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Leadership Strategies to Engage Employees and Sustain Small Businesses

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Donald A. Ngwa

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Leadership Strategies to Engage Employees and Sustain Small Businesses

by

Donald A. Ngwa

MS, Walden University, 2017

BS, University of Buea, 2008

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2022

Abstract

Small businesses in the United States safeguard long-term employment opportunities, job security, and economic growth, yet only 50% of small business establishments survive beyond the first 5 years of startup. Small business survival is vital to the health of an economy, given the number of employees that depend on income generated from jobs created by small business owners. Grounded in the transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies small retail store managers use to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. The participants comprised 6 small retail store managers in Columbia, South Carolina. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, company documents, and websites and analyzed using thematic analysis. Three major themes emerged from the data: setting the tone, motivation and reward, and managing capabilities. A key recommendation is for leaders to lead by example and model desired behaviors for subordinates to emulate. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase the local community's economic development through job creation, provision of goods and services, and facilitation of commerce.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to the Almighty God for giving me the strength and courage to go through this process successfully despite the numerous challenges encountered along the way. To my late father, Isaac Ngwa for helping me build a strong educational foundation in preparation for post graduate studies. To my mother, Florence Temfeh, for her continuous prayers and intercessions. Much thanks to my lovely wife, Gisele Akah, mother-in-law, Emmerencia Tingu, and my children, Awesome Akah, Precious Akah and Joy Akah, for standing by me throughout my post graduate studies.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Globalization and liberalization of companies has allowed more businesses to enter the market (Amankwah-Amoah & Debrah, 2010, 2017), leading to high competition and increased business failure (Amankwah-Amoah, 2018). A manager's ability to understand and implement leadership strategies that can engage employees to achieve organizational goals may contribute to the success of small businesses. Small business survival is vital to the health of an economy given the number of employees that depend on income generated from jobs created by small business owners. In the United States, small businesses generate 47.3 % of jobs in the private sector (Small Business Administration [SBA], Office of Advocacy, 2019). Small business owners are responsible for approximately 89% of yearly jobs created in the United States' economy (Neumark et al., 2011). The significant role small businesses play in the economy is a reason for more studies to be performed about strategies to sustain small firms.

Background of the Problem

A small business is an independent or privately owned corporation, partnership, or sole proprietorship with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2018). Approximately 90% of firms in the United States are small businesses (SBA, 2018). The 28 million small businesses in the United States contributes 54% of sales in the economy (Alvarez, 2016). Despite the effect of small enterprises on the economy, about 50% of newly created small businesses have failed within the first 5 years (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2018). In the United States, only 50% of small businesses survive after the first 5years (Julien, 2018; Ripsas et al., 2018), compared to only 33% of small businesses that survive in Europe

(Muller et al., 2016). The survivability of small businesses can contribute to maintain and promote the economic health of the U.S. economy.

Researchers have advanced reasons why small businesses fail, but little attention has been given to ineffective leadership as a cause of business failure (Bengesi & Roux, 2014; Minello et al., 2014). Leaders can improve employee performance and achieve positive organizational outcomes by inspiring followers to follow their improvement processes and methods (Siangchokyoo, et al., 2020). The rationale of this study is to influence small business managers to success by exploring successful leadership strategies that can engage employees and lead to business survivability. Small businesses must develop and implement successful strategies for survival early because enterprises that have operated after 5 years have continued to survive for the next 5 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

Problem Statement

The high failure rate of small businesses is a cause for concern to policymakers, scholars, and small business owners (Cepec & Grajzl, 2021, p. 555). Approximately 50% of newly created small businesses in the United States have failed within the first 5 years of startup (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2018, p. 2). The general business problem is that business leaders lack adequate survival strategies, which may lead to business failure. The specific business problem is that some small retail store leaders lack strategies that contribute to sustaining business operations beyond the first 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small businesses leaders used to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. The target population was six small retail store managers in South Carolina who successfully used and implemented leadership strategies to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. Leadership strategies that result from this study may be used to improve employee performance and to sustain small businesses that contribute to the local community's economic development through job creation, provision of goods and services, and facilitation of commerce.

Nature of the Study

Three types of research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Guetterman, 2020). In a qualitative study, researchers use interviews and archival records to gain insights into the characteristics and meaning of individual experiences associated with a phenomenon (van den Berg & Struwig, 2017). Researchers use the qualitative method to explore a phenomenon by finding solutions to *why*, *what*, and *how* open-ended questions (Yin, 2018). The qualitative method was suitable for this study because I used *what* and *how* questions to explore a phenomenon base on real-world experiences that cannot by statistically quantified. Quantitative researchers measure variables and test hypotheses for examining variables' characteristics, relationships, or groups differences to address the research question (Goertzen, 2017). A quantitative method was not appropriate because the research goal was not to examine the relationship among variables or to test hypotheses. Mixed method researchers use

quantitative and qualitative methods in the same study (Gunasekara & Zheng, 2019). A mixed method study was not appropriate because I did not need to examine relationships or test hypothesis to answer my research question.

I considered three possible qualitative designs: case study, phenomenological, and ethnographic. Researchers use the phenomenological design to understand the personal meanings of the lived experience of participants related to the study purpose (Alase, 2017). The phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study as the approach is limited to an exploration of participant's personal experiences, but my intent was also to explore related experiences, perspectives and supporting documents to investigate the phenomenon. Ethnographic researchers seek to explore the culture and related actions of individuals or groups (Reeves et al., 2013). Ethnographic research design was not suitable as understanding a group culture would not help address my research question.

Using a case study design enables researchers to comprehensively understand a phenomenon by developing in-depth descriptions and assessments of a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals over a specific time and for one or more specific places (Yin, 2018). A case study design was appropriate to explore and gain an in depth understanding of successful leadership strategies that retail store managers have used to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. In a single case study design, researchers focus on investigating the actions of an individual or a specific group in an organization (Yin 2018). A single case study was not appropriate because the study goal was to explore the actions of individuals from multiple organizations. I conducted a

multiple case study because the study goal was to explore whether the effective strategies differ among similar small retail establishments.

Research Question

What leadership strategies do small retail store managers use to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What leadership strategies do you use to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?
2. How did you assess the strategies' effectiveness in sustaining business operations beyond the first 5 years?
3. What leadership strategies were most effective in sustaining business operations beyond the first 5 years?
4. How did you implement your leadership strategies to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?
5. What challenges did you encounter implementing your leadership strategies to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?
6. How did you overcome the challenges to the implementation of your leadership strategies to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?
7. What other information would you like to share about leadership strategies that your organization used to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

I used the transformation leadership (TL) theory developed by Burns (1978) and extended by Bass (1985) as a conceptual framework for the study. The TL Burns and Bass developed characterizes a leadership style where leaders work with their subordinates to identify areas that need improvement and create a new vision that will guide workers through the change process (Bass, 1985). Avolio and Bass (1999) identified four significant constructs of TL as (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Transformational leaders are perceived to possess inspirational, motivational, stimulating, and visionary qualities, which is reflected by the performance of employees under their supervision (Boamah et al., 2018). Transformational leaders instill new values and beliefs into their followers and inspire followers to perform above required standards (Conger & Kanungo, 1994). Leaders can improve employee performance and achieve positive organizational outcomes by inspiring followers to follow improvement processes and methods (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020).

The TL theory was appropriate for addressing this study's research question because the participants were expected to be transformational leaders who have been successful in developing and implementing leadership strategies to engage employees and sustain their small business beyond the first 5 years. The participants demonstrated some TL traits by striving to inspire and align employees with improved organizational processes and methods. Data analysis was facilitated as the traits of TL theory was a guide to the selection of relevant data from participants' responses.

Operational Definitions

Small business: A small business is an independently or privately owned corporation, partnership, or sole proprietorship with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2018).

Employee engagement: Employee engagement is the ability for workers to develop a positive work-related mindset that enhances their cognitive, emotional, behavioral energy and willingness to commit towards the attainment of organizational goals and objectives (Shuck *et al.*, 2017).

Leadership: Leadership is the process of motivating and stimulating employees with the purpose of achieving organizational goals and objectives (Andersen, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are aspects or elements of a research that are generally accepted to be true without any proof that they are accurate (Schoenung & Dikova, 2016). To explore the strategies used by small retail managers to sustain business operations in corporate institutions, some assumptions were made. The first assumption was that the information and data gathered and used in the research remains accurate. Second, I assumed that the interview questions would produce meaningful responses that address the research question. Finally, I assumed that the interviewees were honest and truthful in all the responses they provided. To ensure that responses from interviewees were truthful and unbiased, participants were assured of participation anonymity and the confidentiality of data collected during the interview process.

Limitations

Limitation constitutes potential problems, deficiencies, and biases that restricts the study of a researcher (Esmaeilzadeh et al., 2014). The research was limited to small retail store managers in Columbia, South Carolina with less than 100 employees. A qualitative multiple case study approach was used for the study, and data were collected only through interviews and information from retail small business documents. The short time limit of the study was also a limitation. The results might not necessarily be the same if the study was extended to other parts of the country. Additionally, some of the information gathered from the participants might be inaccurate because of response bias. To ensure that responses from interviewees were truthful and unbiased, participants were assured of participation anonymity and the confidentiality of data collected during the interview process.

Delimitations

A delimitation is a technique that researchers use to limit the scope and shape the boundaries of a study (Sung et al., 2015). The focus of the study was to uncover the leadership strategies used by retail store managers to engage employees and sustain business operations beyond 5 years. Other strategies like the use of technology, strategic growth management, and marketing initiatives were not taken into consideration in this study. Second, the geographical location of this interviewees (Columbia, South Carolina) is a delimitation to this study. I selected and interviewed only retail store managers in Columbia, South Carolina with fewer than 100 employees. The data collected during the study and the research findings cannot be generalized.

Significance of the Study

Contributions to Business Practice

The strategies that emerged from my study may help small business managers to better coach and inspire employees to meet or exceed organizational goals. The findings may also help small retail store managers to expand their knowledge and understanding of which leadership strategies are most effective in motivating employee performance which leads to sustained business operations beyond the first 5 years. The results of this study might contribute to effective business practice by helping retail small business managers find effective leadership strategies and derivative business processes that result in sustained business operations after 5 years.

Implication for Positive Social Change

Organizational leaders who implemented leadership strategies and became successful have the potential to expand their business recruit more employees from communities and engage in social responsibility activities such as charitable giving and volunteering, which may improve the living standards of community residents. The implementation of leadership strategies from this study may contribute to the success of small businesses that can create avenues for individual development by providing training and apprenticeship opportunities to youths and community members. Leadership strategies that result from this study may be used to improve employee performance and to sustain small businesses that contribute to the local community's economic development through job creation, provision of goods and services, and facilitation of commerce.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A systematic assessment of related literature on leadership, employee engagement, and small business survival allows readers to understand why this research is essential. Readers can better appreciate research credibility when researchers present ideas from previous works that agree or disagree with the subject under study (Wood & Logsdon, 2020). The literature review section will contain scholarly articles related to the central topic: leadership strategies and small business continued existence. An assessment was made on small business studies, transformational leadership, employee motivation, and business survival.

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore the strategies that small retail store managers use to engage employees and sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. About 50% of newly created small businesses have failed within the first 5 years (SBA, Office of Advocacy., 2018). In the United States, small businesses generate 47.3 % of jobs in the private sector (SBA, Office of Advocacy., 2019). As a result, small business survival contributes to the health of the economy given the number of employees that depend on income generated from jobs created by small business owners. Small business owners seeking to use leadership qualities to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years may find useful information from this study.

The literature review section will contain information about four different topics (a) small businesses, (b) leadership, (c) employee engagement, and (d) organizational performance. The focus of the study was on how traits of transformational managers affect employee engagement and small business survivability. The databases from which

information was extracted include (a) Academic Search Complete, (b) ABI/INFORM Complete, (c) Business Source Complete, (d) Google Scholar, (e) government websites, (f) ProQuest Central, (g) Sage Premier, and (h) Thoreau Multi-Database Search.

The Evolution of Leadership

Several researchers have attempted to define leadership, but none of the many definitions has been universally accepted and adopted (Bush, 2008; Smith & Hughey, 2006). The definition of leadership has changed over time based on how each of the writers expresses their contextual views on governance (Esen et al., 2020). In the past, leadership was defined using the personal qualities or characteristics of a leader (Alberto, 2016). Plato identified a leader as wise (Takala, 1998), whereas Machiavelli defined leaders in terms of intellect and ability to gain employee loyalty (Machiavelli, 1992). The definition of leadership continued to evolve until after the Second World War when Stogdill (1950) saw leadership as an effort to encourage people to work toward achieving a particular goal. Tannenbaum et al. (1961) also suggested that leadership involves people influence and added that leaders could achieve the organizational goal by effectively communicating and directing employees through the entire process.

In the 1990s, some researchers began to view leadership from a different perspective. Bass (1990) insisted that leadership not only involves a process whereby a leader influences people but is a collaboration between two or more people in an organization. According to Bass, any group member or employee could be a leader by simply motivating or influencing other colleagues to attain a goal. At the end of the 20th century, another leadership author Drucker (1996) defined a leader as anyone who has

followers. Leadership principles have significantly changed over time, but they are also different based on the place or country in which the standards are being applied. Over time, researchers have advanced different definitions of leadership but to an extent, the researchers agree that leaders should possess the characteristics of influencing other people (Kellerman, 2014).

The relevance of leaders in a business environment can be comprehended when a leader is recognized. A leader is someone who can motivate and stimulate employees to achieve organizational goals and objectives (Andersen, 2016). Leaders have specific characteristics or skills that differentiate them from non-leaders (Khan & Shahed, 2018). The most important quality of a leader is self-confidence and the desire to lead (Newstrom, 2004). Leaders can be identified by their ability to portray self-confidence, integrity, determination, and sociability (Bligh, 2011). Characteristics of successful leaders and entrepreneurs also include (a) risk-taking, (b) vision, (c) achievement-orientation, (d) able to motivate, (e) creativity, (f) flexibility, (g) persistence, and (h) patience (Fernand et al., 2005). The Cambridge sustainability leadership model also expanded the definition of a leader to include characteristics such as visionary, transformational, servant, ethical, authentic, primal, and holistic (Murari & Mukherjee, 2021). The characteristics or traits of a leader helps in the identification of a leader and differentiates one category of a leader from another.

Transformational Leadership Theory

The TL theory is the conceptual foundation on which this study is grounded. Downton (1973) was the first researcher to introduce and use the phrase TL. The TL

theory was first developed by Burns (1978) and later extended by Bass (1985). The research of Bass on leadership was based on how transformational leaders can influence admirers. The TL theory was used to explain a leadership style where leaders will work with their subordinates to identify areas that need improvement and create a new vision that will guide the workers through a change process (Bass, 1985). Researchers have recently given a lot of attention to the TL theory since its inception 40 years ago (Dinh et al., 2014). Empirical studies show a relationship between transformational leaders, followers, and organizational performance (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020).

Contemporary leadership researchers have expanded and validated the TL theory constructs into a widely accepted concept even though scholars are still researching the topic (Dinh et al., 2014; Northouse, 2016). The most significant development of the TL theory was in terms of (a) the actions of leaders who initiates a change in the actions of follower, (b) strategies leaders used to transform followers, (c) the relationship between the influence of a leader on followers and organizational performance (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders can achieve managerial excellence and improved organizational performance and survivability by using TL traits to motivate employees (Murari & Mukherjee, 2021). Avolio and Bass (1999) identified four significant constructs of TL: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration.

Idealized Influence

Idealized influence refers to that attribute of a leader to instill trust and confidence into followers and act as a role model to inspire them to emulate their behavior (Alzoraiki

et al., 2018; Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1999). Transformational leaders with idealized influence characteristics are expected to create a work environment where workers focus on achieving the organizational goals by collaborating with others and sharing expertise without thinking it will negatively affect their interest (Podsakoff et al., 1990; Shih et al., 2012). Idealized influence is an attribute that measures the level of trust, faith, and respect that a leader creates and maintains with his subordinates (Avolio & Bass, 1999).

Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation describes a transformational leadership characteristic in which a leader can inspire employees to understand the organizational vision and crave to perform above set standards of the organization (Bass, 1985; Bass et al., 2003; Hussain, et al., 2019). Leaders in this category strive to motivate and change followers' perspectives from egocentrism to a more collective effort to help others accomplish the goals of a group (Rubin et al., 2005). Inspirational motivation is a transformational leadership quality that addresses how a leader outlines and communicates a vision to his subordinates in a way that motivates them to focus on assigned tasks (Avolio & Bass, 1999). Leaders can achieve the objective of motivating their staff by introducing employee recognition and reward programs (Hussain, et al., 2019).

Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leaders with intellectual stimulation qualities can develop creative thinkers to solve daily work problems by identifying, motivating, and promoting the innovative skills employees (Bass, 1999; Bass et al., 2003; Smothers et al., 2016). Employees are more successful when they are given the allowance to freely air their

opinions and make decisions in their line of duty without being afraid of being reprimanded by superiors (Shih et al., 2012). The intellectual stimulation leadership construct is the ability for leaders to provide a creative environment for workers and enlighten personnel on the importance of tolerating diverse ideas in the workplace (Avolio & Bass, 1999).

Individualized Consideration

Individualistic consideration is a transformational characteristic of a leader to create an interactive rapport with employees and build a conducive work environment where the concerns of workers can be established and addressed (Nemanich & Keller, 2007). Followers who have an interactive rapport with leaders tend to replicate such a relationship with their colleagues to promote the interest of groups in achieving the organizational goals and objectives (Yin et al., 2019). Avolio and Bass (1999) suggested that individualized consideration measures the extent to which a leader is interested in the well-being others and how a manager assigns tasks based on the employee ability.

Criticism of the Transformational Leadership

Despite scholarly arguments in favor of transformational leadership, several authors have criticized the role of transformational leaders in a business environment. Johnson et al. (2012) argued that the implementation of transformational leadership style at work leads to employee resistance to change because workers must employ greater effort to achieve the desired outcome. Yukl (2010) criticized the transformational leadership theory because the theory measures organizational effectiveness by gauging

employees' skills and behavior instead of analyzing and comparing the level at which goals are achieved.

In another study, Bass (1985) concluded that transactional and transformational leadership are complementary theories with related and not opposite characteristics. According to Bass, organizational outcomes are only achieved with a combination of transactional and transformational leadership styles. Bass concluded that a significant relationship exists between transformational and transactional leadership as personnel that scored high in the former leadership style did the same with the latter. Additionally, Lowe et al. (1996) emphasized that transformational leaders will not effectively achieve organizational goals and objectives if management does not apply transactional leadership principles.

Contrasting Theories

Transactional Leadership

The behavioral theory of exchange and Skinner's theory of operant conditioning form the base from which transactional leadership was developed (Safonov et al., 2018). The transactional leadership theory was first developed by Burns (1978) during the analysis of political leadership. Transactional leadership is a process whereby leaders define and set expectations for followers and reward people that meet set standards while punishing others for falling short of expectations (Xu, 2017). Bass (1985) viewed transactional leaders as management gurus whose leadership style is based on risk avoidance, attention to time and efficiency, and preference to stick to the business process rather than the process' significance. Bass's transaction leadership model has

three major elements: (a) contingent reward, (a) management-by-exception, and (c) laissez-faire. Contingent reward describes the role of leaders to assign work to subordinates with emphasis on what level of achievement attracts rewards by punishing followers who fall short and rewarding those who meet the standards (Burns, 1978). Management-by-exception is when leaders closely monitor the progress of followers and only intervene with corrective action when subordinates deviate from the set standards (Keskes, 2014). Leaders who exhibit the laissez-faire leadership quality avoid making decisions when required to and will prefer to remain neutral or indifferent to the task involving followers (Rassaa, & Emeagwali, 2020). The approach used by transactional leadership is different from other leadership styles, but transactional leaders can positively affect employee performance in an organization.

Laissez-faire Leadership

The laissez-faire leadership style was first introduced by in 1939 by Lewin, Lippitt, and White (Wren, 2013). Laissez-faire leadership is an approach in which leaders assign tasks and provide the necessary resources to subordinates but neither direct, support nor motivate workers to accomplish the task (Bass et al., 2003). A laissez-faire leader believes in allowing employees some freedom to choose or determine what to do and is undecided when called to make decisions (Bass, 1999). Laissez-faire is a leadership style that does not express personnel need for guidance from leaders and conveys the tendency for leaders not to respond to the needs of subordinates (Skogstad et al., 2014). Some scholars have argued that laissez-faire leaders remain neutral in circumstances that intervention is needed because managers trust the ability of employees

to overcome duty related challenges (Ågotnes et al., 2020). However, laissez faire leadership is ineffective (Bass, 1990) and counterproductive (Skogstad et al., 2007) because laissez-faire leadership style implementation results in high-stress level, low performance, conflicts among personnel, and minimal job satisfaction (Singfiel, 2018).

Comparing Transformational and Transactional Leadership

The TL theory explain a leadership style where leaders will work with their subordinates to identify areas that need improvement and create a new vision that will guide them through the change process (Bass, 1985). Xu (2017) described transactional leadership as a process whereby leaders define and set expectations for followers, rewarding workers who meet the set standards while punishing others that fall short of expectations. The major difference between transformational leadership and transactional leadership is what leaders and followers mutually benefit or can do for each other (Conger & Kanungo, 1994). Transformational leaders study a larger picture in an organization by focusing on achieving challenging needs, while Transactional leaders focus on a give and take relationship with followers (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Transformational leaders also inspire followers to achieve results while transactional leaders use reward and punishment to ensure that their followers achieve desired organizational goals (Jung & Avolio, 1999). Another difference is that transformational leaders create room for creativity while transactional leaders focus only on the agenda and are less likely to promote employee creativity if innovation is not part of the plan (Herrmann & Felfe, 2014). Though scholars have identified the differences between

transformational and transactional leadership theories, the two concepts possess some similarities.

Despite the differences between transformational and transactional leadership theories, Avolio (1999) argued that transactional and transformational leadership theories are related because transactional leadership theory forms the basis of transformational leadership. Bass (1998) contended that transformational leaders influence followers to exceed expectations only after supporters understand and accomplish the standards set by transactional leaders. Transformational leadership prevails in circumstances where transactional leadership is used to develop a foundation through which other concepts can be applied (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Another common characteristic between transformational and transactional leaders is their ability to gain the trust of followers though transformational leaders are expected to create more confidence than transactional leaders (Sarwar, & Mumtaz, 2017). Both transformational and transactional leaders engage in a leader followers' relationship to benefit from each other and accomplish tasks on behalf of the organization (Alrowwad et al., 2020).

Transformational Leadership at Work

Transformational leaders can positively influence organizational outcomes by practicing the leadership qualities they possess. Leaders demonstrate transformational leadership qualities by putting knowledge and experience in practice through the communication of organizational goals and objectives in a manner that resonates with employees at the workplace (Soane et al., 2015). Transformation leaders promote workplace culture by creating norms and inspiring subordinates to align to the

organization's values and work towards the achievement of the business overall goal (Jones et al., 2019). The strategies that transformational leaders use to influence employee performance and organizational outcomes include communication, organizational change, employee creativity, motivation, and training (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Leaders with transformational leadership traits can effect change and contribute to the success of a business by implementing strategies with the employees they interact with daily at work.

Employee Creativity

Researchers have indicated that Transformational leadership plays a significant role in improving employee creativity (Caniëls, 2018; Shalley et al., 2000; Williams et al., 2017). Bai et al. (2016) affirmed that the positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity is based on three factors: (a) ability to recognize and formulate a mutual vision, (b) motivation and promotion of innovative skills, and (c) acceptance and incorporation of challenges in the workplace. Employee creativity is achieved when leaders can articulate the vision in a way that inspires workers to gladly participate in the implementation process (West & Anderson, 1996). Other researchers agree with Bai et al. that transformational leaders motivate and promote innovative employee skills. Andriopoulos (2001) stated that providing more opportunities for employees to acquire knowledge opens the door for more employee creativity.

Worker's involvement in crafting new problems solving approaches exposes employee innovative abilities and might lead to creativity (Bass, 1990; Herrmann & Felfe, 2013). Results from researcher's studies affirm the assertion that transformational

leadership positively affects employee creativity. Mahmood et al. (2019) performed a study to investigate the effects of transformational leadership on employee engagement in the process of creativity. Mahmood et al. conducted the study by administering 400 questionnaires to employees of small and medium-size enterprises in Bangladesh. After data analysis, Mahmood et al. uncovered that transformational leadership positively affects employee creative process management. In another study to investigate the role of transformational leadership on employee engagement and creativity, Azim et al. (2019) analyzed 194 surveys responses from information and communication technology firms and concluded that transformational leaderships drive employee creative process engagement.

Communication

Organizational leaders who communicate effectively and maintain interpersonal relationships with employees can drive the management toward the achievement of organizational goals and objectives (Claassen, 2015; Obiwuru, Okwu, & Akpa, 2011). Transformational leaders can positively influence the perception of workers about the working environment by effectively communicating the organizational objectives and goals (Momeny & Gourgues, 2019). Bass (1985) acknowledged that when transformational leaders appealingly communicate the vision of a company, the managers set the stage for employees to understand the expectations and perform above set standards. Transformational leaders can enhance communication and knowledge sharing among employees of an organization especially during a crisis (Nguyen et al., 2021).

In the United States, a study was conducted by Pacleb and Bocarnea (2016) to ascertain the relationship between leadership style and communication style. The results predicted that transformational leadership positively affects expressiveness, preciseness, and questioning communication styles. In another study Lee and Chon (2020) studied the effect of transformational leadership on employee internal and external communication conduct. Lee and Chon found that transformational leadership positively affects employee voice behavior, positive and negative megaphone actions.

When employees use the voice behavior, which Morrison (2014), defined as the ability of workers to express suggestions to leaders, workers can provide ideas or opinions that contribute to successful decisions for the interest of the company (Zhou & George, 2001). Employees are more likely to propagate positive information than negative adverts about their organization when leaders effectively communicate the vision and mission of an institution (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Transformational leaders are more likely to improve employee performance because workers possess verbal and non-verbal communication skill (Kotter, 1990), the ability to inspire and communicate high expectation messages to employees (Howell & Wang, 2012), and the capability to allow open communication channel with employees to discuss and address concerns (Bass, 1998).

Motivation

Leaders with transformational leadership traits can improve employee performance by motivating followers (Yukl, 2005). Transformational leaders can motivate subordinates to perform above the set standards and drive the organizational

performance in a positive direction (Doucet et al., 2015). Reviewing the theory of motivation is a step to comprehend the significance of the concept of motivation. The most famous of the motivation theories was the “*Hierarchy of Human Needs*” introduced by Maslow (Sadri & Bowen, 2011). Maslow identified 5 levels of human needs (a) physiological needs, (b) human safety needs, (c) needs of belonging, (d) self-esteem needs, and (e) self-actualization needs. When employees satisfy a need, the next level of needs are automatically activated (Zareen et al., 2015). Leaders must understand that employees in an organization can be classified in distinct level of needs and have different motivational desires (Momeny & Gourgues, 2019). Leaders are expected to adapt to changes in employee behavior and adjust their leadership style to meet the needs of workers worker (Northouse, 2015).

Motivated employees are bound to perform better than unmotivated workers because motivation plays an important role in driving employee performance in an organization (Anoraga, 2006). Hadi (2018) performed a research using a sample of 340 employees to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership, employee performance, and motivation in a limited liability company. Hadi et al. found that the transformational leadership style significantly affects employee performance and motivation. Leaders play a significant role in motivating their employees to achieve the desired goal or objective.

Organizational Change

Change is inevitable in the business environment. With the high level of uncertainty in a new business’ ecosystems, organizations must continually change and

adapt to the competitive environment to improve survival chances (Doppler et al., 2011). Transformational leaders can keep employees motivated and focused during a change process (Oreg & Berson, 2011). Leaders with Transformational leadership characteristics can positively affect employee ability to commit to change (Herold et al., 2008) and mentally prepare for the change process (DeCelles et al., 2013). Sarros et al. (2008) argued that leaders play a significant role in introducing new ideas and creating a conducive environment where employees can willingly engage in the change process. Faupel and Süß (2019) conducted a study using surveys to engage 328 employees in a company involved in a change process. The study results according to Faupel and Süß, show that transformational leadership positively affects work engagement and the perception of employees on how the change process is beneficial to stakeholders. Harb and Sidani (2019) conducted a similar study in Lebanon to explore transformational leadership role in organizational change. Managers that adopted the transformational leadership characteristics played a significant role in successfully implementing organizational change in the public sector of Lebanon (Harb & Sidani, 2019). Though transformational leadership plays a significant role in the organizational change process, other writers argued that other factors might hinder the change process. In a study carried out with Indian organizations, Saini and Bhatnagar (2005), concluded that the three elements that obstructed the change process included: (a) staff resistance, (b) union non-cooperation, and (c) managers' discomfort.

Employee Engagement

Contemporary scholars have emphasized the significant role employee engagements play in the productivity and profitability of an organizations (Gupta & Aileen, 2017). Data estimated show that only 14% of personnel in the world are effectively engaged (Attridge, 2009). In the United States poor employee engagement levels have resulted in a significant loss of productivity, estimated to be between 300 and 600 billion dollars (Attridge, 2009; Saks, 2006). Employee engagement is highly associated with high productivity, improved customer satisfaction, increased profitability (Bowen, 2016), and reduced job turnover (Barrick et al., 2014). Leaders who successfully engage employees reap the benefits regarding enhanced productivity, customer satisfaction, and profit maximization (Ahmetoglu et al., 2015; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014; Vandenabeele, 2014). Setyaningsih & Sunaryo (2021) noted that transformational leadership is a contributing factor to strengthen employee commitment. Researchers agree that engaged employees can garner support from coworkers toward achieving organizational goals and objectives. (Martins & Nienaber, 2018; Purcell, 2014; Saks, 2017). When the behavior of a transformational leader is perceived as honest, fair, and consistent, workers tend to be committed to the organization's mission (Thompson et al., 2021). Employee engagement, as already demonstrated, is important to the success of a business unit. Researchers may want to explore how business owners or managers can improve employee engagement.

Introduction of Reward System

One way in which organizational leaders can improve employee engagement is by establishing a reward system. Rewards, which can be financial, non-financial, intrinsic, and extrinsic (Victor, & Hoole, 2017), are important facets in an organization (Aslam et al., 2015; Bussin & Van Rooy, 2014). Reward programs enhance employee motivation (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Introducing reward programs into the workplace can result in improved employee engagement (Crawford et al., 2010; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013).

According to the social exchange theory, employees that receive rewards and recognition for exceptional performances are more likely to collaborate with team members and become engaged at the job (Ram, & Prabhakar, 2011). In a study to investigate how the internal factors of a firms affect employee engagement and organizational performance, Ali et al. (2019) conducted a survey with 355 participants. The results according to Ali et al., showed a significant positive relationship between rewards and employee engagement. However, organizational leaders have realized that the use of rewards in the form of cash does not effectively enhance the performance, particularly in the long term (Adesola et al., 2013; Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017). The use of money combined with other strategies can achieve better results because of improved employee performance (Burns & Christie, 2013). Apart from rewards, researchers have suggested different ways in which leaders can motivate and enhance employee engagement at the workplace.

Communication

Another way in which business managers can enhance employee engagement is by improving communication between employees and management. Internal communication is a behavior that can positively affect employee engagement level in an organization (Amerine et al., 2017; Choong, 2007; Mazzel et al., 2019). Amerine et al., further explained that leaders who communicate with subordinates can identify and understand personnel needs and use feedbacks to make decisions that enhance employee engagement. Internal communication between employees, management, and other inner stakeholders helps to create and sustain mutually benefitable relationships (Mazzel et al., 2019). Internal communication is critical to organizational success because leaders can motivate employees to attain organizational goals by conveying the right message to ensure employees are involved in decision making (Welch, 2011). Existing literature on organizational change proves that directive and discursive interaction between employees and administrative management leads to employee engagement (Reissner & Pagan, 2013). However, Reissner and Pagan emphasized that employees are only fully engaged when they willfully decide to participate in the engagement process. Mishra et al. (2018) interviewed public relations officers to investigate the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement. Mishra et al. found that internal communication builds trust and a cordial relationship between workers and managers and boost employee engagement.

Motivation

Employee motivation is an approach that business managers can use to enhance personnel engagement in their organization. Contemporary studies have indicated that employee motivation is associated with high levels of commitment, productivity, and performance (Georgellis et al., 2011) and enhances employee engagement (Van Beek et al., 2012). Putra et al. (2015), identified two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation can be derived from interesting work, self-expression, and satisfaction from work itself, while extrinsic motivation comes from pay, job security, and good coworkers (Putra et al., 2015). Extrinsic motivation strategies like rewards in the form of money helped improve employee engagement compared to intrinsic motivational strategies (Asal & Koksal, 2018). Research findings show that employees value jobs where they can express themselves, their skills and gain job satisfaction rather than work that will only benefit them regarding pay, promotion, or job security (Grant, 2007). Intrinsic motivation is positively related to work engagement as inspiration from within is useful to spur the dedication and work energy of workers (Van Beek et al., 2012). Money was used as a significant source of motivation to workers, but employers need intrinsic strategies to ensure their personnel stays motivated.

Training

Training and skill-building programs enhance employee engagement in organizations (Bandura & Lyons, 2017; Nawaz et al., 2014). Highly engaged employees are well trained and have been reported to be more energetic and committed to completing assigned task (Suan & Nasurdin, 2014). The contribution of training on

employee engagement is documented by writers (Lyons, 2017). Contrary opinion suggests that only a combination of human resource factors such as training, empowerment, and rewards can lead to enhanced employee engagement (Karatepe, 2013). Employee engagement has a mediating effect between employee training and employee performance (Sendawula et al., 2018). Suan and Nasurdin (2014) administered surveys to 438 customer-contact employees in Malaysia to probe the effects of specific human resource practices on employee engagement. Suan and Nasurdin concluded that employee training and performance appraisal positively affects work engagement. Even though a combination of human resource practices is needed to improve employee engagement, personnel training can enhance personnel dedication and persistence to achieving organizational goals even when challenges set in (Nawaz et al., 2014).

Organizational Performance

Scholars have advanced several factors that contribute to improving organizational performance. Achieving and sustaining a competitive advantage is a significant step for business owners to enhance organizational performance (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017; Spyropoulou et al., 2017). In a study carried out with a sample of manufacturing exporters in the United Kingdom, the outcome suggested that price dominance was directly related to market performance (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017). Kaur et al. (2019) used secondary data collected from Indian information technology and Information Technology Enabled Services firms to investigate the relationship between core competence, competitive advantage, and organizational performance. The findings from Kaur, Sharma, and Goyal's study showed that the competitive advantage influences

organizational performance of the selected firms. The performance level of organizations indicates the level at which they can compete and gain an edge over competitors in the industry.

Business researchers have acknowledged that technology in its various forms may significantly influence the performance of organizations. Bi (2017) performed a study using 271 small and medium-size enterprises, and the findings suggested that developing and implementing e-business practices significantly affects the performance of the organizations. In a similar study involving 77 randomly selected Small and medium-size enterprises, Sharifonnasabia et al. (2018) found that incorporating internet technology into business helps improve performance. Also, the results of two studies conducted by Chienwattanasook and Jermsittiparsert (2018), and García-Sánchez et al. (2018) indicated that developing and enhancing technological capabilities and skills in an organization can positively affect the institutional performance. Investment in technological infrastructure can influence organizational performance but more research might determine the benefit if companies invest in available human resources technological capabilities and skills.

The managerial ability of business managers can positively or negatively affect the performance of an organization. Studies show that managerial competencies positively affect small businesses' organizational performance (Cheung et al., 2017; Kaczmarek, 2018; Parida et al., 2010). Zacca and Dayan (2018) agree with several scholars that managerial skills or expertise has a positive influence on organizational competence but adds that a combination of competency and the ability to quickly respond to emerging opportunities is required to achieve improved performance. Wilden et al.

(2016) suggested that competency alone is not enough to achieve organizational performance, employees will have to follow through with the institutional changes. More studies should be performed on the effect of leaders on the performances of followers or how different leadership traits affect the level at which followers respond to organizational vision.

Small Businesses

Analyzing enterprises and delineating how important small businesses are to an economy will underline the significance of this study. Business enterprises are categorized based on their size, number of employees, business sector, location, and technology (Buculescu, 2013). For this study, a small business is defined based on the number of employees. A small business is an independent or privately owned corporation, partnership, or sole proprietorship with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2018). Approximately 90% of firms in the United States are small businesses (SBA, 2018). The 23 million small businesses in the United States contributes 54% of sales in the economy (Alvarez, B. A., 2016). Small businesses are rapidly growing with a growth rate higher than that of large corporations (Malchow-Moller et al., 2011).

Successful small businesses can deliver job opportunities to the population and contribute to societal economic growth. Small business owners provide employment opportunities to 47% of workers in the private sector (SBA, Office of Advocacy., 2019). Small business owners are responsible for approximately 89% of yearly jobs created in the United States' economy (Neumark et al., 2011). Small businesses pay taxes to finance federal and state governments' projects and use part of the revenue generated from sales

to fund non-governmental organizations (Prasad et al., 2012). Small businesses provide the convenience for local community members to purchase products and services (Warren & Szostek, 2017). However, small businesses have failed to survive beyond the first 5 years.

In the United States, only 50% of small businesses stay alive after the first 5 years (Julien, 2018; Ripsas et al., 2018), compared to only 33% of small businesses that survive in Europe (Muller et al., 2016). Small businesses significantly contribute to the growth of an economy, though small firm's failure rate surpasses that of larger organizations (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016). Despite the important role small businesses play toward the provision of jobs and economic growth, business enterprises are winding up in large numbers every year.

Small Business Failure

Researchers have concluded that small business failure rate is higher than that of larger organizations (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016). The high failure rate of small businesses can be ascribed to so many reasons. The significance of looking at the different business closure types before probing into why small businesses fail cannot be overemphasized. Business enterprises shut down in several different ways, among which are (a) voluntary closure, (b) bankruptcy, and (c) closure by courts or involuntary closure. Voluntary closure is when business management decides to stop operating and is usually associated with poor organizational performance (Siepel et al., 2017). Bankruptcy, mostly caused by unfavorable economic conditions like the 2008 financial crises in the United States is a voluntary process by business owners seeking relief from debts (Bachmann et

al., 2013). Involuntary business closure is a situation in which banks, creditors, or other stakeholders force a business to shut down because of no capital to finance the daily business functioning (Coad, 2013).

Scholars view business failure from different perspectives. Business failure occurs when a company ceases to exist because commercial activities are unprofitable or when the owners terminate operations because of the inability of organizations to pay business debts (Ucbasaran et al., 2013). Byrne and Shepherd (2015) described business failure as a process in which a business is continually experiencing rising costs to the extent that business expenses are not paid. According to Byrne and Shepherd, the unmet expenses is accompanied by the inability of companies to garner funds from other sources because of the unfavorable financial standings of the organization.

A controversy exist among scholars about the acceptable reasons why small businesses are winding up (Bushe, 2019). Researchers have attributed the failure of small businesses to several reasons, among which are (a) lack of financial resources to expand the business and become competitive (Lee & Black, 2017), (b) poor management skills, little or no knowledge, and working experience in business (Campbell and Park, 2017), (c) high competition (Heracleous, & Werres, 2016), and (d) the inability of small business managers to quickly adapt to constant changes in information technology (Clegg, 2018). Successful small businesses turn to have a mastery of why other businesses have failed (Fatoki, 2014)

Inadequate Financial Resources

Small businesses can fail because of the shortage of financial resources. Lack of capital is the most critical factor that causes firms to wind up (Hyder, & Lussier, 2016). Lack of capital has prevented entrepreneurs from starting a business and is an obstacle to existing businesses' success (Lee & Black, 2017). In the United States of America, inadequate capital is a hindrance to business owners trying to start a business and inhibits entrepreneurs from expanding their business and becoming competitive (Byrd et al., 2013; Frid, 2015). Lack of capital also hinders small companies from taking advantage of market opportunities to expand their business to meet organizational goals and objectives (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011).

Results from two separate studies about small businesses performed by Hyder and Lussier (2016), and Baidoun et al. (2018) indicated that adequate capital, among other factors prevents small business failure. Nkwinika et al. (2020) acknowledge that inadequate capital and lack of financial resources can cause small businesses to fail. However, Nkwinika et al. iterated that business failure because of insufficient capital is prevalent in organizations at the early stage of a startup. Small businesses require financial resources at the start of business operations and to run daily business activities if the organization intends to stay competitive and survive beyond the first few years.

Poor Management Skills

The success or failure of small businesses may depend on the managerial skills of the owners or managers. Grimmer et al. (2017) argued that small business owners' poor management skills were a fundamental cause of poor performances and a reason for

small business failures. Entrepreneurs who acquire managerial skills have a better chance of improving organizational performances and survival chances (Piperopoulos & Dimov, 2015). Lack of experience can translate into poor management decisions that may lead to small business failure (Turner, 2016).

In a study performed with 32 former entrepreneurs of liquidated micro and small firms, the findings indicated that the inability of owners to identify and respond to environmental threats and opportunities timely, caused the firms to fail (Ropega, 2016). According to Ropega, business leaders' failure to quickly recognize and respond to threats and opportunities underlines the lack of managerial capabilities and knowledge to steer the business to success. After the analysis of data from 150 small and medium-size enterprises, the findings indicated that entrepreneurial skills such as leadership, creativity, and innovation, networking, goal setting, and time management are important to the sustainability and growth of small businesses (Mwepu et al., 2016). Managers of successful small businesses employ the necessary managerial skills to ensure that the company stays alive.

Formal education has a significant effect on a leader's development (Hughes et al., 2006). In a study conducted by Guidant Financial (2019), only 33% of small business owners were found to have a high school diploma, 18% possessed a degree, 16% with a master's degree, and only 4% were holders of a doctoral degree. The statistics suggest that most small business leaders only possess the basic level of education. More studies should be performed to investigate the effect of formal education on the managerial skills of small business owners.

Competition

Literature from researchers has attributed small businesses' failure to external factors (Heracleous & Werres, 2016), among which is competition (Mellahi & Wilkinson, 2004). Globalization and liberalization of companies allowed more businesses the opportunity to enter the market (Amankwah-Amoah & Debrah, 2010, 2017), leading to high competition and an increased failure rate of businesses (Amankwah-Amoah, 2018). Between 1998 to 2007 He and Yang (2016) conducted annual surveys on industrial enterprises in China to investigate the cause of firms' high failure rate. He and Yang Found that competition significantly contributes to the failure of small businesses. Competition could also be in the form of spreading rumors and misinformation about a firm to its competitors (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2018). In a study to investigate the effect of inter-firm backstabbing, Amankwah-Amoah et al. uncovered that, rumors, and misinformation in addition to a firms' prior history of inferior products or services could lead to business failure. Competition is more likely to drive the newly created companies out of business than the older enterprises because the experienced firms have become more efficient as they learn from previous experiences (He & Yang, 2016).

Changes in Technology

The constant changes in information technology affect the mode of small business operations and influences how the enterprise can compete in the business environment and stay alive. Information and communication technology (ICT) is a source of competitive advantage to small businesses (Hoque et al., 2016; Purnama & Subroto, 2016). The findings of a study conducted among 462 small businesses support the notion

that ICT has a positive effect on the competitive advantage but only when used in combination with entrepreneurial orientation and organizational agility (Qosasi et al., 2019).

Organizational leaders incorporate information technology into their businesses in many forms, one of which is e-marketing. Small businesses, particularly those involved in retail, are facing high competition with the growing influence of digitalization on business (Huang et al., 2019). While some entrepreneurs are digitalizing their business and staying competitive, others that cannot adapt to the fast-changing environment are running out of business (Helm et al., 2020). Small businesses that cannot integrate information technology into their business processes may find it difficult to compete with firms that invest in technology and are more likely to run out of business in the long term.

Researchers have advanced several reasons while small businesses fail, but little attention has been given to ineffective leadership as a cause of business failure (Bengesi & Roux, 2014; Minello et al., 2014). Longenecker and Insch (2018) noted that poor leadership practices lead to inefficient and less viable organizations. Leadership skills and styles are significant to small business success, especially when leaders can apply the appropriate traits to the right circumstance (Howard et al., 2019). More studies should be performed to understand the effects of leadership on the performance and survival of small businesses.

Small Business Success Strategies

Scholars have suggested several rationales for business success, but no universally accepted measure of business success have been advanced (Gupta et al.,

2013). Business success is measured by the degree to which the business meets or exceeds set goals and objectives (Anderson & Ullah, 2014). Successful businesses continually operate for at least 5 years while providing profits to stakeholders (Strielkowski, 2012). For this study, business success will mean the ability of company owners to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. Though the factors that lead to business success are difficult to accurately determine, several strategies exist that might help to keep entrepreneurs in business.

Customer Retention

Businesses that implement customer retention strategies are more likely to survive and sustain business activities (Kim et al., 2016). Customer retention strategy leads to increased profitability, low production cost, reduced marketing cost, and improved word-of-mouth referrals from customers to potential clients (Byun, & Jang, 2019; Chua et al., 2017). Evidence from literature suggests that customer retention is significantly influenced by customers satisfaction as small businesses with more satisfied customers can guarantee long-term business profitability and sustainability (Bhat & Darzi, 2016). A 1% increase in customer retention level can result in a corresponding 5% increase in financial standings of a firm (Moenardy et al., 2016).

Customer retention may also mean business owners or actions of leaders to ensure that clients remain loyal to the organizational brands (Wu et al., 2014). Consumer loyalty is determined by the relationship businesses create with their customers, and the ability of organizations to use customers relationship management programs to build and maintain a good relationship with clients (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). Kumar and Reinartz argued

that retaining existing customers is more profitable for businesses than attracting potential clients to consume products and services of the company.

Leadership

Successful entrepreneurial leadership forms the basis of competitive advantage for small businesses (Bamiatzi et al., 2015). Small business leaders or owners need to understand how the different leadership styles can apply to the prevailing business structures to achieve success. (Howard et al., 2019). Zhao et al. (2021) argued that transformational leaders can enhance the success of organizational projects. Successful leaders incorporate knowledge and skill from the components of transformational and transactional leadership styles into their daily activities with employees (Johnson et al., 2017). However, the degree of influence that transformational or transactional leadership style has on organizational performance may largely depend on the culture of the organization, standards, values, and industry where the business is operating (Qadir & Yeşiltaş, 2020).

Small business survival largely depends on the entrepreneurial and leadership expertise of business owners or managers (Demartini & Beretta, 2020, Huang et al., 2014, Paudel, 2019). Entrepreneurs who aspire to guide and inspire followers to meet the objectives of the organization require relevant abilities (Dabić et al., 2020) like interpersonal abilities (Claassen, 2015), creativity (Fernald et al., 2005), and opportunity alignment (Ardichvili, Cardozo, & Ray, 2003). A manager or business owners' personality traits can help to predict the success or failure of small businesses (McMullen

et al., 2020). Self-motivated leaders are willing and able to combine production factors to achieve business growth (Neck et al., 2013).

Training

Training is one way to improve management and employee capabilities of small businesses (Panagiotakopoulos, 2020). Scholars have investigated the effect of management training on small business performance. Cheraisi et al. (2014) emphasized that management training positively affects the profitability of a firm. The findings from a study carried out by Patton et al. (2000) proved that management training helps to sustain small businesses. The results of another study involving 600 firms across 6 European countries show that investing in management development leads to improved organizational performance (Mabey & Gooderham, 2005). Mabey and Gooderham found that leaders must complement other human resource practices such as the use of rewards and performance appraisals with management development if the goal is to enhance organizational performance.

Networking

Small businesses that want to maintain a high-performance level and gain competitive advantage must improve the networking capabilities of the company (Naudé et al., 2014; Schoonjans et al., 2013)). Leaders who successfully create and maintain good relationships with customers may enjoy the benefits of client loyalty, dependable payment, sales growth, and access to valuable feedback from customers (Mohamad & Chin, 2018). Small and medium-sized enterprises use social media to showcase their

products and services to gain a competitive advantage over competitors (Mosweunyane et al., 2019).

Networking can exist between businesses and customers and among two or more businesses. Small businesses can benefit from cordial relationships with competitors through knowledge sharing, especially when the business environment is uncertain (Su et al., 2015). Small businesses can use social media tools to share knowledge and information to benefit business operations (Kuhn et al., 2016).

Empirical studies that investigated the relationship between business networking and organizational performance have proven that networking positively affects business performance (Iskoujina et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017; Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2017).

Business networking can lead to organizational sustainability as companies benefit from information and knowledge sharing, and the acquisition of scarce resources (Donnell, 2014). Both small and large businesses engage in networking activities with customers, but small businesses have an advantage over larger companies because of the personal relationship they create with their customers (Gilboa et al., 2019).

Transition

Section 1 began with the background of the study where I introduced the research problem. Next, I included the problem statement, purpose statement and the nature of the study where I illustrated why a qualitative multiple case study approach was suitable for the study. Also, Section 1 included information about the research questions, interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions limitations and delimitations and the significance of the study. In Section 1, a review of professional and

academic literature was conducted on the central topic: leadership strategies to engage employees and sustain small businesses. The literature review section is divided into four major topics (a) small businesses, (b) leadership, (c) employee engagement, and (d) organizational performance.

Section 2 will have detail information on the purpose of the study, the role of the research and the research participants. A detail explanation was provided as to why the qualitative multiple case study is the appropriate method and design for this study. The target population and sampling techniques will also be included in Section 2. Finally, I will include ethical research standards, data collecting techniques, instruments, organization, and analysis and how to ascertain the reliability and validity of research. In Section 3, the findings of this study were presented after data collection and analysis. I will discuss how the findings can be applied to professional practice and the implications for positive social change. Finally, recommendations were made for action and future research.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes information on the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, and the research participants. A detailed explanation is provided to justify why the qualitative multiple case study was appropriate for exploring leadership strategies to engage employees and sustain retail small businesses. The targeted population and sampling techniques is also included in Section 2. Finally, Section 2 includes ethical research standards, data collecting techniques, data collection instruments, data organization techniques, data analysis, and how to establish the reliability and validity of research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small businesses leaders used to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. The target population was six small retail store managers in South Carolina who successfully used and implemented leadership strategies to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. Leadership strategies that result from this study may be used to improve employee performance and to sustain small businesses that contribute to the local community's economic development through job creation, provision of goods and services, and facilitation of commerce.

Role of the Researcher

The role of a researcher is to ensure the ethical conduct of the research process (Cumyn et al., 2019). I was the primary data collection instrument in this research. I selected the appropriate method and design for the study, chose participants, and

collected, analyzed, and interpreted data (see Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). In the process of data analysis, the researcher formulates themes from the literature review and match their meaning with text from conversations with participants (Yin, 2018).

As a researcher, my role was also to protect the integrity of the research by operating professionally, keeping participant information confidential, and following proper research procedures throughout the process. Qualitative case study research is often associated with researcher bias, which may influence the outcome of the study (Yin, 2018). My interest in leadership principles and perception of how a leader should lead could have influenced the findings of the study. To avoid the anticipation bias, I remained focus on the analyses of the data without preconceived ideas. Another way to mitigate bias is by using bracketing, which is a method in qualitative research where a researcher eliminates the potential effects of preconceptions that can taint the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2010). During the data collection process, I took notes or memos to ensure that my engagement was with the data I collected and not my perception.

Another role that I played was to interview the participants. A researcher must gather reliable and valid data from participants by asking purposeful questions to explore the topic (Brinkmann, 2016). As a researcher, I oversaw selecting the participants and conducting the interview using a well framed interview guide. My responsibility was also to collect data from other sources, like company archives, and government sources like websites. Using acceptable selection criteria, I was able to identify small retail store managers, seek their consent, and conducted interviews. Furthermore, I established an

interview protocol, which helps to create a consistent way to collect similar data from participants (see Devotta et al., 2016).

As a researcher, I am obliged to respect the ethical standards in the *Belmont Report*. The ethical standards in the *Belmont Report* include (a) beneficence, (b) justice, and (c) respect for persons (National Institute of Health, 2014). During interview sessions with participants, my goal was to comply with all the principles set forth by the *Belmont Report*. The *Belmont Report* also emphasizes on the necessity for researchers to seek the consent of participants, to exercise fairness in the selection of participants, and to assess the benefits and risks of their participation.

Participants

A researcher collects data only after the identification of participants whose attributes are associated with the primary research question (Schrag, 2017). I selected participants for this study based on the following criteria: (a) small business managers located in Columbia South Carolina, (b) small businesses with fewer than 100 employees, and (c) have used leadership strategies to sustained business operations beyond the first 5 years. The eligibility criteria were spelled out on the recruitment letter so that potential participants could determine if they were eligible for the study.

A researcher must obtain authorization from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before attempting to contact the prospective participants (Morris & Morris, 2016). When I received an approval letter from IRB (approval no. 01-24-22-065983), I immediately extended a participation invitation to potential participants, seeking their consent to take part in the interview process. A consent form was used to ensure the confidentiality of the

information from participants and to emphasize on their right to withdraw from the interview process if they desired (Roulet et al., 2017; Jackson & Larson, 2016). Phone calls were made, and emails sent to ensure participants received the document and to set up communication forums on tools like Zoom or Teams.

Upon receipt of the consent of participants to participate in the interview, the protocols of the study and more information about the purpose of the study were forwarded to the participants. Next, invitations were extended to the volunteers for a Zoom or face-to-face interview. In collaboration with the participants, an interview was scheduled on an appropriate time and date. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with the participants. Before I started any conversation, participants were reminded about the purpose of research, the anonymity of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. The notes and recordings gathered throughout the research process will be stored for 5 years and then discarded.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Three types of research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Guetterman, 2020). In a qualitative study, researchers use interviews and archival records to gain insights into the characteristics and meaning of individual experiences associated with a phenomenon (van den Berg & Struwig, 2017). Researchers use the qualitative method to explore a phenomenon by finding solutions to *why*, *what*, and *how* open-ended questions (Yin, 2018). Researchers use the qualitative method in cases where little data is available about a subject (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014) and when the aim of

the study is to explore a social phenomenon and gain insights into participant's experiences (Fu, 2019). The qualitative method is suitable for this study because I used *what* and *how* questions to explore the phenomenon based on participants' lived experiences.

Quantitative researchers measure variables and test hypotheses for examining variables' characteristics, relationships, or groups differences to address the research question (Goertzen, 2017). Quantitative researchers apply statistical techniques and not methodological measures to determine the validity and reliability of research (Brink, 2015). A quantitative method was not appropriate because the research goal was not to examine the relationship among variables or to test hypotheses. The quantitative approach was not suitable in circumstances where the aim of the study was to explore hidden insights of human experiences (Patton, 2015).

Mixed method researchers use quantitative and qualitative methods in the same study (Bazeley, 2015; Gunasekara & Zheng, 2019). A mixed method study was not appropriate because I did not need to examine relationships or test hypotheses to answer my research question. Mixed method is time consuming as qualitative and quantitative approaches are used in one study (Venkatesh et al., 2013). The limited resources available for this study also did not support a mixed method because applying quantitative and qualitative methods in one study is time consuming and expensive.

Research Design

I considered three possible qualitative designs: case study, phenomenological, and ethnographic. Using a case study design enables researchers to comprehensively

understand a phenomenon by developing in-depth descriptions and assessments of a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals over a specific time and for one or more specific places (Kristine & Evans, 2019; McKinlay et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). A case study design was appropriate because I was able to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of successful leadership strategies that retail store managers have used to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. In a single case study design, researchers focus on investigating the actions of an individual or a specific group in an organization (Yin, 2018), and a multiple case study is helpful when a researcher is comparing and exploring a phenomenon between several cases (Baškarada, 2014). A multiple case study design was used to explore whether the effective strategies differ among similar small retail establishments.

Researchers use the phenomenological design to understand the personal meanings of the lived experience of participants related to the study purpose (Alase, 2017; Flynn & Korcuska, 2018) The phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study as the approach is limited to an exploration of participant's personal experiences. My intent was also to explore experiences, perspectives, and supporting documents to investigate the phenomenon.

Ethnographic researchers seek to explore the culture or related actions of individuals or groups over a prolonged period (Campbell, 2014; Reeves et al., 2013). An ethnographic design is used when the study goal is to observe and record the culture and societal relations of individuals or groups (Jones & Smith, 2017). Ethnographic research was not suitable, as understanding a group culture would not help address my research

question. Data for this study were collected once and not during an extended period as prescribed by ethnographic design

Data saturation occurs in research when the additional data collected by the researcher from the participants does not represent new ideas or concepts to contribute to the phenomenon under investigation (Tran et al., 2017). To ensure the validity and reliability of research, the researcher should make sure that data collection reaches the point of saturation (Wuest, 2011). In this study, data saturation was reached when the information gathered from any additional participant during interviews did not introduce a new leadership strategy that could help to engage employees and sustain small business operations beyond the first 5 years.

Population and Sampling

In this qualitative multiple case study, the population comprised of retail store small business managers in Columbia South who have sustain their business beyond 5 years. Researchers who engage in a qualitative multiple case study use purposeful sampling to identify and select the appropriate participants for their study (Palinkas et al., 2016). I selected retail store small business managers in Columbia, South Carolina who have at least 5 years of experience in successfully managing business operations. Researchers should determine the sample size of the population to be consider for the study (Rosenthal, 2016). Researchers can use at least six samples when conducting a qualitative case study research (Yin, 2018). I interviewed six managers of small retail stores in South Carolina.

The first eligibility criteria for this study was that the small retail stores must have fewer than 100 employees. Second, the organization must be in South Carolina and have been in business for more than 5 years. The participants also had to be a retail store small business manager. Third, the participants must have successfully managed a retail small business for more than 5 years. Fourth, the participant should have an interest and experience in applying leadership principles to manage small retail stores.

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Ethical Research

Ethical standards in research are essential to protect the rights of participant and the credibility of the research process. Set standards and practices instill ethical behaviors and foster policies compliance to enhance the credibility of research (Kirsten et al., 2017). The IRB outlines ethical principles to guide research in a research process (Abernethy et al., 2014). To ensure that ethical standards are respected, an approval number from the Walden University IRB was obtained before any participant was formally contacted.

Potential participants were initially contacted by telephone and email detailing the intent to seek their consent to participate in the study. When I receive an approval letter from IRB, I immediately extended the consent form to potential participants, seeking their permission to participate in the interview process. A consent form was used to ensure the confidentiality of information from participants and to emphasize on the volunteer's right to withdraw without notifications (Jackson & Larson, 2016; Roulet et al., 2017). The consent form also contained information on the structure of the interview process. The participants were required to sign and return the consent form through e-mail if they approve of the content. I made sure that the participants understood the role they play in the research process and emphasize on the absence of any formal procedure or process should they decide to withdraw. All agreement documents were listed in (a) text of study, (b) appendices, and (c) table of content.

As a fundamental principle to ethical research, researcher must safeguard the confidentiality of participants' information (Adams et al., 2015). As a researcher, am obliged to protect the confidentiality of the information collected from participants during the interview process. I only reported accurate information collected from the interviewee and ensured they were safe and comfortable throughout the research process. The final document was designed not to contain any information that can identify individuals or organizations. Contributors were given the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview to ensure that the recorded information represented their views about the topic.

The data that was collected during the interview process will be stored in a safe place for at least 5 years to protect the rights of participants. After 5 years, all information

collected during the interview process will be destroyed. Participation in this study is voluntary and no compensation or incentives were offered to participants after the interview process. However, participants were entitled to a copy of the summary findings once the research process was completed.

Data Collection Instruments

In this study, I was the primary data collection instrument. A researcher plays the role of the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research (Damsa & Ugelvik, 2017; Hanson & Moore, 2014; Yin, 2018). The sources that were used to collect data for this study includes interview, archival documents, company websites, and any information that can be accessed by the public. In person interviews with audio recording help to engage participants in the data collection process and to build trustful and professional relationships with participants (Andreae et al., 2017). A semistructured interview is used by researchers to understand the participants perspective, and to collect data (Rosenthal, 2016). Face-to-face interviews were conducted to gain knowledge on the strategies managers use to sustain their business. Interviews that permit interactions between two or more individuals allows a researcher to build rapport with the participants and motivate them to disclose useful information about the subject (Schober, 2018).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected, the participants were allowed to cross-check the information on audio recordings and the data transcripts from the interview. Members checking techniques allows the participants to cross check and validate the data that was collected through interviews (Birt et al., 2016), and helps the researcher to integrate feedbacks into research reports and interpretations (Madill &

Sullivan, 2017). It is important for participants to view the interpretations of interviews to ensure that their ideas or experiences were correctly represented (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Data Collection Technique

The objective of this study was to explore leadership strategies used by managers of retail small business to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Interviews were used to capture data on the perspective of participants relating to leadership strategies and business survivability. Also, data for the research was retrieved from archival documents. Researchers use interviews as one of the ways to gather data for research (Yin, 2018). Researchers can also retrieve additional information from the archives and documents of a companies (Doll, 2017).

The data collection process began with the selection of 15 potential participants consisting of retail store managers in Columbia, SC who met the eligibility criteria for this study. The contact information of participants such as phone numbers and emails were obtained by going through the official website of the business to retrieve the information. or visiting the business site and requesting for the business cards of retail store managers. Potential participants were first contacted through an introductory email inviting them to voluntarily participate in the interview process. Initially, only two of the volunteers responded to the introductory email. Potential participants who did not respond to the initial introductory email received a reminder email two weeks later. When I later visited the business sites of the potential participants and solicited for their participation in my research study, 4 more volunteers accepted to participate. A consent

form was sent to participant through email to sign if they agree to participate in the interview. Participants who respond by email with “I consent” would have agreed to participate in the interview process. Two of the volunteers responded to the email with “I consent” while the other 4 participants signed the consent form in their offices when I visited. Participants were informed that no participation incentive was available for this study because of the limited financial resources available to the researcher.

I consulted with 6 of the participants who agree to participate in the interview processes to set up a suitable time, place, date, and format for a recorded interview. All participants declined to virtual discussion and preferred in-person interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the offices of the 6 small retail store managers who volunteered to participate in the study. No permission was required before interviewing any of the participants as they were the most senior leaders in their various organizations. I interviewed 5 participants before the point of saturation was accomplished but I conducted one more interview to ensure no new strategy emerged. The questions for the interview were open ended questions with room for follow up questions. An interview protocol was used during the interview process (Brinkmann, 2016) to ensure the rights of the participants are fully respected. Before the start of the interview, the participants were reminded that the conversation was to be recorded for quality reasons.

Data for this study was collected with the use of semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews allow researcher to gather in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon from the participants. Semistructured interviews permits researchers to probe into the problem and gain an understanding of the participants views (McTat &

Leffler, 2017), but it is costly, time consuming and the data collection process may be influenced by the researcher (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Shirani, 2015). I conducted in-person audio-recorded interviews using my cell phone to gather information from the participants on the strategies they use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Data collection tools such as digital recorder, live scribe pen were available, but I used a phone recorder because detail information can be retrieved that could be left out during note taking (Nordstrom, 2015). Personal cell phones are convenient, and password protected making it difficult for unwanted access to data compared to other audio recording devices. Face-to-face sessions provide an opportunity for the researcher to probe and seek answers to question about the subject matter (Barr et al., 2017).

The participants were asked to share with the interviewer any public documents such as meeting notes, records, or annual reports that they used as a guide to share knowledge with subordinates. After the first interview, participants were informed of the necessity of another meeting to validate the interpretation of the data that was collected during the interview process. Transcripts of the interview were forwarded to participants to review and respond within two weeks. Three of the participants provided more clarity to some statements they made during the interview while the rest of the volunteers validated the transcripts and never requested for any changes to be made on the texts. Researchers use triangulation to verify the reliability of data collection sources (Yin, 2018). I used methodological triangulation to improve the quality of the findings by reviewing interview transcripts, archival documents and conducting member checking.

The notes collected during the interview process was an additional source of data used in the analysis and interpretation section of the study. During my visits to the business sites, I recorded information from flyers on the wall of the business premises and data share by the participants from business documents or meeting notes. Only information related to leadership strategies that participants used to sustain business operations was extracted from the flyers and archival documents and used during data analysis and interpretation.

Data Organization Technique

In this study, the code system was used to ensure proper grouping of data and to protect participant's identity. To ensure that the ethics of research are respected, the researcher should ensure the anonymity of participants who participate in the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The participants were identified as participant 1, participant 2, participant 3, participant 4, participant 5, and participant 6, as their names were not disclosed in the research paper. Coding helps researchers to capture and highlight the meaning of data collected from participants.

The data organization procedure is applicable to this study because researchers used the technique to label data collected with audio devices (Bishop & Kuula-Luumi, 2017) and to accurately review, analyze and report data collected through interviews (Watkins, 2017). I used a recording device to record information during interview and subsequently upload the data into a password protected file on my computer where the information was transcribed and organized into themes. A copy of the electronic data was stored in an external hard drive. The NVivo 12 software is a tool helped to code and store

data and to preserve the participant's confidentiality. Qualitative researchers use the NVivo software because of its proficiency, transparency, and ability to manage a large amount of data (Dollah et al., 2017).

The hard copies of transcripts and documents containing information about this study has been stored in a locked metal cabinet. After 5 years, electronic data which was uploaded from the audio devices into my computer and external hard drive will be permanently deleted. All paper copies of data will be destroyed after 5 years using a shredding machine.

Data Analysis

After data has been collected and transcribed, the next step in the research process is data analyses. Data analysis is the process of collection, classification, and interpretation of data (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). Ajjan et al. (2016) identified eight different techniques that researchers use to analyze qualitative data (a) categorization of codes, (b) creation of coding manual with operational definitions, (c) data triangulation, (d) developing concepts and themes from existing literature, (e) emergent of data saturation, (f) use of NVivo qualitative analysis software, (g) use of pattern matching to attain validity, and (h) validating concepts with secondary documents. Though other software exists, the NVivo 12 Plus software is the appropriate tool that was used in data analysis. In contrast to other software, NVivo 12 Plus software is user-friendly with modernized features that simplify data coding

Data analysis involves organizing, classifying, categorizing, summarizing, interpreting, synthesizing data, and formulating the results of the findings (Marshall &

Rossmann, 2016). Recurrent themes were identified based on the frequency of words on the interview transcripts. Researchers can identify and analyze repeated patterns of data to gain fundamental insights into large volume of text transcribed from interview audios (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). I used the NVivo 12 software to enhance data collection and analysis. The NVivo 12 software enhances the search, sorting, and classification of information and identifies relationships in data (Adu, 2019). After the analysis of data by NVivo 12 software, I coded and analyze the results to develop themes that align with the study's literature and conceptual framework.

The triangulation method was applied to analyze data collected on the leadership strategies used by managers of small retail stores for business survivability.

Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources, theories, and methods by researchers to provide combined evidence about a phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2018).

Triangulation enables researchers to use different data collection methods in the same research, different population samples, and different theoretical view to justify the results obtained from the study (Marshall & Rossmann, 2016). In this study, triangulation was used to improve the quality of the findings through the review of interview transcripts, journal notes, member checking and archival documents. I used the data triangulation method for this study because triangulation ensures the validity and credibility of (Turner et al., 2017).

The TL theory played a significant role in the data analysis process to explore leadership strategies that small business leaders use to sustain business operations. The TL theory helped in the construction of research questions that are used to explore the

phenomenon. Data analysis was facilitated as the traits of TL theory was a guide to the selection of relevant data from participants' responses. The TL theory proposes explanations to the actions of leaders during the interpretation of data in the findings section.

Reliability and Validity

The credibility of a study was determined by evaluating the reliability and validity of the research process. Assessing the reliability and validity of quantitative studies helps researchers to ascertain the truthfulness and accuracy of research processes and findings (Yin, 2018). Reliability and validity can be used by scholars to establish consistency and dependability in research (Morse, 2015a). The criteria used by qualitative researchers to establish research reliability and credibility include (a) credibility, (b) confirmability, (c) transferability, and (d) dependability.

Reliability

Reliability is the ability for a researcher to apply the same research instruments under similar circumstances and still achieve consistent results (Leung, 2015). Researchers must provide sufficient evidence to convince readers that the study will yield similar results even when conducted by different scholars using distinct methods (Hadi & Closs, 2016). To ensure the reliability of research, I collected data from the primary source, verified the data to ensure it conforms with the context and employed member checking to authenticate the information from participants.

Dependability can be addressed in a study with the use of strategies like member checking, reflexivity, and reviewed notes collected during interactions with participants

(Anney, 2014; Morse, 2015). Reaching data saturation is another way in which researchers ascertain the dependability of a study. During the data collection process, participants reviewed transcript responses to affirm the completeness and accuracy of the information that was collected through interviews. Transcript review helps to reinforce the authenticity of the data collected from participants. Member checking improves the integrity of the research and aids researchers to better understand the event that is being investigated (Bennett & McWhorter, 2016). After data review, discrepancies were discussed with the volunteers and the necessary changes made to ensure the authenticity of information collected. Another way to ensure the dependability of the findings of this study was by making sure data saturation was reached during the interview process.

Validity

Qualitative researchers use validity as a research instrument to determine how participants will assess the level of accuracy of data collected. (Eiras, et al., 2014; Noble & Smith, 2015). Validity in qualitative research involves compliance with credibility, confirmability, and transferability standards (Cope, 2014). To ensure the validity and reliability of research, I ensured that data collection reached the point of saturation as prescribed by Wuest (2011).

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research measures the level at which participants and readers trust the study's findings (Munn et al., 2014). To confirm the credibility of this study, tools like interview protocols and member checking were employed to ensure that the data collected is accurate. Participants were given interview transcript for verification

and reconciliation to ensure the data to represent the facts about the topic. Another way of ensuring research credibility was by using triangulation which involves the use of more than one data source (Baillie, 2015; Harvey, 2015). Data sources that were employed into this study to establish credibility include (a) interviews, (b) archival documents, and (c) official business documents. Interview responses were crosschecked with business and documents to validate the information collected.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the ability for researchers to accurately collect data that is void of researcher biases (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). In qualitative research, researchers can establish confirmability by ensuring that during interviews, participants provide details about their views on the subject that is in question (Moon et al., 2016). Also, Moon et al. emphasized that member checking is vital after interviews have been conducted to allow scholars to validate the researcher's interpretations of the data provided by the participants. Confirmability is achieved when researchers use multiple sources of data accompanied by triangulation to compare data (Morse & Wilson, 2016). In this study, I used interview, archival and official business documents to collect and verify data for authenticity. Also, interview transcripts were cross checked with participants to ensure the accuracy of the information collected throughout the data collection period.

Transferability

Researchers should meticulously describe the context of their study, as well as the methodology used and the research scope (Anney, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). Future

leaders can better assess the transferability of the study when they can access and evaluate comprehensive evidence about the study in question (Adamson & 74 Prion, 2014). I guaranteed the transferability of this study by providing detail information about data collection and analysis technique, implementing interview protocols, member checking, and ensuring that data collection reaches a point of saturation.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 was used to describe the role of the researcher, participants research method, research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, reliability, and validity of the study. This section justifies the use of qualitative multiple case study approach to investigate the strategies used by small retail store managers to engage employees and sustain business operations.

In Section 3, the findings of the study were presented after data collection and analysis. I will discuss how the findings can be applied to professional practice and the implications for positive social change. Finally, recommendations for action and future research were made in this section.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that small retail store managers use to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. I conducted semistructured interviews with six managers of small retail businesses who have used leadership strategies to sustain their business operations beyond the first 5 years. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained by conducting interviews in a secured environment and tagging the various participants with the codes P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6. Triangulation was achieved through the review of data from interview transcripts, notes, websites, and public archival documents from participants. Three major themes emerged from the interview transcripts: (a) setting the tone, (b) motivation and reward, and (c) managing capabilities. Section 3 includes how the study findings aligned with the conceptual framework and associated theories discussed in the review of related literature

Presentation of Findings

The research question for this study was “What leadership strategies do small business managers use to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?” Transformational leadership theory was used as a conceptual framework for this study. To answer the research question, six small retail stores managers who have successfully used leadership strategies to sustain business beyond the first 5 years were interviewed. To safeguard the confidentiality and privacy of participants, the six were assigned codes (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6). The participants were made aware that their formal name or business name was not going to be used in the final study.

The data collection process included interviews and examination of business websites and archival documents. The websites of P1, P2, P4, and P6, and archival documents from P1, P3, P5 and P6 were reviewed. The company documents reviewed included flyers on the walls of the business premises and meeting notes from participants that contained information about leadership strategies. The participants shared manuscripts of meeting minutes with their staff and the notes they used as a guide to coach employees. Business websites of the retail stores were also explored, and information related to leadership strategies was recorded. Information from company documents and websites aligned with data from interview transcripts.

After the interviews were conducted and audio files transcribed, the initial data analysis was submitted to the participants for verification and validation. Member checking allows the participants to cross check and validate the data that was collected through interviews (Birt et al., 2016) and ensure their ideas or experiences were correctly represented (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Three of the participants provided more clarity to some statements they made during the interview, and the rest of the volunteers validated the transcripts and never requested for any changes to be made on the texts. At the end, all six participants verified and validated the interview transcripts that were provided to them.

Three major themes emerged after data from interviews was collected and coded, and information from websites and archival documents was examined. The themes were (a) setting the tone, (b) motivation and reward, and (c) managing capabilities. Nine subthemes emerged after I did the second round of coding. Table 1 shows the core

themes and the frequency of occurrence, and Tables 2, 3, and 4 depicts the subthemes.

Data analysis was facilitated as the traits of TL theory was a guide to the selection of relevant data from participants' responses. The TL theory proposes explanations to the actions of leaders during the interpretation of data in this section.

Table 1

Frequency of Core Themes on Leadership Strategies

Core themes	Frequency of occurrence
Setting the tone	29
Motivation and reward	20
Managing capabilities	50

Theme 1: Setting the Tone

Table 2

Subtheme of Setting the Tone

Core themes	Participants	Frequency of occurrence
Model desired behaviors	5	15
Build rapport	2	4
Effective communication	4	9
Develop and sell vision	4	6

Successful leaders set a tone by using their daily actions to exhibit desired behaviors for followers to emulate (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). All participants underscored the need for leaders to set a tone for others to follow. One-way participants set the tone was by modelling desired behaviors at their job sites. P1, P3, P4, P5 and P6 demonstrated that modelling desired behaviors was a leadership strategy that helped to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years. P1 stated, "the biggest leadership strategy is leading by example." P1 further explained, "As a manager, if you are going to

tell someone to do something then you should be able to do it yourself and be prepared to show them how to do it.” P2 discussed how to lead by example by modeling desired behaviors:

As leader, you must lead by example, just not by telling people what to do, but by doing it yourself. Coming to work, being able to show up. If I tell employees they need to be at work at 7, I too need to be at work at 5 minutes before 7. Being that example is a motivation to these employees, so I make sure I show up to work early enough.... They look up to me like a role model and then they can go out there and do the same things I do.

P4 explained why employees look up to him as a role model: “Because I’ve done it much longer than anybody else, they follow in my footsteps and look at what I do.” P6 described how he leads by example and acts as a role model to employee. “The way my employees learn from me is.... Because I come here on time, usually, I open my store, I cleaned my store, I do pretty much the job that my employees do not want to do.”

Leaders also set the tone by building a rapport or good working relationship with their employees. P1 believed in creating a relationship with employees that results in the identification and resolution of issues that could hinder their performances. P1 added that “you still have to build a little rapport with somebody, you can’t be dry, you know you have to be able to go with the flow..., my employees are loyal with me so long as I am loyal to them.” P2 emphasized the significance of creating a rapport with employees as they will feel comfortable to discuss professional and personal issues that hampers their performances. Similarly, P3 stated, “You will have to try and keep somebody close to

you that you know they're having a bad day or something...., maybe you could help him out through the day or something." P3 further emphasized the worth of building rapport among team members:

It's about building teams in cohesion, building a relationship between all of us. The employees are open to each other. They can say anything they want to say and contribute towards the success of this place. So, I think that's the most effective strategy, having each other's back, being there for each other, being like a family. I look at the business like a family so when you keep that going then you keep everybody happy; you keep your productivity high too. I think that's one of the most effective strategies, I think just keeping everybody happy, keeping everybody as a part of the team.

P4 stated that "so we all primarily just know each other..., we understand each other..., we're friends with each other...., we do stuff outside of work together, I think it's an inner motivation."

Further, leaders set the tone by effectively communicating with their subordinates.

P1 emphasized that leaders should be able to listen and understand the perspective of subordinates: "if people get upset when I tell them to do something, I want to hear their side and then maybe talk about it, whether it's man to man or man to woman."

Statements from P3 and P5 correlate with information from P1 indicating that employees only feel they are part of the team when their opinion are taken into consideration by leaders. P3 stated, "when you speak, you have to also listen to other opinion and let the employees know they are part of the group." P4 indicated that leaders should ensure their

subordinates understand why they must do a particular task and the role they play in achieving the goals of the institution.

P2, P4, P5 and P6 underlined the need for retail store managers to develop and sell the business vision to employees if they strive to sustain business activities beyond the first 5 years. P2 emphasized on aligning employee with the vision of the business:

Without your employees, your business can't grow. If you don't have the best product in the world and knowledgeable staff that are willing to support your work ideas, your program, you're not going to be successful. You can have the best widget in the world, but if you don't have someone that believes in their mind that our process is the best, then it's not going to work, and that's what we do.

P4 ensured that every employee understood that the role they play every day they come to work is to fulfil the overall mission of sustaining the business long term, their jobs and salary. P5 stated, "you have to work with them to understand what our goals are, you must state your goals or vision clearly." P5 added, "I have to monitor everybody that work with me to understand what the goals are, and how we could get there." P6 explained the significance of separating the business from management and encourages employees to focus on the vision of the business and not any employee that is going against the idea.

Relating Theme 1 to the Literature

Existing literature supports the findings of this study that setting the tone can contribute to the survivability of retail small businesses. Setting the tone involves the

application of transformational leadership strategies to achieve improved performance. Small business leaders or owners need to understand how the different leadership styles can apply to the prevailing business structures to achieve success. (Howard et al., 2019). Successful leaders incorporate knowledge and skill from the components of transformational and transactional leadership styles into their daily activities with employees (Johnson et al., 2017). Small business survival largely depends on the entrepreneurial and leadership expertise of business owners or managers (Demartini & Beretta, 2020; Huang et al., 2014; Paudel, 2019).

Bass (1985) acknowledged that when transformational leaders appealingly communicate the vision of a company, the managers set the stage for employees to understand the expectations and perform above set standards. Employees are more likely to propagate positive information than negative adverts about their organization when their leaders effectively communicate the vision and mission of an institution (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Transformational leaders can positively influence the perception workers about the working environment by effectively communicating the organizational objectives and goals (Momeny & Gourgues, 2019). Transformational leadership positively affects employee voice behavior and positive and negative megaphone actions (Lee & Chon, 2020).

Relating Theme 1 to the Conceptual Framework

The study to explore the leadership strategies that contribute to sustain small retail business operations was grounded on the transformational leadership framework as proposed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). All study participants outlined leadership

strategies that were in line with the constructs of transformational leadership as stipulated by Avolio and Bass (1999), who identified four significant constructs of TL as (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. The findings of this study confirm that leaders set the tone by being an example and modelling desired behaviors. Idealized influence refers to that attribute of a leader to instill trust and confidence into followers and act as a role model to inspire them to emulate their behavior (Alzoraiki et al., 2018; Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1999). The most significant development of the TL theory was in terms of (a) the actions of leaders that initiates a change in the actions of follower, (b) strategies leaders used to transform followers, (c) the relationship between the influence of a leader on followers and organizational performance (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass, 1985). The participants also expressed the need for leaders to build a rapport with their followers. Individualistic consideration is a transformational characteristic of a leader to create an interactive rapport with employees and build a conducive work environment where the concerns of workers can be established and addressed (Nemanich & Keller, 2007).

The participants also emphasized the necessity for leaders to communicate effectively and sell the business vision to employees. Effective communication and selling the business vision are linked to the inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation traits of a transformational leader. Employees are more successful when they are given the allowance to freely air their opinions and make decisions in their line of duty without being afraid of being reprimanded by superiors (Shih et al., 2012). The intellectual stimulation leadership construct is the ability for leaders to provide a creative

environment for workers and enlighten personnel on the importance of tolerating diverse ideas in the workplace (Avolio & Bass, 1999). Inspirational motivation describes a transformational leadership characteristic in which a leader can inspire employees to understand the organizational vision and crave to perform above set standards of the organization (Bass, 1985; Bass et al., 2003; Hussain et al., 2019). Inspirational motivation is a transformational leadership quality that addresses how a leader outlines and communicates a vision to his subordinates in a way that motivates them to focus on assigned tasks (Avolio & Bass, 1999).

Theme 2: Motivation and Reward

Table 3

Subtheme of Motivation and Reward

Subtheme	Participants	Frequency of occurrence
Monetary reward	6	12
Nonmonetary reward	5	8

All participants indicated that they used motivation and reward as a leadership strategy to engage employees and sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years. P1 through P6 provided monetary rewards to inspire employees. P1 revealed that financial incentives motivate employees to perform better and advocates for monetary incentives for workers that exceed expectations. P2 noted that commission motivate employees and reduces the possibility for workers to look for opportunities in other companies. P3 stated

There are other ways in which we motivate these employees.... Insofar as the organization is doing well and making more money than it used to...., pay them a

little bit more to compensate for the efforts which they have made towards achieving organizational goals.

P4 agreed with other participants that financial incentives motivate employees and said, “Compensation makes a big deal, I mean, obviously you know employees get paid bonuses based off sales, the more we sell, the more money they make.” P5 offered loans to employee as a financial incentive. According to P4

They have needs, like somebody wants to buy a car, you give them some money, or you buy for them while they’re repaying back. An interest free loan that they get from the company to do what they must do... I pay it back with their salary.

P2, P3, P4, and P6 underscored the effectiveness of non-monetary reward as a strategy to engage employees and sustain business operations. P2 and P6 used non-monetary reward as a tactic to retain high performing employees. P2 noted that

Keep your employees here, even if that means they need more time off or they need better benefits or whatever it may be, we get together as a group, the owners and the managers and we come up with a plan to keep specific employees in place because in this environment, most workers go to where they’re getting paid the most.

Furthermore, P6 said,

We give employees gifts, something to make them want to stay here longer. If workers work here for a year, they have a week of paid vacation, and we always celebrate their birthday. We just buy a cake, and give you a gift and every

Christmas, we gave bonuses, and we have a big meal in my house. They come here and eat some food. They love it and cannot wait for Christmas to come.

P3 and P4 acknowledge how non-monetary incentives stimulate employees to perform better. P3 noted “We give them recognitions, time off. Paid holidays, sometimes they can take a break from work take care of family issues, take off time for their personal life and then they still get paid. P3 emphasized on the significance of developing and implementing non-monetary rewards to motivate employees.” Similarly, P4 believed that nonfinancial incentive motivate employees and stated that

Buying lunches, hey I got your lunch today, I’ll take care of it. As a store owner, just giving them little perks like that or maybe some time off could be a motivating factor. We got a little bit of free time we can spare and so on, that works.

Relating Theme 2 to the Literature

Leaders can achieve the objective of motivating their staff by introducing employee recognition and reward programs (Hussain, et al., 2019). Existing literature outline two way in which leaders can motivate and reward employees to ensure their productivity is beyond expectation. Putra et al. (2015), identified two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation can be derived from interesting work, self-expression, and satisfaction from work itself, while extrinsic motivation comes from pay, job security, and good coworkers (Putra et al., 2015). Extrinsic motivation strategies like rewards in the form of money helped improve employee engagement compared to intrinsic motivational strategies (Asal & Koksai, 2018). Research findings

show that employees value jobs where they can express themselves, their skills and gain job satisfaction rather than work that will only benefit them regarding pay, promotion, or job security (Grant, 2007). Intrinsic motivation is positively related to work engagement as inspiration from within is useful to spur the dedication and work energy of workers (Van Beek et al., 2012). Mabey and Gooderham (2005) in a study on management development found that leaders must complement other human resource practices like the use of rewards and performance appraisals with management development if the goal is to enhance organizational performance. a combination of human resource factors such as training, empowerment, and rewards can lead to enhanced employee engagement (Karatepe, 2013).

One way in which organizational leaders can improve employee engagement is by establishing a reward system. Rewards, which can be financial, non-financial, intrinsic, and extrinsic (Victor, & Hoole, 2017), are important facets in an organization (Aslam et al., 2015; Bussin & Van Rooy, 2014). Reward programs enhance employee motivation (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Introducing reward programs into the workplace can result in improved employee engagement (Crawford et al., 2010; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013).

Relating Theme 2 to the Conceptual Framework

The findings from this study suggest that motivation and reward is a contributing factor to the survivability of small businesses. Intrinsic motivation forms the basis of the transformational leadership theory. The most significant development of the TL theory was in terms of (a) the actions of leaders that initiates a change in the actions of follower, (b) strategies leaders used to transform followers, (c) the relationship between the

influence of a leader on followers and organizational performance (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass, 1985). Inspirational motivation describes a transformational leadership characteristic in which a leader can inspire employees to understand the organizational vision and crave to perform above set standards of the organization (Bass, 1985; Bass et al., 2003; Hussain, et al., 2019). Leaders in this category strive to motivate and change follower's perspectives from egocentrism to a more collective effort to help others accomplish the goals of a group (Rubin et al., 2005). Transformational leaders with intellectual stimulation qualities can develop creative thinkers to solve daily work problems by identifying, motivating, and promoting the innovative skills employees (Bass, 1999; Bass et al., 2003; Smothers et al., 2016).

Theme 3: Managing Capabilities

Table 4

Subtheme of Managing Capabilities

Subthemes	Participants	Frequency of occurrence
Retain talents	6	25
Adaptability	3	11
Performance evaluation	4	8

P2, P3, and P4 indicated that managing employee capabilities through retention, adaptation, and performance evaluation helped to sustain business operations. According to P2 small retail business leaders should strive to retain skilled or knowledgeable employees to improve the possibility of business success. P2 noted

I think the best strategy to sustain a business is to keep your workers and make sure your employees are well paid and happy because without knowledgeable

personnel and sales you have nothing... Once you have a guy that's been with you for more than a year, part of management's strategy to keep business successful is to keep your employees here, if that means they need more time off or they need better benefits or whatever it may be. We get together as a group, the owners and the and the managers and we come up with a plan to keep specific employees in place.

P2 added that a business may not succeed without knowledgeable employees that are willing to stay and contribute to the success of the institution. P3 stressed on the significance of retaining workers and stated

Every employer's aim is to keep employees, keep them comfortable. We try to retain them so that their performance will continue to improve, and this place may continue to improve. There's no way you do that when you allow a high turnover of your employees. So, I try as much as possible to keep them.

P4 revealed "I mean, there's absolutely no reason not to try to retain employees if they are performing at a high standard or to an exceptional standard".

P1, P3 and P5 argued that a manager's ability to recognize and adapt to the different personalities of employees contributes to sustain business operations. P1 said,

The biggest strategy is hiring good people, working with the people you have, also realizing that people you hire may not meet the expectations, you have to know the fields you're in and you must adapt and make them better.

P1 emphasized that managers must identify the capabilities of employees, build on their strengths and weakness consistently. P1 added,

I would say being consistent. Hiring good people and then working with those people with their failures, pluses, and minuses instead of just giving up. You must realize what you've got to deal with in that person and there are people that don't make it and you make decisions along the way for that.

P3 did not only agree with P1 on adapting to the strengths and weaknesses of employees but also encourage workers to learn from each other. P3 stated that

Everybody is not the same. You must adapt to various individuals. You must learn their abilities. Yes, the individuals are better off doing one thing that they order, so you must know their strengths and weaknesses and then focus on their weaknesses and try to build their strengths so that they grow up to the level of performance that is acceptable and exceptional. You use their strengths to know they are more comfortable in doing one thing than the other. You can have employees learn from each other. Strengths and weaknesses are always going to exist, so you must hear and balance between those strengths and weaknesses.

In response to interview question 1 P5 explained "I mean, they're just some basic things that everybody knows; understand who you're working with, understand their strength, understand their weakness, as well as you must understand yourself and find a way to balance those things out together, so, you guys can work out whatever."

In response to the interview questions, P1, P3, P4, and P5 confirm that their ability to track the performance of employee and provide feedback helped to improve performance and to sustain business operations. P1 did not only evaluate the performance of employees but did a self-evaluation. P1 explained "I tracked my numbers, what I did

daily, what I did monthly, what I did yearly, I mean I have all those records, so I know exactly if I'm doing better than last month or last year." P1 added "So I would write down the numbers they had, and I would go over their averages with them and sit there and talk about where they can improve or what you're lacking." P4 and P5 agreed with P1 on evaluating the performances of employees but added that it should be done more frequently, and an incentive should be provided to employees who perform better. P5 noted,

Communicating with workers about the goals, why they did some of what they are doing, how they can be part of the plan and how well they are taking care of the goals of the company. We must be on the same page. Basically, communicate and get feedback on things that you have going on and how to get it done and remind them it's not going to be 100%, but they must continue picking up.

P5 also emphasized that leaders should constantly remind workers what the goals are, how to achieve them, and what the benefit will be if the goals are achieved?

Relating Theme 3 to the Literature

Managing employee capabilities is a theme that emerged from this study findings that correlates with existing literature on leadership strategies to sustain small retail businesses. Leaders must understand that employees in an organization can be classified in distinct level of needs and have different motivational desires (Momeny & Gourgues, 2019). Leaders are expected to adapt to changes in employee behavior and adjust their leadership style to meet the needs of workers worker (Northouse, 2015). Training is one way to improve management and employee capabilities of small businesses

(Panagiotakopoulos, 2020). Scholars have investigated the effect of management training on small business performance. Cheraisi et al. (2014) emphasized that management training positively affects the profitability of a firm

Relating Theme 3 to the Conceptual Framework

Managing capabilities is one of the core themes that emerged from the interview transcripts and requires leaders to evaluate the performance of employee, identify and adapt to worker's strengths and weakness. The TL theory was used to explain a leadership style where leaders will work with their subordinates to identify areas that need improvement and create a new vision that will guide the workers through a change process (Bass, 1985). According to Yukl (2010) the transformational leadership theory measures organizational effectiveness by gauging employees' skills and behavior instead of analyzing and comparing the level at which goals are achieved. Transformational leaders with intellectual stimulation qualities can develop creative thinkers to solve daily work problems by identifying, motivating, and promoting the innovative skills employees (Bass, 1999; Bass et al., 2003; Smothers et al., 2016).

Application to Professional Practice

The strategies that emerged from this study may help small business managers to better coach and inspire employees to meet or exceed organizational goals. Small retail store owners who understand the constructs of the TL strategies of this study can incorporate the strategies into their business and inspired employees to greater performance levels. The survivability of a business depends on the ability of the manager

to apply the right leadership strategy to stimulate employees to improve performance (Popli & Rizvi, 2017)

The three themes that emerged from this study provide small business managers with strategies that can sustain their business beyond the first 5 years. The findings may also help potential and existing small business managers to expand their knowledge and understanding of which leadership strategies are most effective in motivating employee performance which leads to sustained business operations beyond the first 5 years. The results of this study may contribute to effective business practice by helping retail small business managers find effective leadership strategies and derivative business processes that result in sustained business operations after 5 years

The first theme of this study highlights the necessity for small business managers to set the business tone. Findings from this study can help business leaders to by an example and model desired behaviors for followers to follow. When leaders create and sell a clear vision, they pave the way for employees to develop and maintain values that are geared towards the achievement of organizational goals and objectives. Leaders who lead by example can garner support from employees by ensuring that their actions reinforce company values and helps towards the realization of improved performance and business sustainability.

Implication for Positive Social Change

Sustainable businesses can ensure long term employment opportunities, jobs security and community growth (You & Fan, 2020). Organizational leaders that implement leadership strategies from this study have the potential to expand their

business, recruit more employees from communities and engage in social responsibility activities such as charitable giving and volunteering, which may improve the living standards of community residents. Job security and low employment rate can improve the welfare of individuals and the economic security of the community.

Leadership strategies that result from this study may be used to improve employee performance and to sustain small businesses so that they can contribute to the local community's economic development through job creation, provision of goods and services, and facilitation of commerce. Leadership strategies that result from this study can help retail store managers to minimize business failure which could benefit the community in terms of economic prosperity through jobs and income from taxes. Successful small businesses can create avenues for individual development by providing training and apprenticeship opportunities to youths and community members.

Businesses that sustain after 5 years can continue to provide employment opportunities and contribute to realization of a viable economy in the United States (Harhara et al., 2015). Business institutions and employees pay taxes to fund the project of the government. Income generated from taxes help in the provision of social amenities such as roads, hospitals, and schools, that can improve the wellbeing and quality of life of the members of the community. The income generated from taxes also helps in the economic development of the community and society at large.

Recommendation for Action

Approximately 50% of newly created small businesses in the United States have failed within the first 5 years of startup (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2018). The findings

of this study show that the survivability of small businesses depends on the ability of business leaders to develop and implement leadership strategies which can engage employees and improve performance. First, I recommend small business leaders should set the tone by being role models for employees to follow. Leaders that set the tone are willing and able to lead by example, adapt to the strengths and weaknesses of employees and can create a rapport with their subordinates. By setting the tone, leaders can lead by example and create a culture in the business where workers are willing to perform beyond expectations to achieve the goals and objectives of the institution. Small business leaders should consider creating a selling a vision that will ensure employees are working towards the achievement of the mission of the organization.

Second, small businesses should consider motivating and rewarding employees to improve performance and sustain their business beyond the first 5 years. Leaders can achieve the objective of motivating their staff by introducing employee recognition and reward programs (Hussain, et al., 2019). Monetary and non-monetary reward can contribute to the survivability of small business. Bonuses, commissions, gifts, and paid vacations have proven to be a source of motivation for employees to continue to perform at a high level or exceed standards for the benefit of the business.

Third, if small business leaders intend to achieve the objective of keeping business operations beyond the first 5 years, they must strive to identify and manage the capabilities of employees under their supervision. Panagiotakopoulos (2020) underscored the importance for leaders to manage the capabilities of employees. Leaders are expected to adapt to changes in employee behavior and adjust their leadership style to

meet the needs of workers (Northouse, 2015). The ability for business leaders to adapt the capabilities of employees can contribute to small businesses success. Small business leaders should be able to evaluate employees to identify their strengths and weaknesses and provide feedback to ensure workers are on the right path.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study helped shed light on the tactics that retail store managers can use to sustain business activities beyond the first 5 years. This study was limited to small businesses with less than 100 employees. I would recommend further research need to be conducted on organizations with more than 100 employees including larger companies to uncover leadership strategies that result in sustained business operations. Further research in those large institutions other than small businesses could unravel leadership strategies that this study did not discover. Also, researchers should consider increasing the sample size from the initial 6 participants to gain a broader perspective of business leaders about the leadership strategies that help to keep their business alive.

The study population was limited to small retail store managers in Columbia, South Carolina who have used leadership strategies to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. Hence study findings may not include the perspectives of other business leaders in different geographical locations in the United States and around the world. A recommendation for further research could include an application to other geographical regions with the goal to uncover leader perspective on leadership strategies that may help business operations sustainability.

Reflection

At the start of the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program, I did not know that the Doctoral study will be the most challenging academic course in my life. Every step of the program was both challenging and rewarding, and pushed me beyond my limits, At the beginning I felt like giving up but thanks to my military experience and encouragement from my Committee Chair Dr. John Hannon, I thankfully continued pushing forward till the end. Every phase of the process came with challenges, but Walden University provided resources, both human and material that helped to overcome the challenges.

The time spent to complete my Doctoral study was more than initially anticipated. The doctoral study at Walden University is divided into three stages: (a) prospectus, (b) proposal, and (c) final study. A lot of time was spent on my prospectus, making the required changes, and resubmitting the material. At the end, I realized that the feedback from staff helped me build a foundation for the completion of my studies. Despite the challenges, every completed stage was a reward and served as a source of motivation for me to continue till the end. If I were to offer some advice to anyone who want to engage in the Doctoral journey, three things will come to mind: (a) devote enough time for the process, (b) be open minded, and (c) be prepared to consider recommendations from your supervisors because they have experience in what they do and will guide you on the right path of success.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that retail store managers used to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. The participants consisted of six retail store managers who have used leadership strategies to sustain business operations for 5 years or more. Business leaders can achieve growth and survivability when they incorporate strategies into their business plan (Jahanshahi et al., 2015). Evidence from the study suggested that retail store managers who align their leadership style with strategies from the traits of transformational leadership theory usually sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years. Small retail business managers align their leadership strategies by setting the tone, motivating, and rewarding employees and managing the capabilities of workers. A key recommendation for business success includes the ability for leaders to lead by example by modelling desired behaviors that followers can emulate. Organizational leaders that implement leadership strategies found successful in this study have the potential to expand their business, recruit more employees from communities and engage in social responsibility activities such as charitable giving and volunteering. All of which may improve the living standards of community residents. The results of this study may also contribute to effective business practice by helping retail small business managers find effective leadership strategies and derivative business processes that result in sustained business operations after 5 years.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

The purpose of this study is to explore leadership strategies that retail store managers use to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years. The research population consist of retail store managers in Columbia South Carolina with less than 100 employees and who have used leadership strategies to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years

This interview is projected to last 30 to 45 minutes, and the participant reserves the right to withdraw without prior notification. Before commencing the interview, I will ascertain that the participant is still willing to participate in the data collection process. The following procedures will be a guide through each interview

- 1) Begin by thanking the interviewee for volunteering for the study.
- 2) State the purpose and the significance of the study.
- 3) Notify the participant that their identity and responses will remain confidential.
- 4) Remind participants about the anonymity of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time
- 5) Notify the participant that the interview will be audio-recorded.
- 6) Reiterate and advise participant that no participation incentives are available.
- 7) Inform participant about the necessity of another meeting to validate the interpretation of the data that was collected during the interview process.

- 8) I will ask the participants to share with me any public documents such as meeting notes, records, or annual reports that they use as a guide to share knowledge with subordinates.
- 9) Advise participants they will receive a summary of the findings at the end of the study.

To gain in-depth knowledge about the leadership strategies used to sustain small businesses, I will ask probing questions in the following order.

- a) What leadership strategies do you use to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?
- b) How did you assess the strategies' effectiveness in sustaining business operations beyond the first 5 years?
- c) What leadership strategies were most effective in sustaining business operations beyond the first 5 years?
- d) How did you implement your leadership strategies to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?
- e) What challenges did you encounter implementing your leadership strategies to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?
- f) How did you overcome the challenges to the implementation of your leadership strategies to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?

- g) What other information would you like to share about leadership strategies that your organization used to sustain business operations beyond the first 5 years?

Finally, thank the participants for taking off time from their busy schedules to share their views and experiences about leadership strategies and remind them of the member checking process after data transcription.

Participation consent: Yes__ No__ Date_____