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Effective Leadership Strategies to Sustain Small Businesses' Operations Beyond 5 Years

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Abstract

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by

Sulemana Jawula

MS, City University of New York, 2013

BS, City University of New York, 2009

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2021

Abstract

Small businesses play a critical role in the job creation and overall growth of the U.S. economy; however, many small businesses fail soon after startup. The failure of small businesses results psychological, social, and financial turmoil for small business leaders. Grounded in transformational leadership theory and Chamberlin's theory of strategy, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies small business leaders use to sustain their operations beyond 5 years. The participants were five business leaders of five selected small businesses in the Bronx, New York, who used effective leadership strategies to sustain their operations beyond 5 years. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and company documents and were analyzed with thematic data analysis. Five themes emerged: effective communication, assessing employee performance, motivation and recognition, the right leadership, and strategic planning. One key recommendation is that leaders of small businesses implement social media communications such as Twitter and Facebook. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create new jobs and empower the locals socially and economically.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to God Almighty for granting me good health and strength and guiding me through, despite the countless challenges and disappointments on this journey. To my late father, Mr. Abdulai Issah Jawula, for motivating me to consider education as a key priority in my life. Thank you for encouraging me to take up the challenge and may your soul rest in perfect peace. To my late mother, Minata Mohama, thank you for your love and prayers, and may your soul rest in perfect peace. To my lovely aunt, Hajia Ayishetu, thank you for your constant prayer and moral support. I dedicate this doctoral study to my wife, Alfacash, and my children, Latifa, Abdul-Hakam, and Nana Aisha, for the understanding to further my education at the doctoral level. Thank you for your prayer and support from start to finish.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the Almighty God for his eternal favor and strength; without him, it would be impossible to endure this research rigor. I acknowledge my wife, Al-facash, and children, Latifa, Abdul-Hakam, and Nana Aisha, for being my source of motivation, strength, and support. I sincerely thank you.

I acknowledge my chairperson, Dr. Mohamad S. Hammoud, for his tireless contribution, persistent guidance, feedback, and patience to help me grasp the research concepts right. Thank you, Dr.Hammoud, for your professional mentorship. Also, I acknowledge my second committee member, Dr. Robert Banasik, University Research Reviewer, Dr. Richard Boyd Johnson, and Program Director, Dr. Susan Davis. My memories of other individuals not acknowledged in this study will remain alive in my heart. Thank you for your support and guidance.

I am thankful to all the participants who willingly accepted and participated in this research by sharing their experiences and skills and contributing to the body of knowledge on measures for addressing issues about leadership strategies for sustaining small business operations. Finally, I wish to extend my sincere thanks to my godfather, his majesty, Lepowura MND Jawula, and the entire Jawula dynasty for their support and prayers.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small businesses represent the backbone of the American economy, as they remain the essential constituents in the development of the economy (Elimam, 2017). In the United States, small business leaders contribute to several sectors including productivity, social cohesion, innovation, and creation of jobs in the organization (Spremo & Micic, 2015). Despite their contributions, many challenging factors continue to hamper the economic growth and survival rate of small businesses (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). Only two-thirds of small businesses survive at least 2 years while 50% fail to sustain operations beyond their fifth year (U.S. Small Business Administration [USSBA], 2018).

Background of the Problem

Small businesses play a critical role in the growth of the U.S. economy, yet some of those small businesses fail soon after their startups (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). A small business is an organization with fewer than 500 employees and not more than $7 million in yearly turnover (USSBA, 2018). About 99% of small businesses employ 64% of private workforce, providing 40% of private sales (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018). Existing literature has revealed that researchers have considered the right leadership behavior as the most important element of small business performance (Vidal et al., 2017). Furthermore, the study of leadership has become professional pursuit in this multidimensional globalized world, yet a myriad of leadership-related questions regarding the best leadership styles that leaders of

organizations might need to sustain operations has remained unanswered (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018).

Problem Statement

Small businesses play a critical role in the job creation and overall growth of the U.S. economy; however, many small businesses fail soon after startup (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Fifty percent of small businesses fail to sustain operation before their fifth year (USSBA, 2018). The general business problem is that some small business leaders fail to sustain their operations beyond 5 years. The specific business problem is that some small business leaders lack effective leadership strategies to sustain their operations beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore effective leadership strategies that some small business leaders use to sustain their operations beyond 5 years. The targeted population consisted of business leaders of five selected small businesses in the Bronx, New York who used effective leadership strategies to sustain their operations beyond 5 years. The study findings may contribute to positive social change by increasing employment opportunities through successful business organizations, which may result from using effective leadership strategies.

Nature of the Study

There are three major research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (McKim, 2017). I employed the qualitative method for this study. Qualitative method is the systematic inquiry into social phenomena in natural settings to include how people

experience aspects of their lives, how individuals or groups of people behave, and how organizations function (Teherani et al., 2015). Researchers use qualitative research to provide an in-depth and detailed description and interpretation of the research topic (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). In qualitative descriptive design, researchers can detect themes from the data they gather from participants' experiences (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Qualitative method was suitable for this study to detect themes from data and participants' experiences. In the quantitative method, researchers examine the relationship between variables, which are measured numerically to test hypotheses (Rahman, 2016). I had no intention to use the quantitative method given that I was not going to examine relationships between variables nor measure these variables to test hypotheses. The mixed method is the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Yin, 2017), and as such was not appropriate for this study because one of the components is used to test hypotheses.

Research designs that researchers use in qualitative studies include case study, ethnography, and phenomenology (Grossoehme, 2014). Yin (2017) asserted that using the case study design enables researchers to collect data via interviews and review of important documents to investigate in greater depth a case or a phenomenon within real-life context. According to Yin, researchers use case study to achieve better understanding of their fields of interests such as studying organizational and managerial processes. The case study was appropriate for this study because I planned to explore effective leadership strategies by collecting and analyzing data via interviews and reviews of company documents concerning small business sustainability. A review of the

phenomenological and ethnographic designs showed both were not appropriate for this study. According to Flynn and Korcuska (2018), phenomenological design comprises rich philosophical positions with the aim to uncover the essence of participants' lived experiences. I did not select the phenomenological design because my intent was not to uncover the essence of human lived experiences of business leaders. Jones and Smith (2017) explained that researchers use ethnography to observe the culture and the social interactions of groups of individuals. Ethnography was not appropriate for this study because the investigation did not include cultural observations.

Research Question

What effective leadership strategies do small business leaders use to sustain their operations beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What leadership strategies do you use to sustain your operation beyond 5 years?

2. What process did you use to implement leadership strategies?

3. What types of leadership styles did you use to manage your company?

4. Who is responsible for your company's leadership strategies? How did you address the barriers to leadership strategies? How do you measure the success of your leadership strategies?

5. What other information do you want to share concerning leadership strategies you use to sustain your operation beyond 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

I used Chamberlain's theory of leadership strategy and Burns's transformational theory as the conceptual frameworks for this study. Chamberlain's theory of strategy was published in 2010 (Chamberlain, 2010). Chamberlain extended the works of Andrews (1971), Mintzberg (1990), and Quinn (1980). Chamberlain analyzed the strategy construct by treating it as a combination of the following four factors: (a) what strategy is about, (b) the forces that shape a strategy, (c) the processes that form a strategy, and (d) the mechanisms to deploy a strategy. Chamberlain stated that his theory can be applied to and implemented in any organization. Using the Chamberlain theory of strategy enabled in understanding the effective leadership strategies used to sustain operations beyond 5 years. Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory was the primary conceptual framework for this study. Transformational leadership theory is based on the notion that certain leaders' behaviors transform followers' values, needs, preferences, and aspirations, and motivate those followers to perform beyond the call of duty (Nohe & Hertel, 2017). Bass and Avolio (1997) developed the work of Burns to include: (a) idealized influence, (b) individualized stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) individual consideration concepts of the theory. Using the transformational leadership theory enabled small business leaders in understanding effective leadership strategies to sustain their operation beyond 5 years.

Operational Definitions

Business sustainability: Bansal and DesJardine (2014) defined business sustainability as the business leaders' ability to achieve their business's short-term profitable needs.

Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship is the ability of an individual or a group of individuals to create or discover an opportunity and use it to the benefit of the society, which, in turn, will bring success to the innovators and their organization (Yusuf & Albanawi, 2016).

Leadership: Bass (1990) defined leadership as the influence of attitudes and behaviors of individuals within or between groups with the aim of achieving goals.

Small business: There is no universal definition for small business. A small business is a business that employs 500 or fewer persons (USSBA, 2018).

Small business failure: A small business failure is the inability of a small business to sustain operations beyond 5 years (USSBA, 2018).

Small business success: Small business success is the ability of a small business to sustain operations beyond 5 years (USSBA, 2018). Small business success is usually measured by profitability (USSBA, 2018).

Strategic leadership: The concept of strategic leadership has numerous definitions in the literature (Palladan et al., 2016). Strategic leadership is the ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, and empower others to create strategic change as necessary, so that business can have a viable future (Ireland &Hitt, 1999).

Sustainability: Jasiulewicz-Kaczmarek (2014) defined sustainability as the ability of a business to maintain support and prevent the failure of an activity.

Transformational leader: A transformational leader encourages their subordinates to achieve higher levels of performance for the sake of the organization (Bass, 1999).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

In qualitative research, assumptions are principles or facts that the researcher assumes to be true even without scientific proof (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). What researchers predict to be accurate without scientific proof is termed as assumption. Researchers use several assumptions within the context of their study. I included four fundamental assumptions in this study. The first assumption in this study was that successful business leaders of five selected small businesses would participate in this study. The second assumption was that all the five participants would respond to the interview questions honestly regarding their leadership strategies to sustain operations. The third assumption was that effective leadership strategies would enhance small business operations beyond 5 years. My fourth assumption was that the participants would provide enough and accurate information base on their understanding of leadership concepts and strategies.

Based on the interviews and interactions, I found that the participants were successful small business leaders. All the participants responded to the interview questions honestly regarding their leadership strategies to sustain operations. I found that

the participants provided enough, and accurate information based on their understanding

of leadership concepts and strategies.

Limitations

Berg et al. (2017) noted that limitations are compelling factors that researchers

encounter in conducting research. In qualitative study policy restraints, influences of

various form and other possible forms of weaknesses are some aspects of limitations of

the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Due to small sampling size of the research study,

transferability to a larger business could represent the key limitation (Morse, 2015). In

some cases, research limitations might be uncontrollable. Thus, in any research study

outside the extent of the researcher, limitations and weaknesses may exist (Yin, 2017).

For instance, during data collection I ensured that interview questions were effectively

framed to allow every participant to voluntarily provide full information to avoid bias. I

expected possible time constraint due to possible difficulty in gaining access to small

business leaders. Being that I was the only person conducting this study, collecting,

analyzing, and interpreting data collected could cause limitation. I anticipated time

constraint due to the nature of Walden University DBA program as a potential limitation.

As a researcher, I understood that I was not able to control the lack of knowledge of some

participants.

Delimitations

The boundaries and parameters within which the researcher would operate are the

delimitations (Qiu & Gullett, 2017). I focused on effective strategies used by small

business leaders to sustain operations beyond 5 years in the Bronx, New York area. Small

business leaders who did not use effective leadership strategies to sustain their operations beyond 5 years would not qualify as participants in this study. Researchers use the term *delimitation* to describe the boundaries within which a research will be restricted to and beyond the restricted area of the study (Qiu & Gullett, 2017). I limited this study to small businesses within the Bronx, New York area.

Significance of the Study

This study might be significant because I explored leadership strategies that may contribute to sustain small businesses beyond 5 years in the Bronx, New York neighborhood. Small business leaders might use the findings of this study to operate their businesses. With the findings of this study, small business leaders might be able to increase their understanding of effective strategies they will need to sustain their operation beyond 5 years. Small business leaders who may use the findings of this research to sustain their operation beyond 5 years might contribute to the positive social change through job creation.

Contribution to Business Practice

This study may contribute to business practices by exploring strategies that may enable small businesses to sustain their operation beyond 5 years. When small business leaders realize the important roles that leadership strategies play, they will be willing to apply some of the leadership strategies this study may include. With the findings of this study, small business leaders might be able to apply leadership strategies to improve business practices and provide strategic ideas to sustain their operation beyond 5 years. The findings may enable small business leaders to understand the kind of leadership

strategies that are appropriate in terms of business sustainability beyond 5 years and the way they can modify their leadership strategies for effective operations.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change for this study include an opportunity for small business leaders to promote corporate social responsibility programs in the community. In Shukla and Shukla's (2014) view, small business leaders are among the stakeholders who bring positive social change in communities by contributing to the skills development of community members through their organizations. The knowledge of effective strategies that some small business leaders lack or fail to engage might enable these leaders to reduce business failure, which may improve the standard of living of families of employees and customers. Small business leaders might use this study as a resource to use effective leadership strategic practices to improve performance, ethical practice, and effective corporate social responsibility. If small business leaders apply the findings of this study, they may increase job opportunities and revenues of their businesses, which might contribute to positive change by reducing the burden of unemployment and increasing government revenue through taxes.

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A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

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The purpose of conducting this multiple case study was to explore effective leadership strategies that small business leaders use to sustain operations beyond 5 years in the Bronx, New York. Small business leaders are innovators of entrepreneurial activities and contribute about 39% to the United States GDP by reducing the level of local unemployment and poverty (Cheng, 2015; Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). Small

businesses represent 99.9% of all United States businesses and made up of 54% of United

States sales (USSBA, 2018). Despite the contribution of small businesses to the

economy, about 50% of these small businesses fail to sustain operation beyond 5 years

(USSBA, 2018). I provided relevant information regarding the research questions to

facilitate the research process in this study. Relatively, this literature review included the

analysis and synthesis of articles related to the central research question: What effective

leadership strategies do small business leaders use to sustain operation beyond 5 years.

The objective of this review was to enable the understanding of the problem, which might

provide a comprehensive view of the sustainability of small business operations beyond 5

years.

Research Strategy

I used books, magazines, peer-review, and journal articles to obtain information

from the following databases: (a) Walden University business and management online

databases, (b) Emerald Insight, (c) ABI/IFORM collection, (d) SAGE journals, (e)

Science Direct, (f) ProQuest, and (g) Google scholar as the main database's source for

this study. Besides, I considered government sources such as the Bureau of Labor

Statistics (BLS) and the USSBA as a resourceful information center for the literature

review. This study contains 396 references. Out of these references, 184 peer-reviewed

articles were used in the Review of the Professional and Academic Literature section.

Additionally, 349, or 88% of the total references were peer-reviewed and 140 or 35.4%

were published between 2017and 2021.

I searched the literature using the following search keywords: *leadership concept, leadership theory, Chamberlain's theory of strategy, Mintzberg's model, the system theory, small business, the impact of leadership on small business, the impact of small business on the American economy, business strategy, small business performance, challenges of small business, and small business leadership strategies.* Subsections in the literature review will include Chamberlain's theory of strategy, Mintzberg's 5Ps of strategy as an alternative theory, the system theory/system thinking as an alternative theory, transformational leadership theory, and transactional theory as comparing theory for transformational leadership theory. Other sections in this review include leadership concepts, leadership theory, the impact of leadership on small business performance, the impact of strategy on organizational performance, an overview of small businesses, the impact of small businesses on the American economy, challenges of small businesses, causes of small business failure, and small business leadership strategies to sustain operations beyond 5 years.

Conceptual Framework

It was strategic to establish a conceptual framework to explore effective leadership strategies that small business leaders might use to sustain operations beyond 5 years. Specifically, I used two theories in this conceptual framework for the review of the professional and academic literature to support this study: (a) Chamberlain's theory of strategy and (b) transformational leadership theory.

Chamberlain's Theory of Strategy

Chamberlain's theory of strategy was published in 2010 (Chamberlain, 2010). In his analysis of the theory of strategy, Chamberlain (2010) explored strategies that business leaders might use to sustain their businesses. Chamberlain extended the works of Andrews (1971), Mintzberg (1990), and Quinn (1980). Chamberlain analyzed the strategy construct by treating it as a combination of the following four factors: (a) what strategy is about, (b) the forces that shape a strategy, (c) the processes that form a strategy, and (d) the mechanisms to deploy a strategy. Using Chamberlain theory of strategy will enable business leaders to understand strategies that might help them to sustain business operations beyond 5 years.

In a more specific way and in attempt to explore significant areas that other theorists failed to address, Chamberlain undertook further research on the concept of strategies and as a result came out with his version of theory of strategy in 2010 to shed light on strategy. To explain further, Chamberlain analyzed his proposed strategy contrast by treating it as an amalgamation of four factors.

In factor one, Chamberlain (2010) explained his theory of strategy by introducing a specific and a more coherent interpretation of strategy construct. It is impossible to analyze or compare strategies if business leaders cannot describe and categorize what they are looking at (Chamberlain, 2010). Chamberlain used factor one to interpret the concept of strategy in the summary of seven propositions. In proposition one, Chamberlain posited that strategy operates in a bounded domain that is separate from the policy, tactical, and operational domain. Proposition two contains the fact that a strategy

has a single but coherent focus. In proposition three, Chamberlain explained that a strategy consists of a basic direction and broad path. In the fourth proposition, Chamberlain suggested that organizational leaders could deconstruct strategy into elements. Proposition five states that, each of individual component of a strategy's broad path is a single coherent concept directly addressing the delivery of basic organizational direction. Proposition six states that, a strategy's constituent elements are each formed either deliberately or emergently.

Chamberlain (2010) explained the forces that shape strategy in factor two. According to Chamberlain, outcome of the interactions of different forces like the internal, external, and shareholders surrounding an entity whether large or small businesses are influence by strategy. For instance, regardless of the level of strategy used in small businesses, leaders still face the challenges of getting things done to sustain operations. Leaders need to put effective strategies into practice to meet the organizations needs of strategic direction (Giles, 1991). Chamberlain (2010) developed cognitive bias theories, which applied psychological theories including the Kirton Michael's (1976) adaption-innovation theory to identify twelve types of a strategist. Chamberlain explained that only six of the identified strategists are likely to be successful as strategists and named those six as operators, executives, administrators, entrepreneurs, Pioneers, and Visionaries. Factor three is the process that forms a strategy. In factor three, Chamberlain explained that his factor one and two indirectly specify the various processes that leaders can use for strategy formation. Chamberlain believed his theory could provide the needed solution to previous disputes in an organization.

In factor four, Chamberlain (2010) discussed two strategy processes that he believed could be influenced. The first strategic process is the rational type, which is made up of standard economic forces. The second type of strategic process is called the social approach and is made up of the combination of economic and psychological forces. Combining business environments with the ways these environments can influence creates six types of strategies that could enable leaders to achieve their intended objectives (Chamberlain, 2010). Naming these categories as the channels of influence, Chamberlain asserted that competent leaders could use the six strategic processes to sustain business operations. In his narrations, Chamberlain argued that his strategy is applicable to any organization regardless of the type or size of business organization.

Alternative Theories

Researchers use numerous theories to gain the understanding of small businesses strategies and sustainability.

Mintzberg's 5Ps of Strategy

Henry Mintzberg is a Canadian management scholar who first developed his various approaches to strategy in his work of 1987 entitled The Strategy Concept 1: Five Ps for Strategy. Mintzberg developed 5P's (Plan, Ploy, Pattern, Position, and Perspective) to meet the various demands and strengths of organizations (Mintzberg, 1987).

Strategy as a plan is the awareness of actions that the leader intends to meet or the guideline to deal with a situation in an organization (Mintzberg, 1987). For effective and successful plans, the leader's intended actions must be unified, comprehensive, and purposefully planned to ensure that the goals of their organization are achieved

(Mintzberg, 1987). Strategic management deals with unifying themes that offer coherence and direction to the activities and decisions of the organization (Muhoho & Margaret, 2016). The strategic management process involves strategy formation, implementation, evaluation, and control (Muhoho & Margaret, 2016). Strategy formulation is the proposal of a long-term plan for effective management of business opportunities and threats, considering the organization's weaknesses and strengths (Muhoho& Margaret, 2016). One example of a strategy as a plan is when leaders of C. Town, a supermarket in the Bronx, decided to expand their market target by offering a 7% discount to New York city employees.

Mintzberg (1987) defined strategy as a ploy or a specific and creative move by organizational leaders to outperform their competitors. Business leaders use the ploy to reshape the firm's structure for positive transformation (Mintzberg, 1987). The decision to use strategy as a ploy depends on the activities of others (Mintzberg, 1987). For instance, organizational leaders can overtake their competitors by employing secret plans such as discouragement, disruption, and constant advertisement (Mintzberg, 1987). One scenario where an organizational leader can use strategy as a ploy is when they decide to establish a branch in a newly discovered area for the purpose of preventing potential business competitors from opening a shop there. Similarly, business leaders in an organization can announce their intention to increase their production capacity to discourage their competitors from building a new plant.

Strategy as a pattern is the consistency in an organization's intentional and unintentional decisions and actions over time (Mintzberg, 1987). For instance, leaders of

a shipping company who initially opened a new branch as a pattern to increase sales are not consistent with the decision-making process if they decide to expand very rapidly to 100 branches in a year. Porter (1996) insisted on the importance of consistency in organizational development. For instance, small business leaders need to have a consistent framework for developing compelling plans. Furthermore, organizational strategies may emerge from past organizational decisions and activities or from coincidentally discovering workable actions which Mintzberg (1987) described as the unconscious choice of emergent strategies.

Strategy as a position helps leaders to identify the position of their organization within an environment (Mintzberg, 1987). To define their positions, business leaders of organizations need to pursue a complete environment and opportunities analysis which they present to enable them to facilitate the development of competitive advantage through strategic planning (Mintzberg, 1987). The final 'P' stands for 'perspective', which describes how leaders of the organization perceive and engage competition in the marketplace (Mintzberg, 1987). While strategy as position plays the role of locating the organization in the outside environment, strategy as perspective operates within the internal environment of the organization, indeed inside the parameters of leadership. Leaders' strategies of Small businesses are characterized by expression in the firm's written plan, and how to compete in the marketplace with the ploys to outperforming their competitors (Kachouie et al., 2018). Mintzberg (1987) proposed the five 'Ps' for business leaders to develop a robust business strategy for the purpose of taking full advantage of their organization's strengths, weaknesses, operations, and threats.

I preferred the theory of strategy proposed by Chamberlain in 2010 to the Mintzberg's five 'Ps' of strategy because it is an extension of the work of Mintzberg (1990) and other scholars. The theory of strategy is preferable because Chamberlain (2010) undertook further research on the concept of strategies and as a result came out with his version of the theory of strategy to shed light on the strategy concept. The theory of strategy will provide small business leaders with the framework for decision-making and enables them to measure their organizational progress. Through effective strategy formulation, small business leaders engage in plans and create opportunities to evaluate their priorities thereby offering those small businesses the potential to achieve their objectives. To improve their performance, enhance growth, and sustain operations, small business leaders should articulate the main direction of the business through effective business strategy (Ibrahim, 2015).

The System Theory/Systems Thinking

I considered the system theory and system thinking as an alternative theory for the conceptual framework of this study. The general system theory which was first developed by Von Bertalanffy (1950) in the 1930s, is made up of objects, internal relations, attributes, and system environment and that means business leaders use this theory in different industries (Gabriel et al., 2016). Von Bertalanffy compared his theory to a whole business, which has interconnected moving parts that have relations with other parts. According to Perdicoúlis (2016), systems thinking is the process in which people apply their knowledge to a firm as a whole and understand the relationship between the parts. In the context of small business management, leaders use the system theory to

sustain operations beyond 5 years through profit maximization and effective business structure.

According to Smith and Weistroffer (2016), the purpose of Von Bertalanffy's theory was to find the strategy of resolving the phenomena of research by separating it into independent sections and studying each in isolation without respect to the problem of the whole. Barile et al. (2016) explained that systems thinking is made up of a system that forecasts and analyzes a concerning problem. In the system theory, interactions of sections in the organization and how these interactions affect other sections influence the decisions of organizational leaders (Barile et al., 2016). Von Bertalanffy (1950) discovered the system theory as a result of a series of research of many areas including science, social phenomenon, or living organizations (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). Smith and Weistroffer posited that the principles or laws that apply to the system theory in general and the nature of the components, as well as their relationship, are the main concern of business leaders. The purpose of the system theory was to enable leaders to capture different types of systems and provide guidelines to solve problems (Smith &Weistroffer, 2016).

Von Bertalanffy (1950) proposed internal relations, objects, environment of the system, and attributes them as the four key parts of the system theory. Von Bertalanffy identified the following four functional parts in the system theory: objects in the system represent the departments in the business with different positions like the manager and other employee roles, the characters are different functions between departments and their relationship with other business ventures, how the leaders and employees relate

within the organization, and how the departments coordinate with the entire system for an organization to gain profit. When components in the system are isolated, leaders might be able to study each separate component and understand how they relate to set a molding component platform for the entire system (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). The system theory is relevant in research because it enables researchers to understand casual relationships and feedback that exist by components of system thinking analysis (Nordby et al., 2016). Each component plays a different key role in the system analysis by being responsible for connecting and stimulating the entire system (Nordby et al., 2016).

In a small business perspective, the relevance of the system theory is that it enables leaders to focus on the relationship between the sections of the entire entity (Perdicoúlis, 2016). The system theory might enable leaders of small businesses to identify where they need to apply the theory to achieve anticipated objectives. The significance of the system theory in this study was that the interaction at the system analysis represents an integral part of all the parts and this might help business leaders to identify and solve problems within the business (Gabriel et al., 2016; Von Bertalanffy, 1950). Perdicoúlis (2016) posited that the system thinking creates awareness for business leaders to evaluate how the organizational component coordinates. Nonetheless, the system thinking, or theory is a suitable platform for proving and predicting problems within organizations (Gumel, 2017). According to Chamberlain (2010), the theory of strategy is suitable for any organization regardless of the type or size. The system theory was not suitable for this study because small businesses may not have physical department due to their size. Understanding the concept of strategy, the forces that shape

strategy, the process that form a strategy, and the mechanism to deploy a strategy will enable small business leaders to understand effective leadership strategies to sustain operations beyond 5 years. Chamberlain's theory of strategy could represent a roadmap through which any business organization can change to a preferred future condition from its present condition.

Leadership Concepts

Different scholars have defined leadership in various ways (Ghazzawi et al., 2017). Tead (1935) explained that leadership is the act of influencing people to work together towards the common goal that they come to recognize are desirable. Defined by Burns (1978) as one of the most observed and least understood phenomena, leadership is a topic that many researchers had a long-excited interest in. Historically, researchers consider leadership as the main factor that most business leaders use to accomplish their goals (Ghazzawi et al., 2017). In the view of researchers like Hughes et al. (2012), leadership is a necessity for decision making in every business organization. Popli and Rizvi (2017), applying the right leadership style can enable business leaders to direct employees and move the business in the right direction, thus improving business sustainability.

Leadership has a great influence on every organizational activity including sustainability strategies. Using effective leadership approach is critical for business sustainability and is considered a human capital priority for many business leaders (Tobin, 2019). Applying the right leadership brings about positive change to organizational strategy, vision, and culture (Tabassi et al., 2016).Any organization's

successful operation depends on the nature of its leadership and management of its resources (Lubguban, 2020). Organizational leaders aim to raise the performance and the ethical aspirations of both leaders and the management to achieve an organization's goals (Udovita, 2020). Appropriate leaders can adapt to the rapidly changing business environment (Udovita, 2020). Right leaders employ strategies that best fit the organizational culture to improve employee performance (Udovita, 2020). Also, organizational sustainability requires a leader to take a strategic and bold change to achieve a better level of performance (Zulkiffli & Latiffi, 2016). It is necessary for business organizations, including small businesses, to transform their leaders to be able to take advantage of the benefits of sustainability to operate their businesses. Ukaidi (2016) claimed the productivity of every organization depends on the leadership style adopted. Leaders of business organizations influence their productivity level by showing their willingness, selflessness, pro-activeness, and commitment to act in responsible ways that will result in favorable profit margins (Ukaidi, 2016).

Many scholars have found that the success or failure of a business organization to achieve its goal of the establishment is related to the kind of leadership the business owners use to sustain operations (Berg & Karlsen, 2016). In the context of small business management, Madanchian et al. (2016) posited that to drive the success of small business leaders must play a major role in the total well-being of the business by employing effective leadership in the decision-making process. Madanchian et al revealed that inadequate and weak leadership strategies are the common causes of small business failures. Therefore, small businesses need to advance their leadership strategies to control

their firms via all circumstances including crisis time. For instance, for any organization to avoid failure and achieve success, the leaders must exhibit the right leadership strategies. Effective leadership strategies are very significant because they enable leaders to achieve organizational goals (Fiedler, 1996).

In analyzing factors responsible for organizational success, scholars have posited that effective leadership is the main architect of organizational success (Madanchian et al., 2016). Furthermore, many scholars have provided a treatise on the significance of leadership on the basis that leadership effectiveness of any organization including small businesses is their key decider of success or failure (Dunne et al., 2016). Consequently, based on the experience of daily business practices, Madanchian et al. (2017) argued that effective leadership and operational management of business organizations have proven to have a substantial influence on the organization.

By large, leadership styles practiced by leaders might determine the success of a business organization (Arshad et al., 2016). The way organizational leaders interact with their subordinates is simply described as a leadership style (Arshad et al., 2016). For instance, the behavior of a small business leader towards their subordinates might portray the leadership style they are practicing. Therefore, the leadership style practiced in any organization could influence the effort and commitment of the individual in that organization. Studies have shown that leadership styles and character traits of organizational leaders play a critical role in improving organizational performance (Arshad et al., 2016). Arshad et al. (2016) explained that the direct involvement of

leaders with subordinates can affect the subordinates, even though different subordinates might exhibit different behavior under different leadership style (Arshad et al., 2016).

Leadership Theory

Leadership theorists have engaged a cluster of leadership styles in other to give comprehensive views connected to leadership concepts (Mkheimer, 2018). Leadership styles exhibited by leaders of organizations depend on the task, the subordinate being led, leaders' initiative, and the environment within which the organization operates (Ukaidi, 2016). Notwithstanding this, different leaders portray different leadership characteristics. Leaders of business organizations are grouped by leadership theories base on the leaders' characteristics and how they influence their subordinates to achieve the goals of the organization (Mkheimer, 2018). Amanchukwu et al. (2015) discovered the following three main leadership styles in empirical research they conducted: autocratic, laissez fair and democratic leadership. Furthermore, researchers indicated that transformational leadership promotes knowledge management to enhance organizational performance through effective use of internal resources (Sayyadi & Mostafa, 2019). Transformational leaders promote strategy implementation which facilitates knowledge management to serve as the driver of organizational performance (Sayyadi & Mostafa, 2019).

According to Burns (1978), moral leadership enables business leaders to make strategic decisions that lead to business success. Many scholars of leadership theory explained that leaders must be an individual of ethical or moral character to have the moral authority to influence subordinates of the organization (Mango, 2018). Conversely, leadership character is inevitable in any organization that wants to achieve its goal

(Mango, 2018). Accordingly, values such as humility, integrity, and stewardship which leadership of any organization embodies, will empower leaders with the moral authority to educate the subordinates on how to use those values (Mango, 2018). The great man theory, trait theory, level-five leadership, authentic leadership, adaptive leadership, charismatic leadership, transformational leadership, and ethical leadership are some of the leadership theories that have their contents at the centrality of character (Weber, 1947).

Researchers have classified business leaders into situational, transactional, and transformational in analyzing the leadership styles from the viewpoint of power and its use to deliver results (Mkheimer, 2018). Therefore, understanding and applying these three different leadership trends can provide a conceptual framework that may result in fruitful and projected outcomes of a business (Mkheimer, 2018). Defining the individual leader's trait is critical for analyzing the leader's capabilities and effectiveness, especially when it is closely connected to organizational objectives. The objective of achieving a high productivity level in any organization will depend on the leadership style adopted (Ukaidi, 2016).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Notably, James MacGregor Burns, Bernard M. Bass, Bruce J. Avolio, and Kenneth Lieithwood are some of the scholars who are closely associated with transformational leadership. Each of these personalities contributed to the evolution process of transformational leadership and therefore must be acknowledged in this study.

According to Roberts (1985), transformational leadership is a leadership approach that causes a change in individuals and social systems. Burns (1978), who first introduced the concept of transformational leadership in his descriptive research on political leaders, defined transformational leadership as the process where people engage with one another in a manner where leaders and followers elevate each other to greater heights of morality and motivation. Burns (1978) was the first theorist to formulate the concept of transformational leadership. Burns (1978) posited that transformational leaders concentrate on connecting the subordinates' sense of ability and self to the objectives and general facts about what the organization stands for to serve as a model for the subordinate to challenge and inspire them to be responsible for their work. Transformational leadership theory can influence employees' attitudes by adopting and implementing innovation (Guerrero et al., 2016). Transformational leaders foster the motivation level of those they lead (Burns, 1978).

According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees through four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and personal considerations. Transformational leader encourages people to be unified in order to pursuit higher goals with the aim of a positive important change in an organization. Burns (1978) posited that transformational leadership theory entails inspirational leadership skills which adds affective qualities to the influence process using inspirational talks and emotional appeals. The inspirational leadership component of transformational leadership theory is the use of oral communication to motivate and arouse followers' emotions (Bass, 1985).Wang et al. (2016) found that

transformational leadership style has a positive relationship with effective communication. For instance, small business leaders engage their subordinates meaningfully through direct and honest communication, constructive feedback, and communication technology. Effective communication in business environment is an essential leadership skill (Marsen, 2019). Smalley et al. (2016) explained that being accountable, taking responsibility, learning, and adapting to change, along with effective communication, are some of the essential leadership skills. Therefore, communication skills are important skills for effective leadership.

Transformational leadership theory is based on the notion that certain leaders' behaviors transform followers' values, needs, preferences, and aspirations, and motivate those followers to perform beyond the call of duty (Nohe & Hertel, 2017). Burns (1978) argued that transformational leaders use inspirational and visionary techniques to motivate subordinates to achieve specific goals. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership is the leadership style that is in line with the ideals and values of subordinates. Transformational leaders transform their subordinates to have the desire to adopt the vision of the organization as if that vision was their own (Jiang et al., 2017). Transformational leadership is a significant predictor of organizational performance (Jing, 2017) and job satisfaction (Aydogmus et al., 2018). Burns (1978) revealed that the role of organizational leader and subordinate needs to be relatively aligned while leadership plays the role of interplaying conflict and power. To achieve a collective purpose, organizational leaders should align their leadership with their purpose and their ability to function as leaders must be judged (Burns, 1978). Bass and Avolio (1997)

developed the work of Burns to include: (a) idealized influence, (b) individualized stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) individual consideration concepts of the theory. Bass and Avolio (1997) asserted that organizational leaders use their transformational leadership traits to influence employee's perceptions, change expectations, and motivate employees to commit to organizational growth. Transformational leaders can use strategies to enhance the behavior of employees to commit to the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1997). The role of a leader in strategic planning is a crucial one (Gumel, 2017). Transformational leaders forecast the organization into the future by designing a positive perspective of what the organization can become and simultaneously provide emotional support during the transition process (Burns, 1978).Using the transformational leadership theory will enable small business leaders to understand effective leadership strategies to sustain operation beyond 5 years. Burns's initial work on transformational leadership was instrumental in his decision to elaborate and conceptualize the two leadership concepts: transformational and transactional.

Previous research studies showed positive relationships between transformational leadership constructs and employee performance (Hasmin, 2017;Li &Liang, 2016). Assessing employee performance is very important because it enables organizational leaders to see how employees can support the organization's goals (Al-Amin, 2017). After evaluating employees' performance, business leaders can determine the right employees to occupy certain positions objectively, as the basis of employee development training and as the basis of proportionally compensated (Al-Amin, 2017). According to

Li and Liang (2016), previous research revealed that transformational leadership is positively correlated with followers' task performance.

Transformational and Transactional Leadership

Transformational and transactional leadership concept has been of great interest for many researchers making them the modern leadership theories that came into the spotlight in the 1980s to date (Ibicioglu et al., 2009). Known to many scholars as to managerial leadership, transactional leadership deals with the activities of organizational management while transformational leadership deals with the activities of organizational leadership (Conger, 1999).

Transformational leaders appeal to the ideals and morals of followers with the aim to inspire followers to achieve their goals (Felix et al., 2019). Transformational leadership could be charismatic leadership that Houseet al. (2004) considered as the most desirable. Burns (1978) who researched on political leaders described transformational and transactional leadership in his leadership book in the following ways: transforming leadership comes into place where leaders tap into follower's higher needs and values inspire followers with new possibilities that have strong appeal, elevate their stages of confidence, and the desire to achieve a moral purpose. Transformational leaders build connections between themselves and followers, influence employees to become role models to them, and in the end encourage them to work beyond their performance (Sirin et al., 2018). The Transformational leadership model has four dimensions: idealized influence, individualized considerations, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1990). Leadership dimensions are the specific channels

transformational leaders use to ensure motivation among followers (Orabi, 2016). Each

of these leadership dimensions contributes to organizational change processes that could

lead to organizational success (Caillier, 2014). Combining the forces of all the leadership

dimensions together could enable organizational leaders to facilitate motivation among

followers at a high level (Tharnpas & Sakun, 2015; Veríssimo & Lacerda, 2015). Dixon

(1998) analyzed the intrinsic behavior of transformational leadership as the critical driver

of effective leadership as the leader's behavior is directed by integrity, self-confidence,

personal values, and honesty. The leader's ability to combine experiences with

transformational behavior is the main driving cause of effective organizational

performance (Dixon, 1998). Most organizational leaders who have the quality of

transforming behavior can articulate a strategic vision through communication and by

leading an exemplary life. For instance, with effective communication skills,

transformational leaders can come into agreement with their followers regarding the

goals of the organization. Furthermore, transformational leaders motivate followers to

commit themselves to organizational objectives and to ensure positive performance

outcomes, which exceed beyond expectations (Steinmann et al., 2018). Transformational

leaders help followers with their needs, listen to their concerns, and considerate towards

the individual (Bass, 1985).

Ahmetasevic and Obralic (2018) posited that transformational leaders perceive

long-term scenarios for organizations. Purpose, power, and relationship are three key

concepts that described transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). Therefore,

transformational leaders in small businesses have a perfect ability to enhance their

follower's commitment through the promotion of values that are significant to achieve the expected goals. The transformational leaders in small businesses might achieve their goals by emphasizing the relationship between followers' effects and purpose achievement as well as creating a high level of individual commitment (Simola et al., 2012). Effective transformational leadership activities can lead to positive performance and an increase in the survival rate of small businesses.

One example of a transformational leader in the United States is Bill Gates of Microsoft Corporation who started Microsoft as a small business owner. Various professionals who undertake research and development programs (Kabeyi, 2018) are running Microsoft Company today. Bill Gates's small business survived operations and grew further into large corporation because he was able to sustain his business leadership by using the four dimensions of transformational leadership. Microsoft leaders gave vision and sense of mission to their followers, put high expectations on followers, inspire followers to be innovative and consider followers' needs by acting as their mentors. Despite the positive contribution of leadership, some leader's contributions could have negative impacts on organizations (Kabeyi, 2018). From the perspective of the negative impact of consequences of transformational leadership, some leaders might be transforming yet in a negative way (Kabeyi, 2018). Kabeyi (2018) termed this negative transformation as pseudo transformational leadership. Although transformational leaders invest more resources and foster followers' commitment to attaining the goals, some negative impact might arise during this process (Lai et al., 2020). For instance, challenging and holistic goals that are set by the leaders could imply a high risk for

followers; therefore, unforeseen failure may occur during job performance (Lai et al., 2020). This unpredictability of results and risk feelings may hinder followers' desire to work hard to achieve this result unless leaders create a supportive and safe environment that will allow followers to express themselves (Lai et al., 2020).

Leadership that focuses on transactions between leaders and followers is termed as transactional leadership (Bass, 1999). Kabeyi (2018) posited that transactional leader always shows the zeal to give followers something in return for executing their responsibilities. The reciprocal incentive from transactional leaders can be a good performance review, a raise or promotion, a new responsibility and sometimes the desired change in job responsibility (Kabeyi, 2018). In addition, known to many scholars as managerial leadership, transactional leadership deals with supervision, organization, and group performance (Kabeyi, 2018). Bass (1985) noted that providing contingent rewards is an element of transactional leadership that fosters employee's effort and performance. However, the aversive reinforcement of contingency rewards will minimize transactional leaders' effects (Bass, 1985).Kabeyi described transactional leaders as leaders who are can adapt and make a motivational agreement that benefits the organization. Transactional leadership is different from transformational leadership in that the former concentrates on the short-term physical and safety needs of followers within the context of rewards and performance (Sirin et al., 2018). For instance, leaders with transactional qualities reward followers who meet expectations and receive punishment for performing below expectations. Leaders could praise followers for exemplary behavior and punish culprit followers for failure outcomes. Followers of an organization under a transactional

leadership acknowledge these rules and regulations and as well agree to work under these conditions. The existing organizational structure is mostly not the concern of the leader with transactional traits; rather this kind of leadership motivates their followers with rewards and promotion. Transactional leaders are less interested in their follower's entrepreneurial innovative skills but the interest to continue supervising the activities within the basic goals and objectives of their organization (Howell & Avolio, 1993). Transactional leadership relies on three main dimensions, which include contingent rewards, active management by exception, and passive management by exceptions. (Bass, 1985). Considering this, Bass (1985) explained that leaders use contingent rewards to motivate their followers via conditioned rewards to lure them to act in the leader's favor. The followers understand that if they act accordingly, they will receive rewards. Asal and Koksal (2018) suggested that reward-goals create a relationship between the leader and the follower. A situation where the leader monitors the performance of their followers and finds immediate solutions when something goes wrong during the production process is called the active management by exception (Asal & Koksal, 2018). Bass (1985) defined transformational leaders in terms of active management by exception and passive management by exception. According to Adeel et al. (2018), passive leadership involves passive management by exception and laissez-fair. In passive management by exception, leaders do not interfere unless a problem becomes severe and action is required (Bass, 1990). On the other hand, leaders in the laissez-fair do not participate in the organization's decision-making (Bass, 1990).

Four Dimensions of Transformational Leadership

According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership displays the following

dimensions which influence followers to perform their duties beyond expectations:

Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized

Consideration.

Idealized Influence

Many scholars consider this characteristic of leadership as a critical dimension of

transformational leadership (Abou-Moghli, 2018). Being recognized by many as the

behavioral charisma of the leader, in the context of the idealized influence,

transformational leaders serve as role models and turn to provide a sense of purpose

through the installation of shared vision and mission (Alzoraiki et al., 2018). For

instance, leaders with transformational qualities lead by example and set the needed

goals. These leaders achieve their goals by building some degree of trust between them

and their followers, setting excellent moral and ethical standards (Bass, 1985). Leaders

gain respect as mentors, admired by their followers who represent the chief architects of

performance, and idealized leaders who step ahead of their followers. Within the context

of idealized influence, the leader's action shows his ethical conduct, and the leader is

willing to take the risk for the success of the organization (Yaslioglu & Erden, 2018).

Inspirational Motivation

Burns (1978) considered inspirational motivation as the extern to which leaders

articulate the organizational vision in an appealing and inspiring way to followers (Burns,

1978). Followers look up to their inspirational leader as the one who provides them with

an emotional and understanding of their planned goals. In this dimension, the leader inspires and encourages their followers to align their individual personal goals with the purposes of the organization and sometimes even go beyond the organization's goals (Bass, 1990). For instance, through inspirational and motivation process, small business leaders could simultaneously achieve the organization's objectives in that the outcome would have a favorable implication for both the organization and the employees. Transformational leadership's inspirational motivation plays a role in building trust and follower's satisfaction (Rawung et al., 2015). Rawung et al. (2015) posited that inspirational motivation enables leaders to serve the foundation for the sharing of knowledge that leaders consider as the most critical component to ensure organizational success. It is essential for organizational leaders to understand the factors that motivate employees in organization (Afolabi et al., 2018). Employee rewards and recognition play a critical role and must be employed by organizational leaders to enhance employee motivation (Hussain, et al., 2019). Organizational leaders must recognize the contribution of their employees to keep their self-esteem high and keep them passionate. When organizational leaders recognize employees, they are motivated to perform well to achieve their goals and boost employee morale, resulting in their overall sustainability (Hussain et al., 2019).

Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation is an essential component of transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). The Intellectual stimulation dimension refers to leaders who encourage their followers to be creative, innovative, and who dedicate their effort to the

organization's vision (Burns, 1978). The leader accepts risk and seeks for their followers'

ideas (Burns, 1978). Leaders with intellectual stimulation turn to nurture and affect

knowledge of followers to think independently. To these leaders, learning is an asset.

According to Smothers et al. (2016), intellectual stimulation makes it easier for follower

empowerment with the help of effective communication and encouragement to establish

and offer solutions to organizational problems. For instance, small business leaders can

give their followers the big picture and strategies for executing their responsibilities.

Small business leaders can interrogate with followers' questionable wisdom and come

out with practical solutions to small business problems.

Individual Consideration

Individual consideration is the extent to which the leader attends to the needs of

their followers and grand them the audience for their concerns and needs (Bass, 1985).

The desire and ability to give nurturing support for individual followers by the leader is

strong. The obligations and the potential for the development of other key players are the

main priorities of the leader (Bass, 1985, 1990).

The Impact of Leadership on Small Business Performance

Scholars like Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986) used profitability rate,

investment, and asset returns, customer satisfaction, quality, innovation, and employee

satisfaction as the leading indicators of organizational performance. Bass (1985)

considered the concept of performance as the extern to which organizations reach

success. For instance, small business leaders use the performance indicators as

the *plus* measurement. Small business leaders could use performance measurement to

evaluate the success of their organizations. Leadership can influence organizational performance in two ways (Manzoor et al., 2019). Leadership could directly enhance performance in an organization because it is the chief determinant of success or failure of every organization (Manzoor et al., 2019). Organizations, including small businesses, are compelled to focus on their leadership as a strategy for enhancing performance. Besides, leadership could indirectly improve organizational performance via the continuing commitment by business organizations to behave ethically (Manzoor et al., 2019).

Innovation and learning orientation have positive relationships with organizational performance (Farrell, 2000; Slater & Narver, 1995). Innovation is essential because it will enable business leaders to adopt a market change and new demand (Lestari et al., 2018). For high performance, small business leaders can use innovation to solve their internal and external environment turbulences (Damanpour, 1991; Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011). Innovative skill is essential for organizational leaders because it will enable them to produce and supply quality products and services to customers.

The ability and willingness of members of any business organization, including small businesses to contribute to making effective use of the resources of their organizations, will depend on how leaders of these organizations understand and adopt appropriate leadership styles in discharging their responsibilities as leaders. Leaders of small businesses must ensure the efficiency of resources mobilization, use, and enhance organizational performance through appropriate leadership strategies. The outcome of the research conducted showed different relations between entrepreneurial leadership and the

business performance of small businesses (Mgeni, 2015). Every business organization

pursues the objectives of achieving a high sustainable competitive advantage through the

effective use of both human and non-human elements (Burke, 2007). Researchers have

found that leadership and entrepreneurship have a distinctive set of ideas, characters, and

competencies (Engelen et al., 2015). Even though leadership is different from

entrepreneurship in terms of analysis, both fields went through similar development in

numerous processes. For instance, it is a shared practice among entrepreneurial leaders to

play a leadership role in a specific context. Entrepreneurs turn to act as the leaders

responsible for making decisions in a new firm's success via risk-taking to identify

available opportunities that other small business leaders cannot discover. While some

scholars have integrated leadership and entrepreneurship to analyze effectiveness in a

firm, others have concentrated on the effects of entrepreneurial leadership behavior on

new business performance (Dunne et al., 2016). A review of existing literature revealed

that leadership and entrepreneurship are related to each other (Leitch & Volery, 2017). A

leader's ability to understand how to discover available strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities and threats could increase their competitive advantage Barney, 1991). A

healthy competitive could lead to the success of a business (Barney, 1991) and enable the

leader to discover how their organizations' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and

threats (SWOT) could contribute to the formation and implementation of business

strategies (Porter, 1985).

Nonetheless, practical SWOT analysis could help business leaders to designate

the purpose for which the business was set up and identify the internal and external

indicators that would influence their goal achievements (Porter, 1985). The success or

failure of any organization strategically depends on the leadership style employed by the

leader (Ukaidi, 2016). Leadership enhances subordinates and organizational outcomes in

numerous ways (Madanchian et al., 2017). For instance, transformational leaders have

strong positive influences on the commitment level and job satisfaction and followers'

performance in the organization (Choi et al., 2016; Top et al., 2015).

In the context of the impact of transformational leadership, the information

provided by scholars has shown that this leadership approach has remarkable

implications for subordinates (Orabi, 2016). In general, transforming employees of any

organization are could bring a direct impact on organizational performance (Hoxha,

2015). Trmal et al. (2015), who noted that transformational leadership could be the most

effective leadership since it enables leaders to drive change in peoples' character, which

might result in the achievement of the organizational goal, have supported this assertion.

It is essential to mention that transformational leadership could have a considerable

impact on the total performance of the organization, ensuring that there is the support

needed to yield the desired result (Orabi, 2016). It is essential to acknowledge that, to

comprehend the roles of transformational leaders in achieving organizational

performance, many scholars have focused on how this leadership style influence

employees and organizational behavior to improve outcomes (Orabi, 2016). For instance,

the intellectual stimulation component of transformational leadership enhances

subordinates' empowerment via communication and encouragement to identify problems

and solutions (Smothers et al., 2016). It is the responsibility of small business leaders to

persuade and provide support for their team members through effective communication (Luthra & Dahiya, 2015). According to Luthra and Dahiya (2015), communication enables business leaders to interact with employees, managers, vendors, creditors, and stakeholders. Luthra and Dahiya posited that through effective communication leaders of small businesses can motivate and inspire employees to perform their duties. Transformational leadership has positive relations with organizational performance on some parameters like subordinates, job performance, group performance, and organizational growth.

According to Burns (1978), leaders are people who encourage the motivation of their subordinates to achieve their goals, and transformational leadership is a process due to which leaders deal with other people and create the relationship between them, and because of that increases motivation and moral level. Motivation is a means to help employees effectively complete their tasks (Nguyen et al., 2020). Motivation can strengthen employee commitment which may lead to improved organizational performance (Siswanto et al., 2021). Employee recognition is the effort by organizational leaders to appreciate employees or its members as a response to their specific actions (Ndungu, 2017). Employee recognition has a significant and positive effect on employee performance. Employee recognition boost employees' motivation as employees will obtain something in return for their achievements or contributions to the organization (Tirta & Enrika, 2020). Recognition fosters employee retention within the organization, enabling the organization to achieve its long-term goals (Tirta & Enrika, 2020). Transformational leaders make followers' performance better and help them to develop

to their full potentials (Avolio, 1999). According to Mamza et al. (2019), transformational leaders focus on team building to improve morale, motivate team members, and collaborate with followers at various stages in the organization to achieve change. Therefore, transformational leadership is suitable for any organization, including small businesses who want to achieve their goals.

For small businesses to make successful changes, their leaders need to understand the importance of change and be ready to adapt to current and future business trends to sustain long term operations (Khan et al., 2016). Therefore, organizations need competent and skilled leaders who will perceive a positive future and address challenges in the best manner (Khan et al., 2016). In every business organization, leaders must introduce some productive business activities of the organization to increase efficiency in the organization. According to Strukan et al. (2017), the leader's knowledge of *financial performance* and *new product development* will influence the performance of the organization. I discussed these two concepts in more details.

Financial Performance

Research conducted by Warren and Szostek (2017) revealed that effective financial strategies and management contribute to the building of a sustainable business. Financial performance is an important business activity, which enables the organization to increase its efficiency (Strukan et al., 2017). The performance of the organization's profitability, assets growth, competitive advantage status, and the level of production depends on effective financial management (Strukan et al., 2017). Within the context of small businesses, financial performance is of significant interest (Strukan et al., 2017),

especially for salary and productivity performance. Strukan et al. discussed a set out of seven financial performances, which include market share, sale growth, productivity, as well as assets growth and employees' salaries. For instance, some small business leaders may consider productivity as the ratio between the overall quantities of goods, essential resources for production. Strukan et al. explained that productivity is the indicator of a set of success, which comprises invested money and financial results, dividend cover, and sales. There must be a positive relationship between assets or capital employed and profit maximization (Strukan et al., 2017). Asset growth is a significant financial performance indicator for organizational development and growth (Strukan et al., 2017). Strukan et al. (2017) defined the assets of the organization as economic values that business leaders can use to achieve their goals. For instance, small business leaders can convert long-term assets in the organization into products or services. In finance, performance means the measurement of organizational results regarding financial terms (Naz et al., 2016). Financial performance is how the financial strength of the organization for a period is measured (Naz et al., 2016). Financial performance is the action that organizational leaders use in financial terms to be able to generate higher profit. Leaders of organizations use financial performance to investigate the organizations' success compliances and financial strength. The return on investment, equity, capital used by the organization, and profitability level reflect the organization's performance level (Naz et al., 2016).

New Product Development

According to Strukan et al. (2017), new product development is the strategic part of the future condition of an organization. New product development is the basis of the strategic plan of the business. The leader's role, such as distribution and promotion in the context of market success, is very crucial because leaders have the responsibility of ensuring that products and services are designed and developed per targeted consumers' expectations and needs (Strukan et al., 2017). For instance, if a leader of small business wants to execute transactions successfully and to be a strong competitor in the market, they must ensure that their organization puts new product development in its plan. Organizational leaders need to bring various activities that will ultimately have similar activities with the aim of achieving technical success, customer satisfaction, successful market target or product market identification of newly developed products through which the organization put in invested funds to develop and launch newly invented products in the market at a profit. With the availability of new products, the organizations stand to gain competitive advantage (Strukan et al., 2017).

Leadership is an essential factor that could influence innovation and performance in a small business. Therefore, small business owners and leaders must understand the impact of the leadership concept. Effective leadership could help leaders to confront small business challenges such as limited access to finance, inadequate managerial skills, corruption, and lack of technology and equipment. In the context of small business, the managers or the leaders are an essential individual because they have what it takes and make decisions daily that have an impact on the survival of the small business.

The Impact of Strategy on Small Business Performance

Porter (1980) defined a strategy as a process by which organizational creates a unique and valuable position, relying on a set of activities that are different from those of an organization's competitors. Mintzberg (1987) explained that a strategy is a plan, a ploy, a pattern, a position, or a perspective. Nickols (2016) opined that a strategy or design should align with significant goals of the organization, policies, and actions of a set of related events into a cohesive whole. A strategy is the course of action taken to achieve primary long-term organizational goals as well as the allocation of resources required to carry out those goals (Chandler, 1962).Strategic planning may enable leaders of small businesses to analyze, explore, comprehend, and develop plans of actions to confront identified challenges to achieve a positive impact towards long-term goals (Kazmi et al., 2016).Developing a strategic plan can enable small business leaders to improve their business performance (AlQershi, 2021). Strategic planning is how business leaders authenticate and establish a direction for business activities by evaluating both the present and future objectives (Henderson & Hines, 2019). Organizational leaders must ensure that the strategic plan is flexible and adapts to a changing situation (Thomas, 2021). A strategic plan must recognize the significance of matching available resources to opportunities (Thomas, 2021). For example, Giles (1991) linked the strategic process to the strategy theory, suggesting that competent leaders could use the strategic plan to sustain business operations. Thus, the awareness of actions or the needs that the leader intends to meet is a plan.

With a strategic plan, organizational leaders can record their mission, vision, and values, as well as their long-term goals and the plans they will use to sustain operations (Thompson et al., 2012). Strategic planning involves an analysis of an organization's mandate, mission, and vision and an analysis of an organization's internal and external environment, identifying strategic challenges based on these analyses and specifying strategies to address these challenges (Bryson, 2018).According to Thompson et al. (2012), a strategic plan positively relates to better performance in every organization. Therefore, a good strategic plan can result in high profitability irrespective of its size because it is a major contributing factor to organization's success. Also, Leaders adopt strategies to enable them to achieve a competitive advantage (Hart, 1992). For instance, it is critical for every organizational leader, including small business leaders, to consider learning organization as a strategy for development by focusing on constant learning and the application of knowledge to improve performance. Plan for the competition is a critical key to the success of organizations because it influences people, team, and organizational learning that will lead to constant improvement and innovation in small business operations. A strategy is about making choices by leaders (Porter, 1985). A strategy is a way to ensure a sustainable competitive advantage through the investment of resources that the organization needs to develop critical capacities that might lead to long-term superior organizational performance that is sustainable (Cheng & Lin, 2014). Organizational leaders use strategies for changing their environment to achieve the combination of circumstances in the organization (Anwar et al., 2016). The emergence and development of an organization can positively enhance employees' commitment

level (Rustamadji & Omar, 2019). The strategic process involves the actions that leaders take and how they split those actions for implementation in the organization (Anwar et al., 2016). organizational leaders need to elaborate the circumstances that contribute to strategic management process from the perspective of understanding the planning and the sequence of the process and employee commitment (Al-Fadley et al., 2018; Ghanney, 2018).

The concept of strategic leadership has numerous definitions in the literature (Palladan et al., 2016). Ozera and Tinaztepe (2014) explained that strategic direction includes dealing with problems usually addressed by a firm's top management team. From the perspective of leadership strategy, the leader can execute a strategic vision and motivate followers to adopt that vision for the organization. Nonetheless, in strategic leadership practice, the leaders of the organization can use strategies to manage their resources employees. In the global competitive landscape, in the 21st century, some level of strategic leadership capabilities is expected by business leaders to sustain operations (Ireland &Hitt, 1999). Ireland and Hitt (1999) posited strategic leadership entails the development and communication of vision, building dynamic core competencies, emphasizing and effectively using human capital, investing in the development of new technology, engaging valuable strategies, building effective organizational culture, developing and implement balance control, and engaging in ethical practices.

Researchers have identified different types of strategies. Mintzberg (1987) proposed five behaviors of an approach commonly known as the five Ps of strategy. First, the awareness of actions or the needs that the leader intend to meet is a plan, which is the

first P. Mintzberg (1987) named the second P as the 'ploy' and described it as the method

leaders use as a tactic to plan a strategy that will outperform business competitors.

Business leaders use the ploy strategy to reshape the firm's structure for positive

transformation (Porter, 1996). The third 'P' represents a pattern that Mintzberg described

as the already implemented strategies. Specifically, Mintzberg refers to the strategic

pattern behavior as the strategy that enables business leaders to achieve their intended

goals. Leaders need to work on those strategies in more detail (Mintzberg, 1987). In the

context of the strategic pattern behavior, the initial plan that organizational leaders

implement represent a critical foundation for developing a strategy. The patterned

behavior is a decision-making flow with intentional or unintentional action exhibited in

which employees or teams present. For instance, small business needs to have

consistency framework for developing compelling plans. The fourth 'P' denotes position,

which helps leaders to identify an organization within an environment. The final 'P'

stands for 'perspective', which describes how the leaders of the organization perceive and

engage competition in the marketplace (Mintzberg, 1987).

Hee et al. (2019) postulated that employee performance embodies the

organization's achievement in the organization's regulations, requirements, and

expectations. One performance improvement strategy employed by business leaders to

contribute to high employee performance is effective communication (Hee et al., 2019).

According to Hee et al., effective communication is a vital tool commonly used by

business leaders to achieve a high quality of performance and nurture strong working

relationships. Therefore, small business leaders' lack of performance improvement

strategies may contribute to low employee performance and promote the potential to decrease business sustainability. Transformational leaders concentrate on influencing employees' sense of ability to perform to facilitate organizational growth (Burns, 1978). Burns asserted that organizational leaders could assess employee's performance by aligning followers with tasks that optimize their performance. Hee et al. explained that a vigorous assessment of employee's performance by organizational leaders could enhance productivity. Business leaders can use employee performance to improve organizational performance which leads to satisfaction among leaders and employees (Almatrooshi et al., 2016). Employee performance is closely related to the results of each employee's work in an organization or company (Kuswati, 2020). Kuswati (2020) posited that the achievement of employee performance in any business organization is determined by the leader's ability to lead, foster, and direct employees in carrying out their duties. Moreover, effective employee performance can enable business leaders to generate more revenue to advance their business sustainability (Li et al., 2020).

Small Businesses: Overview

It is essential to adopt a functional definition of small business for this study. Base on its number of employees and annual income or both, a business organization can be termed as a small business (USSBA, 2018). For this study, there is the need to adopt the definition given by the USSBA (2018), that small business is a business that employs 500 or fewer persons. Although establishing a business can be challenging yet understanding the problems regarding small businesses and the main factors responsible for their

success might enable business leaders to make the right decisions to sustain their operations (Hazudin et al., 2015).

Business leaders dominate in the performance of their duties due to the structural nature of their businesses, and this helps the leaders to improve on their skills (Asomaning & Abdulai, 2015). In the context of growth in capacity and size, small businesses are different. Asomaning and Abdulai (2015) explained that small business leaders enjoy the advantage of total independence in managing their activities. For instance, small business leaders are not accountable to any superior. Business leaders of small companies face similar challenges at the same level of development (Asomaning & Abdulai, 2015). Schaupp and Bélanger (2016) explained that social and other media platforms enable small businesses to sustain and operate effectively within the business environment (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2016). To build a competitive advantage, business leaders of small companies resort to using websites, social media, and other technological advancements (Jones et al., 2015). Using technology enables a small business to increase awareness and inquiries, strengthens the relationship with its customers, increases the power to reach customers on a global scale, and helps promote local companies that enhance the image of small businesses (Jones et al., 2015).

Nnamseh and Akpan (2015) explained that the growth of small businesses has a significant reflection on the development of the economy, and this led governments all over the world to intervene with grants and other incentives in the form of support for research on a strategy to help small businesses. Although the growth of startup is a complex process with many factors affecting their growth, many scholars have found the

significance of growth strategy in the development and survival of small businesses

(McDowell et al., 2016). In their research to examine the impact of policy on small

businesses' performance, McDowell et al. (2016) found that effective strategies in line

with the prevailing market condition were responsible for the success of small businesses.

One case in the United States is where Price and Stoica (2015) researched to find the type

of resources that small businesses use that is essential for organizational performance.

Using 229 small companies to conduct a test on organization, social, entrepreneurial

orientation, and knowledge-based resources, Price and Stoica (2015) concluded that

knowledge-based and entrepreneurial orientation was the most significant to small

businesses.

The Impact of Small Businesses on American Economy

Small businesses are the backbone of American economy, as they remain

essential constituents in the development of the economy (Elimam, 2017). Small

businesses contribute the majority of share in the economic development of any country

(Al-Khatib et al., 2015). Small businesses are connected to the process of enhancing the

of job which contribute to the economic development of the United States (Elimam,

2017). Rubach et al. (2015) explained that, entrepreneurs contribute to the economic

growth of both developed and developing countries. For instance, the effective measure

of economic growth of developed and developing nations are determined by small

business activities (Cantamessa et al., 2018). There is a high rate of small businesses

among immigrants due to immigrant business activities (Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Small

business sector is growing at a faster rate (USSBA, 2018). Since 1982, the number of

small businesses in America has increased by 49% owing to the downsizing of corporate American businesses (USSBA, 2018). In 2015, there were about 30.2 million small businesses in the United States, which accounted for 99.9% of all businesses and out of the total number of businesses, 8.58 million or 28.4% represent the service industry in the United States (USSBA, 2018). Small businesses contribute to boost the American economy through employment. For instance, the USSBA (2018) indicated that, 54% of United States sales come from small businesses. Therefore, not all revenue from sales are considered the amount of money generated by those small businesses alone. In addition, the fact that small businesses help to boost the United States GDP, they might as well help to boost the stock market. In the case of United States, anytime the economy is growing due to the direct action of small businesses, businesses including corporate and small businesses across the United States usually report positive earnings. Consequently, this process yields positive impact on the stock market, as small businesses patronize majority of the goods produced by indexed companies. In addition, small businesses employ appreciable number of all private sector work and contribute to the total net job growth more than large businesses counterparts in the United States (USSBA, 2018). Small businesses provide essential support to communities in the United States (USSBA, 2018). For instance, small businesses provide different additional support by contributing to the local tax base and helping to make the communities the drivers of economic development. Throughout the communities, some business owners or leaders participate in the local organization of their communities through team sponsoring, charity donation, and community events participating.

New York has about 2.1 million small businesses, which represent about 99.8% of New York businesses (USSBA, 2018). Small businesses employ about 4.0 million people, which are about 50.2% of total New York employees. In 2015, 37, 949 companies exported goods from New York alone. Of these, 35,642, or 93.9%, were small business: these small businesses contributed about 57.0% of New York's $68.7 billion in total exports.

Challenges of Small Businesses

Small businesses contribute to the growth of the economy through entrepreneurial activities, yet numerous challenges continue to hinder the economic growths and survival rates of these small businesses (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). Whether in a developed or developing nation, small businesses continue to serve as drivers of the economies (Karadag, 2015). However, Small businesses face numerous progress and survival challenges (Dinka, 2019).

In the United States, about 50% of these small businesses fail to sustain operations beyond 5 years (USSBA, 2018), and mitigating small business challenges might enable their sustenance and services beyond 5 years (Gumel, 2017). Lampadarios (2016) reviewed scholarly literature on small businesses and grouped the challenges facing small businesses into external business environment challenges, entrepreneurial challenges, and enterprise challenges of small businesses. Economic, legal, and regulatory, political, and socio-cultural factors were, among other things, considered by Lampadarios (2016) as the external environmental challenges affecting small business survival. Lampadarios (2016) referred to the external environment to problems outside

the business that defined the shape of the firm, the firm's operations, and the capacity to mobilize the primary resource. In the context of Government dominance as a challenge facing the small business sector, a favorable environmental needs approach for low business expansion and sustenance is the way forward (Lampadarios, 2016). Most government policies are not beneficial for small business survival.

Nonetheless, the government must discharge its responsibility of creating policies that will enhance business growth (Gumel, 2017). For the contribution of small businesses to the economy, governments' state of economic development and innovation support should aim at bringing small businesses to the forefront of its policy (Ruchkina et al., 2017). Despite numerous government policies for measurements, including a measure on promotions of innovation to support development needs for small businesses, small businesses continue to face many challenges (Ruchkina et al., 2017). For instance, in recent times, several laws and regulations that were adopted had introduced more restrictions and high-interest small business financial burdens like sale tax and high-interest rates (Ruchkina et al., 2017). One case in New York is that small business leaders have cited government regulations as the main challenge at many levels (New York State Department of Labor, 2016). Even though it is known as the home of small business, New York City is a regulatory environment with about 6,000 regulations and about 250 business licenses and permits rules to ensure that businesses comply with the law (New York State Department of Labor, 2016).

The initial capital to start a small business or invest in the already existing small business is essential for growth, sustenance, and survival of small businesses (Gumel,

2017). Raising capital to finance small business has always been the major internal

challenge (Cheng, 2015; Wilson, 2015). Most small businesses have inadequate funds to

meet their required working capitals (Dinka, 2019). The profit-generating level of most

small businesses is far less as compared to their large-scale business counterpart because

small businesses operate in the local market where they have no access to finance to

make large operations (USSBA, 2018). Accordingly, the confidence level of financial

institutions to loan money to small businesses is low since small businesses are unable to

satisfy the lending institution's collateral requirement (Cheng, 2015; Wilson, 2015). At

the startup phase, most small business owners rely on their savings, loans from friends,

and microfinance companies (USSBA, 2018).

Most small businesses are unable to patronize in the global market. Globalization

is the interconnections between societies where business events in other parts of the

world have an impact on the people and the community far away (Oladimeji et al., 2017).

Oladimeji et al. (2017) posited that with the concept of globalization, small businesses

would be able to do business internationally without restrictions, and this could enhance

cross-border relationships (Oladimeji et al., 2017). Businesses consider going global as a

necessity and not a preference (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). It would amount to enough

cause of failure if businesses, whatever their size, fail to patronize global markets

(Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). Ineffective globalization has led to the collapse of many

small businesses (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). One case across the world is Chinese small

businesses that enjoy the benefits of exporting cheap products ranging from electronics to

clothes forcing small businesses another part world to fold up in the mix of competitors

in the global market (Bushe, 2019). Due to globalization, small businesses have lost their

status as domestic business organizations in the competitive global environment

(Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). The problem is that when small businesses fail to participate

in the worldwide market, this could limit them to do business with borders (Sitharam &

Hoque, 2016). When small businesses fail to engage in global competitive advantage

through the provision of quality products at a competitive price, they may not be able to

survive operations. Through globalization, small businesses might be able to open their

businesses to the outside world to enhance the distribution of their goods and services

(Oladimeji, et al., 2017). Without globalization, there will be barriers to trade and

competition, which may present less opportunities to small businesses and eventually

lead to their failure (Oladimeji et al., 2017).

Lack of leadership is a crucial challenge of small business (Gumel, 2017). For any

small business to succeed, it must have excellent leadership (Gumel, 2017). According to

Gumel (2017), scholars have indicated that transformational leadership is suitable for

small businesses, as it would enable leaders to put extra effort in confronting challenges

they face. Transformational leadership activities can lead to positive performance and

increase the survival rate of small businesses. Arshad et al. (2016) asserted leadership

styles adopted by leaders might determine the success and failure of the business.

Therefore, business leaders need to use leadership styles, such as transactional, to

influence effectiveness, loyalty, and effort to mitigate their challenges (Gumel, 2017).

Most small businesses fail due to a lack of effective leadership (Gumel, 2017) to help

increase the life span of those businesses (Shah, 2018). Poor leadership planning and

management skills are the cause of the high failure rate among small businesses in the United States (USSBA, 2018). The intention and management skill level of a small business leader could influence the performance of the business organization (Gumel, 2017). In this context, if an individual starts a small business for self-employment, the business might not sustain operations beyond 5 years (Gumel, 2017). Small business leaders could sustain operations beyond 5 years if the leaders use it for an entrepreneurial purpose (Gumel, 2017).

Businesses, regardless of their sizes, often face challenges related to engaging corporate social responsibilities (Yuen & Lim, 2016). In this context, corporate social responsibility is the concept whereby firms integrate social and environmental issues in their business operation and their interaction with stakeholders voluntarily (Commission of the European Communities, 2014). For instance, small business leaders habitually evolve in the daily operations resulting in time constraint on the part of the leaders to ensure corporate social responsibility effort like offering support to local charity organizations and non-governmental activities. Small business leaders lack corporate social responsibilities vision because of inadequate finance, human capital, knowledge, and expertise (Yuen & Lim, 2016). For instance, a study conducted by Yuen and Lim (2016) revealed that to achieve effective implementation of corporate social responsibility in shipping industry, business leaders must invest large number of resources. Most small businesses face the challenge of corporate social responsibility because they do not have a dedicated department for such an essential component of business (Yuen & Lim, 2016). Understanding the barriers to social responsibilities will

enable business leaders to avoid or overcome them and improve on the changes that leaders make to implement social responsibility strategies (Yuen & Lim, 2016).

Cybercrime is a challenge in the business world (Romanosky, 2016). Because of cyber-attacks, most businesses, regardless of their sizes, lost financial assets, tarnished their reputations and consumer confidence, and loss of revenue (Romanosky, 2016). Srinidhi et al., (2015) suggested that business leaders must implement effective leadership strategies to enable them to protect their business networks. Each year the global economy loses about $575 billion to cybercrime, and this had some impact businesses (Waldrop, 2016). According to DiMase et al., (2015), cybercrime-related cases that affected small businesses were about 86%. This high rate of cybercrime was caused by technological advancement (Akaeze, 2016) as business leaders depend on modern technology like computers, e-commerce, devices to receive and send information and perform business transactions (Manworren et al., 2016).

Small Business Failure

Small businesses face unforeseen circumstances that mostly bring about failures their leaders could not avoid altogether (Nair & Blomquist, 2019). Despite these unexpected challenges they face, small businesses are the primary panacea for enhancing the economic development of every nation by reducing unemployment through job creation, equitable distribution of income, and reducing poverty (Bushe, 2019). According to Byrne and Shepherd (2015), the failure of small businesses results in the psychological, social, and financial turmoil for small business leaders. Therefore,

research into the causes of small business failure is necessary for the United States and in the global arena at large (Bushe, 2019).

Internal and external factors are responsible for small business failure (Atsan, 2016). Internal causes of small business failure embody those decisions made by management whiles external causes failure embody the events that are outside the control of management (Atsan, 2016). Lack of skills and knowledge needed by business leaders to run their businesses is common in the context of small business management (Lampadarios, 2016). Poor employee management skill is a critical factor that could cause business failure (Bushe, 2019). For instance, employing people with the required skills and resorting to the use of modern technology is an effective strategy for small businesses to strive. Despite the availability of advanced technology and equipment, it is very critical for business leaders to employ people with the required skills to operate this equipment in the organization. Without the right human resource to perform, the organization might not be able to survive operations. Bushe (2019) explained that the lack of employees with the required skills could pronounce doom for a small business.

Some small businesses fail to sustain operations due to a lack of business strategy (Bushe, 2019). Bushe (2019) explained that small businesses must emulate from large companies by formulating business strategies on specific sectors of their business environment. For instance, small business leaders can use the niche strategy in the market segment where large companies have not explored yet (Bushe, 2019). When small business leaders fail to formulate and execute effective policies on their market structures, these businesses may fold soon after their startup. In most cases, leaders of

small companies do not possess the required leadership strategies before starting their businesses (Nolan & Garavan, 2016).

Under the external environment, economic variables such as market competition, crime, corruption, and regulation, are the factors that cause business failure (Kolstad & Wiig, 2015). Bushe (2019) found a lack of business competitiveness as the cause of business failure. For small businesses to be able to grow and become sustainable, they must be competitive in the market. As the need and expectation of consumers, technical development, and globalization of the market always change, ignoring market competition could cause small businesses failure (Bushe, 2019). For instance, competition in the technology-related industries is very keen, and this makes it difficult for small businesses in these sectors to stay profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. Another example is that some small business leaders who lack skills to compete become obsessed with some sections of their businesses without paying attention to their competitor's strategies.

A poor marketing plan can lead to business failure (Bushe, 2019). When small business leaders are unable to plan and execute the market strategies, the organization will not be able to provide its customers with quality products, promotional effort, and appropriate pricing (Bushe, 2019). Most researchers agreed that poor marketing, pricing, location, and market promotion are the causes of business failure (Bushe, 2019). With a good business plan, most entrepreneurs eventually become a stereotype and turn to emulate what other market leaders have done.

Luck of effective leadership could cause business failure (Bushe, 2019). According to Dunne et al. (2016), researchers have revealed the significance of leadership by explaining that the effectiveness of organizational leaders is one of the determinants of business success or failure. Leadership and organizational management have relative effects on the organizational process (Bass & Avolio, 1997) like the innovation process (Kang et al., 2015; Norbom & Lopez, 2016) and entrepreneurship (Zhou, 2016). Effective entrepreneurial leadership plays a significant role in the daily activities of a business, as such, business leaders must understand entrepreneurial leadership behaviors to be able to confront uncertainties they face (Harrison et al., 2016; Leitch & Volery, 2017). Therefore, to avoid small business failures, leaders must equip themselves with leadership skills to identify and explore opportunities. Leadership entails the provision of vision and motivation within organizations for leading this organization to success (Bushe, 2019). Although commitment to leadership involves more effort exhibition, a business without effective leadership control can lead to an organizational deviation that might eventually cause failure (Bushe, 2019). The standards of competition have changed among small businesses over time (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). Small companies to improve their market trends, technologies, new management, and business strategies to enhance their business competition and sustainability levels (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). In every competitive market, an effective leadership strategy plays a critical role (de Santos et al., 2017). Therefore, business leaders need to design different activities and actions to outperform their competitors (Kachouie et al., 2018).

Small Business Leadership Strategies to Sustain Operations

Wilshusen and MacDonald (2017) defined business sustainability as business leaders' ability to achieve business short-term profitable needs. Business leaders consider sustainability as a long-term goal plan (Aragon-Correa et al., 2017). Therefore, a firm to survive leaders must ensure continued operation over time (Aragon-Correa et al., 2017). Collins (2016) noted that business strategy is the activity of a specified process, which leaders predictively define by choosing a set of activities carefully. In any competitive economy, leaders use business strategy as the means of pursuing competition (de Santos et al., 2017). For the dynamism of developing new strategies, the transformation of a small business will require a dynamic and transformational leader who can confront the possible challenges of adopting new strategies (Miftari, 2018). Therefore, leaders of small businesses need to engage effective business strategies to achieve their objectives of sustaining operations in the competitive market (Gauthier, 2017).

Three completive strategies revealed by researchers include differentiation, focus, and cost leadership (Kharub et al., 2019; Porter, 1980) Cost leadership is a small business strategy that leaders use to ensure the lowest per-unit cost in the business to engage a price war with large firms for gaining access to customers and a higher profit level than their competitors (Porter, 1980). According to Porter (1980), business leaders use strategies to gain the competitive advantage of low cost and quality of the product over their competitors. Differentiation is a competitive strategy that small business leaders use to create a scenario of significance and uniqueness (Aisyah, 2019; Porter, 1980). Focus

strategy, which is mostly practiced by small businesses, entails concentrating on a specific segment of a market (Porter, 1980).

The main factor responsible for the success and sustenance of a small business is effective leadership (Jabbar & Hussein, 2017). Jabbar and Hussein (2017) explained that business leaders who can execute the organization's goal of achieving a positive working environment contribute to the sustenance of the business. For instance, small business leaders who implement strategies would achieve their goals (McDowell et al., 2016). Therefore, to sustain operations, small business leaders must consider their leadership styles as an essential strategy because it affects the profitability and success of the organization (Valdiserri & Wilson, 2010). Small business leaders have the responsibility of identifying opportunities and resource allocation to take advantage of those opportunities (Lans et al., 2016). Furthermore, small businesses achieve success through effective leaders who examine and comprehend the main success factors at hand (Lussier & Corman, 1995).

Ibrahim (2015) suggested the need for small business leaders to use suitable business strategies to enhance operations. In his quest to identify the types of strategy successful small business leaders use to sustain operations, Ibrahim studied 220 small businesses and revealed defender prospector, differentiation, and niche as the main strategies pursued by most small business leaders. McDowell et al. (2016) suggested the need for businesses to focus on strategies that are more external to sustain operations. For instance, small business leaders use market penetration to sell their products. These businesses increase their customer targets by cutting down prices and focusing on their

distribution process. Baker et al. (2016) revealed an external network as an innovative external strategy for a learning process, which enables small businesses to absorb information and knowledge surrounding the environment. According to Baker et al. (2016), external innovative strategies play a crucial role in the sustainability of small businesses by understanding the needs of customers in the market. These external innovative strategies are essential in enabling innovative sustainability of Small business and increasing relationships with leaders, suppliers, and customers, which allows small business leaders to develop performance in new product activities (Prajogo, 2016).

Baker et al. (2016) categorized the framework of external innovative strategies into three layers: product network layers, resources network layers, and social network layer. According to Baker et al, the product network layer under the external innovative strategies involves critical suppliers and significant customers who provide new and concept, ideas, and information for small businesses to enhance efficiency. The product network layer of external innovative strategies under effective leadership will enable small businesses to sustain operation because strategies would allow leaders to reduce cost, secure better deals for new technology, and target essential markets. According to Scuotto et al. (2017), under the external innovative strategies, the social network layer entails the establishment of social relations of entrepreneurs to develop a platform for business leaders to interact with external partners and employees of the same industry. An excellent social relationship among entrepreneurs will enable small businesses to enhance the sharing of knowledge and information (Scuotto et al., 2017). Resources network layer under external innovation strategy entails the compliment of resources

deficiency in sponsoring human resources and expertise, which could influence small

business capabilities in innovation (Subramaniam &Youndt, 2005). The resource

innovative network strategy is a framework, which enables small business leaders to

solve all the problems that they confront at the early stage of the business (Subramaniam

&Youndt, 2005). The external innovative network strategy framework might enable

business leaders to solve challenges of innovation to enhance profit level through the

expansion of the market and improve the ability to connect with critical elements to

sustain operations (Jia et al., 2018).

A business section that has not received the attention it deserves in the

establishment of strategy, especially in the study of small business, is financial decision

management despite its role as the determinant of business competitiveness (López

Salazar et al., 2012). Economic strategy is a leadership strategy that enables business

leaders to sustain operations (Mason & Brown, 2013). Mason and Brown (2013) noted

that strategizing the firm's financial activities is an essential factor for the firm's

sustainability because inadequate access to capital is a significant challenge for business

sustainability. López Salazar et al. (2012) suggested that financial strategies are goals and

alternatives that business leaders use to improve financial management for achieving the

firm's objectives (López Salazar et al., 2012). When small business leaders want to

investigate human capital and sustainability of their businesses, they take upon

themselves to focus on their financial strategies (Miller et al., 2015). Similarly, business

leaders should pay attention to financial strategies for qualified personnel, effective

production and operation, management of information, and customer service (McDonald, 2016).

Transition

Researchers have undertaken several studies to investigate the sustainability of small businesses. In section 1, I included the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the nature of the study. I used two theories as to the conceptual framework for this study: Chamberlain's theory of strategy and transformational theory. I explored the assumptions, limitations, delimitation, significance of the study, and the review of the professional and academic literature.

Section 2 contains the details of the role of the researcher, the participant, research methods and design, population and sample, and data collection instrument. Also, this section contains the discussion of data collection technique and analysis, reliability and validity, and the transition summary. In section 3, I presented the findings, recommendations, implications for positive social change, and the research conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

In this section, I discussed the following subsections: (a) purpose statement, (b)

role of the researcher, (c) research participant, (d) research method and design, (e)

population and sampling, (f) data collection instrument, (g) data collection techniques, (h)

data organization technique, (i) data analysis, and (j) reliability and validity. Within this

section, I define the scope of the population and justify the sampling method. Also, I

outline the guidelines of the informed consent form to express the requirement for ethical

research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore effective

leadership strategies that some small business leaders use to sustain their operations

beyond 5 years. The targeted population consisted of business leaders of five selected

small businesses in the Bronx, New York who used effective leadership strategies to

sustain their operations beyond 5 years. The study findings may contribute to positive

social change by increasing employment opportunities through healthier organization,

which may result from using effective leadership strategies.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers play essential roles as research instruments in qualitative research

(Brannen, 2017). The researcher plays the role of accessing the feelings and thoughts of

the participant (Sutton & Austin, 2015) and identify self, mitigate biases, and interpret the

research themes that emerge from data collected (Loeb et al., 2017). Qualitative

researchers collect, organize, and analyze data to provide answers to the chosen research

question (McKinlay et al., 2017). Selecting a suitable research method and design, focusing on the research problem using the right framework, defining target participants, and evaluating data are the key roles of the researcher (Olin et al., 2016; Takyi, 2015). I performed several roles in my capacity as the research instrument, including selecting a suitable methodology and design, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. I coordinated all parts of the research investigation. Likewise, as the primary data collection instrument, I ensured that data collected from participants were accurate. Yin (2017) posited that researchers are responsible for coding themes and finding the meaning of the response from participants during interviews. In qualitative research, researchers obtain information from many sources, including in-depth interviews, direct observation, and company documents (Watkins, 2017). I was responsible for primary data collection from one-on-one interviews, archival records, and field notes. In qualitative research, the researcher must prepare, plan, listen, and ensure data evaluation accuracy (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Developing interest in the study topic is part of my role. I conducted this study to explore effective leadership strategies that small business leaders use to sustain operations beyond 5 years. I developed an interest in leadership strategies and sustainability in my experience as a small business owner who worked closely with small business leaders. Due to my work experience as a small business owner for about 11 years, I developed some level of curiosity regarding the research topic. My interest in this research is the direct response to the USSBA (2018) report that about 50% of small businesses in the United States failed to sustain operations beyond 5 years. Besides, the

USSBA confirmed that small businesses in the Unites States contribute to economic growth by increasing employment opportunities and revenue. Internationally, small business enterprises in developing economies represent the engine for growth and offer employment for the people (Ebitu et al., 2016). The USSBA attributed challenges like poor innovative skills, inadequate capital, and inefficient leadership strategies as some of the causes of small business failure to sustain operations beyond 5 years.

The *Belmont Report* entails the acceptable standards to safeguard the rights of human subjects in research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979). As stated in the Belmont report, researchers are required to respect the autonomy of participants, limit their risk, and ensure justice for them by using a consent form (Friesen et al., 2017). The NCPHSBBR (1979) suggested the application of principles by researchers to include securing informed consent, which involves evaluating the risk and benefits before subject selection. The role of the researcher relating to research ethics and the protocols of the *Belmont Report* requires privacy and confidentiality for research participants (Shoup, 2015). Complying with the ethical standards stated in the Belmont Report (NCPHSBBR, 1979) will enable the researcher to conduct ethical research by ensuring respect and fairness towards the participants. Therefore, to ensure ethical standards in this research, I complied with the guidelines included in the *Belmont Report*.

Researchers use interviews as a tool for collecting information concerning the views and beliefs of the participant regarding a research problem of interest (Weiss, 1994). I used semistructured and one-to-one interviews for this qualitative research.

Under the semistructured interviews, researchers will get a more flexible approach to the interview process (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). For instance, semistructured and one-to-one interviews will enable researchers to learn about responses of participants and to investigate more gray areas to create room for anticipated responses and other challenges (Dempsey et al., 2016). Furthermore, semistructured and one-to-one interviews will enable researchers to develop rapport and to encounter with the interviewees (Zhang & Guttormsen, 2016).

Besides serving as the primary research instrument, researchers raise the concern regarding bias in qualitative research (Mehra, 2002). During data analysis, bias may occur due to the perception, personal values, and experiences the researcher (Sandler et al., 2016). Being mindful of possible research bias, I did not include my personal lens or perspectives in the research data. I ensured consistency in this study before, during, and after the interview process by controlling my lens and reactions. Bias may occur due to the following reasons: (a) the researcher not adequately prepared to conduct the research, (b) the researcher conducting inappropriate interviews, (c) the researcher's mental and other discomforts could pose a threat to the validity and reliability of data obtained (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003). Furthermore, the affinity rate of researchers with the targeted population under study and the researchers themselves being part of the population could result in bias in research (Mehra, 2002). Researchers need to make more efforts to reduce biases and errors in qualitative research (Hyett et al., 2014). Therefore, researchers need to safeguard against bias by considering the opinions of participants in qualitative research (Mackieson et al., 2019). According to Elo et al. (2014), responsibly

collecting data can enable qualitative researchers to minimize bias. I adhered to the recommended qualitative research guidelines and steps to reduce potential personal biases. Many researchers use bracketing to mitigate bias in qualitative research (Chan et al., 2013). Bracketing is a technique used in qualitative research to mitigate the potential of the preconception that may taint the research process (Chan et al., 2013). In qualitative research, bracketing is a methodological strategy that requires researchers to deliberately exclude their own beliefs about the study under investigation or what the researchers already know about the study before or throughout the study under investigation (Sundler et al., 2019). Qualitative researchers use bracketing to mitigate bias during the investigation process and findings (Chan et al., 2013). Researchers use bracketing as a strategy to give a practical exhibition of the validity of the data collection and analysis process (Sundler et al., 2019). Consequently, I tried to put aside my repertoires of knowledge, experience, and beliefs to enhance the accurate description of the participant's view and life experience.

To ensure credibility and validity and assess trustworthiness, researchers use member checking. Member checking involves asking participants about whether the researcher's interpretation of their responses is correct (Wagner et al., 2016). Researchers share part of the analysis of the data with participants to conduct ethical research in a qualitative study. Involving participants to check and confirm the results of the research can minimize research bias (Birt et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2016). As the researcher for this study, I conducted member checking to obtain correct information by confirming with participants to ensure that the research interpretation reflects the participant's

meaning as envisioned. Yin (2017) opined that field notes were taken by the researcher to capture comments and thoughts at the time of the data collection process. Therefore, to mitigate bias, researchers must use field notes to record the views of participants and validate the right interpretation of the research's results. Harvey (2015) explained that researchers could use member checking to ensure that the participant's experience and observation form the basis of data analysis and the interpretation of the research results.

Another essential tool used by qualitative researchers to mitigate bias is interview protocol (Fusch et al., 2017). Interview protocols are guidelines meant to direct qualitative researchers during the interview process (O'Keeffe et al., 2016). Therefore, to conduct research, qualitative researchers need to develop interview protocols. Pandey and Chawla (2016) suggested essential components of interview protocol include the introduction of the interviewer (researcher) to establish a relationship with the interviewee (participant), sharing the background of the study with the interviewee, the nature of confidentiality of information, and the research questions of the study. Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested that using an interview protocol enables the researcher to stay at the same pace as each participant regarding relevant issues to explore during interviews. With the interview protocol at hand, I had the guide to ask the same open-ended questions in an orderly manner to each interviewee. The use of interview protocol enabled me to mitigate preconceptions and increase intellectual rigor during the interview. Interview protocol served as a procedural guide for me to remind the participants about the aim of the study.

Participants

Participants play a key role in qualitative research by serving as sources of data (Yip et al., 2016). Vaioleti (2016) asserted that the involvement and familiarity with the research topic by the participant is essential in qualitative research. In qualitative research, researchers select participants whose behavior and eligibility criteria are aligned with the research question (Schrag, 2017). Researchers can use multiple participants to achieve the purpose of a qualitative study (Yin, 2017). I researched small businesses using five participants. The targeted population in this study was business leaders of five small businesses in the Bronx, New York, who used effective leadership strategies to sustain operations beyond 5 years.

The underlying strategy that most researchers engage in selecting participants to provide essential information for a study is a purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). I used purposive sampling to select participants from small business leaders who used effective leadership strategies to sustain operations beyond 5 years. According to Cho and Shin (2014), a potential participant who meets the criteria for research should get the opportunity to volunteer in the research. Five years criterion was one of the indicators of being a successful small business. To select small businesses that have succeeded because of their effective leadership strategies, I posed this question to the potential participants: Did you use effective leadership strategies to sustain your operations beyond 5 years? Only those who affirmed that they used effective leadership strategies to sustain their operations beyond 5 years were selected. The participants met specific requirements to qualify to participate in this study. The eligibility criteria for the research participants

included the following: (a) must be a small business leader in Bronx, New York State, (b) must be a leader in a small business or corporation who uses effective leadership strategies to sustain operation beyond 5 years, (c) must be willing to allow the inclusion of parts of the interview in the doctoral study and any other publication, and (d) must be willing to participate in a telephone interview. I invited participants who satisfied the above eligibility criteria for this study. Business leaders who failed to meet the eligibility criteria were not selected to participate in this study. Kircher et al. (2017) opined that getting access to research participants comes in different ways, based on the research topic. Informed consent is an important document that researchers use as a strategy to gain access to participants (Nakkash et al., 2017). Researchers consider informed consent as a critical ethical and legal document in qualitative research, which involves human subjects (Ibrahim et al., 2019). In qualitative research, the informed consent form entails the provision of research participants with clear information regarding the purpose of the study, the responsibility of the participants, and the way researchers should store data for safety (Nijhawan et al., 2013). Participation in a research study should be voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any point during the research (Roulet et al., 2017).

The researcher's inability to get access to reliable and credible participants in the area of study is a significant challenge in conducting research. Kircher et al. (2017) revealed that researchers use different methods to get access to research participants based on the content of the study undertaken. I used professional and small business institutions to gain access to research participants for this study. Noel and Luckett (2014) revealed that the Chamber of Commerce administrates the events of business leaders and

researchers to come in contact to share information and approve instant access to businesses. Besides, Miller et al. (2015) posited that the internet, social media, and company websites are a means of accessing and obtaining potential applicants for research. The metric that I used to ascertain that participants were qualified included5 years criterion as an indicator of being successful. Therefore, as part of a strategy, I considered the local Chamber of Commerce in the Bronx and company websites as the sources of locating small businesses for this study. I achieved this target by reviewing small businesses listed on the Chamber of Commerce and small businesses' websites to gain access to nearby small businesses who used effective leadership strategies to sustain operations beyond 5 years after getting approval from IRB. Once I discovered my targeted small businesses, I obtained their emails via their official websites and contact the organization's decision-maker to introduce myself and explain the study's parameters to obtain permission to gain access to their leaders. After identifying potential participants, I emailed them to obtain their consent before initiating the interview process. The content of the invitation letter (see Appendix A) specified the purpose and voluntary nature of the study as well as the rights of the participant to withdraw at any time. The invitation letter explicitly specified non-financial or incentive rewards for participation. I offered participants the opportunity to schedule time and date for interviews through emails to participate in this study (see Appendix A).

Building trust with participants could yield a working relationship with the researcher, and this could influence the participants' involvement in the study (Strech et al., 2015). The knowledge of participants' behavior will enable the researcher to establish

a good rapport and draw out responses for a study (Barratt et al., 2015). Anthony and

Danaher (2016) suggested the need for researchers to give a brief and concise description

of the purpose of the study for participants to avoid the situation where laborious

explanations might deter participants from getting involved. Therefore, I was able to

build trust by developing good working relationship with participants and developed a

concise description of my research project to the participants.

Selecting three participants is suitable for sample size in a qualitative study (Yin,

2017). To ensure the coverage of a broad scope for gaining enough representation for the

problem of research, I engaged five participants for this study. Large or small sampling

sizes do not guarantee data saturation; the important thing is what constitutes a sampling

size and whether the researcher will achieve data saturation. In the context of data

saturation, the researcher needs to collect a standard and enough data to complete a study

(Fusch& Ness, 2015). Identifying the appropriate research participants is one of the

essential tasks in the study design in qualitative research (Sargeant, 2012). Sargeant

explained that researchers consider several factors in selecting participants, including the

research questions. Sargeant asserted that selected participants must be able to provide

relevant information related to the research topic being studied. Researchers engage

enough participants to obtain a sample that is enough to meet the requirements of the

study (Benoot et al., 2016). To ensure data saturation, I analyzed participants' responses

to ensure that no new themes, new coding, and further understanding are revealed and

that I collected enough data to replicate the research. I continued to gather data until I

achieved data saturation. By this, I obtained enough data to the point that additional data

could not make any difference regarding the richness of the data. I interviewed selected

participants and did follow-up interviews as needed to ensure I attained data saturation.

Research Method and Design

The three main methods researchers use to conduct research are quantitative,

qualitative, and mixed method (McKim, 2017). A few existing qualitative research

designs used by researchers include the case study, narrative research, ethnography, and

phenomenology (Bristowe et al., 2015). Out of these research methods and designs,

researchers select the most suitable once considering the research question and the

purpose of the study. Research method is the process of collecting data or information

allowed for decision-making in the study (Yin, 2017). Research design is the arrangement

of conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to add value to

the research purpose (Akhtar, 2016). In qualitative research, researchers use the case

study when they want to understand a problem for a period (McKinlay et al., 2017). For

this study, I selected the qualitative method and the case study design. My academic

ability in the knowledge of research methods and design, as well as my quest to attain

more knowledge, were the compelling reasons for my choices. The nature of the research

question in this study and my interest in exploring effective leadership strategies to

sustain small business operations beyond 5 years urged me to select these research

method and design.

Research Method

Qualitative method is the systematic inquiry into social phenomena in natural

settings to include how people experience aspects of their lives, how individuals or

groups of people behave, and how organizations function (Teherani et al., 2015; Vaismoradi et al., 2016) with less emphasis on numerical information (Gibson, 2017; Shin & Biocca, 2017). Researchers use qualitative research to provide an in-depth and detailed description and interpretation of the research topic (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). In qualitative descriptive design, researchers can detect themes from the data they gather from participants' experiences (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

I considered the qualitative method to be the most suitable approach for this study because the purpose of this research was to explore effective leadership strategies to sustain small business operations beyond 5 years through in-depth interviews instead of statistically interpreting causal relationships. The qualitative method was suitable for this study to detect themes from data and participants' experiences. I preferred the qualitative approach because it enabled the understanding of the research topic via in-depth interviews and open-ended questions to answer the research questions adequately.

In the quantitative method, researchers examine the relationship between variables, which are measured numerically to test hypotheses and increase the rigor of the methodological process (Rahman, 2016). Crane et al. (2017) noted that researchers use quantitative methods to observe quantifiable data and facts to demonstrate causality. I had no intention to use the quantitative method given that I was not examining relationships between variables nor measure these variables to test hypotheses. The quantitative method was not suitable for this study.

The mixed method is the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Roulston, 2016), and as such was not appropriate for this study because one of the

components is used to test hypotheses. The mixed method is a term that researchers use to designate mixing qualitative research with quantitative research methods in the same study (Anguera et al., 2018). Statistical analysis and numerical data used by researchers in quantitative methods are applicable and considered as part of the mixed method (Laher, 2016; Loh et al., 2015). Since the focus of this study was on in-depth understanding of an applied business problem that does not include quantifiable variables, the quantitative or the mixed method was not suitable.

Research Design

Research designs that researchers use in qualitative studies include case study, ethnography, narrative design, and phenomenology (Grossoehme, 2014). Researchers use the case study for in-depth exploration using various kinds of data collection to accumulate information (Crooke & Olswang, 2015). For this research study, I considered a qualitative multiple case study design as the most suitable to solve the research question. According to Yin (2017), researchers use the case study to achieve a better understanding of their fields of interest, such as studying organizational and managerial processes. The flexible nature of the case study makes it suitable for qualitative researchers who want to gain an understanding of specific phenomena over the identified period (McKinlay et al., 2017). Yin (2017) asserted that using the case study design enables researchers to collect data via interviews and reviews of essential documents to investigate in greater depth a case or a phenomenon within a real-life context. The case study was appropriate for this study because I planned to collect and analyze data via interviews and reviews of company documents concerning small business sustainability.

A review of the phenomenological and ethnographic designs showed both are not appropriate for this study. The phenomenological design comprises rich philosophical positions to uncover the essence of participants' lived experiences (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). I did not select the phenomenological design because my intent was not to uncover the essence of the human lived experiences of business leaders. Jones and Smith (2017) explained that researchers use ethnography to observe the culture and the social interactions of groups of individuals. Ethnography was not appropriate for this study because the investigation did not include cultural observations. Bruner et al. (2017) claimed that narrative researchers focus on participants' stories as the key to data for examining the meaning and enabling the understanding of life experiences of individuals. In qualitative research, researchers consider the narrative design as an interpretative method of sharing individual experiences to enhance responses (Sahni & Sinha, 2016). For this study, the narrative design was not suitable because I was exploring data concerning an applied business problem, but not collecting data about life stories of participants.

In the qualitative study, researchers conduct a way that will enable them to achieve data saturation (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). The point at which no further information is received, even though more participants are being interviewed is data saturation (Galvin, 2015). Researchers may achieve data saturation under the following circumstances: (a) when there is sufficient data to replicate the study (O'reilly & Parker, 2013), (b) when more data obtained will not point to the discovery of new information relevant to the research question (Lowe et al., 2018), and (c) when more coding is no

longer feasible (Guest et al., 2006). Conducting research without achieving data saturation will affect the quality and content validity of the research findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To ensure data saturation, I continued the interviews until enough data were collected to replicate the study, and more coding was no longer feasible. I continued to gather data until I achieved data saturation. I interviewed 5 participants and did follow-up interviews as needed to ensure I attained data saturation.

Population and Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting a statistically representative sample of individuals from the population of interest (Majid, 2018). In qualitative research, researchers select participants whose lived experiences align with the overarching research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The targeted population for this study will included business leaders of five small businesses in the Bronx, New York, who used effective leadership strategies to sustain their operations beyond 5 years. Researchers in the qualitative study uses some level of eligibility criteria to determine whether an individual is qualified to be a participant in a research study (Majid, 2018). The eligibility criteria for the research participants included the following: (a) must be a small business leader in New York State, Bronx, (b) must be a leader in a small business or corporation who uses effective leadership strategies to sustain operation beyond 5 years, (c) must be willing to allow the inclusion of parts of the interview in the doctoral study and any other publication, and (d) must be willing to participate in a telephone interview. Being that it was highly impossible to interact with all members of the research population due to cost and period, I used a purposeful sampling technique.

In the qualitative study, researchers use different strategies to obtain a representative sample from a targeted population. Majid (2018) opined that researchers use sampling strategies to conduct their research, depending on the nature of the targeted population. Probability and nonprobability are the two techniques of sampling commonly used by researchers (Sharma, 2017). Probability sampling, which is a scientific method of obtaining a representative sample out of a targeted population, is used by researchers to construct valid statistical inferences for a target population (Kim & Wang, 2019). In probability sampling, researchers use random techniques to collect samples of participants from the targeted population (Sakshaug et al., 2019). In nonprobability sampling, researchers do not offer the individual in the population an equal opportunity to be selected as a representative sample (Hourani, 2017). Researchers create research samples based on the participant's features concerning the study (Rafail, 2018). Rafail (2018) revealed that nonprobability entails the subjective judgment of the researcher, but not all members of the population are given the same opportunity to be selected. In the nonprobability sampling selection, the researcher knows the participants in the research (Etikan et al., 2016; Sharma, 2017). Organizations mostly use nonprobability sampling for research (Etikan& Bala, 2017). I considered nonprobability sampling because it does not involve statistical sampling regarding population.

Qualitative researchers use different nonprobability sampling techniques like convenience sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball or chain sampling (Ames et al., 2019). The convenience sampling technique involves participants who are available and ready for the research (Naderifar et al., 2017). Although the convenience sampling

technique is easy to use, it does not ensure a reasonable representation sample (Ishak et al., 2014). Snowball sampling is a type of convenience sampling technique that qualitative researchers use when much effort is needed to access participants with the target qualities (Naderifar et al., 2017). With snowball sampling techniques, researchers allow active research participants to select future participants due to their relations with them (Naderifar et al., 2017). Snowball sampling may be suitable for this study because leaders can share their experiences among themselves. Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained that when researchers use snowball sampling, the findings of the study may be affected by unexpected challenges such as unnecessary pressure in recruiting participants.

Purposive sampling is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participants possess (Etikan et al., 2016). The researcher, in this case, decides what needs to be known and put in place the mechanism of getting people who can and are willing to provide information due to their knowledge and experience (Etikan et al., 2016). Researchers select the participants according to the understanding that the participants are most likely to provide in response to the questions (Gentles et al., 2015). For this study, I used the purposive sampling technique to select the participants who speak English in the Bronx, New York area, and can provide me with the information-rich case on exploring effective leadership strategies that small business leaders use to sustain operations beyond 5 years.

Barratt et al. (2015) and Ames et al. (2019) posited that purposeful sampling is the process researchers use to target participants to obtain the most reliable and knowledgeable participants to help answer the research question. With the knowledge of

purposeful sampling, I was able to select the participants who might be able to inform and guide me to comprehend this study. Using purposive sampling will enable researchers to execute the study on time with the help of data collected from participants (Dorney, 2016). Therefore, purposive sampling is the most appropriate sampling method for this study because I intended to interview individuals with specialized knowledge of effective leadership strategies to sustain small business operations beyond 5 years. My role as the researcher in this study was to create the criteria that permit the successful collection of data and ensure data saturation.

In qualitative research, sample size depends on what the researcher intends to inquire, the purpose of the research, how it will be useful, and what available time and resources will be used (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Boddy (2016) recommended researchers to access the context of the research to determine the appropriate sample size of the study. Nonetheless, if researchers use an in-depth or constructivist qualitative approach, they may be able to use one case to justify the study (Boddy, 2016). Unlike quantitative research, in qualitative research, researchers require small samples to achieve the general aim of sampling of acquiring information that is useful for understanding the context of a phenomenon (Gentles et al., 2015). For instance, Stake (2006) explained that multiple case study would result in limited benefits if less than four cases are chosen, while more than 10 cases may yield better results. Therefore, interviewing five small business leaders will be appropriate for this qualitative multiple case study because it will enable me to achieve data saturation. Whiles Guest et al. (2006) favored 12 samples for researchers to understand the study. Yin (2017) recommended the use of three

participants could be adequate to produce valuable, reliable, and credible information for research.

One factor that researchers consider relevant when deciding on sample size is data saturation (Dworkin, 2012). Researchers achieve data saturation when further information no longer emerges during the data collection process (Rubach et al., 2015). Furthermore, at the stage of data saturation, new information will not provide further explanation of the study (Tran et al., 2017). I achieved data saturation when I collected rich and enough data to provide adequate answers to the research question. I ensured that enough information was obtained for data analysis by interviewing five small business leaders who sustained their business operations beyond 5 years. Until data saturation is achieved during the initial stage, researchers are recommended to keep conducting the interview with the participants (Saunders et al., 2017). After the initial interview, if I did not achieve data saturation, I recruited additional participants and perform new interviews until it became apparent that I achieved data saturation by the lack of appearance of new themes or codes. Due to the potential for uncertainty regarding the point at which data saturation is achieved, qualitative researchers need to focus more on providing evidence of achieving data saturation, than focusing on concerns regarding the point at which saturation will occur (Constantinou et al., 2017). Throughout the study, I focused on providing evidence of achieving data saturation.

Ethical Research

Ethical issues regarding participant's sensitive information are components of ethical standards in the process of designing and researching a qualitative study (Yin,

2017). Therefore, when designing and conducting research engaging human data, researchers must consider the principles of ethical conduct (Kaewkungwal & Adams, 2019). As the key instrument of this study, I ensured that (a) participant's confidentialities were protected, (b) participants were protected from harm, and (c) the participant's consent was received during the research study. Yin (2017) acknowledged the importance of the consent form and recommended that researchers obtain consent to maintain their research ethics. Subsequently, as part of my duty of ethics in this research, I requested for and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRS) from Walden University to ensure I conducted this research project in compliance with the university ethical standard and the federal regulation of the United States (IRB # 08-17-20-0548916). A search conducted by Kaewkungwal and Adams (2019) indicated that many researchers had evaluated the ethical acceptability of the research proposal considering risk or benefit, vulnerability, and confidentiality or privacy as the core ethical considerations. Researchers need to follow some rigorous procedure to make sure that human dignity and rights including the implication of informed consent regulations, using sources provided by IRB, and the applying the Belmont Report (Huang et al., 2016). Therefore, the main concern in this research project regarding the recommended informed consent form from IRB will be the guarantee that the risk that participants may face is minimized. In the like manner, Nadal et al. (2015) explained that in qualitative studies, researchers deposit confidential data in a safe to satisfy the basic requirements which relate to ethical consent.

The IRB is required to supervise any research involving human subjects to attain the subject's safety and privacy and to sustain the study process at the highest level (Haahr et al., 2013). In human subjects, ethical research involves informed consent, which is a method to secure ethical rights for potential participants by researchers who seek to gain the participant's authorization or refusal of engaging research (Biros, 2018). Kaye et al. (2015) explained that informed consent is a type of legal policy and contractual agreement between the public and researchers. The informed consent form is designed to document records of the researchers' intention of securing the confidentiality and integrity of the identities of participants (Marrone, 2016). The components of the informed consent form are (a) the IRB approval, (b) the researchers' information, (c) the procedure of the study, (d) possible risk and benefits of the study, (e) voluntary nature of the study, (f) researcher's document retention and security for 5 years privacy disclosure, and (g) disclosure statement such as gift, payment or refunds (Abaunza & Romero, 2014). By receiving an approval number (IRB# 08-17-20-0548916) from Walden University IRB, I was required to comply with the research ethics protocol that forbids me from exploiting the research participants. As part of this ethical process, I gave a detailed explanation of the research study, the role of the researcher, the strategy to protect identity, and the confidentiality of the participants. Voluntary participation was required for this research project with no persuasion, and at any time, participants could withdraw if they wish to do so.

I ensured the confidentiality of participants by using pseudonyms names like P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 to represent each of the five participants in this study. For the safety of

the research recordings and electronic documents, I stored them on a personal computer

with a secret password and encrypted Cloud drive format to protect them from any form

of natural hazard. Moreover, I used the shredding machine to destroy any form of hard

copy data and terminally deleted all recording and electronic documents with the aid of

Cloud drive data removal software 5 years after the research was complete.

As part of ethical consideration, researchers must introduce themselves to the

participants (Damsa & Ugelvik, 2017). I introduced myself to the participants by

providing detailed information regarding my background, explained the content of the

informed content, and responded to participants' concerns to guarantee their

confidentiality and protection. In qualitative research, participants must be allowed to

read the informed consent before signing to accept to participate and approve the use of

data recording instruments during the interview process (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014).

Data Collection Instruments

The key data collection instrument in research is the researcher (Damsa &

Ugelvik, 2017). I was the data collecting instrument in this study. Researchers use

different methods like semistructured interviews and examining company documents to

collect data in qualitative research (Pampoulou, 2016). In qualitative research, using

numerous data sources like the review of a company report, interview, and observations

would enable researchers to compare present and past data (O'Cathain et al., 2016).

Likewise, Researchers must select the most suitable data collection method to enable

them to achieve the goal of their study (Bennett & McWhorter, 2016). Therefore, I

conducted in-depth semistructured interviews to provide structure included in the

interview protocol (see Appendix B) but permitted flexibility for the participants to give detailed spontaneous narratives and descriptions. The researcher should consider the types of documents and how organizations use documents in their business activities must consider the types of documents and how organizations use these documents in their business activities (Flick, 2014). In this study, I focused on the methods that organizations use to conceptualize and classify documents. According to Paradis et al. (2016), researchers should use research questions to guide the types of organizational documents, including (a) records, (b) notes of meetings, (c) checklists, and (d) newspaper articles. In this study, I used organizational documents like notes of meetings, records, and checklist during the interview with participants to validate the accuracy of data collected. Yin (2017) asserted that the case study design enables researchers to collect data via interviews, observations, documents, archival records, and physical artifacts. Researchers will attain clear and meaningful data if they grant the second interview (Pampoulou, 2016).

Yin (2017) suggested the use of interview protocol as an essential tool that provides details of the interview process and trustworthiness in a qualitative study. The importance of the interview protocol is that it entails the required wording of interview questions, the collection process, and represents the research report guide (Yin, 2017). To validate the credibility, verifiability, and accuracy of the data collection, researchers engage member checking (Fan et al., 2015).

Researchers will gain a better understanding of participant's perspective if they can connect with and listen to participants throughout the interview process (Collins

&Cooper, 2014). Collins and Cooper (2014) asserted that in a qualitative study, emotional and interpersonal skilled researchers would likely succeed in their data collection process. For instance, researchers with the ability to handle situations during interviews without unnecessarily escalating the situation could attain successful data collection. Besides, good relationship management, right body language, good listening, and collaborative nature are examples of interpersonal skills that could enable the researchers to obtain data from participants successfully. To gain more trust with the participants, I spent enough time to observe and engage with the participants. Morse (2015) explained that researchers could obtain good and rich data for valid results if they extend enough time to observe and engage with their participants. In a qualitative study, measuring the meaning of the answers provided, descriptive data, and specific variables are the key interest of the researcher (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014).

In the telephone interview to ensure flexibility in the interview process, I asked seven semistructured interview questions (see Appendix C). In this study, I interviewed business leaders (participants) of five selected small businesses in the Bronx, New York, to get perspectives of leadership strategies to sustain operations beyond 5 years. Using member checking and feedback-driven exploration technique will enable researchers to prove the validity of the research findings (Birt et al., 2016; Duan et al., 2016). Therefore, I used member checking to ensure clarity of the transcript obtained from the participant's response to the research questions to achieve accuracy and rich thickness in the research findings. I used member checking and the feedback-driven exploration technique. After conducting short follow up interviews, I sent my interpretations of the participants'

responses with the request to member check and authenticate the validity and accuracy of the data collected, I then considered the output of the interview process validated to strengthen the research finding.

In qualitative research, the application of multiple sources of data (data triangulation) can influence data saturation, ensure data reliability, data validity, and accurate research result (Fusch et al., 2018). At the beginning of the interview, I asked participants to send me a copy of company documents like business reports and business plans to enable me to compile multiple source data. In qualitative research, saturation is a method researcher use to discontinue the collection of data (Saunders et al., 2017). When researchers fail to reach data saturation, the quality of the research finding could be affected (Fusch & Ness, 2015). When new information is no longer emerging, and new data is not yielded from the interview, then the researcher is said to have attained data saturation (Boddy, 2016; Morse, 2015). To achieve data saturation during the interview, l continued to recruit participants until it became evident that I achieved data saturation.

Reliability is the extent to which a measurement of a phenomenon provides a stable and consistent result (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). Noble and Smith (2015) claimed that reliability in qualitative research is the ability of the researcher to produce consistent outcomes in the analytical processes and consideration for personal and research method biases that could affect the findings. Reliability enables the researcher to ensure the credibility of their data finding (Srivastava & Misra, 2014). Leung (2015) explained that the rate of dependability, credibility, conformability, and transferability of research results in qualitative research is the validity of the research. Researchers ensure that the

results of their research are accurate and reflect the data in other to achieve validity

(Noble & Smith, 2015). For this study, I used multiple sources to collect data, provided

evidence, and ensured that all participants reviewed my interpretations of the interviews

to achieve validity.

Data Collection Technique

To collect data, qualitative researchers use different techniques (Yin, 2017). Yin

(2017) posited that collecting data involves the gathering of information from research

participants. It is the researcher's responsibility to determine the best method to collect

data in a qualitative research study (Elo et al., 2014). Researchers collect rich and in-

depth data to answer research questions through data collection technique (Wardale et al.,

2015). Interviews and the review of company documents are the key sources through

which researchers collect data in case studies (Landrum & Garza, 2015). The most

common approach to collect data among participants includes in-depth interviews,

company documents, participant's observation, and audio recordings (Marshall &

Rossman, 2016). Therefore, the data collection technique consisted of a review of

company documentation and interview in this study. I used a semistructured interview

format in this study because it was the most appropriate method of obtaining rich data on

participants' experiences. Researchers employ semistructured interviews due to the

available use of already developed questions that enable them to ensure clarification of

responses from participants (Rosenthal, 2016). The advantage of using semistructured

interview is that researchers are given the opportunity to use comfortable setting to

execute interviews with participant interviews (Scheibe et al., 2015). Semistructured

interviews enable researchers to collect data for future research process (Cridland et al., 2015). After I extended an invitation and participants agreed to take part in the research, I began the data collection process, which included several steps. I conducted semistrucured telephone interviews and ensured that the company documents had a relation with my research question: What effective leadership strategies do small business use to sustain their operations beyond 5 years?

An interview serves as the primary method of data collection in a qualitative study (Algozzine & Hancock, 2016). Algozzine and Hancock (2016) noted that interviews offer numerous benefits, including enabling researchers to access a depth of personalized information. After obtaining IRB approval (IRB# 08-17-20-0548916), I began contacting selected small business leaders in the Bronx, New York, to determine their suitability. Doody and Doody (2015) noted that researchers use interview protocols to ensure both ethical and effective interaction for effective time management with the interviewee. Therefore, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix B) to administer the interview process. After I obtained IRB approval (IRB# 08-17-20-0548916) for this study, the next step was to contact the pool of potential participants through email and the objective of the study. I then scheduled a telephone appointment with the participants to analyze the study. I ensured that selected participants are given informed consent form to review and sign, and after receiving the signed consent form, the next step is to schedule the time for each interview. Each participant will receive a copy of the research questions to ensure familiarization and to address their concerns. It was essential to acknowledge that no participant in this study received any form of incentive.

Structured, unstructured, and semistructured are the essential methods researchers can use to conduct interviews (Giudice et al., 2019). Structured interviews enable researchers to achieve a broader sample of participants (Doll, 2017). In a structured interview, the participants do not have the opportunity to explore interview questions in detail (Doll, 2017). In qualitative research, researchers may use unstructured interviews that have no format but contain open-end questions (McTat& Leffler, 2017). McTat and Leffler (2017) added that unstructured interviews allow the researcher and participant to engage in a flow of discussion during the interview period, thereby consuming more time. An unstructured interview is not suitable for this study because researchers and participants can divert from the main topic. In this study, I used semistructured interviews to collect data. Researchers explicitly ask questions regarding key elements of the phenomenon under study using semistructured interviews (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Using a semistructured interview will enable researchers to capture key aspects of the phenomenon and allow flexibility for research participants to share their personality and perspectives in the interview discussion (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). In qualitative research, when researcher's audio-record an interview, they will retrieve essential information they might miss during notetaking (Nordstrom, 2015).

Other data collection techniques considered essential in qualitative research are note-taking of inconsistencies like participants body language, long pauses, and gestures during interview process (Myers & Lampropoulou, 2016) and onsite visits to access companies' documents to ascertain more information regarding the research phenomenon under study (Doll, 2017). Researchers use open-ended questions in combination with

other data collection techniques like semistructured interviews to explore the research

phenomenon in-depth to comprehend and obtain essential data regarding participant's

views (Weller et al., 2018). Participants are not only allowed to indicate their agreement

with the research information collected for the validity of the analysis, but to also ensure

their confidentiality and privacy (Reed et al., 2016). The interview questions (see

Appendix C) attached to the interview protocols (see Appendix B) entails five open-

ended interview questions for data collection. Qualitative researchers need to engage

member checking strategies to achieve accurate interpretation of data collected from the

interview (Birt et al., 2016). To ensure accuracy in this study, I provided my

interpretations of the interview data to each participant to assure the authenticity and

approve the validity and accuracy of the responses gathered during the interview.

Data Organization Technique

Once researchers complete collecting data, the next step is to ascertain the best

method for organizing the data for effective analysis. Moreover, a detailed and well-

organized data regarding a phenomenon will enable researchers to obtain accurate results

(Lienhard & Kettiger, 2017). Researchers use different data organization techniques such

as attaching labels to participant's responses on audio-recordings of interviews to

safeguard the originality of the data collected (Bishop & Kuula-Luumi, 2017; O'Keeffe

et al., 2016). The technique in collecting data in qualitative research is essential for

researchers due to the significant role it plays in analyzing, reviewing, and reporting

interview results accurately (Watkins, 2017; Yin, 2017). Effective data organization

techniques will enable the researcher to easily access all recorded data (Basurto & Speer,

2012). As the instrument of this study, and understood that I was responsible for all data collection and organization, I ensured that each participant's file contained the date and time of the interview, the company document, transcripts from the interviews, and the informed consent. Using a pseudonym for research participants will enable the researcher to maintain confidentiality (Petrova et al., 2016). In this study, I used pseudonyms name such as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 to represent the five participants. For each interview question, I created a file in Microsoft (MS) Word and Excel documents to enable me to categorize and label all transcribed data. For effective data organization, I identified themes by using code numbers to analyze and interpret data. Besides, I adopted a logbook and a backup journal to draft notes during the interview.

NVivo is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) commonly used by researchers to organize data in qualitative research (Birt et al., 2016; Woods et al., 2016). The advantage of using NVivo software is that it enables researchers to retrieve and manage data promptly for analysis. I uploaded collected data on NVivo software to enable me to organize the outcome of the interviews into themes or categories using thematic techniques. In a qualitative study, researchers are required to store transcribed recorded interviews data of participants in a safe place like a personal password-protected and encrypted Cloud Drive for the confidentiality of participants and to keep it safe from fire and any natural hazards (Traynor, 2017). In a qualitative study, researchers are required to store transcribed recorded interview data of participants in a safe place like a password folder on a hard drive for the confidentiality of participants (Traynor, 2017). Researchers use NVivo software to achieve a flexible response and data

analysis through coding and systematic collated data from interviews (Woods et al., 2016). The NVivo software enables researchers to store and code data as well as help in the preservation of participant's confidentiality. I stored the raw data of interviews, journal documents of the interview process, and in a confined security cabinet at home for 5 years to comply with Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirement. From the perspective of the participant's privacy and confidentiality, I secured data from the interview on hard copy, which I locked in a metal cabinet in my room. I stored the electronic data collected version of this research in a Google cloud technology and USB flash drive with a secrete password. I will then delete all electronic data and use a shredding machine to destroy all hard copy files after 5 years.

Data Analysis

Researchers consider data analysis as an essential stage in qualitative research (Raskind et al., 2019). Data analysis is a process of developing data from participants and other sources to determine primary themes, patterns, and descriptions that provide answers to the research question of the study (Yin, 2017). Methodological triangulation is the use of different methods of data collections like interviews. Observations, and reviews of company documents to ensure rich, reliable, and trustworthy of a research finding (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Using methodological triangulation in research can help researchers to ensure that biases that arise from using a single method of data collection are overcome (Noble & Heale, 2019). For data analysis in this study, used methodological triangulation to compare raw data from interviews with data from the review of company documents and observations. The procedure of methodological

triangulation is suitable for reinforcing data verification, validity, and to achieve

conformability (Yin, 2017). After the first field access, observation, interviews, data

collection and transcription, a researcher rigorously analyze data to express lived

experiences of people and to illustrate interventions (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Nowell et

al., 2017; Raskind et al., 2019). Therefore, after observation, interviews, and collecting

data, I prepared field notes and begun the analysis. As a result, I did not wait with the

analysis because it entailed an approach where I moved back and forth between sampling,

data collection, and analysis to achieve rich data and accurate findings in this study.

I used Yin's (2017) five-step data process to analyze data for emergent themes

and patterns. Yin (2017) explained the following five steps to analyze data in qualitative

research: (a) compilation, (b) disassemble, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e)

review the data to conclude. The compiling involves organizing data to create a database

(Yin, 2017). I labelled and compiled data by grouping information from interview

transcripts, company documents, and notes from the interview process base on their

similarities. I then created a centralized database for all information collected and

uploaded them into NVivo software to enable me to Code, organize, and interpret the

data. Researchers use NVivo software to achieve data analysis through coding and

eliminating systematic collated data from interviews (Woods et al., 2016). The NVivo

software enables researchers to store and code data as well as help in the preservation of

participant's confidentiality.

The disassembling procedure is the second step in data analysis, which calls for

breaking down the compiled data into narrative segments (Yin, 2017). Researchers repeat

the disassembling step several times in the form of a trial and error process for testing

codes and accounting for the connection of the first two steps (Yin, 2017). Coding

involves mapping or indexing data to give an overview of disparate information that

enables researchers to make sense of them relative to the research question (Elliott,

2018). I used the formal procedure of coding data as proposed by Yin (2017) to break

down data in this study. I transcribed and coded all recorded audio of the interviews using

NVivo software. According to Yin, using defined codes and computer software enables

researchers to reassign matching ideas from data collected. After coding the words, I

grouped the related words into themes as recommended by Yin.

Reassembling data is the third step in data analysis in qualitative research. At the

reassembling stage, researchers use substantive themes to identify the disassembled

pieces into core grouping and sequences in a more advanced analysis as compared to the

disassembled step (Yin, 2017). During reassembling, researchers need to organize and

sort data like interview transcripts and other relevant documents to create a database

using regrouping as a strategy (Yin, 2017). For instance, coding is an essential part of

data analysis that researchers can use to group participants' responses and other sources

into categories to bring similar ideas and themes together (Cope, 2010) I grouped the data

to identify possible similarities and conflicts.

The fourth step, which Yin (2017) discussed, is interpreting the data. Interpreting

data at this step involves formulating new narratives that could become the central

analytical part of the drafted manuscript, using the reassembled information. Researchers

interpret the reassembled material by drafting narrative reports using tables. Early

interpretation may enable the researcher to recompile the database in a new way (Yin, 2017).

The fifth and last step of data analysis explained by Yin (2017) is reviewing the data to draw a conclusion. This step calls for concluding the entire study after data is reviewed, and the researcher accesses the data connection to the research question (Yin, 2017). To simplify the data analytical process, Rogerson et al. (2016) suggested the use of NVivo software. NVivo is a beneficial tool that enables researchers to identify essential themes, mind mapping, and coding in a study (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). Besides, Zamawe (2015) considered NVivo software as a tool that enables researchers to save time and reduce human errors that are like to occur during manual coding and theme selection. Weighing the pros and cons, I concluded that using NVivo will enable me to collect and analyze data effectively.

Reliability and Validity

In research, while quantitative researchers apply statistical methods to achieve the reliability and validity of research findings, qualitative researchers employ designs and methodological methods to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings (Barnham, 2015). In qualitative research, reliability and validity are critical in obtaining the accuracy and trustworthiness of a study (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Noble & Smith, 2015). Elo et al. (2014) Posited that during collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, researchers ensure thorough and defined procedures. The key elements of reliability and validity are dependability, credibility, transferability, member checking, and confirmability in qualitative research (Bengtsson, 2016; Houghton et al., 2013; Kern, 2016). Bengtsson

(2016) opined that researchers confirm the validity of research in qualitative research through member-checking and methodological triangulation. Conducting qualitative research requires the assurance of confirmability, credibility, and trustworthiness of the study that researchers undertake (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015).

Reliability

Reliability is the consistency with which the finding of the research is obtained (Andrade, 2018). In qualitative studies, researchers obtain reliability by repeating the research questions in a similar setting to participants to achieve consistent results (Shayestefar & Abedi, 2017; Starcher et al., 2018). In qualitative research, reliability is achieved when researchers obtain the same findings using the same method to conduct a study (Elo et al., 2014). Moreover, researchers use measurable, orderly, and repetitive practices to obtain consistent findings to establish dependability so that other users and researchers can replicate the study (Noble & Smith, 2015). Researchers resort to the approach of reliability to enable them to evaluate trustworthiness to reduce the possibility of research outcome biases (Assarroudi et al., 2018). During data collection and analysis, researchers must ensure the reliability of the study by repetitively performing the same data collection and analytical procedure in each case to handle data to avoid biases (Ruel et al., 2016).

During data collection and analysis, I made sure I remained unbiased by using member checking. Researchers can gain feedback by sharing data with participants to allow them to prove-check the interpretation made by the researcher (Yin, 2017). I reviewed the interviews with each participant, transcribed the interview feedback,

interpreted the feedback, and allowed participants to validate the accuracy and validity of the processed documentation. After interviewing each participant, researchers transcribe the audio recording to improve the accuracy of all captured views provided by the participants (Neal et al., 2015). I outlined the process of data collection in the interview protocol (see Appendix B) to obtain the reliability of gathering data in this study. To ensure unbiases, ethical, and confidential results by the researcher, Yazan (2015) suggested the use of NVivo software.

Validity

In a qualitative study, validity entails the effectiveness of an instrument's function (Andrade, 2018). The effectiveness of a research instrument will determine the validity of the research, which is essential to the quality of the research (Andrade, 2018). Internal validity examines whether the way a study was designed, conducted, and analyzed by researchers allows trustworthy answers to the research questions in the research (Andrade, 2018).

Regarding whether the method used by researchers to conduct, design, and analyze can provide trustworthy answers to a research question is examined by internal validity (Andrade, 2018). To achieve the validity of a study in qualitative research, researchers need to use the available body of knowledge (Ellis & Levy, 2009). For researchers to achieve a study's credibility and validity, they need to collect data, interpret data, and provide accurate findings of the participant's view of the study (Yin, 2017).

Researchers can achieve validity by presenting conformability, transferability, dependability, and credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is a strategy used by researchers to explore the accuracy, credibility, transferability, and validity of a study (Birt et al., 2016; Thomas, 2017). I used member checking as a technique to explore the credibility and dependability of the results of the study. Another technique that researchers use to achieve validity in qualitative research is data saturation, which entails the consistency of participant's responses (Birt et al., 2016). Methodological triangulation, which involves the use of several sources of information to validate data from the interview, will help ensure validity in research (Kern, 2016).

In a qualitative study, researchers need to achieve data saturation (Hancock et al., 2016). Researchers will achieve data saturation if they discover the reoccurrence of the same theme, with no new ideas appearing (Lowe et al., 2018). Therefore, during the interview process, I continued interviewing the participants until no new themes emerge in this study. Researchers doubt the quality, validity, and quality of a study when they fail to achieve data saturation.

Transferability

Researchers use transferability to examine whether an observed relationship in the research is generalized to different measurements, persons, setting, and time (Calder et al., 1982). Transferability is the way researchers apply the study's findings to other comparable perspectives (Noble & Smith, 2015). Transferability or applicability is when the findings of a study can fit into its external context situation, and the researcher considers the findings meaningful and transferable into their own experience

(Hammarberg et al., 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015). In qualitative research, researchers meet the standards of transferability when non-participants (readers) understand the meaning of the research findings using their own experiences (Cope, 2014). Researchers achieve some level of transferability if they use a systematic approach to describe the population, the location within the jurisdiction of the study, and the data collection process for individuals to apply to their situations (Morse, 2015). To ensure transferability, researchers need to explain the nature of the population and share information about the boundaries of the population to the participant (Piskur et al., 2017). Therefore, I used a systematic approach to provide information about the participants and the location of the study to comply with the transferability requirement. Moreover, I recorded the procedure, collected, and analyzed accurate data to ensure a credible research finding. In this study, the participants represented the leadership within small businesses who used effective leadership strategies to sustain operations beyond 5 years. The findings of this study might be applied by small business leaders, despite the suggestion by Marshall and Rossman (2016) that readers are the key deciders of transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a strategy researcher use to access the quality of a study (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). Scholars explained that researchers achieve confirmability of a study through audit trail and methodological triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, reviewing the findings of research enables the researcher to achieve confirmability (Brott, 2015). Therefore, the researcher can use the audit process to

confirm that the results of the data collecting process are reasonable, of high quality, and contain no ambiguity (Yilmaz, 2013). Methodological triangulation is the method by which researchers use multiple sources and different techniques and theories to achieve corroborative evidence (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Methodological triangulation enables researchers to minimize bias and crosscheck the accuracy of the participant's response. In qualitative research, an audit trail is a mechanism researcher use to establish the dependability and confirmability of research findings (Bowen, 2009). Audit trails provide the mechanism of ensuring that research concepts, themes, and theories can be seen to have emerged from the data, thereby confirming the findings of the research and grounding them into the evidence (Bowen, 2009). Moreover, researchers use a strict scientific process to conduct research, write down the research procedures, and use rigor approach without the interference of personal biases to maintain confirmability (Trainor & Graue, 2014).

Regarding confirmability, the data that represents the participant's response are detailed descriptions that participants use to explain emerging themes (Cope, 2014). Moreover, in qualitative research, researchers might achieve confirmability by comparing the original data to the conclusion of the study (Alparslan & İçbay, 2017). I used a strict research process to achieve the accuracy of the research data. I used a reflective journal or practice and audit trial to help establish confirmability in this study. Researchers keep reflective journals for future reference (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

Credibility

The way researchers evaluate the actual value, or internal validity is considered the credibility of the study (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Researchers consider credibility as the confidence that they have in the research findings (Macnee & McCabe, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that credibility proves the extent to which research findings stand for plausible information extracted from the initial data and is the right interpretation of the initial expressions of the participant. From the perspective of qualitative research, researchers consider a study to be credible when there is enough description of the context of results, which are recognizable to individuals who share the experience (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

Researchers defend the credibility of their research through practices like reflexivity, triangulation, audit trial, and extensive description of their interpretations (Bowen, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sandelowski, 1986). Anney (2014) proposed that researchers establish rigor description of their study by resorting to credible strategies like member checking, triangulation, interview techniques, and reflexive practice. For instance, researchers might use direct quotations from responses of participants to illustrate as evidence to support their interpretation (Sandelowski, 1986). I defended the credibility of this study in several ways, including the use of data triangulation, interviews, member observation, and documentary analysis.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore effective leadership strategies to sustain small business operations beyond 5 years, using the design of multiple case study and research participants who will provide data during interviews and review of company

documents. Section 2 included a restatement of the purpose statement, the research

method and design, and the justification for eligibility of the participants for this study.

Moreover, I included the choice and justification of the research method and design. In

the next step, I provided detailed information regarding the population sample using

purposeful sampling with five leaders of five small businesses on the base of established

eligibility criteria. Other components in this section included a detailed discussion of the

ethical research, data collection instrument, data collection technique, data organization,

and analysis with more focus on validity and reliability. I continued with the discussion

on dependability, credibility, transferability, data saturation, and confirmability to ensure

reliability and validity.

In the final section, which is section 3 of this study, I gave a brief introduction and

restatement of the purpose statement. After introducing the research topic, I then

provided a detailed discussion on the following: (a) the findings of the study, (b) the

study's application to business practice, (c) the study's implication for social change, and

(d) the recommendations based on the result of the research. I concluded this study by

offering suggestions for future research and my reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore effective leadership strategies that small business leaders used to sustain small business' operations beyond 5 years within the Bronx, New York. Based on the predefined criteria, five small business leaders participated in five distinct individual interviews. I reviewed company documentation and used it as a second type of data to validate the findings from telephone interviews. I discovered five core themes from participants' responses that were associated with successful small business leaders' strategies for sustaining operations after performing data analysis: effective communication, employee performance, motivation, the right leadership, and strategic communication. Some internal drivers like constructive communication, social networking, performance approval, rewards, transformational leadership, and a business plan emerged as the key strategies from the core themes. The findings of this study contributed to improvements in small business leaders' strategies to sustain operations beyond 5 years.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: What effective leadership strategies do small business leaders use to sustain their operations beyond 5 years? I conducted semistructured interviews and reviewed company documents to gain an in-depth understanding of the effective leadership strategies small business leaders use to sustain operation beyond 5 years. These findings aligned with some the literature themes in Section 1. Table1 indicates the frequency of occurrence of the core themes.

Table 1

Frequency of Core Themes on Effective Leadership Strategies to Sustain Small

Businesses

Core themes	Frequency of occurrence
Effective communication	19
Employee performance	24
Motivation and rewards	22
Right leadership	19
Strategic planning	10

The study findings revealed that effective leadership strategies enable small business leaders to sustain operations beyond 5 years. Regarding the review of company documents, the study findings aligned with the effective leadership strategies small business leaders use to sustain operations beyond 5 years. The study also aligned with Chamberlain's (2010) theory of strategy and Burns's (1978) leadership theory.

Theme 1: Effective Communication

Effective communication emerged from the analyzed data as an effective leadership strategy that small business leaders use to sustain operations beyond 5 years. Effective communication is a strategy that will enable business leaders to express the organization's cultural understanding, listen to business partners and employees, manage meetings, and provide training for employees. Leaders of small businesses can achieve their obligations by motivating and inspiring employees to perform their duties to achieve

the business's sustainable goals through effective communication (Luthra & Dahiya,

2015). Table 2 includes the subthemes relevant to effective communication.

Table 2

Subtheme of Effective Communication

Subtheme	Frequency	Percentage of occurrence
Communication technology	7	37%
Constructive communication	7	37%
Social networking	3	16%
Feedback	2	11%

Participants discussed effective communication 19 times. Within this theme, the

participants discussed communication technology, constructive communication, social

networking, and feedback. In the business world, effective communication strategies are

essential at the higher level of leadership to interact with external partners, influence

employee relations, and communicate in a time of challenges. Small business leaders

with effective communication strategies can encourage employees and customers to win

their trust in the organization. All the participants indicated that they used effective

communication as a strategy to sustain operations. This study's findings revealed that

effective communication among leaders, employees, and customers are essential factors

in sustaining small business operations beyond 5 years. All the participants indicated that

small businesses are leaders, employees, and customer-based organizations, and

managing effective communications among leaders, employees, customers, and other

stakeholders in the organization is an effective leadership strategy in communicating in small businesses. According to P1, business leaders develop their communication system by offering writing and speech skills training to their employees to ensure smooth and appropriate communication within the company: "We ensure the expressing of cultural understandings, carefully speaking, and listening to individuals both inside and outside our organization."P2 and P3 also indicated they inspired their employees and other organization stakeholders by using the right dialogues and channels to share information within the organization. P4 reflected that managers who regularly use multiple communication strategies could carry appropriate information, get feedback, and motivate employees to act. P5 noted that business leaders boost their business sustainability by focusing on frequent communication among their employees, customers, and other stakeholders.

The adoption and use of communication technology were essential issues that all participants raised and discussed during my interview session. For example, P1 noted the following: "Because we are using communication technology, the efficiency and effectiveness of our business processes has been improved, thereby transforming our business plans to reality." Similarly, P2 stated that leaders of small businesses who want to survive in the New York business environment need to adapt communication technology. Moreover, P3, P4, and P5 agreed that the adaption and use of communication technology have helped them achieve growth by becoming more efficient, effective, innovative, and competitive in the Bronx area. According to P3, "Our business leaders have relied on communication technology for almost every aspect of our operations. We

use social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter as valuable business communication tools.""Our leadership has recently adapted information technology development in our accounting, marketing, and communication sections. We are now using accounting software like QuickBooks to assist them in creating a financial statement to reduce errors and increase management's decision-making," explained P4. P5 added, "In my quest to increase productivity for the organization, I used information technology as operational methods in the workplace. Using the internet, social networking, and smartphones enabled us to improve communication and increase productivity in our business." In response to Interview Question 1, P4 explained, "I have a strong belief that information and communication technology increase the business efficiency." According to P4, communication technology enables business leaders to make effective decisions regarding business opportunities. P5 agreed that small business leaders consider using communication technology as a tool to compete and grow.

In response to Interview Question 3, participants agreed that constructive communication is an element of effective communication. P1 posited that using constructive communication within the business environment will foster good relationships and understanding between top management and individuals. P1 added, "Because we use constructive communication, our leaders can avoid miscommunication and prevent potential conflicts promptly." P2 said they adapted the rule of constructive communication in their business environment, which helped them prevent unwanted personal conflicts and find ways to change disagreements into strategies for growth: "Under our constructive communication strategy, we motivate the individuals in the

organization to be open-minded and ready to respect other people's views." P3 answered, "I believe that potential conflicts with my client and other business partners can escalate from minor to major problems if I apply deconstructive communication strategies." P3 also posited that business leaders could benefit from communicating constructively with their employees and business partners. "Using meaningful non-verbal communication, statements, and remaining calm has always been the way forward whenever I aim for constructive communication," P3 concluded.

P4 stated that effective listening is an essential element of effective communication in any business environment. P4 reported, "I benefited more from every conversation with my employees and customers, particularly when I concentrate and used positive body language to foster effective listening." P5 stated that they sometimes organize workshops on communicative skills for their employees. P5 postulated, "Good communicative skills help employees to express themselves and create a fruitful and enjoyable relationship among people within our business environment."

Responding to interview question 5, P1 narrated that open and objective communication enhances commitment in the organization. P2 said, "Stating your goals clearly, using the right tone of your purpose, and keeping the language simple will make your writing communication effective." Participants' responses to interview questions 1-5 revealed that good communication is an effective leadership strategy for sustaining small business operations. Four of the five small business leaders who participated in this study confirmed using effective communication as a strategy to maintain their business operations. P2, P3, P4, and P5 statements were consistent with Luthra and Dahiya's

(2015) findings that leaders of small businesses can achieve their obligations through effective communication by motivating and inspiring employees to perform their duties to achieve sustainable goals of the company.

Theme 2: Assessing Employees Performance

The periodic review of employees' performance offers essential benefits to small business. Assessing employee performance helps business leaders enhance the organization's productivity by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the task's expectation (Hee et al., 2019). Hee et al. (2019) posited that assessing employee performance ensures quality productivity in the organization. Collis and Montgomery (1995) advised business leaders to focus on effective employee performance because it substantially affects organizational performance. Employee performance is closely related to the results of each employee's work in an organization or company (Kuswati, 2020). Kuswati (2020) posited that the achievement of employee performance in any business organization is determined by the leader's ability to lead, foster, and direct employees in carrying out their duties. The statements of four of the participants were consistent with the findings of Hee et al., Kuswati, and Collis and Montgomery that assessing employee performance ensures quality productivity which substantially effects organizational growth. Table 3 includes the subthemes for assessing employees' performance.

Table 3

Subtheme of Assessment of Employee Performance

Subtheme	Frequency	Percentage of occurrence
Performance appraisal	8	33%
Feedback	6	25%
Self-evaluation	4	17%
Scale rating	3	13%
Checklist	3	13%

Participants discussed effective communication 24 times. Within this theme, the participants discussed performance appraisal, feedback, scale rating, and check list. The theme assessing employee performance emerged from interview questions 1, 2, 3, and 5. All the participants indicated that assessing employee performance will give the leaders an insight into how well the employees are performing and committed to performing their tasks. In response to Interview Question 1, P1 posited that using performance appraisal to assess subordinate's performance foster the success of a business. P1 added that performance appraisal guideline is designed for both our leadership and employees and provides critical information and best practices for receiving and giving monthly performance appraisals. P1 explained that giving employees the opportunity to self-evaluate themselves will help business leaders to identify the employee's weaknesses and strengths and to help them improve on the job performance. P1 noted, "We used a 360-feedback system and a scale of 1-5 or A to Z to receive feedback from our employees, manager, colleagues, and supervisors." P2 reported, "We take feedback system seriously in this organization. We allow each employee to understand that their feedbacks play

essential role in the sustainability of our company." P2 stated that organizational leaders

highly regard the feedback strategy because it ensures efficiency in production, high

revenue, and profit-making, leading to the organization's success. P3 postulated, "We

adopt a graphic rating scale where we use sequential numbers like 1 to 10 to rate

employees' performance in a section of the business." P3 suggested that employees like

working where they will get the opportunity to evaluate themselves or request feedback

from their managers. P3 stated, "We use a simple checklist of yes or no to identify

employees' weaknesses on the job assigned. This strategy helps us to identify employees

who need additional training to become more efficient." P4 said they used performance

appraisals such as graphic scale rating, checklist, and self-evaluation to assess their

employees' performance frequently instead of the yearly base, which helps their

leadership identify challenges at the early stage.

In response to Interview Question 3, participants indicated that the nature of

leadership styles they used determined their employees' performance levels. According

to P1, leaders can enhance employee performance by investigating their work

engagement, resulting in business growth. P2 narrated, "Besides emphasizing on the

importance of our mission, strategies, training, and development in attaining

sustainability in our organization, we also consider the people in the organization itself as

the main factor in achieving success." P2 said they played a vital role in influencing

employee engagement and assessment, which eventually led to better employee

performance. P2 said they appraised the performance of their employees to foster

commitment towards the company's sustainability. P3 noted that small business leaders

motivate employees to foster their desire to sacrifice beyond expectation by bring their capabilities to the businesses' success.

Responding to interview question 5, P4 said strategic leadership fosters a unique relation between organizational leaders and employees to influence employee performance. According to P4, business leaders are interested in assessing their employees' performance for effective use of human resources in the organization. P4 explained that organizational leaders conduct employee evaluation regularly to help employees understand their duties, foster communication between managers and employees, and offer employees the appropriate recognition for their commitment. P4 postulated, "When we evaluate our employees' performance, it enables us to yield positive energy and perception, leading to effective and efficient performance." In response to Interview Question 5, P5 explained that business leaders must use formal performance appraisal by adopting a system to occasionally and systematically assess their employees' performance: "Teamwork is a good leadership strategy that helped us run our business for all these years." P5 shared, "Considering all my employees as important team members are the most effective leadership strategy." As applied in this study, the participants' responses aligned with the assertions of Hee et al. (2019)and Collis and Montgomery (1995) that business leaders use the assessment of employee performance as a strategy to sustain operations.

Theme 3: Motivation and Recognition

Inspirational motivation is when leaders articulate the organizational vision in an appealing and inspiring way to followers (Burns, 1978). Deressa and Zeru (2019) posited

that different motivators drive the needs of employees. Therefore, every organization's leaders must understand the factors that motivate employees to maximize the organization (Afolabi et al., 2018). Employee rewards and recognition play a critical role, and organizational leaders must use it to enhance employee motivation (Hussain et al., 2019). Reward and motivation can strengthen employee commitment which may lead to improved organizational performance (Siswanto et al., 2021). Employee recognition is the effort by organizational leaders to appreciate employees as a response to their specific actions (Ndungu, 2017).Corporate leaders must recognize their employees to keep their self-esteem high and keep them passionate. When organizational leaders recognize employees, they are motivated to perform well to achieve their goals and boost employee morale, resulting in the organization's overall sustainability (Hussain et al., 2019). Employee recognition enables business leaders to boost employees' motivation as employees will obtain something in return for their achievements or contributions to the organization (Tirta &Enrika, 2020). Recognition fosters employee retention within the organization, enabling the organization to achieve its long-term goals (Tirta & Enrika, 2020).All the research participants corroborated Afolabi et al. 's and Hussain et al. 's statements that motivation, employee rewards, and recognition are effective leadership strategies that business leaders can employ to sustain their business operations. Table 4 includes subthemes for motivation and recognition**.**

Table 4

Subtheme of Motivation and Recognition

Subtheme	Frequency	Percentage of occurrence
Monetary reward	10	45%
Non-Monetary reward	12	55%

Participants discussed motivation and recognition 24 times. Within this core theme, participants discussed monetary rewards and non-monetary rewards. The theme motivation and recognition emerged from interview questions 1 and 5. All the participants indicated that they used motivation and recognition as leadership strategies to sustain their business operations. In response to Interview Question 1, P1 indicated that using monetary and non-monetary reward systems is the most effective strategy to motivate employees to discharge their duties.P1 revealed, "Monetary rewards like salary increment, annual or semi-annual bonuses, and profit-sharing plans are great for encouraging healthy competition among employees concerning performance and sustainability." P2 noted, "offering monetary incentives can boost employees' morale and make them give out the best in them for the company." P2 added that they introduced a reward system to motivate employees to perform their duties. P3 acknowledged that their company's leadership stimulated and motivated employees by allowing them to be responsible team players, ensure job satisfaction, recognition, and opportunities to achieve growth and advancement. Individual consideration is the extent to which the leader attends to their followers' needs and grand them the audience for their concerns and needs (Bass, 1985).

According to Bass (1985), leaders use contingent rewards to motivate their followers via conditioned rewards to lure them into acting in the leader's favor supports this study's findings on motivation and recognition. Responding to Interview question 5, all the participants indicated that motivation and recognition are effective strategies to influence employee's performance and that rewards, compensation, and benefits are incentives to motivate employees to actively commit to their organizations. P1 said,

> We created a sense of belongingness, friendship, and love for all our employees to satisfy their social needs. We ensure that the physiological needs like based salaries and fair working conditions are promptly provided in our company.

Transactional leaders concentrate on the short-term physical and safety needs of followers within the context of rewards and performance (Sirin et al., 2018). P2 reported, "Providing the safety needs can boost employee's morale and motivation and make them give out the best in them for the company." P2 said, "One of the strategies for sustaining small business operation is by offering safety needs such as work safety, job security, and health insurance benefits or attractive compensation that commensurate employee' experience contribution." Participants 3 and 4 agreed that an incentive package that motivates and recognizes employee performance is a leadership strategy for sustainable business operation. Small businesses should adopt an employee benefits package that can inspire employees and influence their decision to give out their best in the organization (Kabeyi, 2018). P3 was of the view that small business leaders should consider self-actualization needs as an essential motivator of employees. P3 said,

We must create opportunities for our employees to reach their full potentials to

contribute to our company's sustainability. Small business leaders must recognize

their employees' worth, capabilities and ensure their growth at the workplace.

P4 indicated that when business leaders offer attractive salary, good working condition,

work safety, job security, and health insurance benefits they will boost employee

motivation level. According to P4,self-esteem needs of employees are good motivational

factors.P5 added, "After employees attain some level of work experience, our leaders

give them the recognition they deserve by offering them promotions."P5 reported, "I

adopted a total reward policy to define my leadership strategy to motivate, recognize, and

engage my employees." According to P5,

> As a small business leader, my goal is to sustain operation beyond 5 years. Most
>
> of my employees have been with me for a long time because of their fair
>
> compensation. Besides paying my employees for their rendered services, I give
>
> them fixed and variable pay tied to the rate of their performance.

Employee recognition plays a critical role, and organizational leaders can use it to

motivate employees (Hussain et al., 2019). P5 concluded, "I gave recognition to my

employees by adopting programs that acknowledged the performance of my employees.

These programs supported my leadership strategies to sustain operations by encouraging

behaviors that contributed to the success of my business."

As applied in this study, the participants' responses aligned with the assertions of

Hussain et al. (2019), Afolabi et al. (2018), and Deressa and Zeru (2019) that

encouraging motivation and recognition are effective leadership that small business leaders use to sustain operations.

Theme 4: Implementing the Right Leadership

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was implementing the right leadership. Leadership is the main factor that most business organizations use to accomplish their goals (Ghazzawi et al., 2017). Using effective leadership approach is critical for business sustainability and considered a human capital priority for many business leaders (Tobin, 2019). According to Popli and Rizvi (2017), applying the right leadership style can enable business leaders to direct employees and move the business in the right direction, thus improving business sustainability. The findings of this study were consistent with the findings of Ghazzawi et al. (2017) and Popli and Rizvi (2017) that the right leadership is one effective strategy and a significant determinant of any business organization's success. All the participants acknowledged the necessity and the use of the right leadership style as practical strategies to sustain their business operations. Table 5 includes the subthemes of the right leadership.

Table 5

Subtheme of The Right Leadership

Subtheme	Frequency	Percentage of occurrence
Honesty and integrity	5	26%
Transformational leadership	5	26%
Vision	6	32%

| Good communication | 3 | 16% |

Participants discussed the right leadership 19 times. Participants discussed honesty and integrity, transformational leadership, vision, and good communication within this core theme. The theme of implementing the right leadership emerged from interview questions 3 and 5. In response to interview question 3, P1 said they do not remember using a single leadership style to manage their employees. However, P1 said they studied each of their employees and tried to know the communication style that fits them to set them up for my business success effectively. P1 explained that using strong communication enabled their leadership to inspire and stimulate subordinates, and this, I consider a great leadership strategy. According to P1,

it is essential for small business leaders to I hold their employee's accountable to the principles of honesty and integrity. P1 explained that "the culture of honesty and integrity begins with top leaders who must ensure that their subordinates exhibit the most acceptable behaviors."P1 mentioned that "holding employees accountable to principles of honesty and integrity is an organizational core values that serve as the foundation for growth and create the opportunity for business leaders to succeed in the long term."P2 stated that leadership by trust focuses on trustful behavior towards employees. P2 stated,

On ethical conduct, we focus on trust at higher standard, and by this, we won our subordinates' trust. I am human; although hard to do, I must admit my mistakes. I believe that my honesty and trustworthiness make me the right leader for my company.

According to P2, what makes their management style transformational is that they focus

on creating an environment that supports innovation. "By engaging in this leadership

strategy, we can push our employees to reach stretch goals," P2 said. "For this reason,

they offer training to their organization's managers to improve their skills to become

change leaders. In my view, this is the strategies any leader can employ to achieve their

goals," P2 concluded. P3 said, **"a** vision is an essential means for leaders for focusing

attention on what matters most; what leaders want to accomplish and what kind of leaders

they wish to be." P3 indicated that a good vision must be rooted in your past, address the

future, and deal with today's realities. P3 said, "our vision represents who we are and

what we stand for." P2 posited that communication training effectively increases business

leaders' ability to communicate their vision and establish clear goals for the company and

ensure the effective execution of those goals.

Responding to the same question, P3 said leaders transforming strategies could

help any organization to establish a good working relationship between managers and

other members of the organization, which can, in turn, ensure high morale and

motivation. P3 also added that most employees become demotivated in an organization

due to the bad leadership. P3 said it is essential for small business leaders to

occasionally meet their employees and stakeholders to interact and discuss with them any

issues they are facing and help them resolve the problem. P3 shared,

> being inspirational and persuasive and using good communication skills to discuss
>
> challenges and other important issues with employees is a good leadership

quality. Because our leaders are truthful, it is easy for them to influence workers through effective communication.

According to P3, "being that we are in a competitive market that changes regularly, our leaders resorted to transforming the entire business adaptability, and problem-solving innovation strategies." Kabeyi (2018) posited that transactional leaders always show the zeal to give followers something in return for executing their responsibilities. "Our management style enabled leaders in our business to deal with supervision and ensured group performance," explained P3. P3 added, "As a leader, I always visit the new product team and challenge them with tough questions until I am convinced that these employees were doing the right thing."P4 said they played significant roles in shaping the working behavior and attitudes of subordinates by focusing on the part of a leader as a motivator." P4 explained, "I offer the people who work for me the chance to change, transform and, by so doing, develop themselves as contributors, and I believe it is this that helped me to achieve the best leadership outcome." P4 said: "Organizational leaders used transformational style to encourage, inspired, and motivated to create change that brought growth and success." P4 added that their business leaders achieved their goals by using a transformational leadership style. P4 continued that leaders of their organizations give their employees more room to be creative and be prepared to become transformational leaders through mentorship and training. P5 explained that their leaders set the pace and focus on high standard performance and hold their employees accountable for achieving their goals.

Effective leadership and resource management determine an organization's success and sustainability (Lubguban, 2020). To adapt to the rapidly changing business environment, organizations will need the right leaders who can lead to achieve their business goals (Lubguban, 2020). Generally, the right leaders employ strategies that best fit the organizational culture to improve employee performance (Udovita, 2020).In response to interview question 5, P1 said, "I find it difficult to explain exactly how each strategy had a direct impact on our business goals. But I kept in mind that my responsibility as the supervisor was to influence, engage, and encourage employees to work for a common goal." P1 expanded, "We are growing now because I had a vivid vision for our business future, mobilized my employees, and made appropriate decisions." P2 explained,

> One strategy that helped me a lot was the use of replacements. I engaged my employees to perform some of the tasks I have previously performed myself over the years. Using virtual employees and software services in this era of COVID-19 pandemic was a good strategy for my business.

P3 said he or she delegated others to handle tasks necessary to keep the business rolling, and by so doing, I saw other people as team members who contributed to the decision-making process. P4 said, "The big picture of my leadership goal for this small business is planning a vision, motivating employees to engage with that vision, ensuring the delivery of my vision, and training my employees to achieve our vision." "This is extra information about leadership strategies we use to improve our business," explained P4. P5 shared, "Regardless of the experience or competence level of our new workers, our

leadership ensure their happiness and commitment and provide specific direction and closely monitors task accomplishments."

Theme 5: Strategic Planning

The interviews revealed that P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 used strategic planning as an effective leadership strategy for sustaining business operations. A strategic plan enables organizational leaders to record their mission, vision, values, and long-term goals (Thompson et al., 2012).Strategic plans will enable small business leaders to improve their performance (AlQershi, 2021). Organizational leaders must ensure that the strategic plan is flexible and adapts to a changing situation (Thomas, 2021).All the participants agreed that a strategic business plan enables organizational leaders to achieve their long-term sustainability goals. The participants reported that they did have a strategic business plan at the start-up of their business and learned from trial and error and suggestions of bankers and business consultants who helped launch the initial business plans. P2 said that providing a complete sense of direction for a business will enable business leaders to sustain the operation. P2 added that knowing the direction a company is heading in the short or long term is essential for business sustainability because leaders could keep up to date in the competitive business environment.P1 explained,

> One element that played an essential role in our strategic planning is the purpose and mission statement. Small business leaders need to state the type and purpose of the business they intend to operate and the difference they intend to bring in the mission statement.

P2 said, "Since customers like to compare prices in the market, our leadership had to engage a price war with other small businesses by ensuring the lowest per-unit cost for our products at a profitable level." Table 6 includes the subthemes relevant to strategic planning.

Table 6

Subtheme of Strategic Planning

Subtheme	Frequency	Percentage of occurrence
Vision and mission	6	60%
Business plan	4	40%

The total frequency in the discussion of the strategic planning core theme is ten. The subthemes were Vision and mission, and business plan. P3 explained that a vision and mission communicate about a company's enabling leadership to understand their duties and both the current and future benefits.P3 indicated, "our vision states the expected result of sustainable operations of our business, the process of achievement our vision is stated in mission." A strategic plan is the awareness of actions that the leader intends to meet or the guideline to deal with a situation in an organization (Mintzberg, 1987). According to P3, business leaders must first analyze their current strategic position and understand their environment to identify their strengths and weaknesses before starting a strategic plan. P3 added, "I spend valuable time to identify where I want to take the business and how to get help to reduce and manage risks." P4 and P5 agreed that business leaders need to formulate strategies as their businesses become complex to

sustain growth. According to P4, business leaders must keep their business developing by collecting and analyzing a broad range of information.

In response to interview questions 4 and 5, participants agreed that business leaders must formulate and manage a strategic plan. "Small business leaders need to first identify their strategic position in the competitive market before developing a strategic plan. The leader must also identify the mission statement, vision, and potential risk that may be associated with the plan." P1 stated. P1 added, "Strategic plans enable small business leaders to minimize economic uncertainties as they provide essential information about competitors and business trends." P1 reported, "Strategic plans are the basis for better decision-making to bring business activities into perspectives." P2 and P4 agreed that strategic plans play a role in business growth. P2 and P4 opined that a business organization might benefit from implementing an effective strategic plan regardless of its size. P2 noted that business leaders who fail to plan for their businesses in advance might not meet their survival goals. P2 and P4 acknowledged that their business growth rate increased after they engaged the services of business consultants who advised them to focus on strategic planning values and promote the effective use of resources, quick decision making, and rapid identification of steps to achieve sustainability.

P4 posited that when formulating a strategic plan, it is essential that business leaders involve a mix of creative thinkers and those with a solid grasp of the strategic planning process. Further, P4 accepted strong opinions from professionals like accountants, department heads, board members, customers, clients, advisors, and

consultants to formulate a comprehensive strategic plan. P4 mentioned that "letting everyone in the team know their duties is a strategy that small business leaders use to direct their employees." For example, P4 often holds monthly meetings with the strategic team to ensure that their performance is in line with the strategic plan. Although business leaders are responsible for strategic planning, P4 and P5 agreed that some experienced individuals could help the leader identify possible internal and external factors favorable to achieving their long-term goals. P5 concluded that using a business plan gave them a sense of direction to survive among numerous competitors.

Correlating the Findings to the Conceptual Framework

I explored the phenomenon to complete my study through the lens of transformational leadership theory, strategy theory, and the system theory. Bass (1985) explained that charisma, inspirational leadership, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation are dimensions of transformational leadership. All the participants agreed that a strategic business plan enables business leaders to achieve their long-term sustainability goals. Theme 5 (strategic planning) relates to transformational leadership theory. The findings of this study confirmed that a strategic business plan enables organizational leaders to achieve their long-term sustainability goals. Transformational leaders forecast the organization into the future by designing a positive perspective of what the organization can become and provide emotional support during the transition process (Burns, 1978). The objective of both strategic planning and transformational leadership is to anticipate the future. Like strategic planning, transformational leadership is vision-driven, emphasizing communication, vision, self-confidence, and inner strength.

A leader with an idea and a well-developed strategic plan can overcome the problems and uncertainties that the organization will face and make opportunities available to both the organization and its members. The theory of strategy was the second conceptual framework for this study. The information obtained from the participants further aligned with Chamberlain (2010) theory of Strategy which asserted that competent leaders could use the six strategic processes to sustain business operations. Moreover, the theory of strategy may help small business leaders to engage in plans and create opportunities to evaluate their priorities, thereby offering those small businesses the potential to achieve their objectives (Chamberlain, 2010).

The literature relates to the findings of the study which revealed that small business leaders strategic planning fosters the effective use of resources and help them to achieve their long-term sustainability goals. The finding is in tune with that of Giles's (1991) which suggested that competent leaders could use the strategic plan to sustain business operations. Strategic planning involves an analysis of an organization's mandate, mission, and vision and an analysis of an organization's internal and external environment, identifying strategic challenges based on these analyses and specifying strategies to address these challenges (Bryson, 2018). A strategic plan enables organizational leaders to record their mission, vision, values, and long-term goals (Thompson et al., 2012). Small business leaders should also be encouraged to develop their strategic planning to improve their performance (AlQershi, 2021). A strategic plan enables organizational leaders to recognize the significance of matching available resources to opportunities (Thomas, 2021).Through a plan, the leader's intended actions

may become unified, comprehensive, and purposefully planned to ensure that their organization's goals are achieved (Mintzberg, 1987). As the leaders discussed effective strategies used to sustain their operation, most of them identified the significance of formulating and implementing strategic business plans. All the participants reported that they did have a strategic business plan at the start-up of their business and learned from trial and error and suggestions of bankers and business consultants who helped launch the initial business plan and strategies. Felix et al. (2019) stated that transformational leaders' appeal to employees' ideas and morals might help small businesses achieve their strategic goals. Transformational leaders strategically envision the future, build an enthusiastic team spirit, and create employees' commitment to the organization's vision that blends the strategic business plan (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Notwithstanding, participants' responses suggested a little relationship between a business plan and performance improvement.

Transformational leadership theory aligns with the participants' responses regarding the implementation of the right leadership. Thus, transformational leaders can positively influence followers' performance (Kazmi et al., 2016). Participants acknowledged the necessity and use of the right and effective leadership style as effective strategy to sustain their business operations. Burns (1978) argued that transformational leaders use inspirational and visionary techniques to motivate subordinates to achieve specific goals. According to Burns (1978). The study findings support those of Tobin (2019) that applying the right and effective leadership style is essential for business sustainability and considered a human capital priority for many business leaders.

Transformational leadership theory will enable small business leaders to understand

effective leadership strategies to sustain operation beyond 5 years. Transformational

leadership is a significant predictor of organizational performance (Jing, 2017) and job

satisfaction (Aydogmus et al., 2018).

The *implementing the right leadership* theme directly relates to the Von

Bertalanffy's (1950) system theory, which elaborated how external and internal

environments coexist within a system and how each of these environments influences the

other's responses and general stimuli of given circumstances. The system theory is

comparable to a whole business, which has interconnected moving parts that have

relations with other parts (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). Furthermore, the systems theory is the

process in which people may apply their knowledge to a firm as a whole and understand

the relationship between the parts (Perdicoúlis (2016). In the context of small business,

when leaders use the system theory it will enable them to sustain operations beyond 5

years through effective business structure and profit maximization. For a small business

to sustain operations, the leader needs to comprehend all the functioning sections and

bring different functions together to complement each other. Implementing the right

leadership is one effective strategy and a significant determinant of any business

organization's success (Ghazzawi, et al. 2017). In general, applying the right and

effective leadership style is essential for business sustainability, and considered a human

capital priority for many business leaders (Tobin, 2019). The right leaders bring the

needed changes to strategy, vision, and culture of the business organization (Tabassi et

al., 2016). Effective leadership and resource management determine an organization's

success and sustainability (Lubguban, 2020). To adapt to the rapidly changing business environment, organizations will need the right leaders who can lead them to achieve their sustainability goal (Lubguban, 2020). Aboramadan and Dahleez (2020) posited that transformational leadership comprises charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and personal recognition.

Intellectual stimulation is component of transformational leadership theory, which uses communication to motivate and arouse followers' emotions (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership theory helps in furthering effective communication through constant interaction with subordinates in the organization as it supports participants' responses on effective communication (Burns, 1978). Therefore, using effective communication will enable transformational leaders to influence employees to discharge their duties effectively. Moreover, this study indicated that small business leaders who practiced transformational leadership use effective communication strategies to sustain operations. This study's findings showed that transformational leaders' effective communication strategies to sustain operations are communication technology, constructive communication, networking, and feedback.

The literature further aligns with participants' responses regarding effective communication. Effective communication in a business environment is an essential leadership skill (Marsen, 2019). Using effective communication, transformational leaders can influence employees' motivation through their actions (Rijal, 2016). Smalley et al. (2016) explained that being accountable, taking responsibility, learning, and adapting to change, along with effective communication, are some of the essential leadership skills.

Therefore, communication skills are not the only crucial skills for effective leadership. Effective communication among leaders, employees, and customers are essential factors in sustaining small business operations beyond 5 years. Wang et al. (2016) found that transformational leadership style has a positive relationship with effective communication. The study capitulated similarities in the leader communication strategies which are consistent with transformational leadership theory that the participants used to sustain their business operations. Small business leaders engage their subordinates meaningfully through direct and honest communication, constructive feedback, and communication technology. Employees and other services providers professionally engage one another through direct and effective communication, which are some of the tenets of transformational leadership theory, which leaders employ as effective strategies. All the participants favored communication as an effective leadership strategy.

Burns (1978) transformational leadership theory aligns with participants' views on employee motivation and recognition. Transformational leaders foster the motivation level of those they lead (Burns, 1978). For example, Burns (1978) linked motivation and reward to employee performance, suggesting that motivation and rewards can influence subordinates to excel beyond their expectations. According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees through 4 dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and personal considerations. Orabi (2016) noted that the leadership dimensions are the specific channels through which transformational leaders act to ensure motivation among followers.

Thus, small business leaders can motivate their employees to perform their tasks without coercion to voluntarily behave and act according to the business through motivation and rewards. The results of this study showed that small business leaders who practiced transformational leadership used motivation and recognition as leadership strategies to influence employee's performance for improved outcomes. This research yielded similarities in the small business leader motivation and recognition strategies that the participants used to influence employee's performance. One emergence similarity is motivation, which is consistent with Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory and motivation strategies present in the existing literature.

The body of the literature supported the theme that motivation and recognition can foster the sustenance of small business operations. The findings of this study showed that motivation strategies used by small business leaders for improving employee's motivation are monetary and non-monetary rewards. The responses from all the participants and information retrieved from company documentation showed characteristics of transformational leadership theory, the use of motivation and reward strategies which positively fosters employee's motivation. The findings of this study confirmed and extended the knowledge of the influence of the leader's motivation and reward on employee's motivation as follows: Employees are positively influenced by their leaders when their leaders reward them. The practice of using rewards to influence employees has a significant relation with organizational performance. Rewards can be in the form of financial or non-financial material. Burns (1978) considered inspirational motivation as the extern to which leaders articulate the organizational vision in an

appealing and inspiring way to followers. Transformational Leaders' inspirational motivation plays a role in building trust and followers' satisfaction (Rawung et al., 2015). Rawung et al. (2015) posited that inspirational motivation enables leaders to serve the foundation for sharing knowledge that leaders consider as the most critical component to ensure organizational success.

In the literature review, Naile and Selesho (2014) noted that organizational leaders influence employees' behavior and through motivation and recognition to foster sustainability of the business (Naile & Selesho, 2014). All the participants agreed that they used motivation and recognition as leadership strategy to sustain their business operations and that poor performance at their workplaces was caused due to lack of motivation and rewards among their employees. Motivation and recognition can strengthen employee commitment which may lead to improved organizational performance (Siswanto et al., 2021). Motivation and recognition can strengthen employee commitment which may lead to improved organizational performance (Siswanto et al., 2021). Recognition fosters employee retention within the organization, enabling the organization to achieve its long-term goals (Tirta & Enrika, 2020).Motivated employees in small business can help leaders to achieve their organizational goals because successful leaders influence employees to help accomplish their organizational goals. One essential part of leader's motivation is helping their employees to accomplish their personal and career goals (Naile & Selesho, 2014). Also, leaders influence their employees' behavior through effective communication, motivation, rewards, and discipline.

The respondents' recommendations are in line with the body of literature that assessing employee performance will give business leaders an insight into how well the employees are performing and committed to performing their tasks, which may improve organizational sustainability. Assessing employee performance is very important because it enables organizational leaders to see how employees can support the organization's goals (Al-Amin, 2017).Collis and Montgomery (1995) advised business leaders to focus on effective employee performance because it substantially affects organizational performance. The *assessing employees performance* theme directly relates to the transformational leadership theory, in which Burns (1978) explained that transformational leaders use intellectual stimulations to stimulate followers to assess their ways of working and convey the high performance expectations and quality work demands from their followers. Employee performance is closely related to the results of each employee's work in an organization or company (Kuswati, 2020). Kuswati (2020) posited that the achievement of employee performance in any business organization is determined by the leader's ability to lead, foster, and direct employees in carrying out their duties. Moreover, effective employee performance can enable business leaders to generate more revenue to advance their business sustainability (Li et al., 2020).The study's findings support those of Hee et al. (2019), Kuswati(2020), and Li et al. (2020) that assessing employee performance ensures follower's task performance and quality productivity in the organization. By using performance appraisal as all the participants indicated, small business leaders can assess subordinate's performance, which may foster the sustainability of a business.

Applications to Professional Practice

This research's findings are potentially essential to organization leaders in numerous ways. Small businesses continue to confront challenges that hinder their economic growth and survival rate (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). Andrews (1971) explained that it is essential for business leaders to embark on effective strategies to sustain growth. This study's findings indicated that leadership and strategic planning are significant determinants of any business organization's success. Transformational leaders create commitment by enticing and appealing to others to motivate their morals (Burns, 1978). Chamberlain (2010) posited that a strategy might help small business leaders to engage in plans and create opportunities to evaluate their priorities, thereby offering those small businesses the potential to achieve their objectives (Chamberlain, 2010). Because leadership is the main factor that most business organizations use to accomplish their goals (Ghazzawi et al., 2017), applying the right leadership style can enable business leaders to direct employees and move the business in the right direction, thus improving business sustainability (Popli & Rizvi, 2017).

The five emerged themes revealed by this study's results can help establish sustainable business models for small business leaders in the Bronx, New York neighborhood, and other places. Leaders of existing and future small businesses can use this study's findings to improve their understanding of leadership strategies that will enable them to sustain their business operations. The results of this research can serve as guidance for various stakeholders for small businesses like business consultants, business

schoolteachers, and government officials in their quest to provide supportive services to society.

The study's findings revealed that applying the right leadership is an effective strategy and a significant determinant of any business organization's success. Using effective leadership approach is critical for business sustainability and considered a human capital priority for many business leaders (Tobin, 2019). According to Popli and Rizvi (2017), applying the right leadership style can enable business leaders to direct employees and move the business in the right direction, thus improving business sustainability. Depending on the situation, small business leaders can choose transformational leadership to inspire their employees to achieve their sustainability goals (Burns, 1978). Leadership is a critical element to drive small businesses (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2019). The right leader can influence employees and other stakeholders to perform their roles to achieve positive organizational outcomes (Razak, 2011). Small business leaders need to understand interpersonal behavior, inspire their subordinates, recognize the significance of situational factors, and encourage employees to contribute to the organizational mission's achievement.

Moreover, current or future small business leaders cannot develop their businesses to succeed without effective leadership strategies. For instance, due to the small size and limited number of resources, leaders of small businesses' understanding of effective leadership strategies must ensure further sustainability. Small business leaders must acquire diverse knowledge of effective leadership strategies to enhance their businesses (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2019). The results of this study supported some

practitioners' suggestions and the findings of study that implementing the right leadership is imperative for both large and small businesses.

The study's findings, as aligned with the statement of Thompson et al. (2012), revealed that understanding and implementing strategic plans enable organizational leaders to record their mission, vision, values, and long-term goals. Understanding the vision and mission of the organization can improve small business leaders' ability to plan and improve business sustainability. Anwar et al. (2016) opined that organizational leaders should use strategic plans for changing their environment. Strategic plans are the basis for better decision-making for small business leaders to bring business activities into perspective. The benefits of adopting a strategic plan are that it would enable small business leaders to minimize economic uncertainties as they provide essential information about competitors and business trends.

The study's findings are in line with the statement of Collis and Montgomery (1995) that assessing employees' performance will ensure quality products and can substantially affects organizational growth. Depending on the situation, small business leaders can apply the *Assessing Employees Performance* strategy to enhance the organization's productivity by improving the task's expectation's efficiency and effectiveness (Hee et al., 2019). Acquiring the five-employee performance process: (a) performance appraisal, (b) feedback, (c) self-employment, (d) scale rating, and (e) checklist would give a business leader insight into how well the employees are performing and committed to fulfilling their tasks (Adler et al., 2016). Understanding the key benefits of assessing employee performance would enable business leaders to

develop consistent and objective methods for evaluating employees. Evaluating employees' performance helps business leaders to determine the weaknesses, strengths, and potential gaps in the business organization.

Implications for Social Change

Small businesses are the primary panacea for enhancing the economic development, the social welfare of communities, and the establishment of new small businesses(Bushe, 2019). The study's implication for positive social change includes the potential to avail strategies to leaders of small businesses to provide an avenue for business and revenue growth, enhance job creation, encourage social unity, and contribute to local and national economic stabilities. This study's findings may provide opportunities for small business leaders in sectors that produce goods and related services in the Bronx, New York neighborhood, by providing professional skills regarding leadership strategies that small businesses can use to sustain operation beyond 5 years. This study may enable small business leaders to understand the plan for continuing business operations, which may result in an increase in job creation and revenue level at the local and state level. Lussier and Corman (1995) explained that when small business sustains operations beyond 5 years, they will continue to contribute to the growth and stability of an organization. For instance, business leaders can access Chamberlain's theory of strategy which states that competent leaders could use the strategic process to sustain business operations (Chamberlain, 2010). Chamberlain's theory of strategy applies to any organization, regardless of type and size.

You and Fan (2020) explained that sustainable businesses contribute to long-term job creation, job security, and community wealth in general. Small business leaders can use this study's findings to develop successful leadership strategies as the best business practices, resulting in social change in a society like minimizing unemployment level, improving the welfare of individuals and the overall economy of the United States.

An increase in the employment rate due to long-term business sustainability may result in a viable U.S. economy (Harhara et al., 2015). Thus, the working class may pay taxes, which will be used for governance. The revenue obtained from other sources may help the government to provide social amenities such as schools, hospitals, and other public institutions. This study's findings may help scholars to gain an understanding of the phenomenon. Scholars may use the knowledge gained from this study's results and impart the knowledge to their students to help the students understand some of the concepts related to effective leadership strategies to sustain business operations.

Recommendations for Action

Nair and Blomquist (2019) explained that Small businesses face unforeseen circumstances that mostly bring about failures their leaders could not avoid. About 50% of these small businesses fail to sustain operations beyond 5 years, causing a decline in employment rate and economic growth (USSBA, 2018). Organizational leaders use strategies to change their environment to achieve their goals (Anwar et al., 2016). This study shows that small business sustainability beyond 5 years depends on effective leadership communication, employee performance, motivation and rewards, the right leadership, and strategic planning. First, I recommend that small business leaders and

other organizational leaders prioritize adopting effective leadership strategies to enhance sustainability. Thus, small business leaders should implement effective business strategies to achieve their objectives of sustaining operations in the competitive market (Jahanshahi et al., 2015). By implementing effective leadership strategies, one may encourage employee recognition, delegate power, communicate the vision to improve performance and accomplish its goals.

Second, small businesses and other organizations should consider written or verbal communication as core competence within the work environment. For this reason, the leadership of small businesses should consider providing their leaders and employees with training and advancement opportunities for ineffective communication or hire employees with solid communications skills in the workplace. Effective communication may help small business leaders to take appropriate measures to identify employees' needs and concerns. According to Adil and Awais (2016), effective communication can give small businesses some competitive edge and foster the coordination between employees and departments via constructive feedback to the organization's interest. Leaders can also use communication to promote employee motivation by clarifying to employees how to discharge their duties to improve performance in the organization (Cheraisi et al., 2014).

Third, organizations must strive to create a healthy and positive relationship with their employees (Lee & Raschke, 2016). Since different motivators influence employees' needs, small business leaders need to understand what motivates their subordinates to maximize performance (Lee & Raschke, 2016). Small business leaders should take

appropriate measures such as providing incentive systems, empowerment, flexible workplace, redesign jobs training, decision-making involvement, effective communication, compensation, and knowledge management to harness employees' motivation to achieve their goals (Cheraisi et al., 2014). In a competitive business environment, business leaders alone can't ensure an organization's competitiveness. Therefore, it is recommended that small business leaders maintain highly motivated employees to help develop and execute the business's strategic plans. Also, when organizational leaders recognize employees, they are well motivated to perform well and boost employee morale, resulting in the organization's overall sustainability (Hussain et al., 2019).

Fourth, entrepreneurial leadership anticipates some level of uncertainty in the business environment. Therefore, small business leaders should have the skills to think strategically and work with others to make changes to create a better future for the businesses (Harrison et al., 2016). Employing the right and good leadership style is one effective strategy and a significant determinant of any organization's success (Long et al., 2014). I recommend small businesses and other organizations to engage the services of the right leader. Thus, every small business leader must have the ability to inspire employees, develop a vision, set clear goals and stay focused, communicate effectively, ensure a feedback, know the strengths and weaknesses of yourself and other people, and successfully execute a strategy. I intend to disseminate the results to current and future small business leaders and other interested groups through training, conferences, seminars, and publication in academic and business journals.

Recommendations for Further Research

Through further research, limitations in this study which developed some boundaries or restricting cap, can be addressed. The study's findings shed light on some of the measures the participants used to address sustainability issues. Several motives may lead to business failure, and leaders need effective leadership strategies to sustain operations beyond 5 years. I would recommend that researchers conduct further studies in organizations other than small businesses to determine effective leadership strategies leaders use to address sustainability issues. Research in organizations other than small businesses may help unravel effective leadership strategies that this study fails to reveal.

I narrowed this study's population to business leaders of five selected small businesses in the Bronx, New York, who used effective leadership strategies to sustain their operations beyond 5 years. Therefore, this study may not reflect the perspectives of business leaders in general. Recommendations for further research include focusing on small businesses' sizes and varying geographical locations to understand the effective leadership strategies to sustain operations from a more diverse and broad number of participants. I conducted this study on small businesses in different industries. I recommend future researchers repeat this research on a specific sector of small business leaders instead of various sectors. The findings included considerable knowledge and strategies essential for small business leaders to help their companies stay competitive and profitable beyond five years. For small business leaders to identify alternative knowledge necessary to keep their businesses profitable and sustainable, I recommend future researchers conduct further qualitative research on this research. I recommend

future researchers consider studying small business leaders who have increased

sustainability and examine the relevance of gender and age variances of the small-

business leaders through the quantitative method.

I recommend future researchers conduct longitudinal research over a more

extended period, more resources, and a large sample of participants from a more

comprehensive geographical location to account for business sustainability changes.

Also, to ensure regionally balanced findings for this study, a different geographical area

other than the Bronx, New York, is highly recommended. This study was limited to a

qualitative research method with a case study design; I recommend future researchers use

other research methodologies and designs for further research on effective leadership

strategies for small business sustainability. I recommend researching the emergent

themes of effective communication, assessing employee performance, motivation,

implementing the right leadership, and strategic planning concerning small business

sustainability.

Reflections

The decision to pursue this Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program

marked the beginning of a turning point in my life. The learning process at Walden

University embodied learning networks, challenges, informative, self-directive,

commitment, and discipline. I gained much knowledge and variety of experiences from

the DBA program, although it was challenging, fulfilling, and rewarding. During the

doctoral completion stage, I had the opportunity to study under the guidance of

experienced scholars and professionals; notable was Dr. Mohamad S. Hammoud, my

Chair. I will never forget the possibility of learning under Dr. Hammoud; he ensured I succeed through his timely evaluations and feedbacks. He pushed me to meet my designed goal of completing this study. As a novice researcher and independent scholar, conducting this study has broadened my understanding of small business sustainability and effective leadership strategies for confronting those challenges.

Undertaken this research was an essential learning process because it involved effective instructional design**.** I actively engaged with challenging assignments embedded in a community of people with academic and professional experience. The learning process was effective and rewarding because it involved multimedia content from video and audio to text, photographs, infographics, illustrations, or even comics, blackboard discussions. One learning process that I believed has instilled professional discipline in me is contacting the partner organization and selecting the participants for this study before obtaining permission for data collection from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Gaining insight on the content of the Belmont Report requirement, ethics, and the obligations for the researcher was a reflective experience. Having the opportunity to interview participants of this study was a life-long learner experience as they contributed to revealing valuable information that deepened my understanding of some effective leadership strategies to sustain small businesses. Although I faced some challenges, most of the stakeholders and participants were enthusiastic, altruistic, caring, and compassionate.

I had the opportunity to attend face-to-face academic residencies, which aligned with the online coursework to enhance my skill development and professional practice.

The academic residencies also provided me with the opportunity to collaborate and network with other Walden University students, staff, and faculty members to achieve my educational goals and satisfy my program requirements.

Conclusion

Small business sustainability could lead to profitability, continuous growth, and competitive edge regardless of market threats (Wiesner et al., 2018). Strategies are essential assets that play a critical role in helping small business leaders reach competitive advantage goals and sustainability (Jahanshahi et al., 2015). This research suggested that small business leaders who implement effective leadership strategies could sustain operations for a long time. Therefore, confronting effective leadership strategy in small businesses is a matter of concern to small businesses' leaders. The general business problem is that some small business leaders fail to sustain their operations beyond five years. The specific business problem is that some small business leaders lack effective leadership strategies to sustain their operations beyond five years. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effective leadership strategies small business leaders use to sustain operations beyond five years. This study's central research question was: What effective leadership strategies do small business leaders use to sustain operations beyond five years?

Small business leaders should devise and implement effective leadership strategies that will enable them to confront long time sustainability issues. Such measures include effective communication, employee performance, motivation and rewards, the right leadership, and strategic planning. When small business leaders adopt these

strategies, it may not only help sustain operations but will also help improve competitiveness and record their mission, vision, and values, as well as their long-term goals. Small business leaders can also effectively promote positive social change in the community if they implement the research suggested in this study. Thus, sustainable business events may reduce the burden of unemployment and increase government revenue through taxes, part of which small business leaders and government may use to support education and development programs that may benefit individuals and communities.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Sulemana Jawula and a doctoral student at Walden University. As part of my doctoral dissertation research, I have chosen to conduct research on effective leadership strategies to sustain small businesses beyond 5 years operations in Bronx, New York. As a leader of a successful small business, I need your help to understand the strategies you used to sustain operations beyond 5 years. I am requesting to conduct semistructured interview with you via telephone because of social distancing restrictions caused by the COVID-19 in the Bronx, New York. The interview is estimated to last between 45 to 60 minutes. With your permission and consent, I will ask you questions and record your responses. In addition, the interview process will include sharing of documents like notes of meetings, records, checklists, and annual reports that participants use to share knowledge with their employees. I will transcribe, analyze, and document the data collected. Your personal information will remain confidential and will not be published nor shared with any individuals or organizations. Please read the attached consent form carefully and ask any questions that you may have before accepting the invitation. I appreciate your valuable time and thank you in advance for your cooperation. Sincerely Yours.

Sulemana Jawula
Doctor of Business Administration Candidate
Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: _____

Interview Date_____ Total Time_____

Interview Location: Via Telephone

What to do	What to say- Script
1. Begin the interview by welcoming the participant to the interview session with greetings and then introduce yourself to the participant. Make sure the participants receive a copy of the consent form to read the content. Ask the participant if they have any concerns or questions. Address any questions or concerns before proceeding with the interview process. Let the participant know that you about to start the interview and then switch on audio recorder. 2. At the beginning of the interview, ask available company sources like	1. Good afternoon Mr.……………… My name is Sulemana Jawula, a doctoral student at the department of business administration of Walden university, conducting a research on effective leadership strategies to sustain small business beyond 5 years in the Bronx. 2. You understood the research well enough to decide about it and replied me via an email to Consent your desire to participate in this research. You printed or save a copy of this consent form. The duration of this interview will be

business reports, business plan, and organizational plan. Ask the participant to send me these documents via email. Start the interview with question 1 and end with last question.	45–60 minutes. This Interview will be audio-recorded and. transcribed. I would like you to share with me any documents, like notes of meetings, records, checklists, and annual reports that you use to share knowledge with your employees. Do you have any question before we begin?
3. For more depth in data collection, follow with additional probing questions with participants. Discuss member checking with the participants to enhance the rigor of data by formally checking out the interpretation of data analysis from participants interviewed to ascertain the reliability and validity the end of the interview. Show appreciation by	1. What leadership strategies do you use to sustain your operation beyond 5 years? 2. What process did you use to implement leadership strategies? 3. What types of leadership styles did you use to manage your company? 4. Who is responsible for your company's leadership strategies? 5. How did you address the barriers to leadership strategies?

thanking the participant for honoring the interview. Share contact numbers with participants for follow up questions if the need arises. Wrap up the interview with participant and thank them for sharing their experiences.	6. How do you measure the success of your leadership strategies? 7. What other information do you want to share concerning leadership strategies you use to sustain your operation beyond 5 years? Thank you very much for taking your time to participate and share your views and experiences with me. I will transcribe the interview data and return it to you within 2 weeks to ensure the accuracy of the interview data.
4. Finally, schedule a follow up member checking interview	I will share with you a short (1 to 3 Page) summary of my interpretations of your responses.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What leadership strategies do you use to sustain your operation beyond 5 years?

2. What process did you use to implement leadership strategies?

3. What types of leadership styles did you use to manage your company?

4. Who is responsible for your company's leadership strategies?

5. How did you address the barriers to leadership strategies?

6. How do you measure the success of your leadership strategies?

7. What other information do you want to share concerning leadership strategies you use to sustain your operation beyond 5 years?