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## Leadership Strategies for Sustainability of Small and Medium Enterprises in Swaziland

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Lizzy Taiwo

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Leadership Strategies for Sustainability of Small and Medium Enterprises

in Swaziland

by

Lizzy Taiwo

MA, University of Cumbria, 2016

BA, University of South Africa, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2022

## Abstract

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play an essential role in national and global economic growth. Lack of leadership strategies can negatively impact the sustainability and growth of SMEs. Business owners who implement appropriate leadership strategies can ensure the sustainability of their SMEs. Grounded in transformational leadership theory and sustainability development theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies owners of SMEs use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. The participants were four owners of SMEs within the four regions in Swaziland who successfully used leadership strategies to enhance the sustainability of their organizations. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, company archival documents, and notes. Thematic analysis yielded four themes: employee engagement and quality of service, listening and communication, performance review and reward system, and leadership style. A key recommendation is for SME owners to conduct annual performance reviews of their employees and generate an effective reward system to enhance business sustainability. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create job opportunities, provide social amenities and welfare, and support the economic development of regional communities.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my children, Abigail, Henry, and Nathan, and my parents, to whom I am appreciative for their prayers, love, encouragement, and support during my doctoral journey.

## Acknowledgments

First, I thank God for His unfailing love and divine protection through this doctoral journey. He gave me the strength and courage to persevere along and to the end; I could not have made it without Him. My special thanks goes to my children and my parents, who encouraged me daily and assumed some of my responsibilities to ensure I dedicated more time to my studies. To my parents, Festus and Elizabeth Ogunode, I say thanks for instilling in me, from early childhood, the importance of learning and perseverance.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operate in the same dynamic environment as larger organizations; hence, SMEs require business leaders with appropriate leadership strategies to enhance performance, growth, and sustainability. SMEs now operate in a dynamic market with advancements in technology, business competition, dynamic customer needs, and globalization (Buli, 2017). Owners of SMEs need to adopt appropriate leadership strategies to survive in the global market through enhanced business sustainability.

### **Background of the Problem**

SMEs play a significant role in national economic growth and environmental and societal sustainability for developed and developing nations. Most governments are now paying more attention to SMEs' growth, development, and sustainability (Johnson & Schaltegger, 2016). The failure rate of SMEs has continuously increased due to such factors as lack of enabling environment, inappropriate leadership and management skills, and financial factors (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2019; Olawale & Garwe, 2015). Some business owners' lack of appropriate leadership strategies could affect the sustainability and growth of SMEs, resulting in a negative impact on job creation, income generation, and poverty reduction in emerging economies such as Swaziland (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2017; Howard et al., 2019). Furthermore, about 80% of SMEs collapse in the first 2 years after establishment, thereby adding to the unemployment rate of 28.0% in Swaziland (Dziedzic, 2019). It is paramount for business leaders in Swaziland to possess appropriate leadership strategies to minimize the failure rate of SMEs (Muriithi, 2017).

Due to the increasing failure rates of SMEs, business practitioners and the government should provide training for business leaders on appropriate leadership skills to improve SMEs' growth and sustainability (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016). Leaders of SMEs play a crucial role in the growth and sustainability of their organizations. Most employees and stakeholders of SMEs support the organizations' procedures, practices, and processes that improve productivity and performance through transformative leadership and influencing skills (Kusi et al., 2015). By implementing appropriate leadership strategies, SME business owners could contribute to sustainability, which may lead to job creation, improvement in employment rates, improved living conditions, social infrastructure development, and social well-being of the populace in the communities (Martinez-Conesa et al., 2017).

### **Problem Statement**

Lack of appropriate leadership strategies by some business owners of SMEs affects SMEs' sustainability and growth, which could negatively impact job creation, income generation, and poverty reduction in emerging economies such as Swaziland (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2017; Howard et.al., 2019). As Muriithi (2017, p. 40) discussed, about 70% of SMEs collapse in their first year of establishment in Africa, contributing to an increase in the unemployment rate such as that experienced in Swaziland. The general business problem was the lack of appropriate leadership strategies by some business owners, which affects the sustainability of SMEs in Swaziland. The specific business problem was that some business owners in Swaziland lack leadership strategies to ensure the sustainability of their SMEs.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the leadership strategies that some small business owners use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations in Swaziland. The target population consisted of four small business owners within the four regions of Swaziland who had successful businesses beyond 5 years of business commencement. The implications for social change include SMEs' sustainability and the potential to create more job opportunities to improve the populace's living conditions and social well-being in the business communities and Swaziland as a nation.

### **Nature of the Study**

A researcher may select from the following research methods: qualitative, quantitative, or mixed (Saunders et al., 2015). A researcher's choice is dependent on the most applicable research method that aligns with the purpose of the study (Yin, 2016). I used the qualitative research method for this study. Researchers use the qualitative method to explore why and how people cope in real-world settings (Klenke, 2016). I used the qualitative method to generate nonnumeric data about business owners' leadership strategies and organizations' sustainability. As indicated by Yin (2018), researchers use the quantitative method to examine or explain the relationships among variables using statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques regarding a phenomenon of interest. The quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because the focus was not examining the relationships among variables. As opined by Palinkas et al. (2015), the mixed method combines qualitative and quantitative methods that involve

examinations of variables and analyzing empirical data. The mixed method was also not appropriate for this study because the purpose of this study was not to examine relationships among variables or analyze empirical data.

The principal qualitative research designs include case study, phenomenological, ethnographic, and narrative (Kim et al., 2017). For this study, I used multiple case study as the research design to gain in-depth knowledge about the study from various cases. In conducting a case study, qualitative researchers use open-ended questions in semistructured interviews to gather information that answers *how*, *why*, or *what* questions about a phenomenon or situation and identify patterns (Bengtsson, 2016). Researchers use the phenomenological design to understand the universal nature of the personal meanings of participants' life experiences, which was not the focus of this study. As discussed by Kim et al. (2017), researchers use the narrative design to obtain information from individuals' personal stories, leading to contextualized, historical accounts, which was not the focus of my study.

Researchers use ethnographic designs to identify and explain the significance of a shared pattern, beliefs, culture, and behavior of individuals and groups of people (Bengtsson, 2016). The ethnographic design was not used for this study because my intent was not to identify a group of people's shared beliefs, culture, and behavior. I used a multiple case study design for this study versus a single case study because addressing the purpose of this study required comprehensive data collection from different cases. By comparing data among cases, it was possible to gain a better understanding of relevant



perspectives, leading to an accurate understanding of the various leadership strategies that business owners use to enhance SMEs' sustainability in Swaziland.

### **Research Question**

What leadership strategies do small business owners use to ensure the sustainability of SMEs in Swaziland?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What specific leadership strategies are you using to manage your organization?
2. How do you implement these strategies?
3. How did you assess the effectiveness of these strategies?
4. Which of these leadership strategies has been the most effective in the sustainability of your business?
5. What were the key challenges you faced as a business leader while implementing these leadership strategies?
6. How did you overcome these key challenges?
7. What other business strategies do you use to sustain your business services and products?
8. What strategies do you use to motivate employees to achieve organizational goals?
9. What other information would you like to share about your leadership strategies that, based upon your experience, have influenced the sustainability of your business?

## **Conceptual Framework**

The transformational leadership theory developed by Burns in 1978 and the sustainability development theory proposed by Brundtland in 1987 constituted the composite conceptual framework for this study. Burns (1978) developed the transformational leadership theory on the construct of a leader's behavior and its influence on employees, performance, and organizational sustainability. The fundamental tenets of the transformational leadership theory are the ability of a transformational leader to use idealized behavior, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation to lead followers toward the attainment of enhanced performance and sustainable organization (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016).

The sustainability development theory has three principal constructs: economy, society, and the environment. Business leaders use the sustainability development theory principal constructs as foundational principles to guide their business activities to meet economic value while protecting the environment and adding positive social impact to society (Williams et al., 2017). Firms also use the sustainability development theory as a model to describe, analyze, manage, and communicate a firm's sustainable value proposition through its business activities to stakeholders (Clayton & Radcliffe, 2018). Many organizations use the sustainability development theory principal constructs to foster best business practices to capture and increase economic value while also delivering a positive environmental and social impact to stakeholders and society (Clayton & Radcliffe, 2018).

The transformational leadership theory enables researchers to explore the leadership strategies that business owners use to lead and direct their organizational growth through self-awareness, idealized behavior, and inspirational motivation for business sustainable development initiatives and practices (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2016). Researchers use the sustainability development theory to analyze how business leaders can make informed business decisions, reduce uncertainty, improve marketplace practices, and address specific business goals for improving business financial performance, with positive environmental and societal benefits (Langwell & Heaton, 2016; Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2016). In summary, the transformational leadership theory and the sustainability development theory were the appropriate conceptual framework for this study because both models align with leadership strategies for SMEs' sustainability.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Business innovativeness:* The creative process to introduce new ideas, workflows, procedures, processes, methodologies, and practices to improve on existing products or services for higher performance and sustainable competitive edge in the organization (Ceptureanu & Ceptureanu, 2019).

*Business sustainability:* The management and coordination of business activities to meet economic value while protecting the environment and positively impacting society. It is how organizations satisfy the current generation's economic needs without compromising future generations' social well-being and environmental protection while carrying out their business activities (Parida & Wincent, 2019).

*Leadership strategies:* Refers to the disciplined strategic effort, procedures, methods, and practice used by leaders to manage and influence organizational members and their activities for enhanced performance, growth, and overall success (Atan et al., 2019).

*Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs):* Formally registered organizations with 250-500 employees in developed economies, 100 or fewer employees in developing economies, and 50 or fewer employees in underdeveloped economies (Dziedzic, 2019).

*Small business owner:* A person with the sole responsibility to create, organize, and manage a business as the major shareholder or sole owner of the organization (Bimha et al., 2018).

*Stakeholders' engagement:* Refers to the approach of business management practices that supports systematic, continuous improvement through the engagement of the organization's various stakeholders in decision making to meet customers' needs and improve efficiency (Burawat, 2019).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are integral to research but are not within a researcher's control (Bryman, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). One of the assumptions of this study was that the responses from the participants would be correct and a truthful representation of the real-life experiences of respondents on leadership strategies and practices that they used for business sustainability. Another assumption was that the sampled population for this study would be capable of self-expression and could provide appropriate responses to

the interview questions. Furthermore, I assumed that the use of multiple case study as the study's research design was appropriate for exploring the various leadership strategies that business leaders use for SMEs' sustainability. Finally, I assumed that the sample was an appropriate representation of SMEs in the four geographical regions of Swaziland.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of a study are the features of a study, such as design and methodology, which a researcher has no control over and may affect the interpretation of study results (O'Leary, 2014; Yin, 2018). This study had four limitations. First, I selected only four SMEs for this study; therefore, the findings might not be generalizable to the larger Swaziland SME population. Second, participants' inaccurate recall of their experiences or lack of comfort in disclosing information about their business operations might have affected the accuracy of the findings of this study. Third, the background of the SME owner-managers interviewed in the study might not represent the Swaziland SME population, especially in age, gender, educational attainment, experience, and entrepreneurial orientation. The fourth limitation of the study was that the interviewees might, for various reasons such as confidentiality, trustworthiness, and security, have been restrictive in volunteering answers to the interview questions. To mitigate these limitations, I collected information from multiple sources, including but not limited to annual reports, document reviews, and my reflections, to ensure triangulation.

### **Delimitations**

As part of the investigation of a phenomenon, researchers need to acknowledge delimitations in a study. Delimitations are the parameters and factors that the researcher

uses to define the boundaries of a study and limit the scope of the study (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The first delimitation of this study was no assessment of the impact of any specific leadership strategies or style on the performance of SMEs' sustainability in Swaziland. Instead, the result within the scope of this study would expose the leadership experiences of SME owner-managers concerning their enterprise performance and sustainability. Another delimitation of this study was that all study participants were from Swaziland; therefore, findings from the study might not apply to SMEs in other countries.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

This study's findings might be significant to business practice because SME owners in Swaziland could benefit from better knowledge and understanding of leadership strategies and practices needed for improved productivity, performance, and overall sustainability of their businesses. This study could also assist business owners in gaining an in-depth understanding of transformative leadership strategies' role in business sustainability that considers the economic, social, and environmental impact in society. Furthermore, SME owners in Swaziland could use the results from this study to understand the role of inappropriate leadership strategy in the high failure rate of SMEs' survival beyond 2 years of establishment to improve business practices.

#### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change arising from this study include promoting the growth and sustainability of SMEs, leading to job creation and income

generation for economic growth in society. As opined by Martinez-Conesa et al. (2017), improvement in the employment rate through the sustainability of SMEs may aid in meeting the corporate social responsibilities of SMEs in their communities. The application of the study findings could promote the sustainability of SMEs, resulting in improved living conditions, social infrastructure development, and the social well-being of the populace. The implication for a positive social change might arise from this study through broadening SMEs' sustainability knowledge.

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

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the leadership strategies that some small business owners use to ensure the sustainability of their business in Swaziland. Lack of appropriate leadership strategies by some business owners of SMEs affects business sustainability and growth, resulting in a negative impact on job creation, income generation, and poverty reduction in emerging economies such as Swaziland (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2017). Understanding the implications of leadership strategies for SMEs' sustainability has become increasingly important due to SMEs' fundamental economic roles in employment creation, poverty alleviation, and entrepreneurial development in emerging economies (Muriithi, 2017). The findings from this study could benefit owners of SMEs in Swaziland by offering them better knowledge and understanding of leadership strategies and practices needed for improved productivity, performance, and overall sustainability of their businesses. Business owners could also use this study's results to gain an in-depth understanding of transformative

leadership strategies in business sustainability that considers society's economic, social, and environmental impact.

The literature review for this study included an extensive examination of professional and academic resources to answer the research question of this study: What leadership strategies do small business owners use to ensure SMEs' sustainability in Swaziland? I explored various professional and academic articles, peer-reviewed journals, and scholarly publications related to leadership strategies, business sustainability, and SMEs, which were the main themes for this study. I began the literature review with a critical analysis of the study's conceptual frameworks, transformational leadership theory and sustainability development theory, and I discussed related and contrasting theories. Also incorporated into the literature review is an extensive analysis of various leadership strategies that business owners can use for SMEs' sustainability. The concluding aspect of the literature review is an extensive exploration and analysis of SMEs and SMEs in Swaziland.

For this literature review, I used academic and professional sources such as Walden University Library and electronic dissertation database, Business Source Premier, ProQuest, ABI/INFORM, EBSCOhost, Science Direct, and Sage Publications. My search keywords included *leadership strategies*, *transformational leadership style*, *transaction leadership style*, *business sustainability*, *SMEs' productivity*, *SMEs' performance*, *SMEs' failure*, *SMEs' sustainability*, *SMEs' leadership*, and *business operating environment*. The literature review sources were 140 references consisting of 119 peer-reviewed journals, three non-peer-reviewed journals, four books, and four



government or corporate sites (see Table 1). A total of 93% of the sources used for this literature review were published within 5 years of the expected approval date of my doctoral research study.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Literature Review Sources of Resources*

Reference type	< 5 years	> 5 years	Total
Peer-reviewed journals	119	10	129
Non-peer reviewed journals	3	0	3
Books	4	0	4
Government or corporate sites	4	0	4
Total	130	10	140

The literature review begins with a discussion of the conceptual frameworks and related and contrasting theories. The topics discussed in the literature review include (a) transformational leadership theory and sustainability development theory; (b) related and contrasting theories—transactional leadership theory and entrepreneurial theory; (c) business leadership strategies; (d) business sustainability in the context of SMEs; (e) the nature and significance of SMEs in Swaziland; (f) SMEs’ productivity, performance, and failures; and (g) SMEs’ leadership and business operating environment. I used transformational leadership theory and sustainability development theory as the conceptual framework for this study to analyze and explain various researchers’ perspectives on leadership strategies for SMEs’ sustainability. The literature review section ends with a summary of the findings and a conclusion.

## **Transformational Leadership Theory**

Exploring the various leadership strategies that SMEs in Swaziland use to enhance business sustainability requires establishing a framework to understand leadership strategies and styles, business sustainability, employee performance, and their relationship to organizational sustainability. Transformational leadership theory (TLT) and sustainable development theory (SDT) were the frameworks for this study. TLT provided the lens to explore the leadership strategies that business owners use to lead and direct their organizations effectively and efficiently. In contrast, SDT provided the lens to analyze how business leaders make informed business decisions, improve business practices, improve marketplace practices, and address specific business goals to improve business financial performance, with positive economic, environmental, and societal benefits.

Understanding of the historical development of leadership theories, such as the transformational and transactional leadership model, provides practitioners and scholars with adequate knowledge about leadership practice in SMEs (Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2015). Burns (1978) developed TLT on the construct of a leader's behavior and its influence on employees, performance, and organizational sustainability. The key tenets of TLT involve a transformational leader's ability to use idealized behavior, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation to lead followers toward the attainment of enhanced performance and sustainable organization (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016).

Bass (1978) introduced TLT while researching political elites and behavioral attributes exhibited by transforming leaders in their relationship with subordinates. Bass (1999) extended the development of TLT by explaining that transforming leaders are individuals who demonstrate integrity and fairness and positively influence subordinates to motivate them for higher performance in an organization (Faupel & Süß, 2019). Transformational leaders use idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized considerations, and intellectual stimulation to drive followers' performance in the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994). A transformational leader uses intellectual stimulation to initiate creative potentials among followers. In contrast, the transformational leader uses inspirational motivation and individualized considerations to mentor followers from personalized perspectives toward attaining organizational objectives (Howard et al., 2019).

Transformational leaders work hand in hand with their team members to identify changes needed to effectively improve their overall performance through guidance, collaboration, and motivation (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leaders are participative leaders involved in creating an organization's vision and collaborating with followers to carefully execute the organization's vision (Li et al., 2016). Transformational leaders exhibit other leadership characteristics such as adaptability, entertaining new ideas, and being willing to make sacrifices for the excellent course of the followers and the promotion of the organization (Oladele & Akeke, 2016). Transformational leaders can also use idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to enhance innovation performance and organizational support in SMEs (Tajasom et al.,

2015). The TLT is an ideal approach for exploring the leadership strategies that small business owners use to ensure the sustainability of their businesses in Swaziland.

Transformational leaders motivate their followers to generate optimal performance, guide them when needed, and allow autonomy (Khalili, 2016). Transformational leaders can psychologically empower employees to increase their commitment level and thus reduce employee turnover intentions (Mittal, 2016). The impact of the four tenets of transformational leadership on organizational performance may vary without significant high-performance management practices such as stakeholders' engagement, compensation, and job design (López-Pérez et al., 2018). Through the use and integration of the various characteristics and attributes of a transformational leadership style and strategies, business leaders of SMEs can improve their employees' productivity and performance levels, leading to improved business growth and sustainability (Goswami et al., 2016). SME owners should adopt TLT to ensure their business growth and sustainability.

The transformational leadership style has been known to have a positive influence on employees' engagement, changing employee behavior and promoting creative thinking in SMEs (Azim et al., 2019). A transformational leadership style with appropriate management behaviors can improve employee engagement and creativity in an organization (Sulieman, 2018). Azim et al. highlighted some transformational leadership styles and management behaviors that business leaders of SMEs could use to enhance creativity and employee engagement. Actions indicative of transformational leadership styles include (a) designing a supportive organizational culture, (b) giving

employees the latitude to engage in creative activities, and (c) maintaining close relationships with employees.

The use of a transformational leadership style by owner-managed SMEs has a significant positive relationship to the success of a change management initiative in an organization (Sulieman, 2018). Business leaders could use a transformational leadership style to influence and motivate SME employees and other stakeholders to support change initiatives for an overall competitive advantage. The behaviors of a transformational leader in SMEs can improve workers' perception about change management, thus leading to a higher success rate, growth, and sustainability (Sulieman, 2018). Some factors affecting the SME business environment include technology advancement, change in government policies, consumers' changing needs, and competitors' advancement. Therefore, to overcome the ever-dynamic nature of SMEs' business environment, business leaders of SMEs should replace traditional leadership styles with transformational leadership styles to enhance their organizational performance and sustainability (Atan et al., 2019).

Leaders who create and maintain successful organizations in a dynamic business environment exhibit behaviors that inspire employees to foster competitive positioning for the organization (Ng et al., 2016). Studies have shown that SMEs characteristically have a small number of employees and that leadership style can easily permeate and influence employees and other stakeholders in the organization (Boukamcha, 2019). Business leaders should use a transformational leadership style to influence and motivate employees to support SMEs' social, environmental, and economic sustainability

(Sulaeman et al., 2019). Many researchers have demonstrated that the transformational leadership style enhances business performance, growth, and sustainability.

Consequently, I explored the various elements of transformational leadership styles as part of leadership strategies for SMEs' sustainability in Swaziland.

### **Sustainability Development Theory**

Brundtland proposed SDT in 1987. The three principal constructs and foundational principles of SDT are economy, society, and the environment, which guide business activities in an organization to meet economic value while protecting the environment and positively impacting society (Parida & Wincent, 2019). Other theories and models incorporated in the SDT include corporate social responsibility, stakeholder theory, and green economics (Soto-Acosta et al., 2016). Owners of SMEs should understand leadership strategies to improve their business performance and sustainability.

Sustainability models in a business ensure that business activities conform to sustainable practices (Lim & Greenwood, 2017). According to Schaltegger et al. (2017), some sustainability models addressed the triple bottom line, namely, economic, environment, and society. Business leaders can use the system theory to guide their organizations' attainment of social, economic, and ecological concerns while carrying out their business activities. Corporate social responsibility assists organizations in contributing to societal concerns through economic responsibility, social responsibility, environmental responsibility, legal responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility. The stakeholders' theory guides organizational business ethics by ensuring that the interests of various stakeholders are given adequate consideration through ethical relationships,

fairness, justice, and the safeguard of their natural rights. Sustainable business models in SMEs incorporate monetary and nonmonetary relationships among stakeholders and create economic value, environmental benefit, and social impact through organizations' sustainable business practices (Johnson & Schaltegger, 2016).

Business leaders use SDT as a model to describe, analyze, manage, and communicate their firm's sustainable value proposition through its business activities to stakeholders (Clayton & Radcliffe, 2018). Most organizations use the SDT principle construct to foster best business practices to capture and increase economic value while also delivering a positive environmental and social impact to stakeholders and society (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2016). SDT helps in analyzing how business leaders make informed business decisions, reduce uncertainty, improve marketplace practices, and address specific business goals for improving business financial performance, with positive environmental and societal benefits (Langwell & Heaton, 2016). SME owners should adopt SDT to for improving their business performance and sustainability.

Sustainability development refers to how organizations satisfy the current generation's needs without compromising future generations' social well-being and environmental protection while carrying out their business activities (Brenner, 2018). Falle et al. (2016) posited that a sustainability balanced scorecard (SBSC) could help translate an organization's vision and strategy into sustainable strategic objectives and performance targets, measured with respect to six perspective areas. These areas are (a) finance, (b) customers, (c) internal business processes, (d) learning and growth, (e) environmental, and (f) social criteria. Heizmann and Liu (2018) highlighted the complex

concept of leadership concerning sustainability and the need for business leaders to use preemptive business strategies instead of reactive tactics to initiate business processes. Sustainability in business incorporates the organization's commitments to the society and includes the organization's moral and ethical obligations and their impacts on the global community (Aghelie, 2017).

Leaders of SMEs must meet new demands to remain competitive by differentiating themselves from competitors through implementing sustainable practices with higher economic, environmental, and social value for competitive advantage (Parida & Wincent, 2019). Emerging trends of the circular economy, servitization, and digitalization drive sustainable transformation in organizations by shouldering life-cycle responsibilities; shifting from unrenowable to renewable energy; embracing recycling, reusing, refurbishing, and remanufacturing of products; and improving maintenance commitments (Brenner, 2018). Furthermore, leaders of SMEs can use servitization, which is a sustainable transformation that focuses on providing solutions through a service-dominant logic rather than a product-dominant logic for business sustainability and competitive advantage (Parida & Wincent, 2019).

SMEs are constantly facing stiff competition, especially from the external environment; thus, leaders of SMEs should understand how to use their internal resources (intellectual capital, knowledge management, and innovative intelligence) to build sustainable competitive advantage (Ngah et al., 2015). A business leader's knowledge of human resources is indispensable in SMEs' sustainability. Sulaeman et al. (2019) opined that human resource factors such as resource efficiency, employee empowerment,



employee confidence, owner motivation, government motivation, consumer pressure, stakeholder engagement, and transformational leadership support business sustainability.

### **Related and Contrasting Theories to Transformational Leadership Theory and Sustainability Development Theory**

The TLT and SDT are the conceptual frameworks for this study. The alternative theories to TLT and SDT are transactional leadership theory and stakeholders' theory. In the following subsections, I discussed the transactional leadership theory as a contrasting theory to the TLT and stakeholders' theory as a related theory to the SDT.

#### ***Transactional Leadership Theory***

Leadership styles are often used interchangeably with their underlying leadership theories. The transformational leadership theory is used interchangeably as a transformational leadership style, while transactional leadership theory is used interchangeably with the transactional leadership style (Franco & Matos, 2015). Transactional leadership theory was developed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) on the premise of using reward and punishment to influence followers' behavior in an organization. The transactional leadership theory is related to transformational leadership theory. The transactional leadership style is associated with a reward mechanism for employees, while the transformational leadership style draws on self-inspiration to motivate employees (Franco & Matos, 2015).

Both transactional and transformational leadership styles have universal acceptance (Bass, 1997). The transactional leadership style is an exchange process between the leader and the followers where the leader's influence determines compliance

from the followers (Gross, 2016). Appelbaum et al. (2015) indicated that the transactional leadership style does not emphasize employees' shared team values and does not foster a conducive environment for employees' innovativeness and creativity. Transactional leaders use rewards and punishment to exhibit corrective and constructive behaviors among followers; the bond of exchange between leaders and followers is a mutual benefit (Northouse, 2016).

The transactional leadership theory's tenets centered on improving organizational productivity by getting employees and other followers to accomplish assigned tasks through the exchange process (Burns, 1978). The transactional leadership style is an exchange of relationships between the leader and the follower, involving each party's efforts to achieve self-interests that enhance the achievement of the organizational goals (Appelbaum et al., 2015). Transactional leaders also provide tangible rewards and assurances to followers on self-interest, thereby reducing work-related anxiety. Northouse (2016) posited that transactional leadership is a distinct leadership paradigm with a positive relationship between leaders and followers for effectiveness in an organization.

According to Bass and Avolio (1994), there are three dimensions of transactional leadership: contingent reward, management by exception actively, and management by exception passively. The contingent reward dimension involves leaders rewarding followers based on achieving set targets while in management by exception actively, leaders are actively involved in monitoring employees for enhanced performance. The management by exception passively allows leaders to support followers only when there

are issues or problems on the followers' pathway to performance. Most successful leaders of SMEs displayed an average leadership style that inclines a transformational leadership style that can inspire employees to think and exceed expectations (Dzomonda et al., 2017). Transformational leadership and transactional leadership are the most effective in SMEs when complementing the organization (Singh, 2016).

### ***Laissez-Faire Leadership Style***

Leaders of SMEs have a more direct and constant interaction that influences employees than larger enterprises due to more negligible hierarchical levels (Ogarcă et al., 2016). Compared to the transformational and transactional leadership style that engages employees, the laissez-faire leadership style is a passive-avoidant leader. Employees of SMEs perceive the democratic leadership style to be more superior to the laissez-faire leadership style due to their ability to engage their followers towards achieving a set goal (Mui et al., 2018). Leaders need to perceive how their leadership style influences their employees to exhibit behaviors that enhance optimal performance and productivity in an organization.

Leaders that exhibit the passive-avoidant leadership style are neither task-oriented nor relationship-driven; they do not engage employees to commit to their responsibility (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2016). Avolio and Bass (1999) identified two central tenets of the passive-avoidant leadership style, which are: (a) indifference to employees and lack of commitment to the task, (b) application of corrective measures by the leader in response to employees' shortcomings. Despite the negative impact of the passive-avoidant leadership style on employees and tasks, the laissez-fair leadership style gives

employees the freedom to use their initiative for creativity and innovative processes (Samuel et al., 2015).

### ***Stakeholders' Theory***

Freeman developed the stakeholders' theory in 1984 to help organizational leaders understand how to approach individuals' and groups' interests that impact an organization's effectiveness either directly or indirectly. Stakeholder groups of SMEs may include shareholders, employees, suppliers, customers, government, non-governmental organizations, competitors, activists, media, and local communities (Freeman, 2015). Business leaders are encouraged to develop business models that incorporate stakeholders' engagement for value creation and organizational sustainability (Freudenreich et al., 2019). Stakeholders' theory is closely related to SDT because both theories reinforce the significance of creating value for different stakeholders of an organization to enhance its effectiveness and sustainability. Both SDT and stakeholders' theory emphasize the need for organizational leaders to consider stakeholders impacted by their business activities through engagement to create economic, societal, and environmental benefits.

Researchers use the stakeholders' theory to analyze individuals or groups of people who can impact an organization and how organizational leaders react to these individuals or groups to manage effectively (Freeman, 2010). Ali Mahdi et al. (2015) emphasized the need for business leaders to engage stakeholders in their strategic plans to achieve their vision and objectives and meet the markets' and stakeholders' expectations. When stakeholders are effectively engaged in the organization's planning process or

given due considerations, it enhances stakeholders' confidence, loyalty, and support to their products and services (Seay, 2015). The stakeholders' theory is a suitable lens for organizational leaders to analyze and understand stakeholders' needs and perspectives regarding economic, social, and environmental benefits (Jones et al., 2018).

Strategic incorporations of socially responsible actions that engage stakeholders by SME leaders contribute to the organizations' growth and competitiveness (Madueno et al., 2016). The different stakeholder groups of SMEs could influence organizational activities and play significant roles in developing and implementing measures to alleviate SMEs economic, environmental, and societal issues (Sancho et al., 2018). Organizational leaders should take ownership of the economic, environmental, and societal problems emanating from their organizations' planning, processes, and practices by reinforcing stakeholders' engagement and other measures to curb the adverse effects on their business activities (Madueno et al., 2016). Proactive stakeholder management can influence SMEs' overall performance and sustainability; therefore, owners of SMEs should understand the stakeholders' theory and its impact on their organization.

### **Leadership Strategies in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises**

Effective leadership strategies that leaders of SMEs use to manage their organizations are significant drivers for improving employee performance, business growth, and sustainability (Atan et al., 2019). Ineffective leadership strategies impede employee performance and threaten the leader-subordinate relationships and SME sustainability (Asah et al., 2015). According to Dinh et al. (2014), there are no universally accepted leadership strategies or models to manage SMEs. However, a

leader's leadership strategies in an organization for short- and long-term survival are dependent on the organization's situation and the environment. Some SMEs leaders lack an in-depth understanding of their leadership style to objectively evaluate its implication on employees' performance and organizational growth. Because of the characteristic small-size of SMEs, the leader's leadership style and behavior quickly permeate and influence the entire team's culture and performance (Muriithi, 2017; Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2015).

### ***Strategic Planning***

Leadership strategy in SMEs starts with a systematic strategic planning process. A strategic process is a disciplined effort, formalized procedures, and methods an organizational leader uses to formulate strategic decisions integrated into the organizational system to shape, guide, and direct its activities towards achieving articulated results over a period (Ali Mahdi et al., 2015). Bryson (2004) simplified the strategic planning process using the alphabet ABC. The letter A stands for where the organization is today, its mission of existence, while B stands for where the organization intends to reach, its future state called vision. The alphabet C is the how-to, which adopts various strategies through a well-structured plan process that leads the organization from point A to B.

According to Bryson (2004), understanding the organizations' mission statement and defining a strategic plan is essential to SME's sustainability and growth. Owners of SMEs should align their sustainable leadership strategy formulation with the organization's mission statements and share with the organization's stakeholders to

establish a unified purpose and direction of business activities (Duygulu et al., 2016).

Organizational leaders who establish a well-defined plan for accomplishing their organization's vision find it easy to implement various leadership strategies that translate to positive organizational performance and outcomes (Pyngavil, 2015).

### ***Stakeholders' Engagement***

Various studies have shown that leadership styles significantly influence organizational performance and sustainability; and that different leadership styles may produce varying results in different cultural settings (Muriithi, 2017; Olawale & Garwe, 2015). However, when business leaders can strategically engage all stakeholders in the organization's business activities, it may lead to an affective commitment from employees and other stakeholders (Azim et al., 2019). Abdullah et al. (2017) indicated a significant relationship exists between employees' happiness at the workplace through engagement, which increases their affective commitment to the organization's performance and growth initiatives. Leaders of SMEs should ensure that employees' strategic engagement is part of their leadership strategy for business growth and sustainability.

Business leaders need to exhibit management behaviors that impact and improve employee engagement and enhance the organization's creative process (Azim et al., 2019). According to Azim et al. (2019), business leaders have used various management behaviors to enhance creativity and employee engagement in SMEs. Some of these management behaviors include (a) designing a supportive organizational culture, (b) giving employees the latitude to engage in creative activities, and (c) maintaining close

relationships with employees in the organization to stimulate workplace happiness and affective commitment. Goswami et al. (2016) also emphasized that business leaders should use cheerful humor to inspire and influence subordinates' positive emotions at work and work engagement.

Business leaders face challenges such as changing government policies, managing disruptive technology, or changing customers. Leaders of SMEs who consult employees and other stakeholders when faced with challenges in the organizations can efficiently address and overcome these barriers through strategic stakeholder engagement (Sikalieh et al., 2016). Business leaders need to adopt lean management practices, an approach of business management that supports systematic continuous improvement through employee engagement in decision making to meet customers' needs and improve efficiency (Burawat, 2019).

### ***Leadership Style***

An ineffective leadership style often impedes SMEs' operation and growth (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016). Appropriate leadership style has a significant impact on SMEs' function and performance. Atan et al. (2019) indicated that SME leaders use transformational leadership to increase employee engagement and employee competency, which drives individuals, groups, and the entire organization to become more effective, competitive, and overall business transformation. Sulieman (2018) opined that transformational leadership behaviors increase workers' perception of change management, leading to a higher success rate, growth, and business sustainability. Mihai et al. (2017) examined the similarities, differences, and particularities of leadership styles



among 50 SME owners in Romania and 128 SME owners in the Netherlands. The study showed that the democratic leadership style was the most dominant and most acceptable leadership style by employees and SMEs' owners in the two sampled countries. Mihai et al. opined that factors such as the SME owners' organization and sex's age significantly impacted leadership styles and behaviors.

SME business environments are constantly changing. Some factors that influence SME business environments include technology advancement, change in government policies, consumers changing needs, and competitors' advancement. Because of the dynamic SME business environment, researchers have recommended that business leaders should replace traditional leadership styles with transformational leadership styles to enhance organizational performance and sustainability (Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2015). Through a transformational leadership style, business leaders will influence and motivate employees and other stakeholders to support change initiatives for an overall competitive advantage for the organization (Boukamcha, 2019). The transformational leadership style tenets regarding intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation trigger workers' innovativeness, proactiveness, and venturing into a new business (Khalili, 2016). Long et al. (2016) indicated that inspirational motivation has a significant and robust positive relationship with affective organizational commitment; hence transformational leadership is deemed to have a higher significance to organizational commitment than the transactional leadership style.

According to Ogarcă et al. (2016), owners of SMEs can reduce the high failure rate in SMEs if they can incorporate leadership style and personal values that motivate

and boost employees' morale in their organization's management. Some of these personal values, as mentioned by Asah et al. (2015), include; (a) improved remuneration and benefits, (b) employee's involvement in decision making, (c) fairness and transparency in leadership, (d) simplified job description and process, (e) empathy from leaders, (f) effective communication strategies, and (g) employee motivation. The adoption of leadership development practices and human resource management (HRM) strategy in SMEs that fit into organizations' corporate strategy through leadership expertise can influence the intensity of SMEs' development (Garavan et al., 2016). Leadership development practices should be adopted in theory and practice by leaders of SMEs to harness their leadership style in line with the HRM strategy for optimal performance, growth, and sustainability (Garavan et al., 2016).

### ***Innovativeness***

With the increase in globalization, rapid pace of technology advancement, changing customer needs, and a growing knowledge workforce, SMEs must adopt an organizational change leadership model that supports risk-taking for higher innovation to achieve optimal organizational performance (Maladzhi, 2015). Competent leaders of SMEs can achieve higher innovativeness in their organization by encouraging their employees to be creative (Woschke et al., 2017). Leaders of SMEs that adopt the risk-taking leadership model can create an innovative environment for higher performance and sustainable competitive edge (Ceptureanu & Ceptureanu, 2019). Employees' perceptions towards leadership, work value ethics, and workplace innovation significantly impacts adopting innovative practices in SMEs. Hence, business leaders

should exhibit behaviors that promote workplace innovativeness for enhanced organizational performance and productivity (Muenjohn & McMurray, 2016).

Government policies that promote innovative practices for SMEs' sustainability are often reviewed and prioritized because of SMEs' vital role in most countries' economic growth (Muenjohn & McMurray, 2017). Most governments now ensure that favorable policies are put in place to guide SMEs' operations. By sustaining improved performance through continuous innovative practices, owners of SMEs could increase their business survival rate, thereby contributing to unemployment and poverty reduction as social implications (Martinez-Conesa et al., 2017). Also, SME leaders who create behaviorally integrated top management teams offer their team members more chances of being innovative and generating new ideas than the less behaviorally integrated management team in the workplace (Jahanshahi & Brem, 2017). SMEs' leaders should ensure that the leadership strategies they use in managing their organization are intensive and dynamic to enhance organizations' agility, business model renewal, and sustainable competitiveness (Arbussa et al., 2017).

### **Business Sustainability**

The drive for sustainability in the contemporary business world is centered on three principal constructs: economy, society, and the environment (Williams et al., 2017). These foundational principles guide business activities to meet economic value while protecting the environment and positively impacting society (Parida & Wincent, 2019). Organization leaders are the main drivers of sustainability initiatives and practices, and they must develop strategies that enhance corporate sustainability. Business leaders

should ensure that all business activities have an economic-financial impact on the organization and give due consideration to social and environmental impacts (Shields & Shelleman, 2015).

Davis and Boulet (2016) indicated that business leaders should imbibe the culture of sustainability by ensuring that their stakeholders share the same convictions regarding economic efficiency, social equity, and environmental accountability associated with all business activities in the organization. A culture of sustainability develops when employees participate in sustainability projects through learning and engagement (Aghelie, 2017). According to Georgalis et al. (2015), employees play crucial roles in achieving any successful change initiative, such as driving towards a sustainable organization. Employees are part of the active implementers of business activities channeled towards a sustainable purpose. Therefore, it is pivotal for organizational leadership to engage employees in implementing sustainable business activities and practices collaboratively. Consequently, organizational leaders and policymakers should give importance to employees and other stakeholders' engagement in any change initiative that promotes overall business sustainability.

### ***Environmental Sustainability***

To enhance the organization's environmental sustainability due to concerns and pressures from various stakeholders and regulators, most business leaders seek an innovative alternative source of green business practices. Alternative energy sources like solar power, wind power, and biofuels reduce the carbon emissions in the environment from their business activities (Kylili & Fokaides, 2017). Business leaders need to focus

on trends and innovation using renewable or alternative energy sources to promote environmental awareness in their sustainability drive (Yoon et al., 2016). According to Choudhary and Srivastava (2019), the energy innovation system is never an easy process due to the complexity of technological success, public acceptance, and environmental sensitivity, which often affect the product supply chain. However, an energy innovation system is an initiative that organization leaders need to embrace for enhanced environmental sustainability for now and in the future.

Business leaders embrace new trends and innovative business practices that promote environmentally sustainable practices that give due consideration to the present and future impact of its activities on the environment (Hashmi et al., 2015). Creating action-centered learning opportunities for employees and other stakeholders to better understand and contribute their business activities to economic, social, and environmental well-being may enhance sustainability drive in SMEs (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014). Most SMEs' actions in the construction sector harm the natural environment due to energy usage, materials usage, water consumption, and waste generation (Kylili & Fokaidis, 2017). Hence, regulatory bodies need to continuously enact and review policies, directives, initiatives, and regulations that improve environmental awareness and sustainability in the construction sector. Sustainability practice in the construction industry could improve through alternative, recycled, natural, thermal insulation materials, prefabricated building elements, and unconventional materials for energy savings and waste minimization (Kylili & Fokaidis, 2017). There is a constant need for globalization and government intervention to improve environmental sustainability by

integrating life cycle assessment (LCA) of materials usage and disposal in SMEs (Bell et al., 2019).

### ***Social Sustainability***

Stakeholders should support a corporate social sustainability drive that meets societal expectations. According to Epstein and Buhovac (2014), it is paramount to engage stakeholders through collaborative efforts that promote more innovative business practices that support the organization's competitive advantage and incorporate concepts that enhance social benefits. Some organizations assume that equating their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities to a sustainable organization is incorrect. CSR affects organizations' sustainability performance without the other principal constructs of sustainability (Raza & Majid, 2016). Business leaders should create a value system that integrates all parties' interests with adequate considerations while engaging in business activities that drive positive social impact to improve societal and organizational well-being (Hahn et al., 2014).

Organizational leaders need to consider social responsibility that maximizes firm value. Firms can achieve their values through business sustainability by protecting all stakeholders (Choudhary & Srivastava, 2019). An organization's stakeholders include investors, creditors, suppliers, customers, employees, the environment, and society. When stakeholders' interests are well protected in the quest for sustainable practices in the organization, it enhances social benefits such as job creation and employee satisfaction (Aghelie, 2017). As Davis and Boulet (2016) emphasized, business leaders should integrate strategies that promote cross-training of employees and other stakeholders

through action learning opportunities to enhance the attainment of environmental sustainability.

### ***Economic Sustainability***

By properly aligning organizational values with societal values, business leaders may create streamlined practices to increase economic responsibility and create shared value (Duygulu et al., 2016). One of the foundational essences of business establishment is value creation. Therefore, organizational leadership and policymakers continually collaborate to ensure that organizations create and deliver values efficiently to generate profit after cost. SMEs' value creation process involves creating more valuable outputs than inputs (Le Pennec & Raufflet, 2018). Organizational leaders should consider all stakeholders' interests and strive to develop a sustainable corporate organization through managerial strategies to enhance the organization's shareholders' economic value creation. Managers and leaders of SMEs can enhance their economic value creation through stakeholder synergy in their strategic realm to create a broader value creation that produces a sustainable competitive advantage for the organization (Tantalo & Priem, 2016). Stakeholder synergy can be achieved through the engagement and collaboration of all stakeholders to align organizational values with societal values to create shared values for economic, social, and environmental benefits (dos Santos Santiago et al., 2018).

### **Sustainability in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises**

The pressures from ecology, regulations, customers, and social groups tend to enhance SMEs' exhibition of sustainability practices (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016). SMEs have more flexibility than more giant corporations to quickly adapt and change to meet

critical environmental and social targets (Rauter et al., 2019). Thus, SMEs can offer economic prosperity and environmental protection through their business activities with the right strategy. According to Rauter et al., 2019 business leaders should meet new demands to remain competitive by differentiating themselves from competitors through implementing sustainable practices with higher economic, environmental, and social value for competitive advantage. Parida and Wincent (2019) indicated that the circular economy's emerging trends, such as servitization and digitalization, drive sustainable transformation in SMEs through the shouldering of life-cycle responsibilities. The shift from unrenowable to renewable energy to embracing recycling, reuse, refurbishing, and remanufacturing products and improving maintenance commitments (Parida & Wincent, 2019). Furthermore, SMEs need to embrace servitization, a sustainable transformation geared towards solution provision through a service-dominant logic rather than a product-dominant logic (Parida & Wincent, 2019). Driving sustainability practice in SMEs must not be limited to business leaders and owners but should include other organizational stakeholders to understand the effects and impacts of sustainable business activities and practices on the economy, environment, and society (Davis & Boulet, 2016).

### ***Drivers and Barriers to Sustainability in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises***

Business practitioners and policymakers need to know the drivers and barriers to SMEs' sustainable business practices (Aghelie, 2017). SMEs make a significant contribution to the economic growth of many nations. Hence, owners of SMEs, policymakers, and government regulators must understand the opportunities that enhance SMEs' sustainability and develop appropriate strategies to overcome barriers to



sustainable business practices (Boukamcha, 2019). Researchers have identified some identified barriers to sustainable practices (Yadav et al., 2018; Aghelie, 2017). The barriers highlighted are: (a) inappropriate business structure and style, (b) lack of government regulations, (c) lack of knowledge and awareness of green business practices, (d) social barriers, and (e) financial obstacles. Business owners and government regulators should draw strategies to overcome these barriers, which may ease SMEs' sustainable practices (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016).

Leaders of SMEs and other stakeholders in the organization need to understand the effect of identified drivers of sustainability and integrate and implement them to promote sustainable practices (Yadav et al., 2018). Aghelie (2017) indicated that there are internal and external drivers of sustainability practices. Some of the identified external drivers of sustainability practices in SMEs are: (a) government, (b) customers, (c) network and alliances, (d) suppliers, (e) community surrounding, (f) competitors, and (g) tangibility aspect of the business sector. In contrast, the identified internal drivers of sustainability practices are (a) employees, (b) organizational culture, (c) brand image and reputation, (d) competitive advantage and strategic intent, (e) environmental management capability, and (f) size of the firm (Aghelie, 2017). Ungrouped drivers of sustainability practices such as future environment importance and the advancement of technology in SMEs are drivers that could enhance SMEs' operational efficiency and profits (Yadav et al., 2018).

## **Performance and Sustainability of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises**

Performance management and sustainability are important factors for SMEs' growth and development (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2019). There are various strategies that leaders of SMEs can adopt to optimize performance and sustainability in their organizations. In the following subsections, I discussed some business optimization strategies.

### ***High-Performance Management Practices***

Researchers have demonstrated that a strong relationship exists between high-performance management practices (HPMP) and sustainability in SMEs; the human resource management practices adopted by leaders of SMEs have a significant impact on the organization (Raziq & Wiesner, 2016). By adopting some critical HPMP, owners of SMEs could positively impact their organizational productivity, turnover, financial performance, and sustainability. According to Raziq and Wiesner, some HPMP include (a) personnel selection, (b) performance appraisal, (c) incentive compensation, (d) job design, (e) grievance procedures, (f) information sharing, (g) attitude assessment, (h) labor-management participation, (i) quality management, and (k) stakeholder's engagement. Leaders and managers of SMEs should understand how their leadership and management style influences their employees to exhibit behaviors that enhance optimal performance and productivity in an organization (Ogarcă et al., 2016).

### ***Sustainability Balanced Scorecard***

Business leaders could achieve strategic sustainability and optimize SMEs' performance by developing a sustainability balanced scorecard (SBSC). Organizational

leaders use SBSC to translate an organization's vision and strategy into strategic objectives, performance targets, and measures regarding six perspectives (Falle et al., 2016). The perspective areas of SBSC influence are: (a) finance, (b) customers, (c) internal business processes, (d) learning and growth, (e) environmental, and (f) social criteria. The integration of SMEs' specific objectives to align with SBSC model development is paramount to its success. The process of creating an SBSC in SMEs should be understandable and straightforward to align with the prevailing conditions concerning strategic management, organizational structure, company know-how, and resources (Falle et al., 2016).

Business leaders and other organizations' employees need to be engaged as project team members to develop the organization's SBSC model. The extent of top management support, the presence of a project team, and high employee involvement are key supporting factors to SBSC's success in an organization. The lack of specific resources and blurry strategy formulation negatively influences SBSC development (Falle et al., 2016). SMEs' leadership should support adopting business strategies and activities such as SBSC for enhanced performance and sustainability (Kusi et al., 2015).

### ***Internal Resources and Competencies***

SMEs that integrate transformational leadership, entrepreneurial competence, technical competence, and innovativeness as core management internal resources will grow and sustain their business, irrespective of limited resources available in the organization (Ng & Kee, 2018). Some internal resources and competencies owners of SMEs require to promote open innovation that leads to business sustainability are design-

thinking strategies, value-based communication, stakeholders' engagement, and market orientation (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2017; Yoon et al., 2016). Owners of SMEs could use the business leaders' management characteristics as the bedrock formation of organizational culture that enhances sustainability.

The behaviors and attitudes of managers of SMEs affect employees' overall behavior, thus creating the culture of the organization that becomes embedded in its procedures and practices (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2019). According to Buli (2017), strategic orientation, such as entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation, are internal resources that contribute to superior performance, enabling SMEs to grow and remain sustainable. Integrating entrepreneurial and market orientations into SMEs' operation enhance SMEs' survival due to institutional complexity and economically turbulent environments (Buli, 2017). There is a strong link between internal technical competence, entrepreneurial competence, and innovativeness, leading to optimal performance and sustainability in an organization (Ng & Kee, 2018). Therefore, SMEs' leaders should develop these internal core skills to enhance their growth and sustainability.

### **Organizational Structure and Tactical Business Plans**

The different elements of an organization, starting from vision development, organization structures, tactical business plans, operational activities, and management practices, help achieve higher performance, growth, and sustainability in SMEs (Howard et al., 2019). Developing a business plan that aligns with the organization's vision is vital for SMEs' growth. Business owners should integrate an effective organizational structure

that promotes an optimistic shared vision in an organization to achieve higher performance and sustainability (Muriithi, 2017). There is a need for business owners to analytically examine their organizational structure, organization design thinking, and business plans to enable them to manage their organizations effectively and successfully (Snyder et al., 2018).

### ***Ethical Behavior***

The ethical risks that leaders of SMEs face and how they can mitigate these risks using their values, systems, and operational mechanisms are critical to SMEs' performance and sustainability (Robinson, & Jonker, 2017). Leaders of SMEs face an increased level of ethical risks in product quality, sales and misconduct by customers, the threat of theft, unfair competitive behavior, accounting, fraud, and their supply chain (Robinson, & Jonker, 2017). Business leaders should display a high commitment to ethical behavior regarding fair treatment of customers concerning the pricing of their products and services. When stakeholders perceive organizations as firms that exhibit and uphold ethical behaviors, it builds confidence, trust, and support, thus optimizing performance and business sustainability (Fatoki, 2015). Therefore, owners of SMEs are encouraged to ensure they should exhibit ethical behaviors that foster sustainability and enhance performance when faced with an ethical situation in their organization. The effect of integrative dynamic capabilities on SMEs' social, environmental, and economic performance can occur when business leaders focus on attaining sustainability goals alongside stable economic outcomes (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2019).

## **Nature and Significance of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Swaziland**

The Kingdom of Swaziland, now known as the Kingdom of Eswatini after a name change on 19 April 2018, is the smallest country in Southern Africa, which once had one of the highest incomes per head in Africa (Meyers, 2019). Swaziland's economic development has remained very low over the years, with a decrease in its gross domestic product (GDP) from an average growth rate of 2.7% in the early 2000s to a low of 1.7% in 2015 (CBS, 2016; CSO, 2015). The World Bank's Gross National Income (GNI) estimates in 2001 classified Swaziland as a middle-income economy (World Bank, 2016; WHO, 2015). Swaziland's economic growth has declined in recent years due to a lack of job creation for many job seekers, thereby threatening the country's economic stability (Hlophe & Dlamini, 2017; Meyers, 2019). Due to Swaziland's unemployment rate surge, many job seekers have become entrepreneurs who own SMEs and mostly depend on government and other developmental organizations for survival (Meyers, 2019).

There are various criteria business professionals use to describe the nature and definition of SMEs'. Researchers have used the location, industry classification, economic region, number of employees, net assets, and revenue as the basis for SMEs' description. The most widely adopted SME classification criterion in the literature is the number of employees. In the developed economies, SMEs are regarded as an organization with 250-500 employees and 100 employees or less in the developing economies, while in the underdeveloped economies, the threshold is 50 or less (Dziedzic, 2019; World Bank, 2016). According to OECD (2017), SMEs can be categorized into micro, small, and medium enterprises employing between 1 to 9 persons, 10 to 49

persons, and 50 to 249 persons. The World Bank defines SMEs as any organization with an annual turnover of 15 Million US Dollars (World Bank, 2015). In Swaziland, SMEs are regarded as organizations with 5 to 100 persons with average net assets not exceeding twenty thousand US Dollars (Bimha et al., 2018).

SMEs are known for their significant contribution to economic development in Swaziland (Sridhar, 2020). Most developed and developing countries recognize that SMEs' businesses and entrepreneurs have a crucial role in job creation and contribution to a nation's economic growth (Muriithi, 2017). About 70% of SMEs collapse in their first year of establishment in Africa, contributing to an increase in the unemployment rate of 28 percent in Swaziland (Dziedzic, 2019; Muriithi, 2017). Developing economies need to create proactive policies focused on growing SMEs rather than large-scale job creation that is not productive. SMEs account for close to 90% of global businesses and create 50-60% of Africa's total employment (Jones et al., 2018; World Bank, 2016).

Lack of appropriate leadership strategies by some business owners of SMEs affects the firms' sustainability and growth, resulting in a negative impact on job creation, income generation, and poverty reduction in emerging economies such as Swaziland (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2017). Hansen et al. (2018) examined performance variations from 210 African food processing SMEs in Tanzania, Kenya, and Zambia to measure their significance to the populace's economic and societal well-being. According to Triguero et al. (2016) and Hansen et al., African SMEs can consist of three general groups based on performance; these groups are (a) laggards, (b) followers, and (c) gazelles. The gazelles were the high-performing companies with skill-intensive, medium-

sized business units selling differentiated products to a niche market. Simultaneously, the laggards are frequently the small, capital-intensive ones who adopt a cost differentiation strategy in the market. For either a gazelle, laggards, or follower SMEs, the key driver of variation in performance is the quality of the external business environment, the capability of the management team, and the strategic differentiation (Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020).

Researchers use different criteria to explain SMEs' nature depending on the local context, country, and economic development of its location. In some instances, SMEs' definitions vary according to the industry classification. These definitions are primarily associated with the number of employees, net assets, and SMEs' revenues. The World Bank defines SMEs as enterprises with a maximum of 300 employees, an annual turnover of 15 Million Dollars, and net assets of 15 million Dollars (World Bank, 2015). According to OECD (2017), SMEs are firms employing up to 249 persons.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 1 of this study contains the foundation of the study, the background of the problem, problem and purpose statements, nature of the study, research question, conceptual framework, definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, delimitation, and the significance of the study. Section 1 also contains an extensive literature review of conceptual frameworks (TLT and SDT) and alternative theories, leadership strategies and business sustainability, performance and sustainability of SMEs, and nature and significance of SMEs in Swaziland. In section 2, I restated the purpose statement and described the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population



and sampling, ethical research, data collection and analysis techniques, and validity and reliability of the study. In section 3, I provided an overview of the study, incorporated the findings of the doctoral study, and discussed the application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and further study, reflections, and summary and study conclusions.

## Section 2: The Project

In this section, I restate the purpose statement and describe the research method and design for the study. I discuss the role of the researcher, participants, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis for the study. Lastly, I discuss the reliability and validity of the study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the leadership strategies that some small business owners use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations in Swaziland. The target population consisted of four small business owners within the four regions of Swaziland who had successful businesses beyond 5 years of business commencement. The implications for social change include SMEs' sustainability and the potential to create more job opportunities to improve the populace's living conditions and social well-being in both Swaziland communities and Swaziland as a nation.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the main instrument for conducting the study (Yin, 2018). The researcher has the primary responsibility for collecting all of the data to be used in the study through interviews, observations, document reviews, and the researcher's reflections (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The researcher is an active participant in the research process, acting in collaboration with the selected study participants to compile the findings for the study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). My role as

the researcher for this study was to carefully identify four successful owners of SMEs within the four regions in Swaziland as participants for the study. My role as the researcher also included conducting interviews with the identified participants, audio-recording the information that participants provided, taking notes, transcribing, coding, organizing data into themes, and analyzing findings from the collected data for the study. As the main instrument for this study, I took all necessary steps to ensure that rich, informative, and unbiased data were collected and analyzed. For this study, I gained access to participants through an informed consent form and a letter of invitation (see Appendix A). I collected data from participants using interview protocol (see Appendix B) and interview questions (see Appendix C) to answer the research question.

The relationships between the researcher and the participants before the research, during the research, and after the research are critical elements of a research design (Florczak, 2017). As an SME owner in South Africa for over 10 years, I have had experience with the importance of appropriate use of leadership strategies to ensure business sustainability. My personal experience with how SME owners can effectively use leadership strategies to enhance business sustainability was one motivating factor for this study. Merriam and Grenier (2019) recommended that a researcher reflect on their relationships to the study participants and make decisions to mitigate rapport from affecting the research outcomes. It is also essential that any prior personal or professional relationships between the researcher and any of the participants are well explained before the commencement of data collection (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). I ensured that I had a purposeful and equitable selection of participants to mitigate unfair inclusion or exclusion

of potential participants. For this research, I had no direct relationship with the selected participants from the four regions of Swaziland.

The interpretative nature of qualitative studies requires that researchers make explicit their experiences, bias, and personal backgrounds such that these considerations add value rather than undermine researchers' interpretations and propositions (Brown et al., 2018). Though it is helpful for the researcher to bring relevant personal experiences into the research process, the researcher must ensure that these experiences do not bring bias or constitute ethical flaws in the research (Florczak, 2017). To mitigate biases, I ensured that I avoided personal assumptions and beliefs and used recordings of the participants' voices for data analysis instead of using my personal experience.

Researchers should use the researcher identity memo to ensure that their personal beliefs and experiences do not influence the research process (Cypress, 2017). I ensured data saturation through continual interviews of participants until no new themes emerged. Further, I excluded personal bias from the interviews, observations, and documentary reviews such that the collected data did not include my personal opinions.

In conducting research that requires interaction with human beings, a researcher must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the study's objectives do not take precedence over the ethical and moral protection of the rights of the participants (Collins & Stockton, 2018). The chosen research methodology by the researcher should be ethically and morally acceptable and protective of the participants from the period of gaining access to participants until the publishing of the results of the study (Abdalla et al., 2018). I conducted this study in full compliance with the Walden University research protocols

and Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations. I also adhered to the *Belmont Report* (1979) by informing participants about the risk and benefits of taking part in the study and ethically guided, respected, and protected them as human subjects used for the research.

### **Participants**

In a qualitative study, the appropriateness of the target participants is vital to the credibility and acceptability of the research (Yin, 2018). The participants for this study comprised four owners of SMEs, one from each region of Swaziland. Researchers need to select participants with the required knowledge and experience regarding their research topics (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). To ensure that the selection of participants aligns with the overarching research question, a researcher needs to establish criteria for participants' selection (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The criteria for the selection of participants for this study encompassed SME owners who had used various leadership strategies to enhance their business sustainability with more than 5 years of experience. Another criterion specified the selection of SME owners who had been in business in Swaziland for 5 years.

Researchers should ensure that they explore various strategies to gain access to the target participants for a study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I used the purposive sampling technique to gain access to the population for this study. I accessed the participants for this study through the Swaziland Micro Medium Enterprises Unit and the Swaziland Association of Business Owners directory. This website categorizes organizations by the nature of the business, names of owners, years of operation, business

telephone, and email addresses. After obtaining approval from the Walden University IRB, I gained access to participants by sending out an informed consent form to the target participants explaining the purpose of the study and seeking their willingness to participate.

My initial contact with the participants for the study occurred after receiving approval from the Walden IRB. Building a good relationship with the study's participants is central to receiving needed cooperation and information from the participants (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). Establishing a good working relationship with the participants is an approach that a researcher can pursue to encourage openness and sharing of information about the research topic (Kraft et al., 2019). An essential practice in conducting research is to obtain approval from the official gatekeepers of an organization (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). After receiving approval from the IRB, I introduced myself to the prospective participants and informed them about the purpose of the study through a phone call. Next, I sent the informed consent form, letter of invitation (see Appendix A), and interview protocol (see Appendix B) with questions through email to the potential participants. I also explained their right to confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation in the study. There was consistent communication between me and the participants via telephone or email about appointment schedules or clarification of any concerns about the research. I also assured participants of the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality, trust, interview modalities, and other disclosures as deemed fit before conducting the research.

## **Research Method and Design**

Research method and design are fundamental components of the research process and are essential in attaining reliable and credible outcomes of a study (Abdalla et al., 2018). The research question, the nature of the phenomenon of the study, worldview assumptions, and personal experiences are some of the primary factors that researchers consider when choosing research methods and design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). According to Corlett and Mavin (2018), the three main research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Researchers should ensure that the chosen research design aligns with the research method to effectively answer the overarching research question of the study (Yin, 2016). The following are the various research designs for qualitative studies: (a) case study, (b) narrative, (c) ethnography, and (d) phenomenology (Yin, 2016). In this section of my study, I discuss the selected research method and the research design for this study, the rationale for choosing a qualitative multiple case study approach, and how I reached data saturation.

### **Method**

A researcher may select from the following research methods: qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). A researcher's choice is dependent on the most applicable research method that aligns with the purpose of the study (Yin, 2016). I used the qualitative research method for this study because it aligned with the purpose of the study. Researchers use the qualitative method to explore why and how people cope in real-world settings (Klenke, 2016). I used the qualitative method to

generate nonnumeric data about the various leadership strategies that owners of SMEs in Swaziland use to enhance their business sustainability.

The qualitative research method is applicable where a statistical application is impossible for addressing a study's phenomenon, and textual data are needed to answer the research question (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). Qualitative researchers better understand a phenomenon under study by collecting data from participants through interviews, observations, and review of documents (Yin, 2018). I explored the various leadership strategies that small business owners use for business sustainability beyond 5 years through conducting semistructured interviews with some owners of SMEs in Swaziland. My focus was interviewing participants to gain an in-depth understanding of their answers to the research question using open-ended interview questions and probing to the point of data saturation when no new themes emerged.

The quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because the focus was not explaining the relationships among variables. Researchers use the quantitative method to examine or explain relationships among variables using statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques concerning a phenomenon of interest, which was not the focus of this study (Appelbaum et al., 2018). Quantitative researchers formulate questions and hypotheses to direct and anchor a study (Khaldi, 2017). The quantitative research approach is based on statistical evidence through hypothesis testing of numerous variables (Yin, 2016). The quantitative research approach includes managing numerous variables relevant for studies requiring numerical measurements (Saunders et al., 2015). In quantitative studies, the emphasis is on controlling variables



instead of understanding a phenomenon from participants' experience, as in qualitative studies (Yin, 2016). My goal in this study was not to examine the relationship between variables or test hypotheses; therefore, the quantitative method was not suitable for this study because it did not align with the objective of this study.

The mixed method was also not appropriate for this study because the purpose was not to examine relationships between variables. As opined by Palinkas et al. (2015), mixed methods combine qualitative and quantitative methods that involve examinations of variables and analyzing empirical data, which were not applicable for this study.

Researchers use the mixed method approach to explore phenomena based on examining the relationship between variables and participants' perspectives (Saunders et al., 2015).

The mixed method was unsuitable for this study because the emphasis was on understanding the phenomenon within the participants' experiences and not examining or comparing variables based on statistical data.

### **Research Design**

The principal qualitative research designs include case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative (Kim et al., 2017). For this study, I used multiple case study as the research design to develop in-depth knowledge about the study from various cases. Researchers use open-ended questions in semistructured interviews to gather information that answers *how*, *why*, or *what* questions about a phenomenon or situation and identify patterns (Bengtsson, 2016). Case studies are appropriate for researching a contemporary phenomenon because the researchers can gather valuable features of events and simultaneously maintain the holistic context (Yin, 2018). Case study designs are suitable

for exploring all of the components, interrelationships, and contextual conditions about a study's phenomenon (Kegler et al., 2019). Analyzing and reporting data within the context of real life rather than attempting to manipulate the context is an integral part of a case study design (Brown et al., 2018). Using open-ended, semistructured interviews is one of the strategies in case study design for collecting data through direct communication with participants (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

Researchers use single case study design to understand an issue among subunits that are part of one case and use multiple case designs for exploring a phenomenon between cases to understand similarities and differences (Yin, 2018). Comparison between cases was helpful for this study because it helped me to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' practices, which was valuable for literal replication. I used multiple case study as the research design for this study versus a single case study. Addressing the purpose of this study required data collection from different cases to compare data among cases for a better understanding of relevant perspectives. Using a multiple case study design enabled me to understand better the various leadership strategies that business owners use to enhance SMEs' sustainability in Swaziland. I used the multiple case study design to answer the overarching research question concerning the various leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to enhance business sustainability.

Researchers use the phenomenological research design to understand the universal nature of participants' life experiences (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016; Nazir, 2016), which was not the focus of this study. Through this study, I intended to understand various

leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to enhance business sustainability in a real-life context, rather than to understand the phenomenon based on the participants' lived experiences. The fundamental elements of the phenomenological design do not meet the need for obtaining a contextual view of leadership strategies in SMEs, which was the focus of this study.

According to Kim et al. (2017), researchers use the narrative research design to obtain information from individuals' personal stories, leading to contextualized, historical accounts, which was not the focus of this study. The use of the narrative approach as a research design in a study involves exploration through the chronological narration of individuals' life stories and experiences (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). In the narrative design, the researcher explores the reality of a phenomenon, focusing specifically on events as they happened in the lives of individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The narrative design did not align with the aim of this study, which was to explore various leadership strategies that business owners use in an organizational system versus understanding a phenomenon through the life story of specific individuals. The chronological dimension of the narrative approach would not have helped to enhance the data collection, analysis, or interpretation of this research inquiry.

Researchers use ethnographic research design to identify and explain the significance of a shared pattern, beliefs, culture, and behavior of individuals and groups of people (Bengtsson, 2016). The ethnographic design allows researchers to understand the cultural behaviors of a group by interacting within the group, interviewing, and observing members over a prolonged period (Atkinson & Morriss, 2017). The

ethnographic design involves interpreting a phenomenon through the shared beliefs, behaviors, and experiences of a group in its environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). I did not use the ethnographic design for this study because my intent was not to identify a group of people's shared beliefs, culture, and behavior.

Data saturation is a technique used by researchers to ensure that data collected are adequate and meet the quality criteria of research to enhance the credibility of the findings in the study (Cypress, 2017). Sample size consideration is essential to ensure extensive information regarding the phenomenon of the study is adequately collected (Abdalla et al., 2018). The sample size for this study included four owners of SMEs within the four regions of Swaziland.

To achieve rigor and validity in a qualitative study, researchers should attain data saturation when no new information emerges with additional interviews (Florczak, 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To reach data saturation in this study, I continued to collect and analyze data from the participants of this study until no new information and themes were emerging. The study's strategy for enhancing credibility, reliability, and validity was to conduct semistructured interviews with a small purposive sample of SMEs owners in Swaziland to obtain their real-life experience of using various leadership strategies to enhance their business sustainability.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population and sampling techniques used in qualitative research should align with the study's phenomenon and research methodology (Schreier, 2018). Defining the target population of a study is an essential step in the sampling stage of research

(Abdalla et al., 2018). The target population for this study consisted of four owners of SMEs within the four regions of Swaziland. Researchers need to establish a specification as boundaries for the target population by using selection criteria that align with the study's intent when selecting the participants for a study (Etikan & Bala, 2017). I selected the participants for this study using the following criteria: (a) be an owner of SME within the four regions of Swaziland (b) has led and managed an SME successfully for 5 years or more, and (c) have actively held a leadership position in the management of a successful SME.

In a qualitative study, researchers use various sampling techniques such as purposive sampling, random sampling, and snowball sampling (Ames et al., 2019). I used a purposive sampling strategy for the selection of the participants for this study. Purposive sampling techniques involve grouping individuals by the selection criteria defined by the researcher for the selection of participants for the study (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Researchers use purposive sampling to match the cases under study to align with the research objectives (Schreier, 2018). The rationale for choosing a purposive sampling technique was to gather explicit and rich details from individuals who have used different leadership strategies to lead SMEs beyond the period identified in the participants' selection criteria.

Researchers need to ensure they explore various strategies to gain access to target participants for the study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I used the purposive sampling technique to gain access to the population for this study. I accessed the participants for this study through the Swaziland Micro Medium Enterprises Unit, Business Eswatini, and

the Swaziland Association of Business owners' directory. The website categorizes organizations by nature of the business, names of owners, years of operation, business telephone, and e-mail addresses of potential participants for the study. In purposeful sampling, the researchers select a sample size that can provide relevant knowledge, practices, and experience that align with the phenomenon under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). An essential consideration in my selection of sample size for this study was to select participants with the most relevant knowledge, through practice, about leadership skills for SME sustainability.

One way of enhancing rigor, improving validity, credibility, and transferability of findings in a study is the use of appropriate participants and sample size (Boddy, 2016). The sample size in a qualitative study is dependent on the degree of certainty the researcher aims to secure in a multiple case study (Schreier, 2018). Sample size consideration is essential in ensuring that the researcher collects an extensive volume of information and points of view regarding the research topic (Lune & Berg, 2017). The sample size for this study included four owners of SMEs within the four regions of Swaziland. The sample size is appropriate if the participants can adequately answer the research question, focusing on the depth of data versus the frequency of appearance of the data (Yin, 2018). There was consistent communication between the participants and me via telephone or e-mail about appointment schedules, updates on the research, or clarification on any concerns about the research. I also assured the participants consistently about the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality, and trust.

## **Ethical Research**

Ethical consideration is one of the primary concerns of a researcher in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers need to comprehend and consider professional codes of conduct issues on integrity, ethics, and honesty in all aspects of their research (Fouché & Chubb, 2017). I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) web-based training (see Appendix D), a requirement by Walden University, to better understand the ethical issues that affect participants while conducting research. I adhered to Belmont Report's ethical standards to avoid ethical concerns. Some common ethical issues with qualitative research include confidentiality, privacy, and protection right, and researchers' bias on the participants (Dekas & McCune, 2015; USDHHS, 1979). To demonstrate compliance with ethical practices, participants received initial communication to participate in the research after receiving approval from the IRB of Walden University. Researchers must ensure adherence to ethical principles, codes, and practices before, during, and after the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

One of the ethical obligations in conducting qualitative research is to provide adequate information about the study to ensure targeted participants can independently determine his or her participation in the research (Chesser et al., 2019). After obtaining IRB approval, I sent an informed consent form to all potential participants for the study. The content of the informed consent form included the purpose of the study, the procedure for consenting, the right to participate voluntarily, the nature of the study, and the protection of the participant's right to privacy. Other information contained in the informed consent form included the risk and benefit of participating in the study, the

option to withdraw at any time from the study, payments, if any, participants' signature, and my contact information. Participants appending their signature on the consent form will demonstrate the participant's and the researchers' agreement to pursue the interview following the terms identified in the consent form (Dekas & McCune, 2015). In qualitative research, participants have the right to withdraw before or during the data collection process without penalty by informing the researcher of their decision to withdraw either through email, phone, or face-to-face contact (Hadidi et al., 2013; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Qualitative researchers need to consider offering participants incentives while recruiting the participants for a study (Ketefian, 2015; Robinson, 2014). The use of incentives might increase the possibility of participation and motivation of participants; however, ethical issues may also arise from offering incentives (Oltmann, 2016). For this study, I informed the participants that there would not be any payment or incentive for participation. However, I enlightened the participants about the benefits of learnings from the study and promised to provide them with a summary report of the study's findings. The anticipation was that the information from this study would help understand the various leadership strategies for SMEs' sustainability and survival beyond 5 years.

One of the strategies to minimize or eliminate participants' anxiety during the data collection process is to discuss the appropriate location and time for the interview with the participants (Fouché & Chubb, 2017). I informed the participants of their right to choose the location for their interview. To demonstrate trustworthiness, credibility, and avoid unnecessary ethical risks that could harm the participants and discredit the



research, qualitative researchers should establish ethical practices to protect participant's privacy and safety before data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative researchers need to maintain participants' confidentiality by using abstract codes such as alphanumeric codes- P1, P2, P3, and P4 to generate names and label to protect participants' identities in the study (Fouché & Chubb, 2017). For all participants' information collected through online videoconferencing for a one-on-one interview and emails to obtain consent, I ensured the confidentiality of data by removing all possible participants' identifiers.

Qualitative researchers need to give due consideration to participants' privacy and security of confidential data throughout the life cycle (Head, 2018). I secured all information from the interview on a password-protected computer with access restricted to me only. I recorded the interviews digitally, downloaded data onto a computer, transcribed it, and will store them in a secure place for 5 years. At the end of the storage period, data disposal shall involve destroying all data collected from participants, forms, and journals linked to the study in adherence to Walden University's ethical standards and guidelines.

## **Data Collection**

### **Instruments**

I was the primary data collection instrument for this study. In qualitative research, the primary data collection instrument is the researcher, who facilitates collecting valid and reliable data for the study through interviews, sample observation, and examination of documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative researchers use different techniques

to collect data, including structured, unstructured, and semistructured interviews, observation, document search, and review of archival documents for information (Yin, 2018). By assuming the role of the primary data collection instrument, the researcher could exercise some degree of adaptability and flexibility as opportunities arise for deeper exploration of emerging issues in the study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

For this study, the second data collection instrument used semistructured interview questions (see Appendix C) to obtain information from the participants. I also reviewed archival company documents to obtain additional data for this study. I ensured that the interview questions align well with the research question, problem statement, and purpose statement of this study. Due to the ongoing Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and to adhere to social distancing guidelines, I sent the interview questions by email to the participants in a word document format. Sending the interview questions allowed the participants to familiarize themselves with the interview questions and intent of the study in advance. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix B) to direct the interview process for this study. Qualitative researchers use interview protocol as a valuable instrument for data collection, which enables researchers to follow procedural guidelines to direct the conduct of the interview process (Weller et al., 2018). Researchers could also use the interview protocol to focus on the research topic and the procedures they need to follow during and after the interview (Yin, 2018). The use of interview protocol could also enhance the transparency, reliability, and quality of the research.

I used semistructured interview questions (see Appendix C) through telephone communication to obtain information from participants. Researchers use interviews as

techniques to obtain information from participants through conversation, either face-to-face or telephone (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The telephone interview is a flexible and optional form of data collection and could enable researchers to adhere to current health and safety restrictions due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, I reviewed company documents to explore archival data. Researchers use semistructured interview questions to engage participants and gain a better response from participants that align with the questions received from the case study (Oltmann, 2016). I used the interview questions to explore the various leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to ensure business sustainability.

In qualitative research, data source triangulation strengthens research findings' validity and reliability and reduces biases (Abdalla et al., 2018). I used methodological triangulation of multiple data sources and member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of data collected for this study. Note-taking during interviews and collecting information from multiple sources also enables researchers to achieve data triangulation in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Researchers use methodological triangulation and member checking for quality control to enhance the data collection process's accuracy, validity, and credibility by confirming the findings (Abdalla et al., 2018). I examined some archival company documents of the participants, including review of annual online reports, notes and bulletins. Furthermore, I used member checking to verify the accuracy of the information collected from the various owners of SMEs in Swaziland for this study.

## **Data Collection Technique**

Qualitative researchers use different data collection techniques such as surveys, interviews, direct or participants' observation, site visit, video recording, review of a company or archival documents, a sample of existing data or records to obtain data in a study (Anselmi et al., 2018). For this study, I used the semistructured interview as the primary data collection technique to formulate answers to the research question, which was to explore the various leadership strategies owners of SMEs use for business sustainability. Through semistructured interviews, researchers can ask open-ended questions to extract in-depth and rich information from participants about the phenomenon under the study (Oltmann, 2016).

One main advantage of using the semistructured interview as a data collection technique is that researchers could develop questions around predetermined themes to allow for flexibility in discussions and clarifications through follow-up questions during the interview of participants (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Draper et al. (2018) discussed two significant side effects of using a semistructured interview technique for data collection. First is the likelihood of the researcher's interjection of explicit or covert statements that may connote personal opinions and influence participants' responses. The second side effect is the potential to introduce bias in a study either due to poor construction of questions or participants' basing their responses on personal interpretation. Pilot testing was not done before this study because it did not apply to this study.

I obtained IRB approval before initiating contact with all participants for this study. All participants were provided with an informed consent form to understand the purpose of the study and append their signature as legal consent to participate in the study. I interviewed according to the guidelines of the interview protocol (see Appendix B). Qualitative researchers use interview protocol as a valuable instrument for data collection, which enables researchers to follow procedural guidelines to direct the conduct of the interview process (Weller et al., 2018). Using the same collection tools, format, questions, introductory and closing remarks for each participant enhances consistency and rigor in a study (Mulder & de Bruijne, 2019). I administered the interview questions (see Appendix C) for this study to explore the various leadership strategies owners of SMEs use in Swaziland to enhance their business sustainability beyond 5 years. During the interview process, I obtained digital audiotaping of the participants' responses to ensure the accuracy and credibility of data collected. To further enhance the credibility, reliability, and validity of the data collection process, I used member checking and methodological triangulation of multiple data sources. I examined the various archival company documents of the participants and used member checking to verify the accuracy of the information collected from the participants.

### **Data Organization Techniques**

Efficient organization and data documentation is an essential aspect of the research process for ease of retrieving data, protection of data, and confidentiality of participants (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Data organization in research is also an approach to enhance the reliability and credibility of the study (Lindlof & Tylor, 2019).

For this study, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix B) that prescribes procedures such as digital recording, notes taking, data transcription, and analysis using NVivo 11 software to organize data and documents. Note-taking and digital recording during interviews and collecting information from multiple sources enable researchers to effectively organize data and enhance the data analysis process in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

I collected, filed, and labelled all data in folders on my computer for ease of accessibility and protection of data. To prevent data loss, I backed up data on iCloud and flash drive. One primary element of the data organization process includes protecting the identity of participants through the use of labels and coding (Lindlof & Tylor, 2019). I used alphanumeric labels for each participant, such as P1, P2 and P3, to identify participants. Using pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants in a qualitative study is an ethical practice and acceptable research process standard (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I used pseudonyms to identify participants for this study. The protection and security of data are part of the ethical responsibilities of a qualitative researcher (Yin, 2018). I stored all data collected for this study for 5 years safely in a passworded electronic storage device. All hard copies of data collected were stored in a confidential file, locked, and accessible to me alone. I will destroy both paper documents and electronic data after 5 years.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

In a qualitative study, data analysis forms the basis for presenting the results of a study before concluding empirical evidence (Lindlof & Tylor, 2019). The primary

objective of the qualitative researcher in analyzing data in a study is to interpret the meaning of the data through identifying patterns and themes to answer the central research question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Different qualitative research designs require different data analysis processes (Yin, 2018). For this study, I analyzed data using the methodological triangulation process to increase the credibility of the case study. I scrutinized and compared data from interviews of the four owners of SMEs and the review of existing documents regarding leadership strategies for business sustainability. Methodological triangulation is the collection and analysis of data from more than one source, such as interviews, review of archival documents, field notes, and observation (Shrestha & Bhatta, 2018).

I used NVivo 11, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, to code, categorize, and build hierarchies of themes that provide meaningful insights related to leadership strategies SME owners use for business sustainability in Swaziland. NVivo is a software tool used in qualitative research to facilitate the coding of a large volume of textual data in nodes, showing commonalities among the thematic nodes, and organizing data in hierarchical order (Lowe et al., 2018). Using NVivo to analyze data enables researchers to add codes during data analysis to the point of saturation and enhance a study's reliability (Houghton et al., 2015).

I textually inputted both transcribed, and extracted notes data into the computer for data analysis. I created initial codes relating to the research question and design from the data and input the codes into the computer with the NVivo application for data analysis. I analyzed the data from the semistructured interviews for common themes.

Researchers compare responses from participants to make comparisons in emerged themes with each interview (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). I used the voice web application in transcribing the data for each participant's interview. I constantly studied the data output to observe emerging patterns and themes that answer the research questions. I further used member checking to authenticate the data analysis process. An essential element of data analysis in research is to establish the correlation between the conceptual framework and the study's findings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The conceptual framework of this study is the stakeholders' theory and the transformational leadership theory. I compared the emerging themes from the data analysis with the conceptual framework of this study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

In qualitative research, there is a need to establish the reliability and validity of a study to determine the consistency and trustworthiness of the study (Cypress, 2017). Qualitative researchers use the concepts of dependability, creditability, transferability, and confirmability to establish rigor and demonstrate the existence of a credible alignment between the data and the study's findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). To further enhance rigor and validity in qualitative research, researchers use data triangulation to achieve data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

#### **Reliability**

The concept of reliability in a qualitative research study relates to the stability and consistency of the research process and the findings of the study over time (Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers need to provide evidence of reliability in the study by



documenting each step of the research process and using interview protocol to ensure consistency (Hadi & Closs, 2016). A qualitative study is reliable if the results from the study are dependable, consistent, and replicable by other researchers over time (Cypress, 2017). To establish reliability in this study, I documented the research process and used the interview protocol (see Appendix B) to ensure consistency during the interview process. I further used member checking to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings of the study.

### ***Dependability***

The dependability of the findings from qualitative research enhances the study's rigor and reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In qualitative research, some of the strategies for addressing the dependability of a study are (a) member checking, (b) audit trail of field notes, (c) reflexivity, and (d) a methodological triangulation (Dikko, 2016). For this study, I used member checking and interview protocol to affirm the authenticity and dependability of the findings. Member checking involves participant's verification of interview transcript and feedback from information generated from participants' responses during the interview (Hadi & Closs, 2016). During the member checking process, participants affirmed the accuracy and completeness of the transcribed responses and summary of the interview. Documentation of the case study procedure and methodological triangulation are other strategies that qualitative research can use to enhance the dependability of the findings in a study (Kornbluh, 2015). I documented all the case study procedures and used methodological triangulation and member checking to enhance the dependability of the findings of this study.

**Validity**

In qualitative research, researchers use validity to ensure credibility, confirmability, and transferability of data (Carcone et al., 2015). Validity in qualitative research refers to the suitability of the research instruments such as methodology and design for exploring the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2018). The concept of research validity is also used in qualitative research to establish trustworthiness, integrity, and to minimize bias and errors in a study (Dikko, 2016). Using the validity concept, qualitative researchers could ensure data collection instruments align with the research question to reflect actual participants' experiences and perceptions (Noble & Smith, 2015). In the following subsection, I discussed the use of credibility, confirmability, and transferability to address the validity of my research tool and study findings.

***Credibility***

Credibility in qualitative research denotes the truthfulness of the researchers' presentation of data and accurate interpretation of participants' experiences and perspectives (Hadi, & Closs, 2016). Researchers support credibility in a study through methodological triangulation, engagement, and member checking (Kornbluh, 2015). The credibility of a study depends on the accuracy, consistency and interconnections of the concepts, instruments and constructs concerning research findings (Yin, 2018). I used data triangulation by comparing participant's responses and archived company documents to ensure credibility in this study.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability is the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study apply to other contexts, settings, or participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). To establish transferability, I described the research design, the data collection processes, and the study context to allow ease of comparison of this study to another context. Techniques for establishing transferability in a study include thick descriptions of the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Using the strategy of thick descriptions, the researcher provides in-depth detail of the phenomenon and the methodologies of the study (Cypress, 2017). To establish transferability, qualitative researchers should attempt to articulate, in rich descriptive language, information concerning the context of their study to ensure participants can determine whether the findings are congruent with their experiences (Hadi & Closs, 2016; Kornbluh, M. (2015). I used the purposive sampling method for data collection, a detailed verbatim description of the participants' responses, and a data triangulation strategy to establish the transferability of this study.

### ***Confirmability***

An essential aspect of confirmability is the researcher's ability to show that the data represent the participants' experiences and perspectives and not the researcher's preferences (Leung, 2015; Morse & Coulehan, 2015). I achieved confirmability for this study through member checking and audit trail. Audit trails, member checking, and triangulation are valuable strategies for attaining confirmability in a study (Yin, 2018).

### ***Data Saturation***

Data saturation involves collecting and analyzing data to the point where no new themes or insights emerge (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The attainment of data saturation in a study could enhance the validity and reliability of qualitative research (Cypress, 2017). Researchers could achieve data saturation in qualitative research through multiple data collection methods such as observations, interviews, and documents review (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). I conducted semistructured interviews with the participants of this study until no new themes are emerging to ensure data saturation.

### **Transition and Summary**

In section 2, I restated the purpose of the study, discussed my role as the researcher and participants of the study, presented the research method and design, and described the population and sampling strategies. Section 2 also included the data collection instruments and techniques, data organization and data analysis techniques, ethical consideration in research, and the validity and reliability in research. In section 3, I provided a summary of the findings and present data from the study findings, including data from interviews, analysis of the interviews, and archival company documents. I also discussed the application of the findings to professional practice and the implications for social change. Finally, I presented recommendations for action and future research, my reflection on the research process, and the concluding statement.

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

The narratives in this section include an overview of the study and a presentation of the leadership strategies that some owners of SMEs use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations in Swaziland. The research participants provided the illustrations that I used to link the study findings with the conceptual frameworks regarding TLT and SDT. Other topics discussed in this section include applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and future research, reflections, and summary and study conclusions.

#### **Overview of Study**

This qualitative multiple case study aimed to explore the strategies that owners of SMEs use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. The conceptual frameworks were TLT and SDT. The overarching question was the following: What leadership strategies do small business owners use to ensure the sustainability of SMEs in Swaziland? Four owners of SMEs within the four regions of Swaziland who had successfully implemented leadership strategies to ensure their businesses' sustainability participated in this study. The participants provided me with the primary and secondary data to answer the overarching research question.

The primary data source was the participants' responses to the semistructured interview questions, and the secondary data sources included online archival documents and notes. I achieved data saturation when no additional information emerged from the company document review and the interview process. Based on the participants' responses to the interview questions, I identified four themes: (a) employee engagement

and quality of service, (b) listening and communication, (c) performance review and reward system, and (d) leadership style. By relating TLT and SDT to the findings, I developed a better understanding of the leadership strategies that some owners of SMEs use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations in Swaziland. The study findings indicate that some owners of SMEs use a blend of strategies to ensure the sustainability of their organizations in Swaziland.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question for this study was the following: What leadership strategies do small business owners use to ensure the sustainability of SMEs in Swaziland? SMEs operate in a dynamic market emerging from advancements in technology, business competition, dynamic customer needs, and globalization (Buli, 2017). Some business owners' lack of appropriate leadership strategies could affect the sustainability and growth of SMEs in emerging economies such as Swaziland (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2017). Business practitioners and the government should provide training for business leaders on appropriate leadership skills to improve SMEs' growth and sustainability (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016). Using the triangulation method, I collected data from interviews and combined data from company archival documents such as online annual reports, bulletins, and notes. Upon completing the fourth participant interview, no new information or themes emerged, indicating that I had reached data saturation. I organized the study data using the NVivo 11 application and conducted the thematic analysis.

SMEs play fundamental economic roles in emerging economies; therefore, owners of SMEs need to understand the implications of leadership strategies for organizational sustainability (Muriithi, 2017). Some factors that continuously increase the failure rate of SMEs are lack of enabling environment, inappropriate leadership and management skills, and financial factors (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2019; Olawale & Garwe, 2015). Business leaders in Swaziland should develop appropriate strategies to minimize the failure rate of SMEs (Muriithi, 2017). Effective leadership strategies that leaders of SMEs use to manage their organizations are significant drivers for improving employee performance, business growth, and sustainability (Atan et al., 2019). The four themes that I identified in this study were (a) employee engagement and quality of service, (b) listening and communication, (c) performance review and reward system, and (d) leadership style. In the following subsections, I presented the four themes that emerged from the document reviews and thematic analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Leadership Strategies That Owners of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Use to Ensure the Sustainability of Their Organizations (N = 4)*

Strategies	Percentage of use by participants
Employee engagement and quality of service	100%
Listening and communication	100%
Performance review and reward system	100%
Leadership style	100%

### **Theme 1: Employee Engagement and Quality of Service**

Business leaders who can strategically engage all stakeholders in the organization's business activities may attain affective commitment from employees and other stakeholders (Azim et al., 2019). Transformational leaders are participative leaders who are involved in the creation of an organization's vision and collaborate with followers to carefully execute the organization's vision (Li et al., 2016). The first theme to emerge was employee engagement and quality of service, which highlighted the importance of engaging employees to sustain the business. The theme employee engagement and quality of service emerged from Interview Questions 1-7 and 9. All participants affirmed using employee engagement and quality of service as a leadership strategy to ensure the sustainability of their organizations.

Abdullah et al. (2017) indicated that a significant relationship exists between employees' happiness in the workplace through engagement, which increases their affective commitment to the organization's performance and growth initiatives. Transformational leadership style with the deployment of appropriate management behaviors can improve employee engagement and creativity in an organization (Sulieman, 2018). Responding to Interview Question 1, Participant 2 (P2) said, "We tell our employee what to do." According to P2, they "exercise patience with them." In response to Interview Question 1, P4 stated, "I only get my people involved in what I envisage for the progress of the business; we discuss it." Responding to Interview Question 2, P2 asserted, "When I see what I think is right for us to do, I inform him, and he informs the supervisors, or I deal with the employees directly at times." In response to



Interview Question 2, P3 affirmed, “I set down the rules, set the policies, I follow up on the policy and ensure it works for the organization.”

Business leaders need to exhibit management behaviors that impact and improve employee engagement and enhance the organization’s creative process (Azim et al., 2019). The transformational leadership style has been known to have a positive influence on employees’ engagement, changing employee behavior, and creative thinking in SMEs (Azim et al., 2019). In response to Interview Question 3, P4 explained, “I know the strategy is working, but when I do not see people coming, then I know it is not working, and we have to reschedule another meeting to re-strategize.” Responding to Interview Question 4, P3 noted, “I work on my quality and give good price, and it works for me.” In response to Interview Question 5, P3 opined, “I make sure that the quality is not compromised. So, sometimes I have employees who try pilfering or deliberately abandon critical line work that will affect the result in a timely manner.”

Goswami et al. (2016) emphasized that business leaders should use positive humor to inspire and influence subordinates’ positive emotions at work and work engagement. Atan et al. (2019) indicated that SME leaders use transformational leadership style to increase employees’ engagement and employees competency, which drives individuals, groups, and the entire organization to become more effective and competitive and thereby supports overall business transformation. Responding to Interview Question 6, P3 said, “Some people who have worked with me for years have been helpful in talking to them to explain that if they can focus on their designated

responsibilities, they will reap the benefit as a reward.” In response to Interview Question 7, P1 stated,

Majorly we look at what our competitors are doing to achieve success and leverage on it by going the extra miles on it. If they give their participants take home gadgets, we will add the pouch to it, provide free airport pick up and others.

P3 confirmed, “The main thing I use is quality over quantity. I make sure that I do not compromise the quality of my product, even if the prices might be higher. I maintain that organization standard.” Responding to Interview Question 9, P3 advised upcoming entrepreneurs to be “friendly and have humor, participate and let people feel your impact.”

Leaders of SMEs who consult employees and other stakeholders when faced with challenges in the organizations can efficiently address and overcome these barriers through strategic stakeholder engagement (Sikalieh et al., 2016). Firms can achieve their values through business sustainability by protecting all stakeholders (Choudhary & Srivastava, 2019). The findings in the study indicated that owners of SMEs used employee engagement and quality of service as a leadership strategy for ensuring the sustainability of their organizations in Swaziland. As applied in this study, 100% of the participants acknowledged using employee engagement and quality of service as a leadership strategy to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. The participants acknowledged using various strategies to overcome the implementation barriers regarding employee engagement and quality of service to ensure their business sustainability.

## **Theme 2: Listening and Communication**

Ahmed (2017) advised business leaders to use effective communication to enhance their organizational performance. Business practitioners and policymakers need to know the drivers and barriers to SMEs' sustainable business practices (Aghelie, 2017). SMEs' leadership should support the adoption of business strategies and activities for enhanced performance and sustainability (Kusi et al., 2015). The theme of listening and communication emerged from Interview Questions 1-2, 4, 6-7, and 9. All participants recognized the importance of effective listening and communication as a leadership strategy to ensure the sustainability of their business.

Responding to Interview Question 1, P2 stated, "I also listen to their complaints and act where necessary." In response to Interview Question 1, P4 said, "I use effective communication strategy as the main tool to lead the organization all right." Responding to Interview Question 2, P1 remarked, "we communicate as at when due on expectations." P2 stated, "I also take their suggestions, and we go around until everybody will agree and we make a decision." In response to Interview Question 2, P4 attested, "We sit to discuss the vision, then all departmental members contribute, and we distribute assignments based on the organization structure."

In response to Interview Question 4, P2 affirmed, "I am a good listener, and I also come down to the level of my employees. My office is open to all my employees." Responding to Interview Question 4, P4 remarked, "I am open to my employees, so they know the general vision and how to work towards its attainment." In response to Interview Question 6, P1 noted, "I communicate with them on why we cannot fulfill the

promises we made to them and their look for a way to meet them halfway so that both the organization and the employees will gain.” Responding to Interview Question 6, P4 stated, “I listen to our customers and see what our competitors are doing. We try to edge our competitors by ensuring we promote creative and innovative ideas, especially those that are technology driven.”

Responding to Interview Question 7, P2 attested, “We also listen to our customers. We use good marketing methods as my son read marketing and advertising in school, so we look for methods to advertise continuously.” In response to Interview Question 7, P4 commented, “We constantly communicate to all our stakeholders. We get involved in some corporate social responsibility activities in our community; like fixing street lights for the community.” Responding to Interview Question 9, P3 advised owners of SMEs to “have those traits to communicate with the people.” In response to Interview Question 9, P4 opined, “Truthfulness from the leader will always develop trust from the followers, I also listen to their ideas and do not just discard it.”

The participants’ responses to the interview questions aligned with Aghelie’s (2017), Ahmed’s (2017), and Kusi et al.’s (2015) statements that business leaders use effective listening and communication as a strategy to ensure business sustainability. The study findings demonstrated that owners of SMEs used listening and communication as a leadership strategy to ensure the sustainability of their business in Swaziland. As applied in this study, 100% of the participants attested to using listening and communication as a leadership strategy to ensure their organization’s sustainability.

### **Theme 3: Performance Review and Reward System**

Some owners of SMEs lack appropriate leadership strategies to affect their business sustainability and growth (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2017). By adopting ineffective leadership strategies, business owners may impede employee performance and threaten the leader-subordinate relationship and SME sustainability (Asah et al., 2015). Performance management and sustainability are important factors for SMEs' growth and development (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2019). The theme of a performance review and reward system emerged from Interview Questions 1-2, 5-6, and 8. All participants attested to using a performance review and reward system as a leadership strategy to ensure their organizational sustainability.

Responding to Interview Question 1, P4 stated, "I only get my people involved in what I envisage for the progress of the business, we discuss it, and then monitor if it is working or if we need to further review it." In response to Interview Question 2, P1 said, "We communicate as at when due on expectations with proper and effective follow up to monitor progress and implement changes when necessary, by giving room for corrections and effective monitoring and evaluation." Responding to Interview Question 2, P4 remarked, "Then, we have periodical meetings for review, feedback, evaluations, and monitoring."

In response to Interview Question 5, P1 affirmed, "Also due to the economic challenges from the current ongoing global pandemic, we were unable to keep some of the promises we made especially on the health insurance policy we had promised to our employees." Responding to Interview Question 6, P2 remarked, "When I am laying off

some of my staff, I give them half of the following month's salary to make them happy because when your employees are not happy, they will go about spoiling the market for you." In response to Interview Question 6, P3 noted, "I also try to have regular meetings with my employees to create and remind them about the work ethics, strategies and set goals for the organization." Explaining further, P3 added, "I maintain an open reward system that boosts the morale of employees to be at their best to enjoy accrued benefits for their labor." Responding to Interview Question 6, P4 stated, "I create a record system that monitors stages of our implementation, I also punish the unserious employees."

Responding to Interview Question 8, P1 opined, "We practice empathy and make sure their salaries are paid as at when due." In response to Interview Question 8, P2 commented, "You know we Swazis like food a lot, so I always organize a party, and I give my staff members bonus as well. I also give schools free exercise books."

Responding to Interview Question 8, P3 remarked,

I ensure that when you do the right work and exceed expectations, you will be rewarded for it, and if you do not meet the target, I deduct from your pay. I also ensure that I keep to my promise, I also pay them aright without underpaying them.

The participants' responses to the interview questions aligned with Asah et al.'s (2015), Muriithi et al.'s (2017), Eikelenboom and de Jong's (2019), and Madanchian and Taherdoost's (2017) statements that owners of SMEs use a performance review and reward system as a leadership strategy to ensure the sustainability of their organization. The study findings demonstrated that owners of SMEs used a performance review and

reward system as a leadership strategy to ensure their business sustainability. As applied in this study, 100% of the participants attested to using a performance review and reward system as a leadership strategy to ensure their organization's sustainability.

#### **Theme 4: Leadership Style**

A transformational leader uses inspirational motivation and individualized considerations to mentor followers from personalized perspectives towards attaining organizational objectives (Howard et al., 2019). Transformational leaders exhibit other leadership characteristics such as adaptability, entertaining new ideas, and are willing to make sacrifices for the excellent course of the followers and the promotion of the organization (Oladele & Akeke, 2016). The behaviors of a transformational leader in SMEs can increase workers' perception of change management, thus leading to a higher success rate, growth, and sustainability (Sulieman, 2018). According to Ogarcă et al. (2016), owners of SMEs can reduce the high failure rate in SMEs if they can incorporate leadership style and personal values that motivate and boost employees' morale in their organization's management. The theme, leadership style emerged from Interview Questions 1-2, 4, and 8-9. All participants attested using leadership style as a leadership strategy to ensure the sustainability of their organization.

Transformational leaders work hand in hand with their team members to identify changes needed to effectively improve their overall performance through guidance, collaboration, and motivation (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leaders can also use idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to enhance innovation performance and organizational support in SMEs (Tajasom et al., 2015).

Responding to Interview Question 1, P1 opined, “Our leadership strategy is situational based as we adopt the Transformational leadership strategy and the Transactional leadership strategy as the case may be.” In response to Interview Question 1, P2 commented, “I incorporate family members among my team, and my son mostly runs the organization on my behalf.” Responding to Interview Question 1, P3 remarked, “I use Transactional Leadership Strategy just like Bill Gates to manage my organization.” In response to Interview Question 2, P2 attested, “My son is the operational manager of the printing press I run.”

Business leaders should use a transformational leadership style to influence and motivate employees towards support for SMEs’ social, environmental, and economic sustainability (Sulaeman et al., 2019). Through a transformational leadership style, business leaders will influence and motivate employees and other stakeholders to support change initiatives for an overall competitive advantage for the organization (Boukamcha, 2019). In response to Interview Question 4, P1 affirmed, “Transformational Leadership Strategy has been very effective thus far in the sustainability of our business especially as it practices intellectual stimulation.” Responding to Interview Question 4, P3 remarked, “I use only one strategy, and it is transactional. It has been effective for me for the past six years.” Responding to Interview Question 8, P4 stated, “I am very free with my employees and live like a family. I also encourage them, support them.” In response to Interview Question 9, P1 attested, “We encourage people to look beyond their self-interest towards the greater good of the organization and encourage self-development to aid them in their future career as we do not expect them to be with us forever.”



The participants' responses to the interview questions demonstrated that leadership style is essential for ensuring the sustainability of SMEs. All owners of SMEs who participated in this study confirmed using leadership style as a leadership strategy to ensure their organization's sustainability. The participants' responses aligned with Boukamcha's (2019), Howard et al.'s (2019), Ogarcă et al.'s (2016), and Sulaeman et al.'s (2019) assertions that business leaders should adopt leadership style to ensure their organizational sustainability. The study findings demonstrated that owners of SMEs used leadership style as a leadership strategy to ensure their organization's sustainability in Swaziland. As applied in this study, 100% of the participants attested using leadership style as a leadership strategy to ensure their organization sustainability.

### **Findings Related to Transformational Leadership Theory and Sustainable Development Theory**

Understanding the historical development of leadership theories, such as the transformational and transactional leadership model, provides practitioners and scholars with adequate knowledge about leadership practice in SMEs (Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2015). The use of a transformational leadership style by owner-managed SMEs has a significant positive relationship to the success of a change management initiative in an organization (Sulieman, 2018). The use of leadership style within and across the organizations enhanced employee performance, thereby ensuring business sustainability. The study findings indicate that owners of SMEs ensured the sustainability of their organization by implementing effective leadership strategies based on TLT. As applied in

this study, all participants attested using a combination of leadership strategies to ensure their organization's sustainability.

The fundamental tenets of TLT' are a transformational leader's ability to use idealized behavior, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation to lead followers towards the attainment of enhanced performance and sustainable organization (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016). Transformational leaders use idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized considerations, and intellectual stimulation to drive followers' performance in the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Employee engagement and communication are essential to ensuring the sustainability of an organization. As applied in this study, owners of SMEs should establish effective leadership strategies for ensuring the sustainability of their business. Based on the themes the participants presented, the TLT and SDT tenets were present in the blend of leadership strategies used to ensure organizational sustainability. All participants confirmed the TLT and SDT regarding using employee engagement and communication as a leadership strategy to ensure the sustainability of their organizations.

Most organizations use the SDT principle construct to foster best business practices to capture and increase economic value while also delivering a positive environmental and social impact to stakeholders and society (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2016). Leaders of SMEs must meet new demands to remain competitive by differentiating themselves from competitors through implementing sustainable practices with higher economic, environmental, and social value for competitive advantage (Parida & Wincent, 2019). When owners of SMEs implement effective leadership strategies, they

are ensuring the sustainability of their organizations. As applied in this study, owners of SMEs should establish leadership strategies for ensuring business sustainability. All participants confirmed the TLT and SDT models regarding using leadership strategies to ensure their organizational sustainability.

Business leaders use the sustainability development theory principal constructs as foundational principles to guide their business activities to meet economic value while protecting the environment and adding positive social impact to the society (Williams et al., 2017). Many organizations use the sustainability development theory principal constructs to foster best business practices to capture and increase economic value while also delivering a positive environmental and social impact to stakeholders and the society (Clayton & Radcliffe, 2018). As applied in this study, owners of SMEs should establish leadership strategies to ensure their business sustainability. All participants confirmed the TLT and SDT regarding the use of leadership strategies to improve the sustainability of their organizations. All participants' responses validated the application of TLT and SDT to ensure business sustainability.

The tenets of TLT and SDT aligned with the study objective of exploring the leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. The owners of SMEs applied the principles of idealized behavior, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, economy, society, and the environment in ensuring the sustainability of their businesses. All participants used various leadership strategies involving employee engagement and quality of service, listening and communication, performance review and reward system,

and leadership style. As applied in this study, all participants applied TLT's and SDT's critical components to enhance their organizations' sustainability.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Identifying the leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to sustain their business is crucial to the economy of developing countries, including Swaziland. About 70% of SMEs collapse in their first year of establishment in Africa, contributing to an increase in the unemployment rate such as experienced in Swaziland (Muriithi, 2017). Most governments are now paying more attention to SMEs' growth, development, and sustainability (Johnson & Schaltegger, 2016). All participants affirmed using a blend of leadership strategies to enhance the sustainability of their organizations. This study's findings could contribute to business practice by providing owners of SMEs in Swaziland with better knowledge and understanding of leadership strategies and practices needed for improved productivity, performance, and overall sustainability of their businesses. The findings from this study could contribute to the literature on SMEs and provide owners of SMEs with new insight regarding leadership strategies to ensure the sustainability of their firms. New and upcoming SME business owners may use the findings of this study to understand the leadership strategies and best practices for ensuring their organizational sustainability.

SMEs are known for their significant contribution to the economic development in Swaziland (Sridhar, 2020). Business practitioners and policymakers need to know the drivers and barriers to SMEs' sustainable business practices (Aghelie, 2017). The study results could help owners of SMEs gain an in-depth understanding of transformative

leadership strategies' role in business sustainability that gives due consideration to the economic, social, and environmental impact in society. The study findings might add value to the SME community through the dissemination of information which could significantly contribute to information sharing and networking among SME owners who seek leadership strategies to enhance their business sustainability. Some SMEs with weak leadership strategies may apply this study's findings to ensure their organization's sustainability. The study findings could significantly enhance SMEs' performance on leadership strategies to ensure business sustainability in Swaziland.

Business leaders in Swaziland should develop some appropriate strategies to minimize the failure rate of SMEs (Muriithi, 2017). Leaders of SMEs and other stakeholders in the organization need to understand the effect of identified drivers of sustainability and integrate and implement them to promote sustainable practices (Yadav et al., 2018). Based on the study findings, the most significant contribution to professional practice may be identifying potential leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to ensure their organization's sustainability. Owners of SMEs could use this study results to understand the role of inappropriate leadership strategy on the high failure rate of SMEs survival beyond 2 years of the establishment to improve business practices. The knowledge gain on the leadership strategies for SME sustainability may enable SMEs to direct their limited resources to those areas critical to the sustainability of their businesses. All participants acknowledged that employee engagement and quality of service, listening and communication, performance review and reward system, and leadership style were fundamental to ensuring their organizational sustainability.

Business practitioners and the government should provide training for business leaders on appropriate leadership skills to improve the growth and sustainability of SMEs (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016). The study findings may help organizational leaders, including governmental and non-governmental agencies, small business owners, and entrepreneurs, gain helpful information on strategies to enhance the sustainability of their organizations. These study findings could provide owners of SMEs with knowledge on how to use appropriate leadership strategies to ensure their business sustainability. Based on the study findings, the most significant contribution to professional practice may be providing a practical model for owners of SMEs to develop leadership strategies for enhancing their business sustainability. The practical model could serve as the basis for ensuring the sustainability of SMEs in Swaziland.

### **Implications for Social Change**

By implementing appropriate leadership strategies, SME business owners could contribute to sustainability, which may lead to job creation, improvement in employment rate, improved living conditions, social infrastructure development, and social well-being of the populace in the communities (Martinez-Conesa et al., 2017). By implementing excellent leadership strategies, owners of SMEs could ensure the sustainability of their firms. As illustrated in the study findings, leadership strategies might assist owners of SME businesses to sustain their business and continue to provide social amenities and educational empowerment to the local community. The implications for a positive social change for this study include promoting the growth and sustainability of SMEs, leading to job creation and income generation for economic growth in the society. With improved

business sustainability, owners of SMEs would pay more corporate taxes, which local and state governments could use to provide social amenities to the community.

Lack of appropriate leadership strategies by some business owners of SMEs affect SMEs 'sustainability and growth, which could result in a negative impact on job creation, income generation, and poverty reduction in emerging economies such as Swaziland (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2017). Due to the surge in Swaziland's unemployment rate, many job seekers have become entrepreneurs who own SMEs and mostly depend on government and other developmental organizations for survival (Meyers, 2019). The study findings might contribute to positive social change by helping owners of SMEs to understand the challenges in the business sector and gain adequate knowledge of leadership strategies to enhance business sustainability. By sustaining their businesses, owners of SMEs would provide job opportunities to local citizens and promote economic growth in the local community. The application of the study findings could promote sustainability of SMEs resulting to improved living conditions, social infrastructure development, and social well-being of the populace.

An improvement in employment rate through the sustainability of SMEs may aid in meeting the corporate social responsibilities of SMEs in the communities (Martinez-Conesa et al., 2017). Policy makers should understand the implications of leadership strategies for SMEs' sustainability to meet its fundamental economic roles in employment creation, poverty alleviation, and entrepreneurial development in emerging economies (Muriithi, 2017). The implication for a positive social change for this study might also broaden SMEs sustainability knowledge thus promoting overall positive changes for the

society. The general public and global communities might learn from the leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations, which could inspire a positive social change in the perception of SMEs.

### **Recommendations for Action**

An effective leadership strategy is crucial to enhancing business sustainability. The failure rate of SMEs has continuously increased due to such factors as lack of enabling environment, inappropriate leadership and management skills, and financial factors (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2019; Olawale & Garwe, 2015). Because of the characteristic small-size of SMEs, the leaders' leadership style and behavior quickly permeate and influence the entire team's culture and performance (Muriithi, 2017; Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2015). I recommend that owners of SMEs should implement a combination of leadership strategies to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. I recommend that owners of SMEs should adopt employee engagement and quality of service to enhance their business sustainability.

The lack of appropriate leadership strategies affects the sustainability and growth of SMEs in emerging economies such as Swaziland (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2017). The effective leadership strategies that leaders of SMEs use to manage their organization are significant drivers for improving employee performance and business growth and sustainability (Atan et al., 2019). An ineffective leadership style often impedes SMEs' operation and growth (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016). I recommend that owners of SMEs should establish, implement, and maintain effective communication and listening process to ensure the sustainability of their organization. To sustain their businesses, I



recommend that owners of SMEs should establish guidelines for improving the performance review and reward system to enhance their business sustainability.

The government and business practitioners should train business leaders on the appropriate leadership skills for improving the growth and sustainability of their SMEs (Katarzyna & Joanna, 2016). Business leaders in Swaziland should adopt appropriate strategies to minimize the failure rate of SMEs (Muriithi, 2017). Most employees and stakeholders of SMEs support the organizations' procedures, practices, and processes that improve productivity and performance through transformative leadership and influencing skills (Kusi, et al., 2015). I recommend that owners of SMEs adopt appropriate leadership style to ensure the sustainability of their organizations.

Studies have shown that SMEs characteristically have a small number of employees, and that leadership style can easily permeate and influence employees and other stakeholders in the organization (Boukamcha, 2019). Most successful leaders of SMEs displayed an average level of leadership style that incline towards a transformational leadership style that can inspire employees to think and exceed expectations (Dzomonda et al., 2017). The study findings indicate that owners of SMEs use a blend of leadership strategies to enhance the sustainability of their organizations. I recommend that owners of SME should have adequate Knowledge, skills, and competency to identify the appropriate leadership strategies for enhancing their business sustainability. I will disseminate the findings of this study to interested groups through presentations at conferences, seminars, and training; sharing knowledge in my workplace, social media, and network; and publications in academic and business journals on SME.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that owners of SMEs in Swaziland use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. The study findings, recommendations, and conclusions might contribute to existing and future research and close gaps in business practice regarding leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to enhance their business sustainability. Mihai et al. (2017) opined that factors such as the SME owners' organization and sex's age significantly impacted leadership styles and behaviors. This study was limited to cross-sectional, exploratory qualitative, multiple case study involving the use of semistructured interview to collect primary data from owners of SME in Swaziland. I recommend that future researchers should explore using longitudinal, quantitative or mixed methods, involving diverse participants from varying levels of management at different geographical locations.

Driving sustainability practice in SMEs must not be limited to business leaders and owners but should include other organizational stakeholders to understand the effects and impacts of sustainable business activities and practices on the economy, environment, and society (Davis & Boulet, 2016). A significant limitation of this study was the small sample size of four owners of SMEs from four regions in Swaziland. Researchers who use larger or smaller sample size could generate different themes which show significant differences in the study phenomenon. Therefore, I recommend further studies with larger sample size from various geographical locations such as Africa,

America, and Europe, which could provide useful insight on leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations.

Leaders of SMEs and other stakeholders in the organization need to understand the effect of identified drivers of sustainability and how they can integrate and implement them to promote sustainable practices (Yadav et al., 2018). Because I am a novice in academic research, my competency and knowledge of doctoral study are evolving. Therefore, the study was limited to my subjective evaluation and accurate interpretation of the participants' responses to the interview questions. Also, the study was limited to my personal beliefs and professional background with the topic involving the leadership strategies owners of SMEs use to enhance their business sustainability. Finally, the study was limited to the accuracy of information from the participants and the availability of archival data. I recommend that future researchers should comprise of experts from related multi-disciplines in SME sustainability to divulge some details I must have omitted in this doctoral study.

### **Reflections**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies that some owners of SMEs in four regions of Swaziland use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. In compliance to research ethics and Walden University IRB requirement, I completed the CITI web-based training and secured IRB approval before engaging the participants, which improved my understanding of the requirements for using human beings in the research study. I used emails and telephone to contact the participants, which provided me the opportunity to improve my

collaborative, empathy, inspirational, negotiation, innovation, and skills. Using the purposive sampling technique, I selected four owners of SMEs from four regions in Swaziland. The purposive sampling technique enabled me to select four owners of SMEs who had relevant competence, experience, training, and knowledge to answer the overarching research question.

In conducting this study, I used the qualitative research method to explore the leadership strategies that owners of SMEs in Swaziland use to enhance their business sustainability. I conducted semistructured interviews and interacted with the participants, which improved my communication, emotional intelligence, listening, observation, interpersonal, networking, self-confidence, inspirational, and problem-solving skills. Because I interviewed the participants at their preferred time and date, they expressed themselves freely, which enabled me to gain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the research problem. The organization and analysis of data enabled me to understand the research problem, to identify the themes and patterns, and establish the study findings. A reflection of my experiences in this study indicate that I gained a better understanding of the doctoral study research process, thereby improving my skills in conducting academic research work.

From the study findings, I gained an in-depth knowledge of the research problem from four owners of SMEs in four regions in Swaziland regarding their use of leadership strategies to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. I learnt that owners of SMEs use a blend of leadership strategies involving employee engagement and quality of service, listening and communication, performance review and reward system, and

leadership style to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. My new knowledge and understanding of the research problem positively changed my preconceived beliefs, ideas and values, personal bias and perceptions on leadership strategies owners of SMEs use to enhance the sustainability of their organizations.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

Owners of SMEs face challenges on how to use effective leadership strategies to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. This qualitative multiple case study aimed to use TLT and SDT to explore the leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to enhance the sustainability of their organizations. I administered nine open-ended questions through semistructured interviews with four owners of SMEs within the four regions in Swaziland, to collect the primary data to answer the research question. The sources of secondary data included company archival documents and notes. The four themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of data were: (a) employee engagement and quality of service, (b) listening and communication, (c) performance review and reward system, and (d) leadership style. The study findings indicated that owners of SMEs used a blend of business strategies to enhance the sustainability of their organizations.

By implementing leadership strategies, owners of SMEs could sustain their businesses, thereby generating economic growth for local communities. With enhanced business sustainability, owners of SMEs would pay more corporate taxes, which local and regional governments could use to provide social amenities to the local citizens. Also, ensuring the sustainability of their organizations might help owners of SMEs to

continue to provide job opportunities to the residents. The general public might learn from the study findings about leadership strategies owners of SMEs use to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. The use of TLT and SDT as lenses for this study involving owners of SMEs may fill a gap in the literature on SME sustainability strategies. The study findings align with previous scholars' conclusions regarding the need to implement effective leadership strategies to ensure the sustainability of SMEs.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Invitation

July 6, 2021

**Letter of Invitation**

Dear Sir/Madam,

As part of my doctoral research at Walden University, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting to explore the leadership strategies for the sustainability of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Swaziland. The findings of this study may help owners of SMEs to identify leadership strategies needed for enhancing performance and business sustainability. The participants for this study shall be owners of SMEs who have been in operation for a period not less than 5 years. The participants will also be owners of SMEs with significant success in the sustainability of their firm.

The mode of data collection shall be via zoom interviews of approximately 45 minutes duration, and provision of non-confidential documentation relating to the subject of leadership strategies by email. The zoom interview will be voice recorded. All data collected will be treated as confidential, and your participation in the study is voluntary. Immediately after I complete the interview transcription, I will ask you to verify that I correctly transcribed the interview. I will send you the transcript electronically via email and request a response within 3 days if revisions are needed.

Enclosed with this letter is the Participant Consent Form. If you are interested in participating in the study, kindly review the form carefully and send an email with the words "I consent".

Your participation will not only contribute to the success of the proposed study but may help stimulate interest among SME owners in Swaziland and appropriate leadership strategies needed for business sustainability.

Sincerely,



Lizzy Taiwo

### Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1. I will greet the participant and reintroduce myself.
2. I will then go over the consent form to make sure the participant has read over it and know their rights as a participant.
3. I will ensure the participant is ready and will begin audiotaping the interview, acknowledging the pseudonym given to the participant as well as the time and environment.
4. I will begin asking the participant the nine interview questions, giving them time to answer and ask any follow-up questions.
5. Once the interview is completed, I will set up a time for transcript review and conduct member checking of interpreted data.
6. After the member checking has been conducted and confirmed by participants, I will let the participant know that their time was appreciated.

### Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What specific leadership strategies are you using to manage your organization?
2. How do you implement these strategies?
3. How did you assess the effectiveness of these strategies?
4. Which of these leadership strategies has been the most effective in the sustainability of your business?
5. What were the key challenges you faced as a business leader while implementing these leadership strategies?
6. How did you overcome these key challenges?
7. What other business strategies do you use to sustain your business services and products?
8. What strategies do you use to motivate employees to achieve organizational goals?
9. What other information would you like to share about your leadership strategies that, based upon your experience, have influenced the sustainability of your business?

Appendix D: CITI Certification

[citiprogram.org/verify/?wbd4cf205-cacc-4394-ac35-785d60ce64f8-42439551](https://citiprogram.org/verify/?wbd4cf205-cacc-4394-ac35-785d60ce64f8-42439551)