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Leadership Strategies and Employee Performance Within Small Business

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Letica Sellers

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Leadership Strategies and Employee Performance Within Small Business

by

Letica Carla Sellers

MS, Walden University, 2013

BS, Francis Marion University, 2006

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2017

Abstract

The survival of the small business industry is important to the United Sates workforce and economy. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies of 2 small business managers in a manufacturing setting who had a demonstrable record of improving employee performance to meet organizational goals. The conceptual framework for this study was Burns and Bass’s transformational leadership theory. The small business managers were from 2 small manufacturing plants in the coastal plains region of South Carolina. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, archival documents, and observations of the managers during their daily activities. Data analysis included identifying relevant themes using the comparison method. Data were compared at each phase of the data collection process, revealing themes of following a vision, self-efficacy, self-determination, and need fulfillment. Findings suggest that other small business managers in similar contexts may improve employee performance using the transformational leadership approach, especially when employee encouragement, managerial experience, and adaptation are present. Small business managers and owners can benefit from the study results by using these findings to improve employee performance.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to the small business community and future entrepreneurs.

Acknowledgments

To my dedicated family: Thank you for your patience and support throughout this process. To my son, I love you and hope one day you understand why I was always on the computer. I know I was not alone on this journey and want to thank you all for your belief in me.

To my coworkers: Your support, encouragement, and understanding have allowed me to complete this journey. Each day you all challenged me and helped me remain focused.

To my committee members: Dr. Janet Booker, Dr. Denise Land, and Dr. Mary Dereshiwsky. Without your help, I would have been lost. Dr. Booker this journey took me longer that I anticipated but thank you for your time and advise.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Managers in the small business sector may need to understand the importance of leadership strategies to improve employee performance. The small business sector in the United States accounted for 63% of new job creation in 2014 (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2014). Due to the relevance of the small business sector on the performance of the workforce, providing information on best practices is essential. In this study, I intend to bridge the ideas between academia and industry, so small business practitioners understand the relevance of leadership strategies.

Background of the Problem

A small business is an independently owned organization with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2014) that operate for profit and are not dominant in their field (SBA, 2013). Small businesses represent half of the labor force in the United States and create a half a million new businesses monthly (SBA, 2014). Despite the impact on the workforce, in the first 5 years of operation, 50% of all small businesses and 30% fail in the first 2 years (SBA, 2014; Solomon, Bryant, May, & Perry, 2013). Some scholars believe that despite the increase in leadership studies, a gap still exists in leadership knowledge (Klein & Salk, 2013). Researchers have studied how the different leadership styles of small business managers affect survival, but research is lacking on which leadership strategies improve employee performance. By sharing the findings from this study, my results may influence managers by demonstrating how leadership strategies can improve employee performance.

According to the opinions of scholars, the proper leadership of human capital in small businesses leads to organizational success (Baptista, Karaöz, & Mendonça, 2014; Germain, 2012). Small business managers help improve and build the economy and community by creating jobs; therefore, the existence of small businesses is relevant. Scholars have not explored how leadership influences the small business sectors in depth (Marcella & Illingworth, 2012). Through this study, I may influence small business managers by exploring the influence of leadership strategies in successful small businesses. Based on the background information provided, the business problem follows.

Problem Statement

An estimated 50% of small businesses in the United States fail to thrive in the first 5 years of start-up, and 30% fail in the first 2 years (SBA, 2014; Solomon et al., 2013). In the United States, failing small businesses represent 39% of the gross national product and more than 50% of the jobs generated annually (SBA, 2014). The general business problem is that small business managers lack the knowledge to sustain a business beyond 5 years. The specific business problem is that some small manufacturing business managers lack the leadership strategies to improve employee performance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how small manufacturing business managers use leadership strategies to improve employee performance. The targeted population was small business managers from two small manufacturing plants in the coastal plains region of South Carolina. These managers used leadership strategies to improve employee performance making them appropriate to solicit for data collection. Small businesses account for 97% of employers in South Carolina, and manufacturing facilities account for about 5% of firms that employ South Carolinians (SBA, 2013). The implication for positive social change included the potential to improve small business performance to strengthen the local economy through job development. According to Liu, Eng, and Ko (2013), positive social change for small businesses can include establishing a community relationship and building unity.

Nature of the Study

I chose a qualitative method for this study. Researchers use qualitative methods to explore a phenomenon and use dialogue to gain insight (Bernard, 2012). Learning about the experiences of a manager through face-to-face semistructured interviews provided different perspectives to consider. The qualitative method is appropriate for a study with no predetermined answer (Yin, 2014). Researchers can detect themes from the data they gather from participants' experiences in a qualitative study (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012), so I identified leadership strategies relevant to performance. Researchers who develop themes and commonalities from responses may be able to provide small business managers with evidence of leadership strategies that can influence employee performance. A qualitative method was appropriate because I explored the influence of leadership on employee performance. The quantitative method is appropriate when researchers intend to analyze numerical data (Myers, 2013; Thamhain, 2014). A quantitative study cannot display the true meaning of leadership with statistical results (Yin, 2012), so the quantitative method was not appropriate for this study. In a mixed method study, researchers can evaluate a research question using both numerical and non-numerical data (Yin, 2014). The mixed method approach was not suitable for this study due to the lack of any element in this study requiring quantitative analysis.

I chose a multiple case study design for this study. Researchers can choose to use a single, multiple, exploratory, or explanatory case study design (Singh, 2014). A case study involves exploring real-world perspectives and collecting evidence-based information regarding a practice (Yin, 2014). A case study is appropriate when researchers are trying to answer questions over which they have no control (Yin, 2013). A review of the phenomenological and ethnographic designs revealed neither were as appropriate as the case study design for this study. The phenomenological design is not appropriate for gathering in-depth analysis of the case using multiple sources (Yin, 2012). An ethnographic study was not appropriate for understanding issues of a diverse group of small business managers. Researchers seek to understand how a particular culture works in an ethnographic study (Kimmel, 2013), rather than to understand the issues within a diverse set of cultures. A multiple case study design was appropriate for this study because I conducted an in-depth analysis of the leadership strategies of managers from two successful organizations.

Research Question

This study included one central research question: What leadership strategies do small manufacturing business managers use to improve employee performance?

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your leadership strategies?

2. What leadership strategies have you used to improve employee performance?
3. What would you describe as a challenge to implementing strategies to improve employee performance?
4. How have you evolved your leadership strategies over time?
5. What leadership strategies do you intend to change?
6. What additional information would you like to share regarding your experience with leadership strategies?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework I used in this study was transformational leadership theory. In 1978, Burns introduced the transformational leadership concept that Bass later developed into the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985). I believed the theory was suitable for exploring leadership because the theory builds on the idea that managers develop followers, build relationships, influence positive employee performance, and act as visionaries to improve an organization. In business, employees expect leaders to perform multiple functions, such as having a vision and providing guidance to meet organizational goals (Youngwirth, 2013). Fundamental concepts of the transformational leadership theory are (a) need fulfillment, (b) self-determination, (c) self-efficacy, and (d) following a vision (Kovjanic, Schuh, Jonas, Quaquebeke, & Dick, 2012). Transformational leaders offer inspirational motivation to their followers to encourage them to achieve personal and organizational goals. If the leader–follower relationship is valid, then the influence a manager has on followers will determine their course of action. As applied to this study, and in accordance with the transformational leadership theory, I expected leadership influences or explains the performance of employees because the theory indicates that people will follow those who inspire them. Transformational leaders enhance the ability of their followers to meet the demands of an organization (Kovjanic et al., 2012). The personal development of followers enables them to perform tasks that may improve organizational performance. Building upon the transformational leadership theory, Aggarwal and Krishnan (2013) indicated effective leaders use their influence for the improvement of their followers and organization. In the study, I wanted to understand how leadership strategies have a positive influence on employee performance.

Operational Definitions

To certify the readers of this study can comprehend the intent of the study, the following definitions may help to clarify terms that appear in this study.

Effective leadership: Effective leadership is how leaders positively motivate followers to develop themselves while achieving organizational goals (Conchie, 2013).

Employee satisfaction: Employee satisfaction occurs when employees are happy and content and have their needs and desires fulfilled at work (Boyad, Lyndon, & Malekar, 2012).

Leader: A leader is an individual recognized by others as a person who could lead a group (Westcott, 2014).

Organizational performance: Organizational performance depends on the firm leaders' desired outcomes usually measured by financial and operational benefits (Vele, 2013).

Small business: A small business is an organization that is operated for profit, independently owned, and is not dominant in its field (SBA, 2013), with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following components include a discussion of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study. Researchers who identify these concepts may be able to explain to readers the scope of their research. These three factors may include circumstances that may restrict the methodology and data analysis.

Assumptions

Assumptions are things that researchers cannot control in a study but are relevant to the research (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). I assumed certain factors were true. I assumed managers from two small manufacturing businesses in the coastal plains region of South Carolina; would participate in this study to reach data saturation. I assumed the data I gathered was the participant's honest opinion and free of personal biases. I assumed the information in the literature review section would support my idea that the leadership strategies used in successful small businesses could improve employee performance. I assumed that the participant would provide as much detail and accuracy as possible based on the participant's understanding of leadership. I assumed semistructured interviews would allow me to gather sufficient data. Researchers use semistructured interviews to gather in-depth data (Cooper, Fleischer, & Cotton, 2012). I assumed I would avoid misleading questions. I assumed including managers from two small manufacturing businesses would result in enough data for me to provide a list of effective leadership strategies and meet data saturation. If not, I would have solicited additional participants to gather more data until I achieved data saturation. Another assumption is the multiple case study design was suitable for this study because I seek descriptive data from the multiple data sources. In a multiple case study, a researcher seeks to understand more about a phenomenon (Konig & Waistell, 2012). I assumed small business managers would be able to use the data I provided in this study to improve business practices and positively affect social change.

Limitations

Limitations are conditions that place restrictions on a research and include the potential weaknesses of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The sample size represents a limitation. Time constraints would also limit this study. Another limitation is the geographic location. This study included participants in a specific geographic area of the southern United States. Studying one geographic area or a small sample size are limitations (Coffie, 2013). The experiences of small business practitioners limited this study to these persons. The participants had a minimum of 5 years of experience in a management position in one of the two manufacturing plants. The participants used leadership strategies to improve employee performance. The experience of the participant led to meaningful interpretations of leadership strategies. During interviews and observations, a researcher's presence may have an influence on participant responses or actions; therefore, having to gather the honest experiences of a participant could also be a limitation to this study. In a case study, the prior knowledge of a researcher makes the research subject to bias (Yin, 2014). I used cross checking to help eliminate or minimize the effects of these actions.

Delimitations

Delimitations serve as the beginning and endpoints of research and represent the scope of a study a researcher can control (Yin, 2014). A delimitation of this study was the geographic location, which was the coastal plains region of South Carolina. Focusing on this specific area may lead to a generalization of leadership strategies in small businesses located in other regions. In this study, the participants were small business managers from one of the two manufacturing plants. The participants had a minimum of 5 years of experience in the small business atmosphere, which delimited this study, as individuals with less experience did not meet the requirements. The sample size might limit the understanding of other industries. In this study, small businesses consisted of businesses with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2014); therefore, including these organizations was a delimitation. Participation criteria include engagement in small business management and not from larger companies. I gathered data from the experience of small business managers from two manufacturing plants to understand their perspective of leadership. I used face-to- face semistructured interviews, archival documents, and observations to establish what leadership strategies improved employee performance in small businesses.

Significance of the Study

This study may be significant because I explored strategies that contribute to improving employee performance in small businesses in the coastal plains region of

South Carolina. Small businesses comprise 97% of state employers in South Carolina (SBA, 2013), which means they are significant to the state economy. This study may serve small business managers as a reference or guide to leading a successful small business. Managers may use the findings to increase their understanding of leadership theories, employee performance, and organizational goals. With this study, small business managers may be able to train each other to become aware of strategies that may improve employee performance, promote organizational vision, and improve organizational performance. This study may contribute to an improved economy through job creation and may benefit future researchers as a guide.

Contribution to Business Practice

The developmental themes that arose from the experience of successful small business managers may lead to a better understanding of the leadership strategies to improve employee performance in a small business. Leaders must be able to learn the relevance of strong leadership to gain small business sustainability (Germain, 2012). After managers realize the significant role of leadership, they may be willing to use the list of suggested leadership strategies.

The focus was to identify leadership strategies used in a successful small business to improve employee performance while promoting the organization's vision of success. Thirty percent of small businesses fail within the first 2 years (Solomon et al., 2013), which justifies the relevance of studying impacts on performance. A link exists between effective leaders and improved organizational performance (Paracha, Qamar, Mirza, & Waqas, 2012); therefore, an attempt to obtain further understanding of the leadership concept is relevant. If managers can distinguish between the strategies that stimulate employee satisfaction and performance, small business performance may improve. Study results indicated employees are more productive and committed to their organizations (Paracha et al., 2012). Implementing the ideas that arise from this study into leadership training courses may lead to educating managers of the appropriate strategies to gain employee trust to follow their vision and achieve organizational success. Small business practitioners might be able to apply a list of unique leadership strategies to improve the survival rate of their businesses. Understanding the leadership theory and constructing an aid to apply the theory in practice seems relevant to scholar-practitioners. Through continuous learning and feedback, small business managers might be able to use the findings from this doctoral study to improve small business practice.

Implications for Social Change

The implications to positive social change include an opportunity to provide small business managers with a list of appropriate leadership strategies to meet organizational goals and sustainability. Leaders influence business operations (Germain, 2012). If small businesses continue to fail, investors and entrepreneurs may be unwilling to take the risk to open new establishments. In this study, I provided a list of leadership strategies that may influence positive organizational performance and social responsibility. Social responsibility is a growing concern for all business due to public demand (Thornton & Byrd, 2013). Small business owners create jobs and use their businesses to help sustain the economy in the United States (Shukla & Shukla, 2014). The purpose of this study was to explore successful leadership practices for a better level of understanding of the leadership strategies that may improve organizational performance and promote social change. The information gathered from successful managers could lead to improved success rates.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this literature review section was to explore the literature regarding the transformational leadership theory. Researchers conduct a literature search to review sources in the subject field to identify future research questions (Rowley, 2012). The literature review section includes articles related to the central research question: What leadership strategies do small manufacturing business managers use to improve employee performance? The literature review includes an assessment of relevant studies relating to small business, transformational leadership, and employee performance. The focus of prior studies pertaining to small business included human resource management and the high failure rates, rather than specific leadership strategies that influence organizational performance (Massey & Campbell, 2013).

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore which leadership strategies small business managers should use in a manufacturing setting to improve employee performance to meet organizational goals. Every year small businesses account for over half a million new jobs in the United States (SBA, 2014). An estimated 30% of these small businesses will fail to thrive in the first 2 years after start-up (Solomon et al., 2013), and as the unemployment rate continues improving, this statistic is critical to the American public. The survival rate of small businesses influences the unemployment rate and economic trends in the United States (Shukla &

Shukla, 2014). This study may lead to information that is relevant and informative to small business managers to determine what leadership strategies may help improve organizational performance.

This section includes a description of the search strategy I used to find relevant literature on how leadership strategies affect employee performance. The transformational leadership theory introduced by Bass in 1985 is essential in this proposed study. The themes that were helpful in organizing the literature review section include (a) the relevance of small business, (b) the evolution of leadership, (c) transformational leadership theory, and (d) opposing theories. Within the review, I also covered how managers can enhance organizational performance, which traits predict a specific leadership style, and which strategies have been successful in a small business setting.

The databases used in this study included (a) PsycINFO, (b) ProQuest, (c) ABI/INFORM Complete, (d) Business Source Complete, (e) Google Scholar, and (f) government databases. The keywords or phrases used in the search included entrepreneur, small business, leadership, servant, transformational, transactional, organizational performance, theory, goals, and success. Results revealed approximately 230 peer-reviewed articles chosen based on the relevance to the topic. The search consisted of articles from the foundation year of the transformational leadership concept through the evolution of leadership between 2012 and 2016. Most of the research results came from journal articles and books, as shown in Table 1. Additional information and statistics came from other sources, including the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the SBA.

The findings from this study may stimulate ideas to help sustain the economy and include future research suggestions. Small business practitioners help improve and build the economy and community by creating jobs; therefore, their existence is relevant. In Section 2, I outlined the process chosen to gather and analysis data.

Table 1

Literature Review Sources

Sources	Older than 5 years	2012 and later	Total
Non-peer-reviewed articles	2	2	4
Books	7	0	7
Dissertations	0	0	0
Peer-reviewed articles	5	101	106
Government websites	0	2	2
Total	14	101	115
Percentage of total	12%	88%	100%

Relevance of Small Business

Understanding why small business matters may indicate the significance of this study. For the purpose of this study, I referred to small businesses as organizations independently owned, operated, and organized for profit with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2013, 2014). As these businesses develop, their managers can employ more citizens, but to grow, they must be able to perform. Twenty-three million small businesses comprise 54% of all sales in the United States (SBA, 2014). Small business leaders create jobs, and the businesses help sustain the economy in the United States (Gale & Brown, 2013; Junaidu, Abdul, Mohamed, & Sambasivan, 2012; Shukla & Shukla, 2014); however, small businesses have a sluggish performance economically. An estimated 30% of small businesses in the United States fail to thrive in the first 2 years of start-up (Solomon et al., 2013). Small business survival is important to many nations because of the economic impacts (Fadahunsi, 2012; Nair & Chelliah, 2012). Because so many businesses fail within the first 2 years, the assumption is that the leadership skills and strategic planning are necessary to maintain a business (Cordeiro, 2013). The factors researchers attribute to small business success are the availability of financial resources and customer focus, so there is little focus on leadership (Bengesi & Roux, 2014; Halabí & Lussier, 2014; Minello, Scherer, & da Costa Alves, 2014).

Another identified issue of small business failure was the confidence of owners. An owner's perception has an influence on what the managers believe is the best fit for an organization. Little research exists about leadership in smaller enterprises (Marcella & Illingworth, 2012). The proper leadership of human capital in small businesses could lead to organizational success (Germain, 2012; Lavine, 2014). Leadership is relevant in an entrepreneurial setting because it helps improve small business performance and maintain focus (Theodorakopoulos & Figueira, 2012). For example, Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) evaluated various practices across 14 different organizations, including sustainability, leadership, and employee practices as organizational objectives. Firms whose leaders paid attention to key leadership practices became successful, which positively affected earnings (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). Small business owners need to improve (a) visionary leadership, (b) coaching skills, (c) contingent reward, and (d) active management by exception (Mesu, Maarten, & Sanders, 2013).

Entrepreneurs have to act as both owners and managers in some small businesses; therefore, entrepreneurs should prepare to be leaders (Surdez-Perez, Aguilar-Morales, Sandoval-Caraveo, Lopez-Parra, & Corral-Coronado, 2014). Entrepreneurs with prior experience have better reactions to arising issues (Chinomona, 2013). Using the entrepreneur theory, I assume that inheriting and instilling values into individuals is normal. Successful entrepreneurs make a commitment and stick to it, which indicates passion is a desired trait (Tasnim, Yahya, & Zainuddin, 2014). Entrepreneurs need to recognize the relevance of leadership. In a small business, owners' perceptiveness can limit the role of managers. If owners do not believe the goals set by the manager can lead to success, they may change the manager's objectives. Entrepreneurial orientation is a suggested cause to improve firm performance (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). The goals they set for the organization determine how the company will grow and what type of employees they seek. Researchers who studied small business failure and poor performance, about owner competence, focused on the areas of human resource management (Massey & Campbell, 2013). Owner competence and leadership practices are factors that contribute to success (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013; Parilla, 2013). Small businesses are important to the U.S. job market and economic growth (Judd & McNeil, 2012; Shukla & Shukla, 2014); therefore, small business managers need to know the appropriate leadership practices.

Leadership has come to be important in academia and economics due to the failures of large organizations and chief executive officer dismissals (Carter & Greer, 2013). For this research study, I referred to meeting organizational goals or performance as a business's ability to sustain 2 years or more (SBA, 2014). Despite the impact small businesses have on the economy, scholars have not explored the small business sectors in depth (Marcella & Illingworth, 2012).

Organizational Performance

Some scholars may refer to the ability of an owner to attain large market shares and good financial outcomes as organizational success. Organizational performance has many measures but depends on the owner's expectations (Raymond, Marchand, St-Pierre, Cadieux, & Labelle, 2013). The findings of a 2012 study in Canada indicated that organizational performance depends on whether owners achieve their objectives (Armstrong, 2012; Koech & Namusonge, 2012). Using surveys to gather data from owners, Raymond et al. (2013) explored what small business owners perceive as organizational success. Four hundred and thirty-three Canadian business owners served as participants, and they all had different ways to measure successful performance. The business type was also a variable, and Raymond et al. (2013) concluded that owner intent is an important variable when determining how to measure performance. Organizational performance is a reflection of owners and employees.

In a 2013 study on whether or not leaders can influence the performance of a franchise, Berkowitz and Wren examined the role of leadership style in the strategic commitment-performance relationship. In the study, Berkowitz and Wren (2013) utilized a traditional survey research method to understand franchise systems in various businesses in the United States. From the findings, Berkowitz and Wren concluded that a linkage exists between leadership style, organizational openness, and organizational structure. No leadership style was superior, but when the employees understood the vision of the organization, performance increased. Understanding which leadership style is appropriate depends on the situation because having limited information on an appropriate leadership style could jeopardize the survival of a small business (Marcella & Illingworth, 2012).

The focus of prior studies has been small business owners using different leadership styles, but not the effect leadership strategies have on employee performance and organizational vision. Researchers who understand leadership strategies in small businesses can help determine what factors contribute to successful business performance. Using the case study design, Psychogios and Garev (2012) investigated leadership in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) using interviews and a document review. From 32 interviews with middle management of SMEs, Psychogios and Garev were able to gain the perspective of the managers. Managers' responses coupled with regulation and procedure documents indicated that lack of role clarity, uncertainty, and the absence of a vision had an undesirable effect on employee performance. From the results, Psychogios and Garev indicated flexible structure, job rotations, and collaboration are the top strategies for business enhancement.

In contrast, Prieto (2013) noted that a leader's behavior could relate to organizational success. Small and medium-sized enterprises operate in chaotic business settings due to changing demands that affect organizations' performance. Leaders use certain behaviors to implement change due to environmental demand (Sakiru, D'Silva, Othman, DaudSilong, & Busayo, 2013). The managers of these businesses must adapt to change in order to survive; thus, understanding leadership behaviors and the impact they have on organizational goals is relevant.

In a 2013 study, Yan and Yan indicated a link existed between leadership, innovation, and organizational behavior in small businesses. Using a multiple regression analysis of 206 small businesses, Yan and Yan found that the leadership behaviors of the small business managers had a positive relationship with innovation. Also in that study, Yan and Yan noted that sharing experiences helped improve employee performance. Leadership style affects employee performance and relationships between employees (Mitonga-Monga, Coetzee, & Cilliers, 2012). To address the central research question, I evaluated transformational leadership theory.

Conceptual Framework

The theory used in this study was transformational leadership. In 1978, Burns introduced the transformational leadership concept that Bass later developed into the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985). Scholars use the theory to explore leadership, build on the idea that managers develop followers, build relationships, influence positive employee performance, and act as visionaries to improve the organization. In business, employees expect leaders to perform multiple functions, such as having a vision and providing guidance to meet organizational goals (Youngwirth, 2013). Fundamental concepts of the transformational leadership theory are (a) need fulfillment, (b) self-determination, (c) self-efficacy, and (d) following a vision (Kovjanic et al., 2012). When these managers provide inspirational motivation to their followers, they encourage them to achieve personal and organizational goals. If the leader–follower relationship is valid, a manager's influence on a follower will determine the course of action. As applied to this study, according to the transformational leadership theory, I expected leadership to influence or explain the performance of employees because the theory indicates that people will follow those who inspire them. Transformational leaders enhance the competence of their followers to meet the demands of an organization (Kovjanic et al., 2012). Followers' personal development enables them to perform tasks that may improve organizational performance. Building upon the transformational leadership theory, Aggarwal and Krishnan (2013) indicated effective leaders use their power for the betterment of their followers and organization. In this study, I tried to understand what specific leadership strategies have a positive influence on employee performance. The next section includes an exploration of the evolution of leadership.

The evolution of leadership. This section includes a discussion of the leadership theory to establish the relevance of leadership. Leadership is a process; although some scholars have indicated people are born with individual qualities that could help determine which style, they use (Bass, 1985). In a 2013 study, Odumer and Ogbonna noted that leadership contributes to the overall well-being of organizations and staff achieving a goal, which is similar Bolden's (2011) theory that leadership is the interaction of individuals trying to achieve a shared vision. The perspectival leadership theory indicates there are different understandings of leadership (Gagnon, 2012). There are numerous definitions of leadership, with no single dominant one (Yukl, 2012); therefore, a manager's responsibility may explain the leadership concept within a given organization. The way organizational leaders view leadership may differ, but the concept is important to organizational effectiveness (Northouse, 2012; Tonkin, 2013). Depending on the responsibilities of a leader, different activities are necessary (Youngwirth, 2013); therefore, role clarity is an important part of leadership (Abu Elanain, 2012).

Understanding the topic of leadership requires knowing how to identify a leader. A leader is a person who influences, inspires, and motivates subordinates to accomplish organizational objectives (Ojokuku, Odetayo, & Sajuyigbe, 2012). Leaders help to establish organizational goals and inspire others to achieve those goals (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Leaders have focus and often have anticipation (Sakiru et al., 2013), which could contradict the owner's expectations. According to Rana and Malik (2016), leaders acknowledge change and then create strategies that can turn the changes into opportunities. Leaders need certain personality traits to be successful (Malos, 2012). Leadership begins with concentrating on the leader's objective and then organizational goals. After a leader has followers, the focus moves to performance. Followers have expectations and expect leaders to possess certain traits (Bolton, Brunnermeier, & Veldkamp, 2013), which justified Westcott's (2014) definition of a leader as an individual others recognize as the person who leads the effort. Different leadership styles exist because all successful leaders influence the people around them (Ojokuku et al., 2012).

Leadership style is an alternative approach to motivating people and providing direction (Ojokuku et al., 2012). Good leaders listen to the people around them before making decisions, and they understand the business functions (Stadler & Dyer, 2013), which indicates that leadership strategies may not be measurable but seen through results.

Whether leadership style is hereditary or whether a particular style develops over time is debatable (Bass, 1985). If organizational leaders can teach style, they can determine the qualities they seek in a manager and either teach those traits or find someone who has them.

Leaders should have followers; therefore, anyone with subordinates has an opportunity to become a leader. A manager, a supervisor, or a superior can influence or inspire; however, these individuals may not have the necessary knowledge to be a leader. There is a difference between a manager and a leader, as leaders motivate and inspire (Westcott, 2014), although Ojokuku et al. (2012) noted that leadership is a necessary management skill. In a 2012 study in Nigeria, Koech and Namusonge indicated that managers should be role models, be inspiring, provide individual attention, and motivate, which is why companies offer leadership training. Organizational leaders use training as an opportunity to teach the skills leaders may find necessary to reduce failure (Phipps, 2012). Organizational leaders who change the management structure with the available leadership knowledge can improve employee satisfaction and organizational performance (Sakiru et al., 2013).

Small business managers must think on a global scale. The concern regarding how to avoid failures because current leadership practices have failed in countless organizations is growing (van Vugt & Ronay, 2013). Small businesses fail at a higher rate (Solomon et al., 2013); however, large corporations have also failed. For example, the financial crisis in the early 2000s was the result of poor leadership in large financial firms (Falk & Blaylock, 2012). To compete, business owners need leaders who understand how to lead others and navigate situations. Transformational leaders use positive interaction and inspiration to improve organizational success (Nixon, Harrington, & Parker, 2012).

Leadership is an important subject in the field of organizational performance. Researchers have failed to clarify the relation of why and how leadership has an influence on performance (Mahdinezhad, Suandi, Silong, & Omar, 2013). Understanding the influence of leadership requires knowing how a person becomes a leader. The three theories that Bass (1990) suggested that explain how people become leaders are trait theory, great events theory, and transformational leadership theory. Based on the great event theory, people can display unique leadership qualities if given an opportunity (Bass, 1990). Trait theory indicates that people maybe led into a leadership role if they possess certain personality traits (Koech & Namusonge, 2012). Contrary to trait theory, transformational leadership theory indicates that people can decide to become leaders and learn the necessary leadership traits. In this study, I intended first to identify the specific leadership strategies that have a positive influence on organizational performance and then create a list for small business managers to implement. I assume people can learn to be leaders; therefore, I used the transformational leadership theory to investigate leadership.

Transformational leadership theory. Based on the ideology of Bass, an assumption of the transformational leadership theory is that people follow those who inspire them, and by injecting enthusiasm, people will present desired results (Kovjanic et al., 2012). Transformational leaders use (a) exemplary behaviors, (b) inspiration, and (c) selfless attitude to encourage their followers (Aggarwal & Krishnan, 2013).

Transformational leaders also understand that there will be setbacks and challenges when trying to achieve goals and do not initiate punishment (Bass, 1985). In a 2014 study, Washington, Sutton, and Sauser noted that transformational leaders are individuals who elevate the interest of employees. Transformational leaders motivate followers by listening to concerns, in addition to using ceremonies and rituals to motivate (Bass, 1985; Holstad, Korek, Rigotti, & Mohr, 2014). According to transformational leadership theory, social rewards such as recognition provide the desired results, unlike economic rewards such as money (Kowalewski & Phillips, 2012), which is consistent with Bass's (1985) components of transformational leadership. The components Bass recognized are intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence.

Transformational leaders influence, inspire, motivate, and encourage employees to achieve goals (Holstad et al., 2014; Karakitapoglu-Aygün & Gumusluoglu, 2013). For this reason, transformational leadership is a form of leadership that involves causing a change (Bass, 1985). These leaders create value with others and influence followers to become leaders. Leaders use individualized consideration when they recognize followers as individuals and encourage development (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders become mentors to their followers by using individualized consideration, so that followers can reach their goals (Bacha & Walker, 2013). These leaders do not focus on the exchange of rewards for the effort provided but build relationships encouraging personal development (Joo & Lim, 2013). Leaders use inspirational motivation to foster a sense of purpose among employees by encouraging them to exceed expectations (Bass, 1985). The process of transformational leadership involves leaders trying to increase their associates' awareness, raising their associates' motivation, and not focusing on self-interest (Bass, 1985). A transformational leader motivates individuals to learn based on the concept that after they have those skills, they can help meet organizational goals and increase employee confidence (Cavazotte, Moreno, & Bernardo, 2013). Using a sample of 115 employees from two private sector organizations in Nigeria, Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa, and Nwankwere (2011) rated leadership styles in SMEs. Using questionnaires, the participants indicated the leadership style that was most effective. Participants indicated both transactional and transformational leadership had a positive influence on performance, but Obiwuru et al. indicated the transformational leadership style was the most significant in developing followers into leaders. Transformational leadership emerged as the most used in Nigeria and as important to the success of the organizations because it enhances individuals in the organization (Obiwuru et al., 2011).

A transformational leader seeks to develop individuals' abilities, attitudes, and values; hence, transformational leaders can influence or change the thinking of followers (Choudhary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2013). Such leaders convince their associates to strive for a higher level of achievement. By using intellectual stimulation, leaders push followers to exceed expectations using critical thinking and creativity (Bass, 1985). When associates are performing well, so does the entire organization, and according to Ojokuku et al. (2012), transformational leaders clarify the interest, values, and motivation of followers by allowing followers to perform as expected. By developing the staff, the ultimate goal is developing the organization.

Transformational leadership improves individual and organizational performance. Organizational specialists consider transformational leadership significant to organizational development (Ferris, 2013). Transformational leaders can change employee perceptions and offer payoffs because there is high performance when employees feel appreciated (Ferris, 2013). The leader's ability to change employee perceptions coincides with Bass's (1985) reference to transformational leaders as change agents.

In a 2015 study on transformational leadership, Rua and Araujo explored organizational commitment. With a sample size of 58 employees, the researchers collected survey responses. Rua and Araujo used a quantitative approach to analyzing the data. The results indicated that transformational leadership could improve organizational trust, but not commitment. The transformational leadership approach helps improve employee job satisfaction which enhances employee commitment.

In order for a transformational leadership style to work, numerous parties must collaborate to achieve the same goals (Ferris, 2013). The commitment these workers have to the organization goals could have a link to the leadership approach (Othman, Mohammed, & D'Silva, 2013). Using surveys to collect data, Othman et al. (2013) solicited 151 Nigerian public university lecturers in selected Malaysian universities. From the research gathered, Othman et al. found a link between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. Through the leadership approach, the leader generates enthusiasm, enhances a vision, recognizes accomplishments, and encourages creativity.

To improve employee performance, transformational leaders should act as visionaries (Cavazotte et al., 2013). In a quantitative study, Cavazotte et al. (2013) solicited 125 managers from a Brazilian financial group as the sample. Using questionnaires, Cavazotte et al. examined how followers viewed superiors ranging from one (lower level compared to peers) to seven (higher level compared to peers). From the results, Cavazotte et al. indicated transformational leaders have a positive effect on employee performance and a desire to complete assignments. Transformational leaders develop relationships with employees and put the goals of others before their own; however, these leaders create value by influencing other followers to become leaders (Khan, Aslam, & Riaz, 2012; Men, 2014).

Empirical evidence has indicated that transformational leadership could lead to a reduction in employee turnover rates or an increase in employee production, employee fulfillment, and employee development (Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013). An analysis of the literature presented by Berendt, Christofi, Kasibhatla, Malindretos, and Maruffi (2012) indicated transformational leadership plays a significant role in the development and performance of organizations; however, Bass (1985) stated no one leadership style would work in all organizations. Transformational leadership theory aligns diligently in exploring all the concepts that merge for small business managers to improve employee performance to meet organizational goals. The next section includes a discussion of using transformational leadership theory to (a) understand the relationships between leaders and followers and (b) support the development of individuals.

Leader and follower relationship. To be a leader, an individual must have followers, but becoming an effective leader requires effective followers. Effective followers should have the necessary traits for leadership to be relevant (Jowah, 2013). Effective followers desire a harmonious relationship in a nurturing environment with coworkers (Prilipko, Antelo, & Henderson, 2011). Colleagues in a nurturing relationship learn from one another and are supportive (Prilipko et al., 2011). Based on the idea of followership, Prilipko et al. (2011) noted effective leadership is similar to ying-yang because, in order for a leader to exist, they need followers and effective leaders require effective followers. Effective followers must gain skills, have competencies, and be willing to learn and teach (Prilipko et al., 2011). To be successful, leaders need followers who contribute to the success of the organization through teamwork because workplace relationships are common and will exist (Prilipko et al., 2011). Effective leaders can use individual consideration to develop followers. The individualized attention could help followers become leaders. Effective transformational leaders motivate followers to achieve organizational goals while improving themselves. Transformational leaders also use intellectual stimulation to push employers to be creative in achieving shared goals. Leaders who use intellectual stimulation are strategic thinkers and help followers become problem solvers (Bass, 1985). These leaders use obstacles to ensure followers are moving toward common goals with an in-depth understanding of their duties (Mokgolo, Mokgolo, & Modiba, 2012). After they have an understanding of their capabilities, followers can perform their jobs and be a role model to others. The top three attributes of a leader are reliability, supporting others, and contributing to the group (Prilipko et al., 2011).

When followers understand they are important to the organization, they accept their role. Then followers who have trust in their leaders indulge the ideas and visions of the leaders. The relationship between a leader and a follower plays a significant role in an organization's progress. During the time at the organization, followers will become committed and believe in the organization's goals and culture (Dixon, Mercado, & Knowles, 2013). The leader has an influence on the followers, which could determine how they perform their duties. The leadership style develops from the interaction between the leader and the follower (Moore, Cangemi, & Ingram, 2013).

To understand how followers contribute to effective results, Schyns, Maslyn, and van Veldhoven (2012) considered leader–member exchange (LMX) and span of control. Based on the results, Schyns et al. noted that an LMX relationship works in a group setting. To determine if leadership has an effect on performance outcomes, Abu Elanain (2012) examined the impact of LMX in the United Arab Emirates. In a quantitative study, 121 employees completed a questionnaire and rated organizational justice perceptions, organizational citizenship behaviors, and LMX. In the results, Abu Elanain noted that LMX positively relates to job satisfaction, employee performance, and organizational commitment. In the study, Abu Elanain opined that LMX positively affects role clarity. The results were consistent with a prior study by Psychogios and Garev (2012), who indicated the relationship between employees and leaders positively affects work outcomes, employee attitudes, and behaviors when clarity exists.

The relationship between leaders and employees affects employee performance (Kovjanic et al., 2012). To illustrate the leadership relationship, Kovjanic et al. (2012) indicated that followers' basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness facilitate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction, self-efficacy, outcomes, and commitment to the leader. A link exists between transformational leadership and followers' job satisfaction; however, trust must exist between the leader and the employees for the relationship to work (Cavazotte et al., 2013). In a transactional relationship, there is a sense of trust that both leaders and followers want to meet their goals (Paracha et al., 2012). The relationship between leader and followers could have a significant effect on an organization. Followers' relationship is important to employee performance.

A leader's behavior influences the way employees or followers perceive their job. The relationship between superiors and employees influences job satisfaction (Paracha et al., 2012). Good leaders can get employees to maximize output (Choudhary et al., 2013). For the transformational leadership theory to be true, a leader must have the characteristics a follower desires. The follower then develops an idealized image of the leader and tries emulating the leader's behaviors (Wang, Meyer, & Jackson, 2013).

In a 2015 study, Bayram and Dinc explored the job satisfaction in private universities. This qualitative study included a sample of 150 employees. They completed a three-part instrument from two private universities. The results of the study indicate that employees whom are satisfied with their have an impact on the organization. When a transformational leader focuses on an individual's growth, the followers work toward the goals of the organization. According to Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse, and Sassenberg (2013), transformational leaders influence the follower perception and what they achieve influences their perceptions of the leader.

The characteristics followers seek to depend on their expectations and needs, whereas leaders seek followers who adapt to change, have flexibility, and can multitask (Prilipko et al., 2011). The follower's experience (age and work) and background have an influence on these characteristics. The culture of prior workplaces is also a factor that shapes followers' expectations. Effective leadership promotes employees' commitment to the organization and shapes their views. Followers must find a trait that makes a leader an individual to follow, and Verlage, Rowold, and Schilling (2012) noted that leadership is about perception. According to the leadership theory, a leader has traits that followers interpret as a positive thing, and those traits make people follow the leader (Jowah, 2013). For example, Cavazotte et al. (2013) and Kovjanic et al. (2012) indicated transformational leaders identify with subordinates and need to have compatibility. Their behaviors influence the followers' action and the trust in the relationship.

Employee satisfaction. Several researchers have reviewed the influence of leader and follower relationships on employee job satisfaction. Employee satisfaction indicates if employees are content or satisfied with their work and self (Boyad et al., 2012). When employees feel satisfied with their jobs, their performance improves, and ultimately the individual performances complement the overall organization (Paracha et al., 2012). Organizational leaders consider job satisfaction a primary objective because the negative output of an employee could affect coworkers and customers (Sakiru et al., 2013).

Leaders are an essential component of boosting employee job satisfaction and improving employee performance (Paracha et al., 2012). The type of organization may affect leadership strategies and employee performance, and Paracha et al. (2012) suggested addressing the makeup of the business environment in future studies on leadership.

Follower satisfaction is a result of proper leadership, and job satisfaction leads to improved employee performance (Sakiru et al., 2013). Leaders must understand the impact they have on employees’ perception of their job and organizational commitment. Job satisfaction is important to improving organizational performance (Millán, Hessels, Thurik, & Aguado, 2013). If employees do not understand the organization’s goal or do not feel satisfied with their job, there is an negative effect on employee engagement and performance (Sakiru et al., 2013). Dissatisfaction may lead to lower profits and higher costs (Sakiru et al., 2013). Leaders need to know how to communicate with employees to achieve desired goals and avoid dissatisfaction.

Some scholars associate communication with organizational behaviors and the prevention of organizational risk (Daniela, 2013). The lack of communication leads to alterations in key components of organizational management, but Savkin (2014) noted that being able to communicate with people is not a leadership trait. In a contrasting study, Daniela (2013) indicated employees are unable to perform their duties if there is no communication. Daniela suggested that work environments with effective communication are more efficient than work environments that lack communication, aligning with Berkowitz and Wren’s (2013) ideology of openness. When there is openness, all individuals are aware of the objectives. Employees who communicate can engage in an organization’s vision and identify communication as a trait of an effective leader (Berkowitz & Wren, 2013). The leaders communicate the vision by setting their expectations of followers (Northouse, 2012; Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014). By instilling knowledge and self-belief, leaders enable followers to become leaders. The ability to inspire and motivate has a positive influence on job satisfaction and indicates a link exists between followers’ job satisfaction and affective commitment to the leader (Kovjanic et al., 2012; Sakiru et al., 2013). Leaders need to use inspirational motivation continuously to ensure followers stay engaged and encourage followers to achieve goals (Cavazotte et al., 2013; Popa, 2012).

Employee motivation. Employee motivation is a set of both environmental and interpersonal forces that influence an employee’s work-related behavior and that demonstrate motivation is a positive form of reinforcement (Devadass, 2011). Motivating employees and keeping them part of the organization is a challenge business leader’s face, but motivating employees can increase performance (Tebeian, 2012). By examining transformational and servant leadership, Tebeian concluded that both leadership styles influence motivational factors such as job satisfaction and team performance. Participants who have different desires but who feel motivation can change their performance. By using inspiration, these leaders’ simulated enthusiasm, and build confidence in their followers, which supports Z. Wang and Gagné’s (2013) assumption that transformational leadership encourages self-sufficient motivation and high employee values.

Motivation is a factor that influences employers, owners, and leaders. For instance, Kroon, Voorde, and Timmers (2013) explored the factors that could stimulate high performance in the workplace, such as employee abilities, employee motivations, and opportunity to perform. By reviewing these factors, Kroon et al. considered obstacles that would deter employees, such as resources or lack thereof and leaders' strategic decision-making. Even though lack of resources affects the ability to motivate through compensation, leaders' expertise could positively influence employee performance (Kroon et al., 2013). To enhance employee performance, organizational leaders must understand their employees; Wiley (2013) recommended using enhancement surveys to gather employee data. Organizational leaders may begin to build relationships and trust with such information.

Some scholars believe that transformational leadership is superior in enhancing organizational performance, whereas others contradict this; each study has a different concept of transformational leadership, which makes direct comparisons virtually impossible. Transformational leadership theory influences various aspects of organizational performance. Regarding small business performance, owners have their own perception of performance but believe transformational leadership theory has the components needed to make this relationship complete (Raymond et al., 2013).

In a study conducted in Pakistan, Paracha et al. (2012) indicated that when working toward goals, transformational leaders make the process simple by indicating the vision and encouraging followers to pursue that vision and not worry about outside distractions. In a similar study, Tasnim et al. (2014) indicated a link must exist with the goals and entrepreneurial surroundings for small businesses to succeed. Employees who know their importance to the business and receive recognition for accomplishments feel positively engaged in their work (Moore et al., 2013). The next section includes a review on how transformational leadership compares to other leadership theories.

Opposing Theories

Researchers should acknowledge the importance of competing theories. Some researchers have indicated an association exists between employee performance and other leadership styles. This section includes a background of opposing theories and an explanation of why these theories will not be suitable for this study.

Transactional leadership theory. Another form of leadership is transactional leadership. In 1947, Max Weber introduced the transactional leadership concept, which Bass later expanded (Bass, 1985). A transactional leader rewards employees for compliance and punishes employees for noncompliance (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013). Rewarding employees is important to organizations because employees are a critical component for success. The focus of transformational leadership is on the commitment to the organization's objective while the focus of transactional leadership is identifying the needs of followers. Transactional leaders are not looking to change the future, but to maintain or keep things the same. Transactional leaders analyze the work of their followers and issue rewards; efficiency is a strength of transactional leadership (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013).

Transactional leadership includes an assumption that rewards and punishments motivate people (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013). Small business leaders often lack the resources to provide monetary rewards (Kowalewski & Phillips, 2012) that may enhance performance. Transactional leaders work through a clear reward structure without mentioning punishments that employees know exist through employment agreements (Burns, 1978). Employers assume employees understand the duties of a job when a recipient accepts a job, including listening to authority; therefore, transactional theory includes a reliance on the exchange principle and a reaction to rewards and punishments (Sakiru et al., 2013). In a study conducted in Kenya, Koech and Namusonge (2012) concluded that the relationship between leader and follower is about agreement and exchange; therefore, the impact of leadership strategies under investigation is not significant for the focus on rewards within the transactional leadership theory. Using a random selection of participants, Emmanuel and Ugochukwu (2013) studied the Nigerian workforce and surveyed 184 employees to understand leadership. Based on the results of the study, Emmanuel and Ugochukwu indicated that transformational leadership has a stronger influence on organizational performance than transactional; however, both leadership styles had a significant and positive relationship with organizational performance.

Transformational leadership and transactional leadership entail conflicting views for leaders; however, transactional leaders can go through training to become transformational leaders (Seidman & McCauley, 2011). Transformational leaders produce better results than transactional leaders do, and Seidman and McCauley (2011) noted transactional leadership could negatively influence organizational performance due to limited thinking by leaders. Transformational leaders want followers to optimize performance without narrow thinking (Bass, 1985). Transactional businesses are routine actions, whereas the focus of transformational leadership is on evolving and redesigning.

Servant leadership theory. Transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership exist on Bass's leadership continuum, but Koech and Namusonge (2012) suggest laissez-faire has no influence on organizational performance; therefore, this review includes the servant theory. In contrast to transactional leadership, which includes rewarding individuals as a focus, servant leadership contributes to organizational development through hope and caring (Greenleaf, 1977). In 1970, Greenleaf developed the servant leadership concept, which had the desire to serve as a focus (Greenleaf, 1977). Scholars consider servant leadership religious because it teaches serving others first and behaving ethically (Boone & Makhani, 2012). Servant leaders focus on others and can transform organizations successfully because they motivate by serving (Boone & Makhani, 2012).

According to servant leadership, servant leaders serve others first to improve their followers. A follower of servant leadership has an interest in personal development (Greenleaf, 1977). This leadership approach is not useful in a small business where owners are trying to obtain a specific goal because employees would not focus on the organizational goals (Berkowitz & Wren, 2013). Leaders must know what their followers are seeking and how to inspire and motivate them to achieve the organizational goals (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). Servant leadership and transformational leadership enhance followers' abilities and self-belief, but the difference is that servant leaders uphold different morals than transformational leaders (Choudhary et al., 2013). Transformational leaders encourage employees to look beyond self-interest (Washington et al., 2014).

The traits of a servant leader include listening, empathy, conceptualization, healing relationships, foresight, stewardship, awareness, persuasion, commitment to human resource development, and commitment to building a community (Greenleaf, 1977). For servant leadership to be successful, employees must have a compatible attitude (Boone & Makhani, 2012) and need to adapt and accept the vision of the leader. Servant leaders do not force people to follow (Boone & Makhani, 2012) because the leaders focus on the needs of people and the development of people. Both servant and transformational leadership are people-oriented styles (Choudhary et al., 2013), although servant leaders engage followers toward personal goals, not organizational goals. Servant leaders communicate a vision by indicating everyone is in it together, which builds community (Boone & Makhani, 2012). Scholars, including Choudhary et al. (2013) and Washington et al. (2014), explained servant and transformational leaders are similar in that they focus on empowering, encouraging, and listening to followers. This personal focus helps build strong relationships, but Choudhary et al. concluded that transformational leadership has a more positive impact on organizational performance.

Using a population of commercial banks in the United States, Gupta (2013) explored how servant leadership could help marketers adapt to bottom-of-pyramid markets. The leadership style caters to the needs of others, which could mean helping people develop. Servant leadership style in the commercial banking industry could help bottom-of-pyramid markets grow and prosper through the development of the community. In another study, Washington et al. (2014) compared different leadership styles within an organization using the responses of 207 employees. The focus of the questionnaires was on immediate supervisors; the responses indicated that servant leadership was similar to transformational leadership because of the emphasis on individual development. The employees indicated servant leaders focus on ethics whereas transformational leaders focus on goals. Motivation seemed to be the primary concern of the employees. In the study, Washington et al. noted that the majority of the participants were from one organization, but the motivational factors varied among participants.

Servant leadership and transformational leadership affect motivational factors such as job satisfaction and team performance (Tebeian, 2012). Leaders must know what their followers are seeking and how to inspire and motivate them to achieve the organizational goals (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). Scholars often compare servant leadership with transformational leadership because the focus of both is on individual development. The difference is that a servant leader's objective and motivation is serving and developing others (Boone & Makhani, 2012), whereas transformational leaders help develop individuals for the good of the organization. Transformational leaders can transform employees into leaders by instilling values and vision and by ordering them to meet organizational goals, whereas the focus of servant leadership is on people and not organizational performance (Bass, 1985). Based on Bass's view, Spears (1998) suggested that servant leadership is best for nonprofit or educational institutions.

Comparing Theories

The focus of current studies on leadership is on the two primary styles of leadership: transactional and transformational (Washington et al., 2014). In an investigation into the effect of leadership styles on organizational performance, Koech and Namusonge (2012) selected participants from a pool of state-owned corporations in Kenya. The leadership styles under investigation were the effect of laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership styles on organizational performance. Using surveys, Koech and Namusonge gathered the perceptions of middle and senior managers in 30 state-owned corporations based in Mombasa. The correlation between the transformational leadership factors and organizational performance ratings was higher than for transactional leadership, which indicated no relationship existed between laissez-faire leadership style and organizational performance (Koech & Namusonge, 2012). Based on the results from the study, Koech and Namusonge suggested that managers should be role models, inspire, provide individual attention, and motivate. Based on their results, Koech and Namusonge indicated that the laissez-faire leadership style has no further need for examination, but they also recommended an in-depth analysis of transformational and transactional leadership.

In a 2011 study on leadership, Chu and Lai focused on how transactional and transformational leadership affect performance, organizational commitment, and job characteristics. Transactional leadership seems to depend on the leader–follower exchange based on the results presented by Chu and Lai. An assumption within the exchange is that followers execute based on the drive and trend from the leaders, and leaders reward the efforts (Chu & Lai, 2011), which indicates that transactional leadership is about negotiation because the employees receive rewards for following. If no reward is present, this style cannot exist. In contrast, the focus of transformational leadership is on developing the organization as a whole, not just one individual. The transformational leadership style allows leaders to empower and encourage employees to meet organizational goals without providing rewards (Kovjanic et al., 2012).

Prior researchers have looked at the effect of leadership on growth, followers, and workplace relations. Transformational leadership can enhance organizational performance. For example, Obiwuru et al. (2011) studied the differences between transformational and transactional leadership style. A transformational leader displays charisma, inspiration, motivation, and intellectual stimulation, and Obiwuru et al. indicated transformational leadership is appropriate for enterprises to develop, grow, and mature. Transactional leaders focus on providing rewards for performing a task; therefore, they are not able to provide enthusiasm or gain employee commitment (Bass, 1985). Due to the influence of the global market, businesses have changed from using transactional leadership to using transformational leadership (Kamisan & King, 2013).

Methodologies

An example of a qualitative case study is Vohra's (2014) study that included 17 leaders from organizations operating in different sectors. Using interviews, observation, and company documents, Vohra explored various sources of data to gather in-depth details on leadership. Using their responses, Vohra compiled themes and categorized the responses to explain the behaviors of leaders under different circumstances. A quantitative study may not display the meanings or identify themes, which is why Vohra suggested that quantitative researchers conduct narrow investigations.

For example, Gorgievski, Ascalon, and Stephan (2011) used a quantitative method for their study. Using the questionnaire responses of 184 business owners and a multidimensional chart, Gorgievski et al. suggest that business owners have their value orientations. Researchers may use these findings to improve research and the recruitment of nascent entrepreneurs; however, descriptive characteristics were lacking. A limitation of a quantitative study is the inability to display the true meaning of leadership through statistical results (Yin, 2012). Researchers have used the qualitative method to explore participants' lived experiences through interviews to understand the phenomenon through the eyes of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Studying leadership through a qualitative approach supports the triangulation of data (Takahashi, Ishikawa, & Kanai, 2012).

In the leader–follower relationship section of the literature review, I identified that higher sample sizes could have a drastic impact on research results. The disadvantage is the need for a large sample to get accurate results and no true understanding of participants' thoughts and feelings. I also found areas of improvement for small businesses. Using interviews and questionnaires to collect data, Bencsik and Juhász (2012) concluded the main reason for the failure of a small business is the lack of collaboration and lack of using human capital. Bencsik and Juhász did not discuss the findings in depth or provide meanings to the results. Qualitative research would have involved in-depth analysis of a phenomenon with subjective information (Yin, 2012).

In the literature review, I found that researchers have used quantitative approaches more times than qualitative approaches in leadership research; therefore, they have not fully explored the perception of the impact of leadership strategies on employee performance through case studies. A qualitative case study approach using a smaller sample size could provide a better understanding of the specific leadership strategies needed to improve employee performance. To understand meanings, describe experiences, and understand beliefs, the qualitative method is necessary. When researchers conduct qualitative studies, they focus on one phenomenon to confirm their optimism. Researchers can use qualitative studies to connect data and enhance results with people's experiences. Gathering data from participants' experience helps develop themes (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012) and may help identify leadership strategies relevant to performance. Developing themes and commonalities from experiences may also provide small business managers with evidence of leadership's influence on employee performance. I used a qualitative research because I wanted to present data using descriptive and interpretative details to gain an understanding of the influence leadership strategies have on employee performance. The next section includes a review of the empirical research related to this study.

Empirical Research Related to the Study

Related studies included journal articles and seminal sources on leadership and employee performance in small business. Through a review of these studies, a better understanding of employee performance developed in relationship to leadership strategies. The focus of the majority of the studies was on transformational leadership and transactional leadership. The studies on transformational leadership indicated organizational performance relates to employee satisfaction (Paracha et al., 2012). Researchers used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to study leadership.

This study involved an attempt to understand the type of leadership strategies that influences employee performance, which was the basis of my doctoral study. To test the significance of leadership style and skills, Fahed-Sreih and Morin-Delerm (2012) gathered data on small businesses in Lebanon. During the study, 155 owners and managers received questionnaires. An entrepreneur's drive and goals can determine the success of an organization. Different variables might have produced different results, and Fahed-Sreih and Morin-Delerm suggested using a different evaluation method for future studies.

A study of the leadership strategies of successful small business managers may lead to a better understanding of how to improve employee performance, thereby assisting other managers of small businesses. In the literature, scholars identified leadership as an essential subject in the field of organizational development. Leadership has a dynamic effect on individual and organizational growth, and scholars have suggested effective leadership can promote improvements in organizational performance and employee satisfaction. The literature does not extensively address leadership strategies that are beneficial to organizational performance. After reviewing related literature, I reviewed the effects transformational leaders have on employee performance, and the evidence indicated that satisfied employees perform better than dissatisfied employees do, which leads to better organizational performance.

My original plan was to determine the effects a specific leadership style has on employee performance and organizational vision in small businesses. Researchers have explained to some degree the relevance of transformational leadership on organizational performance, but they have not explained which leadership strategies small business managers should use in a manufacturing setting to improve employee performance to meet organizational goals. A study of the transformational leadership influence on small business managers of successful ventures could be beneficial to practitioners wanting to learn adequate leadership strategies to improve employee performance.

The empirical research included a wealth of information. Leadership is an evolving topic and needs continued exploration. Prior scholars focus on behavior and psychological aspects of leadership, which indicates that the social and psychological needs of employees may influence how they complete assigned tasks (Singh, 2013). Existing background information provides insight into current leadership knowledge. The problem identified was the 30% failure rate of small businesses after 2 years (Solomon et al., 2013); in this study, I used a qualitative method to understand the phenomenon from the experiences of a participant using descriptive responses and supportive data. Researchers can use participants' lived experiences to conduct an in-depth exploration into a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), which represented one form of data collection in this case study. Quantitative researchers disregard participants' experiences and archival documents (Myers, 2013). Future research in different geographic locations, organizations, and industries could lead to a better understanding of leadership (Cavazotte et al., 2013).

I intend to use this study to help small business managers improve practices by implementing transformational leadership and determining current leadership strategies used within a successful manufacturing facility. The literature review section included the challenges and advantages that small business managers face trying to implement leadership strategies. The transformational leadership approach is appropriate in many industries; therefore, transformational leadership is relevant for leadership studies among small business leaders (Kopperud, Martinsen, & Humborstad, 2014; X. Wang, Chontawan, & Nantsupawat, 2012). Several researchers have explored transformational leadership theory as a means of improving organizational performance, but few have explored transformational leadership theory and the influence on employee performance. Prior research in other business sectors showed that transformational leadership is appropriate in large organizations, and I determined it is appropriate in a manufacturing setting. To determine if transformational leadership was necessary to improve employee performance in a small business setting, I implemented a multiple case study, which I discussed in Section 2.

Transition

Small business performance is a relevant research topic for the academic and business community. A review of prior research revealed insightful information and the need for further research to understand leadership strategies. Based on the review of the literature, the performance of small business was a suitable topic of research as the business world continues to change. In the United States, employees of small businesses account for 50% of the workforce (SBA, 2014), and further analysis may ensure future employment. Organizations not currently performing well may need a list of leadership strategies to implement. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how small manufacturing business managers use leadership strategies to improve employee performance. Section 2 includes an explanation of the processes selected to gather and analyze data. I also discussed the role of the researcher, population sampling, and ethical research in Section 2. Section 3 includes a presentation of the results of the semistructured interviews and recommendations for small business managers.

Section 2: The Project

The focus of Section 1 was on developing a better understanding of transformational leadership theory and possible impacts on employee performance. Small business managers may use the results from the analysis of data from the semistructured interviews with the participants to improve employee performance in their small businesses. In Section 2, I discussed methodology and provided detailed information about the study. The section includes requirements for participation, population, sampling, and ethical requirements of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) regarding protecting the privacy of participants. The discussion included protecting data and interview criteria and aligning the research question and purpose of the study. I concluded Section 2 with a discussion of reliability and validity to ensure the quality of the doctoral study. This data may be suitable to improve employee performance in small businesses by understanding leadership.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how small manufacturing business managers use leadership strategies to improve employee performance. The targeted population was small business managers from two small manufacturing plants in the coastal plains region of South Carolina. These managers used leadership strategies to improve employee performance, so are appropriate to solicit for data collection. Small businesses account for 97% of employers in South Carolina, and manufacturing facilities account for about 5% of firms that employ South Carolinians (SBA, 2013). The implication for positive social change included the potential to improve small business performance to strengthen the local economy through job development. According to Liu et al. (2013), positive social change for small businesses can include establishing a community relationship and building unity.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers may have several roles in a case study, such as conducting interviews, observing, recording data, and analyzing material while remaining unbiased (Chereni, 2014). In qualitative research, researchers assume the role of the primary data collection tool (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). I began my case study by constructing open-ended interview questions and soliciting participants with IRB approval.

The connection I had to the small business community was prior experience developing business plans for prospective entrepreneurs. These prior experiences exposed me to the demands and obstacles some small business managers may experience. I built a relationship with the participants to access their knowledge. A qualitative researcher must interact with participants when collecting data (Yin, 2012). I build additional trust by communicating with the participants prior to the interviews, through email communication.

As the researcher, I must protect the participants from harm, protect the participants' confidentiality, and obtain the participants' consent. According to the *Belmont Report*, researchers have to treat individuals as independent agents and should not exploit a participant's vulnerability (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). To provide the participants with adequate background information, the informed consent form (see Appendix A) included the purpose of a study (Rogers & Lange, 2013).

Researchers should ensure interviewees remain comfortable during interviews to obtain bias-free data (Doody & Noonan, 2013). During the interviews, I listened to the participants' responses to determine the intended meanings to avoid bias. Researchers must interpret data correctly to eliminate bias (Yin, 2014). Interviewers' preconceptions can also create bias (Wilson, 2012; Xu & Storr, 2012). By using multiple data collection instruments, I mitigated bias. Researchers can use data triangulation to help minimize some bias (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012).

I used an interview protocol (see Appendix B) to ensure the interviewees respond to specific questions. Researchers use interview protocols to collect data on the topic and maintain organization (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Researchers also use interview protocols to increase reliability in a case study (Yin, 2014). The interview protocol allowed me to ask follow-up questions and not overlook the original interview questions. I was also able to write notes on the protocol.

Participants

Participants must have knowledge of the phenomenon under study to provide relevant data (Yin, 2014). The population in this study included two small manufacturing plants in South Carolina because small business accounts for 97% of employers in the state, and 5% are manufacturing facilities according to the SBA (2013). I selected managers from two different manufacturing plants located in the coastal plains region of South Carolina. These two businesses had fewer than 500 employees and manufactured different products. To participate in this study, the participant had to meet certain criteria: (a) be a manager who has used leadership strategies to improve employee performance, (b) be in a management position at a manufacturing plant for at least 5 years, and (c) have at least three subordinates. Using criteria can guarantee the selection of an appropriate participant (Konig & Waistell, 2012). After I received IRB approval, I solicited potential participants using the yellow pages, and the local chamber of commerce business listings. I called several organizations that met the criteria and spoke to the HR personal and left voicemail messages. This took about 2 weeks before I got a formal conversation with the HR directors. I was rejected several times and had one person dropout before I could schedule an interview. I then sent an email upon (see Appendix C) request to describe the study criteria. Once I got a call back or emailing stating that the company would be willing to participant I then sent the letter of cooperation from a research partner (see Appendix H). Once the letter of cooperation was signed, I forwarded them to the IRB for approval. Once I had approval, I requested that the HR personnel forward the recruitment letter to managers that met the criteria. Once a manager agreed to participate, I then sent a request to schedule an interview (see Appendix E) followed by a reminder of recruitment (see Appendix D).

To establish a working relationship with participants, I began by explaining to them my intentions and expectations for the study. It is important to create a working relationship with participants to conduct an effective qualitative study (Swauger, 2011). I tried not to coercive participants to ensure an ethical study. I notified the participants that at any time they could withdraw from the study. To help build this relationship I continuously communicated with the participants once they agreed to participate in the study.

Research Method and Design

This component includes a discussion of the selected research method and design. Researchers must determine the appropriate method to understand the research question (Hayes, Bonner, & Douglas, 2013). In this study, I explored the leadership strategies that manufacturing managers use to improve employee performance from the perspective of small business managers. A need exists for leadership development in small business, but research regarding effective leadership practices is not widely available (Marcella & Illingworth, 2012). To understand the experiences of a manager in a manufacturing management position, I used a qualitative multiple case study methodology.

Research Method

The three possible research methods include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method (Yin, 2012). The research question under investigation was: What leadership strategies do small manufacturing business managers use to improve employee performance? A researcher should use the research question to determine the appropriate research method to use (Yin, 2012). A qualitative method answers questions with no predetermined answer, whereas the focus of quantitative research is to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Polit, Beck, & Stannard, 2012). Using the qualitative method, explored multiple sources of information to identify new understandings of the leadership phenomena. Researchers conduct interviews to understand a central phenomenon through the eyes of the participant (Moustakas, 1994). Understanding circumstances that play a role in a phenomenon are important; therefore, interviewing people who have experienced the phenomenon is relevant (Liang & Chi, 2013). Qualitative research aligns with the best practices relating to leadership strategies in small business because participants can provide firsthand experiences with a phenomenon (Coenen, Stamm, Stucki, & Cieza, 2012). Researchers conduct qualitative studies to focus on the meaning of participants' responses (Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2012). Studying leadership through a qualitative approach can involve triangulating data. The qualitative approach allows researchers to use more than one data source to triangulate data (Takahashi et al., 2012). I used the qualitative research method because I wanted to present data using descriptive and interpretative details to gain an understanding of the influence leadership strategies have on employee performance. I selected the appropriate method to explore best practices in small business leadership strategies. Researchers should select a method through which they can gather meaningful data (Folta, Seguin, Ackerman, & Nelson, 2012).

Researchers use the quantitative research method to generalize the data from the sample using numerical analysis (Poore, 2014). In a quantitative study, researchers may not display meanings or identify themes, which is why Vohra (2014) noted that quantitative researchers conduct narrow investigations. A limitation of a quantitative study is researchers are unable to display the true meaning of leadership through statistical results (Yin, 2012). A quantitative method is appropriate when researchers intend to analyze numerical data and explain relationships among variables, not to gather in-depth analysis of a phenomenon using open-ended questions (Thamhain, 2014). In an experimental quantitative design, researchers use surveys, mathematical analysis, randomization, and highly structured protocols to obtain a limited number of predetermined responses (Hoe & Hoare, 2012). In quantitative studies, researchers examine relationships among sets of variables by testing theories (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Polit et al., 2012), which was not the intent of this study. The descriptive data the participant may provide regarding the leadership phenomenon could be impossible to quantify in a quantitative study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

The mixed method approach is a mixture of the qualitative and quantitative approach (Yin, 2014). A disadvantage of the mixed method approach is a researcher must conduct two separate studies, which consumes more time (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). The mixed method approach is appropriate when a researcher determines a study requires one method to clarify another and if a researcher has ample time (Wisdom et al., 2012). Researchers conduct the mixed method approach to compensate for the weaknesses of a qualitative or quantitative method (Venkatesh et al., 2013). My intentions were to gain an understanding of how the leadership strategies of a small business manager can improve employee performance, not to expand on numerical data.

The number of jobs small businesses create is an indication of the importance of this business sector to the U.S. economy, but I was not trying to prove a relationship among variables (Polit et al., 2012). In this study, I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of how small business managers in a manufacturing firm could succeed in their business despite other industry failures. A quantitative approach was not appropriate because I could not gain an understanding of a small business manager’s knowledge and practices without descriptive data. When using a qualitative research method, researchers can use numerical data to help understand human behavior (Yin, 2014). In a 2012 study, Downes and Koekemoer used a qualitative method to explore employee productivity in small businesses, which justifies using a qualitative method for this study.

Research Design

The multiple case study design was appropriate for this study because I wanted to understand the leadership strategies from a small business manager’s point of view. A researcher can choose to use a single, multiple, explanatory, or exploratory case study design (Singh, 2014; Yin, 2014). In a case study design, a researcher can explore multiple sources of information to identify new understandings of a phenomenon (Yin, 2012). Through the case study design, a researcher can gain insight into the experience of participants through a real-life context (Yin, 2014). Using open-ended questions, I gained insight into the specific leadership strategies influencing employee performance, and archival documents supported the findings. Researchers can gain valuable knowledge by gathering data from multiple sources (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012; Yin, 2014). Case study research is appropriate when a researcher seeks to determine what happened or why it happened (Yin, 2013). I used the multiple case study for this study, but I did consider other designs.

The designs I did not select included narrative, ethnography, and phenomenological. Researchers must interpret the meanings expressed in narrative data, unlike case studies where researchers express the meaning of the participants (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Researchers use narrative inquiry to identify stories, journals, and life experience of individuals (Korach, 2012). I did not use these types of sources, and therefore, the narrative design was not appropriate for this study. My objective was to explore the experiences of individuals with knowledge of the leadership phenomenon in a small business setting. The narrative design works best when exploring a process, which was not the intent of this study (Konig & Waistell, 2012).

In an ethnography approach, the intent is for the researcher to use archival research and perform continuous observations of the participants to collect data (Sangasubana, 2011); however, the purpose of this study was to explore a phenomenon building on a theory to improve business practices. In an ethnography study, researchers theorize a participant's experience while not engaging in the participant's daily activities (Down, 2012; Yanow, 2012). In my study, I observed the participants during their daily activities, which is why the ethnography approach was not appropriate.

The researcher's focus on the phenomenological approach is forming conclusions and recommendations based on the participants' lived experiences (Englander, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Researchers use the phenomenological design to focus on a diverse group of experiences using in-depth interviews (Wisdom et al., 2012). A disadvantage of the phenomenological design was that researcher bias could jeopardize the validity of the study. A phenomenological design is appropriate when the purpose is to explore lived experiences (Englander, 2012) but was not appropriate to explore leadership strategies in natural environments, which was the intent of this study. I used multiple data collection instruments to understand the leadership strategies and increase research validity, as opposed to a phenomenological design that includes interviews alone.

I did not investigate shared beliefs, develop new theories, or use interviews as the primary source of data, which is an indication that the multiple case study design was appropriate. This study involved an opportunity to conduct an in-depth analysis of the research question. The participants' insight and experience provide distinctive information to help define a study, but corroborating those findings with other evidence adds strength to the findings (Yin, 2014). Researchers conduct a multiple case study to gather in-depth descriptive data (Yin, 2014). In a qualitative case study, researchers can focus on the evidence and not just on the lived experiences (Petty et al., 2012).

To ensure data saturation, I conducted member checking to allow participants to add new information. Participants did not think any additional information was needed and agreed with my interpretations. During member checking, if no new information emerges, the researcher can achieve data saturation (Katre & Salipante, 2012). If new data had emerged, I would have solicited additional participants. By analyzing the participants' experiences, researchers can gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Dworkin, 2012). By using open-ended questions, the participants elaborated on their responses. I compared interview responses with data I collected from observations and archival documents. Once there is redundancy in data, researchers have achieved saturation (Walker, 2012).

Population and Sampling

I selected from a purposeful sample of research participants in this qualitative multiple case study. Researchers use a purposive sample to select the appropriate participants' to provide relevant and informative data (Konig & Waistell, 2012; Tello, Yang, & Latham, 2012). Researchers also use purposeful sampling to comprehend a phenomenon and ensure the data provide diverse perspectives (Petty et al., 2012). The experience and perception of an individual who is part of a successful small business helped address the central research question.

I selected participates from two successful small manufacturing plants to gather in-depth data. An advantage of a small sample size is that researchers can use open-ended semistructured interviews to gather rich data (Yin, 2014). The appropriate sample size for a qualitative study depends on what researchers seek to understand (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Using a case study design, Kirchner, Ford, and Mottner (2012) achieved data saturation after five semistructured interviews. In this study, I used semistructured interviews to gather data to understand how leadership affects employee performance in a small business. Another example of small sample sizes was a 2014 case study in which O'Donnell (2014) indicated saturation could occur after two interviews. O’Donnell used a qualitative method to gain an in-depth understanding of small-business marketing using seven participants. The researchers of both these studies demonstrated that researchers with small sample sizes could achieve data saturation. Using more than 10 participants does not guarantee sufficient or more detailed data (Rowley, 2012). I used a multiple case study design on a population of small manufacturing managers; saturation determined the stopping point. In a case study, the sample size can be small, and the researcher could still achieve data saturation because data in a case study can come from multiple sources (Yin, 2014).

I interviewed small business managers from two different manufacturing plants and was able to achieve saturation. The sample size in a qualitative study is sufficient after data saturation occurs through redundancy in participant responses and data (Dworkin, 2012). Participants' interview responses had redundancy with other data sources. The same themes that emerged from the interviews were present in the management assessments and observations. After redundancy occurs in the data, a researcher can achieve saturation (Walker, 2012). I input the interviewee responses into categories, and after no new themes had developed, the data set was complete. Once a researcher can complete a data set, there is saturation (Katre & Salipante, 2012).

To ensure a study includes people with a successful history and people who relate to the research question, researchers create criteria (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The participants expanded on effective leadership strategies. I solicited participants from two manufacturing plants. These plants had fewer than 500 employees, manufactured different products, and were located in the coastal plains region of South Carolina. To participate in this study, the participant had to meet certain criteria: (a) be a manager who has used leadership strategies to improve employee performance, (b) be in a management position at a manufacturing plant for at least 5 years, and (c) have at least three subordinates. Participation in this study was voluntary. Using criteria to select participants can guarantee an appropriate selection of participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Managers who did not meet the criteria did not participate in this study. Researchers select participants with in-depth experience to meaningful gather data (Yin, 2012). I interviewed small business managers from two manufacturing plants with 5 or more years of experience. The participants with the required experience provided a detailed account of leadership strategies from over a 5-year period. The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the leadership strategies that successful small business managers in a manufacturing firm used that contributed to improved employee performance. Participants need to provide enriched data to fully understand a phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2014).

I scheduled a 90 to 100-minute face-to-face semistructured interview with each participant. During semistructured interviews, researchers can record nonverbal communication and fully address the research question by allowing participants to expand on responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The site of an interview may affect data collection; therefore, interview locations should be convenient and comfortable (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The interviews took place at the participant's place of business, the participant did not have to travel to another destination, and I was able to observe the environment. By using interviews, researchers have a chance to interact with participants and observe the day-to-day practices (Moll, 2012). Conducting an interview in a quiet room at a participant's place of business may help the participant to speak freely and extensively. After selecting an agreeable interview site, I called ahead to ensure the room met research requirements. An interview process is easier in a quiet and comfortable environment because participants feel free to share information (Anyan, 2013). To avoid additional distractions, I requested an interview space with no televisions, radios, or coworkers. I closed the door of the interview room to avoid interruptions and requested a desk on which to place the two recording devices.

Ethical Research

As the researcher, I must protect the participant from harm, protect the participant's confidentiality, and receive the participant's consent. Obtaining consent is important to research ethics (Yin, 2014). The study included participants, who had experience using leadership strategies to improve employee performance in a small manufacturing business. Bearing in mind the *Belmont Report* on performing ethical studies (Cseko & Tremaine, 2013); I reported accurate information, respected the participant, and did not cause any harm to the participant. I informed the participant of the consent process prior to the interview. Participants should be aware of their role in a study (Killawi et al., 2014).

The participant read and agreed to the consent form (see Appendix A) prior to the study beginning. During the consent process, participants should gain a clear understanding of the expectations for their participation (Yin, 2012). All documents given to participants disclosed the intent of the qualitative research study and the participants' role in the study. The informed consent letter (see Appendix A) detailed the research process to ensure the study was ethical. The participants received the consent form and an explanation of this study to ensure he or she had a full understanding of participation. It is important to inform participants of some inherent risks by obtaining informed consent, upholding participant privacy, and ensuring confidentiality (Xie, Wu, Luo, & Hu, 2012). I collected the consent form in person to ensure the participant was willing to participate. The participant must give written permission indicating a willingness to participate according to Walden IRB requirements. The IRB reviewed the study and grant approval if the study demonstrates ethical standards (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). I sent a recruitment letter (see Appendix C) to the participant to explain the criteria, followed by a reminder of recruitment (see Appendix D) and a request to schedule an interview (see Appendix E). The participants did not receive compensation for taking part in this study.

I continuously review research practices to ensure I am performing an ethical study and protecting participant confidentiality. I attempted to solicit non-vulnerable adults for this study, although vulnerability could have remained unknown until after beginning data collection. It is a researcher's responsibility to protect participants, develop trust, and ensure integrity (Rowley, 2012). I informed the participant of the option to withdraw from this study by sending written or verbal communication. If a participant elected to leave this study, I would have destroyed any data obtained from that participant. Confidentiality is important in ethical research to ensure validity and protect the privacy of participants (Graebner, Martin, & Roundy, 2012).

I stored data in a safe place to which I have access for 5 years to protect the rights of the participant. University protocol requires researchers to destroy data after the IRB critical period of 5 years to protect the privacy of the participant. Coding data provides additional security for participant information (Yin, 2012). I did not include the participant or organization name in this study, but I will include a Walden IRB approval number (09-08-16-0311325).

Data Collection Instruments

After a participants agreed to participate in this study, the next phase was data collection. The data collection process included several steps. First, I selected the data collection instruments and then began to collect data to analyze. In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2014). As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument in this study. I began the data collection process by conducting semistructured interviews with successful small business managers, followed by observations, and reviewing of archival documents. Researchers use a combination of data collection instruments when triangulating data (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). The three data collection techniques that Stake (1995) and Street and Ward (2012) recommend researchers to use in a case study are interviews, archival records, and observations. Researchers construct interview questions, conduct interviews, review archival documents, perform data analysis, and report findings in a case study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Interviews are reliable tools that researchers use to open the dialogue with participants to gather in-depth data (Petty et al., 2012). The interview process consisted of developing open-ended interview questions, selecting participants, taking detailed and accurate notes, audio recording, and transcribing responses to determine common themes (Moustakas, 1994). The interview technique is useful when trying to understand participants' experience (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Researchers conduct semistructured interviews to gain a better understanding of participants' experience and fully address the research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used an interview protocol to construct six original open-ended questions for different stages of the interview (see Appendix B) to ensure I asked each participant the prerecorded questions. Researchers who use an interview protocol may increase the reliability of case studies by ensuring all participants respond to the same line of inquiry (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Yin, 2014). The interview protocol can also help to ensure researchers and interviewees discuss key topics (Trotter, 2012). Each interview consisted of six open-ended questions and follow-up questions to explore the participant's experience and understanding of the leadership strategies small business managers need to improve employee performance. Some interviewees expanded on their experiences during the semistructured interview, so I presented follow-up questions. When researchers use open-ended questions, a participant has an opportunity to provide detailed responses (Moustakas, 1994). A protocol also helps increase the reliability of the case study (Yin, 2014). With the permission of participants, I audio tape-recorded the interviews and later transcribed the interview data into a Microsoft Word document using Voice Base to ensure validity and reliability of the data. I maintained a journal to record participant behaviors during the interview. Researchers use journals to take notes and record important nonverbal communication (Evans & Rooney, 2013).

To help enhance the reliability of this study, I used member checking. Interviewees reviewed my interpretations to confirm the intended meaning. Member checking is a quality control process researcher's use when conducting a qualitative study (Harper & Cole, 2012). To ensure accuracy of data interpretation, a researcher should give interviewees the opportunity to evaluate the adequacy of data and initial results

(Harper & Cole, 2012). Researchers use member checking to ensure their opinions about the initial findings and interpretation are accurate (Ramthun & Matkin, 2014). Interviewees' agreement with the researcher's interpretations adds validity to the study (Beck, 2014). Through member checking, participants are able to correct errors and contest the interpretations they perceive as incorrect (Littvay, Popa, & Fazekas, 2013).

I observed the participant for 4 hours during a normal workday using an observation protocol (see Appendix G). As the participant interacted with subordinates and conducted daily functions, I took notes. I observed how the manager tried to assist associates and how the manager encouraged employees to ask questions. I observed the managers to see if they are able to demonstrate a task if an employee asked for assistance. According to Bass (1985), the transformational leadership theory includes managerial concepts and managers can use these concepts to build a positive relationship with their employees. I observed how the managers tried to motivate employees to increase their productivity. In my notes, I recorded how the manager walked the floor and what actions they performed. Researchers observe participants in their natural setting to collect meaningful data (Yin, 2012). As the researcher, I must identify unique themes that explain the meanings regarding the leadership phenomenon. Observing the participants provided additional insight into actual leadership strategies managers' used on a daily basis. Observation could also complement the use of archival documents (Bernard, 2012).

The performance reviews that were available allowed me to assess if the employee's performance was improving, while their goals allowed me to determine if the manager had influenced them to be self-efficient. I was only allowed to review the performance reviews from M1 on site, while I received a copy from M2. During the reviews, I recorded the ratings, initiatives, and scores, this review took 1 hour. The manager assessment helped me determine if the employees perceived the manager to be a visionary. These assessments had five or six categories where employees rated the managers. When reviewing the archival documents, I highlighted key phrases and or words that appeared in multiple locations. The data collection process can be challenging but could strengthen the results of a study if the researcher validates the findings (Yin, 2014). Archival documents may include additional information that researchers cannot identify during observations or interviews (Stake, 1995). Researchers use archival documents in a case study to triangulate data (Yin, 2014). By using multiple data sources, I triangulated the data, and according to Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012) and Yin (2014), multiple sources can ensure reliability of a study.

Data Collection Technique

In a qualitative study, a researcher can explore a research question from various angles (Yin, 2014). The three data collection methods that Stake (1995) and Street and Ward (2012) suggested for a case study are interviews, archival records, and observations. For example, Psychogios and Garev (2012) and Vohra (2014) used multiple data collection techniques to understand leadership in SMEs. These prior studies justified using semistructured interviews, observations, and archival documents to collect data.

The semistructured interview process consisted of developing questions, interviewing the participant, and recording data. In a 2012 study, Downes and Koekemoer effectively used semistructured interviews to understand the effect of flexible work programs on employee productivity. Likewise, in a 2012 study Simpson, Padmore, and Newman used in-depth interviews with owners and managers to identify individual firm characteristics related to business success. Exploring the firsthand experiences of small manufacturing business managers could lead to effective leadership strategies and thus indicate that the use of semistructured interviews was relevant. Researchers use semistructured interviews to gather detailed descriptions from participants' lived experiences (Yin, 2014) and to find a new line of inquiry using open-ended questions and still discuss the topic in more detail (Maxwell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014).

I used the six open-ended interview questions to conduct the semistructured interviews and allowed other questions to evolve during the interview. Participants responding to open-ended questions can address the questions as they see fit (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Open-ended questions are more effective at helping researchers gain enriched data than closed-ended questions (Roulston, 2012; Yin, 2014). The specific interview questions appear in Appendix F. The data gained from the answers to the interview questions led to an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon addressed in the research question. When researchers are developing interview questions, they need to ensure the questions align with the phenomenon under study (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). The interviewees expanded on their experiences, so I had an opportunity to present follow-up questions (Baskarada, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). Gathering data from the participant's experience may help the researcher to develop themes and help identify leadership strategies relevant to employee performance (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012).

The interviews took between 25 to 40 minutes at an agreed-upon location. During semistructured interviews, researchers can fully address the research question by allowing participants to expand on responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This length of time is subject to change depending on the participant's responses to the interview questions (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). I conducted interviews in the participant's place of business, and the specific time and date depended on our schedules. The site of the interview may affect data collection; therefore, interview locations should be convenient and comfortable (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Scheibe, Reichelt, Bellmann, & Kirch, 2015; Yin, 2012). The interviews should take place in a quiet setting to avoid noise distortion (Anyan, 2013). The participant may feel able to speak freely and extensively about their experiences in a comfortable place. I reminded the interviewee of the option to leave the study if he or she feels uncomfortable. With the permission of the participant, I audio tape-recorded the interview using two devices and transcribed the interview data into a Microsoft Word document using Voice Base. By using an audio recording device, I listened to the participant's responses to clarify meaning to avoid bias. Using a digital audio device enabled me to use the Voice Base app and upload the audio for transcription, which took about 24 hours to complete. Then I copied the pdf into Word and listened to the recording to correct and discrepancy. The second device served was a backup in case of a malfunction, which I did not experience. Audio recordings promote accuracy of content (Anyan, 2103; Simola, Barling, & Turner, 2012; Yin, 2014). Obtaining participant permission to use a recording device helps to ensure participants are comfortable and aware of all data collection methods (Jensen, Ammentorp, Erlandsen, & Ording, 2012).

I maintained a journal and took notes during the interviews to ensure data are accurate. Researchers can take notes to record participant reactions (Beetz, Uvnäs-Moberg, Julius, & Kotrschal, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Petty et al., 2012). Researchers can use journals to minimize preconceptions and eliminate interviewer bias (Cooper et al., 2012; Tufford & Newman, 2012).

An advantage of the semistructured interview process is researchers can ask additional questions if new data emerge and participants can seek clarification (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Researchers who use semistructured interviews gain a better understanding of participants' experience and fully address the research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Semistructured interviews are useful to researchers when there is one opportunity to interview participants (Verner & Abdullah, 2012). Another advantage of face-to-face semistructured interviews is that the interviewer can observe nonverbal communication (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

There are disadvantages to the semistructured interview process. During interviews, researcher bias and misinterpretation of data can ruin the credibility of a study (Baskarada, 2014). To avoid bias, researchers should not try to lead interviewees' responses, keep notes, or use multiple data sources (Baskarada, 2014; Tufford & Newman, 2012; Yin, 2012). Another disadvantage is that in order for the data from an interview to be accurate, the interviewers must provide their full attention (Irvine et al., 2013). However, the interviewer's presence could influence interviewees' responses because of their desire to please the interviewer (Evans & Rooney, 2013). Another disadvantage to the semistructured interview process is that the large volume of information could be difficult to transcribe (Yin, 2014).

Researchers often collect secondary evidence in a case study to triangulate data (Petty et al., 2012; Street & Ward, 2012; Takahashi et al., 2012). The performance reviews allowed me to assess if the employee's performance was improving, while their goals allowed me to determine if the manager had influenced them to be self-efficient. The manager assessment helped me determine how the employees rated the manager's leadership strategies. The performance reviews were of the participant's subordinates to determine if the manager has had an impact on performance. I confirmed with the manager that the records are complete, accurate, and provide detailed information regarding improvements in performance or explain areas employees needed to improve. M1 explained the weight of their performance reviews and what they took into account. I highlighted areas that were related to interactions with managers and productivity. From the data on the documents, I scanned for keywords and phrases and later put them into an Excel spreadsheet. After recording the themes that emerge from the documents, I compared the document themes with the themes from the interview transcripts. Researchers use the comparison method to determine data saturation (Ng & Chan, 2014; Stoddart, Bugge, Shepherd, & Farquharson, 2014; Wadham & Warren, 2014). In a 2012 study, Psychogios and Garev used archival records to help determine factors that affect leadership in SMEs. In a study that involved exploring marketing practices in SMEs, Bettiol, Di Maria, and Finotto (2012) used company documents, website, and articles and recommended appropriate marketing practices. Those examples justified the use of archival documents to support data obtained from interviews.

There are advantages to using archival documents. Researchers may use archival documents to provide information that they cannot identify during observations or interviews (Baskarada, 2014; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Researchers can also use archival documents to cross-validate (Yin, 2014). The disadvantages of using archival documents could be inaccurate data, the amount of time spent, and researcher misinterpretation.

The third data collection tool I used was observations. I observed the participant for up to 4 hours in their natural setting during a normal workday. Researchers use observation to explore a participants' environment (Moustakas, 1994) and to collect meaningful data from participants' natural setting (Baskarada, 2014; Yin, 2012). Participant observations also complement the use of archival documents (Bernard, 2012). Through observation, I discovered areas where the managers and employees interpret duties differently.

The advantages to using observation are I was able to triangulate data and see the effect of the leadership strategies firsthand. There are also disadvantages to observations. Observations can become deceptive or biased. Participants may go through a reactivity effect that alters their behaviors because they are under observation (Evans & Rooney, 2013). Researchers must maintain a low profile to minimize distractions (Bernard, 2012; Yin, 2013). While observing the participants at work, I did not interact with the participants to maintain my role as an observer. I noted the interaction, communication, and feedback of the managers.

I used member checking to enhance the credibility of the study. Member checking is a quality control process researchers use to eliminate misrepresentation when conducting a qualitative study (Harper & Cole, 2012). In the study, member checking involved sharing my interpretations with the participants and allowing participants to verify interpretations. After I transcribed and interpreted the data, I met with the participants to allow them to review my interpretations. Researchers use member checking to minimize incorrect interpretations, with the goal of providing accurate results (Harper & Cole, 2012). Through member checking, researchers can verify the accuracy of word choice and interpretation (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). When researchers allow participants to review their interpretations, they promote credibility and accuracy (Harper & Cole, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012). When new data emerged, I determined if the data was similar to a current category or I created a new category. I inputted the responses into categories, and after no new themes develop, I ended the interviews. A researcher achieves saturation when no new themes emerge (Katre & Salipante, 2012). If I had been unable to achieve saturation after the first initial interviews, I would have solicited additional participants. I did not conduct a pilot study.

Data Organization Technique

Another important function in the data collection phase is data organization. It is a researcher’s responsibility to accurately and securely organize and store data throughout the data collection process. Researchers who properly organize data are able to access the data when needed (Basurto & Speer, 2012; Hays & Wood, 2011; Korhonen, 2014). Protecting participants' privacy is also the researcher's responsibility (Rowley, 2012).

Organizing

In a case study, researchers need to organize continuously, explore, and interpret data (Yin, 2014). I reviewed data for similarities throughout the data collection process. By continuously comparing data, researchers can achieve saturation and minimize categories (Ng & Chan, 2014; Wadham & Warren, 2014). In their 2014 study, Stoddart et al. used the comparison method to analyze interview responses regarding implementing clinical leadership policies; therefore, I used the comparison method. To maintain structure and accuracy, I used an interview protocol template (see Appendix B) for the interviewee. An interview protocol helps to increase the reliability of a case study by ensuring all participants respond to the same line of inquiry (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Yin, 2014). The interview protocol can also help to ensure the researcher and the interviewee discuss key topics (Trotter, 2012).

I used two audio-recording devices during the interviews, with participant permission, to ensure accurate records. By using an audio recording device, I listened to participant responses to clarify meaning to avoid bias. Researchers can use audio recording device to ensure accuracy of transcription (Simola et al., 2012; Yin, 2014). By using audio recordings and storing interview data, researchers can also ensure a study is ethical (Camfield & Palmer-Jones, 2013). Obtaining participant permission to use a recording device also ensures participants are comfortable and are providing accurate data (Jensen et al., 2012). I used Voice Base to transcribe interview responses and the program identified keywords from the interview. I recorded the keyword presented by Voice Base into an Excel spreadsheet then did a manual scan of the transcript to identify similar ideas. Researchers use interview transcripts to locate commonalities in interviewee responses (Moustakas, 1994; Simola et al., 2012). By listening to the audio recordings prior to beginning transcription, I was able to decipher the interviewee responses, as suggested by Maxwell (2013) and Othman and Rahman (2014). I transcribed the recorded interview verbatim and stored the transcription for 5 years, as required by the university. I maintained a journal and field notes to record the daily routines and observations of employees. Researchers can use journals and field notes or memos to triangulate data, reduce preconceptions, and identify the alternate perspectives of participants (Cooper et al., 2012; Korhonen, 2014; Tufford & Newman, 2012). I also used a research journal to arrange ideas when no computer is available.

The cataloging process included labeling all material with an identification number and saving files to a flash drive. By assigning identification numbers, I was able to distinguish participant responses and label data. Researchers use identification numbers to ensure the confidentiality of each participant in the final publication (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013), for example, M1 represented a manager.

After the interview, I labeled documents and placed them in a folder along with any notes taken during the interview. I used Excel to store interview data and codes. I input all responses into a spreadsheet; each question had a separate sheet. Microsoft Excel is a helpful tool for storing and organizing data (Given, 2008; Meyer & Avery, 2009), researchers can create an Excel spreadsheet to verify data (Camfield & Palmer-

Jones, 2013). After I input responses, I reviewed to identify redundancy. Researchers should store all data they obtain during a study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Researchers label data to access data when needed and to protect participant privacy (Basurto & Speer, 2012; Carlström & Ekman, 2012; Rowley, 2012).

Storing

I stored written notes, an external drive, interview transcripts, confidentiality documents, and the reflection journal in a locked file cabinet for up to 5 years until I destroy the data to ensure the participant remains anonymous. The suggested period to store data typically ranges from 3 to 10 years (Goth, 2012; Torrance, 2012), and the requirement at Walden University is 5 years (Coffie, 2013; Ekekwe, 2013). I will delete all electronic files, shred all paper documents, and delete all recordings after 5 years to ensure confidentiality. Confidentiality is important in ethical research to ensure validity and protect the privacy of participants; therefore, securing documents is important (Graebner et al., 2012). Researchers use confidentiality agreements, so participants will feel free to speak openly and honestly without fear of negative consequences (Ivey, 2012). By labeling and storing files by name, I can retrieve data when necessary. I am the only person who has access to the data. No identifiable information from the participant appears in the final publication of this study.

Data Analysis

The way to analyze a qualitative study varies among studies (Maxwell, 2013). The data analysis stage consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, and testing (Yin, 2014). Researchers analyze data to determine the meanings of the data (Ginsberg &

Sinacore, 2013; Lawrence & Tar, 2013). A researcher can analyze a case study by using pattern matching, time-series analysis, logic models, cross-case synthesis, or explanation building (Yin, 2014). The analysis for this study included (a) gathering the data, (b) grouping the data, (c) creating themes, (d) accessing the data, and (e) using the comparison method to understand the leadership strategies of successful small business managers. Data analysis begins when researchers transform data into written text (Maxwell, 2013).

In the examining stage, I reviewed all data. I began by reviewing interview transcriptions from each interview. I used Voice Base to transcribe the interview transcripts and then transferred them into a Microsoft Word document by copying the interviews for the Voice Base pdf output. Researchers transcribe data to identify similar ideas (Moustakas, 1994; Simola et al., 2012) and to interpret data and identify commonalities (Yin, 2012). Researchers can use the comment feature in Microsoft Word to highlight codes (Cater, Machtmes, & Fox, 2013; Given, 2008; Seidman, 2013). Properly sorting data simplifies the identification of themes (Bishop & Lexchin, 2013). I listened to the full interview and made corrections by keyboard if the output was not accurate. Listening to audio recordings ensured that I correctly deciphered the interviewee responses. Researchers can use an audio recording device to ensure accuracy of transcriptions (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Othman & Rahman, 2014). After I transcribed the data, I met with participants to review a copy of the coded transcripts for feedback on my interpretations. Through member checking, researchers can verify accuracy of word choice and interpretation (Harper & Cole, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After reviewing the interview, I reviewed the notes taken from the archival documents and observations. Researchers can use a reflective journal to record observations as well as arrange ideas during interviews (Hinder & Greenhalgh, 2012). As themes emerged from the documents, I corroborated with the interview transcript to determine similarities. Researchers read, organize, and understand the data to reflect and perhaps discover new ideas and themes (Yin, 2012). The disadvantage is the reviews can be tedious and time-consuming. After redundancy occurs in participant responses, no further interviewing is necessary (Walker, 2012).

The next stage in data analysis is categorizing. I began by developing codes. Organizing and grouping data makes the coding and categorization process efficient while easing the process of accessing data (Basurto & Speer, 2012; Carlström & Ekman, 2012). Researchers use coding to identify subjects the participants describe and to contribute to analyzing and organizing data for later interpretation (Da Mota Pedrosa, Näslund, & Jasmand, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Coding involves deriving themes and categories from the data (Da Mota Pedrosa et al., 2012). Open coding consists of one or two words, whereas axial coding involves relating codes (Petty et al., 2012; Sarker, Xiao, & Beaulieu, 2013). By using coding, researchers can tie responses to the theory (Yin, 2014). By continuously rechecking coding, I uncovered patterns and identified relationships between categories. Researchers apply coding to identify patterns and secure information (Smit, 2012). In their 2012 study, Lam and O'Higgins used coding to catalog data and protect participant privacy. Researchers can combine codes to reduce categories (Cater et al., 2013; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). The number of categories depended on the different themes that emerge. I was able to identify four themes from the data. The themes were (a) following a vision, (b) self-efficacy, (c) self-determination, and (d) need fulfillment. I used locating keywords and phrases as the first step in categorizing. For example, Lam and O'Higgins (2012) used coding in their study on transformational leadership to help categorize data. I was able to determine the characteristics from the conceptual framework were relevant to the findings. I used Microsoft Excel software to review and code data and to identify common terms that I missed within a manual review process. Using Excel, I sorted themes and compared responses to identify similarities. Microsoft Excel has a built-in sorting mechanism to assist researchers with organizing and reviewing data (Flick, 2014; Given, 2008; Silverman, 2013). Computer-assisted tools can assist with data review, and researchers should identify any meaningful categories (Baskarada, 2014).

The next stage consisted of tabulating and testing data. After developing codes, the next step was testing the codes. To test codes, I reviewed the data. Researchers read and examine transcriptions to identify themes (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012; Yin, 2012). I used a thematic analysis to compare the data and corroborate evidence to generate a clear understanding of the manager's perceptions of the influence of leadership strategies on employee performance. Through thematic analysis, researchers can pinpoint patterns (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Continuously comparing data also helps determine data saturation (Ng & Chan, 2014; Wadham & Warren, 2014). Researchers can use data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation to analyze data (Denzin, 2012). Researchers use multiple sources of data in a case study to identify patterns (Yin, 2014). Methodological triangulation may lead to a more detailed understanding that may not be possible using one type of data (Heale & Forbes, 2013; Psychogios & Garev, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012). The data collection instruments I used consisted of an interview, observations, and archival documents. Researchers can use multiple data collection instruments to triangulate data (Balzacq, 2014; Petty et al., 2012; Stake, 1995). Using these sources, I began to compare themes to corroborate data and to determine if a correlation exists with the employee performance reviews and interviewee responses. The documents led to an opportunity to reduce categories and create subcategories.

The final step was the comparison method. After triangulating the data, I compared transcripts, archival documents, and observation notes to reduce and eliminate categories. Researchers conduct the comparison method to identify similarities and differences in responses (Baskarada, 2014). Using the comparison method, Stoddart et al. (2014) analyzed interview responses in their study on leadership. After I identify leadership strategies, I used the comparison method with prior study findings to merge overlapping themes. After no new themes are feasible, I did not conduct any further coding. Researchers continuously compare codes and merge themes to determine data saturation and validate research findings (Katre & Salipante, 2012; Ng & Chan, 2014; Wadham & Warren, 2014). Using the ideas derived from the data, I reported the results. The results may provide information to help improve the lack of leadership knowledge in small businesses.

Reliability and Validity

Future scholars may use this study as a platform; therefore, I ensured I provided quality data in my study. Scholars confirm the quality of data by verifying the validity and reliability of the study (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2012; Yin, 2014). To achieve quality, researchers must keep accurate records, interview relevant participants, and record the steps they use during the study (Ali & Yusof, 2011). Monitoring and reporting procedures completely and truthfully can also ensure reliability (Applebaum, 2012; Yin, 2014).

Reliability

Reliability refers to the repeatability of research procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). I provided a detailed record of the research collection methods and explained the research design, sampling methods, data collection methods, and data analysis to ensure the quality of the findings. Documented procedures bring reliability to the study (Applebaum, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2014). I maintained a research log to record procedures and track progress. A research journal or log is suitable for documenting procedures, demonstrating credibility, and enabling future scholars to replicate the research findings (Grossoehme, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2014). By properly outlining the steps of this study and storing all documents, I ensured results remained trustworthy and valid.

Reliability also refers to a researcher's responsibility to check for accuracy of the data (Ali & Yusof, 2011). When checking reliability, researchers should review transcripts for mistakes, monitor changes in codes, and crosscheck data (Ali & Yusof, 2011). After conducting interviews, I transcribed interviewee responses using Voice Base. I used an audio recording device to verify accuracy of transcriptions. Researchers can record interviews and review recordings to ensure accuracy (Hess, McNab, & Basoglu, 2014; Simola et al., 2012; Yin, 2014). By reviewing data accuracy, researchers can minimize bias to ensure data reliability (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Simola et al., 2012; Yin, 2014).

Discussing the experiences of participants also indicated the quality of the data provided. The participants were relevant to the topic. The criteria for selecting participants helped ensure their credibility. A participant with a successful history ensured the credibility of research; therefore, I selected the interviewees from a purposeful sample. By using the opinions of the community of scholars, researchers can ensure reliability (Konig & Waistell, 2012; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Dependability involves ensuring researchers are aware of all changes affecting the research process and are documenting these changes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process can ensure the data are reliable. I achieved dependability in this study by using detailed records and member checking data interpretation.

Member checking. Researchers can ensure the credibility and validity of data by allowing participants to review interpretations. After I transcribed the data, I met with participants to review a copy of the coded transcripts to receive feedback on my interpretations. Participants can review data for clarifications and provide further information if essential (Wahyuni, 2012). Misinterpreting data can risk the validity of the study; therefore, member checking is necessary (Beck, 2014; Littvay et al., 2013;

Ramthun & Matkin, 2014). Through member checking, researchers can verify with the participants the accuracy of word choice and interpretation (Houghton et al., 2013).

Validity

A qualitative researcher can verify accuracy by using certain procedures or tests (Ali & Yusof, 2011) that help determine the quality of a research design (Yin, 2014). The four tests to ensure research validity are (a) credibility, (b) transformability, (c) dependability, and (d) conformability (Houghton et al., 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Including these concepts in a qualitative study helps to ensure validity.

Credibility involves ensuring the research findings are authentic based on the participants' assessment (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013; Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). Activities that help improve research credibility include persistent observation, triangulation, and checking raw data against the researcher's interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure research credibility, Munn et al. (2014) and Wahyuni (2012) recommended triangulation to demonstrate reliability across data collection techniques. For this study, I used methodological triangulation to ensure credibility.

Methodological triangulation. In a qualitative study, researchers can validate data by triangulating interviews, archival documents, and observations (Street & Ward, 2012). Researchers can use triangulation to ensure validity by crosschecking the reliability of data sources (Verner & Abdullah, 2012; Yin, 2014). An advantage of methodological triangulation is researchers can use multiple sources to corroborate findings and strengthen a qualitative study (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Verner &

Abdullah, 2012; Yin, 2014). In this study, I used semistructured interviews, observations, and archival documents to collect data. In a 2014 study, Vohra (2014) used interviews, observation, and document review to understand the behaviors of leaders in SMEs, which indicated the effectiveness of triangulation.

The focus of transferability is on transmitting study outcomes to additional populations on a widespread basis (Houghton et al., 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the transferability of this study, I provided readers with a detailed account of my research process, use open-ended questions, and discuss limitations. Researchers use open-ended questions to obtain research data that enhance transferability across populations (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012; Roulston, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By documenting procedures and limitations, future scholars should receive similar results if they follow the same procedures, thereby ensuring transferability (Applebaum, 2012; Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Conformability is true value and congruence that researchers can establish through a bias-free research process (Houghton et al., 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used a reflective journal to help eliminate some bias because I disclosed all data collected in the journal entries. Researchers must ensure data are accurate and must not falsify information to avoid bias (Cooper et al., 2012; Grossoehme, 2014; Yin, 2014). Researchers can also minimize bias by disregarding their preconceptions (Wilson, 2012). I reviewed data for accuracy and use member checking to ensure accurate interpretations. By checking data for accuracy and using member checking, researchers can validate research data (Harper & Cole, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2014).

In a qualitative study, data saturation is another strategy that can enhance reliability by demonstrating commonalities in data (Anyan, 2013; Yin, 2014). I achieved saturation by using a purposeful sample of small business managers. Researchers can use a purposeful sample to obtain data from the participants and find commonalities in experiences (Dworkin, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). I compared data from interviews, archival documents, and observations to identify common themes. Researchers also use triangulation to achieve saturation from multiple sources (Street & Ward, 2012; Verner & Abdullah, 2012; Yin, 2014). When repetition occurs in interview data and document reviews, saturation has taken place (Dworkin, 2012; Ng & Chan, 2014; Walker, 2012). Data saturation is also an indication of an adequate sample size (Goldberg & Allen, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). I did not have to contact the participant to present additional follow-up questions because I was able to achieve data saturation after the first interview. Achieving data saturation is important to researchers because saturation is an indicator that commonalities exist and helps strengthen research findings (Dworkin, 2012; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012).

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I discussed the purpose statement, role of the researcher, data collection, and validity of this study. Section 2, I included the methodology I used in this study, a discussion of the suitability of a qualitative multiple case study design for this study, and a review of the purpose of this study. I used a qualitative research method in the form of a multiple case study design to explore the impact leadership strategies have on employee performance. A researcher can build on theory using the multiple case study design (Houghton et al., 2013). To ensure alignment with the central research question and purpose statement, this discussion included criteria for collecting data, managing and storing data, and interviewing. I included sections on the data collection instruments, data organization techniques, and data analysis. Data collection involved using a self-developed interview protocol, reviewing archival documents, and observation. The section included requirements for participants, ethical research, and population sampling methods. The purposeful sample included managers from two small manufacturing businesses that produce different products. Using a successful practitioner to understand leadership led to information useful to other small business practitioners to understand the type of managers needed to improve employee performance. Section 2 ends with a discussion of reliability and validity to ensure the doctoral study meets quality standards. In Section 3, I used the data techniques to gather and record the responses of the participant, and I presented the results of interview responses and an evaluation of the interview transcripts. In Section 3, I included a discussion and presentation of the application of the results and findings to professional practice and implications for social change. Section 3 included recommendations for action based on the results of this study and recommendations for future studies in the areas of leadership and organizational performance in small business.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how small manufacturing business managers used leadership strategies to improve employee performance. Small businesses achieve organizational success through the proper leadership of human capital (Baptista et al., 2014; Germain, 2012). The focus of this research was to explore the leadership strategies that improve employee performance to meet organizational goals.

The participants for this study consisted of two managers from two small manufacturing facilities that had experience using leadership strategies. I conducted semistructured interviews guided by open-opened questions with participants to answer the overreaching research question for this study: What leadership strategies do small manufacturing business managers use to improve employee performance? Comparing data from relevant organizational documents such as employee performance reviews, management assessments, and employee goals, in addition to interview results and observation notes led to a comprehensive analysis suggested by (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The resulting themes were the fundamental concepts of transformational leadership: (a) following a vision, (b) self-efficacy, (c) self-determination, and (d) need fulfillment. Based on the data and the emergent themes, I found that the initial research findings of this study matched the fundamental concepts of the transformational leadership theory identified by Kovjanic et al. (2012).

Presentation of the Findings

A case study approach serves as an effective way to investigate a phenomenon in multiple real-life settings (Yin, 2014). The overreaching research question for this study was: What leadership strategies do small manufacturing business managers use to improve employee performance? The four main themes that emerged from the data analysis of the two interviews and observations and archival document reviews were (a) following a vision, (b) self-efficacy, (c) self-determination, and (d) need fulfillment. I used semistructured interviews, observations, and archival documents reviews to obtain and in-depth understanding of perspectives of effective leadership strategies. The chosen participants were manufacturing managers who had experience using leadership strategies to influence employee performance. Each participant worked for a small manufacturing plant, in the coastal plains region of South Carolina. Once I completed data collection, I coded the participants by using M to represent a manager and numbers 1 - 2 to identify managers' data, to ensure confidentiality. Therefore, M1 represented the first manager I interviewed. Data was interpreted using thematic analysis. Through thematic analysis, researchers can pinpoint patterns (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

The following themes that emerged under following a vision were: (a) anticipation and (b) shared goals. The themes under self-efficacy were: (a) exemplary behaviors and (b) selfless. The main themes under self-determination were: (a) sense of purpose, (b) increase self-awareness, and (c) increase confidence. The themes under need fulfillment were: (a) abilities, (b) commitment, and (c) job satisfaction.

First Theme: Following a Vision

The first theme that emerged from the analysis was following a vision. The responses to interview questions 1 and 2 indicated their ongoing efforts to instill the organization's vision in employees. The literature review supports the emerging themes of; (a) anticipation and (b) shared goals. Based on the results from the 2012 study, Koech and Namusonge suggested that managers should be role models, inspire, provide individual attention, and motivate. In business, employees expect leaders to perform multiple functions, such as having a vision and providing guidance to meet organizational goals (Youngwirth, 2013). In questions 1, 2, 4, and 5, I explored the participants' insight into improving employee performance in a manufacturing setting. Having a vision to follow was a main idea that all participants seemed to indicate in their responses. All participants shared their thoughts about a vision being what they wanted to instill in the employees. Effectively implementing the vision allows the employees to be productive in the workplace. M1 stated:

> …we have got to change with times we've got to continue to encourage people I said you people out here are all as intelligent as I am. Don't check your heads at the door think about something that we can do to improve. Even a fifteen to twenty-minute improvement in the time it takes to do something is huge so don't check your heads because what you been doing if we don't change we won't be here another 4 years.

Knowing that it takes change and being able to adjust to change is important in the small business industry. For this reason, transformational leadership is a form of leadership that involves causing a change (Bass, 1985). According to Rana and Malik (2016), leaders recognize change and then create strategies for those changes.

Anticipation. In a study conducted in Pakistan, Paracha et al. (2012) indicated that when working toward goals, transformational leaders make the process simple by indicating the vision and encouraging followers to pursue that vision and not worry about outside distractions. The study results, correlate with the idea that leaders have focus and often have anticipation (Sakiru et al., 2013). The participants agreed that as a manager you have to be a step ahead. In the 2012 study, Psychogios and Garev indicated that lack of role clarity, uncertainty, and the absence of a vision had an undesirable effect on employee performance. Organizational leaders who change the management structure with the available leadership knowledge can improve employee satisfaction and organizational performance (Sakiru et al., 2013). M2 said,

> …explain to them if we stay here and do the same things the way we've done here the last forty years then we won't be here 40 years from now. I guarantee you this world is changing so fast in the speed of time and speed of the Internet and just everything of how we evolve businesses are going to be here that do the same thing.

A transformation leader understands that they have to adapt to change. Leaders seek followers who adapt to change, have flexibility, and can multitask (Prilipko et al., 2011). From the manager assessments, I reviewed the employees seemed to respect, the managers input and seek their assistance. Three out of the four reviewed indicated that the manager was able to adapt to changes.

Shared goals. Effective leadership is how leaders positively motivate followers to develop themselves while achieving organizational goals (Conchie, 2013). All participants indicated that they want the employees to work at a certain level. When employees complete work properly then the company is able to prosper. According to Rua and Araujo (2015), transformational leaders have to be able to instill the organizational goals in the employee to make them adopt the organization's philosophy. In response to interview question 2, M2 stated:

> My inventory control person I encouraged him to go to college to get this year degree. He's a sharp guy and could be a manager role but he needs that piece of paper so encourage him and he is excited he comes in here every day wants to perform well for me and for the company.

The findings supported Bayram and Dinc (2015) claimed that when leaders put the followers' needs first, the followers are willing to work toward the leader's expectations. M1 suggested that if managers can show employees the proper way of how to do the job employees could learn just by watching in order to meet the organization's needs.

Second Theme: Self-Efficacy

The second theme that emerged from the analysis was self-efficacy. The responses to interview question three and six indicated their self-efficacy. The literature review supports the emerging themes of; (a) inspiration and (b) selfless. Transformational leaders use (a) exemplary behaviors, (b) inspiration, and (c) selfless attitude to encourage their followers (Aggarwal & Krishnan, 2013).

Inspiration. The findings from the interview data indicated that inspiration allows them to motivate employees to perform. According to Hamstra et al. (2013), the relationship the manager or supervisor has with the employee can influence their performance. Two managers indicated that leading by example is important because the leader is making decisions that affect the organization. The follower then develops an idealized image of the leader and tries emulating the leader's behaviors (Wang et al., 2013).

Transformational leaders use positive interaction and inspiration to improve organizational success (Nixon et al., 2012). Leaders need to use inspirational motivation continuously to ensure followers stay engaged and encourage followers to achieve goals (Cavazotte et al., 2013; Popa, 2012). M1 stated:

> You've got to be able to listen people, and you got to be able to encourage then through discipline, not just beat them up in discipline. I think that that's a wrong way to approach……… encourage me to give something to look forward to and not just doing or saying things and that's one of the things that I brought up here recently with this team.

Selfless. Selfless stemmed from responses to interview questions 3 and 6, on participant insights on challenges and employee development in order to improve employee performance. The purpose of the question was to explore what elements hinder the impact of their leadership strategies. Transformational leaders encourage employees to look beyond self-interest (Washington et al., 2014). Transformational leaders develop relationships with employees and put the goals of others before their own; however, these leaders create value by influencing other followers to become leaders (Khan et al., 2012; Men, 2014). All participants suggested that you have to be open to change and allow growth. M1 stated:

> People get stale get stagnant and you've got to encourage them to learn something do something more... So I think those are some things to utilize to help sometimes pull people out of a slump give them a different look on life give a different look on the company. What we're doing to try and help them grow personally and professionally.

Third Theme: Self-determination

The third theme that emerged from the analysis was self-determination. The responses to interview questions and goal assessments indicated self-determination is relevant to effective leadership. The literature review supports the emerging themes of; (a) sense of purpose, (b) increase self-awareness, and (c) increase confidence. A transformational leader motivates individuals to learn based on the concept that after they have those skills, they can help meet organizational goals and increase employee confidence (Cavazotte et al., 2013). By using inspiration, these leaders' simulated enthusiasm, and build confidence in their followers, which supports Z. Wang and Gagné's (2013) assumption that transformational leadership encourages self-sufficient motivation and high employee values.

Sense of purpose. Based on a response to a follow-up question and interview question 1 regarding previous experiences and describing their strategies, there is an understanding that when employees have a sense of purpose their performance improves.

All participants emphasized employees need to feel appreciated and that they are a part of something bigger. M2 stated, “People on the shop floor like to know who things are going to. Encouraging them and getting to understand how they're and what they are doing matters whether its bottom line or not.”

Based on data retrieved from the employee goals it is apparent that all the employees embrace their responsibilities and look forward to development. All participants suggested that they learned from previous experiences and understand that results matter but the employees have to know their purpose. M2 stated:

> What does their job mean to the overall business? And I think you know when you sitting here and people are doing their work and they don't understand really what the end goal is here or you get them in the same routine every day and I don't like people to be in that routine I want them to understand the importance of their work.

The findings supported Rua and Araujo (2015) claim that in order to meet organizational goals transformational leaders should explain to employees their roles. This result also supports the suggestion by Abu Elanain (2012) that role clarity is an important part of leadership.

Increase self-awareness. Employee satisfaction indicates if employees are content or satisfied with their work and self (Boyad et al., 2012). When employees feel satisfied with their jobs, their performance improves, and ultimately the individual performances complement the overall organization (Paracha et al., 2012). By instilling knowledge and self-belief, leaders enable followers to become leaders. M1 suggested that, "…just encourage and even get a certificate or associate degree or something even if it took them six years at least they're working towards something that can help benefit them personally and help them grow even in this organization."

Findings from the review of the employee performance reviews indicated progression, and the employee comments illustrated their understanding of self-development. One organization even offers online certification through their company. The manager indicated that taking the online test was a part of their performance reviews and employees are given an objective. The management assessments indicated that management had embraced changes, encouraged growth, and provided assistance.

Increase confidence. A transformational leader motivates individuals to learn based on the concept that after they have those skills, they can help meet organizational goals and increase employee confidence (Cavazotte et al., 2013). From a review of employee goals, I observed that some lower level employees were striving to make major improvements. One indicated they wanted to take additional certifications online. Because these employees have set goals for themselves under the supervision of the manager, it may be safe to assume the manager had an impact on their targets. According to Rana and Malik (2016), when employees deem themselves or their jobs important, they make improvements, which can be because of their leader's influence.

Fourth Theme: Need Fulfillment

The fourth theme that emerged from the analysis was need fulfillment. The responses to interview question five indicated the relevance of need fulfillment. I identified need fulfillment as relevant to the transformational leadership theory. This theme was strengthened through the results of the Kroon et al. (2013) study. The literature review supports the emerging themes of: (a) abilities, (b) commitment, and (c) job satisfaction. To illustrate the leadership relationship, Kovjanic et al. (2012) indicated that followers' basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness facilitate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction, self-efficacy, outcomes, and commitment to the leader.

Abilities. A transformational leader seeks to develop individuals' abilities, attitudes, and values; hence, transformational leaders can influence or change the thinking of followers (Choudhary et al., 2013). For instance, Kroon et al. (2013) explored the factors that could stimulate high performance in the workplace, such as employee abilities, employee motivations, and opportunity to perform. From the interviews, all participants indicated that they interact with employees to instill the correct abilities. The participants indicated that they lead by example to meet organizational goals. M1 stated, " Get out there and just show them the proper way of how to do the job. And they can learn by watching me. We can do it together." From the performance, reviews I was able to determine that employees were attempting to learn new abilities.

These findings coincide with Bayram and Dinc (2015), assertion that when followers know their worth, they work towards goals. Based on the performance reviews the employees seem to be learning new functions and embracing the business culture.

Commitment. The commitment these workers have to the organization and their goals could have a link to the leadership approach (Othman et al., 2013). According to Rana and Malik (2016), these leaders can develop commitment in their followers. During my observation of the managers, I saw that the employees sought the manager's advice and guidance. I observed employees that had been with the organization for at least 6 years and as we walked, the floor there was positive interaction. The manager spoke to the employees, and I could see that they had good relationships. Not only did they talk about production issues and inventory, but they also had conversations about family. Later in the office, the manager expressed how important it was to build a relationship and think about how the company could improve for the future. One organization offered online training courses and tuition reimbursements, so they could develop their staff and retain them for the future. So not only were the employees committed, but so was the company. M2 stated: "So I think you have to have a lot of things in an organization to be successful. You've got to have good people, you've got to embrace the people encourage people."

The findings indicated that when commitment to organization goals are the focus of conversation business survival is achievable. Optimism, focus, growth, and teamwork are concepts of the commitment theme. According to Armstrong (2013), when managers display commitment, that enhances the survival and growth of a small business.

Job Satisfaction. Organizational leaders consider job satisfaction a primary objective because the negative output of an employee could affect coworkers and customers (Sakiru et al., 2013). Leaders are an essential component of boosting employee job satisfaction and improving employee performance (Paracha et al., 2012). Follower satisfaction is a result of proper leadership, and job satisfaction leads to improved employee performance (Sakiru et al., 2013). The managers indicated that want to make their employees happy. They continuously communicate with them and encourage suggestions. M1 stated:

> …have an open door policy an that's kind of my style. When I recently I took over the operations role as well. Supply chain what I did here is I raised my curtains here in the office, so I get a visible anybody come in from the shop floor if they're going to use restroom or go into the break room they see me I wave to them I say hello.

This result supports the suggestion by Bayram and Dinc (2015) that satisfied employees contribute to the organization.

Findings Tied to Transformational Leadership Theory

Further analysis of interview data revealed employee encouragement, managerial experience, and adaptation are important concepts when trying to improve employee performance. These managers leadership strategies all recognized employee encouragement, managerial experience, and adaptation as infrastructure to effective leadership. The more a concept emerges in data collection, the more likely it is a relevant theme (Guba, 1978). Employee encouragement, managerial experience, and adaptation reoccurred in over half of the responses among participants. This results support Bass (1985) idea, that encouragement is essential to employee performance.

According to Bayram and Dinc (2015), existing empirical research suggests that employee job satisfaction influences a business’s chances of survival. The themes I gathered from my study display the leadership strategies small manufacturing managers should implement to improve employee performance. The participant’s responses and supplemental data support the transformational leadership theory, which was the conceptual framework for this study.

Applications to Professional Practice

This study is important to understanding the leadership strategies small manufacturing managers need to improve employee performance to meet organizational goals. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies successful small business managers have utilized to improve employee performance to sustain business beyond 5 years. Findings from the study and recommendations will serve as the basis for the development of the leadership strategies managers of small manufacturing can use to improve profitability. The results of this study provide suggestions to underperforming organizations on which leadership strategies can be used to improve employee productivity and job satisfaction. If managers consider these findings, the gap in business practice relating to profitability and sustainability could improve. Study results indicated that leaders with the appropriate leadership knowledge enable small business managers to improve employee performance and organizational performance as suggested by Sakiru et al. (2013). Furthermore, these results provide managers with implementable information to increase productivity. Leaders must know what their followers are seeking and how to inspire and motivate them to achieve the organizational goals (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). The ability to inspire and motivate has a positive influence on job satisfaction and indicates a link exists between followers' job satisfaction and affective commitment to the leader (Kovjanic et al., 2012; Sakiru et al., 2013). Transformational leaders enhance the ability of their followers to meet the demands of an organization (Kovjanic et al., 2012).

Study findings are relevant to professional practice, as this study identified practical solutions for managers of small manufacturing facilities. In addition, the findings provide a practical guide for small business managers to change their leadership strategies and improve employee performance to increase productivity and sustainability. The study's findings and recommendations added to the knowledge of business development through identifying the needed leadership strategies that improve employee performance. The factors included in the emerging themes may assist managers in increasing productivity and boosting employee morale while increasing profits.

Implications for Social Change

Implications for change from this doctoral study include the potential to construct a list of leadership strategies for small business managers to improve employee performance and sustain beyond 5 years. In the United States, the small business sector accounted for 63% of new job creation in 2014 and 50% of the workforce (SBA, 2014). This study is important to understanding how to improve employee performance and profitability of small businesses. When managers know how to improve employee performance, they enable the organizational to thrive.

The purpose of this study was to explore leadership strategies that improve employee performance. The findings contribute to the understanding of effective leadership strategies to improve employee performance in a manufacturing setting. When a business is successful the business, employees, customers, and community benefit

(Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). Probable social changes include improved living standards and continuous employment opportunities.

The results of this study identified viable options to improve employee performance through effective leadership strategies. Furthermore, the results of this study showed that effective leadership could build employee morale and satisfaction. Findings ways to improve employee performance may increase productivity and profits. By improving organizational performance, small businesses may maintain sustainability more than 5 years, which will help the performance of the U.S. workforce and strengthen the economy.

Recommendations for Action

The intent of this study was to provide small manufacturing managers within the small business area in their beginning phase of operation with leadership strategies that could improve employee performance. Using the information gathered from successful small manufacturing managers as a resource may prove beneficial to organizational success. The participants provided valuable insights into their experiences with employee engagement, employee empowerment, leadership, communication, and growth. The recommendations are consistent with the Kovjanic et al. (2012) concepts of transformation leadership, meaning implementation is mindful of demands, inspiration, and job satisfaction. The qualitative data obtained from this study provided small business insight into leadership strategies that can increase the survival rates of small business. The findings yielded several conclusions regarding effective leadership strategies that improve employee performance. The results of this study could assist organization's managers in the implementations of effective leadership strategies that improve employee performance. I could distribute information regarding these results through a training program, pamphlets, or an online assessment. Conferences and training programs are effective ways to communicate these results to the community of scholars, small business managers, and owners. From these events, attendees should also receive reading material for later reference. I also intend to one day have this study published in a reputable business journal. I recommend that small business managers (a) actively communicate with employees, (b) give employees rotating functions, so that their potential could develop, (c) build a trusting relationship with employees through team building exercises, and (d) engage in the daily activities.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of the study was to explore the leadership strategies that small manufacturing managers use to improve employee performance. The findings indicated the leadership strategies that were important to succeed in a small business environment. In this study, a limitation was the geographic location and industry. Further studies should include a larger geographic area, diverse industries, and a mixed method to produce findings that will be generalizable to other industries. This research study included two small manufacturing managers in the coastal plains region of South Carolina. I would recommend further studies with participants for other states. Studying one geographic area or a small sample size are limitations (Coffie, 2013).

There is existing research on leadership; however, there is little research regarding effective leadership strategies. A future study could focus on how a manager's leadership strategies influence organizational performance. Furthermore, recommendations for research include replicating this study to determine if leadership strategies are industry specific. All organizations use leadership; however, determining industry specificity results are significant. Research studies considered in the literature review section covered education, experience, or age.

For further research, I also recommend a case study that focuses on human resource management, as opposed to operation managers. This follow-up study may also include employee perceptive on leadership approaches to compare and contrast perceptions of managers from this study. In addition, future research could focus on the impact of leadership on employee morale.

Reflections

I had the opportunity to interview small manufacturing managers who are managing successful small businesses and have been in business for at least 5 years. This research project broadened my knowledge of doctoral research. My knowledge and understanding of leadership in small businesses, and specifically in the small manufacturing setting, grew through this study. Through purposeful sampling, I accessed participants that were relevant to the study. However, my initial attempt to obtain participants commitment was tedious and often discouraging, because I spoke to seemingly enthusiastic and interested individuals that later declined. Some human resource managers and operational managers were reluctant because they thought that I would occupy too much of their time. I continually reached out to different organizations until participants accepted.

All participants shared their lived experiences with enthusiasm. The participants were at ease with me, as they educated me on matters of successful small business leadership. The findings from this study have changed my personal perception of leadership and employee performance. I had little knowledge regarding leadership strategies and practices.

The qualitative multiple case study involved exploring leadership strategies that improve employee performance. The identified samples were two manufacturing managers that have used leadership strategies in the past. The participants were in the coastal plains region of South Carolina. The research process included conducting semistructured interviews, observations, and archival document review to gain an understanding of the leadership strategies the participants utilized. I asked opened-ended questions, took notes during observations and reviewed employee goals, management assessments, and employee performance reviews. Participants were willing to provide detailed responses and allowed me to observe their routines. The findings increased my understanding of small business and have reinforced my goals of establishing a small business.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Small businesses represent half of the labor force in the United States and create a half a million new businesses monthly (SBA, 2014). According to the opinions of scholars, proper leadership of human capital in small businesses leads to organizational success (Baptista et al., 2014; Germain, 2012). Employee performance is important for a successful organization. With the proper leadership strategies, being implemented

managers could help small businesses sustain. The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership strategies that small manufacturing managers use to improve employee performance. Findings may help sustain the small business sector to survive beyond 5 years. The results can serve as a guide to small business managers that have productivity and morale issues to improve employee performance. The conceptual framework for this study was the transformational leadership theory. I conducted semistructured interviews, observed managers, and reviewed archival documents to gain insights of leadership strategies that small business managers require to succeed beyond 5 years. The participants consisted of two small manufacturing managers who were in business for at least 5 years in the coastal plains region of South Carolina. Data collection had 10 themes that I grouped into four categories (a) following a vision, (b) self-efficacy, (c) self-determination, and (d) need fulfillment. The data indicated that employee encouragement is relevant to the growth and success of a small business. Building a relationship with the employees instills trust and loyalty that translates into increased productivity and professional growth. Managerial experience allowed managers to understand employee behaviors and engage in positive reinforcement. Adaptation emerged throughout the findings because the participants' believed that in order to survive a business has to evolve. The recommendations from this study consist of effective leadership strategies that could be used by current and future managers. Any small business that is struggling or stagnant should implement these leadership strategies.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Title of Doctoral Study: Leadership Strategies and Employee Performance Within Small Business

Date ____________ Interviewee___________________

Participant Consent Form: Yes__ No ___

This interview may take 90 to 100 minutes. As per Walden University guidelines, all interviewees retain the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how leadership strategies influence employees' performance to meet organizational goals.

Interview Questions for Manager

1. How would you describe your leadership strategies?

Response:

Follow-up question: ____

Response:

2. What leadership strategies have you used in the past to improve employee performance?

Response:

Follow-up question: ____

Response:

3. What would you describe as a challenge to implementing strategies to improve employee performance?

Response:

Follow-up question: ____

Response:

4. How have you evolved your leadership strategies over time?

Response:

Follow-up question: ____

Response:

5. What leadership strategies do you intend to change?

Response:

Follow-up question: ____

Response:

6. What additional information would you like to share regarding your experience with leadership strategies?

Response:

Follow-up question: ____

Response:

I will transcribe your responses into a Microsoft Word document and then I will need to contact you so we can review my interpretation. Are you willing to participate in the member checking process?

Yes__ No__

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter for Study Participants

[Date]

Re: A Research Study That May Interest You

Dear [Name]:

My name is Letica Sellers and I am currently a graduate student at Walden University pursuing a doctoral degree in business administration (DBA). I am conducting research on how leadership strategies influence employees' performance entitled: "Leadership Strategies and Employee Performance Within Small Business." I am interested in conducting a study to explore what leadership strategies influence employees' performance.

I am seeking to interview managers' of a small business who fit the following criteria:

- Be a manager who has used leadership strategies to improve employee performance,
- Be in a management position at a manufacturing plant for at least 5 years,
- Manager must have at least 3 subordinates

I believe managers' who fit the criteria for this study could bring a unique perspective and understanding to this research. During the course of this study, I will conduct a face-to-face interview with the participant and review archival documents. At the end of this study, I will share results and findings with the participant, other scholars, and the business owner.

The individual, who met the above criteria and is interested in participating in this study, please contact me at letica.sellers@waldenu.edu. Participation in this study is voluntary.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Letica Sellers

Walden University DBA Student

Appendix C: Reminder E-mail for Recruitment of Study Participant

[Date]

Re: Reminder E-mail for Research Study Participation

Dear [Name]:

I previously sent you a request to participate in a research study I am conducting on understanding the impact leadership strategies have on employees' in the small business sector. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at letica.sellers@waldenu.edu as soon as possible.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Letica Sellers

Appendix D: Request to Schedule an Interview

[Date]

Re: Request to Schedule an Interview

Dear [Name]:

The purpose of this letter is to schedule an interview with you. I previously sent you a request to participate in the research study I am conducting on understanding the impact leadership strategies have on employees' in the small business sector. You have expressed your interest in participating, so I would like to take this opportunity to schedule a time and place for the interview.

Interviews can be conducted in your place of business at your convenience. The interview will take 90-100 minutes. The interviews will be recorded and you will be provided with a paper copy of the final transcript. As per Walden University guidelines, all interviewees retain the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

Once you review your schedule and determine your availability, please contact me at letica.sellers@waldenu.edu to schedule the interview.

Thank you.

Letica Sellers

Walden University DBA Student

Appendix E: Walden University DBA Student Interview Questions for Manager

1. How would you describe your leadership strategies?
2. What leadership strategies have you used to improve employee performance?
3. What would you describe as a challenge to implementing strategies to improve employee performance?
4. How have you evolved your leadership strategies over time?
5. What leadership strategies do you intend to change?
6. What additional information would you like to share regarding your experience with leadership strategies?

Appendix F: Walden University DBA Student Observation Protocol

Observation Protocol
Location/ Setting: ____
Individual observed: ______________________________________
Date/Time: ____
Start Time: ____
End Time: ____

Initial actions of manager when on the floor (description)
Notes: ____
____
____
____

Does the manager assist employees while on the floor □ Yes □ No
Notes: ____
____
____
____

Does the manager ask employees if assistance is needed □ Yes □ No
Were they able to assist? □ Yes □ No
Notes: ____
____
____
____

Is there any discussion of production issues? □ Yes □ No
Notes: ____
____
____
____

Does the manager observe the employees? □ Yes □ No
Notes: ____

Personal Comments:
Notes:

Describe the manager's routine
Notes:

Appendix G: Letter of Cooperation From a Research Partner

Community Research Partner Name
Contact Information

Date

Dear Letica Sellers,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Leadership Strategies and Employee Performance Within Small Business within the Insert Name of Community Partner. As part of this study, I authorize you to solicit managers with this organization to participate, conduct interviews, observe the manager during the work day for 4 hours, and review employee performance reviews, management assessments, and employee goals. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: allowing managers to participate, accommodate an interview location, and provide access to company documents. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official
Contact Information