

2023

## Successful Innovation Strategies of Ugandan Small and Medium Enterprises

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Fidelis Oketch

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Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Successful Innovation Strategies of Ugandan Small and Medium Enterprises

by

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MBA–HCM, Saint Leo University, 2014

MBA, Saint Leo University, 2013

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2023

## Abstract

Uganda's small and medium enterprises (SMEs) face high business failure rates. Fifty percent of SMEs in Uganda fail during the first year of operations due to poor business performance stemming from the lack of innovative strategies and consistent policies for SMEs to guide their growth and development. Grounded in disruptive innovation theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the innovation strategies leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance. The participants included five leaders of five SMEs in Uganda with successful experience implementing innovation strategies to improve business performance. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and company documents. Thematic analysis of the data resulted in three themes: product strategies improved business performance, process strategies improved business performance, and human capital strategies improved business performance. A key recommendation is for leaders of SMEs in Uganda to implement product strategies by focusing on innovative solutions to customers' business problems that promote customer satisfaction, which retains existing customers, attracts new customers, and improves business performance. The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve the performance of Ugandan SMEs, which may lead to increased revenue, employment, and the local tax base.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my father Richard Oketch for his presence throughout my educational journey; to my wife Angel and my twin daughters who inspire me to be a better person; and to my siblings Patrick, John, Rita, Achidi, and Hanifa, for their continued love and support. Finally, I dedicate this study to my grandmother Mary Aloikin.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Innovation strategy has been the quest for many small and medium organizations in Africa. According to Buwule and Mutula (2017), Uganda's rapidly growing population requires simultaneous economic expansion. Leaders of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are looking for strategic initiatives to implement new ideas. In this qualitative study, I explored the innovation strategies that leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance.

### **Background of the Problem**

SMEs are engines for growth in any economy. Therefore, for any economy to achieve exponential growth, there must be SMEs' catalysts. As a matter of fact, SMEs are a major economic driver in most nations across the world. The Uganda Investment Authority (2016) asserted that SMEs are spread in different sectors in the economy, as 49% are in the service sector, 33% in the commerce sector, 10% in the manufacturing sector, and 8% in other sectors. The Uganda Investment Authority also noted that SMEs contribute up to 45% of employment in the country. However, the Uganda Investment Authority posited that to spur economic development, the SMEs must grow exponentially.

According to Manzoor et al. (2021), SMEs are the backbone of economic development, as they provide sustained employment market and increase the wealth and income of people. Despite their significance, SMEs in developing countries exhibit poor performance with a high rate of failure in contrast to large enterprises (Pierre & Fernandez, 2018).

Brown et al. (2018) linked business performance to access to financial resources, entrepreneur attributes, and SMEs' characteristics. Business performance relates to appropriate human resource and working capital (Jin & Choi, 2019). According to Fanelli et al. (2019), managerial competencies and the years of operation contribute to lack of effective innovation strategies and application of information technology. However, business innovation as a contributing factor to business performance in SMEs in Uganda receives little attention, despite increasing pressure to compete locally and globally (Fanelli et al., 2019; Rulangaranga et al., 2020).

### **Problem Statement**

Uganda's SMEs face high business failure rates (Baluku et al., 2018). Fifty percent of SMEs in Uganda fail during the first year of operations for several reasons, including the lack of innovative strategies and consistent policy for SMEs to guide their growth and development (Ibrahim et al., 2018). The general business problem is that some Ugandan SMEs lack competitive resources to grow and sustain their businesses. The specific business problem is that some leaders of SMEs in Uganda lack innovation strategies to improve business performance.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the innovation strategies that leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance. The target population for the study consisted of five leaders of SMEs in Uganda with successful experience implementing innovation strategies to improve business performance. The implications for positive social change include improved performance

of Ugandan SMEs, which may lead to increased revenue, employment, and the local tax base.

### **Nature of the Study**

There are three research methods in social science research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. I used the qualitative method for this study. Qualitative researchers explore the *what*, *why*, and *how* of a phenomenon in its real-life setting (Yin, 2018). I used the qualitative research method to explore the *what*, *why*, and *how* of a phenomenon in its real-life setting, which are the innovation strategies that Ugandan SMEs' leaders use to improve business performance. The quantitative researcher examines the relationships among various variables, using numerical data and measuring techniques to analyze the data by testing hypotheses (Glonti & Hren, 2018). I did not select the quantitative method for the study because I did not examine relationships among variables using statistical analyses. In a mixed-method study, the researcher uses qualitative and quantitative methods (Yin, 2018). I did not select the mixed method for this study because I did not use numerical data and, therefore, I did not need to conduct the quantitative portion of a mixed-method study.

I considered the following qualitative research designs: case study, narrative, phenomenological, and ethnographic. Researchers use the case study design to explore real-life events and business problems that are bound by time and space (Yin, 2018). Case studies include both single and multiple case studies (Heale & Twycross, 2017). While a single case study includes only one unit or case, a multiple case study includes multiple cases or units. A multiple case study design has advantages over the single case

study design, including the generation of more robust data (Goffin et al., 2019). I selected a multiple case study design because I explored a phenomenon in its natural setting, which is the strategies that Ugandan SMEs' leaders use to improve business performance. In the narrative design, participants share their experiences through their personal stories in an open and interpretative manner (Pope, 2017). I did not use the narrative design because this research did not focus on participants' experiences, described through their personal stories, in an open and interpretative manner.

Phenomenological scholars use interpretivism to explore participants' lived experiences to understand the meaning of a phenomenon (van Manen, 2017). I did not select the phenomenological design because I did not focus on the personal meanings of participants' lived experiences. According to Vougioukalou et al. (2019), researchers use the ethnographic design to conduct an in-depth exploration of the everyday life of the members of a cultural organization in a community. The ethnographic design was not suitable for this study because I did not conduct an in-depth exploration of the everyday life of the members of a cultural organization in a community.

### **Research Question**

What innovation strategies do leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What innovation strategies did you use to improve the performance of your organization?

2. How were the innovation strategies used to improve the performance of your organization?
3. How did your employees respond to the innovation strategies you used to improve the performance of your organization?
4. What, if any, modifications did you apply to any innovation strategy to improve its effectiveness in improving the performance of your organization?
5. What innovative processes have you used to implement the strategies for improving the innovation of your organization to improve its performance?
6. What were the key barriers to implementing innovation strategies to improve the performance of your organization?
7. How did you overcome the key barriers to implementing innovation strategies to improve the performance of your organization?
8. What else would you like to add about the innovation strategies used to improve the performance of your organization?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I used disruptive innovation theory, developed by Christensen (1997), as the conceptual framework for this study. Disruptive innovation occurs when customers become less focused on market-leading products and services and turn their attention to lower-performing products and services (Christensen, 1997). These lower-performing products and services offer a different level of value than that of more established technologies (Kushins et al., 2017). Industry and technology leaders usually focus on developing innovative products and services, despite having knowledge of lower-

performing technologies (Christensen et al., 2015). Because the disruption process evolves over time, industry and technology leaders consider the timeline for the disruption and decide to overlook disrupters.

An innovation becomes disruptive when the following events occur: (a) initial underperformance against a dominant technology; (b) valued attributes, such as features, price, simplicity, size, and convenience; (c) initial rejection by existing customers, initial commercialization in insignificant markets, and the rationalization by incumbents to not competitively invest; (d) gradual performance improvement to meet market standards; and (e) displacement of dominant technology by disruptive technology and displacement of incumbents by the new entrants (Christensen, 1997). In addition, Christensen (1997) acknowledged that disruption could take decades to be implemented in the business. The extended nature of disruption can overwhelm a business leader's capacity to endure the challenges that precede long-term success. Christensen's disruptive innovation theory aligned with this study because I explored the strategies that bring about disruptive innovation which might assist leaders of SMEs in Uganda to incorporate innovation into their business practices to improve business performance.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Disruptive innovation:* Disruptive innovation a process whereby a smaller company with fewer resources is able to successfully challenge established incumbent businesses (Christensen et al., 2015).

*Innovation:* A process that includes the development and implementation of new ideas (Edwards-Schachter, 2018).



*Technology absorption*: This is the process of acquisition, assimilation, and utilization of technological knowledge by a firm (Yi et al., 2019).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Wolgemuth et al. (2017) defined an *assumption* as a condition taken for granted in a research situation. Wolgemuth et al. stated that assumptions are factors in the study that a researcher has no control over but are part of the study. I assumed that innovation strategies would benefit Uganda's SMEs in their future business goals. I also assumed that successful innovation strategies would lead to a competitive advantage to SMEs in Uganda. Finally, I assumed that participants would provide honest answers to interview questions.

#### **Limitations**

*Limitations* are mostly constraints in the study that the researcher cannot control (Fountouki & Theofanidis, 2017). Limitations of the study included successful innovation strategies only focusing on SMEs in Uganda. Participants in this study were limited to owners and managers of SMEs in Uganda. A limitation of this study was that only a few Ugandan SME business leaders participated in the study. Conducting a study at a few SMEs prevented the generalization of results across the Ugandan SME industry. Some participants rejected to participate in the study.

#### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are factors that hinder research questions and considered boundaries a researcher sets in the study (Fountouki & Theofanidis, 2017). The delimitations of the

study included sample size of five leaders of Ugandan SMEs. Only Ugandan leaders of SMEs meeting the established participation were eligible to participate. The participants had to possess successful experience in using innovation strategies to improve business performance.

### **Significance of the Study**

SMEs' owners may use the findings of this study to develop and implement strategies for improving business performance. Policy makers in Uganda could use the results of this study to identify things that spur innovative practices among small-scale entrepreneurs to stay competitive. According to Andreini et al. (2021) innovation could lead to business development and growth, especially in a country like Uganda where there are many aspiring business entrepreneurs with startup business ventures. The management of SMEs might find the results of this study helpful in making decisions regarding the integration of innovation into their business operations and practices.

### **Contributions to Business Practice**

SMEs' owners can use the results of this study to change their business practices, share their resources with other businesses for research and development purposes, and increase business success. SMEs may be able to share resources with their business communities to increase information and knowledge-based sharing to develop an organizational culture to foster creativity and teamwork with their respective organizations (Zutshi et al., 2021). Finally, owners of SMEs might develop solutions to support and promote cutting edge innovative practices that enhance productivity and surpass competition.

## **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include the potential to develop innovative strategies that leaders of SMEs in Uganda could use to improve business performance and obtain higher profits. Uganda is among the developing countries with many aspiring entrepreneurs trying to start a business for the first time (Baluku et al., 2018). Ugandan SME leaders can use the innovative solutions from this study to influence change, improve business practice, and generate higher profits. SMEs that experience higher profits have an increased tax base for local governments to use to deliver more goods and services to the residents of the local communities.

## **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

I reviewed the literature on successful innovation strategies of Ugandan SMEs published in various journals and seminal scholarly books. Google Scholar, linked to the Walden University Library's website, served as the primary source for accessing journal articles. Databases used to obtain literature for this study included Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Management, Sage Premier, and ProQuest Central. I also accessed various open journals to obtain literature related to successful innovation strategies of Ugandan SMEs. I accessed AOSIS Open Journals to find peer-reviewed scholarly journals from various academic disciplines. Similarly, I used ScienceDirect to obtain both tolled and open access to a full-text scientific database containing journal articles and book chapters. In some instances, I accessed government websites to obtain information about successful innovation strategies of Ugandan SMEs.

The strategy for searching through existing literature entailed the use of keywords and phrases in the various databases listed above. I applied filters to database searches to narrow down the search results. These filters included specific keywords, a specified period, and specific databases. When using Google Scholar, I gave preference to articles published in or after 2018, ensuring the literature is topical and relevant. Secondly, I gave preference to articles that were available in the Walden University's Library. The keywords and phrases I used in my search were *innovation strategies*, *implementation of innovation*, *innovation in the developing countries*, *innovations in SMEs*, *disruptive innovation*, and *small and medium enterprises*. Crossref and Ulrich's Periodicals Directory are tools to verify that literature is peer reviewed. The 310 references that this study contains include 280 scholarly peer-reviewed articles representing 81% of the total, 30 non-peer-reviewed articles representing 10%, four government websites representing 1%, and 10 books representing 3%. The total number of references in this study published within the 2018–2022 period is 257, which is 73% of the total number. The literature review contains 162 references, with 129 references published within the 2018–2022 period, representing 80%, and 112 from scholarly peer-reviewed sources, representing 87%.

### **Literature Review Organization**

The literature review section has several subsections. The first subsection is the introduction, which includes information about the strategy for searching the literature, the frequencies, and percentages of peer-reviewed articles as well as publication dates. In the next section, I focus on the application of the literature to the research question and

include a brief description of the purpose of the study. Throughout the literature review, I compared and contrasted different points of view and relationships between previous research and findings with the study.

The first theme in the literature review subsection, disruptive innovation theory, includes a critical analysis and synthesis of the conceptual framework I selected for my study, which is disruptive innovation theory using supporting and contrasting theories from relevant literature on the topic of successful innovation strategies of Ugandan SMEs. Some of the supporting and contrasting theories are dilemma theory of innovation, innovator's solution theory, open innovation theory, and blue ocean theory.

The second theme in the literature review is concerns and consequences. Under this theme, I discuss SMEs' performance models and the factors that cause these models to fail. I also discussed the implementation of innovation strategies across SMEs in Uganda. Finally, I look at the significant role of SMEs in economic development in Uganda.

The third and final theme found in the literature review of the study is leadership styles. I present a general discussion about leadership and leadership styles, as they relate to successful innovation strategies of Ugandan SMEs. Leadership styles reviewed include transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and autocratic leadership.

### **Application to the Applied Business Problem**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the innovation strategies that leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance. Developing an understanding of such strategies requires a qualitative approach, more

specifically an exploratory multiple case study. The findings from this study might provide insight into successful innovation strategies used by leaders of Ugandan SMEs.

The findings of the study may assist other leaders with the development of appropriate strategies for implementing innovation to enhance productivity and business success. Once an understanding of the underlying meaning emerges, appropriate strategies might equip leaders with the skills to improve successful innovation strategies of Ugandan SMEs. The findings from the study might improve business practice by identifying appropriate strategies, leading to increased productivity and organizational competitiveness. The implications for positive social change include improved performance of Ugandan SMEs, which may lead to an increase in revenue, employment, and the local tax base.

### **Disruptive Innovation Theory**

According to Christensen (1997), disruptive innovation is an innovation that creates a new market and value network, which eventually disrupts an existing market and value network and displaces established market leaders and alliances. However, disruptive technology does not necessarily represent an attempt to bring better products to established customers in existing markets; instead, disruptive technology introduces products and services that are not as good as currently available products. Christensen et al. (2015) added that, despite the challenges, disruptive technologies offer other benefits that are simpler, more convenient, and less expensive products that appeal to new or less-demanding customers.

Christensen (1997) described *disruptive innovation* as a term used in business and technology literature to describe innovations that improve a product or service in ways that the market does not expect, typically by lowering its price or designing it for a different set of consumers. Disruptive innovations change the competition in the marketplace because they attack an existing business and offer great opportunities for new profit growth (Christensen, 1997). However, only radical innovations lead to growth. Kawamoto and Spers (2019) defined disruptive innovation as an exploited product, service, or business model, which had been successfully exploited, that positively transformed the demand and needs of an existing market as well as disrupting its former key player. Kivimaa et al. (2021) defined disruptive innovation as an innovation that results in significant changes in any organizational activities. Ho (2021) defined disruptive innovation as a product, process, or service with either unprecedented performance features or familiar features that offer significant improvements in performance or cost that transform existing markets or create new ones.

Roblek et al. (2021) asserted that individuals use disruptive technology as a powerful means for creating and developing new markets, providing new functionalities that have disrupted those existing market linkages. These disruptive technologies have created a negative impact for many of the incumbent companies that, for many years, were successful and are now failing and barely holding on to their businesses. Individuals use disruptive technologies to provide different values from mainstream technologies, which were initially lower compared to prior customers. This scenario occurs mainly

because loyal customers do not adapt easily to disruptive technologies, especially due to a high-price fear of low-quality products.

Companies that adopt disruptive technologies ensure that they develop consistent and high-quality products. For that reason, they target many customers preferring quality products (Christensen et al., 2003). Christensen et al. (2003) highlighted that disruptive innovations spur growth because better-quality products attract more capital gain. Sounderajah et al. (2020) described disruptive innovation as a relative phenomenon and that many business leaders adopt innovative products to change their previous business models. Business leaders adopted disruptive innovations because they were looking for opportunities that would help their businesses operate effectively (Sounderajah et al., 2020). For instance, Dell Computers preferred selling their merchandise by sending emails or via the telephone. Dell chose this mode of disruptive innovation because it was sustainable as well as innovative. Disruptive innovations occur primarily because the company desires to change its past business models or help companies to increase product attractiveness and availability, which maximizes profits since the company's products are desirable and available (Sounderajah et al., 2020).

Khatab and Yousef (2021) noted that individuals should not use disruptive innovation theory to explain all kinds of disruptive innovations. Instead, individuals should treat disruptive innovation theory as a distinct phenomenon. Khatab and Yousef claimed that disruptive innovations are not superior to traditional ways of competition. Khatab and Yousef further added that if leaders of a company introduce disruptive innovation, these leaders will conquer the market. Khatab and Yousef opposed the earlier



idea of Christensen (1997) that disruptive innovation should only be used to explain all kinds of disruptive innovation. Khatab and Yousef's argument was that established companies do not need to rush to incorporate disruptive innovations because it may be detrimental to their success.

Leaders of business organizations should not always jump into disruptive innovations (Dedehayir et al., 2017). For business leaders to thrive in their businesses, Dedehayir et al. (2017) argued that they should first understand the phenomenon. Business leaders gaining an understanding of the phenomenon would not make adverse decisions because they would not risk damaging their existing businesses. Dedehayir et al. gave examples of established companies, such as British Airways and Unilever. When these companies were faced by their competitors, they had to strategize again and devise ways of venturing in disruptive innovations to successfully respond to other disruptive innovations. According to Dedehayir et al., most businesses face a dilemma when extreme competition is present, but it is worthwhile to consider disruptive innovation and effective innovation strategies. However, Dedehayir et al. argued that businesses using disruptive technology must consider innovations that do not damage their existing business or undermine their existing business strategies.

According to Zubizarreta et al. (2020), many business leaders see disruptive innovation as an attack, even though disruptive innovation is an appropriate innovation approach for SMEs by exploring new markets. Zubizarreta et al. discussed various opportunities offered by disruptive innovation and the way some SMEs could benefit from those opportunities. Zubizarreta et al. further discussed the process and features of

disruptive innovation and the benefits to managers. Zubizarreta et al. advised SMEs to take advantage of disruptive innovation to target low-end markets due to a high potential growth.

Although many well-managed companies are failing due to disruptive innovation, the research on the subject matter had become a contentious venture to pursue. Chemma (2021) argued that, despite the challenges, many SMEs were benefiting from disruptive innovation changes. Through disruptive innovation, SMEs are taking advantage of the markets at the low end and attaining value chain by putting pressure on the market leaders. Chemma stated that SMEs have implemented innovative strategies due to disruptive innovation. Chemma also discussed the actions companies' leaders must take to create new ways of managing productivity and services for those unserved mass markets in developing countries at the cost of disruptive innovation.

SMEs have increasingly contributed to the growth of innovation, contributing significantly to the growth of economies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). Innovation in SMEs occurs particularly when they share and exchange vital information on managing a business successfully. Gherghina et al. (2020) discovered that SMEs are engines of economic growth in any economy. According to Gherghina et al., SMEs have spurred job creation, which has alleviated poverty among the citizens, hence contributing significantly to economic growth. Gherghina et al. added that SMEs are great economic drivers because they help in expanding the tax base of an economy, driving innovation, and creating new employment opportunities. Erdin and Ozkaya (2020) affirmed that SMEs' success and economy growth are related processes.

SMEs are essential components in creating new job opportunities, hence they promote economic growth and development. If the SMEs are successful, an economy thrives because SMEs are backbones of the economy. SMEs are key players in domestic and international trade. Therefore, if there is no growth of SMEs in an economy, economic growth is daunting. Countries must set up SME-friendly environments to allow SMEs to thrive and alleviate the economic status of a country. Additionally, SMEs aid in boosting a country's economy by diversifying the economy instead of depending on a few industries in the economy (Van Scheers, 2016).

Marketing processes and organizational innovations have a positive effect on SMEs' performance in supporting industries (Kijkasiwat & Phuensane, 2020). In addition, Kijkasiwat and Phuensane (2020) argued that the higher the level of innovation activities, the better the innovative performances in SMEs. Similarly, the higher the level of innovation processes and marketing innovation activities, the greater the level of innovative performance. To improve innovation and SMEs' performance, SMEs must concentrate highly on the process, marketing, and organizational innovation activities, instead of focusing on the product. Innovative marketing is a critical issue in SMEs and it should be encompassed in the following activities: Market focus, modification, integrated marketing, unique proposition, marketing variables, and customer focus (Adam & Alarifi, 2021). SMEs need to concentrate on their survival by introducing products that are relevant to the market (Damoah & Peprah, 2021). For instance, it would be relevant for SMEs to introduce an innovation relevant to the current market trends. SMEs need to modify their organizational structure to gain a competitive advantage against their

competitors. Kraus et al. (2019) concluded that SMEs should focus on their in-house unique capabilities to increase their market performance. If SMEs have a unique ability to deliver quality products, they need to do it so well to attract more customers and retain current customers.

SMEs particularly in developing countries have offered employment to individuals from either low income, semiskilled, or even nonskilled backgrounds (Bertello et al., 2021). Innovation does not only impact SMEs' success, but it has a significant influence on the development of a nation (Bertello et al., 2021). However, Damoah and Peprah (2021) discovered that the lack of access to innovation strategies, lack of adequate finances, and poor technology, are some of the many challenges SMEs face in developing countries. Issau et al. (2021) affirmed that innovation, particularly disruptive innovation, is critical to a firm. However, several factors hinder SMEs from achieving their full potential when using disruptive innovation, such as poor infrastructure of the company, lack of adequate financing, and poor leadership. Meng et al. (2021) concluded that disruptive innovation was a contributing factor to the success of SMEs. Unfortunately, most companies refused to apply innovation strategies, resulting in emergent innovation due to rapid environmental changes.

Disruptive innovations have the potential of generating growth in any startup (Ramdani et al., 2021). Organizational leaders use disruptive innovations to introduce innovative products which are cheaper, better and more convenient, thereby accelerating growth for the company. Saunila (2020) discovered that disruptive innovations are caused by inequalities in the industry that change the prevailing trends. Disruptive innovation's

challenges and changes have transformed ways in which SMEs do things; therefore, the improvement or implementation of innovation has clearly illustrated the way a new type of innovation just introduced results in managerial challenges (Barann et al., 2019). Kilkki et al. (2018) stated that innovation has since improved business communication and social and media interaction.

Innovation or technology has witnessed a massive and drastic change, especially over the past decade (Edwards-Schachter, 2018). Edwards-Schachter (2018) also asserted that the massive changes in innovation and technology have caused researchers to conduct research on innovation. Pierre and Fernandez (2018) affirmed that despite technological innovations emerging almost every day, the lack of effective managerial practices may make SMEs fail. Pierre and Fernandez asserted that many SMEs consider technology to be the only factor contributing to the success of the SMEs. However, SMEs need to embrace knowledge management and good managerial practices to grow. Innovation plays a significant role in SMEs by helping them become more dynamic and competitive in the market (Dossou-Yovo & Keen, 2021). Dossou-Yovo and Keen (2021) explained that SMEs need to embrace innovation to have an impact on the economy, but SMEs lack access to financial incentives from the government. To spur innovation in SMEs, the government needs to provide SMEs with adequate capital to run their daily operations and continued growth. SMEs should view innovation as a tool for providing answers to known problems. As a matter of fact, many SMEs have fostered innovation by using their unique capabilities and scarce resources (Linton & Solomon, 2017).

Uganda's SMEs play a vital role in the economic development of the nation (Kintu et al., 2019). Pedauga et al. (2021) discovered that SMEs are the main drivers of a country's economy due to innovation and technology. Technology and innovation in an SME cause social and monetary change in an economy, thereby causing an impact in the country's economy (Pedauga et al., 2021). SMEs innovation and technology need to be critically assessed because they play a positive and significant impact of the performance of SMEs (Pierre & Fernandez, 2018). Gherghina et al. (2020) argued that SMEs play a fundamental role in the economy by creating employment opportunities and alienating poverty. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the performance of SMEs to support the economic development role. The challenges with SMEs' performance models are affected by a number of disadvantages because SMEs intensively used a business ratio approach since, they neglected an important nonfinancial parameter. Individuals in Uganda view SMEs as a homogenous group that has downplayed the variations in size, age, location, and business sector (Erdin & Ozkaya, 2020). Individuals consider these companies closed systems that undermine the significance of networking platforms in the promotion and enhancement of SMEs' performance in the nation (Erdin & Ozkaya, 2020).

A business model is essential for the success of SMEs (Pierre & Fernandez, 2018). However, the business model must be in tandem with the SMEs' vision and must be communicated to all stakeholders to maintain their involvement in the business model. Rotar et al. (2019) addressed the implementation of innovation strategies in SMEs in Uganda, which includes the advantages and disadvantages of the existing business

models used in the performance evaluation of SMEs. Chong et al. (2019) discovered that SMEs building business models should factor SMEs heterogeneity, and business leaders should consider the state of SMEs before developing suitable business models. Consequently, suitable business models ensure that the failure rate for SMEs is significantly reduced (Pierre & Fernandez, 2018).

### **Other Supporting and Contrasting Theories**

In this section, I present a discussion of supporting and contracting theories related to disruptive innovation theory. I discuss the dilemma theory of innovation, innovation solutions theory, and blue oceans theory. The first supporting theory is the dilemma theory of innovation by Christensen et al. (2003).

#### ***Dilemma Theory of Innovation***

The dilemma theory of innovation's main premise is that a good manager must ensure the business grows by listening to customers' needs and investing in the business. However, several managers make the mistake of ignoring firms undergoing disruptive innovation. Christensen et al. (2003) highlighted that innovative firms face an important challenge, which is that managers focus on business growth but fail to distinguish their core competencies to compete with disruptive innovative firms. Christensen et al. stated that some companies build technology gadgets, either for new subsegments of the market or for an altogether new market. Chemma (2021) disagreed with Christensen et al.'s dilemma theory of innovation, arguing that the Christensen et al. provided warnings of future outcomes, but did not encourage critical thinking among firms. Li and Huang (2019) warned businesses about disruptive innovation because disruptive innovation does

not act as a substitute of critical thinking. Dedehayir et al. (2017) discovered that technology widgets survive and thrive in a competitive environment and dismissed Christensen et al.'s argument that entrant firms disrupt established firms. Christensen et al.'s did not provide clear-cut criteria for determining the establishment of disruptive technology (Zhang et al., 2020).

Companies must undergo disruptive innovation due to abrupt changes in the business world. Terry (2020) supported the dilemma theory of innovation by stating that innovation change is inevitable for companies. Terry posited that change due to innovation caused businesses to re-engineer organizational processes, hence supporting firms in creating a sustainable future. Christensen et al. (2003) added that innovative companies face an irresolvable dilemma because they concentrate on consumer products, while competitors focus on product diversification. The technological trajectory of the gadget destroys the widget market, eventually usurping the position of widgets in the whole marketplace. Rojas-Córdova et al. (2020) discovered that mundane companies have outdated products that minimize firms' chances of market survival. Companies that listen to their existing customers and perfect their technology accordingly will incorporate innovation and avoid redundancies of the company's products, which in turn prevent customers from shifting to more innovative companies (Albors-Garrigos et al., 2018). Due to rapid changes in the technology industry, industrial decision makers have been forced to upgrade old technology to new technology (Albors-Garrigos et al., 2018). Because of innovation, companies invent innovative products for the market. Woods (2016) concluded that the dilemma theory of innovation is a good practice of



management. Woods stated that the middle management of any organization is responsible for gathering all the organizational resources to implement organizational goals and objectives. Well-managed organizations gravitate towards higher goals of profit making (Acosta-Prado et al., 2020).

A firm's managers should establish a desired outcome to accelerate their products' performance improvement. Christensen (1997) found that manufacturers of most products have established a trajectory of performance improvement over time. Christensen gave an example of Intel Corporation's initiative to increase the speed of their microprocessors by 20% each year, ranging from their 8 megahertz (MHz) 8088 processor in 1979, to 133 MHz Pentium chip by 1994. Despite the challenges Intel faced, the company improved the purity of 10,000 impure ppm in 1925, to 10 ppm in 1980, which was an annual improvement of 14% from the previous year. Abubakar et al. (2019) discovered that companies could improve their trajectory performance through collaboration and integration of the whole organization. Technological skills encourage organizational innovation in a company (Chatterjee et al., 2020).

If a company improves its technological skills, it creates distinct technological competencies, hence improving organizational performance. Giotopoulos et al. (2017) affirmed that for a company to face today's dynamism in knowledge, the company must have distinctive technological capacities. For that reason, technology absorption is salient in any organization because it improves the strategic mechanism of the firm. Organizations can achieve their goals and add value to their shareholders by absorbing recent technology.

Christensen et al. (2003) stated that the impact of technological change was different in various organizations. Christensen compared the notebook computer to a mainframe computer, which was introduced earlier. A notebook computer introduced a completely new performance trajectory, with a performance that differed substantially from the way mainframe performance was measured. Rau et al. (2021) concluded that a notebook's performance should be improved to achieve its sustainability performance.

Technology is a catalyst for innovation and has a significant and positive impact on the dilemma theory of innovation. Technology is not only changing the way people work, but technology has revolutionized the way businesses create and capture value (Jakšić et al., 2018). Earlier technology improved product performance by sustaining an industry's innovation rate, but earlier technology encountered many difficulties ranging from incremental to radical. Smajlović et al. (2019) stated that innovation hurtled businesses towards an industrial revolution. For that reason, business managers must figure out how to transform their business with advanced technology. Otherwise, the businesses will undergo disruptive innovation due to technological changes. Industry leaders always lead to developing technology by adopting those new technologies. Albors-Garrigos et al. (2018) contended that a disruptive environment is an effective tool for disruptive innovation to take place in an organization. On the one hand, technology advancement in a company encourages disruptive innovation because of the paradigm shift caused by innovation. Innovations of the second sort disrupted performance trajectories and failed an industry's leading firms. The paradigm shifts in technology caused companies to assimilate disruptive innovation to attract new business and create

value for their companies (Si et al., 2020). Applying this concept to SMEs, Shorey et al. (2018) found that technological innovations are paramount, and innovations have led to web-training modules, which are essential tools for SMEs because these models give SMEs a guide and step-by-step procedures on how to run and operate SMEs successfully. However, some strategies must be integrated into disruptive technology for innovation to occur in any company. These strategies must be considered because they are significant in the success of any organization (Brorström, 2019; George et al., 2019; Kabeyi, 2019). Brorström (2019) listed these strategies, which include organizational structure, culture, and the delivery methods of conveying messages to the staff. For instance, when communicating a message to the staff, an effective organizational structure makes message delivery much easier compared to a complex structure (George et al., 2019). The culture and delivery method of the message depends on the social and psychological environment of the organization (Kabeyi, 2019). All these processes should be in tandem to ensure a smooth transition of disruptive innovation and ensure that the organization remains a market leader in the industry.

Dilemma theory of innovation leads to disruptive innovation. Nicholas (2021) asserted that disruptive innovation is inevitable within firms, which undergo technological change. Consequently, these firms lead to the creation of new markets by encouraging new technology uptake. Many of these companies are new to the industry during technological change, which makes the firms an entrant at one specific point in the industry's history. These companies respond to technological advancements due to organizational changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Manzoor et al., 2021).

Technological patterns must be visible in SMEs because technology learning is a process (Guffarth & Knappe, 2018). Therefore, business leaders of SMEs should identify technological gaps in their organization with the aim to narrow these gaps (Bateman & Davies, 2014). The dilemma theory of innovation has not captured that improvements in technology cause disruptive innovation. Improvements in technology, sustainability in business, growth of businesses, and competitive advantage among various businesses are some of the advantages of business ventures (Christensen et al., 2016). On the contrary, one of the major setbacks of integrating technological innovations is the high failure rate by firms (Zhang et al., 2019).

Organizational knowledge should comprise both individual and collective knowledge (Guffarth & Knappe, 2018). Before an organization undergoes technological change, it is crucial for organizations to introduce the employees of the organization to a continuous learning process. Business leaders should differentiate between subjective and objective information (Erkut, 2018). Wang et al. (2020) agreed that organizations should train their employees on technology assimilation because the companies that Yousefi studied were no longer teaching their staff using the traditional method, but they were using technological methods, such as online training of employees. If a company wants to manage its employee's soft skills, and improve on the productivity of the company, the business leaders should introduce technology-based training in their organizations (Hwangbo et al., 2020). SMEs leadership should organize for staff to be trained on technology use as well as incorporating that to their ERP system. If proper training is conducted, technology change will not be a daunting task in SMEs (Chilembo, 2021).

In summary, disruption innovation theory faced sharp criticism from Kivimaa et al. (2021) by stating that Christensen's (1997) disruptive theory only focused on disruptive technologies. Zubizarreta et al. (2020) argued that Christensen's idea was incomplete because the theory had been used to explain the various forms of disruptive innovations. Sounderajah et al. (2020) asserted that there are different kinds of innovations, and they have competitive effects on different markets. Zhang et al. (2020) criticized the disruption innovation theory by Christensen because it assumed that the goal of all businesses was to maintain a market share. However, it is evident that most businesses are not there to maintain the market share, but to maximize profits, and increase their shareholders value.

Various kinds of innovations would affect various phenomena. For instance, in SMEs setting, the kind of innovation introduced would be very different from the innovation in the ICT sector. For example, in an SME, the introduction of new customer products would be considered as innovation, whereas in ICT, the introduction of new and efficient computer systems would be considered an innovation. Individuals should not assert that different kinds of innovation have the same effect on the same market because different forms of innovation cannot be applied in a single market, but various markets (Zhang et al., 2020).

### ***Innovator's Solution Theory***

The innovator's solution theory supports disruptive innovation theory. Christensen (1997) discovered the innovator's solution theory and argued that well-managed companies were facing business challenges because they were unwilling to

enforce business success factors. The innovator's solution theory main premise is that innovation strategies in any business would be disruptive to a company's business models (Christensen, 1997). The theory consists of solutions for successful companies that experience failure when exposed to disruptive markets. Christensen's innovator's solution theory is an analysis of the reasons companies fail to innovate. The theory involves creating sustainable growth for businesses. The innovator's solution theory focuses on corporate management and ways to engage in disruptive competition. The innovator's solution theory creates a solution for unsuccessful companies.

Some research has supported the innovator's solutions theory. Ho (2021) asserted that most SMEs fail in their first attempt to integrate disruptive innovations. SMEs fail because they do not sustain disruptive innovation (Fuller & Hansen, 2019). SMEs fail in integrating disruptive innovations because they do not consider the profitability, sustainability, and competitiveness of their businesses (Braithwaite et al., 2021). For that reason, these small businesses end up making the wrong decisions, which affect their businesses in the end. The decisions made because of wrong choices may make sense in the short run to the organization, but in due course, they may send the organization into an inexorable death spiral (Braithwaite et al., 2021). Christensen et al. (2018) stated that customers prefer innovative products to incumbent products because they are cheaper, convenient, and accessible. If customers find convenient products, they maintain brand loyalty. Christensen et al. developed a framework to help firms achieve optimal growth. In addition, Christensen et al. noted that, for companies to succeed, they must follow certain principles of success, which he outlined as follows:

**Having an Independent Project.** According to Christensen (1997), companies are unsuccessful because they fail to consider the project as a different unit from the organization. Parker et al. (2016) stated that different business units should be separated and become network-based businesses. These business units would run as independent entities, and deal with different products and services. This does not mean total isolation of the project, but it means that the project has its independent value system. This way, managers can single out any challenges facing a project. It is not right to consider the project as part of the organization because the project will be isolated. If a business unit is running independently due to disruptive innovation, the new business unit must gain the support of incumbent business units (Ansari et al., 2015). In this study, considering any innovation as separate and distinct from the organization is crucial because doing so helps to measure the project's success. SMEs' innovations are great, but innovation belongs to individual projects.

**Start Small Projects.** Christensen (1997) advised businesses in any organization to start small. However, small organizations need to invest much effort in the life of the project to ensure its success. Disruptive innovation results in the innovation of smaller ideas being born because of viewing the world and the business differently (Chemma, 2021). Organizations that start small have an opportunity to attract large wins, which has a trickling effect on the project and the organization. Prudent organizations should ensure that all projects start small. Kimiloglu et al. (2017) stated that SMEs could start small by lowering their operational costs, such as staff and production costs. The Harvard Business Review (2018) supported the innovator's solutions theory by premising that it is

important to make small steps in any business because, in doing so, a business can start a project, which may eventually become a big business project. Small businesses have fewer resources than large businesses do, therefore, they have an option of starting small (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017).

**Be Ready to Fail.** Most businesses fail on their first attempt to launch their products in the market (Christensen & Raynor, 2013). Christensen and Raynor (2013) stated that 60% of all new business ventures do not make it to the market. Additionally, 40% of the product developments see the market, but have to be withdrawn because they are not making substantive profits. Dias and Teixeira (2017) stated that it is common for businesses to fail on their first attempt to integrate disruptive innovation. Most small organizations fail by ignoring the changing business trends and following the traditional market and business trends (Vaska et al., 2021). According to Christensen et al. (2018), most companies fail because they do not expect to fail. SME leaders assume that, because their business forecasts are correct, they must succeed in their first business attempt. However, Christensen et al. has advised business managers to be cognizant that failure is a part of business growth, and managers need to embrace failure. Failure prepares companies to face the business world because organizational leaders become aware of what they should or should not do. Organizations fail partially because of lack of free information flow between the employees (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Lack of information access creates challenges in accessing information flow from the organizational structure, which leads to organizational disconnect.



Additional research has supported the innovator's solution theory. Lyver and Lu (2018) stated that mutual knowledge among employees is essential. The lack of proper communication in SMEs has adverse effects on team effectiveness. Therefore, SMEs should be ready to fail and learn from their mistakes. Ciuchta et al. (2017) explained that most organizations fail in their first market penetration in part because marketers lack proper marketing segmentation skills. Some businesses fail because of lack of preparation for disruptive innovations (Anjum, 2019). Most SMEs face technology and environmental turbulence, and leaders are unaware of how to deal with it. However, Al-Buraiki and Khan (2018) suggested that businesses should include both old and new technology to counter disruptive innovation as part of the innovator's solution as proposed in the innovator's solution theory. A business should have a clear-cut goal in customer's age groups (Mabula & Dong, 2018). For instance, in most fashion SMEs, most of the consumers are age 18 or older, so when an SME is developing any product, it should tailor products to suit this age group. Concerning the price, SMEs should have prices that favor the relevant age group.

Industry leaders were blindsided by disruptive innovations because they focused closely on the most profitable customers and businesses (Christensen & Raynor, 2013). Kaur et al. (2020) added that innovator's solution theory has helped companies re-invent their products to ensure a sustainable future and profitability. Additionally, innovation has helped companies to get to the other side of the dilemma that created the disruption (Christensen & Raynor, 2013). Hermundsdottir and Aspelund (2021) stated that for companies to succeed in implementing innovation, the company should assess the

response and usability of human factors within the organizational structure. According to Hermundsdottir and Aspelund, innovation is a predictable process that delivers profits and sustainable growth. To enhance innovation in organizations, companies must regularly introduce new products to the market (Behara & Davis, 2015). The constant introduction of new and enhanced products in the market guarantees SMEs' competitiveness and sustainability. Christensen and Raynor (2013) noted that there are forces that caused managers to make bad decisions as they packaged and shaped new ideas. These business forces, therefore, offered a new framework that helped managers create the right conditions for a disruption to succeed.

For SMEs to achieve profitability and sustainability, business leaders need to implement the innovator's solution theory successfully (Eton et al., 2018). Proper management and government intervention influence SMEs' growth (Eton et al., 2018). Eton et al. (2020) stated that government regulations and policies can hinder or facilitate the growth of SMEs. To support the growth and sustainability of SMEs, the government should provide SMEs with adequate financing since this will ensure there are economies of scale in the economy (Durst & Gerstlberger, 2020). However, achieving and sustaining growth in SMEs can be difficult without effective and efficient management. According to Lavrinenko (2015), managers are to blame for failing to generate new growth due to inadequate organizational policies.

Christensen and Raynor (2013) stated that to solve this problem, a better managerial approach must be implemented to restart a firm's growth. Christensen and Raynor concluded that about 90% of all publicly traded companies have proved

themselves unable to sustain for more than a year since incorporation. Some research also supported the innovator's solutions theory by arguing that managerial support is one of the motivational factors to employee's good performance (Weng et al., 2015). Managers should be qualified to provide proper assistance to accelerate the growth and sustainability of the firm. Christensen and Raynor added that thriving firms have the ability to sustain growth if they have risk averse managers. Aboramadan et al. (2019) stated that the future of any organization depends on innovation. Morgan added that innovation does not only increase the profitability of the firm, but it helps the firm gain a competitive edge in the market. Van Niekerk and Blignaut (2014) stated that when managers are introducing technological changes into any organization, managers are supposed to link the systems to employees in the organization, and accord the necessary assistance where required.

Some research has contradicted the innovator's solution theory. For example, Kawamoto and Spers (2019) argued that the innovator's solution theory has not captured the aspect of product innovation and that the elements of the theory did not fit primary conditions and predictions. Sometimes, a company introduces disruptive innovation, which is inferior to incumbent products, but the company does this to appeal to fringe customer benefits (Li & Huang, 2019).

### ***Blue Ocean Theory***

Kim and Mauborgne (2018) developed the blue ocean theory, which supports the disruptive innovation theory. The main premise of this theory is that organizations should try to exploit new market spaces, instead of drawing strategies to defeat their competitors

(Madsen & Slåtten, 2019). Marketing philosophers developed the blue ocean theory in an effort to explain how companies can break the existing marketplace by creating a new marketplace, thus outdoing their competitors (Kim & Mauborgne, 2018). The main concept from the blue ocean theory is to stand out from the competition (Kim & Mauborgne, 2018). Kim and Mauborgne stated that it is important to move from the red ocean theory to the blue ocean theory. Since the inception of the blue ocean theory's strategy, most organizations have opted to use the blue ocean strategy due to its various advantages (Lohtander et al., 2017).

In the red ocean strategy, organizations try to compete with their competitors in the same marketplace, and with the same conditions. In the red ocean strategy, companies tend to have head-to-head competition (Raman, 2014). If company X is producing certain raw materials at a certain price, company Y develops a more superior product at a cheaper price with an attempt to draw all the consumers to its product. While the red ocean strategy may work in certain markets, it is not durable because companies will keep on strategizing after a short period. Additionally, if a company produces constant quality products, it will always dominate in the market. For example, Kentucky Fried Chicken has produced fried chicken for many years, and it has earned the customer's trust. Many similar companies have tried to supersede Kentucky Fried Chicken, but they have been unlucky mainly because of using the red ocean theory. However, companies that may try adopting the blue ocean strategy will end up competing with dominant companies. The blue ocean theory, a concept outlined by Kim and Mauborgne, states that companies could succeed not by battling competitors, but by creating *blue oceans* of

uncontested market space. In the blue ocean's theory, competition is not relevant since there are many opportunities for growth. Some research has supported the key concept of the blue ocean theory, which is to create value for the buyer, the company, and its employees, thus opening new and uncontested market space (Sang & Kimitei, 2021). The aim of value innovation is not to compete, but to make the competition irrelevant by changing the playing field of strategy. Value innovation is a concept that challenges Hajar et al. (2021) idea that successful businesses are either low-cost providers or niche-players. Instead, blue ocean strategy proposes finding value that crosses conventional market segmentation and offering value and lower cost.

According to Kim and Mauborgne (2018), blue ocean strategy creates a win-win situation to both the buyers and sellers. Kim and Mauborgne pushed all company managers to adopt a blue ocean strategy because of the following advantages:

- An organization stands out of competition. In the blue ocean theory, managers develop clear-cut strategies, which lead to creation of new markets, hence creating new demand. Consumers will not be spoiled for choices because there are not alternatives, but to try out the new product. This will cause companies to have a competitive edge compared to the competitors. Moreover, noncompetition creates an opportunity for any company to develop a winning strategy (Raman, 2014). This is achievable because new markets help an organization to explore where other companies have not explored. For that reason, they develop a niche that is unique, and has a 100% winning projection.

- Achieving high yields while using low costs. If a company taps unexploited market, it will run on low costs, hence implicating low prices to the consumers of the product (Kim & Mauborgne, 2018). If companies apply the blue ocean strategy, differentiation and low cost will occur due to non-competition. Companies that adopt this strategy hedge against risk, and incur low production costs because they are the price determinants in the area. Subsequently, this has a trickling effect on the prices.
- Industry works in your favor. The industry will work in your favor because there are no other companies producing a similar product (Kim & Mauborgne, 2018). For example, Bloomberg, a financial services provider, applied the blue ocean strategy by creating value of the lives of traders. Bloomberg applied the blue ocean strategy by providing analyzed information through the click of a button. For that reason, traders were able to do an instant market analytics and make wise trading decisions (Kim & Mauborgne, 2018). To date, this has worked well, and traders prefer Bloomberg as their best financial information tool compared to the others (Kim & Mauborgne, 2018).

Individuals using the blue ocean theory achieve milestones because companies create and develop appropriate markets to satisfy market demand (Kim & Mauborgne, 2018). One of the greatest strategies in blue ocean theory is innovation. If SMEs in Uganda adopt innovation, they can introduce the use of mobile phone applications for customers to assess loan facilities. In Uganda, application technology is unique for consumers because few SMEs use mobile apps. Innovation creates a competitive edge

among SMEs, and consumers prefer SMEs with advanced innovation compared to traditional SMEs (Kim & Mauborgne, 2018).

Kim and Mauborgne (2018) asserted that the blue ocean theory derived its importance in emphasizing on traditional rules and using competition as a benchmark. Porter (1985) encouraged organizations to tap into creativity through innovation, and up with products, processes, and market innovations that challenge the fundamental principle of conventional strategy. If companies use the blue ocean theory, they will create new and uncontested market space and consequently improve their performance.

### **Concerns and Consequences**

According to Buwule and Mutula (2017), Uganda's SMEs play a vital role in the economic development of a nation. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the performance of these SMEs in playing the economic development role. SMEs' performance models have several disadvantages because they use a business ratio approach and neglect important non-financial parameters (Primadona & Padang, 2018). To support the study by Primadona and Padang, Gatautis et al. (2019) posited that SMEs' performance models are essential in SMEs for increasing performance and sustainability. Effective strategies are needed by corporate leaders to implement business models in organizations (Kiyabo & Isaga, 2020). To achieve SMEs' optimal performance, leaders of SMEs should develop appropriate business models that enhance SMEs' growth. In addition, Cicea et al. (2019) stated that SME's leaders should develop performance models based on innovation and learning orientation in the enterprise. However, business models differ in various SMEs. For that reason, SMEs should develop a performance model based on revenue and

business structure. For business leaders to develop effective strategies and performance models for SMEs, business leaders should adopt the diffusion of innovation theory to determine reactive strategies (Afriyie et al., 2019).

When SMEs' leaders determine proactive and reactive strategies, leaders make sound business decisions which can propel companies to the next business level (Semuel, et al., 2017). Cicea et al. (2019) encouraged SMEs to develop appropriate performance models because this helps alleviate unemployment and influence the gross domestic product of a country.

Despite SMEs' performance models influencing their success, some SMEs have experienced a high failure rate. SMEs have failed to develop business models that assess the resilience factors in the industry (Nikolić et al., 2018). It is impossible to thrive in any industry without assessing all the important variables of success in an industry (Asgari, 2018). Most SMEs end up not attaining the full cycle of a business because they do not assess success factors in the industry. SMEs have closed systems that undermine the significance of networking platforms in the promotion and enhancement of SMEs' performance in a nation, thereby causing SMEs performance models to fail (Guo et al., 2017). Cicea et al. (2019) asserted that most SMEs performance models fail because SME business leaders do not respond to disruptive innovations in the market. For instance, if an SME fails to adopt the latest technology in the market, its business model will fail because of under-utilization of resources. SMEs performance models fail because of the challenges faced during the sustenance of disruptive technologies (Mallinguh et al., 2020). A business may introduce a disruptive technology, but it does



not have enough labor or resources to sustain the technology. In such cases, SMEs' performance models fail because they cannot be sustained or implemented. According to Al-Tameemi et al. (2018), SMEs fail to implement their infrastructure needs due to lack of financial and technical capabilities. However, to mitigate these challenges, business leaders should develop appropriate performance models that do not strain the company's resources. SMEs' innovation has greatly impacted the country's economy (Buwule & Mutula, 2017). For that reason, companies rely on sophisticated and statistical structural methods that make these models unpractical for use by SME managers. Unpractical business models hinder the performance of SME leaders, thereby causing the failure of SME performance models.

Innovation strategy refers to a unique strategy adopted by a firm to survive in a competitive market (Varadarajan, 2018). Innovation is a critical component in the survival of SMEs, and leaders of SMEs should continue to develop innovative strategies to create a competitive environment (Pierre & Fernandez, 2018). SMEs' leaders are seeking innovative strategies to improve SMEs performance and innovation. A firm should have the innovation capacity to coordinate and implement innovation strategies. SMEs' innovation strategies should position SMEs as business leaders in the market by introducing evolving disruptive innovations. In addition to innovation capacity, SMEs should consider customers during the innovation process (Adam & Alarifi, 2021).

Customers should provide knowledge and their desired products to SMEs to ensure the development of customer-centric products. Carvalho et al. (2021) highlighted innovation strategies in Uganda's SMEs, which include the advantages and disadvantages

of existing models used in the performance evaluation of SMEs. Yoo et al. (2018) posited that technology advancements in businesses affect businesses overall operations as well as the sustainability of traditional business models. Story et al. (2014) observed that SMEs should incorporate innovative strategies into business practices due to globalization. Global changes in the world, such as changes in technology have forced SMEs to change their strategies and develop innovative strategies for their survival (Mwika et al., 2018). Business leaders should implement innovative strategies in SMEs by integrating all technology innovations to the business, thereby giving the business a competitive advantage among other businesses in the market (Mallinguh et al., 2020).

SMEs face challenges, including lack of managerial skills, little access to capital, low bargaining power, limited market and frequent changes in commodity prices, and inadequate access to timely market information (Siuta-Tokarska et al., 2021). Business leaders face challenges in integrating disruptive innovations into operations to realize SMEs' profitability and sustainability (Asgary et al., 2020). Mwika et al. (2018) also noted that SMEs face some challenges in political instability, low productivity, and economic recessions. For instance, in Uganda, SMEs face a great challenge due to political instability because of the constant arrest of the opposition leader. Ugandan SMEs cannot successfully implement innovation strategies because they are unsure of the political climate. Currently, SMEs' growth in Uganda did not achieve optimal growth because of the general election in 2021. To mitigate SMEs' challenges, businesses should provide a remedy by implementing organizational changes based on current and future changes (Pearce, 2016). In countries facing political tensions like Uganda, the country

should ensure political stability so that SMEs can implement innovation strategies.

Christensen et al. (2016) concluded that businesses should adopt disruptive innovation to overcome failure and improve performance in businesses.

SMEs are the major contributing factor in the economic development of a country (Mayanja et al., 2019). SMEs are vital to the economic growth of a country because they contribute in creating employment, alleviating poverty, and improving the living standards of the citizens. If SMEs operate in a business-friendly environment, they cause significant economic development (Dagvadorj & Bo, 2019). For that reason, governments should pay keen attention to the growth of SMEs by supporting SMEs and providing an enabling environment to enhance their growth. Siuta-Tokarska et al. (2021) concluded that the financial sector in Uganda had reached an acceptable level of performance in enhancing SMEs growth. Therefore, Uganda SMEs should receive continued support by allowing opportunities for growth and allowing SMEs easy access to capital. Consequently, SMEs growth will result in improved economic development of Uganda and increased job opportunities for the citizens (Siuta-Tokarska et al., 2021).

## **Leadership Styles**

### ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leaders create a suitable environment for motivating their followers towards a shared vision (Reza, 2019). According to Alqatawenah (2018), transformational leaders help organizations achieve a competitive advantage.

Transformational leaders create a valuable and positive change in followers, developing them into future leaders. Transformational leaders develop values and leadership

perceptions, which prevent cynicism in organizations (Eratlı Şirin et al., 2018).

Transformational leaders build a connection between the leadership and workers, which activates the motivation, morale, and performance of employees (Li et al., 2019). A transformational leader influences employees, and this changes employees' morals and values and improves employees' job satisfaction (Lan et al., 2019).

Transformational leaders have made a significant impact on organizational performance (Arif & Akram, 2018). Arif and Akram (2018) noted that transformational leaders build strong relationships with their employees. Transformational leaders encourage organizational innovation because they stimulate innovative work behavior in the organization (Xenikou, 2017). Akparep et al. (2019) premised that democratic leadership yields many benefits because leaders encourage subordinates to share their thoughts, which leads to creative solutions to problems. Al Khajeh (2018) stated that effective leadership is important for organizations to perform optimally. Organizations achieve optimal results when organizational leaders treat employees well (Haque et al., 2017). Akparep et al. agreed that success within an organization is realized when business leaders treat their employees well. Transformational leadership is an important factor for any organization to thrive (Reza, 2019).

### ***Autocratic Leadership***

Autocratic leaders make decisions on their own without consulting subordinates (Dyczkowska & Dyczkowski, 2018). Dyczkowska and Dyczkowski (2018) also noted that in the autocratic leadership style, managers retain much power and the decision-making authority. Autocratic leaders give clear and short instructions that employees

should follow (Puni et al., 2016). In autocratic leadership, managers do not consult employees and employees do not contribute to decision making because managers provide specific procedures that employees must follow in performing certain functions (Wang et al., 2019). In an autocratic leadership, employees obey orders without questioning their bosses (Abu Bakir, 2017). A structured set of incentives and punishments causes employee motivation. This style of leadership hinders innovation and growth of the organization. Al Khajeh (2018) agreed that autocratic leadership has a detrimental effect on organizations because autocratic leaders usually rely on threats and punishment to influence employees. Autocratic leaders do not trust employees and they do not allow employee input. However, autocratic leadership is effective when the job requires detailed orders and instructions (Specchia et al., 2021). For instance, a manager may use an autocratic leadership style when employees do not respond to any other leadership style and these results to increased productivity (Essa & Alattari, 2019).

Autocratic style has merits and demerits. However, people may perceive leaders relying on this leadership approach as being bossy or with a dictatorial mindset (Al Khajeh, 2018). According to Knights et al. (2018), different leadership styles are used in different circumstances, depending on the current situation, type of tasks the employees are working on, and the characteristics of employees in the organization. According to Iqbal et al. (2015), autocratic style leadership can lead to organizational conflicts due to excessive control by SME managers. The autocratic leadership style has adverse effects when a leader or a manager overuses this style and applies it to the wrong groups of employees or situations because leaders do not have faith in their followers (Harms et al.,

2018). If autocratic leaders lead SMEs, these leaders could achieve either organizational success or failure (Akpapere et al., 2019). For that reason, SME leaders should use autocratic leadership to perform tasks effectively and meet tight deadlines. Autocratic leadership style can be beneficial to make fast decisions without consulting with a large group of employees (Jdetawy, 2018). Many projects require strong leadership to get things done in a timely manner.

### ***Transactional Leadership***

Leaders with transactional leadership skills increase individual outcomes, which translates to positive organizational performance (Hashim et al., 2018). Transactional leaders thrive on motivating group performance based on a system of incentives and punishment (Al Khajeh, 2018). Transactional leaders achieve the right balance of rewards and punishment s to persuade employees to perform at an exceptional level (Kabeyi, 2018).

Lesha (2017) revealed that transactional leaders play a role in motivating employees, but it does not have a correlation to organizational performance. Lesha argued that transactional leadership does not promote innovation among employees because organizational leaders reward them for good performance. However, employees' good performance does not meet organizational goals, especially because the organizations have a mission and vision to attain (Hashim et al., 2018).

According to Hashim et al. (2018), the transactional leadership style focuses on the idea of a management process, which includes three basic concepts: organizing, controlling, and planning in the short term.

- **Organizing:** A transactional leader ensures that the group or organization has a set plan and that the organization has a clear blueprint on ways of achieving organizational goals.
- **Controlling:** A transactional leader should supervise and provide adequate guidance to employees on the running of set goals. In this section, a transactional leader should also monitor projects that are not running well and provide corrective action.
- **Short-term planning:** A transactional leader should focus on organizational goals for the near future.

Transactional leadership focuses on motivating and giving followers directions by appealing to their self-interest. In SMEs, business leaders should make organizations more successful by accomplishing SME needs (Nguyen et al., 2021). Transactional leaders will guide their group in the right direction to achieve that goal. If a manager is successful at convincing employees to put the organization first, the results are very positive (Agostini, 2016).

Mohiuddin (2017) stated that the transactional leadership theory allows both leaders and followers to accomplish many things. Transactional leadership theory allows leaders to accomplish their performance objectives, complete required tasks, and maintain the current organizational situation. Transactional leaders motivate followers using rewards and incentives. When employees are motivated to work hard using rewards and incentives, employees fulfill their self-interest; minimize workplace anxiety; and

concentrate on clear organizational objectives, such as increased quality, customer service, and production and reduced costs (Essa & Alattari, 2019).

Transactional leadership has its merits and demerits. In most cases, transactional leadership is similar to transformational leadership because a leader influences followers. However, there are some critical differences between the two. One of the biggest differences is the fact that transactional leaders are not necessarily trying to change the way members of an organization might act. Instead, a transactional leader tries to mold employees of the organization.

### **Transition**

Section 1 included the problem statement, purpose statement, and the nature of the study to support the selection of a qualitative methodology and a case study design for this study. In Section 1, I also presented the interview questions; operational definitions; and assumptions, limitations, and delimitations for the study. The last two components of Section 1 are the significance of the study and a review of the professional academic literature. In the literature review, I presented a comprehensive analysis of research relevant to disruptive innovation theory, other supporting and contrasting theories, and concerns and consequences.

In Section 2, I provide a restatement of the purpose of the study, an explanation of the role of the researcher, a description of the participants, the population and sampling methods, and ethical concerns related to this study. Additionally, I justify the research method and design and discuss my plans for data collection, organization, and analysis. I conclude Section 2 with a description of reliability and validity concerns as they pertain



to this study. Section 3 will include the following subsections: (a) Presentation of the Findings, (b) Application to Professional Practice, (c) Implications for Social Change, (d) Recommendations for Action, (e) Recommendations For Further Study, (f) Reflections, and (g) Conclusion.

## Section 2: The Project

In this section, I provide a restatement of the purpose of the study; an explanation of the role of the researcher; a description of the participants, the population, and sampling methods; and ethical concerns related to this study. Additionally, I justify the research method and design, and discuss my plans for data collection, organization, and analysis. I conclude Section 2 with a description of reliability and validity concerns as they pertain to this study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the innovation strategies that leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance. The target population for the study consisted of five leaders of SMEs in Uganda with successful experience implementing innovation strategies to improve business performance. The implications for positive social change include improved performance of Ugandan SMEs, which may lead to increased revenue, employment, and the local tax base.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Researchers have a variety of roles when collecting data, including obtaining access to potential participants, interacting with potential participants, organizing the entire research process, conducting the research study, and collecting and analyzing data (Tracy, 2019). In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the research instrument (Rahi, 2017). I was the primary research instrument in the study in charge of defining terms and procedures, collecting data using several techniques, conducting and

transcribing interviews, performing member checking procedures, analyzing all data collected, and developing of themes and codes. Yin (2018) recommended that researchers use several data collection techniques to collect data, such as conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts. I conducted semistructured interviews and reviewed organizational documentation and artifacts in the study. I also contacted the local chamber of commerce and used LinkedIn to develop a list of potential participants whom I purposively identified to participate in the study.

I have been a Ugandan resident for the past 20 years. I am knowledgeable about successful innovation strategies Ugandan SMEs use. I obtained successful innovation strategies and business insights through my involvement in several SMEs in Uganda. This experience was instrumental in framing the interview questions needed to gather the required data in this research study. The members of the federation of SMEs in Uganda and the local chamber of commerce helped me in selecting the appropriate population.

Conducting ethical research should be a key concern for any researcher (Petrović, 2017). Researchers should consider ethical requirements when conducting social research, including codes and regulations that professional associations and review boards enforce (Xu et al., 2020). Additionally, these ethical considerations should align with *The Belmont Report* protocol guidelines (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). *The Belmont Report* protocol contains three ethical principles researchers must follow when conducting research with humans, which are *respect for persons*, *beneficence*, and *justice* (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). According to *The Belmont Report*, the *respect for persons* principle consists of

researchers realizing that some participants may have diminished autonomy, and researchers should honor this fact. The *beneficence* principle involves researchers maximizing the benefits of the research study but ensuring that they do not harm the participants in any way. The *justice* principle relates to researchers treating participants fairly regarding potential benefits and drawbacks that the research study could bring to the participants (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979).

*The Belmont Report* protocol contains additional information regarding the adherence to ethical principles, including selecting study participants, obtaining informed consent from participants, and assessing the risks and benefits associated with the research study (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1979), researchers use the informed consent process to inform study participants of the disclosure and understanding of information and the voluntary nature of participation. As an ethical researcher, I had the responsibility to adhere to the (a) *Belmont Report's* ethical principles, (b) Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, and (c) ethical requirements of the participating organizations. I obtained permission from the IRB before starting the research study. Before conducting the study, I engaged the participants by explaining to them the informed consent process and obtained their approval via email, ensuring adherence to ethical principles when conducting research studies. I treated all participants fairly, ensured participant confidentiality, informed participants about the voluntary nature of their participation, and informed participants that they could have withdrawn at any stage

of the study without having to provide a reason for such withdrawal or suffering any negative consequences.

Research bias occurs when researchers prefer evidence that supports their own beliefs and perceptions (Nyhan et al., 2019). Eliminating bias in research is hard, but a researcher must remain unbiased throughout a study (Galdas, 2017). Researchers should eliminate bias by eliminating errors in the initial assumptions. Researchers should not introduce a form of bias to eliminate another form of bias (Glaw et al., 2017).

Researchers eliminate bias in research design by conducting member checking (Yarborough, 2021). Researchers conduct member checking by providing participants with the researchers' interpretations of participants' responses to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of such interpretations (Busetto et al., 2020). I conducted member checking to ensure data validity and reliability by providing participants with my interpretations of their responses to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations.

Researchers develop an interview protocol to ensure that they follow certain steps in the research process, including the interview steps and process, a script for the introduction and conclusion, reminders to obtain participants' signed informed consent forms, and interview questions and prompts (Peterson et al., 2017). I used an interview protocol (see Appendix) to guide me through the interview process and to achieve consistency by sharing the same information with all participants.

## Participants

Researchers need to identify suitable participants before beginning the data collection process (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). According to Smith and McGannon (2017), researchers must ensure that the participants' eligibility criteria align with the study's overarching research question. Researchers face challenges, including finding and accessing appropriate organizations and obtaining participants' agreement to participate in a study (Tracy, 2019). Researchers establish participant eligibility criteria, such as age and years of experience, to ensure that participants meet these criteria to qualify for participation (Freeman, 2019). For participants to be eligible to participate in a research study, they must possess knowledge of, and experience in, the phenomenon under study (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

I determined participants' eligibility criteria based on participants' successful experience using innovation strategies to improve business performance. Eligible participants possessed at least 5 years of successful experience using innovation strategies in Uganda to improve business performance. I used Uganda's Chamber of Commerce and LinkedIn to purposively identify this study's participants. The participants identified were suitable as they possessed knowledge of, and experience in, the phenomenon under investigation, which in this study was using innovation strategies to improve business performance.

In research, obtaining research authorization in organizations and access to participants is difficult (Vuban & Eta, 2018). To mitigate this challenge, Vuban and Eta (2018) opined that researchers should purposively provide organizational incentives, such

as promising to deliver a summary of study findings; understanding the characteristics of the target population; using extra recruitment techniques; and collaborating with organizational personnel. According to Amundsen et al. (2017), researchers become aware of underlying assumptions by accessing the participants. In this study, working with key organizational personnel was important because I discussed my intentions with the management team to conduct the study.

A trusting relationship must exist between the researcher and the study participants (Toombs et al., 2016). The establishment of rapport with study participants allows researchers to collect rich data (Miller, 2017). Regular engagement between the researcher and the study participants builds trust and rapport (Nuil et al., 2020). I increased the probability of collecting rich data by building a trusting relationship with participants and engaging with the participants regularly.

A suitable research design consists of the central research question aligning with the study participants (Alase, 2017). Participants are selected according to the eligibility criteria researchers established, which results in knowledgeable participants possessing knowledge of, and experience in, the phenomenon under investigation to help researchers answer the central research question (Levitt et al., 2017). Purposive sampling helps to select appropriate and knowledgeable participants (Marcondes, 2019). I purposively selected participants possessing knowledge and successful experience in using innovation strategies to improve business performance.

## Research Method and Design

### Research Method

There are three methods in social science research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. I used the qualitative method for the study. Qualitative researchers explore the *what*, *why*, and *how* of a phenomenon in its real-life setting (Yin, 2018). Researchers use the qualitative method to examine real-life experiences, understand in-depth perceptions, and interpret these descriptions (Cropley, 2019). I used the qualitative research method to explore the *what*, *why*, and *how* of a phenomenon, which is Ugandan SMEs leaders' use of innovation strategies to improve business performance. The quantitative researcher examines the relationships among various variables, using numerical data, and measuring techniques to analyze the data by testing hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2017). Apuke (2017) opined that researchers use the quantitative method to analyze numerical data collected in a research study. I did not select the quantitative method for the study because I did not examine relationships among variables using statistical analyses. In a mixed-method study, the researcher uses qualitative and quantitative methods (Yin, 2018). A mixed-method research study entails collecting and analyzing data using both qualitative and quantitative research methods in a single study (Subedi, 2016). I did not select the mixed method for the study because the study did not include numerical data, which is the quantitative portion of a mixed-method study.

### Research Design

I considered the following qualitative designs: case study, narrative, phenomenological, and ethnographic. Researchers use the case study design to explore



real-life events and business problems that are bound by time and space (Yin, 2018). A case study researcher investigates, analyses, and validates a phenomenon (Turnbull et al., 2021). Case studies include both single and multiple case studies (Yin, 2018). Although a single case study includes only one unit or case, a multiple case study includes multiple cases or units (Yin, 2018). A multiple case study is more rigorous than a single case study (Yin, 2018). I selected a multiple case study design because I explored the phenomenon of innovation strategies that leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance.

In the narrative design, participants share their experiences through their personal stories in an open and interpretative manner (Saunders et al., 2017). The researcher then describes the study participants' stories by narrating their individual experiences (Abkhezr et al., 2020). I did not use the narrative design because the study did not focus on participants' experiences, described through their personal stories, in an open and interpretative manner. Phenomenological scholars use interpretivism to explore participants' lived experiences to understand the meaning of a phenomenon (Van Manen, 2017). Phenomenological researchers focus on the participants' perspectives related to a phenomenon under investigation (Sohn et al., 2017). I did not select the phenomenological design because I did not focus on the personal meanings of participants' lived experiences. According to Marshall and Black et al. (2021), researchers use the ethnographic design to conduct an in-depth exploration of the everyday life of the members of a cultural organization in a community. Rapp (2017) revealed that researchers use the ethnographic design to observe participants interact in a

cultural organization of a given community. I did not use the ethnographic design because I did not conduct an in-depth exploration of the everyday life of the members of a cultural organization.

Researchers reach data saturation when additional data collection and analyses does not lead to any new information (Tran et al., 2017). According to Saunders et al. (2017), data saturation occurs when obtaining new data is no longer feasible. I continued interviewing participants until no new meaningful information or themes emerged.

### **Population and Sampling**

An appropriate sampling method enhances the reliability of a research study (Maier et al., 2018). Researchers use purposive sampling to identify participants from the available pool, using the same participant eligibility criteria to ensure participants possess the knowledge and experience in the phenomenon under investigation (Vasileiou et al., 2018). According to Chironda and Bhengu (2018), researchers use purposive sampling to select participants meeting the participant eligibility criteria. To collect rich data, I used purposive sampling to select participants possessing knowledge of, and experience in, the phenomenon under investigation, which for the study was the innovation strategies that leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance.

I collected data from five leaders of SMEs, located in Uganda, possessing successful experience in using innovation strategies to improve business performance. Researchers take into account several factors to determine the appropriate size of the sample for a study, including the nature of the study, required richness of data collected, and whether the sample size could be generalized to the entire population (Bush et al.,

2019; Sim et al., 2018). According to Saunders and Townsend (2016), an appropriate number of participants for a case study should be between three and five participants to have a reliable research outcome. Moser and Korstjens (2017) stated that study participants must possess knowledge of, and experience in, the phenomenon under investigation to contribute to a research study. Choosing a suitable sample size in case study research is difficult (Sim et al., 2018). Yin (2018) opined that two or three participants are adequate for a case study. I continued to conduct interviews until I achieved data saturation.

Researchers reach data saturation when additional data collection and analyses does not lead to any new information (Tran et al., 2017). According to Saunders et al. (2017), data saturation occurs when obtaining new data is no longer feasible. Researchers could reach data saturation if they obtain rich information about the phenomenon under investigation from conducting semistructured interviews with study participants (Constantinou et al., 2017). To reach data saturation, I conducted semistructured interviews and asked open-ended questions to obtain rich information related to the phenomenon under investigation, which was the innovation strategies that leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance. To obtain participation approval from the research participants, I sent invitation emails and called research participants.

I ensured that I selected an interview setting that was suitable for open dialogue. When study participants feel that the interview setting is convenient, participants' anxiety diminishes (Maharajan et al., 2017) and the interview environment leads to building rapport and engaging in rich dialogue (Shell & Buell, 2019). Researchers must conduct

interviews in quiet environments and convenient and private locations to make participants feel comfortable (McGrath et al., 2018). I ensured that I selected an interview setting that was suitable for open dialogue and convenient to the participants to reduce their anxiety. I also ensured that the interview environment led to building rapport and engaging in rich dialogue with participants. Finally, I ensured that the interview setting was quiet and in a private location to make participants feel comfortable. I informed each research participant that the duration of each interview would be approximately 60 minutes.

### **Ethical Research**

Researchers must obtain consent in a research study (Nicolaidis et al., 2019). Before participating in the study, all participants read an informed consent form and agreed to participate by replying to my email. The informed consent form included the nature of the study, expected risks and benefits of carrying out the study, researchers' expectations of study participants, participants' withdrawal procedures, and researchers' contact information (Yin, 2018). Various scholars (e.g., Bloomer et al., 2017; Moriarty et al., 2020; Pratap et al., 2019) have recommended that researchers must inform study participants about the voluntary nature of participation. I informed participants in this study that their participation was strictly voluntary. Participants could cease participation without having to state the reason for such decision (Yin, 2018). As explained in the informed consent form, I informed the research participants that they had an unconditional right to withdraw from the study by telling me at any time either orally or in writing and without giving any reason or suffering negative repercussions.

Confidentiality and privacy of research participants must be mandatory in every research study (Katzman et al., 2018). I did not give any kind of gift or compensation to study participants for participating in the study. A research study may become biased if participants receive any type of gift or compensation (Mohajan, 2017).

I ensured that all study participants met the required eligibility criteria. The interviews, conducted through the videoconferencing platform Zoom (<https://zoom.us>), did not begin until the IRB at Walden University cleared me to conduct the study. I conducted every Zoom interview and concentrated on participants' safety, confidentiality, and informed consent, following IRB guidelines. Walden University's IRB approval number for this research study is 04-01-22-0128997.

The informed consent process has two stages, namely producing a consent form and providing the consent form to study participants (Burgess et al., 2019; Bazzano et al., 2021; Tindana et al., 2020). I developed an informed consent form using basic English with clear sentences to ensure the study participants with different reading levels would easily understand the information presented to them, including the interview questions, as Pilten (2016) recommended. Upon identification of a participant meeting the established participation criteria, I emailed each participant a copy of the informed consent form and discussed each item in detail. Individual review of the informed consent form is important because, quite often, participants do not read the entire form (Nusbaum et al., 2017).

I masked the names of research participants and their business organizations to ensure participants' confidentiality. I did not include any characteristics or identifiable

information related to the participants or their organizations that could reveal their identities. Researchers must conduct studies ethically to produce meaningful results and ensure that participants experience minimal risks, such as natural tiredness (Nowell et al., 2017). I will store all data collected, including scanned hard copies and electronic files, on a password-protected external flash drive for a period of 5 years. In compliance with IRB guidelines at Walden University (2020), I will destroy all study data after 5 years.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) established that the researcher is the main research instrument. Qualitative researchers are aware of the fact that they are the research instrument in their studies (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Korstjens & Moser, 2017a; Smith & McGannon, 2017). Researchers are the main research instrument; therefore, they conduct case studies by collecting data through interviews, observations, and document analyses (Mohajan, 2018).

Qualitative researchers usually conduct semistructured interviews with open-ended questions (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Kallio et al., 2016) to understand study participants' experiences with the phenomenon under study (Hong & Cross Francis, 2020). Qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews to collect data because semistructured interviews allow researchers to ask follow-up questions, resulting in an improved understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Miller et al., 2018). Conducting semistructured interviews allows researchers to collect data from experts in the phenomenon under investigation (Mergel et al., 2019).

I used open-ended questions to conduct semistructured interviews to gather data from leaders of SMEs in Uganda. Researchers collect rich data from study participants on the phenomenon under scrutiny (Adjerid & Kelley, 2018). Rich data collection using semistructured interviews may allow the researchers to discover new themes (Stieglitz et al., 2018). Researchers use semistructured interviews to ask participants previously prepared questions and, if necessary, clarifying questions (Brown et al., 2018). I conducted semistructured interviews to ask open-ended and clarifying questions to obtain rich data.

I was the primary research instrument in the study, and I collected data by conducting, audio-recording, and transcribing semistructured Zoom interviews, following an interview protocol (see Appendix) I designed. The participants answered all the questions set in the interview guide. I gave participants an opportunity to give any thoughts after the interview related to innovation strategies they used to improve business performance. At the end of the interview, researchers should give participants an opportunity to give their views and experiences on the phenomenon under study that did not emerge during the actual interview (Alase, 2017; Bradshaw et al., 2017). In a research study, a researcher can introduce bias unknowingly (Yarborough, 2021). To avoid bias, a researcher can engage in reflexivity (Reid et al., 2018). Researcher reflexivity refers to the researcher's critical reflections on data collected (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). Reflexivity is an essential tool to address and respond to researchers' own biases, resulting in increased transparency of the data collection process (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). I engaged

in reflexivity exercises by examining and reflecting upon the data collected and recorded my own thoughts about the data collection process to mitigate biases.

Researchers use document analysis, which is another data collection technique, to gather data (Gaus, 2017; Wood et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Researchers use document analysis and interviews at the same time to explore the phenomenon under scrutiny because using both data collection techniques increases the study's validity and rigor and allows the researcher to conduct methodological triangulation (Abdalla et al., 2018; Gaus, 2017; Wood et al., 2020). Researchers analyze different organizational documents, including budgets, financial statements, and annual reports, to learn some of the organizations' critical information directly related to the phenomenon under investigation (Wood et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). I analyzed public records, company annual reports, and financial statements related to innovation strategies leaders of Ugandan SMEs use to improve business performance.

Researchers use member checking to allow participants to critically analyze and confirm data aspects, increasing data validity and reliability (Iivari, 2018; Thomas, 2016; Roberts et al., 2019; Varpio et al., 2016). Researchers conduct member checking by asking study participants to verify the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations of participants' answers to interview questions (Iivari, 2018). I conducted member checking by asking participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations of their answers to interview questions.



### **Data Collection Technique**

Qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews to collect participants' experiences with the phenomenon under study (Alase, 2017). Researchers use open-ended questions to allow participants to give their experiences on the phenomenon under scrutiny (Connor Desai & Reimers, 2018). Researchers conduct semistructured interviews using the study's central research question to control the direction of the interview and ask supporting interview questions to obtain any additional information related to the phenomenon under study (Willis & Templeton, 2018). I conducted semistructured interviews with leaders of Ugandan SMEs to obtain the innovation strategies they use to improve business performance. Qualitative researchers also analyze organizational documents and artifacts related to the phenomenon under scrutiny (Mariani & Baggio, 2020). I analyzed organizational documentation and artifacts related to strategies Ugandan leaders of SMEs use to improve business performance. Methodological triangulation ensures rigor and data validity by combining data collection methods, resulting in an improved understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Ashour, 2018). I conducted methodological triangulation by using semistructured interviews and analyzing organizational documentation and artifacts to determine if data collected from various sources aligned.

Researchers face advantages and disadvantages when conducting semistructured interviews and analyzing organizational documents and artifacts (Brown & Danaher, 2017). Regarding the advantages of conducting semistructured interviews, researchers could ask participants clarifying questions to obtain rich data by allowing participants to

expound their responses (Brown & Danaher, 2017). Another advantage is that researchers are able to observe participants' nonverbal cues when responding to the interview questions (Eaves & Leathers, 2017). Researchers benefit from analyzing organizational documents and artifacts because collecting data from various sources allows researchers to conduct methodological triangulation to determine if data alignment occurred (Fusch et al., 2018). Another advantage of analyzing organizational documents and artifacts is that researchers can discover new themes by exploring new data (Sun & Yin, 2017). Organizational documents could contain employees' names and a thorough overview of incidents connected to the phenomenon under scrutiny (Wenzel & Van Quaquebeke, 2017). I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews and asking participants clarifying questions to obtain rich data. I conducted methodological triangulation by gathering data from conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documents and artifacts to compare both sets of data to determine if data alignment had occurred.

Researchers face disadvantages when conducting semistructured interviews and analyzing organizational documents and artifacts (Queirós et al., 2017). Qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews, which causes participants to feel anxious when researchers audio-record participants when answering questions (Keenan, 2017). Inexperienced researchers face difficulties when conducting semistructured interviews (McGrath et al., 2018). Research participants may introduce response bias in a research study by giving answers that they think researchers would like to hear (Smith & McGannon, 2017). When researchers use nonverbal cues during an interview and

communicate their views to participants, researchers introduce bias into a study (Vrij et al., 2019). A drawback of analyzing organizational documentation and artifacts is that the employees could have integrated biases into the organizational documentation and artifacts, satisfying their own interests (Azungah, 2018). Organizational documentation and artifacts could contain inaccurate data due to employee bias (Agniel et al., 2018). Access to certain organizational documents and artifacts may be a challenge for a researcher (Mills & Mills, 2017).

Qualitative researchers conduct a pilot study when necessary to assess the study's feasibility (Ismail et al., 2017). A pilot study is not critical to case study research and requires long-term commitments because the researchers have to use multiple data collection methods required of the case study design (Fraser et al., 2018). A pilot study is not critical when conducting case studies and, therefore, I did not conduct a pilot study due to time constraints.

Qualitative researchers use member checking to give participants an opportunity to review researchers' interpretation of participants' answers to interview questions to ensure the accuracy of such interpretations (Iivari, 2018). Researchers use member checking to ensure data credibility (McDonald et al., 2019). Researchers face disadvantages when using member checking (Yin, 2018). For instance, if study participants do not comment on researchers' interpretations of participants' answers to interview questions, researchers may assume that those participants agreed with such interpretations; however, the participants might not have read these interpretations at all (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b). Another disadvantage is that study participants may accept

the researchers' interpretations as accurate because they do not want to disagree with the researchers (Smith & McGannon, 2017). I conducted member checking by asking participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations of their answers to interview questions. I used member checking to increase the validity of the data.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Qualitative researchers develop a data organizational system before engaging in data analyses to conduct more rigorous research studies (Yin, 2018). Similar to organizing quantitative data in a database, researchers collect and organize qualitative data in a systematic manner (Yin, 2018). I developed a data organizational system to conduct a more rigorous research study. I conducted semistructured interviews with leaders of Ugandan SMEs with successful experience in implementing innovative strategies to improve financial performance. I used open-ended interview questions. To ensure confidentiality, I pre-assigned codes to all study participants, as Thomas (2020) recommended. The pre-assigned codes for leaders of Ugandan SMEs consisted of the letter "P" and a number between 1 and 5. For instance, I used P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5, for the five participants, and O1, O2, O3, O4, and O5, for their respective participating business organizations. P1 worked in an SME that manufactures aloe vera, P2 worked in an SME offering technology solutions, P3 worked in an SME that manufactures women's products, P4 worked in an SME that manufactures leather products, and P5 worked in an SME that manufactures hand-made items. I deleted personal information from the interview transcripts. Surmiak (2018) claimed that researchers must remove any information that may directly or indirectly lead to the discovery of the participants'

identities to ensure participant confidentiality. I ensured the confidentiality of all study participants by transcribing all the interviews, removing participant identifying information, matching participants' pre-assigned codes to the corresponding transcripts and any other documents or artifacts.

I stored research-related folders in a password-protected external flash drive. The folders contain interview transcripts, observations I made during the interviews, and any other notes I wrote during or after the interviews. The initial step towards organizing data was scanning and converting paper files into PDF images, allowing me to ensure data protection and security. Upon having all data in electronic format, filing electronic documents into a dedicated folder enabled me to organize and retrieve data more effectively and efficiently. Yin (2018) proposed that scanned documents should contain annotated bibliographies to facilitate indexing and retrieval.

I stored electronic data folders in a flash drive. A computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) enables effective data organization and analysis (Dalkin et al., 2020). Raw data importation from the flash disk into the CAQDAS program improved data organization in the study. However, Sánchez-Gómez et al. (2019) asserted that the effectiveness of CAQDAS in data organization and analysis does not serve as a substitute for the researcher's role in the effective organization and analysis of data collected. DeDoose is a cloud-based application for analyzing qualitative and mixed-methods research (Dedoose, 2020). I used DeDoose to import, store, and organize all data collected. I kept data in a central location for efficient and effective data retrieval and analysis.

Qualitative researchers keep reflective journals to ensure transparency in the research process (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017) and assist in the bracketing process (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). Researchers use reflective journals to record their personal experiences and observations during the research process, capturing rich descriptions that include the interview setting and the participants' nonverbal cues (Ghanizadeh et al., 2020). To ensure transparency, I kept an electronic reflective journal to document my personal experiences during the semistructured interviews and my decisions during the research process, including rich descriptions about the interview setting and the participants' nonverbal cues.

Researchers need to retain data only for the required period and must keep them secured (Jiang et al., 2019). Data protection laws provide a legal framework that researchers can adopt to ensure data protection and security during the research process (Lauber-Rönsberg, 2017). Part of this legal framework include establishing the purpose of data collection, obtaining participant consent, gathering data strictly related to the research study's purpose, retaining information only for the required period, and keeping the all research-related data secured.

I stored electronic data, including scanned files of hardcopies on a password-protected external flash drive. After scanning the hardcopies, I stored them in a locked file cabinet to ensure data security. Researchers use data protection techniques to ensure data security throughout the research process (Gruschka et al., 2018). To retrieve data more effectively and efficiently, Jameel and Majid (2018) proposed that researchers must adhere to ethical requirements by storing electronic data folders in a password-protected

flash drive and hardcopies in a locked file cabinet. Upon completing the study, I stored all data collected, including scanned hard copies and electronic files, on a password-protected external flash drive and will keep them for a period of 5 years. In compliance with IRB guidelines at Walden University (2020), I will destroy all study data after 5 years.

### **Data Analysis**

Triangulation enhances a research study by combining data collection methods, resulting in the confirmation of the data collected and a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Aguilar Solano, 2020). Qualitative researchers use methodological triangulation to confirm if data collected from various sources align (O'Donovan & McAuliffe, 2020). Methodological triangulation increases the credibility and validity of the data collected (Dźwigoł & Dźwigoł-Barosz, 2020). Researchers use methodological triangulation to explore a phenomenon from different perspectives using data collected from various sources (Noble & Heale, 2019). For example, a researcher achieves convergent evidence when using methodological triangulation because researchers align data collected from conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documents and artifacts. Yin (2018) stated that researchers achieving convergent evidence increase the construct validity in case studies. I conducted methodological triangulation by gathering data from conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documents and artifacts and compared the data collected to determine if data alignment had occurred. I used methodological triangulation to confirm data validity and reliability. Researchers conduct member

checking to confirm the validity and reliability of the data collected by giving participants the researchers' interpretations of participants' answers to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of such interpretations (Yin, 2018). I conducted member checking to ensure data validity and reliability by providing participants with my interpretations of their responses to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations. Finally, I compared the member-checked data with data collected from my review of organizational documentation and artifacts and determined that data alignment had occurred.

Data analysis occurs parallel to data collection (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Data analysis methods include thematic, content, and discourse analysis (Mackieson et al., 2018). Researchers use thematic analysis to examine data and identify common themes by reading transcripts more than once (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Researchers use CAQDAS, such as DeDoose, to enable effective data organization and analysis (Sapat et al., 2017). Researchers also use CAQDAS to identify common themes and the relationship among them (Silver, 2017).

Qualitative researchers use the following steps in data analysis: compile, disassemble, reassemble, clarify, and conclude (Yin, 2018). The first step entails organizing data to identify emerging themes found in the interview transcripts. Alam (2020) proposed that researchers should use data analysis software, such as NVivo, to code and analyze the data collected. NVivo is a useful software package, as researchers use it to organize, code, and classify substantial amounts of data in an efficient manner (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019). Researchers disassemble the data to assign codes to



the data collected in the second step. Researchers reassemble and reorganize data collected by themes in the third step. In the fourth step, researchers conduct thematic analysis to validate their interpretations of participants' answers to interview questions contained in the interview transcripts. Researchers conduct thematic analysis of data collected with the goal of identifying patterns and themes to answer the overarching research question of a study (Lawless & Chen, 2018). Researchers conduct thematic analysis and use member checking to validate their interpretations of participants' answers to interview questions contained in the interview transcripts (Brear, 2018). I conducted member checking to ensure data validity and reliability by providing participants with my interpretations of their responses to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations. I then compared member-checked data with data obtained from my review of organizational documentation and artifacts and determined that data alignment had occurred.

Case study research has a foundation in the collection of data from multiple sources to gather rich data (Krehl & Weck, 2019). Yin (2018) claimed that data triangulation ensures data richness by combining data collection methods, resulting in an improved understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and enhancing the study's credibility. Qualitative researchers use methodological triangulation to increase data validity and credibility by comparing data collected from multiple sources, such as semistructured interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts (Moon, 2019). In terms of organizational documentation and artifacts, researchers use thematic analysis and content analysis to analyze data collected from reviewing organizational

documentation and artifacts (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). I used content analysis to analyze organizational documentation and artifacts relevant to Ugandan SME leaders' innovation strategies used to improve their businesses' performance. Using content analysis when analyzing data enables researchers to categorize identified codes and identify themes (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Researchers using content analysis to analyze organizational documentation and artifacts engage in three steps, which are preparation, organization, and reporting (Roller, 2019). I used methodological triangulation to compare data collected from conducting semistructured interviews and analyzing organizational documentation and artifacts to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In Step 5, the researcher answers the overarching research question by drawing conclusions and giving recommendations based on the study's findings (Yin, 2018). To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, I compiled and assembled the data, used codes to disassemble the data, reassembled the data by themes, interpreted data using thematic analysis, and developed conclusions that emerged from the study findings.

Qualitative researchers map the relationships among the themes to develop the main themes, answer the study's central research question (Yin, 2018), and correlate the main themes with current literature and the study's conceptual framework (Snyder, 2019). When researchers code data using labels, researchers can easily group similar labels to different data categories (Williams & Moser, 2019). Researchers establish theme codes' statistical occurrence by conducting frequency data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The conceptual framework helps researchers obtain key literature themes

(Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019) by linking past literature, methodology, and the study's findings. I identified and correlated the main themes with current literature and the conceptual framework of the study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative researchers use the following stringent criteria to establish a study's validity and reliability: confirmability, transferability, credibility, and dependability (Forero et al., 2018). Researchers contemplate that trustworthiness encompasses these four criteria (Nyirenda et al., 2020). When researchers ensure a qualitative study's trustworthiness, they address a quantitative study's reliability and validity (Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers ensure the trustworthiness of a study by ensuring the equivalent of reliability and validity requirements of a quantitative study.

#### **Reliability**

Reliability is vital in the case study research design. To ensure the study's reliability and validity, qualitative researchers should use reliable instruments in conducting a study (Mohajan, 2017). I used two sources of evidence that researchers normally use when using the case study design, which are semistructured interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts, to enhance the study's credibility and validity, as recommended by several researchers (Larsen et al., 2020; Sarabi-Jamab & Araabi, 2018; Zhao et al., 2020). Yin (2018) contended that all sources are essential, and researchers should not assume that a source is better than the others because all sources are complementary. Therefore, a solid case study design has multiple data sources.

Dependability is data stability over a certain period and conditions (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). I used the same interview questions to ensure data dependability, as several researchers (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) suggested. To ensure data dependability, I conducted member checking, as Castleberry and Nolen (2018) recommended. Member checking involves asking study participants to verify the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations of participants' answers to interview questions (McGrath et al., 2018). Researchers eliminate bias by conducting member checking, enhancing data dependability (Glaw et al., 2017).

Researchers audio record the interview sessions to reflect on the interviewees' responses to produce credible interview transcripts and identify critical themes (Goodman-Delahunty & Martschuk, 2018). To reduce bias, I requested interviewees to expound on their answers, and if their answers were not relevant, I asked them to elaborate their answers, as Yin (2018) suggested. I did not have a conversation with the participants regarding the study's details before the interview to avoid integrating my biases into participants' views, resulting in reliable results, as recommended by several researchers (Alase, 2017; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Sigstad & Garrels, 2017). I adhered to the interview protocol guidelines. I was consistent by sticking to the original questions to increase the study's consistency and reliability, as Deterding and Waters (2018) and Majid et al. (2017) suggested.

### **Validity**

The research validation structure consists of credibility, transferability, and confirmability (FitzPatrick, 2019). Researchers use the case study design to collect data

from various sources to conduct methodological triangulation to determine if data alignment occurred, enhancing the study's credibility (Fusch et al., 2018). If solely one researcher analyzes data, the study's credibility depends on the data inclusiveness and representativeness (Jebb et al., 2017). Researchers could establish data credibility by reviewing the interview transcripts rigorously (Rose & Johnson, 2020). I reviewed the interview transcripts several times to understand the participants' views. I also compared and contrasted the study participants' perspectives. To ensure data validity, I conducted member checking prior to data analysis and after transcription by allowing participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations of their answers to interview questions, as Iivari (2018) suggested.

Transferability is when researchers are able to apply the results of their study to another study (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2019). Yin (2018) accentuated that case study researchers' objectives should be to provide findings of excellent quality by choosing suitable study participants, giving detailed participant demographic information, conducting thorough data analysis, and providing results in a simple-to-understand manner to enhance a study's transferability. To increase the study's transferability, I provided findings of excellent quality by choosing suitable study participants, giving detailed participant demographic information, conducting thorough data analysis, and providing results in a simple-to-understand manner.

In qualitative research, confirmability occurs after establishing dependability, credibility, and transferability (Haven & Grootel, 2019). Confirmability refers to researchers' confirmation that a study's findings are free from researchers' biases and are

an accurate representation of the study participants' responses (Fusch et al., 2018). I listened to the study participants during the interview and recorded my thoughts, perceptions, and biases. To enhance the confirmability of the study's results, I transcribed all the interviews' audio recordings cautiously to connect data with results and use current literature.

Qualitative researchers use methodological triangulation in case studies to improve a study's rigor and validity (Ashour, 2018). Methodological triangulation entails using several data collection methods and comparing the data collected to determine if data alignment occurred, resulting in an improved understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Dźwigoł & Dźwigoł-Barosz, 2020). I conducted methodological triangulation by comparing data collected from semistructured interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts to determine if data alignment occurred. Researchers conduct methodological triangulation as the main strategy to establish validity in a case study because methodological triangulation's foundation is in the collection of data using several sources (Farquhar et al., 2020).

I collected data until I reached data saturation. Data saturation occurs where the collection of new data is not feasible (Saunders et al., 2017). Researchers reach data saturation when additional data collection and analyses do not generate any new themes or meaningful information. A researcher must reach data saturation to obtain valid results (Lowe et al., 2018); therefore, I continued to collect and analyze data until no new themes or meaningful information emerged.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 1 included the background of the problem; problem statement; purpose statement; nature of the study; research question; interview questions; conceptual framework; operational definitions; assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; significance of the study; and a review of the professional and academic literature. In the literature review, I presented a comprehensive analysis of research relevant to successful innovation strategies of Ugandan SMEs.

In Section 2, I restated the purpose of the study; explained the researcher's role; and described the research method and design, population and sampling methods, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity of the study.

Section 3 contains the introduction of the study and the presentation of findings. Furthermore, Section 3 includes the applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action. Finally, Section 3 includes the recommendations for further study, reflections, a summary, and study conclusions.

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

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the innovation strategies Ugandan SMEs leaders use to improve business performance. The sample comprised five Ugandan SME leaders with successful experience implementing innovation strategies to improve business performance. I conducted semistructured interviews with all participants. I also reviewed organizational documentation and artifacts to obtain the relevant information on innovation strategies deployed by Ugandan SME business leaders to improve business performance. I analyzed the data gathered from the participants' responses to interview questions and reviewed organizational documentation and artifacts. Organizational documents included pre- and post-business performance reports related to the implementation of innovation strategies. I conducted methodological triangulation and found that participants' responses to interview questions aligned with the information I found from reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts. The following themes resulted from analyses of all data collected: product strategies improved business performance, process strategies improved business performance, and human capital strategies improved business performance.

This section includes the presentation of findings from the data I gathered from interviewing Ugandan SMEs leaders and reviewing the organizational documents and artifacts. I also present the findings, discuss the impact of the study's results to the professional practice, explain the implications of the study for positive social change, give recommendations for future research, reflect on the study process, and provide a conclusion.



## **Presentation of the Findings**

This qualitative multiple case study's overarching research questions was: What innovation strategies do leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance? Next, I present a discussion of each of the three themes that emerged as a result of data analyses. I conducted member checking and methodological triangulation to establish validity in this study.

### **Theme 1: Product Strategies Improved Business Performance**

After I analyzed all data collected, the first theme that emerged was that product strategies improved business performance. All five participants claimed that product strategies are essential in enhancing business performance, and their SMEs innovated various products, which improved business performance. All five participants believed that product strategies have played a significant role in achieving improved business performance. P1 posited that the deployment of product strategies helped them attain competitiveness and improve market performance. P2 claimed that product strategies promoted customer satisfaction and assisted the firm to gain competitiveness. P3 reiterated the claims by P2 that product strategies improved customer satisfaction and business performance. P4 pointed out that product strategies helped their firm attract new customers and retain old customers, promoting business growth and improving business performance. P5 stated that product strategies mitigated product problems and promoted customer satisfaction. P5 further echoed the claims by P1, P2, P3, and P4 that product strategies promoted customer satisfaction and resulted in improved business performance.

This finding is supported by the literature. For example, Varadarajan (2018) stressed that innovation of product strategies is critical for firms to maintain competitiveness. Similarly, Pierre and Fernandez (2018) affirmed that product strategies are critical in SMEs, and SMEs should continue to develop product strategies to create a competitive environment. Product strategies allow organizations to set their strategic vision. According to Ali et al. (2021), product strategies help organizations to set their strategic vision for product offerings. The firm's vision outlines the current state of the company's products, the products' vision, and the measures to achieve product success. Organizational products are critical assets that assist organizations to improve their business performance (Islami et al., 2020). Product strategies allow companies to concentrate on a specific target market (Al Badi, 2018). Concentrating on a specific target market enables firms to produce unique goods, as they aim to gain a competitive advantage. Competitive advantage leads to differentiation and creation of value, which improves business performance (Onileowo et al., 2021).

All five participants stated that product strategies allow them to focus on a specific target market and improve their business profit. As an example, P1 stated the following:

We developed a product strategy to increase awareness and ensure our products gain competitiveness. Most cosmetics in the market have a detrimental impact on woman's faces. Most ingredients in the market are corrosive on women's skin, and unfortunately, some are ineffective. In extreme cases, some women have developed acne when they used certain skin-care products. Therefore, when

developing our skin care products, we ensured that the ingredients do not contain any harmful chemicals that damage the customer's skin. For instance, we ensured that the products are not absorbed by the skin to mitigate harmful reactions. This product strategy ensured that our products were accepted in the market, allowing them to gain competitiveness.

P1's account regarding the impact of product strategies on business performance demonstrated that it was incumbent for the SME to deploy the appropriate market strategies to realize competitiveness and improve market performance. P2 added the following about product strategies:

Product strategies help in improving customer satisfaction and gaining competitiveness. When developing our products, we have to consider the customers' perception of the product. For instance, we ask ourselves whether our products will solve our customers' problems. If not, we have to go back to the drawing board and create innovative product strategies. Our innovation strategies are solely based on customers' needs. In fact, we go an extra mile by asking our regular and prospective customers on the features they need in our products. This information assists us in developing customer-centric products. When we develop products based on our customer's needs, they feel honored that we incorporated their suggestions in developing our products, resulting in customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction increases customer loyalty and promotes customer satisfaction, which helps us sell more of our products.

P3 also stated the following related to product strategies:

Product strategies are crucial in our firm during the creation of new products and product development. We decided to incorporate views from our customers whenever we are innovating or modifying our products. Customer views have been very instrumental in product development and modification. For instance, one of our customers intimated to me that we should always introduce something unique when we are modifying our products. According to the customer, the introduction of something unique will eliminate the cliché of our products. I think that implementing these strategies from customers is essential for us, and it has really improved our business performance.

Regarding product strategies, P4 stated the following:

After we introduced product strategies in all our products, we created new business. Our products were viewed as new and unique, helping us to gain a competitive advantage. The adoption of several product strategies helped us to attract new customers and retain old customers, as they were looking for something new. One of the customers informed me that he hated boring products; therefore, he wanted to try something new. New and loyal customers boosted our business performance and promoted business growth.

Finally, P5 explained a few issues related to product strategies:

Product strategies have helped us mitigate challenges in developing the final products. We develop product strategies to ensure that we produce goods according to the customers' requirements. This strategy helps us fulfill customer

satisfaction, and it has really helped our business grow. We will continue using product strategies because it has helped us realize immense profits.

After analyzing the organizational documents and artifacts, which included the survey results, I gained further insights into the benefits of deploying product strategies to improve business performance. The survey findings affirmed that product strategies propel business performance. For instance, one of the survey results indicated that 62% and 30% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that their firm's product strategies are innovative, ensuring they have a competitive advantage. In another survey question, 48% and 29% of respondents strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, with the statement that product strategies helped their firms focus on specific target markets. Knezović and Hamur (2021) asserted that product strategies are realistic and accurate, enabling firms to focus on their goals and improve business performance.

According to Agrawal et al. (2021), product strategies allow firms to answer various questions, such as the product beneficiaries and how the product would impact the users. As such, products are developed with the aim of satisfying customers. Customer satisfaction results in increased repeat purchases, which increases sales and improves business performance (Otto et al., 2019). Product strategies motivate firms to be product-oriented and customer-oriented (Atulkar & Kesari, 2018). Al Asheq et al. (2021) acknowledged that customer-oriented businesses focus on realizing and satisfying customer needs. Therefore, these companies align their business goals with their customer goals. Aligning business goals with customer goals attracts new customers and

retains loyal customers, improving business performance (Zemguliene & Valukonis, 2018).

### ***Correlation to the Literature***

This study's Theme 1, which is that product strategies are paramount in business performance, aligned with the findings of Christensen et al. (2018) in that product strategies improve business performance. Christensen et al. argued that product strategies enable firms to develop innovative products for their consumers. Innovative products should be convenient to the customers, as they enhance customer loyalty and improve business performance (Brammah et al., 2021). Ho (2021) asserted that product strategies create disruptive innovations. Product strategies drive product innovations, which redefines markets and creates customer value. Customer value is essential in business, as it increases loyalty and sales, improving business performance (Coletta et al., 2021). Product strategies help customers to maintain brand loyalty, promoting business growth and performance (Fuller & Hansen, 2019).

### ***Correlation to the Conceptual Framework***

This study's Theme 1, which is that product strategies are paramount in business performance, aligns with the disruption innovation theory, this study's conceptual framework. All study participants' responses alluded to the elements similar to the concept of innovation, which according to Christensen (1997) are a critical element in the disruption innovation theory. Some of the words used by the study participants included "innovation" and "product strategies." These keywords relate to the concept of disruption

innovation theory, which Christensen claimed that firms that deploy innovations achieve competitiveness and improve business performance.

### **Theme 2: Process Strategies Improved Business Performance**

The second theme that emerged after analyzing the data collected is that process strategies improved business performance. All five participants stated that process strategies play a significant role in improving their firms' performance. Furthermore, all five study participants affirmed that process strategies assist the firm in improving the production process, which results in improved business performance. According to all five participants, process strategy implementation assists the firms in determining their process objectives and achieving their business goals. P1 claimed that process strategies help them achieve the desired outcomes. P2 posited that process strategies promote the achievement of a competitive advantage. P3 reiterated the claims P1 made that process strategies help their business to achieve the desired process outcomes. P4 agreed with P2 that process strategies help them in achieving competitiveness. P5 reiterated the claims made by P2 and P4 that process strategies help them gain competitiveness.

All five participants further intimated that process strategies help determine the organization's desired goals. As an example, P1 stated the following:

We introduced a process strategy in our firm to ensure we achieved the desired outcomes. We checked the available resources, such as aloe vera, and we developed the appropriate strategies on how we can use it to provide value to our cosmetics. For instance, we discovered that one of the benefits of using aloe vera is to improve the skin because it has antioxidant and antibacterial properties. For

this reason, we developed effective process strategies to achieve the desired outcomes with our skin-care products. The implementation of these process strategies helped us achieve unmatched business growth.

P2 added the following words related to process strategies:

We use process strategies to reduce product turnover and gain a competitive advantage. Process strategies help us reduce the time taken in a product life cycle, which also helps us reduce the product life cycle costs. Reducing the product life cycle helps us increase the product output and predict project success. Increased product output and turnover reduction have helped our company grow significantly and achieve a competitive advantage.

P2's claims about the effect of process strategies on business performance indicated that process strategies significantly reduce turnover time, reduce operational costs, and improve business performance. P3 added the following related to process strategies:

The deployment of process strategies in our SME has been mind-blowing to our business growth. Process strategies have assisted our firm in achieving the desired business outcomes. We realize the expected business outcomes when we achieve the desired process outcomes. Achieving the desired business outcomes has helped us achieve business growth.

P4 also added a few points related to process strategies:

We have implemented various process strategies in our business, which have helped us achieve competitiveness. Furthermore, implementing process strategies has helped us know the specific direction of the firm's business processes.



Therefore, we have been able to focus and develop unique process strategies than our competitors. Additionally, these process strategies have allowed us to experience business growth because we develop unique products in the market. When customers notice we have unique products, they buy our products a lot, helping us increase sales and realize business success.

P5 made the following statement concerning process strategies:

We have always used process strategies to remain at the top of the market. For instance, we have developed process strategies that detail how our business resources could be transformed into outputs. These strategies have been instrumental to our firm, as they have helped us to achieve our business potential.

After reviewing the organizational documents and artifacts, including survey results, I further understood the importance of deploying process strategies to improve business performance. In one of the survey questions, while 50% of the respondents strongly agreed that process strategies improved business performance, 32% agreed that process strategies improved business performance. In another survey question, 62% of employees claimed that process strategies assisted them in gaining a competitive advantage, eventually resulting in improved business performance.

Carvalho et al. (2021) found that process strategies are imperative in organizations as they help direct all their organizational processes to achieve the organizational goals and objectives. Arguably, achieving organizational goals and objectives helps attain business performance. According to Mallinguh et al. (2020), process strategies give businesses a competitive edge and help them realize business

success. Process strategies enable organizations to increase their output (George et al., 2019). Organizations increase their output due to increased production. Biondi and Russo (2022) noted that process strategies result in the improvement of quality processes. Quality processes promote efficiency and waste reduction, enhancing organizational growth (Fundin et al., 2020).

### ***Correlation to the Literature***

This study's Theme 2, which is that process strategies promote business performance, aligned with the findings of Hermundsdottir and Aspelund (2021), who asserted that process strategies are critical in a business, as these strategies determine the process roadmap the company will take. Therefore, in the event of any challenges, the firm will always refer to its original process roadmap. The findings also aligned with a study by Tiberius (2019), who posited that process strategies assist an organization in creating a vision and direction for the process, and the entire firm will work towards the attainment of those process strategies. Arguably, the achievement of the process strategies realizes improved business performance. Process strategies lead to new ideas, which improve business performance (Hughes et al., 2017).

### ***Correlation to the Conceptual Framework***

This study's Theme 2, which is that process strategies promote business performance, aligns with the disruptive innovation theory, which was this study's conceptual framework. All five study participants' responses stated that innovation is a key driver of business performance. Christensen (1997) claimed that innovation is vital in disruption innovation theory. Process strategies relate to the concept of disruptive

innovation theory, which is innovation (Lundgren et al., 2021). Process strategies involve innovating new processes, which are deployed in business operations and result in improving business performance (Rajesh, 2021). Innovation in organizations involves the deployment of innovative business models that allow the development of sophisticated products and services, which leads to disruptive innovation (Ozkan-Canbolat & Beraha, 2019). Process strategies involve transforming organizational products and services that meet customer needs (Roblek et al., 2021). Transforming organizational products and services leads to the introduction of new and enhanced products and services, which displaces incumbent businesses, and leads to disruptive innovation (Postavaru et al., 2019).

### **Theme 3: Human Capital Strategies Improved Business Performance**

The third theme that emerged after analyzing the data collected is that human capital strategies improved business performance. All five participants agreed that human capital strategies have a notable impact on their business performance. All five participants also noted that human capital strategies ensured that they have the appropriate human capital when needed. All five participants stated that having the appropriate human capital when they need it helps them conduct the firm's daily operations and handle the customers effectively and efficiently. P1 stated that human capital strategies help them drive their business. P2 claimed that human capital strategies have helped to increase productivity and promote business growth. P3 asserted that human capital strategies help their firm to choose the most qualified individuals to work in the organization. Additionally, P3 argued that the most qualified individuals help to

propel the business to achieve its organizational goals and objectives. P4 agreed with claims made by P3 that human capital strategies have helped them to improve productivity. P5 stated that human capital strategies ensure they have the right human capital at the right time and cost. P5 further argued that having the right human capital at the right time and cost allows them to optimize talent management and achieve organizational objectives.

All five participants claimed that human capital strategies promote business performance. As an example, P1 stated the following:

Previously, we underestimated the value of human capital strategies in our firm, but over the years, we have come to appreciate it as the most valuable resource in the business. We drafted human capital strategies detailing how we would hire, manage, train, and maintain employees. These strategies allowed us to remain with high-performing employees. High-performing employees have contributed a lot in the long run and helped us to achieve great success. We also introduced incentives, such as awarding employees based on their yearly performance. This way, we have motivated employees to work hard to be awarded at the end of the year. Therefore, all the employees work to achieve optimal results and improve business performance. I can confidently say that human capital strategies have helped propel business performance in my SME.

P2 added the following about human capital strategies:

Last year, we deployed human capital strategies in our SME and reaped positive results in business performance. Human capital strategies ensure that we select the

best candidates during the recruitment process. The strategies have helped us scrutinize candidates thoroughly before hiring them. Thorough scrutiny ensures that we get competent employees that fit various roles. Human capital strategies have also been instrumental in our SMEs as they have contributed to enhanced business performance. However, we did not realize improved business performance immediately, but we experienced improved business performance in the long run.

P3 explained that human capital strategies significantly positively impact business performance:

Human capital strategies help us in organizing employee training. One of the major components of human capital strategies is employee training needs. It is indispensable for employees to undergo training to improve their skill sets and competencies. Furthermore, the SME market and our business are constantly changing; therefore, it is requisite for employees to regularly upgrade their knowledge to keep up with the diverse market demands. Notably, our firm realized that employee training equips them with the requisite skills and knowledge to propel the business to the next level. When employees have updated knowledge and skills required in running a business, employees are a valuable resource to the firm; therefore, employees help the firm achieve business performance.

P4 also made the following claims related to human capital strategies:

I strongly believe that human capital strategies are important in business performance. I also believe that human capital strategies have helped our business exist because, without these strategies, we cannot utilize employees to create value for our organization. Maximizing employees' potential is critical in our firm, as employees help us realize business success. After thoroughly implementing human capital strategies, I found out that employees attain organizational goals. Furthermore, I found that human capital strategies have helped our employees increase in knowledge, especially in management. Consequently, an increase in management knowledge among employees results to increased innovation. Innovation is an imperative factor that promotes competitiveness and improves business performance.

P5 made the following statement related to human capital strategies:

I attest that human capital strategies have done “magic” to my SME. For instance, human capital strategies have allowed our firm to invest in employees by training and educating them. Furthermore, these strategies have allowed us to focus more on increasing the employees' competencies. We provide adequate training to them to allow them to have the requisite knowledge. Training employees makes them productive and productive and boosts business performance.

After reviewing the organizational documents and artifacts, such as survey results, I realized that human capital strategies significantly improved business performance. One of the survey questions indicated that 75% of the respondents strongly agreed that human capital strategies improved business performance, and 25% agreed that human capital

strategies improved business performance. In another survey question, 85% of employees stated that human capital strategies promoted innovation, which enhances firm performance.

Human capital strategies are an intangible asset in an organization, assisting in the evaluation and optimization of employees to achieve competitiveness (Koech et al., 2022). Competitiveness attracts more customers and contributes to high-profit margins, resulting in improved business performance (Nafari & Rezaei, 2021). According to Almekhlafi (2022), human capital strategies help in driving productivity, which is a key driver of improved business performance. Human capital strategies help deploy strategies that help employees become productive. Productive employees promote business performance (Thuda et al., 2019).

### ***Correlation to the Literature***

This study's Theme 3, which is that human capital strategies promote business performance, aligned with the findings of Gerhart and Feng (2021), who asserted that human capital strategies allow interactive learning among employees to promote productivity. Mira and Odeh (2019) contended that employee training influences job satisfaction positively and results in improved business performance. Human capital strategies promote a positive working environment (Deming, 2022). Pereira et al. (2019) claimed that human capital strategies contain strategies for recognizing and rewarding the best-performing employees. Recognizing and rewarding employees cultivates morale and motivation and enhances business performance (Van der Kolk et al., 2018).

### ***Correlation to the Conceptual Framework***

This study's Theme 3, which is that human capital strategies promote business performance, aligns with the disruptive innovation theory, which was this study's conceptual framework. All five study participants' responses stated that innovation is a prerequisite to business performance. Christensen (1997) claimed that innovation helps organizations create new markets and competitiveness. Human capital strategies focus on employee training and improving their competencies (Ngwenya & Pelsler, 2020). Employee competencies enable them to improve their skills and knowledge in achieving organizational goals, which promotes business performance (Mihardjo et al., 2020). Zhou et al. (2019) argued that human capital strategies allow the development of strategies to help employees absorb and develop new knowledge. The absorption and the development of new knowledge lead to innovation and positively influence business performance (Exposito & Sanchis-Llopis, 2018).

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

This multiple case study aimed to explore the innovative strategies leaders of SMEs in Uganda used to improve business performance. I conducted semistructured interviews with leaders of SMEs in Uganda and reviewed organizational documents and artifacts related to innovation strategies to improve business performance. After data analysis, three themes emerged: product strategies improved business performance, process strategies improved business performance, and human capital strategies improved business performance.



Innovative strategies are imperative for business performance (Andreini et al., 2021). From the study's findings, Ugandan SME leaders could use innovative strategies, such as product, process, and human capital strategies to spur business performance. For example, SME owners could innovate and improve their products to ensure they do not lose customers (Xie et al., 2019). Organizational products should be innovative to attract customers. SME leaders could use innovative strategies to influence change and improve business practices (Hameed et al., 2021). For instance, SME leaders could use this study's findings to gain meaningful, innovative strategies to enhance business performance. As an example, SME leaders could innovate and improve their processes to attract more customers and retain existing customers (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021). SME leaders could also adopt innovative strategies to realize change (Distanont & Khongmalai, 2018). The deployment of innovation strategies in organizational processes promotes the discovery of new opportunities, which fosters competitive advantage and improves business performance (Bracken et al., 2020).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include the potential of developing innovative strategies by Ugandan SME leaders. SME leaders could use this study's findings to develop innovative strategies, such as product, process, and human capital strategies to improve business performance (Andreini et al., 2021). Ugandan SME leaders could also use innovative strategies to improve productivity and create competitiveness (Exposito & Sanchis-Llopis, 2018). Competitive advantage assists businesses to improve business performance. Ugandan SMEs leaders could also use innovative strategies to

improve business practice (Udriyah et al., 2019). For instance, the SME leaders could set clearer business goals. Well-defined business goals are critical as they inform employees on the business's direction, which cultivates collaboration and teamwork (Shad et al., 2019). Shad et al. (2019) further argued that collaboration and teamwork among employees helps them focus on attaining the company's objectives, which improves business performance.

Innovative strategies would assist Ugandan SME leaders to state clearly their business strategies, which can be evaluated and assessed. Bracken et al. (2020) claimed that clear business objectives are profit drivers and improve business performance. The study might also help Ugandan SME business leaders to adopt innovation strategies, thereby promoting value addition in business. Aquilani et al. (2020) claimed that creating value in a business helps to sell products and services, increasing a business's profitability and performance. Ugandan SME leaders could deploy innovative strategies to influence positive change in business as innovative strategies influence change (Dupont, 2019). Change influences efficiency in work processes, ultimately, improving business performance (Xie et al., 2019).

Profitable SMEs pay more taxes, which increases the tax revenue for local governments (Festus & Oyindamola, 2020). Local governments utilize tax revenues to provide services to the public. Alshira'h (2019) argued that profitable and tax compliance SMEs provide adequate revenue for local governments, which is used to reduce poverty in a community by implementing poverty reduction strategies, such as offering more job opportunities to the community.

Profit-making SMEs pay taxes to the local governments, which enables the local governments to construct and maintain infrastructure, such as road, railways, and schools (Carsamer & Abbam, 2020). Adequate infrastructure improves a community's living standards (Mamirkulova et al., 2020). Marusin et al. (2019) added that improved infrastructure enhances service delivery in a community due to improved service delivery.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Ugandan SME leaders should pay attention to this study's findings and consider evaluating the innovation strategies used to improve business performance. Based on this study's results, I propose the following recommendations for action for Ugandan SME leaders to improve business performance:

- Implement product strategies to improve business performance. Ugandan SME leaders may consider deploying product strategies to realize competitiveness. Ugandan SME leaders might also consider deploying product strategies to promote customer satisfaction, which retains existing customers, attracts new customers, and improves business performance.
- Deploy process strategies to enhance business performance. Another recommendation that Ugandan SME leaders may use to improve business performance is implementing process strategies to improve business performance. Ugandan SME leaders should set clear goals for business processes. Ugandan SME leaders could introduce process strategies that focus on customer needs. Ugandan SME leaders may introduce process strategies to

improve efficiency, reduce operating costs, and increase output quality. For instance, Ugandan SME leaders may introduce process objectives that align with their businesses' objectives. Aligning process strategies objectives with business objectives might help SMEs gain competitiveness and improve business performance.

- Introducing human capital strategies to improve business performance.

Ugandan SME leaders should deploy human capital strategies, such as using effective talent acquisition and optimizing employees' skills. Ugandan SME leaders might also enhance human capital strategies, such as developing employees' innate aptitudes and enhancing employees' productive capacities.

All the five participants will receive a brief summary of this study's findings. To ensure my study reaches a significant readership, I will publish it on the ProQuest database of dissertations and theses. I also plan to submit a short version of my study to an academic journal for review and prospective publication.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the innovation strategies that Ugandan SME leaders use to improve business performance. This study had limitations and, therefore, researchers are encouraged to conduct studies to explore innovation strategies that SME leaders might use to improve business performance. I offer the following recommendations for future research based on this study's results:

- The target population of this study consisted of five leaders from five Ugandan SMEs with successful innovation strategies to improve business performance. Future researchers should conduct studies outside Uganda.
- Future researchers should address some of this study's limitations. This study's limitations included: participants in this study were limited to five owners and managers of SMEs in Uganda. Another limitation is that only a few Ugandan SMEs participated in the study and, consequently, conducting the study with a few SMEs prevents the generalization of results across the Ugandan SME industry. Future researchers are encouraged to increase the sample size.
- Researchers conducting similar research studies in the future should interview other business leaders in other industries to gather rich data on innovation strategies used to improve business performance.
- Future researchers should also consider interviewing the employees supervised by Ugandan SMEs to explore different perspectives related to innovation strategies used to improve business performance.
- Future researchers should also consider conducting research with other business leaders in different industries to obtain information on innovation strategies used to improve business performance.
- Researchers conducting similar research studies in the future should consider using the quantitative or mixed-methods research methodologies to explore the innovation strategies that Ugandan SME leaders use to improve business

performance, such as (a) product strategies that improve business performance, (b) process strategies that improve business performance, and (c) human capital strategies that improve business performance. Future researchers conducting longitudinal studies should examine these variables to provide SME leaders with new statistical data that might help them in deploying innovative strategies to improve business performance.

### **Reflections**

During this study, I have gained tremendous knowledge on SMEs, and how they could be enhanced to improve business performance. I have also improved my research skills by learning the art of searching and finding the appropriate literature for this study. Furthermore, I have learned to write coherently on various topics.

Before conducting this study, I had my own personal biases about SMEs and performance. However, I have learned that a researcher should view the phenomenon under investigation through the perspectives of the study's participants to avoid personal biases. I have also learned that I should be open-minded during the research process to allow innovative thinking and mitigate personal bias. I also learned that I should avoid having preconceived notions during the research process.

I was aware that I could integrate my personal bias during the process of data collection and analysis. To mitigate personal bias, I adhered to the interview protocol to ensure equal treatment of study participants. When conducting the interviews, I observed that the study participants were passionate and confident about discussing the innovative strategies used by Ugandan SMEs to improve business performance. I gained deeper

insights on the innovative strategies, such as product, process, and human capital strategies.

### **Conclusion**

Innovative strategies have a valuable role in improving business performance. SME business leaders could leverage their employees to fulfill their business' vision of improving business performance. Innovative strategies encourage employee participation, which promotes team innovation and continuous improvement, ultimately improving business performance (Shad et al., 2019). Deployment of innovative strategies allows business leaders to set clear business objectives, which are profit drivers that improve business performance (Bracken et al., 2020).

Based on this study's results, it was evident that innovative strategies, including product, process, and human capital strategies improve business performance. Furthermore, SMEs should create and foster an innovative culture for employees, as it is critical in improving business performance. I found that innovative strategies reduce operating costs, which increases a business' profitability and improves business performance.

SMEs, therefore, should implement innovative strategies to add value to their businesses. Value addition helps a business attract more customers, which boosts revenue and profitability, ultimately improving business performance (Aquilani et al., 2020). SMEs should also use innovative strategies to drive change. Organizational change improves business efficiency and business processes, which promotes business performance (Xie et al., 2019).

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

**Successful Innovation Strategies of Ugandan SMEs**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study is to explore the innovation strategies that leaders of SMEs in Uganda use to improve business performance.

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

## Notes:

1. Greet interviewee and introduce yourself.
2. Provide overview of the study and indicate the usefulness of the outcome.
3. Obtain signed consent form. Offer to answer any questions that interviewee may have.
4. Remind interviewee about their volunteer efforts to participate in the study.
5. Remind interviewee about recording the interview and start the recording.
6. Start the interview by recording interviewee's pre-assigned coded name, date, time and location.
7. Start asking interview questions. Allow enough time to answer those questions.
8. Listen carefully to interviewee. Ask probing and follow-up questions, if needed.
9. At the end of the interview, thank interviewee for their participation and time.
10. Provide participant your contact information if they have any questions.