2022

Empowerment Strategies for Sustaining Small Business Moving Companies

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Walden University
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Abstract

Empowerment Strategies for Sustaining Small Business Moving Companies

by

LeRoy P. Fontenette Jr.

MBA, University of La Verne, 1984

BA, University of La Verne 1980

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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August 2022

Abstract

The lack of empowerment strategies can cause high employee attrition for small moving company owners and lead to business closures within 5 years. Small moving company owners using effective empowerment strategies can reduce attrition and increase business longevity. Grounded in the transformational theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore empowerment strategies three small moving company owners in California used for sustaining their business beyond 5 years. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and company documents, such as logistics instruments, a combined agreement contract for moving services, and a freight bill. Using thematic analysis, the three themes that emerged were (a) leadership styles, (b) management of the business environment, and (c) business owners' knowledge. A key recommendation for action is for business owners to combine different leadership styles to retain employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create employment opportunities in local communities, thus increasing the local economy.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my wife and partner, Martha B. Fontenette, Jr. Initially, my doctoral journey was for the pride of our family name. However, this road to success has challenged me, and your words of encouragement have carried me to the finish line. Thank you, Queen, for being on this journey every step of the way and not giving up on me. Thank you for your compassion and understanding throughout this process. A special dedication in loving memory of my parents, LeRoy Sr. and Aristine, my brothers and sisters, especially my brothers Brian and Lester, and sister-in-law Karen, our children Tiffany, Donald, Leah, Brandt, Brittany, Chelsea, and LeRoy III. Thank you for the pep talks, moral support, celebration, and the constant reminders to stay the course. I could not have done this without the "villages" love and kicks in the backside to keep pushing forward. Thank you to my junior high school friends, Michael, and Pinkie Oliver. You both have been a part of this journey, and your candor has been invaluable. Lastly, I respectfully dedicate this doctoral study to my grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, who aspire to walk onward and upward.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to acknowledge and give all praise to God for His favor, grace, and mercy; without Him, I would not have been able to endure the rigor of this academic program. He gave me the strength, put the right people in my path at the right time when times were tough and challenging. Proverb 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." To my parents, the late LeRoy Sr. and Aristine, for the love and values you instilled in me to pursue this journey. Thank you to my family and friends, who have supported me. It has been a long road. I want to acknowledge my chair, Dr. Gwendolyn Dooley: Wow! There are no words to express my gratitude for your help, support, and the talks along the way in succeeding in this doctoral program. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Matasha Murrelljones, Dr. Cheryl Lent, and Dr. Judith Blando. Finally, I would like to thank my participants of this study for their willingness to participate and give time to the authentication of this research.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Owners in the small business sector need to understand the importance of employee empowerment strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Between 2000 and 2019, there were 31.7 million small businesses in the United States, and the small business sector accounted for 65% of net new job creation in that timespan (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2020). The small business sector's significance and contribution to the U.S. economy have led to a need to bridge the ideas between academia and industry. Hence, small business owners understand the relevance of employee empowerment strategies to sustain businesses beyond 5 years.

Background of the Problem

The U.S. moving and storage industry is complex and diverse. The moving and storage industry consists of large corporate organizations and "mom-and-pop" operations. The average survival rate for all small new companies is 2 years, and 44% survive at least 4 years (Galli-Debicella, 2020). There is a need for small business owners to acknowledge and adapt to cultural diversity, change management, and additional leadership strategies (Gendron, 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009). Exploring these factors and additional leadership strategies could improve small business sustainability and allow small businesses to survive beyond 5 years.

The economic security of small businesses directly impacts the health of their communities. Despite increasing leadership research, Klein and Salk (2013) noted a gap in leadership knowledge, specifically succession planning with small business owners. Small businesses play a large role in the U.S. economy, substantially contributing to job

creation and economic growth (Calopa, 2017). Small businesses accounted for 65% of net new jobs between 2000 and 2019, and 31.7 million small businesses in the United States provide employment opportunities (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2020). Despite this workforce impact on small businesses from 1994 to 2018, 67.6% of new employer establishments survived at least 2 years. The 5-year survival rate in California was 48.8%, which employed 7.1 million people in the private workforce (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2020). Employee empowerment strategies are vital for small business owners to succeed beyond 5 years.

Researchers have studied the various leadership styles that affect small business owners' survivability rate but have not discovered which leadership styles as empowerment strategies improve sustainability. McDowell et al. (2016) noted a distinctive, finite set of resource connections between small business owners' strategic plans, business skills, resource availability, and overall performance. Some small business owners operate with an intimate structure, which resembles the inspirational and inclusive transformational leadership (TL) style (Lam & O'Higgins, 2012). TL style could be one of the employee empowerment strategies small business owners could use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Problem Statement

Small businesses are essential to U.S. economic development because small businesses with less than 250 employees account for 99.9% of all businesses (Fairlie & Fossen, 2021). An estimated 48.8% of new small businesses in the United States fail within the first 5 years (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2020). In 2017, 1 million

businesses opened, 898,000 closed (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2020). From 1994 to 2018, 67.6% of new small businesses survived 2 years or more (U. S. Small Business Administration, 2020). The general business problem was that some small moving company owners lack employee empowerment strategies to sustain their business. The specific business problem was that some small moving company business owners (SMCBOs) lack effective empowerment strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the effective empowerment strategies small moving company owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The target population was three to six experienced SMCBOs in Southern California who successfully employed employee empowerment strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Understanding the employee empowerment strategies, such as transformational leadership, and combining different leadership styles the SMCBOs used may lead to employment opportunities in Southern California, resulting in increased prosperity in local communities.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I employed the qualitative methodology to explore small moving company business owners' strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The three available research methodologies are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Benoit et al., 2017). Qualitative researchers focus on commonplace events in their natural settings to understand participants' real-life experiences in an everyday

environment (Ho et al., 2017). The qualitative research method was the most appropriate for this study because the research question focuses on what strategies SMCBOs use to improve the success rate and sustain businesses beyond 5 years. The goal was to explore the SMCBOs' personal experiences and knowledge, not statistical data.

According to Babones (2016), using a quantitative method allows researchers to examine relationships or differences among variables and test associated hypotheses. There were no quantitative relationships, variables, or hypotheses for testing in the current study. Researchers use quantitative and qualitative methodologies for the mixed methods approach, whereas one process may prioritize the other to analyze data (Doyle et al., 2016). The mixed method approach was not applicable because no quantitative (i.e., statistical) data were analyzed as part of this study.

I chose a multiple case study design for this study. Yin (2018) noted that researchers use the single or multiple case study design to identify and explore current processes or activities impacting a phenomenon. Phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory are three designs for qualitative research (Jamali, 2018). According to Cypress (2018), in the phenomenological design, participants share their lived experiences and interpretive meanings of a unique phenomenon. The phenomenological design did not apply to the scope of the current study because I focused on employee empowerment strategies and not the meanings of the participants' personal lived experiences. Ethnography is a qualitative design to identify an entire culture's values and beliefs (Ottrey et al., 2018), which was not the focus of the current study. Finally, the grounded theory design focuses on systematically collecting and analyzing data to

construct theories for explaining phenomena by exploring the data (Baines & Edwards, 2018), which was not the focus of this study. A case study involves investigating one or more real-life cases to capture their complexity and details, focusing on how and why questions (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018; Yin, 2018). A multiple case study design was most appropriate to explore the strategies of three small business moving company owners who have sustained their businesses beyond 5 years.

Research Question

What effective empowerment strategies do small moving company owners use to sustain business beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to sustain this business beyond 5 years?

2. What strategies offered the best results?

3. How did you overcome critical challenges in the implementation of this strategy?

4. How do you handle the current regulations and challenges to continue sustaining your business?

5. What additional information would you like to share about the strategies you used to sustain this business beyond 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was TL theory. Downton (1973) created TL theory (as cited in Barbuto & Burbach, 2006), while political sociologist, James MacGregor Burns (1978), introduced the TL framework. Transformational leaders

change and transform people by building relationships, developing followers, influencing

positive employee performance, and providing a vision to improve the organization

(Barbuto & Burbach, 2006). Through the strength of their vision and personality,

transformational leaders can instigate inspirational motivation in their followers to help

them achieve personal and organizational goals. TL is a style of leadership that involves a

change (Money, 2017). The elements characterizing TL and the leader-follower

relationship for this framework are (a) idealized influence, measured on two components:

attributional and behavior; (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and

(d) individualized consideration (Khan et al., 2019). As part of leadership strategies, the

four TL elements could be used to motivate followers to work together toward common

goals, helping sustain the business beyond 5 years.

Operational Definitions

Charisma leadership: A personal charm or a "gift of grace" that helps one to

influence, inspire, and lead others (Tokbaeva, 2021).

Entrepreneurial perception: Perception that involves personal beliefs and

opinions about entrepreneurship that impact the decision to participate in entrepreneurial

endeavors (Murray & Crammond, 2020).

Leader-follower relationship: This relationship expresses the interaction between

the leader and follower. This interaction is significant for both parties and can take on

multiple forms (i.e., servant, transactional, or transformational: Al-Awlaqi et al., 2021).

Micro-sized businesses: A minimal type of company with less than nine

employees (Osakwe & Anaza, 2018).

Transformational leader: A style of leadership in which the leader positively impacts followers' performance and influences the follower to rise above their self-interests through engagement, inspiration, and empowerment (Xu et al., 2021).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

In the following subsections, I discuss the study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations to explain the research scope. These three factors may include circumstances that could have restricted the methodology and data analysis.

Assumptions

Assumptions are responses taken for granted and presumed accurate but not verified (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). Assumptions are beliefs that researchers hold to be accurate and sometimes not supported by facts; however, they contribute to the study's development (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Turner & Endres, 2017). I assumed that the semistructured participant interviews would allow the ability to gather sufficient data. Researchers use semistructured interviews to collect in-depth data (Rosales & Whitlow, 2019). Another assumption was that the qualitative methodology was appropriate to explore strategies SMCBOs use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. I also assumed that participants would have the experiences and knowledge regarding the phenomenon and respond honestly to the interview questions with simple and free from personal bias answers. Another assumption was that the selected small business owners would know how to provide strategies and methods to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. I assumed that TL was an appropriate framework to use because it builds on the idea that leadership develops followers, builds relationships, influences positive

employee performance, and the leader acts as a visionary to improve the organization. The final assumption was that three to six small business owners was an adequate sample size to collect enough data to achieve saturation, following the suggestion of Boddy (2016).

Limitations

I identified multiple limitations to this study. Limitations are conditions or restrictions related to the research's potential weaknesses that are out of the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The first limitation was difficulty collecting data because of limited time and availability of moving company owners, the COVID-19 pandemic, and my physical location. To address this limitation, I conducted Zoom interviews and provided each participant with two potential dates and time slots for the interview. Another limitation was the unwillingness of participants to share relevant information regarding their strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years. I was transparent by explaining that their best practices and privacy would be protected to establish a positive and professional rapport with each participant and to eliminate or minimize this unwillingness.

Delimitations

A researcher uses delimitation to place limits and boundaries on the research. A researcher decides to set the boundaries or limitations of the work so that the study's aim and objective do not become impossible to achieve (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The first delimitation was of the geographic location of this study, which only focused on SMCBOs in Los Angeles County. Another delimitation was that the sample size would

be limited to three small moving company owners who have sustained their business for 5 years. I specifically focused on the strategies, knowledge, and available resources small moving company owners use to sustain the business beyond 5 years. Future researchers exploring the employee empowerment strategies of SMCBOs should consider replicating the study in other sectors and with other participants.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study may have significance and provide SMCBOs with a better understanding of employee empowerment strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. There are 31.7 million small businesses in the United States, and small businesses account for 99.9 % of all firms within the United States (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2019). Los Angeles County (2020) is home to 244,000 businesses, consisting of racial-ethnic minority-owned businesses than any other county in the nation. Los Angeles (2020) is the nation's primary port for international trade and manufacturing centers.

Small business owners and managers could use the study results as a reference or guide to help them lead a successful small business. Sustainability strategies and increased knowledge could help reduce small business failures, which may lead to increased social inclusion, connections, financial literacy, and future prosperity of the workers and their families within their communities.

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings from this study may provide SMCBOs with practical strategies that facilitate better practices and sustainability. SMCBOs contribute by uncovering TL

practices and behaviors to produce strategies to empowered and motivated employees.

The SMCBOs could use the findings from the study to share their practical strategies and

knowledge with other small business owners and identify business skills required for

individuals attempting to start a new small business venture to sustain business operations

beyond the 5 years.

Implications for Social Change

This study's implications for positive social change include providing knowledge

and/or opportunities to improve the human and social conditions within the local

communities. Social change aims to benefit society more than organizations (Lumpkin et

al., 2018). The findings from this study may help small business owners develop

employees and contractors into appreciated citizens of their communities. Identifying and

potentially providing a list of leadership strategies could enable small business survival

and sustainability that would benefit employees and their families while providing

longevity, local employment, and stable incomes that can catalyze local economic

growth.

<center>**A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**</center>

In the academic literature review, a researcher presents reviews, critiques, and

synthesizes the extant literature on the topic under study. The academic literature review

process could be integrated to bring new frameworks and perspectives to the research

topic (Decker & McGill, 2019). Rocco et al. (2018) noted that a structured literature

review systematically gathers relevant literature on the research topic. A researcher

seeking relevant literature on issues should use connectors such as "and" or "not"

because these Boolean operators help to narrow the search results and provide results in line with the requested search (Rynes & Bartunek, 2017).

In this academic literature review, I encapsulated, analyzed, and reviewed past and current reference articles, journal articles, doctoral studies, and books on empowerment strategies, sustainability strategies, and leadership styles relevant to the business problem. The Walden University Library provided me with online access to multiple business database to obtain these resources, including ProQuest, Business Source Complete, SAGE Journals, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Management Journal, EBSCOhost. The Google Scholar search engine and government databases were also searched. I used the Boolean connector method to search key terms and applied search filters, such as limiting for peer-reviewed journal results only. The keywords and phrases used in the search were *small business, small business failure, little business success, short business survival, strategic management, small business planning, business skills, entrepreneur, leadership, servant, transactional, transformational, leadership styles, organizational performance*, and a mix of these keywords. The literature review comprises data from 244 sources, including peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, textbooks, doctoral dissertations, and content from reputable websites. Of the 244 sources, 183 (75%) of the references and publications were published within 5 years of my expected graduation date. Conversely, 25% were published before 2016. Additionally, 195 sources in the literature review, accounting for 80% of the references, were peer reviewed.

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored employee empowerment

strategies and obtained knowledge from SMCBOs that sustained their business beyond 5 years. Researchers use a specific framework to gather relevant factors or evidence to support the research topic (De Leeuw et al., 2015). Using TL theory as the conceptual framework for this study provided structure to obtain a deeper context to answer the following research question: What empowerment strategies do small moving company owners use to sustain business beyond 5 years? In the next subsection, I discuss TL theory as the conceptual framework of the study.

TL

Transformational leader is one of the most dominant and debated leadership theories. Thompson et al. (2021) noted that more than 3 decades have passed since Bass (1985) first acknowledged TL. Although it would be far-fetched to suggest that leadership scholars agree on which behavior and styles are optimal for leadership, the arguments for TL are more persuasive than any other (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Burns (1978) first proposed the TL theory in the late 1970s. Khanin (2007) noted that Burns described TL as a leader-follower relationship based on motivation and morality. Other researchers have debated different definitions of TL. Tyssen et al. (2014) opined that TL shapes employee commitment, while Mclaggan et al. (2013) described a transformational leader as one who can inspire followers to forgo their good for the organization's sake. Yuan and Lee (2011) concurred that TL involves coaching and mentoring, which are focused on leveraging followers' characteristics to promote motivation, satisfaction, and commitment. Most leadership approaches that have emerged could be categorized as either transforming (i.e., transformational) or transactional (Burns, 1978).

Transformational and transactional leadership styles are commonplace in the workforce.

Imran et al. (2016) agreed that the TL style for business owners successfully motivates and empowers employees, helps improve business performance, and contributes to business sustainability. According to Wasim and Imran (2010), the transformational leader has a pathfinder's role and communicates their vision with the employees through their skills and style. Zizek et al. (2017) claimed that transformational leaders positively impact the welfare of employees and organizations worldwide. Transformational leaders who inspire their followers use strategies to improve employees' motivation and empowerment.

Several leadership styles produce results. Bass (1978) and Burns (1978) found that the TL style is more effective in motivating employees than other leadership styles. According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders exhibit behaviors that support and empower employees to increase engagement. Bonau (2017) concluded that transformational leaders create an environment of commitment and motivation among their followers, inspiring, stimulating, and motivating them through a shared vision that raises the desire to do better. Transformational leaders empower followers to develop new and unique ways to challenge the status quo and alter the organization to ensure success.

Transformational leaders create valuable and positive change in employees (Butt, 2020). Bass (1985) noted that followers seek honest leaders who can trust and influence. Bass and Avolio's (1997) earlier work included four dimensions of TL: (a) idealized influence, (b) individual consideration, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) intellectual

stimulation. The following year, Bass and Avolio subdivided idealized influence into two additional components of idealized attributes and idealized behaviors. These five components of TL are defined as:

- Idealized attributes: Exhibiting selflessness and respect for others (Bass & Avolio, 1997).

- Idealized behaviors: Encouraging followers to achieve defined goals through the existence of a shared vision, mission, and set of ideals (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Casimir et al., 2012).

- Individual consideration: Attending to followers' needs and serving as mentors and coaches (Bass & Avolio, 1997).

- Inspirational motivation: The development of meaning and a robust team environment as well as the provision of challenging work (Bass & Avolio, 1997).

- Intellectual stimulation: The encouragement of innovation, creativity, and followers' involvement in problem-solving (Bass & Avolio, 1997).

Transformational leaders who display behavior in a manner perceived by followers as respectful, fair, and consistent with moral and ethical standards can expect more outstanding follower organization and team attachment (Thompson et al., 2021). Transformational leaders do not initiate punishment and understand that setbacks and challenges will be faced when working to achieve goals (Bass, 1997). Humility, integrity, creativity, tenacity, strength, innovation, and inspiration are critical attributes of the transformational leader (also referred to as the charismatic leader; Berendt et al., 2012).

Charismatic leadership and TL represent vital examples of theories of exceptional leadership; in other words, leadership theories where followers often produce performance beyond expectations (Dionne et al., 2012). It is debatable whether charismatic leadership and TL are distinct styles.

Charismatic leadership derives from the Greek word for "gift" (Tokbaeva, 2021). Shao et al. (2016) concurred with Fiol et al. (1999) that there are similarities between the two theories. According to Shao et al., charismatic leadership has the most critical influence on individual behaviors. Charismatic leadership and TL share a crucial core element concerning the emotional attachment developed with followers and linked to an overall, common cause that contributes to the greater good (Dionne et al., 2012). Charismatic leadership instills a common and shared vision toward the future that is initially labeled as idealized influence.

Interactional justice is the psychological mechanism expected to reflect best how transformational leaders influence followers, specifically, to increase employee performance for sustainability. In a study on TL, Thompson et al. (2021) explored the impact of TL and interactional justice on follower performance and organizational commitment in a business context. In another study conducted in a business context, Cho and Dansereau (2010) found that interactional justice was responsible for transmitting the effects of individualized consideration. Cho and Dansereau's study was conducted in a collective culture (South Korea) where employees were willing to subordinate self-interest for the larger collective. Transformational leader behaviors in one situation may not translate to effective performance in a different context (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002).

Transformational leaders whom followers perceive as kind, respectful, and dignified can expect followers to respond with behaviors aligned with the leader's goal, such as working harder to enhance personal performance for sustainability. When leaders change, the organization can accomplish more.

Transformational leaders style has been noted to increase harmony in the workplace due to its emphasis on cooperation and teamwork (Chung & Li, 2018). Bass (1985) found that transformational leaders are goal-oriented motivators who are caring, helpful, and passionate about leading. Choi et al. (2016) supported Burn's (1978) findings, discovering a significant relationship between TL and employee empowerment. Choi et al. found that leaders use TL characteristics to develop employees to achieve desired outcomes. Transformational leaders empower employees to build new and unique ways to challenge the status quo and alter the organization to help ensure success.

Transformational leaders can transform employees' concentration to focus on the organization's collective vision and inspire them to be innovative. Malik et al. (2017) found that a transformational leader is an example of a leader who can inspire and motivate employees by ensuring they have a clear vision of their goals and the required skills to perform at higher levels. Mittal and Dhar (2015) noted that transformational leaders could share the organization's vision because of their ability to inspire innovation and problem solving among employees. Mokhber et al. (2018), in concurrence with Bass (1985), found that transformational leaders promote professional and personal growth. TL could support an organizational culture that fosters enhanced business practices by empowering leaders and employees (Burns, 1978).

Diverse leaders demonstrate TL through enacting dynamic change. Examples of TL in action would be: Franklin Roosevelt leading the United States through turmoil and uncertainty following the Great Depression by establishing the New Deal (Dowling, 2017). Henry Kaiser was a medical transformation founder on a population level with the Kaiser Foundation and Kaiser Permanente initiation (Kattih et al., 2021). Bill Gates revolutionized the electronic age through work with Microsoft, and he and his wife, Melinda, set an example for philanthropic models of educational transformation through their foundation (Allen et al., 2016). Within a service-oriented industry, a transformational leader typically demonstrates highly effective emotional intelligence. These are examples of the use of TL that have impacted employees and business performance.

Transformational leaders create a vision and develop strategies for employees to follow to achieve the desired goals (Chung & Li, 2018). Effelsberg et al. (2014) noted that transformational leaders inspire employees to change their views and expectations and motivate them to achieve shared goals. Atwijuka and Caldwell (2017) concurred with Hunt (2017), declaring that transformational leaders build relationships and earn employees' commitment to create organizations that perform efficiently and effectively to compete against their competitors successfully.

Transformational leaders demonstrate the principles and morals that project trust and loyalty to team members (Chung & Li, 2018). Transformational leaders emphasize teamwork and the attainment of shared goals, which are also values of collectivist cultures (Newman & Butler, 2014). Transformational leaders are intellectually

stimulating and generate images of possibilities as part of a creative process for

employees to look at problems innovatively and creatively (Bass, 1978). Malik et al.

(2017) revealed that transformational leaders encourage interpersonal relationships to

improve employee gratification and their desire to continue employment. Communication

between the transformational leader and employees is important to create trust and

loyalty. These qualities could be beneficial to small mom-and-pop moving businesses to

sustain the business beyond 5 years.

Transformational leaders are typically understood to positively influence

employees and help improve organizational performance. Nohe and Hertel (2017) stated

that transformational leaders enhance organizational performance. Transformational

leaders impact organizational outcomes by influencing employees' behaviors,

commitment, and engagement, resulting in increased performance (Farahnak et al.,

2020). Choi et al. (2016), in agreement with Burns (1978), found a significant

relationship between TL and employee empowerment. A transformational leader can

positively change the organization and its employees (Malik et al., 2017). These various

examples of TL could be elements used by small business owners to improve best

practices and enable sustainability beyond 5 years.

Transformational leaders can help influence employees to make a commitment to

the organization. In a quantitative study, Rua et al. (2016) surveyed 58 employees to

study organizational commitment. The researchers obtained a 71% response rate, and the

results revealed that TL positively enhanced organizational trust but not commitment. In

contrast, Caillier and Sa (2017) concluded that transformational leaders deliver high

organizational performance. Paladan (2015) stated that the TL theory is the most well-known leadership theory scholars use to explore strategies and bring positive organizational change. The TL style could be beneficial to small, mom-and-pop, moving businesses to inspire and motivate employees to achieve collective goals. Fostering an environment that enhances employees' performance contributes to employees' innovation to sustain operations.

Transactional Leaders

Transactional leadership is a directive of an interaction between the two (leader & follower) dominated by exchanging a transaction. Max Weber introduced the transactional leadership concept in 1947, which Bass (1985) later expanded on. Transactional leadership originated from the marketplace of fast, simple transactions among multiple leaders and followers, leading to short-term relationships of exchange with leaders (Burns, 1978). Additionally, some scholars have criticized transactional leadership theory because its focus generally is a one size fits all, universal approach to leadership that disregards situational and contextual factors relating to organizational challenges (Ghani et al., 2018; McCleskey, 2014). TL focuses on the commitment to the organization's objective, and transactional leadership focuses directly on contingent rewards and sanctions. Offering rewards and sanctions are directly linked to the employee's behaviors, efforts, or results and are vital for the transactional leader. Bass's full-range leadership model conceptualized transactional leadership as having three dimensions: contingent rewards and two management forms by exception. Transactional leadership would be an opposing theory to transformational theory in that it is routine

actions.

A *contingent reward* is a degree to which the transactional leader sets up constructive transactions or exchanges with followers and promises to provide suitable rewards and recognition to achieve the goals or execute the tasks as required (Bass, 1985; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). The purpose of contingent rewards is to create an incentive mechanism through which employees expect their efforts to increase performance, and in return, the employees will be rewarded (Lunenburg, 2011). Transactional leadership involves contingent reinforcement. Transactional leaders are not focused on changing for the future, mainly keeping practice and process the same, negatively affecting sustainability.

Management, by exception, is the degree to which the transactional leader takes corrective action based on leader-follower transactional results (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). The management by exception consists of two forms, active and passive. Active leaders monitor followers' behavior, anticipate problems, and take corrective actions before the behavior creates severe difficulties. By contrast, passive leaders wait until the behavior has caused problems and take disciplinary action (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). The third leadership style as part of Bass's (1985) full-range model is laisse-fair leadership. As cited by Robert and Vandenberghe (2021); Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by avoidance and inaction (Hetland et al., 2014). This leadership style would demonstrate and negatively impact sustaining a profitable business.

Transactional leadership is commonly understood as power-based leadership. Transactional leadership is strongly associated with top-down power and is a

conventional concept for leaders and not enough for organizations that want positive change (Passakonjaras & Hartijasti, 2019). Bass (1985) defined transactional leadership as behavior based on reward and punishment. Transactional leadership is contrasted to TL as a set of actions that seek to develop, share, and sustain a vision intended to encourage employees to transcend their self-interest and achieve organizational goals (Jacobsen & Andersen, 2015). In a study conducted in China, Afsar et al. (2017) concluded that TL positively relates to entrepreneurial behavior, whereas transactional leadership negatively influences it. Researchers collected data from a cross-industry sample of 557 employees and 64 leaders from eight knowledge-intensive organizations.

During a random selection of participants from the banking and insurance industry, Afsar et al. (2017) studied subordinates and their direct supervisors in Marketing, Administration, Human Resources, Operation and Customer Care, and the eight organizations' Information Technology departments. Based on the study results, Afsar et al. (2017) indicated that TL positively relates to entrepreneurial behavior when high psychological empowerment. In contrast, transactional leadership has a negative relationship with entrepreneurial action.

TL, in numerous ways, represents the opposite of transactional leadership. Leadership conceptualizes differentiating ordinary from extraordinary, transactional, and TL (Burns, 1978). As previously stated, transactional leadership is typical and based on a conventional exchange relationship in which followers' compliance is an exchange for expected rewards (Passakonjaras & Hartijasti, 2019). In contrast, TL is an extraordinary leader raising followers' consciousness levels, providing coaching, mentoring, and

achieving positive outcomes. The principles of TL continued to expand and grow with time. Researcher discussion of various leadership theories is needed to identify which style could positively affect sustainability.

Sustainability: Leadership Strategies

This study is centered on identifying potential leadership strategies that can positively influence an organization's performance, resulting in sustainability. The challenge to define sustainability seems even more complicated because of the relationship between science-based and value-based indicators. Servant and sustainable leadership approaches have a unique contribution to enlightened strategic decision-making in this expanded context of responsible leadership that other leadership theories cannot make. Strategic leadership and corporate sustainability have come together, inconspicuously explicit fashion, through the emergence of top management team positions with dedicated corporate sustainability responsibilities (Rosenhead et al., 2019).

Sustainability is a complex concept and should be the priority for all businesses. Sustainability pertains to a firm's ability to remain in operation for an extended period by achieving relevant objectives. These objectives may include social, environmental, and economic responsibilities (Pojasek, 2010). Sustainability is a complex concept that has been a challenge to understand truly (Dantsis et al., 2009). Different agents use embedded assumptions in sustainability investigations and assessments (Borsato et al., 2020). Sustainable development is a significant concern in research regarding business strategies and practices.

Small business owners' effective strategies and behaviors can positively influence

sustainability. From a study conducted in South Africa, Masocha (2019) concluded that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) potentially benefit from a broader performance spectrum by practicing social sustainability. Using a random selection of small and medium enterprises from the Limpopo province of South Africa, predominantly rural, Masocha (2019), studied 238 SMEs to see if SMEs in developing economies benefit from practicing social sustainability. Social sustainability is the activities that ensure that communities are impartial, varied, allied, and self-governing and deliver a noble value of life. Social activities were sports, health, well-being, education, and helping the low-income earners (Turyakira et al., 2014). These activities are seen as interventions to enhance the social and cultural causes in societies and community development.

In Africa, SMEs contribute to social sustainability by employing people with inadequate education and skills levels and women in lower spectrums of society. By examining the relationship between social sustainability, financial performance, customer satisfaction, and employee satisfaction, Masocha (2019) indicated that all three postulated hypotheses were supported. Owners/managers perceived increased social sustainability practices to enhance their small businesses' financial performance.

Sustainable has been defined in many ways. The Brundtland Commission report as cited by Buziemescu and Buziemescu (2020), defined sustainable development as when development meets the present's needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs. Sustainability is a long-term journey, a direction that requires sustainable leadership, responsible decision-making, and an understanding of sustainability principles and commitments (Mirvis & Googins, 2006). Venters et al.

(2015) noted sustainability as the capacity of a system to endure and preserve a system's function over an extended period. Small business owners with measurable traits could determine whether the business is sustainable.

A sustainable leadership style focuses on nurturing future generations' potential for a dignified existence. The subject of sustainable leadership is a continued interest in academia; boundaries and guiding threads have yet to be determined. However, sustainable leadership is distinctive from servant leadership because it focuses on the future needs of many stakeholders and not only the present conditions of current followers (Macke & Genari, 2019). Imbeau et al. (2015) noted that sustainable organizations involve having the support and commitment of their leaders and implementing initiatives to improve environmental performance. Sustainability leadership should be a priority for any business.

Corporate social responsibility has been the response organization to challenge sustainable development, for short-term profit and its actual survival and growth for the long haul (McCann & Sweet, 2014). In this context, sustainable leaders value human development and the environment without neglecting the organization's financial and structural capital (Armani et al., 2020). Imbeau et al. (2015) stressed the value-focused environmental measures as basic characteristics of sustainable leaders. Sustainable leaders reinforce the organization's internal resources to solve social and environmental challenges, generate value for the business, and be responsible for developing the communities they are a part of (Armani et al., 2020). Meeting stakeholders' expectations and commitment to the organizational transition towards sustainability.

Leadership is an important component of the life of any business. A review conducted by Hallinger and Suriyankietkaew (2018) analyzed approximately 952 Scopus-indexed documents explicitly concerned with sustainable leadership and pointed out that the subject is emerging as a new domain of study within the field of business administration. Sustainable leadership in sustainable development studies shows the direct responsibility of owners and managers within the organizations to meet the expectations and values of society (Boiral et al., 2014). Armani et al. (2020) indicated that sustainable leaders are usually change-oriented and intensely concerned about the well-being of others and the environment. The definition of leadership from a sustainable perspective is based on the idea that the organizations are part of an environment where it is possible to generate sustainable value and revenue for the business. Demonstrating concerns about the well-being of others and establishing values could be another empowering strategy to sustain the business beyond 5 years.

Top management teams (TMT) and the board of directors are generally strategic leaders of firms, colleges, and schools. Traditionally referred to as "upper echelons theory" (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Hambrick, 2007), the central thesis of strategic leadership is that a small group of people who occupy the positions at the top of an organization – the top management team – have a significant effect on organizational outcomes. The chief sustainability officer position was to be temporarily, in some cases with intentionality, to raise sustainability considerations and related issues on the corporate's strategic plan, meaning that removing the TMT position may well indicate its success.

Chanpoom and Intrawong (2019) defined this leadership as the ability to understand the key elements of creative, strategic thinking, understand the creative planning process's steps and implementation, and understand and write down the strategic plan. Viitala et al. (2017) referred to strategic leadership as those that create strategies by analyzing the organization's internal and external environment and applying the right approach at the right time to evaluate and act according to the environment. Strategic leaders work collectively to develop a clear vision, emphasize innovation, establish a valuable organizational culture, and enter ethical applications (Hitt et al., 2010). The intention is to place the organization at the forefront, noting that it is more extensive than traditional leadership.

The ideal work environment is highly influential on all individuals, including employees, management, and leadership. Mubarak and Yusoff (2019) concurred that strategic implementation is a critical element of strategic management practice, transforming strategies into a sequence of activities and achieving the organization's strategic objective, mission, and vision. The strategic implementation creates a team environment to increase performance and revenue to sustain the business.

A strategic leader will have many characteristics that enable the individual to be strategic in their leading process and ethical in the entire process. Jansen et al. (2009) stated that leaders' traits are critical in determining how strategic they are in persuading others and supporting them during the journey of achieving their organization's goals, mission, and vision. Increased performance is revelatory in performance, and cultivating a positive workplace further influences improved performance. Graham et al. (2015)

supported that the relationship between the good performance of leadership and ethical values may attract individuals to adapt those ethics in their work.

Strategic leaders' characteristics will vary depending on the field of interest, organization, and nature of their activities. Phipps and Burbach (2010) noted common characteristics that each strategic leader should have: excellent communication skills, motive, cognitive abilities, and differentiation between an individual's skills and abilities (as cited in Hodges & Howieson, 2017). Hodges and Howieson noted that leaders must have social intelligence and behavior complexity among the specifications of a strategic leader, allowing them to influence others and share positive traits and feelings.

There will be times when a leader must respond to an administrative situation that requires decisions to address the issue. Ethics is the science of trial and error or good and evil and is a well-established characteristic of the self-make good acts. The concept of ethical leadership is distinct from other leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, spiritual, and authentic leadership (Ko et al., 2017). Strategic leadership and ethical leadership are two concepts that can work hand in hand in call levels of society worldwide. These are two leadership styles that should be used in a case-by-case situation.

Other Leadership Styles

There are different kinds of leadership styles. This section includes a brief background of varying leadership styles and explains why these theories are not suitable for this research. According to Al Khajeh (2018), leadership styles matter to organizational productivity. Corporations, Small businesses, and Schools seek leadership

ability because they believe they bring unique assets to their organizations and improve the bottom line. Xu and Wang (2008) defined leadership as crucial for creating visions, mission, determination, and objectives. Organizations have indicated challenges with unethical practices in today's current times, high labor turnover, poor financial performance, and much more. This problem could be due to the lack of effective leadership. This research aims to identify leadership strategies that empower SMBCOs to sustain themselves beyond five years.

A leadership style is the manner and approaches a leader uses with employees to provide directions, implement plans, and motivate and influence people. Leaders focus on people and attaining organizational goals. The first concentrated study of leadership styles was conducted in 1939 by Lewin (Al Khajeh, 2018). Common leadership styles include TL, transactional leadership, autocratic leadership, servant leadership, situational leadership, and adaptive leadership.

Servant Leadership

Leadership as a theme in management has generated a wealth of research over the past several decades. Scholars have recently investigated a type of leadership mainly oriented to employees' needs, known as servant leadership (O'Leary et al., 2002). Greenleaf (1997) is the founder of conceptualization of servant leadership. Servant leadership has experienced a steady following, especially among practitioners and religious leaders (Liu, 2019).

Servant leaders begin with the natural feeling of serving first. Jeyaraj and Gandolfi (2019) indicated that Servant leadership engages followers in relational, ethical,

emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Eva et al., (2019) concluded that servant leadership empowers followers to reach their full potential. A servant leader's traits include listening, stewardship, foresight, healing relationship, empathy, and a commitment to building community (Greenleaf, 1997). Scholars consider servant leadership religious because the focus is on serving others first and conducting oneself ethically (Wong et al., 2018). When leaders can shift the administration's focus from the organization to the follower, this is a distinguishing factor to classify leaders as either transformational or servant leaders (Stone et al., 2004). Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) shared that servant, and transformational leaders are similar in that they focus on listening, encouraging, and empowering followers. Compared to servant leaders, Graham (1991) stated that transformational leaders directly impact organizational change and transformation instead of individuals' transformation. Servant leaders focus on others and, by doing so, help transform organizations successfully through motivation and serving.

Eva et al. (2019) differentiated servant leadership from other leadership approaches by stating that servant leadership is not a performance-oriented leadership approach because it does not sacrifice people for profit and growth. Servant leadership is suited for the satisfaction of the psychological needs of followers than TL. Spears (2010) noted that servant leadership would be more beneficial to nonprofit organizations than TL. Interest in servant leadership theory continues to advance.

Situational Leadership

Leadership continues to be a topic of discussion in the academic and business

worlds. Ardichvili and Manderscheid (2008) stated that many leadership theories and styles exist. The Hersey-Blanchard situational leadership model introduced in 1979 is the most used in large business communities and has been modified and expanded over the years (Hersey & Blanchard, 1979). Situational leadership evolved from task-oriented versus people-oriented leadership (McCleskey, 2014). Hersey and Blanchard (1996) have argued that there is no right or wrong leadership style, and it is the attitude of the leaders that makes a difference. Situational leadership is adjusting one's leadership style to meet the followers' needs. The follower grows and becomes more capable of completing the tasks required.

Schermerhorn and Bachrach (2015) supported the idea that leaders can alter their leadership style to fit the follower's needs (as cited in Wright, 2017). Hersey and Blanchard (1996) believed that successful leadership selects the most suitable leadership style based on the followers' readiness level. Hence, Hersey and Blanchard categorized the response by leaders into four quadrants:

1. Telling: Followers unable, unwilling, or insecure in completing a task, the leader must rely on giving instruction and directing.

2. Delegating: When followers are ready, willing, and able to complete the work.

3. Selling: When followers cannot complete the tasks but are still ready, willing, and confident, they can do so.

4. Participating: Followers require high support with little guidance (Papworth et al., 2009).

A change in the leadership behavior of situational leadership is triggered by an

improvement in the follower's performance as they move along the development

continuum (Lynch, 2015). To be an effective leader requires that a person adapt their

style to different situations' demands. Implement leadership styles can be a challenge if

an individual is unfamiliar with the types.

Situational leadership has been popular but still an under researched theory.

Mehta (2012) noted that many studies and researchers recognized that the situational

leadership theory model has been relevant to the training and human resource

development fields. Situational leadership theory is frequently cited throughout academic

management textbooks, among the most widely known leadership theories in

management training programs and schoolteacher training settings.

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership is about how leaders encourage people to adapt – to face and

deal with problems and challenges and to change and grow. Adaptive leadership is

unique because it is followers-centered rather than leader-centered. Resulting in a

prescriptive approach for leaders to help their followers confront and manage conflicting

values and beliefs that occur in complex and changing work environments (Heifetz et al.,

2009). Adaptive leadership is one style delivered successfully based on existing strengths

and works with effective technical leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009; Khan, 2017).

Adaptive leadership encourages significant change across multiple levels, including self,

organizational, community, and societal (Northouse, 2016). In adaptive leadership, it

becomes critical for the leader to comprehend what is happening and frame critical issues

and questions within the social team/group. A facilitative, inclusive approach is key to

lasting impact (Heifetz et al., 2009). Jefferies's (2017) article, adaptive leadership in a socially revolving world: a symbolic interactionist lens of adaptive leadership theory, highlighted Northouse's six primary behaviors of adaptive leadership:

1. Get on the balcony: Step away from the mix to gain a new perspective.

2. Identify adaptive challenges: Focus on the problems requiring collaboration with others.

3. Regulate distress: Monitor the stress of others during times of uncertainty while recognizing the need for change.

4. Maintain disciplined attention: Influence others to remain focused.

5. Give the work back to the people: Adaptive leadership empowers others to take ownership of their work, solve their problems, and take responsibility.

6. Protect leadership voices from below: pay attention, listen, and consider ideas from all involved, including racial-ethnic minority classes.

Jefferies's (2017) adaptive leadership in a socially revolving world noted that Northouse (2016) clarified that these behaviors needed further refinement because of the lack of clarity and specificity and partially because of the lack of evidence-based research supporting the theory. Most writing about adaptive leadership has been prescriptive and based on anecdotal and observational data rather than data derived from rigorous scientific inquiry. Adaptive leadership is about changing and adjusting to new circumstances (Northouse, 2016), as cited in Jefferies adaptive leadership research. Scholars and practitioners have recognized the approach's merits, but adaptive leadership's theoretical underpinnings remain in the formative stages.

Leadership in the Workplace

Managers work in an international context and need to deal with subordinates of different cultural backgrounds. Van Woerkom and De Reuver (2009) believed that increasing companies expand beyond national borders. Current research on leadership strongly emphasizes that TL models are related to a wide variety of positive individual and organizational outcomes (De Hoogh et al., 2004; Podsakoff et al., 1990). Although TL style has been linked to excellent management performance, research on TL effectiveness in a multicultural context is limited.

According to Stone et al. (2004), "The extent to which the leader can shift the primary focus of leadership from the organization to the follower is the distinguishing factor in classifying leaders as either transformational or servant leaders" (p. 1). Van Dierendonck et al. (2014) concluded that servant leadership is a newer study area. Only a handful of empirical studies have been conducted to test the effects of servant leadership. According to the TL theory, transformational leaders' emergence and effectiveness will be associated with the leader's sense of social responsibility and collective interests rather than self-interest (Hughes et al., 2018). Because of this social focus, these leaders can be expected to function well across different cultures.

The TL style requires numerous parties to collaborate to achieve the appointed goals. Hughes et al. (2018) shared that the effects of TL styles can be generalized across cultures. Studies based on the charisma scale of the multifactor leadership questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1997) have demonstrated similar findings in the United States, India, Singapore, the Netherlands, China, Japan, and Canada. Johnson (2015) concluded that no

"one style suits all" for the multicultural and multigenerational workplace. The main challenge is how societies, groups, and individuals engage in intercultural relations (Boddy, 2016). Although culturally diverse societies experience challenges facing their diversity, all cultures do not develop and pursue the exact strategies to deal with their situations.

Workforce diversity is most common in companies of the 21st century. Cultural challenges are manageable if managers and team members choose the right strategy and avoid imposing single-culture-based approaches to multicultural situations (Brett et al., 2006). Heifetz et al. (2009) concluded that leadership is a change or adaptive process to address conflicts in people's values or diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face. Finally, leaders' power is dependent mainly on how they are perceived by others (Hollander & Julian, 1969; Maurer & Lord, 1991; Pfeffer, 1977). The challenge to effectively managing multicultural teams is recognizing underlying cultural causes of conflict and intervening in ways that both get the team back on track and empower its members to deal with future challenges.

The coronavirus pandemic in 2020 has forced small companies and significant firms local and worldwide to transition to a virtual workplace (Mishra & Jena, 2020). Social distancing, washing hands, and wearing masks are the new norm, creating one of the most extensive works from home experiments humanity has ever participated in (Mishra & Jena, 2020). Leadership local and worldwide is in a dilemma incorporating such an enormous change and immediate effect (Hamilton, 2020). Employees, leaders, and owners need to work with one another more than before and hold shared

accountability for success.

Leadership has become more creative and thinks "outside" the box. In the virtual workplace, a term called lean leadership has surfaced. The lean methodology focuses on consistent performance through continuous improvement checks by defect reduction and wastage analysis. According to Alves et al. (2012), the lean management method effectively minimizes waste and identifies bottlenecks, bringing substantial cost reduction in the business process. Implementing the lean methodology requires a review of the current business processes in place. A researcher can differentiate the task performed into value-adding, non-value-adding, and enabling (Bhamu et al., 2013). Implementing lean management principles requires the managers and owners to work in tandem by sharing decision-making capacity. Some of the ways that managers and owners across different sectors applied the lean concept in their organization were as follows:

1. Employees intensively equip them with machine maintenance, reducing machine downtime.

2. In the financial services sector, teams were assembled to streamline the customer handling process to meet the customer requirements faster.

3. The law enforcement industry used lean to save personnel hours in the jail booking process, thereby minimizing costs by a great deal.

4. Effective teams were created to identify the bottleneck processes in the healthcare sector to reduce the patient waiting time and paperwork delays.

5. A core principle of lean is people development, and the education industry uses lean extensively to improve student and educator performance.

6. The leaders used various process improvement tools to optimize the business.

7. Plan-do-check-act: This continuous improvement cycle results in frequent improvements (especially in quality control).

8. Sorting, straighten, sweep, standardize, sustain: This long-term tool creates workplace behaviors to maintain an organized workplace.

Implementing the above tools and techniques, leaders need to create an environment that supports such a change virtually. Leaders and owners would have to develop a lean culture, keep their employees engaged virtually, and assemble efficient teams by connecting employees to one another.

Leadership in the Schools

School leadership has more responsibilities. School principals have critical roles because of their duties and responsibilities and the leadership roles (Ucar & Dalgic, 2021). The primary immigrant-receiving nations are increasingly culturally diverse, schools are often viewed as areas of intercultural tension (Celeste et al., 2019). The schools can also be important sites of "ethnic-racial socialization," where children and adolescents often interact with their peers in cross-cultural circumstances (Zhou et al., 2020). Children can learn about cultural diversity and their own cultural identity and develop a sense of belonging within a multicultural society (Civitillo et al., 2017). In potentially intercultural tension areas, schools can be pivotal in developing strategies for multicultural understanding and combatting racism (Vervaet et al., 2018). Because of the increasing multiculturality in schools, school leaders' roles and responsibilities have been reviewed (Kemp-Graham, 2015).

School leadership creates school environments sensitive to multicultural reality (Merlin-Knoblich & Chen, 2018). Leadership style shapes culture, and culture affects leaders. School leadership can respond to the multicultural school environment by adapting its policies, programs, and practices (Merlin-Knoblich & Chen, 2018). Multicultural leadership refers to the interpretation of the policy by school principals. More specifically, the degree to which school leaders and teachers claim that multiculturalism is recognized in their school's policy. When school leaders meet resistance and lack preparation, and are unaware of multiculturality in their school, they will not reduce pupils' ethnic prejudice by providing multicultural leadership. The same principle applies to small moving companies with multicultural employees.

Forrest et al. (2017) concluded that the primary goal of multicultural education is to help students develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function within their own (and) other micro-cultures and within the global community (Banks, 2001, p. 25). Workplace and Schools can be successful based on how well diversity is understood, appreciated, and leveraged.

Cultural Diversity

Different languages spoken, different religions, observation of different holidays, racial and ethnic identity are part of cultural diversity. Culture is that which shapes us; it shapes our identity and influences our behavior. Culture is our "way of being." It refers to the shared language, beliefs, values, norms, behaviors, and material objects passed down from one generation to another (Schaefer, 2006). The ability to embrace critical dialogue across differences is essential to effective leadership and responsible people in a global

society.

The term "culturally diverse" is often used interchangeably with the concept of "multiculturalism." Multiculturalism is defined as: "a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or community (Dan, 2014). Diversity and inclusion are conversation starters of multiculturalism and learning and transformation are emphasized (Choi & Lee, 2020). The value that diversity contributes to learning, in general, is also increasingly recognized as essential to leadership learning.

Cultural diversity is important because our country, workplaces, and schools increasingly consist of various cultural, racial, and ethnic groups. Cultural diversity allows each culture to recognize and respect different "ways of being" that are specific to that culture. This can lead to interactions with others and build respect, trust, and understanding across cultures.

Change Management: Overcoming Resistance to Change

More significant or small organizations must keep up with the ongoing changes to survive and evolve. Burnes (2015) believed that leaders had to change first and assist the followers to adapt to change for the organization to survive. Such is the importance now given to change that it has been seen as the prime responsibility of those who lead organizations, as the rise of the transformational leader shows (Bass, 1978; Burns, 1978; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Approximately 70% of change initiatives fail. Many reasons have been put forward for such a high level of failure (Rosenbaum et al., 2018), but

employee resistance has been one of the most frequently cited (Oreg et al., 2018).

Ceptureanu (2015) concluded that resistance to change is based on logical reasons arising

from the third law of Newton's dynamics that every movement always meets resistance

forces. Two sufficiently antimoniacal paradigms on resistance to change are observed:

traditional and modern paradigms.

Understanding and interpreting resistance to change remains a significant

challenge, despite the abundance of literature and the concept's popularity. Bareil (2007)

found that the crux of opposition to change is still unclear. Remembering resistance is

usually associated with an act, an action, a behavior: the "act of resisting, fighting

against" and is generally interpreted as an obstacle to change. Bareil (2007) stated

traditional paradigm is resistance construed as the enemy of change, an adversary, a

barrier to change, and a problem to be eliminated. A maladaptive anti-change behavior or

an inappropriate threat on the part of a change recipient, usually an employee (Shimoni,

2017), with a dispositional inclination to resist change (Oreg et al., 2018). In contrast,

according to a modern paradigm, the act of resisting (the exact behavior of resistance) is

interpreted differently: as a resource, a form of a feedback of discomfort (Bareil et al.,

2007; Oreg et al., 2018), and a preoccupation (Bedrule-Grigoruta, 2017). Also, an

ambivalent response (Stouten et al., 2018) to a proposed change (neither consistently

negative nor consistently positive) on the part of a change recipient who cares about the

organization (Whiting & Ford, 2009) and could contribute to effective change

management (Oreg et al., 2018). However, it is still hesitant.

Change is not easy, and it means getting out of your comfort zone. Sinek (2009)

noted that influential leaders enable followers to understand the reason for the change and

see its personal and organizational benefits, as cited in Caulfield and Senger (2017).

Although each company's particular circumstance accounts for some of the problems, the

widespread difficulties have at least one common root: Managers and employees view

change differently. Top-level managers see change as an opportunity to strengthen the

business by aligning operations with strategy, taking on new professional challenges and

risks, and advancing their careers. Many employees, including middle managers, are

neither sought after nor welcomed change. It is disruptive and intrusive and upsets the

balance. Senior managers consistently misjudge the effect of this gap on their relationship

with subordinates and on the effort required to win acceptance of the change (Caulfield &

Senger, 2017).

Emotional reactions to change are considered normal. According to Umble and

Umble (2014), the underlying issue is that significant change always involves uncertainty

about affecting people. Therefore, uncertainty can lead to fear as people imagine real

threats to their job status or security. Fear often leads to resistance, sometimes fierce

opposition, to the proposed change. Tobias (2015) recommended that a leader must

articulate what changes are necessary for his behavior for change to work. The leader

must personally – and authentically – state why it is important to change while modeling

the desired changed behavior. Without that problematic, challenging, and yet crucial step,

the likelihood of a change effort's success is remote.

Leaders cannot ignore the stress factor of individuals to change. The reality of

change and the resulting need to adapt is a must for success (Blom, 2018). The McKinsey

consulting group reported data in 2019 alarming; 70% of all change management efforts

failed (Jones-Schenk, 2019). Jeffery Hiatt, the author of the Awareness, Desire,

Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement five-step process, notes that change management

is personal and individualized (Shepherd et al., 2014). Hiatt's five-step process considers

a person's view of the current state as to how the problem is perceived, the sender's

credibility, the circulation of the misinformation, and the contestability of the reasons for

change. This change model's uniqueness offers more of a bottom-up than a top-down

perspective to guide plans for change (Jones-Schenk, 2019). Iuliana (2020) concluded

that obtaining change implementation and management depends vastly on the employees'

perception of it. Key factors driving positive change are sharing the vision, open

communication, mission, leadership, and organizational culture. Leaders utilizing

practical change management skills will minimize the resistance from the start.

Transition

Section 1 of this doctoral study included information regarding the research

problem. Additional items discussed in this section include conceptual framework,

operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitation, and the significance of the

study. Section 1 concludes with a review of the professional and academic literature. Are

presenting the basis for the research to understand leadership strategies. This qualitative

multiple case study explores small moving company owners' empowerment strategies to

sustain their business beyond 5 years. Section 2 contains the research procedure that

explains my role as a qualitative researcher, including the research population and

sampling method, research method, design, ethical research, data collection instrument

and techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I provide a formal presentation of the results of the semistructured interviews, implications for social change, a recommendation for future action, and suggestions for small business owners.

Section 2: The Project

The target population was three to six small moving company owners located in Southern California. The focus of this study was to better understand the owners' use of TL theory and employee empowerment strategies to sustain the business beyond 5 years. In this section, I discuss the requirement for participation, research method, data collection, and the ethical requirements of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) regarding protecting participants' privacy.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the effective employee empowerment strategies small moving company owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The target population was three to six experienced SMCBOs in Southern California who successfully employed employee empowerment strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Understanding the employee empowerment strategies, such as transformational leadership and combining different leadership styles the SMCBOs used may lead to employment opportunities in Southern California, resulting in increased prosperity in local communities.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is vital for data collection and data analysis. I was the primary data collection instrument for the study. A researcher's role in the data collection process is to observe the phenomenon of interest ethically and unbiasedly, secure the collected data, and interpret the data, (Hoeber & Shaw, 2017; Sanjari et al., 2014; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Yin (2018) described four steps to the

research process: (a) the design of the study, (b) evidence of collection process, (c) method of analyzing the data collected, and (d) reporting the findings of the data analyzed. When interviewing the participants, I followed these four steps to explore the employee empowerment strategies SMCBOs use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. I collected, processed, and reported the data collected and then analyzed the data for the findings. I did not have any direct relationship with any of the participants in the study. I was knowledgeable about the field of study because I am a prior SMBCO.

An additional role of the researcher is to be ethical when interacting with the participants. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013) published *the Belmont Report* to provide a structured framework to analyze ethical issues and outline the principles for ethical research, which are (a) respect for the person, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (Miracle, 2016). I referred to the framework and principles presented in *the Belmont Report* to ensure this study met ethical standards. Participants were asked if they reviewed the informed consent form before conducting the interviews to understand their rights and privacy. The informed consent form alleviates the researcher's personal biases and provides the participants with an understanding of the research scope, risks, and benefits (Yin, 2018). Bias may appear in some qualitative research because of the interaction between a researcher and participants on topics both parties are familiar with and have experienced (Devotta et al., 2016; Odierna et al., 2013). Understanding that biases could influence the study's outcomes, I selected owners from the industry with whom I had no direct relationship with to mitigate any conflicts of interest or personal bias.

It is the role of a researcher to develop an interview protocol for collecting qualitative data and ensuring reliability. Using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) systematically ensures that a researcher asks each participant the same questions to enhance data quality (Yin, 2018). A researcher uses the interview protocol to allow each respondent to provide their perspective in an orderly and guided manner (Yin, 2018). Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested that researchers use the following four steps to strengthen interview protocols: (a) confirm interview questions link to the research questions, (b) use an inquiry approach to drive the conversation, (c) obtain interview protocol feedback, and (d) implement a pilot for the defined interview protocol. I used an interview protocol to apply a consistent and standardized approach when asking the semistructured interview questions.

Participants

The participants for this qualitative multiple case study included three SMBCOs who successfully implemented employee empowerment strategies and sustained their business for a minimum of 5 years. Researchers select participants based on the respondents with direct knowledge or experiences about the phenomena or problem explored (see Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016; Yin, 2018). I based participant selection on their knowledge and experience to answer the research question (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Additional criteria included (a) owning a small moving company in the Los Angeles County for at least 5 years and (b) employing less than three employees.

To gain access to the participants, I contacted the owners of small moving companies with three or more employees in the study location. I used the internet to

search for small moving company owners' contact information within the study location. A researcher gains access to participants through prior affiliations and may need to interact with gatekeepers (Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016). After obtaining the contact information, I called potential participants to discuss the study, anticipated benefits, and use of the data each would provide. Participants were not accessible in a face-to-face manner because of their geographical location and COVID-19 restrictions, resulting in the five interviews being conducted via phone calls with one being conducted over the Zoom platform. Participants received an invitation email and the informed consent form for their review. The invitation provided instructions for the participant to review the informed consent form and respond to the email with the words, "I consent," indicating they had read the informed consent and agreed to participate. I requested that participants respond by email within 5 days of receiving the invitation email if they were willing to participate, allowing for planning and scheduling the interviews.

Upon receiving the participant's informed consent, I established a working relationship by conducting an introductory phone call. Researchers build connections and trust with respondents by being transparent about the study background and purpose (Mohebbi et al., 2018; Park & Lunt, 2015). Following the phone call, I sent each participant a confirmation email and thanked each participant for their participation. I confirmed the date and time for the initial interview with the Zoom link.

<div align="center">**Research Method and Design**</div>

Research Method

I chose a qualitative method to explore employee empowerment strategies

SMCBOs use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Saunders et al. (2019) termed research methodology as a set of beliefs and assumptions to develop a study's knowledge and classified them into three types: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions, artifacts, and words to thoroughly understand a phenomenon through people's lenses (Cypress, 2018; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2019). The quantitative method permits participants to respond to questions in their own words to answer the research question (Cypress, 2018). A quantitative method collects statistical and numerical data to answer questions of how many (David et al., 2017; Lubbers et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2019). Researchers use a quantitative method to examine a phenomenon and rely upon statistical data to validate the hypothesis by comparing the relationship between variables (Cypress, 2018; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Singh, 2015). I did not choose the quantitative method because this study was not reliant on statistical and numerical data. The mixed-methods approach includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. The mixed-methods approach was not appropriate to explore the employee empowerment strategies the SMCBOs use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years because there was no quantitative component to the study. Neither the quantitative approach nor mixed methods were appropriate because the study was not focused on statistical data to prove a hypothesis and the relationship between variables. A qualitative method was suitable for understanding SMCBOs' employee empowerment strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Research Design

I selected the multiple case study design for this study. Providing clear objectives

derived from the research question designates the source and collects the data (Saunders et al., 2019). There are various qualitative research designs; the ones I considered for this study were narrative, ethnography, phenomenology, and case study. Narrative and ethnographic designs focus on predesignated cultural groups or telling chronological events (Houghton et al., 2013). Neither was acceptable for this study because the research was not limited to one cultural group or a chronological narrative. The phenomenological design is used as a lens to understand an individuals' lived experiences (Greenfield & Jensen, 2010). I did not choose the phenomenological design because this study was focused on the organizational process and not the individuals' lived experiences.

A researcher uses the case study design when the research questions require in-depth or extensive explanations of a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). A case study design is preferred over other designs when (a) a researcher has little or no control over the events; (b) the focus of the study is current, not historical; and (c) the research questions require what, how, or why responses (Neubert, 2016; Yin, 2018). A case study can be designed as a single or multiple case study. A single case study is used when the study is of a new, critical phenomenon or is unique (Yazan, 2015). Yazan noted that a multiple case study is preferred when reproducing the study provides triangulation and validity to the conclusions. A single case study was not appropriate because this study was focused on multiple organizations in the industry and not on one specific organization.

One purpose of a qualitative research is to attain data saturation. Saunders et al. (2018) defined data saturation as the point when new data begin to repeat, and no new themes emerge. Fusch and Ness (2015) noted that researchers use interviews as the

primary data source to reach data saturation. Furthermore, (Fusch & Ness, 2015) concluded that researchers should structure interviews to ask multiple participants the same questions and ensure data saturation, when no new information is found, or the information begins to repeat.

Population and Sampling

I used purposive sampling to recruit three SMCBOs in the study location who implemented employee empowerment strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Qualitative researchers use a purposive sampling technique to select participants who can share their unique experiences regarding the specific phenomena (Boddy, 2016; Bougie & Sekaran, 2016). Purposive sampling encompasses choosing participants based on the assumption that the richness of the participant's information is significant to the research questions (Yin, 2018). Convenience sampling is random and occurs when participants who fit a study's criteria are enrolled in the study. One drawback of using purposive sampling is that the study could lack generalizability because of the biases of the sample (Emerson, 2021). However, purposive sampling encompasses choosing participants based on the assumption that the richness of the participant's information is significant to the research questions (Yin, 2018). Purposive sampling was appropriate for this qualitative multiple case study.

I had a sample of three business owners. Compared to quantitative research, which requires larger sample sizes, the sample size in qualitative research can be minimal because of the rich and detailed data collected from research participants (Boddy, 2016). Boddy (2016) and Yin (2018) defined small sample sizes in qualitative research as being

as small as three to six participants, which is best when exploratory or case-based research is being conducted. Researchers have generally agreed that it is impossible to specify a sufficient sample size for qualitative research (Gentles et al., 2015). Palinkas et al. (2015) concluded that researchers often use purposeful sampling for a qualitative case study to choose the most relevant participants who have the most knowledge and experience to answer the research questions. I used purposive sampling was used to select the participants who met the eligibility criteria for the research. Data saturation was met when data did not produce new information (see Boddy, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015). The interview process was continued until no new themes emerged.

Ethical Research

Before I began collecting data for this study, I received approval from the Walden University IRB (Approval Number 12-28-21-0694291). Before conducting the interviews, I sent the informed consent form (see Appendix C) to each participant to provide them with specific information regarding the study, its potential risks and benefits, their rights and responsibilities as participants, and my contact information (see Perrault & Keating, 2018). Each participant was instructed to review the ICF prior to consenting. Participants who agreed with the ICF were required to respond to the email with the phrase, "I consent." I asked each participant to maintain a copy of the ICF for transparency and accountability throughout the research. Participants who agreed to participate in this research were volunteering, and there were no monetary incentives offered for their participation. Participants could elect to withdraw before or during the interview by phone, email, or verbally, at which time, I would have destroyed all data

provided by that participant.

Proper protection for each participant is mandatory when conducting research. I followed *the Belmont Report's* protocols and its three principles of (a) beneficence, (b) justice, and (c) respect for persons (see Miracle, 2016). I adhered to the principles as the researcher to maintain professionalism and treat each participant fairly, equally, and respectfully. Researchers must uphold ethical requirements by protecting a participant's privacy and confidentiality. Confidentiality represents a core principle of research ethics and forms a standard practice in social research (Surmiak, 2020). I protected the participants' identities and used defined codes to maintain their confidentiality, replacing their names with a participant code (P for participant) and numbers according to the interview (P1 for the first interview, etc.).

To protect all data, I transferred all hard copies of the research data, transcripts, and any recorded data to an electronic format and stored it on an encrypted USB. All information related to the participants or their organizations participating in the study is protected on an encrypted USB that will be stored in a secure, fireproof safe in my home for a minimum of 5 years to preserve all participants' confidentiality. After 5 years, I will destroy the information by shredding all paper documents and burning the encrypted USB.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative study. Yin (2018) described a qualitative researcher as the primary data collection instrument because they observe, interpret, and record the data. In this study, I employed methodological

triangulation consisting of of two data collection approaches to investigate the topic under study. The primary data source was recorded semistructured interview responses and company documents. A researcher can use several data sources, such as interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations, archival records, and documents, to collect data (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019; Yin, 2018). Semistructured interviews provide the means of obtaining firsthand information in a timely and resource-efficient manner (Kumar et al., 2018). McIntosh and Morse (2015) posited that asking semistructured interview questions allows for discussion and the use of follow-up questions. To ensure consistency during the interviews, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) that included semistructured interview questions; follow-up, probing questions; and scripting prior, during, and after the scheduled interviews. The utilization of an interview protocol helped standardize the process to ensure consistency, reliability, and validity of the interview questions (see Schwab & Syed, 2015; Venkatesh et al., 2016.

Reliability and validity can be achieved utilizing an expert panel and member checking. I used member checking to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and to reduce the chances researcher bias reactivity. Trustworthiness in qualitative research is rooted in data adequacy, making it possible to show consistent support for one's analysis across participants. The validity is related to data appropriateness, making it possible to provide an accurate account of participants' experiences within and beyond the immediate context (Spiers et al., 2018). A reliable interview protocol is crucial to obtaining valuable qualitative data (Yeong et al., 2018). Ensuring the reliability and validity of data is vital in qualitative research.

To improve the reliability and validity of my interview protocol, I used my doctoral chair committee as my expert panel before IRB approval to evaluate my interview protocol. Yeong et al. (2018) indicated that expert panels help enhance the predictability and credibility of an interview protocol. Member checking was used to ensure accurate and reliable data was collected during the interview process. I provided each participant with my interpretation of their interview responses following each interview, allowing participants to evaluate my interpretation, identify any areas for corrections, suggest changes, and provide additional insights.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique included data from semistructured interviews, and documents. The documents were an interoffice template with pertinent information for the drivers. The pertinent information included pick up location, desired pick update and time, pick up contact name and phone number, description of items being picked up, dimensions and weight, final delivery location, and any special instructions. The combined agreement contract for the moving services and freight billing, was a contract that provided pick up location, delivery location, description of articles being moved, materials being used and the charges per box, consumer protections and/or waivers, issuance of agreement for moving services, and hourly rate. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) for three participants to guide the interview process. Yin (2018) stated that researchers collect data from the study participants to understand a phenomenon. Researchers conducting interviews are among the most common data collection tools used in qualitative studies (Wilson et al., 2016). Researchers can conduct interviews in

person or by phone.

Because of Covid-19, the interviews were done via phone calls and online via Zoom. I contacted my doctoral committee to act as an expert panel to review my interview protocol. I began the data collection by sending an invitation email to the participants identified through purposive sampling. The email included a brief introductory message and invitation to participate and instructions to review the attached informed consent, which included the (a) purpose of the research, (b) eligibility selection criteria, (c) interview questions, (d) potential audience of the study results, and (e) the participants' rights if participating in the study. The email had a password-protected Zoom teleconference link stating that each interview would last between 30 to 45 minutes. I conducted semistructured interviews, one via zoom and two phone calls with three SMCBOs in Southern California to answer the overarching research question. Participants are more at ease when they can review interview questions beforehand and appropriately respond (Morse, 2015). I asked each participant the same set of questions in the same order. I informed each participant that I would take written notes and ask them if they were ok with me using a mini voice recording device as an alternative. In the end 12 participants did not have the time and were not interested.

I used methodological triangulation and member checking to ensure the trustworthiness, credibility, reliability of the collected data. Members checking is a technique to better the validity of qualitative data by lowering the likeness of participants, responder, and reaction bias (Candela, 2019). I did not conduct a pilot study for this research because of the small size and limited participant pool. Boddy (2016) and Yin

(2018) defined small sample sizes as small as three to six participants used in qualitative studies are best where exploratory or case-based research is conducted. I provided each participant a transcript of my interpretation of their responses to ensure accuracy and conducted follow-up interviews to confirm my interpretation and make any needed modifications.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using semistructured interviews in qualitative research. Iyamu (2018) found that semistructured interviews keep researchers focused on the research topic. Semistructured interviews enabled researchers to learn how individuals and groups act or respond to different circumstances in their environments (Tsang, 2014). Katz (2015) suggested that interactions between a researcher and participants substantially improve explanations of the studied phenomena. The semistructured interviews are flexible and allow extended interaction and various responses, reducing bias risk (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As the primary data collection instrument, I clarified questions when needed, and participants were able to provide detailed responses.

There are challenges with gathering qualitative data using the semistructured interview technique. Cleary et al. (2014) argued that qualitative studies rely on interactive interview-based, spoken language, clarity, and explicatory in gathering in-depth data. The data collection techniques chosen could have influenced the result by: (a) changing the sequence of interview questions asked by leading the interview's direction or conclusion, and (b) the researcher must clarify the interpretation of the responses to ensure correct understanding (Grossoehme, 2014). I asked the questions in the same sequence for each

participant to not lead the interview's direction or conclusion.

Data Organization Technique

Qualitative researchers must realize that organization and tracking the data is critical to the credibility of the qualitative research. The researcher's responsibility is to store data accurately and securely throughout the data collection process. Data organization techniques can include data storage, data cleaning, and categorization (Chiarini & Brunetti, 2019; Soares et al., 2015). I used a combination of techniques to organize and manage the collected data. I used a field journal to capture (a) information describing each participant, such as P1 for the first participant, P2, etc.; (b) my views of the details of the interview; and (c) any reservations I had regarding the interview, or the data collected. Using a database significantly increases the reliability of the case study (Yin, 2018). I used NVivo 12 an automated qualitative data analysis program (CAQDAS). Nvivo 12 is effective for document and database management because it enables the creation of linkages that simplify data manipulation and make it easier to reshape and reorganize coding and node structure (Min et al., 2017; Zamawe, 2015).

After 5 years from my study's completion date, to satisfy Walden University's requirement, I will destroy raw data collected through shredding. I will use a reputable company's services to destroy physical copies of signed consent forms, audio recordings of interviews, and any documents of evidence received. If required, I will provide a certificate of destruction to participants.

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to analyze the data from semistructured interviews. Data

analysis is critical to qualitative research. Yin (2018) indicated that researchers use

multiple steps to understand a phenomenon in depth. Thematic analysis is a process for

identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The

foundation for thematic analysis is data analysis in a qualitative research study.

Researchers use it to organize, recognize, evaluate, and describe themes identified in a

data set (Nowell et al., 2017).

There are six phases associated with thematic analysis. I used the six-phase

analysis technique noted by Maguire and Delahunt (2017) to analyze the data. The

thematic analysis consists of these six steps: (a) become familiar with the data, (b)

generate initial codes, (c) search for themes, (d) review themes, (e) define themes, and (f)

write up, which is a practical framework for conducting this kind of analysis. Below are

the six steps of the data analysis process.

1. I became familiar with the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) declared that

    researchers read and re-reading the transcripts. I first engaged myself by

    transcribing each participant's interactions, reading and re-reading transcripts,

    and listening to the recording. Additionally, I gained a comprehensive

    understanding by taking notes of the data collected during the interview and

    the repeated reading of the data helped aid in formal coding process.

2. I developed initial codes from the data. I used the research question,

    conceptual framework, and transcripts and organized the data in a meaningful

    and systematic way. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), this step is

    when I developed and initiated codes while working through transcripts of the

data collected. Bhalla et al. (2021) declared that researchers could use NVivo software to assist with coding and labeling large amounts of data. I used window NVivo 12 computer software to organize the data interpreted data. I created initial codes by doing the following: (a) I developed initial codes from the research question, literature review, and conceptual framework, and (b) I looked for repetitive terms and meanings in the data using the NVivo 12 software.

3. I searched for emerging themes. I reviewed initial codes and grouped them into themes according to similarities. Themes are a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and research question (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Researchers should organize codes into broader themes related to the specific research question (De Klerk & Pretorius, 2019). I arranged the coded data into main themes and subthemes.

4. I reviewed the themes and generated a thematic map. I checked compositions based on the research question. Some themes were not used due to a lack of data to support the theme (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher should conduct a final re-read of data into broader themes related to the specific research question (De Klerk & Pretorius, 2019). I arranged the themes into main and subthemes.

5. I defined and named themes. I defined and labeled each theme during this phase. Braun and Clarke (2019) stated that a researcher should possess the ability to define what is unique and specific about each theme. I reviewed the

themes to identify each theme's essence and the relationship between the main and subthemes to determine which one related to my research question.

6. I produced the report of the findings of data analysis. After completing all themes and conducting conclusive research (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). I wrote a detailed description of a clear, reasonable, nonrepetitive, and noteworthy account of all the data within and across the themes (Nowell et al., 2017). I organized the data into main themes generated from the reviewed academic literature and conceptual framework to improve the data credibility by showing alignment.

To strengthen the data analysis process, I used methodological triangulation for the company documents received from participants voluntarily. Methodological triangulation is a strategy researchers use to confirm the participants statements with a study (Renz et al., 2018). Joslin and Muller (2016) noted that methodological triangulation could occur when researchers combine two or more data sources to understand the phenomenon in greater depth. Joslin and Muller identified four kinds of triangulation: (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) methodological triangulation, and (d) theory triangulation. Methodological triangulation is the most used type of triangulation (Joslin & Muller, 2016). I used methodological triangulation to strengthen the validity of my study. I used semistructured interviews and reviewed company documents to attain methodological triangulation.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are fundamental concepts that establish the rigor and

accuracy of the data. Research must have truth, applicability, consistency, and neutrality (Amankwaa, 2016). Trustworthiness includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Connelly, 2016; Stahl & King, 2020). To strengthen the accuracy and quality of the researcher, a researcher must have reliability and validity (Yin, 2018). Monitoring and reporting procedures completely and truthfully can also ensure reliability (Applebaum, 2012; Jackson et al., 2018). Trustworthiness is a critical component of the research process.

Reliability

A quality indicator of reliability is dependability. Reliability in a qualitative study refers to dependability and the repeatability of research procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018). Additionally, a researcher ensures reliability by developing a logical, traceable, and documented process. I was the data collection instrument, maintaining a field journal providing detailed records of the research collection methods, data collection methods, and the data analysis to ensure the findings' quality. Fritz and Vandermause (2018) noted that documented procedures bring reliability to the study. I worked with my doctoral chair committee to evaluate and ensure my data collection instrument is reliable for collecting the data it intends to gather. Yin (2018) described a researcher as the primary data collection instrument because they observe, interpret, and record the data. The data sources were the interview protocol and company documents. The interview questions were the same for all participants to provide a consistent research process (Giorgi, 2009). Implementing interview protocols, member checking, and methodological triangulation were strategies used to support reliability.

Validity

Validation of the researcher interpretations is critical. Validity addresses whether the data collected accurately reflects the researched phenomena (Jordan, 2018). Cypress (2017) noted that rigor in qualitative research is the quality or state of being precise, thorough, and accurate. Credibility, transferability, and confirmability are quality validity indicators (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I achieved validity by using these indicators and bringing rigor to the study's conclusions.

Credibility

Credibility is the accuracy of a researcher's interpretation of the participant's views. Korstjens and Moser (2018) noted that credibility establishes whether the findings represent the information collected from the participant's original data. Maintaining the same interview protocol throughout the study provides consistency and credibility (Fusch et al., 2018). I used a field journal to keep notes for reflection. I used member checking to establish the credibility by allowing the participants to review my interpretations via email. I asked the participants to provide comments and feedback regarding my interpretation of the interview. I used member checking, field journal, and methodological triangulation to ensure the credibility of my study.

Transferability

Transferability is sharing knowledge. To ensure transferability, I provided detailed descriptions of the research responses, participants, research process, analysis, and results. Transferability relates to the findings' ability to be transferred to another context or setting (Maher et al., 2018). A qualitative study has met this criterion if the

results have meaning to individuals not involved in the study, and readers can associate

the results with their own experiences (Cope, 2014). Transferability occurs by providing

a thick description that can enable researchers to consider if a transfer to another context

is possible (Xerri, 2018). I ensured transferability by translating thick and rich

descriptions of the study's finding, research design, participants, data sources, coding of

the themes, and analysis.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the process where results can be confirmed or supported by

others. Moreover, confirmability is an indication that data and interpretations of the

findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination and getting as close to objective

reality as qualitative research can get (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Tobin & Begley, 2004).

There must be some objective reality to subject one's research to auditing. Amankwaa

(2016) suggested confirmability includes an audit, audit trail, triangulation, and

reflexivity. An audit trail is a transparent description of a researchers' research process to

writing the final report. To ensure credibility and accurate interpretations, I used an audit

trail, research design, data collection and analysis, data sources, and the findings.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is key to ensuring the validity of qualitative research. Data

saturation is when data begins to repeat what has been collected (Saunders et al., 2018).

Guest et al. (2020) noted that data saturation might be attained by as little as six

interviews depending on the population's sample size. Gentles et al. (2015) discussed a

sample size of four to 10 to be appropriate, while Gutterman (2015) noted that as few as

four were relevant. While there was no universal approach to achieving data saturation, researchers agree that no new data, no new themes, no new coding, and the ability to replicate the study are common principles of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Lowe et al., 2018). Data saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged.

Transition and Summary

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the effective empowerment strategies small moving company owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years and explain my role as a qualitative researcher. Section 2 included a detailed description of the data collection and data analysis. I discussed sample size and sampling technique and described the interview protocol. I discussed the collecting, managing, storing, and interviewing criteria to ensure alignment with the research question and purpose statement. I discussed member checking to ensure accurate and reliable data were collected during the interview and my role to assure the ethical protection of participants during and after the study. Section 3 I explain the semistructured interviews' findings, including the analysis, discussion of my research findings, detailed discussion on the applicability of the findings to small business owners, the implication for social change, the recommendation for future action, and future research in the areas of leadership and empowerment strategies.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the effective employee empowerment strategies SMCBOs use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Imran et al. (2016) agreed that business owners who use TL as a management style successfully motivate and empower employees, improve business performance, and contribute to business sustainability. Bonau (2017) concluded that transformational leaders create an environment of commitment and motivation. The participants indicated that they inspire, stimulate, and motivate their followers through a shared vision that raises their employees to desire to do better than average. I conducted Zoom and telephone interviews with three small moving company owners with experience and knowledge related to successfully sustaining their businesses beyond 5 years. Additional data came from reviewing company documents provided by participants included a communication template and a combined agreement contract for the moving services and freight billing. The communication template was an interoffice template with pertinent information for the drivers. The form included fields for pick up location, desired pick update and time, pick-up contact name and phone number, description of items being picked up, dimensions and weight, final delivery location, and any special instructions. The combined agreement contract for the moving services and freight billing was a contract. The fields included the pick-up location, delivery location, description of articles being moved, materials being used and the charges per box, consumer protections and waivers, issuance of the

agreement for moving services, and hourly rate. These documents confirmed the SMCBOs' strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

I used a multiple case study design and thematic analysis to analyze participants' feedback, insights, and experiences to determine themes and codes. Data analysis produced the following three themes: (a) leadership styles, (b) management of the business environment, and (c) business owners' knowledge. Section 3 includes a presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, the implications for social change, and my recommendations for action. I conclude Section 3 with my recommendations for further research and personal reflections on my experience with conducting the study.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What effective employee empowerment strategies do SMCBOs use to sustain business beyond 5 years? I conducted semistructured interviews via Zoom and the phone with three SMCBOs in Southern California to answer the overarching research question. To protect each participant's identity, I assigned codes instead of names. The codes for the participants were P1, P2, and P3. The participants provided their strategies, insights, and experiences in response to open-ended questions and explained how they implemented various strategies to sustain the business beyond 5 years. I used Braun and Clark's (2006) six phases of analysis to analyze the data into themes and patterns. NVivo 12 software helped to automate and organize the collected data. After coding and conducting triangulation during the data analysis process, three themes emerged: (a) leadership

styles, (b) business environment, and (c) business owners' knowledge. All three participants discussed and provided insights related to the three themes. I also reviewed company documents received from participants: a communication template and combined agreement contract for moving services and freight billing. The documents confirmed their strategies of business knowledge and management through effective leadership.

Theme 1: Leadership Styles

The first theme that emerged during data analysis was the different leadership styles these owners used and did not realize. Leadership styles play a critical role in small business owners' ability to empower their employees and sustain their businesses. Thompson et al. (2021) noted that more than 3 decades have passed since Bass (1985) first acknowledged TL. Leadership is a process, although some scholars have indicated that people are born with individual qualities that could help determine which style they use (Bass, 1985). After analyzing the data collected, I identified two subthemes related to leadership styles which are (a) TL leadership and (b) a combination of leadership styles: charisma leadership, servant leadership, and adaptive leadership. Owners acknowledged the significance of adaptation to change to sustain their businesses. Employees view owners as inspiring when they use encouraging language to communicate and, in some cases, hands-on in the "daily grind." The literature review supports the emerging themes and subthemes.

Transformational Leadership

TL is the contrast to transactional leadership, which is strongly associated with top-down power and is a conventional concept for leaders and not enough for organizations that want positive change (Passakonjaras & Hartijasti, 2019). However, TL is a style of leadership that involves a change (Money, 2017). P1 referenced the work ethic difference in previous years compared to current employees. Additionally, P1 acknowledged, "This business is evolving; now, we must be more consistent, organized, and communicate what needs to be done." P3 shared the same sentiments and emphasized that "We all have had to make changes to stay competitive." P2 said, "This industry is not like it used to be years ago when you had a few good local moving companies, and people talked about you to friends and family for jobs." P2 noted that the consequences for missing work were stricter in previous years than in current work environments. P2 was still being challenged with the transactional leadership state of mind. Transformational leaders create valuable and positive change in employees. Farahnak et al. (2020) stated that transformational leaders impact organizational outcomes by influencing employees' behaviors, commitment, and engagement resulting in increased performance. Knowing what it takes to change and adjust to the changes is critical in the small business industry.

The TL themes supports Atwijuka and Caldwell's findings (2017) in concurrence with those of Hunt (2017) who declared that transformational leaders build relationships and earn employees' commitment to create organizations that perform efficiently and effectively to compete against their competitors successfully. Choi et al. (2016), in

agreement with Burns (1978), found a significant relationship between TL and employee empowerment. A transformational leader can positively change the organization and its employees. TL, in various ways, is the contrast to transactional leadership. Some scholars have criticized transactional leadership theory because its focus is generally a one-size-fits-all, universal leadership approach, and it disregards situational and contextual factors relating to organizational challenges (Ghani et al., 2018; McCleskey, 2014). TL is one of the most dominant and debated leadership theories. As previously stated, transactional leadership is typical and based on a conventional exchange relationship in which followers' compliance is exchanged for expected rewards (Passakonjaras & Hartijasti, 2019). In contrast, TL is based on an extraordinary leader raising followers' consciousness levels, providing coaching, mentoring, and achieving positive outcomes. Transformational leaders who inspire their followers use strategies to improve employees' motivation and empowerment.

Combination of Leadership Styles

All participants noted that they had to make changes in their leadership styles. The moving industry has changed, and they had to change to maintain a competitive advantage. A leadership style is a manner and approach to direct and guide employees, implement plans, and motivate and influence people (Al Khajeh, 2018). The first concentrated study of leadership styles was conducted in 1939 by Lewin (Al Khajeh, 2018). P1 evaluated operations year over year by reflecting on "how we see ourselves as the owners/leaders versus how others see us, as it does not match the direction of our goals and vision." P2 has 21 years as an SMBCO, saying "I have had to change my way

of telling to asking and realizing that listening to the needs of my employees benefits my

business." P2 endorsed the value of innovation to reduce time and cost. P3 stated,

> I make sure that I find time to let our employees know when they are doing the
>
> right thing, praising them in front of peers for motivation, and giving them
>
> recognition when recognition is due. I make them interested in what they do and
>
> make a good team.

Several leadership styles produce results. Transformational leaders empower

followers to develop new and unique ways to challenge the status quo and alter the

organization to ensure success (Nielsen et al., 2019). The participants' articulation of how

they have been addressing the changes in the moving industry and within their businesses

emphasized how various leadership styles are being used as strategies. These owners

were not aware of the academic terminology. Shao et al. (2016) concurred with Fiol et al.

(1999) that there are similarities between the theories of charismatic leadership and TL.

According to Shao et al., charismatic leadership is the most critical influence on

individual behaviors. P3 stated,

> I talk with all my employees to create a friendly environment where, you know, it
>
> does not necessarily have to feel like work. It has a feeling more like everyone has
>
> a good relationship with one another and good team.

Charisma leadership is a common and shared vision toward the future and is initially

labeled as idealized influence (Shao et al., 2016).

Servant leaders begin with the natural feeling of serving first. Jeyaraj and

Gandolfi (2019) indicated that servant leadership engages followers in relational, ethical,

emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Eva et al. (2019) concluded that servant leadership empowers followers to reach their full potential. P1 shared,

> whenever we start on new jobs, we go over with each driver/worker their roles and expectations. We keep it fresh. Some of our drivers we call "flex drivers" so they are not just drivers, they are willing and able to do a lot more.

The owners who implement a servant leadership strategy motivate employees and increase job satisfaction and empowerment.

Transformational leader understands that they must adapt to change. Adaptive leadership is about how leaders encourage people to adapt to face and deal with problems and challenges as well as to change and grow (Jefferies, 2017). Generally, adaptive leadership is about changing and adjusting to new circumstances (Northouse as cited in Jefferies, 2017). P3 shared, "It is a process everyone must adapt to, you know, how the business is changing. With COVID and all that. We just must adapt." P1 discussed,

> we look at do we have the right number of staff, drivers, and workers because we are getting bigger. Lastly, I think this is the basic things of what we have and are doing; being curious, talking with our employees, and being open for feedback is how we will make another 5 years.

This exchange shows the change in owners and is a strategy to continue empowering the employees.

The use of leadership styles as strategies has evolved. Combining various leadership strategies supports Hamilton (2020) who inferred that leaders, both local and worldwide, are in a dilemma incorporating such an enormous change for immediate

effect, having employees, leaders, and owners working with one another more than before and holding shared accountability to success. Charismatic, servant, and adaptive strategies reoccurred in better than half of the responses among the participants. These strategies support Bass's (1985) idea that leaders exhibit behaviors that support and empower employees to increase performance for sustainability. When leaders change, the organization can accomplish more.

Theme 2: Management of the Business Environment

The second theme that emerged during data analysis was business environment management. After analyzing the semistructured interview data, I identified one subtheme related to the management of the business environment: talent. The participants' responses to Interview Questions 3 and 5 posed challenges and additional hiring strategies to recruit talent.

Talent

Each participant was challenged in hiring skilled employees over the past 2 years. According to Mazzei et al. (2016), selective hiring practices focus on the potential employee's ability at the time of hiring. P1 shared, "There is no sense of having all the process and visions, if you do not have the talent to back it." P2 asserted frustration related to the current environment of lack of employees, stating, "You must have the right people; hiring is a mess right now because of this COVID-19." The lack of employees and the impact of COVID-19 have obstructed business for each participant.

P3 implemented a unique hiring technique by integrating other team members in the interviewing process before making a final decision. The new process empowered P3

and staff to hire a diverse team and change hiring and recruiting strategies. As Mazzei et al. (2016) noted, greater autonomy among the team drives success. The document shared from P1 supported the discussion of implementing strategies to enhance the business environment by investing in skilled employees and their overall development, enhancing the business's success.

The subtheme of talent supports Malik et al. (2017) who found that transformational leaders are an example of a leader who can inspire and motivate employees by ensuring they have a clear vision of their goals and the required skills to perform at higher levels. Transformational leaders who inspire their followers use strategies to improve employees' motivation and empowerment. Attracting and retaining skilled people is a recognized determinant of business competitiveness and success (Mazzei et al., 2016). Additionally, Sungu et al. (2019) noted that TL takes an interest in followers' psychological needs, providing personalized career growth support above the contractual leadership style (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders whom followers perceive as kind, respectful, and dignified can expect followers to respond with behaviors aligned with the leader's goal, such as working harder to enhance personal performance for sustainability. The findings of Theme 2 also appear to address the research question.

Theme 3: Owners' Knowledge

The third theme that emerged during data analysis was the years of knowledge these businesses owners had and how they each used it for their success. Data analysis revealed two subthemes to Theme 3: experience and personal change. The participants

discussed their personal experiences and how they had to change to stay competitive and continue sustainability.

Personal Experiences

Business owners' family and work both have their demands and balancing them is challenging. P1 was the youngest of the three SMBCOs. P1 discussed the path leading to being an SMBCO, saying that "The knowledge and experience I gained from the prior years with those companies were second to none." The participant reflected on the values of mentors and leaders as learned experiences. P1 stated, "I recall the feelings I felt when bosses would belittle you to do jobs because it was the way of doing business years ago." Previous leaders of P1 created a poor culture and, as a result, P1 leveraged those experiences to enhance their current workplace environment.

P2 has been an SMBCO for 21 years. While business practices have evolved, employee retention was not an issue. The capability to communicate as the business expanded service areas contributed to an increase in performance. As the COVID-19 pandemic impacted every industry, P2 was not any different and they confronted employee retention challenges. P3 had similar experiences as P2 with great employees and effective teamwork. P3 stated, "You know, it does not necessarily have to feel like work. It must feel more like everyone has a good relationship and good team." While the experiences shared varied by participant, each used a leadership style that increased performance.

The personal experience subtheme supports Tyssen et al. (2014) who argued that TL shapes employee commitment. The TL style has been noted to increase harmony in

the workplace due to its emphasis on cooperation and teamwork (Afsar et al., 2017). Based on responses to follow-up questions and Interview Question 5 regarding additional information you would like to share, each participant spoke of their personal experiences over the years. Interestingly, two of the three participants welcomed change and recalled their times of being employees before becoming owners. The third participant was still somewhat in denial about how the industry has changed and has challenges with making some of the changes, mainly involving computer technology. Zizek et al. (2017) claimed that transformational leaders positively impact employees and organizations; therefore, transformational leaders use the strategy of encouraging and inspiring their followers to improve employees' motivation and empowerment.

Personal Change

Leadership is an essential component of any business, and change is inevitable and challenges leaders and employees to grow. Caulfield and Senger (2017) noted that influential leaders enable followers to understand the reason for the change and see its personal and organizational benefits. P1 shared the significance of cross-department training as the participant implemented a template to be more functional. P1 said, "I implemented a template with all the pertinent information that we need to be functional and gain the success we wanted." The process resulted in cost savings and time reduction. P2's lack of acceptance resulted in dependency on other team members' innovation. P2 expressed, "we still use the original combined agreement for moving service and freight billing. Business partners helped me see the opportunities to strengthen the business by

aligning the operations with new and improved strategies and enrolling in a computer class."

P3 fostered a positive culture resulting in "Handle challenges' just like everyone does. I will say by making sure the good people stay, while the bad guys are not interested in making the team, they are pretty much gone by now."

Each participant acknowledged the requirement of adaptation for operational sustainability. P3 asserted, "If you have a good relationship with your workers, the rest becomes more accessible." Schermerhorn and Bachrach (2015) supported the idea that leaders can alter their leadership style to fit the follower's needs. Paladan (2015) stated that the TL theory is the most well-known leadership theory scholars use to explore strategies and bring positive organizational change. When individuals change, the organization can accomplish more.

The alignment of personal change supports Tobias's (2015) findings that recommended that a leader must articulate what changes are necessary for behavioral change to work. The leader must personally and authentically state the need for change while modeling the desired behavior. Knowing what it takes to change and adapting to change is essential in the small business industry. Therefore, the participant's responses and documentation templates support the transformational leadership theory, the conceptual framework for this study.

Applications to Professional Practice

I explored empowerment strategies and knowledge that small company owners use to sustain business operations beyond 5 years. The research findings include three

significant themes and five subthemes. The applicability of the findings from this study may positively influence small moving company owners seeking empowerment strategies that enable small business success. Owners in the moving industry could benefit from (a) leadership styles, (b) management of the business environment, and (c) business owners' knowledge.

The owners in the study supplied examples of leadership and empowerment strategies. The practical application of the research findings may encourage small moving company business owners to consider the value and benefits of TL and the combination of different leadership styles. Herlina et al. (2019) noted that successful small business owners recognize the need to enhance their knowledge and adapt to change. Communication between the transformational leader and employees is vital in creating trust and loyalty. With further research on the small moving company businesses, these could be needed qualities to sustain the business beyond 5 years.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change may be accomplished by providing a list of leadership strategies that can be applied to empower and provide opportunities to improve the human and social conditions within the local communities. Social change aims to benefit society more than organizations (Lumpkin et al., 2018). The research findings could help small business owners develop employees and contractors into appreciated citizens of their communities. Identifying and potentially providing a list of leadership strategies could enable small business survival sustainability and benefits

employees and families while providing longevity, local employment, and stable incomes that can catalyze local economic growth.

Recommendations for Action

This qualitative multiple case study aimed to explore the effective empowerment strategies small moving company owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The research findings include three significant themes and five subthemes. The participants provided valuable insights into their own experiences with prior bosses, leadership, employee empowerment, communication, and growth. The recommendations for action include small business owners implementing TL and combining different leadership styles. The recommendations are consistent with Imran et al.'s (2016) concepts of TL style for business owners successfully motivating employees, empowering employees, helping improve business performance, and contributing to business sustainability.

Furthermore, small business owners are responsible for a positive work environment and all management activities (William & Aaron, 2018). Finally, I would recommend that the small business owners attend leadership seminars annually to become knowledgeable about leadership styles and the terminology and understand which leadership styles or combination can enhance their communication skills and continue to help sustain the business success. The findings of my study could help persuade new, existing, and those thinking about becoming business owners to act for personal development.

After completing the study, each participant will receive a one-to-two-page summary of findings to support them as leaders. In addition, I plan to attend the National Society of Leadership Success conference to complete my final step, which executive leadership and share my study with classmates and colleagues. This study will be published in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database for future use and review.

Recommendations for Further Research

This qualitative multiple case study aimed to explore the effective empowerment strategies small moving company owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The findings indicated the leadership strategies essential to succeed within a small business environment. The main limitation of this study was the geographic location and sample size. The study of one geographic area and a small sample size allows researchers to identify and recommend future research topics (Greener, 2018). This research study included three small moving company owners in Southern California. Future research should include a more significant geographic location, increased sample size, diverse industries, and a different conceptual framework and methodology.

There is extensive research on leadership. However, there is little research regarding small moving company owners' leadership strategies for empowering their employees. A future study could focus on the impact of leadership styles among small business owners within the moving industry. Researchers can use quantitative or mixed-method research to identify strategies that advance small business success and sustainability beyond 5 years.

Reflections

The Doctor of Business Administration program at Walden University has been the most challenging experience as an adult. The journey has been overwhelming, frustrating, and stressful. I recall being in one of my residencies, and the professor stated, "life will get in the way on this journey; how will your response?" I was confident in staying the course, but life happened. The loss of my mother, the birth of my grandchild, relocating, my wife's illness was "life experiences" that I endured during my educational career. With unwavering support from family and friends, I was determined to finish. My chair, Dr. Dooley, support has contributed tremendously, coupled with my classmates. We are a family/team.

I began this doctoral program to represent my family proudly. The experience has challenged me beyond measures and enabled me to grow professionally and personally. While I was confident that the path would be leisurely because of my experience in the field, it was the opposite. My doctoral study has enabled me to solve for challenges of SMBCOs and the significance of analysis.

Conclusion

Some SMBCOs lack strategies to effectively operate a business beyond 5 years. This qualitative multiple case study aimed to explore strategies that small moving company owners use to sustain business beyond 5 years. The processes used in the data collection included semiconstructed questions, triangulated data, member checking, direct observations using video conferencing, and field journaling. In addition, I incorporated methodological triangulation for validation of the three main themes and

subthemes. The conceptual framework for this study was based on the TL theory by Burns (1978). The conclusions of this study offer insight into multiple strategies that SMBCOs employ to sustain operations. Three main themes and subthemes emerged: (a) leadership styles, (b) management of the business environment, and (c) business owners' knowledge. SMBCOs should evaluate their leadership style to empower employees to contribute to operational sustainment.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol for Small Business Moving Owners

Research Question: What are the empowerment strategies that small moving company owners use to sustain business beyond five years?

I will contact my doctoral committee to act as an expert panel to review my interview protocol.

Upon receiving the Informed Consent Form by email or mail, I will email participants to obtain a convenient scheduled time for a Zoom interview.

Once received, I will email a meeting request for the agreed-upon time, include the zoom link, and ask the participants to find a private location to connect via zoom.

Contact participants by phone to confirm receipt of the email with the zoom link.

I will join the zoom meeting at least 15 minutes before the start of the interview.

Once connected with the participant, I will welcome and introduce myself and provide a brief recap:

Good morning/afternoon, Mr./Ms. XXX, thank you for taking the time to discuss this with me. The purpose of this study is to explore the empowerment strategies owners use to sustain their business beyond five years. Thank you for your participation. Your participation today should take no longer than 45-60 minutes. Please be reminded that I will be using a mini record for accuracy and ultimately capture your responses in addition to the Zoom recording. Thank you for reviewing and completing the informed consent form emailed to you on xxx date. Do you have your copy? Do you have any questions about the form? After today's interview, together, we will schedule a follow-up meeting to review my interpretation of your interview responses. This is to ensure that I accurately represent your experiences. During the follow-up interview, you will also be allowed to address any inaccuracies and include other necessary information. You are free to withdraw your participation from the interview if at any time you wish to do so. Before we begin, do you have any concerns about the process?

Interview Questions: I will ask the question and probing questions that develop or are needed to clarify the responses.

1) What strategies have you used to sustain this business beyond five years?
2) What strategy has given you the best results?
3) How did you overcome critical challenges in the implementation of these strategies?
4) How do you handle the current regulations and challenges to continue sustaining your business?

5) What additional information would you like to share about the strategies you used to sustain this business beyond five years?

Wrap-up Interview: thank you for your participation in this interview session.
All information obtained is confidential. Once I have transcribed our conversation, I will reach out to you via email to review the transcript for clarity, accuracy, and or confirmation of the information provided. Can we schedule our follow-up interview now? I will provide you with my transcript 48 hours in advance of our meeting for your review.