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Understanding Leadership in Small Business from the Perspectives of Practitioners

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Daniel Holloway

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Walden University
2013

Abstract

Understanding Leadership in Small Business from the Perspectives of Practitioners

by

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MBA, City University, 2001

BSBA, Saint Joseph's College, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2013

Abstract

Many small businesses fail after 5 years, having a negative impact on local and national economies. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore small-enterprise leader-operators' experiences regarding practices that aid sustainability beyond 5 years. Twenty small enterprise leaders in the United States Midwest who were identified as having 5 years of longevity in leading organizations with fewer than 500 employees were invited to participate. These participants shared their lived experiences through semistructured interviews conducted in-person and by telephone. The dynamic theory of leadership development was used to underpin the study. In the central research question for this study, the skills and practices needed by small-business practitioners to ensure success beyond 5 years were addressed. A reduction method was used to reduce data from 11 interview questions in 20 semistructured interviews into common themes. Seven themes emerged as long-term practices used by practitioners. These 7 practices included collaboration and forms of communication, mentoring, people skills, networking, investing in people, setting an example, and planning. The implications for positive social change include the potential to stabilize the economic wellbeing of the small business sector and therefore the community. Small business practitioners may benefit from this research by identifying and improving practices leading to long-term viability.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my mother, an immigrant, from Japan who pushed me to be better than the world I knew would allow. My father shares in the study as someone who moved me to do things right, was perhaps the wisest man I knew. Additionally, my children and grandchildren, whose patience and love allowed me to miss occasional memorable family events. Finally, my wife whose patience and long-suffering allowed me to pursue my dreams, and whose deep love keeps me firmly grounded in reality.

I cannot say enough to the people who inspired me to improve, not least among them the Walden faculty and dissertation committee who pushed me to do my best. The Walden process of continuous improvement kept me aligned with both my heritage and my goals. When I started this endeavor, it was clear; I was standing on the shoulders of others. It is humbling to participate with people having the same goal of understanding and improvement.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

There is a need for a better understanding of leadership in the area of small business to reduce failure rates and promote sustainable success in that sector of business (Teng, Bhatia, & Anwar, 2011). Information and appropriately applied knowledge from the experiences of successful practitioners might help alleviate problems in business (Atamian & VanZante, 2010). A gap between educators and practitioners in the transference of knowledge appropriate to businesses have caused failures and drawn criticism in leadership development (Isomura, 2010). Datar, Garvin, and Cullen (2011) identified small businesses as a resource neglected in terms of research. Lewis and Cassells (2010) noted that there is little commitment to sustainability in the small business sector because of limited resources and a lack of usable information to reconcile corporate social responsible actions to their daily operational routines. These routines include broader stakeholder input in financial position, environmental impact, and personnel decisions within the organization.

The small business sector influences both the environment and economics of the United States (Small Business Report, 2010). It is essential to reach this segment with information on best practices. Small business leaders are multifunctional, often restricted by daily operational demands, yet are encouraged to facilitate sustainability. How the leader resolves these issues might be the difference between operational success and failure (Atamian & VanZante, 2010). Leadership in small businesses needs information appropriate for their business operations. Universities, community colleges, and business

forums must find the most effective means of imparting practices that will drive sustainability to leaders of small businesses (Djordjevic & Cotton, 2011).

Small business leadership is a phenomena needing further understanding from practitioners. Teng et al. (2011) suggested that small businesses could succeed through additional leadership information and the adoption of suitable small business policies by the government. A better understanding of leadership based on the experiences of practitioners should have relevance for the small business operator while bridging the gap between academia and industry.

Background of the Problem

The way small business managers identify and use leadership information might prove to be the key to success or failure (D'Amato & Roome, 2009). Barnard noted problems in understanding the thought processes of business practitioners as early as 1937 (as cited in Isomura, 2010). Isomura (2010) noted that, while academia provided a platform for theory, there is a need to use practitioner-based knowledge to further the leadership training process. This transference of knowledge gap between educators and practitioners has caused failures in the practice field and has drawn criticism from leadership development researchers (Isomura, 2010).

A gap exists between academic teaching and field practice. Mintzberg and Fayol claimed that there is a gap between academics and practitioners (as cited in Pryor & Taneja, 2010). Fayol based his theories on his career as a practitioner, whereas Mintzberg's theories originated from his studies as an academic (as cited in Pryor & Taneja, 2010). Both Fayol and Mintzberg contributed to the knowledge base of business

practitioners (as cited in Pryor & Taneja, 2010). Exploration of the lived experiences of successful practitioners in small enterprise leadership might lead to a better understanding of leadership, reduce small business failures, and positively affect social change.

Small business leaders need an array of skills and knowledge not often found in an individual (Atamian & VanZante, 2010). New demands of society and the business field call for a complete transformation of traditional business structures, leadership, and methodologies that meet the demands of future generations (Hamel, 2009).

Organizational leaders and educators need to prepare future business practitioners to lead into the next generation (Isomura, 2010). Atamian and VanZante argued that learning for leadership is indispensable, and programs must be taught in ways relevant to everyday business practices to see a return on investment. Small businesses need information for leaders that encourage corporate global responsibility through vision, top management buy-in, and learning processes. Information from the research should add to the knowledgebase and bridge a gap in usable research for the small-business sector (Teng et al., 2011).

The faculty of many business schools emphasizes profit without attending to corporate social responsibility initiatives needed for sustainability (Blewitt, 2010). As leaders of small- and medium-sized enterprises explore new markets to further growth, they need tools to adapt to change (Goxe, 2010). These leaders and the enterprises they operate play a role in the economics of most industrialized nations and require knowledge and management information to keep up with the rapid globalization of society (Singh,

2011). Many companies do not benefit from leadership programs and need appropriate information to find effective methods to develop their leaders (Hotho & Dowling, 2010). There is a need for additional investment in human capital and information for creating better leadership for long-term success (Ling & Jaw, 2011).

Problem Statement

Small businesses are failing at high rates (Cader & Leatherman, 2011). In the United States, problems have surfaced in small businesses, with only 50% existing after 5 years (Small Business Report, 2010). Researchers have claimed that leadership deficiencies are the cause for failure (Isomura, 2010). Blewitt (2010) noted a lack of leadership skills in business, including basic skills, motivation, and sustainable knowledge among graduates. This lack of developed skill-sets affects leadership performance in organizations.

The general business problem is that leadership deficiencies, including those of ethics, have led to costly business failures (Plino, Young, & Lavery, 2010). Atamian and VanZante (2010) noted that for small businesses to prevail, they need practitioners with knowledge, skills, and education appropriate for their operations. The specific business problem is a limited understanding of leadership skills and operational practices appropriate for small business operators (Samujh, 2011) that will help ensure success beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand small-enterprise leader-operators and the skills or practices that allow sustainability beyond 5

years. I used semistructured interviews with recording devices and journal notes on a purposive sample of 20 small enterprise leaders, having a minimum of 5 years of leadership experience. The population under study was comprised of leaders of small businesses in the U.S. Midwest. Researchers for the Small Business Report (2010) defined these small enterprises as having less than 500 employees.

Small businesses have an economic impact in the United States (Small Business Report, 2010). Equally vital is the leadership that plays a role in the health of the local community (Eveleth, Chung, Eveleth, & O'Neill, 2011). The small enterprise leader, constrained by the daily decisions of management, needs practical solutions for successful operations (Atamian & VanZante, 2010). The study findings may serve academia and business managers by gaining new knowledge from practitioners and positively affecting the communities they serve.

Nature of the Study

I chose a qualitative research method for this study because it allowed the flow of data from interviews to explore the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Twenty small-enterprise managers participated in semistructured interviews to build common themes from their experiences as leaders of small organizations. A qualitative researcher may ask the initial question of phenomenon: why or how does this event happen? When an event occurs, hard data might not be available concerning it. Consequently, it is necessary to understand the initial relationship and the constructs that surrounded those events (Kainth & Verma, 2011).

A quantitative method does not allow access to the lived experiences of the participants and, therefore, was not appropriate for this study. Quantitative research is a means for testing theory by examining the relationship among variables (Chao-Chien, 2011). Quantitative research can be a resource for creating theory, but for an idea to develop for testing, certain base constructs need further understanding (Kainth & Verma, 2011). Quantitative measurements might be applicable later for further inquiry into the topic. Likewise, a mixed method approach because of the requirements of a quantitative component was not appropriate for this study as a better understanding and exploration of experiences concerning the phenomenon needs to occur.

The exploration of lived experiences in leadership is essential to develop a better understanding of how successful leaders function in small businesses. The phenomenological design was appropriate for understanding the leadership phenomena through interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews provided a richer understanding of small enterprise leadership through the thoughts and ideas of practicing leaders (Lasch et al., 2010). Through the lens of these leaders' experiences, a better understanding of leadership might have implications for the long-term success of small businesses. Leadership practices and characteristics from the 20 practitioner's experiences might have practical implications for smaller organizations and help bring about positive social change.

There was consideration for ethnographic and case study designs; neither was as suitable as the phenomenological design for this study. An ethnographic study is not appropriate for reaching several groups of small-business practitioners. In an

ethnographic study, a researcher delves into the daily lives, behaviors, and activities of a community or culture (Pritchard, 2011). The ethnographic design would not allow me access to a diverse set of practitioners. The case study design was not appropriate to study a social event. The case study design might not have allowed diverse inquiry into the phenomena of leadership development as applied to small-enterprise practitioners (Lasch et al., 2010).

Research Question

The experiences of successful small business practitioners form the central research question for this study. What skills and practices do small-business practitioners need to ensure success beyond 5 years? The following interview questions should develop a better understanding of small-business leadership practices.

1. What is your experience with leadership?
2. What situations have influenced your experiences with leadership and sustainable success?
3. What would be an effective method of delivering leadership knowledge to small businesses?
4. What skill-sets, both hard and soft help improve current and future small-business operators?
5. How is leadership developed in your organization, does it return value, and has it been a success?
6. How can educators and business-owners work together to communicate successful leadership practices?

7. How can business-owners and their local communities communicate needs and expectations for leaders?
8. What would be the best method to communicate a sustainable strategy (people, products, and planet) versus the short-term profit strategy to leaders of small organizations?
9. What role might government play to help initiate sustainable objectives for leaders of small businesses?
10. How does your organization reinforce positive leadership practices?
11. What additional information could you provide to improve leadership in small businesses?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework relating to this qualitative study included common themes from the literature review to understand leadership practices in small business. Mostovicz, Kakabadse, and Kakabadse (2009) presented the dynamic theory of leadership development based on the supposition that leadership is a developmental process founded on the choices a leader makes. Mostovicz et al. noted the importance of finding the right fit for a leader's worldviews and their organizational practices. Mostovicz et al. presented two schools of thought held by scholars regarding leadership traits: (a) born leaders as in the great man theory or (b) human beings develop traits of leadership through their life experiences and eventually emerge as leaders. Mostovicz et al. argued that leaders develop from past, present, and future life experiences. In the first stage, individuals develop self-awareness like the understanding of an individual's

emotions, strengths, and weaknesses. In the second, they engage in social encounters. In the third stage, they find their unique purpose in life. The practitioners participating in this study developed from experiences pertaining to leadership.

Leadership developed from lived experiences includes human characteristics derived from interaction with other people. Holt and Marques (2012) examined the developmental path of leadership and argued that certain interhuman skill sets developed over time. These interhuman skills were similar to the soft characteristics Hamel (2009) espoused. In these characteristics, Hamel encouraged leaders to become social architects, characterized by purpose and vision. Some of these leadership characteristics focus on appropriate fit for leaders in organizations (Claydon, 2011). Successful leaders who have experienced this developmental process might influence future practitioners and benefit society by reducing small-business failures.

It is important for small business leaders to understand both failings and skill-sets relating to sustainability. Researchers claimed (The Small Business Report, 2010) that smaller enterprises (defined as employing fewer than 500 workers) have a high attrition rate and only 50% are still in existence after 5 years. Small businesses need transformation from the traditional approach of profit, to businesses that meet the demands of future generations, with vision and purpose (Hamel, 2009). Small businesses require the tools, skill-sets, and characteristics to transform and embrace a sustainable future (Goxe, 2010). Organizational structures with resilience, adaptability to the environment, and responsiveness to social imperatives succeed through organizational leaders (Barrett, 2009). It might prepare small-business leaders better if decision

processes included an understanding of sustainable initiatives, corporate global responsibility, strategic vision, and management integrity. The soft skill characteristics espoused in the above discussion emerged as a part of the semistructured interviews. They might help practitioners understand the needs and actions appropriate for small-business leaders.

Many small companies do not benefit from leadership programs and their operators need better ways of gaining new knowledge tools (Hotho & Dowling, 2010). The long-term success of small businesses is dependent on investment in human capital and training for sustainability (Ling & Jaw, 2011). Appropriate training for small-business leadership is necessary, designed with flexibility, knowledge relevance, and an environment where participants can apply what they learn (Atamian & Van Zante, 2010).

Society needs the collective voice of experienced practitioners working together to help small-business operators understand leadership for their enterprises to succeed. The interviews with participants allowed for the exploration of their lived experiences and provided information regarding leadership that might be appropriate for small businesses. Common themes emerged from the research that might lead to a better understanding of leadership in small enterprises, further benefiting society by reducing small-business failures. Solutions developed by understanding patterns and common themes, from a better understanding of the problem as a whole (Mehrjerdi, 2011).

Definition of Terms

Corporate social responsibility: The financial, social, and environmental aspects of business operations integrated with stakeholders, local communities, government, and nongovernmental entities (Sawyer & Evans, 2010).

Small business: Businesses defined as less than 500 workers (Small Business Report, 2010).

Triple bottom line: Business operations defined as the financial, social, and environmental considerations for businesses (Gundlach & Zivnuska, 2010).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

I assumed that the participants presented their honest experiences and these experiences will be the basis for their understanding of leadership. I assumed that the participants fully understood the questions and related their experiences without personal bias. Allotted time for interviews was adequate and no interruptions occurred to disrupt the process. To corroborate accuracy in the extended interviews notes, I audio recorded the interviews for consistency. Additionally, participants were to remain objective and free of personal or political biases. I further assumed that the literature review would support my premise that small-business leaders needed a better understanding of successful practices from a practitioner's view. Finally, I assumed that the 20 interviews and 11 interview questions would lead to data that sufficiently answered the research question.

Limitations

The experiences of educators, small business practitioners, and leaders of small enterprises limited the study to these specific persons. Criteria for the interviews limited the practitioners to a minimum of 5 years of experience within their field of expertise. The requirement for 5 years of experience in their field of expertise excluded businesses that perform well in less time, or ones that have changed hands and failed after the transference of operations. A 5-year leadership requirement for participants meant that the participant should be able to consider business leadership in the context of sufficient experience. Additionally, the honest experiences of participants limited the study.

The research included interviews of 20 participants in a limited geographical area of the United States that included states in the U.S. Midwest. The sample from this restricted area might limit the applicability of generalizations drawn to other countries and cultures. The sample size and nature of the businesses might limit understanding in more specific industries. Similar to Lasch et al. (2010), I interpreted the interviews based on the participant's lived experiences with the phenomena of leadership.

Delimitations

The 20 participants had a minimum of 5 years of experience in their respective field of expertise assured their durability and success in the work environment. This requirement delimited the study as less experienced leader-practitioners failed to meet the stated requirements. The participants included small business leaders, organizational professionals, and educators. Larger businesses were outside the bounds of this study. I

conducted the 20 semistructured interviews in the U.S. Midwest, in the states of Michigan, Ohio, and Kentucky.

Potentially, the sample size and diverse nature of the businesses might limit the understanding of more specific industries. The semistructured interviews were face-to-face, and some by telephone as circumstances required. The participant's participation criteria required engagement in small-enterprise management and persons from larger companies were not participants. The participant's shared phenomenon is the exposure to leadership and their understanding of the leadership practices needed to effect long-term actions of small businesses.

Significance of the Study

Organizational stakeholders might better understand the practices of the small-business leader through the results of this study. Common themes emerged, allowing existing and future practitioners a better understanding of the requirements for leaders to operate a sustainable small business. The themes and concepts developed from the reported experiences of participants might reduce failures in the small business community.

The deficiencies of leadership caused business leaders to search for people who understand leadership responsibilities, including corporate social responsibility (Claydon, 2011; Eveleth et al., 2011). Small businesses could benefit by having a better understanding of the experience of practitioners as they search for leaders who understand sustainable practices. Educators might benefit as they create curricula to train small-business leaders for the future. Ultimately, society benefits as more leaders who

value sustainable initiatives in both business and society flow from a pool of participants who have met the expectations of their peers in education and small- and medium-sized businesses (Brown, 2011; Sowmya, & Majumda, 2010). Human resource professionals might benefit from the development of training programs geared to produce new kinds of business leaders sensitive to the future needs of a globalizing society. The Institute for Educational Leadership (2010) noted that individuals and businesses benefit through a community of collaboration and shared experiences. These shared experiences improve communication and understanding of small business leaders as they develop into practitioners.

Reduction of Gaps

Government policy makers and small business practitioners need information and collaboration to sustain success. Teng et al. (2011) noted gaps in small business research that might help small businesses succeed. Chances for success might improve in the future through additional information for leaders and the adoption of supportive small business policies by the government. Researchers have neglected small businesses in terms of research (Samujh, 2011). The leadership at universities, community colleges, and business forums must find the most effective means of imparting definitions, expectations, and behaviors about sustainability to leaders of small businesses (Djordjevic & Cotton, 2011). The gap between educators and practitioners in the transference of knowledge appropriate to businesses caused failures in practice and drawn criticism from researchers in leadership development (Isomura, 2010). A better

understanding of how leadership, from the experiences of successful practitioners, might help future leaders meet the demands of sustainability.

Implications for Social Change

Leadership deficiencies, like mistrust and unethical behavior, in organizations have led to failures costing society millions of dollars in investments, time, and trust (Plino et al., 2010). This mistrust has ushered in growing global support for corporate social responsibility (CSR) and for the triple bottom line (TBL) metric for sustainability, that is, economic, social, and environmental responsibilities for businesses (Sawyer & Evans, 2010). The demand for social responsibility for businesses and educators is growing, and society is asking these groups to incorporate social responsibility into their organizations (Claydon, 2011).

Small business practitioners have knowledge developed from experiences that might improve the transformation and longevity of other businesses. The failures of small businesses after 5 years have affected 65% of new job growth in the past 15 years (Small Business Report, 2010). In addition, leadership and management decisions in all enterprises, regardless of size, are facing new challenges and need to transform (Hamel, 2009). The transformation of leadership and businesses might benefit through the information gained from the experiences of successful practitioners. Leadership practices and training problems have also affected the relationship between educators and business practitioners (Pettijohn & Pettijohn, 2009). Blewitt (2011) noted that business school graduates are deficient, lack crucial skill-sets, and are unprepared for the demands of the

business climate. Business leaders are looking to employ people who understand CSR and its importance to communities and society (Claydon, 2011; Eveleth et al., 2011).

The failures of small businesses (Small Business Report, 2010) and its leadership is a phenomenon that might benefit from a better understanding of the experiences of successful practitioners. Leadership initiatives need further understanding to reduce the failures of small businesses. Results from this study might provide leaders of small businesses a better understanding of sustainable practices for these enterprises to become *living systems* that meet the expectations of society (Senge, 2008). A better understanding of why small enterprises fail to engage effective leadership practices might reduce the rate of failure and become a resource to teach sustainable practices to future leaders.

The purpose of this study was to explore practitioner-based leadership to gain a better level of understanding of leadership that reduces small-business failures and promotes positive social change. It is crucial to explore small business leadership from successful practitioners. The information gained from successful practitioners might lead to leadership practices appropriate for the small enterprise and add to their success rate. This research might serve as a beginning point for the study of knowledge transfer techniques, curriculum development, management training programs, and questions that might surface from the implementation of new training practices.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Many small companies do not benefit from leadership programs and their operators need better ways of gaining new knowledge tools (Hotho & Dowling, 2010).

The long-term success of small businesses is dependent on investment in human capital and training for sustainability (Ling & Jaw, 2011). Many professional groups that noted the importance of skills and relevant education have recognized the value of educational programs. There is a need for appropriate training for leadership for small business practitioners, designed with flexibility, knowledge relevance, and an environment where participants can apply what they learn (Atamian & Van Zante, 2010).

Society needs the collective voice of educators and practitioners working together to help small-business operators understand leadership for their enterprises to succeed. Mostovicz et al. (2009) introduced the developmental pathway, a process perhaps further understood through the lived experiences of successful practitioners. Information from these practitioners provided information regarding leadership that might be appropriate for small businesses. Common themes emerged from the interviews that might lead to further understanding of leadership in small enterprises and how successful leaders developed, further benefiting society by reducing small business failures.

Researchers have revealed gaps in knowledge transference, best practices for educational collaboration with industry, and leadership appropriate for CSR in small enterprises. According to Sawyer and Evans (2010), literature on successful leadership in small business includes examples of how sustainable practices return value to businesses and society. Understanding leadership through the experiences of practitioners may lead to a better leadership in small business. The benefits of the study include information gathered from leaders who practice sustainability and return value to society.

Small businesses have a social and economic impact on communities (Fitzgerald, Haynes, Schrank, & Danes, 2010). Small businesses, their leadership, and their practices, or lack thereof, has affected practitioners and society in actions of CSR (Box, 2011). The demand by society for positive social change encourages business educators to engage, reform, and connect with practitioners (Curid-Halkett & Stolarick, 2011). The small business enterprise practitioner needs to assimilate appropriate and relevant information into an environment of resource constraints, sustainability initiatives, and daily operations. Information from historical practices, successful small-enterprise practitioners, educators, and leadership researchers might provide a better understanding of how leaders might cope with resource constraints and sustainable initiatives to improve their organizations overall social impact.

Books used in this study were purchased from the Walden University bookstore as reference material. Articles retrieved from the Walden University online library included several databases, ABI Inform, Business Source Complete, Emerald Management, and SAGE Premier. Key words used to search the databases included but are not limited to combinations of the following words, small business, leadership, economics, education, sustainable, leadership styles, leadership types, small and medium business, and theory.

Leadership Theory

Leaders develop from their experiences and represent many of the leaders of organizations found in small businesses. Mostovicz et al. (2009) theorized that leadership is a developmental process. Mostovicz et al. argued that leaders develop traits

of leadership through past, present, and future life experiences, a developmental process. In the first stage, individuals develop self-awareness like the understanding of an individual's emotions, strengths, and weaknesses. In the second, they engage in social encounters. In the third stage, they find their unique purpose in life. This study included the lived experiences of successful small-business practitioners to develop a better understanding of leadership. These lived experiences might provide information regarding leadership skills that help small businesses in the future. Further understanding Mostovicz et al.'s developmental pathway through the experiences of successful practitioners might provide information regarding leadership skills appropriate for small businesses.

Throughout business, common themes and patterns emerge that support success and failure. Mehrjerdi (2011) acknowledged that the understanding of patterns and common themes leads to solutions from a better understanding of the problem as a whole. Common themes developed from the research study might help future practitioners understand successful leadership. The results from this study might help leaders alleviate some of the failures evident in the small-business sector.

Leadership History, Impact, and Surveys

Leadership history concerns recent developments, theories, and practices. The theories and teachings of several pioneers of modern organizational management and leadership development still affect the way organizations approach business, CSR, and leadership training. Bernard noted problems of leadership practices as early as 1937 (as cited in Isomura, 2010). The gap between educators and practitioners in the transference

of knowledge appropriate to businesses has caused failures in the practice field, and has garnered criticism from researchers of leadership development (Isomura, 2010).

Scholars and organizational psychologists (Riaz & Haider, 2010), in identifying the next great athlete, politician, businessperson, or spiritual leader espoused the great man theory. Gurd and Hee (2010) identified key traits of successful leaders as a including a sense of self, creativity, resilience, productivity, and innovation. However, there is a need for further exploration of these traits as they pertain to small business leaders. Leadership is a key component in organizational success as well, with a relationship to low employee turnover (Van Dick & Schuh, 2010). In contrast, Plino et al. (2010) discussed the failures of leadership and the repercussions for society. Organizations need to look at the past and consider the practitioner practices for new leadership initiatives.

Clarity of vision, scope of work, and educational development are important to successful leadership. Fayol advocated for management education (as cited in Pryor & Taneja, 2010). Pryor and Taneja discussed Fayol's 14 management principles that included attributes of positive leadership. According to Pryor and Taneja, Fayol advocated for a division of work, authority, discipline, unity of command, unity of direction, subordination of individual interests, remuneration, centralization, scalar chain, order, equity, and stability of tenure, initiative, and esprit de corps. Some of Fayol's characteristics are similar to transformational leadership characteristics in the business world, like unity of direction, subordination of individual interests, equity, initiative, scalar chain, and esprit de corps (as cited in Hussain & Riaz, 2010).

Leadership needs transformation to succeed and includes strategic planning, holistic management practices, and collaboration. Pryor and Taneja (2010) discussed Porter and aspects of strategic planning. Fayol undergirded Porter's theory of strategic planning message in the 14 principles of management (as cited in Pryor & Taneja, 2010). Pryor and Taneja argued that Porter's theories were difficult to understand and implement, whereas Fayol's principles could enable strategic business planning to be more precise. Easily accessible knowledge, including new holistic management practices, affect strategic planning practices in small businesses. Hamel (2009) espoused the concept of business leaders acting as social architects and entrepreneurs of purpose. The job of the new leader will be to create an environment in which diversity, personal value, innovation, and creativity are exercises in collaboration, and the drivers of sustainability (Hamel, 2009, p. 93).

The need for sustainable initiatives and CSR, coupled with the dynamics of global competition, adds another requirement for leadership. Business leaders must act appropriately given the changing world for businesses large and small (Burke, 2011). Theorists link leadership characteristics with complementary behaviors that serve the corporation at optimum levels. Such leaders must engage their community of stakeholders and help them become more socially responsible (Sawyer & Evans, 2010). Burke noted an association between Theory Y practitioners and humanistic practices. These latter practitioners have traits similar to those of transformational leaders (Jogulu, 2010). These leadership traits are necessary to understand as they might affect much of the small enterprise operation.

Educators, consultants, and practitioners have presented leadership models based on successful leaders so that other practitioners might benefit from this theoretical work. Leadership styles refer to leadership that best fits a particular enterprise's organizational plan (Brinkman & O'Brien, 2010). Bucic, Robinson, and Ramburuth (2010) presented a model that included the attributes of transactional and transformational leadership called the ambidextrous leadership model. Bucic et al. proposed the use of both transactional and transformational styles to respond to business situations needing the one or the other. Scholars have also developed the full range leadership model that incorporates attributes of transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidance behavior to deal with situations that might need some combination of all three styles (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010). Each of the models has a purpose and function in the appropriate situation (Jogulu, 2010). While accepting the concept of leadership as appropriate for each unique situation, the goal of this study was to develop a better understanding of leadership in small businesses that reduces failures and increase their sustainability.

Leadership is a success factor for projects and businesses (Nixon, Harrington, & Parker, 2012). Nixon et al. discussed the relevance of leadership performance to project outcomes as well as the traits and behaviors that linked behaviors to the success of a project. Nixon et al., in reviewing transactional and transformational styles, concluded that the transformational style created corporate vision and team cohesion. Burstein, Sohal, Zyngier, and Sohal (2010) questioned why so many organizations lacked an understanding of the processes necessary to develop sustainable strategies and for clarifying the importance of leadership and knowledge management. Burstein et al.

argued for definitive positions on who should be involved in action strategies and what their roles should be. These roles relate to a sustainable strategy and might include the responsibilities of environmental impact and community relations.

Organizational success and failure are both leadership dependent and components of CSR and sustainability initiatives (Dahlgaard-Park 2009). Dahlgaard-Park argued for metrics that included ways to measure the human-oriented side of leadership and performance to create more sustainable organizations. Although the style of leadership may vary with each situation, applying the appropriate style is important for success (Jogulu, 2010). Jogulu argued for the consideration of culture in leadership and management education. In this regard, the approach to leadership education should consider the context and culture.

In addition to having the right performance and metric indicators when developing leadership education for businesses, it is essential to manage knowledge strategically. Small business enterprises need information to enhance their knowledge-management programs. Capo-Vicedo, Mula, and Capo (2011) argued for organizational structures that eliminate barriers for the creation of and transfer of knowledge. Because small businesses are resource constrained, they need to encourage both cross-functional and cross-cultural networks to influence collaboration and team building (Capo-Vicedo et al., 2011). Capo-Vicedo et al. noted that because of resource constraints, this type of holistic structure might be difficult for small enterprises to afford, but strategic alliances might help overcome some barriers. These strategic alliances have helped small business leaders to improve even when resources are limited.

Small- and medium-enterprises have an economic and environmental impact in the industrialized world. Constantinos et al. (2010) reported on the size and impact of small businesses in Europe. Constantinos et al. stated that small- and medium-sized enterprises contributed 64% of the environmental impact to the region. Additionally, less than one quarter of enterprises engaged in activities that reduced their environmental impact. Constantinos et al. found that the small business sector in Europe included 20 million enterprises, of which 99% had fewer than 250 employees, and 92% had fewer than 10 employees. The small- and medium-sized enterprise sector generated 58% of value-added economic activity compared to 42% for large businesses (Constantinos et al., 2010). To solve the problem of negative environmental impact, the European Union (EU) issued tool kits to help individual small- and medium-sized enterprises reduce their negative environmental impact.

The researchers at the Small Business Administration (2010) found similar figures for small businesses in the United States. These researchers corroborated that small firms represented 99% of all firms and employed 65% of new hires in the 15 years preceding the study. Furthermore, the researchers of The Small Business Administration reported that small firms had 16 times more patents per employee than those of larger firms. The numbers represent significant aggregate impact for innovation and the economy in the United States.

Results in an executive survey have shown the priorities of organizational leaders from different perspectives. Sitkin, Emery, and Siang (2009) contributed additional information regarding leadership and rankings for leadership values. According to Sitkin

et al., top concerns for executives participating in the survey were operational and included performance challenges and leadership development. Credibility was an important soft leadership skill. The behaviors affecting performance most were inspiration and leadership responsibility, and hard skill-sets were not high value business-leadership traits (Sitkin et al., 2009). The executives spent only 25% of their time on leadership education activities, contrasted with leadership development as the number two concern among executives (Sitkin et al., 2009). Sitkin et al. noted that leadership development had room for improvement. In their view, not one leadership-development program, whether created in business or academia, scored higher than *good* using a scale of *fair*, *good*, and *excellent* (Sitkin et al., 2009). Sitkin et al. concluded that the improvement needed to begin at the executive level with proper support mechanisms.

A survey of executives to determine the overall impact of small businesses showed that the small business sector was not doing well. The State of Small Business (2011) used a survey to measure the performance of the small business sector and addressed the aggregate impact of small businesses on the U.S. economy. Categories in the report identified U.S. small businesses as having fewer than 100 employees. In grading this business sector with Small Business Success Index indicators, researchers for the State of Small Business found an overall decline in performance. Business leadership, academia, and society all play a role in the success or failure of leadership development. Atamian and VanZante (2010) argued that learning for leadership is indispensable and programs need relevance to everyday business practices to see a return

on investment. As many small businesses are resource constrained, the return on investment for education and training is important.

Leadership Styles

Leadership styles traverse the spectrum from authoritarian to holistic leaders. Many descriptions of leaders are similar in meaning and practice, and incorporate the same types of leadership characteristics. Leadership is a factor in the success or failure of an organization (Burstein et al., 2010). Burstein et al. noted that effective leadership was lacking in many organizations, and organizations need clarity and specific goals for leadership. Burstein et al. argued that basic questions of inquiry who, how, and what need special focus from management leadership as organizations seek to develop strategies for the future. Additional research in the leadership of ethnic and gender groups might develop a greater understanding of any differences in them. For example, Tibus (2010) noted a lack of research regarding female-owned businesses whose growth rate doubled for all firms. Because leadership is vital to both businesses and society and the impact of the role of females in the workforce is notable, a better understanding of leadership from females in small business is equally valuable.

A recent trend for leadership styles has been the emergence of the team concept including virtual or information technology teams. The competitive nature of global business has pushed the virtual team concepts offshore and led to increased cost savings and synergy (Holtzman & Anderberg, 2011). Holtzman and Anderberg argued for greater diversity and heterogeneous traits for teams with leaders having clear corporate vision and promoting open communication. D'Amato and Roome (2009) concluded that

clear communication was a necessary competency for business leaders. Randeree and Ninan (2011) noted that of the several styles of leadership that emerged as workable in the virtual team, transformational and transactional styles were most dominant. Based on those findings, Randeree and Ninan established an integrated leadership model combining the traits of both styles to build successful teams. These teams needed the attributes of both styles of leadership to be successful.

The most prominent styles of leadership include transformational and transactional. According to Hussain and Riaz (2010), researchers have focused on two leadership styles: transformational and transactional. Often contrasted, transformational, and transactional leadership have good results when used appropriately. Marques (2010) supported the argument of appropriate leadership for each situation, called meta-leadership. The meta-leadership style includes many traits of transformational leadership while adding humanistic values for balance. Marques argued for leaders who adapt to situations and needs by employing the appropriate method or style. Eyal and Roth (2011) contrasted transformational and transactional styles in a situation in which self-determination was prevalent. Eyal and Roth concluded that transformational leadership improved situations in which the mission was value laden, and individuals interpreted the meaning of the organizational mission. In this study, I reviewed leadership styles and discuss their relevance to small businesses. Practitioners should decide for the style most suitable for their situations.

Servant leadership. Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, and Colwell (2011) defined servant leadership style as the internal conviction to serve and includes putting others first. This

relationship prioritizes the followers' needs versus organizational performance (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010). According to Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010), six different dimensions comprised servant leadership: voluntary subordination, authentic self, covenantal relationship(s), responsible morality, transcendental spirituality, and transforming influence. The servant leader's behavior includes readiness to renounce the superior status of leadership and the voluntary subordination of self. Sendjaya and Pekerti concluded that all six dimensions, linked to trust and appropriate behavior might engender followers to trust the servant leader's vision and commitment.

Empowering leadership. Team environments are suitable for the empowering leadership style. With the advent of multinational corporations, global expansion, and cross-cultural engagement, the virtual team has become a necessary means of meeting corporate efficiency standards (Tung & Chang, 2011). The empowering leader works in environments in which individuals work through the delegation of decisions, providing increased autonomy for the employee (Tung & Chang, 2011). The empowerment style includes the sharing of power through knowledge sharing to elicit positive synergy and a coordinated effort to a common purpose. In the empowerment style, power decentralized through knowledge sharing creates positive synergy and a coordinated effort for a common purpose. The knowledge-sharing process leads to team cohesion and trust. The trust factor is a key component in developing a positive team climate and ensuring success of the virtual team (Xue, Bradley, & Liang, 2010). Tung and Chang argued that the empowerment aspect of this style should go beyond the mere sharing of power and

include positive motivation of employees by management. Tung and Chang also found that empowerment happens more by degree than in a total way.

It is important to be aware of the affect of delegated power. Tung and Chang (2011) noted that leaders should exercise judgment regarding the staff members they empower. The empowering leader provides guidance and fair treatment to all followers and considers the inputs of followers as valued contributions to the common purpose. This sort of leader promotes team problem solving, a process that increases the knowledge base by inviting input from team members. In this relationship, the empowering leader increases team cohesion and knowledge sharing, both critical components of the team concept. Kuo, Lai, and Lee (2011) noted a number of firms were using team-based knowledge management as a way of seeking improved competitiveness. Kuo et al. found that empowering leadership fostered the sharing of knowledge and expertise among the workers and generated innovation and new ideas.

Information sharing and communication affect individuals in the team. Xue et al. (2010) noted that leadership practices affected the knowledge sharing behavior of individuals. The team climate, according to Xue et al., developed affiliation, trust, and innovation among the workers involved. Empowering leadership, Xue et al. found, has five dimensions: leading by example, coaching, encouraging participative decision-making, showing concern for the workers, and facilitating an unimpeded information flow. The empowering leader's use of these attributes to remove barriers and motivate the team for performance is critical to successful team management. Last, Xue et al.

noted that cultural considerations were important when applying this sort of program and values to other countries. Jogulu (2010) supported the conclusions from Xue et al.

The servant leader may share many of the attributes of authentic and spiritual leaders who transform followers into servants (Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, & Colwell, 2011). Reed et al. (2011) noted that servant leaders move beyond performance outputs by emphasizing the moral, emotional, and relational aspects of ethical leadership. The servant style, categorized along with other value-based leadership, relates to spiritual leadership, although less altruistic and more in tune with followers (Crossman, 2010).

The servant style shares many leadership traits and contrasted with transformational leadership (Parolini, Patterson, & Watson, 2008). Parolini et al. argued that of the two, servant leadership was morally superior. Parolini et al. noted servant leadership could overcome the moral weakness in the transformational leader's allegiance to the organization. According to Parolini et al., a transformational leader might violate organizational and ethical norms if the transformational leader overrode the individual's interests and values to suit the organization's values. Additionally, Parolini et al. stated that transformational leaders have a mission to change and create or grow the organization, whereas servant leaders seek to grow the individuals in the organization. According to Parolini et al., leadership traits should correspond to organizational goals and aid workers in attaining their objectives.

Transactional leadership. One style dominating the business landscape is transactional leadership. Jogulu (2010) defined transactional leadership as transactions made between the leaders and followers depend on work performance. Jogulu built on

the concepts of Burns (1978) who identified the transactional leadership style as using power and control to exact behaviors from followers. Transactional leaders set up agreements, explaining rewards and incentives for specific outcomes of followers' behavior. Jogulu noted that transactional leadership has a universal appeal because it can adapt to the surrounding environment. Jogulu also argued that the transactional leadership style was dependent on the amount of power respective cultures assigned to those leadership positions.

In a job-performance burnout study Zopiatis and Constanti, (2010) contrasted transactional and other leadership styles. Zopiatis and Constanti defined burnout as a syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and having a negative personal effect for the individual leader and their organization. Zopiatis and Constanti used a modified version of a leadership questionnaire to test their hypothesis about the nature of executive burnout. Zopiatis and Constanti concluded that transactional leadership had a negative or weak correlation to emotional exhaustion and a significant correlation with personal achievement. Zopiatis and Constanti found that the laissez-faire style might imply a disengaged method of leadership but in fact had a stronger relationship to job burnout.

The transactional leadership style, characterized by an exchange process based on the implied agreement between leaders and followers, sets goals and modifies work outcomes through rewards to the followers for achievement (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010). The transactional style has three primary factors, contingent rewards leadership that clarifies roles and rewards accomplishment, management by *exception active*, which

ensures meeting goals, and management by *exception passive*, which intervenes only when noncompliance occurs (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010).

Transformational leadership. The style most preferred by organizations that use a communal, collaborative, or participative approach to leadership is transformational leadership (Jogulu, 2010). The traits of the transformational leader, largely holistic include charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and consideration for others. The characteristics of transformational leaders go beyond self-interest to prompt vision, innovation, and knowledge transference (Bucic et al., 2010). These characteristics, referred to as the *4-I's*, namely, ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Jogulu, 2010). Noted for its proactive approach, this style of leadership stimulates followers to transcend individual interests for the collective good of the organization (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010). The idealized influence refers to the social charisma of the leader, the feeling of confidence, experience, and power they give off. Moreover, this leader's focus is always on beliefs, values, and higher order ideals of the organization. Inspirational motivation is the way such leaders energize their followers toward goals and company's vision. Intellectual stimulation for followers consists of the actions that the leader takes to stimulate followers toward innovation and problem solving. Individual consideration is the behavior of the leader who contributes to the satisfaction of each follower by supporting and paying attention to the needs of all the workers (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010, p. 210). Bodla and Nawaz noted two different styles of transformational leadership: ethical and unethical. The ethical leader is

moral and authentic; they embrace fairness and honesty. In contrast, the unethical transformational or pseudo-transformational styles are selfish and politically motivated.

Schell (2010) gave an overview of the importance of leadership with performance. Schell noted a gap in the understanding and development of transformational leaders in small businesses and offered a new instrument that might assess leadership skills called the Lifetime Leadership Inventory. Schell used the survey instrument to assess skill sets and experiences that might align transformational characteristics with organizational performance requirements.

There has been a paradigm shift from transactional to transformational styles in the health care professions (Fulop & Day, 2010). Jogulu (2010) noted that transactional leadership has a universal appeal because it can be adapted to the surrounding environment but is dependent on the amount of power respective cultures assign to those leadership positions. The competitiveness of the business environment requires a shift from this type of collectivism to a style more appropriate to global resources and competition. The transformational style has additional qualities of understanding the environment, including flexibility for change and resolving issues as a way of attaining competitive advantage. This style tends to strengthen organizational development through employee motivation to achieve higher goals (Fulop & Day, 2010).

Through the ability to create a shared vision, transformational leaders can achieve both team and project management success. Vision sharing enhances worker commitment and the performance of both the individual and the project (Nixon et al., 2012). Researchers have measured behavioral characteristics of transformational leaders

by using a leadership questionnaire. In reviewing the characteristics associated with job performance and burnout, Zopiatis and Constanti (2010) found that of the three leadership styles, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire, transformational was the least likely style affected by burnout. Researchers have focused on two main leadership styles, transactional and transformational, but have found that the transformational style goes beyond what most organizations need for growth and innovation (Hussain & Riaz, 2010). Hussain and Riaz argued for a balanced, or hybrid, approach that included attributes from both the transformational and transactional leadership styles to handle a greater variety of business situations. Warrick (2011) argued for transformational leaders who developed traits to ensure organizational success. Many of the new leadership-development programs incorporate elements of several styles. The most prominent composite application mentioned in recent literature is the full range leadership model.

Full range leadership. Different leadership styles work best in different situations, and for optimum effectiveness, it is important to apply the appropriate style to each situation. The full range leadership theory (FRLT) known as the transformational-transactional leadership theory performs as a blended style. According to Bodla and Nawaz (2010), the term, coined by Bass (1998), refers to an effective leader being able to use the right approach in different situations. Full range leadership includes a combination of the transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles of leadership to accommodate situations in which the strengths of each style might be the most appropriate response. The FRLT leader uses the appropriate technique to motivate

followers, solve problems, or step back and allow others to lead. The transformational component enables the leader to take a proactive management approach, build team cohesiveness, and motivate followers to achieve goals. Companies defined as high-power distance corporate cultures, and more structured or authoritarian in practice use the transactional component. The laissez-faire style might be suited for leaders who choose to step back from highly motivated teams that already innovate, solve problems on their own, and merely need information and the freedom to follow through (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010).

In the ambidextrous leadership style, Bucic et al. (2009) presented a style blending of the components of transactional and transformational leadership. This approach includes transformational and transactional traits in diverse situations. Bucic et al. argued for the ambidextrous model in a team setting to institute effective operational leadership development, and became a strategic resource for the organization. Jogulu (2010) and Xue et al. (2010) argued for cultural consideration when considering leadership styles because culture may influence which style might be appropriate for various situations in differing cultural contexts. Xue et al. argued for a leadership model driven by the situation. While the FRLT style may not be the answer to all leadership problems, its diversity of styles allows for a broad array of leadership traits to accommodate a variety of environmental or situational factors (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010).

The effect of ethics on leadership behavior is an important consideration for organizational leaders. Toor and Ofori (2008) studied ethical leadership and its relationship to FRLT. Toor and Ofori examined the ethical characteristics of leadership

behavior in relation to organizational culture. Toor and Ofori concluded that the ethics of leaders affected organizational performance and played a role in each style of leadership embraced within the FRLT. Sustainability initiatives might help small businesses adapt to changing business environments by using the FRLT.

Leadership Sustainability

Sustainable initiatives need support from leaders to establish priorities and become a part of organizational strategies. Babiak (2010) called for leadership and the entrepreneurial ingenuity North America possesses to solve problems. Babiak argued that CEOs should take responsibility for their actions by including consideration for corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their organizations. The CSR message has resonated throughout society and the global business community, and according to D'Amato and Roome (2009) considered in all leadership development programs. Stakeholders have called for companies and leaders to shift from profit-based initiatives toward a triple bottom line including financial, ecological, and social criteria. D'Amato and Roome (2009) argued that business organizations should instill global responsibility through leadership to change the system.

Leadership is the variable that can cause success and failure of sustainable actions. D'Amato and Roome (2009) argued that leadership in an organization must shift from a single profit-based bottom line to the triple bottom line. D'Amato and Roome found that organizational leadership has three basic ideas: people lead others, leadership is a multilevel phenomenon, and the study of leadership competencies is less important to business than leadership practices. D'Amato and Roome noted that leadership was

responsible for initiating policies that place sustainable actions into operational context by ensuring suppliers commit to such ideals. D'Amato and Roome called for leadership to set the example for sustainable actions with their own behavior, both on-the-job and in private. D'Amato and Roome noted good leaders might improve CSR in their organizations by engaging outside stakeholders through partnerships, extending their network boundaries, and lowering barriers for good collaboration. According to D'Amato and Roome, leaders should foster open communication and develop practices of mentoring and coaching to link the employees to activities furthering a triple bottom line. The coaching and mentoring aspects will create an atmosphere of empowerment and cohesiveness for the employee.

Although CSR is prominent in business, it lacks relevant information to be widely accepted. Smith and Sharicz (2011) noted that business leaders lacked information about CSR and its relevance to daily operations. As a result, such leaders considered CSR initiatives to be optional activities. Because most learning about CSR took place in networking settings, Smith and Sharicz suggested that executives build into their organizational capacity the concept of CSR through education, communication, rewards, and performance. Atamian and VanZante (2010) supported this suggestion for continued education in small business as long as it held relevance to daily functions and had a return on investment.

Appropriate behaviors modeled by company leaders include those reinforcing the sustainable strategies of the organizations. D'Amato and Roome (2009) saw this process happening in four phases. Phase 1 includes learning how to implement sustainable

activities including operational initiatives. Reinforcement, training, and communication of the expected behaviors implemented in each phase leads to the next activity. Each phase, reinforced through consistent behaviors of workers lead to the next. During the second phase, the sustainable strategy begins to make sense to leaders as positive results start to occur. In the third phase, the new internalized strategy reaches outside its own boundaries. This phase corresponds to the concept of embedded routines discussed by Grayson (2011). In the third phase, the sustainable strategy becomes a part of the fabric of the organization, and employees accept it as a new and viable way of doing business. The fourth and final phase takes place when the organization's partners and vendors adopt this alternative business ethic. D'Amato and Roome argued that leadership is the key ingredient for ensuring a successful organizational change outcome and each leader might reinforce change and that each leader needs to reinforce change by personally modeling the appropriate behavior.

Leaders of programs at universities, community colleges, and business forums must find the most effective means of imparting definitions, expectations, and behaviors about sustainability and CSR to leaders of small businesses (Djordjevic & Cotton, 2011). These programs might help reduce the mortality rate in small businesses (Small Business Report, 2010). It is crucial to find the best vehicle and convey the messages of leadership and sustainability to future practitioners.

The information flow of sustainable success to small businesses needs further consideration. Lueneburger and Goleman (2010) demonstrated an example of leadership and sustainability, geared to small businesses, and provided a model of how companies

transition to organizations of sustainability. Lewis and Cassells (2010) noted little commitment to sustainability in the small business sector. Lewis and Cassells found limited resources and a lack of usable information reconciling CSR actions to daily operational routines. Additionally, Lewis and Cassells concluded that small businesses were cynical about the benefits of CSR, saw little environmental impact of their businesses, and believed CSR was difficult to engage because of resource constraints. Lueneburger and Goleman described the need to create a sustainable vision, translating it into action, and anticipating future organizational needs. Lueneburger and Goleman concluded that sustainable activity in an organization should translate into long-term organizational viability. Djordjevic and Cotton (2011) argued for effective communication as the most important factor in educational programs meant to commit small- and medium-enterprises (SMEs) leaders to sustainable business practices (p. 392).

Blewitt (2010) cited a lack of production among universities for graduates with skills, motivation, and knowledge necessary to promote sustainability in the future. Furthermore, Blewitt noted that several countries had identified a curriculum that would supply these skills and teach future business leaders sustainable practices through an educational program. Manion (2009), in exploring the productivity gap between workers in the United States and the United Kingdom, reported 30% lower productivity in the United Kingdom and identified less government intervention there and the presence of more effective postsecondary business programs as key factors in the U.S. edge. Collaboration between educators and practitioners might be the key to reducing the fatality rate of small businesses and understand effective leadership. There is a

significant gap between industry expectations for graduates prepared for real-life work and those who simply meet academic standards (Blewitt, 2010). There is a need for higher education to better prepare future leaders. A better understanding of leadership that includes the experiences of successful practitioners might fill this gap.

This present study might provide U.S. small businesses a better understanding of sustainable practices to build a foundation for creating living systems that meet the expectations of society (Senge, 2008). The failure rates and ensuing economic impact for small enterprises are high (Small Business Report, 2010). A better understanding of why some small enterprises fail to make use of information for leadership might reduce their mortality rate and introduce them to successful practices.

Small Business Enterprises

There is operational research on small business enterprises, but researchers have tended to address the needs of larger businesses (Gebauer, Paiola, & Edvardsson, 2010). However, little research exists about leadership in smaller enterprises (Samujh, 2011). The Small Business Report (2010) defined a small business as having less than 500 employees. Ekanem (2010), in speaking to the uniqueness of small- and medium-sized businesses, commented that generalizations not be made, what works for a large corporation might not work for a small business. Ekannem mentioned the greater resource constraints on small enterprises and that their owner-managers often lacked the understanding needed to achieve business success.

Small businesses are unique and need information that is relevant to that sector. Gebauer et al. (2010) agreed that most research on business, written with larger

organizations in mind is not transferable to the needs of the small business sector.

Reijonen (2010) supported the uniqueness of the small business sector concerning marketing concepts by observing that although small businesses seemed more chaotic, they could be effective in meeting needs. Gebauer et al. argued that findings for larger companies could not transfer to smaller ones because the latter occupy an altogether different position in the value chain. Yang and Chen (2009) examined the efficiencies of small businesses and found that, when controlling for size, the small businesses were more efficient than the larger businesses. There is a potential for small businesses to adopt sustainable strategies and to move their operations to longer-term strategies with appropriate information.

Collaboration and information sharing between small and large companies is important. Faisal (2010) argued that large companies have an effect on supply chain sustainability through their CSR initiatives. Some form of required compliance might hamper the sustainable initiatives of larger firms, whether through quality circles or outside pressures of nongovernment organizations. Moreover, larger counterparts help their SMEs through collaboration and information sharing. Gottfridsson (2010) supported the idea of knowledge sharing in small and medium businesses as a means of learning about sustainability and CSR. Gottfridsson concluded that small- and medium-sized businesses develop solutions from both internal and external interactions. Faisal found that managers of large organizations faced challenges achieving supply chain sustainability because of pressures from outside stakeholders, whereas smaller firms considered such issues a part of the product life cycle. Faisal found that many SMEs

lacked resources and failed to report sustainable compliance initiatives. Faisal did find that the interaction of society, government, and enterprises led to sustainable competitive advantage and created a win-win outcome for all participants.

Many small businesses operate in obscurity, have few employees, and lack access to information. Samujh (2011) noted neglect for microbusinesses, those businesses with fewer than five persons, in terms of resources and research dedicated to them. This sector makes up greater than 95% of businesses in most countries (Box, 2011). The microbusiness sector suffered the same resource constraints as other larger SMEs, but researchers have offered them few solutions (Samujh, 2011). Faisal suggested that by collaborating, SMEs would enhance their sustainability and competitive advantage.

There is a significant collective impact of SMEs on economies and the environment (Constantinos et al., 2010). SMEs not only play a role in employment and innovation but also are key links in the supply chains of multinational companies (Faisal, 2010; Small Business Report, 2010). The reports from both Europe and the United States are similar in relation to the size and impact of small businesses of both regions. Constantinos et al. (2010) found the following, 99% of all firms were SMEs, small businesses employed 70% of the workforce, more than 90% of SMEs had fewer than 20 employees, and SMEs contributed between 60-70% of the EU's environmental impact. In the United States, SMEs accounted for 99% of all firms, employed half of all workers, generated 65% of the new jobs in the last 15 years, and produced 16.5 times more patents than large firms produce (Constantinos et al., 2010). In the United States, half of all small businesses cease to exist after 5 years (Small Business Report, 2010). Therefore,

although the aggregate impact of the SMEs on global business is large, their failure rate and environmental impact are problematic.

Small businesses not only have an economic impact but also operate close to their local communities. While lacking resources, SMEs tend to be independent, diverse, and unlikely to engage in sophisticated planning programs. As a result, this sector is difficult to track (Chapman & Randall, 2012). Fumo and Jabbour (2011) described microbusinesses in this sector and found these businesses have fewer than nine employees. Fumo and Jabbour argued for relaxed government regulations and increased communication of available resources for the sector. The microbusiness sector in Mozambique made up 98% of all businesses (Fumo & Jabbour, 2011), and like their U.S. counterparts, have a high attrition rate. Educational training programs for the microbusinesses included academic and government sponsored events (Fumo & Jabbour, 2011). Seleim and Khalil (2011) contributed to the debate regarding the management of knowledge and intellectual capital for SMEs. Seleim and Khalil noted that appropriate knowledge management would enhance competitive advantages resulting in improved resource alignment improving a small firm's viability. Teng, Bhatia, and Anwar (2011) addressed key success factors for small businesses in Singapore and found characteristics applicable to businesses of any size. Teng et al. noted gaps in small business research that might help improve chances for success in the future improved through further leadership training and the adoption of suitable small business policies by the government.

Family businesses play an important role in the small business sector. These businesses range in size from small two-person operations to large Fortune 500 businesses. The family business sector comprises 90% of all businesses in the United States (Headd, 2010). Collins and O'Regan (2011) identified a gap in research for family businesses that was disproportionate to its economic impact. Collins and O'Regan noted that 70% of family businesses, which were more complex than traditional nonfamily businesses, failed to plan strategically, and 66% of the owners had no succession plan. Information on leadership suitable for family businesses might also influence the leadership in these businesses. A family business, defined as a business in which a majority of the ownership lies within a family and involves two or more family members (Small Business Administration Report, 2009). Zachary (2011) noted that the family-owned business was the prevalent form of business in the United States. Furthermore, Zachary argued that family-owned businesses had a competitive advantage over other businesses through a stronger value structure. The family-owned business might take on several forms of business and range from entrepreneurs to large corporations.

The copreneurship, defined as cohabiting couples that own a business is a new entry in the small business sector (Fletcher, 2010). There are three main types of the copreneurship: informal, classic, and intergenerational (Fletcher, 2010). The informal version involves one partner acting as the principal owner-manager while the other partner tends to be part time and works in the periphery. The classic model involves the equal ownership and management of the business. The intergenerational style consists of one partner from an older generation and one partner from a younger generation.

Typically, the older partner is the manager, with the younger serving as a helper. There is an eventual transition of management from the older to the younger generation (Fletcher, 2010).

The problems with family-owned-and-operated businesses are the interdimensional aspect of having business and family decisions intermingled. According to Fletcher (2010), there is little separation between life and business decisions, with life decisions often entangled with those involving the business. The family might bears the risk for business decisions and burdened with legal obligations (Fletcher, 2010). Brice and Richardson (2009) also addressed the culture of family businesses. Brice and Richardson found family businesses have a competitive advantage over nonfamily businesses through a value and belief system inherent in such enterprises.

In many small businesses owners wish to leave a legacy for others to follow. Fox, Tost, and Wade-Benzoni (2010) investigated the effects of family legacy on businesses and examined the relative sustainability of businesses with such legacies against those without them. A trend exists between business owners who want to leave a personal legacy through their business and sustainable practices for future generations of stakeholders. Fox et al. concluded strategic planning allows for the attainment of both goals. A phenomenon in small family business is generational legacies; information from successful family-owned practitioners might influence leaders in these businesses.

A majority of small businesses are family owned. Lussier and Sonfield (2010) found that 80% of the businesses were family owned, contributing more than 50% to Gross Domestic Product, and providing nearly 50% of all employment. In addition,

Lussier and Sonfield reviewed practices and characteristics of multigenerational family-owned businesses and found that as outside management increased between generations, succession planning decreased, and the founder's influence was in time no longer evident. Family-owned businesses, generally SMEs, need access to leadership information to sustain their business viability. Burstein et al. (2010) identified leadership as a key ingredient in the success or failure of organizations. It is necessary to secure this key ingredient, along with long-term sustainable business practices, through appropriate leadership education.

Education

To develop long-term organizational sustainability businesses, society, and government need to collaborate (Rake & Grayson, 2009). Today, the expectation from consumers is for businesses, markets, and government to work together to find solutions for global problems. The vehicle used to deliver the information is not as important as the solutions. Atamian and VanZante (2010) argued for relevant information in small business.

Graduate programs in business schools have offered education for leadership for some time (Isomura, 2010). However, educators are reviewing their offering due to a lack of effective leadership programs. Developing a better understanding of leadership might increase the information and knowledge of small-business owner-managers. Jones and Hegarty (2011) examined the marketing of courses in entrepreneurship and found higher education doing a lackluster job. According to Jones and Hegarty, institutions of higher education lacked a clear understanding and framework for this type of practical

business education. Jones and Hegarty (2011) supported values including educator quality, a good learning environment, and practical value of the program for students. Small business operators look for practical solutions for daily operational problems and want managers prepared to meet those challenges (Woods & Dennis, 2009). Woods and Dennis found that 60% of businesses were searching for graduates, but only 22% hired them, finding the interviewees ill prepared for the rigors of small business. Zhang and Hamilton (2009) challenged the higher-education institutions to deliver skill sets based on understanding the learning needs of small business operators. Panagiotakopoulos (2011) noted the economic importance of small business and that organizational learning was a key driver in these organizations.

An important aspect of leadership is education is the role played by higher education institutions. Cress, Yamashita, Duarte, and Burns (2010) noted traditional university teaching practices isolated community input, and argued for transformed educational instructional approaches that included service learning. Cress et al. proposed service learning and collaboration within the industry, as tools for a pedagogical strategy for higher education based business leadership curricula. Nabi and Linan (2011) corroborated the idea that higher educational institutions play a role in leadership education, but few research-based solutions offered the kinds of programs the small business sector needed. Bicknell, Francois-Smythe, and Arthur (2010) offered a method called Knowledge Transfer in Academia to bridge the gap between industry and academia. Bicknell et al. argued for practiced-based examples and anecdotal teaching methods to help students master the material. Bicknell et al. also challenged academia to

respond to knowledge-transfer requirements by using real-world situations. Knowledge transfer and management are key components to organizational sustainability, innovation, and competitive advantage (Lakshman, 2009). Reaching the small business sector with information from small-business practitioners might help drive sustainable development. However, educators and practitioners must combine theory with practice in applications that are appropriate for the situation.

Perhaps the solution begins with institutions that deliver relevant practices. Atamian and VanZante (2010) noted the importance of up-to-date skills and relevant education as a key ingredient for building success in small businesses. Moreover, Atamian and VanZante noted that continuing education should be relevant, flexible, and facilitate confidence as the small business owner applies what they learn. Toor and Ofori (2008) argued for more holistic approaches in construction-management education. Jogulu (2010) argued for appropriate application of leadership styles in business settings and a greater emphasis on the development of business-oriented curricula. Jones (2010) added that universities and educators have a responsibility to provide educational programs that have value for students and society.

Atamian and VanZante (2010) identified educational opportunities for small-business leaders that included colleges and online instruction. Atamian and VanZante suggested that continuing education be relevant for the small business practitioner. Blewitt (2010) identified the ongoing debate between those espousing the conventional educational-business models based on company profitability and those preferring the holistic approach of CSR. Blewitt noted that several countries had responded to the need

and closed the educational gap with a curriculum that drives sustainability in education. Developing programs designed with CSR in college and university students by educators is important (Seto-Pamies, Domingo-Vernis, & Rabassa-Figueras, 2011). Kerklaan (2011) argued for a different educational learning tool that included techniques to represent ideas, giving visual cues that added different perspectives to problem solving, thus creating an atmosphere of collaboration. Educational approaches to business leadership training appropriate to SMEs should require the student to be engaged in the learning process.

Koenigsfeld, Perdue, Youn, and Woods (2011) noted a human resource aspect for leadership development. Koenigsfeld et al. demonstrated the importance of leadership and learning to overall corporate performance. Through leadership education, human resources departments could create a corps of people with skill-sets that meet the long-term needs of the enterprises (Koenigsfeld et al., 2011). Eveleth, Chung, Eveleth, and O'Neill (2011) investigated the role of leadership in community of practice programs. Eveleth et al. examined the corporate climate and leadership interactions that developed initiatives to transform companies into sustainable organizations. Chow, Finney, and Woodford (2009) advocated for a training tool in business organizations that teach people to be responsive to the changing environment. The interactions of managers and the acquisition of knowledge reinforce job training through experience (Chow et al., 2009).

Knowledge management is a dimension of sustainable education. To build sustainable organizations, the management of knowledge has become a critical component for competitive advantage (Niu, 2010). Niu also identified knowledge

management as a key driver for innovativeness and sustained competitive advantage. To institutionalize knowledge management organizations need unrestricted collaboration, shared experiences, understanding, and the reconstructing of knowledge (Niu, 2010).

Avery and Bergsteiner (2012) evaluated various practices of sustainability, leadership, decision-making, employee practices, quality initiatives, and innovation in businesses. Avery and Bergsteiner categorized the practices across 14 organizations and concluded that sustainable practices flourish in diverse countries, from the United States to Thailand. Avery and Bergsteiner showed that firms who paid attention to sustainability, including key leadership practices, became successful, yet another example of how an emphasis on good leadership might positively affect earnings.

Farazmand and Green (2012) advocated collaboration by business educators and practitioners to develop solutions for the problems seen in small enterprises. Farazmand and Green underlined processes of applied learning to produce practical solutions for everyday problems. Pearson (2010) discovered the importance of prioritizing sustainable actions versus those that do little for long-term CSR. Pearson concluded that businesses should prioritize actions for long-term viability, rather than for short-term gains, even if the latter seemed more popular. Rake and Grayson (2009) spoke in favor of the combined efforts of society, business, and government to develop solutions for sustainability in organizations. Consumers expect businesses, markets, and government to work together to find solutions to global problems. Xie, Zeng, and Tan (2010) advocated for a greater use of a hands-on pedagogical approaches in small business leadership education. Xie, Zeng, and Tan found that academia and industry had restricted

views of the needs of business students. Sowmya and Majumda (2010) argued that academic business education, with assistance from policy-makers, should prepare small business leaders for social as well as financial responsibility, benefiting their enterprises and society.

Leadership in business and education has been the focus of few studies and the topic requires additional research. Leadership education is a process supported with good communication and used to enhance the skills of future leaders in small business (Abbasi, Siddiqi, & Azim, 2011). This concept encourages an individual's career by reinforcing the process through education and collaborative support. Leaders must take the initiative to learn and lead within the social context of learning with and from others.

Krizek, Newport, White, and Townsend (2012) noted that universities, unlike corporations, do not have shareholders. Still, universities require the same businesslike initiatives for sustainability. Krizek et al. argued for greater communication, top-management buy-in, defined organizational goals and responsibilities, and humanistic values to ensure success. To ensure sustainability universities could embrace the traits of small and large businesses. There is a need for communication, training, measuring best practices, and a focus for CSR among employees. The solutions for universities and small businesses are similar concerning leadership training. Information regarding leadership education is a process that needs further understanding; its method of delivery, consideration for cultures, and focus on sustainable activity is essential to the long-term health of small business and society.

Transition and Summary

In Section 1 the discussion centered on developing a better understanding of leadership from practitioners in small enterprises. Results from the analysis of information from the interviews of participants might reduce small business failures and promote issues of CSR. My discussion included an introduction to the study, background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statements, and the nature of the study. A discussion regarding the conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations occurred in Section 1. A review of the study significance, value of the study to businesses and society, and implications for social change took place.

The literature was deficient in information from successful practitioners that might affect how leadership in small businesses might become more sustainable. Despite the identification of leadership characteristics in the literature review, few discussions included the experiences of successful practitioners in small business. A trend by human resources professionals identified positive feedback when training employees to develop sustainable leadership qualities, but little research exists for the small-enterprise leader. The discussion centered on several aspects important to understanding leadership in small businesses. I discussed leadership history, impact surveys, and styles, along with the components of education and sustainability, all to have a richer understanding of how leadership in small businesses works.

Section 2 contains discussions regarding methodology and design, along with responsibilities and role of the researcher. The section includes requirements for

participants and population sampling methods. A review of ethical research in Section 2 with an emphasis on Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol will ensure the privacy of participants. The discussions will include criteria for managing and storing data. A review of data collection methods along with interview criteria will ensure congruence with the central research question and purpose of the study. Finally, Section 2 ends with a discussion of reliability and validity to ensure the doctoral study meets quality standards.

The reported experiences of successful practitioners might improve the understanding of leadership for small organizations. The results of this study might help fill the knowledge transference gap between educators and practitioners. The research might help reduce the failures in small businesses and benefit society through business leaders who demonstrate sustainability.

Section 2: The Project

In this research project, I sought a better understanding of small-business leadership from the lived experiences of 20 small-enterprise practitioners to improve the quality of small business leadership. Marques (2010) explored participant's experiences using a phenomenological design with semistructured interviews to elicit responses regarding a common phenomenon. It was appropriate to use open-ended questions in interviews with 20 small enterprise practitioners to explore the leadership phenomena. Understanding the practitioner's leadership experiences and the possible influence of those leadership experiences to others formed the basis for the interview questions. Analysis of study information gained from the participants might further the understanding of small-business leadership practices.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand small-enterprise leader operators through their lived experiences and the leadership skills they employed that allowed sustainability beyond 5 years. I selected the phenomenological design to explore the experiences of small enterprise leaders and better understand the needs for sustainable small business leadership (Moustakas, 1994). Small businesses need information from the collaboration of educators and leaders of all small enterprises (Atamian & VanZante, 2010). The population in this study included leaders in small businesses in the U.S. Midwest. The Small Business Report (2010) defined small businesses as having less than 500 employees. The small business sector has an economic impact on the national economy (Small Business Report, 2010) and leadership

plays a role in the health of the local community (Eveleth et al., 2011). The small enterprise leader, constrained by the daily decisions of management, needs practical solutions for successful operations (Hacker, 2010). Information gained from the participants might help society by reducing small business failures.

The problems in leadership behavior have affected many organizations. Ip (2011) noted deficiencies in ethical leadership at corporations causing financial and personal loss to stakeholders. The deficiencies are part of a knowledge transference gap between educators and practitioners that have caused failures in the practice field (Isomura, 2010). The experiences of educators and practitioners with information appropriate for small business leaders might remedy these deficiencies.

Role of the Researcher

A better understanding of the phenomena of leadership in small businesses might reduce failures in small business. Suri (2011) recommended interviewing to a point of data saturation using purposive sampling and a small number of participants. Interviews with 20 successful small enterprise practitioners might further the understanding of their leadership practices. Marques (2010) used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to elicit responses from the participants regarding their experiences. Similar to Marques, I included semistructured interviews and open-ended questions as a method to elicit responses from participants (Lasch et al., 2010). Responsibility for interviews, data collection, notes, logs, analysis, and interpretation and summarizing the material belong to the researcher. After IRB approval, I contacted participants through an existing contact list. My responsibilities included observing and interviewing objectively,

eliminating personal bias, and keeping interpretations uninfluenced by participant behavior. The participants chose a location of convenience appropriate for the interview process. Walden University IRB guidelines provide protocols for gaining written permission during the interviews for the use of individual's opinions in the research. Coding documents maintained the anonymity of the 20 participants. University protocol requires proper collection and storage of consent agreements (see Appendix A) introduced during both initial solicitation and the interview process.

My education and small business background provided insights that a layperson may not see and helped motivate me to complete this study. A history and rapport with small-business owners allowed freedom to observe their places of business. Many of the observations included reviewing the conditions at the small businesses during the course of business activity. These activities included customer interface, supplier engagement, and service activities as performed by the small business enterprises.

Participants

I explored the participant's experiences using the qualitative, phenomenological method of study. Researchers using this method elicit responses from participants and include the data to build the concepts of the research topic (Moustakas, 1994). The solicitation of willing participants using a contact list occurred after IRB approval. Soliciting participants originated from existing relationships and through interactions that included face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations, and e-mail. Additionally, participant solicitation occurred from initial investigations of availability and qualification criteria. Some of the participants were leaders of enterprises where existing relationships exist. All interviewees had at least 5 years of tenure in their respective positions or professions to ensure that the study include organizations and people with a history of durability and success (Small Business Report, 2010). The consent form and letter of introduction (Appendix B) helped with soliciting additional participants. Marques (2010) used referrals from qualified participants to reach other participants; some referrals served to solicit qualified participants in this study.

Before each interview, participants received a description of the study purpose and intent. To ensure the privacy of participants, coding of personal information occurred. Instructions given to the participants concerning the right to withdraw from the interview without penalty was necessary to ensure their ethical treatment. Obtaining permission and receiving signed consent agreements from the participants before beginning interviews or making and using recordings was necessary to protect the university. To protect the privacy of participants and in accordance with university

protocol, data stored in a secured cabinet and computer is accessible for a period of 5 years. I will shred the data after the 5-year period to protect the privacy of each participant.

The studied populations were small-enterprise practitioners in the U.S. Midwest. Lasch et al. (2010) claimed that it is important to select purposive sampling, choosing participants who have shared a common phenomenon for their study. The participants in this study shared the phenomena of successful leadership involvement, selected as part of a purposive sample. Some small business owners were colleagues and participated in the study. Similar to Lasch et al., this research study included interviews using open-ended questions with a purposive sample of 20 willing participants, practitioners in education, small business, or leaders of strategic business units. The purposive sample size met the criteria developed by Suri (2011) for phenomenological research interviews that developed data redundancy through successive interviews from common traits in the phenomenon. The sample size reached the number of participants sufficient to meet data saturation standards (Dworkin, 2012), that is, a point where no new information came from the data. Each participant received notice by a letter of introduction to prepare adequately for the interviews. With their backgrounds, the participants could put forward ideas and opinions based on experience (Lasch et al., 2010).

University protocol requires the security of research data for the protection of participant's anonymity. The researcher secures data in a locked cabinet, and destroys the data after 5 years for protection and privacy of the interviewee. Written permission

from all participants will follow Walden University's IRB protocols and obtained prior to including data from their interviews in this study.

Research Method and Design

The qualitative, phenomenological research method allows for the development of ideas through interaction with selected participants and provides for the exploration of ideas that pertain to any topic (Moustakas, 1994). Similar to Marques (2010), this study included participants selected because of their experience and expertise in the fields of small-enterprise leadership. Developing a better understanding of leadership from the experiences of successful small-enterprise practitioners formed the basis of the research question in this study. I interpreted the interview questions contained in Appendix C to develop a better understanding of leadership from the multiple views of successful practitioners.

Reducing the data for analysis was important in developing common themes. Searle and Hanrahan (2011) developed a data analysis method and the relevant portions included *reviewing participant descriptions* that align with the interview questions and study purpose. From these descriptions, the researcher extracts *significant statements* and *formulates them into themes* to answer the interview questions. The themes then *organized into clusters* of information that relate to the *participants descriptions*. Reducing the data from the participant's interviews regarding the phenomena of leadership should form *common themes*. A written *synthesis of textural and structural descriptions* from the participants in the results section provides corroboration for the research study.

Method

I chose the qualitative research method because it allows for the exploration of participants' lived experiences through interviews, to elicit responses from the participants, and collect data that explore the concepts of the research topic (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative researchers may ask the initial question of phenomenon: why or how does this event happen? When an event occurs, hard data might not be available concerning it. Consequently, Kainth and Verma (2011) stated that it is necessary to understand the initial circumstances, to explore interactions, and the surrounding constructs that played roles in the phenomenon. Further understanding the phenomenon of small business leadership is important to improving the performance of future leaders.

The qualitative method was the most appropriate for exploring the lived experiences of the participants. Other methods of inquiry were not suitable for the purpose of this study. In a quantitative study, researchers cannot explore and understand participant experiences; rather, researchers use this method to test theory with defined variables (Chao-Chien, 2010). Quantitative researchers test theory, but for an idea to develop, certain base constructs have to be understood so that they can be tested for congruency (Kainth & Verma, 2011). Quantitative researchers test objective theory by examining the relationship of variables (Chao-Chien, 2010).

A mixed-method approach can be another method to build knowledge in an area that needs dialogue. The mixed-method approach might be acceptable at a time when data collection for measured results complement the method of inquiry (Kainth & Verma, 2011). This study was exploratory, as the lived experiences of participants first needed a

better understanding before applying information. Therefore, a mixed-method approach was not appropriate.

Research Design

The design of the study is important to understanding how leaders in small business operate. Moustakas (1994) described the phenomenological design as the development of ideas through the interaction and lived experiences of the participants. Birkinshaw, Brannen, and Tung (2011) described qualitative theory development as the first-handedness in which researchers strive to be at one with their phenomena. The exploration of the lived experiences of professionals using the phenomenological design might further the understanding of leadership in small organizations. Similar to Dworkin (2012), field data from the interviews in this study might help the small business community understand the phenomena of leadership from the collective input of the participants. Interviews provide a better understanding of leadership in small enterprises through the thoughts and ideas of practicing leaders and are part of the phenomenological design (Lasch et al., 2010).

Ethnographic and case study designs were not as suitable as the phenomenological design for this study. According to Pritchard (2011), an ethnographic researcher delves into the daily lives, behaviors, and activity of a community or culture. Therefore, an ethnographic study is less appropriate for reaching several groups of practitioners and academics. The case study design would also limit the sample size and not allow for a diverse inquiry into the phenomena of leadership development as applied

to educators and practitioners. Furthermore, a case study design might fail to reach a data saturation point large enough to draw generalizations to the small business community.

Population and Sampling

My intent was to develop a better understanding of leadership from 20 successful small-enterprise practitioners to improve sustainability in small-business enterprises. The participants for data collection were in the U.S. Midwest and were from a contact list. Marques (2010) incorporated a purposive sample in a study to elicit information from participant experiences. Similarly, a researcher using this purposive sample gathers information from a group of participants who have experienced a similar phenomenon. The purposive sample allowed me to use the explanations of participants who had the experience and knowledge to affect the constructs of leadership in small businesses. Suri (2011) and Dworkin (2012) prescribed the participant numbers in a range from five to 30 to find a point of data redundancy, where the data reflects no new information. A purposive sample size of 20 participants reached a number sufficient to meet data saturation standards that is a number in which the data becomes repetitive (Dworkin, 2012). All interviewees met the eligibility criteria of leadership, having led a strategic enterprise, owned or operated a small business, and had at least 5 years' tenure in their respective positions or professions. The use of the minimum criteria ensured that the study focus was on organizations and people with a history of durability and success (Small Business Report, 2010). A contact list from referrals and other participants allowed for an adequate selection of participants. Some of the participants were leaders

of enterprises where relationships exist. Interviews took place in a setting where the participants were comfortable, and completed in an effective manner.

Ethical Research

The research for this study involved a purposive sampling of willing participants who have experienced the leadership phenomena (Marques, 2010). Chao-Chien (2010) addressed the need for research that was appropriate for a study. Similarly, Graffinga, Bosio, and Olsen (2010) addressed ethical research appropriate for qualitative studies, noting special consideration for participants. A part of the process involved gaining written permission in the form of consent agreements from the participants before beginning interviews or making and using recordings. I contacted participants to obtain consent agreements in person, by mail, or electronic mail. Written permission from all participants, in accordance with Walden's IRB protocols prior to including data from their interviews in this study, was necessary to ensure their willingness to participate. Participants received an explanation of their rights regarding interview termination and the option to use a recording device. Explanations by mail, e-mail, or verbal communications helped ensure ethical standards. Each participant received information including the consent process and interview questions so they could weigh options and be comfortable with their decisions. Security access by the researcher and coded data will ensure the privacy of the participants. The university protocol specifies all data securely kept for a period of 5 years and only be accessible to the researcher. University protocol requires the researcher to destroy data after the IRB critical time-period to protect participant's privacy. Final publication of this study will not include participant names or

names of organizations. Interviewees will not receive compensation for participation in this study.

Data Collection

Instruments

I served as the sole researcher to interview and collect information from participants. Marques (2010) used interviews to gain access and uncover information needed to address the phenomena. Similarly, this study included semistructured interviews and open-ended questions to elicit responses concerning leadership in small businesses. Interview documentation included a journal, log, or recording devices. A review of each transcript by analyzing answers to each question confirmed the validity and consistency of the data. If the evaluation process revealed inconsistency, new or extended interviews would take place. The participants have access to the final report and could review their input for accuracy through a question and answer period following the interviews.

Other researchers have availability of data from the interview transcripts upon request, after the removal of confidential information from the participants in accordance with protocols by the university. Throughout the process and in accordance with university protocol, only the researcher has access to a locked cabinet or personal computer. A logical sequence of gathering information using the same interview questions throughout the 20 interviews added to consistency (Lasch et al., 2010). Consistently repeating the interviews should allow another researcher in similar conditions to duplicate the outcomes, adding quality to the process (Mayer & Boness,

2011). I used open-ended interview questions and follow-up questions to stimulate responses concerning the interviewees' opinions about leadership practices, their expectations for future leaders, the successes, and failures of current small business leadership programs. To ensure participant confidentiality, university policy requires data security for a period of 5 years.

Data Collection Technique

Twenty small-business practitioners participated in interviews taken from a purposive sample of participants from a contact list of known leaders of small enterprises. Marques (2010) also used interviews with participants from a purposive sample that shared a common phenomenon. Each interview began with a review of the purpose and reason of the study. Following this first step, a second review covered the consent form and participant's rights to withdraw. Research notes from the field followed a logical progression to gather data including name, dates, questions, responses, and general observations. The guided interview questions included a similar sequence for each of the participants. A journal, log, and recording device ensured that meanings and interpretations are consistent with the recorded interviews. The questions while leading the participants into various aspects of the topic allow for the free exchange of their relevant experiences (Bjerregaard, 2011). As interviews repeated with one interviewer, other researchers in similar conditions should duplicate the outcomes adding to reliability and validity (Lasch et al., 2010). Following the interview, the participant has an opportunity to ask questions and garner feedback for their personal introspective reasons. For a period of 5 years only the researcher can access the participants recorded interviews

and journal notes. A single transcriptionist will transfer the data from recorded devices. The research will not include identifiable personal or organizational information from participants in this study.

Data Organization Techniques

I recorded and noted the data from interviews in journal format. Graffigna, Bosio, and Olsen (2010) noted careful consideration for consistency in data collection. First, participant information included the date, participant's name, and nature of business. Data stored in a locked cabinet meeting university protocol will only be accessible to the researcher. The use of a written journal or log added to consistency by corroborating recordings and notes for emerging themes (Marques, 2010). Common themes emerged from the interview data to address the research question (Lasch et al., 2010). NVivo software helped me manage the interview data and group thoughts and ideas into themes. Data security requires anonymity for the participants and companies, limited access, storing data for 5 years, then destroying it in accordance with university protocol.

Data Analysis Technique

In this study, I gained a better understanding of the participants' experiences concerning leadership in small enterprises. The following interview questions allowed me to explore the experiences of successful enterprise practitioners:

1. What is your experience with leadership?
2. What situations have influenced your experiences with leadership and sustainable success?

3. What would be an effective method of delivering leadership knowledge to small businesses?
4. What skill-sets, both hard and soft, help improve current and future small business operators?
5. How is leadership developed in your organization, does it return value, and has it been a sustainable success?
6. How can educators and business-owners work together to better communicate successful leadership practices?
7. How can business-owners and their local communities communicate needs and expectations for leaders?
8. What would be the best method to communicate sustainable strategies (people, products, and planet) versus the short-term profit strategies to leaders of small organizations?
9. What role might government play to help initiate sustainable objectives for leaders of small businesses?
10. How does your organization reinforce positive leadership practices?
11. What additional information could you provide to improve leadership in small businesses?

Interpretation and summaries of each participant's experiences helped me understand the phenomena of leadership in small business. Similar to Lasch et al. (2010) I analyzed the data using a process that reduces the information to common traits and themes. Moustakas (1994) used these components for analyzing data: organizing data

into common themes, reducing the data and eliminating irrelevant material, clustering the data into common themes that emerge from the participants, final theme identification, a textural description of what the participant experienced, and a structural description of how they experienced their phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

Theme and data coding followed the thoughts and ideas as supplied by the participants. Some data formed themes of leadership characteristics, skill-sets, and methods of delivering leadership criteria to small businesses. Common themes developed from how programs have aided sustainable initiatives, returned value, and what has driven success or failure. Additional themes compiled from the participants emerged forming new information. The doctoral study includes summarized results from the interviews and corresponding themes. The use of NVivo software helped develop common areas and allowed presentation of the data in table format. A presentation and explanation of the results should help produce a better level of understanding of leadership practices in small businesses.

The themes produced ideas and constructs that relate to leadership in small businesses from the experiences of the participants with the phenomena of leadership. Mostovicz et al. (2009) stated that leadership is a developmental process and presented the developmental pathway theory. Mostovicz et al. argued that leaders who develop traits of leadership through life experiences shape their styles from their past, present, and future. Mostovicz et al. surmised that leaders develop from the sum of their experiences. Holt and Marques (2012) examined the developmental process of leadership and corroborated the work of Mostovicz et al. The lived experiences of successful

practitioners might further the understanding of the developmental theory introduced by Mostovicz et al. Data gathered from the 20 semistructured interviews might reduce the information gap regarding leadership that might be appropriate for small businesses. As common themes developed from interpretation of interviews, a better understanding of leadership activity in small enterprises might benefit society by reducing small-business failures.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

To ensure reliability in the study, another researcher with similar background, resources, and questions would be able to replicate the findings using similar methods (Lasch et al., 2010). The use of a purposive sample of successful small-business practitioners who have common experiences and participant reviews for interview consistency adds to reliability. Semistructured interviews and questions derived from the topics evident in the literature review should corroborate the data and strengthen reliability (Dworkin, 2012).

Employing personal interviews and themes developed from practitioners' common reported experiences lend weight to project reliability (Marques, 2010). The sequence of events in the data collection, organization, and analysis sections should allow for monitoring accuracy following the interviews. Following the sequence in these sections should allow other researchers to reach similar findings. The interview questions allowed the participant to formulate answers relating to their understanding and experiences with leadership, allowing for a better understanding of leadership practices.

Thematic software results, interviews, themes, and codes corroborated and reconciled to the research question. Using reflexivity minimized researcher bias in the study. The sample size is small, but the results generalize across the small business sector.

According to Larsh et al. (2010), reliability occurs in practice from people doing research and reproducing similar results.

Validity

According to Larsh et al. (2010), validity concerns the issues of credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness. Mayer and Boness, (2011) noted these same characteristics as quality criteria for research. Mayer and Boness addressed dependability as an additional quality indicator. Consistent inferences from participants throughout the interviews ensured internal validity and dependability (Graffigna, Bosio, & Olson, 2010). The process of interviews with a purposive sample of willing participants experienced in their fields, followed by a set of designed questions, added to the quality and validity of the study. Larsh et al. addressed trustworthiness, through the consistency found by using one researcher, and verifying findings in each interview that corroborate the research question adds to internal validity and trustworthiness. The allowance for participant review of transcripts to ensure accuracy led to an increased credibility, trustworthiness, and validity (Larsh, et al., 2010).

External validity, found in data that reached a saturation point and stable categories emerging from data gathered during interviews, added support that the research is trustworthy (Larsh et al., 2010). The 20 interviews represent differing sources of information, from various participants, and reached data saturation. Data saturation

occurred when the data collected from the interviews became repetitive, and participant's meanings generalized to a similar population. The questions led the participants and allowed for exchange of their relevant experiences (Bjerregaard, 2011). The 20 interviews and data saturation should add to transferability of the research to other small-enterprise operations. The participants have access to the final report and could review their input for accuracy through a question and answer period following the interviews.

Transition and Summary

Included in Section 2 was a discussion on the research methodology, design, and responsibilities and role of the researcher. The section included requirements for participants and population sampling methods. A discussion regarding ethical research ensures the privacy of participants. To ensure congruence with the central research question and purpose of the study the discussions included criteria for managing and storing data, data collection, and interview criteria. Finally, Section 2 ended with a discussion of reliability and validity to ensure the doctoral study met quality standards.

There is a gap between the expectations of society and the training of leaders. Universities and trade schools are reviewing their business curriculum to improve the delivery of successful leadership practices. The difference in business school instruction and practitioner's demand has caused failure in the practice field. Collaboration between practitioners to understand leadership information for small businesses might develop from the experiences of successful practitioners. The experiences of successful small enterprise practitioners might help the small business community understand the type of leaders it needs for sustainability in the 21st century.

Section 3 includes a discussion and review of the purpose statement, research question, and summary of the findings. I presented the findings in table form, with corroboration through interpretation of the interviews in text. Additionally, the findings relate to the literature and the topic of leadership. The interviews and ensuing data analysis might produce a better understanding of leadership in small business, providing implications for social change and recommendations for future actions. A review and discussion of personal bias, reflections of the study, and doctoral processes will conclude section 3.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand small-enterprise leader-operators and the skills or practices that allowed sustainability beyond 5 years. I selected the phenomenological design to explore the experiences of small enterprise leaders and better understand the needs for sustainable small business leadership (Moustakas, 1994). Small businesses need information from the collaboration of educators and leaders of all small enterprises (Atamian & VanZante, 2010). The population in this study included leaders in small businesses in the U.S. Midwest. The Small Business Report (2010) defined small businesses as having less than 500 employees. The small business sector has an economic impact on the United States (Small Business Report, 2010) and leadership plays a role in the health of the local community (Eveleth et al., 2011). The small enterprise leader, constrained by the daily decisions of management, needs practical solutions for successful operations (Hacker, 2010). Information gained from the participants might help society by reducing small business failures.

The 11 opened-ended interview questions with 20 willing participants related to the central research question: What skills and practices do small-business practitioners need to ensure success beyond 5 years? The semistructured interviews occurred both face-to-face and by telephone. The participants' shared experiences provided identifiable practices that might help future and existing practitioners with long-term viability in their organizations.

Presentation of Findings

The significance of the study lies in its finished product. Information from the interviews with participants produced practices from the experiences of successful practitioners applicable to the rigors of small enterprises. Common themes developed from the participants' practices might serve as a resource for understanding leadership in small businesses.

Participants (identified as P1 through P20) shared personal information contributing to the diversity of the study. Each participant met the 5-year requirement for the study. The lowest tenure in leadership was 6 years and the highest 50 years. All participants attended college with additional training and accreditation pertinent for their career. The participants included 12 males and eight females, of which three were minorities. The average experience level in leadership was 22.2 years. Five participants had advanced degrees in medicine or law.

The research question included the following: What skills and practices do small-business practitioners need to ensure success beyond 5 years? Thematic software from NVivo and significant statements from the interviews helped me establish a list of practices common to successful practitioners. Themes from the participants' experiences regarding skills and practices formed clusters of information from significant statements gathered during interviews and include

1. Collaboration and forms of communication
2. Mentoring
3. People skills and motivations

4. Networking and trade associations both formal and informal
5. Investing in people, vision alignment, education, training, and knowledge increase
6. Example setting, leading by example, and modeling best practices
7. Planning, strategies, and tools

Participants' significant statements and word searches produced themes relating to people. Although only mentioned directly in Themes 3 and 5, the term *people* relates to each theme. The practices developed from the participants' significant statements follow in this section. As an observation, each leader exhibited a passion for their work and the commitment to stay at the task under all circumstances.

Themes and Practices

Theme 1: Collaboration and Forms of Communication

The practices of collaboration and communication engage five of the seven practices mentioned previously. Communication is a vital part of collaborative management, both internally and externally to the organizations. Collaboration and communication directly related to the participants' practices of mentoring, relating to people, networking and associations, setting an example, and planning. New leaders will need to collaborate and engage people to lead competitive organizations (Hamel, 2009).

Interview Questions 1 and 2. In Questions 1 and 2, I solicited participant's experiences relating to personal examples. The design of the questions helped me to elicit responses that allowed each participant to share relevant information regarding personal leadership experiences. The participants responded to some form of

communication, collaboration, and information sharing in 80% of their responses to Interview Questions 1 and 2. Additionally, 100% of participants mentioned some form of collaboration in their responses to the 11 interview questions. P4 summarized the importance of communication stating, “Communication is key, you cannot over communicate.” P1 noted the importance of working with people and collaborating with institutions stating, “Having a strong relationship between our schools and our businesses is important.” P10 noted, “It is sharing and collaboration, then nurturing, and then you have leaders standing up.”

Interview Questions 3, 4, 5, and 10. In these questions, I solicited responses from participants to address skill sets, leadership development, leadership practices, delivery methods, and how these practices affect the person and organization. These questions, aided by the responses of the first two questions, helped me to build a foundation to understand the practices of the participants within the organizations they operated.

According to participants, communications becomes the vehicle used to deliver the practices. A part of the communication process involves a listening component. P3 addressed communication stating, “I am constantly sharing vision, mission, and what we are trying to accomplish and then I listen for people that seem to buy into it...so I’m looking for people that are hearing and buying into the vision.” P7 noted their field of practice “did not encourage collaboration.” Additionally, P7 noted soft skills included leading by example and in relation to communications to “encourage people and ask for

inputs, then value the inputs from them.” P12 supported the duality of communication by stating, “Sharing, listening, and really paying attention to what they say.”

Interview Questions 6, 7, 8, and 9. I grouped Interview Questions 6, 7, 8, and 9 to understand how a leader related to institutions outside their organization. The questions concerned how business leaders relate to educators, communities, government, and a larger group of stakeholders. The practice of communicating outside of their organizations often helped participants extend resources and organizational longevity.

Collaboration and communications affect relationships in each of the stakeholder groups and is vital to the longevity of the relationship. To support the importance of communication to this larger stakeholder group, P16 stated, “A total and absolute collaboration between them... by collaborating everyone benefits...by collaborating you increase your sphere of knowledge on both sides.” P17 supported another side of communication including an unspoken aspect, but equally as important, of setting an example. P17 noted that setting the example was how they engaged the community: “I have been very involved in community, helping others, creating opportunity, and it returns value to the individual and the community.” P18 and P20 supported the setting example, P18 stating, “Examples, lessons, need to come from home and school.” P19 supported information sharing saying, “educate, and share information.”

The participants related how communication and collaboration was important to maintaining and growing their relationships. The participants addressed why sharing information, collaborating with others, and communicating appropriately helped people understand the purpose or what they were doing. These communication practices were

something that these leaders did well and incorporated into their own practices to improve organizational performance. Trust and communications enhanced personal relationships, delivery of skill sets, training, education, and knowledge improved through collaborative processes (Darabi & Clark, 2012).

Theme 2: Mentoring

Participants remarked about mentoring as a practice in two respects. In the first category, mentoring related to the participants' personal and organizational experiences. In the second category, participants addressed mentoring in terms of a delivery method or support mechanism. Participants mentioned mentoring 70% of the time in the interviews. When combined with *people* as a term, mentoring becomes an influence in the experiences of all participants.

Interview Questions 1 and 2. In these questions, I addressed personal and situational leadership experiences from each participant and allowed them to share relevant experiences regarding mentoring. Many of the participants' personal experiences included mentors that significantly influenced their careers. In addition, the participants used mentoring to engage and motivate the people around them. It was my observation that participants continued the mentoring process by extending the experience to others.

Participant P6 noted, "Putting oneself in a position with someone that you can trust and learn from, the owners I worked for were great coaches or mentors and helped me make assessments and create effective actions." P7 commented that their mentor "was a great communicator, not so much by his words but through his actions and

philosophy, another mentor was a good person and example of how one should work with people.” Supporting the idea of mentoring and working with someone over a long period, P8 stated, “I was mentored and am still being mentored, we share notes and work through struggles.” The mentor for P8, while retired, actively helps this participant through the leadership process. Participant P9 commented about learning best practices from several mentors: “I learned a lot from them and we spoke often, I used a lot of their procedures.” Participant P11 addressed mentoring from the role taking and giving advice. P11 stated, “Mentoring has been a part of my practices...I model and try to improve and lead by example.” P15 supported the give and take role of mentoring by stating, “I have had good mentors, surround oneself with good people, and continue to train them.” Surrounding oneself with good people in this context means using other people’s skill sets to complement your own. The mentors influenced participants outside the work environment. P18 noted, “My dad was a person that always stepped up and did the right thing, and I would say he was a mentor to me.” Supporting the concept of having mentors outside the work environment, P20 noted, “My dad was clearly a mentor, primarily by example.”

Interview Questions 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9. In these questions, I solicited how participants’ experiences engaged leadership practices to a larger community of stakeholders. These questions solicited responses from participants, designed to address skill sets, leadership development, leadership practices, delivery methods, and how these practices affect the person and organization. The aspect of mentoring as it related to

these questions included short- and long-term mentoring. In addition, mentoring was reciprocal, both giving and receiving to other individuals or their communities.

Mentoring served as a communication vehicle for some of the participants; they saw it as a delivery method through people-to-people communications. Participant P1 noted that mentoring allowed an individual to approach the small business operator with real-world experience, “one cannot just come in and tell a small business owner what to do. You have to do it together through mentoring.” P7 stated that greater collaboration along with mentoring opportunities is needed.” P7 stated, “We lack mentoring opportunities...we do not collaborate enough in our profession.” In support of mentoring through collaboration, P20 stated, “The best mentoring is to have someone witness what you are doing.” To reach a broader stakeholder base P14 added, “I think mentoring and showing by example is a way to do that...if people see me do things they will model that behavior.” Mentoring actively engaged people and allowed the participants to learn and develop with guidance and direction.

Participants noted mentoring in two areas: how mentoring affected them and the impact it had on their practices and how mentoring served as a solution to what needed to occur to deliver leadership practices. As discussed by many of the interviewees, mentoring served them well as they developed into their roles, and was an effective practice that helped the long-term viability of their enterprises.

Mentoring, identified as a process for the transmission of knowledge and social capital by the recipient, entails both formal and informal communications between parties in which a person has greater knowledge and experience (Price & McMullan, 2012).

Mentoring is a practice that might serve as a solution for getting appropriate information to small enterprise leaders. The UK Government and European Commission recognized mentoring as a potential solution for entrepreneurs to get usable information (Price & McMullan, 2012). Price and McMullan (2012) noted one mentoring system that had encompassed many of the practices found in the themes identified in this study including planning, networking, training, and information sharing.

Theme 3: People Skills and Motivations

I identified this practice set as intuitive skills, knowing, understanding, discernment, and identifying how and why people-to-people relationships work. Additionally, including *dedication* in the theme was critical. In business, a difficult part of running an operation is managing the people within the processes. Participant P20 described this dedication to work as “loving what you do, much of what you do is drudgery.” P20 went on to say, “Those that do that well (love the drudgery), succeed.” Leadership dedication, commitment to the task, and loving or having a passion for what one does is an important practice. Although difficult to measure, each of the participants demonstrated an attitude of dedication to their enterprises and the people within the organizations. My observation was that their commitments reached deep into their families, organizations, and community. P14 noted this about a mentor, “She loved what she did, and you have to love what you do.”

Each of the participants mentioned people, working with them, aligning resources with them, guiding and planning with them. One hundred percent of all participants cited people in some context during their interviews. When coupled with sharing information,

collaboration, mentoring, setting examples, and other people skills this category of practice becomes important. People skills are intuitive; they have basic understandings and concepts and are iterative and heuristic.

Interview Questions 1 and 2. In these questions I identified certain people based practices in the lived experiences of the participants. Applying the skills is developmental, one learns as situations repeat, sometimes by trial and error. In addressing their business, P5 acknowledged, “One must have a well-defined outline and scope of work performed daily, weekly, or monthly...and flexibility is important.” This repetitive action lends to acquiring the skills necessary to motivate and engage people. P6 addressed people and motivations by stating in his experience, “Measured goals and team concepts keep people on track.” Additionally, P6 noted that one uses discernment to find the person who is worthy of investment. P9 added, “If I made a commitment to a person I kept it... honesty and integrity are so important.” This dedication to doing the right thing and being dependable was a mainstay for the vitality of the business owned by P9.

Participant P10 addressed people skills by noting, “Being exposed and working side by side was huge in building my awareness for what worked and what did not.” P10 noted, “Working with people and sharing ideas was important, along with being flexible and adaptive has worked for me.” P11 stated, “I have always been intuitive, I model best practices and try to improve.” Participant P12 noted, “People are my business,” and it is from people that P12 learned and developed. Participant P13 acknowledged learning from people and taking the best attributes and using them to motivate others. P13 stated,

“I pay attention to how people present themselves and work as bosses.” P14 supported learning from people and stated, “I collaborated and learned from others, on the job type training. I look at others and use their best practices as models.” P16 noted the importance of learning to work with all kinds of people, stating, “I had the ability to work with high profile people, ones that led the industry.” Working with people, being respectful of them, collaboration, and sharing are all important aspects of how P18 leads the organization. P20 noted, “It is achievement that makes people satisfied, placing value on them is important.” Each of these participants had attributes that allowed them to identify needs, align resources, and meet the needs of people by being flexible. The participants learned how to deal with people and developed motivations that allowed them to succeed.

Interview Questions 3 through 10. These questions addressed certain practices and traits, knowledge deployment, and how small business leaders related to stakeholders outside their organizations. Observation during the interviews led me to understand the dominant skill sets used were generally people skills. Participants highly regarded personal improvement through education and knowledge growth, they either complemented their limitations with people who had the knowledge necessary or used the knowledge base to improve their craft. P7 stated, “Soft skills are so important, hard skills, we did not get enough business training.” Theme 5 furthers the discussion on investing in people.

People skills, methods of motivation, and learning to value others helped these participants be successful. As businesses increase their base of operations, and additional

people engage in the processes, the dynamics of working with others will be important to getting things done. The participants addressed how they interacted, accommodated, and used people to successfully complete tasks. According to the participants, what was important was learning to work with people, find motivators, and become involved with others. The *people* component of the participants was evident as I observed their planning, ideas, and operations. The participants had a keen awareness of people around them, and used that to their advantage.

The practice of appropriately managing people and aspects of human resources is important to small business owners. Small business owners ranked human resources issues as the second most important management activity after general management (Hargis & Bradley, 2011). In the interviews, participants mentioned hiring right as a people practice. Hargis and Bradley noted small business practitioners considered this aspect important in organizations having more than 10 employees. Likewise, working with people, hiring right, training, and motivating people were practices that small enterprise leaders actively engaged in their organizations.

Theme 4: Networking and Trade Associations

A significant practice for successful small business leaders is networking and associations. This practice closely resembles Theme 1, collaboration, sharing information, and communication. The practice has a component internal to most of leader's organizations as well as an external component as many of the networks and associations are peer related. Trade associations usually serve as an external component and make up a more formal block of members often being agenda driven. Trade

associations, set in a community forum take the form of clubs, informal organizations, or nonprofits engaging like-minded individuals who work for a common cause. Networking is a social practice that involves the actual engagement of people, one-on-one, and practiced in a formal or informal setting. Networking with people can take many forms both inside and outside the organization. The benefit of networking is getting to know an individual in a setting outside the normal course of activity. Networking includes many settings including (a) community little league teams, (b) company bowling leagues, (c) after work happy hours, (d) political events, (e) churches, and (f) funerals.

The participants mentioned networking or associations in 45% of the interviews; however, one cannot effectively network without people or communication, and all of the participants held people skills and communications in high regard. The nature of the term, coupled with both people and collaboration, is a formidable practice, and extends the leaders influence outside of the organization. It was my observation, when participants used networking; they extended their resources and helped sustainable development. P1 supported the idea of extending one's resources through networking by saying, "Because a lot of businesses engage our networking events, they have relationships with people from the township and schools, so if there is a problem they connect because of their relationships."

Interview Questions 1 and 2. These questions related to the personal experiences of participants and 60% used some form of networking as a relevant part of their experiences. Participant P4 noted, "I don't have all the answers, I collaborate both

internally with my own company, and externally outside of the company.” P10 supported this internal mechanism by stating, “I try to be aware and open to feedback.”

Interview Questions 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9. These questions solicited responses from participants, designed to address skill sets, leadership development, leadership practices, delivery methods, and how these practices affect the person and organization. These questions related to how a participant might deliver leadership knowledge to others and 85% cited networking and associations as a method. Participant P2 noted they used an industry association, “Which has networking meetings, training, small group workshops, and large group lectures to help sustain momentum.” P3 supported networking with this, “People only listen when you have some kind of clout, so the more business and community leaders get together the more clout you have.” P3 continued with, “Part of the networking time has to be talking about integrity and things that might not translate to the bottom line.”

Participant P4 used trade associations to get information outside their organization and pass it to team networks inside the organization noting, “The information is not coming from just me, but from the outside through a national association.” P8 stated, “We are a part of networking associations, and have many meetings of sharing information and collaborating.” P5 supported the notion that trade associations were the primary source of their continuing educational requirements stating, “We need a broad field of knowledge, and they give us that.”

Participant P19 addressed associations as the primary method of delivering focused information and stated, “I belong to both a trade association, and a business

association, and both are effective for teaching.” P6 noted, “Networking with the community” was a method to deliver leadership expectations. P9 supported community networking as a method to deliver leader expectations noting, “We developed programs and partnered to teach people about our business.” Participant P12 liked the intimacy of small group associations saying, “It’s sharing, listening, and asking questions, collaborating with people.” P14 supported the small group setting, “Small groups where people interact with other leaders is so important.” P13 noted, that “working in the community and aligning resources” to fit the needs of the business and community was important. The practice of networking with a trade association focuses on needs ubiquitous to the group. P15 stated, “Associations are good, and we could partner with educators to deliver information, there is so much information available and businesses don’t always listen.” P20 encouraged community volunteering and networking to deliver information to an audience noting, “A person can make an example of oneself in groups where mutual resources and needs meet.”

Interview Question 11 created an opportunity for participants to review, reflect, and offer a summation of significant traits or practices that might help small-business leaders. In Question 11 I asked, “What additional information could you provide to improve leadership in small business?” P2 cited networking as a key practice for leaders saying, “Continuous networking with community leaders and collaborating outside of the walls of the office...working to facilitate using tools to improve.” P15 added, “Talk to a lot of people, and surround yourself with strong people.” As participants developed their

answers to question 11, it was common to find some type of networking whether formal or informal mentioned as a key practice.

Participants identified how they used networking either internal to the company or externally to extend their resources. They also noted what results they experienced through networks as delivery methods for educational forums. Both internal and external mechanisms for networking were successful practices that allowed the participants a way to gain knowledge, share information, solicit ideas, and get closer to their communities. Entrepreneurs often used social networks for advice, financing, employees, customers, and increasing knowledge or skills (Klyver & Grant, 2010). When used to extend a small-enterprise operator's resources networking is a viable practice that helps build organizational success.

Theme 5: Investing in People, Vision, Education, Training, and Knowledge Increase

The practice of investing in people considers the investment of time and financial resources and is different from the people skills mentioned in Theme 3. All of the participants addressed the need to invest in people with time, knowledge, and other resources. Participants shared that people with desire, commitment, enthusiasm, someone who bought into the vision, and loyal were worth investment. P10 noted, "They are buying into the vision and it is our responsibility to sell the vision in a manner compelling enough that they want to stick around." P6 supported this practice with, "Are they open, willing and passionate, committed and loyal, those are the types of things worth investing in." P7 supported the willingness attribute and said, "We have a small staff and I ask for help suggestions to improve our business, when someone is willing I

take advantage of that because it returns value by making them feel satisfied and makes our practice better.” P8 believed that building programs around people’s strengths was a method to invest and return value, “We spent a year working with a young man, and we built a program around him, now he shares his story and has helped in the community.” P13 supported building around a person’s strengths as a way to invest stating, “I create a job around what they want to do and create a fit for them.”

Interview Questions 5 and 10. These interview questions related to how leaders viewed other stakeholders in the organization and developed them into leaders for the future. The development of personnel is important to the longevity of an organization. P1 noted, “You bring them to the challenge and encourage them, find ways to motivate them, you have to create an environment for sustainability. If you look at successful companies, look at the young talent they have, that is sustainability.” P2 mentioned, “Training methods for new talent, to grow them and find ways to make them successful. We had an associates program, and chose individuals to mentor. We also adapted to their needs, and committed resources for success.” P3 said, “I share vision and look for people buying into it, because if you are not buying the vision we cannot go any further. I am looking for folks buying into the vision and getting enthusiastic. I affirm positive behavior.”

Participant P4 approached education and training by hiring right and using intensive screening methods, P4 said, “I am looking for a good fit, once they pass everything we put them through a rigorous training regimen.” P4 addressed investing in people by noting, “I continuously want to develop employee strengths, and I invest in that

(helping them to improve their skill sets).” P16 also addressed training by saying, “Hire right, hire for best fit, and make sure the job description is clear. I put them through a 60 day training regimen and debrief daily.” P18 used “Hands on training, continuing education, and technology” to train and develop people. P5 noted, “the way most people do it is poorly, generally reflected in pay, we have flexibility for the employee, adapting to changing needs of people and business.” P20 also noted, “Situational training” to get people the experience they needed to be successful.

As noted in this theme investing in people, educating, training, and generally increasing the knowledge base was a practice used by successful leaders. It became apparent that these successful leaders took the time to hire, train, and utilize the strengths of others to sustain their businesses. Many of the practitioners used financial resources, time, and the flexibility of small businesses to retain and keep their people on track and successful. Participants shared how and what they did to invest in people having value. The long-term success of most small businesses is not in the next great business leader as the Great Man Theory suggests, but by ensuring the business has the right people and developing them through the processes of that business.

For many of the participants investing in people began with hiring the right people. Hargis and Bradley (2011) noted this as an important aspect of managing by small business leaders. Ensuring a good fit and hiring the right people impacts job performance, employee retention, and organizational effectiveness (Hargis & Bradley, 2011). Investing in people through training and development programs enhance employee’s job related skills and ability to improve job performance. Furthermore, data

suggests that investing in training for employees helps build technical expertise and innovation (Hargis & Bradley, 2011). Sharing information regarding financial benefits from investing in people is appropriate. It is noteworthy that firms experience 22% higher revenue growth, 23% higher profits, and 68% reduction in employee turnover (Hargis & Bradley, 2011). This information corroborates this practice by small business leaders as a sustainable initiative.

Theme 6: Setting an Example, Leading by Example, and Modeling Best Practices

The participants acknowledged this practice as an important attribute for success in 95% of the interviews. The participants spoke of the practice in the common terminology of setting an example, being an example, leading by example and modeling best practices as examples. The meanings were interchangeable and synonymous with each participant. It was my observation that when participants used the terminology it implied a standard for the business culture. For example, if a leader took the time to further their education or trade skills others would follow that example. A leader often drives the culture of an organization by being an example (Banutu-Gomez, 2013).

Participant P12 stated, “I invest time and let them know who I am. The people have to know you, lead by example.” The statement was reflective of a participant who practiced servant leadership but also captured the essence of leading by example. Supporting the premise that leadership drives the culture of an organization P14 noted, “Showing by example, if people see me do things they will model that behavior.”

Example setting, whether accomplished through modeling or being an example is a practice that the participants used to motivate their people. Sometimes being an

example was setting a standard other times an unspoken action. Participant P7 described a mentor as a good communicator and personal example, “Not by talking about what he or she did, but by modeling a whole philosophy.” Supporting the notion of actions being a strong influence P7 described another person as a personal example of how to work with others stating, “She was a good person and a good personal example of how to work with people.” P20 mentioned setting an example along with accountability for one’s actions by stating, “Having someone witness what you do.” P14 corroborated that actions were important to practicing example setting by noting, “I am straight forward and don’t try to oversell myself, I try and lead by example, walking the walk.”

Many of the participants using example setting as a motivator did so by building trust in their relationships, without trust, few relationships develop (Banutu-Gomez, 2013). It was my observation; the trust built from these successful practitioners was through a willingness to show that they would do whatever it took to improve. This related back to dedication as an integral part of operating a small business. P3 stated, “I try and have skin in the game, being part of things, and believing in what I am doing.” P4 said, “Consistency is what I try and follow.” P8 corroborated modeling this consistency and steadfastness in example setting by stating, “I have to model steadiness by setting an example.” Participant P7 stated, “In my experience it’s seeing how people live their lives, someone that you want to emulate.” Participant P11 gave this statement, “I always lead by example and tell them sometimes the best thing to do is hard, what you get see is what you get from me.”

Participant P12 had a unique perspective on being an example, “Leaders are like spotlights, and if you are a leader you need to have your act together, be careful of how you live.” P12 noted that a leader is under the spotlight, and his or her actions, good or bad, reflected outwardly. Using modeling or other people’s examples was a practice employed by P13. P13 stated, “I learned and modeled best practices, I took what I liked and left the rest.” Supporting modeling best practices and using them to improve P14 and P19 visited other businesses and used their practices to improve. P15 added, “You lead by empowering and enriching.” P17 stated, I lead by modeling and being an example, showing confidence and certainty in the position.” P18 noted that having good examples should start in the home and continue in formal education. As an outreach for the trade profession P19 sets the example for communication so that the community better understands the nature of the business. For hiring the right people P19 noted, “They need to model my values, ethics, and morals.” Addressing the questions of delivering leadership practices P20 stated, “By example, ultimately what we become is through what we see.” To answer Interview Question 9, of governments role in sustainable objectives for small businesses and to address a broader stakeholder base P20 continued with this statement, “Government needs to be an example itself, they need to be honest, dishonesty has caught up with them.”

Participants counted on setting an example as a practice, instilling how they would accomplish a goal or what resources they might use to complete a task. The participants saw an example early in their careers, became examples to motivate people, or used other people’s examples to improve. The practice itself is similar to on-the-job

training and helps set metrics for one's own endeavors. The leaders used example setting as a practice to achieve long-term viability and demonstrating commitment to the organization. The importance of setting the example and being an organizational role model was important to the participants and corroborated by Mihelic, Lipicnik, and Tekavcic (2010). Leaders are the primary influence for ethical conduct in organizations (Mihelic et al., 2010). Likewise, the participants inherently knew that they were the primary influence for conduct in their organizations.

Theme 7: Planning, Strategies, and Tools

Successful leaders and practitioners addressed this theme in 80% of the interviews. Some participants spoke in terms of specific formal business plans and used strategies like flexibility or resource alignments, or as informal plans that allowed them to meet more immediate needs. The resources and tools used by the practitioners varied with each business, but having plans or strategies and using resources were apparent in operating the businesses. As part of a plan, vision, goals, and resources aligned to accomplish the tasks of the business. In some instances to explain their use of planning, participants explained they saw a need, or a chance to improve, and took the initiative to organized for the task. P1 stated, "I perceive things that I believe need change, and adapt to do so." P1 also spoke to a communication strategy by noting, "In small business once you determine the audience, you need to get appropriate information to them, appropriate and intentional to what the business does." Planning appropriately is an essential part of a sustainable strategy.

One resource strategy of small businesses is the flexibility to adapt and make decisions rapidly. P2 stated, “Being flexible is a challenge, but somehow over the past 5 years to survive the economic climate, we were flexible, adaptive, creative, and persistent, reinventing the business.” Planning can be informal and many of the businesses visited during the interview process did not have a vision or goal on display, but the mission was apparent in their speech patterns. P3 noted, “I am constantly sharing vision, mission, and goals.” Supporting the strategy practice P10 said, “They are buying into the vision and it is our responsibility to sell the vision in a manner compelling enough to get them to stick around.” P6 did not have an apparent vision statement but said, “Have a vision both long and short term, documented in some way for reference. That is important so you can measure against the goal.” In a different perspective, P4 noted several times the goals, ambitions, and metrics for people in the organization. P4 also noted, “To promote a sustainable strategy it has to be communicated all the time, you can never over communicate.” Participant P5 was more formal in his or her approach to planning saying, “You must have a defined outline of work to be performed daily, weekly, monthly, or annually. Then be flexible and adjust the plan to changes in the market.” P15 and P16 supported the formal business plan approach with P15 stating, “Before you start, one really needs a business plan, then talk to a lot of people.”

Participant P7 stated their business plan was, “informal and loose, but with defined roles and an overall goal of high quality in the service end of the business.” P8 supported the notion of being flexible and informal by stating, “During a time of financial struggle we set new priorities and one was to maintain our good reputation with vendors,

we agreed to adjust and sacrifice.” This participant’s organization adopted a mission statement but was flexible in the approach to accomplishing the vision. According to P5, a business owner should review their plans on an ongoing basis to ensure one is on track when things change.

Participant P11 adopted a team strategy and used vision, sharing, and communication as resources to execute the plan. Similarly, and in response to using a plan involving a broader stakeholder group P13 stated, “Define what your company does, core values, and align resources to work with communities.” Participants shared what they planned and how they accomplished goals through careful planning. Planning for the participants often included collaboration, information sharing, and the involvement of people both inside and outside the organization. Planning was a practice used to ensure success over the long-term life of the organization.

Having a plan, strategizing, and having tools and resources to accomplish goals was important to successful participants in this study. Aldehayyat and Twaissi (2011) provided evidence that addressed planning in small businesses. The evidence supported, small businesses that adopted strategic planning shared benefits including enhancement of organizational performance. The study results supported a positive relationship between strategic planning and financial performance (Aldehayyat & Twaissi, 2011). P20 summed planning as, “There is a tremendous amount of preparation necessary for success.” In support of participant P20, to prepare is to plan, perhaps best stated in the axiom of *plan the work, and work the plan*.

Tie to Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework tied the development of leaders to their experiences. Mostovicz et al. (2009) presented the dynamic theory of leadership development in 2009 noting leadership is a developmental process and presented the developmental pathway theory. Mostovicz et al. argued that leaders who develop traits of leadership through life experiences shape their styles from their past, present, and future. The seven themes identified from the thoughts and experiences of the participants with the phenomena of leadership support the theory as presented in the dynamic theory of leadership development. The resulting seven themes related to skills and practices developed over time, accumulated from learning situations, and applied from the knowledge gained through heuristic and iterative processes. The lived experiences of the participants might further the understanding of the developmental theory introduced by Mostovicz et al.

Understanding that the right leader should fit the appropriate position is important to organizational success. Mostovicz et al. (2009) noted the importance of finding the right fit for a leader's worldviews and their organizational practices. Mostovicz et al. presented two schools of thought held by scholars regarding leadership traits: (a) leaders have traits inherent from birth, as in the great man theory, or (b) human beings develop traits of leadership through their life experiences and eventually emerge as leaders. Data gathered from the 20 semistructured interviews with successful enterprise leaders who developed through personal experiences might reduce the information gap concerning appropriate knowledge for small businesses. As common themes developed from

interpretation of interviews, a better understanding of leadership activity in small enterprises might benefit society by reducing small-business failures.

Holt and Marques (2012) examined the developmental path of leadership and argued that certain inter-human skill sets developed over time. These inter-human skills were similar to the soft characteristics Hamel (2009) espoused. In these characteristics, Hamel encouraged leaders to become social architects, characterized by purpose and vision. The participants, all successful leaders who have demonstrated success have exhibited some or all of the seven themes identified in this research study. Different opportunities allowed these participants to hone the practices most appropriate for their organizations. Leaders having experienced this developmental process might positively influence future practitioners, and benefit society by reducing small-business failures.

Participants P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P14, P17, and P20 noted gaps between the education process and practitioners. Some participants trained and had access to higher education; others had strong influences, usually mentors that aided their development. It became apparent throughout the interviews that the participants developed through the sum of their experiences. The participants used their practices as situations arose and needed attention. The participants applied their knowledge and skills to adapt to the situation at hand and find solutions. Xue et al. (2010) argued for a leadership model driven by the situation. Recognizing situations to use appropriate leadership training and knowledge comes from skill sets developed over time (Holt & Marques, 2012). Results from this research might help bridge the gap between educators and practitioners and find a common delivery method for appropriate information.

Ties to the Literature

Small businesses need transformation from the traditional approach of profit, to businesses that meet the demands of future generations, with vision and purpose (Hamel, 2009). Small business operators require the tools, skill-sets, and characteristics to transform and embrace a sustainable future (Goxe, 2010). Participants P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P13, P17, and P20 supported the gap in knowledge transference between the classroom and the practice field. Atamian and VanZante (2010) noted the importance of up-to-date skills and relevant education as a key ingredient for building success in small businesses. Moreover, Atamian and VanZante noted that continuing education should be relevant, flexible, and facilitate confidence as the small business owner applies what they learn. Toor and Ofori (2008) argued for more holistic approaches in construction-management education. Jones (2010) added that universities and educators have a responsibility to provide educational programs that have value for students and society.

It might prepare small-business leaders better if decision processes included an understanding of sustainable initiatives like collaboration, mentoring, people skills, networking, investing in people, setting examples, and planning. The soft skill characteristics espoused in the above discussion emerged as themes developed from the semistructured interviews. Additionally, they might help practitioners understand the needs and actions appropriate for small-business leaders.

Educators, consultants, and practitioners have presented leadership models based on successful leaders so that other practitioners might benefit from this theoretical work. Although the participants used different styles of leadership, most noted that education,

training, and investing in people led to improved organizational and personal performance. All of the participants noted the importance of training and investing in people and themselves.

Leadership styles refer to leadership that best fits a particular enterprise's organizational plan (Brinkman & O'Brien, 2010). Bucic, Robinson, and Ramburuth (2010) presented a model that included the attributes of several leadership styles called the ambidextrous leadership model. Scholars have also developed the full range leadership model that incorporates attributes of transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidance behavior to deal with situations that might need some combination of all three styles (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010). Each of the models has a purpose and function in the appropriate situation (Jogulu, 2010). Xue et al. (2010) argued for a leadership driven by the situation. Similarly, as participants used different styles of leadership they applied their strengths and supported their weaknesses by furthering their education and training, or by surrounding themselves with knowledgeable people.

Leadership is the catalyst to successful implementation of sustainable strategies. D'Amato and Roome (2009) argued that leadership in an organization must shift from a profit-based bottom line to the sustainable triple bottom line style of thinking. D'Amato and Roome found that organizational leadership has three basic ideas: people lead others, leadership is a multilevel phenomenon, and the study of leadership competencies is less important to business than leadership practices. These characteristics are evident in the seven themes developed from the interviews and corroborate that leadership is developmental, and these practices are relevant to long-term success. Participants

addressed sustainable practices when they invest in people, collaborate, and involve themselves in communities. Participants P1, P2, P3, P6, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, and P14 noted their community involvement, training people, and collaboration with a broader stakeholder group. According to D'Amato and Roome, leaders should foster open communication and develop practices of mentoring and coaching to link the employees to activities furthering a triple bottom line. As participants encouraged and practiced open communication and mentoring, they increase their chances of success and help communities with stable resources.

The participants noted an educational component internal to their organizations, found when addressing training. They also noted education as a delivery mechanism to get successful practices in the hands of practitioners. The participants noted that education could play a key role in the transference of knowledge to others. To develop long-term organizational sustainability businesses, society, and government need to collaborate (Rake & Grayson, 2009). Today, the expectation from consumers is for businesses, markets, and government to work together to find solutions for global problems.

According to Jones and Hegarty (2011), institutions of higher education lacked a clear understanding and framework for this type of practical business education. Nabi and Linan (2011) corroborated the idea that higher educational institutions play a role in leadership education, but few research-based solutions offered the kinds of programs the small business sector needed. Knowledge transfer and management are key components to organizational sustainability, innovation, and competitive advantage (Lakshman,

2009). Perhaps the solution begins with institutions that deliver relevant practices. Atamian and VanZante (2010) noted the importance of up-to-date skills and relevant education as a key ingredient for building success in small businesses. Atamian and VanZante identified educational opportunities for small-business leaders that included colleges and online instruction. Kerklaan (2011) argued for a different educational learning tool that included techniques to represent ideas, giving visual cues that added different perspectives to problem solving, thus creating an atmosphere of collaboration. Meredith and Burkle (2008) advocated for a greater use of a hands-on pedagogical approaches in small business leadership education. As participant P4 noted, "I would love to have an educator come in and spend time learning about what we do." A higher level of collaboration between educators and practitioners might offer valuable solutions for problems in small business.

Participants used the practices as situations and conditions demanded action and solutions. P6 and P20 supported situational learning for training purposes. Perhaps, and addressed by the participants, the hands on approach might be appropriate pedagogy and include on-the-job training, mentoring, job shadowing, and situational learning as a solution. Collectively, the participants honed the applications of their skills over time and through experiences encountered in the operations of their enterprises. While accepting the concept of leadership as appropriate for each unique situation, the goal of this study was to develop a better understanding of leadership in small businesses that reduces failures and increase their sustainability.

Applications to Professional Practice

The experiences of successful small business practitioners form the central research question for this study: What skills and practices do small-business practitioners need to ensure success beyond 5 years? My intent for this qualitative phenomenological research study was to understand the practices of successful practitioners and gain new knowledge that might help practitioners succeed beyond 5 years. These practices will affect a broad stakeholder group as small business leaders adopt them for sustainable success.

Results from the study gave organizational stakeholders leadership practices with a success record appropriate for small enterprises. Themes and concepts developed from the reported experiences of participants might reduce failures in the small business sector. Small businesses could benefit by having additional resources developed from successful practitioners to use as they search for leaders who understand sustainable practices. Participants P3, P4, P6, P9, P14, P15, P16, and P20 noted broadly sharing information, communicating, engaging the community, case studies, and methods that work were methods to deliver a sustainable message. Educators might benefit as they create curricula to train small business leaders for the future. According to Jones and Hegarty (2011), institutions of higher education lacked a clear understanding and framework for this type of practical business education. Participants noted and in some cases offered to help educators by giving hands on learning experiences. Engaging this type of collaboration to disperse appropriate knowledge to practitioners of the future is crucial. Knowledge transfer and management are key components to organizational

sustainability, innovation, and competitive advantage (Lakshman, 2009). In discussing appropriate actions of educators and practitioners of small businesses, Gibb (2011) argued for the education of students through practical experience. As organizational trainers look for future leaders, they need criteria that have practical applications for small businesses. Human resources professionals could benefit from the value added for them through the development of training programs geared to produce new kinds of business leaders sensitive to the future needs of a globalizing society. Perhaps human resources professionals that adopted more collaborative approaches could enhance employee training with suppliers.

The practices of successful small business practitioners have an impact on the economy and the local communities. By adopting some practices employed by these successful practitioners, acts of (a) collaboration, (b) mentoring, (c) using people skills, (d) networking, (e) investing in people with training, (f) setting an example, and (g) planning, more businesses will prevail long-term. I found practices appropriate for leaders of small businesses tested through the experiences of other successful practitioners. Ultimately, society benefits as more leaders who value sustainable initiatives in business flow from a pool of participants that have been field-tested and met the expectations of their peers (Brown, 2011; Sowmya & Majumda, 2010). The engagement of both businesses and higher education can help business development through social networking to solve problems that affect society (Gordon & Jack, 2010). This study engaged small enterprise leaders to explore the relevant needs of small business practitioners and develop solutions proven successful. Successful practitioners

supported networking, sharing information, collaboration, and general engagement of their communities in their organizations. As small businesses adopt sustainable practices, and set the example for collaboration, society benefits from the information flow across different sectors of business.

Implications for Social Change

The demand of social responsibilities on businesses and educators is growing and society is asking these groups to find answers that will affect the activity of organizations as it relates to corporate social responsibility (Claydon, 2011). The leadership deficiencies in organizations led to failures costing society millions of dollars in investments, time, and trust (Plino et al., 2010). The research from this study centered on exploring the experiences of successful small enterprise leaders and noted practices that might help practitioners succeed into the future. As leaders of small enterprises adopt sustainable practices, individuals, organizations, and communities succeed.

The failures of small businesses after 5 years have a tremendous economic impact by effecting 65% of new job growth (Small Business Report, 2010). In addition, leadership and management development in all enterprises regardless of size are facing new challenges (Hamel, 2009). Leadership-development problems have also affected the relationship between educators and business practitioners (Pettijohn & Pettijohn, 2009). There is an urgent need for transformational leaders who meet the needs of organizations in the future and for businesses to prioritize talent development for sustainability (Warrick, 2011). Because of these deficiencies and needs, business leaders today are looking to employ people who understand corporate social responsibility and its

importance to communities and society (Claydon, 2011; Eveleth et al., 2011). Results in this study showed a significant involvement of participants in the communities they served. With continuing collaboration, networking, and sharing of information businesses and communities can work together, to set expectations and reap rewards of small business leaders committed to sustainability.

Leadership in small enterprises is a phenomenon that calls for further examination. A better understanding of effective leadership practices might reduce the rate of failure and become resources to teach sustainable practices to future leaders. The qualitative methodology allowed me to explore ideas and thoughts of successful small-enterprise leaders toward the creation of more appropriate criteria for small business leaders. Klapper and Tegtmeier (2010) identified the social significance of entrepreneurial behaviors and encouraged its furtherance into educational programs. These aforementioned authors established a link between entrepreneurial behavior and positive influences in the local, regional, and national contexts (Klapper & Tegtmeier, 2010).

The results of the study might lead small business leaders to a better understanding of sustainable practices. As Gordon and Jack (2010) argued for a richer development of networking between educators and practitioners, this study will engage practitioners in a similar manner to bring solutions to the field of practice. The intent of the study focused understanding leadership criteria that might help build a foundation for small enterprises to become *living systems* that meets the expectations of society (Senge, 2008).

The successful practices employed by these practitioners included acts of (a) collaboration, (b) mentoring, (c) using people skills, (d) networking, (e) investing in people with training, (f) setting an example, and (g) planning. As evidence suggested, more practitioners adopting some of these practices increase their long-term viability (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Klapper and Tegtmeier (2010) established a link between positive entrepreneurial behavior and its influence with the local and regional economies. The practices found with the successful participants might lead to a long-term collaboration between business operators and society benefiting all the stakeholders as they participate.

The research objective of this study was to explore practitioner-based leadership to find qualities that result in positive social change. The study methodology allowed me to explore these relevant concepts with regard to small business leadership and the extent to which they might help assure higher long-term sustainability for small enterprises. Thus, appropriate practices developed from successful practitioners and if adopted might become a resource for small business sustainability. This research might serve as a beginning point for the study of knowledge transfer techniques, curriculum development, management training programs, and questions that might surface from the implementation of training practices that need further understanding.

Recommendations for Action

Components of the research project contained evidence for additional field research in the area of small business. The literature review contained examples of small business resource constraints, leadership deficiencies, and educational opportunities that

might help reduce the number of failures in small businesses. The results of the interviews led me to conclude that small-business practitioners need a variety of tools to compete in the global market and initiate more sustainable practices that might lead to long-term viability. These practices include collaboration, mentoring, using people skills, networking, investing in people with training, setting or being an example, and planning.

The level of higher education institutions offering entrepreneurial classes has grown (Smith & Beasley, 2011), and curriculum to meet future demand is critical. An increasing number of women entering the small business sector (Lawton, 2010), requires a better understanding of the resources needed to succeed and might prove valuable for future practitioners. The service industry represents 50% of small businesses (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011) and people owning service companies will need to evaluate their practices as well. The information from the interviews lends a clearer understanding of the practices needed to succeed. Existing practitioners and those embarking on owning or operating a small enterprise might benefit by adopting practices found relevant by successful small-enterprise leaders. It is my intention to reach other practitioners through networking associations, local business incubators, and educational forums with the information from this study so that some type of action might begin.

Leaders educated and trained with practices appropriate to the small-business sector might also positively affect the behavior of leaders in other areas. As noted by the participants, hard skills are necessary to evaluate and understand one's position, but soft skills motivate people and allow them to focus on the vision. An interview participant noted, "The best instructors were once practitioners themselves." One of my goals was to

reach out to local business programs at several levels of education with the information from the study, perhaps it only builds awareness at first, but the results might influence an audience of practitioners as well. Additionally, upon completion of the study publication it is my intention to further the results through journals, networking, trade associations, and the educational system to foster awareness and change in small enterprise operators.

Recommendations for Further Study

Field research included interviews with 20 participants in small enterprises; all participants had greater than 5 years of experience in leadership. The analyzed interviews might contain data that will reduce the failures in small businesses. Demographic data from the interviews contained, years of experience, gender, education, and minority status. The participants included 12 males, eight females, of which three were minorities. All of the participants had some college education, with 15% involved in the educational process. Six of the participants had professional degrees including two medical doctors, three attorneys, and two certified public accountants. The average length of time the participants spent in leadership was 22 years.

An interesting element worth noting, eight of the participants acknowledged a gap in knowledge transference between the classroom and the practice field. Closing this gap with further information from similar participants might reduce the small business failure rate, provide a method of delivery appropriate for small businesses, and evaluate educational curriculum with practices that matter to practitioners. Research in the field

might produce more collaboration between academia and practitioners and help bridge this gap for the benefit of society.

As noted by the participants, hard skills are necessary to evaluate and understand one's position, but soft skills motivate people and allow them to focus on the vision. Education appropriate for the needs of small business is important (Atamian & VanZante, 2010). According to the participants, it is equally important to balance the theory with real-world practice. More research made available to small-enterprise leaders in terms of using and implementing practices of on-the-job training, job shadowing, service learning, and situational leadership training would benefit both current and future practitioners.

Mentoring is another opportunity for research. Understanding the best practices of mentors, how they function and practice their craft, when does one become a mentor, or how would a mentor program work all need further understanding as the demand for sustainable leadership grows. None of the participants in the study had a formal mentoring program, but invested in people who showed a strong desire to improve. Informal programs in small enterprises need measured results and communications that allow people engaged in the process an opportunity for feedback. As one interviewee P6 noted, feedback and measured results are important in understanding where one is in the process.

This study began with a desire to help strengthen small businesses with workable solutions that might lead to reduced failures and sustainable actions that encourage practices suitable for long-term viability. My career has allowed me to be involved with a few large businesses, but mostly was in the field dealing with small businesses and

small strategic business units. This allowed observations that included both success and failures of small businesses. Leadership was a key ingredient in all of the field observations. Certain indicators of success and failure became apparent and needed further explanations. This need for additional understanding became the impetus for the study.

It was apparent from the interviews that the participants demonstrated a strong work ethic and were willing to stretch their mental and physical resources to improve their enterprise. Participants cited that having a mentor and surrounding oneself with good people was important to having a sustainable business. The phenomenon of mentoring and surrounding oneself with good people included the actions of using the talents and abilities of others to complement one's shortcomings. Most of the participants serving as mentors would take an initial first step in leadership development by investing in people who had a strong desire to improve. This investment included, time, money, continuing education, and working to increase the knowledge base. Some of the investments were cautionary with a caveat for leadership candidates to have a strong desire to share in the company vision. Mentoring would be a subject that needs further research. Collaboration both inside the company and through networking outside the organization helped add to the knowledge base and further ones value. Networking and collaborative practices would make topics for additional research.

Reflections

My perspective on small-business leadership originates in my youth and with the exception of 10 years at a large business, my time was in small enterprises. I watched these men and women struggle with resources, technical deficiencies, lack of knowledge, government intrusion, and succeed with practices not found in the educational systems. These successful leaders practiced skills found through experience, with a dash of dedication. The participants love for what they did left a lasting impression and I knew they practiced something more than the hard skills found in the classrooms.

To refrain from personal bias, I used a list of participants that included people some unknown to me or in whom I had little knowledge of the leadership methods of their operations. The study introduction included an announcement of my name, contact information by the university, that I was the researcher, and doing a study on leadership in small enterprises. The participants answered the 11 interview questions and did not ask about my professional background. The consent agreement contained the intent of the study, and interviews conducted professionally, ensuring the comfort of the participant. With the exception of making sure I had the correct nomenclature or meaning I do not think that I influenced the answers. The questions were straightforward and asked of the participant's personal experiences regarding leadership. I have a personal bias toward companies that operate well, and most recently with those practicing sustainable initiatives. I view this as an opportunity for improvement, for the companies, and society.

The participants shared their experiences honestly. There was no motivation to be less than honest as the questions explored the experiences of the participants. I appreciated their willingness to share time, thoughts, and practices with the intent of helping others succeed. When the study began, the outcomes or practices shared had no preconceived significance. The authors of the literature review addressed attributes and practices randomly and participants freely shared their experiences. From experience, one could predict some of the themes, but that was not relevant to the lived experiences of the participants. Observing and interviewing the participants allowed me to learn, apply, and set new metrics for the future.

Summary and Study Conclusions

In an article titled *Small Entrepreneurships in the United States*, Yallapragada and Bhuiyan (2011) noted two lists of practices. The first list included factors for success and was comparable to the practices developed from participants in this study. With the exception of mentoring and networking, the seven practices noted in this study reflected similar findings. Likewise, the second list included causes of business failure. The seven practices mentioned in this study in which participants excelled, corroborated the findings of failures where people did not perform well.

The interviews with 20 participants from small enterprises in the US Midwest allowed me to draw conclusions about the practices of leaders of small enterprises. Small enterprise leaders need a diverse skill set that comes primarily from exposure over time. This developmental process involves hands on and situational learning found in the practice field. Results of the study support the literature review, noting such learning

methods as on-the-job training, service learning, and situational leadership training. The results affirmed that soft, or people-skills were significant to successful long-term operations. The results corroborated the leadership survey at Duke University by Sitkin, Emery, and Siang (2009). Hard skill-sets were not high value business-leadership traits (Sitkin et al., 2009).

The message to small business practitioners and educators is clear. Collaboration and communication need to be more prominent between academics and practitioners to provide leadership prepared to address the demands of small business and society. Mentoring, coaching, and the engagement of people are necessary skill-sets that need practice and support to develop leader candidates. The investment in people with education, training, and knowledge management has a return on investment. Consistent leadership behavior in the form of modeling best practices, being an example, or setting the example demonstrates for others a commitment to improvement and a willingness to succeed. Existing practitioners adopting some of the strategies identified above as part of a strategy to become sustainable gain practical experience and knowledge that benefit the leader and the organization.

Future small-enterprise leaders might evaluate and adopt the practices to strengthen attributes recognized that need work. The resulting practices add to the knowledge base and offer alternatives to failure. Reducing the failure rate of small businesses would benefit society with new leaders using field-tested practices with successful practitioners. Finally, as educators and industry collaborate, a new foundation grows for practices appropriate to small businesses.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of leadership in small businesses.

You were chosen for the study because you have led an organization for more than 5 years. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. A researcher named Dan Holloway, who is a Doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore your experiences with leadership in small enterprises. The intent is to better understand leadership from successful practitioners and collect information that might help reduce the failure rate in the small-business sector.

Procedures:

Participation in the study means you:

- Participate in an audio recorded or transcribed interview of questions regarding your experiences with leadership development lasting approximately 30 minutes.
- Be available for possible follow up questions and comments
- Review your transcripts at your discretion of the interview for accuracy.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

You may feel awkward answering questions during the recording event. Participants might benefit from a better understanding of leadership in small business and increase their chances for longevity in their markets. Information gathered from the research might help reduce small business failures and help the community by having successful and sustainable practices.

Compensation:

There is no compensation.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via telephone at [REDACTED] or by email at Daniel.holloway@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 07-10-13-0178096 and it expires on July 9th, 2014.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature

The Uniform Electronic Transactions Act regulates electronic signatures.

Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix B: Letter of Introduction

This research study delves into developing a better understanding of successful leadership in small businesses. The purpose of the study is to develop this understanding through the experiences of successful practitioners that have lead or operated a small enterprise. The research will use open-ended interview questions that will explore the experiences of successful leaders to understand their practices and help alleviate the systemic failures seen in small businesses. This research study includes a brief interview taking approximately 30 minutes. Information from the interviews is confidential and in accordance with Walden University's review board kept secure. Participants receive no compensation; their names and company affiliation are confidential and not published in the doctoral study.

Your participation might provide valuable information that helps the success of small businesses. Your choice to participate is voluntary and you may stop at any time during the interview process. Furthermore, you may request a copy of your transcribed interview. A copy of the research results found in the summary is available upon request.

Should you have any further questions regarding the study please feel free to call or email. My email address is daniel.holloway@waldenu.edu and my phone number is

██████████ The institutional Review Board at Walden University on 07- 10 - 2013 has approved this project.

Sincerely,

Daniel Holloway

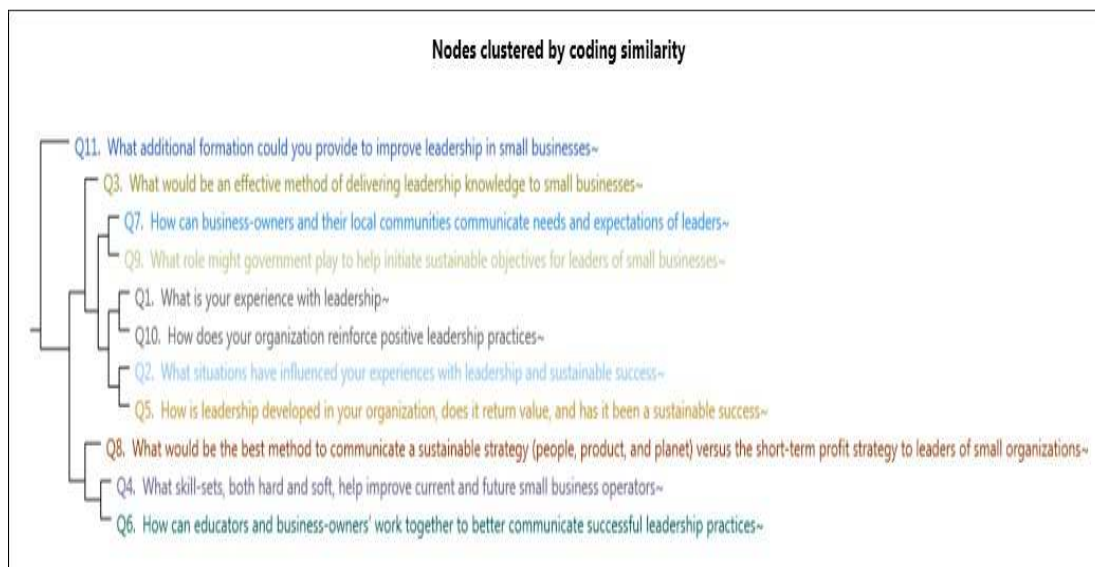
Appendix C: Interview Questions

The experiences of successful small business practitioners form the central research question for this study. What skills and practices do small business practitioners need to ensure success beyond 5 years? The following interview questions should develop a better understanding of small business leadership practices.

1. What is your experience with leadership?
2. What situations have influenced your experiences with leadership and sustainable success?
3. What would be an effective method of delivering leadership knowledge to small businesses?
4. What skill-sets, both hard and soft, help improve current and future small business operators?
5. How is leadership developed in your organization, does it return value, and has it been a sustainable success?
6. How can educators and business-owners' work together to better communicate successful leadership practices?
7. How can business-owners and their local communities communicate needs and expectations of leaders?
8. What would be the best method to communicate a sustainable strategy (people, product, and planet) versus the short-term profit strategy to leaders of small organizations?

9. What role might government play to help initiate sustainable objectives for leaders of small businesses?
10. How does your organization reinforce positive leadership practices?
11. What additional information could you provide to improve leadership in small businesses?

Appendix D: Interview Question Clusters



This is a representation of nodes or questions clustered by coding similarity in NVivo software. As corroborated with NVivo, question 11 indirectly relates to questions 3, 4, and 5 concerning necessary skills, traits, and methods to deliver the information to leaders of small enterprises. Questions 6, 7, 8, and 9 concern how leadership and their practices related to a broader community of stakeholders. Questions 1, 2, and 10 relate to both personal and organizational experiences. The researcher clustered the interview questions in groups as they related to the research question. Questions 1 and 2 related to the experiences of participants as they engaged practices that helped sustainable success. Questions 3, 4, 5, and 10 connected how leaders and their organizations engaged and delivered leadership practices. Questions 6, 7, 8, and 9 related to how leadership practices engaged the community of stakeholders outside of the organization. Interview question 11 was a summary question relating to the other questions.

Appendix E: Reduction Representation of Significant Meanings

Data reduced by participant's significant meanings

Practices developed from participant interviews				
Word Query	Count	Significant statements	Count	Text search reference percentage of participants
people	59	People	59	100%
collaboration	41	Collaborate, communicate, sharing, information	115	100%
set	47	Set Example	85	95%
example	38			
communication	34			
invest	31	Invest, educate, train, knowledge	165	100%
mentoring	27	Mentoring	27	70%
education	32			
networking	26	Networking	26	45%
sharing	26			
experience	34			
good	30			
knowledge	32			
hands	21			
information	14			
positive	20			
job	15			
processes	18			
planning	13	Planning, processes, flexible strategies	43	80%
flexibility	12			

The data were refined with word searches and coding inquiries in NVivo. The researcher used the transcripts to refine meanings from the interviews and word searches, reducing the data to significant statements. Themes and practices emerged that were important to the practices of the small enterprise leaders and helped the longevity of their firms.

Curriculum Vitae

Daniel E. Holloway**Objective:**

Consultant, Advisor, Business Leadership

Education:

Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Doctor of Business Administration in Leadership (2013-2014)
Dissertation: "Understanding Leadership in Small Business from the perspective of Practitioners"
Committee Chair: Dr. Thomas Schaefer

City University of Seattle, Bellevue, Washington
Masters of Business Administration (2001)

Saint Joseph's College, Standish, Maine
Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (1995)

Business Experience:

Owner, Chief Instructor 1981-present
Owner and General Manager 2000-present
Vice President and sales executive 1989-2000
National Sales Manager 1984-1989
Mid-level management and personnel trainer 1971-1983

Conference Presentations:

Martial arts seminars, the US Midwest, 1975-present
Industry related presentations for practitioners and governments in North America and Asia, 1985-present

Professional Affiliations:

United Isshin Ryu Karate Association – Director and Vice President
Okinawan Karate Association – Board of Directors

Technical Skills:

Hachi Dan (8th degree Black Belt) in Isshin Ryu Karate, ancient weapons

Commercial pilot, ratings in Seaplanes, tail wheel, and complex aircraft
Microsoft Office products, Blackboard learning

Awards and Honors:

Master Shimabuku Award for Outstanding Achievement
Harold Mitchum Award for Outstanding Achievement
Isshin Ryu Hall of Fame Inductee
Leadership Community Award from West Bloomfield Schools
Sales Representative of the Year