

2018

Human Resource Management Strategies for Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprise Project Success

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Armstrong M. Alexis

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

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Project Success

by

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MBA, Durham University, 2008

MS, University of the West Indies, 1997

BS, University of the West Indies, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2018

Abstract

Critical success factors that contribute to project success in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have received insufficient attention in research. Guided by the goal-setting conceptual framework, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the human resource management (HRM) strategies used by owners of SMEs to achieve project success. Five owners of SMEs in St. Lucia participated in the research by contributing their experiences in using HRM strategies to achieve project success. Data were collected from SME owners using semistructured interviews, and from observations and analysis of company records. Data were manually analyzed using Yin's 5 phases. Five themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the data obtained from the interviews, observations, and company records: (a) financial rewards, (b) team meetings and briefings, (c) training and staff enhancement, (d) retention and loyalty, and (e) work-life balance. The HRM strategies used by the participants to achieve project success have implications for social change because project success can lead to the sustainability of SMEs, thereby creating employment and improving the quality of life for citizens who benefit from the successful infrastructural and social projects that owners of SMEs undertake.

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Dedication

It is seldom the case that a major achievement like completing doctoral studies is accomplished without the support, and inspiration of those closest to you. During the journey of completing this doctoral study, many who were close to me met their mortal demise before I got to the finish line. I therefore dedicate this study to my grandpa, my friend Ralph, and my work colleague Roy who acknowledged my start but departed this life before seeing me to the finish. Those who saw me start and finish this journey have provided invaluable and immeasurable support. To my mom who is perhaps the proudest person who accompanied me throughout this journey, I say, Ma' this is for you. My sisters Eleanor and Alisha, my brothers Keith, Solly, and Adams, and my sons Jenai and Alex, are happy today that their sibling and father has reached the heights of academic accomplishment. And of course, to my wife Gail, who was a tower of support throughout - babe you have your husband back!

Acknowledgments

I could not have completed this study without the assistance and support of a number of people. Firstly, to my Walden University Chair, Dr. D'Marie Hanson who encouraged, coached, and guided me throughout the research stage of my studies – you have been more than just a Chair. I owe my success to your incredible support. My second committee member and university research reviewer, Dr. Teresa Jepma, and Dr. Matthew Knight guided me in the direction of success, and I thank both of you for your contribution to my success. My team synergy colleagues kept me energized through our weekly calls, the result of which was the inspiration to persistently achieve critical milestones.

I would not have completed my field work without the assistance of Mr. Leo Titus Preville and Mr. Guillaume Simon, who together, furnished me with the list of registered SMEs in St. Lucia. Thank you, gentlemen, for helping me set the cornerstone to successfully complete my fieldwork. The five owners of SMEs in St. Lucia that participated in my research are the ones most responsible for the successful completion of this study. I would not have completed my research without your willingness to participate and so willingly agreeing to share your experiences as SME owners using HRM strategies to achieve project success in St. Lucia. I wish all of you the very best in your efforts to grow your businesses.

Finally, to all my friends and family who periodically inquired about my progress and continuously provided encouragement, I owe all of you a debt of gratitude.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem	1
Problem Statement	2
Purpose Statement.....	3
Nature of the Study	3
Research Question	5
Interview Questions	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Operational Definitions.....	7
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	7
Assumptions.....	8
Limitations	8
Delimitations.....	9
Significance of the Study	9
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	10
Goal-Setting Theory.....	11
Goal-Setting and Human Resource Management.....	18
Goal-Setting and Employee Performance Management.....	20
Goal-Setting and Project Success	26
Small and Medium Enterprises.....	29

Small and Medium Enterprises in the Caribbean	31
Critical Success Factors	32
Human Resource Management as a Critical Success Factor	36
Understanding Projects	38
Project Success.....	40
Project Success in Small and Medium Enterprises.....	44
Managing Employee Performance.....	46
Human Resource Management and Performance.....	51
Summary and Transition.....	54
Section 2: The Project.....	56
Purpose Statement.....	56
Role of the Researcher	57
Participants.....	60
Research Method and Design	60
Research Method	61
Research Design.....	62
Population and Sampling	64
Ethical Research.....	66
Data Collection Instruments	69
Data Collection Technique	72
Data Organization Technique	75
Data Analysis	76

Reliability and Validity.....	78
Reliability.....	79
Validity	80
Summary and Transition.....	82
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change	84
Introduction.....	84
Presentation of the Findings.....	85
Theme 1: Financial Rewards	89
Theme 2: Team Meetings and Briefings.....	91
Theme 3: Training and Staff Enhancement	94
Theme 4: Retention and Loyalty.....	97
Theme 5: Work-Life Balance	99
Applications to Professional Practice	101
Implications for Social Change.....	104
Recommendations for Action	105
Recommendations for Further Research.....	107
Reflections	108
Conclusion	110
References.....	111
Appendix A: Interview Questions	141
Appendix B: Invitation Letter to Participate in the Research	142
Appendix C: Interview Protocol	144

Appendix D: Observation Protocol.....145

List of Tables

Table 1. Grouped Data and Their Frequency.....	86
Table 2. Grouped Data and Emergent Themes	877
Table 3. Number of Respondents per Theme	888

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

A large proportion of the projects undertaken worldwide is done by small and medium enterprises (SMEs, Marcelino-Sádaba, Pérez-Ezcurdia, Lazcano, & Villanueva, 2014). Despite the importance of projects to SMEs, project success has not received sufficient attention in research, and as a result, most of the data that exist apply to larger firms. Pollack and Adler (2014) revealed that, although SMEs undertake the largest number of projects, research on how SMEs use project success for their survival is minimal. Bansal and Agarwal (2015) cautioned that researchers should not treat SMEs as scaled-down versions of larger organizations. It is therefore important to understand the factors that contribute to project success in SMEs. This study explored the human resource management (HRM) strategies that owners of SMEs use to achieve project success. The study focused on the HRM strategies that are critical for project success. The results of the study should help owners of SMEs understand how to use HRM strategies as critical success factors for project success.

Background of the Problem

SMEs are important to the economies of many countries. Across Latin America and the Caribbean, SMEs account for 94% of all private sector firms (Angelelli, Moudry & Llisterri, 2006). Dasari, Jigeesh, and Prabhukumar (2015) claimed that one-third of business operations in SMEs is related to managing projects. Despite their importance, only 61% of SMEs survive beyond 3 years (Gray & Saunders, 2016). For SMEs to continue contributing to economic prosperity, they must survive for more than just a few

years. Dasari et al. (2015) posited that successful projects in SMEs contribute to SME survival.

Although project success is important to the overall success of the SME, research addressing project management in SMEs is limited. Burke and El-Kot (2014) reported that in comparison to large organizations, relatively little research has been undertaken in SMEs. Bansal and Agarwal (2015) opined the factors that lead to success in large firms do not automatically apply to SMEs. Bansal and Agarwal cautioned that researchers should not treat SMEs as scaled-down versions of larger organizations. SMEs require their own body of knowledge to understand the factors that contribute to project success.

I have based this study on the claim by Dasari et al. (2015) that project success is important for SME success. Altarawneh (2016) revealed a positive relationship between human resource (HR) practice and firm performance. Additionally, Sheehan (2014) opined that SME performance can be achieved by focusing on HRM strategies. During this research, I explored how owners use HRM strategies as critical success factors for project success.

Problem Statement

HRM is one of the most important contributing factors for project success (Popaitoon & Siengthai, 2014). Cullen and Parker (2015) reported that 42% of engineering projects and 81% of oil and gas projects were behind schedule, and only 32% of information and communication technology (ICT) projects were successful. Khan and Rasheed (2015) posited that there is an enriching connection between HRM and project success. The general business problem is that unsuccessful projects are costly to SMEs.

The specific business problem is that some SME owners lack HRM strategies for achieving project success.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the HRM strategies SME owners use for achieving project success. Although I initially targeted four owners of SMEs on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia who have demonstrated success in using HRM strategies for achieving project success, to participate in semistructured interviews, I completed the study after conducting five interviews. The results of this study may provide owners with strategies that can secure the success of their organizations and in turn, contribute to the employment of a significant number of people on the island of St. Lucia. The implication for social change includes improvement in the quality of life of SME employees as well as improvement in the quality of life of citizens who benefit from the successful infrastructural and social projects that owners of SMEs choose to undertake.

Nature of the Study

Delost and Nadder (2014) proposed three methods to address a research problem: qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method. Barnham (2015) suggested that quantitative methodology is best suited for testing hypotheses about variables' relationships or differences, or analyzing hard, factual data. This study was not designed to test hypotheses or analyze hard, factual data. Therefore, the quantitative method was not the best choice for this study.

Although mixed-method research has gained popularity, Venkatesh, Brown, and Sullivan (2016) advised that mixed method is only useful when the researcher is combining quantitative and qualitative data-collection procedures to both explore and examine research questions. Since this research did not require me to gather or analyze statistical data for testing hypotheses about variables' relationships or differences, the mixed method was not appropriate for this research.

Park and Park (2016) stated that the qualitative methodology is best suited when the researcher is seeking to understand and explore descriptive accounts, and similarities and differences among various social events. The qualitative method was appropriate for this study since my goal was to explore HRM strategies used by SME owners to achieve project success.

In conducting qualitative research, the researcher can choose from a number of different designs, including case study, ethnography, and phenomenology (Awasthy, 2015). The purpose of ethnographic research is to describe a cultural phenomenon that a group has experienced or to research patterns of behavior or attitudes within a culture (Kruth, 2015). This research was not designed to describe a cultural phenomenon or patterns of behavior. Therefore, the ethnographic research design was not the best choice for this research.

Kruth (2015) explained that the phenomenological design is useful when the researcher is interested in focusing on the meanings of participants' experiences. Since I described the actual experiences of SME owners and not the personal meanings of

experiencing the phenomenon of project success itself, the phenomenological design was not the best choice for this research.

Aczel (2015) explained that the qualitative case study design is useful when the researcher is conducting an exploratory investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context. I chose the multiple-case study design because I sought to explore a phenomenon in its real-life context.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was: What HRM strategies do SME owners use for achieving project success?

Interview Questions

1. What human resource management (HRM) strategies have you used to achieve project success in your organization?
2. What HRM strategies have you found most effective to achieve project success?
3. What were the key barriers to implementing your HRM strategies for project success in your organization?
4. How did you address the key barriers to implementing your HRM strategies for project success?
5. What HRM strategies have you found to be least effective for achieving project success?
6. How do you measure the effectiveness of your HRM strategies on project success?

7. What additional information would you like to share on HRM strategies you use for achieving project success in your organization?

Conceptual Framework

The goal-setting conceptual framework, proposed by Locke and Latham in 1990, formed the conceptual framework of this study. It is based on the idea that task performance is regulated by consciously setting goals for individuals to attain. In 1990, Locke and Latham conducted research among 40,000 subjects in eight countries by applying 88 tasks to time spans which varied from 1 minute to 3 years. Locke and Latham revealed that goals which are specific and challenging led to better performance and concluded that goals positively affect performance if there is a commitment to them.

Researchers use the goal-setting conceptual framework to explain how goals that are assigned by influential people can lead to positive outcomes. By assigning the goal, the authority figure is expressing confidence in the subordinate which can increase the subordinate's self-confidence (Locke & Latham, 1990). The individual undertaking the task is motivated to achieve and attains self-satisfaction from a good performance. Locke and Latham (1990) suggested that leaders and managers ensure a means of tracking performance related to the set goals.

HRM strategies include managing employee performance by setting performance targets (Marshall, Ashleigh, Baden, Ojiako, & Guidi, 2015). The goal-setting conceptual framework can be helpful for understanding the findings of this study because it explains how clear, and challenging goals contribute to performance and organizational success. Miller and Weiss (2015) opined that specific and challenging goals influenced

performance and served as a good measure of the employee's contribution to organizational success.

Operational Definitions

Critical success factor: Critical success factors are those few things that must go well to ensure success for a manager or an organization (Blaskovics, 2016).

Employee performance management: Employee performance management is a process through which managers continuously identify, measure, and develop the performance of individuals and teams, and align performance with the strategic goals of the organization (West & Blackman, 2015).

Human resource management strategies: Human Resource Management (HRM) strategies are the approaches and mechanisms adopted by an organization to manage the human resources of the organization (García-Carbonell, Martín-Alcázar, & Sánchez-Gardey, 2016).

Project success: Project success refers to the triangle measure of cost, time, and scope, and includes meeting the varying concerns and expectations of the project stakeholders (PMI, 2008).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

In all research, there are constraining factors which are beyond the control of the researcher. These factors are referred to as assumptions and limitations and represent situations and circumstances that may affect or restrict the research (Singh, 2015). However, there are factors that are within the control of the researcher and embody or

describe the scope of the research. Vernon-Dotson (2013) referred to these factors as the delimitations of the research.

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements accepted to be true if future endeavors hold as planned (Gao, Ergan, Akinici, & Garrett, 2014). Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that the researcher does not verify assumptions during the research. In this study, the first assumption was that there are SMEs in St. Lucia that have used HRM strategies to achieve project success. I also assumed that the owners of these SMEs were willing to discuss their strategies with me and would be truthful and honest in sharing all the relevant information in an unbiased, factual manner. Another assumption I made was that by using the semistructured interview, document review, and observation, I would be able to fully answer the central research question of this study. I assumed the results of this study would present evidence which links HRM strategies to project success in SMEs.

Limitations

Simon and Goes (2013) described limitations as occurrences that arise in a study that are beyond the researcher's control. The main limitation of this study was the participants in this research were a purposive sample that did not represent all owners of SMEs in St. Lucia. Since I used the qualitative multiple-case study design, this study is descriptive, and therefore, limited to only producing findings that are subjective in nature. The small size of the business sector also presented a limitation. St. Lucia is a small independent nation in the Caribbean, and the number of businesses to choose from was

limited. The research also faced a limitation related to the quality of the data SMEs in St. Lucia keep.

Delimitations

Marshall and Rossman (2016) considered delimitations to be the restrictions or limits that the researcher imposes on the study. Delimitations may include the criteria for selecting participants for the study, the geographic location selected for conducting the research, and the organization on which the study focuses (Vernon-Dotson, 2013). The first delimitation was the geographic location. I selected St. Lucia, a small island nation in the Caribbean, where SMEs are primarily family-owned businesses. In the second delimitation, I restricted the study to five owners of SMEs who used HRM strategies as critical success factors in achieving project success. In the third delimitation for this study, I chose to gather data only from the owners and not employees since my main research interest was the HRM strategies SME owners used, and not employees' perception of the strategies.

Significance of the Study

SMEs are important to most economies around the world (Maksimov, Wang, & Lou, 2017). Dasari et al. (2015) indicated that project success is a major pillar for the survivability of SMEs. HRM is important for SME success. Doherty and Norton (2014) advised that SMEs survive largely because of strong, yet flexible HRM strategies. This study may be of value to business because its findings could be used to provide SME owners with ideas on how to use HRM strategies to contribute to the achievement of project success. Although Williams (2014) explained that SMEs do not have the

resources to invest in systems that contribute only to long-term business success, the long-lasting loyalty of employees and customers is important for the survival and growth of the SME. As a result, SME owners invest in HR strategies that have both short-term and long-lasting positive impacts on their organizations. The implications for social change include that by increasing the sustainability rate, SMEs can contribute to business survival and employment creation, which benefits employees, families, and communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

I conducted this study to explore the HRM strategies owners of SMEs use to achieve project success. I used the following databases in my literature search: (a) Academic Search Complete; (b) Business Source Complete; (c) Emerald Insights; (d) ProQuest Central; (e) SAGE Journals, and (f) Google Scholar. The major key search words I used for this study were; *small and medium enterprises, project management, project success, critical success factors, employee performance management, performance management, human resource management strategies, and project implementation*. Of the 199 references I cited in this study, 185 (93%) were scholarly peer-reviewed articles. The non-peer reviewed references included two technical reports representing 1%, 11 books representing 5%, and two government reports representing 1%. The references published within the past 5 years constituted 180 or 90% of the total number of references in the study. The literature review contains 106 references, out of which 104 (98%) were peer-reviewed. The total number of references in the literature review that were published in the past 5 years was 94 or 89% of the references in the literature review.

To provide a conceptual basis for this research, I began my literature review with a presentation of the goal-setting theory and how setting goals influences employee performance. I then focused on a brief description of SMEs in the Caribbean and placed special attention to SMEs on the island of St. Lucia. I continued with a review of a body of literature to provide context and rigor to this study. The literature substantiates the basis for my inquiry and explains what makes projects successful. Evidence from the literature confirms that critical success factors (CSF) contribute to project success and although there is inadequate research on HRM as a critical success factor in SMEs, the existing literature serves to frame my research and encapsulates relevant professional and academic debates related to the research topic. This literature review covers important discourse that links this research to the extant literature.

Goal-Setting Theory

Goal-setting is used by many organizations to establish a clear result from the actions of people within the organization. In presenting the theory, Locke and Latham (1990) described a goal as the desired outcome linked to the level of performance of an employee when undertaking a task. Locke and Latham summarized the results of nearly 400 laboratory and field studies and concluded that specific, challenging goals lead to better performance than easy, and vague goals (Burdina, Hiller, & Metz, 2017). Locke and Latham believed that goals provided a cognitive explanation for motivation. Individuals optimize their performance and commit to a task because the goal provides direction, serves to energize the individual, provides a base for prolonged action, leads to arousal and discovery, and discovers task-relevant knowledge and strategies (Locke &

Latham, 2002). To ensure that employees are focused on efforts that contribute to organizational performance, Favero, Meier, and O'Toole (2016) suggested that as a first step, managers must set clear, feasible, yet challenging goals.

Reemts, Hirsch, and Nitzl (2016) explained that business leaders used goal-setting theory to set performance goals. The basis for the goal-setting theory is the idea that employee performance on an assigned task is regulated by consciously setting goals for individuals to attain. Locke (1968) conducted research and concluded that with hard goals, individuals performed at a higher level. The research which Locke conducted also revealed that when goals were specific and hard, the level of output was higher than when individuals had goals that simply expected them to do their best. In the 1970s, researchers applied the goal-setting theory to workplace production and confirmed the link between goal-setting and workplace performance (Burdina et al., 2017). Neubert and Dyck (2016) indicated that in 1990, Locke and Latham refined the theory which formed the basis for directly regulating task performance.

When performing tasks, individuals display behavior and take actions that are consistent with the set goals. Ganegoda, Latham, and Folger (2016) identified four ways in which goal-setting theory affected employee behavior. Ganegoda et al. (2016) indicated that the first effect goal-setting has on employee behavior is to make relevant information salient. Ganegoda et al. explained that goals direct the attention of employees away from irrelevant information. In the second instance, Ganegoda et al. explained that goals energize individuals, and direct them to spend their effort on tasks that lead to the agreed outcome. In explaining a third way that goal-setting affected employee behavior,

Ganegoda et al. stated that goals increase persistence, and finally, Ganegoda et al. explained that goals affect behavior by motivating individuals to discover and apply knowledge and strategies that are relevant to the goal.

The effect of goal-setting on behavior that was articulated by Ganegoda et al. (2016), was previously expressed by Locke and Latham (2002). Locke and Latham advanced four mechanisms through which goals operate. In the first place, goals direct the attention of employees towards activities that are relevant to the set goals. Locke and Latham went on to explain that goals motivate and energize employees to put forward great effort in the tasks that lead towards goal attainment. In outlining the third mechanism through which goals operate, Locke and Latham explained that goals increase persistence and sustain efforts over a prolonged period to accomplish the task. The fourth mechanism put forward by Locke and Latham focused on how goals could lead individuals to discover and use new task-relevant knowledge to improve performance. Authors such as Locke and Latham; and Ganegoda et al. have shown that individuals apply a focused approach to tasks when goals are clear and known from the beginning of the assignment. The goal-setting theory is, therefore, a suitable framework for grounding this study.

Arumugam, Anthony, and Linderman (2016) indicated that research on goal-setting has established a positive relationship between setting challenging goals and performance outcomes. Locke and Latham (1990) showed that individuals with specific challenging goals, will perform at a high level. Kuvaas, Buch, and Dysvik (2016) posited that employee performance management involves three interrelated activities: setting

goals, evaluating goal attainment, and providing performance feedback. The setting of goals is a foundation for managing performance. Successful organizations use performance management as a critical business tool for translating strategy into results (Devarajan, Maheshwari, & Vohra, 2016). Devarajan, Maheshwari, and Vohra (2016) indicated that setting goals allow managers to measure performance. The performance of employees linked to the overall performance of the organization benefits from clearly set goals. Devarajan et al. explained that managers used goals to evaluate performance and provide feedback.

Individuals may have goals assigned to them, or the opportunity can be afforded for employees to participate in setting their own goals (Locke & Latham, 1990). Latham, Seijts, and Slocum (2016) argued that self-set goals, along with assigned goals, and goals set as a result of employee participation in decision making, were effective ways of increasing job performance. Latham et al. (2016) opined that employee participation in setting goals produced results that were just as effective as the results obtained from goals that set by a supervisor. Employee participation ensured that there was clarity on the set goal. Although self-set goals are at the core of self-regulation, Latham et al. found that self-set goals, were less impactful on organizational performance. After reviewing ten organizational behavior textbooks as part of an investigation about how managers addressed goal-setting, Miller and Weiss (2015) concluded that goals created through participation gave rise to setting even more challenging goals, as well as providing individual insights into methods for achieving their goals.

Although goals can be set by a supervisor, employee, or via consultation between the employee and the supervisor, Locke and Latham (1990) drew on the findings of research to explain that when legitimate authority assign goals, employees often comply. The primary reason why assigning goals results in compliance is that the act of assigning a goal is an indication that the authority figure is confident in the employee's ability to reach the goal. The goals assigned by an authority figure therefore serve to motivate the employee (Locke & Latham, 1990).

The goal-setting theory explains how performance goals improve task performance (Landers, Bauer, & Callan, 2017). In describing the main purpose of goal-setting theory, Rutherford and Meier (2015) pointed out that goals stimulate people to prioritize and focus on the task at hand. Locke and Latham (1990) explained that performance is enhanced when the employee is committed to the goals. When a legitimate authority sets goals, employees become motivated to perform (Doerr & Gue, 2013). Doerr and Gue (2013) indicated that when employees internalize goals, they improve their performance through behaviors such as attention, effort, persistence, and improved task strategies. Although Locke and Latham posited that the main purpose of the goal-setting theory was to explain why some people worked harder than others, or performed better than others on a task, Neubert and Dyck (2016) offered a different perspective by stating that that the goal-setting theory contributed to short-term, and long-term viability of organizations and society.

Setting goals is a good way to establish performance expectations of employees. Gutiérrez, Lloréns-Montes, and Sanchez (2009) argued that setting challenging goals

provides the context for members of a team to be oriented towards a shared vision which in turn will influence project success. In a study of six sigma project performance, Arumugam et al. (2016) reported that research on goal-setting theory had established a positive relationship between setting challenging goals and performance outcomes. Arumugam et al. found that project goals and knowledge creation contributed to high employee performance on projects. Arumugam et al. noted that if goals were challenging and realistic, they would have a positive impact on project success. Goals should not be too simple to achieve since they will hardly motivate employees to put in any effort, and if employees perceived goals to be too difficult, employees often reject them and feel demotivated if they do not reach the set goals (Doerr & Gue, 2013). Goals should, therefore, be set at a level at which they will lead to motivating employees to strive to achieve them.

Lee, Keil, and Wong (2015) advocated for goals that would lead to an escalation of commitment and advised that assigning a goal that is extremely difficult can result in the de-escalation of commitment. Difficult goals can positively impact task performance only up to the point that employees consider the task to be attainable (Lee, Keil, & Wong, 2015). In setting goals, managers must, therefore, seek to balance goal difficulty with the desired project outcomes (Lee, Keil, & Kasi, 2012). In associating goals to project success, Arumugam et al. (2016) argued that goals that influence learning can positively influence project success. Arumugam et al. suggested that when goals orient a team towards a shared vision, the team is more likely to achieve project success. When undertaking a project, members of the project team perform tasks and functions that are

in keeping with set goals that relate to their roles. Arumugam et al. argued that project teams draw on the skills and knowledge of their members to achieve success.

Setting goals provides managers with the basis for managing employee performance. Kuvaas et al. (2016) argued that employers managed employee performance through a process of setting goals, evaluating goal attainment, and providing feedback. In linking employee performance and project success, Latham et al. (2016) advised that setting goals is essential for success in today's business. Devarajan et al. (2016) supported this view by stating that performance management is a significant system that leads the business to organizational results and is considered an important driver to create value for an organization. Goal-setting serves as a motivational tool affecting employee performance (Latham, Seijts, & Slocum, 2016). Latham conducted research and found that the higher the goal, the higher the performance, and as indicated by Mensah (2015) the performance of the employee contributes to the overall success of the organization.

For organizations to be successful, the people in the organizations must perform to a standard that leads to success (Atan, Raghavan, & Mahmood, 2015). Atan, Raghavan, and Mahmood (2015) argued that the success of an organization depends on the job performance of employees. Business managers must have the means to determine whether employees are performing at the level that contributes to organizational success. Decramer, Smolders, and Vanderstraeten (2013) stated that employee performance is a continuous process of identifying, measuring, and developing employee performance.

They argued that individuals, teams, and the organization benefit if goals are set and can be measured.

Setting goals is the first phase of managing performance. Decramer et al. (2013) proposed three broad phases to categorize employee performance: the planning or goal-setting phase, monitoring or the feedback phase, and evaluation or the appraising phase. Setting goals at the beginning and having a system to manage performance through effective feedback and rewards has a significant impact on organizational results (Devarajan et al., 2016).

Goal-Setting and Human Resource Management

Goal-setting is an important component of managing the human resources of any organization (Lim, Wang, & Lee, 2017). Aksoy and Bayazit (2014) advised that there are numerous HRM practices that link goal-setting and HRM. Aksoy and Bayazit posited that management by objectives (MBO) is an HRM practice which links HRM to goal-setting in organizations. Aksoy and Bayazit indicated that appraisal and management of employees, department, and business performance, are the primary functions of MBO. The MBO systems involve setting company-wide goals; establishing the team and department objectives; collaboratively setting individual level goals that align with corporate strategy, and team and department goals; and reviewing performance and providing feedback (Aksoy & Bayazit, 2014). Yildirim and Elbas (2014) suggested that in MBO, the manager and employees collaborate to set employee goals for the next planning period and assess the extent of success derived at the end of the period.

Boyer, Rodriguez, Artis, and Garcia (2016) argued that practitioners have been paying special attention to SMART (Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, and Time-bound) goals as a strategy in goal-setting. Boyer et al. (2016) suggested that SMART goal setting was a popular goal-setting strategy that is widely used by managers today. When using the SMART format to set goals, managers set goals that are easy to understand and access throughout performing the task (Boyer Rodriguez, Artis, & Garcia, 2016). Boyer et al. suggested that for a goal to be considered SMART, it had to target a specific area for improvement, quantify an indicator of progress, specify who is involved, state the expected results that can realistically be achieved with the available resources, and specify the timeframe for achieving the results. Boyer et al. suggested MBO is the foundation of SMART goals and opined that setting goals using SMART format was an effective HR tool for assessing goal performance. With SMART goals, a basis is set to assess whether the employees are achieving the goals. Management by objectives, therefore, serves as a useful tool not just to set performance goals but also to provide feedback that is important for employee development and performance improvement (Yildirim & Elbas, 2014).

When used as an HRM tool, goal-setting helps employees to know what to do, and how to tackle tasks related to goals (Rashidi, 2015). The employees also have a better sense of how their abilities match the tasks and can use task related goals to set proper career goals and identify the source of performance problems (Rashidi, 2015). Rashidi (2015) also argued that goals allow the manager to provide feedback and guidance to help

employees identify their weaknesses, strengthen their performance to reach goals, improve the working atmosphere, and design a fair reward system.

Neves, Almeida, and Veles (2018) posited that commitment-based HR practices set the stage for a positive relationship in which employees reciprocate by using their enhanced abilities and motivation to achieve organizational goals. Such commitment is derived from HR systems which promote perspectives to explain how HR systems engender strategically important employee behaviors (Neves, Almeida, & Veles, 2018)). When employees consider goals to be fair, their motivation to succeed is high (Ganegoda et al., 2016). Ganegoda et al. (2016) suggested that fairness was a fundamental aspect of goal achievement. Ganegoda et al. argued that when burdens and benefits are allocated equally, the relationship between the employee and the organization was positive. The organizational culture that is articulated through the HR strategy of the firm forms the basis for building trust. Employees feel a sense of fairness and believe the goals that have been set are a platform for equal treatment (Marshall, Ashleigh, Baden, Ojiako, & Guidi, 2015).

Goal-Setting and Employee Performance Management

One of the primary objectives of HRM strategy is to enhance employee performance. In reviewing the literature related to goal-setting and employee performance management, I came across a body of evidence that relates goal-setting to employee performance. Ford (2017) advised that goal-setting was one of the most widely used and effective interventions to increase work performance. In explaining the performance management approach, Bititci, Cocca, and Ates (2016) posited that

performance management included both the measurement and management of employee performance related to increasing organizational effectiveness. If managers conduct performance measurement techniques, such as periodic performance appraisal without effectively managing employee performance, the effect of goal-setting on performance will not be fully known. Reemts et al. (2016) advised that if the effect of goal-setting was to be truly known, organizational leaders had to both manage and measure employee performance.

Reemts et al. (2016) found that goal difficulty and specificity influenced workers' motivation. Reemts et al. explained that employees who perceived their goals to be difficult displayed high levels of motivation. Reemts et al. also explained that employees who believed in their ability to achieve goals, had a high sense of self-efficacy, and worked harder at the tasks they had to perform. Through the process of constantly assessing whether employees are achieving set goals, managers remain connected to the quality of performance of their employees. Kuvaas et al. (2016) opined that goals should be dynamic and may require continuous revision throughout the performance cycle. If organizational leaders are to follow the advice of Bititci et al. (2016) to both manage and measure employee performance for organizational effectiveness, it will be necessary to ensure that the employee performance management system that organizational leaders use, is consistent and not a yearly or half-yearly event of applying a score that only reflects the manager's view of the performance of the employee. The performance management system must be flexible enough to respond in various ways to revise goals. The employee performance management system should ensure that both employee and

supervisor are engaged in regularly reviewing the goals. Kuvaas et al. posited that with regular updates, the supervisor could communicate with employees and provide responses about how well they were doing in relation to the goals. The supervisor can also inform the employees if they are expected to act more responsibly and use their judgment if they think the goals are not in line with the successful completion of the assignment.

Miller and Weiss (2015) advised that goal difficulty, and goal specificity, had the most robust effects on performance. Rashidi (2015) suggested that setting achievable and measurable goals led to improved performance of employees and organizations. Performance management begins with the identification and agreement on the goals that will guide performance (Kuvaas, Buch, & Dysvik, 2016). Employee performance has an important role to play in the success of an organization (Atan et al., 2015). However, Bititci et al. (2016) advised that performance management systems consist of a range of activities which the organization engages in to enhance the performance of the employee or a group, with the ultimate purpose of improving organizational effectiveness. These include setting goals and measuring feedback (Devarajan et al., 2016). Performance goals affect task performance and contribute to organization success (Sitzmann & Bell, 2017). By incorporating HRM activities such as identifying and developing employee competences, enhancing employee performance, and distributing rewards, performance management could lead to organizational success (Decramer, Smolders, & Vanderstraeten, 2013).

Aguinis and Pierce (2008) outlined some performance management steps which align performance with the strategic goals of the organization. Aguinis and Pierce described performance management as an ongoing process that involves six stages. The first stage is the pre-requisite stage at which point the employee is expected to display knowledge of the organization's mission and strategic goals. At the second stage, Aguinis and Pierce emphasized performance planning where the supervisor sets goals, and the supervisor and employee reach agreements about what the employee needs to do. During the third stage, the employee performs according to the goals agreed upon earlier. The fourth stage involves the employee and supervisor coming together to evaluate the extent to which the employee has displayed the desired behaviors, and whether the employee has achieved the desired results. During the fifth stage, the employee and supervisor conduct an assessment which they will both review. Aguinis and Pierce called this stage the appraisal meeting or discussion stage and claimed that it is at this stage that the supervisor provides feedback to the employee. Aguinis and Pierce referred to the sixth stage as the performance renewal and re-contracting phase and stated that at this stage the supervisor sets new goals similar to the ones set during the performance planning stage. During this stage the supervisors may adjust goals based on the experience of goal attainment in the previous cycle.

Goal-setting is a prominent theme in the performance management literature. Daniel, Lee, and Reitsperger (2014) indicated that for quite a long time, goal-setting had been recognized as an effective tool for performance management. Goals provide employees with a yardstick to determine whether feedback on performance reveals

acceptable or unacceptable performance (Locke & Latham, 1990). In a discussion on the effect of goal-setting on performance, Lynn and Reilly (2000) advised that setting goals for individuals and groups facilitate performance. Lynn and Reilly argued that goals help to establish direction and establishes a domain of interest for motivating staff to search for ways to achieve the goal. Evidence from research suggests that individuals with specific goals outperform those with no goals at all or those who are told to do their best (Lynn & Reilly, 2000).

Devarajan et al. (2016) argued that the competitive business landscape has placed increased pressure on business entities with a strong emphasis now being placed on measuring and managing individual performance. Devarajan et al. suggested that measuring individual performance takes place by setting goals to be achieved during the performance period. Devarajan et al. also proposed that business performance at organization, team, and individual levels benefit from goal-setting. Unger-Aviram, Zwikael, and Restubog (2013) argued that successful performance is the result of routine and automatized individual behavior. Decramer et al. (2013) outlined a three-step process for performance management which started with goal-setting at the planning stage and followed by monitoring, where supervisors provide feedback, and evaluation, where the employee participates in a performance appraisal.

Literature has also revealed that when employees participate in setting goals, there is a high level of performance. Locke and Latham (1990) indicated that letting individuals participate in setting goals to guide their performance had the same effect as a person in authority setting goals for the employee. Participation in goal-setting is not less

effective than assigning goals (Locke & Latham, 1990). Some employee performance management strategies encourage goal-setting by employees and managers to take place at any time during the performance cycle. Devarajan et al. (2016) revealed that many organizations are redesigning their performance management system to meet the growing demands of a changing business environment. Some performance management systems are backward-looking with once per year goals that supervisors set at the beginning of the year and feedback provided only when the year ends (Devarajan et al., 2016).

Organizations are now looking at forward-looking programs that are real-time, continuous, consistent, and intuitive (Devarajan et al., 2016). Devarajan et al. proposed that this forward-looking approach to performance management allowed employees to participate in goal-setting, to update progress at any point in time, and conduct a real-time dialogue with supervisors. This new approach is beneficial and translates strategy into results (Devarajan et al., 2016).

Kuvaas et al. (2016) discussed the challenges associated with disconnected performance management activities. When goals are set once or twice a year, or even quarterly, there is the likelihood that some of the goals may become obsolete, redundant, or wrong, during the performance cycle (Kuvaas et al., 2016). Goals that are perceived as invariable are negatively related to performance (Kuvaas et al., 2016). Kuvaas et al. suggested that a good performance management system will facilitate employees adjusting their goals. Goal-setting that is dynamic relies on the continuous participation of employees. Kuvaas et al. concluded that with clear communication from supervisors, employees will know that if goals are obsolete, redundant, or wrong, they can use their

knowledge, skills, abilities, and commitment to the task to make discrete judgements during the performance cycle.

Goal-Setting and Project Success

One way of ensuring that employees deliver the desired result, is to set goals that guide performance towards project success. Masters and Frazier (2007) argued that organizations set goals for teams working on projects to achieve. Aga, Noorderhaven, and Vallejo (2016) posited that specific and clear goals that are accepted by the team have a positive correlation with project success. In reviewing literature from a series of studies, Aga et al. (2016) concluded that when team members agree on project goals, the success of a project will come. Masters and Frazier opined that individuals performing in groups have the same desire to achieve goals as individuals aiming for personal success. Increased goal-setting in project teams have a positive relationship with project performance (Masters & Frazier, 2007). Masters and Frazier concluded that managers could increase project performance by increasing the goal-setting activities for individuals working in the project team.

In deepening their argument on the effect of goal-setting on project success, Masters and Frazier (2007) posited that if a project does not have clearly defined goals, it is reasonable to assume that the project team will not have a point of reference from which to construct individual goals that relate to their contribution towards the project. Masters and Frazier reiterated that project success relies on setting goals and providing feedback on how employees are achieving the goals. Masters and Frazier went on to state that goal-setting affects project quality and project performance and indicated that the

stronger the individual goals are identified within the project, the greater the chances that individual team members will contribute towards project quality. Masters and Frazier suggested that personal goals and project success goals must be oriented towards the same end thereby creating a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the goals among employees and managers.

Chockalingam and Ramayah (2013) related goal-setting to enterprise resource planning (ERP) and opined that communicating ERP business goals was a critical success factor for project success. In defining ERP as an information system strategy adopted by organizations to synergize and increase operating efficiency, Gollner and Bauman-Vitolina (2016) explained that goals must be set, and must be communicated to the project team members, and across the entire organization. When using the ERP project cycle approach, support and commitment from senior levels of management will be necessary if the strategic goals are to contribute to project success (Chockalingam & Ramayah, 2013). Chockalingam and Ramayah argued that goals must be clearly defined as an essential guide for ERP implementation and concluded that clear goals should be specific and operational if they are to contribute to ongoing organizational efforts. Chockalingam and Ramayah referred to goals as the blueprint for organizational success.

Liu and Cross (2016) proposed some input factors for project success and opined that goal clarity addressed the degree to which the goals of the project were well defined. Liu and Cross stated that the literature supports a strong, and positive relationship between goal clarity and project success. As the scope of the project is determined, project goals need to be clarified (Gollner & Bauman-Vitolina, 2016). In project

management strategies such as six sigma, managers place a strong emphasis on setting challenging specific goals (Marzagão & Carvalho, 2016). Six Sigma projects measure the achievement of goals as a key item to determine the success of a project (Marzagão & Carvalho, 2016). Marzagão and Carvalho (2016) advised that project activities must ensure that the goals of the project can significantly affect the results that the business is trying to achieve, thereby creating a bridge between goal-setting and project success.

Although Locke and Latham (2002) advised that goals form a major source of motivation and regulator of behavior to achieve project success, Unger-Aviram et al. (2013) went beyond goal-setting to suggest that task-focus leadership behaviors were necessary for employees to accomplish tasks. Task assignment, which some studies referred to as goal-setting (Choockalingam & Ramayah, 2013; Devarajan et al., 2016; Gil & Carter, 2016), provides specification about the way work is to be conducted (Unger-Aviram, Zwikael, & Restubog, 2013). Unger-Aviram et al. explained that leaders initiate structures to emphasize goal attainment activities, and orient individuals and teams toward task accomplishment. Project managers ensure that teams and individuals achieve compliance with project goals. This requires the project manager to ensure that team members direct their attention, behavior, and effort towards goal attainment activities (Unger-Aviram et al., 2013).

One core element which determines the influence that team behavior has on project performance is task type and project complexity (Malach-Pines, Dvir, & Sadeh, 2009). Project teams regularly engage in highly complex tasks for which they need to generate innovative ideas and think of solutions and actions that will contribute to the

success of the task. Unger-Aviram et al. (2013) explained that the goals set often have to be adjusted to take on board changing circumstances during the life cycle of the project.

Small and Medium Enterprises

I begin the review of the relevant literature by focusing on SMEs. Leithold, Haase, and Lautenschlager (2015) characterized SMEs as organizations with flat hierarchies, limited bureaucracies, short pathways of communication, a low division of labor, and high motivation across management and employee levels. The characteristics of SMEs are not the same as those of large firms. Xiang, Archer, and Detlor (2014) argued that unlike larger organizations, SMEs have their distinct features. SMEs are flexible, can reorient themselves quickly, can make quick decisions, and are closer to their markets (Petkovska, 2015). In making the argument about the difference between SMEs and larger firms, Bansal and Agarwal (2015) advised that researchers should not treat SMEs like scaled-down versions of larger organizations. Some of the innate features which distinguish SMEs from larger organizations include fewer employees, less work, fewer customers, and restricted markets (Petkovska, 2015). The features outlined by Petkovska can place SMEs in an advantageous position over larger organizations. Dasari et al. (2015) explained SMEs make quicker decisions and face less resistance than larger organizations. In presenting a similar perspective, Petkovska opined that SMEs are dynamic, can adapt easily, and are flexible.

More SMEs are operating worldwide than large organizations. Psychogios, Szamisi, Prouska, and Brewster (2016) called SMEs the backbone of economies of both developing and developed countries, and revealed that 99% of all private sector

businesses in Europe were SMEs. In the United States, 99% of all private sector firms are SMEs accounting for 50% of all jobs (Labeledz & Berry, 2011). Adisa, Abdurraheem, and Mordi (2014) reported that with over 60% of all business in Nigeria categorized as SMEs, Nigerians rely on SMEs for their livelihood. The economies of developing countries such as those of the Caribbean, rely heavily on SMEs. Ramukumba (2014) argued that SMEs could improve income distribution, create new employment, reduce poverty, and facilitate export growth. Since SMEs are the majority of enterprises and provide employment for more than two-thirds of the private sector workforce, the social and economic viability of countries, depend heavily on strong and successful SMEs (Petkovska, 2015).

Modern-day SMEs undertake most of their assignments as projects (Dasari, et al., 2015; Marcelino-Sádaba et al., 2014). Marcelino-Sádaba et al. (2014) advised that projects are critical for the survival of SMEs. In expanding their thesis, Marcelino-Sádaba et al. posited that SMEs accomplished growth through projects. SMEs have a strong record of developing new products as part of their project portfolio (Leithold, Haase, & Lautenschlager, 2015). The literature confirms that projects form an important part of the functioning of SMEs. Owners provide leadership to the SMEs and can adjust the operations of the enterprise to satisfy increasing project demands. Prabhukumar (2015) stated that it is common for senior people in an SME to perform the role of project manager. Owners of SMEs who successfully manage projects contribute to their organizations' survival and growth.

Small and Medium Enterprises in the Caribbean

The Caribbean is a region of small island developing states. The islands of the Caribbean are among the smallest nation-states of the world (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2016). As a result of their size, the islands of the Caribbean do not have the population or market for large businesses. SMEs, therefore, make up the majority of private sector businesses in the Caribbean (Lashley & Moore, 2013). Angelelli, Moudry and Llisterri (2006) posited that SMEs constitute nearly all private sector firms in the Caribbean. Because of their small economies, the islands of the Caribbean also have micro enterprises employing five people or less (Julien & Edwards, 2016). Julien and Edwards (2016) noted that in addition to SMEs, there exist in the Caribbean, a categorization of enterprises known as micro-enterprises, thus giving rise to the business grouping known as micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

Julien and Edwards (2016) reported that the governments of the Caribbean nations use three measurements to define MSMEs: assets, employment, and turnover. Kozlowski and Matejun (2016) posited that both qualitative and quantitative characteristics are used to define SMEs. Kozlowski and Matejun opined that the qualitative characteristics of SMEs included; environmental, organizational, decisional, psychosocial, and information features. The quantitative features of SMEs, as posited by Kozlowski and Matejun included; resources, size of the business, and employment volume. These features help to define MSMEs in the Caribbean and as Julien and Edwards concluded, in the Caribbean, a micro enterprise employed between one and five

employees, a small enterprise employed between six and 15 employees, and a medium-sized enterprise employed between 16 and 50 employees.

St. Lucia is a Caribbean island with a population of 166,526 persons (Census Report, 2010). Lashley and Moore (2013) revealed that 77% of enterprises in St. Lucia are MSMEs employing 64% of the labor force. MSMEs are therefore important to the economy of St. Lucia. In 1998, the Parliament of St Lucia passed the Micro and Small-Scale Business Enterprise Act (Lashley & Moore, 2013). The Act was amended in 2001 and defined a micro enterprise as a business organization with a maximum of five employees, an asset base of \$27,778, and an annual sales turnover of not more than \$37,000 (Lashley & Moore, 2013). Lashley and Moore reported that the Micro and Small-Scale Business Enterprise Act of St Lucia defined a small business as an organization with a maximum of 50 employees, an asset base of \$185,000, and an annual sales turnover of \$370,000. The Micro and Small-Scale Business Enterprise Act of St. Lucia makes no distinction between medium and large enterprises, and Lashley and Moore revealed that based on the definitions in the Micro and Small-Scale Business Enterprise Act, the majority of firms in St. Lucia were micro enterprises.

Critical Success Factors

When writers first proposed critical success factors (CSF) in the 1960s, the aim was to introduce an organizational approach to help management achieve organizational goals (Ram & Corkindale, 2014). In explaining the value of CSFs to achieving success Ram and Corkindale (2014) indicated that the concept of CSFs introduced a systematic approach for managers to identify the key areas or signposts that require constant and

careful attention to achieve performance goals. Hwang and Lim (2013) presented similar views by suggesting that CSFs were the activities that had to yield favorable results if the manager were to achieve the set goals. Critical success factors, therefore, related to the favorable results of some activities which were necessary for a manager to reach set goals. These factors contribute to and are critical for success in project implementation (Hwang & Lim, 2013). Critical success factors help managers to set goals and predict success, rather than just hope for the mere survival of projects (Hwang & Lim, 2013). Hwang and Lim argued further that CSFs are a starting point for project success.

Allen, Alleyne, Farmer, McRae, and Turner (2014), stated that CSFs are the few areas where things must go right for the business to flourish, and proposed a framework of project success by highlighting some CSFs for project success. Allen et al. posited that the three CSFs for project success were the external influence, the project manager, and the scope, schedule, and budget of the project. Allen et al. suggested that the culture of the organization was the most critical element of the external influence. It is the responsibility of management to ensure a high degree of organization and planning, create a collaborative and friendly working environment, and lead a culture of change by communicating and delegating effectively. The external influence also requires an environment in which staff are motivated to accomplish goals and objectives (Allen, Alleyne, Farmer, McRae & Turner, 2014).

In describing the second CSF, Allen et al. (2014) posited that the project manager must establish a relationship with all stakeholders, including employees to foster growth and entrepreneurial thinking. Employees are stakeholders who have the potential to affect

the project, and although the interaction with them can be either proactive, or reactive, Allen et al. advised that a proactive interaction builds confidence and usually yields positive results. The project manager interacts with other stakeholders, including those who are affected by the project (Allen et al., 2014). The project manager tailors solutions based on the specific problems identified in the project, and by engaging all stakeholders, the project manager is also able to tailor the resolution of any potential conflict towards to particular stakeholder (Allen et al., 2014).

The third CSF which Allen et al. (2014) identified was scope, schedule, and budget. For this CSF, Allen et al. suggested that these three elements formed a CSF that a project team must understand when it comes to the overall success of a project. The project manager must have the required competencies in these aspects because the expertise required for scheduling, estimating cost, and controlling the scope of the project are usually the responsibility of the project manager. Allen et al. argued that the scope of the project helps the project manager to define the contractual expectations, mandatory tasks, and the results that the customer expects. Allen et al. also indicated that the project manager of a successful project designs instruments to ensure that these elements are broken down into manageable pieces. To ensure that organizational leaders achieve project milestones that are according to plan, the project must have a proper schedule. Allen et al. argued that planned dates, durations, milestones, and resources, are important for project success. If the project leaders did not design the project schedule properly and if results are not according to the schedule, the customer will express dissatisfaction with the project, thereby compromising the success of the project (Allen et al., 2014). Allen et

al. argued that a project is not successful if the project team does not obtain the project's results within the budgetary allocation agreed upon at the beginning.

In presenting the effect that critical success factors were having on project success in SMEs, Ates, Garengo, Cocca, and Bititci (2013) argued that small firms exhibit different management characteristics to large firms. Ates et al. (2013) posited that informal strategic planning, poor decision-making, poor managerial skills, and limited resources for investment in the workforce are characteristics of small firm management. Owners of small firms operate in a context of inadequate human and financial resources, and informal business arrangements (Voss & Brettel, 2014). In contrast, larger firms possess the means to invest in critical success factors; small firms have fewer options to invest in measures aimed at improving long-term performance (Sheehan, 2014). Williams (2014) supported this view by positing that small firms are inherently vulnerable because they lack the resources and organizational structure to invest in systems that can improve their efficiency.

Although small firms contribute significantly to economic growth, their survivability remains a major concern. Adisa et al. (2014) reported that of every 100 start-ups, only 50 SMEs survived the first three years. Given the peculiar challenges of SMEs put forward by Ates et al. (2013); Voss & Brettel (2014); and Williams (2014); it is significant that the limitations of SMEs often lead to owners prioritizing activities that they can relate to daily work with less emphasis on additional longer-term activities such as employee performance management (Höber, Pergler, Weitlaner, & Grahl, 2015). To overcome the challenges inherent in SMEs, Ram and Corkindale (2014) suggested that

CSFs provided a systematic way for managers of SMEs achieve performance goals. The CSFs helps to identify key areas that require the attention of management for the business to flourish and for the manager to attain set goals (Ram & Corkindale, 2014).

Common across most definitions of critical success factors are clear goals, senior executive support, and adequate resources (Besteiro, Pinto & Novaski, 2015). Andersen, Birchall, Jessen, and Money (2006) had previously identified personnel, client consultation and acceptance, monitoring and feedback, and communication as CSF for organizational success. Decramer et al. (2013) described employee performance management as a strategic and integrated approach to help employees understand and recognize their part in contributing to the overall success of the organization. Maley (2014) indicated that firms with employee performance management systems are 51% more likely to outperform competitors on financial outcomes, and 41% more likely to outperform competitors on customer satisfaction, employee retention, and other important measures of business success outcomes.

Human Resource Management as a Critical Success Factor

The people employed to do the job, are critical to the success of the business operations of any organization. Sripirom, Jhundra-Indra, and Raksong (2015) advised that the people in an organization are the critical factor necessary for moving an organization to superior competitiveness. Organizations seek to remain competitive by putting specific HRM strategies in place to manage talent and contribute to organizational effectiveness (Sripirom, Jhundra-Indra, & Raksong, 2015). In addressing the importance of HRM to the success of the firm, Sripirom et al. (2015) opined that strategic talent

management is a primary function of managers of organizations. Young and Mustaffa (2013) expressed a similar view by stating that human-related factors were important to the success of projects. The HRM strategy of firms takes staff competence, commitment, and communications into consideration when relating the role of the staff to organizational success (Young & Mustaffa, 2013).

There is no universally accepted definition of critical success factors for project success (Hwang & Lim, 2013). HRM has, however, been a feature of many CSF frameworks. Atan et al. (2015) posited that for firms to be successful, an effective HRM practice will have to be in place. Jenko and Roblek (2016) classified CSFs into three main groups: human, or people-related CSFs; organizational, or process and company-related CSFs; and technical, or software and IT system-related CSFs. Jenko and Roblek advised that there existed a classification of human critical success factors. The classification proposed by Jenko and Roblek included: competence, knowledge transfer, tacit knowledge sharing, knowledge management and education; communication, motivation, team composition and transformation; organizational and team learning cycle; team resilience, problem solving competence, conflict resolution, relationship bonding, spiral continuous improvement, cognitive learning, collective intelligence, knowledge withholding intentions and social cognition; group cohesiveness and normative conformity; and personal interest in agency theory. Research by Charland, Leger, Cronan, and Robert (2015) revealed competency-based learning helped to integrate HRM into critical factors that contribute to overall organizational success.

Many authors have positioned HRM as one of the most critical factors in project success. Sheehan (2014) opined that humans are the critical factor that can move an organization from average performance to superior competitiveness. Sheehan noted that despite the significant differences between large firms and SMEs, and although most of the literature on HRM is from research conducted on large firms, one resource that is common to all organizations, is the human resource. Sheehan regarded human resources as a pivotal input into the resource base of the firm and scholars have suggested that small firms can improve their performance by adopting specific HRM practices. Yang, Chen, Wu, Huang, and Cheng (2015) posited that HRM is positively linked to organizational performance and is a core process of project-oriented companies.

Understanding Projects

To study project success, we first must have a clear understanding of what a project is. Arratia, Lopez, Schaeffer, and Cruz-Reyes (2016) defined a project as a set of interrelated tasks that are scheduled and sequenced and are carried out by one or more individuals within an organization. Projects have well-defined objectives, a budget, and specified timeframe for completion. Too and Weaver (2014) referred to a project as a temporary endeavor that is undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. It is customary, particularly in SMEs for the staffing structure of the organization to reflect the projects. Yang et al. (2015) advanced the thought that projects are temporary organizations and, in a project-oriented company, the HRM configuration is changed to suit the temporary work processes required to deliver products and services to the client.

Given that projects contribute to the overall strategic goal of an organization, business leaders tend to cluster projects into portfolios to spread risks, consolidate gains, and give the projects a greater chance of success (Teller, Kock, & Gemünden, 2014). Ursulescu and Popa (2013) referred to a portfolio as a collection of projects and programs that are grouped and managed in a coordinated manner to obtain benefits and maintain control in a manner that would not be possible if organization chose to manage the projects individually. Arratia et al. (2016) argued that a portfolio of projects receives funding either simultaneously or subsequently over a period and it is the responsibility of the project manager to ensure that the project achieves success.

The growth of projects as a major activity of organizations has led to an increase in the number of project managers employed in organizations. Project managers have become central to organizations' efforts to achieve maximum benefit from projects. Allen, Ericksen, and Collins (2013) observed that the project manager is responsible for the full delivery of a completed project and must ensure that the results of the project contribute to organizational strategy. The project manager proactively addresses problems, generates performance reports and provides an overview of the project to the project team and senior management (Conforto & Amaral, 2016). Conforto and Amaral (2016) explained that the project manager is also responsible for using project information to make decisions, to improve the process, and discuss upcoming risks. The project manager also makes decisions about moving the project to its next step. The project manager is, therefore, the one who ensures that the portfolio of projects is in line

with the organization's goals and must be the one to review continuously whether or not the project is achieving its set goals (Conforto & Amaral, 2016).

The literature emphasizes the critical role of the project manager by indicating the need to secure project success. Pollack and Algeo (2016) considered project success to be one of the most popular topics in the project management literature. Practitioners and scholars have developed multiple measures of project success, and the definitions vary. Joslin and Müller (2015) proposed some criteria to measure project success. Joslin and Müller proposed that the first measure of success was if the project met the scope, objectives, and cost defined at the commencement of the project. They went on to outline customer satisfaction despite not meeting all the criterion of the project and fulfillment of the main purpose of the project. Doskočil (2016) reviewed the work of many researchers and concluded that critical success factors, key performance indicators, and performance-measuring processes had the most influence on project success.

Project Success

It is reasonable to assume that whenever an organization undertakes a project, the organization's leaders, employees, and clients expect the project to be successful. Project success has been a major theme in the project management literature. Carvalho, Patah, and Bido (2016) posited that the high failure rate of projects has caused both practitioners and academia to focus on project success as a primary component of effective project management. Berssaneti and Carvalho (2015) argued that because projects are a way to improve business, and implement changes, project success has become the main interest of project managers. Aga et al. (2016) explained that project success first became part of

project management as objective, measurable, and well-accepted criteria related to construction and engineering projects. Projects were assessed to determine whether the project team achieved all the intended project purposes and whether the team met all the projects' objectives, within the specified time and the available budget (Aga, Noorderhaven, & Vallejo, 2016). Aga et al suggested that the project criteria of time, budget, and compliance has been referred to in the literature as the triangle criteria. Cullen and Parker (2015) referred to the same three project criteria as the triple constraints. In seeking to define project success, Berssaneti, and Carvalho reached a similar conclusion and stated that the client and the project team considered a project to be successful if the project meets the requirements of time, cost, and quality – historically referred to as the iron triangle.

The criteria for determining project success has expanded beyond the iron triangle of cost, schedule, and quality (Aga et al., 2016). Berssaneti and Carvalho (2015) advised that because there is no consensus on how to measure project success, and given the complexities related to the concept of project success, the traditional dimensions of cost, schedule, and quality, are still the most popularly used measurements of project success. Consequently, those who have an interest in the project considered it a success if the cost at completion of the project did not exceed the budget allocated for the project, if the project was completed within schedule, and if the deliverables of the project met the requirements established by all the stakeholders of the project. Cullen and Parker (2015) suggested that there has been an evolution in the criteria for measuring project success, going beyond the triple constraints of cost, time and scope. The more contemporary

criteria included more quality-based criteria than cost, time, and quality. Cullen and Parker argued that awareness of stakeholders' needs, as well as the inclusion of other internal and external quality measures, such as constraints, risks, skills of the project team, and organizational capabilities, served to increase the likelihood of project results.

There is a link between the success of projects and the overall success of business organizations (Badewi & Shehab, 2016). Kloppenborg and Tesch (2015) argued that companies undertake projects to create value that allows the organization to maintain a competitive edge in a rapidly changing and volatile business environment. The success of a project is the result of many factors. Early literature on the topic presented work by authors who declared projects as successful if they met the scope, objectives, and costs assigned to the project (Doskočil, 2016). Joslin and Müller (2016) reviewed the factors that contribute to project success and concluded that over the past forty years, new success factors had been applied to increase project success. Joslin and Müller suggested that clients considered both objective and subjective measures when broadening the success criteria.

As the field of project management evolved, scholars and practitioners have introduced new measures for project success. Rolstadas, Tommelein, Schiefloe, and Ballard (2014) stated that in the 1970s, project success focused on measuring time, cost and functionality improvements, implementation and delivery systems. Rolstadas et al. (2014) went further to state that since the 1980s, there has been a growing body of literature advancing critical success factors (CSF) as the most objective way to measure project success. Rolstadas et al. took their definition of CSFs from Müller and Jugdev

(2012) who defined CSF as elements of a project which, when influenced, increase the likelihood of success. Ika (2015) captured the new wave of thinking by stating that although cost, time, and quality dominated the measurement of project success in the 1960s to 1980s, other criteria such as benefit to the organization, satisfaction of the end user, benefits for the stakeholder, project personnel benefit, the relationship of the project to the strategic objectives of the organization, and overall business success, were important criteria in measuring project success in the twenty-first century. The Project Management Institute (2008) aligned its definition with the wider view of project success by emphasizing that project success is based on balancing the competing demands of project scope, time, cost, and quality, as well as meeting concerns and expectations of all the stakeholders of the project.

As the definition of project success continues to evolve, there are increasing schools of thought that seek to explain the phenomena. Jugdev, Perkins, Fortune, White and Walker (2013) observed that more recent literature presents upwards of nine schools of thought in project management and project success continues to be one of the schools. Kloppenborg and Tesch (2015) argued that several well-known studies are built on each other to expand our understanding of project success. Kloppenborg and Tesch posited three important success factors for measuring project success. The first factor related to customer impact that measured the extent to which the project created deliverables that met the needs of the customer. The second factor measured how well the project met agreements such as being completed on time, within budget, and to specifications. The third factor related to the future benefits of the company. Kloppenborg and Tesch posited

that if a project was successful, the company that undertook the project should be in a position to benefit from new technologies and build commercial success. Jugdey, Perkins, Fortune, White, and Walker (2013) sought to explain the varying definitions of success by suggesting that there is project success which relates to judgment about the outcomes of the project while other explanations of success emphasized project management success which related to the successful delivery of the project.

Project Success in Small and Medium Enterprises

The conditions and factors necessary for project success may differ in SMEs and larger organizations. Many writers have argued that SMEs do not have the resources required to invest in factors that lead to project success. Sheehan (2014) argued that SMEs have limited resources that do not allow them the options available to larger counterparts to improve performance. Although SMEs undertake the largest proportion of projects, and notwithstanding the critical role of project management to the survival of small organizations, there is not much research that has focused on how owners of SMEs used project management (Pollack & Adler, 2014). SMEs cannot be considered to be smaller versions of their larger counterparts (Bansal & Agarwal, 2015). The SMEs have several innate features resulting from their size that distinguishes them from the large enterprises. Petkovska (2015) argued that SMEs have fewer employees, less work, fewer customers and operates mostly on the local market. As a result, the SME is flexible and more amenable to embracing innovation (Petkovska, 2015).

Although there is no consensus on measuring project success in SMEs, Dasari et al. (2015) suggested that SMEs relied on meeting the schedule, budget plan, and technical

specification of a project to assess project success. The financial constraints of SMEs may hinder the level of investment their managers can make in project management tools that make project success possible (Dasari et al., 2015). Dasari et al. argued that SMEs rely on good technical design, timely response, the good understanding of processes, usage of the right tools and quality material, and continuous feedback to secure project success.

Researchers have argued that there is a distinction between SMEs and larger firms. Dasari et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study of a small firm in Hyderabad, India and focused primarily on the things that made projects successful in the selected small business. The authors argued that time, cost, and quality were the three critical success factors contributing to project success in small firms. The research revealed that good technical design, timely responses during teething problems, proper feedback to maintain spare knowledge about the project, managing response, and frequent meetings on progress, were the major factors contributing the project success in small firms.

The literature is inconclusive on whether SMEs are better placed to achieve project success. Marcelino-Sádaba et al. (2014) claimed that because of their size, SMEs have limited resources and normally find it difficult to cope with new projects. The authors opined that although projects are the main tool for change in SMEs, managers of SMEs were largely unskilled and ill-equipped for strategic management or to use the recognized standards of project management. SMEs faced greater challenges in raising finances to fund their projects ideas or in gaining access to technology (Marcelino-

Sádaba et al., 2014) and could therefore badly manage the project process (Williams, 2014).

One technique that has been used to promote project success in SMEs is the enterprise resource planning (ERP). Bansal and Agarwal (2015) explained that ERP is a business management system that relies on tested software to integrate the various facets of the business. Through ERP, a firm is expected to rationally deploy its resources to effectively manage the entire enterprise. Although setting up an ERP is considered to be extremely challenging in an SME, Höber, Pergler, Weitlaner, and Grahl (2015) argued that ERP was designed as a novel measurement framework for measuring performance in SMEs. Enterprise resource planning requires company managers to commit a significant amount of company resources to the ERP process (Tasevska, Damij, & Damij, 2014). Consequently, ERP in SMEs has not been popular. Tasevska, Damij, and Damij (2014) have however argued that ERP systems can be of benefit to all enterprises, whether large, medium or small. Tasevska et al. (2014) also revealed that recently, firms had developed special ERP software packages for SMEs that focused on cost and functional scope.

Managing Employee Performance

The performance of employees is crucial to any organization (Kirovska & Qoku, 2014). Nzuve and Njambi (2015) researched employee performance and highlighted that managing employee performance required managers to consider the quantity, and quality of output, how timely was the project team achieving outputs, employee presence or attendance on the job, efficiency in completing a task, and whether the effectiveness of task completion was satisfactory. Researchers such as Decramer et al. (2013), Burney and

Widener (2013), Stanton and Pham (2014), and Mensah (2015) have proposed that employee performance management should form part of the wider HRM system of the organization. In outlining the main elements of employee performance management, Decramer et al. noted that performance management and HRM practices are aligned to maximize current and future employee performance for the benefit of the organization. Decramer et al. suggested that since employee performance management was a continuous process that addressed the current and future performance of employees, management personnel had to consider employee competence to maximize the impact of employee performance on the success of the organization.

Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) opined that performance management was composed of two main elements – measurement, and management of employee performance aimed at increasing organizational effectiveness. Nzuve and Njambi (2015) echoed this view of employee performance management by indicating that management of performance occurred through an integrative process of strategic HR strategies. Nzuve and Njambi advocated for managers to set tasks, and provide organizational policies, practices, and resources as the framework to ensure employees were successful in completing their tasks. Nzuve and Njambi argued that through performance evaluation, managers measured both the extent and the quality of the performance of the employee. Although company leaders design performance management and measurement as tools to determine the effect that employee performance is having on organizational success, Burney and Widener (2013) argued that it is performance measurement that translates the strategy of the organization into tangible objectives and measures for the employees.

Decramer et al. (2013) posited that performance management had a scope wider than measurement. That scope included continuously identifying, measuring, and developing employee performance aligned with the strategic goals of the organization. Sharma, Sharma, and Agarwal (2015) contributed to the debate on employee performance measurement and employee performance management by suggesting that even if performance management had a wider scope of guiding employees to success, the terms management and measurement were often used interchangeably in the literature. Wendt (2014) however, indicated that performance management is a systematic approach to managing the human resources of an organization, and stand in stark contrast to performance measurement which is a predecessor to performance management.

Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) expanded the debate on the link between performance measurement and performance management. Dewettinck and van Dijk explained that research found performance review, which is part of performance measurement, when carried out informally, had a stronger link with managing employee performance than a formal review system. Informal measurement of employee performance was viewed by Dewettinck and van Dijk as a platform for the supervisor and subordinate to explicitly and implicitly discuss the performance of the subordinate. In managing the performance of a subordinate, Dewettinck and van Dijk explained that the supervisor relied on a system for regular interaction, frequent feedback. Dewettinck and van Dijk presented formal performance reviews as a measurement system described by a theory of control, while the informal performance review, enhanced performance through a combination of management practices linked to the goal-setting theory.

Like many other concepts in organizational behavior, the concept of employee performance has no universally accepted definition (Mensah, 2015). In seeking to clarify what employee performance is, Mensah (2015) suggested that any definition of performance should include the resourcefulness with which individuals take actions that contribute to the organization's objective, an observation of the things people do that are relevant to the goals of the organization, and how individuals perform on the tasks they were hired to undertake. Mensah associated employee performance with the ability of the individual to realize work-related goals, fulfill expectations, and attain job targets set by the management of the organization, and concluded that employee performance was the positive contribution that the employee made to the performance of the organization. The definition proposed by Nzuve and Niambi (2015) closely reflected Mensah's definition. Nzuve and Niambi posited that employee performance had to do with employees successfully completing tasks assigned to them by their supervisors. The supervisor outlined pre-defined standards, and the employee utilizes available resources to successfully complete the job.

Sharma et al. (2015) advised that performance management systems should be perceived by the employees as being fair and should motivate staff to perform. In the view of Sharma et al. there are four stages which comprise a performance management system. Sharma et al. referred to the first stage as the performance planning stage. At this stage, the supervisor aligned employee performance goals with organizational goals. The second stage was called the feedback and coaching stage which required the supervisor to provide the employee with feedback throughout the year and offer coaching to ensure the

employee improved in areas where the supervisor identified shortcomings. During the third stage which Sharma et al. called the performance review stage, supervisors conducted the performance appraisal. This phase is known as the measurement stage (Sharma et al., 2015). During the final stage, which Sharma et al. called the accuracy stage, the employee expected that issues such as performance-based rating, compensation, reward, and recognition would for part of the performance review.

Employee performance management goes beyond performance appraisal (Waeyenberg, Decramer, Desmidt, & Audenaert, 2017). Waeyenberg, Decramer, Desmidt, and Audenaert (2017) suggested that identifying, measuring, and developing employee performance through a cycle of performance planning, monitoring, and evaluation steps, was the basis of employee performance management. The system put in place to manage employee performance often enhances employee satisfaction. It also drives commitment and contributes to reducing staff turnover (Waeyenberg et al. 2017). Wendt (2014) posited that at the core of employee performance management is the idea that people make a difference in organizations. The performance management system adopted by the organization is expected to improve organizational success (Wendt, 2014). Wendt also argued that the performance management system contributed to an increase in the productivity of employees, and improved business results. Employee performance management must, therefore, create a shared vision of the what the organization is aiming to achieve, and how employees contribute to organizational success (Decramer et al., 2013).

Human Resource Management and Performance

HRM practice is a major pillar of the performance level of employees (Atan et al., 2015). Atan et al. (2015) argued that HRM practice served as a key tool for improving the job performance of employees. How firms manage their human resources is therefore critical to the firm's success (Atan, et al., 2015). Altarawneh (2016) advised that HRM practice is a source of sustained competitive advantage for firms that align sound HRM to the firm's competitive strategy. Altarawneh advanced the view that HRM is increasingly essential to performance and is key to success in organizations. Through HR strategies, firms establish the mechanisms to adequately apply the motivation and effort, knowledge, skills, and abilities of the employees for optimal performance of the firm (de Brito and de Oliveira, 2016).

Yang, Chen, Wu, Huang, and Cheng (2015) described a project-oriented company as an organization that adopted temporary work process to supply clients with goods and services in a dynamic work environment with fluctuating workloads, uncertainty, and multiple demands. Yang et al. (2015) explained that because of the dynamic nature of the project-oriented organizations, the HR configuration was constantly changing to respond to new project demands. In commenting on the relationship between HRM and organizational performance, Yang et al. advised that the HRM practice included recruitment and selection; planning the personnel configuration; training and development; managing employee performance; teamwork; providing performance-related pay; providing employment security; career advancement possibilities;

participation; communication; and job description. All these elements were important to ensure that HRM remained important to organizational success.

De Brito and de Oliveira (2016) acknowledged that HRM was important to organizational performance. De Brito and de Oliveira opined that performance of the organization was the results of the performance of employees and suggested that the two cannot be separated. De Brito and de Oliveira assessed empirical studies that addressed the relationship between HRM and performance and concluded that HR practices resulted in a competitive advantage for the firm. Altarawneh (2016) suggested a caveat to de Brito and de Oliveira's assertions and suggested that HR can be the main source of sustainable development for the firm, only if company leaders integrate the HRM policies and practices into the business culture of the organization.

Vui-Yee (2015) articulated that the HRM practice included effective management of recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation, performance management, employment security, and work-life balance. When these components of the HR practice of the firm were managed effectively by management, the employees tended to be highly motivated and gave back to the firm through their high performance (Vui-Yee, 2015). Slavic, Berber, and Lekovic (2014) held similar views as Vui-Yee. Slavic et al. (2014) advised that performance management implied that the HR practices including recruitment, training, career development, and rewards motivated staff and resulted in strong organizational performance. Vui-Yee proposed that the motivation of the employees was the biggest contributor to performance.

Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) indicated that there are several theories that provide a background to the relationship between HRM and performance. Ogunyomi, and Bruning outlined the ability-motivation-opportunity model and suggested that the firm needed to recruit and select personnel and motivate them to perform well to support organizational performance. The ability-motivation-opportunity model also addressed the need for management to provide opportunities for employees to become engaged in decision making in the firm. High organizational performance was achieved both through high retention and better-performing employees (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016). Another theoretical perspective proposed by Ogunyomi and Bruning, was the Human Capital theory. Ogunyomi and Bruning suggested that the human capital theory placed a strong emphasis on the relationships between the prosperity and functioning of the firm, and the strong reliance on the human capital of the firm. The human capital represents the investments made in the employees, to develop them in such a way that they contribute to organizational productivity. The human capital theory emphasized the investment in training and development, skills development, and productive capacity (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016).

Combs, Liu, Hall, and Ketchen (2006) conducted research and presented 13 HR practices that were likely to have a positive relationship with performance. These 13 practices were incentive compensation, training, compensation level, participation, selection, internal promotion, HR planning, flexibility work, performance appraisal, grievance procedure, teams, information sharing, and employment security. From the

findings of the research, only teams, performance appraisal, and information sharing did not positively relate to performance.

Summary and Transition

To gain an understanding of the HRM strategies SME owners use for achieving project success, I presented an overview of project success in SMEs. In Section 1, I presented a background to the study and discussed the problem, the purpose statement, and the nature of the study that justified my use of a qualitative method. I described the qualitative multiple case study and explained why it was the most suitable research design for this study. I also explained the conceptual framework I chose for the study and why I think it was a suitable framework for grounding this study. In Section 1, I included the main research question and the interview questions, the significance of the study, operational definitions, and assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. I concluded Section 1 with a review of the professional and academic literature. I presented evidence to show that the seminal work of Locke and Latham (1990) has influenced further research into the positive effect of goal-setting on performance. The literature that I reviewed also revealed that HRM strategies are critical success factors for project success in SMEs.

In Section 2, I discuss the role of the researcher, and present information on the participants I selected for the study. I provide a detailed description of the research methodology and design, population and sampling technique used, ethical research, the data collection instrument, organizing the data, data analysis, and reliability and validity of the findings of the study. In Section 3, I present the findings of the study. I relate my

research findings to professional practice and indicate the likely implications for social change. I used the results of the study to make some recommendations for action and for further research. I end Section 3 with some reflections on my experience during the DBA doctoral study process.

Section 2: The Project

Sound HRM strategies are required to create an environment wherein employees can perform optimally and contribute to organizational success. Ayers (2015) warned that unless the organization has a plan that links individual goals with organizational performance, there is always the risk of the organization underperforming. This research explored HRM strategies that contribute to project success in SMEs. This section presents the research plans that I designed to undertake the study. I outline the purpose of this research and provide a synopsis of the research, including my role as the researcher, the participants of this study, the ethical considerations that guided my relationship with the research participants, and the methodological and data gathering requirements of the study. I end the section with a discussion of validity and reliability in qualitative research and how I addressed these issues.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the HRM strategies SME owners use for achieving project success. Five owners of SMEs on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia, who demonstrated success in using HRM strategies for achieving project success, were invited to participate in semistructured interviews. The results of this study may provide owners with strategies that can secure the success of their organizations and in turn, contribute to the employment of a significant number of people on the island of St. Lucia. The implication for social change includes improvement in the quality of life of SME employees as well as improvement in the

quality of life of citizens who benefit from the successful infrastructural and social projects that owners of SME choose to undertake.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher of a qualitative study plays a critical role in the research. Hammersley (2013) advised that the researcher is often the instrument of the investigation process. Sze and Tan (2014) stated that in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and serves as the facilitator and investigator, who also answers questions that may come from participants. In my role as researcher and primary data collection instrument, I collaborated with participants to collect data for the study. I also performed my role in keeping with Bispo (2017), who suggested that the researcher must have the capacity to judge how to design research and grasp the nature of the data. According to Yin (2014), the four main roles of the researcher are data collection and analysis, reporting findings, maintaining the confidentiality of participants, and conducting research ethically. In conducting the research, I fulfilled Yin's four roles.

Scholars have opined that in qualitative research, the researcher is not just a collector and analyzer of data. Chetty, Partanen, Rasmussen, and Servais (2014) explained that in qualitative research, the researcher is a key instrument of the research whose actions and decisions can actively influence the research process. To minimize the possibility of influencing the research process, I ensured that my actions and decisions were just, respectful, nonjudgmental, and conducive to frank and open communication between the participants and myself. My role was to listen, remain engaged, and

interested in what the participants had to say, to refrain from judgment, and to probe participants without making them feel that I was interrogating them. Although part of my role was to identify the participants for the research, I remained impartial and did not influence their input. I have never owned a small business, neither do I have any personal links with owners of SMEs in St. Lucia. I therefore faced no challenge with vested interests or personal desires for results or a particular kind. My interest was to understand the HRM strategies owners of SMEs use to achieve project success, and I undertook the study in an impartial and unbiased manner.

Yallop and Mowatt (2014) advised that the researcher has a responsibility to the participant and must display the capacity to make good decisions. The *Belmont Report* (1979) identified a number of principles when researching with human subjects. These include respect for all participants, ensuring participants are protected from all harm, and informed consent. My role as the researcher was to ensure that I applied all these principles in this research. I applied the Belmont principles by ensuring that I sought the voluntary consent of each participant, I invited the participants to select a convenient time and preferred venue for interviews, and I shared the findings of the interviews with the participants to ensure they approved the summary that was prepared from the information they shared during the interviews. As the researcher, I abided by the expectation to remain impartial and unbiased throughout the research process. I posed questions that allowed the participants to freely share their experiences, and I avoided all visible reactions to the feedback provided by the participants.

Given the role of the researcher as data collector and data analyst, there is always the potential for researcher bias (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Cope (2014) suggested that researchers can mitigate bias by striving for the highest standard and quality when conducting a study. Researchers can also mitigate bias by ensuring that their personal worldviews and biases are kept separate from the questions the research is seeking to answer (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used the suggestions proposed by Cope (2014); and Marshall and Rossman (2016) and ensured that I did not allow my biases to affect how I collected or analyzed the data from this research. I adopted an empirical approach and allowed the responses of the participants to dictate the results of the study. I did not engage participants with whom I have any association and ensured that I did not incorporate my personal views in the analysis of the research findings.

In fulfilling my role as the primary instrument to collect data, I developed a list of interview questions (see Appendix A) and an interview protocol (see Appendix C) that I used to guide the semistructured interviews. Castillo-Montoya (2016) advised that a well-structured interview protocol helps the researcher to elicit responses that are useful to the research question. The interview protocol also serves to maintain consistency in all interviews the researcher will conduct to gather data on the research question (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Castillo-Montoya also opined that the interview protocol can help the researcher to enhance the reliability of data collected during the interview. The interview protocol that I developed allowed me to maintain the focus of the interviews within the boundaries of the research.

Participants

For this research, I selected owners from five SMEs in Saint Lucia with which I am familiar. For owners to participate in the study, their SMEs had to have met the criteria of being in existence for more than 5 years, employing less than 50 employees, and having HRM strategies in place. The participants in the study had to be familiar with the research problem. Gökmen, Uysal, Yasar, Kirkeskis, Güvendi, and Horzum (2017) advised that researchers should select participants who are able to answer the main research question. I, therefore, targeted owners and managers of the SMEs that met the criteria of the study.

Cook, Hoas, and Joyner (2013) indicated that institutional review boards (IRBs) serve as key oversight bodies to monitor research that involves human participants. As a requirement of this doctoral program, I had to seek, and obtain the approval of the IRB of Walden University. After I received the approval from Walden's IRB (Approval No. 2018.06.22 15:45:42-05'00'), I wrote to the owners of four SMEs, to invite them to participate in this research. Mitchell (2015) advised that the researcher can go through gatekeepers who know the eligible participants and who can provide an entry point to the participants. It was necessary for me to go through a gate keeper to secure two of my participants.

Research Method and Design

When deciding on the research method, the researcher must consider whether the main aim of the research is to test an existing theory or to build a theory. The three methods used in research are quantitative, mixed method, and qualitative. Since my

doctoral study was an exploratory research into HRM strategies as a critical success factor to achieve project success in SMEs in St. Lucia, the qualitative method, with a case study design was the most appropriate approach to answer the research question.

Research Method

All methods used in research must be guided by the nature of the investigation (Park & Park, 2016), and aim to provide unbiased and reliable information in a format that is relevant and meaningful to the targeted audience (Kruth, 2015). Venkatesh et al. (2016) opined that the researcher decides on a research method only after carefully thinking about the research questions, purposes, paradigmatic views, and contexts. This research sought to understand and explore descriptive accounts of SME owners. By using a qualitative method, I sought to answer the research question by analyzing the experiences of participants. I used the qualitative method to draw on the experiences of participants. Delost and Nadder (2014) explained that the qualitative method allows the researcher to explore the relevant experiences of the participants and to make specific observations that can be used to form a theory that explains the research question. The research took place within the context of SMEs whose owners use HRM strategies as a critical success factor for project success. I was guided by the advice of Kruth (2015) who argued that qualitative research provides flexibility to inductively explore, in depth, the factors influencing a particular phenomenon in its natural setting.

The quantitative and mixed method were not suitable for this research. Dasgupta (2015) explained that the quantitative method is used when the research focuses on examining constructs in numerical terms, and when the researcher is testing a theory.

Quantitative method is used when the results of the study are used to reject, modify, or support a theory or hypothesis (Delost & Nadder, 2014). The quantitative method was not suitable for this research because I did not examine constructs in numerical terms, neither did I test a theory, or sought to reject, modify, or support a hypothesis.

Annansingh and Howell (2016) explained that mixed method is used when the quantitative or qualitative method alone is inadequate to explain or understand the research problem. In mixed-method research, the researcher combines quantitative and qualitative data sources to study a phenomenon (Delost & Nadder, 2014). The mixed method was not suitable for this research because I did not combine quantitative and qualitative data during the data collection and analysis stages of this research.

Research Design

I used the multiple case study design for this research. Aczel (2015) explained that the qualitative case study design is useful when the researcher is conducting an exploratory investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. I chose the multiple-case study design because I sought to explore a phenomenon within its real-life context. Kruth (2015) explained that case studies allow the researcher to develop a detailed understanding of how a particular event occurs in a given context. Yin (2014) posited that the investigator uses the case study to focus on a real-world situation including managerial processes and is afforded the opportunity to analyze the contextual conditions about a particular case. Conducting a multiple case study of two or more firms can be on the basis that the firms in the study meet a pre-determined set of criteria and are exemplary in the phenomenon that the researcher is studying (Yin, 2018). Park and Park

(2016) advised that the case study design relies on interviews, document search, and observation. By conducting a multiple case study of SMEs, I used the experiences of owners of five SMEs to answer the research question. To gain a holistic understanding of how owners of SMEs use HRM strategies as a critical success factor for project success, I conducted interviews, searched company documents, and observed how owners dealt with HRM strategies when interacting with staff. I gathered narratives and testimonies as a result of my interaction with owners as co-researchers. I used semistructured interviews, document search, and observations, and present findings that explains how owners of the selected SME use HRM strategies to achieve project success. Yin (2018) explained that by carefully selecting the cases, the investigator could report on results that address either literal replication, meaning results that are similar in the two or more cases, or theoretical replication which means contrasting results.

Before deciding on the multiple case study design, I considered a number of alternatives. Awasthy (2015) advised that in addition to the case study, the researcher can choose ethnographic, or phenomenological designs. I reviewed the situations in which the ethnographic design was deemed appropriate and concluded the ethnographic research design was not suitable for this research. Kruth (2015) revealed that the purpose of ethnographic research was to describe a cultural phenomenon that a group has experienced or to research patterns of behavior or attitudes within a culture. This research focused on the experiences of owners and does not describe a cultural phenomenon nor patterns of behavior. The ethnographic design was therefore not a suitable design for this study. The phenomenological design is suitable for research that focuses on gathering

first-hand accounts and lived experiences of participants (Dowden, Gunby, Warren, & Boston, 2014). Kruth explained that the phenomenological design is useful when the researcher is interested in focusing on the meanings of participants' experiences. Since my intension was to describe the actual experiences of SME owners and not the personal meanings of experiencing the phenomenon of project success itself, the phenomenological design was not the best choice for this research.

In using the multiple case-study design, I achieved data saturation after five interviews. Fusch and Ness (2015) opined that data saturation in qualitative research is important to ensure the quality of the research and for achieving content validity. Data saturation is achieved when no new information is being gathered with additional samples (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). After conducting five interviews the responses from participants were becoming repetitive and were not contributing any new information. I knew I had reached data saturation and decided not to continue with any additional interview, as the data I had collected contained the appropriate depth and breadth necessary to achieve validity.

Population and Sampling

SMEs form the largest group of private sector companies in St. Lucia. The population for this study were owners from SME in St. Lucia that have been in operation for 5 or more years, with 50 or less employees, and whose owners admit to having an HRM strategy in place. I used the nonprobabilistic purposive sampling procedure to identify the sampling units for this study. I drew my sample from the population of owners of SMEs that met the criteria and were registered with the Ministry of Commerce

and Industry in St. Lucia. The purposive sampling method allowed me to deliberately select participants who admitted to using HRM strategies to achieve project success. Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2015) explained that when using the purposive sampling method to select cases, the researcher purposefully targets those who are rich with information about the subject of inquiry and those whom the researcher can learn from. Kline (2017) added that participants must be conveniently accessible, and must be willing to participate in the research. Venkatesh et al. (2016) described the purposive sample as a sampling method that allows the researcher to select units based on specific requirements necessary for answering a research question. Owners with experience in using HRM strategies to achieve project success were, therefore, targeted for this research. I selected five owners who possessed rich knowledge and experience about using HRM strategies for project success in SMEs. The participants were accessible, and willing to participate in the study.

Apostolopoulos and Liargovas (2016) advised a large sample is not necessary for a purposive sample. It is important, however, to ensure that the researcher reaches data saturation by obtaining all the information that is relevant to gain a complete understanding of the topic (Rijnsoever, 2017). Boddy (2016) advised that data saturation is the point at which no new information or theme is emerging from additional interviews. Boddy suggested that by achieving data saturation, the researcher can present a full understanding of the phenomenon. Boddy further argued that a single case study is not enough to reach data saturation because there is no way to judge whether respondents have exhausted all the themes of the research, or if there is no additional information

emerging from interviews. Although initially I planned to interview four owners, using a semistructured questionnaire comprising seven open-ended interview questions, I conducted one additional interview in order to achieve data saturation. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) advised that data saturation represents a point in the data gathering process when the researcher is not able to add anything new to the research. Since I did not reach data saturation after four interviews, I conducted one additional interview with the owner of an SMEs that meet the criteria for the study.

Rimando et al. (2015) advised that the interview should take place at a time and place that are suitable for the interviewee. My primary concern for the interview setting was the comfort, privacy, and confidentiality of the participant. I invited the participants to select a convenient day and time, and identify a suitable location to conduct the interviews. All the interviews were conducted in at the business location of the SMEs.

Ethical Research

Yin (2014) and Lin (2016) are two authors who have elaborated the need to bear ethical considerations in mind when conducting qualitative research. Yin argued that research bias fell under the general rubric of research ethics and advised that the researcher can avoid bias by maintaining strong professional competences in areas such as ensuring the accuracy of the information, researcher credibility, and respecting participant confidentiality. Lin advised that the researcher must treat all participants fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and within an ethic of respect. To conduct this research in an ethical manner and to avoid bias in the research, I ensured that I did not violate the general principles of participant confidentiality, respondent focus, professional

competences, and information accuracy. I ensured that each participant in the research provided voluntary consent for their participation in the research by signing a Participant Consent Form before the commencement of the interview. I also recognized the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

Yin (2014) reported that a number of agencies with interest in human subject research have highlighted ethical standards. These include the American Anthropological Association, American Association of University Professors, and American Evaluation Association. These associations highlighted protecting human subjects, gaining informed consent, protecting privacy and confidentiality, ensuring equity in the selection, and taking special measures to protect vulnerable subjects. The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1979) produced the *Belmont Report* which highlighted the ethical standards a researcher is expected to maintain when conducting research with human subjects. I upheld these principles, and as a student of Walden University, I ensured that I abided by the university's expectations to conduct this research ethically.

Walden University ensures that before going out into the field, every student must receive approval from the Walden IRB. The IRB approval served as one of the primary measures of assuring the ethical protection of the participants of the research. I respected the basic considerations that the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1979) has outlined for conducting research using human subjects. By seeking formal approval of the research design from the Walden University IRB, I secured the institution's ethical clearance and was awarded the number 2018.06.22 15:45:42-05'00' as evidence that my IRB application was cleared by Walden University. It was my

responsibility to ensure that I submitted the correct information to the IRB and I conducted the research within the parameters of the approval I received from the IRB.

As the researcher, I had to ensure that I did not expose the participants in the research to any danger. Before the commencement of the research, I formally requested the voluntary participation of the owners of the SMEs targeted for this study. I shared the proposed list of interview questions (Appendix A) as well as a Participant Consent Form with the potential participants. The Participant Consent Form clearly stated that participation was voluntary. I explained to participants that they were free to contact me by phone, e-mail, or in person, if at any time, they wished to withdraw from the study. I also explained to the participants that there were no penalties for withdrawing from the study. Participants were invited to sign the Participant Consent Form before the commencement of the interview. I did not offer any incentives to the participants, and every participant had the right to withdraw from the research at any point without any penalty or consequence. To have accurate information for analysis, it was necessary to record the interview. I therefore sought the prior consent of the participants for me to audio record of the interview.

The ethical consideration for participant safety is paramount and is highlighted by Yin (2014) as the consideration requiring special care and sensitivity. It is also part of the ethical standards of qualitative research for the researcher to protect the identity of the subjects of the research. Miyazaki and Taylor (2008) stated that by using pseudonyms, the researcher can help to protect the identity of the subjects. I therefore used codes to protect the identity of my respondents. Finally, to ensure that researcher bias is reduced, I

returned to the participants with a synopsis of the interview transcript, so they can check and confirm the accuracy of my interpretation of their responses during the interview. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) advised that member checking is a method of returning an interview or analyzed data to a participant who is given the opportunity to validate, verify, or assess the trustworthiness of qualitative results. Participants' trustworthiness in the results of study is the bedrock of qualitative, and through the process of member checking the results, the participant in the study develops trust in results (Birt et al., 2016).

Protecting the confidentiality of participants is a requirement of ethical research. I am the only one with control of, and access to, all the information provided by the research participants. In keeping with the Walden IRB, I will store all the data, consent forms, audio recorded interviews, and field notes for 5 years. During that period all material related to the study will be stored in a locked box and in an electronic file that will be protected by a password. After the mandatory 5 years, I will destroy all research information by shredding all hard copies and deleting all digital and recorded information.

Data Collection Instruments

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument (Rich & Misener, 2017). Fusch and Ness (2015) advised that researchers in qualitative studies cannot separate themselves from the research and are therefore the primary instruments for collecting data. Rich and Misener (2017) suggested that as the primary data collection instrument, the researcher listens to participants,

records participants' responses, develops themes from participants' feedback, and analyzes data from interviews. In fulfilling my role as the primary data collection instrument, I had to engage the research participants by actively listening to them and recording their responses, observing their behavior, developing themes from their feedback, and analyzing data obtained from the interviews.

In presenting three types of interview, Mitchell (2015) proposed that the structured interview involved a predetermined set of closed-ended questions usually presented in a questionnaire with prescribed answers from which the interviewee can choose. Mitchell suggested that the structured interview is synonymous with generating quantitative data. Researchers use the unstructured interview to generate qualitative data, but this type of interview has no prepared questions (Mitchell, 2015). The questions evolve as the interview progresses. Mitchell suggested that the semistructured interview has elements of both the structured and the unstructured interview. Mitchell argued that with the semistructured interview, the researcher uses an interview guide to focus the content of the interview. Zohrabi (2013) described the semistructured interview as an approach that allows the researcher to guide a conversation with the interviewee. I used a semistructured interview (see Appendix A) to ask all participants the same questions related to the topic and used an interview protocol (see Appendix C) to maintain consistency in my approach to gather information.

I gathered information by analyzing key documents from the records of the SMEs participating in the research, and through observation of the HRM practices of the owners. I gained insights into the HRM strategies of the participants by examining their

records. Cypress (2015) advised that examining records, provided the researcher with an opportunity to gain an understanding of what the participants have done that relates to the subject of inquiry and how they have gone about doing it. Islam (2014) opined that document analysis has been an essential part of the qualitative research for decades. Islam argued that document analysis was normally used along with interviews to gain qualitative data. Likewise, Dasgupta (2015) posited that archival documents and various business reports were valuable sources of information for comparing the responses from interviews. In keeping with advice from Ngulube (2015) who suggested that observation was one of the recognized research methods used to gather qualitative data, I observed how the participants used their HRM strategies in the workplace. By using the semistructured interview, company records, and observations, I was able to conduct triangulation of the data from the research.

I started my data gathering stage of the research by conducting four interviews. Since I did not reach data saturation after the four interviews, I conducted one more interview at which point I reached data saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) advised that data saturation increased validity. The validity of this research findings was therefore verified on the basis that no new information related to the research is emerging from additional interviews. Yazan (2015) and Castillo-Montoyo (2016) advised that for case studies to achieve reliability, the researcher should have protocols for inquiry-based conversations in place. I used the interview protocol that I designed to ensure there was consistency in my approach to obtain information from the participants. The interview

protocol allowed me to expose each participant to the same approach thereby increasing the reliability of the data.

Within 2 days after the completion of the interview, I submitted a copy of my summarized notes back to the participant via e-mail. The participants verified the accuracy of the information. After analyzing the data, I shared the analysis with the participants so that they can check and confirm the results. Goodell, Stage, and Cooke (2016) advised that the practice of returning the findings of the research to the participants for them to review, correct, and confirm, is referred to as member checking, and is a technique used in qualitative method to enhance reliability and validity of the data.

Data Collection Technique

The research question for this study was: what HRM strategies do SME owners use for achieving project success? The data collection techniques for the research was face-to-face interviews, review of company documents, and observation. Myers (2013) opined that the semistructured interview allowed the researcher to gather qualitative data from the participant. I used a prepared a set of open-ended interview questions (Appendix A) as well as a pre-designed interview protocol (Appendix C) to guide the semistructured interview and to gather rich data from the participants. Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014) stated that interviews are the most popular technique researchers use for collecting data in qualitative research. Zohrabi (2013) suggested that the semistructured interview is flexible and allows participants to freely express their viewpoints while providing detailed information about the phenomena. Zohrabi advised that if clarity or additional

information is required, the interviewer has the option to add to the pre-scripted questions. I conducted follow-up inquiries and probing, as needed.

There are advantages and disadvantages associated with every data collection technique. Although Ngulbe (2015) suggested that one of the major advantages of the semistructured interview is the ability to acquire in-depth responses from the interviewee, Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2015) advised that semistructured interviews can lead to misinterpretation as responses can be wide-ranging and vague. The semistructured interview is useful for retrieving information that is rich (Palinkas et al., 2015). It will help me obtain rich and vivid descriptions of the HRM strategies owners of SMEs use to achieve project success. To avoid misrepresenting the feedback from the research participants, and to secure accuracy of the information, I audio recorded the interviews. Anastas (2014) suggested that recording interviews in qualitative research helps to eliminate errors and has become the norm. During the semistructured interview, participants may not provide all the information related to the research question (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). I mitigated the possibility of inadequate information by using company records and observation.

Participants have a right to decide whether or not, they would like to participate in the research (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Anastas (2014) advised that the researcher must protect the privacy of the research participants, particularly when recording the interviews. My first step towards protecting the privacy of participants and ensuring the confidentiality of the research process was by obtaining IRB approval from Walden University for conducting the research. After receiving IRB approval to undertake the

research, I wrote to the potential participants. Each potential participant received the same letter (see Appendix B). I dispatched the letter via e-mail to the initial four research participants at least two weeks before the proposed date for the interview. I placed telephone calls to confirm that the potential participants for the study received my request to participate in the study. I sought the consent of each participant for a mutually convenient day, time and place to conduct the interview. On the day of the interview, I called to confirm all arrangements are in place and the participant is on schedule.

I commenced each interview with an introduction to the study, and I engaged the participant in some brief informal discussion to ensure the participant was relaxed. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) suggested that informal talk relaxes the interviewee before the interview gets formally started. After the informal discussions, I explained the conditions for participation and invited the participants to sign the Participant Consent Form. In the Participant Consent Form, I explained the reason why I was undertaking the research and outlined the conditions for participating in the research. I outlined the procedures and steps I planned to take to protect the privacy of participants and stated that the participant was free to withdraw from the research without any penalty.

Kline (2017) suggested that to ensure a high respondent response, the interview should be as short and effortless as possible. Although I requested the participants to set aside one hour for the interview, the face-to-face opened-ended interviews lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. The interviews met the standard set by Yin (2014) who opined that an interview should not go beyond one hour.

After transcribing the interview, I returned a summary of the interview to the participants. Although Goodell et al. (2016) referred to the process of returning the data from the interview to the participants, as member checking and suggested that member checking was good for reviewing, correcting, and confirming the summary of data, Zitomer and Goodwin (2014) opined that member checking is used to elaborate on emerging themes from the interviews. I used member checking to confirm the accuracy of my interpretation of the information as well provide an opportunity for the participants to elaborate on any information provided during the interview.

Data Organization Technique

I used the recording application on my Samsung device to record the interview. I used a pen and field notebook to record some points I wanted to highlight or return to as part of the inquiry-based conversation. Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested that in addition to using the interview as an opportunity to ask questions and engage in a conversation about the aims of the study, the researcher can also use the interview to organize the flow of the conversation.

To structure the data, I used an Excel resource spreadsheet to organize the data into themes. Chandra and Shang (2016) argued that researchers in the twenty-first century use computing technologies, particularly computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) tools such as NVivo® to analyze qualitative data. I conducted manual analyses of the data I obtained from the participants and used NVivo 12 to support how I organized and analyzed the data. The NVivo 12 software also helped me to classify, sort, and arrange information into themes.

The Walden IRB requirements served to guide how I collected and stored all data relating to the study. I have sole control of, and access to, all the information provided by the research participants. In keeping with the Walden IRB, I have stored all the data, consent forms, audio recorded interviews, and field notes in a locked box in my home office and will keep all material for 5 years. During that period all material related to the digital information will be kept in an electronic file that will be protected by a password. Printed material will be kept in a folder and placed in a locked box. After the mandatory 5 years, I will destroy all research information by shredding all hard copies and deleting all digital and recorded information.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data is a critical step in the research process, yet Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, and Casey (2016) advised that no systematic rules exist for analyzing qualitative data. Houghton et al. further stated that what is important is for the research findings to be organized, and for there to be patterns and themes in the data. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that to gain a more thorough picture of the matter under investigation, the researcher should use multiple sources of data through an approach called triangulation. Annansingh and Howell (2016) argued that triangulation enhanced the accuracy of interpretation of data gathered for the study. Based on the explanation provided by Annansingh and Howell, triangulation supports the testing of validity and reliability of the study and helps the researcher to confirm that the data from the study was not the result of circumstance or chance. In his seminal work on triangulation, Silverman (1985) explained that one form of triangulation combines several different qualitative methods

such as interviewing, observing, and interpreting documents. Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2018) advised that within-method triangulation is a type of methodological triangulation that researchers use to compare data from multiple data collection methods. I used methodological triangulation by comparing the data I obtained from the interviews, with information retrieved from the records of the SMEs, as well as observation of the strategies owners use to achieve project success.

Yin (2014) listed five phases that a researcher can use to manually analyze data; (a) collecting data, (b) separating data into groups, (c) regrouping data into themes, (d) assessing information, and (e) developing conclusions. I used Yin's five steps to analyze the data. Gläser and Laudel (2013) advised that coding, which evolved from grounded theory in the 1970s, is now acceptable in qualitative data analysis. I began the analysis of data by manually reviewing the raw data from the interviews, then I coded the data. Campbell et al. (2013) advised that coding helped the researcher to organize the data and improve reliability. I applied descriptive content analysis, and thematic labeling to analyze, and report the themes emerging from the data. Vaismoradi, Turnunen, and Bondas (2013) suggested that both content analysis and thematic analysis were used to analytically examine narrative material from the experiences of the respondent. Content analysis helps to report common issues while thematic analysis involves searching for and identifying common threads that extend across the interviews that were conducted (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

After manually conducting a comprehensive analysis of the data, I entered the responses of the interview, the information obtained from the records of the SMEs, and

my observations into the NVivo 12 for Windows software. Although researchers have used CAQDAS tools such as NVivo to dramatically enhance the quality of their research reporting, it cannot replace the researcher's responsibility to make decisions about how to organize the data (Salmona & Kaczynski, 2016). I used NVivo software to store, manage, and analyze the data. NVivo 12 did not replace the analytical skills I brought to the research, but I used the software to validate coding, organize the data, analyze emerging themes, and group data that are conceptually similar. Yin (2014) advised that the software was not designed to perform finished analyses on its own, and Chowdhury (2015) stated that despite the CAQDAS, the researcher still needed to apply creativity, and the plurality of thought and representation to the research. I compared the outputs from my manual analysis with the analysis from NVivo to formulate statements about the patterns that are emerging from the analysis. Salmona and Kaczynski (2016) suggested that the researcher engages in a process of labelling themes. I used the query and model features in NVivo in combination with my manual analysis to label the themes emerging from the research.

Reliability and Validity

Pilcher and Cortazzi (2016) argued that although validity and reliability are common to positivist hard-science research, qualitative researchers must ensure high levels of reliability and validity of their research finding. Olson, McAllister, Grinnell, Walters, and Appunn (2016) posited that validity and reliability are equally applicable to quantitative and qualitative research, as both methods must establish credibility of findings. Kihn and Ihantola (2015) stated that validity and reliability were important to

validate and evaluate qualitative research. Kihn and Ihantola advised that validity referred to the extent to which the conclusions from the findings of the research accurately reflected or explained the phenomenon under study, and reliability referred to the extent to which the measure, instrument, or procedure used will yield the same results if the study was repeated. Bennett and McWhorter (2016) argued that although the literature categorized validity as internal validity, external validity, and construct validity, the boundaries between the types of validity were artificial. Hadi and Closs (2016) advocated for adopting and applying positivist terminologies such as validity and reliability to qualitative research. When applied to qualitative research, reliability focused primarily on the extent to which replicating the study would produce the same results, while validity addressed the trustworthiness and defensibility of the research (Olson et al. 2016).

Reliability

Gökmen et al. (2017) suggested that in qualitative research, reliability covered accuracy of the research results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) opined that whilst accuracy of the research results was manifested by the ability to replicate an earlier research design and achieve the same findings, it was difficult to replicate qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba therefore proposed that dependability in qualitative research was equivalent to reliability in quantitative research. Zohrabi (2013) explained that reliability, which referred to the consistency, dependability, and replicability of the results, was difficult to achieve in qualitative research primarily because the data are in narrative and subjective form. Zohrabi therefore posited that instead of focusing on obtaining the same results if the research was to be replicated, qualitative researchers should focus on using the data

collection processes to achieve consistency and dependability in the findings and results. Lincoln and Guba proposed that one way to enhance dependability and consistency of qualitative results is through triangulation. Zohrabi also suggested that collecting varied types of information from different sources can enhance the reliability of the data and the results. Fusch and Ness (2015) defined triangulation as the process of using multiple sources of data to enhance the objectivity and truth of the data. Triangulation in this research resulted from the semistructured interviews, observations, and review of company documents that I undertook. By triangulating the data obtained from these three data collection techniques, I enhanced the reliability and dependability of the research.

Validity

Kihn and Ihantola (2015) advised that compared with quantitative research, validity had a different meaning in qualitative research. Validity in qualitative research sought to ensure that research findings were trustworthy and defensible (Olson et al., 2016). Zohrabi (2013) proposed triangulation and member checking as two ways to enhance validity, and Fush and Ness (2015) advised that failure to reach data saturation will have a negative effect on validity. I therefore used triangulation, member checking, and data saturation to enhance the validity of my research.

Olsen et al. (2016) posited that triangulation was the most common means of increasing validity in qualitative research. Tibben (2015) stated that there are four types of triangulation. The first type of triangulation that Tibben proposed was called data triangulation which involved the use of a variety of data sources. The second type of triangulation which Tibben proposed was called evaluator triangulation and involved

using different researchers to achieve the results of the study. In the third type of triangulation, which Tibben called methodological triangulation, the researcher used multiple methods of data collection to achieve the same result. The fourth type of triangulation proposed by Tibben was theory triangulation, in which the researcher used multiple theoretical frameworks to achieve the same result. I used methodological triangulation to validate the findings of this study. The data sources for this study were face-to-face semistructured interviews with five participants, observations, and company records. Since there was convergence in the findings from these three sources, validity of this research was enhanced.

Kihn and Ihantola (2015) stated that in qualitative research, validity meant increasing the credibility of the research by providing evidence that the report or description of findings was correct. Birt et al (2016) advised that through member checking, the researcher could enhance the credibility of the research by returning data to the participants to verify the accuracy of the data. I used member checking as a second strategy to enhance the validity of the research by sharing a synopsis of the interview with the participants, so they can verify the accuracy of my interpretation of their responses to the interview. Marshall and Rossman (2016) opined that member checking led to participants confirmation of research data. Cope (2014) advised that in qualitative research, confirmability occurred when the data represents the responses of participants. Member checking allowed me to confirm participants' responses and enhance the credibility of my findings.

Data saturation is reached when the researcher has collected enough information to replicate the study and when further collection of data is not resulting in any new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I started the research with the intention to conduct four interviews. Since I did not achieve data saturation after the four interviews, I approached a fifth owner from an SME that met the criteria to be included in the population of my research. By the end of the fifth interview, there was no new information or additional themes emerging and I achieved data saturation.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that transferability was essential for establishing external validity of a qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba opined that transferability addressed the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study could be applied to new settings. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016) stated that to enhance transferability, the researcher had to provide a full description of the research questions, design, context, findings, and interpretations. To improve the likelihood of transferability of this research, I drafted seven research questions (see Appendix A) and an interview protocol (see Appendix C) that I used to ensure consistency in conducting the research. After compiling and analyzing the research findings, I provided each participant with an overview of the research findings and interpretation.

Summary and Transition

The principal objective of this research was to explore the HRM strategies owners in SMEs used to achieve project success. In Section 2, I presented the purpose statement of this study, and addressed the role of the researcher. I have described the research participants. I have outlined the research methodology, and the research design, and

described the population and sampling method used for the research. I outlined my considerations for conducting ethical research, and then described the data collection instrument, data collection technique, data organization techniques, and data analysis. I concluded Section 2 with a discussion on methods and techniques for determining reliability and validity in the study.

I began Section 3 with an introduction to highlight the general purpose of the study and to present a brief summary of the research findings. In Section 3, I provided a comprehensive description of my research findings. I explained how the research findings helped answer the main research question. It is important in research to describe how the research contributes to business practice. I have explained how the findings of the research contributes to improved business practice. The contribution of this research to social change forms part of Section 3, and I have presented some recommendations for future action, and research. I have concluded the section with some reflections and a general conclusion statement to end the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the HRM strategies SME owners use for achieving project success. I used a semistructured face-to-face interview to collect data from five SME owners in St. Lucia. To ensure methodological triangulation, and to enhance the accuracy of interpretation of the data (Annansingh, 2016), I conducted observations and perused company records. Before meeting with the research participants, I sent invitation letters via e-mail requesting the selected SME owners to participate in the research (see Appendix B). After securing agreement from the SME owners willing to participate in the research, I sent a Participant Consent Form to each of the prospective participants. I then followed up with e-mails and telephone calls to arrange the dates, times, and places for the interviews.

I collected data from five SME owners, whom for confidentiality, I coded as SME1, SME2, SME3, SME4, and SME5. Each participant responded to seven interview questions (see Appendix A). The interviews lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. I then conducted member checking to ensure that my interpretations of the responses from the participants were correct. I verified the objectivity and accuracy of the interview data by comparing the results from the interviews with data obtained from company records and observations. I applied Yin's 5 phases for analyzing qualitative data to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' responses. I then used the CAQDAS, NVivo 12, to sort and organize information into themes.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What HRM strategies do SME owners use for achieving project success? Pollack and Adler (2014) revealed that although SMEs undertake the largest number of projects, research on how SMEs use project success for their survival is minimal. I relied heavily on Dasari et al. (2015) who indicated that project success is important for SME success. Since Sheehan (2014) opined that SME performance can be achieved by focusing on HRM strategies, I explored the extent to which SME owners in St. Lucia used HRM strategies to achieve project success.

The findings of this study confirm previous research findings that HRM strategies are necessary for project success. Sripirom et al. (2015) advised that organizational success requires specific HRM strategies. Dahie and Mohamed (2017) revealed that HRM strategies help firms achieve better organizational performance. The SME owners who participated in this study shared the HRM strategies they used to achieve project success and confirmed that sound HRM strategies were critical success factors for project success. I conducted five semistructured interviews over a period of 2 weeks and used Yin's (2014) five steps to analyze the data. I also used observations and records of the SMEs whose owners participated in the research, to triangulate the data. After sorting the field notes and reviewing the findings from the observations and company records, I compiled a summary of the data to establish the database for the research. The research database contained 52 words, phrases, and sentences that represented the main findings that addressed the research question. I then grouped the data by assigning labels to the

research findings and calculated how frequently the labels occurred in the database. Table 1 represents the coded data and their frequency.

Table 1

Grouped Data and their Frequency

Grouped Data	Frequency	Frequency (%)
Salaries, incentives, compensation, performance-based rewards, bonuses	10	20
Team meetings, staff meetings, briefings, regular feedback, involving staff in decision-making, staff input	12	23
Training, workshops, exams, right skills for the job	12	23
Staff retention, loyalty to the company	6	12
Celebrating national events, celebrating staff birthdays, hosting staff Christmas parties and other major celebrations	12	23

After conducting manual procedures to group and analyze the data, I used NVivo 12 to sort and organize information in themes. Hitka, Lorincová, Ližbetinová, Bartáková, and Merková (2017) summarized their research findings by indicating that factors such as salary, job security, fringe benefits, social care, workplace safety, and personal growth, were important to staff and emphasized my managers. Similarly, this research revealed that participant owners emphasized a number of strategies that were important for project success. I categorized the strategies used by the participant owners into five major themes: financial rewards; team meetings and briefings; training and staff enhancement;

retention and loyalty; and work-life balance. Table 2 outlines the grouped data from participant feedback and the themes that capture the similarity of the data.

Table 2

Grouped Data and Emergent Themes

Grouped data	Theme Name
Salaries Incentives compensation Performance-based rewards Bonuses	Financial rewards
Team meetings Staff meetings Regular feedback Involving staff in decision-making Staff input	Team meetings and briefings
Training Workshops Exams Right skills for the job	Training and staff enhancement
Staff retention Loyalty to the company	Retention and loyalty
Celebrating national events Celebrating staff birthdays Hosting staff Christmas parties and other major celebrations	Work-life balance

The conceptual framework for this qualitative multiple case study was the goal-setting framework proposed by Locke and Latham (1990). Goal-setting is based on the idea that task performance is regulated by consciously setting goals for individuals to attain. The suggestion by Lock and Latham that goals assigned by influential people can

lead to positive outcomes, was evident in the findings. Participants explained that as owners of their SMEs, they set attainment goals for their staff working on projects. This finding confirms results from Shoaib and Kohli (2017) that goal-setting theory predicts employee engagement and contributes to positive organizational performance. All owner participants reported they set goals to keep their staff focused on the tasks associated with successfully completing a project. The participants attributed the success they attained to staff achievement of the goals they set.

The themes that I used to categorize the data, represent HRM strategies the majority of the participants used to achieve project success. There was only one theme that did not emerge from all of the interviews. Table 3 presents the themes and the number of participants who revealed data that were categorized under the various themes.

Table 3

Number of Respondents per Theme

Theme number	Theme name	Number of respondents	Respondents as a %
1	Financial rewards	5	100
2	Team meetings and briefings	5	100
3	Training and staff enhancement	4	80
4	Retention and loyalty	5	100
5	Work-life balance	5	100

Theme 1: Financial Rewards

The first significant theme to emerge from the analysis of the participant data was financial rewards. The data showed that all the participants used a form of financial reward, including incentives, wages, commissions, bonuses, and performance-based rewards as HRM strategies to achieve project success. Sharma et al. (2015) indicated that employees expect compensation, and reward to form part of their employer's recognition of their contribution to business success. Similar outcomes were revealed when Hitka et al. (2017) presented research findings which had financial rewards as a major HRM strategy used by an SME in Slovakia. The effect of compensation and rewards on project success was significantly reflected in the response of SME5 who reported that the most effective HRM strategies were the financial rewards, incentives, and bonuses he offered to his staff. The participant said "if project managers bring projects in below the budgeted cost, without discussion, I split the savings 60/40. This is a major source of motivation for the guys." The participant shared documents which validated the statement that he provided financial rewards to his staff. I reviewed documents about two recent projects that employees completed below the budgeted cost. The documents confirmed that employees had received 40% of the savings on a project that was completed below the budgeted cost. I also observed SME5 handing an envelope to his Secretary and he explained that this was cash for an employee who earned 40% of the savings on a project that the employee completed below the projected cost.

SME1 opined that incentivization that is linked to goal achievement is a critical HRM strategy that she used. The approach used by the participant aligns with Reemts et

al. (2016), who explained that business leaders used goal-setting theory to set performance goals and achieve success. The financial rewards used by the SME1 included attractive wages with salary increases that are pegged to cost of living increases, commissions related to goal-attainment, and performance related bonuses. The participant took a structured approach to providing incentives. The accuracy of the data from the interview was validated when SME1 shared company documents that outlined the base salary, salary increases, commissions, and bonuses she paid to every employee. I reviewed staff memos which contained evidence that employees received salary increases. The staff memos referenced the officially published cost of living increases. SME1 explained that she offered annual and quarterly incentives that were based on productivity linked to “each and every project.” SME1 set individual goals for every employee to secure no less than \$2,000 of new business per year. Employees who achieved this goal received a commission that was commensurate with the value of the new business.

SME2 referred to incentives as what drives his workers. He admitted that there was a point in the life of his SME when he managed a percentage of the largest projects in St. Lucia related to his field. During that period, the participant provided amongst the most competitive compensation packages, offered annual bonuses, and provided rewards which also included assigning a company vehicle to every project supervisor. My observation of an employee handing a folder that contained documents for SME2 to review and determine the bonuses he would approve for employees who recently

completed a project on time and within the allocated budget, confirmed the finding that SME2 used bonuses as an incentive.

In the case of SME3, the participant explained that his employees get paid on a commission basis and, as a result, they produce maximally to “optimize their earnings for any given period, on any given project.” SME4 linked financial rewards to self-improvement and provided incentives to all staff who exceed 5 years with the SME. SME4 stated “employees who stay with the company for 5 years, should be more qualified and better trained than when they came in. We support them to get professional qualification.” The review of company records confirmed that SME4 wrote letters to convey the SME owner’s decision to support training of two employees who were employed in the SME for more than 5 years.

Theme 2: Team Meetings and Briefings

The data showed that all participants used team meetings and briefings as an HRM strategy for project success. The participants revealed that they used team meetings, daily briefings, and regular staff meetings to review business performance and set individual and team goals. SME3 stated that he sets daily goals for his employees and has designed an automated system to track goal-achievement. Three of the five participants used daily briefings, one used monthly meetings, and one varied the frequency of his meetings to suit the demands on his time. The data showed that team meetings and briefings helped owners of the SMEs to disseminate information about projects, refine schedules, set goals, review experiences and customer feedback, provide management feedback, and examine project deadlines. Dassari et al. (2015) pointed out

that frequent team meetings were a major factor contributing to project success in small firms in Hyderabad, India. The data from this study, substantiates the point purported by Dassari et al. I observed two team meetings during my field research which enhanced the accuracy of my findings.

Two participants revealed that they used team meetings and briefings to provide staff with the opportunity to participate in decision-making. Locke and Latham (1990) advocated for employees to be involved in decision-making. The evidence from the research data validates the suggestion from Locke and Latham. SME1 explained that she engages her staff in making decisions on both project related matters such as setting the goals for the week, and on personnel matters such as agreeing on the time to start the working day. The participant shared that when the staff is involved in making decisions, they show more commitment and zeal to achieve. The participant shared briefing notes which confirmed that she used team briefings to make decisions. The briefing notes captured information about which staff member was responsible for agreed actions. There was a section of the briefing notes that was reserved for comments that the employees were expected to fill in after undertaking the assigned tasks. SME3 revealed that he used team meetings to collectively examine deadlines and “have our staff have an input.”

The use of meetings as an HRM strategy had mixed results. SME1 identified meetings and briefings as among the most effective HRM strategies, whilst the other participants lamented meetings and briefings as among the least effective HRM strategies used in achieving project success. The participants who reported that meetings and briefings were the least effective HRM strategies for achieving project success, pointed

out that employee apathy, poor communication skills among staff, low educational attainment, and the inability of staff to document concerns from the project site, affected the effectiveness of the meetings and briefings. I observed one team briefing SME4 held. SME4 started the team briefing by welcoming the team members and asked them to share their thoughts on the project they were working on. The team members did not say much. SME4 proceeded to discuss the project and set the goals for each team member. She asked the employees to comment, make suggestions, or ask questions. None of the team members spoke. The reaction of the employees to the team briefing was evidence that for SME4, team briefings was not an effective HRM strategy.

SME2 shared his experience using team briefings to address negligence and wastage of material. SME2 explained that a few hours following a briefing, he visited a project site, only to find the ongoing practice of wastage. SME2 said “when they continue the practice of wastage, they are sending me clear signals that these discussions in the team meetings and briefings are not having the desired impact.” SME5 also reported he observed some level of enthusiasm for one morning after a briefing, but by the afternoon, his employees had resorted to their “old ways.” Despite their disappointment with the effectiveness of team meetings and briefings, SME2 and SME5 reported they continue to have meetings and briefings. I observed SME2 use team briefings to set goals and encourage his employees to use the supplies for the project wisely. The participant encouraged his staff to keep a record of major observations, customer feedback, and any quality concerns they may have while undertaking their project tasks.

Theme 3: Training and Staff Enhancement

After analyzing the data, it was clear that training and staff enhancement were HRM strategies used by the participants to achieve project success. Slavic et al. (2014), Vui-Yee (2015), and Yang et al. (2015) suggested that training and development formed part of HRM practice. Although one participant did not mention any HRM strategy that could be categorized as training and staff enhancement, the overall evidence from the research substantiated the claim that training and development are critical HR practices. My observation of certificates, displayed on the walls of three of the SMEs in the study, from training employees participated in, confirmed that the SMEs invested in the training and enhancement of their employees. SME1 explained that her SME was ISO certified, and therefore, training and upgrading the skills of employees was compulsory. Every year, SME1 used the month of January when there was a lull in project activities to update her training manuals, and arranged periodic training, exams, and workshops necessary to maintain ISO certification. I reviewed documents provided by SME1 which confirmed that in January 2018, her SME organized ISO training for her employees. The findings from the interview and company documents were validated by the ISO certificates which I observed were displayed in the office of SME1. The participant explained that employees had to be familiar with all the products of the company and she organized internal training to enhance staff knowledge and competences.

The owner participant from SME4 explained that in her SME, having knowledge of the company's products and possessing expertise for error free installation were fundamental for project success. SME4 explained that for her SME to be internationally

certified, she was obligated to maintain industry standards. SME4 shared documents that validated the finding that her SME was regularly assessed as a requirement for international certification. The review of documents revealed the SME has membership in international bodies that set standards for the industry that her SME is a part of. Staff competence formed a major part of the certification process. During observation, I saw certificates and awards both the SME and its employees have received displayed in the Office of SME4. SME1 explained that as a small company, her staff needed to be familiar with the entire project cycle. She therefore trained her entire production crew on all aspects of engagements of the company and assigned staff based on the areas they excelled in. I reviewed documents SME1 and SME4 provided about the curriculum and modules for training they offered to their employees. The company documents revealed that training programs covered a variety of topics such as health and safety, product development and installation, customer relations, and use of tools and equipment. The training modules confirmed the owner participants' claims that they invested in training and staff enhancement.

The data revealed various opportunities that SME owners provided for staff enhancement and personal development. Documents from SME1 confirmed the findings that the SME owner provided opportunities for staff enhancement and personal development. SME1 explained that she recognized the potential of one of her employees who has been with the SME for over 10 years and supported her financially to complete her undergraduate degree in HRM. Company records verified that the SME owner covered 75% of the tuition of the staff member undergraduate education. SME4 stated

that employees who stay with the SME for more than 5 years, received the opportunity to become qualified in their respective fields. SME4 shared a file that contained letters to staff supporting the SME owner's decision to fund a staff member's enrollment in an accounting certification course

Two of the participants who mentioned training as HRM strategies, pointed out that there were risks for their SME when they invested in training. SME2 reported that over the years, some of the staff who he has trained have now branched off to either start their own companies, or to join other SMEs, thereby increasing his competition. He remained optimistic that despite having a few of his trained employees who have moved on, he maintains an overall high level of retention, and he considers those who have left his SME to be his contribution to expanding SMEs in St. Lucia. During observation, I saw photographs displayed on the walls of the SME confirming that training sessions have been conducted with employees. The photographs on display had individuals who are no longer employed by the SME.

SME5 explained that his employees are daily paid workers. Therefore, if he were to send employees to a training program, he would have to compensate them at a rate equivalent to that which is paid to them for being on the project site. He did not think the benefits outweighed the costs of training and therefore opted for on-site training and "learn as you go" experiences. SME5 opined that employees learned best, when he stood next to them to "teach and advise them." SME5 shared photographs to substantiate his point about "learn as you go" training. SME5 explained that his employees understood the business he is in and why professionalism matters, because he "teaches them the right

way.” I observed SME5 sharing job samples from his mobile telephone with his team whilst explaining the benefits of approaching a task in a particular way. During the observation I heard SME5 emphasizing the need for his employees the pay attention to completing the project on time, and to the satisfaction of the customer.

Theme 4: Retention and Loyalty

Research about SME survival identifies loyalty and staff retention as critical for business survival. Williams (2014) explained that long-lasting loyalty of employees and customers is important for the survival and growth of the SME. Maley (2014) posited that firms with good HRM strategies are able to retain staff and outperform their competitors. Based on the findings of this study, staff loyalty and high rates of retention, were among the HRM strategies the owners of SMEs used to achieve project success. In emphasizing the value of loyalty and long years of service provided by his employees, SME2 said, “over here, we are more like a family than a company. Some of my staff know nowhere else.” I observed how SME2 interacted with his employees. SME2 addressed his staff casually and in return, the employees were very relaxed when interacting with him. SME2 forged a relationship with his staff that seemed familial. SME1 explained that one of her employees had been with the SME since its commencement 21 years ago, and another had worked for the SME for the past 15 years. In her own reflection, the participant said, “we don’t have people coming and going. I have a steady group of 13 people, who I know I can rely on for the long haul.” SME1 shared letters she wrote to employees confirming their long service to the SME.

SME3 believed that the loyalty of his employees is partly responsible for the success he experiences with projects. He explained that he took over the SME from his father, after internal mismanagement led the business to bankruptcy. “Were it not for my staff, who were willing to carry us through our rough patches, I would not be where I am today.” The participant credited his staff for believing that under his leadership, the company can grow back to being a profitable business. My observation of SME3 speaking to two of his employees and advising them on how they should plan for undertaking a project in his absence, was indicative of the confidence he had in his employees and the reciprocal confidence his employees had in him. SME3 explained that the two employees he spoke to were long-serving staff who he has promoted to the level of supervisor. SME3 said “these guys know the company more than me. They were here before me and I know I can rely on them.” SME3 advised, that his strategy is to thank the employees for their contribution and when things are “not that bright for us,” ask for their patients and understanding. The Participant explained that he believes his approach and relationship with his employees are the foundation for the loyalty he enjoys from the people working with him on various projects.

SME4 described the high retention rate in her SME as the reason why her SME has grown over the years. Documents from the SME confirmed that 85% of the employees have been on staff for more than 5 years. SME4 explained that the high retention rate works as a good HRM strategy, since the expertise that have been developed over the years, remain available to the company. In addressing the impact that loyalty and retention has had on project success in her SME, the participant said “all our

employees remain, unless they are sent home. We hardly have team members who decide, I am going.” Company documents confirmed that employees remain with the company for a long time. Since her business relies on highly trained and skillful craftsmen, SME4 purposefully facilitates loyalty and long retention, by responding to the needs of her staff. The participant provides support to staff in distress and has introduced a long service award, to recognize the contribution of employees who remain with the company for periods above 5 years. I observed two long service award plaques with the employees’ names and years of service on display in the office of SME4. The long service award plaques validate the interview findings that employees remain with the SME for many years. During observation, an employee approached the SME owner with a concern which she addressed by informing the staff that he is senior enough and has enough experience with the SME to take a decision. The way SME4 addressed the matter builds confidence and staff loyalty.

Theme 5: Work-Life Balance

All the participants identified celebrating social events, providing support to the staff, and making employees feel a part of the SME, as necessary and good HRM strategies that contributed to project success. By creating a relaxed atmosphere, participants provided the basis for a conducive working environment. Allen et al. (2014) opined that it is the responsibility of management to ensure a collaborative and friendly working environment. The data revealed that SME owners created a collaborative and friendly working environment by making it possible for staff to engage in collective team building and personal welfare events. The data revealed that to build team spirit,

encourage cooperation, and engender a sense of inclusion, participants instituted practices that were not directly related to a formal employee-employer relationship. These practices included supporting staff to respond to personal and family crises, celebration of birthdays of staff members, offering scholarships to dependents, and staff celebration of national events. The participants believed that by creating a cordial and relaxed atmosphere at the workplace, employees will have high levels of motivation that can spill over into project success. Maley (2014) referred to all the interventions that related to staff welfare, and not directly associated with the core business of the organization, as work-life balance. In analyzing the data, I grouped all the social events, national celebrations, and support to staff, under the theme work-life balance.

One of the most celebrated national events in St. Lucia is Jounen Kweyol, which is a national celebration of the nation's colonial past that focuses on its French Creole heritage. All the participants reported that they celebrated Jounen Kweyol with their staff. The participants provided time, space, and resources including food and drinks, for their staff to celebrate together. My observation of photographs of past Jounen Kweyol celebrations displayed on the walls of three SMEs confirms that SME1, SME2, and SME4 used the Jounen Kweyol celebrations to build a cordial working environment. The data revealed that owner participants established practices for celebrating birthdays, end of year and Christmas, and other significant events. SME1 reported that she invested in a fully functioning kitchen and made it possible for the staff to occasionally cook together to build team spirit. During observation, I saw the staff lounge and kitchen, which confirmed the data from the interviews. SME4 explained that her staff looked forward to

their end-of-year event and receiving their Christmas packages that includes wine and cake. The participant thought that, by such a simple gesture, she was able to build a conducive working environment.

The data provided evidence that by addressing the personal concerns of employees, the SME engenders high levels of performance. SME5, revealed that he helped staff members who were in distress or who needed non-work-related support from management. Company records confirmed that SME5 approved three staff loans to enable three staff members to purchase a vehicle. SME5 explained that because of his gesture to approve a staff loan for one of his project supervisors to purchase his vehicle, the commitment of the project supervisor improved. SME1 reported that after the 2017 hurricane season, some of her employees were without water within their households. She provided water tanks to employees who were affected by the hurricane as a sign of caring for the welfare of staff. I observed water tanks on the compound of the SME and SME1 explained that these were extra tanks from her last purchase which she may have to distribute when if there is a hurricane in 2018. The participant explained that staff expressed gratitude whenever they received support. She explained that the zeal expressed by her staff and the commitment they displayed whenever there is a project to complete, is a direct result of the attention she pays to their personal needs.

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the HRM strategies SME owners used for achieving project success. The study provided an opportunity for five owners of SMEs in St. Lucia to share their experiences in using

HRM strategies to achieve project success. The views expressed by Sripirom et al. (2015) that companies accomplished organizational success by putting HRM strategies in place, were found to be relevant to this study. The data from the study confirmed that SME owners used a variety of HRM strategies to achieve project success. Consistent with the views proffered by Williams (2014) that small firms are inherently vulnerable because they lack the resources and organizational structure to invest in HRM, the participants in the study revealed that although they used HRM strategies, they lacked the finance to structurally invest in a human resources department. They all, however, believed that HRM is a critical success factor for project success.

The findings of the study contain clear evidence that SMEs that undertake projects can benefit from using HRM strategies as critical success factors for project success. Although the participant owners described the HRM strategies they used as informal HRM strategies, the findings from the analyzed data revealed that the HRM strategies the participant owners used, were critical success factors for project success. Voss and Brettel (2014) addressed this issue when they advised that since owners of SMEs operated in a context of inadequate human and financial resources, they were likely to use informal business arrangements.

This study contributes to the literature on project success in SMEs and provides evidence that substantiates the posit by Sheehan (2014) that project success in SMEs can be achieved by focusing on HRM strategies. In small island states like St. Lucia, the SME sector is critical to the economy. It was evident during the review of existing literature that there have only been few studies on SMEs in small island states. Angelelli et al.

(2006) reported that SMEs account for the vast majority of private sector firms in the Caribbean. There is therefore a need for a better understanding of what accounts for SME success in small island states. Practitioners and scholars who wish to understand the SME sector in small island states like St. Lucia, could use this study to explore important themes related to project success in SMEs.

Marcelino-Sádaba et al. (2014) advised that a large proportion of the projects undertaken worldwide are done by SMEs, and Dasari et al. (2015) revealed that one-third of business operations in SMEs are related to managing projects. Dasari et al. (2015) and Marcelino-Sádaba et al. provided justification for more research to focus on the contribution of SMEs to project success. Pollack and Adler (2014) advocated for more research to be focused on how owners in SMEs used project management, and in this study, the data revealed that owners of SMEs undertake projects as a major component of their business activity.

Project managers focus on project success as one of the major themes for overall business success (Berssaneti & Carvalho, 2015). The data from this study provided evidence that goal-setting was used as a major strategy for project success. The participants shared their experiences with goal-setting by explaining how their staff meetings and team briefings were oriented towards setting goals, providing feedback, and inspiring employees to work towards goals. Using goal-setting as the conceptual framework for this research provided a sound anchor to understand how participant owners used HRM strategies to achieve success in the projects they undertook. Practitioners and scholars in the field of project management can therefore reference the

experiences of the participants of this study when citing examples of how goal-setting contributes to project success.

Implications for Social Change

There is compelling evidence that SMEs contribute to social change in many societies. In St. Lucia, SMEs account for 77% of the enterprises on the island and employ 64% of the labor force (Lashley & Moore, 2013). Income generation and steady employment for the citizens of St. Lucia are therefore reliant on the viability and sustainability of SMEs. As posited by Dasari et al. (2015), since one-third of business operations in SMEs is related to managing projects, the survival of SMEs is inextricably linked to the successful implementation of projects. Owners of SMEs in St. Lucia acknowledged that HRM strategies are critical success factors for project success. By successfully managing projects within their SMEs, owners can ensure sustainable job opportunities for a significant number of the citizens of St. Lucia.

It is possible that the results of my study can provide owners with the strategies to secure the success of their SMEs and in turn contribute to employment of a significant number of the citizens of St. Lucia. Social change projects SME owners undertake include infrastructural projects such as the construction of schools and health clinics, the lighting of playing fields, and connecting rural communities to main water distribution systems. The implications for social change also include creating employment and improving the quality of life of citizens who benefit from the successful infrastructural and social projects that owners of SMEs undertake.

Recommendations for Action

The data from this study has generated insights which can assist SME owners achieve project success. The SME owners who participated in this study all revealed that their HRM strategies contributed significantly to the success of the projects they undertook. The owner of SME2 put it succinctly when he said, “we are more like a family than a company. We have played the survival game better than others and it is my focus on building a good team that makes the difference.” Based on the findings of the study, I identified three major recommendations that could benefit SME owners who undertake projects: (a) invest more resources, time, and expertise in HRM, (b) train staff to make the link between personal responsibility and project success, and (c) establish mechanisms for managing and measuring staff performance.

Sripirom et al. (2015) posited that sound HRM strategies enhances the competitiveness of organizations, and although SMEs may not have the resources to invest in systems that contribute only to long-term business success (Williams, 2014), the findings of this research revealed that SME owners understood the value of investing in HRM strategies. One common barrier to effective HRM strategies faced by each of the participants was the lack of finance and other resources to invest in HRM. Owners can overcome this challenge by outsourcing the human resource function of their SME, thereby reducing the cost and achieving beneficial HRM results.

Vui-Yee (2015) advocated for training and development as an HRM strategy. Based on the data analyzed from the study, participants faced challenges related to the level of formal training of their staff, negligence and wastage of supplies which affected

project success, resistance of the staff with the use of health and safety equipment, punctuality, and staff apathy. All of these challenges hinder effective HRM strategies. Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) linked personal contribution to organizational success, and owners of SMEs can improve project success by ensuring that their staff are appropriately trained to understand how their individual contribution relates to project success.

Although the data revealed that annual performance appraisals were not effective HRM strategies, the owners interviewed identified regular feedback to staff among the most successful HRM strategies that contributed to project success. This is in keeping with the measures proposed by Bititci et al. (2016) who suggested that if managers conduct performance measurement techniques, such as periodic performance appraisals without effectively managing employee performance, the effect of goal-setting on performance will not be fully known. Additionally, Kuvaas et al. (2016) argued that employers managed employee performance through a process of setting goals, evaluating goal attainment, and providing feedback. Devarajan et al. (2016) posited that organizations are moving toward performance management that is real-time, continuous, consistent, and intuitive. My recommendation to establish mechanisms for managing and measuring staff performance is rooted in advice from Kuvaas et al. and Devarajan et al. that consistently managing and periodically measuring performance lead to improved employee performance.

Owners of SMEs in St. Lucia who wish to secure organizational effectiveness would benefit from paying attention to the results of this study. In addressing the

importance of HRM strategies to the success of the firm, Sripirom et al. (2015) opined that strategic talent management is a primary function of managers of organizations. The recommendations for action can help SME owners manage the talent of their staff, remain competitive, and contribute to organizational effectiveness.

In 2010, the St. Lucia Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture, launched the annual St. Lucia Business awards. This event brings attention to SME contribution to national development. Public lectures, exhibitions, panel discussions, and other information sharing events are held in a weeklong commemoration of the awards. These events can serve as a good opportunity for disseminating the results of this study. Publishing in peer reviewed journals can also serve as an effective channel for disseminating the results of the study.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this multiple case study provided a foundation for researchers to explore the contribution of HRM strategies to project success in SMEs in St. Lucia. Although the data revealed that the HRM strategies used have a positive impact on project success, the participants in the study admitted that they applied the HRM strategies informally since they lacked the resources to invest in dedicated HRM expertise in their SMEs. One recommendation for further study is to explore whether formal and informal application of HRM strategies have different impacts on project success. There are SMEs that do not use HRM strategies for project success (Garavan, Watson, Carbery, and O'Brien (2015). In order to gain a better understanding of how HRM strategies contribute to project success, further research can be undertaken to

compare SMEs that use HRM strategies to achieve project success with SMEs that do not use HRM strategies. Further study can also be undertaken to determine whether the five themes that emerged from this study have varying impacts on project success.

Since this research used a qualitative multiple-case study design to gather data, only descriptive analyses were possible. Future studies could use quantitative designs to produce objective findings on the contribution of HRM strategies to project success. Further research can overcome the limitations I faced in using a purposive sample from a small population of SMEs in St. Lucia by expanding the population for further research to include SMES on islands in the Caribbean with comparable social and economic conditions.

Reflections

The journey to complete this doctoral study was challenging yet enjoyable. It taught me that anything I set my mind to, I can accomplish. One major lesson for me was that whilst frustrations along the way were inescapable, they were also temporary. I was inspired by every short step forward, every milestone achieved, and every positive feedback I received from my committee members. My desire to successfully complete the program kept growing. I have worked in the project management field for the past decade and have been concerned about the low success rate of projects. Although I have no experience or expertise in SME matters, I undertook this research with the view to better understand the factors contributing to project success and what critical success factors contributed to project success in SMEs. Since limited research has been conducted on SME project success, I was not certain I could obtain relevant data to

confidently explore how owners of SMEs in St. Lucia used HRM strategies to achieve project success. My initial thought was that SME owners had to have the right HRM strategies to complete a project successfully. After formulating my research question, and exploring the extant literature, it became apparent to me that there was minimal research conducted on SMEs in St. Lucia. I therefore undertook this research with a sense of trepidation and worry that perhaps owners of SMEs in St. Lucia may not have an appreciation for HRM strategies as a critical success factor for project success.

Given my background in project management, I was mindful that I could be approaching this research with some biases. I abided by the ideas purported by Cope (2014) and Marshall and Rossman (2016) and maintained the highest standards and quality while conducting the research and ensured that my biases and preconceived notions did not unduly influence my involvement in the research. I mitigated researcher bias by maintaining strong professional integrity in areas such as ensuring the accuracy of the information, researcher credibility, and respecting participant confidentiality.

I was impressed with the positive response I received from the participants of my study. Although only one of the five respondents had written HRM policies, they all used HRM strategies and willingly shared their experiences in using HRM strategies to achieve project success. I have developed an appreciation for the challenges faced by SME owners and whilst I started this study thinking SME owners would not appreciate the value of research about their HRM strategies, I ended with the distinct impression that SME owners crave both theoretical and practical solutions to the day-to-day HRM challenges they face in managing projects.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the HRM strategies SME owners use to achieve project success. Five owners of SMEs in St. Lucia participated in the study. The data collected using face-to-face semistructured interviews revealed that owners of SMEs in St. Lucia understand the critical role HRM strategies play in achieving project success. Despite the challenges they face in formalizing HRM strategies in their SMEs, owners recognize that by using various HRM strategies, staff contribution to organizational success is enhanced. The goal-setting conceptual framework used to underpin this study provided useful explanations for how owners were able to set clear and challenging goals, manage staff performance, and achieve organizational success.

The findings of this research emerged from three sources of data. The primary data source was a semistructured interview, and the secondary data sources which secured methodological triangulation were from observations and company records. The findings outlined the HRM strategies SME owners could adopt when undertaking projects. The common themes of financial rewards; team meetings and briefings; training and staff enhancement; retention and loyalty; and work-life balance which emerged from the research, can be applied by other SME owners who are seeking to successfully undertake projects.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What human resource management (HRM) strategies have you used to achieve project success in your organization?
2. What HRM strategies have you found most effective to achieve project success?
3. What were the key barriers to implementing your HRM strategies for project success in your organization?
4. How did you address the key barriers to implementing your HRM strategies for project success?
5. What HRM strategies have you found to be least effective for achieving project success?
6. How do you measure the effectiveness of your HRM strategies on project success?
7. What additional information would you like to share on HRM strategies you use for achieving project success in your organization?

Appendix B: Invitation Letter to Participate in the Research

Date

Recipient Contact Details

Dear _____,

As a candidate of the doctoral program at Walden University, I am conducting research exploring the human resource management (HRM) strategies small and medium enterprises (SMEs) use to achieve project success. I consider your organization to be one of the SMEs in St. Lucia with HRM strategies that contribute to project success. Your experiences in using HRM strategies for project success can help other SMEs to achieve project success by following some of your models and can contribute to greater knowledge about how owners in SMEs use HRM strategies to achieve project success.

With your permission, I would like to interview an owner or Manager of your organization about your HRM strategies and how these strategies contribute to managing successful projects in your organization. I would also like to review your organization's HR strategies and observe how HRM strategies are implemented at the workplace. Your participation in the research will be fully voluntary and will be kept confidential. Neither you nor your SME will be identified in the research study.

It is my hope that with your agreement to participate in this research, I will gain an understanding of the HRM strategies you have used to achieve project success. I look forward to your response. I will contact you in the coming days to confirm your participation and to answer any questions which you may have.

Armstrong M. Alexis

Doctoral candidate

Walden University

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

1. I will commence the interview by introducing myself and outlining the purpose of my research. I will engage the participant in some brief informal discussion to ensure the participant is relaxed.
2. I will thank the participant for agreeing to participate in the research and will ask the participant to raise any questions or queries about the interview process.
3. I will introduce the consent form and encourage discussion of its content. If the participant is happy with the process of the interview and the guidelines outlined in the consent form, I will invite the participant to sign the form.
4. The interview will then officially start. I will record the day, time, place of the interview. I will remind the participant that the interview will be audio recorded.
5. I will ask the 7 questions listed as interview questions and allow the participant time to respond. If there is need to probe responses, I will do so without making the participant feel that I am conducting an interrogation.
6. I will thank the participant for participating and for responding to my questions.
7. I will inform the participants that a copy of the transcript will be made available for participant confirmation of the accuracy of the information.
8. I will provide my contact details to the participant in the event there is a need to contact me.
9. I will switch off the audio recording of the interview.
10. I will end the interview by once again thanking the participant.

Appendix D: Observation Protocol

1. I will seek the permission of the SME owner to observe his interaction with employees. My observation will be unobtrusive, meaning that I will not be introduced in the setting, neither will I occupy any space that creates an unnatural setting either for the owner or the employees. I will not interfere in the communication between the MSE owner and employees, neither will I interact directly with the employees.
2. I will record the day and starting time of the observation.
3. I will take hand-written notes of the interactions between the SME owner and the employees. The reaction of the employees is not my primary concern and will not form part of note-taking. I am interested in the HRM strategies that SME owners apply practically. I will pay attention to conversations, verbal and non-verbal cues on matters related to setting performance targets, negotiating performance goals, reviewing performance and providing feedback to employees.
4. When the observation period is over, I will record the time that the observation ends.