of competence and commitment instead of ability and willingness, respectively (Blanchard et al., 1993). The combination of task/directive behavior and relationship/supportive behavior produced a taxonomy of four leadership styles contingent on follower maturity or readiness: telling/directing, selling/coaching, participating/supporting, and delegating styles (Blanchard et al., 1993; Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). The SL model prescribes directing style for followers requiring high directive and low supportive behaviors labelled S1, coaching for followers needing high directive and high supportive behaviors labeled S2, supporting for followers needing low directive high supportive behaviors labelled S3, and delegating for follower needing low directive and low supportive behaviors labelled S4 (Blanchard et al., 1993; Hersey et al., 2013). The leadership styles depicted in the SL model are prescriptive rather than normative; hence, there is no single best style but any one of the four styles could be

most effective depending on the diagnosis of the situation (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017).

An important contribution of the SL model to the field of leadership is the emphasis on flexible and adaptive behavior of leaders, which has become an important principle of contingency theories of leadership (Thompson & Glasø, 2018). The SL model is popular in the fields of leadership development, training, and education because of the focus on the development of the follower or student and the need for leaders to adapt their style to help increase the development level and performance of followers (Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Situational leaders possess multiple leadership styles and skill sets, are able to recognize the abilities and potential of followers, and provide the right style and skills for the situation (Stewart & Gapp, 2017).

### **Summary of Contingency Theories of Leadership**

Table 2 is a taxonomy table summarizing the contingency theories of leadership. The table contains the leadership styles, contingency factors, and alignment classification of each theory or model. The leadership styles are similar since they are derivatives of constructs of the Ohio State leadership studies of the 1950s: initiating structure and consideration. Task-oriented, directive, achievement-oriented, and autocratic styles are derivatives of initiating structure while relationship-oriented, supportive, and participative styles are derivatives of consideration. Major differences between the theories are the contingency factors, which together provide a broad and rich set of contingency factors. As the pioneering theorist, Fiedler focused on a large set of contingencies relating to the leader, the follower, the task, and the organizational structure while subsequent theories/models focused on specific contingency factors

providing a rich understanding of each factor. House's path-goal theory focused on attributes of the task. Vroom, Yetton, and Jago focused on the attributes of the decision and followers' role in the decision, while Hersey and Blanchard focused on the needs of the follower.

The contingency theories provide two major strategies of achieving alignment between leadership style and the situation. Fiedler's categorization of a leader's style as a stable disposition and contingency factor suggests leader selection is important and either changing the leader or the situation would achieve alignment when there is a mismatch. Other contingency theories focus on factors other than the leader because of the underlying notion that leaders can easily learn new behaviors through training and experience; hence, leadership style is flexible and adaptable, and leaders can change their style to match the situation.

**Table 2***Taxonomy of Contingency Theories and Models of Leadership*

Theory	Year	Author(s)	Leadership Styles	Contingency Factors	Alignment Classification and Strategy
Contingency theory of leadership	1967	Fiedler, F.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relationship-oriented/High LPC personality or style</li> <li>2. Task-oriented/Low LPC personality or style</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Leader personality: leadership style is a stable disposition</li> <li>2. Situation control:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Leader-member relationship</li> <li>b. Task structure</li> <li>c. Leader position power</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p>Leader trait/situation match</p> <p>Change leader or situation to achieve alignment</p>
Path-goal theory	1971	House, R	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Directive path goal clarifying</li> <li>2. Supportive</li> <li>3. Participative</li> <li>4. Achievement-oriented</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nature of task: Task clarity or ambiguity               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Routine or complex task</li> <li>Satisfying or dissatisfying task</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p>Leadership style/situation match</p> <p>Change leadership style for alignment</p>
Normative and descriptive decision making model	1973 1988	Vroom, V. Yetton, P. Vroom, V. Jago, A.	<p>Variants of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Autocratic (AI and AII)</li> <li>2. Participative (CI, CII, and GII)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Quality of decision</li> <li>2. Subordinate acceptance and commitment to decision</li> <li>3. Cost of decision (time and dispersion)</li> <li>4. Development of subordinate</li> </ol>	<p>Leadership style/situation match</p> <p>Change leadership style for alignment</p>
Situational leadership model	1972	Hersey, P. Blanchard, K.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Telling/directing</li> <li>2. Selling/coaching</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Follower readiness/development               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ability/competence</li> <li>b. Willingness/commitment</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p>Leadership style/situation match</p> <p>Leadership style is flexible and adaptable</p>
Situational leadership model II	1985	Blanchard et al.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Participating/supporting</li> <li>4. Delegating</li> </ol>		

*Note.* LPC = Least Preferred Coworker. Taxonomy table created by author.

### **Recent Studies Based on Contingency Theories of Leadership**

Scholars using the contingency theory of leadership focus on the effectiveness of the behavior and style of leaders, and they highlight the need for fit between the leader and the context or situation. Jones (2000) explored leadership styles of firms pursuing holistic sustainable business development and found one style did not prove effective in all situations in value-based firms with diversity. Based on the case study research design using a grounded theory approach, Jones recommended leaders adopt a supportive transformational leadership style that facilitates opportunities to provide employees with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and a transparent participative transactional leadership style for easy decision making within the organization. The application of the contingency leadership theory enables leaders adopt leadership styles that foster diversity of goals, values, and perspectives within the organization (Jones, 2000). Vidal et al. (2017) studied the behavior of leaders in small enterprises using the Hersey-Blanchard situational leadership model classification of leadership styles (directing, coaching, delegating and supporting) based on employee characteristics of skill and motivation levels. Using the Hersey-Blanchard situational leadership model, Zigarmi and Roberts (2017) examined the level of alignment between followers' desired and received leadership behaviors, and the effect of the level of alignment on follower performance. Zigarmi and Roberts found significantly more leaders were delegating and fewer leaders were coaching compared to followers desiring these styles because many leaders lacked directive and supportive skills followers needed. Kim and Shin (2019) found empowering elements of transformational leadership are contingent on organizational

structure, which is a situational factor leaders should consider when determining effective leadership styles. Therefore, leadership effectiveness depends on the situation, and the ability of leaders to correctly diagnose the situation and apply the appropriate behavior or style.

Shao (2019), and Oro and Lavarda (2019) focused on specific leadership behaviors rather than general styles. Shao focused on how organizational culture affects alignment between two components of transformational leadership (idealized influence and inspirational motivation) and information systems business strategy. Shao found leaders within cultures that encouraged flexibility were able to achieve better alignment than those within controlling cultures. This highlights the importance of adaptability over conservativeness, a view supported by Oro and Lavarda in a study of the alignment between management control systems and strategy in family owned businesses. As such, the adaptability of leaders, as individuals or a team, to different situations is a key feature in contingency theory. The ability of a leader to achieve or regain alignment depends on the ability to assess the situation, assess personal capabilities, and make a decision about the most appropriate behavior or course of action.

Another proposition of contingency theorists is the relative stability of a leader's style and the need to select the right leaders for particular contexts or design the job to suit the leader's style (Vroom & Jago, 2007). Håkonsson et al., (2012) examined the impact of executive style on strategy implementation in Danish SMEs and found a misalignment between style and strategy would result in significant reduction in performance. Håkonsson et al. categorized leaders as maestros, managers, leaders, and



producers according to the leaders' most preferred behavior with regard to delegation and uncertainty avoidance, and matched leader categories with fitting strategies using the Miles et al. (1978) typology.

### **Contingency Theory and Strategy**

Apart from leadership styles, scholars have applied the contingency theory to business strategy of firms to gain competitive advantage (Håkonsson et al., 2012; Ratcliff, 2018). Contingency theory scholars assert no one strategy works best for every situation and the environment determines the choice of strategy (Shao, 2019). For effective strategy formulation, business leaders must analyze and create an alignment between the external market forces and their internal resources and capabilities (Dyer et al., 2016). Ratcliff (2018) used the strategic contingency theory as a conceptual framework, which stipulates that business leaders create strategies that fit their operating environment, the nature of their business, their employees, and target customers. Ratcliff stressed the importance of flexibility and adaptability of leaders when making strategic choices, and the importance of alignment between leadership style and strategy for effective strategy formulation and implementation. Håkonsson et al. (2012) stressed the difference between strategic choice and strategy implementation. While strategic choice involves decision making at the strategy formulation stage, strategy implementation involves day-to-day running of business operations in line with strategic choices, suggesting executive styles required for strategy implementation could be different from those for making strategic choices.

Håkonsson et al. (2012) used the capacity of firms for exploration and

exploitation of opportunities to determine the most effective business strategy based on the Miles et al. (1978) typology of prospector, defender, analyzer, and reactor strategies. Håkonsson et al. used a model that suggested reactor firms are low on exploration and exploitation, defender firms are low on exploration but high on exploitation, prospector firms are high on exploration but low on exploitation, and analyzer firms are high on exploration and exploitation. Håkonsson et al. found the leader, producer, and maestro styles aligned with the prospector, analyzer, and reactor strategies, respectively, and resulted in higher business performance. However, the defender strategy did not align with any specific style and did not improve business performance. This suggests the contingency theory proposition of the need for alignment between leadership style and strategy may differ with strategic choice.

Chen et al. (2017) examined how directive and supportive leadership styles affect the relationship between differentiation strategy and organizational performance in Danish organizations. Chen et al. considered contingency factors that affect the relationship between the variables of the study such as gender, tenure, managerial level, and educational level of leaders; the size, strategic clarity, and number of plants of the firm; and external contingencies such as environmental risk, industry type, and industry competition. Chen et al. found leadership style is an important factor in strategy implementation and supportive leadership is more effective than directive leadership for implementing a differentiation strategy considering the influence of contingency factors. Though Chen et al. conducted the study in Denmark and did not focus primarily on SMEs, findings from the study highlighted the importance of leadership style in the

strategic implementation process and the effect of organizational context on leadership style.

### **Defining Leadership**

Leadership is a complex and multidimensional concept with many definitions (Franco & Matos, 2015; Gandolfi & Stone, 2018; Reed et al., 2019). Leadership matters and is an important topic because people usually link the performance of organizations and the state of society, whether good or bad, to leadership (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Although, leadership is a term used universally, there is no commonly agreed definition of leadership among management scholars and practitioners (Vroom & Jago, 2007). However, the most common themes in the definitions of leadership include: (a) leadership is a process; (b) it occurs in groups consisting of at least one leader and one follower; (c) it involves influence; and (d) it entails achieving a common goal (Northouse, 2016). Simply, leadership is a process where an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal (Middlebrooks & Ludorf, 2019; Northouse, 2016). Instead of defining leadership as a process, some scholars define leadership as a capability of a person to drive the process or in terms of its purpose. For example, Mgeni and Nayak (2015) defined leadership as the ability to influence a group of people towards achieving a vision or set of goals. According to Hogan and Kaiser (2005), the purpose of leadership is establishing effective teams by persuading or influencing people to pursue a common goal instead of personal goals or interests.

Contingency theorists also defined leadership. Vroom and Jago (2007) defined leadership as the potential, rather than a process, for influencing a group of individuals to

achieve a common goal. However, Vroom and Jago described influencing as a process determined by several factors such as the traits of the source of influence or leader, the cognitive processes within the leader, the nature of the relationship between the leader and follower(s), and the situational context within which leadership occurs. Similarly, Hersey et al. (2013) defined leadership as an individual's attempt to influence the behavior of another individual or a group and differentiated leadership from management by the type of common goal the group pursues. Vroom and Jago as well as Hersey et al. suggested leadership implies engaging in the process of influencing others but does not imply success with influencing others; hence, effective leaders successfully influence others. Leadership is a broad concept involving the pursuit of common goals, setting direction, and coping with change, while management usually involves pursuing organizational goals by coping with complexity in a systematic way (Hersey et al., 2013).

It is possible to define leadership based on the role of leaders. The five key roles of leaders are: (a) modelling the way, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) challenging the process, (d) enabling others to act, and (e) encouraging the heart (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Gandolfi and Stone (2018) identified five criteria for leadership to exist; (a) one or more leaders, (b) followers, (c) action oriented behavior, (d) legitimate course of action, and (e) goals and objectives. Hence, we can define leadership as a process involving one or more people who select, inspire, equip, empower, and influence one or more followers having diverse gifts, abilities, and skills to willingly and enthusiastically focus and expend energy and resources in an organized

effort to achieve organizational goals and objectives.

### **Leadership Style**

Gandolfi and Stone (2018) defined leadership style as intentional behaviors by which a leader influences a group of people to achieve a shared vision and/or organizational goals and objectives. Similar to leadership, there are many theories and concepts about leadership styles, many of which overlap (Anderson & Sun, 2017). The focus of this study was leadership styles defined within the contingency theories of leadership. Contemporary leadership styles and theories such as full range leadership model, servant leadership, and responsible leadership model were also relevant to this study.

### **Major Contingency Theory Leadership Styles**

The leadership styles defined in the contingency theories of leadership are Fiedler's relationship-oriented and task-oriented leadership; House's directive path goal clarifying, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership; Vroom, Yetton, and Jago's autocratic and participative leadership; and Hersey and Blanchard's directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating leadership. Based on the definition of leadership styles as intentional behaviors of leaders, I shall not discuss relationship-oriented and task-oriented leadership much further since Fielder considered them as traits of leaders instead of behaviors. The primary motivation of relationship-oriented leadership is a close relationship with followers while that of task-orientation is task performance and completion (Popp & Hadwich, 2018). Furthermore, task-oriented leaders usually demonstrate directive behaviors while relationship-oriented leaders

usually demonstrate supportive behaviors (Afshari et al., 2017). Hence, the leadership styles discussed further are autocratic, directive, supportive, participative, achievement-oriented, coaching, and delegating.

### ***Directive Leadership***

Directive leadership is common to the path-goal theory and situational leadership model. Directive leadership emerged from the 1950s Ohio State leadership studies construct of initiating structure (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Initiating structure involves defining and organizing roles and communication channels to enhance goal attainment (Hoang et al., 2019). Directive leadership entails structuring, which is giving instructions for completing tasks and monitoring results (Thompson & Glasø, 2018). House (1996) defined directive leadership as path goal clarifying behavior providing psychological structure for subordinates by letting subordinates know the expectations of the leader or organization, giving specific guidance, scheduling and coordinating work, and clarifying rules, policies, and procedures. The directive leadership style combines high guidance behavior with commanding behavior (Kunnanatt, 2016). In as much as leaders help subordinates navigate through complexity of performing tasks, leaders are also strict and do not condone deviations from the norm or from instructions from the leader. Directive leadership style benefits subordinates with low competence and high commitment (Thompson & Glasø, 2018). In addition, subordinates performing ambiguous tasks that have complex processes and unclear boundaries require directive leadership (Bickle, 2017). Such subordinates require the guidance of leaders to complete tasks and have the commitment to cope with the commanding behavior of leaders. According to Hoang et

al. (2019), directive leadership is necessary for achieving short-term goals when leaders are more experienced than subordinates who need guidance to complete the task. Chen et al. (2017) described leaders with directive style as decisive, confident, prepared to take risk, competitive, and result-oriented. However, directive and initiating structure behaviors of leaders may discourage employee innovation because of increased restrictions on employee autonomy and freedom to explore alternative methods and solutions (Hoang et al., 2019).

### ***Autocratic Leadership***

Leadership scholars sometimes refer to autocratic leadership as authoritative or directive leadership style (Mihai et al., 2017; Vroom & Jago, 1995). Vroom and Jago (1995) defined autocratic leadership in terms of decision-making behaviors and situations in which the leader makes decisions without consulting with followers and tells followers what to do. Vroom and Jago (1995) opined autocratic behaviors and situations are more predominant in industries with strong hierarchies such as the military; in less developed countries with shortage of skilled or experienced workers; in unstructured, stressful, conflict, or crises situations when important decisions are necessary; and in situations where subordinate goals are not congruent with organizational goals. Autocratic leadership entails excessive control, centralized decision-making, unilateral communication, and little regard for subordinate opinion and contribution but high expectation of subordinate submission and loyalty (Agarwal, 2020; Mihai et al., 2017).

### ***Supportive Leadership***

Supportive leadership involves showing consideration for the wellbeing and

needs of subordinates by creating a friendly and psychologically supportive work environment (Chen et al., 2017; Karnopp, 2019). Supportive leadership emerged from the Ohio State leadership studies construct of consideration (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Supportive leadership is essential to the path-goal theory and situational leadership model. Supportive behaviors entail high leader consideration combined with low structuring, which are suitable for subordinates with moderate to high levels of competence but inconsistencies in commitment (Thompson & Glasø, 2018). Such employees have demonstrated competence while performing tasks, performance shortfalls may be a result of socioemotional and interpersonal challenges, which supportive leadership behavior can address. In addition, low commitment may result from routine tasks that are repetitive and unchallenging (Bickle, 2017). Supportive behaviors increase subordinate performance by increasing self-confidence and satisfaction, and reducing stress and frustration of subordinates while performing tasks (House, 1996). Examples of supportive behaviors include friendliness, accessibility, respect, listening, encouraging, and providing adequate resources for tasks and explanations for decisions (Northouse, 2016; Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017).

### ***Participative Leadership***

Participative leadership primarily entails involving subordinates in decision-making, problem solving, strategy development, and business operations (House, 1996; Karnopp, 2019; Lythreathis et al., 2019). Sometimes referred to as democratic leadership, participative leadership is the opposite of autocratic leadership (Agarwal, 2020; Mihai et al., 2017). The path-goal theory, normative and descriptive decision-making model, and



situational leadership model recognize participative leadership as a leadership behavior or style. While participative leadership improves subordinates' commitment, satisfaction, performance, and innovation because of positive feelings of being valued and having a voice, decision-making can be slower because of the collective or consultative process where leaders solicit everyone's opinion (Lythreatis et al., 2019). Participative leadership can be effective based on the premise subordinates are able to contribute important information that improves quality of decisions, and are more likely to take ownership of implementing decisions they are involved in making (Lührs et al., 2018). Participative leadership can also be effective in situations where tasks are complex, ambiguous, and unstructured requiring brainstorming, innovation, or unconventional solutions (Bickle, 2017).

### ***Achievement Oriented Leadership***

Achievement oriented leadership style is specific to the path-goal theory, which entails setting challenging goals, encouraging excellence, striving for continuous improvement, and demonstrating confidence in the ability of subordinates to excel (House, 1996; Karnopp, 2019). Achievement oriented leadership is different from directive leadership in that it concerns setting high goals and standards while directive leadership entails clarifying goals and ensuring subordinates achieve them. Achievement oriented leadership can be effective in situations where high potential subordinates require motivation to complete complex and ambiguous tasks.

### ***Coaching***

Coaching leadership style, sometimes called selling or persuading, is specific to

the situational leadership model (Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Coaching usually benefits subordinates with low competence and low commitment thereby requiring high structuring or directive behaviors combined with high supportive behavior (Thompson & Glasø, 2018). The leader plays the role of a teacher, mentor, and supervisor (Agarwal, 2020). Subordinates that require coaching are usually at the lowest development level (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Hence, coaching is a hybrid leadership style consisting of directive and supportive leadership behaviors.

### ***Delegating***

Delegating is another leadership style specific to the situational leadership model opposite in application to coaching. Leaders delegate when subordinates demonstrate high levels of competence and commitment when performing tasks (Raza & Sikandar, 2018; Thompson & Glasø, 2018). Such subordinates are at the highest development level and have little need for directive or supportive behavior (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Hence, the leader gives subordinates a free hand to perform tasks. Zigarmi and Roberts (2017) found some leaders delegate when they lack capacity to provide needed supportive or directive behaviors.

### **Contemporary Leadership Styles and Models**

Contemporary leadership styles are alternative leadership styles from those identified from the contingency theories of leadership that SME leaders may use when implementing business strategies for CSV. Such leadership styles include transformational and transactional leadership, which are leadership styles of the full range leadership model, servant leadership, and responsible leadership. This section

contains brief descriptions of some contemporary leadership styles.

### ***Full Range of Leadership (FRL) Model***

Bass and Riggio (2006) presented the FRL model. The FRL model consists of three leadership styles and their components: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Laissez-faire is the absence of effective leadership in which the leader abstains from giving directions and support, and leaves decision-making to subordinates (Donkor & Zhou, 2020; Imhangbe et al., 2019; Tremblay & Gibson, 2016; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). The fundamental premise of the FRL model is, even though leaders may demonstrate one style predominantly, every leader demonstrates each of the three leadership styles to some amount (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Anderson and Sun (2017) called for a new full range of leadership model that integrates newer leadership theories such as servant leadership, authentic leadership, ethical leadership, and spiritual leadership with overlapping components and constructs.

**Transactional Leadership.** Transactional leadership style entails the exchange of financial and psychological rewards for productivity or performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Transactional leaders lead through economic and social exchange (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Donkor & Zhou, 2020; Liden et al., 2016).

Transactional leaders clarify expectations and offer recognition, praise, rewards, additional resources, or avoidance of punishments when subordinates achieve agreed goals, and deny rewards or apply punitive actions when subordinates do not achieve goals (Tremblay & Gibson, 2016; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Hence, transactional leadership

relates significantly with directive leadership style (da Costa Nogueira et al., 2018; Raza & Sikandar, 2018). The self-interest of subordinates is central to transactional leadership since rewards motivate performance (Sethibe & Steyn, 2018). Transactional leadership has three components: contingent rewards (CR), active management by exception (MBE-A), and passive management by exception (MBE-P) (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). CR is the exchange process between leaders and subordinates, while MBE-A involves leader intervention to correct subordinate performance before a problem occurs, and MBE-P is intervention after a problem occurs (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016).

**Transformational Leadership.** Transformational leadership is one of the most popular leadership styles among leadership researchers and practitioners (Ng, 2017; Smith et al., 2017; Xie, 2019). Transformational leadership expands on transactional leadership because it entails inspiring and motivating subordinates to rise above self-interests and pursue extraordinary shared goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Ng, 2017; Tremblay & Simard, 2018). Transformational leaders empower and develop potential of subordinates, consider subordinate wellbeing, and respond to their needs (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Mittal, 2016; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Hence, transformational leadership combines supportive, participative, coaching, and achievement-oriented leadership behaviors (Sethibe & Steyn, 2018). Transformational leadership consists of four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Mittal, 2016; Ng, 2017; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Idealized influence, sometimes called charisma, is the leader's ability to

be a role model, provide a clear vision, and sense of purpose, while inspirational motivation is the ability to inspire and motivate subordinates to commit to achieving shared goals (Ng, 2017; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Intellectual stimulation is the ability to encourage subordinates to challenge the status quo, be creative, and participate in problem solving, while individualized consideration is the leader's ability to build strong relationships with each subordinate and address the subordinate's needs (Anderson & Sun, 2017; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Ng, 2017; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016).

### ***Servant Leadership***

Servant leadership is an altruistic calling or aspiration to lead borne out of a deep desire and choice to serve others (Greenleaf, 2014; Heyler & Martin, 2018). Greenleaf introduced servant leadership as a philosophy of life before leadership scholars developed it into a leadership theory (Song, 2018). Eva et al. (2019) defined servant leadership as a leadership approach prioritizing the wellbeing and interests of others, a personal relationship between leaders and followers, and re-orientating followers from focusing on self to achieving goals that benefit the organization and society. Servant leaders empower and meet the needs of followers or subordinates in order to achieve shared goals (Alafeshat & Tanova, 2019; Gandolfi et al., 2017; Liu, 2019; Wu et al., 2020). While transformational leaders focus primarily on a mission and empower followers to achieve the mission, servant leaders focus primarily on the success and wellbeing of followers, and then work with followers to achieve a mission (Gandolfi et al., 2017; Hoch et al., 2018; Xie, 2020). Heyler and Martin (2018) identified six major characteristics of servant leadership: humility, empowering and developing people,

providing direction, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship. Servant leadership is a holistic approach to leadership with multiple types of dimensions for engaging followers such as relational, ethical, emotional, rational, and spiritual (Eva et al., 2019; Eva et al., 2018). Hence, Eva et al. (2019) identified several dimensions of servant leadership including emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, accountability, humility, authenticity, courage, stewardship, covenantal relationship, transcendental spirituality, responsible morality, and transforming influence.

### ***Responsible Leadership***

Responsible leadership is a contemporary leadership concept that emerged from research on corporate responsibility and sustainability (Miska & Mendenhall, 2018). Responsible leadership links the field of leadership to ethics and social responsibility (Haque et al., 2019). Miska and Mendenhall defined responsible leadership as a social relational and ethical phenomenon focused on achieving societal and environmental goals of sustainable value creation and positive change. Responsible leaders intentionally do good and avoid harm to stakeholders of the organization and society (Waldman et al., 2020). While many other leadership styles focus majorly on a mission or interests of subordinates within an organization, responsible leadership focuses on interests of multiple stakeholders within and outside the organization (Miska & Mendenhall, 2018). Antunes and Franco (2016) identified four dimensions of responsible leadership: (a) virtuousness characterized by purpose, safety, fairness, justice, humanity, and decency;

(b) stakeholder involvement; (c) leaders modelling problem solving, authenticity, stewardship, coaching, and driving change; and (d) ethical values and principles such as honesty and integrity. Since responsible leadership is an emerging concept, the dimensions are not well defined, lack validation, and appropriate measuring instruments (Miska & Mendenhall, 2018).

### **Studies on Leadership in SMEs**

Leadership is important to the performance of business enterprises. Szczepanska-Woszczyzna and Kurowska-Pysz (2016) found leadership is a key factor affecting sustainable business development of SMEs. Asikhia (2016) identified CEOs/owners of SMEs as the most critical element in the strategic management process because they shoulder the responsibility of making important decisions. Hence, studies on performance of SMEs usually focus on some aspect of leadership behavior or capability. Akinso (2018) highlighted the importance of cognitive ability of SME owners and leaders in developing effective business strategies. Navamarat (2018) stressed the importance of leadership in building agile organizational cultures that facilitate employee engagement. Petrov et al. (2018) identified culture as the most important construct of leadership, proposing transformational leadership style as the most effective style for building a healthy culture in volatile environments. The need for Petrov et al. proposing a leadership style without much explanation highlights the importance scholars attach to the determining effectiveness of leadership styles on performance of SMEs because leaders in small organizations play a more significant role in daily operations than leaders in larger organizations.

Findings of recent studies show relationships between leadership styles and SME performance exist. Oladele and Akeke (2016) found only two components of transformational leadership (charisma and individual consideration) and one of transactional leadership (management by objectives) have significant relationships with sales performance of SMEs in Nigeria. Mgeni and Nayak (2016) also found transactional leadership affected SME performance in Tanzania. Birbirsu and Lakew (2020) found transactional and transformational leadership have significant relationships with job satisfaction of employees in Ethiopian SMEs, which affect how SMEs create value for employees, retain employees, and enhance employee performance. Searching through extant literature, studies on effect of leadership styles on SME performance in Africa are few, and focus mainly on transformational and transactional leadership styles. In a multiple case study of Portuguese SMEs based on the full range of leadership model, Franco and Matos (2015) argued leaders do not use only one but a mix of leadership styles. Franco and Matos found transactional leadership had a stronger effect on performance of SMEs than transformational leadership but concluded the most appropriate leadership style for SMEs depends on contextual factors.

Eva et al. (2018) examined alignment between servant leadership, structure, and strategy in Australian SMEs. Eva et al. opined studying the effect of leadership style on SME performance is simplistic and does not capture the more complex interactive nature of organizational elements such as strategy, structure, and culture. Eva et al. studied the moderating effect of strategy and structure on the relationship between servant leadership and performance of SMEs in Australia, and found servant leadership had the strongest



effect on performance in SMEs with low cost strategy and organic or low formalization structures. Eva et al. highlighted the importance of considering interaction of organizational elements such as strategy, shared values (culture), leadership styles, and structure when studying SME performance. Håkonsson et al. (2012) and Chen et al. (2017) examined relationship between leadership style, strategy, and performance in Danish companies but similar studies in African countries are difficult to find.

### **Strategies of SMEs**

Strategy refers to the plans an organization makes to enable it gain competitive advantage and create value for all its stakeholders (Dyer et al., 2016). Important business strategies organizations use include differentiation, cost advantage, and innovative strategies (Dyer et al., 2016). While cost advantage strategy focuses on reducing cost below those of competitors through lower cost inputs and economies of scale, differentiation strategy focuses on offering unique products and services to customers, and innovative strategies involve introducing new and different business models from those of rivals (Dyer et al., 2016). Investigating the impact of strategy and structure on financial performance of SMEs in Nigeria, Agwu (2018) found strategic implementation had a positive impact on market share whereas structure did not have a significant impact on sales. Specifically, Asikhia (2016) found niche and product differentiation strategies had the most predominant relationship to wealth creation, and simple rather than complex structures facilitated greater wealth creation in Nigerian SMEs.

Turner and Endres (2017) identified three major themes when conducting a qualitative multiple-case study of small businesses in Florida. First, the importance of

networking by small-business owners to support business development; second, the importance of using a business plan during start-up; and third, ensuring market differentiation by providing a unique product that is difficult to replicate. Yanes-Estévez et al. (2018) analyzed the strategic behavior of SMEs in the Canary Islands by addressing entrepreneurial, technological, and administrative problems in the same study using the Miles et al. (1978) typology of prospector, defender, analyzer, and reactor strategies. Yanes-Estévez et al. found most SMEs had analyzer strategies, a hybrid of prospector and defender strategies, which allowed SMEs to take a more aggressive prospector stance in turbulent markets or a more conservative defender stance in stable markets. However, administrative problems defined mostly by organizational structure did not usually align with other strategic behaviors.

Okundaye et al. (2019) explored how SMEs in Nigeria use information and communication technology (ICT) adoption as an innovative business strategy for gaining competitive advantage. Okundaye et al. highlighted the responsibilities of SME leaders in ensuring ICT adoption, which included identifying the appropriate technologies for achieving organizational strategic objectives, and determining the appropriate leadership style for ICT adoption and success of their organizations. Another innovative strategy worth mentioning is the creation of industrial clusters, which enables SMEs take advantage of scale without undergoing vertical integration; improving their ability to compete with large organizations (Ikram et al., 2018). The cluster strategy improves logistics and Ikram et al. (2018) showed how SMEs in China, an emerging economy, successfully implemented the cluster strategy. Enabling local cluster development is one

of the three strategies Porter and Kramer (2011) proposed for CSV. Alberti and Belfanti (2019) showed how using the cluster strategy created shared value in Italy.

Through these studies, scholars have highlighted the strong relationship between strategy and SME performance in volatile and uncertain markets such as Nigeria compared to the inconsistent relationship between structure and SME performance. Evidence from the studies show a differentiation strategy and collaboration between SMEs in form of developing local clusters or networking improves SME performance and ability to gain a competitive advantage. Furthermore, the role of leaders and leadership style is important for successful strategy development and implementation, and the performance of SMEs.

### **Performance of SMEs**

The contribution of SMEs to the economic and social wellbeing of communities, especially those in developing countries is important (Ng et al., 2019). As such, factors affecting the performance of SMEs are important to scholars and practitioners (Asikhia, 2016). Studies on SME performance such as Agwu (2018); Akinso (2018); Asikhia (2016); Navamarat (2018); Oladimeji et al. (2017); and Oladimeji et al. (2018) focused on different measurements of the performance of SMEs depending on the purpose of the study. These ranged from non-financial measures such as age/long-term survival, size/growth, and employee turnover to financial measures such as wealth creation, market share, sales, annual turnover, profits, and return on asset. Akinso and Navamarat focused on the long-term survival of SMEs while Asikhia focused on the broad issue of capacity for wealth creation. Agwu and Oladimeji et al. used specific financial

performance indicators such as market share, revenue, and transaction volume. Eva et al. (2018) measured performance using sales, profit, market share, and growth. From the literature, researchers that used quantitative methods focused more on objective and quantifiable performance indicators such as financial measures whereas studies with qualitative methods had non-financial and/or financial measures. Consequently, the factors affecting the performance of SME varied depending on the performance indicators and scope of the study.

Akinso (2018) and Navamarat (2018) conducted exploratory studies and identified factors around major themes that affected SMEs performance in Nigeria and Thailand respectively. Akinso identified cognitive abilities leaders obtained through education and training, effective business strategies including finance and marketing, and efficient infrastructure and facilities such as power supply, water, and roads. On the other hand, Navamarat identified governance, which include leadership, marketing and branding using social media and networking, and integration of information technology. Considering the differences between key factors identified by Akinso and Navamarat, performance of SMEs depend on environmental context such as industry and country. Asikhia (2016) presented a list of variables affecting SME performance including some factors also identified by Akinso and Navamarat but stressed the importance of human resource, especially leadership capabilities of owners/CEOs of SMEs as the most important factor. Culture is a country specific contextual factor affecting leadership style, which affects employee and organizational performance (Akanji et al., 2020). Adewale (2020) and Akanji et al. (2020) found evidence of a patriarchal system that fosters

paternalistic and patrimonial leadership behaviors in Nigerian organizations, which could have positive and negative implications on employee performance.

### **Creating Shared Value (CSV)**

CSV is one of the concepts that present a business case for corporate sustainability and social responsibility (Schaltegger et al., 2019). Porter and Kramer (2011) introduced CSV and defined it as organizational policies and practices that increase competitiveness while simultaneously promoting the economic and social well-being of host communities. Porter and Kramer argued CSV is the best way for business enterprises to gain legitimacy, competitive advantage, and long-term success; hence, large organizations such as Nestle, Novartis, Walmart, and HP have embraced the concept of CSV (de los Reyes et al., 2017). CSV entails creating economic and social value simultaneously (Dembek et al., 2016; Lankoski & Smith, 2018). Economic value refers to profit-generation or profit-maximization of business firms (Dembek et al., 2016; Lankoski & Smith, 2018; Moon & Parc, 2019). Social value refers to societal benefits or improvements to social welfare derived from the activities of an organization or business firm, which include provision of jobs, housing, food, clean water, quality healthcare, education, and equality at work (Dembek et al., 2016; Fraser, 2019; Lankoski & Smith, 2018; Moon & Parc, 2019). CSV strategy involves creating economic value by using business models that enable businesses find solutions to social challenges (Alberti & Belfanti, 2019). Three ways enterprises can engage in CSV are; (a) reconceiving products and markets since societal needs define products and markets; (b) redefining productivity in the value chain by expanding the value chain to allow more stakeholders

engage in value creation; and (c) facilitating the development of local business clusters (Alberti & Belfanti, 2019; Fernández-Gámez et al., 2019).

Dembek et al. (2016) found the concept of CSV is new and still vague even though CSV has become popular in business practice. Dembek et al. argued CSV lacks philosophical clarity and empirical foundations resulting in various definitions and measures of the concept, which overlaps with related concepts such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, bottom of the pyramid (BoP), stakeholder theory, and social innovation. de los Reyes et al. (2017) opined the strongest criticism of CSV is it does not equip leaders and managers to deal with conflicts of interests between business and society that result in win-lose or lose-win situations. Notwithstanding, the basic premise of CSV is worth pursuing because it encourages and equips business leaders to approach economic, social, and environmental challenges in innovative ways (de los Reyes et al., 2017).

Smith (2016) conducted a multiple case study of big pharmaceutical firms in India engaging in CSV and supported the view of Porter and Kramer by asserting CSV is a proactive approach to social impact aligned with profit maximization and beneficial to all stakeholders. In addition, Porter and Kramer (2011) recommended CSV as a set of best practices that should become part of the strategic decision-making processes of organizations. Moon and Parc (2019) compared CSR and CSV and proposed a new concept, namely corporate social opportunity (CSO), which embraces and extends CSR using the concept of CSV. According to Moon and Parc, CSR and CSO are different levels of social activities while CSV is a process for transitioning from social activities of

CSR focusing on survival and maintaining corporate reputation to social activities of CSO that enhance the competitiveness of business firms. Park and Seo (2018) conducted a survey study of 300 SMEs in South Korea and regarded CSV as a strategic orientation of business leaders related to innovation, entrepreneurship, growth, and profit maximization. SME leaders can be innovative in making profits and creating solutions to societal challenges. Park and Seo found CSV orientation has a strong positive impact on SME performance. Therefore, rather than exploring strategies for sustaining SME performance, it may be useful to explore strategies SME leaders use for CSV, which is a strong determinant of SME long-term success.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

Creation of economic and social value, regarded as shared value when both are created simultaneously, are important outcomes for evaluating the performance of any enterprise, be it small, medium, or large. Scholars have established strategy is an important factor affecting SME performance but the relationship between strategy and SME performance depends on environmental context and alignment with other organizational elements such as leadership style. Past studies and extant literature on the effect of leadership style on SME performance in Nigeria and Africa focused on transformational and transactional leadership styles, and economic outcomes. The contingency theories of leadership, based on the premise there is no single leadership style that is the best in every situation, is a viable conceptual framework for this study and for explaining how SME leaders create shared value in Nigeria. Exploring strategies SME leaders use for aligning leadership style with strategies for CSV, with emphasis on

how leadership style affects the strategic management process would be a valuable research endeavor, especially in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan African communities with significantly different cultures and contexts from those of the western world.

### **Transition**

Section 1 comprised of the problem statement, purpose statement, conceptual framework, nature of the study, and significance of the study, which provided a good understanding of the problem I addressed and the importance of this study. Section 1 also included definitions of important terms, and a delineation of the scope of this study. I concluded Section 1 with a detailed review of professional and academic literature related to the contingency theories of leadership, leadership styles, strategies and performance of SMEs, and the creation of shared value concept. Through the literature review, I was able to identify gaps in knowledge requiring further research such as the scarcity of literature on leadership styles in African SMEs and social outcomes of SME business strategies.

Section 2 contains detailed descriptions with supporting evidence from literature about how I conducted the study. Section 2 covers the role of the researcher, participants, the research method and design, ethical considerations for conducting qualitative research, and techniques for collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Section 3, the final section, contains the findings of the study, their implications for business practice and social change, my recommendations, reflections, and conclusion from the study.



## Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I start by reiterating the purpose statement, and then I discuss in detail different components of the research project, providing adequate evidence from literature to support my research decisions. The main components of Section 2 cover the role of the researcher; strategies for identifying, protecting, and maintaining a working relationship with participants; the research method and design; the study's target population and sampling of the population; and ensuring ethical research conduct. Furthermore, I provide adequate information about data collection instruments and techniques, data organization and analysis techniques, and strategies for ensuring reliability and validity of the study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SME leaders use for ensuring leadership style aligns with business strategy for CSV. The target population were owners and senior managers of between three and six SMEs in specialty and general consumer goods retail industries in southwest Nigeria that were at least 5 years old and grew in sales revenue and number of employees since inception. Shared value refers to economic and social value for all major stakeholders of an enterprise (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Through this study, business leaders and scholars can gain insight into how strategic fit between business strategy and leadership style affects shared value creation. Implications for positive social change include sustainable economic and social wellbeing of host communities of SMEs through regular payment of taxes, creation of jobs, and creation of services and products that benefit society.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative case studies, the researcher plays multiple roles vital to the success of the study. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Consequently, the researcher's role involves sustained and intensive interaction and engagement with research participants, which has personal, ethical, and strategic ramifications (Karagiozis, 2018). Personal responsibilities include identifying, assessing, and reporting researcher biases and assumptions that might affect data collection and interpretation (Karagiozis, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ethical implications include adhering to a strict code of conduct during the research, ensuring participants do not suffer any harm, and treating participants respectfully as people and not subjects or objects of research (Karagiozis, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Strategic implications include decisions on research design, selection of participants, and gaining access to participants and other sources of data (Yin, 2018).

Cumyn et al. (2019) identified three roles of researchers: the reflective practitioner, protector of participants, and technician. As reflective practitioners, researchers must be aware of their responsibility to society, including the academic and business communities who are consumers of research findings, to demonstrate scientific and ethical integrity in collecting and handling data (Cumyn et al., 2019). It is important for researchers to be self-reflective and transparent about their subjective point of view, as their identity and perspective shape the interpretations and findings of the research (Karagiozis, 2018). In addition, researchers should be explicit about their role, relationship to participants, any conflict of interests, and the importance of the research

topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I critically reflected on each aspect of the research from formulating the research question to publishing the results, and took full responsibility for ethical conduct. Upholding the views of Karagiozis (2018), I avoided using terms such as objectivity, unbiased interpretation, true knowledge, and generalizability of findings, which were not appropriate for the epistemological stance of qualitative research. I am a citizen of Nigeria. I lived in the southwest region of the country for over 40 years, working mostly in the education sector. I chose the research topic because of the high number of SMEs in Nigeria and my interest in how SMEs leaders create economic value and contribute positively to social change through their businesses. Since my research focused on SMEs in the retail industry, my relationship with research participants did not exceed that of a customer. I neither owned nor worked for any of the SMEs that participated in the research.

Eliminating researcher bias is impossible; hence, researchers using qualitative methods must take practical steps for mitigating researcher bias such as achieving data saturation and triangulation (Bucic et al., 2010; Peterson, 2019; Yin, 2018). Other ways of mitigating researcher bias include using an interview protocol, conducting member checking, and bracketing, which involves putting aside one's assumptions and keeping an open mind (Peterson, 2019). I used an interview protocol, achieved data saturation, triangulated data from different sources, conducted member checking, and used bracketing techniques to mitigate my biases during the study.

As a protector of participants, the researcher has a duty to respect participants, minimize harm to participants, obtain informed consent, and carefully handle sensitive

aspects of the research such as confidentiality of data and privacy of participants (Cumyn et al., 2019; Lancaster, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). Researchers should be respectful and sensitive to the rights of participants to continue or withdraw from the research at any time. They should maintain a non-judgmental posture when interacting with, interviewing, and collecting data from participants (Karagiozis, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Hence, researcher should avoid playing the role of a judge, therapist, or apathetic listener (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Another ethical consideration is ensuring accurate representation of information from participants during analysis and reporting, even if it contradicts expected outcomes (Mertens, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). I was aware of the research ethics principles stipulated in the Belmont report by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979), which include respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. I provided participants with adequate information for making an informed decision about participating voluntarily in the research. I took necessary steps toward protecting all participants, such as storing data in secured devices and locations and protecting the identity of participants.

As technicians, researchers should participate fully in the ethical review process to obtain approval from the institutional review board (IRB) and demonstrate a good understanding of all research procedures, ethical considerations, and standards (Cumyn et al., 2019). It is the responsibility of the researcher to clearly explain the processes involved in conducting the research and make a convincing presentation of the research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers conducting interviews should develop

and use an interview protocol, screen participants, and develop skills for conducting a good interview and analyzing data correctly (Peterson, 2019; Yin, 2018). In addition, when using documents as a source of data, it is the responsibility of the researcher to determine authenticity and accuracy by verifying the origin, author, and contexts of the documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Hence, I developed and used an interview protocol for conducting semi-structured interviews and took appropriate steps in verifying documents from participants. In addition, I ensured I had adequate skills and tools for collecting and analyzing qualitative data, and I obtained IRB approval before commencing data collection. The Walden University IRB approval number for this study is 08-04-20-0979107.

### **Participants**

In qualitative studies, the researcher selects purposefully, using a set of criteria, participants who will be able to contribute to answering the research question; hence the use of purposive or criterion sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). For case studies, it is necessary to first identify criteria for selecting cases before identifying criteria for selecting participants within each case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Gerring and Cojocar (2016), exploratory case studies may use an outcome criterion for selecting cases. Cases for this study were SMEs in specialty and general consumer goods retail industries in southwest Nigeria that successfully created shared value over a minimum period of 5 years since startup, using growth in sales revenue and employee size as indicators for CSV. Annual reports of SMEs provided information about age, employee size, and sales revenue of SMEs. Based on the research question of

the study, a major criterion for participants was they are owners or senior leaders of SMEs selected as cases for the study. Qualitative research participants must be able to provide rich and in-depth data about phenomena relating to the research question (Moser & Korstjens, 2017; Yin, 2018). Hence, the SME owners and leaders that participated in the study were able to provide rich and in-depth information about strategies for aligning leadership style with business strategies for CSV from their personal experiences.

Another important criterion is cases and participants from each case must be willing to participate in the study and accessible to the researcher (Heath et al., 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

Gaining access to research participants in organizations in Africa can be challenging due to cultural and contextual factors (Vuban & Eta, 2019). Factors hindering access to cases and participants include administrative formality and red tapes, negative attitudes towards research and lack of a research culture, insecurity about confidentiality of information provided, African time syndrome or lack of respect for time schedules and appointments, and language barriers due to having a multilingual society (Vuban & Eta, 2019). Strategies for facilitating continued access include using personal networks and building rapport with participants, using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, adapting to ethical demands of participants, and appreciating efforts of participants and gatekeepers (Hamilton, 2020; Vuban & Eta, 2019). Providing participants with adequate information about the researcher, the research, safeguards to protect their confidentiality, and possible benefits to their enterprise and others facilitated obtaining informed consent and establishing a working relationship with participants

(Hamilton, 2020; Vuban & Eta, 2019; Yin, 2018). Giving participants options for how their interview is conducted can also facilitate access to busy participants (Heath et al., 2018). I gave participants adequate information about the study and options for conducting virtual interviews such as telephone interviews, or video conferencing via Skype, Zoom, or WhatsApp.

### **Research Method and Design**

The research method is the most suitable approach and techniques for collecting and analyzing data within the context of a study (Lucas et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). The three major research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research (Almalki, 2016; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019). The research design denotes the type of enquiry within a research method guiding the choice of techniques (Almalki, 2016).

### **Research Method**

The research method for this study was the qualitative research method. Qualitative research, which usually involves an interpretivist or constructivist epistemology, entails an exploratory study of a phenomenon based on real-life experiences and meanings of individuals or groups within their natural context or setting (Gephart, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017a; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers use qualitative methods to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of a phenomenon from descriptive accounts of participants' experiences and their interpretations thereof (Dasgupta, 2015; Mohajan, 2018; Yilmaz, 2013). Qualitative methods allow for interaction between the researcher and participants, subjective opinions of participants,

and an inductive approach to understanding a phenomenon and generating theories (Gephart, 2018; Park & Park, 2016; Peterson, 2019). Interviews using open-ended questions, observations, and documents are common methods for collecting data in qualitative research; hence, qualitative data usually consists of rich and thick descriptions, and may contain value-laden and biased opinions of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Park & Park, 2016; Yilmaz, 2013). Findings from qualitative studies provide depth and are usually not generalizable to wider populations (Park & Park, 2016; Peterson, 2019; Yilmaz, 2013). According to Bansal et al. (2018), qualitative methods are suitable for answering the what, how, and why questions for understanding complex phenomena. Hence, it was an appropriate method for this study.

Quantitative research methods usually involve a positivist epistemology suitable for testing or confirming existing theories using a deductive approach, empirical observation, and quantifiable measurements (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Park & Park, 2016). Quantitative research entails examining the relationship between variables of a phenomenon using statistical techniques (Saunders et al., 2019). Quantitative methods require the researcher to be independent from the research, objective, value-free, and unbiased (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Park & Park, 2016; Yilmaz, 2013). Hence, quantitative methods usually produce a broad and generalizable set of findings but do not provide insight into the personal experiences, thought processes, and meanings participants attach to their experiences (Yilmaz, 2013). Since quantitative methods are not appropriate for answering the how and why research questions, it was not a suitable method for this study.



The mixed methods research approach involves combining qualitative and quantitative research methods in a study (Almalki, 2016; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Mixed methods research entails using a deductive, inductive, or abductive approach to theory development, and conducting qualitative and quantitative methods concurrently or sequentially (Almalki, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). Mixed methods research draws on the strengths of the qualitative and quantitative methods to provide pragmatic advantages for studying complex research questions (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). However, the mixed methods approach usually requires a lot of time and resources, which made it unsuitable for this study.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research designs include case studies, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and phenomenological research (Gephart, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017a; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mohajan, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). The research design for this study was the multiple case study design. The multiple case study design entails conducting in-depth and holistic inquiry into complex and context-dependent social phenomena involving individuals, groups, organizations, communities, events, practices, or cultures referred to as cases using multiple perspectives and research techniques (Cope, 2015; Dasgupta, 2015; Harwati, 2019; Korstjens & Moser, 2017a; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). The multiple case study design allows for comparison between cases, a deeper understanding of research phenomena, and stronger support for theory development and external validity or transferability of findings than the single case study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mohajan, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Hence, I chose the multiple case study design for this study.

The case study design, which could be single or multiple, and exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive, provides a sound methodology applicable to a variety of research contexts and a wide range of research questions (Harwati, 2019; Lucas et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). The case study research design is appropriate for gaining an understanding of how and why a phenomenon works within a particular context, compared to other qualitative research approaches focusing on defining or describing a phenomenon (Cope, 2015). An advantage of the case study design over other qualitative research designs is the flexibility of exploring a phenomenon through a variety of lenses, which usually generates rich and thick data that allow in-depth understanding of complex context dependent experiences and circumstances (Farquhar et al., 2020; Lindgreen et al., (in press); Lucas et al., 2018). The case study design allows the use of multiple data collection methods and triangulation, which enhance collecting rich and thick data and reaching data saturation (Fusch et al., 2018; Fusch & Ness, 2015). My choice of the multiple case study design and the use of semi-structured interviews and documentary evidence for collecting rich and thick data from multiple sources ensured achieving data saturation.

Ethnography is the study of the relationship between people and their social environment focusing on social-political, cultural, and historical aspects of their life (Harwati, 2019). Ethnographic studies usually focus on providing a holistic view of the culture of a group of people and has roots in the field of anthropology (Korstjens & Moser, 2017a; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ethnography usually requires a close

relationship between the researcher and research participants because the researcher takes the role of a participant-observer for extended periods to collect data from a wide sample of the population (Harwati, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mohajan, 2018). I did not choose ethnography because it focuses primarily on culture of a group and not individuals, it is time consuming, and does not allow for adequate comparison between cases.

Phenomenological research most often involves exploring and examining everyday life experiences of people to understand how they make sense of such experiences (Gill, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2017a; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mohajan, 2018). Phenomenology is usually suitable for studying emotional and intense human experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Many of the concepts used in phenomenology for gaining a deep understanding about meanings people derive from their lived experiences come from the fields of philosophy and psychology (Gill, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2017a). Phenomenology was not appropriate for this study because the focus was not the philosophical meanings of life experiences of participants; rather, the focus was on how and why the experiences and decisions of participants influenced the phenomena under study considering context or situational factors.

Narrative research usually entails stories about the life and important events of participants usually told in chronological order (Korstjens & Moser, 2017a; Mohajan, 2018). Since the focus of this study is not the chronological order of life stories of participants, narrative inquiry is not appropriate for this study. Grounded theory research design entails understanding a real-world phenomenon with the primary goal of building

a substantive theory (Korstjens & Moser, 2017a; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mohajan, 2018). The primary focus of this study was gaining a rich description and deep understanding of the research concepts and not building a substantive theory about the research phenomena; hence, I did not choose the grounded theory design.

### **Population and Sampling**

In qualitative studies, the researcher seeks to collect data from an appropriate sample of the general population comprising of individuals with the ability and opportunity to provide accurate and relevant information about phenomena of the study (Asiamah et al., 2017). The general, target, and accessible populations of a study comprise of individuals who have common attributes implied by the research question and objectives (Asiamah et al., 2017). The general population is the largest group of potential participants who share some primary attributes of interest (Asiamah et al., 2017). The target population is the focus of study and consists of members of the general population with specific attributes and the ability to share experiences relevant to answering the research question (Asiamah et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). The accessible population are members of the target population willing and available to participate in the study (Asiamah et al., 2017).

Since the research question of this study focused on strategies SME leaders use for aligning leadership styles and business strategies, the appropriate target population were owners and senior managers of SMEs. The industry of interest and region were specialty and general consumer goods retail industries in southwest Nigeria. The retail industry had the highest number of SMEs in Nigeria, consisting of about 42% of 41.5

million SMEs as of 2017 (NNBS, 2019). Also in 2017, southwest Nigeria had the highest number of SMEs with about 32% of all SMEs in the country (NNBS, 2019).

Sampling in qualitative case studies entails selecting cases, participants, and data sources that provide rich data on the research topic or phenomena of interest (Farrugia, 2019; Gentles et al., 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). The research question of a study guides decisions about sampling approach and selection of cases (Farrugia, 2019; Ishak & Abu Bakar, 2014). Qualitative methods researchers sample deliberately, purposively, or purposefully and not randomly because key informants must have special knowledge about the phenomenon, which they are willing to share with the researcher (Asiamah et al., 2017; Farrugia, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

Purposive sampling is a criterion based non-probabilistic selection process dependent on the judgement of the researcher to select the most appropriate cases and participants for the study based on the research objectives and available resources (Farrugia, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since criteria for selecting cases include uniqueness and context of each case, statistical or empirical generalization of findings of studies using purposive sampling to wider populations are not appropriate (Gentles et al., 2015; Ishak & Abu Bakar, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The selection criteria for SME owners and leaders participating in this study were evidence of creating share value through growth of sales revenue and employee headcount since inception of their SMEs, a minimum SME age of 5 years, and the willingness and availability to share their experiences. Research participants above 20 years of age, with experience in leading employees and CSV in an SME for a minimum

of 5 years were appropriate for this study because they possessed expert knowledge and could provide rich descriptions relevant to the study. Furthermore, to encourage participants share their experiences freely with minimal distractions, I gave participants the choice of selecting a convenient, safe, and private location and time for conducting interviews for a duration of between 60 and 90 minutes. Giving participants a choice in determining how the researcher will conduct interviews enhances participants sharing their experiences (Cypress, 2018; Heath et al., 2018).

Sample size in terms of number of cases and participants for qualitative case studies is usually difficult to determine before engaging in data collection because the usual criteria for determining sample size is data saturation (Boddy, 2016; Gentles et al., 2015; Hennink et al., 2017). Data reaches the saturation point when no new information, insight, codes, or themes emerge and only repetition of existing information occurs from new participants (Boddy, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gentles et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2018). According to Rheinhardt et al. (2018), qualitative data collection decisions such as appropriate sample size and when to stop collecting data depend on the research design, research questions, and themes emerging from the data or data saturation. Complexity and scope of a study would determine sample size for addressing the objectives of the study adequately or exhaustively, assuming availability of research resources is not an issue (Schreier, 2018). In doctoral studies and research funded by a limited grant, available time and research resources may become more important factors than data saturation for determining sample size and when to stop collecting data (Schreier, 2018). Usually, researchers stop collecting data when the cost far outweighs

the benefits of finding new information (Turner-Bowker et al., 2018). For multiple case studies, Gentles et al. (2015) suggested between four and 10 cases is adequate to achieve data saturation but also affirmed many studies use less than four or more than 10 cases with good reason. Boddy (2016) suggested a sample size of between 10 and 12 participants using in-depth interviews could achieve data saturation, Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested as few as six participants using multiple data sources and triangulation, while Gentles et al. (2015) suggested between 10 and 30 participants. The type and purpose of the study determines when data saturation occurs (Hennink et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2018).

Turner and Endres (2017) conducted a multiple-case study of small business owners with only three cases and participants. Bucic et al. (2010) achieved data saturation with three cases and 12 participants in their multiple-case study exploring the effect of leadership style on team performance. Okundaye et al. (2019) conducted a multiple-case study of Nigerian SMEs with a sample size of four cases and 20 participants. Considering the variability in sample size of different studies, a sample size consisting of between three and six cases, and between six and 15 participants was appropriate for this study. I stopped collecting data after 11 participants from four cases due to data saturation.

### **Ethical Research**

Ethics during qualitative research in the social sciences usually involves respecting the rights and privacy of research participants, protecting research participants from harm, and ensuring research merit and integrity (Cumyn et al., 2019; Mertens,

2018; Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). It is important to reflect on research design choices to minimize risks to participants and ensure research benefits outweigh potential risks (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). Strategies for ensuring ethical research conduct include obtaining voluntary informed consent from participants, protecting confidentiality of participants by anonymizing the data, ensuring participants can withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, and declaring any affiliations with participants and partnering organizations (Cumyn et al., 2019; Ngozwana, 2018; Roth & von Unger, 2018). Other strategies include providing options for data collection and obtaining the participant's consent before taking notes, making audio recordings, quoting participants in publication with or without attribution, and archiving transcripts and recordings of interviews (Kirilova & Karcher, 2017). In African contexts characterized by collective and high power distance cultures, economic challenges, and political tensions, the researcher needs to demonstrate resilience, transparency, and adaptability when applying ethical standards in situations that differ from the norm in western cultures (Ngozwana, 2018; Vuban & Eta, 2019). An example of adaptability of ethical standards to African culture is the discretionary use of incentives to build rapport, appreciate, or motivate participants and gatekeepers during data collection, which may include financial tokens for meals, stationery, or transportation, and voluntary support to business operations (Ngozwana, 2018; Vuban & Eta, 2019).

I understood the importance of undergoing the IRB process and obtaining approval before collecting data from participants during my study. I provided each participant with an informed consent form with adequate details about the purpose of the



study, the role of the researcher and participants, the voluntary nature of the study, the risks and benefits of the study, and security measures to protect the confidentiality of participants. Only participants that understood, agreed, and signed the informed consent form participated in the study. I ensured participants understood the importance of their contribution to the study and their right to withdraw from the research at any stage without consequences. The procedure for withdrawal only required participants informing me of their intention to withdraw verbally, in writing, or through any other convenient means. Due to COVID-19, the Walden University IRB limited interaction with participants including obtaining informed consent from non-anonymous research participants and data collection to virtual platforms only (Walden University, 2020). After adequately informing participants about the study and their rights, I obtained informed consent via email.

During data collection, I interacted with all participants and gatekeepers respectfully and with integrity. When scheduling and conducting interviews, I considered the privacy and convenience of participants, and sought permission before commencing, recording, extending, concluding, or rescheduling interviews. Practical steps for protecting confidentiality of participants in my study included conducting interviews in private and safe spaces, hiding identity of participants by using pseudonyms or labels, storing data in secured and pass-warded devices for a minimum of 5 years, after which I will destroy the information, and using the data only for the purpose stipulated in the consent form.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The researcher is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An important principle of data collection in case studies is the use of multiple tools for gathering data such as interviews, documentation, and observation (Farquhar et al., 2020; Fusch et al., 2018; Runfola et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). Hence, the different sources of data and the protocols for these sources serve as instruments at the disposal and discretion of the researcher for collecting data in qualitative studies (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Clark & Vealé, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using multiple sources of data allows in-depth study, multiple measures, and data triangulation of the phenomenon of interest, which enhance the validity and reliability of the study (Antunes & Franco, 2016; Nowell & Albrecht, 2019; Yin, 2018). For example, Antunes and Franco (2016) used semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol as the main data collection instrument, document analysis as a secondary instrument for data collection, and triangulation of both sources in a multiple case study of leadership practices in Portuguese firms.

Since this study involved qualitative methods, I was the primary instrument for data collection. The secondary data collection instruments I used were semi-structured interviews and document analysis or documentation. Qualitative multiple case studies on SME leadership and performance such as Antunes and Franco (2016), and Franco and Matos (2015) involved using similar data collection instruments.

Interviews are the most direct approach for collecting rich qualitative data about a phenomenon from participants of a study, especially in situations where direct

observation by the researcher is not possible (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Runfola et al., 2017). Interviews are the most popular tool for collecting data in qualitative case studies in management and business research (Runfola et al., 2017). Semi-structured interviews entails asking specific questions about core elements of the phenomenon from all participants but allowing flexibility to explore relevant issues that emerge during the discussion using probing questions (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An interview protocol or schedule with open-ended non-leading questions that cover key aspects of the study enhances the reliability of the interview as an instrument (Nowell & Albrecht, 2019; Yin, 2018). Member checking is useful for enhancing the credibility of case studies by confirming accurate representation and interpretation of participants' experiences, and mitigating researcher bias (Iivari, 2018; Thomas, 2017). Hence, I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix A), which I used during the semi-structured interview sessions and conducted member checking using summaries of the interview transcripts for consenting participants.

Documentation as a secondary data source involves collecting information related to the case from personal documents and communications of participants, reports or records of events, administrative documents such as periodical company reports, formal studies or evaluations, and articles from mass media or news publications (Yin, 2018). Since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, it is the responsibility of the researcher to find relevant documents, determine their accuracy and authenticity, and correctly interpret the documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Developing and using a protocol for determining the author and purpose, history and context, genuineness and

completeness of documents enhances the reliability and validity of documentation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I developed a protocol for collecting documentary evidence (see Appendix B). I kept an audit trail and database of documents from which I collected data using a research journal and electronic data files, respectively. An audit trail, which contains explicit information about processes the researcher used for collecting and analyzing data, improves the reliability and validity of a study (Annink, 2016; Lester et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Nowell & Albrecht, 2019). Creating a case study database also increases the reliability of the study by enabling readers follow the chain of evidence using the original data sources (Yin, 2018).

### **Data Collection Technique**

The overarching research question of this study was; how do SME leaders ensure alignment between leadership style and business strategy for CSV? Hence, the units of analysis of the study were SME leaders and SMEs. The semi-structured interview was an appropriate instrument for collecting data from SME leaders while documentation or documentary analysis was appropriate for collecting data about SMEs participating in the study. Advantages of using semi-structured interviews include popularity among qualitative researchers and the potential for collecting rich and thick data about experiences of key informants using open-ended and probing questions (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Semi-structured interviews aid data saturation because the researcher can ask multiple participants the same basic set of questions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Disadvantages of semi-structure interviews include high implementation cost and time, problems with handling difficult participants or locations, and unreliability of interview

data when participants are untruthful, biased, or cannot correctly recollect experiences (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Advantages of collecting documentary evidence include easy access to publicly available documents from the internet and libraries with little restriction, and low cost since documents already exist and the researcher does not need to generate new data (Rapley & Rees, 2018). However, the researcher needs to search for and determine the authenticity, credibility, meaning, and representativeness of the documents (Rapley & Rees, 2018).

During case studies, collecting qualitative data through semi-structured interviews usually begins after developing an interview protocol, purposefully selecting cases and participants using relevant criteria, and gaining access to and obtaining consent of participants (Antunes & Franco, 2016; Dasgupta, 2015). The process of conducting semi-structured interviews usually entails scheduling interviews, establishing a rapport with participants, conducting and recording interviews, and noting observations and reflections during data collection in a research journal/diary (Annink, 2016; Dasgupta, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Scheduling interviews at a convenient time and safe space for participants, and establishing a rapport at the beginning of the interview session allow participants feel at ease about sharing their experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Hence, I paid attention to scheduling interviews and building rapport with participants to optimize the use of interview sessions. Due to COVID-19 restrictions during data collection that prohibited physical contact with participants, I recruited participants and conducted interviews using virtual platforms such as email, telephone, and video conferencing. Depending on the convenience, accessibility, availability, and information

and communication technology (ICT) proficiency of participants, I was flexible with options of virtual platforms for conducting interviews and member checking. While telephone and video conferencing facilitates data collection when physical access to participants is difficult, and reduces cost and logistics of collecting data, the researcher loses some capability to observe non-verbal cues, which face-to-face interviews provide (Archibald et al., 2019; Lo Iacono et al., 2016). The visible co-presence possible when using video conferencing platforms for interviews facilitates establishing a good rapport between the researcher and participants, which enhances collecting rich data (Weller, 2017). Video conferencing platforms commonly used in qualitative studies include Skype, Facetime, and Zoom (Archibald et al., 2019; Lo Iacono et al., 2016; Weller, 2017). The advantages of Zoom over other video conferencing platforms such as Skype include inbuilt secure recording facilities and a more stable connection over the internet (Archibald et al., 2019). A disadvantage of Zoom is difficulty in joining meetings experienced by some participants, especially those not familiar with using virtual platforms (Archibald et al., 2019). However, familiarity with Zoom and other video conferencing platforms with users increased because of mandatory COVID-19 mitigation strategies such as social distancing and limits to physical gatherings of persons (Hill et al., 2021; Lv et al., 2021). All participants of this study were comfortable using Zoom; hence, I conducted all interviews using the Zoom platform.

Important tools for conducting semi-structured interviews are interview protocols or guides and recording devices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview protocols or guides are effective for pursuing the line of inquiry when conducting semi-structured

interviews while recording devices aid transcription of interviews (Dasgupta, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix A) containing specific questions to ensure participants adequately address key concepts of the study. I used probing questions to explore concepts further when necessary. I limited interview sessions to periods of about an hour and only extended interviews with the permission of participants. I recorded all interviews with the permission of participants to facilitate accurate transcription of the interviews using the recording facility of Zoom. At the end of each interview, I requested a follow-up interview session with participants in case I needed more information and for member checking purposes. I conducted member checking on interview data by sending a summary of interview transcripts to participants within a week of conducting the interview to confirm if I accurately represented their experiences and opinions. Most participants provided feedback to the interview summaries via email. I scheduled a follow-up telephone call with participants to clarify significant issues identified while reviewing the transcripts.

Documents collected as qualitative data include paper-based and computer-mediated documents such as reports and messages containing written texts and non-written elements such as images and diagrams (Rapley & Rees, 2018). The process of collecting documentary evidence includes requesting relevant personal and company documents from participants; searching public records and media sources such as company websites, newspapers, and magazines for publications about the company; and mining documents for relevant data on the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Carr et al. (2019), qualitative analysis of emails and instant messages on smartphones

and mobile devices can provide rich information about behaviors, responses, and communication exchanges of participants in different situations relevant to the phenomenon of interest. I requested relevant documentary evidence about each case after interviewing each participant. I focused on publicly available documents such as company annual reports, publications, website, news, and mass media publications using a simple protocol for collecting documentary evidence. The documentary evidence protocol (see Appendix B) I used contained questions about the document's source, author, age/history, purpose/type, content, context, audience, genuineness, and completeness.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Qualitative data organization and management techniques usually focus on storing and coding data to facilitate data analysis (Maher et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Paulus et al., 2017). Researchers assign codes to portions of qualitative data to facilitate identification, retrieval, comparison, and storage of data during analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Paulus et al., 2017; Williams & Moser, 2019). Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo and Atlas.ti can facilitate data coding, storage, retrieval, and sorting (Houghton et al., 2015; Maher et al., 2018; Paulus et al., 2017; Williams & Moser, 2019). Hence, I used the standalone version of NVivo to facilitate data management.

Another important consideration of data organization is securing data to protect the confidentiality of participants by anonymizing data files and using secured storage devices (Heath et al., 2018; Kirilova & Karcher, 2017). Merriam and Tisdell (2016)



advised using secured multiple data storage devices such as external hard drives and cloud storage to safeguard against accidental loss of data. For this study, I stored transcribed interviews using MS Word files and documentary evidence using MS Word and PDF files. In addition, I anonymized and stored the data in secured storage devices with passwords such as my personal computer, an external drive, and Google drive as backup. I recorded personal observations, appointments, and confidential information about cases and participants in a private research journal. I shall keep all data files and devices for a period of 5 years after completion of the study, after which I will erase and/or reformat all electronic storage devices, and destroy all physical documents and personal journals containing confidential information.

### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative studies, data analysis and data collection usually occur simultaneously so that insights from early stages of data analysis can guide collection of rich data and help determine when data saturation occurs (Belotto, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Multiple case study analysis usually involves conducting within-case analysis followed by cross-case analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). A strategy for enhancing reliability and validity of qualitative case studies is triangulation, which involves checking for convergence of information collected and emerging findings using different sources, methods, and investigators for collecting and analyzing data (Farquhar et al., 2020; Flick, 2018; Fusch et al., 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation involves using several data collection methods or instruments, while data

triangulation involves collecting data from different categories of people, different places or organizations, or at different times (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, methodological triangulation was relevant for within-case analysis using data collected from semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. I performed data triangulation through cross-case analysis since each case was a different organization in a different location.

The process for analyzing qualitative data usually entails several iterative stages of coding, categorizing, and integrating data until major themes for making sense, constructing meaning, or building theories from the data emerge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017; Williams & Moser, 2019). Thematic analysis is a general approach to qualitative data analysis involving identifying, organizing, and interpreting themes applicable to different types of qualitative data (King & Brooks, 2018; Lester et al., 2020). Content analysis is another general approach for rigorous qualitative data analysis involving identifying and describing codes and patterns, which has theoretical flexibility and applicability to a wide range of data sets (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). I used a data analysis strategy based on thematic and content analysis consisting of five procedures for interview data and documentary evidence. These are: (a) preparing the data for analysis, (b) generating initial codes and categories, (c) sorting and naming categories, (d) generating major themes, and (e) construction of meaning (Lester et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

Yin (2018) recommended researchers use an iterative analytical strategy that involves analyzing the data from the perspective of the research questions through a

transparent and defensible process that would result in trustworthy findings and conclusions. The analytical strategy I used followed Yin's (2018) recommendation of relying on theoretical propositions, working through the data from the ground up, developing a case description, and examining plausible rival explanations. I started the first two stages of the data analysis process during data collection, specifically after each interview session to facilitate effective data collection during subsequent sessions and detect data saturation. After completing data collection, I performed all five stages of the analytical strategy iteratively.

Preparing data for analysis involves transcribing the data, becoming familiar with the data, and adding marginal notes about personal reflections on the data (Lester et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Preparing the data for analysis helps the researcher identify limitations and gaps in the data during data collection, refine and focus the data collection process, and identify initial codes for analysis (Lester et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following the advice of Lester et al. (2020), I transcribed audio recordings of interviews myself to enhance familiarization with the data and I stored the transcribed interviews as MS Word data files, which are compatible with the NVivo data analysis software. In addition, I read each interview transcript and document until I am familiar with the data and made notes of personal reflections on each transcript that were useful during subsequent interviews and the analysis process.

The first level of coding usually involves generating as many initial codes from the data as possible that are relevant to the research question and concepts of interest

(Maher et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019). A code is a word or short phrase with symbolic meaning that describes a unit of data (Lester et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019). Generating initial codes involves describing the data in a process similar to open coding in grounded theory research (Moser & Korstjens, 2017; Williams & Moser, 2019). Initial, open, or broad coding exposes concepts, ideas, and meanings inherent in the data (Houghton et al., 2015). I used the NVivo software to facilitate the initial coding process. NVivo has capabilities for creating, linking, storing, and retrieving codes assigned to data sets (Maher et al., 2018; Williams & Moser, 2019).

Sorting and naming categories is the second level of coding, similar to axial coding in grounded theory research, which involves identifying emerging patterns and categories from initial codes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019). Generating major themes is the third level of coding, similar to selective coding in grounded theory research, which usually involves generating between three and six major themes from related categories at a higher level of abstraction that represent the major findings of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019). Themes are recurring distinct features of data relevant to the research question (King & Brooks, 2018). The second and third levels of coding constitute the process of ordering and refining theme categories by identifying relationships between codes, sorting codes, and synthesizing codes to generate major themes from the data that align with the conceptual goals of the study (Houghton et al., 2015; Lester et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Major themes emerging from the coding process enable

creation of case study narratives and within-case analysis (Williams & Moser, 2019). I used a combination of NVivo software and the traditional tools such as a large display board, sticky notes, and colored pens during the analysis process for sorting and naming categories and generating major themes. According to Lester et al. (2020), using NVivo for generating and storing codes combined with traditional methods for comparing and sorting codes usually produce the most effective process for analyzing qualitative data and maintaining a clear audit trail of the data.

The final stage of data analysis, construction of meaning, involves comparing themes with theoretical concepts to make sense of the data within the purpose of research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019). Construction of meaning involves interpreting emerging themes to facilitate understanding of the phenomenon of interest, answer the research questions of the study, and identify alternative explanations that differ from the conceptual framework of the study (Belotto, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers can construct meaning for individual cases or across multiple cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I performed cross-case analysis of themes emerging from each case for constructing meaning, understanding common concepts across cases, and identifying unique themes from each case of the study. I viewed common and unique themes from cases through the conceptual framework of the study to obtain a deep understanding of the concepts of the study and identify strategies SME leaders use for aligning leadership style with business strategies for CSV. Furthermore, I correlated emerging themes from the study with major themes on leadership style and CSV strategy of SMEs from current relevant academic publications, especially articles discussed in my

literature review. I kept updating the literature review section with newly published relevant publications throughout the study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Under reliability and validity of qualitative studies, researchers address concerns about the trustworthiness, or level of confidence of readers about the quality and authenticity, of the research process and findings (Cypress, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rigor is an essential part of the research process for achieving trustworthy research findings, which is the goal of the study (Cypress, 2017; Nowell & Albrecht, 2019). Addressing trustworthiness entails outlining strategies for ensuring research rigor, which differ from obtaining measurable indications of reliability and validity in quantitative research (Daniel, 2019; Nowell & Albrecht, 2019). Common strategies for ensuring research rigor include appropriate sampling, using appropriate data collection protocols, prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation, member checks, peer debriefing, negative/alternative case analysis, developing a coding system, presenting a clear audit trail, and thick description of cases (Morse, 2015; Nowell & Albrecht, 2019). Commonly used criteria for determining the trustworthiness of qualitative research are dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability instead of quantitative research criteria for quality such as reliability, internal validity, objectivity, and external validity or generalizability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Morse, 2015).

#### **Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency or stability of research processes and

findings; that is, the extent to which the same findings would emerge if the researcher repeated the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Morse, 2015; Yin, 2018). The concept of reliability is problematic in qualitative research due to the dynamic nature of human behavior and the notion of multiple realities in social constructivism (Cypress, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Hence, replicating qualitative studies may be a challenging proposition.

### ***Dependability***

This involves basing interpretations on accurate data from participants to ensure consistency or stability of findings over time, which addresses the reliability of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b). Strategies for ensuring dependability or reliability include using protocols to ensure consistency in data collection and analysis (Forero et al., 2018; Nowell & Albrecht, 2019; Yin, 2018). It is also important to maintain a clear chain of evidence or audit trail between the data and findings by providing detailed notes about research decisions and data collection and analysis processes (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Maher et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). Member checking to ensure the researcher understands and interpreted the data correctly enhances reliability (Morse, 2015). Triangulation of data from different sources and ensuring data saturation also enhances dependability of a study (Fusch et al., 2018). For this study, the main strategies for ensuring dependability were the use of protocols for collecting interview and documentary data, maintaining a clear audit trail, member checking of interview transcripts, and sharing a summary of key findings from data analysis of each case with respective participants to validate interpretation of data.

**Validity**

Validity refers to the accuracy of qualitative research findings (Cypress, 2017; Daniel, 2019). Triangulation and data saturation are important for ensuring validity in qualitative research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Triangulation is a major strategy for ensuring validity in qualitative and mixed methods case studies (Farquhar et al., 2020; Flick, 2018; Franco & Matos, 2015; Fusch et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). In qualitative studies, researchers usually address validity in terms of credibility, transferability, and conformability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Morse, 2015).

***Credibility***

Credibility in qualitative studies corresponds to internal validity of research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). Credibility refers to a true representation of the social reality of participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Maher et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement are important strategies for ensuring internal validity (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking involves sending transcripts of interviews and a summary of findings to participants for correction and feedback (Iivari, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Thomas, 2017). Member checking and sharing results with participants enhance validity and accountability of the research (Naidu & Prose, 2018). I achieved data saturation, used methodological and data triangulation, conducted member checking of interview transcripts, and shared a summary of case findings with participants as strategies for ensuring credibility and accuracy of findings of the study. My choice of a multiple case study research design facilitated data triangulation.



Collecting interview and documentary data facilitated methodological triangulation, while collecting data from different cases facilitated data triangulation.

### ***Confirmability***

This addresses objectivity or neutrality of the researcher with respect to research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Maher et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Confirmability is the degree to which other researchers can confirm the findings of a qualitative study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b). A major strategy for ensuring confirmability is maintaining a clear audit trail (Cypress, 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2017b). I kept a reflective research journal, which facilitated creating a clear audit trail and managing personal bias.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability corresponds to external validity or generalizability and concerns how the findings of a qualitative study are applicable to other contexts or situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rheinhardt et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). It is not the responsibility of the researcher to determine transferability but to provide adequate information about the research for the reader to make this judgement (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Rheinhardt et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). A common strategy for enhancing transferability is providing a thick description of the context and cases of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Maher et al., 2018; Rheinhardt et al., 2018). I followed the recommendation of Merriam and Tisdell (2016) about providing a thick description of cases, which entailed detailed information about cases, participants, and findings of the study including evidence from the data in form of quotes to help readers

determine how to apply the findings of the study. Reaching data saturation enables the researcher provide detailed information for replicating the study in the future (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used multiple data sources and collection methods, and conducted semi-structured interviews with a diverse sample of targeted participants and cases using interview protocols to ensure I achieved data saturation. By providing detailed information about the cases, including the methods and findings of the study, SME leaders will be able to determine if and how the findings of my study are applicable, while researchers can determine the relevance of my study for future research.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 contains a detailed description of the decisions and processes for conducting the study. I restated the purpose of the study and provided details supported by evidence from relevant literature about how I carried out the exploratory study. I discussed my role as the researcher, the selection and role of participants, and the research method, design, and processes. These involved clarifying ethical issues related with the study, providing details about processes for collecting and analyzing data, and strategies for ensuring trustworthiness of the research findings.

Section 3 will be the final part of the doctoral study report. In section 3, I will present a description of cases and the findings of the study. I will present applications of the findings of the study to business practice, implications for positive social change, and recommendations for action and further research. Finally, I will provide personal reflections from my research journal and conclusions based on my findings.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In Section 3, I present the findings of this study. These include descriptions of each case and a discussion of major themes emerging from the cases. In addition, the section includes a discussion of applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further research, which business leaders and researchers may find useful. Finally, I present my reflections about the study and conclusions.

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SME leaders use for ensuring leadership style aligns with business strategy for CSV. Four SMEs in the retail industry in southwest Nigeria were the cases for this study. After data collection and analysis, major themes emerged about business strategies for CSV, leadership styles of SMEs leaders, and strategies SME leaders use for aligning leadership styles and strategies for CSV. Five major themes about strategies SME leaders use for aligning leadership style and strategies for CSV emerged from the data: (a) leaders set the tone, (b) leaders adapt their leadership style, (c) organizational systems and procedures, (d) good communication, and (e) feedback and evaluation.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question of this study was: How do SME leaders ensure alignment between leadership style and business strategy for CSV? I carried out a multiple case study of four SMEs in the retail industry of southwest Nigeria using the contingency theories of leadership as a conceptual framework. To protect the

confidentiality of participants and cases, I have removed all identifying information from the data. I represented participants using an alphanumeric code; letter *C* represents cases while letter *P* represents participants, and numbers differentiate between cases and participants. For example, *C1P1* represents *Participant 1* of *Case 1*. Table 3 depicts the description of SMEs used as cases and the participants from each case. The four cases included two small enterprises and two medium-sized enterprises, all of which had different retail specialties. The medium-sized enterprises had been in operation for over 10 years longer than the small enterprises; hence, they had grown from small enterprises to medium enterprises and had developed strategies for CSV and aligning leadership style over a longer period. Four of the 11 participants of the study were female leaders. *C1*, *C3*, and *C4* had at least one female participant, and only *C2* had participants that were all male leaders.

Table 4 depicts the data sources used for this study. I used two major sources of data, namely semi-structured interviews and documentary evidence. I interviewed all participants virtually using the Zoom video conferencing platform. The duration of interviews was between 40 minutes and 75 minutes, after which I sent summaries of the interview transcripts to participants via email for member checking. Four participants responded via email, while member checking for other participants took place via a follow-up telephone call. Documentary evidence sources included company financial reports, websites, newspaper and magazine articles, and online business directories. The sources provided a rich data from which major themes about business strategies for CSV,

leadership styles of SME leaders, and strategies SME leaders use for aligning leadership styles and CSV strategies emerged.

**Table 3**

*Description of SMEs Used as Cases*

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Retail specialty	Renewable energy products	Bookshop and resource center	Community pharmacy	Electrical/home appliances and souvenirs
Size (number of employees)	Small (< 50)	Medium (50 – 200)	Medium (50 – 200)	Small (< 50)
Age (years of operation)	> 5 years	>15 years	> 15 years	> 5 years
Number and description of participants	Owner (C1P1), senior manager (C1P2)	Senior managers (C2P1, C2P2, and C2P3)	Director (C3P1), senior managers (C3P2 and C3P3)	Owner (C4P1), co-owner (C4P2), senior manager (C4P3)

**Table 4**

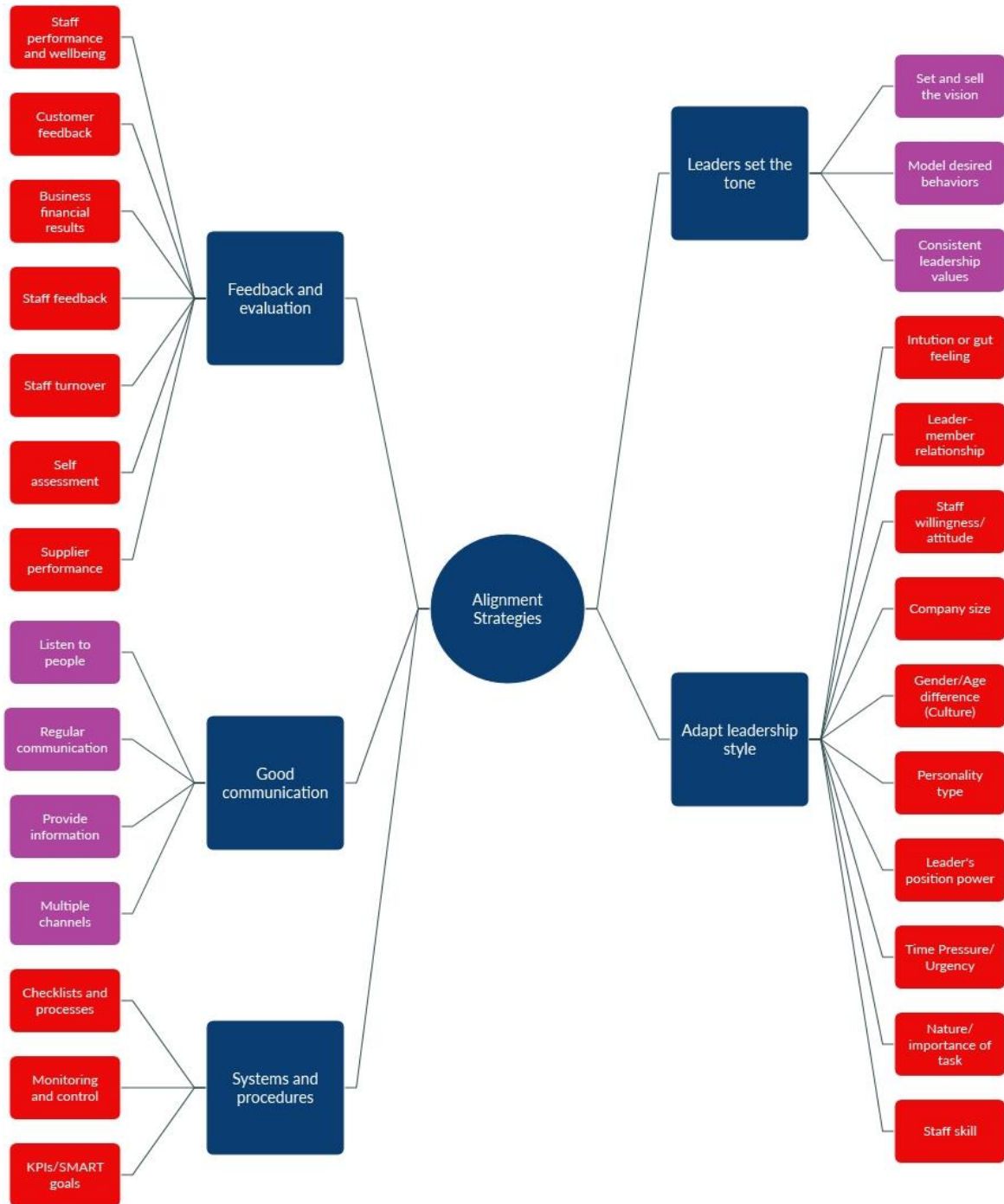
*Data Sources*

Data sources	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Virtual semi-structured interviews	X	X	X	X
Company reports and financial documents	X	X		
Company website	X	X	X	X
Newspaper/magazine articles	X	X	X	
Online directory and customer reviews (FindGlocal and VYMaps)		X	X	X

Appendix C contains mind maps of codes and emerging themes for each case. There were 85 initial codes across the four cases after the first round of coding from which 18 categories emerged after the second round of coding. Code categories about leadership styles show SME leaders use various styles but mainly directing and participating style of leadership. Other styles SME leaders use are supporting, delegating, autocratic, transformational, and transactional leadership. Code categories about business strategies for CSV include (a) building strong relationships with external partners, (b) having customer-centric approach, (c) ensuring staff engagement and development, (d) engaging in community and CSR projects related to core business, (e) ensuring business agility, and (f) having a long-term or sustainability perspective. Major categories and themes emerging from the data about strategies SME leaders use for aligning leadership style and strategies for CSV are (a) leaders set the tone, (b) leaders adapt their leadership style, (c) organizational systems and procedures, (d) good communication, and (e) feedback and evaluation. Figure 1 is a mind-map depicting major and minor themes across cases about strategies SME leaders use for aligning leadership style and business strategies for CSV.

**Figure 1**

*Strategies for Aligning Leadership Style and CSV Strategies*



*Note.* Mind-map shows major and minor themes emerging from the data across all four cases of the study. The themes depict strategies SME leaders use for aligning leadership style with business strategies for CSV.

### **Theme 1: Leaders Set the Tone**

Effective and exemplary leaders set the tone others follow through their everyday behaviors and actions (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). All participants identified the need for leaders to set the tone or lead by example as a strategy for ensuring alignment between leadership style and strategies for CSV. *C4P1* stated, “Largely, a leader determines the tone, seriousness, atmosphere, or culture of the business.” Similarly, *C2P2* stated, “The leader should set the tone or example for followers in terms of performance and technical skills, and learning is important to maintain that edge.” *C1P2* also stated, “Once the leadership is right, the organization grows and is able to contribute to society.... However, if leaders fail in their role, the business will fail within a short time and society will not benefit at all.” Participants identified three ways leaders set the tone: (a) setting and selling the vision, (b) modelling desired behaviors, and (c) demonstrating consistent leadership values and virtues. This theme highlights the importance of ensuring leaders’ behavior and actions align with the shared vision and values of the company to enable sustainable creation of shared value. The theme also suggests leaders’ actions are as important, if not more, as their words. From the data, leaders that set the tone as a strategy for ensuring alignment with CSV strategies used directive, participative, supportive, and transformational leadership styles. Some leaders, especially *Case 4*, also showed servant leadership characteristics such as putting the needs of people first.

*C4P1* stressed the importance of vision when implementing strategy: “the vision of the company is important when implementing strategy or people will do whatever they



like.” *C4P2* buttressed the importance of selling the vision to employees by stating, “We educate our workers about the company’s vision, mission, and products and services to clients...” *C1P1*, usually a participative leader, discussed selling the vision and modelling desired behaviors:

It is more of trying to model things you want to see and getting staff close to you to replicate your thinking and vision to everyone because it is obvious you cannot be everywhere.... Now, when I am going out on sales or marketing, I take a staff along and model the way I do things so that they can learn. My focus is trying to replicate my thoughts, my vision, the way I want things done in as many people as possible and give them the flexibility or opportunity to try things.

*C4P1* gave an example of how to model desired behaviors:

A leader should lead by example, even in little things. I do not like boring routine work ordinarily but when I sometimes stay in the staff quarters with my employees, I go to work by 7:30am because I have to lead by example.

Sometimes, I am already at the office before they get to work.

According to Kouzes and Posner (2007), leaders must first identify and clearly state values that serve as guiding principles for desired behaviors within the organization. *C4P1* highlighted the importance of values when implementing strategy: “Our strategies are offshoots of our value system.... Our values help us focus our energy and drives implementing our strategy.” Participants identified important leadership values and virtues such as patience, integrity, honesty, excellence, and continuous learning. *C1P2* and *C2P3* identified patience when dealing with customers and employees, respectively.

*C1P2* stated, “When dealing with external stakeholders such as customers and prospects, I am cautious and patient because customers do not consider our products as essential commodities and they want to think and budget carefully.” *C4P1* identified patience and perseverance as important qualities for achieving goals: “I am very patient and persevering, and I do not quit until I achieve my goals.” Several participants stressed the importance of integrity in building trust and strong relationships, and continuous learning for growth and innovation. *C2P2* stated, “We value our integrity. We do not promise what we cannot deliver.” *C2P1* stated, “When addressing colleagues or subordinates, leaders should speak from a position of knowledge and authority. It is important to keep abreast with developments in the economy, the business world, industry regulatory and compliance requirements, and government policies.” *C2P2* also stated, “As a leader, you must continuously improve yourself... If you cannot improve yourself, there is no way you can be a leader because your followers expect you to know better than they do.” Similarly, *C4P1* stated, “A key resource is knowledge and books. All our offices have well equipped libraries with the books we need to read to make our businesses better. I read and encourage my people to read.” *C3P2* and *C3P3* identified excellence as a key leadership value in modelling desired behaviors. *C3P3* stated:

The core objective of our company is to deliver excellent service to customers at minimal cost. Hence, our core values include excellence... and we stand for quality... Our strategy includes setting the pace for others to follow and encouraging participation of our employees. My boss, the MD, always sets the

example and first does whatever he is asking employees to do. He focuses mostly on service delivery to customers and less on administrative work.

Experiences of supportive leaders, especially *Case 4*, suggest it is easier to influence employees to create value when leading by example and ensuring leaders' behavior towards staff are consistent with company values. *C4P1* stated,

For us, it is beyond making money but about the value and impression we create.

We put premium on people. It is all about people. We believe it is not too much to do anything to serve people. We operate like a family. My staff are important. I could stop the world to focus on my staff, when the need arises... While customers are important, my people are equally important.

Statements from *C4P2* and *C4P3* correlated with the statement from *C4P1* showing that employees follow the example of leaders who live by values that appeal to employees.

*C4P2* stated, "Employees embrace my leadership style because of the good rapport I have with them. They learn from it and use it when dealing with existing and prospective customers." Similarly, *C4P3* stated, "My team is amazing because they usually respond quickly to meet demands even when it requires working through the night. In such situations, I do not need to explain because I am involved and setting the example."

### ***Correlating Theme 1 to Existing Literature***

In a seminal publication, Kouzes and Posner (2007) identified five practices of exemplary leadership: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. The theme, leaders set the tone, correlates with the practices of exemplary leadership. When leaders articulate a

shared vision and consistently demonstrate values and behaviors that align with the vision, they inspire and enable followers to achieve the objectives of the organization. This theme supports findings of Birbirsa and Lakew (2020), Eisenkopf (2020), Howard et al. (2019), Kizer (2016), Simmons (2018), and Yi (2019). Eisenkopf found a stronger correlation between the actions of leaders and followers when followers see alignment between the words and actions of a leader than when followers do not see an alignment. Alignment between words and deeds of a leader, referred to as behavioral integrity, show leaders lead by example and builds trust among followers (Eisenkopf, 2020). Kizer (2016) and Simmons (2018) identified leading by example as an important strategy small business leaders use for increasing employee engagement. Birbirsa and Lakew found transformational leadership behaviors such as inspiring and articulating a shared vision had a significant positive relationship with job satisfaction in Ethiopian SMEs. Howard et al. identified developing and selling a shared vision as important components of effective management and leadership style of small business owners. Yi identified strategies leaders use for establishing a healthy organizational culture, which include setting the mission and goals of the organization, and leading by example. Idealized influence, a dimension of transformational leadership, entails the leader's ability to be a role model, and provide a clear vision and sense of purpose (Ng, 2017; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Gandolfi and Stone (2018) argued servant leadership entails inspiring followers to buy into a shared vision and achieve organizational goals by focusing on the needs, wellbeing, and success of followers. Eva et al. (2018) and Eva et al. (2019) identified the sixth dimension of servant leadership as transforming influence, which

entails behaviors such as vision setting and role modelling. Hence, setting the tone or leading by example correlates with supportive and participative leadership behaviors, and transformational and servant leadership style dimensions for providing a clear sense of purpose and increasing employee engagement, which facilitate CSV and achieving organizational goals.

### ***Correlating Theme 1 to the Conceptual Framework***

Leaders setting the tone correlates with the path-goal theory and situational leadership model, which are contingency theories of leadership. The path goal theory identifies four leadership styles; directive, participative, supportive, and achievement-oriented, through which leaders create a clear purpose and set challenging goals for the organization (Saleem et al., 2020). Using the path goal theory to explain the effect of transformational leadership behaviors on employees, Pahi et al. (2020) found visionary leaders with a clear purpose and firm values had a positive effect on employee commitment to achieving organizational goals.

The SL model identifies four leadership styles derived from a combination of supportive and directive behaviors in response to the ability and willingness of followers (Hersey et al., 2013; Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Leaders setting the tone correlates with the participating and selling style for followers or employees who are unwilling and able or unable and willing, respectively. Unwilling employees lack confidence, commitment and motivation to perform tasks while unable employees lack skills for performing tasks (Hersey et al., 2013). Selling involves seeking employee buy-in through explaining, persuading, and clarifying behaviors while participating involves encouraging and

building employee commitment through supporting and empowering behaviors (Hersey et al., 2013). Chen et al. (2020) found participative leaders create a psychologically safe work environment and culture that encourages free exchange of ideas and creativity among employees.

Findings from this study support findings of Chen et al., (2020) and Pahi et al. (2020) about leaders providing a clear vision and sense of purpose, and establishing a healthy culture to achieve the vision. SME leaders persuaded employees, facilitated employee commitment, and established a healthy culture by setting the tone. However, transformational leadership theory provides a more plausible explanation for setting the tone than contingency leadership theories.

### **Theme 2: Leaders Adapt their Leadership Style**

Effective leaders are able to adapt their leadership style appropriately depending on their understanding of the situation (Cote, 2017; Debebe, 2017; Stewart & Gapp, 2017; Wright, 2017). All study participants shared the opinion SME leaders use a variety of leadership styles depending on the situation. For example, *C2P1* stated, “My interpretation of the demands of the particular situation I find myself determines my leadership style. My leadership style is not cast in stone but dynamic.” Similarly, *C2P3* stated, “my leadership style is not fixed; I am a situational leader.” *C3P1* stated, “Our leadership style is a mix”, while *C4P1* stated, “I use a combination of leadership styles”, and *C1P2* said, “situations usually determine my style, whether transformational or directive, especially when dealing with staff in-house.” Therefore, it was important to

identify contingency or situational factors affecting the style of SME leaders participating in the study.

**Table 5**

*Factors Affecting Leadership Style of SME Leaders*

	Number of participants	Frequency of occurrence
Staff skill level	7	12
Time pressure or urgency of the situation	6	6
Nature or importance of the task	6	6
Position power of leader	4	4
Leader-member relationship	2	3
Gender	2	3
Age difference	1	1
Company size	1	1
Personality	1	1
Willingness or attitude of staff	1	1
Intuition or gut feeling	1	1

Table 5 shows the factors affecting leadership styles identified by participants in order of popularity and frequency. The most common factors identified are staff skill level, time pressure or urgency of the situation, and the nature or importance of the task. Other factors include the position power or authority of the leader and leader-member relationship, which cultural factors such as attitudes towards gender and age difference influence. Participants also identified individual characteristics such as personality and willingness of members and intuition of leaders, and organizational factors such as company size.

Responses from participants of the study indicate SME leaders adapt their style or behaviors according to skill levels of employees to achieve business objectives. *CIP1*

stated, "...the skill level of staff I engage with affects my leadership style. With low-level staff, I could be more directing and instructing to get things done while with skilled staff, I tend to collaborate more." Regarding strategy implementation, *CIP1* stated; "... generally, for low-level staff, we do more of control and micromanaging but for the higher-level staff we give flexibility to take decisions." *C2P3* provided more details about the effect of employee skills on leadership style stating:

Using a participative leadership style depends on the skill level and capabilities of your team members. It is important to know your team members and the tasks to assign to each person based on their capabilities. Some are more entrepreneurial than others are, some more persuasive, while some are more responsive and dependable than others in the team, which helps you limit the number of people you consult when taking an important or urgent decision... There are team members I have to micromanage on a daily basis because they are new and they do not know what to do, which is not the case with others who know what to do.

For novice employees with low-level skills and unclear roles and objectives, *CIP2* used a combination of directive and participative style. *CIP2* stated, "... it is important to use a directive style where you give instructions and a participative style where they learn from your example. This helps employees learn and become skilled workers with the right attitude for the workplace."

Usually, other factors combine with employee skill level to influence how leaders adapt their style. Two of such factors are time pressure and nature or importance of the task. *C3P3* referred to such situations as critical situations. *C3P3* stated, "... in critical



situations that warrant quick action, such as theft or fraud, the chief pharmacist can take decisive action... ” *C4P1* shared another example of an important and urgent situation:

During the COVID-19 lockdown, I had to take charge, make decisions, and give instructions to resolve the situation with our office lease without consulting others due to time pressure and my vision about where the business is going... I also had to make fast decisions to seize good opportunities that did not give me time for consultation.

Similarly, *C4P3* stated, “... when there is pressure from the CEO and the task is important and urgent, I do not have to explain reasons or appeal to staff.” In high pace and demanding situations, *C4P2* stated, “the number of customer requests and questions could overwhelm inexperienced employees; hence, I am usually around to give instructions and I use a directive style.”

Time pressure or urgency of the situation was a major factor affecting the type of leadership style SME leaders used. *C2P1* stated, “Sometimes, time constraints due to the various roles I handle create issues that affect my leadership style.” Some participants opined participative style takes time and may not be appropriate during urgent situations. *C2P3* stated, “... in participative leadership, decision-making may take time and there are situations that require you take responsibility and make decisions because you do not have the luxury of time to get everyone’s contribution and buy-in.” Similarly, *C1P2* stated,

Our work is usually time-bound. When dealing with customers based on an appointment, customers are displeased when we do not fulfil our promise. In such

situations, we do not negotiate in-house but do whatever is necessary to ensure staff perform the work. When there is no time to explain or convince people about your ideas, I use a directive style.

The nature of the task, sensitivity of the information, or the importance of the decision also affects the choice of leadership style of SME leaders. Participants identified instances involving confidentiality and security. For example, *C2P3* stated, "... though I use a participative leadership style, I do not divulge sensitive and confidential information to my team." Similarly, *C3P2* stated, "... there are levels of access given to different levels of staff for security reasons to prevent situations such as theft. For example, staff members still in their probation period have little access to important company information." *C3P3* also stated, "In sensitive situations, not all employees may participate in making decisions. For example, in the accounting section, we reserve some information for management, which I cannot share with everybody." The nature of the task in terms of specialty or complexity also matters. For example, *C3P2* stated, "...technical decisions are limited to members of the unit who inform everyone else impacted by the decision."

Other factors worth discussing include position power or authority of the leader and culturally sensitive factors such as age and gender difference between leader and follower. Participants *C2P1* and *C4P3*, who are senior managers, acknowledged that deferring to the authority of the CEO, who makes the final decision, affects their leadership style with employees. In addition, owners such as *C3P1* and *C4P1* acknowledged they sometimes use an autocratic leadership style, especially when

making decisions based on experience, intuition or gut feeling, and when they do not want to explain or entertain questions from employees. Three of four female participants referred to using supportive leadership style while only two of seven male participants did. *C4P3* linked adapting leadership style, especially choosing between directive and supportive leadership, with gender difference:

Being a female leader has an effect on my leadership style. Mostly, I work with male junior colleagues, which requires patience and good judgement. Many times, men underrate you because you are female, and if you are not careful, you may respond in a way that appears arrogant, rude, or unreasonable. Therefore, when I notice the male ego, I try to be calm and talk to them. I ask about their wellbeing; if everything is okay, or if there is anything wrong. I realized it is not effective giving instructions all the time and you should allow people to be themselves”.

Furthermore, *C4P3* stated,

I learned from the CEO to maintain a cordial relationship with everyone and I do not have to prove to anyone that I am the boss. Male colleagues are somewhat tough but when you understand ways of working with them, they are great to work with. Men try to be hard because the general opinion men have is that female leaders want to dominate and are tough. They have the mindset that their female boss will give them trouble and they are determined to resist. When I see this, I use another approach of being considerate, compassionate, and understanding.

### *Correlating Theme 2 to Existing Literature*

The theme, leaders adapt their leadership style, correlates with findings from studies about leadership style and strategy in SMEs and other organizations. Stewart and Gapp (2017) and Vidal et al. (2017) found small business leaders use a variety of styles specified by the SL model depending on employee maturity described as employees' ability and willingness to take responsibility or perform tasks. This theme reinforces Cote (2017), Debebe (2017), Klarare et al. (2020), Wright (2017), Yi (2019), and similar studies that concluded effective leaders are flexible, use a variety of leadership styles, and adapt their style to fit the context or situation. However, several studies showed other factors affect how well leaders can adapt their styles. For example, Debebe argued a lack of awareness or authenticity about a leader's identity affects understanding of context; hence, leadership flexibility and effectiveness. In addition, not all leaders possess a wide range of leadership styles that enable them adapt behaviors appropriately even when able to diagnose the situation correctly (Yi, 2019; Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Fiedler (1981) and, more recently, Zaccaro et al. (2018) argued leadership style is a more stable personal disposition and rather than adapt style to match the situation, leaders have some control over situations and adapt the situation to suit their dispositions and capabilities. Evidence from the study support the view of Zaccaro et al. about leader agency of situations if viewed differently. For example, some may consider firing a disloyal, incompetent, or unwilling employee adapting the situation to suit the leader but others may consider such an action adopting a directive, autocratic, or transactional leadership style. Klarare et al. argued effective leadership should not focus on adjusting the situation

to suit the leader's style but adapting the leader's style to meet the individual and collective needs of team members. Nonetheless, findings from the study show SME leaders should adapt their style or behaviors depending on the situation to be effective when implementing CSV strategies.

### ***Correlating Theme 2 to the Conceptual Framework***

Leaders adapting their leadership style depending on the situation correlates with the contingency theories of leadership. An assumption of the SL model, path-goal theory, and normative and descriptive decision-making model is leadership style is flexible and adaptable (Hornstein et al., 1987). Based on leadership theories such as the contingency theories and evidence from empirical research, Oc (2018) concluded context affects leadership. Oc identified factors affecting leadership style, which include national culture, economic factors, institutional forces, sex composition of groups, nature of tasks, time pressure, and physical distance. Evidence from the study about situational factors affecting the choice of leadership style, shown in Table 5, correlate with factors identified from the contingency theories shown in Table 2 and factors Oc identified. Studies by Stewart and Gapp (2017) and Vidal et al. (2017), based on the SL model, identified employee maturity consisting of employee ability and willingness, as a major situational factor. Popp and Hadwich (2018) identified situational factors such as nature of the task, leader-member relationship, and leader position power based on Fiedler's contingency theory of leadership. In addition, participants identified cultural factors based on societal norms such as gender and age difference between leaders and employees or members also affect leadership style, especially for female leaders; factors

which Debebe (2017) also identified. Evidence from the study suggest SME leaders consider employee skill-level or ability, time pressure, and nature of the task the most important factors based on the frequency of occurrence of factors participants identified, which adds knowledge to the field of study.

### **Theme 3: Organizational Systems and Procedures**

Organizational systems and procedures are measures SME leaders utilize to guide or influence employee behavior to achieve desired results (Pešalj et al., 2018). These include the use of job descriptions, key performance indicators (KPIs), SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound) goals, checklists, task procedures, periodic appraisals, reporting processes, monitoring and controls, and rewards or sanctions. Eight participants of the study mentioned the use of organizational systems or procedures within their enterprises. Table 6 shows the importance of using organizational systems and procedures as a strategy for aligning leadership style and CSV strategies by SME participating in the study. Evidence from the data shows leaders of larger SMEs or those who intend to grow into large organizations place more importance on using organizational systems and procedures than leaders of smaller SMEs. For example, *C4P1* explained the need for systems,

I plan to have a huge business empire, so I cannot afford to build the business around me. I am always building and refining my business systems and processes so that the business revolves around the system and not me. As such, the issue of situation or context is minimized. We establish solid systems based on our experiences to address issues that arise, which are usually not new, such as

occasional disloyal staff, pilfering, visit of tax or local government officers, or troublesome customers. The purpose of these procedures is to improve customer satisfaction and build lasting relationships.

**Table 6**

*Importance of Organizational Systems and Procedure by Case Size*

Case ID	Size of enterprise	Number of participants	Frequency of occurrence
<i>Case 1</i>	Small	0	0
<i>Case 2</i>	Medium	3	4
<i>Case 3</i>	Medium	2	4
<i>Case 4</i>	Small	3	4

Organizational systems and procedures facilitate the development and effective utilization of organizational resources and capabilities for creating value (Miles & Van Clieaf, 2017). In *Case 2*, SME leaders used procedures and checklists to complement directive behaviors, and SMART goals along with periodic appraisals to facilitate employee learning and performance. *C2P3* stated, "...we also have templates, flowcharts, procedures, and checklists to help team members complete unfamiliar tasks." In *Case 3*, SME leaders mainly used directive and transactional leadership style, and used systems for monitoring and controlling employee behavior. According to *C3P3*, "Over time, we adopted controls because we believe trust is good but control is better. At every level of management, we have appropriate controls to guide staff and ensure they do not violate their authority." *C3P1* also supported the reason for using systems within the enterprise and gave examples of systems for monitoring and driving employee performance and ensuring quality control of products from suppliers:

We have performance based employee incentives using a tracking system that monitors sales by employees and locks out employees who come late to work 3 days in a week. This seems dictatorial but it is a way of ensuring punctuality and knowing the number of customers a staff attends daily. When we pay salaries at the end of the month, we have different incentives accruing to employees in addition to their usual wages...

*Case 3* leaders used a collaborative or participative leadership approach with various stakeholders for developing robust organizational systems. *C3P1* stated,

With suppliers, we established a working relationship such that within 2 weeks they receive payment for products they supply if there are no complaints about their products... We have a relationship with a nearby University, which allows us send samples of our products to their laboratory for analysis without informing the supplier. Such systems, which include collaborating with external stakeholders and holding suppliers accountable, help us ensure the effectiveness of our alignment strategies.

*Case 4* leaders regularly use job descriptions, KPIs, SMART goals, reporting procedures, and performance appraisal systems to improve effectiveness and ensure a balance between supportive and directive leadership behaviors. *C4P1* stated, "Two strategies I adopt are communication and appraisal. Everyone I employ has a job description... I expect regular reports using a template with key parameters and indices, depending on the employee's job description, that accumulate towards our goals." *C4P2* stated, "There are processes we put in place to ensure effectiveness and I do not go overboard with my



informal style... Whatever our leadership style, we can evaluate our effectiveness using some of these markers.”

### ***Correlating Theme 3 to Existing Literature***

The theme correlates with literature on organizational design. Organizational design includes organizational systems, processes, procedures, and structures for achieving strategic objectives and sustaining competitive advantage (Miles & Van Clieaf, 2017). The use of organizational systems and procedures by SME leaders to improve leadership effectiveness and SME performance correlates with finding of studies about organizational or performance systems on SME performance. First, the greater use of organizational systems by leaders of medium enterprises compared to small enterprises correlates with the conclusion of Taylor and Taylor (2014) that organizational size influences the use of systems and processes. As organizations grow in size, formality and complexity increase necessitating the use of systems and procedures that align with the organizations strategy for creating value; hence, compared to large organizations, small organizations are less likely to use systems and procedures (Taylor & Taylor, 2014). Isichei et al. (2020) found structural infrastructural capabilities such as work and reward systems are critical factors that drive performance in Nigerian SMEs. However, developing infrastructural capabilities require more processes, time, and resources, which most SMEs in Nigeria cannot afford (Isichei et al., 2020). Evidence from this study shows that as SMEs grow, the need, affordability, and adoption of systems and processes by SME leaders increase. Second, Pešalj et al. (2018) found organizational systems and controls help leaders manage conflicting goals and balance tensions within the business,

which correlates with the use of systems to increase leadership effectiveness and balance between supportive and directive leadership styles by leaders such as *C4P2*. Similarly, Shahzad et al. (2019) found performance systems improve innovativeness and performance of SMEs because employees have more equal opportunities to develop capabilities and contribute to organizational practices and policies.

### ***Correlating Theme 3 to the Conceptual Framework***

Correlation of the use of organizational systems and procedures with the contingency theories of leadership is relevant in terms of identifying contextual or situational factors affecting developing and use of systems and procedures in SMEs. As discussed earlier, Taylor and Taylor (2014) identified organizational size as a contingency factor. Kim and Shin (2019) found organizational structure was a contingency factor influencing empowering processes. Rahim and Lotfi (2017) identified leadership style, organizational culture, and strategy as contingency factors affecting maturity levels of performance measurement systems (PMS) in Moroccan SMEs. Regarding leadership styles, Rahim and Lotfi found participative leadership style facilitates the development of advanced PMS while autocratic leadership style is detrimental in advancing PMS maturity. Evidence from the data, especially *Cases 2 and 3*, show participative leadership aligned with performance improvement systems of employees and suppliers while autocratic, directive, and transactional leadership aligned more with basic PMS such as monitoring and control measures to minimize breaches to company policies and undesirable behaviors. Alternative theories and models explaining the use of organizational systems and processes depending on organizational resources or

leadership style, strategy, and culture are the resource-based theory (RBT) and strategic fit theories such as McKinsey's 7S model of organizational alignment, respectively (Dyer et al., 2016).

#### **Theme 4: Good Communication**

Good communication, especially open, two-way, and regular communication, is essential for leadership effectiveness (Putra & Cho, 2019; Wright, 2017). Eight participants across all cases of the study identified good communication as a strategy for ensuring alignment between leadership style and CSV strategies. Elements of good communication participants identified are listening to people, regular communication, providing or sharing information, and using multiple communication channels or mediums. Five participants mentioned the importance of communicating regularly and providing valuable information or feedback. Communication of leaders using directive leadership style usually focused on performance goals, strategies, expectations, work procedures, and results, while communication of participative and supportive leaders included employee contributions, feedback, and wellbeing. For example, *C2P1* stated, "Constant communication, providing valuable feedback, and ensuring timelines for deliverables, though not open-ended, are reasonable strategies for ensuring alignment." Similarly, *C2P3* stated, "When implementing strategy, we maintain open communication, schedule regular meetings, and have different communication mediums such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and telephone to obtain regular feedback and enable us re-strategize if we are not performing well." *C2P3* and *C4P3*, who use supportive

leadership style, stressed the importance of asking regularly for feedback from employees about their performance and general wellbeing.

Five participants identified the importance of listening to staff members or customers for feedback. For example, *C2P2* stated, “My leadership styles entails listening to people. I first listen before talking or acting.” *C1P2* stressed the need to listen actively to improve communication: “It is important to avoid wasting time and try to understand what people are saying. Personally, I listen more. I assess what others are saying and repeat the message to confirm I understand what the person said.” Participants also stressed the importance of easy access to leaders for enhancing good communication. *C3P2* stated, “Our open style helps us get information from even the least of our staff because our leaders are easily accessible... This helps getting on-time information and feedback so we can address problems quickly.”

Apart from ensuring good communication with employees, participants also emphasized good communication with other stakeholders such customers, suppliers, distributors, government agencies, and local communities. All cases had active websites for sharing information about company products, events, and incentives for customers. In addition, all cases offered online shopping on their websites and provided multiple channels such as email, telephone, and social media platforms for customers and other stakeholder to communicate with them.

#### ***Correlating Theme 4 to Existing Literature***

This theme aligns with the consensus in leadership research literature that good communication is essential for leadership effectiveness. Evidence from the study shows

leaders with good communication skills clarify organizational goals and engage stakeholders in achieving desired outcomes by building strong relationships. Agarwal (2020) found democratic and transformational leadership style facilitate free flow of information in all directions within organizations to ensure organizational objectives are clear and facilitate participation of stakeholders. Minor themes associated with this theme are regular communication, listening to people, sharing information, and using multiple channels. These entail SME leaders engaging in two-way communication with customers, employees, and other stakeholders through various channels or mediums. This strategy correlates with the Stewart and Gapp (2017) finding that increased communication of SME leaders correlates with stronger relationship with all stakeholders. Yi (2019) identified the need for leaders to encourage open communication, free dialogue, and knowledge sharing through multiple communication channels. Turner and Endres (2017) also found regular communications using multiple mediums facilitated building strong relationships with customers that increased success rates of small business owners. Similarly, Lythreatis et al. (2019) found SME leaders who share information and listen to employees build stronger relationships that benefit the business than those who do not. However, the findings of this study does not address how communication skills of leaders affect different organizational outcomes. For example, there is no evidence to support or refute Dunne et al. (2016) who concluded good communication is important for effective leadership but found leaders' communication competence did not influence innovation in SMEs.

### *Correlating Theme 4 to the Conceptual Framework*

Findings of studies on SMEs based on the contingency theories of leadership such as the SL model view effective communication in terms of different leadership style and the situational contexts. SME leaders communicate effectively when they understand the situation and adapt their communication appropriately (Stewart & Gapp, 2017). Using the SL model, Salehzadeh (2017) found followers needing high relationship behaviors such as the coaching, participating, or supporting leadership style require regular two-way communication through multiple channels, while followers needing high task behaviors such as the directing style usually require detailed but one-way or top-down communication. Evidence from this study supports the finding of Salehzadeh as well as Stewart and Gapp, which is; effective leaders adapt their leadership style and communication to the situation. The ability to adapt communication to the situation suggests effective leaders use a variety of communication modes and channels. Singh and Rangnekar (2020), a study based on the path-goal theory, identified information sharing as an important way leaders empower employees to achieve shared goals. Hence, while leadership literature generally describes good communication as open, regular, and two-way information sharing facilitating participation, there may be situations where one-way or top-down communication is more effective. For example, Cao et al. (2016) recommended the use of one-way or top-down communication approach in combination with two-way participatory communication when managing organizational change initiatives. One-way communication was effective for quick and extensive dissemination of motivational outcome-driven messages that do not require employee or customer

feedback (Cao et al., 2016). Transformational leadership theory offers a strong explanation for building strong relationships and achieving organizational objectives through good communication (Putra & Cho, 2019).

### **Theme 5: Feedback and Evaluation**

The process of obtaining feedback and evaluating desired outcomes helps leaders ensure their alignment strategies are effective. All participants of the study constantly evaluated important performance indices, processes, and the outcomes of CSV strategies as a strategy for ensuring or assessing their effectiveness as leaders. For example, *CIP1* stated, “For SMEs, which usually have the challenge of lack of professionals, there is a need for a good feedback mechanism that supervisors can use to measure what is going on.” The feedback mechanism includes non-financial performance metrics such as staff and customer feedback, staff turnover, staff wellbeing and performance, and supplier performance, as well as financial metrics such as sales revenue, inventory level, costs, and profit.

Table 7 shows the metrics for evaluating leadership effectiveness and ensuring alignment of leadership style with CSV strategies identified by participants of the study in order of frequency of occurrence within the data set. The data shows staff metrics including wellbeing and performance, feedback and complaints, or turnover, and financial results are important indicators that appeared across all four cases of the study. Customer feedback was another important indicator identified by leaders from three of the four cases, especially participants from *Case 2* and *Case 3* due to their customer-centric CSV strategy.

**Table 7***Metrics for Assessing Alignment of Leadership Style and CSV Strategy*

	Number of participants	Frequency of occurrence
Staff wellbeing and performance	7	8
Financial results	6	7
Customer feedback	5	5
Staff feedback and complaints	5	5
Leader self-assessment	3	5
Staff turnover	2	2
Supplier assessment	1	1

The set of metrics each leader focused on was different depending on the goals the leader considered important and the leader's leadership style. *C2P3* stated, "Assessing leadership effectiveness depends on the goal the leader wants to achieve. If the goal is clear, it is possible to measure and compare for variances during the execution of strategies." The data suggests when leaders used directive and participative leadership styles, the focus was on business financial results, customer feedback, and staff feedback but when leaders used the supportive leadership style, the focus was on staff wellbeing and performance. The wider the range of leadership styles a leader uses, the wider the range of metrics the leader looks at for feedback. For example, *C2P3* identified financial results, customer feedback, and staff wellbeing and performance as important indices for assessing leadership effectiveness while *C3P3* identified customer feedback, staff feedback, and financial results, and *C4P3* identified staff wellbeing and performance.



Sales revenue was the most important financial result or metric identified by participants. Other financial metrics used were inventory levels, costs, and profit and loss. For example, *CIP1* stated,

We have metrics for checking the impact of our leadership style. These include economic metrics such as the bottom line of the business... Sales revenue is an important metric. When revenue is going down, I want to be sure that I am engaging properly with staff and I randomly ask staff about the state of their wellbeing and work.

Supportive leaders usually linked sales results to staff wellbeing and productivity, whereas other leaders, especially directive leaders did not. *C3P3* also emphasized the importance of sales revenue to SME leaders when assessing effectiveness of leadership style and strategies but linked sales revenue to customer satisfaction and company procedures rather than staff wellbeing. According to *C3P3*,

The perfect answer for assessing effectiveness of our alignment strategies is results. We look at results, especially our sales over a month or period. We compare sales figures over several periods and ask questions to determine whether there is an improvement in sales or not based on our current strategy. If not, we consider adopting another strategy. We also assess effectiveness of new procedures from customer feedback and reaction. If customers complain, we try to adjust our procedures to suit everyone and ensure our internal controls are not breached.

Data showed all *Case 3* leaders used customer and staff feedback as indicators for assessing alignment strategies and making adjustments when necessary. *Case 3* appeared more in user blogs with customer reviews than other cases of the study. *C3P1* stated, “Feedback from the employees and customers helps us align our leadership style with our strategy for CSV. We look at the rate of attrition and reasons of employees for leaving our company... We also document and review customer complaints.” Similar to leaders from other cases, *Case 4* leaders looked at periodic business reports and results for feedback and discussed ways to improve performance with staff. However, *Case 4* leaders also discussed personal challenges affecting performance of staff and ways to resolve such issues. *C4P3* stated, “I have access to the reports of staff and I am able to evaluate their performance and capabilities. It is also important to understand reasons behind the behavior and performance of staff to be able to support their development.”

#### ***Correlating Theme 5 to Existing Literature***

The use of feedback and evaluating performance metrics by all participants of the study correlates with existing literature on performance measurement methods of SMEs. Findings of this study support Madanchian and Taherdoost (2019) who concluded the most common way of assessing leadership effectiveness in SMEs is by assessing outcomes of the actions and strategies of leaders. Hence, the ability to monitor results and the environment is an important dimension of leadership effectiveness (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2019). Performance metrics SME leaders use fall into two major categories; financial and non-financial indicators (Panno, 2020; Stojkić & Bošnjak, 2019). Evidence from the data support the finding of Panno (2020) that SME leaders

regularly use a balanced system of financial and non-financial performance indicators to assess performance. While Panno found customer metrics were the most important non-financial metric for customer-centric enterprises and a lead indicator of financial performance, findings from this study indicates customer and staff metrics are the most important non-financial metrics. Some participants of this study suggested staff metrics is a lead indicator of customer metrics. In addition, findings of this study support the findings of Marchand and Raymond (2018) about the purpose of performance measurement systems, which include strategic decision-making by SME leaders and strategy diffusion to all stakeholders contributing to SME performance. Using feedback and evaluation strategies to obtain relevant information, SME leaders are able to determine the effectiveness of their leadership style, CSV strategies, and alignment strategies, and find ways to alter leadership behaviors and business strategies to achieve the desired results.

#### ***Correlating Theme 5 to the Conceptual Framework***

Obtaining feedback and evaluating performance correlates with the contingency theories of leadership as means for obtaining performance and contextual information that would improve decision-making and leadership effectiveness. The Vroom, Yetton, and Jago's decision-making model highlights the importance of availability of information to the quality of decisions leaders make (Lührs et al., 2018). Using the path-goal theory as a conceptual framework, Magombo-Bwanali (2019) found the need for leaders to create self-awareness about leadership behaviors by conducting self-

assessment, which improves the ability of leaders to choose appropriate leadership style for improving employee performance and achieving desired outcomes.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

SMEs are vital to economic growth and sustainable development of developing countries (Rubio-Mozos et al., 2019; Tokognon & Yunfei, 2018). However, challenges such as lack of leadership and strategic management skills of SME leaders hinder the performance and growth many SMEs (Agwu, 2018; Tokognon & Yunfei, 2018). The purpose of this study was to address the problem by exploring strategies SME leaders use for ensuring leadership styles aligns with business strategy for CSV. Therefore, the findings of this study would provide useful information for SME leaders desiring to grow their businesses and contribute to sustainable development of their local and national economies.

The first theme of the findings highlights the importance of SME leaders engaging employees and other stakeholders in creating value by setting a clear vision for the business beyond creating wealth for the owners and articulating the vision in a way all stakeholders can give their buy-in. It is important for leaders to also identify and clarify values for building a culture that aligns with strategies for achieving a shared vision. Most importantly, leaders should lead by example by ensuring everyday decisions and actions reinforce the values of the company, which help reduce role conflict, facilitate quick decision-making, and improve performance of employees and the business.

The remaining themes reveal the need for leaders to improve their effectiveness by sharing relevant information openly with employees and other stakeholders, and engaging in two-way communication using multiple channels. Obtaining information by soliciting feedback from employees, customers, and other stakeholders, and constantly scanning the environment to identify and understand situational factors would help leaders adapt their behavior or style to achieve desired outcomes. Furthermore, findings of this study show SME leaders who develop systems and procedures that align with company vision and values, and facilitate strategies for creating value are able to sustain competitive advantage and CSV over the long-term.

### **Implications for Social Change**

SME leaders who use the findings of this study for sustaining CSV through their business enterprise over the long-term can contribute to positive social change. Common social challenges in Nigerian communities include poverty, unemployment, poor healthcare and education, and gender inequality (Egaga & Aderibigbe, 2015). Lack of financial resources hinders SME leaders struggling to run their business from contributing to alleviating social challenges (Boso et al., 2017). Implementing CSV strategies and aligning leadership styles with CSV strategies enable SME leaders create wealth and address social challenges simultaneously through their enterprises.

Sustainable growth and profitability of SMEs increases the capacity of SMEs to provide employment, contribute to infrastructural development, and allocate resources for addressing other social challenges (Boso et al., 2017). Social sustainability, which entails providing a noble quality of life for people within the community, relates

positively to the financial performance of SMEs and the capacity of SMEs to create value that satisfies customers and employees (Masocha, 2019). SME leaders implementing CSV strategies are conscious of social challenges in their communities and adopt business models and strategies for addressing such challenges, ensuring social sustainability.

Findings from the study reveal SMEs with sustained growth and competitive advantage embrace CSV principles. An important CSV strategy of SMEs is engaging regularly in community projects and CSR initiatives that align with the vision and values of the company. For example, *Case 2* promotes literacy and a reading culture among children and adults within its community while *Case 3* organizes regularly free health check-up and awareness campaigns for the public, which address important social issues and expands the market size of the SMEs, simultaneously. Engaging in community projects and CSR initiatives plays an instrumental role of achieving the corporate vision and wealth creation in business firms, and a normative role of addressing societal challenges because it is the right thing to do (Abdulrazak et al., 2016).

### **Recommendations for Action**

Many large organizations have embraced the concept of CSV, which enables business organizations to pursue profit maximization and social benefits simultaneously to gain and sustain competitive advantage and legitimacy (de los Reyes et al., 2017). There is a need for more SMEs, especially in developing economies such as Nigeria, to embrace the concept of CSV when developing business strategies and reinforce CSV strategies with appropriate leadership behaviors. The following recommendations for

SME leaders, based on the findings of this study, would facilitate the use of CSV strategies and appropriate leadership styles. First, SME owners should examine their entrepreneurial intentions and motivations to determine reasons for starting a business and create a shared vision for themselves, employees, customers, and other stakeholders. According to Bolzani and Foo (2018), personal values play an important role in shaping the overarching goal small business owners pursue and express through their enterprises. Hence, SME leaders should identify and consistently portray values that support a noble shared vision, especially self-transcendence values that enable CSV such as compassion, humility, excellence, inclusion, integrity, relationships, benevolence, continuous learning, service, and making a difference.

Second, SME leaders should engage in leadership development initiatives for acquiring a wide range of leadership skills that would increase leadership effectiveness. Leadership development initiatives include leadership training programs, webinars, workshops, and providing learning resources. Developing a wide range of leadership skills enhances the ability of leaders to diagnose situational factors and adapt leadership style appropriately. Third, SME leaders should invest in organizational systems, processes, and procedures that facilitate effective communication across the organization and with external stakeholders, improves operational efficiency, and enhances employee performance. Findings of this study show organizational systems and processes are necessary for organizational growth and sustainability, and reduces the effect of situational factors on employee performance. SME leaders should establish information and knowledge sharing systems, work procedures, performance management systems,

reward systems, and financial management systems. Fourth, SME leaders should actively engage in networking activities and collaborative initiatives with external stakeholders such as industry partners and competitors, local government authorities, civil society organizations, and educational institutions to share information and contribute to solving societal challenges.

Owners and senior managers of SMEs, especially in the retail industry, should pay attention to the findings of this study. After concluding this study, I will share more details about the findings with leaders of the SMEs that participated in the study and disseminate the results to other SME leaders and the public through the Walden University scholarly works publication platform. In addition, I plan to publish this study in academic or professional journals, and present findings at conferences and training workshops for SME leaders.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This was an exploratory study focused on identifying strategies for aligning leadership style and CSV strategies without examining relationships between constructs of leadership styles and CSV. Researchers conducting further research could focus on any of the leadership styles identified in this study such as democratic, autocratic, supportive, transformational, transactional, servant, and responsible leadership, and examine the relationship between the dimensions of each leadership style and elements of CSV. Apart from the concept of CSV, further research should consider sustainability concepts such as the triple bottom line concept of economic, social, and environmental impact of SMEs in developing economies.



This study provides a good foundation for further studies examining how strategies of SME leaders identified in this study affect leadership effectiveness and performance in Nigerian SMEs. There is a need for further empirical research examining the effect and importance of leadership skills and strategies such as leading by example, ability to adapt leadership style, and establishing organizational systems on performance of SMEs within the Nigerian and Sub-Saharan Africa context. Past research on such strategies usually focused on large multinational organizations resulting in a gap in literature on African SMEs.

The use of qualitative multiple case study research method with a small sample size delimited this study. Researchers should consider using quantitative or mixed methods with a large representative sample size to enhance the generalizability of findings. Further research may require adopting or modifying existing quantitative research instruments, or developing new instruments for capturing alignment strategies and CSV strategies of SME leaders. In addition, further research should address SMEs from other industries apart from the retail industry and locations apart from southwest Nigeria, and compare evidence across industries and locations to enhance the external validity of findings.

### **Reflections**

The DBA doctoral study process has been a challenging but interesting and enriching learning journey due to changes in external factors I did not envisage at the beginning of the program such as family relocation due to work changes and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the onset of the COVID-19 restrictions, I thought

collecting data would be difficult if not impossible. The restriction to only virtual contact and interviews affected access to research cases and participants, and subsequently, the data collection process. I spent more time and used a lot of personal contacts and referrals to gain access and establish a rapport with potential participants I could not meet face-to-face. Due to travel restrictions, I had a time difference of 9 hours with participants, which made scheduling and conducting interviews challenging. On the positive side, conducting virtual interviews using the Zoom platform saved time and resources scheduling face-to-face meetings and facilitated scheduling interviews at convenient times outside work hours of participants. Once the interviews started, most participants were willing to share their experiences but reluctant to share company documents, especially financial reports, which some considered too sensitive. However, I was able to collect rich data for the study.

Conducting a major qualitative study for the first time using a qualitative data analysis software was challenging. The most challenging part of managing bias was to keep an open mind during data collection and analysis. I had to be conscious of how I asked questions during the interviews, especially probing questions, to ensure I did not ask leading questions steering participants in the direction I expected or did not change the meaning of statements participants made when paraphrasing. Conducting member checking during the interview by summarizing the responses of participants after each question and asking if I captured their experiences accurately helped minimized personal bias. Another challenge was identifying initial codes from the large amount of data collected from 11 participants and making sense of the data. Initially, it was confusing

but focusing on the research question and conceptual framework was helpful in making a headway. There was also a tendency to focus on data from interviews and neglect data from documentary evidence because semi-structured interviews was the primary data collection instrument. I consciously referred to evidence from documents during analysis of data and reporting of findings, and performed some data triangulation during the data analysis.

Upon completing this study, I appreciate more the complexity of leadership issues in business firms and realise there are no simple strategies or solutions for approaching business problems. I chose my research topic because I think it is relevant for sustainable development of SMEs and their local communities. I found there is no golden bullet or single solution that works in every situation, which makes leadership less prescriptive and more of a learning journey. Furthermore, no one theory or concept fully explains any phenomenon resulting in large overlaps and interactions between leadership theories and management concepts. I have a better understanding of the view that leadership is an art and a science.

### **Conclusion**

Evidence from this multiple case study shows SME leaders who align their leadership style with strategies for CSV usually sustain growth and competitive advantage over the long-term. Alignment strategies of SME leaders include setting the tone, adapting leadership style to the situation, using organizational systems and procedures, good communication, and obtaining feedback and evaluating outcomes to ensure strategies are working. It is important SME leaders in Nigeria have a noble vision

beyond creating wealth for themselves that stakeholders can buy into because it involves creating economic and social value for all stakeholders. CSV strategies, which involve creating economic value using business models that address societal challenges, help business firms gain long-term legitimacy, competitive advantage, and success (Alberti & Belfanti, 2019; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

According to the contingency theories of leadership, no single leadership style works best in every situation and effective leaders change or adapt their style to suit the situation (Vidal et al., 2017). Evidence from the study shows the style or behaviors of SME leaders for influencing stakeholders to create shared value depends on situational factors such as the skills and attitudes of employees, urgency and importance of the task, the leader's authority and relationship with members, and cultural factors such as attitudes towards gender and age difference. This study shows the contingency theories of leadership are a viable conceptual framework for viewing leadership effectiveness in SMEs and SME leaders need to develop a wide range of leadership skills to facilitate flexibility or adaptability of leadership style.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

<b>Specific Business Problem</b>	
The specific business problem is some SME leaders lack strategies for ensuring leadership style aligns with business strategy for creating shared value.	
<b>Research Question</b>	
How do SME leaders ensure alignment between leadership style and business strategy for creating shared value?	
<b>Primary Research Goals</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To understand how business leaders create shared value.</li> <li>2. To identify factors affecting the implementation of business strategies for creating shared value.</li> <li>3. To identify leadership styles of SME leaders.</li> <li>4. To understand how leadership style affects and aligns with strategy for creating shared value.</li> <li>5. To understand factors affecting choice of leadership style during strategy implementation for creating shared value.</li> </ol>	
<b>Participant Criteria</b>	
The criteria for participants for the interview include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Owners and senior leadership/executive position of SME in retail industry in southwest Nigeria</li> <li>2. Participant's role involves strategy implementation in the SME</li> </ol>	
<b>What you will do</b>	<b>What you will say—script</b>
This column contains what the researcher will do in addition to asking the interview questions.	This column contains what you will say to the participant as you proceed through the interview. Note—that one will add probing questions as appropriate.
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee</p> <p>Remember to show genuine care and concern for the interests of participants.</p> <p>Demonstrate good listening skills</p>	<p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview session. The purpose of this interview is to identify strategies for adapting your leadership style to ensure successful creation of shared (economic and social) value in your business and community. The focus of his study is how leadership style and business strategy affects creation of shared value in Nigerian SMEs.</p> <p>I would like to inform you that your participation should be voluntary and you have the right to discontinue this interview at any time. In addition, I assure you that I will protect the confidentiality of information you provide, and will only use</p>

<p>Try to keep interview to within 1 hour. Ask for permission to continue or reschedule if interview exceeds 1 hour.</p>	<p>the information for my doctoral study as indicated. With your permission, I am recording this interview for the purpose of effective transcription. I assure you that I shall securely keep all audio and written records of this interview.</p> <p>Please confirm your consent, if you agree to participate voluntarily in this study.</p> <p>Please share a bit about your organization and your role within the organization.</p>
<p>Reminders that you should do during the interview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch for nonverbal cues</li> <li>• Paraphrase as needed</li> <li>• Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth data.</li> <li>• Remember that qualitative researchers need deep and rich data. A one sentence short answer to the interview question may provide superficial data at best.</li> <li>• Again, probe, probe, probe. Metaphorically dig deep for rich data.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Interview question What is your business strategy for creating shared value?</li> <li>2. Interview question How would you describe your leadership style?</li> <li>3. Interview question How does situation or context affect your leadership style?</li> <li>4. Interview question How does your leadership style affect your strategy for creating shared value?</li> <li>5. Interview question What determines your leadership style when implementing strategy for creating shared value?</li> <li>6. Interview question How did you ensure alignment between your leadership style and strategy for creating shared value?</li> <li>7. Interview question How did you assess the effectiveness of your alignment strategies to achieve the desired outcomes of creating shared value?</li> <li>8. Interview question What other information would you like to share about how you align leadership style and shared value creation strategies?</li> </ol>
<p>Wrap up interview thanking participant</p>	<p>We have come to the end of this interview. Once again, thank you for participating in this interview.</p>
<p>Schedule follow-up member checking interview</p>	<p>If it is okay with you, please permit me to contact you in case I need additional information or clarifications. In addition, I would send you a copy of this interview to confirm that I have accurately represented your experiences and opinions, and share the findings of my research with you if you so desire.</p>

## Appendix B: Documentary Evidence Protocol

<p><b>Specific Business Problem</b></p> <p>The specific business problem is some SME leaders lack strategies for ensuring leadership style aligns with business strategy for creating shared value.</p>
<p><b>Research Question</b></p> <p>How do SME leaders ensure alignment between leadership style and business strategy for creating shared value?</p>
<p><b>Primary Research Goals</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To understand how business leaders create shared value.</li> <li>2. To identify factors affecting the implementation of business strategies for creating shared value.</li> <li>3. To identify leadership styles of SME leaders.</li> <li>4. To understand how leadership style affects and aligns with strategy for creating shared value.</li> <li>5. To understand factors affecting choice of leadership style during strategy implementation for creating shared value.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Types of documents</b></p> <p>Request or search public records for the following documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Company annual reports for last five years</li> <li>2. Company internal memoranda and reports</li> <li>3. Company websites, newsletters, magazines, and blogs</li> <li>4. Organizational promotional materials</li> <li>5. Public newspaper and magazine accounts about company</li> <li>6. Company awards and certifications</li> </ol> <p>Request for relevant personal documents participants are willing to share such as</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Letters and emails</li> <li>2. Personal diaries and blogs</li> <li>3. Personal awards and certifications</li> </ol>
<p><b>What you will do when collecting documentary evidence.</b></p> <p>Remember to take the following actions when collecting documentary evidence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask participant's permission to use company and personal documents in the study.</li> </ol>



2. For printed documents, if possible, sight original copies of documents.
3. Perform a quick check for authenticity of documents.
4. Clarify any issues about authenticity of documents with participant.
5. Ask permission to make photocopies or scan documents.
6. Delete or blot identifying information from copies of documents.
7. Label documents appropriately for identification, storage, and analysis.
8. Store document in secure device/location
9. Thank participant for sharing documents or giving permission to use documents.

**Criteria for authenticity/inclusion of documents**

Check documents for authenticity using the following criteria before including documents:

1. What is the type of document?
2. What is the document's source and author?
3. What is the document date, age, and history?
4. Who is the intended audience of the document?
5. What is the purpose and context of the document?
6. What is the content of the document?
7. Is the document genuine and complete?

Appendix C: Mind Maps of Cases

