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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Hicham Jaroudi

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Strategies for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Geoeconomic Crisis

by

Hicham Jaroudi

MS, Drexel University, 2001

BS, Drexel University, 1999

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2017

Abstract

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Lebanon are at risk of failure because of the geoeconomic crisis. The purpose of this single case study was to explore strategies that successful leaders of SMEs use to sustain their businesses during tenuous economic conditions. The target population for the research comprised 6 business leaders of SMEs in Beirut, Lebanon: 3 in the civil security field and 3 in the facilities management field. Kotter's change model theory provided the conceptual framework for this research. Data were gathered from company documents and interviews with SMEs leaders in Beirut. Data were analyzed using Yin's data analysis method, which included compiling the data, disassembling the data, reassembling the data, interpreting the meaning of the data, and concluding the data. Member checking and methodological triangulation were used to add consistency and rigor to the findings. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) leaders of SMEs embedded change management in their organizations to sustain their businesses, (b) leaders of SMEs increased awareness in their organizations, (c) leaders of SMEs succeeded in creating solid organizational and financial structures to ensure a sustainable cash flow, and (d) leaders of SMEs formed niche markets to grow. Leaders of SMEs achieved their strategies by (a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) forming a powerful guiding coalition by creating awareness in leaders' organizations, (c) empowering others to communicate both organizational and financial visions, and (d) generating short-term wins. The implications for positive social change include the potential to reduce unemployment rates and create new job opportunities by sustaining businesses of SMEs during tenuous economic conditions.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research to my wife and best friend, Lina, who sacrificed her career in education and personal life and held my hand throughout this doctoral journey. My two sons are my heroes, joy, and happiness, who always considered me as their superhero. I want to dedicate this research to my late father, who always encouraged and pushed me to reach the peak both professionally and academically. I want to take this opportunity to make a special dedication to Dr. Sami Mahroum, a friend and a mentor, who was an inspiration to me throughout this journey.

Acknowledgments

I probably cannot change the world, but I will try to change my world. I would like to thank my family and the very few who stood beside me throughout my hardship during this journey. I would also like to thank the Walden University faculty and staff who have supported me during the DBA process, especially my chair, Dr. Mohamad Hammoud, who motivated and inspired me to reach my goals and helped me look at things from a different perspective. I would like to thank my academic advisor, committee members, and the program director who made sure that I completed this program successfully.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been a critical factor for the success of the middle-class economy in Lebanon. For a long period, the Lebanese economy depended on SMEs, as they constitute 85% of Lebanon’s private sector, accounting for 1.05 million of 1.24 million jobs (Fahed-Sreih & Pistrui, 2012). However, SMEs in Lebanon are at risk of bankruptcy because of the lack of support from the government and restrictions of financial institutions (Ramady, 2014; Sardouk & Dorant, 2015).

The risks of failure of Lebanese SMEs in geoeconomic crisis are a composition of unemployment, limited human resources, and geoeconomic sentiments (Ramady, 2014). The economic crisis is diminishing job opportunities and economic growth in Lebanon, which is negatively affecting SMEs (Ministry of Economy and Trade [MoET], 2014). The success and failure of SMEs depend on business performance, which reflects the consequences of leadership and innovation. Lebanese SMEs are continuously facing challenges despite the initiatives the MoET is providing to support SMEs to overcome obstacles and mitigate risks (MoET, 2014). Unemployment, economic slowdown, loss of national competitiveness, and substantial brain drain are four pressing challenges facing Lebanese SMEs (El Khoury, 2013; MoET, 2014).

Problem Statement

Business leaders of SMEs in Lebanon face risks of failure because of geopolitical and economic unpredictability in the country (Sardouk & Dorant, 2015). These failures are significant, as SMEs constitute 85% of Lebanon's private sector, accounting for 1.05 million of 1.24 million jobs (Fahed-Sreih & Pistrui, 2012). The general business problem was that geopolitical and economic unpredictability in Lebanon negatively affects organizational bottom-line. The specific business problem was that some Lebanese leaders of SMEs lack strategies to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs use to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. The target population for this research comprised six business leaders of SMEs in Beirut, Lebanon, in the service industry—three in the civil security field and three in the facilities management field—who were demonstrating effective strategies to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. Leaders of SMEs, who were able to adopt effective strategies to sustain their businesses, were more likely to survive the current and unpredictable economic strains. Understanding the strategies of successful leaders positively affects unemployment by sustaining the current employment levels and possibly producing new career opportunities for fresh graduates and entrepreneurs. The knowledge of strategies of business leaders may reduce the migration of the skilled workforce, which tends to seek employment outside of the country.

Nature of the Study

I considered three methods of research for this research, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. When using a quantitative research method, the researcher uses variables and tests the statistical, objective information supporting the presence or absence of a phenomenon, relationships, or differences among variables (Anyan, 2013; Zohrabi, 2013). In my research, I did not seek to test a hypothesis; the quantitative method was not the right method. Mixed-method researchers focus on exploring matters, which relates to organizational problem solving, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative methods in the same research inquiry that can augment the validity and reliability of the data and their interpretation (Zohrabi, 2013; Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). The mixed-methods approach was not appropriate for the purpose of this research. Researchers in the mixed-method approach test variables against certain hypotheses included in the quantitative inquiry supporting the presence or absence of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Qualitative studies are the most logical and fitting choice when a researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon (Murshed, Murshed, Zhang, & Zhang, 2016). The appropriate choice that fit my research was a qualitative method because I was studying the phenomena associated with successful strategies of business leaders.

The qualitative research method encompasses the following designs: (a) ethnography, (b) phenomenology, and (c) case study (Gandy, 2015). Ethnography design encompassed real people at the level of small communities or individuals at the societal level. Ethnography has been often exploratory in using observations to construct the analysis from a bottom-up approach rather than top-down approach (Ghorbani, Dijkema,

& Schrauwen, 2015). According to Wilson (2015), phenomenological researchers address the lived experiences of participants to develop common themes within a particular phenomenon. I did not choose a phenomenological approach because I was not interested in the lived experience of Lebanese leaders, but in the in-depth study of a specific case. Case study research is a viable means of studying emerging ideas from multiple sources (Yin, 2014). Case study design is an in-depth study of a singular or multiple cases to gain experience and derivative perspectives of individuals and situations (Yin, 2014). Case study design is the most suitable design when using semistructured interviews and open-ended interview questions and drawing upon researchers' observations to provide meaning through patterns and themes within and from the phenomenon (Mariotto, Pinto Zanni, & De Moraes, 2014; Yin, 2014). The purpose of my research was to conduct an in-depth inquiry about strategies using multiple data sources and semistructured interviews. A case study was the best fit for the purpose of this research.

Research Question

The central research question was: What strategies did successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs use to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions?

Interview Questions

1. What were your business goals under tenuous economic conditions?
2. How did you execute and monitor your objectives as part of your business strategy under tenuous economic conditions?
3. What business strategies did you use to sustain your business during tenuous economic conditions in the country?

4. What business strategies did you use to employ effective leadership to your organization under tenuous economic conditions?
5. How did you proceed to implement your business strategies under tenuous economic conditions?
6. What barriers did you encounter to implement your business strategies under tenuous economic conditions?
7. How did you address the barriers to implement your business strategies under tenuous economic conditions?
8. How did you measure the effectiveness of your business strategies under tenuous economic conditions?
9. What other information would you like to share regarding business strategies that you developed to make you successful under tenuous economic conditions?

Conceptual Framework

I used Kotter's change model as the conceptual framework for my research. Kotter developed the change model theory in 1996 (Kotter, 1996). Appelbaum, Habashy, Malo, and Shafiq (2012), revisited Kotter's change model theory, and they developed current arguments and counterarguments supporting Kotter's classic change management model. Appelbaum et al. highlighted the eight fundamental concepts in their change model.

The eight concepts were as follows: (a) establishing a sense of urgency about the need to achieve change, (b) creating a guiding coalition, (c) developing a vision and strategy, (e) communicating the change vision, (f) empowering broad-based action, (g) generating short-term wins, (h) consolidating gains and producing more change, and (i) anchoring new approaches in the corporate culture. Kotter did not consider all the eight steps in the model necessary. None of the leaders in the workplace use a formal change management model when implementing a healthy workplace initiative (Chappell et al., 2016). As highlighted by Chappell et al. (2016), based on the change management model, some leaders have the perception that communicating the vision, developing the vision, and creating a guiding coalition are integral parts of the process, although there is less emphasis on the importance of creating a sense of urgency and consolidating change. Kotter's change model theory aligned well with my research because leaders of SMEs in Lebanon need particular strategies to sustain their businesses. Kotter's change model theory is a model of lasting change in organizations that has a positive effect on business sustainability and can have an indirect effect on social change (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1989).

Operational Definitions

Business incubators: Business incubators are effective for creating jobs and accelerating the growth of new ventures (Maraqa & Darmawan, 2016).

Business performance: Business performance is a combination of management and analytic processes, allowing managers and leaders of organizations to achieve their goals. Business performance changes in many factors, such as employment, financial turnover, and profits (Blackburn, Hart, & Wainwright, 2013).

Business transaction: A business transaction is a secure process in which business decision makers need prior authorization. This process could be as small as a financial withdrawal to as large as a joint venture with another company. This process could be a legal, financial, or commercial transaction (Venkatesan, Vijitha, & Karthikeyan, 2015).

Critical success factors (*CSFs*): Critical success factors (CSFs) are necessary factors in modern organizations to achieve organizations' missions and goals. By definition, organizations require a critical factor or activity for ensuring the success of a company or an organization. The critical factor or activity is a catalyst that helps business leaders manage and sustain stakeholder relationships as a fundamental cornerstone of partnership development (McLachlan et al., 2016).

Knowledge management (*KM*): Knowledge management (KM) is the process of creating, sharing, using, and managing the knowledge and information of an organization (Jennex, Smolnik, & Croasdell, 2016).

Small and medium-sized enterprises (*SMEs*): Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are businesses with 500 or fewer employees, depending on the industry. SMEs in Lebanon constitute 85% of Lebanon's private sector, accounting for 1.05 million of 1.24 million jobs (Fahed-Sreih & Pistrui, 2012). Consequently, small enterprises are businesses employing fewer than 100 workers and medium-sized enterprises are businesses employing between 100 and 500 workers (MoET, 2014).

Sustainability: Sustainability is an economic development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption is a principle that researchers consider accurate without verification (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013; Francis, 2014). I assumed that all participants were honest and provided information detailing the phenomena without intentionally introducing biased responses.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses that could affect the research (Yeatman, Trinitapoli, & Hayford, 2013). The primary limitation in this study was that the classification of the position of the business leaders as CEOs or general managers limited the research to a top-down perspective in the opinion of upper management. Another limitation was that I included only six participants, making my research limited to their experiences and feedback. Finally, the single case study is limited by the number of participants and SMEs; the responses may not be relevant to all SMEs.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the constraints or bounds of the scope of the research (Thomas, Silverman, & Nelson, 2015). A delimitation was that the extent of the research was limited to Beirut, the capital. Another delimitation was that the boundaries of the research were composed of interviewing business leaders, which included general managers and chief executive officers (CEOs).

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because I explored strategies that successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs used to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. I shared a summary of the findings with my participants, which assisted SME leaders (participants) to understand critical success factors (CSFs). Other business leaders can use the findings of this study to sustain their enterprises and provide potential skilled Lebanese workers' job opportunities to remain in their country. The goal is to provide information, which can contribute to a flourishing and stable economy in Lebanon (Tarhini, Ammar, & Tarhini, 2015).

Contribution to Business Practice

The results of my research may have a significant effect on business practices, including organizational strategies, processes, and procedures during business operations. The successful execution of an organization's strategy by SME leaders could reveal factors affecting organizational success (Srivastava, 2013). By providing such insights on sustainable strategies and procedures, less successful SME leaders enact similar strategies and practices in similar business conditions for catalyzing business success.

Implications for Social Change

Increasing the survival rate of troubled SMEs could reduce unemployment rates, sustain the current employment levels, produce new career opportunities for new graduates and entrepreneurs, and lead to financial development. Financial development contributes to economic growth in the country (Abosedra, Shahbaz, & Sbia, 2015).

Financial development plays a dynamic role in the country's economic stability and sustainability.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies that successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs used to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. I focused the literature review on four themes, which I supported by theories researchers used to interpret these themes and how the findings of one research supported or contradicted the findings of others and why.

I reviewed peer-reviewed articles, seminal books, dissertations, and government sources related to the research problem. The percentage of sources published in the period 2013 to 2017 was 97.96%. The percentage of the peer-reviewed sources was 88.16%. In this section, I review 105 peer-reviewed sources.

The primary sources of data were Walden University library (using databases such as ProQuest and EBSCOhost), Google Scholar, and other local and international resources. I retrieved articles from Science Direct, Emerald Management Journals, Sage, ABI/Inform Complete, and Business Source Complete/Premier. I focused the literature review on the following themes: *relevant theories*, *small and medium size enterprises* (*SMEs*), *family businesses*, *business incubators*, *critical success factors* (*CSFs*), *risks and challenges in SMEs*, *innovation and sustainability*, and *corporate social responsibility* (*CSR*).

Relevant Theories

Change management is becoming an increasingly significant topic for project management research and practice. The inclusion of stakeholder management as a tenth knowledge area in the *Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* is a general shift toward issues most commonly associated with change management in the normative project management literature (Rose, 2013). Researchers have showed in their studies that further integration exists between project management, change management, and organizational promptness for a change (Hornstein, 2015). Hornstein (2015) continued that the integration is an important feature in effective implementation of new policies, programs, and practices. Conversely, a lack of brief, dependable, and valid measures might occur regarding organizational promptness and change (Shea, Jacobs, Esserman, Bruce, & Weiner, 2014). Until researchers develop such measures, experts and researchers could not provide evidence-based direction for organizational leaders about how to increase readiness (Shea et al., 2014).

The relevance of the research to the project management community lies in developing an understanding of the nature of organizational change management. Pollack (2015) explored the change management literature and change managers' perspectives to test previous researchers' claims, in which a divide is possible between change management theory and practice. Kotter's model remains a fundamental reference in the field of change management (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Kotter (1996) emphasized the behavioral, cognitive, and affective responses to change. Kotter's model incorporates specific procedural recommendations and identifies the new behaviors desired (Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, & Do, 2016). Kotter's model explicitly focuses on how change context and process variables affect recipients' responses to change (Oreg et al., 2016). Oreg et al. (2016) continued that the predominant attention is toward the role of change agents in organizational change and change recipients, in which their experience is beginning to take center stage. Oreg et al. avowed that change agents provide practical guidance on issues that are essential tools to the success of change efforts.

Despite the variety of literature about change management, evidence shows that researchers are either not conducting relevant research to the practice of change management or are providing realistic data for practitioners without testing their effects (Pollack, 2015). Employee engagement in organizational change and development is an important human resource function of an organization (Sawitri & Muis, 2014). Pollack and Pollack (2015) examined the application of Kotter's process, in which the process remains more descriptive than critical. Kotter's eight-stage process of creating a significant change became the most popular model for transforming organizations and the most compelling recipe for change management success and mainstream wisdom about how to manage change (Pollack, 2015). Pollack (2015) continued that academic research has the potential to provide significant benefits to practitioners when distanced from practical implementation research, in which academic researchers have a unique opportunity to abstract from practice, bridging learning with practice environments. Without commitment and an integration process of change management practices, any association over a divide between theory and practice is unlikely (Pollack, 2015). Appelbaum et al. (2012) gathered information in support of Kotter's classic change management model of leading change. The initial steps require establishing a sense of urgency about the need to achieve change and creating a guiding association to carry out developing a vision and strategy (Appelbaum et al., 2012).

Owners of organizations must communicate their vision to encourage and empower those involved to develop a broad-based plan of action (Appelbaum et al., 2012). After achieving short-term wins and consolidating gains, which often produce more change, organizations integrate new approaches in their corporate culture (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). Researchers studying change management should form a link with stakeholders to translate current research into a usable format for practitioners (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Resistance to change has cumulative negative relationships with two important consequences: employees' commitment to the organization and perceptions of organizational success (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). Jones and Van de Ven (2016) continued that these relationships are becoming stronger rather than weaker, which suggests bad effects of resistance to change. Through time, transformation leadership has an increasing effect in minimizing change resistance. Engaging in supportive leaders' behaviors can be useful in amending resistance to change at later stages of a change initiative (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016).

The change process has evolved, resulting in two types of paradigms, traditional and modern paradigms (Bareil, 2013). The failure rate of implementation remained high for organizations. Resistance to change covers three broad categories: disagreement about the problem or solution, the implementation, and that the person initiating the process is the same person who implements the change (Umble & Umble, 2014). Experts at

McKinsey & Co. revealed that approximately 70% of all significant change initiatives in organizations fail (Hornstein, 2015). Despite the increase of studies, theories, and change management programs, the success rate has not improved (Umble & Umble, 2014). Similarly, executives know that the cost of failure is not just the waste of time, money, and the loss of opportunity (Bareil, 2013). The failure in change initiatives raises cynicism, kills motivation, and triggers withdrawal from involvement in future efforts (Bareil, 2013; Umble & Umble, 2014).

Almost every project initiative leads to small or large changes in the core organization (Kuster et al., 2015). Kuster et al. (2015) affirmed that innovation affects some of a company's business processes. Innovation leads to new operational structures, different organizational units, previous work becoming unnecessary, and defining services differently. Conversely, change leads people to alter their activities, behaviors, and attitudes. Project management approaches that concentrate purely on objective goals are typically not successful.

Change in response to the organizations' aging workforce introduces a knowledge management (KM) program focusing on the interpersonal aspects of knowledge retention (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). KM is a multidisciplinary approach (an enabler of organizational learning) referring to achieving organizational objectives by making the best use of knowledge (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). The four dimensions to measure KM success are (a) effect on business processes, (b) effect on KM strategy, (c) leadership/management support, and (d) knowledge content (Jennex et al., 2016). Although Kotter's model emphasizes a top-led model for change, the change team should engage at many levels of the organization to implement the organizational change (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). Managing change requires the change team to facilitate multiple concurrent instances locally relevant to participants in the change process (Umble & Umble, 2014).

The three steps of Kotter's eight-step model for managing organizational change are relevant to innovation. The three necessary steps, which complement Kotter's model of change, are creating a sense of urgency for a change, building a powerful guiding coalition, and establishing a clear and shared vision for the future (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Appelbaum et al. (2012) continued that the need for leaders to stay within the bounds of incremental innovation requires little change management, which enables leaders to innovate and move the organization forward.

Organization development is a phenomenon requiring strategies, processes, and long-term schemes, which entail efforts to improve the organizations' systems and internal and external environments (Creasey, Jamieson, Rothwell, & Severini, 2015). The two types of change, organization development (OD) and change management (CM), provide a common set of values and principles serving to unify the disciplines rather than promote divergence (Creasey et al., 2015). Creasey et al. (2015) concurred that individual employees make critically important contributions to the health and success of organizations during times of change. The two fundamental aspects of organizational development are adaptation to change by innovating and leadership, in which leaders of organizations must turn to a flexible and dynamic organizational structure and improve their organizational development (Zadeh & Ghahremani, 2016).

In OD, organizational culture ensured corporate success. Researchers identified many frameworks, including the process of creating organizational culture, the approach to organizational culture that leads to successful outcomes, and ways of using culture to create successful solutions to organizational problems (Kim, Jung, You, & Kim, 2015). The four types of OD involvements are human process intervention, techno-structural intervention, human resource management intervention, and strategic intervention (Zadeh & Ghahremani, 2016).

Managing change is more than a project; it is a mixture of initiative organizations' planning, staffing, delivering, and disbanding (Leach, Wandmacher, Ayres, & Gobran, 2013). Continuously, managing a portfolio of multiple and overlapping change initiatives is in need, which are challenging objectives (Leach et al., 2013). In some cases, leaders of enterprises might find it helpful to distribute change expertise across multiple business units and, in other cases, a global and centralized change management "center of excellence" may be more appropriate (Leach et al., 2013). The effectiveness of the change capabilities, such as strategic alliances, depends on choosing an organizational model, which is the right fit for how the enterprise operates (Harrigan, 2015).

Researchers revealed a conceptual integration of the dynamic capabilities perspectives to understand how firms adapt to discontinuous change (Birkinshaw, Zimmermann, & Raisch, 2016). Birkinshaw et al. (2016) posited that a universal set of dynamic capabilities is impossible to identify. The dynamic capabilities are a priority with three modes of adaptation: structural separation, behavioral integration, and sequential alternation. Conversely, the use of strategic alliances in affiliation to the three modes of adaptation triggers lasting industry changes (Birkinshaw et al., 2016; Harrigan, 2015). As strategic alliances are becoming more commonplace, leaders are learning to take their transformative powers for granted; they treat strategic alliances as another trait characterizing competitive behaviors with which they must cope for their firms to survive and thrive (Birkinshaw et al., 2016; Harrigan, 2015).

Few organizational change efforts tend to be complete failures, but others tend to be entirely successful, in which most efforts encounter problems; they often take longer than expected, as they sometimes kill morale, and they often cost much regarding managerial time or emotional upheaval (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1989). Effective leadership influences employees' behaviors toward organizations' commitments (Wallace, de Chernatony, & Buil, 2013). If a leader fosters an unhealthy workplace, employees would be most unacceptable to organizational change (Wallace et al., 2013).

Some organizations have not attempted to initiate changes because leaders of organizations are fearful they are unable of successfully implementing these changes in their organizations (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1989). In the modern economy, Kotter's change model would be most useful as an implementation-planning tool (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Complementary tools are also essential during the implementation process to adapt to circumstantial factors or obstacles. Kotter's change model theory is a model of lasting change in organizations that has a positive effect on businesses sustainability and can have an indirect effect on social change (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1989).

In summary, similar to Kotter's model, Bridges developed a three-stage individual transition process (Beatty, 2015). The primary stage is ending old identity/behavior in which one gives up one's former situation and identity. The next stage is a neutral zone of deconstruction and transformation, which is a challenging expedition through uncertainty and disagreement as people discovered new roles and functions. The final stage is a new beginning once people accept that the change is beneficial (Beatty, 2015). Lewin's model is a classic approach to managing change (Cummings, Bridgman, & Brown, 2015).

In Kotter's model, the first step in a successful change process is establishing a sense of urgency (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Kotter, 1996). This step is indicative of unfreezing in Lewin's model (Beatty, 2015; Cummings et al., 2015). Moving activities (Beatty, 2015; Cummings et al., 2015) in Lewin's model is equivalent to Kotter's five steps: creating the guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering broad-based action, and generating short-term wins (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Kotter, 1996). The final two steps in Kotter's model—consolidating gains and producing more change, and anchoring new approaches in the corporate culture (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Kotter, 1996)—are comparable to refreezing in Lewin's model (Beatty, 2015; Cummings et al., 2015). An important assumption underlying Kotter's model, leadership is critical to successful change management, in which the leader must champion the initiative by exhibiting the necessary behaviors to guide and motivate (Kotter, 1996). Table 1 illustrates four approaches to Kotter's eight-stage model. The development of change models in the course of 2 decades does not contradict Kotter's work.

Table 1

Comparison Between Kotter's Eight-Stage Model and Other Change Models

Kotter (1996)	Lewin (1947)	Bridges (1992)	Kanter, Stein, & Jick (1992)	Leucke (2003)
Establish a sense of urgency	Unfreeze	Ending (separate from the past)	Analyze the organization and its need for change Create a sense of urgency Separate from the past	Mobilize energy and commitment through the joint identification of business problems and solutions
Create the guidance coalition Develop a vision and strategy Communicate the change vision Empower broad-based action Generate short-term wins	Move	Neutral zone	Create a vision and a common direction Support a strong leader role Line up political sponsorship Craft an implementation plan Develop enabling structures Communicate, involve people, and make honest decisions	Develop a shared vision; how to organize and manage for competitiveness Identify leadership Start the change at the periphery, let it spread to other units without pushing it from the top Focus on results, not activities
Consolidate gains and produce more change Anchor new approaches in the culture	Refreeze	New beginning	Reinforce and institutionalize change	Institutionalize success through formal policies, systems, and structures Monitor and adjust strategies in response to problems in the change process

Note. Adapted from "Key Success Factors of Planned Change Projects," by Beatty, C. A., 2015, *Industrial Relationship Centre (IRC)*, p. 7. Copyright 2015 by IRC, Kingston, ON.

Naldi, Achtenhagen, and Davidsson (2015) introduced Stevenson’s theory. Despite globally increased attention on SMEs and entrepreneurship, researchers incur little knowledge about firm-level entrepreneurship on the SMEs level in international markets (Naldi et al., 2015). Naldi et al. applied the opportunity-based conceptualization of entrepreneurial management by Stevenson to international corporate entrepreneurship activities of SMEs. The different dimensions of Stevenson’s theory have a positive effect on SME international corporate entrepreneurship (Teece, 2016). In retrospect, the results appeared to be positive for some aspects of Stevenson’s theory (Naldi et al., 2015).

Battilana and Casciaro (2013) emphasized a rationale theory of how change agents in organizations who use the strength of ties in their network to overcome resistance to change. Battilana and Casciaro also contended that strong ties to potentially influential organization members who are resilient to change provide the change agent with an effective basis to co-opt them. The two major factors of the adaptation to change are communication and cooperation. The more that leaders deviate from change, the more that the advantages of strong ties to resistors accumulate into the change agent become weaker; this will yield into liabilities and risks decreasing the likelihood of change adoption (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1989).

I chose Kotter’s change model theory over the other concepts or theories, because the Kotter’s model is a model of lasting change in organizations (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Kotter, 1996). The model has a positive effect on business sustainability and can have an indirect influence on social change. Managing change in Kotter’s process is more flexible, because of the process, facilitating multiple concurrent instances throughout the organization. Kotter’s process re-creates change that is locally relevant to participants in the change process (Pollack & Pollack, 2015).

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

In most countries, SMEs constitute fewer than 500 employees and more than 250. In 2010, the small business, labor force consisted of 55 million employees in the United States (U. S. Small Business Administration, 2013). SMEs are essential in job creation, manufacturing of goods, and delivery of services (Karanja et al., 2013). No uniform international definition of an SME is available (Gilmore, McAuley, Gallagher, Massiera, & Gamble, 2013). In a review of 94 articles, Gilmore et al. reported, the size of the SME ranged from 10 up to 500 employees, in which micro and very small businesses are a subset within the SME category that can employ from one to 10 people. The United States Small Business Administration’s measures identified the size of the firm, which includes the number of employees and annual sales (U. S. Small Business Administration, 2014). Small enterprises are uniquely constrained, compared to big businesses and multinational enterprises (MNEs), because of the size and resource limitations (Anderson & Ullah, 2014). Some owners of SMEs remain small as a choice, choosing to benefit from their independence, flexibility, ability to make quick decisions and close relationships with their customers (Anderson & Ullah, 2014; Love & Roper, 2015).

In accordance with SMEs and employment rates, El Khoury (2013) illustrated some indicators of SMEs in various countries and how SMEs play a central role in enhancing economic dynamisms in job creation and innovation. SMEs worldwide, represent more than 95% of enterprises and employ around 68% of developed countries working population, in which their share of exports amounts to approximately 37%, and they contribute to approximately 53% to their countries' domestic gross product (GDP) (El Khoury, 2013). Lebanese SMEs' share represents 51% of the total workforce, which is an indicator Lebanese SMEs plays a significant role in job creation (El Khoury, 2013). El Khoury added more than 95% of the total enterprises in Lebanon contribute about 90% of the jobs, whereas Lebanese SMEs' share alone represents 51% of the total workforce.

Governments should promote and value SMEs because of their economic potential and benefits regarding job creation, efficiency, and growth, compared to large firms (El Khoury, 2013; Miniaoui & Schilirò, 2016). In retrospect, innovation and entrepreneurship are important factors that trigger economic development, boosting the economic growth rates and contributing to the degree of competitiveness (Chun, Hasan, Rahman, & Ulubaşoğlu, 2016). An optimal pace of business dynamics—encompassing the processes of entry, exit, expansion, and contraction—would balance the benefits of productivity and economic growth against the costs to firms and workers associated with the reallocation of productive resources (Decker, Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2014).

Similar to Lebanon, Kosovo's economy has a proactive approach to the development of SMEs for a sustainable fiscal development (Bajraktari, 2015). People do not notice anymore, small businesses as a major constituent of neither the business world, nor small enterprises as the main mainstay of their national economy (Bajraktari, 2015; Taylor & Taylor, 2014). SMEs could benefit from SMEs, small size relative to large enterprises or multinationals, in which SMEs are more flexible with their ability to change and reduce bureaucracy in a timely fashion (Taylor & Taylor, 2014).

Sok, O'Cass, and Miles (2015) discussed how SMEs must possess both resources and capabilities at a senior level. Consequently, resources and capabilities must be harmonious with one another to achieve superior long-term financial performance by leaders of companies (Sok et al., 2015). These resources and capabilities of interest are product innovation and marketing (Lonial & Carter, 2015). Some SMEs might outperform others by possessing a specific resource, such as competence, and by creating collaboration, interaction, and synergy (Sok et al., 2015).

Business leaders must retain and preserve their businesses by setting and maintaining the right direction and vision for their enterprises (Perry, 2014). Perry continued that business leaders of SMEs must have the willingness to collect, circulate, and scrutinize customer and competitor information forms, which is a fundamental basis for establishing and sustaining interactions with customers. One issue SMEs struggled with is marketing, in which marketing is a critical factor in SMEs because it creates revenue for SMEs through the sale of goods and services (Karanja et al., 2013; Resnick, Cheng, Simpson, & Lourenço, 2016). SMEs marketing are effective because they embrace some relevant concepts of traditional marketing, tailor activities to match its customers, and add its unique attribute of self-branding as bestowed by the SMEs' owners (Karanja et al., 2013; Resnick et al., 2016). Knowledge of consumers' needs and perceptions is important for leaders of SMEs is concerning innovation and branding strategizing on the organization's growth (Owolabi, 2013). Social implications include empowerment of organization leaders, marketing professionals with skills, and knowledge to solve consumer perceptual process, brand management, relevant brand attributes, repositioning approaches, and dynamic environment issues (Karanja et al., 2013; Owolabi, 2013).

SMEs are struggling to survive because of the immense pressure both globalization of the world's economy and the competition from giant multinationals are creating. When thinking of business, people automatically tend to envisage big corporations or blue-chip organizations, such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, IBM, Sony, Toyota, or BMW, which are symbols of the industrialized world of the modern society (Bajraktari, 2015). In contrast, leaders in the SME sector can attain a competitive advantage, compared to large organizations or multinationals (Navickas, Krajňáková, & Navikaite, 2015). Navickas et al. asserted that SMEs have four-fold objectives. Primarily, an objective is analyzing SMEs and their competitive advantage using an academic perspective. Another objective is examining the characteristics of SMEs from the theoretical point of view. An objective is investigating the elements of SMEs' competitive advantage to prove their paradigm shift via contemporary conceptual models. The final objective is monitoring of contemporary approaches such as customer satisfaction and applying it in the activities in SMEs to reach competitive advantage (Navickas et al., 2015). Pressures improve productivity and reduce costs during tenuous economic conditions, in which leadership and performance management have a more central role in helping to ensure competitive advantage in a turbulent economic climate (Hall & Rowland, 2016).

Market, entrepreneurial, and learning orientations individually improve firm performance (Lonial & Carter, 2015). Each of the orientations can enhance company success. Looking at these three orientations as the capabilities of SMEs, Lonial and Carter drew on the resource-based view of the firm based on a sample of 164 SMEs. The market, entrepreneurial, and learning orientations jointly give rise to positional advantage relating to the performance of SMEs (Lonial & Carter, 2015). On the other hand, from a market indicator perspective, the channels through which middle-class economies, such as Lebanon, (i.e., SMEs) may matter for consumption growth, as a market indicator (Chun et al., 2016). Using several different middle-class measures and a panel of 105 developing countries covering the period 1985-2013, middle class has significant effects on the consumption growth through a higher level of human capital accumulation (Chun et al., 2016).

As an encouragement for SMEs, banks are acting toward serving SMEs by providing facilities and programs to encourage SMEs in many ways, especially in developing economies, such as Lebanon. Bank Audi, a regional and international bank, headquartered in Beirut, released an e-commerce platform to guide Lebanese merchants' marketplace and to develop on a wider scale (Sankari, Ghazzawi, El Danawi, El Nemar, & Arnaout, 2015). In accordance with Bank Audi, Sankari et al. revealed, Bank Audi is promoting the idea for its individual clients. Bank Audi provides logistic alternatives through deals with Lebanese SMEs, which manage the transfer of merchandise from shop to customer or business to customer (B2C) (Sankari et al., 2015). On the other hand, banks in Lebanon need to understand and adapt the concept of Bank Audi and start targeting customer groups differently, especially SMEs, which will encourage economic growth and sustainability in the country' economy (Ameme, 2015).

Public-private partnership (PPP) is a current topic in theory and practice from the perspective of legislation and classical macroeconomic models (Petković, Djedović-Nègre, & Lukić, 2015). Petković et al. explored the significance of organizational design in a PPP is a necessity for SMEs. Without strong organization, coordination, rules, and corporate values, outcomes and initiatives tend to fail (Petković et al., 2015). Similar to Ameme (2015), Petković et al. noticed in a PPP, a contractual framework and creation of a special purpose company is necessary for business mentalities. Inter-organizational relations require an organizational architecture, which determines who, what, how and by when to deliver resources (Ameme, 2015; Petković et al., 2015).

SMEs play a substantial role in certain economies with a significant contribution to achieving their gross domestic product (GDP) (Lanvin & Evans, 2015). Most SMEs are much more flexible in adapting organizational strategies to the conditions the external business environment imposes (Nicolau, 2015). Nicolau highlighted the implementation of the right strategies and the entrepreneurial behavior within SMEs will eventually lead to the market at large and to an upsurge in the business volume and consequently to an increased turnover.

SMEs are the major source of economic development in industrial countries and developing economies (Bush, 2016). SMEs are a paradigm for job creation (Wright, Roper, Hart, & Carter, 2015). SMEs are fundamental in most of the world's economies, in which internationalization offers many strategic benefits to SMEs (Onkelinx, Manolova, & Edelman, 2016). The investment in the human capital of the entire organization pays off when investment calibrates carefully with the chosen internationalization strategy (Onkelinx et al., 2016). SMEs are significant because they constitute a large portion of employment in many regions' economies (Miniaoui & Schilirò, 2016).

Family Businesses

Researchers thoroughly examined issues related the sustainability of family businesses (Susanto & Susanto, 2015). Susanto and Susanto continued that the life cycle of family businesses undergoes four phases of growth: (a) developing phase, (b) managing phase, (c) transforming phase, and (d) sustaining phase. Susanto and Susanto asserted how family businesses have failed before reaching the sustaining phase because they are unable to generate the right organizational structure, develop the right human resource policy, and envision the most successful method for their future. Another factor contributing to family businesses failing during the transforming phase relates to owners' resistant to change (Bizri, 2016). Bizri posited that the resistance to change is because of a comfort zone with the current situation or outdated mentalities.

Family businesses might hinder change because of the threat it poses to harmonious relationships between businesses (Bizri, 2016; Susanto & Susanto, 2015). Bizri (2016) explored this process while focusing on the drivers behind the choice of the successor and the impact of this choice on the entrepreneurial behavior of siblings. Similarly, Salloum, Bouri, Salloum, and Suissa (2016) chose quantitative analysis to demonstrate the relationship between outside directors and financial performance in unlisted family-oriented firms. Leaders of SMEs, entrepreneurs, and regulators, could build upon their expertise to implement better corporate governance practices to augment the growth and affluence of family businesses (Bizri, 2016). From 322 Lebanese firms covering the period 2008-2010, using regression analysis, profitability of family-oriented SMEs depended on the percent of outside directors only in second and later generations (Salloum et al., 2016). Salloum et al. continued in the first generation, the replacement of an inside director by an outsider has no significant impact on performance; the second generation using outsiders shows effectiveness in governance mechanism and had a major impact on performance.

Fahed-Sreih and Pistrui (2012) discussed the family businesses, revealing evidence, and supportive data on how entrepreneurship is a core driver in their operation. In many cases, second-generation businesses do not survive because of the lack of knowledge of methods to keep the company running (Fahed-Sreih & Pistrui, 2012; Salloum et al., 2016). Family activities are a source of job creation in Lebanon and contribute to the growth of the economy, where the market allocates resources via supply and demand (Fahed-Sreih & Pistrui, 2012). A study by the MoET revealed that Lebanese SMEs have significant hereditary and a family-centered approach to owning and managing businesses (MoET, 2014). As such, many SMEs retain their capital base closed to remain small family-run businesses rather than large family-owned corporations (MoET, 2014; Salloum et al., 2016). Despite many job creations and the increase in the GDP post-civil war, family businesses are among the only organizations capable of supporting entrepreneurial undertakings in Lebanon (Fahed-Sreih & Pistrui, 2012; Salloum et al., 2016).

There are ways to enrich corporate governance regarding privately held family firms in an emerging economy with inadequate legislative and enforcement framework (Azoury & Bouri, 2015). Azoury and Bouri demonstrated in a sample of 288 privately held family firms from Lebanon, in which they found the inequality between cash flow and voting rights of the controlling shareholders increased self-dealing performance or behavior in doing business. Despite family businesses play an important role in all economies, leaders of family businesses often use technological innovation to nurture their competitive advantage (De Massis, Frattini, Pizzurno, & Cassia, 2015). De Massis et al. examined how and why the anatomy of the product innovation process differs between family and non-family firms. As a result, family businesses differ from non-family businesses in product innovation strategies and organization of the innovation process (Azoury & Bouri, 2015; De Massis et al., 2015).

Memili, Fang, Chrisman, and De Massis (2015) examined the significance of family business studies and the knowledge-based view of economic growth in respect to family-oriented businesses. Memili et al. highlighted a model demonstrating the pervasiveness of SMEs under family control, which affects economic growth. The new ideologies regarding inverted U-shaped relationship between family SMEs and economic growth underlies the controversy that growth reaches its peak when a balance exists between a mixture of family and non-family SMEs (Memili et al., 2015; Salloum et al., 2016). Memili et al. (2015) conducted their research from the perspective of the agency, resource-based view, and resource dependence theories. Memili et al. used a survey data from 369 Spanish families SMEs, in which their findings revealed the inverted U-shaped relationship between the proportion of outsiders on the boards of first and second-generation family firms and firm performance. A stable presence of outside directors contributes to value creation in family SMEs, in which the composition and the roles of the board of directors differ from generation to generation in family businesses (Memili et al., 2015).

Family CEOs' political involvement strengthens the relationship with minority shareholders (Bakar, Ahmad, & Buchanan, 2015). On the other hand, the equity ownership of private equity firms in Lebanon acts as a monitoring body; they protect the minority shareholders and conserve their rights (Azoury & Bouri, 2015). Bakar et al.'s (2015) results were not limited to Lebanon, in which these advantages could be transferable to other Middle Eastern countries. The public and private sectors are joining efforts to customize codes of corporate governance in unlisted family firms to promote foreign investment, which is a good incentive (Bakar et al., 2015; De Massis et al., 2015).

Business Incubators

Business incubators are effective in the creation of job opportunities and the acceleration of new ventures (Maraqa & Darmawan, 2016). Maraqa and Darmawan concurred that in Lebanon, business incubators are essential tools, acting as catalysts for the successful development of young entrepreneurs. Although the basic concept of business incubation remains valid, there have been several enhancements to their capabilities to improve their economic drivers (Maraqa & Darmawan, 2016). Developing countries support the concept of business incubators as a part of their national innovation system and economic sustainability (Jamil et al., 2016). Jamil et al. continued that the rapid expansion of business incubators in Asia and the Arab world is a critical phenomenon affecting the economic growth in those countries. Business incubators play a significant role to help governments and local authorities shape future policies for the incubation industry, entrepreneurs, and economic development among Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries (Jamil et al., 2016; Maraqa & Darmawan, 2016).

Business incubators could be effective tools for the success of new or existing companies (Hugh, 2015). Business incubators enable the creation and growth of business enterprises (Jamil et al., 2016). In the modern economy and globalization, entrepreneurial enterprises and SMEs are joining business incubators to receive assistance in running their organizations and developing new techniques to sustain their corporations (Jamil et al., 2016). The assistance might include consulting services, which help business owners of SMEs operate in the short-term using training facilities enabling them to sustain themselves in the long-term (Hugh, 2015).

Business incubators, as part of the developmental business life cycle, enable stability of the business units in the long-term (Zaporozhtceva, Agibalov, & Tkacheva, 2015). Business incubators are a special form of commercial establishments in modern economies (Zaporozhtceva et al., 2015). Zaporozhtceva et al. continued, business incubation is a framework for modern enterprise composition contributing to modern organizations in formulating an independent reference point for steady development. Business incubators could help companies overcome different problems while minimizing risks in the future (Hugh, 2015). The infrastructure of economic security within an organization guarantees the stability of growth at each stage of the development life cycle (Zaporozhtceva et al., 2015). Business incubators need state-of-the-art services in an entrepreneurship ecosystem (EE) were many elements interact, in which business service provision by incubators is a revolutionary and vibrant process when carried out in an open, innovative context (Fernández, Blanco Jiménez, & Cuadrado Roura, 2015). Patterns of service provision according to ownership, size, and partnership of the business incubators, shows the usefulness of the collaboration with private, public sectors, and universities (Fernández et al., 2015).

Business incubators have an impact on firms' survival by comparing and variables (Mas-Verdú, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Roig-Tierno, 2015). Using a comparative configuration method, namely fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), Mas-Verdú et al. questioned whether the survival of businesses depended on innovation, size, sector, and export activity. Business size is a requisite condition for firms to sustain themselves. Researchers concluded that business incubators alone affect the survival of organizations (Fernández et al., 2015; Mas-Verdú et al., 2015). Fernández et al. and Mas-Verdú et al. concurred that governments need to improvise, implement, and facilitate technological innovation and entrepreneurship development to set a platform for future generations. The business incubation system establishes how local, national, and regional economies could create employment opportunities and contribute to SMEs development (Mehmood et al., 2015). Mehmood et al. focused on business incubators as economic development tools for Pakistan, in which other countries can benefit from their learnings. The outcomes could become measuring tools to monitor success factors and shortcomings of the incubation systems (Mehmood et al., 2015).

Critical Success Factors

Parmenter (2015) developed a procedure for identifying the CSFs of an organization in four steps, including documenting the already identified success factors, determining the CSFs in a workshop, presenting CSFs, and explaining the efficiency of CSFs to employees. Similarly, Kemayel (2015) identified factors that affect business CSFs for SMEs in Lebanon using the contingency approach, in which business leaders use the CSFs to measure satisfaction by checking two criteria of essence: financial criteria (the evolution of profitability, turnover, and the cash flow) and marketing criteria (evolution of customers' satisfaction).

Three main factors are essential in the interaction between employees and CSFs (Schlosser, 2015). The primary factor is how to identify and differentiate employees from owners of SMEs and other employees. The secondary factor is how employees' characteristics influence firms' CSFs. The final factor is how employees typically correspond to key success factors (KSFs) of SMEs and their willingness to undertake a moderate amount of risk and differ in education and experience from the entrepreneur or owner of SMEs (Schlosser, 2015). SMEs' characteristics, leaders' characteristics, and ways of doing business (as internal factors affecting the performance) are primary elements (Kemayel, 2015). Camel divided external factors into two measures: (a) the proximity environment, which consists of market share, customer, suppliers, competitors, and relationship with employees and bank's investment environment; and (b) national priorities.

In a study focused on KM and knowledge-based economies, the competitive advantage of leaders of SMEs lies in their ability to drive their businesses in innovative ways (ALAmeri, 2015). In theory, CSFs lead to the improvement in customer relationship management (Nazari, Sarafraz, & Amini, 2016). Nazari et al. performed a statistical analysis indicating the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables as an individual. As a result, all CSFs of KM have a positive effect on customer relationship management (Schlosser, 2015). When interacting with KSFs of KM, customer relationship management is increasing (Nazari et al., 2016; Schlosser, 2015).

Risks and Challenges in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Challenges facing SMEs are a combination of less controllable internal and external factors arising from personal attributes, technical skills, management competencies, and behavior of the owner-entrepreneur influences the chances of growth of entrepreneurship (Karanja et al., 2013). Karanja et al. continued that motives vary from those factors, which "pull" someone into starting their own business such as the search for independence to those who "push" an individual into self-employment such as the lack of employment alternatives. On the other hand, Arab countries are facing many challenges in doing business transactions and making investment decisions (Haidar & Larbi, 2016). Haidar and Larbi considered factors such as the quality of human capital and skills, access to finance for SMEs, quality of infrastructure services, and logistics and cross-border trade facilitation. Another important policy concern, which is relevant for Arab countries and particularly developing countries such as the case of Lebanon, is the growing obstacles SMEs are facing (Haidar & Larbi, 2016). Most new or existing SMEs either are on the verge of disappearing after a few years of operation or remain small with one or two employees (Kaousar Nassr & Wehinger, 2014). Despite SMEs play an important role in employment creation and manufacturing of goods and provision of services, the failure rate of SMEs is high because of the many challenges they encounter (Karanja et al., 2013).

Two major factors are important when it comes to economic growth and financial stability during geoeconomic crisis: (a) reducing SMEs debts could increase SMEs resilience during financial instability, socioeconomic, and geoeconomic crises, and (b) reducing bank dependence in financing SMEs contributes to economic growth and job creation (Kaousar Nassr & Wehinger, 2014). Kaousar Nassr and Wehinger (2016) also emphasized how public equity financing complements market-based finance for SMEs. Kaousar Nassr and Wehinger (2016) continued that no “silver bullet” for SMEs’ finance is available, which is exceptionally complex, because of SMEs diversity. Despite the significance of SMEs to the national economies of many countries, they face significant failure rates compared to larger enterprises (Cant, Wiid, & Kallier, 2015). The development of this market segment could promote investment in SMEs. Despite the benefits of public SMEs’ equity, its share is small, and a gap exists for risk financing (Kaousar Nassr & Wehinger, 2016; Trianni, Cagno, Marchesani, & Spallina, 2016). Some important barriers to the wider use of public equities for SMEs exist, such as admission cost and listing requirements, lack of liquidity, educational gaps, limited ecosystems, and tax treatment (Trianni et al., 2016). Trianni et al. continued that all these issues require attention by regulators and policy makers, in which leaders of SMEs need to recalculate and re-evaluate their strategies as far as risks and challenges considering the lack of innovation is a fundamental challenge.

Data transparency, standardization, and regulatory support are raising awareness about available financing options in developing countries and emerging markets (Kaousar Nassr & Wehinger, 2014). Given the importance of SMEs, more focus on how leaders understand and respond to the economic and financial crisis is relevant (Peris-Ortiz, Fuster-Estruch, & Devece-Carañana, 2013). SMEs are important to economies during a crisis because they sustain economic stability in those countries during the crisis. Financial recovery is important to regain strength if leaders maintain an entrepreneurial attitude in financial and economic crises (Peris-Ortiz et al., 2013). Leaders of SMEs and entrepreneurs, as job creators, should consider sustainable strategies for the longevity of their SMEs.

Lebanese SMEs are continuously facing challenges despite the initiatives the MoET is providing resources to support SMEs to overcome obstacles and mitigate risks (MoET, 2014). According to El Khoury (2013), four pressing challenges are facing Lebanese SMEs. Primarily, a pressing challenge is unemployment, which indicates 45% of the Lebanese population is young, in which Lebanon will need to create 23,000 jobs per year (six times more) to absorb the new entrants to the labor market. The unemployment is 11%, 35% among the youth (1 out of 3). Another pressing challenge is an economic slowdown, which shows the economic slowdown is 1.5-2% in 2012 and 2% in 2013 (El Khoury, 2013). A pressing challenge is the loss of national competitiveness, which indicates the increasing operational and production costs and depleting infrastructure (El Khoury, 2013). Finally, a pressing challenge is a brain drain, which demonstrates a high rate of youth skilled immigration and generates losses to the economy (El Khoury, 2013; MoET, 2014). Lebanon ranks 120 out of 144 countries in the world in brain drain losses, according to the Global Competitiveness Index (El Khoury, 2013). Similarly, Fahed-Sreih and Pistrui (2012) affirmed geoeconomic factors are a major challenge for many businesses. Lebanon went through an inimitable experiment to sustain many SME businesses despite the lack of support from financial institutes. According to a study by Fahed-Sreih and Pistrui, Lebanon scored low on measures of economic performance because of the instability regarding the political and geoeconomic crisis.

Innovation and Sustainability

Business leaders should integrate innovation into their business models, which plays an integral role in the survival and growth of SMEs (Saunila, 2016). Saunila presented a framework for improving innovation capability through performance measurement in SMEs. By improving innovation capability through performance measurement, practitioners could enhance their innovation capability by measurement and by taking better account of different situations (Peris-Ortiz et al., 2013). By integrating innovation capability to the core business, SMEs can easily cope with the increasing need for innovation as an asset of their business performance (Saunila, 2016).

Saunila continued that business leaders using innovative solutions should consider the three major components: idea, adoption, and implementation, in which some business leaders use innovative solutions as part of their mission to gain and sustain competitive advantage.

How to manage value creation and how to maximize the potential of collaborations are challenging issues in the management of cross-sector collaborations (Grudinschi, Hallikas, Kaljunen, Puustinen, & Sintonen, 2015). One strategic tool for addressing these areas of concern is value network mapping serving as the starting point of value network analysis, which maximizes innovations by imitating stronger value creation links with strategic partners (Grudinschi et al., 2015). Grudinschi et al. asserted to design and implement a method for value network mapping would increase the understanding of how to create new values in cross-sector collaborations. Figure 1 shows how every sector perceived benefit and how every sector links to the network.

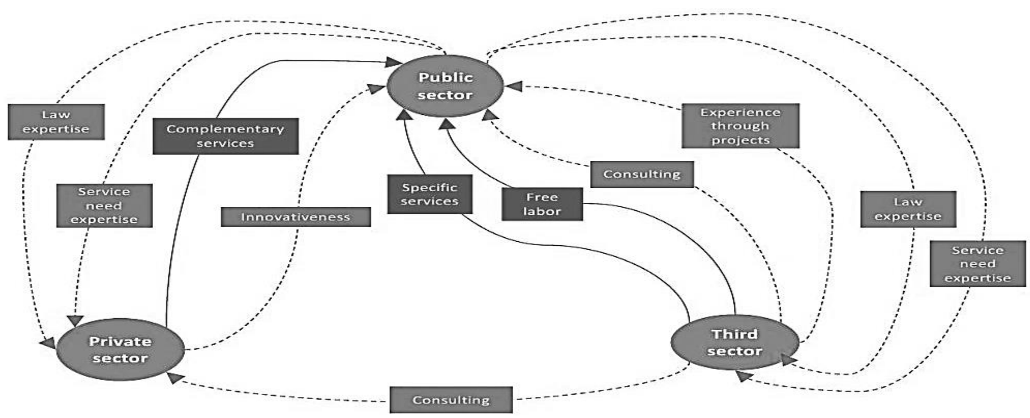

Figure 1. Current Value Network Map. Adapted from "Creating value in networks: A value network mapping method for assessing the current and potential value networks in cross-sector collaboration," by D. Grudinschi, J. Hallikas, L. Kaljunen, A. Puustinen, S. Sintonen (2015), The Innovation Journal, 20(2), p. 14. Copyright (2015) by Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost. Reprinted with permission.

In the modern, dynamic economic environment, facing complex socioeconomic and geoeconomic problems, cross-sector collaborations are continuously increasing. Despite efforts to develop innovative and robust methods for effective management and value creation within the context of cross-sector partnerships, this remains a challenge (Grudinschi et al., 2015). On the other hand, with evidence on innovation, exportation, and growth, environments' enablers play an important role in internal and external environments in the growth of SMEs, which will have a direct impact on the country's economy (Love & Roper, 2015). The challenges related to geoeconomic factors in the Arab regions generate employment, promote inclusive growth, and improve competitiveness (Nasr & Rostom, 2013). Nasr and Rostom underlined the main issues in the region are the development of sustainable growth in relationship to creating jobs and opportunities. Competitive factors in the private sector prove to be effective in the long-term (Love & Roper, 2015; Nasr & Rostom, 2013).

SMEs' leaders should interlink strategies and policies for the creation of productive employment resulting in the endorsement of economic and sustainable growth (Hao-Chen, Mei-Chi, Lee-Hsuan, & Chien-Tsai, 2013). Similarly, the core dynamics and fundamental issues in the Arab region are to change the mentalities of business owners (Nasr & Rostom, 2013). Leaders and owners of SMEs should consider lobbying to convince financial institutions and government sources to assist and support them in developing SMEs through awareness programs and government initiatives (Hao-Chen et al., 2013; Nasr & Rostom, 2013).

Different approaches using a conceptual framework design that can practically help sustainability-oriented innovation (SOI) methods and techniques become useful strategies leaders of SMEs can easily incorporate into their organizational strategies and roadmaps (Adams, Jeanrenaud, Bessant, Denyer, & Overy, 2015). In the same context, although progress toward sustainable development has been slow in the past decade, sustainable development (economic, environmental, and social development) meets present needs and does not prevent future generations from accomplishing their goals (Baumgartner & Rauter, 2016). The only way to create a sustainable business is to stay ahead of the competition and concentrate on building up the firm's reputation and cultural value even before immediate profit calculations (Tolhurst, 2015).

Sustainability and innovation are a combination, which can turn around SMEs' values and philosophies into progressive changes for the improvement of products, methodologies and procedures to serve a purpose, and growth and development of SMEs (Adams et al., 2015). Adams et al. avowed that the combination of sustainability and innovation is also beneficial for realizing social change, which results in profitability. Similarly, implementing innovative sustainability strategies in SMEs is often a significant challenge (Pate & Wankel, 2014). The ability to have a high level of innovative performance is essential in competitive global markets, particularly for SMEs (Adams et al., 2015; Pate & Wankel, 2014).

Permaculture concepts, which is an alternative to the western traditional management models to re-echo innovation as essential to sustainability (Vitari & David, 2017). Vitari and David posited that the Permaculture concept leads societies and businesses into an ecologically sustainable and economically responsibility status. Alternatively, there is no statistical significance between collaboration for innovation and sustainable performance (Kuhl, da Cunha, Maçaneiro, & da Cunha, 2016). In a study related to business sustainability, innovation is crucial to sustainability, in which SMEs shall invest in employees' training rather than research and development (Ketata, Sofka, & Grimpe, 2015).

SMEs should face their challenges in pursuit of innovation in products and services (Gupta & Gupta, 2014). Gupta and Gupta emphasized that the three innovation types are product, management, and process. Those types of innovation will engage leaders of SMEs in production and management innovation; as a result, leaders will accept change with positivity (Gupta & Gupta, 2014). Hao-Chen et al. (2013) introduced new innovative business models, which examine the effects of communication on organizational commitment. With the right leader, language in communicating with a meaningful purpose would have an impact on building workplace performance (Murphy & Clark, 2016).

Business model innovation involves four components: change in the customer value proposition, profit formula redesign, verification of resources, and adjustment of processes (Gupta & Gupta, 2014; Hao-Chen et al., 2013). Similarly, researchers defined sustainability as economic development, which meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to attain success (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014). Epstein and Buhovac asserted that corporate sustainability or corporate sustainability performance includes economic growth, environmental protection, and social progress. A strategic alliance is another option for SMEs business owners, in which researchers defined it as a long-term agreement to endorse businesses to sustain competitive advantage (Mitchell & Canel, 2013). Mitchell and Canel emphasized that strategic alliances allow SMEs to enhance technical and operational resources and reach a wider audience without additional time and capital. As SMEs' business leaders continue to face economic challenges, the potential to collaborate with other businesses to form alliances may become an option for sustainability (Mokhtar, 2013). On the other hand, the failure rates of a business strategic alliance range between 50% and 60% (Mitchell & Canel, 2013). Strategic Alliance has potential cost savings in executing operations, seeking the best quality, and finding inexpensive labor (Mokhtar, 2013).

Baumgartner and Rauter (2016) viewed strategic management from a sustainability perspective, encouraging the integration of sustainability issues into corporate activities and strategies. Baumgartner and Rauter asserted that the three dimensions are namely, strategy process, strategy content, and strategy context. A strong synergy exists between strategic management and sustainable development, which plays a significant role in the development and growth of organizations (Baumgartner & Rauter, 2016). Similarly, the relationship between organizational learning, innovation culture, and performance leads to a conceptual framework to assist SMEs structure their business strategies and practices to keep the alignment intact with the dynamic market (Abdul Halim et al., 2015). Abdul Halim et al. avowed that although some entrepreneurs perceive sustainability and innovative cultures as difficult to foster, they serve as a primary trend, shaping the performance of entrepreneurs toward generating new ideas, knowledge, and skills.

Business and social sustainability are essential elements regarding SMEs organizational development growth (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014; Pate & Wankel, 2014). The survival and success in the turbulent challenging environment depend on competitiveness, in which the capabilities to innovate shape the competitive success of organizations (Rizea, 2015). Innovation is one of the main drivers of sustainable competitive advantage, which shows how innovation leads to sustainability (Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). SMEs are facing challenges using strategic innovation to achieve long-term sustainability and viability, including how those strategies can overcome innovation barriers (Taneja et al., 2016).

SMEs serve as the economic foundation for many nations because they stimulate innovation, provide jobs, foster competitiveness, and support economic growth (Taneja et al., 2016). SMEs can rapidly adapt to change, adopt new strategies, and provide the flexibility, which supports strategic innovation (Pate & Wankel, 2014). Globally, leaders of SMEs strive to use strategic innovation to strengthen their competitive capabilities imposing a strong influence on economic growth and creating opportunities, employment, and technological development (Pate & Wankel, 2014; Taneja et al., 2016).

The role of learning orientation between transformational leadership and creativity, promotes followers’ creativity (Jyoti & Dev, 2015). A relationship exists between transformational leadership and different organizational levels and performance (Boehm, Dwertmann, Bruch, & Shamir, 2015). Management should invest in transformational leadership training for supervisors and team leaders, or use personality testing to screen for high-caliber candidates, who have a high potential of becoming a transformational leader (Jyoti & Dev, 2015; Taneja et al., 2016). Leadership is the most important contextual factor in shaping team performance (Pandey, Davis, Pandey, & Peng, 2015). Followers emulate leader behaviors, which generate a shared team regulatory orientation that influences team performance (Pandey et al., 2015). Transformational leadership has a direct influence (infusing) and an indirect influence (convincing others) on employee use of public values in organizational decision-making (Owens & Hekman, 2015).

The characteristics of a transformational leader yield positive results in the form of creativity, in which managers and leaders can use to generate sustainable competitive advantages for their organizations (Jyoti & Dev). Similarly, when determining the reasons why SMEs can innovate while most cannot, the role of an effective transformational leader is to build a community that is willing and able to innovate continually over time (Hill, Brandeau, Truelove, Sal, & Lineback, 2014; Jyoti & Dev, 2015). Hill et al. (2014) identified three organizational capabilities. The primary capability is collaboration using creative abrasion to create a productive debate and tension within the organization. Another capability is creative swiftness using a repeatable discovery-driven learning process to foster investigation using looped-back learning from stakeholders and customers. Finally, a capability is the ability to integrate organizational decision-making with guidance from the top management teams (TMT) to arrive at optimal solutions (Hill et al., 2014).

Comparing leadership theories with other theories, scholars use transformational leadership as a method of leadership where the leaders recognize the necessary change, generate a vision to guide the change through motivation, and execute the change with the commitment of the group or team members (Zeb, Saeed, Ullah, & Rabi, 2015). Zeb et al. explained that transformational theory is a theory that allows leaders focus on the interest of their followers, in which leaders provide their followers proper counseling regarding awareness, recognition, and motivation keeping them motivated over their self-interest. Transformational and effective or efficient leaders both have common factors; they can develop an environment of trust and creativity, in which they can bring a desirable change in organizational performance (Zeb et al., 2015). Effective or efficient leadership are potential sources of management development that sustain competitive advantage and organizational performance (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1989; Zeb et al., 2015).

Corporate Social Responsibility

Tolhurst (2015) highlighted how innovation, marketing, and CSR are company strategies for SMEs. Tolhurst emphasized that SMEs do not have to have a CSR department so to speak, but shall integrate CSR to the broad strategy of SMEs; leaders shall encompass CSR thinking within their business model. CSR in the context of SMEs has become an important and substantial area of study for some time (Vo, Delchet-Cochet, & Akeb, 2015). Vo et al. highlighted what makes SMEs integrate CSR into their business strategy, which triggers that CSR can bring competitive advantage. Economic, social, and environmental motives in driving SMEs is causing CSR to play an integral role in SMEs' strategic planning and routine operational performance (Panwar, Nybakk, Hansen, & Pinkse, 2016). Those motives enable SMEs gain a competitive edge by differentiating themselves from their competition (Panwar et al., 2016). CSR continues to grow in family businesses, in which leaders are using CSR to avoid the cost of managerial discretion (Martínez-Ferrero, Rodríguez-Ariza, & García-Sánchez, 2016). CSR represents a commitment by a workplace to behave ethically and contribute the new development of an organization (Panwar et al., 2016).

Although CSR focuses more on multinational corporations (MNCs), CSR is becoming an interest and concern to SMEs as suppliers to international companies. While SMEs are an important player in the global economic development, their contributions to CSR are only just starting to gain momentum in developing countries (Lund-Thomsen, Jamali, & Vives, 2014). The momentum applies to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the face of the daunting challenges and tenuous geoeconomic and political crisis. Lund-Thomsen et al. supported the idea that CSR in SMEs in developing countries is drawing on the insights from three streams of literature relating to institutional theory, critical perspectives on CSR in developing countries, and the literature on CSR and SMEs in the developing world. Similarly, the relationship between CSR and financial performance in the context of SMEs indicates a significant, but a weak positive relationship between CSR and financial performance (Jain, Vyas, & Chalasani, 2016). Although SMEs are socially responsible toward their different stakeholders, CSR is not a part of their strategy; rather, an informal and self-driven approach (Jain et al., 2016).

In many cases, SMEs emphasize economic survival over voluntary social and environmental initiatives; the economic motive is the most important driver of CSR integration into business strategy (Vo et al., 2015). Because of the owner-centric characteristics of SMEs, the owner tends to integrate CSR into the business strategy primarily for social and environmental motives (Vo et al., 2015). Economic motive plays a less important role than the social and environmental roles in driving the integration of CSR into SMEs business owners' strategies and corporate policies (Jain et al., 2016; Vo et al., 2015). Both Jain et al. and Vo et al. agreed with their strong "green attitude" and their particularly close relationship with the local community.

The United Nations and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is helping SMEs in developing countries achieve certain management tools and initiatives aimed at promoting CSR in SMEs (Lund-Thomsen et al., 2014). These tools will accord attention to contextual differences and specific individualities of institutional environments in developing countries. Donor agencies could develop such tools in a bottom-up fashion by first mapping the silent CSR practices of SMEs in developing countries, strengthening existing CSR activities in SMEs instead of trying to impose new priorities from the outside (Lund-Thomsen et al., 2014). Embracing CSR practices result in cost savings through energy efficiency enhancements and new business opportunities through innovation (Williams & Schaefer, 2013). CSR is relevant to SMEs because CSR is simply the "right thing to do" (Vo et al., 2015). CSR, sustainability, and corporate citizenship appear to have the most in common, in which

SMEs use them frequently (Carroll, 2015). Other ideas and frameworks are always coming along serving as complementary or competing notions.

Concerning motivation and employees' satisfaction, CSR is gaining momentum in both academic and business circles (Vlachos, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2013). CSR can provide to both academic and business circles a desirable change regarding organizational performance (Vlachos et al., 2013; Zeb et al., 2015). CSR initiatives (intrinsic and extrinsic CSR-induced attributions) have a significant effect on employees, which, influence employee job satisfaction (Vlachos et al., 2013). The significance of CSR in the partnerships between businesses (BUS) and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) is an increasingly prominent element of CSR implementation (Del Baldo, 2013). CSR-oriented partnerships between the BUS and NPOs are diverse, representing social partnerships or as recently named cross-sector partnerships to address social issues (CSSPs). Because of constraints businesses face regarding resource and personal, CSR activities they deploy, the notion of CSR among them is still philanthropic and non-institutionalized (Jain et al., 2016). Jain et al. posited, for some BUS and NPOs in developing countries, the focus of CSR is not necessary for economic imperatives; rather, they associate CSR with religion or religious spirit.

There is a theoretical model linking human resource development (HRD), corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate sustainability (CS), and business ethics (Ardichvili, 2013). Ardichvili stated that the theoretical model development was informed by Bourdieu's relational theory of power and practice and by Norbert Elias' and Michel Foucault's theories of power and knowledge. In the theoretical model, CSR, CS, HRD, and ethics are parts of the same organizational subsystem that shape the interaction between human capital, individual moral development, habits (mindsets, dispositions), organizational practices and culture, and external situational factors (Ardichvili, 2013). The mechanism of the development and change of organizational culture consists of power relationships that can integrate human capital (social, cultural, economic, and symbolic) to achieve raising awareness at all levels of organizations (Lund-Thomsen et al., 2014). For organizations to have long-term success, the workplace needs to focus on continuity and stability that share the same aspects with the workplace organizational cultures (Sasaki & Sone, 2015).

Transition

Section 1 of this study included concepts, concerns, and obstacles relating to the business problem, which prompted this research. The purpose of this research was to explore strategies that successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs used to sustain their businesses during geoeconomic crises. The research question guiding the research was: "What strategies did successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs use to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions?" The conclusions of the literature review indicated a need for further investigation of their strategies and identification of what barriers prevented SMEs' leaders from adopting more effective methods and practices for catalyzing business success.

My intent was to explore strategies that successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs used to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. To explore this topic, I planned to interview a purposive sample of six business leaders within two different sectors; civil security and facilities management sectors. The participants worked at organizations operating within the capital of Lebanon, Beirut. Business owners and general managers were the target population. In Section 2, I addressed my role as the researcher, the participants, and the research method. I discussed the population, data collection techniques, my analytical process, and adherence to ethical conduct. Finally, in Section 3, I presented my findings with the recommendations for future actions and studies.

Section 2: The Project

In this research, I used a qualitative case study to explore strategies that successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs used to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. I used the literature review to identify the range and scope of current research on this topic. Because of my research, I explored strategies that successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs used to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions to form a basis for the questions used for the research interviews. The six interviews that I conducted were based on purposefully selected leaders of SMEs in Beirut in the service sector who had sustained successful strategies during tenuous economic conditions. The participants in the research provided me with the opportunity to develop an understanding of the leadership strategies engaged to embed a successful business model during geoeconomic crisis.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs use to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. The target population for this research comprised six business leaders of SMEs in Beirut in the service industry—three in the civil security field and three in the facilities management field—who were demonstrating effective strategies to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. Leaders of SMEs, who were able to adopt effective strategies to sustain their businesses, are more likely to survive the current and unpredictable economic strains. Understanding the strategies of successful leaders positively influences unemployment by sustaining the current employment levels and possibly producing new career opportunities for fresh graduates and entrepreneurs. The knowledge of strategies of business leaders may reduce the migration of the skilled workforce, which tends to seek employment outside of the country.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection in the research process (Obenchain & Ives, 2015). The three basic ethical principles included in the Belmont Report are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Obenchain & Ives, 2015). Consideration through the demonstration of respect reflected the researcher's regard for each volunteer and the time and information shared during the interview process. *Respect for persons* means treating a participant as an independent individual capable of making wise decisions when provided adequate information about the nature, purpose, and requirements of the research, and that participation is voluntary (Obenchain & Ives, 2015). *Beneficence* means to treat the participant with benevolence and not to cause maltreatment (Obenchain & Ives, 2015). *Justice* means that no participant should benefit from the risks of participating in a research (Obenchain & Ives, 2015). Gaillet and Guglielmo (2014) emphasized that the choice of a research method could help to determine how the researcher designs or plans a research, engages in that research, and ultimately reports the findings. Qualitative researchers engage in exploratory research that involves learning more about topics or phenomena through extended interactions with objects of research. A qualitative research design reveals more insight into phenomena as lived experiences of participants, interactions, and personal perspective of individual relationships (Macur, 2013).

My objective was to conduct research to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies that successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs used to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. I extrapolated data from leaders of SMEs in Beirut who faced a geoeconomic crisis. I used a purposefully selected sample population and chose a relatively small, but targeted group for this research as recommended by Griffith (2013) and Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2014). I reassured the participants that they would receive respect as independent agents of the research, and I observed the ethical principles and guidelines for research involving human subjects, which is based on the original Belmont Report (National Institutes of Health, 2015; Stellefson, Paige, Alber, Barry, & James, 2015). Obenchain and Ives (2015) affirmed three basic ethical principles according to the Belmont report: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. The research review and approval process implemented by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensured that the research complies with the requirements of the Belmont Report. The IRB research approval number for this research was 08-17-17-0535047.

In the initial portion of the interview, researchers seek to build confidence and trust, and engage the participant in the interview (Broadhurst, 2015). Researchers should design questions to elicit general information about the interviewee’s general experience on the job, or typical duties, and business (McGimsey, 2015). Implementing a process of continuous self-reflection is necessary to increase the awareness of researcher’ reactions and insights (Darawsheh, 2014). Respect for participants meant to treat them as independent people, capable of making decisions regarding whether to be included in the research.

I provided each candidate with information regarding the about the purpose and requirements of the research, underscoring the voluntary nature of their inclusion. In demonstrating benevolence, I treated candidates kindly and justly, minimizing any potential harm or risk as recommended by Obenchain and Ives (2015). I encouraged participants to answer the interview questions (see Appendix A) transparently and spontaneously by using an interview protocol (see Appendix B). The interview protocol is a guide throughout the interview process (Jansen, 2015). The interview protocol is more than a list of interview questions (Alshenqeeti, 2014); it comprises a list of systematic steps that the researcher would conduct during the interviews. The consent form (see Appendix C) that the participants signed acknowledged their preparedness. The consent form conveyed to participants what to expect from the interview, follow-up, and distribution of the findings.

Participants

The participants for this research included successful business leaders of SMEs. Successful leaders of SMEs are those who were (a) demonstrating effective strategies in sustaining their businesses under tenuous economic conditions and (b) sustaining the current employment levels and producing new career opportunities for fresh graduates and entrepreneurs. According to the Lebanese MoET, small enterprises are businesses employing fewer than 100 workers and medium-sized enterprises are businesses employing between 100 and 500 workers (MoET, 2014).

The unit of analysis represented the boundaries of the research, specifically noting the focus of the research (Poulis, Poulis, & Plakoyiannaki, 2013). The unit of analysis of this research was the service industries, namely facilities management and civil security sectors through interviewing leaders in these sectors and collecting documents. The leaders of SMEs were either owners, general managers, or chief executive officers (CEOs). A range of six to10 participants is an adequate sample size for conducting a qualitative study (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). The number of participants was six; three within the facilities management sector and three within the civil security sector. Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, was the geographic location where the business leaders conducted their primary activities. The eligibility criteria included business leaders of facilities management and civil security SMEs who have implemented successful strategies during the geoeconomic crisis and tenuous economic conditions in Beirut. The successful business leaders had experience in overcoming obstacles and difficulties while maintaining their corporations during difficult times.

To gain access to each participant and to establish a professional relationship, I prepared an official introductory letter (see Appendix D) and handed it to each participant. In the introductory letter, I explained the purpose and background of the research. My intent was to establish a comfortable environment throughout the interview process. After identifying possible participants in person, I visited each one individually and engaged in a conversation with them before the interview. I introduced myself as a doctoral student at Walden University conducting a research pertaining to strategies of SMEs in geoeconomic crisis. Part of the conversation, I informed the participants that the data collected was confidential, and participation was voluntary. I showed the content of the consent form, which included additional information about the research and the risks and benefits of participation and made sure the participants read the form thoroughly and asked questions. If they agreed with the content, they consented, and returned the form in person, by courier, by fax, or as a scanned copy by email (see Appendix D).

I underscored my expectation for them to respond to the questions I posed thoroughly, removing any preconceived biases. A working relationship between the participants and the researcher must exist to address the case study protocol (Yin, 2014). Communication was an important criterion, which was an essential part of establishing positive engagement with the participants. Another critical strategy for developing a working relationship with the participants was building a trusting relationship to allow them to be comfortable and relaxed while relaying their responses to the questions, honestly, and transparently (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

Research Method and Design

The most appropriate strategy for my research was the qualitative method because according to Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013), the objective of a qualitative method is to explore knowledge through gaining an understanding of people's shared experiences. My intent was to explore strategies that leaders of SMEs used to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic situations and geoeconomic crisis. A qualitative method with a case study design provided a suitable method and design to answer the research question. Interviewing leaders of SMEs (owners, CEOs, general managers, and executives) provided the rich textual data necessary to address the research problem.

Research Method

Bernard (2013) considered three methodologies as potential approaches, which are appropriate for a doctoral research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. A qualitative research method was more appropriate for the purpose of this research, in comparison to a quantitative or mixed method research, because I intended to explore knowledge by gaining an understanding of people's shared experiences, thoughts, and actions. The use of the qualitative research method applied when researchers focus on the *how*, *who*, and *why* of organizational processes (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015; Yin, 2013). Myers (2013) averred that qualitative researchers aim to understand people's thoughts and actions. Qualitative research is the most logical and fitting choice when a researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon (Murshed et al., 2016). Qualitative researchers gather information on various topics to enhance the understanding of experiences (Yin, 2014). A qualitative research method worked best for this research, because I was studying the phenomena associated with successful strategies of business leaders.

When comparing qualitative to quantitative methods, qualitative researchers focus on details, whereas quantitative researchers focus on data volume (Anyan, 2013). Anyan highlighted that quantitative researchers concentrate on extensiveness by collecting data to construct knowledge and using samples to generalize results. Researchers use quantitative methods to test hypotheses, in which they focus on data analysis and the relationship or differences among research variables (Jacobs et al., 2015; Norris, Plonsky, Ross, & Schoonen, 2015). The quantitative method was not the appropriate method for this research. In the mixed methods, researchers explore matters related to organizational problem solving, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative methods in one study that augments the validity and reliability of the data and their interpretation (Boeije, van Wesel, & Slagt, 2014; Zohrabi, 2013). According to Yin (2014), the mixed method approach can be a time-consuming process and contains variables against certain hypotheses included in the quantitative portion of the inquiry, supporting the presence or absence of a phenomenon. The mixed method was not appropriate for my research.

I used semistructured interview questions (see Appendix A) to derive the experiences of leaders of SMEs. The outcomes aligned with the purpose of the research, which was exploring strategies used by leaders of SMEs to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. O'Kane and Cunningham (2013) justified the use of the qualitative method over the other research methods, noting that a strong motive for selecting a qualitative method is to acquire a timely response. Practitioners use the qualitative approach as a tool to explain the world from their unique perspective (Potter, 2013). The qualitative approach enabled the researchers to comprehend the research topic better than a quantitative or mixed method approach. The use of qualitative method allowed participants a broad dais to share experiences on the research topic.

Research Design

The qualitative method using single case study research design was the most appropriate for the purpose of my research. The single case study research design applies to business research because single case studies provide researchers with the opportunity to study a single unit in depth at a specific point in time (Abutalibov & Guliyev, 2013;

Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2014). Case study design can be fundamental, descriptive, and investigative (Gog, 2015). In case studies, researchers study a case or cases broadly by collecting detailed data about individuals using a variety of data collection techniques (Yin, 2014). Qualitative research encompasses the following designs: (a) grounded theory, (b) ethnography, (c) phenomenology, (d) case study, and (e) other basic or generic qualitative approaches (Gandy, 2015). Generic qualitative approaches include a qualitative and descriptive, interpretive method (Kahlke, 2014). By utilizing case study design, I described the views of leaders of SMEs, focusing on the behaviors experienced by those who overcame the challenges they confronted.

Cummins (2016) suggested the utilization of grounded theory research is designed to explain processes, actions, or interactions among a group of people. Cummins advocated that grounded theory direct research toward the coping mechanisms and resilience of the participants. The grounded theory uncovers relevant conditions through the participants' reactions and the consequences following (Cummins, 2016). Researchers use the grounded theory design to stay open to patterns and trends that develop during data collection and improve a concept and theory after data collection and analysis (Foley & Timonen, 2015; Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015). Bulawa (2014) denoted that grounded theory method design consists of the theoretical sampling of data via participant interviews and observations to create, induce, and advance theory while exploring and examining a problem. Ethnography design focuses on the experiences of people in small communities or individuals on a cultural level (Ghorbani et al., 2015). Ghorbani et al. continued that ethnography is often exploratory in nature, using observations to construct the analysis from a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down approach. Phenomenological researchers address the lived experiences of participants to develop common themes within a particular phenomenon (Wilson, 2015). Because I was not interested in the lived experience of Lebanese leaders, but the in-depth study of a specific case, I did not choose a phenomenological approach.

Case study research was a viable means of studying emerging ideas from multiple sources. Case study design is an in-depth study of a singular or multiple cases to gain experience and derivative perspectives of individuals and situations (Yin, 2014). Researchers focusing on a specific situation to analyze a single phenomenon in the workplace follow the case study approach (Cronin, 2014; Mariotto et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). A case study best fits my research. The case study design is the most suitable when using semistructured interviews and open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) along with drawing upon researchers' observations to provide meaning through patterns and themes within and from the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). I asked participants to expand on answers and ask probing questions to clarify meaning, which helped in ensuring data saturation. Researchers reach data saturation when no new themes and codes emerge with additional interviews (Roberts et al., 2014).

Population and Sampling

Qualitative studies do not have a commonly accepted sample size because the ideal sample is contingent on the purpose of the research, research questions, and richness of the data (Elo et al., 2014). The basis of the sample of participants is to explore diversity rather than statistical significance (Elsawah, Guillaume, Filatova, Rook, &

Jakeman, 2015). The size of the sample depends on the aim of the research, sample specificity, use of establish theory, quality of dialogue, and analysis strategy (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2015). The research design was a case study, exploring the practices of Lebanese SMEs.

Researchers use purposeful sampling in qualitative research when they invite information-rich individuals to contribute in the research (Palinkas et al., 2013). When using purposeful sampling, the researcher needs to define who should be selected to participate, and describes the type of sampling, which includes purposeful, snowball, and intensity (Elo et al., 2014; Ingham-Broomfield, 2015). Participant selection in this research commenced by eliciting participation in person and by a follow up email.

I used purposive criterion sampling for this research and selected leaders of SMEs in the research who successfully sustained their businesses during tenuous economic conditions. Using purposeful sampling enables researchers to seek the most information-rich participants who can best serve the research intentions (Jean DeFeo, 2013). I conducted the selection criteria from a list of potential participants (leaders of SMEs), in which I obtained from Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Beirut and personal networks. I contacted potential participants by phone to determine if they qualify for my research by asking basic qualification questions (see Appendix A) relevant to my research and if they could participate in the research.

Researchers cannot consider reaching data saturation because the researchers have exhausted their resources (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation is a complicated process because researchers obtain information only from what they find (Tran, Porcher, Tran, &

Ravaud, 2017). Following the recommendation of Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation is about the depth of the data; a researcher should choose the sample size that has the best opportunity to reach data saturation. I selected six SMEs leaders in the research who possessed the knowledge necessary to understand the factors I investigated in this research. A study population of six participants conformed to trends in case study theory and practice. Sampling reflects a logical and flexible process of choosing a sample size in response to the research question (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). A range of six to10 participants is an adequate sample size for conducting a qualitative research (Marshall et al., 2013). The purpose of a well-constructed qualitative research is to interview up to 10 participants resulting in the identification, transcription, examination, and synthesis of relevant data across common themes of shared experiences (Binks, Jones, & Knight, 2013). SMEs leaders were present in Beirut in the service industry, which demonstrated effective strategies and sustained their businesses under the current tenuous economic conditions. Researchers should conclude the data collection process when no new concepts are emerging from the interviews (i.e., data saturation) (Elsawah et al., 2015).

A relaxed interview setting is necessary to allow participants to respond freely and ask questions (Scheibe, Reichelt, Bellmann, & Kirch, 2015). I allowed participants to choose the interview premises to make participants feel comfortable. I scheduled the meetings at the participants' convenience regarding the date, time, and venue. Conducting one-to-one interviews, promotes the participants' ability to provide information and feedback regarding their fears, thoughts, and concerns by setting the right mood and atmosphere (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

I guaranteed that each participant was a leader in facilities management and civil security SME by asking basic qualification questions (see Appendix A) and received a confirmation or denial from the participant that he or she was an SME leader in Beirut and sustained their business during tenuous economic conditions. Participants in this research were six business leaders of SMEs in Beirut in the service industry; three in the civil security industry and three in the facilities management field, who demonstrated effective strategies to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. Using specific selection criteria ensures participants can provide substantial insight into the research topic (Liang & Chi, 2013).

Ethical Research

Researchers explained that in ethics, the importance is to understand the conflicts from moral imperatives and methods of embracing differences in viewpoints (Avasthi, Ghosh, Sarkar, & Grover, 2013). Ethical concerns and confidentiality are important issues to address when interacting with business representatives and participants (Avasthi et al., 2013). The Belmont Report protocol is a process that researchers use to ensure ethical research and to protect the rights of participants (Bromley, Mikesell, Jones, & Khodyakov, 2015; Stellefson et al., 2015).

I included an informed consent form (see Appendix C) as part of the written documentation in addition to the introductory letter (see Appendix D). By approving the informed consent form, the participants acknowledged their understanding and agreement for participating in this research. Data collection for the research began after receipt of the informed consent form from each participant. In the consent form, I disclosed to the participants any known risk associated with their participation in the research, illustrating what they should expect from the interview. The consent form also included information that participation was voluntary and a participant could withdraw without penalty or obligation to the research at any point in the interview. They could also simply not show up to an interview. In this case, I assumed they were not interested in participating in the study. I did not offer any form of compensation or incentives to participants in the research. The consent form contained the purpose of the research, expectations from the participants, permission to audio record the meeting, and the process of data storage.

The researcher should be the only one to have access to the participants’ personal information (Mitchell & Wellings, 2013). Different organizations expand human research requirements such as the informed consent process to protect participants from harm (Johnsson, Eriksson, Helgesson, & Hansson, 2014). The informed consent is fundamental to the protection of the rights, safety, and welfare of research subjects (Pick, Gilbert & McCaul, 2014). Pick et al. posited that the effective informed consent discussion involves multiple stages, which include establishing rapport with the individuals, obtaining permission for the discussion, preparing the listener, gathering information about the individual's perspective, providing information about the research, and discussion of next steps. I made sure that the identities of participants remain confidential. I stored all information in a secure location for 5 years to protect the confidentiality of the participants as per Walden’s IRB policies and procedures. The research approval process included an ethics review by the IRB at Walden University with approval granted to proceed with the research (Research IRB #: 08-17-17-0535047). The final informed consent and doctoral research included the approval number as per Walden's requirements. I guaranteed further privacy and confidentiality of information and data for all participants and their organizations. I protected the names of the participants and their organizations by using labels and assigning numbers for each participant (i.e., Participant #1, Participant #2 or Participant #3).

Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative researchers can often serve as the instrument for a research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). As the researcher, I was the primary instrument in the data collection process. These inquiries are effective for addressing the research questions for a case study (Yin, 2014). Semistructured interviews (see Appendix A) are significant as primary data collection points, along with secondary data collection sources (i.e., company profiles, brochures, and other written documents) (Hallback & Gabrielsson, 2013). Qualitative methods normally do not include heavily pre-structured or standardized procedures (Collins & Cooper, 2014). Collins and Cooper continued that qualitative methods often require spontaneous decision making by researchers in the field requiring them to have a high level of aptitude and emotional intelligence.

The main benefit of the interview format is to enable healthy and collaborative communication between the interviewer (researcher) and the interviewee (participant) (Yin, 2014). Semistructured interviews (see Appendix A) allow the researcher to pay close attention to the topics without deviating from the primary goal (Hallback & Gabrielsson, 2013). The interviews permit the researcher to familiarize with the life of the participants, which allows the researcher to make observations with much more awareness and greater perception (Hallback & Gabrielsson, 2013). A researcher can make reliable judgments about the choices of the participants, which is seldom attainable in other forms of surveys or studies (Yin, 2014). I took the recommendation of Lloyd and Bergum (2014) and used semistructured interviews as a process for attaining my objective because they included the fundamental history of the subject as opposed to gathering numeric proof.

Triangulation is another powerful technique, which facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources (Myers, 2013). Triangulation refers to the application and combination of several research methods in the research of the same phenomenon (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Ozdemir & Adan, 2014). Methodological triangulation ensures the credibility of research by using primary data from the cases through semistructured interviews and secondary material (Hallback & Gabrielsson, 2013). Methodological triangulation improves data credibility by showing concurrence between two sources of data (Baškarada, 2014; Ingham-Broomfield, 2015; Yin, 2014). Interviews and documents were the two sources I used in my research. I used methodological triangulation to compare the data from interviews with data from documents to improve the validity and reliability of my findings. Having participants check their responses for the sake of authenticity of data and information assured consistency (see Appendix A). I followed the steps included in the interview protocol (see Appendix B) when conducting the interviews. The interview protocol and the order of the interview questions supported consistency while the participants responded to the semistructured interview questions (Bernard, 2013).

Data Collection Technique

Data collection and data analysis transpire simultaneously permitting for adjustments to the coding that enhances the research process (Baškarada, 2014; Ingham-Broomfield, 2015). I built an initial list of codes at the beginning of the data collection process based on the literature review. I updated this list to include codes that emerged from the data generation, coding, and analysis. Researchers use data generation, coding, and analysis to update the list of codes and reflect evolving patterns and variations (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). Member checking enables participants to review and concur with the analysis of the interview responses to validate all responses and ensure accuracy and precision of data (Harvey, 2014; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Morse, 2015). I used member checking by sharing the analysis of the interview responses with participants and asking participants to validate that I accurately interpreted their responses. I allowed the participants the option to respond via email within 3 business days and to provide edits. I presented participant leaders with the transcripts of their interviews and my interpretation of their responses in a follow-up email. The participants had minor changes to the transcripts and were satisfied with my interpretation of the interviews and asked me for a copy of the findings upon completion of the research. A researcher should be accountable for defining the most efficient techniques to gather data from the research participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). An interview protocol (see Appendix B) guided the interview process and enabled the replication of the same steps in all interviews (Jansen, 2015). I used my smartphone, Samsung Galaxy Note 5 as an audio recorder, which enabled me to capture the interview process, without facing any technical problems.

Semistructured interviews provide the opportunity to ask questions, listen to the participants, and take notes to capture rich understandings from the opinions of the participants (Hofisi, Hofisi, & Mago, 2014). Semistructured interviews are one of the most effective ways to collect data in qualitative research studies because they allow the researcher to capture the voices of participants (Onwuegbuzie, & Byers, 2014). Researchers need to have a record of the interview and share the results with the participants to ensure accuracy (Male, 2016). Male asserted that researchers could use off-the-shelf tools for recording interviews, meetings, and presentations, such as Livescribe pen, digital recorders, and audio recorders. During the initial data collection, data transfer, and archiving, I ensured that all data were secured and my laptop was password protected. I backed up all data on a separate hard drive to ensure data safeguard and protection. I used my Samsung Galaxy Note 5 as an audio recorder and kept a backup on One Drive Application (a backup application) in case my mobile audio recorder got damaged; however, I did not need the backup as no technical issues with the audio recording happened.

Face-to-face interviews have advantages and disadvantages (Opdenakker, 2006). An advantage of face-to-face interviews was that they build a relationship and rapport, which might be beneficial in the next stages of research (Elsawah et al., 2015). An advantage of face-to-face interviews included face-to-face contact with the participants, in which the participants will get to see whom they are divulging their information (Kalla, 2016). Face-to-face interviews enable the participant to speak freely in private with a time limit placed on the interview, which does not take up much of the participant's time (Bowden & Williams, 2013). A disadvantage of interviews is that they produce data or information in a format that is sometimes difficult to analyze (Doody & Noonan, 2013). I preserved the data by recording the interviews for my reference to mitigate the loss or damage of information and to provide an opportunity for further exploration or analysis as recommended by Lawrence (2017).

During the data collection process, I collected data from the six leaders of SMEs I interviewed, in which they were all collaborative by showing me their complete strategic plans (company profile, performance reviews, charts, policies, and procedures) during tenuous economic conditions. The documents shared reflected the leaders' performance goal settings, evaluation systems, and action plans. I used the data included in the documents to complement the data gathered from the interviews, which were helpful in theme development. Data collection had advantages and disadvantages. An advantage of collecting documents was the reduction in time and cost to initially collect and analyze data (Simon, 2013). Another advantage of collecting data was that researchers can triangulate data from multiple methods to gain depth of information (Denzin, 2012). I used triangulation of sources to identify consistency. A disadvantage includes the possibility that documents may be outdated, irrelevant, incomplete, unavailable, or in some way biased (Yin, 2014). Although the documentations from the leaders I interviewed were somewhat outdated, they were relevant to my research, in which they complemented the data gathered from the interviews in theme development.

The reason for a pilot study is to develop and test the appropriateness of a research instrument (Findley, Jensen, Malesky, & Pepinsky, 2016). A pilot study is optional when researchers conduct semistructured interviews using open-ended questions (Yin, 2014). I did not conduct a pilot study because I was using semistructured interviews and member checking.

Recording of the interviews commenced after reconfirming the permission of the research participants to assist me in capturing interview details and nuances. I used a semistructured open-ended interview approach, which enabled me to capture rich data about how participants think, interpret information, and make judgments as recommended by Elsawah et al. (2015). Immediately after my completion of the interview transcription, I asked the participants to verify that I correctly transcribed the interview. I presented the participants the transcript of their interviews electronically via a follow-up email. Participants responded via email within 3 business days, and provided their edits with minor changes. Engaging the participant leaders by sending them the transcripts for any changes and clarifications by email helped me ensure unbiased analysis of the information shared. Using member checking enables participants to review and concur with the analysis of the interview responses to validate all responses and ensure accuracy and precision of data (Harvey, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Morse, 2015). I asked each participant to check that I accurately interpreted his or her responses in the analysis of the interview responses. I sent participants the transcripts of their interviews by email together with my analysis of the interview responses so that they can edit, change, update, or confirm the transcripts. I then stored the transcripts and recordings in a secure location for 5 years.

A researcher should be familiar with the interview structures and methods to steer the participants to stay on point (Myers, 2013). The interview structure was semistructured interviews (see Appendix A), in which I used pre-formulated questions without strict adherence to the questions; new probing questions might emerge during the interview (Myers, 2013). Myers continued that semistructured interviews give the participants a chance to add insights to the conversation, whereas the pre-formulated or previously prepared questions restrict their ability to expand on important points.

A relaxed interview setting is necessary to allow participants to respond freely and ask questions (Scheibe et al., 2015). All six participant leaders chose their office headquarters as the setting of the interviews; they all felt comfortable and at ease. The participant leaders scheduled the interviews at their convenience based on their schedules. I did not offer any form of compensation or incentives to participants in the research because the participation in the research was voluntary with no monetary or non-monetary compensation. The reward lay in the participants' contribution to the body of research and the use of the findings for future decision-making. Each participant added to his or her experience by learning strategies from other participants. I promised the participant leaders to share a summary of my findings after I concluded the research.

Data Organization Technique

The objective of this research was to discover the strategies of business leaders in Lebanon to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. A reasonable data storage strategy is necessary to maintain the reliability and integrity of raw data, information, interviews, audio recordings, and any backup copies of interviews (Anyan, 2013). Researchers need to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of information and data for all participants and their organizations (Bromley et al, 2015). I protected the names of the participants and their organizations by using labels and assigning numbers to each participant (i.e., Participant #1, Participant #2, Participant #3, etc.). I respected and preserved the confidentiality of the participants, as I was the only person to have access to the participants' identification and information.

Labeling enabled the researcher to reference a specific participant's interview. Each step of the interview will help the researcher identify themes, patterns, trends, and main topics that emerge and note conflicting participant analyses, alternate viewpoints, and criticisms (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). I stored the raw data, signed consent forms, audio recordings, and transcribed interviews for 5 years in a personal safe at home as per Walden's IRB policies and procedures (Research IRB #: 08-17-17-0535047). After 5 years, I will shred all hard copies and delete all digital files.

Data Analysis

Irwin (2013) pointed out the significant growth in the infrastructure for archiving, sharing qualitative data, and making sense of the data through figures, tables, or in discussions. Irwin asserted that researchers must engage with the contextually embedded nature of data and ways to integrate the information into the primary data. Methodological triangulation was the most appropriate for this qualitative case study research. The focus of this research was to categorize, label, and construe themes that benefited leaders of SMEs to develop strategies in tenuous economic conditions. A researcher recognizes and comprehends new phenomenon using methodological triangulation (Joslin & Müller, 2016). A researcher could get a more comprehensive picture through methodological triangulation than by using one type of data collection (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Methodological triangulation utilizes more than one method of data gathering, such as interviews, questionnaires, observations, and documents (Ozdemir & Adan, 2014).

Yin (2011) described the case study process as an approach of six interdependent stages (Baškarada, 2014) (see Figure 2). The process is beneficial for qualitative researchers. The six interdependent stages included: (a) plan, (b) design, (c) prepare, (d) collect, (e) analyze, and (f) share. I analyzed the data using the Yin's data analysis method. The process included the following five steps: (a) compiling the data; (b) disassembling the data; (c) reassembling the data; (d) interpreting the meaning of the data, and (e) concluding the data (Yin, 2011). Buchanan (2013) used the data analysis method for data analysis for qualitative single-case studies and confirmed its appropriateness.

I shared the analysis results of each interview with each of the participants electronically via email confirming the interview transcript (see Appendix E) and expected a response within 3 business days to inquire of any amendments to the transcript. I ensured soundness and validity of the data through member checking. Member checking strengthens the data collection instrument and confirmability, which helps improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of the transcribed interviews (Houghton et al., 2013). Member checking is the process of taking ideas back to research participants for confirmation (Harvey, 2014). I used member checking during the analysis process to improve the trustworthiness and confirmation. Consistent with the purpose of the research, and to ensure saturation, I investigated the participants' responses until no new information emerges from the discussion or interview.

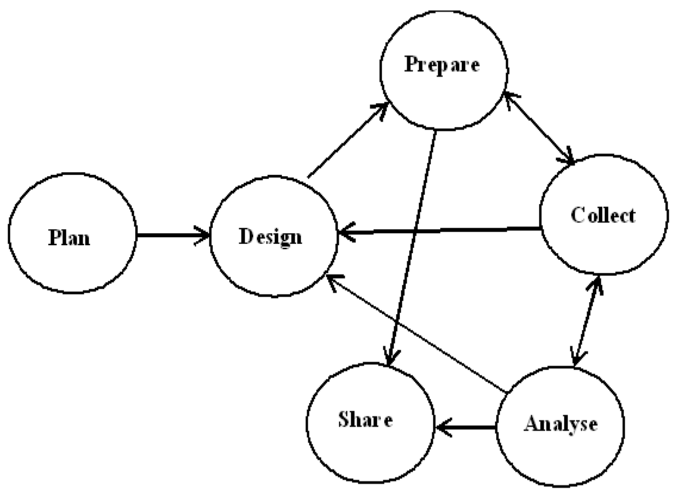

Figure 2. The Case Study Process. Adapted from " Qualitative case study guidelines," by S. Baškarada. (2014), The Qualitative Report, 19(40), p. 9. Copyright (2014) by Commonwealth of Australia. Reprinted with permission.

Researchers must consider and articulate the strategies for selection, collection, and analysis of cases in the early stages of planning to avoid having large data sets, which researchers cannot synchronize (Houghton, Casey, & Smyth, 2017). NVivo software is a powerful data management tool, which is becoming increasingly popular among researchers (Zhao, Li, Ross, & Dennis, 2016). Researchers use NVivo software in a wide range of geographic and disciplinary areas (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016).

NVivo 11 software was a user-friendly tool, which assisted me with the amalgamation of data into themes. I compared the interview data with the record review data. I used the tools in the NVivo 11 software to code and link data together to develop the emerged themes. After receiving responses from the participant leaders, I made the requested edits and changes to the data, and uploaded the transcribed participant interviews into the NVivo 11 software by organizing all the files into a zipped (compressed) folder and named it ‘strategies of SMEs’. I then attached the zipped folder to the contact support form, in which I abided by the restrictions of the zipped file size (less than 8MB) by selecting 'Properties' to view its size. The software had an option to set up a secure file sharing service provided by www.dropbox.com for the uploaded files. The benefit of the Nvivo 11 software was that it helped me analyze the data by identifying the emerged themes. I was familiar with the older version of the software (NVivo 10), but I quickly adapted to the newer version (NVivo 11) by browsing through the menu to familiarize and acquaint myself with it.

Researchers can use NVivo software to assist in the identification of themes (Castleberry, 2014). Woods et al. continued, researchers use NVivo software to analyze textual data from interviews, focus groups, documents, and open-ended survey responses. Researchers must transcribe codes and organize the data they derive from the interviews, in a way that helps researchers identify recurring themes (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Bazeley and Jackson added that NVivo includes a feature to develop research logs for data entries, offers a category system, and data coding including audio, video, websites, and rich text. The NVivo properties provide an analysis platform to assist the researcher in organizing the information according to recurring themes and developing coding protocols (Edhlund & Mcdougall, 2013). NVivo facilitates the process from the design and early sampling procedures, through the analysis of data, theoretical development, and presentation of findings (Hutchison, Johnston, & Breckon, 2010).

Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) incorporates computer technology with an innovative software platform to enable researchers to organize and analyze data (Rockar & Kohun, 2011). CAQDAS software assists researchers in reporting frequent themes from the interview in an objective manner (Castleberry, 2014). CAQDAS has the potential to turn qualitative research into a rigid automated process neglecting the role of human interpretation and reflection (Hutchison et al., 2010). Hutchison et al. continued, the software enables researchers to enhance the data handling and analysis process if they use it appropriately. NVivo supports qualitative methods research as it enables the researcher identify themes related to the research questions (Zhao et al., 2016). The completion of a thorough comparison showing the similarities and contrasting the differences is an essential step in qualitative studies (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). After developing the initial codes at the beginning of the data collection process based on the literature review, I updated this list to include codes that emerged from the data generation, coding, and analysis to identify emergent themes and relationships before reassembling the data around the central theme, the strategies of business leaders during tenuous economic conditions. I used the documents gathered during the interviews (strategic plans comprised of company profiles, performance reviews, charts, policies and procedures) provided by the participant leaders, and uploaded them as pdf files in the NVivo 11 software. The documents were vital to identify the emergent themes. During the research process, I compared and contrasted the themes to the main ideas identified in the literature review and the conceptual framework. The software adds credibility and methodological rigor commonly missing in qualitative case studies (Poulis et al., 2013). The software is user-friendly compared to other tools, provides researchers with smarter insights, enables researchers to make better decisions, and results in effective outcomes (Zhao et al., 2016). Walden University provided students with additional resources, such as an online tutorial of NVivo 11 software, which was another reason for choosing NVivo 11 software for my research.

Reliability and Validity

Validity and reliability are two factors, qualitative researchers consider while planning a study or research, analyzing the results, and judging the quality of the research (Noble & Smith, 2015; Yin, 2014). Preconditions for validity include prevention of alternative interpretations, exclusion of difficult and biased questions, wording, and context (Noble & Smith, 2015). The reliability of the data collection, which establishes the trustworthiness of the research, is an important precondition for validity and relies upon dependability (Nkwake, 2015). Table 2 showed a summary of techniques for establishing trustworthiness showing results and examples of each technique. I used member checking as a technique to keep the research clear, simple, and straightforward. Member checking of data interpretation is the best technique for assessing the credibility of qualitative research (Harvey, 2014). As recommended by Harvey (2014) and Koelsch

(2013), member checking was the best technique for this research because I was able to provide participants with interview transcripts for review, which enabled me to ask participants to comment on the accuracy of my interpretation of the transcript.

Table 2

Summary of Techniques for Establishing Trustworthiness

Technique	Results	Examples
Member checking	Test categories, interpretations, or conclusion (constructions)	Continuous, formal or informal checking of data with stakeholders (i.e., at the end of the interview), review of written passages, or the final report in a draft form
Reflexive journal / thick description	• Document researcher decisions • Provide database for transferability judgements • Provide a vicarious experience for the reader	• Daily or weekly written diary • Descriptive, relevant data
Audit trail	Allow the auditor to determine the trustworthiness of the study	Interview guides, notes, documents, notecards, peer debriefing notes, journal, etc.

Note. Adapted from "*Summary of Techniques for Establishing Trustworthiness*," by Y. S. Lincoln and E. G. Guba, 1985, *Naturalistic inquiry*. Copyright 1985 by Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

Researchers use strategies to establish the trustworthiness of data (Sumpi & Amukugo, 2016). Trustworthiness or rigor of a research refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a research (Conelly, 2016). Conelly asserted that in each study, researchers should establish the protocols and procedures necessary for a study to be worthy of consideration. Sumpi and Amukugo (2016) described the strategies to achieve trustworthiness as the degree of assurance using the criteria of credibility (trust-value), transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency), and confirmability (neutrality). An important element is transparency, which helps ensure reliability and validity as well; the reliability and integrity of the findings signify a foundation for authenticating and validating the credibility of the study's research method and design (Noble & Smith, 2015). Table 3 demonstrated the strategies for enhancing the credibility of qualitative research, affiliating the qualitative research terminology with the corresponding strategy.

Table 3

Strategies for Enhancing the Credibility of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research terminology	Strategy
Truth value	• Reflexivity and reflection on own perspectives: - Reflective journal maintained and decisions documented - Peer debriefing to assist the researcher to uncover taken for granted biases. • Representativeness of findings in relation to the phenomena: - Willingness of participants to share their experiences in depth and over time enable clarification of findings as an ongoing process. - Semistructured audio-recorded interviews allow for revisiting of the data. - Use of rich and thick verbatim extracts from participants, assists the reader to make judgements about whether the final themes are true. • Participants are welcome to comment on the research findings
Consistency/neutrality	• Achieving auditability: - Transparent and clear description of the research process from initial outline, through the development of the methods and reporting of findings. Maintaining a research diary documenting the challenges and issues assisted in maintaining cohesion between the study's aim, design, and methods. - Emerging themes discussed with research team members who had qualitative research expertise in an open process where assumptions could be challenged and consensus reached.
Applicability	• Application of findings to other contexts: - Rich detail of context facilitates the evaluation of study conclusions and transferability to other settings.

Note. Adapted from "*Strategies for Enhancing the Credibility of Qualitative Research*," by H. Noble and J. Smith, 2015, *Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research, 18*(2), p. 35. Copyright 2016 by RCNi, UK.

Transparency, in a business or governance context, is honesty and openness. Transparency and accountability are the two main pillars of good corporate governance

(Sumpi & Amukugo, 2016). The legitimacy of research commences with demonstrating rigor or trustworthiness through transparency, integrity, and competency (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). Dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability are the elements many researchers and practitioners use to determine the reliability and validity (Cope, 2014).

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability and validity are synonymous with credibility and dependability (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). I used the interview protocol (see Appendix B) for the interviews with the participants. After the interviews, I sent the participants the transcribed content as a soft copy via email offering them the chance to review for discrepancies and verify the accuracy of the content. The qualitative data analysis tool NVivo software assisted me in assuring the dependability of the research. Researchers achieve dependability through keeping the raw data, providing a complete explanation of the research method, and interlinking the same procedures throughout the research process (Campbell, 2013).

Member checking of data interpretation is the best technique for assessing the credibility of a qualitative research (Harvey, 2014). Harvey continued that by conducting member checking, researchers are able to define the accuracy of their initial interpretations with the participants. Member checking was the best technique because researchers can provide participants with interview transcripts for review and ask participants to comment on the accuracy of the transcript (Harvey, 2014; Koelsch, 2013). After approximately two weeks from of the interview, I asked each participant to review my interpretations of their responses to confirm that these represent their ideas. This enabled me to define the accuracy of my initial interpretations and eventually correct any wrong interpretation of the participant's interview responses (see Appendix C).

Validity

Validity means measuring the ability of the empirical indicator and the conceptual definition of the construct (Myrick & Feinn, 2014). Validity is the most important component of a research (Sandelowski, 2015). In qualitative research, credibility measures whether a match occurs between the source of the data and the interpretation of the researcher (Munn et al., 2014). Qualitative validity encompasses trustworthiness and credibility (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Researchers can develop credibility by sharing their experiences and validating the findings with each participant (Cope, 2014).

Methodological triangulation was another powerful method to ensure credibility. I used methodological triangulation, which include more than one technique to gather data; interviews, questionnaires, observations, and documents (Ozdemir & Adan, 2014). To ensure credibility, researchers use methodological triangulation by confirming the themes through the interviews, observations, and documents using primary and secondary data (Hallback & Gabrielsson, 2013). In this research, triangulation of data collection techniques assured confirmability, such as the use of a voice recorder to support verbal responses during the semistructured interviews.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings (Cope, 2014). Transferability requires thick description, which is a rich, thorough description of the research setting, and processes observed during the inquiry (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013). The qualitative researcher could enhance transferability by doing a comprehensive job of describing the research framework or context, including the assumptions that are central to the research (Cope, 2014). The most influential factors affecting perceptions of transferability are the studies associated with participants' previous experiences and beliefs (Burchett, Mayhew, Lavis, & Dobrow, 2013). Transferability applies to individuals who are not a part of a research (Cope, 2014), in which third parties could benefit and use the findings in this research in similar situations where SMEs were facing similar tenuous economic conditions.

Confirmability or neutrality of findings indicates the data accurately represents the information the participants provide, in which the researcher does not misread or misconstrue the interpretations (Sumpi & Amukugo, 2016). Researchers achieve confirmability when they take sound and safe measures to validate the findings that emerge from the research they develop from the data and not from personal bias (Matamonasa-Bennett, 2015). The failure to reach data saturation has an adverse impact on the quality of the research, hindering content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Researchers reach data saturation when they have enough information to replicate the research, when they attain the ability to obtain additional new data, and when they find that further coding is no longer feasible (Elsawah et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2014). A range of six to10 participants is an adequate sample size for conducting a qualitative research (Marshall et al., 2013). The purpose of a well-constructed qualitative research is to interview up to 10 participants resulting in the identification, transcription, examination, and synthesis of relevant data across common themes of shared experiences

(Binks, et al., 2013). To achieve saturation, researchers continue with the interviews until no new insights or themes emerge (Marshall et al., 2013). I continued to conduct interviews until I fulfilled two goals: (a) a sample size of six or more participants and (b) no new codes in the data coding process appeared.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included a review of the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, analysis, instruments, techniques, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present the findings of the research with applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further research. In Section 3, I conclude with a reflection and a conclusion that summarized this research.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs use to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. I conducted semistructured interviews with six business leaders within six organizations in Beirut. I used methodological triangulation to compare the data from interviews with data from documents to improve the validity and reliability of my findings. I used member checking to validate the participant's responses. I maintained the confidentiality of the participants with the use of codes for identification. A, B, C, D, E, and F represent sampled SMEs, and L1, L2, L3, L4, L5 and L6 represent participant leaders. I asked participants to expand on their answers by asking probing questions to clarify meaning.

Using the deductive analytical approach, four themes emerged from the data analysis. The themes were associated with strategies that successful leaders use to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. The four themes were (a) leaders of SMEs embedded change management in their organizations to sustain their businesses, (b) leaders of SMEs increased awareness in their organizations, (c) leaders of SMEs succeeded in creating solid organizational and financial structures to ensure a sustainable cash flow, and (d) leaders of SMEs formed a niche market to grow.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: What strategies do successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs use to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions? I used NVivo 11 software as a tool to analyze the transcripts of the interviews and managed to identify four themes from the data. All six leaders described the strategies that they successfully implemented to sustain their business in tenuous economic conditions in Lebanon. The four themes showed how they aligned to the literature review and conceptual framework.

Theme 1: Leaders of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Embedded Change Management in their Organizations to Sustain Their Businesses

Participant leaders of the SMEs embedded the change management in their organizations to sustain their businesses by motivating employees and sustaining a customer base. L1 revealed:

> Being an SME leader within the civil security sector, we were keen in embedding a new mentality of change management that was the ultimate solution to position ourselves in the market, which was rewarding to our business as far as profitability and growth.

L1 continued, “We managed to sustain our business by striving for excellence through our commitment to four guiding principles: (a) satisfying our customers, (b) training and developing our operations team, and (c) improving continuously the effectiveness of our quality management system.” L2 revealed, “Our challenge as an SME leader within the civil security sector was to understand the clients’ needs and expectations, hiring the right operational team, and run the business smoothly and efficiently, which was part of our change management strategy.” L3 mentioned, “As an SME leader in the civil security sector, we were very observant of the market needs and the recurring change the country was passing through.” L5 stated, “As an SME leader in the facilities management sector, one of the most important factor was a good reporting system for the sake of transparency with clients, which was part of the change management system we embedded in our organization.” L6 specified, “As an SME leader in the facilities management sector, a critical factor of change management, was to invest in a qualified team, who was the interface with the client reflecting our company’s image.” L6 continued, “Change management helped us sustain our business by developing a proactive preemptive approach and a quick transparent reporting response system to our existing and potential clients.”

As an effective leadership approach, leaders need to recognize the necessary change, generate a vision to guide the change through motivation, and execute the change with the commitment of the group or team members (Zeb et al., 2015). L2 mentioned, “Having the mentality of change and development, from the start, allowed us to apply our effective leadership to have the room for improvement and development.” L5 mentioned, “Future business leaders could benefit from our experience as leaders by applying an effective business leadership approach; diversity in our business is key by going back to the drawing board and revisiting where we went wrong to keep improving.” L5 continued, “Going back to the drawing board helps us keep a progressive mentality and think outside the box with an optimistic approach and a positive attitude to change.” The two fundamental aspects of organizational development are the adaptation to change by innovating and leadership, in which leaders of organizations must turn to a flexible and dynamic organizational structure and improve their organizational development (Zadeh & Ghahremani, 2016).

Tying Kotter's eight-stage process to the business practice with the SMEs leaders' responses was a compelling process for change management success about how to manage change. Without commitment and an integration process of change management practices, any association over a divide between theory and practice is unlikely (Pollack, 2015). There is an unlikely chance of organizational development with a mentality of resistance to change since it has cumulative negative relationships with two important consequences: employees' commitment to the organization and perceptions of organizational success (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). L4 revealed, "As leaders of SMEs, we were and we still are keen for change, in which we did not have the ego to hang to one mentality, but we decided to be proactive with change." L4 continued, "We are open to new ideas for continuous change."

Organizational transformational actions sometimes cause misalignments between work expectations and individuals as related to work (Williamsson, Eriksson, & Dellve, 2016). If alignment fails to exist within different areas of an organization regarding a change, resistance to change occurs (Latta, 2015). All participant leaders mitigated the resistance to change by systematically improving current processes, goals, and actions using different approaches as per Kotter's change model. L4 mentioned, "One of the barriers was choosing the team who could share the same vision in alignment with our business values." Engaging in supportive leaders' behaviors could be useful in amending resistance to change at later stages of a change initiative (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). L4 asserted, "Today, we are cautious how aligned we are with the business potential." Business leaders and managers can mitigate the resistance to change by managing human resources practices (Yon, Bloom, & Crant, 2014). The attitudes of business leaders towards change should be beneficial to keep individuals informed, consult with them for input, and involve them with participating responsibilities (Yilmaz, Ozgen, & Akyel, 2013). All leaders of SMEs engaged new strategies in which they focused on the efforts needed to manage a buy-in for a significant change within their organizations.

Alignment of incentives is necessary to inspire others for coordination, knowledge sharing, and mixed culture of productivity for a successful change implementation in an organization (Bolton, Brunnermeier, & Veldkamp, 2013). All leaders had solid and robust strategies with aligned visions to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. Regarding the implementation of business strategies, leaders differed slightly in their responses, with the same intentions to expand regionally. L5’s intention was to raise capital through new investors, ensuring continuity for the purpose of regional expansion. On the other hand, L4’s intention was to build a solid base and infrastructure in Lebanon and raise capital through self-financing for the same purpose of regional expansion.

All participants' concerns were to sustain their dedicated and loyal employees and motivate them as part of embedding change management in their organizations to sustain their businesses. A significance to systemic change is to maintain the motivation of the main personnel for the duration of the initiatives (Harrison & Rouse, 2015). Effective leadership allowed leaders focus on the interest of their followers, in which leaders provide their followers proper counseling regarding awareness, recognition, and motivation keeping them motivated over their self-interest (Zeb et al., 2015). One of the main components of a high-performance work system is reinforcement through punishment and rewards (Duarte, Goodson, & Arnold, 2013). L2 mentioned, “I am a believer in dedicated employees, in which I offered my loyal employees some shares between 0.5%-1% to encourage them as part of the Employees’ Shareholder Program (ESP).” L2 continued, “I am proud of this accomplishment, in which this program was an incentive to our loyal employees that helped us measure the internal effectiveness and maintain our loyal customers.” The outcome of organizational team efforts results in a successful team performance, which is a product of the linkage between organizational rewards and work performance (Hamukwaya & Yazdanifard, 2014). Employees’ commitments to the objectives and business values of the organization are essential to organizational performance and growth (Shahid & Azhar, 2013). Managing change is more than a project; it is a mixture of initiative organizations, planning, staffing, delivering, and disbanding (Leach et al., 2013). L4 stated, “We started from planning, staffing the right team, and delivering the right services and products to our clients.” Managing change requires the change team to facilitate multiple concurrent instances locally relevant to participants in the change process (Umble & Umble, 2014).

This finding was consistent with Kotter’s change model. Participant leaders were endeavoring to sustain their enterprises by establishing a sense of urgency about the need to achieve change and communicating the change vision; the emphasis of this theme. Sustaining the customer base to remain competitive was a significant factor for participant leaders. Leaders of SMEs in Lebanon need particular strategies to sustain their businesses. Maintaining a dynamic working environment prone to very rapid changes, requires considerable expertise in the working operations, well-defined processes, motivated employees, clearly defined tasks, and most important of all, communication (Rogleva, Temelkova, & Fustik, 2015). All six leaders implemented solid change mechanisms in their SMEs to sustain their customer base. Some owners of SMEs remain small as a choice, choosing to benefit from their independence, flexibility, ability to make quick decisions and close relationships with their customers (Anderson & Ullah, 2014). Table 4 includes thematic details of the change management subtheme.

Table 4

Change Management Subtheme

Change Management	*N*	% of Participants
Change process	7	67
Organizational transformation	10	100

Theme 2: Leaders of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Increased Awareness in their Organizations

Participant leaders of SMEs increased awareness in their organizations by applying effective leadership. Business leaders should interlink strategies and policies for the creation of productive employment resulting in the endorsement of economic and sustainable growth (Hao-Chen et al., 2013). Leaders of SMEs are continually lobbying to convince financial institutions and government sources to assist and support them in developing their SMEs through awareness programs and government initiatives (Nasr & Rostom, 2013). L1 mentioned, “Our goals can benefit other SMEs by providing training, in which we can help develop a joint workforce and symposium to raise awareness throughout the industry with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities and MoET."

Leaders of SMEs were keen to apply awareness throughout their organizations as part of their effective leadership in a proactive way. According to Dahlgaard, Pugna, Potra, Negrea, & Mocan, 2016, it is necessary to improve service quality and competitiveness as part of an effective leader's characteristics. L1 emphasized:

> Our commitment as effective leaders was to abide by the four guiding principles of our organization: (a) satisfying customers, (b) sustaining the company values, (c) developing and retaining employees, (d) improving the effectiveness of their quality management system continuously.

Those guiding principles align with the conceptual framework. Kotter's model explicitly focuses on how change context and process variables affect recipients' responses to change (Oreg et al., 2016). Change agents provide practical guidance on issues that are essential tools to the success of change efforts (Oreg et al., 2016).

SMEs can easily cope with the increasing need for innovation as an asset of their business performance (Saunila, 2016). The competitive advantage of the leaders of SMEs lies in their ability to drive their businesses in innovative ways (ALAmeri, 2015). L1 and L4 both stressed, "With the right leadership and vision, innovation was a primary factor that allowed us, as leaders of SMEs to remain sustainable in the market." Factors such as the quality of human capital and skills, access to finance for SMEs, quality of infrastructure services, and logistics and cross-border trade facilitation (Haidar & Larbi, 2016). Leaders need to embed the concept of innovative performance in their corporate culture by leveraging on the innovative human capital (Halim, Ahmad, Ramayah, & Hanifah, 2014). All leaders of SMEs managed to create a linkage between organizational culture on innovative human capital and innovative performance. Although the concept of innovation is becoming universal, the Lebanese government is not embarking enough to promote innovation. Researchers need to identify many frameworks, including (a) the process of creating organizational culture, (b) the approach to organizational culture that leads to successful outcomes, and (c) ways of using culture to create successful solutions to organizational problems (Kim et al., 2015).

By integrating innovation capability to the core business, SMEs can easily cope with the increasing need for innovation as an asset of their business performance (Saunila, 2016). L3 explicitly mentioned, “Our survival depended on the continuous improvement of our staff and steady customer base, the development of our internal training program, and the innovative approach we maintained to remain sustainable during the tenuous economic conditions.” L2 claimed, “We were the first in Lebanon to implement CSR to encourage employees to be involved in the community despite the tenuous economic situation.”

This finding was consistent with Kotter’s change model. Participant leaders were endeavoring to sustain their enterprises by creating a guiding coalition and developing a vision and strategy to create awareness in leaders’ organizations; the emphasis of this theme. Leaders of SMEs in Lebanon need strategies to sustain their businesses. All participant leaders used effective leadership to implement their strategies, in which they developed an environment of trust and creativity for their clients and employees, empowering these employees to bring a desirable change to their organizational performance. All leaders recognized the alignment of effective leadership with Kotter's change model as part of the innovation and sustainability of their SMEs. Table 5 includes thematic details of the leadership awareness subtheme.

Table 5

Leadership Awareness Subtheme

Leadership Awareness	*N*	% of Participants
Employees' incentives	10	50
Customer service	11	100
Continuous improvement	13	83

Theme 3: Leaders of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Succeeded in Creating Solid Organizational and Financial Structures to Ensure a Sustainable Cash Flow

All participant leaders of SMEs applied a successful approach to sustaining their businesses, in which they considered risk factors and demonstrated an aggressive approach to sustain their business in the current tenuous economic conditions. Organization development (OD) and change management (CM) provide a standard set of values and principles serving to unify the disciplines rather than promoting divergence (Creasey et al., 2015). All participants applied OD and CM as part of their strategy without necessary naming them. L5 mentioned, "With the right organizational and financial structures, we tend to reach sustainability by developing the right human resource policy."

All participant leaders agreed that the establishment of their business was difficult and challenging during business commencement. Leaders of SMEs managed to overcome those challenges and barriers, by taking significant steps. Leaders of SMEs succeeded to lower the prices of their products and services, but maintaining the quality of service. Leaders of SMEs increased capital by either injecting funds or approaching new investors to sustain their businesses despite the resistance from financial institutions. Lastly, leaders of SMEs assigned representatives similar to all SMEs in the country, to negotiate with the MoET on their behalf to lobby and convince the government to decrease taxes for SMEs or provide loans with low interest rates as an initiative dictated from Banque De Liban (BDL), the Central Bank of Lebanon.

This finding was consistent with Kotter’s change model. The participant leaders were endeavoring to sustain their enterprises by empowering a broad-based action to create solid organizational and financial structures in their SMEs to ensure sustainable cash flow; the emphasis of this theme. Leaders of SMEs in Lebanon need particular strategies to sustain their businesses to shift paradigms. A good example was L5 who stated, “We had to shift paradigms from a profitable business in project management before the economic crisis to establishing a new entity in the facilities management sector to compensate for our loss and sustain our business.” Kotter’s change model theory aligned with this theme because it has a positive effect on business sustainability from an organizational development perspective. All participant leaders created solid organizational and financial structures to ensure financial sustainability. Table 6 includes thematic details of the organizational and financial structures subtheme.

Table 6

Organizational and Financial Structures Subtheme

Organizational and Financial Structures	*N*	% of Participants
Organizational Structure	9	67
Sustained cash flow	7	100

Theme 4: Leaders of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Managed to Form Niche Markets to Grow

Participant leaders of SMEs managed to form niche markets that allowed them to grow and reach economic growth despite the tenuous economic conditions in the country. SMEs play a substantial role in individual economies with a significant contribution to achieving the GDP (Lanvin & Evans, 2015). SMEs comprise of more than 90% of the business around the world (Akbar, Omar, Wadood, & Yusoff, 2017). In the developing countries, SMEs contribute to the GDP, poverty alleviation, and creation of jobs, among other benefits (Akbar et al, 2017). L1, L5 and L6 managed to create a niche market for themselves using their expertise in their sector. All three leaders succeeded in creating new software tools for their existing and potential clients, which enabled them to create new opportunities as part of their innovative tools to remain competitive and sustainable in the market. L6 mentioned, “With our new customized mobile application to households (on demand service), we managed to introduce a new mentality to our existing and potential customers.” L6 continued, “This will take the facilities management and maintenance sector to the next level, in which clients can change whatever they want in their household by a click of a button.”

Internationalization offers many strategic benefits to SMEs, in which they are an asset in most of the world's economies (Onkelinx et al., 2016). SMEs are the major source of economic development in industrial and developing countries as SMEs constitute a significant portion of employment in most economies (Bush, 2016, Miniaoui & Schilirò, 2016). Expansion and growth for all six participants were important factors. Expanding regionally provided a leverage for participant leaders to diversify because the local market in Lebanon is limited. L3 stated, "Regarding productivity, organizational development, and growth strategies, the civil security sector is tough and not easy if we do not have a productive team and appropriate tools to grow and expand locally and regionally." L3 continued, "There is always room for growth in today's global economies, but we always have to identify our specific strategies and create a niche market, which shall differentiate us from our competitors." L6 mentioned, "As a leader in our field, we managed to integrate and align our organizational structure with change management models and innovative tools, creating a niche market for ourselves." L6 persisted, "This will eventually result in generating good profit margins in the future, creating job opportunities for fresh graduates and professionals, and realizing a significant return on investment."

This finding was consistent with Kotter's change model. The participant leaders were endeavoring to sustain their enterprises by generating short-term wins; the emphasis of this theme. For SMEs, leaders who are using niche-marketing strategies are enjoying the success of their organizations (Akbar et al., 2017). Akbar et al. continued that a robust niche marketing strategy is beneficial because the leaders of SMEs can build a good relationship with their consumers and suppliers, in which a good relationship is necessary for sale purpose and for reputation building. Most leaders managed to form niche markets in their sector that allowed them to reach their targets, which was an essential component of the conceptual framework in this research. Table 7 includes thematic details of the niche market subtheme.

Table 7

Niche Market Subtheme

Niche Market	*N*	% of Participants
Expansion and growth	12	67
Innovative tools	8	67

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of the research may have a significant impact on business practices, including corporate strategies, processes, and procedures during business operations. The successful execution of an organizational strategy by leaders of SMEs could reveal factors affecting organizational success (Srivastava, 2013). By providing such understandings on sustainable strategies and procedures, less successful SME leaders can put into action similar strategies and practices in similar business conditions for catalyzing business success. The increased amount of successes in implementing a stimulus of change and induced innovative techniques may stimulate growth in SMEs to apply sustainable models and further expand their spread of positive influence on the Lebanese economy.

The themes provided professional and practical guidelines for prospective leaders to use in the implementation of successful strategies. When combining the themes into professional practices, an organization could align current strategic goals to the successful strategies of leaders of SMEs framework (Lawrence, 2017). Through the efforts of combined practices, leaders of SMEs could align their organization to their strategies by developing a healthy infrastructure to grow and prosper. A successful alignment with leaders’ strategies may convey a clear message to other organizations that yield to several benefits that other business leaders can implement in the future.

All six leaders of SMEs are able to sustain their businesses by integrating innovative tools, maintaining their financial and organizational structures, and creating niche markets to remain in the business. Embedding those strategies into the SMEs organizational structures, enable leaders to overcome challenges and create the buy-in and motivation of stakeholders to adopt. The findings revealed that the leaders of SMEs were able to deploy changes through robust strategic mechanisms within their goals and corporate cultures. The results emphasized that the leaders used different techniques and learned from their experiences to overcome challenges adapting to surrounding changes. Less successful business leaders can use similar techniques to implement these strategies in their organizations.

The findings, which are relevant to the business practice, revealed that SMEs business leaders’ decisions may have significant positive implications for the sustainability of SMEs in Lebanon. Additional information and strategies could help reinforce SMEs, in which the information gained in the research findings can lead to sustainability of SMEs. Additionally, the support from family, friends, and networks can enhance business growth.

Implications for Social Change

Increasing the survival rate of troubled SMEs will (a) reduce unemployment rates, (b) sustain the current employment levels, and (c) lead to financial development. Financial development contributes to economic growth in the country (Abosedra et al., 2015). Financial development is a factor of social change leading to a dynamic role in the country's economic stability and sustainability. Integrating those elements in the business model of SMEs might be a trigger to reduce employment rates, sustain the current employment levels, produce new career opportunities for fresh graduates and entrepreneurs, and eventually lead to financial development and economic growth.

The implication for social change might include the potential to create new jobs in SMEs through government promoting and valuing SMEs by providing them incentives and tax cuts (El Khoury, 2013; Miniaoui & Schilirò, 2016). The contribution of SMEs is significant to economies facing an economic slowdown in specific. With the right support from financial institutions and governments, social change implies that SMEs could act as a catalyst resulting in economic growth and a decrease in poverty (El Khoury, 2013).

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs use to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. The themes provided professional and practical guidelines for prospective leaders to use in the implementation of successful strategies. When combining the themes into professional practices, an organization could align strategic goals to the successful strategies of the leaders of SMEs framework (Lawrence, 2017).

Government leaders can gather some intuitions from this research leading to the preparation of policies customized to SMEs, preparing conferences to increase awareness on a national level, and forming business incubators that are useful in the creation of job opportunities and the acceleration of new ventures. Developing countries like Lebanon, support the concept of business incubators as a part of their national innovation system and economic sustainability, which is a critical phenomenon affecting the economic growth (Jamil et al., 2016). Business incubators are essential tools for the successful development of leaders of SMEs and young entrepreneurs.

The groups that should pay attention to the results of this research include current leaders of SMEs and future business leaders who are currently implementing or exploring the possibility of implementing successful strategies in their business. I will distribute the findings via publication of the study to the MoET in Lebanon and the Chamber of Commerce, and Industry. I will publicize this research to professional consultancy firms. I will strive to market this research as a subject matter expert, which will enable me to present it in seminars and conferences as a case study in both academic and professional settings to benefit other SMEs in countries with similar tenuous economic conditions.

Recommendations for Further Research

Limitations are weaknesses that could affect the research (Yeatman et al., 2013). In this qualitative single case study, the first limitation was that the classification of the position of the business leaders limited the research to a top-down perspective in the opinion of upper management. Recommendations for further research include a study involving a larger sample size of the participants, including managers, to solicit data from both sides of the spectrum (i.e., upper and middle management) to avoid potential bias. Another limitation was that the research only included six participant leaders of SMEs, making the research limited to their experiences and feedback with the geographic constraint to Beirut. A recommendation for further research is that the researcher could avoid this limitation by broadening the population size to more than six participants in other sectors and other regions in Lebanon to ensure diversity with a wider range of experiences by other leaders of SMEs in different sectors.

Additional minor themes resulted from my research, which can be useful for future researchers to apply. The additional themes include (a) specific communication vehicles that influence managers and employee engagements in SMEs, (b) synergies between the private and public sectors to influence the leaders of local Lebanese financial institutions to provide loans with lower interest rates to support SMEs, (c) leaders of SMEs should avoid substantial brain drain by creating jobs for fresh graduates and experienced professionals. The themes can benefit current and potential leaders of SMEs to play a dominant role in the private sector since SMEs are imperative in sustaining middle-class economies; comprising of more than 90% of the business around the world (Akbar et al. 2017).

Reflections

Leaders of SMEs must continuously develop their strategies to sustain their enterprises in a challenging business environment. Leaders of SMEs must have the knowledge to adapt to change that can quickly help them make effective decisions at the time of crisis, which could determine their business directives in the future. The journey of the DBA Doctoral study was challenging, enriching, and enticing, which could enable me to take my knowledge to the next level by applying this research in professional and academic settings in the future. The participant leaders responded to all the questions and shared experiences and insights about their strategies to sustain their business during tenuous economic situations. The preparation of interview questions helps limit personal bias (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). I used semistructured questions in an interview protocol as a guide to limit personal bias. I approached my research with an open mind to avoid research bias following the recommendation of Leedy and Ormrod (2013). I knew some of the participants from social occasions; however, to avoid bias, I was professional and transparent with them during the interview process, in which I controlled my reactions to the interview responses so that it would not impact their answers differently. Finally, I used member checking to limit bias and maintained quality during the qualitative research as recommended by Reilly (2013).

Participant leaders shared a similar appetite to succeed, grow, and sustain their enterprises despite the type of sector they are in. All participant leaders were knowledgeable and experts in their fields and had many years of experience. They all shared perseverance, persistence, and commitment to sustain their enterprises during tenuous economic conditions with an intention to expand regionally once things stabilize both politically and economically. I am a strong believer of the positive impact of SMEs on middle-class economies. From the research findings, I identified the strategies that leaders of SMEs implemented to sustain their business despite the struggles and challenges leaders face in the absence of support from government and financial institutions. The area of change was the effective leadership participant leaders implemented in their strategies. All participants applied different change management techniques to their business models, whether by motivating employees, introducing innovative tools, or engaging in strategic partnerships with local or international organizations to help them sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. Leaders of SMEs were able to sustain their businesses and position themselves in the market as leaders in their field. They managed to do so by concentrating on customer service, strategic alliances, organizational growth, and sustainable cash flow. I found the information in this research beneficial and valuable to entrepreneurs, startups, and current and future leaders of SMEs. The leaders of SMEs conveyed their interest in my research and asked for a copy of this study for future reference.

Conclusion

Leaders of SMEs need a plan to link their strategies with their goals to sustain their businesses. Gaining a better understanding of strategies for sustaining SMEs should help leaders maintain their long-term strategies, acquire new ventures, and sustain their profitability. Leaders should create opportunities to remain sustainable by generating profits, sustaining current employment levels, and producing career opportunities for experienced personnel and fresh graduates. Leaders need to (a) create synergies with other organizations to ensure access to loans with lower interest rates, which are supported by BDL, (b) access new markets by having robust marketing and communication strategies, (c) develop programs with the government to develop business incubators, (d) adopt new innovation tools to remain competitive, and (e) hire qualified skilled human capital to remain productive.

The target population for this research comprised six business leaders of SMEs in Beirut in the service industry; three in the civil security field and three in the facilities management field. Kotter’s change model was the fundamental theory of my conceptual framework. Gathering data using transcribed interviews, I used methodological triangulation to compare the data from interviews with data from documents to improve the validity and reliability of my findings. I used member checking to validate the participant leaders’ responses. I asked participants to expand on their answers by asking probing questions to clarify meaning, which helped me reach data saturation. Using the deductive analytical approach, four themes emerged from the data analysis, which were (a) leaders of SMEs embedded change management in their organizations to sustain their businesses, (b) leaders of SMEs increased awareness in their organizations, (c) leaders of SMEs succeeded in creating solid organizational and financial structures to ensure a sustainable cash flow, and (d) leaders of SMEs formed niche markets to grow.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

A. Basic Qualification Questions

1. Are you a leader of an SME?
2. Is your organization an SME that falls within the category of SMEs?
3. Is your organization in the civil security or facilities management industry?
4. Will you participate in a confidential interview for the purpose of a doctorate study?
5. Where is your preference of the interview location?

B. Interview Questions

1. What were your business goals under tenuous economic conditions?
2. How did you execute and monitor your objectives as part of your business strategy under tenuous economic conditions?
3. What business strategies did you use to sustain your business during tenuous economic conditions in the country?
4. What business strategies did you use to employ effective leadership to your organization under tenuous economic conditions?
5. How did you proceed to implement your business strategies under tenuous economic conditions?
6. What barriers did you encounter to implement your business strategies under tenuous economic conditions?
7. How did you address the barriers to implement your business strategies under tenuous economic conditions?

8. How did you measure the effectiveness of your business strategies under tenuous economic conditions?
9. What other information would you like to share regarding business strategies that you developed to make you successful under tenuous economic conditions?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date:_______________________ Location:__________________________

Researcher:_________________ Participant:________________________

Instructions:

1. Explain to the participant the purpose of the study.
2. Assure confidentiality and ensure that the participant consents to the consent form.
3. Monitor my body language to ensure I do not influence any of the answers.
4. Digitally record each interview, and assign the letter A, B, and so forth for the organizations; L for leaders with a corresponding number in numerical order.
5. Record the participant letter and number on top of the page next to the name.
6. Start each interview with the following background information:
    a. Education background
    b. Business commencement
    c. Number of employees
7. Ask interview questions in the same order.
8. Record the participant' comments exactly and accurately.
9. Ensure member checking occurs through participants' reviewing and concurring with the researcher's interpretation of the interview responses.
10. Stop the audio recording and conclude the interview by thanking the participant for taking part in this study.

The approximate time of the interview will be 45 minutes.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Date________________

You are kindly invited to participate in a research, in which English language proficiency is a requirement. I kindly ask you to provide me with any document that will benefit my research, which will remain confidential. Participants of the research include business leaders of facilities management and civil security SMEs, who have implemented successful strategies during the geoeconomic crisis and tenuous economic conditions in Beirut. These leaders must demonstrate effective strategies and sustain their businesses under the current tenuous economic conditions.

Participants in this research are six business leaders of SMEs in the service industry; three in the civil security industry and three in the facilities management field, who is demonstrating effective strategies to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. The form provides information about the research. My name is Hicham Jaroudi, a doctoral student at Walden University, who is conducting the research. It is very unlikely that you have a working relationship with me. However, if this is the case, then please note that this study is not related to my actual work, role, or company. Your decision to participate or not in this study will not have any impact on any relationship you may have with me or with the company I work for.

Background Information:

The purpose of the interview is to explore strategies successful Lebanese leaders of SMEs use to sustain their businesses under tenuous economic conditions. The research targets SMEs.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, your commitment involves:

1. Participating in a face-to-face interview that will be audio recorded. The face-to-face interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and you are requested to respond to nine questions about your business strategies and experiences during tenuous economic conditions.
2. Providing any document that will benefit my research, which will remain confidential. These documents should include information related to your business strategies during tenuous economic conditions.
3. Transcript Validation: Immediately after my completion of the interview transcription, I will ask you to verify that I correctly transcribed the interview. I will send you the transcript electronically via email and request a response within 3 days if revisions are needed.
4. Member Checking: After approximately two weeks from of the interview, I will ask you to review my interpretations of your responses to confirm that these represent your ideas. This will enable me to define the accuracy of my initial interpretations and eventually correct any wrong interpretation of your interview responses.

Voluntary Nature of the Research:

Your participation in the research is solely voluntary. If you decide to participate in the research now and change your mind later, you have the right to withdraw. You have the right to end the interview at any time and skip any question you do not want to answer.

Withdrawal from Research:

Participants could withdraw without penalty or obligation to the research at any point in the interview. They can also simply not show up to an interview. In this case, I will assume they are not interested in participating in the study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no risks associated with participating in the research. The potential benefit of the research is your contribution to increasing the sustainability of other SMEs' business leaders or owners of similar businesses.

Compensation:

Participation in the research is voluntary with no monetary or non-monetary compensation. The reward lies in your contribution to the body of research and the use for future decision-making. I will make a copy of the final research available to you upon completion.

Confidentiality:

I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information (i.e., research data) can be damaging to the participant's name and business. To ensure confidentiality, all information and data will have high security measures, including password protection, and data encryption. I will keep the data safeguard for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact a Walden representative at 001-612-312-1210 or by email at IRB@mail.waldenu.edu.

Statement of Consent:

I understand the research well enough to make a decision about my participation. I consent to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant ____________________________

Date of Consent ____________________________

Participant's Written or Electronic Signature ____________________________

Researcher's Written or Electronic Signature ____________________________

Appendix D: Introductory Letter

Date________________

Name

Company
Location
Address
Email

Dear Sir/Madame,

I am a doctoral student at Walden University conducting a research pertaining to strategies of SMEs in geoeconomic crisis. I would like to invite you to participate in the research because you are a business owner/leader of an SME, who fits the criteria relating to my research. The data collected will be confidential, and participation is voluntary.

Enclosed with this letter, please find a consent form, which includes additional information about the research and the risks and benefits of participation. Please read the form thoroughly and do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or concerns. If you agree to participate in the research, consent and return the form in person, by courier, by fax, or as a scanned copy via email. For more information, the full details are below:

- Address:
- Fax:
- Email:

The interview should last 45 minutes and will comprise questions about your strategies as an owner/ leader of an SME. I will record the interview and you will have the chance to review the transcribed interview for accuracy before I include it in the research. I appreciate your participation since your input is valuable for the success of the research. I want to thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Hicham Jaroudi
DBA Candidate
Walden University

Appendix E: Email to Confirm Interview Transcript

Dear (Potential Participant's Name),

Thank you for participating in my research entitled "Strategies for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Geoeconomic Crisis." I am attaching the transcript of the interview for your review, confirmation, and amends where there is misinformation or for additional information, which I did not capture. I would like to speak with you within the next 24 hours to inquire if you have any changes to the transcript. I appreciate and thank you for taking your valuable time to attend to my research and reading through my transcript.

Sincerely,

Hicham Jaroudi
DBA Candidate
Walden University