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The Relationship Between Transformational, Transactional, and Passive-Avoidant Leadership Styles and Small Business Sustainability

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Ahmed M. Sedky

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

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Leadership Styles and Small Business Sustainability

by

Ahmed M. Sedky

MBA, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, 2012

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2021

Abstract

Since 2010, more than 50% of the small businesses have failed to sustain profitable operations past the first year in business. Lack of sustainability is important to small business managers because it can lead to business closure. Grounded in the full range leadership theory, the purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to investigate the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles, and small business sustainability. Survey data from 128 U.S. small business construction managers were analyzed using multiple linear regression. The results indicated no statistically significant relationship. A key recommendation is for small business managers to adopt transformational leadership to increase their chances of sustaining their businesses. The implications for positive social change include the opportunity for small business managers to achieve more organizational sustainability and career-advancing opportunities offering the community citizens a more stable labor market.

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Dedication

I dedicate my doctoral study to my wife and best friend, Nermin, who has always believed and encouraged me to take further steps along the way. I also dedicate this study to the leaders and those striving to become the best they can by finding their purposes to enhance life and contribute to their communities. I hope you all find a meaningful purpose to keep leading and making a difference.

I finally dedicate this study to my idol in life, my grandfather, who may have left us a long time ago but still lives in my heart.

Acknowledgments

Our life is a journey toward happiness. With God's blessings, we can make it and reach higher values. I want to thank God for his grace, blessings and for giving me the strength to finish my study. I am also very thankful for my family's endless support and understanding. My wife, Nermine, played the most significant role in pushing me forward and energizing me to go along the way until the finishing line. I sincerely thank her for everything. My son, Amen, and my daughter, Lilia, were incredibly encouraging and following up with me to ensure I keep moving forward and deliver. I thank them all for their patience and understanding when I needed to work on my study. Much credit also goes to my mother, father, and grandfather for believing in me and raising me to be the man I am now. I also thank Dr. Mohamed Nabil for his support and for providing an example of true dedication. I will never forget his role in my life.

A final word, I am really thankful to Walden University for the excellent professors and personnel that I met along the way. I was honored to have high-quality DBA committee members who were supportive all the time, offered continuous guidance, and believed in me. A very special thanks to Dr. Brandon Simmons, my chair, who was outstanding and made the difference. Dr. Frank Bearden, my second committee member, who was always helpful, understanding, and encouraging with his comments. Dr. William Stokes, the URR for his quality comments, and Dr. Karlyn Barilovits, the program director. I met many incredible people, and I thank them all, especially Dr. Mohammed Hammoud, Dr. John Hannon, and Dr. George Bradley.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small businesses are essential to the economies of all countries around the world. Small businesses represent a significant percentage of operating firms and employ the most considerable labor portion (Schoonmaker et al., 2017). In the United States, small business provides a vital role in economic growth, offers employment, and returns to the local community (Johnson et al., 2017). Small business has been contributing significantly to economic growth and employment rates since 2010. With the increased importance of small business, small business managers needed to secure their firms from the potential risk of closure through the first years of operation (Turner & Endres, 2017). From such a perspective, I found it necessary to investigate the small business managers' knowledge of leadership styles that may lead to small business sustainability.

There is an essential need for small business managers to gain leadership styles that may help manage their firms properly. According to Guhr et al. (2018), small business managers who possessed the needed leadership styles were able to make critical decisions to run successful business operations (Luo et al., 2016). Possessing appropriate leadership styles is a key factor to achieve small business sustainability. In this correlational study, I investigated the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Background of the Problem

Small businesses contributed significantly to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the GDP has encountered dramatic losses of opportunities as only 50% of small businesses have managed to avoid the risk of closure since 2010 (Lucian et al.,

2018; Turner & Endress, 2017). A small business manager with an appropriate leadership style may extend the life cycle of a small business and increase the firm chances to achieve business sustainability (Guhr et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2017), which positively impacts the economy. Leadership styles enable small business managers to influence employees to excel and keep firms productive to overcome business closure. Therefore, there is an important relationship between leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Small business managers need to choose between three leadership styles: (a) transformational, (b) transactional, and (c) passive-avoidant. However, small business managers may need guidance in selecting the appropriate leadership style that fits their firms' needs to face the increased business closure risks (Yao & Huang, 2018). A small business manager with the right leadership style may increase small business chances to sustain business and create a positive contribution to the U.S. economy, employment market, and the community social change (Boukamcha, 2019; Wozniak et al., 2019). Business sustainability may allow small business managers to innovate and open new channels to generate revenues. The generated revenues of stable businesses may allow for more investments to create new jobs, better services in the community hospitals and schools, increased savings, and improved local government tax revenues. Therefore, I found out that there is a need to investigate the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Problem Statement

Small business contribution to the national GDP has decreased dramatically since 2010 and impacted the U.S. economy (Lucian et al., 2018). More than 50% of the small businesses failed to continue operating in their first years in business (Byun et al., 2020). The general business problem was that small business managers faced the potential challenge of business closure, which had a negative impact on the national GDP and employment. The specific business problem was that some small business managers lack understanding about the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. The independent variables were transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles, as measured by the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ). The dependent variable was small business sustainability as measured by self-reported profit margin. The study population consisted of the construction projects small business managers in the United States. The implications for positive social change included more organizational sustainability and career-advancing opportunities offering the community citizens a more stable labor market. The outcome was an increase in the local community members spending and the local government tax revenues, which may boost community-based investments to develop the infrastructure, upgrade hospitals, and fund charities.

Nature of the Study

There are three research methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Taguchi, 2018). Quantitative methods allow researchers to analyze surveys to evaluate hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2019). Researchers use qualitative methods to understand the reasons behind a phenomenon rather than prove hypotheses (Taguchi, 2018). Qualitative methods did not fit this study because I did not collect in-depth perceptions to respond to the study question (see Saunders et al., 2019). Mixed-method studies combine quantitative and qualitative approaches (Taguchi, 2018), which did not fit because I did not collect qualitative data. I used a quantitative method to generate numerical data and examine relationships between variables.

The quantitative research designs include (a) correlational, (b) quasi-experimental, (c) causal-comparative, and (d) experimental (Taguchi, 2018). A correlational design uses statistical tools to examine possible relationships between variables (Gao et al., 2019). Researchers use a quasi-experimental study to estimate the interference impact between variables without random assignment (Miller et al., 2020). I measured all independent variables without influencing cause and effect, which did not comply with the quasi-experimental design. In causal-comparative design, researchers examine differences between two or more groups (Taguchi, 2018), which I did not examine. The experimental design manipulates independent variables to test cause and effect in causal relationships under highly controlled conditions (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). I did not manipulate independent variables. Thus, I used a correlational design to

examine the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Research Question

RQ1: Is there a relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability?

Hypotheses

H_01 : There is no statistically significant relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

H_{a1} : There is a statistically significant relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

The full range leadership theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study. Bass and Avolio (1991) introduced the full-range leadership theory, which presented the transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles to guide managers to leadership effectiveness. The transformational leadership style enables leaders to shift followers' performance to higher levels to achieve organizational goals (Guhr et al., 2018). In the transactional leadership style, managers maintained a proper flow of operations and corrective transactions. Leaders relied on disciplinary power and an array of incentives to motivate employees to perform (Northouse, 2018). Passive-avoidant leaders tended to react to existing problems with corrective actions and avoid

decisions (Guhr et al., 2018). The full range leadership theory allowed researchers to explain transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles to drive a successful business (Luo et al., 2016).

The full range leadership theory allowed me to investigate the statistical significance of the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. Small business managers need to understand the importance of the full range leadership theory's leadership styles to manage small businesses in an effective way (Jelaca et al., 2020). This study may guide small business managers to select appropriate leadership styles for their business. Leadership training programs enhanced managers' skills to sustain small businesses (Johnson et al., 2017). The study population comprised U.S. construction projects small business managers who set both long-term and operational activities plans. Therefore, small business managers were able to select an appropriate leadership style to improve their decision-making skills and achieve small business sustainability.

Operational Definitions

Business sustainability: Sustainability is the ability or capacity of something to be maintained or sustain itself (Ede et al., 2016). Sustainability in this study is referred to as establishing, growing, and maintaining the business successfully.

Leadership: The process whereby individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2018). Leadership is about influencing the group to become followers to work together to achieve a common goal. The leader is the person who inspires an organization or community members to achieve such a goal.

Passive-avoidant leadership: A leadership style that describes the absence of leadership (Khan, 2020). Passive-avoidant leaders refer to business leaders who lack decisions whenever needed to avoid damages and rely on punishment (Sims et al., 2020). Passive-avoidant leaders struggle to rectify wrong actions because of delays, absence, and insignificance.

Transactional leadership: A leadership style that may cause a positive impact associated with employee engagement by using rewards and appreciating for task accomplishment (Popli & Rizvi, 2017).

Transformational leadership: A leadership style that generates a change in individuals and social systems (Sun & Henderson, 2016). Transformational leadership creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal to develop followers into leaders.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are the beliefs that academic researchers do not tend to prove (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Researchers need to validate studies by evaluating and validating study assumptions. I assumed that (a) responses obtained through the MLQ from construction projects small business managers provided a truthful response to reflect appropriate leadership styles to sustain small businesses, (b) the multiple regression analysis was the appropriate research analysis to analyze the survey responses and validate the study results, (c) small business managers survey responses provided self-reported profit margin which reflected small businesses sustainability, and (d) the

study sample was appropriate to represent the U.S. construction projects small business managers.

Limitations

Limitations reflect academic studies' weaknesses, which may influence research results and affect study validity (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). Researchers provide meaningful information to businesses and academic communities by sharing study limitations. I identified three limitations: (a) The study sample represented the construction projects small business managers and did not represent other fields small business managers to create a general rule, (b) the lack of trust from the study participants who may not share accurate self-reported revenues, and (c) the study focused on the U.S. small business which may affect generating a general rule to apply to small business in other countries.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the study boundaries, which focus on the study scope and theoretical framework (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Delimitations set academic studies borders and parameters. The first delimitation I identified was that the study population only belonged to the U.S. construction projects small businesses, excluding the medium, large-sized, and corporate level firms. I also identified another delimitation that focused only on small business managers to ensure accurate results related to the appropriate leadership styles to sustain the business.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

This study may help small business managers adopt a leadership style that more effectively increases productivity, motivates employees, and contributes to small business sustainability. There is always a need for small business managers to become leaders who transform employees' performance towards achieving firms' goals and increase small business sustainability chances. This study may highlight the importance of transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles to provide the needed guidance to select the appropriate leadership style and improve small business sustainability. Small business managers with an appropriate leadership style may increase job satisfaction levels, which motivates and engages employees to outperform. Appropriate leadership styles may also strengthen the relationship between firm employees and managers, which may enhance small businesses' operations, ensure small business sustainability, and open small business diversification channels.

Implications for Social Change

Business sustainability empowered by leadership may cause positive social change in the local community by creating long-term employment opportunities and a more stable job market. Business sustainability may also improve job offerings in local communities (Farrell, 2017) and raise employees' dignity, ethical values, and well-being. The benefits of business sustainability may result in career promotions and enhanced income for community members (Camilleri, 2017). The outcome is a boost in residents' savings, upgrade living standards, encourage contributing to local charities, increase

individuals spending potential, and generate tax revenues for local government to develop the infrastructure, schools, and hospitals that benefit the local community.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Small business managers have faced increased challenges in the marketplace since 2010. Small business sustainability implies identifying and implementing appropriate leadership styles to face the increased challenges (Luo et al., 2016; Turner & Endres, 2017). Leadership styles can be one of three: (a) transformational, (b) transactional, and (c) passive-avoidant (Guhr et al., 2018). One of the key indicators of an appropriate leadership style implementation is the extent to which a small business can be sustained (Northouse, 2018). Researchers have investigated relationships between the transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability (e.g., Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018; Boukamcha, 2019; Howard et al., 2019; Perez-Campdesuner et al., 2020; Van Jaarsveld & Ellis, 2019; Warren and Szostek, 2017). According to Van Jaarsveld and Ellis (2019), small business managers possess leadership styles to improve their decision-making capabilities and sustain their firms. However, not all researchers addressed the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and U.S. small business sustainability with a focus on the construction projects industry. In this literature review, I analyzed the academic literature related to this study's theory and variables.

I obtained the academic literature used in this study literature review from current peer-reviewed journals accessed through Walden University library and sourced from databases such as ProQuest, Emerald Insight, Sage, Dissertations & Theses at Walden

University, and Google Scholar. I conducted searches by keywords and terms, including *small business*, *SME*, *leadership theory*, *leadership styles*, *transformational leadership*, *transactional leadership*, *passive-avoidant leadership*, *business success*, and *GDP*. The research outcome was 254 scholarly articles in addition to 10 books, one dissertation, one conference paper, six reports, and three websites. The scholarly articles cited in the literature review were 124 references. All articles cited in this study are 100% peer-reviewed and published articles, out of which 99% are beyond 2015.

In the literature review section, I included an analysis of existing literature and the full range leadership theory to provide the background of the research question about the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. I also emphasized the application to the applied business. Then, I discussed leadership styles, which included an analysis of existing literature for the study independent variables: (a) transformational, (b) transactional, and (c) passive-avoidant leadership styles, as measured by the MLQ. Then, I discussed small business sustainability, the dependent variable in this study, measured by self-reported profit margin. I analyzed the importance of small business sustainability and the related contribution to the national GDP. Finally, I emphasized the important relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. The independent variables which I examined were (a) transformational, (b)

transactional, (c) passive-avoidant leadership styles, as measured by the MLQ, and the dependent variable was small business sustainability, as measured by self-reported profit margin. In this study, I focused on the research question: Is there a relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability? As a result, responding to the research question allowed the researcher to identify possible statistical significance that existed between the study variables.

Application to the Applied Business Problem

This quantitative correlational study contributed to the professional practice by emphasizing the possible relationship of (a) transformational, (b) transactional, (c) passive-avoidant leadership styles, as measured by the MLQ, and small business sustainability, which was measured by self-reported profit margin. This study's null hypothesis was "There is no statistically significant relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability." The alternative hypothesis was "There is a statistically significant relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability." The theory application guides the researcher to identify possible relationships with a statistical significance, which may support small business managers in selecting appropriate leadership styles to sustain their businesses (Yang et al., 2019; Zaech & Baldegger, 2017). Small business sustainability chances may increase when small business managers understand the importance of possessing appropriate leadership styles. Therefore, small

business managers with acquired leadership styles may transform employees, increase productivity, motivate employees, and contribute to small business sustainability.

Full Range Leadership Theory

The full range leadership theory is one of the most used theories in research projects. Researchers use the full range leadership theory to explain how leadership styles may contribute to organizational sustainability and success (Luo et al., 2016). Avolio and Bass (1991) introduced the full range leadership theory to develop leadership theories invented by Burns in 1978, which focused on political leaders and extended to cover others, including business leaders (Curtis, 2018; Guhr et al., 2018). Researchers rely on the full range leadership theory to guide business leaders and improve organizations' performance. Therefore, there is a need to understand leadership styles developed through the full range leadership theory to guide small businesses toward sustainability.

There are three leadership styles developed by the full range leadership theory: (a) transformational, (b) transactional, and (c) passive-avoidant. Transformational leaders managed to influence a follower group to enhance performance to meet organizational goals (Avolio & Bass, 1991; Guhr et al., 2018). Transactional leaders also implied the reward and punishment principle with a dominant reliance on managerial authorities and power (Curtis, 2018; Northouse, 2018). However, passive-avoidant leaders avoided decision-making and interference to leave employees without proper guidance to reach firms' goals (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Many researchers spotted the growing organizational need to implement the full range leadership theory's leadership styles. Therefore, the full range leadership theory was essential to explain the

impact of the transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles on small business sustainability.

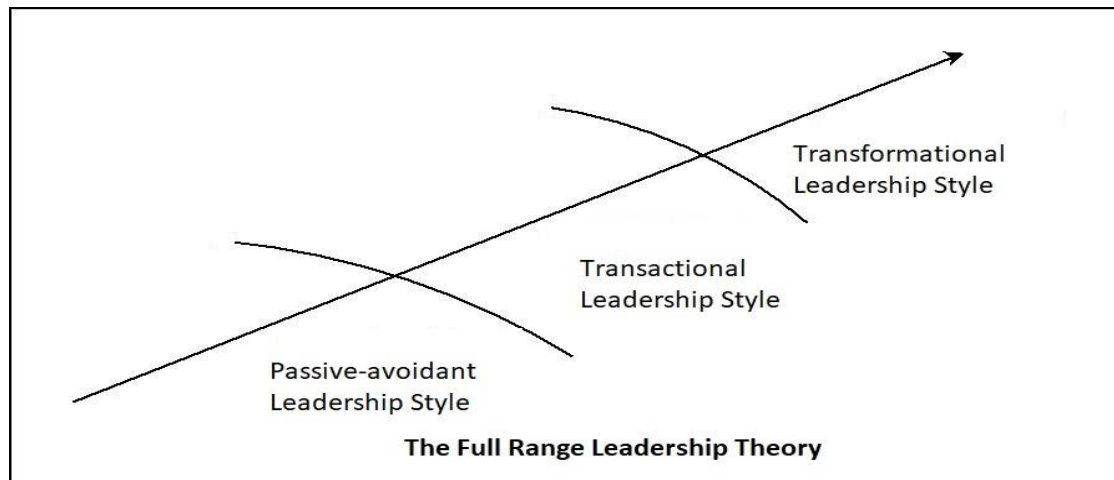
Leadership styles significantly impacted business sustainability through improved performance, enhanced work environment, and increased job satisfaction. Van Jaarsveld and Ellis (2019) emphasized that successful leadership played a significant role in overall organizational success. Implementing the appropriate leadership style may lead to more effectiveness, job productivity, and employee satisfaction. The MLQ is the instrument used by businesses and researchers to evaluate the full range leadership styles impact. (Boamah & Tremblay, 2019). Organizations adopted the MLQ as an instrument to determine successful leadership, and researchers used the MLQ on a wide range to examine the full range leadership theory styles through quantitative research (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2019). Therefore, I used the MLQ instrument to collect data, which enabled me to explain the relationship between the full range leadership theory developed leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Small businesses require small business managers to use the full range leadership theory to identify and select an appropriate leadership style to sustain the business. According to Avolio and Bass (1991), the business leadership maturity level starts with implementing the transactional then adopting the transformational leadership. In Figure 1, a demonstration of the needed leadership direction to ensure a firm performance positive shift to achieve small business sustainability. Leadership engaged employees with management and created an understanding of firm goals, which motivated employees and improved small businesses' performance (Putra & Cho, 2019). The implementation of

appropriate leadership styles is essential for small business managers to drive a successful business. As a result, there is a need to develop a leadership style to lead small businesses to success and sustainability.

Figure 1

A Demonstration of the Leadership Direction to Sustain Small Business



I chose the U.S. construction projects' small business managers as the study sample to investigate the relationship between the transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. The cultural and regulatory barriers did not allow international researchers to generalize findings to the U.S. small businesses belonging to the construction projects' industry. In addition, the existing U.S. studies lacked the focus on selecting the appropriate leadership styles to increase the U.S. small business sustainability, only emphasized leadership importance, and focused on corporate-level organizations.

I identified hypotheses for this quantitative correlational study by focusing on the statistical significance of the study independent variables: (a) transformational, (b)

transactional, (c) passive-avoidant leadership styles, as measured by the MLQ instrument, and the dependent variable, small business sustainability, as measured by self-reported profit margin. The purpose of this study was to identify the importance of implementing and selecting appropriate leadership styles to sustain construction projects small businesses in the United States. Therefore, in this study, I used the MLQ developed by Bass and Avolio (1995) as a validated web-based instrument through quantitative research to examine the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Small Business Sustainability

Small business refers to businesses that employ a few employees compared to medium-sized and corporate businesses. The U.S. small business regulators defined small businesses as the firms which employed 500 employees or less (Bonsu & Kuofie, 2019; Noorda, 2019; Onken et al., 2019; Pai, 2017), and small businesses represented 99.7% of the U.S. employers (Pai, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Small business is necessary for the United States economic growth (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015; U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2015). Small businesses have played a significant role in contributing to the U.S. economic growth and offering employment opportunities to the community. Therefore, small business sustainability is a need to reduce unemployment rates and boost the economy.

Small business count encountered a rapid increase and gained increased importance because of the related impact on both economies and communities. For example, U.S. small businesses represent 96.5 % of the existing U.S. businesses and

employ 48 % of the entire national private-sector labor force (Turner & Endres, 2017). According to Bonsu and Kuofie (2019), small business is in continuous involvement in offering jobs to the community. Small businesses encountered rapid growth over the past ten years and represented most operating organizations in various countries. Therefore, there is a need to keep small businesses sustained for better economies and communities.

Small business sustainability contributed to economic success in developing and well-developed economies such as the U.S. economy. Small businesses' failure to survive negatively impacted the national GDP of countries worldwide (Wozniak et al., 2019). Bonsu and Kuofie (2019) also confirmed that 50% of the new small businesses might fail to achieve sustainability because of various leadership problems such as insufficient cash flow, unmotivated employees, and wrong-targeted markets (Sharma, 2019). Managers with effective leadership may make decisions that improve business operations and sustain the business. Therefore, effective leadership implies that small business managers identify and possess appropriate leadership styles to achieve business sustainability and growth.

Worldwide governments, including the U.S. government, understand that small businesses need effective leadership to sustain the business. For example, the U.S. authorities provided leadership training programs to small business managers to identify effective leadership styles, which may sustain small businesses (Johnson et al., 2017). In discussing safety leadership skills in the United States, Schwatka et al. (2020) also found that leadership training programs were essential to enhance managers' skills. Ingelsson et al. (2020) confirmed the increased importance of leadership training programs to enhance

managers' skills in the Swedish health care industry. Governments worldwide understood the importance of small businesses to national economies and invested in leadership training programs offered to small business managers to sustain small businesses and strengthen GDPs. As a result, small business managers powered by leadership may lead to small business sustainability.

Business sustainability as a term is somehow new to business with a growing impact on the national GDP and employees' social life. As a term, sustainability was introduced to the world in 1987 through The Brundtland Report republished by The United Nations (United Nations, 1987). Nitescu et al. (2019) emphasized that sustainability aimed to balance the relationship between relying on sustainable development and sustainable distribution to protect the environment, business growth, and society. The merge of sustainable development with technology application and behavior standards generated value and business sustainability to benefit firms, consumers, and society. Therefore, small business managers have an increased business sustainability role to ensure firms' continuous operation, employees' job satisfaction, and business profitability.

Small business managers' role in sustaining small businesses reflected the need to possess supportive skills to achieve productivity. In Indonesia, small business managers need to pay attention to various factors that could affect business existence, such as business profitability, licensing, taxation, and survival (Sofyan et al., 2019). Also, Alonso-Almeida et al. (2018) highlighted that leaders need to implement proactive practices to improve competitiveness under challenging times and benefitted the small

Spanish companies to maintain a high-level performance. Josephson et al. (2017) explored means to keep the U.S. small business operating and identified the importance of small business managers' preparedness to face uncertainty risks through education and implemented policy strategies. Also, Warren and Szostek (2017) identified that small business managers' wise decisions enabled small business sustainability, which had a positive reflection on employment rates and the national GDP. Therefore, leadership training was the solution to improve leaders' innovation and entrepreneurship skills to provide small businesses more opportunities to sustain operations.

Various researchers have extended on leaders' skills because of their impact on small business performance. Among those skills, researchers found innovation and entrepreneurship significantly contributing to small business sustainability and community growth. For example, Mohamad and Chin (2019) confirmed that entrepreneurial skills contributed to the growth of the small Malaysian rural business entrepreneurs. Mbuya et al. (2016) also confirmed similar results in South Africa while investigating the underlying factors high failure rate of small businesses. Similar results were concluded in Finland when Lintukangas et al. (2019) examined the relationship between entrepreneurship and sustained business. Also, Maletic et al. (2016) examined the relationship between innovation practices and the related effects on performance dimensions in Germany, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, and Spain. Business sustainability enabled firm managers to boost innovation, which developed opportunities to improve small businesses' financial and nonfinancial performance. In the end, small businesses' success ensures a continuous contribution to economic growth and the implication for

social change. Therefore, small business leaders need to develop skills to increase their chances of achieving small business sustainability.

Small business sustainability is a topic of augmented importance to governments because of the small business reflection on economies and unemployment rates.

Regardless of what extent countries' official authorities invested in supporting small businesses, all governments interfered to ensure small business sustainability and growth as a strategic contributor to countries' economies worldwide (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016; Lo et al., 2016; Radzi et al., 2017). Small businesses comprised around 98% of all Australian firms and accounted for 41% of the total employment over 2001–2011 (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016). Small businesses also contributed to the Asian GDPs on high levels to represent 60% of the Chinese, 65% of the Japanese, 47.3% of the Malaysian, and 8% of the Indian GDP (Kharmawphlang, 2019). Small business managers suffered from business closure risks, while small business is the Indonesian economy backbone, employing 97% of the overall labor force. The Indonesian authorities protected small businesses by an economic policy package, in addition to leadership training programs, to ensure small business continuity and growth (Al Anshori and Ahmat, 2019). The Malaysian and Australian authorities adopted the same initiatives implemented by the Indonesian authorities (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016; Whah & Shiang, 2018). Governments understood the importance of small businesses for their economies and protected those firms' continuous contribution to their GDPs. Therefore, small business sustainability is a growing topic with the annual increase in small business numbers and the growing impact on the Asian and Australian GDPs.

The European governments also planned investments to keep the small business operating for the most extended period possible, which researchers proved through the published European small business statistics. Ludmila and Renate (2019) explained that small business flexibility, agility, ability to respond quickly to market changes, and needs were the main reasons for the increased importance of small business. The European Union members pertained to a socioeconomic well-being reflector. Such characteristics also explain why small businesses had an early beginning in Europe in the 1970s and existence across all European industries until date (European Commission, 2019). Sustainability also allowed small businesses to offer innovative employment opportunities, which corporate-level companies, with their sophisticated policies and procedures, failed to deliver to the European communities (Ludmila & Renate, 2019). Small businesses included micro and small businesses as on January 1, 2019, represented 98.9% of the count of established businesses and 49.4% of employment across Europe with an added economic value of 38.5% (European Commission, 2019), as presented in Table 1 to demonstrate small business performance in Europe. Therefore, there is a significant contribution from small business to the growth of economies and unemployment reduction.

Table 1

Small Business Performance in the E.U. as of 1 January 2019. (Source: European Commission Small Business Performance Review, 2019)

Class Size	Number of Businesses		Employment Record		Economic Added Value	
	Number	Share	Number	Share	Billion/EUR	Share
Small	24,251,638	98.9%	70,562,782	49.4%	2,815	38.5%
Medium Sized	231,857	0.9%	24,201,840	17.0%	1,341	18.3%
Large	46,547	0.2%	47,933,208	33.6%	3,166	43.2%
Total	24,530,042	100.0%	142,697,830	100.0%	7,322	100.0%

The increase in small businesses in Europe directed authorities' attention to the socioeconomic small business role. European governments support small business growth to facilitate the ease of entry and exit in markets, labor legislation, and access to bank credit (Wozniak & Lisowski, 2017). In addition to governments supporting roles, the European Union (E.U.) provided small businesses with more support programs worth EUR 3.6 billion investment to encourage further growth (Wozniak et al., 2019). Local governments and the E.U. provided support programs that increased communities' potential to establish more small businesses, which boosted GDP growth and employment opportunities offered to the European communities. Therefore, small businesses gained considerable attention with their significant contribution to the European GDPs and communities' employment.

The African governments supported small businesses for their contribution to economic growth. In steps to maximize small business economic contributions, authorities provide leadership training programs to small business managers to improve

managers' skills and maintain a sustained business (Mbuya et al., 2016). Altenburg et al. (2017) stated that with the provided support by authorities, 50% of the Egyptian small businesses managed to achieve business sustainability and qualified to obtain loans, which served to upgrade firms' structures and increased business volume. Also, the South African officials estimated that the number of small businesses combined with medium-sized enterprises reached 2.8 million with a contribution to the GDP ranged between 52% – 57% and an employment rate of 60% of the total labor force (Mbuya et al., 2016). As a reflection, the South African government formed the Small Business Ministry, which established the Department of Small Business Development in 2014 and provided leaders training programs to small business managers to gain sufficient skills to operate small businesses (Nieuwenhuizen, 2019). From the provided examples, the African governments realize the importance of small business and support the managers to continue to contribute to economic growth.

Like in other locations of the world, Latin American small businesses have a remarkable share of economic transactions, offer employment opportunities, and boost income. According to Motta (2017), small businesses contribute with a 30% - 50% of GDP growth and comprise 60% of employment to represent South America's economic backbone. With the increased importance of small businesses in Latin America, governments invest in training business managers to drive small businesses' success through innovation and entrepreneurship (Bianchi & Wickramasekera, 2016). Therefore, Latin American governments' support enabled leaders to make decisions that strive for innovative means to sustain small businesses.

The government provides support to Latin American small business managers with the tools to ensure firms' sustainability. Leadership training programs enable small business managers to shift small businesses' performance to higher levels, which sustain operations and increase the business volume (Wegner et al., 2017). Most of the focus went to the Brazilian small businesses model, despite the significant performance of small businesses in other Latin countries such as Chile, Peru, and Colombia as small businesses managed to generate income through exports (Bianchi & Wickramasekera, 2016). In the Chilean example, the government provides extended support, including leadership training programs to sustain small businesses. As a result, the Chilean small businesses improved to a higher standard of stability, economic freedom, and income per capita (World Economic Forum, 2014). Therefore, small business managers need leadership skills to perform better and keep firms existing as an essential contributor to the economic growth of Latin America.

Like in all other countries worldwide, small business growth in the United States faces the capabilities challenge of small business managers' leadership to drive firms' stable operations for the most extended possible period. Dilger (2019) identified that 82% of small businesses failed and closed to leave behind a decreased ability to offer new jobs and shrinking GDP growth (Dilger, 2019). In another investigation, 50% of new small businesses might fail to continue operating after the first five years because of various leadership problems such as; insufficient cash flow, unmotivated employees, and wrong-targeted markets (Birbirs & Lakew, 2020; Bonsu & Kuofie, 2019). Bonsu and Kuofie (2019) also found out that 33% of small business leaders were high school graduates,

20% had a bachelor's degree, 18% had an associate's, 16% held a master's degree, and 4% obtained a doctorate. As a cure to the businesses' failure, the U.S. authorities offer leadership training programs to small business managers to improve their operational skills and sustain the small firms (Johnson et al., 2017). Therefore, small business managers need to enhance leadership skills and identify the appropriate leadership styles to achieve small business sustainability.

The academic literature above provided clear evidence that leadership grants small business strength to survive, contribute to economic growth, and offer employment opportunities to communities. Although governmental support was found in various forms globally, leadership remains one of the most critical aspects to extend small business operations over the years. Therefore, small business sustainability requires managers to select appropriate leadership styles that may boost their efforts.

Leadership Styles

Small business managers need to formulate a fit for purpose business environment that allows small businesses to outperform the market competition. The managers' role is vital to shift and lead the business to sustainability based on the implementation leadership styles (Nasir & Yee, 2016). Leadership is the process whereby a manager or leader has the capability to deliver a positive influence on a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2018). Small business managers need to develop leadership skills to shift from low to high-performance leaders through innovation, which is necessary for managers to transform visions, gain followers' trust, and encourage followers to accept change (Dunne et al., 2016). Small business success requires

necessary leadership skills, which influence business performance and firms' sustainability. Therefore, small business managers comprise leadership by adopting leadership styles, which boosts small business chances to achieve business sustainability.

Small business managers geared with leadership styles are able to reduce business risks and achieve business sustainability. Avolio and Bass (1991) developed through the full range leadership theory three leadership styles: (a) transformational, (b) transactional, and (c) passive-avoidant leadership styles, and such a development enabled managers to apply the needed leadership style that fit organizations (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2018). The transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles served as the three independent variables in this study and were measured by the MLQ instrument. The three independent variables were included in the online survey to be distributed to the research sample. Effective leadership is vital and requires selecting appropriate leadership styles to keep small businesses sustained and operating. Therefore, there is necessity that small business managers understand the importance of leadership in business and start to adopt leadership styles.

Transformational Leadership Style

The transformational leadership style is one of the essential leadership styles used worldwide. Transformational leadership appeared for the first time when Burns (1978) introduced the transformational leadership theory, through which Burns focused on political leaders (Anderson & Sun, 2017). The transformational leadership style is one facet of the full range leadership theory (Curtis, 2018). A transformational leadership style allows leaders to transform individuals' morale and values to the group interest

rather than personal interests (Avolio & Bass, 1991; Guhr et al., 2019). Transformational leaders rely on innovative ideas to motivate team members to achieve a higher performance rather than meeting expectations (Dunne et al., 2016). Transformational leaders are the most proactive leaders in organizations, where the transformational leader makes decisions, participates in organizational activities, and influences followers to enhance performance (Cho et al., 2019; Jimenez, 2018). In addition, transformational leaders use communication skills to influence followers to deliver organizational visions, display behavior, and set a powerful personal example. Simultaneously, researchers assess managers' transformational leadership capabilities by measuring the extent of influence on followers to which managers reached (Northouse, 2018). The transformational leadership style enables managers and employees to reach higher efficiency levels that their firms require to achieve targets and sustain the business. Therefore, transformational leaders increased role may drive firms towards sustainability.

There are key characteristics that transformational leaders enjoy to achieve their organizational mission. Transformational leaders develop four behavioral dimensions; (a) idealized influence, (b) individualized consideration, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) intellectual stimulation (Avilio & Bass, 1991; Dunne et al., 2016; Grin et al., 2018; Guhr et al., 2019; Northouse, 2018). According to Diebig et al. (2016), transformational leaders are creative to identify new means and opportunities to articulate future visions, create a challenging work environment, and inspire followers to execute such visions (Alghamdi, 2018). Transformational leaders also set clear goals to ensure followers' understanding of organizational requirements, for which transformational leaders acquire skills and extend

capabilities (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Transformational leaders need to enhance the four behavioral dimensions to increase their transformational leadership characteristics and achieve organizational missions. Therefore, transformational leaders need continuous learning and skills development to boost the possessed transformational leadership behavioral dimensions and achieve future organizational targets.

Idealized influence. Idealized influence, also known as charisma, provides the highest levels of ethical behavior and trust, where the leader turns to be a role model to lead followers by example (Anderson & Sun, 2017; Barnett, 2019; Guhr et al., 2019; Northouse, 2018). Leaders work hard to convince followers to accept the needed change to achieve higher organizational targets (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Leaders may not achieve results without having the ability to convince followers based on trust and respect. As a result, transformational leaders' influential effect is an essential characteristic to succeed in transforming employees.

The idealized influence of transformational leaders is of increased importance to transform employees' organizational performance. Researchers consider idealized influence a given in the leader-followers relationship since the leader needs followers to engage and achieve organizational targets and business sustainability in Kenya (Change et al., 2019), which Johnson and Bullard (2020) confirmed in the study on employee performance main factors in clinical research in the United States. The idealized influence enables transformational leaders to gain employees' trust and boost their performance to achieve organizational goals. Therefore, there is an increased need that transformational leaders have an idealized influence on employees.

Individualized consideration. Transformational leaders need to be good receivers and new concept initiators. Diebig et al. (2016) confirmed that individualized consideration refers to the degree to which leaders respond, mentor, and listen to followers' needs. Individualized consideration allows leaders to focus on followers' development and respond to followers' needs (Mwesigwa et al., 2020). Leaders are able to set challenging targets and keep a respectful discussion channel open to lead their followers (Diebig et al., 2016). As a result, individualized consideration allows transformational leaders to increase their followers' self-development and motivation to achieve targets. Moreover, transformational leaders express empathy and support, celebrating individuals' contributions.

As the second behavioral dimension of transformational leaders, individual consideration enables leaders to align followers by creating trust. When leaders use individual consideration to clarify employees' roles, such an act increases employees' trust in their leader and develops respectful relationships within businesses (Martinez-Corcoles et al., 2018). Followers accept performance development plans when transformational leaders gain followers' trust (Eberly et al., 2017; Khalili, 2016). Leaders may be able to achieve organizational goals when individual consideration allows for employees' trust and respect. Therefore, transformational leaders need to use individual consideration as a key behavioral dimension to develop employees and achieve business sustainability.

Inspirational motivation. Leaders are employees with higher capabilities to motivate employees to achieve organizational goals. Inspirational motivation indicates to

what extent a leader may articulate a vision and inspire followers to achieve such a vision (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Leaders may be known as visionary leaders and challenge followers to achieve targets after goal communication and to provide a clear optimistic vision about future goals (Chang, 2016; Saliu et al., 2018), which require the capability to provide clear visions and purpose to motivate followers (Guhr et al., 2019). Saliu et al. (2018), in their research, stated that followers turned to be optimists about attaining the required targets after understanding the vision. Therefore, leaders need to possess strong communication skills to communicate a coherent and clear vision.

Transformational leaders can simplify organizational visions to ensure employees' understanding and meeting organizational goals. For example, in a study for Kenyan health insurance, Langat et al. (2019) stated that leaders' communication skills conveyed visions and explained strategies to attain those visions, which confirms with Schuesslbauer et al. (2017) findings in Germany. Transformational leaders who managed to communicate visions were able to motivate employees to achieve organizational success. Therefore, there is a need for transformational leaders to advance inspirational motivation to achieve business sustainability.

Intellectual stimulation. Innovation and creativity are essential tools for transformational leaders. Leaders with intellectual stimulation encourage followers to develop creative ideas to replace existing ones (Chang et al., 2019; Guhr et al., 2019). Also, Donkor and Dongmei (2018) emphasized that transformational leaders require innovation and creativity to train young professionals, enhance teamwork, and communicate appropriately to engage their employees. Leaders successfully increased

followers' independent thinking, risks acceptance, and finding profound motives to improve their performance (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Intellectual stimulation is a key dimension that allows leaders to enhance innovation and creativity skills. As a result of leaders' innovation and creativity, employees accepted the change and performed better.

Many researchers examined intellectual stimulation as an essential behavioral dimension of transformational leaders. Koh et al. (2019) identified that intellectual stimulation enabled leaders to enhance the work environment and increase organizational creativity. Thuan (2019) also confirmed that the leaders' intellectual stimulation developed positive relationships with followers' and enabled the followers' creative performance in the Vietnamese businesses. Leaders intellectual stimulation played an essential role in developing creativity and innovation within organizations. Therefore, intellectual stimulation is an important behavioral dimension for transformational leaders' success in achieving business sustainability.

Worldwide researchers proved how transformational leadership is a consistent leadership style to improve small business performance. Haque et al. (2017) in Australia considered the transformational leadership style as one of the key factors that affected entrepreneurship and firm performance. In Asia, Afsar et al. (2016) confirmed a significant relationship between the transformational leadership style and knowledge in the Indonesian small business, and the transformational leaders encouraged knowledge sharing. In Pakistan, Shafique and Kalyar (2018) explored small businesses' entrepreneurial activities and found that hiring transformational leaders was important to sustain firms through enhanced entrepreneurial activities. Ng and Kee (2018) confirmed

that the transformational leadership style had a similar impact on small businesses, investigating the correlation between the transformational leadership style and Malaysia's organizational performance. Also, the transformational leadership style had the most significant impact on operational efficiency and project success in examining the relationship between leadership, operational efficiency, and Pakistani project success (Ahmed & Abdullahi, 2017). Transformational leaders in Taiwan sustained small firms and increased customer satisfaction by motivating their employees to perform better (Burawat, 2019). Also, Al Harbi et al. (2019) found that the transformational leadership style had a desirable effect on organizational innovation and business sustainability. Leaders then supported employees learning, improved relationships, and individual innovation, as confirmed by Atan and Mahmood (2019) in Malaysia. Transformational leadership enabled small business managers to drive organizational performance to higher levels and achieve business sustainability. Therefore, the transformational leadership style enabled leaders to sustain small businesses across Australia and Asia.

In Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the United States, the transformational leadership style had a tremendous impact on small businesses. Miftari (2018) identified leaders' fundamental characteristics in small businesses and possibilities to transform managers into successful transformational leaders who enhanced communications and motivated employees to achieve Kosovo and other Balkan countries' goals. Also, Teoman and Ulengin (2018) proved that the transformational leadership style significantly impacted Turkish firms' business continuity and success, where the transformational leaders managed to improve supply chain quality performance. While in Ghana, the

transformational leadership style encouraged innovation, which enhanced small businesses' marketing strategies to achieve higher performance levels (Afriyie et al., 2019). Also, Boukamcha (2019) investigated the effect of the transformational leadership style on entrepreneurship in Tunisian small businesses to determine that the transformational leadership style enabled managers to trigger entrepreneurship patterns, which led small businesses to maintain success and achieve sustainability. Garcia-Vidal et al. (2019) expressed that the Ecuadorean small business managers needed to adopt the transformational leadership style to influence and articulate management vision to subordinates, create a healthy workplace, and sustain a small business. Finally, Sow et al. (2017) concluded a positive relationship between the transformational leadership style and the increased job satisfaction in the American health care industry due to the transformational leaders' efforts to enhance the health care industry quality. Therefore, the transformational leadership style provided operational durability and sustained small businesses operated all over the world.

Transactional Leadership Style

The transactional leadership style was an area of development in the full range leadership theory. Along with the transformational leadership style, Burns (1978) introduced the transactional leadership theory, and the purpose of the transactional leadership style was to focus on political leaders (Northouse, 2018). The developed transactional leadership style extended to cover organizational leaders who relied on praises, rewards, and promises to motivate individuals to perform as per firms' job duties (Avolio & Bass, 1991; Barnett, 2019). Transactional leaders motivate followers with

reliance on job role power (Liao et al., 2017; Northouse, 2018). Transactional leaders also govern employee relationships with established processes that aim to engage employees on promises to obtain rewards or apply punishment (Chen & Hou, 2016; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). The transactional leadership style provides leaders with established organizational tools to regulate the relationship between leaders and employees to achieve organizational targets. Therefore, transactional leaders focus on achieving organizational goals defined by processes regardless of followers' development.

The imposed processes were only target-focused and did not allow a strengthened relationship between transactional leaders and employees to exist. Transactional leaders preferred to achieve organizational and individual goals (Erdel & Takkac, 2020), unlike in the transformational leadership style, which raised groups' interests above individual interests and created a healthy relationship between leaders and followers based on trust and leaders influence (Guhr et al., 2019). Both transformational and transactional with related dimensional differences existed and contributed to firms' sustainability and growth. Therefore, the need to develop transactional leadership as a leadership style besides the transformational leadership style through the full range leadership theory existed.

The full range leadership theory identified the transactional leadership style dimensions as three; active management by exception, contingent reward, and passive management by exception. Avolio and Bass moved the passive management by exception to the passive-avoidant leadership style by the full range leadership theory (Anderson &

Sun, 2017; Avolio & Bass, 1991). According to Anderson and Sun (2017), researchers distinguished between contingent rewards, contingent punishment, and noncontingent punishment. Leaders then used such a distinction between contingent reward and noncontingent punishment to apply to a broader range of followers with an increased possibility of fairness. As a result, transactional leaders succeeded in reducing the ambiguity, which threatened the firms' sustainability achievement.

Active management by exception. A fundamental managerial skill is to solve business problems. Active management by exception reflected the status when an active leader interfered with solving a situation before a loss occurred (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Leaders participate in organizational operations to monitor performances and take corrective actions in policy and process violation cases (Barnett, 2019). Transactional leaders should practice problem-solving as being active managers by exception. Therefore, the leader managed problems with immediate interference to rectify existing work errors and conflicts.

Through active management by exception, leaders need to ensure proper control to avoid losses or expose the business to uncalculated risk. Leaders needed to clarify responsibilities and monitored employees' problem execution (Willis et al., 2017). Then leaders would decide the timing to offer solutions before problems cause massive risks that threaten the business sustainability (Rana et al., 2016). Managers have to implement proper processes that provide complete visibility over tasks, which may accelerate leaders' pragmatic interference to solve problems and sustain firms. Therefore, leaders need to be active in monitoring problems to remove conflicts and sustain the business.

Contingent reward. One of the transactional leader roles is to communicate the organizational expectations along with the related rewards. Contingent reward described the extent to which a leader clarified expectations along with the related rewards to a group of followers based on individual performances (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Leaders would also use the previously agreed rewards to identify the employee role and the reward to result from target achievement (Barnett, 2019). In addition to the rewards, transactional leaders used predefined punishments whenever employees failed to meet organizational targets based on allocated job roles (Anderson & Sun, 2017; Northouse, 2018). Transactional leaders managed to shift employees' performance through already established rewards and punishments to achieve organizational goals. Therefore, the transactional leaders' role has an increased ethical obligation to communicate policies and processes to employees with clarity.

Transactional leaders needed to clear employees' doubts by communicating contingent rewards to establish positive relationships within organizations. Previous research confirmed the positive relationship between contingent reward and followers' job satisfaction, followers-leader relationship, leadership effectiveness, and followers' commitment to change, with an increased impact on firms (Diebig et al., 2016; Jiang et al., 2018; Pratama et al., 2018). Transactional leaders needed to emphasize contingent rewards to build constructive individual relationships with employees to reach satisfactory results. Therefore, the transactional leaders' contingent rewards dimension is essential to achieve business sustainability.

Passive management by exception. Numerous work problems may exist when managers do not perform up to expected levels. Passive management by exception reflected the managers' lack of action to manage a business situation (Diebig et al., 2016). A passive leader only interfered with solving a problem after a loss occurred to correct a faulty situation and comply with organizational policies or processes (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Passive management by exception represented a lack of management, which may cause losses due to managers' lack of decision and direction. Therefore, managers need to avoid passive management by exception to reduce risks and ensure business sustainability.

Passive managers by exception are always responsive and negative rather than proactive to address organizational problems. A manager only interfered after a problem has existed (Rana et al., 2016; Willis et al., 2017). According to Northouse (2018), managers responded to existing problems using various means such as applying punishment, criticism, negative feedback, and other forms relying on their powers. With the development of the full range leadership theory, Avolio and Bass (1991) categorized passive management by exception as a form of passive-avoidant leadership style (Barnett, 2019). Passive management by exception managers lacked direction and proper guidance to overcome high risks. Therefore, categorizing passive management by except under the passive-avoidant leadership style repositioned transactional leadership as a style that responds to organizational problems with a problem-solving attitude.

Leadership styles were always a rich subject for researchers to examine and understand to provide business solutions. Many researchers discussed the transactional

leadership style as one of the essential and widely adopted leadership styles. For example, in Asia, Donkor and Dongmei (2018) explored leadership approaches that were practiced for several decades to test efficacy in the global marketplace. The transactional leadership style was more relevant to improve organizational performance with a positive impact on firm employees. Nasir and Yee (2016) also found the increased influence of the transactional leadership style on job satisfaction in examining the Malaysian multinational companies' performance mediated by job satisfaction. When Long et al. (2016) addressed leadership styles contributing the most to affective organizational commitment in Johor small retailers sector in Malaysia, the transactional leadership style had a significant and weak positive relationship with affective organizational commitment. In addition, Mughal et al. (2019) examined the impact of leadership styles on project success in Pakistan to identify the transactional leadership style moderation performed category, which led to project success and small business sustainability. Even in Europe, the transactional leadership style led Albanian managers to sustain their small businesses and grow (Sheshi & Kercini, 2017). The transactional leadership style enabled managers to drive business sustainability within their firms. Therefore, researchers found a positive side for the transactional leadership style, which justified why such a style existed in firms.

On the contrary, not all available research found a positive relationship between transactional leadership style and business sustainability. For example, Afsar et al. (2016) analyzed the transactional leadership style effect on knowledge sharing in Indonesia and did not find a significant relationship. Also, in many research projects, transactional

leadership was observed as the second option to encourage organizational innovation after the transformational leadership style (Donkor & Dogmei, 2018; Ebrahimi et al., 2016; Jia et al., 2018; Prasad & Junni, 2016). Unlike in the transformational leadership style, business sustainability chances did not increase every time leaders used the transactional leadership style to achieve organizational goals. However, researchers still need to examine transactional leadership to improve small business sustainability chances as a leadership style used on a wide range.

Passive-Avoidant Leadership Style

The passive-avoidant leadership style is the third leadership style according to the full range leadership theory. The passive-avoidant leadership style is an ineffective type of leadership (Adeel et al., 2018). Zhou et al. (2020) defined the passive-avoidant leader as the manager who avoided decision-making, failed to impose appropriate behaviors, neglected existing organizational problems, and delegated authorities to employees without proper guidance or feedback to connect employees with the organizational goals (Holtz & Hu, 2017). Passive-avoidant leaders avoided or delayed decision-making (Avolio & Bass, 1991; Barling & Frone, 2017). Managers may need to adopt transformational and transactional leadership styles rather than the passive-avoidant leadership style to ensure business sustainability. Therefore, the passive-avoidant leadership style represented a state of leadership absence and even exceeded the passive management by exception, which the full range leadership theory transferred from the developed transactional leadership style.

Although the full range leadership theory transferred passive management by exception to the passive-avoidant leadership style, there is a difference between managers' behaviors under both. According to Barnett (2019), passive-avoidant leaders differ from passive management by exception since the first may not take corrective action even after a problem exists. However, through passive management by exception, a leader interferes to correct an existing failure (Flatau-Harrison et al., 2020). Leaders' attitudes towards existing problems differentiated between passive-avoidant leaders and passive management by exception. As a result, passive management by exception represents the highest level of passive behaviors.

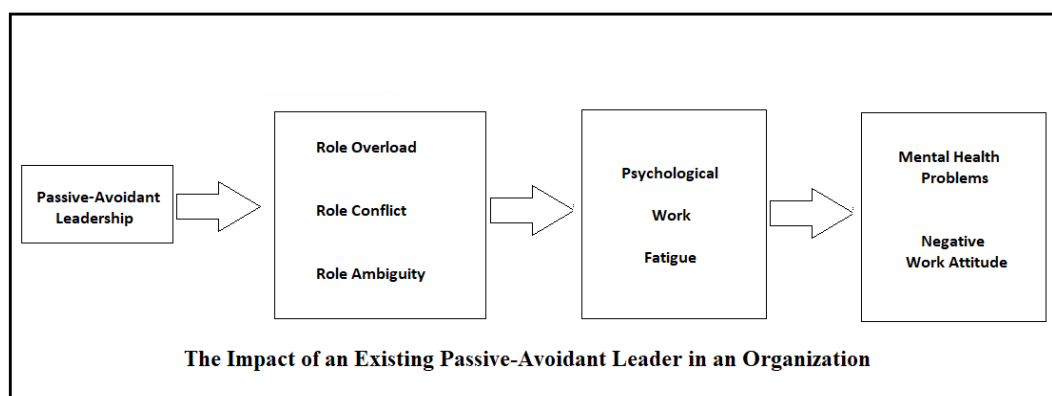
Passive-avoidant leaders might exist in any organization. Business managers might overlook passive-avoidant leaders in organizations since such managers were inactive, uninfluential, and absent whenever a required action was anticipated (Northouse, 2018). Managers with the passive-avoidant leadership style disengaged with followers and refused to participate in organizational tasks that led organizations to encounter severe losses (Barling & Frone, 2017; Curtis, 2018). Organizations keeping passive-avoidant leaders in charge might be exposed to high risks, which may threaten business sustainability. The result of passive-avoidant leaders' existence in firms might be increased role ambiguity, conflicts, and overloaded employees resulted from passive-avoidant leaders' negative behavior.

Indeed, the passive-avoidant leadership style had a negative impact on employees and organizations. Passive-avoidant leaders lacked the expected leadership skills and represented a total absence of leadership (Barnett, 2019). Managers failed to make

decisions and did not set employees' guidelines, creating an enlarged gap between employees' understanding and targeted organizational goals (Northouse, 2018). Managers with a passive-avoidant leadership style may lead to business closure rather than a sustained and growing business. Therefore, the impact of an existing passive-avoidant leader in an organization is unmotivated employees who lack well-being and led to an ineffective organizational performance that threatens the firms' sustainability (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Impact of an Existing Passive-Avoidant Leader in an Organization (Barling & Frone, 2017)



Researchers intersected with the passive-avoidant leadership style in extensive academic literature, which relied on the full range leadership theory to understand leadership relationships. For example, in Asia, Nasir and Yee (2016) investigated the relationship between using multiple leadership styles to ensure job satisfaction and better performance to ensure business sustainability. The study recommendation was that leaders should avoid any passive-avoidant behaviors to avoid the related negative impact on job satisfaction and firms' success. Also, Adeel et al. (2018) relied on the MLQ

instrument to gather data from the Pakistani public sector employees to examine the relationship between the passive-avoidant leadership style, organizational justice, and affect-based trust. Based on participants' responses, passive-avoidant leadership decreased trust and perceptions of organizational justice, and managers needed to avoid the passive-avoidant leadership style as a non-leadership style. Instead, managers needed to adopt transformational leadership or transactional leadership styles. Teoman and Ulengin (2018) recommended the transformational leadership style in the relationship between leadership styles and Turkish firms' business continuity. However, Sheshi & Kercini (2017) preferred the transactional leadership style instead of passive-avoidant behaviors in another research. The passive-avoidant leadership style reflected a state of absence of leadership. Therefore, the passive-avoidant leadership style was never the right choice to sustain a business.

Even when researchers investigated the correlation between leadership styles and variables such as; innovation, creativity, and organizational performance, none of the studies recommended the passive-avoidant leadership style. For example, in a study across Asia, Europe, and United States, Bligh et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between leadership styles and employee error learning. The study concluded that passive-avoidant leaders inhibited employee error learning and disturbed essential organizational change skills such as creativity and innovation. Also, Jing (2018) confirmed that passive-avoidant leadership was not beneficial for the Australian small business performance. Instead, small business managers needed to adopt transformational or transactional leadership styles. Valdiserri and Wilson (2010) also confirmed the need to adopt

transformational and transactional leadership styles in a study that involved small construction business managers in the United States. Barling and Frone (2017) tested a sequential mediational model to explain the negative impact of the passive-avoidant leadership style on the U.S. employee well-being and confirmed Valdiserri and Wilson's findings. The study outcomes were reduced organizational productivity and the lack of business sustainability. Therefore, understanding the relationship between passive-avoidant leadership and small business sustainability may allow small business managers to identify significant leadership styles.

Leadership Styles and Small Business Sustainability

Many researchers discussed the substantial impact of leadership on small business sustainability and how leadership increased small businesses' chances to survive in market competition. Howard et al. (2019) concluded that the leadership influence factor on small business sustainability was critical and dominant. Derecskei (2016) also confirmed Howard et al. (2019) findings in the study to improve creativity through enhanced performance to enable business sustainability. Leadership played a significant role in setting firms' own culture and aligning employees with a direct positive impact on small business sustainability (Szczepanska-Woszczyna & Kurowska-Pysz, 2016). With the increased complexity of modern business, the leaders' role is significant to sustain small businesses. Therefore, there is a need to implement leadership in small business to drive firms to sustainability and continuous operations.

In modern days, leaders gained more stress as the competition reached a peak in the marketplace. Managers needed leadership skills to secure business and clients

because of the growing battle between small businesses and corporates (Khafizov & Mustafin, 2017). Possessing the needed leadership skills became a matter of survival for small businesses (Jansson et al., 2015). The importance of leadership capabilities increased as small business managers oversaw various firms' roles and supervised tasks that varied between strategic, tactical, and operational duties (Garavan et al., 2016). Besides, employees failed to set priorities because personal objectives influenced immediate individual goals (Merriman et al., 2016). Managers with improved leadership skills understood that to keep a productive business for a prolonged period is a small business survival fact that needs employees to change priorities (Merriman et al., 2016). Managers had to align employees with changes in response to market competition's severity (Ozkan et al., 2017). Leadership skills allow managers to make a difference by setting plans, aligning teams, and driving small businesses to sustain themselves. Therefore, there is an essential need for leaders to influence followers and sustain firms.

Managers' leadership roles could lead to the success and failure of companies regardless of firms' size. Wegner et al., 2017 stated that many countries' official authorities offered leadership training programs to small business managers to support small business sustainability. A manager empowered by the appropriate leadership style may motivate small business employees to outperform and achieve business sustainability (Flanigan et al., 2017). On the opposite side, whenever a small business manager failed to adopt a suitable leadership style, threats of business closure and loss of experienced firm employees existed (Bligh et al., 2018). Managers need to identify and adopt leadership styles that may help run a successful business. Therefore, there is a need

that small business managers select the appropriate leadership style to reach small business sustainability.

Some small business managers failed to enhance business performance to continue operating, and the result was business closure because such managers lacked the needed leadership skills to sustain firms' activities. The absence of appropriate leadership was why managers suffer to lead businesses to achieve business sustainability (Acar, 2016; Bambale et al., 2017). Leaders then used a mix of leadership styles before one leadership style became more relevant than the other styles (Bambale et al., 2017). The reflex was that leaders adopted such proper leadership styles, which fitted the organizational structure to eliminate organizational challenges (Howard et al., 2019). Also, Liang and Bao (2018) confirmed that an appropriate leadership style developed entrepreneurial skills and increased the Chinese small tourism business sustainability changes. In Mongolia, employees tended to work for firms that offered satisfactory jobs due to managers' leadership styles' ability to improve small business sustainability and achieved success (Moslehpour et al., 2018). Leadership enabled managers to involve in various activities such as formal mentoring, guided feedback, and communicating the IT small business long-term processes and plans (Hickman & Akdere, 2018). The leadership style implementation provided small businesses with chances to improve performance and survive. The result was a stable business with increased opportunities to grow based on improved relationships between employees and small business leaders.

Organizations may be at high risk without implementing effective leadership that drives healthy relationships between employees and leaders. An effective leadership style

enabled managers to understand the importance of interpersonal behaviors, related situational factors, and inspire followers to achieve results in the Malaysian small business (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2019). Also, Putra and Cho (2019) targeted young employees from U.S. restaurants to explore opinions about small restaurant leaders and identified the key characteristics such as; respect, compassion, effective communication, experience, effective delegation, effort recognition, emotional control, and being organized. Also, effective leadership styles led the U.A.E. small businesses to increase services sales, provide new products, a better stock value, improved market competitiveness, diversified venture skills, and a shift in the number of members of ventures, which improved customer bases (Jawabri, 2019). Appropriate selection and implementation of leadership styles enhanced small business performance and improved operations in various business markets. As a result, small business managers with effective leadership managed to sustain their firms for extended periods.

Many researchers emphasized that small business managers need to adopt appropriate leadership styles to overcome the challenge of sustaining businesses. For example, Yao and Huang (2018) confirmed that leadership style increased job satisfaction and employees' intention to stay, which reflected on small Chinese shipping businesses' sustainability. Also, middle-level managers adopted leadership styles to ensured Czech small business sustainability and security (Kuchynkova, 2016). The presence of a leadership style is essential for small business managers to achieve sustainability in business. Therefore, adopting an effective leadership style always positively impacted driving organizations to maintain a successful business.

Many researchers confirmed that transformational and transactional leadership effectively generated a positive effect on organizational performance and survivability throughout the years. Manzoor et al. (2019) confirmed that the transformational leadership style improved organizational performance to the highest levels possible. Bonsu and Twum-Danso (2018) also expressed that transformational leadership was the dominant style to achieve sustainability in business. In addition, Burawat (2019) confirmed that the transformational leadership style positively impacted firms' business sustainability in assessing the structural relationship model among transformational leadership, sustainable leadership, lean manufacturing practices, and small business performance. Besides the transformational leadership style's role, the transactional leadership style demonstrated increased importance in monitoring contracts and performances in small businesses (Gross, 2016). Alblooshi et al. (2020) confirmed the significant relationship between transactional leadership and organizational innovation. Also, the transactional leadership style's active management by exception enabled managers to set performance standards and guide faulty performances (Crews et al., 2019). Transformational and transactional leadership styles helped small business managers run a sustained business in many countries worldwide. Therefore, small business managers need to choose between transformational and transactional leadership styles based on their firms' business models.

Transition

I presented in this section the research problem, purpose statement, research methodology, and design. The specific business problem is that some small business

managers lack understanding about the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the statistical significance between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. I also presented the full range leadership theory theoretical framework of this study to guide small business managers to select appropriate leadership styles to achieve sustainability in the U.S. small construction projects businesses. Then, I highlighted the previous literature and gaps in research, which this study aims to fill, in addition to assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Then, I presented the possible contribution which small business leaders could provide to their businesses and community to promote social change. In section 2, I discussed the project information, such as the researcher's role, the participants, the research method, design, data collection, analysis, and the tools to promote the research validity.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I outlined my role as the researcher conducting this study and presenting the research method and design, which I employed. This section introduced the population and sampling, data collection technique and data collection instrument, data analysis, and study validity. I also included the ethical research procedures through which I mentioned the consent methods I adopted to protect the research participants.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. The independent variables were transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles, as measured by the MLQ. The dependent variable was small business sustainability as measured by self-reported profit margin. The study population consisted of the construction projects small business managers in the United States. The implications for positive social change included more organizational sustainability and career-advancing opportunities offering the community citizens a more stable labor market. Thus, there may be an increase in the local community members spending and the local government tax revenues, which boosts community-based investments to develop the infrastructure, improve offered services, upgrade hospitals, and fund charities.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers in quantitative studies collect data from specified samples to analyze and respond to research questions. Researchers employ appropriate methods, develop

research designs, administrate survey instruments to participants to collect raw data to analyze and assess relationships between variables (Edwards, 2019). I investigated the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. After I obtained Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number 05-13-21-0729080, I collected the study data. I used SurveyMonkey.com to collect the study data by distributing the MLQ instrument among the U.S. construction projects' small business managers and a statement to self-report profit margin. Then, I used the Statistics Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Software Version 25 for statistical data entry, collected data analysis, created tables, and represented graphs of the study data (see Kolbadinejad et al., 2019). The test results produced by the SPSS software package enabled me, as a researcher, to accept the null hypothesis. Therefore, I was able to respond to the research question.

A researcher should not impose a personal influence on participants. Researchers must minimize any bias influencing participant selection, data collection, and data analysis (Bero, 2017). Bias represents incorrect data and design presentations, leading to inaccurate findings (Leichsenring et al., 2017). Also, researchers consider nonfinancial interests a lesser form of influence than financial interests (Schmiedeke et al., 2019). Researchers need to avoid establishing direct or personal relationships with study participants. As a result, I chose to conduct a quantitative study to examine the study variables to reduce bias by conducting this study.

In this study, I analyzed the collected data to determine existing relationships between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant styles and small business

sustainability. Also, I participated in online training for protecting research participants with the CITI Program. CITI Program training provides a framework for the growing importance of ethical treatment to all study participants, which the Belmont Report confirmed. United States Department of Health and Human Services (2018) stated that the Belmont Report provides the guidelines to protect human subjects from harm when conducting any research and ethical principles. The report also focuses on three areas: (a) beneficence, which guides research ethics, (b) respect of participants involved in the study, and (c) justice. Researchers need to comply with the Belmont Report guidelines to ensure reserving the ethical obligations towards study participants. As a result, I became familiar with the Belmont Report to understand the three areas covered by the report to satisfy the IRB members' obligation by protecting human participants' interests. I have been leading teams as a senior manager for more than 20 years in Egypt, U.K., and the Middle East region. However, this study sample belonged to the U.S. small construction project businesses. I conducted an online survey through SurveyMonkey.com to collect this study data from the specified sample. Online surveys reduce costs and approach a broader sample to generalize findings (Pecakova, 2016). I neither had exposure nor relationships with any of the study participants. Therefore, there was no pressure implied on participants to respond to the online survey.

Participants

Researchers validate research findings by establishing participants' eligibility to ensure the relevancy of study data. Researchers manage to collect meaningful data aligned with the research purpose by ensuring participants' eligibility (Chandler &

Paolacci, 2017). Marzetti et al. (2018) emphasized that researchers need to eliminate noneligible participants to ensure results relevance since study participants should have the experience and research topic-related knowledge to qualify and participate. The eligibility criteria for this study participants included the U.S. small business managers who belong to the construction projects industry and manage small businesses, which employed up to 499 employees according to the U.S. regulators definition of small business (see Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; Lindsay et al., 2019). I reached out to the targeted population through SurveyMonkey to distribute the MLQ tool to collect this study data. Therefore, I ensured the eligibility of participants to receive the survey.

Researchers need to establish a work environment with research participants. Scholars need to maintain a healthy environment with participants based on trust and ethics (Guillemin et al., 2018). Enhanced communication with participants enables researchers to obtain higher responses records, enriching studies and providing more validity to the research results (Van Mol, 2016). I neither had direct nor electronic access to the study participants. Meanwhile, I provided participants with an invitation letter, necessary information, and a proper informed consent form. Therefore, I ensured a healthy environment for the study participants to receive high response rates.

Research Method and Design

Through the investigation of research topics, researchers use research methodologies to gather validated data from multiple sources. Researchers need to select the appropriate research methodology to adequately respond to the research question (Bilau et al., 2018). To investigate the relationship between transformational,

transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability, I used the quantitative research method and the correlational design to respond to the research question.

Research Method

Researchers use three research methods in investigating research topics: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The quantitative research method enables researchers to examine possible existing relationships between study variables and test hypotheses (Apuke, 2017). In quantitative research, a possibly large sample of participants answers predefined questions to validate or nullify several assumptions through produced numerical data (Davies & Fisher, 2018), which leads to efficient results to generalize to a population (Skews, 2020; Turner & Crane, 2016). I tested the statistical significance of the relationships between the study variables. Therefore, among the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, only the quantitative research method fitted my purpose of investigating the statistical significance between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

In qualitative research methods, researchers explore the reasons behind a phenomenon to answer research questions. According to Lerner and Tolan (2016), the qualitative research method enables researchers to explore social and human practices that may vary from one participant to another, relying on semi structured interviews, focus groups, documents review, and observation to collect data (Guest et al., 2017). However, the qualitative research method did not fit the study purpose since qualitative research would not allow me to produce numerical data to analyze. Therefore, qualitative

research did not fit this study to represent the statistical significance between the study variables. At the same time, I did not intend to explore small business managers' insights.

In mixed methods, researchers combine quantitative and qualitative research methods to respond to research questions (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). The purpose behind a mixed-method use is the researchers' intention to exploit quantitative and qualitative research strengths and to validate both methods' findings (Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2018). Researchers in mixed methods produce numerical data through quantitative research and validate the findings by exploring individuals' insights to confirm research findings (Taguchi, 2018). I did not conduct qualitative research because this study aimed to test the statistical significance of the study variables. As a result, both the qualitative and the mixed-method research methodologies did not represent valid choices to answer this study's research question.

Research Design

Researchers who conduct quantitative research methods use one of four quantitative research designs: (a) correlational, (b) experimental, (c) quasi-experimental, and (d) causal-comparative. Researchers rely on the correlational design to investigate noncausal relationships between variables (Pandey, 2020; Seeram, 2019). In this study, I investigated the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. Therefore, unlike the other quantitative research designs, the correlational design allowed me to examine possible relationships between the study variables to identify such relationships' strengths and direction.

The experimental design is one of the quantitative research designs adopted in the research. The experimental design allows researchers to assess the cause-and-effect relationship between variables under highly controlled conditions (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019), as researchers examine the random impact of one or more of the independent variables on one or more of the dependent variables (Liu & Maxwell, 2019). I did not test causal relationships between the study variable. Therefore, the experimental design did not fit the purpose of this study.

The third quantitative research design is the quasi-experimental design. Like in the experimental design, researchers use the quasi-experimental design to test the causal relationship between variables (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). However, researchers cannot apply randomization when assigning variables to groups to test their relationships (Miller et al., 2019). I did not examine cause and effect relationships between variables in this study. As a result, the quasi-experimental design was not the right choice to conduct this study.

The final quantitative design is causal-comparative design. In the causal-comparative design, researchers plan to compare two or more groups of variables (Blakeslee, 2020). The causal-comparative design does not allow researchers to manipulate research variables; however, researchers use the causal-comparative design to investigate relationships between independent and dependent variables after specific events (Ozturk, 2017). In this study, I did not investigate cause-and-effect relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Therefore, I did not use the causal-comparative design; and instead, I used the correlation design.

Population and Sampling

The study participants comprised small business managers who belong to the construction projects industry in the United States. Small business managers are practically the organizational members running small businesses with involvement in various firms' functions ranging from strategic decision-making to operation levels. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. As a result, there was a need to select an appropriate quantitative sampling method and technique.

Researchers in performing quantitative studies use probability or nonprobability sampling methods to select appropriate research samples. In probability samples, the targeted population members are always random, which reduces the bias possibility (Buchanan et al., 2018). However, in nonprobability sampling, researchers select participants from a targeted population to achieve research goals and generalize results to a broader population (Link, 2018). Nonprobability purposive sampling enables researchers to target a specific sample group in quantitative research. Therefore, I used nonprobability purposive sampling to identify the targeted participants to collect data.

Purposive sampling is a sampling technique belonging to nonprobability sampling in scholarly research. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling did not imply a random sample. Purposive sampling enables researchers to select the most relevant sample to the research core topic, according to specific characteristics such as job designations. Also, purposive sampling increased researchers' chances of observing

phenomena (Serra et al., 2018). Purposive sampling represented an appropriate choice for this study purpose since the targeted sample's main characteristic was being small business managers who only belong to the U.S. construction projects industry. Therefore, there was a need to use purposive sampling to approach the U.S. small business managers belonging to the construction project industry as a targeted sample and identify the required sample size for this study.

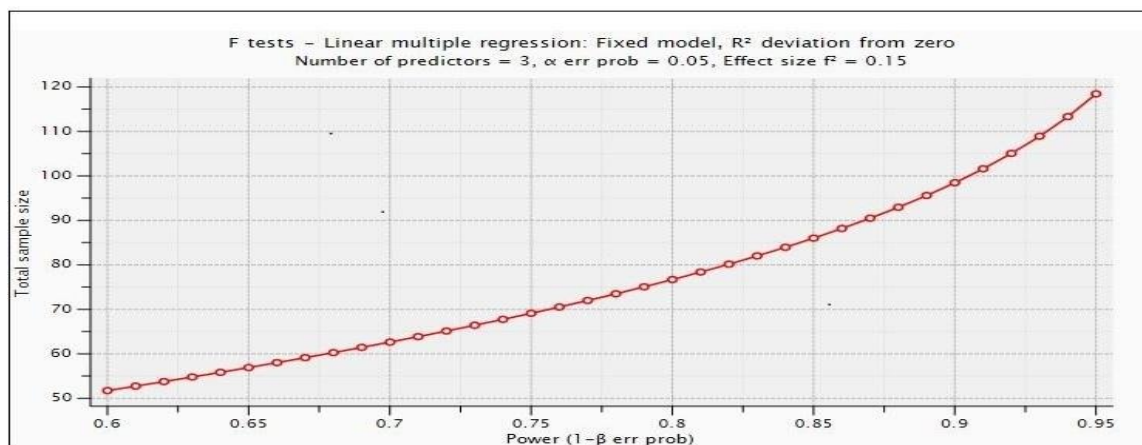
Purposive sampling provided me with many advantages in conducting this study. Purposive sampling allowed me to collect data from a broader sample in a short time and at a controlled cost to calculate the response average (see Serra et al., 2018). Then, I generalized this study's findings among small business managers from the U.S. construction projects industry to enhance small firms' sustainability (Campbell et al., 2020). However, purposive sampling did not allow me to extend this study's findings to small business managers from other industries in the United States. Besides, I did not extend the study findings to other countries' small business managers.

A researcher needs to identify the needed sample size to validate the research findings. As a researcher, I relied on the G*Power software Version 3.1.9.4 to produce a meaningful sample size to validate the study findings (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009; *Universitat Dusseldorf: gpower*, n.d.). Results accuracy requires an increased sample size (Ott & Longnecker, 2016). A priori power analysis allowed a researcher to eliminate the error chances that may occur and ensure an actual effect of the study sample (Albers & Lakens, 2018). The analysis included a medium effect size ($f = 0.15$) and an alpha value of 0.05. Also, the multiple

linear regression analysis required a sample of a minimum of 77 participants when placing the power value at 0.80 and a maximum of 119 participants when increasing the power value to 0.95 for higher accuracy of study results (see Figure 3). In conclusion, in this study, I needed to collect data according to the needed sample size. The study participants were only small business managers who belong to the U.S. construction project industry.

Figure 3

A Priori Power Analysis as a Function of Sample Size



Ethical Research

Researchers need to imply ethical parameters when conducting research.

Researchers employ a defined ethical purpose and maximize the relational validity when setting research designs, analytical methods, and ethical purposes (Powell, 2019). The purpose of the ethical parameters is to ensure participants' protection (Ross et al., 2018), allowing researchers to eliminate participants-related risks and racism (Msimang, 2020). An ethical approach ensures research participants' safety, provides quality studies, and

reflects community respect. Therefore, researchers need to follow ethical practices to conduct social science research.

Scholars need to understand ethical means to approach study samples. The Belmont Report provides researchers with necessary guidelines for approaching a community sample (Friesen et al., 2017), and such guidelines revolved around establishing respect, beneficence, and justice (Adashi et al., 2018). Researchers need to obtain participants' consent, apply fair rules, and minimize possible participant-related risks to comply with the Belmont Report guidelines. Therefore, researchers need to commit to the Belmont Report rules before conducting research studies.

In this study, I ensured full compliance with ethics and awareness of the Belmont Report. Also, I neither communicated with participants nor distributed the MLQ instrument until I obtained the IRB authorization number 05-13-21-0729080. The IRB approval is a Walden University essential requirement to collect data. Participants were not given any incentives before, during, or after participating in this study. In general, a researcher needs to communicate the informed consent form to participants to explain the study's purpose and participants' rights (Krajnovic & Jovic, 2016; Trochim et al., 2016). Participating in research was subject to participants' will to participate (Wilbanks, 2020). Also, researchers need to confirm participants' wellbeing, confidentiality, and keeping participants' names confidential as ethical research obligations (Kara & Lucy, 2017). I added the informed consent form to the online survey invitation letter to address the participants' rights, privacy, and confidentiality terms. I also assured the participants of this study that there was no risk in responding to the study survey. Then, I considered that

participants' proceeding to answer the survey as consent of participation. At the same time, I respected participants' right to withdraw at any time during research without consequences by contacting me by email. The right to withdraw is an ethical right to research participants (Gainotti et al., 2016). There was no participant-related risk as the study participants remained anonymous.

In addition, and for participants' confidentiality protection, I electronically secured the participants-related file in a safe drive with a password. I will keep it secure for 5 years before permanently deleting the file after the expiration of such a period. In addition, and for the purpose of transparency, a copy of the invitation letter is included in this study Appendix A. Therefore, I followed increased standards of ethics in conducting the study survey.

Data Collection Instruments

Many researchers administrated the MLQ, published by Mind Garden, Inc., as a data collection instrument in research. According to Stedman and Adams-Pope (2019), scholars use the MLQ, which Bass and Avolio (1995) developed and validated as a web-based instrument to illustrate transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles through quantitative research. The MLQ is also used in business to assess managers' leadership styles and the related impact on business success (Jaarsveld et al., 2019). Managers empowered by leadership styles play a significant role in enhancing firms' performance, work environment, and job satisfaction, which result in organizations' overall success. As a result, the MLQ is an important instrument for

organizations and researchers to determine successful leadership since managers with appropriate leadership styles influence firms' sustainability and employee job security.

Previously, there were two versions of the MLQ instrument; (a) MLQ (5X-Short) and (b) MLQ (5X-Long). The MLQ (5X-Long), which consisted of 63 items, is no longer available for printing, and the only MLQ version available is the short one, which consists of 45 items grouped according to each leadership style to measure leadership styles based on average score (*Mind Garden*, 2019). The MLQ enabled participants to use a Likert-type ordinal scale ranging from one (Not at all) to five (Frequently) to respond to the survey statements in an approximate period of 15 minutes (Donmez & Toker, 2017). A researcher calculates the average score of transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles groups by scaling and adding all responses score per each leadership style then dividing by the total number of responses for each leadership style (Hansen & Pihl-Thingvad, 2018). Transformational and transactional leadership styles represented higher efficiency in comparison with the passive-avoidant leadership style and enabled organizations to succeed for long periods of operation. Therefore, there was a need to use the MLQ to identify appropriate leadership styles to benefit small business sustainability.

I selected the MLQ as an online survey instrument based on the prior validation by Bass and Avolio (1995) to examine the study's independent variables; (a) transformational, (b) transactional, and (c) passive-avoidant leadership styles possessed by the U.S. construction projects small business managers. I included Mind Garden's permission to use the MLQ in Appendix B for transparency purposes. The proof of

purchase acts as the permission to use the MLQ instrument to collect data. I also listed Appendix B in the table of contents. I also used the MLQ according to the instrument standard use to collect data without modifications. In the survey, I included one more question requesting participants to self-report small businesses' profit margin to measure small business sustainability, the study dependent variable. Therefore, when the participants responded to the survey statements, I obtained the needed data to examine the study variables' statistical significance.

Researchers use proper tests and scales to achieve reliability. Researchers adopt Cronbach's alpha statistic to ensure the summated rating scales' internal consistency or reliability (Vaske et al., 2016). Cronbach's alpha is one of the most important research statistics to involve test construction and use (Taber, 2017). The Cronbach's α for the MLQ was measured at 0.82, with the α 's for transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles at 0.92, 0.83, and 0.74 (Al-Yami et al., 2018; Konstantinou & Prezerakos, 2018). Also, Dimitrov and Darova (2016) analyzed the MLQ scales and subscales to reach acceptable results for the internal validity and construct validity, which confirmed Avolio and Bass's (1995) model. I used the MLQ instrument to measure the extent to which transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles existed to reach the study findings. As a result, I used the SPSS Software Version 25 to conduct a reliability analysis against this study sample to determine the reported and calculated reliability coefficient difference. The raw data are available by request from the researcher.

Data Collection Technique

Online surveys are a popular data collection method for academic research. The use of internet-based data collection has rapidly grown over the past year (Regmi et al., 2017) because of the related low cost, ability to randomize samples, and gathering data with high speed compared to other data collection means (Pecakova, 2016). Researchers need to set clear survey designs, precise questions, use technology, and implement consistency to produce valid results out of online surveys. Online surveys need a simple design to enable participants to understand survey questions and respond appropriately since direct communications between researchers and participants do not exist. Therefore, online surveys with appropriate quality enable scholars to collect precise data in limited lead times and affordable costs.

Although the relatively competitive costs and reduced lead times, online surveys still have a disadvantage, affecting the collected data validity. Participants felt more at ease responding to physical questionnaires based on the built relationships (Shapka et al., 2016). Researchers' presence in interviews with participants ensured that participants understood the research questions and provided valid responses in their voices (Thompson et al., 2019). With the implementation of simple tones and attractive designs, online survey disadvantages do not form an obstacle for researchers to collect data. Therefore, researchers should understand how to distribute online surveys to the targeted participants to collect the needed study data.

Online survey distribution became simple and easy to use with basic technology knowledge. For example, in the treatment of hernia, the cloud-based SurveyMonkey

platform gained endorsement by the European Hernia Society (EHS), Americas Hernia Society (AHS), and Asia Pacific Hernia Society (APHS) as a reliable survey distribution platform (Johansen et al., 2020). SurveyMonkey is an online survey distribution and data collection service. However, researchers still need to minimize response bias by incorporating an automatic question logistic in the online survey setup (Akbulut et al., 2017). Successful survey distribution platforms, such as SurveyMonkey, enabled researchers to target populations and gather a sufficient number of responses with a direct reflection on research results validity. Therefore, online survey distribution services enable researchers to collect more significant data than in traditional methods, minimize the survey distribution and collection lead time at an affordable cost.

In this study, after I obtained the IRB approval number 05-13-21-0729080. I purchased the licenses to use the MLQ instrument developed by Avolio and Bass (1995) and validated in a previous study as per the identified participants' sample size from the publisher website (*Mind Garden*, 2019). Then, I used SurveyMonkey as a reliable web-based platform to distribute online surveys and collect responses. SurveyMonkey offers a targeted responses service, which I used to collect data from the targeted sample for this study (SurveyMonkey, 2019). I also added a statement to self-report the small business profit margin to the survey. SurveyMonkey sent the invitation letter to the targeted sample to participate in the online survey and obtained participants' consent to continue to answer the online survey questions. Also, the platform sent reminders to ensure high rates of participation. The collected data enabled me to answer the research question of this study: Is there a relationship between small business managers' transformational,

transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability?

After the data collection process, I organized the collected data before proceeding with verifications and the analysis to test the study variables' possible relationships.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a critical aspect to achieve valid results in academic research. Data analysis is a significant methodological component that requires researchers in quantitative studies to manage data properly (Abulela & Harwell, 2020). Mishandling data and data analysis errors led to low quality and incredible research results (Sijtsma, 2016). Scholars need to understand how to use data and apply the appropriate analysis, which leads to successful research. Therefore, possessing relevant data and performing appropriate analysis lead researchers to answer the research questions.

In this study, I investigated the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability to respond to the research question. The research question was: Is there a relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability? This study's null hypothesis was: There is no statistically significant relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. While the alternative hypothesis was: There is a statistically significant relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

In this study, I examined the relationship between three independent variables: (a) transformational, (b) transactional, (c) passive-avoidant leadership styles, and small business sustainability. I used the quantitative research method and the correlational design to analyze this study's variables relationships. Quantitative research is a research strategy that enables researchers to quantify the collected data, represent numerically, and examine relationships between variables to generalize findings among a population (Rahman, 2016). The correlational design also enables the researcher to denote relationships between multiple variables (Gogtay & Thatte, 2017) and conduct multiple linear regression analysis (Ebrahimi et al., 2016). The multiple regression analysis allows the researcher to test each independent variable's relationships and the dependent variable (Khan & Zubaidy, 2017). I treated the collected data from MLQ Likert survey as continuous and interval data to analyze this study's independent variable: (a) transformational, (b) transactional, and (c) passive-avoidant leadership styles using the correlational analysis. The correlational analysis enables the researcher to examine numerous relationships which involve two or more independent variables (Liu & Markine, 2019). The correlational analysis was a valid option in previous research, which examined relationships involving independent variables. For example, the correlational analysis enabled Barnett (2017) to test the relationship between leadership styles and job satisfaction. Rana et al. (2019) also used the correlational analysis to analyze the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance. Besides, Somprach et al. (2016) used the multiple regression analysis to investigate the relationship between school principals' essential leadership styles and teachers' participation in professional

learning communities. The researchers managed to prove the significant role of leadership styles in influencing teachers' participation. Therefore, unlike other statistical analyses, the selected statistical analysis may enable the researcher to identify the statistical significance between this study variables.

Other statistical analysis methods and techniques, such as t-test, ANOVA, MANOVA, bivariate linear regression, and hierarchical multiple regression, do not allow the researcher to respond to the research question. The use of t-test, ANOVA, and MANOVA are statistically valid in a two groups comparison. (Field, 2018; Green & Salkind, 2017; Pallant, 2020). Further, Green and Salkind (2017) emphasized that researchers use bivariate linear regression to analyze the relationship between one independent variable and one dependent variable. Also, researchers use hierarchical multiple regression to control an independent variable effect and avoid a significant influence on the dependent variable (Field, 2018). Since this study's variables were three independent variables and a dependent variable, the chosen multiple regression analysis allowed me to examine the relationship between this study's variables. As a result, I accepted the null hypothesis as I found that none of the independent variables had a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable.

There was an increasing concern that the research findings after testing variables relationships might be false. Researchers use one of the data screening techniques to manage missing and incomplete data before analyzing the collected data (Mutz et al., 2018; Tran et al., 2017). Through data screening, researchers attempt to identify and rectify data errors (Greenwood-Nimmo & Shields, 2017), which can be by removing

inconsistency or inaccurate values (Spiegelhalter, 2019). Researchers have to screen the collected data before testing relationships between variables to ensure the accuracy and quality of research results. Therefore, clean data before proceeding with the statistical analysis allowed me to reach accurate results and valid findings.

In concern of missing and incomplete data, missing data tend to be an expected quantitative research challenge. Missing data treatment is a mandatory aspect for researchers to robust research quality (Berchtold, 2019). SPSS Software Version 25 allowed me to clean the data with multiple imputation errors (Zhang et al., 2018). I filtered out incomplete and missing responses that exceeded 5% from participants, ensuring study results accuracy. Therefore, the quality and validity of results were achieved before analyzing the study variables' relationships.

I used Pearson correlation to test the linear relationship strength between the study variables. Then, I conducted a multiple linear regression analysis and assessed the four multiple regression assumptions: (a) normality, (b) multicollinearity, (c) linearity, and (d) homoscedasticity (Green & Salkind, 2017). In the normality assumption, the residuals must be normally distributed and modeled clearly (Chen & Leroux, 2018). Researchers spot the normality assumption when the plot points remain close to the diagonal line (Jeong & Jung, 2016). Researchers may use data transformation to rectify any distribution of non-normal errors (Miot, 2017). Pallant (2020) also stated that multicollinearity exists in highly correlated independent variable cases when $r = 0.9$ or above. I used the variance inflation factor (VIF) to estimated multicollinearity existence. Linearity occurs when two variables represent a linear relationship (Li et al., 2018).

Researchers can reach linearity when presenting a random pattern in the plot of the standardized residuals, which standardizes the dependent variable estimates (Jeong & Jung, 2016). A violation may exist when a researcher randomly spreads points (Pallant, 2020). However, logarithmic, square root, and inverse are data transformation techniques that researchers may use to solve the linearity problem whenever a linearity violation exists (Pek et al., 2017). In addition, homoscedasticity of errors is one assumption of multiple regression analysis (Klein et al., 2016). Homoscedasticity exists when equal residuals exist across regression lines in scatter plots (Jeong & Jung, 2016; Sureiman & Mangera, 2020). I used the Breusch-Pagan test to ensure homoscedastic did not exist, which Anggraeni et al. (2017) used in predicting the number of dengue fever incidents in Malang, Indonesia. Researchers need to use solutions to rectify violations to avoid negative impacts on research results. In any violation existence, I was able to rectify data to reach valid study findings. Therefore, I used SPSS Software Version 25 to check the correlation coefficient values and the normal probability plot to ensure data and assumptions compliances.

Using correlation and multiple regression in this study, I interpreted results using Pearson correlation coefficients. Pearson correlation coefficient (r) measures linear associations between two variables (Xu & Deng, 2018), which ranges between +1 and -1, and the value of 0 indicates that there is no association between variables (Baak et al., 2020). I interpreted the correlation analysis results using Pearson correlation coefficients and effect sizes classification: (a) negligible, (b) weak, (c) moderate, (d) strong, and (e) very strong. The statistical significance level was ($p < .05$). Quantifying results in

empirical research is subjective to the effect size (Liu & Yuan, 2020). In this study, I interpreted the R^2 value according to Cohen's (1992) guidelines of 0.01 small effect, 0.06 moderate effect, and 0.14 large effect.

Study Validity

Researchers capitalize on recognized research measurements to validate research findings. Researchers recently started to use existing measurement instruments to save the time consumed to validate and prove research instruments (Knehta et al., 2019) for every time research uses (Kane, 2016). Researchers need to ensure the significant use of data collection instruments to obtain accurate data to validate the research. As a result, researchers ensure recognized research results to generalize to specific populations.

Researchers need to achieve external, internal, and construct validity. External validity enables researchers to generalize research findings to other populations (Chaplin et al., 2018; Cor, 2016), which Sato (2016) confirmed in assessing the relationships between research variables. Researchers have a growing obligation to generate valid information and avoid bias created by the majority of responses that lack knowledge and expertise. Researchers can minimize external validity threats through proper population size assurance, using validated data collection instruments, and applying appropriate statistical methods. Therefore, scholars have to select appropriate samples to achieve external validity and generalize research results.

Apart from external validations, internal validity is reflected in the acceptance of research results. Internal validity ensured the consistent relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Chaplin et al., 2018). Some researchers prioritized

internal validity over the external since, without a valid relationship between variables, there is no need to generate rules and promote to other populations (Crano, 2019).

Researchers need to eliminate internal validity threats, such as regression validity and selection issues, before improving the external validity. Therefore, internal validity allows researchers to improve external validity to promote general rules for other populations.

The third type of validity is the construct validity. Construct validity refers to the degree of accuracy of which a test measures the assignment intended to measure (Sato, 2016). Not all variables are easy to observe, which led researchers to rely on measurement instruments to search for causal relationships between variables (Wieland et al., 2017). Researchers need to communicate clear tests explanation to research participants to ensure the construct validity. Therefore, researchers avoid violating statistical test results in sample size and significance errors, which falsify research results.

Researchers may face statistical conclusion validity-related issues when analyzing data. Statistical conclusion validity refers to the appropriate statistical techniques which researchers use to meet statistical assumptions to interpret meaningful data (Grigsby & McLawhorn, 2018), which may take one of two errors: (a) Type I error and (b) Type II error. A Type I error occurs when a researcher incorrectly rejects a null hypothesis. A Type II error occurs when a researcher incorrectly supports a null hypothesis when a relationship exists (Hales, 2016). I did not face Type I and Type II errors in this study since this study's sample was a sizable one and the significance level was high (Matuschek et al., 2017). Researchers increase research sample sizes to rectify Type I

error and invest in higher significance levels to overcome Type II error. In this study, the sample size and significance levels were broad. Therefore, there is an increased possibility that this study achieved valid results without facing statistical conclusion validity errors.

Transition and Summary

In the previous section, I presented the research method and design I used in this study. I also presented the ethical research to employ in my role as the researcher in this study to examine the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidance leadership styles and small business sustainability in the U.S. construction projects industry. I used a quantitative research method along with the correlational design.

This section introduced the population and sampling, data collection technique and instrument, data analysis, and study validity. Section 3 introduced the purpose statement again and presented the study findings. I also included the application of findings to professional practice, implications for social change, conclusion, and recommendations for future research.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

In this section, I discussed the testing of assumptions, presented descriptive statistics, presented inferential results, provided a theoretical discussion pertaining to the findings, discussed the application to professional practice, reflected on how the findings may influence social change.

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between the transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. The independent variables were (a) transformational, (b) transactional, and (c) passive-avoidant leadership styles. The dependent variable was small business sustainability. Data collection was through an online survey that incorporated the MLQ and a question to self-report the expected profit margin. The online survey and data collection occurred through SurveyMonkey.com. The outcome of the linear multiple regression analysis used in this study confirmed that there is no statistically significant relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Presentation of the Findings

I selected a correlational design to examine the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. Following are the research question and hypotheses that served in this study to guide the statistical analysis I used to investigate the relationship between the study's variables: Is there a relationship between small business managers'

transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability? The two study hypotheses were:

H_01 : There is no statistically significant relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

H_{a1} : There is a statistically significant relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

The online survey participants answered the MLQ questions and a question to self-report the profit margin percentage expected for their businesses. I tested the collected data from the online survey using Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression with SPSS Version 25 to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. Test results demonstrated that a significant relationship did not exist between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. The alpha value was set at 0.05. Thus, the study results confirmed the null hypothesis of this study ($F(3, 124) = 1.967, p = .122, R^2 = .045$).

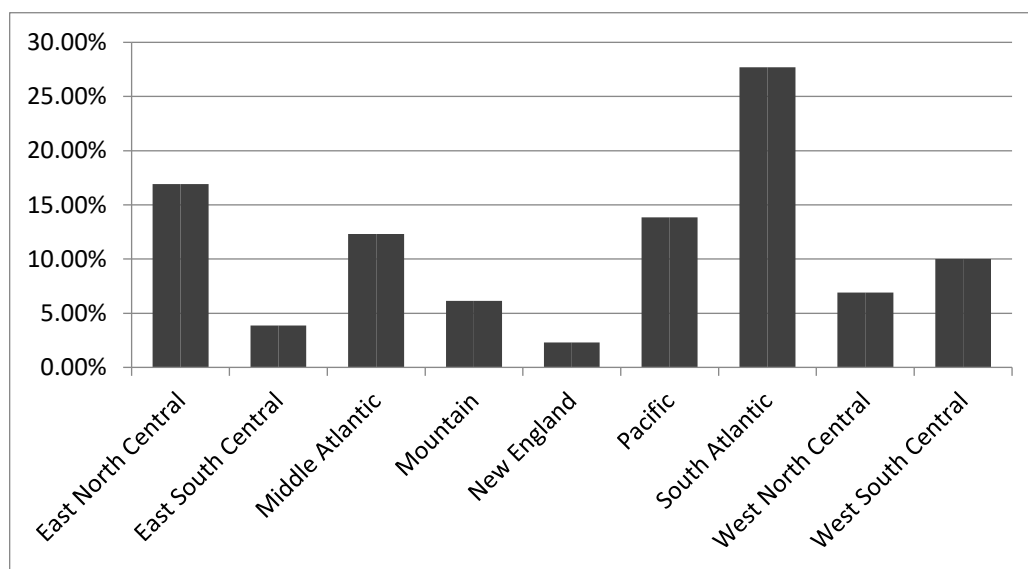
Descriptive Statistics

I used SurveyMonkey's targeted audience feature to distribute the online survey and collect this study's data from a sample of managers who belonged to the U.S. construction projects small businesses. The collected data from the online survey were

138 responses. As reflected in Figure 4, the participants belonged to all the U.S. regions. SurveyMonkey classified the U.S. regions into nine areas: East North Central, with the participation rate of 16%, East South Central, with the participation rate of 4%, Middle Atlantic, with the participation rate of 12%, Mountain, with the participation rate of 6%, New England, with the participation rate of 2%, Pacific, with the participation rate of 14%, South Atlantic, with the participation rate of 27%, West North Central, with the participation rate of 7%, and West South Central, with the participation of rate 10% of the total collected responses. The selection of SurveyMonkey was valid to collect this study's data. Therefore, the collected responses were consistent enough to reflect all regions of the United States.

Figure 4

The U.S. Participation Percentage Per Regions

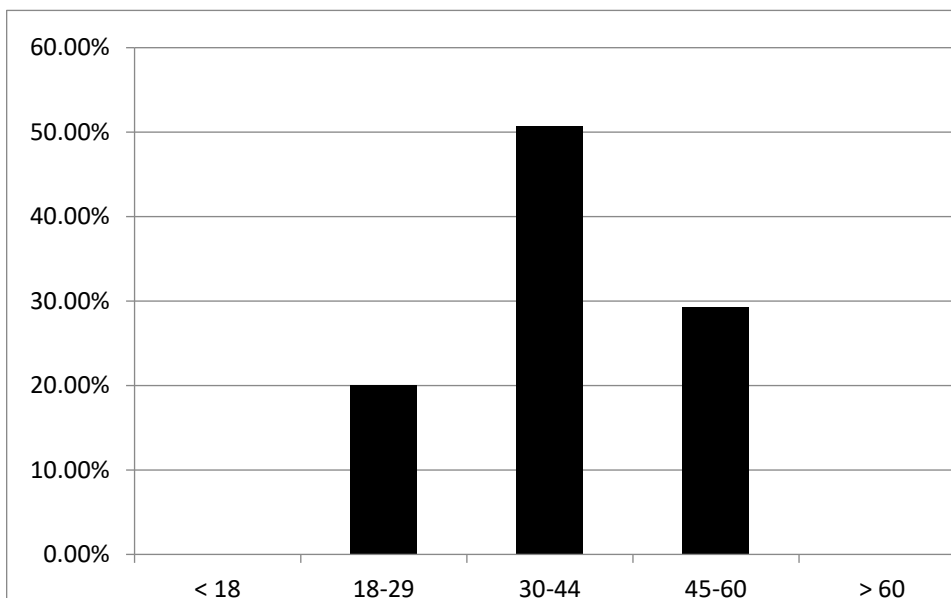


Also, the targeted participants through the online survey of this study were full-time employed small business managers. The age groups of the participants ranged

between 18 to 60 years old. As demonstrated in Figure 5, the participants whose age ranged between 18 and 29 years old represented 20%, participants whose age ranged between 30 to 44 years old represented 50%, and the participants who aged between 45 and 60 years old represented 30% of the total participants in this study. Setting the age groups between 18 and 60 years old enabled to eliminate any research ethics age violation. Therefore, 100% of this study participants enjoyed the capacity to decide to participate in this study.

Figure 5

The Participants Age Groups



Out of 138 collected responses, only 128 ($N = 128$) qualified to meet the parameters set in conducting this study. The transformational leadership style score ranged from 1.45 to 4.00, with $M = 2.78$. The transactional leadership styles score ranged from 1.00 to 3.75, with $M = 2.52$. The passive-avoidant leadership style score ranged

from 0.00 to 3.25, with $M = 1.20$. Table 2 represents the descriptive statistics for the three variables.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of The Independent Variables

Variable	M	SD
Transformational Leadership Style	2.78	0.56
Transactional Leadership Style	2.52	0.60
Passive Avoidant Leadership Style	1.20	0.85

Note: $N = 128$

Researchers use Cronbach's alpha to measure the reliability of the used instrument in research (Taber, 2017). The acceptable Cronbach's alpha range starts from 0.70 (McNeish, 2018). In this study, the three independent variables met the acceptable Cronbach's alpha range. The transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles exceeded the acceptable range of 0.70, scoring 0.90, 0.72, and 0.85, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Cronbach's Alpha of the Independent Variables

Variable	<i>NO. of Items</i>	α
Transformational Leadership Style	20	0.90
Transactional Leadership Style	8	0.72
Passive Avoidant Leadership Style	8	0.86

Tests of Assumptions

Before analysis, I assessed the assumptions of multicollinearity, outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals. I also used

1,000 samples bootstrapping with 95% confidence intervals to overcome the influence of assumption violations.

Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity occurs when two or more independent variables have strong interrelationships that lead to misrepresenting regression models (Assaf et al., 2019; Mohammadi, 2020). The multicollinearity assumption exists when the variance inflation factor (VIF) exceeds 10, and a tolerance statistic below .20 is a cause for concern (Lavery et al., 2017). I tested multicollinearity using Pearson correlation, and the VIF value was less than 10, as demonstrated in Table 4.

Therefore, the research data met the assumption of multicollinearity.

Table 4

Correlation Coefficients Among Study Independent Variables

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Transformational Leadership Style	0.392	2.55
Transactional Leadership Style	0.449	2.22
Passive-avoidant Leadership Style	0.798	1.25

Outliers

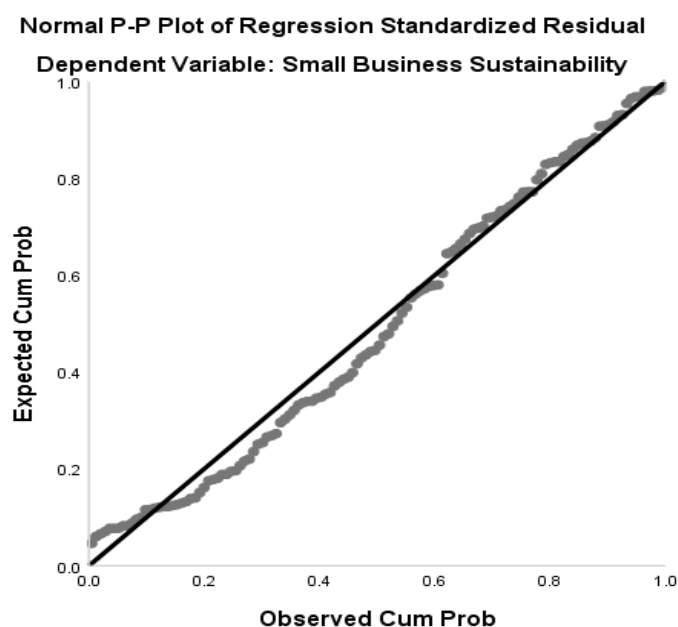
Outliers are data points with extreme distances that cause problematic influences in interpreting the relationships between research variables (Leys et al., 2019). I received a total of 138 completed online surveys for this study. I applied the interquartile range (IQR) rule using a value of 1.5 to screen the responses for outliers. The outcome was removing ten responses before proceeding with this study's analysis depending on the remaining 128 responses.

Normality

Researchers need to ensure that research data are not skewed. Research variables that are not normally distributed can misrepresent relationships and significance tests (Knief & Forstmeier, 2021). In this study, I used the normal P-P plot, which indicated that the collected data were normally distributed in a solid diagonal line, as confirmed in Figure 6. Therefore, the research data met the assumption of normality.

Figure 6

Normal Probability Plot (P-P) of the Regression Standardized Residual.



Linearity

I created a partial regression scatterplot to test the linearity level between the independent and dependent variables (see Figure 7). According to the scatterplot I created, a linear relationship existed between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Further, I used the Durbin-Watson test. Durbin-Watson test allows researchers

to assess that the residuals are not linearly autocorrelated (Turner, 2020). In this study, the Durbin-Watson test confirmed that successive error differences were minor and within the acceptable range. Therefore, the data met the assumption of linearity.

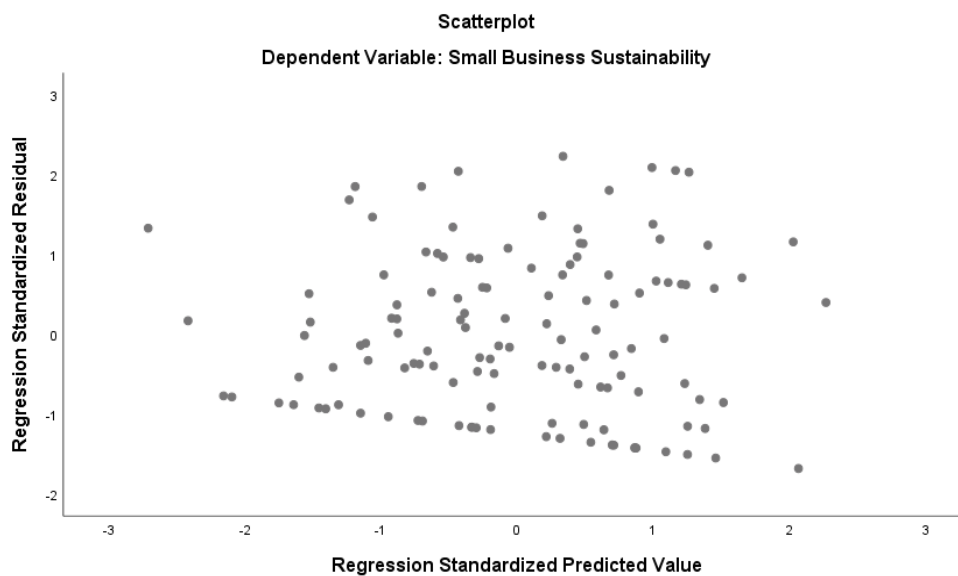
Homoscedasticity

Homoscedasticity occurs when variables' variance in the score is constant (Djalic & Terzic, 2021). I assessed homoscedasticity using the scatterplot of residuals, and the assumption was violated, as indicated in Figure 7. I used the Breusch-Pagan test to assess heteroscedasticity, and no violation against the null hypothesis was found.

Heteroscedasticity may provide a low p value and false evidence against the null hypothesis (Wang et al., 2018). A further proof that there was no violation was accepting the null hypothesis of this study.

Figure 7

Scatterplot of the Standardized Residuals.



Inferential Results

I conducted a multiple linear regression analysis, $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed), to examine the ability of leadership styles to predict small business sustainability in the U.S. construction projects small businesses. The multiple linear regression allows researchers to estimate possible relationships between research variables (Salmeron et al., 2018). The independent variables were (a) transformational, (b) transactional, and (c) passive-avoidant leadership styles. The dependent variable was small business sustainability. The null hypothesis was that small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles were not statistically significant to predict small business sustainability. The alternative hypothesis was the existence of a statistically significant relationship between small business managers transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

The regression analysis results, as demonstrated in Table 5, highlight that there is no statistically significant relationship between the study variables, $F(3, 124) = 1.967$, $p = .122$, $R^2 = .045$. The $R^2 (.045)$ represents approximately 4.5% of the variation in small business sustainability for the linear combination of the independent variables; (a) transformational, (b) transactional, and (c) passive-avoidant leadership style. A statistically significant relationship was not observed between the study's independent and dependable variables. The overall regression model was weak and not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 5*Regression Analysis Summary for Independent Variables*

Model	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Regression	4707.91	1569.30	1.9	.122
Residual	103639.81	0.798	67	

I also demonstrated in Table 6 the model summary providing the strength of the relationship between the study's independent and dependent variables, the standard error of the estimate (28.246), and the Durbin-Watson test (1.894). As per the model, the relationship between the study's variables was weak. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 6*Model Summary (N = 128)*

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	Adjusted <i>R Square</i>	<i>SE of the Estimate</i>	Durbin-Watson
1	.213	.045	0.22	28.246	1.894

a. Independent Variables: (Constant), Transformational Leadership Style, Transactional Leadership style, Passive-Avoidant Leadership style.

b Dependent Variable: Small Business Sustainability.

Analysis Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. I used the multiple linear regression analysis to examine the ability of transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles to predict the value of small business sustainability. Assumptions surrounding multiple regression were

assessed with no serious violations except for homoscedasticity. The model was not able to significantly predict small business sustainability, $F(3, 124) = 1.967, p > .1, R^2 = .045, R^2 = .045$. The conclusion from this analysis is that there is no statistically significant relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Findings Related to Existing Literature

The first independent variable in this study is the transformational leadership style. The results of this study showed no significant relationship between the transformational leadership style and small business sustainability. My study results were contradictory to the findings of many peer-reviewed studies. Previous studies found the transformational leadership style correlating with small business sustainability. For example, Bonsu and Twum-Danso (2018) confirmed that transformational leadership drove sustainability in business. Also, when Burawat (2019) assessed the structural relationship model among transformational leadership, sustainable leadership, lean manufacturing practices, and small business performance, the transformational leadership style positively impacted business sustainability. Even in recent studies, the transformational leadership style significantly impacted small business sustainability. Murari and Mukherjee (2021) confirmed that the transformational leadership style enables managerial excellence and sustainability of the business. The same results were confirmed by the findings of Chen et al. (2021). My study's results contradicted the findings of peer-reviewed studies as no statistically significant relationship existed

between the transformational leadership style and small business sustainability. Thus, my study results did not confirm previous and recent research findings.

The second independent variable is the transactional leadership style. The results of my study showed no statistically significant relationship between the transactional leadership style and small business sustainability. My study results did not correlate with the findings of peer-reviewed studies. In a previous study, Alblooshi et al. (2020) found a significant relationship between transactional leadership and organizational innovation, which sustained business. Also, the current study's results contradicted Crews et al. (2019) as transactional leaders were able to set performance standards, guide faulty performances, and sustain their businesses operations. Even in recent studies, a statistically significant relationship existed between the transactional leadership style and small business sustainability. The transactional leadership style positively impacted motivating employees and boosting organizational performance (Frangieh & Rusu, 2021). Also, unlike the results of my study, Nazarian et al. (2021) confirmed the positive relationship between the transactional leadership style and small business sustainability in investigating the employee's job satisfaction. The results of my study failed to confirm the findings of various peer-reviewed studies. Therefore, my study results contradicted previous and recent research findings.

The final independent variable in this study is the passive-avoidant leadership style. This study showed no significant relationship between the passive-avoidant leadership style and small business sustainability. Additional researchers identified similar results in their studies. For example, a statistically significant relationship did not

exist when Barling and Frone (2017) confirmed that passive-avoidant leaders were disengaged and negatively impacted employees' performance. Also, passive-avoidant leaders formed a high risk to the sustainability of their organizations' business (Curtis, 2018). Passive-avoidant leaders did not sustain their businesses when they avoided decision-making and created a gap with their followers (Barnett, 2019; Holtz & Hu, 2017). My study's results also confirmed the same findings of the recent research. For example, Martinez-Moreno et al. (2021) concluded that passive-avoidant leaders caused dissatisfaction and ineffectiveness by the lack of interaction with their followers. In contrast with my study, passive-avoidant leaders did not help sustain business with their negative impact on organizational performance (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2020). Also, the results of this study were consistent with the findings of Nazarian et al. (2021) in investigating the relationship between leadership and job satisfaction to sustain a business. The results of my study identified the findings of various peer-reviewed studies in assessing the relationship between passive-avoidant leadership and small business sustainability. Therefore, my study results confirmed previous and recent research findings.

Findings Related to the Theoretical Framework

The full range leadership theory grounded this study. Ayalon and Bass (1991) developed the transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles through the full range leadership theory. I used the full range leadership theory as the theoretical framework to examine the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

The full range leadership theory explained to business managers the proper use of leadership styles to improve their businesses (Jelaca et al., 2020). Business managers need to understand the full range leadership theory to sustain their small businesses. The full range leadership theory provides small business managers with a better understanding of leadership styles to implement appropriate leadership styles that fit their organizations. Thus, I aimed to guide small business managers on selecting appropriate leadership styles to drive business sustainability in my study.

The application of the full range leadership theory may not have influenced small business sustainability in this study. I have accepted the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no statistical significance between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership style and small business sustainability. However, the results of my study partially confirmed peer-reviewed research. In contrast with previous research, the findings of this study confirmed similar research results concerning the passive-avoidant leadership style (Guhr et al., 2018). Meanwhile, this study's results contradicted other research concerning transformational and transactional leadership styles when researchers use the theory as a framework (Liao et al., 2017). According to Nazarian et al. (2021), the full range leadership styles had different degrees of effectiveness as predictors of organizational performance. For example, the transformational leadership style highly impacted performance and business sustainability (Guhr et al., 2018). Also, the transactional leadership style came in a second level after transformational leadership in engaging employees to achieve organizational goals (Liao et al., 2017; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Finally, the passive-avoidant leadership style did not positively impact

business sustainability when leaders avoided decision-making (Guhr et al., 2018). The study findings may extend knowledge of the full range leadership theory by assessing the difference between the three leadership styles and their possible impact on relationships within small business firms. The full range leadership theory allowed small business managers to manage their firms effectively (Jelaca et al., 2020). In this study, the passive-avoidant leadership style results confirmed previous and recent research findings. Therefore, the results of my study partially confirmed the peer-reviewed research findings related to the full range leadership theory.

The results of the transformational and transactional leadership styles failed to confirm peer-reviewed research findings that relate to the full range leadership theory. Bias could be a possible reason to influence online surveys participants and contradict existing research (Curtis et al., 2020). Bias could be subjective, instrumental, or related to environmental factors. For example, participants' age and speed of answering questions may influence individuals' understanding when answering survey instruments' questions (DeSimone & Harms, 2017; Isidore et al., 2020). Also, participants may experience background and environmental factors that influence their decision-making process when responding to online surveys (Beldhuis et al., 2021). Although this research's findings did not fully confirm other research findings related to the full range leadership theory, this study can be an indicative guide for small business leaders to sustain their businesses. Therefore, my study may provide a roadmap to small business managers selecting appropriate leadership styles to sustain their businesses.

Applications to Professional Practice

Although the statistical analysis did not show a significant relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability, the leadership role in small businesses is important. Leadership enables managers to motivate their employees to become more productive (Hasmin, 2017). Employees tend to work for firms that value leadership and promote enhanced relationships between employees and management to achieve firms' goals (He et al., 2019). Also, with today's business environment sophistication, and the ongoing globalization, businesses require developing leaders who lead with the purpose of enhancing life. Such a purpose targets the external customers for the business and the internal community within those businesses resembling the small business employees. Communicating such purpose and the influence of leadership may inspire firms' employees to outperform. Therefore, it is recommended that small business managers assess the role of leadership in driving a successful organizational culture within small businesses to achieve the aimed business sustainability.

The development of transformational leaders led on several occasions to the development of organizational culture. Leaders managed to align employees towards the organizational goal, developed employee performance, and reduced employee turnover (Maletic, 2016; Saliu, 2018). Such an impact provided stability within organizations. Stable businesses enabled to achieve business continuity and sustainability. Business sustainability influenced creativity and innovation within firms and led to success. Therefore, small business managers may need to use the transformational leadership style

to influence the organizational culture and enhance employee performance to ensure success.

Implications for Social Change

There is no statistically significant relationship between this study's independent leadership styles and small business sustainability. However, the provided data through the participation of this study's sample confirmed that mostly all small businesses were making profit. The literature reviewed provided contribution examples such as enhancing infrastructure, community offered services, donations to charities, investing in schools and hospitals, and uplifting the living standards. With small businesses' involvement in all segments and industries, there is also a growing need to enhance employees' well-being and life as individuals who belong to the local community (Camilleri, 2017). In addition, as being members of the local community, small business managers need to contribute to the local community to enhance all community members' life. Stakeholders may contribute by investing in setting up more new small businesses that drive services to the local community and offer employment opportunities, in addition to the achieved revenues from the provided services (Farrell, 2017). While this study did not disprove the null hypothesis, the provided literature supported that small business managers need to enhance their skills as members of the local community. Small business managers may also be able to participate in social responsibility initiatives.

Recommendations for Action

The findings of this study indicate that there is no statistically significant relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership

styles and small business sustainability. Small business managers should consider other aspects such as the organizational culture and employee performance besides the transformational leadership style. Enhancing the organizational culture may lead to healthy operations and communication that drive success for the business (Isopeskul & Ponomarenko, 2019). Also, combining leadership and operational efficiency may lead to continuous business success (Ahmed & Abdullahi, 2017). There should be a consideration of implementing a rater to assess the organizational culture and employee performance to provide the small business leaders with valuable feedback to set strategies and sustain their businesses. An example for such an implementation is the People and Culture Department surveys to measure employees' engagement with the organizational culture, coaching programs, and strategies and produce reports on the alignment of the employees with the organizational goals set by the small business managers. The information can also be a triggering point for other areas of development, such as employee satisfaction and reducing employee turnover within organizations.

I will submit the findings and summary of this study to the small business managers belonging to the U.S. construction projects small businesses who participated in this study and may request a summary of the research findings. I also have the intention to publish in professional academic journals and present at professional, academic, and leadership conferences.

Recommendations for Further Research

As this study accepted the null hypothesis, I would suggest extending the research building on this study's findings. Based on this study's results, there is no statistically

significant relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership style and small business sustainability. In the future, researchers may replicate this study to involve a more focused sample from the U.S. construction projects industry or to target another U.S. industry. Researchers may also discover the possibility of combining the transformational leadership style and organizational culture to estimate the impact on business sustainability through quantitative research. Another interesting topic could be investigating the relationship between leadership, organizational goals, and business sustainability. I would also recommend reassessing the impact of leadership styles on small business sustainability through qualitative research to obtain in-depth insights from U.S. small business managers.

As for this study's limitations, the location was challenging, especially since the study's sample was from the United States while I am an international student with limited access. Also, another limitation was targeting the U.S. construction projects small businesses, which imposes a limitation to generalize the study's results to other industries or other countries. I also targeted small businesses, excluding other businesses such as medium-sized firms and corporates, which did not generate a rule to generalize among all businesses.

Reflections

Throughout my professional career, I have worked with organizations that invest in developing leadership skills. I have met many people from different cultures. I found leadership an important topic and wanted to develop my personal leadership skills. I am also a member of the 115 leaders developed by my employer. I am interested in finishing

a DBA program because it is enriching my knowledge and developing my skills and exposure to small businesses. I found it interesting to link leadership and small businesses, especially that small businesses represented the majority of operating firms in the United States and worldwide. My interest in conducting this study increased because 50% of small businesses face the risk of closure.

From such an interest, I conducted my study to investigate the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. I have not faced any bias as I am an international student with no access to the targeted sample of U.S. small business managers. Also, I conducted the study's survey anonymously through SurveyMonkey's targeted audience feature. As I accepted the null hypothesis in this study, I realized that it takes leadership styles and other factors that I did not assess to sustain a small business. Such other factors could be organizational goals, culture, and employees.

Conclusion

Small business contribution to the national GDP has decreased dramatically since 2010 and impacted the U.S. economy (Lucian et al., 2018). More than 50% of the small businesses failed to continue operating in their first years in business (Byun et al., 2020). I conducted this quantitative correlational study to investigate the relationship between transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability.

Analyzing the 128 responses received through the online survey confirmed that there is no statistically significant relationship between transformational, transactional,

and passive-avoidant leadership styles and small business sustainability. Thus, I accepted the null hypothesis of this study. Senior executives who manage the U.S. small construction projects businesses should view this study's results to review, enhance the existing plans, and redirect their investments. Improving the existing plans may lead to achieving small business sustainability.

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Appendix A: Participation Invitation Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Ahmed M. Sedky. I am a doctoral student at Walden University's Doctorate of Business Administration Program. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting. The intention of this research is to examine the possible relationships between different leadership styles and small business sustainability. The study involves collecting data on the transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles, as measured by an anonymous survey, and small business sustainability, as measured by self-reported profit margin. I am inviting the U.S. small business managers who belong to the Construction Projects Industry (Construction, Machinery, and Homes) to participate in this study.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Collected data will not be used unless it is checked and reflects qualified participants to this study. If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Informed Consent letter. Your participation in the research will be of great importance to assist in social change by examining appropriate leadership styles to sustain the U.S. small businesses to create long-term employment opportunities and a more stable job market. As a result, small business sustainability can support the local community citizens through increased investment in new small businesses and open small business diversification channels. Moreover, small business sustainability might have another social impact by boosting residents' savings, upgrading living standards, and encouraging to contribute to local charities.

Appendix B: Permission to Use the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

**Approval for Remote Online Use
of a Mind Garden Instrument**

Effective date is March 3, 2021 for:
Ahmed Sedky

You submitted your Application for Remote Online Use at 6:56 am EST on March 03, 2021.



[v2]