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Successful Strategies for Using Knowledge Management in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

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College of Management and Technology

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Josephine Kayaga Nsubuga-Mugoa

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Successful Strategies for Using Knowledge Management in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

by

Josephine Kayaga Nsubuga-Mugoa

MBA, University of Leicester, 2003

B. Stat., Makerere University, 1990

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2019

Abstract

Knowledge management (KM) is vital for an organization to succeed in a highly dynamic and competitive world. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies that managers of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) use to effectively integrate KM into business practices. The study population comprised 5 managers from 2 SMEs operating in Uganda. The eligibility criteria for this study were that participants had to be from Ugandan SMEs with a knowledge-intensive environment, managers with some responsibility of KM in the organization, and experienced with at least 1 year of successful KM practices. The conceptual framework for this study was theory z. Data were collected through face-to-face, semistructured interviews and reviews of company documents. Member checking was completed to strengthen credibility and trustworthiness. After methodological triangulation of the data sources collected and completion of Yin's 5-step process of data analysis, 5 themes emerged: having supportive leadership, ensuring sustainability, embedding KM practices in the organization culture, socialization, and embracing modern technology. The findings of this study might promote social change by supporting SME managers' use of KM to expand opportunities for employees to learn new skills and knowledge leading to the expansion of employment opportunities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Jackson. Your continued support and encouragement inspired me during this journey of pursuing my doctoral studies. I thank you for your continued sacrifice, patience, and love. Also, to my mother, Kevin Nalule Nsubuga, for I am what I am today because you sacrificed yourself for my sake. Good health, is my daily prayer, for you my dear mother.

Acknowledgments

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Business leaders should be on the lookout for opportunities that lead to innovativeness and competitiveness in their businesses. Knowledge management (KM) has a direct positive and significant relation with both technological innovation and competitive advantage (Lee, Foo, Leong, & Ooi, 2016). Heisig et al. (2016) recommended that researchers should carry out further research on the influence of KM to support business strategy, intellectual capital, decision-making, knowledge sharing, organizational learning, innovation performance, productivity, and competitive advantage. The use of KM practices can contribute to the overall growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by simultaneously and significantly enhancing their performance (Cerchione, Esposito, & Spadaro, 2015). Perez-Soltero, Zavala-Guerrero, Barcelo-Valenzuela, Sanchez-Schmitz, and Meroño-Cerdan (2015) noted that in the implementation of KM strategies in SMEs, there is a gap in understanding how these strategies allow improvements in the development process of the areas involved in them. In this study, I explored the KM strategies that SMEs may integrate into their business practices for competitiveness.

Background of the Problem

Uganda is one of the leading entrepreneurial countries in the world with the majority of its business ventures in the category of SMEs (Olupot, Kituyi, & Noguera, 2014). SMEs have special challenges and factors that affect their business success, and many SMEs do not reach their full potential and fail to grow, leading to loss of jobs and wealth for the areas in which they operate (Byukusenge & Munene, 2017). Innovation fully mediates the relationship between KM and business performance of SMEs (Byukusenge & Munene, 2017). KM as a concept is important due to the growing awareness of the importance of knowledge for organizations' prosperity and survival (Byukusenge & Munene, 2017). Durst and Edvardsson (2012) recommended that future researchers should take a few factors into account. These factors are that SMEs are not comparable to large listed firms, and researchers should thus disengage from discussing KM in SMEs from a large firm perspective and use a more realistic approach by taking into consideration the resource constraints SMEs face and the environments in which they operate (Durst & Edvardsson, 2012). In this study, I explored the KM strategies that SMEs use to overcome some of the resource constraints.

The major constraints that affect SMEs are financial capital and lack of innovative activities, which severely affect their competitiveness (Arasti, Zandi, & Bahmani, 2014). The heterogeneity among SMEs is another problem because small firms are hardly comparable with medium-sized firms; the same problem exists in different industries, which also show size variations, making the comparison of industries more challenging (Durst & Edvardsson, 2012). In this study, I defined the category of SMEs I focused on in terms of size.

Problem Statement

KM is vital for an organization to succeed and survive in a highly dynamic and competitive world (Oye & Salleh, 2013). However, despite the potential benefits of KM, managers in developing countries rarely use KM in their workplaces (Mbhalati, 2014). Lee et al. (2016) found that 49.8% of SMEs in Malaysia, a developing country, spend less than 1000 Ringgit ($230) on KM per annum. The general business problem is that some managers of SMEs in Uganda do not have strategies to integrate KM into their business practices. The specific business problem is that some small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) managers in Uganda lack strategies to effectively integrate KM into their business practices.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some SME managers in Uganda use to effectively integrate KM into their business practices. The target population for this study consisted of managers in two SMEs in Uganda who had experience of successfully integrating KM into their business practices. This study's potential contribution to positive social change is that findings from this study may be helpful in expanding opportunities for employees to learn new skills and knowledge. Another contribution to positive social change may be the expansion of employment opportunities because, as SMEs integrate KM into their business practices, they may become more successful, thus leading to the expansion of employment opportunities.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a qualitative research method. Researchers conduct qualitative research to generate or produce a thick description of the phenomena under study (Yin, 2014). The qualitative method was suitable for this study because I had to produce a thick description of the phenomena under study, that is, the strategies that managers in Uganda use to integrate KM into their business practices. In contrast, researchers use quantitative methods to test and confirm hypotheses, or to test theories by examining the relationships among variables and constructs (Allwood, 2012; Palinkas et al., 2015). Quantitative methods were not suitable for this study because it did not involve testing any relationships among variables. Mixed-methods research includes both qualitative and quantitative elements. Researchers use mixed-methods to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Mixed-methods research was not suitable for this study because it did not include any quantitative elements.

I used a multiple case study design. Researchers use a case study approach to focus on and retain a holistic and real-world perspective of the case(s). This includes studying individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries (Yin, 2014). In this study, I focused on the managerial processes of KM as I explored strategies that some SME managers in Uganda use to effectively integrate KM into their business practices. I used a multiple case study design to help determine the strategies that SME managers may use to integrate KM into their business. Researchers use qualitative multiple case studies to illustrate specific strategies that one may use to conduct an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon at hand and to ensure the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of a study (Dahl, Larivière, & Corbière, 2017; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Researchers use the ethnographic study design to describe the culture of a society or communities, which requires long periods in the field and detailed observational and interview evidence (Yin, 2014). Phenomenological researchers believe that knowledge and understanding are within an individual's day-to-day experiences (Byrne, 2001). Also, phenomenological researchers work to understand and describe reality without bias (Byrne, 2001; Gupta, 2015; Pisarik, Rowell, & Thompson, 2017). This study was not about culture, interpretations, feelings, and experiences. Thus, ethnography and phenomenology were not suitable for this study. In a narrative research design, researchers explore individual lives and retell the participants' stories (Smith, 2015; Zou, Sunindijo, & Dainty, 2014). This study was about exploration of strategies that work and not stories.

Research Question

The research question for this study was: What strategies do some SME managers in Uganda use to effectively integrate KM into their business practices?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to integrate knowledge management in your business practices?
2. How did you disseminate these strategies within the organization?
3. How did the integration of knowledge management in your business practices affect the performance of your organization?
4. How did the integration of knowledge management affect the continuity in business of your organization?
5. How are the knowledge management practices integrated into the organization culture?

6. What strategies do you have in place that help you to retain tacit knowledge in your organization?
7. What strategies do you have in place for sharing and retaining knowledge?
8. What computerized systems do you use to support the integration of knowledge management in your business practices?
9. What additional comments, regarding the use of KM, do you have that you have not discussed?

Conceptual Framework

I based the conceptual framework of this study on theory z (Ouchi & Price, 1978). Researchers and practitioners apply theory z to promote high productivity, partnership, trust, and teamwork (Pascale & Athos, 1981). Ouchi (1980) explained that a variety of social mechanisms reduces differences between individual and organizational goals and produces a strong sense of community. The strong sense of community leads to a set of traditions in a formal organization that may produce a unified, although implicit philosophy, functionally equivalent to a theory about how that organization should work (Ouchi, 1980). A disruption of the socialization process will inhibit the passing on of traditions and bring about organizational inefficiency (Ouchi, 1980). I applied theory z to understand the findings from this study since Ouchi considered KM practices and models that organizations may emulate when developing the theory. The theoretical concepts in this theory including socialization provided a suitable theoretical lens that I used to study the KM strategies that managers use.

Operational Definitions

Explicit knowledge: Explicit knowledge is the rational knowledge expressed in a clear and transferable form (Rih & Guedira, 2014).

Familyism: In the literature, some authors used the word familism and others familyism, but both words mean the same thing. There are two types of familyism, structural and normative. Structural familyism refers to the role of the family in the structure of the firm, including ownership and management. Normative familyism or workplace familyism is incorporation of the values maintained in the family into the corporate values or the values of the business network (Jayakrishnana, Mohamad, Rahim Azmic, & Abdullahd, 2018; Wijaya, 2008).

Knowledge management: Knowledge management is the deliberate performance of activities of discovering, capturing, sharing, and applying knowledge in an organization to enhance, in a cost-effective fashion, the impact of knowledge on the organization's goal achievement (Alawneh & Aouf, 2017).

Small and medium-sized enterprises: In the Ugandan context, the definition for small and medium-sized enterprises has two parts. Small-sized enterprises (SEs) and medium-sized enterprises (MEs). The SEs are enterprises employing 50 employees and below, with an annual turnover of less than 360 million Uganda Shillings (Kasse, Nakawooya, Balunywa, & Nansubuga, 2015). The MEs are enterprises employing more than 50 employees with an annual turnover of more than 360 million Uganda Shillings (Kasse et al., 2015).

Socialization: Socialization is a transfer of tacit knowledge, that is, an acquisition of tacit knowledge by a person who does not have it from another person who does. It usually happens during face-to-face interactions among individuals (Sasaki, 2017).

Tacit knowledge: Tacit knowledge refers to skills and experiences that people have in their minds but are difficult to articulate because this knowledge is typically not codified (Sweitzer, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption is a statement that one would accept as true, or at least plausible, without being scientifically tested; it is an act of taking something for granted which is theoretically not proven (Dayu & Haura, 2016; Schoenung & Dikova, 2016). In this study, I assumed that the leaders of the organizations would recommend to me the participants to interview. I also assumed that participants would be knowledgeable in their area of employment. I also assumed that the participants would respond truthfully to interview questions.

Limitations

A study limitation is an uncontrollable threat to the internal validity of the study (Hambly, 2016). The limitation of this study was that since the study was qualitative, the results obtained from it cannot reach statistical or theoretical generalization. Another limitation was that interviews occurred with only voluntary participants, and if some managers were unwilling to provide information, I had to choose another manager, if available; this caused some delay in completing the study.

Delimitations

A study delimitation is a boundary or restriction that the researcher uses to narrow or control certain aspects of the research (Yin, 2014). One of the delimitations of the study was that I explored KM strategies of only two Ugandan SMEs and I interviewed only five managers, a minimum of two per organization. The interview questions were open-ended with an interview protocol in place.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is that managers working in the SMEs will be able to appreciate the value of integrating KM practices in their day to day management of their organizations. Practicing KM, in turn, could enable SME managers to improve the performance of their organizations. In this section, I discuss this study’s possible contribution to business practice and the implications for positive social change.

Contribution to Business Practice

The purpose of this study was to explore KM practices and KM systems application by SMEs in Uganda as one of the ways of improving performance of the organizations. If organizational performance improves, the organization becomes more credible in the community and attracts more clients. I anticipate that the findings of this study will help SME managers to put in place KM strategies for their organizations and enable them to make more informed decisions, which in turn may help the organizations attract more clients and improve firms' performance and profits.

Implications for Social Change

The first contribution to social change from this study is that the use of KM by managers of SMEs may expand opportunities for employees to learn new skills and knowledge. The expansion of learning opportunities for employees is important to the economic growth in Uganda and other developing countries. The second contribution is that this study may contribute to the expansion of employment opportunities. SMEs play an important role in the growth of employment in Uganda and other developing countries. When managers improve the performance of SMEs, more jobs and better skilled and knowledgeable people will be available on the Ugandan market.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some SME managers in Uganda use to effectively integrate KM into their business practices. I reviewed a number of documents, which included (a) peer-reviewed journals, (b) reports, and (c) seminal scholarly books. My main objective was to find studies on the integration of KM in business practices. Another objective was to better understand qualitative research method and case study design. I also reviewed documents with the intent of finding KM theories, which formed the basis for the conceptual framework. I focused on exploring KM practices within SMEs that prevent knowledge loss and encourage knowledge retention. I focused on models that leaders use to foster knowledge retention and mitigate knowledge loss while motivating employees to remain engaged with KM practices. One such model that I identified is theory z.

Theory z proponents are concerned with human resources and emphasize three, interrelated strategies: (a) long-term employment, (b) an organizational philosophy, and (c) intensive socialization (Ogbu & Oaya, 2017). Ouchi (1980) contrasted theory z with the transaction cost theory (TCT). Another theory I identified that may be equally applicable to this study is institutional theory. In the following subsections, I evaluate, compare, and contrast theory z with institutional theory and TCT.

In the literature search, I used databases including ProQuest Central, ABI/INFORM Global, Taylor & Francis, ScienceDirect, Emerald Management, Business Source Complete, Computers and Applied Sciences Complete, Education Source, Academic Search Complete, and SAGE Premier. The keywords that I used to carry out my search were *knowledge management* or *knowledge management systems*, and *qualitative;* then, *SMEs* and *developing countries*. I also regularly monitored updates from Google Scholar to view new articles, including those with keywords *knowledge management* and *knowledge management systems*. The total number of sources I used in the literature review section is 155. I used the articles to enrich my understanding of the study topic by reviewing studies of other researchers and practitioners and their experiences with KM in developing countries. I also identified theories to find a suitable theory to use in developing a conceptual framework for this study. The theories I identified were theory z, TCT, and institutional theory. Out of the total of 155 sources, 88% were published in 2014-2018, and 85% were peer-reviewed articles. In the following paragraphs, I discuss in detail the theories I identified: (a) theory z, (b) TCT, and (c) institutional theory. The rest of the literature review is about: (a) KM, (b) SMEs, (c) background to KM, (d) integration of KM into business practice, and (e) information and communication technologies' (ICT) contribution to KM implementation.

Theory Z

Leaders of organizations use theory z to enhance organizational performance through proper communication with their subordinates. Theory z is an enhancement of McGregor's (1960) behavioral X and Y approach (Indabawa & Uba, 2014). Theory z relates to the way the organizational culture affects the entire organization regarding management and organizational behavior (Deem, DeLotell, & Kelly, 2015; Ogbu & Oaya, 2017). El Khouly and Fadl (2016) pointed out that organization culture affects work quality, and cultural dimensions, which include participation in decision making, commitment, and time value have high significance on work quality. Leaders of organizations must communicate the corporate culture to their subordinates in order for their subordinates to commit to organization philosophy and values and enhance the performance of the organization (Augustina, Worlu, Oluseye, & Harriet, 2017). Organizational leaders may streamline KM in the organizational culture, and leaders may communicate the KM practice to new employees as they join the organization.

The application of theory z leads to the promotion of high productivity. As Pascale and Athos (1981) pointed out, organizations may promote productivity through partnership, trust, and teamwork. Ouchi (1980) explained that a variety of social mechanisms reduces differences between individual and organizational goals and produces a strong sense of community. The strong sense of community leads to organizational traditions, which produce a philosophy about the way that organizations should work (Ouchi, 1980). A disruption of the socialization process will inhibit the passing on of traditions and bring about organizational inefficiency (Ouchi, 1980). Organizations should be able to put in place systems to ensure sustainability of the socialization process. The sustainability of the process will depend on how managers move ahead with the implementation.

Leaders use theory z characteristics to promote a working environment that motivates employees to consider the organization as their own. The characteristics of theory z are: (a) long-term employment; (b) consensual decision-making; (c) individual responsibility; (d) job rotation and slow promotion with a complex appraisal system; (e) emphasis on work groups; (f) implicit informal control, with explicit formalized measures; (g) moderately specialized career path; and (h) holistic concern, including family (Elegbe & Ibikunle, 2015). Indabawa and Uba (2014) pointed out that theory z's style of management incorporates classical principles, behavioral tenets, and human relations concepts with emphasis on quality and productivity. Also, z type companies endorse collective responsibility, a pervasive concern for employees, and a commitment to participative decision making. Further, they recognize individual and group needs but simultaneously develop exceptional quality control techniques and scientific work methods (Aithal & Kumar, 2016; Indabawa & Uba, 2014). As Indabawa and Uba asserted, the most important element in theory z is its combination of human relations concepts with scientific management techniques. I note that if an organization applies theory z, it would be able to promote the goals of (a) transformation, (b) socialization, (c) long-term employment, and (d) motivation of employees. The goals I identified apply to the integration of KM in business practice.

To accomplish the goals, organizational managers would have to carry out certain processes of KM. There are four main KM processes: (a) knowledge discovery, (b) knowledge acquisition or capturing, (c) knowledge sharing or transfer, and (d) knowledge utilization or application (Alwneh & Aouf, 2017; Obeidat, Al-Suradi, Masa’deh, & Tarhini, 2016). There are also subprocesses that focus on how organizations convert knowledge through the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge. The subprocesses include (a) exchange, (b) externalization, (c) internalization, (d) combination, (e) direction, and (f) routines (Alwneh & Aouf, 2017). If organizations focus on carrying out the KM processes and the subprocesses, then it becomes easy to embed KM into business practices.

Employee motivation is a key goal for those using theory z. Employee motivation factors include (a) incentives and rewards, (b) recognition, (c) organizational value, (d) team building, (e) involvement in decision making, and (f) time management (Ouchi, 1981). Lin (2014) asserted that extrinsic rewards would attract less attention and the focus of KM implementation will shift to other intrinsic motivations, among which are openness in communication and a sharing culture. Benton and Magnier-Watanabe (2014) stated that theory z positively influences the internal sharing of knowledge partly due to long-term employment practices and common cultural values that organizations develop, which promote greater organizational commitment among employees. Also, a supportive work environment, as opposed to a controlling one, leads to the satisfaction of the psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy of the employees; it also encourages the intrinsic motivation and promotes the full internalization of the extrinsic motivation (Hocine & Zhang, 2014). The assumption is that organizational leaders may trust theory z workers to do their jobs to their utmost ability so long as organization owners can trust management to support them and look out for their wellbeing (Ismail, 2014). The practice of employees working as a family would help employees learn from each other rather than compete with each other, and employees' performance and that of the organization as a whole would improve.

I based the conceptual framework of this study on the concepts from theory z. Researchers and practitioners apply theory z to promote high productivity, partnership, trust, and teamwork (Jankurová, Ljudvigová, & Gubová, 2017; Pascale & Athos, 1981). Theory z applies to this study because theory z proponents consider KM practices and models that organizations may emulate. The theoretical concepts in theory z, including the socialization theory, are the theoretical lenses that I used to study the KM strategies that SME managers use. In theory z, Ouchi (1981) emphasized the role of the relationship between managers and employees in organizations. Managers can motivate employees to perform by emphasizing participative decision making and treating employees as family members (Fang, Li, & Li, 2015). Chao and Tian (2017) pointed out that ethnic Chinese managers honor a tight set of business rules that emphasize hard work, thrift, and competitiveness, and a strong belief in Confucian familyism. For employees to practice KM, managers need to put in effort to motivate the employees, and one of the ways of motivating them is to treat them as family members. Familyism builds trust among employees, which would positively influence the sharing of knowledge internally (Benton & Magnier-Watanabe, 2014). To build trust among employees takes time and requires long-term employment practices (Benton & Magnier-Watanabe, 2014). To sustain KM practices, managers of an organization need to build trust among the employees to enable smooth knowledge exchange. Next, I look at alternative theories that I compared and contrasted with theory z, and that may equally apply to KM studies.

Transaction Cost Theory

TCT is one of the theories I explored and found comparable to theory z. Williamson (1975) is the main architect of TCT. Some scholars refer to TCT as transaction cost economics, or transaction cost analysis (Ketokivi & Mahoney, 2016; Sambasivan, Deepak, Salim, & Ponniah, 2017; Wacker, Yang, & Sheu, 2016). The basic concept of TCT is that organizational leaders would like to take on transactions that would reflect lower transaction costs or where the opportunity cost is low (Hsieh, Huang, & Lee, 2016). The implication here is that, in business practice, managers need to do a thorough cost-benefit analysis of whatever activity the organization takes on to ensure that managers obtain return on investment.

Business leaders need to develop a favorable environment for the creation of the short- and long-term return on investment. Researchers and practitioners use TCT to analyze a wide variety of organizational activity including bureaucracy, vertical integration of production, clan-like relations within firms and organizational culture, and inter-organizational collaboration (Salamat, Aliahmadi, Pishvaee, & Hafeez, 2016; Teece, 2014; Williamson, 1979). Researchers and practitioners use TCT to understand economic exchange in situations where transactions are complex (Ketokivi & Mahoney, 2016). Williamson explained the heterogeneity of market transactions by focusing on the different ways individuals enforce transactions between independent parties. Hennart (2015) cited three types of market transactions: (a) classical contracts, (b) neo-classical contracts, and (c) bilateral governance. Classical contracts are the typical market transactions of economic textbooks; neo-classical contracts are long-term agreements, and arbitrators settle disputes rather than the courts; and a shift in focus from specific transactions to relationships characterizes bilateral governance (Hennart, 2015). This study was about KM, and my focus was not about specific transactions costs of KM but about relationships within the organization and sharing of knowledge outside the organization, that is, exchange relationships.

TCT theorists focus on ex-post adaptation problems in organizing economic exchange by using contracts and emphasizing the need to compare alternative contracting modes based on their efficiency in facilitating adaptation to disturbances that may upset exchange relationships (Williamson, 1975). TCT proponents identified the uncertainty surrounding a transaction as a critical factor determining a contractual relationship's adaptation needs and its governance (Reuer & Davarakonda, 2016). TCT researchers and practitioners address two business issues: the most cost-efficient way for a specific organization to pursue a new opportunity, and the form of organization that is sufficiently economical to offer the prospect of positive returns (Low & Ho, 2016). Mwai, Kiplang'at, and Gichoya (2014) pointed out that TCT proponents help companies to predict when they can internally perform certain economic tasks and when they can perform them on the market. On the market, TCT proponents argued that, due to economies of scale and specialization that suppliers provide, outsourcing is a more efficient form of governance (Espino-Rodríguez & Rodríguez Díaz, 2017; Promsivapallop, Jones, & Roper, 2015). Relating outsourcing to KM, the implication would be that organizations may rely on the exchange of knowledge rather than spending much time coming up with something new yet somewhere else; other practitioners may be already practicing it more efficiently.

TCT is about market exchange relationships. When connecting TCT to KM, an individual has to look at the relationship between the opportunity cost of knowledge sharing (KS) and the individual utility. Liu and Dong (2016) asserted that knowledge is a valuable commodity that organizations may trade with a certain award amount. The amount is not necessarily in monetary terms. If organizational leaders value KS in monetary terms, when individuals realize a mismatch, the rate of sharing knowledge will reduce. Organizational leaders should consider the intention to share knowledge. The relationship would be between individual utility, regarding time and energy, and the rate of return for the input, with the focus on the intention of KS (Liu & Dong, 2016). The implication is that KM practices relate to the intention the organization has to achieve in the long run, rather than the short-term monetary value or cost.

Comparing TCT to theory z, theorists use both theories to promote trust and long-term employment. As Reuer and Davarakonda (2016) emphasized the contractual relationship, employment is a contractual relationship that organizations need to sustain based on trust. Under theory z the assumption is that organizations trust workers to do their jobs to their utmost ability while management looks out for employee wellbeing, which is motivation to the employees (Ismail, 2014). The implication is that for organizations to sustain KM in their business practices, managers have to do their best to create an environment of trust. In turn, employees would trust each other and be able to exchange knowledge, providing that management, in turn, supports employees to do their jobs well.

Institutional Theory

Another theory I researched that may apply to KM practice is the institutional theory. Rotting (2016) pointed out that the application of institutional theory to the realm of organizational analysis traces its roots back to 1957 in the seminal work of the sociologist Philip Selznick on leadership in administration. Institutional theory evolved through two phases. In the early phase, theorists saw organizations as institutions infused with meaning, value, and legitimacy by their members and leaders (Ramaswamy, Purkayastha, & Petitt, 2017; Sotarauta & Mustikkamäki, 2015). In the second phase, theorists saw the emerging of neo-institutionalism focusing on external actors that impose values and expectations on organizations (Ramaswamy et al., 2017; Sotarauta & Mustikkamäki, 2015). Theorists in the field of institutional theory include Coase (1937), North (1990), Furubotn and Richter (1991), and others, under the neoclassical economics; and Ludvik von Mises (1933) and Friederich Hayek (1968) under the Austrian School (Barrow, 1998; Boettke & Leeson, 2003; Guerras-Martín, Madhok, & Montoro-Sánchez, 2014; Jon-Arild, 2013; Kaufman, 2017; Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Young, Tsai, Wang, Liu, & Ahlstrom, 2014). Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, and Vaara (2015) pointed out that institutional theory is one of the most important perspectives in management and organizational research. In business practice, three areas exist in which institutional theorists could contribute. The three areas are (a) inter-firm relationship and governance, (b) KM and innovation, and (c) institutional change (Yang & Su, 2014). This study is about KM practices and specific about KM and innovation.

Institutional logics do not necessarily compete, contradict, or conflict continuously, but multiple logics may create latent paradoxes that only surface at particular moments in time (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Greve & Zhang, 2017; Kozica & Brandl, 2015). The issue of logic may cause rigidity and inflexibility for firms to react to the new institutional demands and may weaken the positive effects of business groups' formal and informal controls on strategic entrepreneurship (Yiu, Hoskisson, Bruton, & Lu, 2014). Practitioners have to be strategic while advancing institutional demands. Yiu et al. (2014) highlighted that dueling logics coexisted in business groups and that logics can be sources of variation in advancing strategic entrepreneurship during periods of institutional friction. Institutional theory is about conceptualizing the roots of cognitive, linguistic, and communicative theories of institutions; it has the potential of a stronger communication focus; and theorists labeled the approach *communicative institutionalism* (Cornelissen et al., 2015). The theory puts communication at the heart of institutions, institutional maintenance, and change. KM is about the creation, sharing, dissemination, and maintenance of knowledge. If SME managers apply the approach of communicative institutionalism in their business practice, SME managers would find the KM agenda easy to manage.

Researchers use theoretical and conceptual frameworks to give direction to a study or to identify a framework as an outcome of the study and generating a theory is the purpose of most qualitative research (Green, 2014). Organizations should foster proper communication if they are to implement the KM agenda successfully. Cornelissen et al. (2015) developed communicative institutionalism, a theory that managers may use to integrate communication within their organizations. Cornelissen et al. had to ride on the institutional theory to come up with the framework. I based on theory z to take forward the agenda of integrating KM into business practices of SMEs. The main concepts that I considered include socialization, motivation, communication, reward, ICT, and knowledge management systems (KMS).

There are some reasons researchers and practitioners apply institutional theory. Researchers and practitioners use institutional theory as a tool to understand political, cultural, and social innovations within organizations (Jon-Arild, 2013; Joutsenvirta, 2016). Organizational leaders and entrepreneurs use institutions, that is norms, values, and rules when focusing on performance (Angst, Block, D'Arcy, & Kelley, 2017; Jon-Arild, 2013). Fullerton (2014) posited that organizations could earn legitimacy by demonstrating a strong fit between the values of an organization and the values of target customers. With legitimacy, researchers assume that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Nègre, Verdier, Cho, & Patten, 2017). Organizational leaders need to embed KM within their institutions if the KM practice is to be a success.

This study is about the integration of KM into business practices, with interest to the link of KM and organizational success. Tolbert and Zucker (1996) found that other than efficient coordination and control of production activities for organizational success, institutional theorists focus on some other factors that lead to the adoption of specific structural arrangements that foster social meanings. The factors that foster social meanings within the organization include (a) formal employment policies, (b) accounting and budgeting practices, and (c) offices and positions associated with employment equity (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Leaders of organizations make decisions to benefit the organization. Famiola and Adiwoso (2016) claimed that every decision made by an organization has a social meaning about the institutional context in which it operates. Wang, Tseng, and Yen (2014) suggested that under institutional norms, both tangible management systems and intangible rules equally influence employee KS. Institutional norms are tangible management systems and intangible social rules that motivate employees to share what they know (Neckel & Boeing, 2017; Wang et al., 2014). Institutional theorists, just like theory z and TCT theorists bring out the aspect of employee motivation. The implication from all the three theories is that for managers to sustain KM practices in their businesses, managers should ensure that they motivate their employees.

Knowledge Management

In this subsection, I discuss aspects of the different literature that I explored that directly concerned my area of study. The scope of this study was KM among SMEs. I reviewed studies that other researchers conducted about KM in SMEs. Practitioners using

KM should focus on organizational objectives that include (a) improved performance, (b) competitive advantage, (c) innovation, (d) the sharing of lessons learned, and (e) integration and continuous improvement of the organization (Mousavizadeh, Ryan, Harden, & Windsor, 2015; Oye & Salleh, 2013). KM practitioners should also focus on the quality of knowledge. As Bharati and Zhang (2015) emphasized, volume alone is not sufficient to ensure the success of KM, but rather the quality of knowledge, as organizations are more likely to transfer and reuse knowledge of higher quality. The implication is that leaders of organizations should put systems in place that help managers to cipher out, from volumes of information that come to the organization, the knowledge that the organizations may transfer or reuse.

There are many definitions of KM in the literature. Meihami and Meihami (2014) pointed out that comparing definitions is a good practice to know the focus of each author. Jain (2017) pointed out that KM academics, practitioners, promoters, and other stakeholders define KM differently. Nanda (2016) defined KM as the efficient handling of information and resources within an organization. Nowacki and Bachnik (2016) considered innovative KM and defined it as a company's willingness to introduce innovative KM processes and its ability to execute this strategy. Alternatively, KM is the process through which organizational managers improve performance by putting in place better management of corporate knowledge (Meihami & Meihami, 2014). Another perspective is that KM is the deliberate performance, by practitioners or policymakers, of activities involving discovering, capturing, sharing, and applying knowledge in an organization to enhance, cost-effectively, the impact of knowledge on the organization's goal achievement (Alawneh & Aouf, 2017). Business leaders should consider KM practices that would help them achieve the business goals and improve the performance of their businesses.

Organizational leaders should plan how to manage both tacit and explicit knowledge. Effective KM shows visibility of the knowledge to reach the interested public (Valmohammadi & Ahmadi, 2015). The purpose of KM is not to transform tacit into explicit knowledge but, rather, to systematically and deliberately leverage knowledge assets (Benton & Magnier-Watanabe, 2014). SMEs act as an engine behind the growth of jobs and wealth creation in a country's economic system (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). SMEs provide a service to the public in a competitive manner and managers should employ KM strategies that would enable them to continue to contribute to the economies of their countries.

SME employees bridge the needs of the company with those of the customers. One of the threats to the competitiveness of SMEs is high employee turnover (Hashim, & Shariff, 2016). Cerchione and Esposito (2017) noted that SMEs do not have resources to monitor the process of innovation in the field of KMS. SME managers need sustainable KMS in place that would help them pass on knowledge capital from old employees to new employees and vice versa.

Knowledge management and the human factor. For the successful implementation of KM, leaders of organizations should consider the human factor. Quality KM workers employ quality KM practices to enhance organizational performance by controlling and improving organizational processes (Anthony, 2013;

Zhang, Linderman, & Schroeder 2014). Regarding the human factor, employers play a role in promoting KM principles by encouraging more competent employees, leading to successful and effective work business environments, and building trust among employees through KS (Connel, 2014). Issues concerning the human factor take time to cultivate in the organization. Connel (2014) asserted that to cultivate the human factor successfully in the organization, leaders of organizations should pay attention to the improvement of organizational culture and internal changes, from upper management and leadership to individual employees, and between individual workers. Organizational managers should take care of the human factor and increase their commitment within organizations to take advantage of the knowledge within them (Obeidat & Abdallah, 2014). Human resources practices, recruitment methods, training and development, performance appraisals, and reward systems, influence employees’ organizational commitment and, in turn, improve management of KM processes (Obeidat & Abdallah, 2014). Organizational leaders use human resources practices, organizational commitment, and effective KM processes to achieve a competitive advantage.

The focus of this study was about the integration of KM into business practices of SMEs. In the following subsections, I review and discuss the findings of previous scholars about KM practices and the KM strategies that managers of organizations used to remain competitive in their businesses. Baud et al. (2016) pointed out that leaders of organizations did not use KM strategically for dealing with future complexity and uncertainty. Leaders of organizations should consider KM strategies that organizations may use for business continuity (Baud et al., 2016). Naicker (2013) recommended that leaders of organizations should measure the benefits of KM strategies and the contribution of KM to the performance of an organization. Naicker designed a KM approach and further recommended that if leaders of organizations put in place an effective information systems infrastructure, managers can capture, transform, and disseminate knowledge within the organizations. Calvo-Mora, Navaro-García, Ray-Morano, and Periañez-Cristobal (2016) referred to the KM approach as a process methodology, where partners have to be involved if KM is to have a significant impact on the key results of the business, both strategic and operational. Leaders of organizations should lay strategies that will help them implement KM successfully and integrate KM into their businesses practices.

Knowledge management and organizational learning. One of the strategies that organizations may employ is organizational learning (OL). Leaders use OL as a mediator between KM and the growth of performance of an organization, though some researchers and practitioners tend to confuse KM with OL (Abu Baker & Yosof, 2016; Oye & Salleh, 2013). Manz (2014) found that continuous learning is a critical success factor in organizations trying to establish a KM initiative or to evolve into a learning organization. While KM researchers and practitioners may focus more on the management of knowledge as a strategic asset, OL researchers and practitioners focus on encouraging the sharing of knowledge (Oye & Salleh, 2013). KM is the initial stage of OL and KM practices influence the latter (Ngah, Tai, & Bontis, 2016). Qi and Chau (2018) showed that KM processes mediate the path between enterprise social networking systems (ESNS) and OL as ESNS usage, directly and indirectly, influences OL. The implication is that organizations that are interested in learning from their initiatives, such as taking on OL, will be more likely to prioritize KM in their business practices. OL was outside the scope of this study.

Knowledge management and knowledge loss. If the focus is on the management of knowledge as a strategic asset, leaders of organizations should put in place measures to prevent knowledge loss. As Eugene (2014) argued, organizational knowledge loss is an unfortunate fact that will become a big problem for organizations as the economy improves. Knowledge loss is a situation when valuable knowledge spills out of an organization to competitors, and the competitors may use it to gain a competitive advantage (Durst & Zieba, 2017). Knowledge loss has an impact on the absorptive capacity and performance of departments within an organization (Lin, Chang, & Tsai, 2016). A high employee turnover rate is a significant cause of knowledge loss (Lin et al., 2016). Leaders of organizations should endeavor to implement strategies that can motivate employees to stay with the company for a long period (Ouchi, 1981). The implication then is that if the leaders of organizations put in place KMS and embrace OL, organizations may retain knowledge regardless of the rate of turnover. In the next subsections, I discuss the definition of SMEs, the background of KM in the context of its application to business practices, and the link between this study and previous research studies' findings with particular emphasis to studies about the SMEs.

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

There is no universal definition of SMEs. Leaders in different regions, countries, and sectors come up with their SMEs definitions at a particular point in time (Haq, 2015;

Mbuyisa & Leonard, 2016; Muhanguzi & Kyobe, 2014). All the definitions focus on criteria that include, number of employees in the organization, sales annual turnover, the total value of the balance sheet of the organization, market share and relative size within a particular industry (Alaei, 2017; Etuk, Etuk, & Baghebo, 2014; Haq, 2015; Hassan, Iqbal, Malik, & Ahmad, 2018; Li, Tu, Liu, & Wu, 2015). The SMEs definitions may focus towards quantitative elements, and other SMEs definitions may focus more towards qualitative elements. In quantitative research, researchers and practitioners base the definition on the size of SMEs, mainly in monetary terms and a quantitative index like the number of employees, basing the definition on predetermined characteristics of SMEs (Etuk et al., 2014). The common quantitative differentiators include total assets, sales annual turnover, and number of employees, while examples of qualitative definitions include industry type and independent legal existence (Gupta, Wilson, Gregeriou, & Healy, 2014). The implication is that there is no standard definition of SMEs, as leaders in each country define SMEs from their context and perspective.

In the case of Uganda, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) defined SMEs by separating out small-sized enterprises (SEs) from medium-sized enterprises (MEs) and using only two quantitative factors: the number of employees and sales annual turnover. The MoFPED leaders defined SEs as enterprises employing 50 or fewer people with an annual sales turnover of 360 million Uganda Shillings (UGX) or less and MEs as enterprises employing more than 50 people with annual sales turnover of more than 360 million UGX (Kasse et al. 2015). I took on SEs or MEs employing not less than 10 people and not more than 100 with an annual turnover of not less than 100 million UGX and, for consistency, the term I used in this study is SMEs for both SEs and MEs. SMEs are important business units that contribute to economic development and job creation of both developed and emergent countries (El Khouly & Marwan, 2015; Mbuyisa & Leonard, 2016; Muhanguzi & Kyobe, 2014; Okello-Obura, & Muzaki, 2015; Turyakira & Mbidde, 2015). Ronald (2017) stated that, in developing countries, SMEs account for over 90% of the private sector output and contribute greatly to around 70% the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country. SMEs are key players in the economic development of any country.

Some SMEs have problems of sustainability. SMEs' problems are mainly due to either lack of structures and procedures, poor systems, or inadequate systems (Ahmad, 2016; Hamza, Mutala, & Antwi, 2015; Orobia, Byabasaija, Munene, Sejjaaka, & Musinguzi, 2013). SME owners and managers plan, monitor, and control their working capital and SME owners and managers manage businesses through reliance on memory and oral agreements, informal planning, assuming inventory limits, unconventional record keeping, using cash flow-based information management, and giving credit to close associates (Hunjra, Shamim, & Khalid, 2014; Orobia et al., 2013). Academicians, practitioners, and policymakers should emphasize KM and cash accounting as some of the soft skills that SMEs need to take on in their business practices (Mamabolo, Kerrin, & Kele, 2017; Orobia et al., 2013). Owners of SMEs are entrepreneurs. Hussain, Bhuiyan, Said, and Halim (2017) observed that leaders with entrepreneurship knowledge can acquire entrepreneurial skills. Entrepreneurship is one of the drivers of economic growth. SME managers should embrace KM as a powerful tool to help them respond to tackle many problems that are unique to SMEs and improve their innovation and competitiveness (Mageswari, Sivasubramanian, & Dath, 2015). In the following subsection, I discuss how SME managers use KM to improve the performance of their businesses.

Background to Knowledge Management Study

In this subsection, I explore the different studies researchers conducted about KM and its use among SMEs in general. Martinez-Conesa, Soto-Acosta, and Carayannis (2017) indicated that KM capability has a critical role in the implementation of open innovation. Intellectual capital has a significant impact on KM and the latter on innovation (Obeidat, Tarhini, Masa'deh, & Aqqad, 2017). The SMEs are an entity without a strategy of their own for addressing the processes of KM, though in recent years the number of papers dealing with KM in SMEs increased (Cerchione & Esposito, 2017; Esposito & Evangelista, 2016). KM processes include (a) acquiring knowledge, (b) knowledge storage, (c) sharing knowledge, (d) OL and decision-making, and (e) continuous improvement (Meihami & Meihami, 2014; Obeidat et al., 2017). If managers apply this process, they will aid the organizations in making the transition from managing data to management of knowledge (Cagliano, Grimaldi, & Rafele, 2015; Naicker, 2013). There are some common problems regarding KM. The problems include lack of information and information overload, re-inventing the wheel and loss of crucial knowledge due to key employees leaving the company, and employees’ failure to contribute the knowledge they acquire from trainings in their respective jobs (Naicker, 2013). The implication is that managers of organizations may employ different KM strategies depending on what KM problem exists in their organizations.

One of the strategies for solving KM problems is networking. Networking starts with managers taking into account that individuals are part of the KM process (Schröpfer, Tah, & Kurul, 2017). The starting point of solving KM problems is a strategy for leaders of organizations to retain, attract, and develop staff (Naicker, 2013; Shah & Beh, 2016; Sumbal, Tsui, See-to, & Barendrecht, 2017). The strategy involves leaders of organizations improving the organizational level of employees' retention; recognizing that the employees are an asset to the success of the organization and that their retention is non-negotiable; and expanding the cloud and social networks (Bratianu & Leon, 2015; Naicker, 2013). The implication is that if KM is to succeed in any organization, an individual cannot afford isolation. Organizational leaders need to consider teamwork, valuing other people's contribution, and networking as crucial strategies for the success of KM.

Practitioners should not only focus on the technology issue but should also consider the impact of leadership style and the relationship between superiors and employees (Girma, 2016; Kuo, Lai, & Lee, 2011). Managers need to find a suitable leadership style that supports the implementation of KM programs that augment organizational performance and facilitate an environment where employees participate in KM activities more spontaneously (Birasnav, 2014; Kuo et al., 2011). Leadership style and KM are some of the factors that enable performance excellence and a full range of benefits for the organization (Kuo et al., 2011; Naser, Shobaki, & Amuna, 2016). Leaders of organizations should align leadership style and KM by laying strategies and establishing processes through which they may capture, record, and spread knowledge (Castrogiovanni, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Mas-Tur, 2016). The implication is that organizational leaders should be keen in promoting a leadership style that would enable employees to spontaneously participate in KM activities and contributing to the effective implementation of KM strategies.

The policies that the leaders of the organizations set contribute towards the effective implementation and a sustainability plan of the KM strategies. Al-Hawary and Alwan (2016) posited that the creation of a culture of KM, work principles, organizational policies, and leader behavior makes a tremendous contribution to enable organizations to look to the future and to excel in performance. Opportunities for a better system may influence sustainability issues and dashboards to capture the societal and organizational structure may influence individual beliefs and actions (Spangler, Srouge, Madia, & Singafivakan, 2014). Organizational leaders should pursue sustainability as one of the long-term goals of the organization. Spangler et al. (2014) explained that for sustainable business management, managers should pursue two goals, which are better integration and better leverage of sustainability to create value. Spangler et al. stated that the evolution of supporting systems for sustainable management, from environmental health and safety systems to environmental management systems, to hybrid systems, to social network-based systems provides a roadmap for the integration of sustainability and information systems. Without policies in place that govern continuity, there is no guarantee of sustainability of whatever aspect in whatever discipline.

Another aspect for consideration is knowledge workers (KWs). Ozlen and Handzic (2014) suggested that system sophistication and KWs' self-efficacy influence the benefits the organization perceives and the usage of the system, which in turn affect the net benefits regarding knowledge and performance of the individual KWs and the organization. KWs need support from their supervisors to feel that they are in relational and transactional working mode and be able to exhibit innovativeness in work (Bhatnagar, 2014). The implication is that leaders of organizations should be able to support KWs while implementing the organizational strategies for the success of the organizations.

Integration of Knowledge Management into Business Practice

SMEs' contribution to GDP is high, but SMEs' leaders face problems in different areas. In developing countries, while more than 90% of all firms outside the agricultural sector are SMEs, micro-enterprises account for over 90% of the private sector output and contribute greatly to around 70% of their countries' GDP (Anand, 2015; Ronald, 2017). Anand (2015) identified the major problems of SMEs as (a) absence of adequate and timely banking finance, (b) limited capital, and (c) access to international market and KM. Anand further pointed out that SMEs have a critical role in the economic and social development of emerging markets and governments need to strengthen their role, given their contribution toward fostering equitable growth and employment generation. Governments may enhance SMEs' competitiveness by creating a favorable legal regulatory and administrative environment to enable SMEs to access finance, and put in place institutional structures and the necessary human capital (Anand, 2015). Archer-

Brown and Kietzmann (2018) defined human capital as the knowledge and skills of individuals. Human capital is about quality professionals (QPs). If managers relied on informal and emergent knowledge processing systems, there would be few innovations in the organization (Aribi & Dupouet, 2016). Organizational leaders should ensure that they recruit QPs who will effectively manage knowledge processing systems.

KS is another factor that leaders of organizations use to contribute to the successful implementation of KM strategies of organizations. Hambly, Levy, Seagull, and Nissen (2015) emphasized that the key to organizational success is through the organizational leaders establishing a mutually beneficial relationship and facilitating KS with everyone needing it. The level of success in the organization would depend on managers of the organization and the effort they would put in valuing communication within the organization and outside the organization. Cornelissen et al. (2015) used a *communicative institutionalism* approach and showed that integrating communication into institutions enables the existence, performance, and shaping of the institution. If organizational leaders foster proper communication to all individuals within the organization, everyone in the organization will understand the KM agenda, and employees will understand the role they have to play in the successful implementation of KM. In the literature review I noted that some of the tools that researchers identified that may assist in the process of KM integration into business practice include: (a) enterprise social media (ESM), (b) using information systems as a platform for KS, (c) employees' motivation, (d) organizational learning as a mediator between KM and organizational performance, and (e) process methodology. In the next subsections, I discuss the details that the different researchers explored about these tools.

Enterprise social media. Enterprise social media (ESM) is a tool that organizational leaders may employ to promote communication and KS within and outside the organization. Archer-Brown and Kietzmann (2018) asserted that leaders of organizations use ESM to facilitate the co-creation of ideas, encourage employees to share tacit knowledge, and create a sense of community in collaborative work. Oostervink, Agterberg, and Huysman (2016) considered the aspect of institutional complexity and the use of ESM for organizational KS. With the high employee turnover among SMEs, organizational leaders should engage ESM in developing coping practices including connection management, reputation management, and information management (Oostervink et al., 2016). The benefits that organizations may realize by employing ESM include: (a) improved customer interactions, (b) informed staff, and (c) cost reductions (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018). Organizational leaders integrating communication into the organization may not be enough to push forward the KM agenda. If SME managers understand KS behavior and the factors that organizational leaders may employ to influence the use of ESM, SMEs leaders will motivate employees to share knowledge using social platforms for work-related purposes (Razmerita, Kirchner, & Nielsen, 2016). The implication is that leaders of SMEs may employ ESM as one of the tools to enable organizational leaders to fulfill the KM agenda by promoting KS.

Information systems as a platform for knowledge sharing. If SME leaders prioritize information systems in their businesses, the sharing of knowledge among employees would be easy. Naicker (2013) posited that if organizational leaders provide information systems infrastructure, organizational managers will be able to capture, transform, and disseminate knowledge. Karami, Alvani, Zare, and Kheirandish (2015) recommended some of the aspects of a knowledge-driven culture as (a) reliability, (b) coordination, and (c) trust among employees at all organizational levels. Karami et al.'s recommendations connect with the aspect of human resources that Raeeszadeh, Gilaninia, and Homayounfar (2016) promoted. Raeeszadeh et al. concentrated on marketing performance and indicated that one of the ways to effectively create, acquire, store, transfer, and apply knowledge is KM and that KM has a close relationship with human resources. The implication of the relationship between KM and human resources is that for organizational leaders to implement KM successfully, organizational leaders should have the necessary human resource in the organization. As leaders of SMEs consider the human resource aspect, they should consider the QPs factor as this would assist them in sustaining the KMS of the organizations.

Employees' motivation. Leaders of organizations need to motivate their employees, especially the QPs, to ensure that the QPs remain in the organization as one of the ways to sustain the systems of the organization. If leaders of organizations develop opportunities for teamwork, they would be able to motivate their employees to create and share knowledge (Karami et al. 2015). Leaders of organizations should promote teamwork in their organizations as a way of motivating their employees to create and share knowledge. Ceptureanu (2015) posited that the importance of leaders of organizations to motivate their employees increased given that organizational leaders became dependent on human resource in the generation, use, sharing, and codification of knowledge. Karami et al. (2015) pointed out that managers of organizations may motivate employees to create and share knowledge by paying attention to employee creativity and innovation and by creating opportunities for teamwork. Leaders of organizations should find ways of motivating employees to integrate KM into their day-to-day business practices.

Organizational learning as a mediator. Another theory researchers used for the integration of KM into business practice is employing OL as a mediator. Abu Baker and Yosof (2016) proposed a conceptual framework in which OL was a mediator between KM process and the company's growth performance. The four elements of OL are (a) management commitment, (b) system perspective, (c) openness and experimentation, and (d) transfer and integration of knowledge (Abu Baker & Yosof, 2016). Other theorists approach OL from a different perspective. Jain and Moreno (2015) considered OL factors as (a) collaboration and teamwork, (b) performance management, (c) autonomy and freedom, (d) reward and recognition, and (e) achievement orientation. There is a positive relationship between OL, organizational performance, and KM practices (Jain & Moreno, 2015). The implication is that leaders of organizations may employ OL to foster KM practices in the organization.

There are other perspectives about KM and OL. Haak-Saheem and Darwish (2014) asserted that the official written-down statements or policies of the organizations were not sufficient for the leaders of the organizations to enforce learning and creativity and that institutional changes that organizational leaders put in place reduced the rate of

OL. The implication is that organizational leaders employing effective KM practices do not guarantee OL if the leaders of the organization do not enforce learning and creativity within the organization. Qi and Chau (2018) noted that leaders of organizations use various forms of ESM not only to promote the knowledge activities but also to enhance OL directly or indirectly via the KM processes. Haak-Saheem and Darwish stated that the relationship between organizational transformation and institutional upheaval contributed to the success rate of KM and OL. Haak-Saheem and Darwish further indicated that the institutional framework is a source for generating opportunities for novel ideas and practices, though if the institutional changes are many, the changes may influence KM and OL negatively. Qi and Chau (2018) showed that if leaders of organizations employ both enterprise social networking systems (ESNS) and KM, organizational learning may occur and, if leaders of the organizations promote KM processes, this would be a motivation factor for employees to use ESNS leading to OL. Organizational leaders should not entirely rely on KM to advance OL, but they should combine KM with deliberate efforts of enforcing learning and creativity through ESM and promoting the usage of ESNS by the organization’s employees.

Learning organizations may find it easier than other organizations to implement KM strategies. Manz (2014) demonstrated that continuous learning in a corporate environment is a critical success factor in organizations trying to establish or integrate KM into their business practices or to evolve into a learning organization. The success of an organization working on integrating KM into its business practices depends on managers’ openness to promoting continuous learning in the organization (Manz, 2014).

Mohapatra, Agrawal, and Satpathy (2016) asserted that the more an organization embeds KM in its culture, practices, and processes the more successful it will be in implementing the KM strategies. Mohapatra et al. added that KM is not only about managing knowledge and people; instead, it is about leveraging people and knowledge; and fostering culture, interactions, and sharing of knowledge and ideas. Jain and Moreno (2015) pointed out that the culture of a learning organization recognizes that there should be systems in place to encourage people to foster knowledge creation, sharing, and exploitation. Organizational leaders need to find ways of encouraging their employees to do their job well, as one of the ways to motivate them.

Process methodology. The role that managers play in the promotion of KM is crucial to the sustainability of KM integration into business practices. Managers need to be mindful about the strategies they use to integrate KM into the business practices. Calvo-Mora et al. (2016) indicated that process methodology has an effect on KM in the SMEs. Practitioners and researchers need to understand the point at which a process turns into a methodology. Calvo-Mora et al. further noted that KM was effective in helping leaders of organizations to improve business results and the use of process methodology and the involvement of partners were key factors for KM to have a significant impact on the key results of the business, both strategic and operational. If leaders of organizations apply process methodology they would (a) improve coordination; (b) ensure quality, ownership, security, and privacy of data; (c) analyze and prioritize requirements; and (d) deploy analytical solutions (Saltaz, 2015; Saltz & Shamshurin, 2016). SME managers should consider employing process methodology as a way to sustain KM integration into business practices.

Aspects that contribute to the integration of knowledge management into business practice. The process of integrating KM into business practice may be easy if practitioners understand the factors that may contribute to making it a success. Farzin, Kahreh, Hesan, and Khalouei (2014) noted that leaders of organizations would take on the implementation of KMS with the assumption that the result will be an increase in organizational effectiveness, efficiency, and competitiveness. The factors that researchers considered include (a) the dissemination of KM in an organization, (b) KM practices and organizational performance, (c) KM and business continuity, (d) KM and organizational culture, (e) strategies for KM retention, and (f) ICT contribution to KM implementation. In the following subsections, I discuss details about these factors.

Dissemination of knowledge management strategies. If an organization formulates KM strategies, it is on the path of introducing KM into its business. The leaders of the organization need to ensure that they sensitize everyone in the organization about the KM strategies and put an implementation plan in place. Lee et al. (2016) asserted that KM is composed of three key processes: (a) acquisition, (b) dissemination, and (c) application. Knowledge dissemination or KS plays a part in communicating the knowledge across the levels of organizations (Lin, 2007). Lee et al. recommended that for organizations to achieve competitive advantage, leaders should pay attention to knowledge dissemination or KS among employees. Leaders of organizations may promote knowledge dissemination through the formation of partnerships and collaborative projects within and beyond the boundaries of the organization (Lee et al., 2016). SME managers may promote knowledge dissemination by being more transparent and encouraging employees to share with their colleagues whatever reports or documents they produce within the organization. Managers should also encourage employees to consult among themselves.

Although it is good KM practice for organizations to promote the dissemination or sharing of knowledge, leaders of the organization have to remain sensitive to the kind of knowledge that individuals share outside the organization. Villar, Alegre, and Pla-Barber (2014) posited that managers of SMEs may distribute knowledge both inside and outside the organization using formal and informal channels that include systems to codify tacit into explicit knowledge. SMEs should avoid ineffective knowledge transfer that may arise from problems in encoding knowledge (Villar et al., 2014). The processes of acquisition and dissemination of knowledge in SMEs, the KMS, and the factors that affect the spread of KM practices, should not evolve from the nature of knowledge that is human embedded, but rather from the nature of knowledge of SMEs (Cerchione et al., 2016). The implication is that it is not at the discretion of individuals to decide the kind of knowledge to disseminate or share, it is the process methodology that the leaders of SMEs employ that would dictate. SME managers must provide mechanisms to create, disseminate, and store knowledge within the organization, and establish systems to apply and reconfigure the relevant knowledge (Villar et al., 2014). The knowledge that organizations share outside portrays the image of the organization. Leaders of organizations need to put in place the necessary systems that employees may depend on for knowledge transfer, both inside and outside the organization.

Leaders of organizations should promote cooperation with other organizations in the same industry to share information and learn from each other. Villar et al. (2014) asserted that both internal knowledge creation and external knowledge development are key processes in the active search to exploit and explore new knowledge, through cooperation with third parties in the same industry. Human resources play a crucial role in exploring and exploiting new knowledge and leaders of organizations have to ensure that they foster employees' commitment to OL (Villar et al., 2014). Organizations may also disseminate KM strategies by holding regular meetings to inform and update owner-managers and employees on the progress of a project (Lee & Wong, 2015). Through meetings, managers will be able to keep track of the workflow within the organization and ensure that project deadlines are met (Lee & Wong, 2015). The implication is that leaders of organizations disseminate KM strategies within the organization by holding regular meetings.

Knowledge management practices and organizational performance. The performance of an organization is a concern for business leaders, and leaders embrace KM if it would help them to improve the performance of their businesses. Abu Baker and Yosof (2016) found that knowledge played a vital role in the challenging business environment and contributed to sustaining business performance and, that knowledge is a crucial resource that managers of organizations need to manage well to help their organizations achieve growth performance. Lin, Chang, and Tsai (2016) stated that KM is the source of competitive advantage and excellent performance in organizations. Birasnav (2014) found that transformational leadership has strong and positive effects on KM process and organizational performance after controlling for the effects of transactional leadership. Anwar and Ghafoor (2017) revealed that KM is a key driver of education sectors' performance and a significant instrument for profitability, competitiveness, and survival. The implication is that the leadership in the organization is key to the sustainability of KM practices; and with effective KM practices in place, then, organizational performance would steadily improve.

As leaders of organizations take on KM, they need to consider OL as well. KM, with OL as a mediator, contributes to the better performance of an organization (Abu Baker & Yosof, 2016). Jain and Moreno (2015) found a positive relationship between OL, organizational performance, and KM practices. From a different angle, Manz (2014) found that continuous learning in a corporate environment is a critical success factor in organizations trying to establish a KM initiative. Calvo-Mora et al. (2016) also noted that KM can be effective and can improve the key business results regardless of the size of the organization. KM practices, regardless of the size of the organization, are directly and positively related to organizational performance (Mia & Hasan, 2016). Heisig et al. (2016) found that there is a need for researchers to carry out more research related to the influence of KM to support different OL and business strategies. The implication is that managers of organizations as they implement KM they should embrace OL as well for better organizational performance.

Knowledge management and business continuity. The continuity of a business is a concern for individuals who start a business, but some leaders of SMEs do not have strategies in place for business continuity. Kato and Charoenrat (2018) found that there is a low level of preparedness for business continuity, including a failure to develop a written business continuity plan. Knowledge continuity management (KCM), a branch of KM, is one of the strategies that organizations may employ for business continuity; it is a process that organizations use to transfer know-how from one generation to another, that is from current employees to future employees (Urbancová & Urbanec, 2013). Business leaders invest in KM with the expectation that it will enhance a return on investment (Heisig et al., 2016). If organizational managers do not manage continuity of knowledge in their organization, this will create a threat of loss of key knowledge for the organization and will negatively affect business continuity (Urbancová & Urbanec, 2013). Managers of organizations need to manage knowledge continuity well as a contribution to business continuity. Business leaders should invest in educating managers to deal with knowledge for the managers to be well equipped to navigate organizations more effectively (Heisig et al., 2016). To ensure business continuity, organizational leaders should not stop at the implementation of KM but should move a step further to ensure that organizational managers have the necessary knowledge and skills to handle KMC.

Knowledge management and organizational culture. Organizational culture is one of the aspects that organizational leaders may consider while promoting KM principles. Al Saifi (2015) asserted that managers of organizations could not effectively deal with KM without addressing organizational culture and organizational structure is an important antecedent for managers to create knowledge at work. The implementation of KM in business practices depends on the business leaders and the workers in the organization. Malarvizhi, Tiang, Al-Mamum, and Raston (2016) found that organizational structure, KWs, leadership, and process change play a significant and positive role in the development of KM in an organization. To improve the ability to adapt to and survive the changes in the competitive business environment, SME leaders should focus on (a) promoting a favorable environment for KWs, (b) practicing democratic leadership, and (c) designing an appropriate reward system (Malarvizhi et al., 2016). Connel (2014) pointed out that improvements and attention to organizational culture coupled with trust regarding KS, with quality leadership in place, would enable employers to promote competent, successful and effective workforce and favorable business environments. If organizational leaders take their specific organizational culture type into consideration, they can plan strategically and make informed decisions on the type of KM initiatives to carry out (Al Saifi, 2015). SME leaders have the responsibility of putting in place organization structures and promoting a favorable work environment that will turn into organizational culture and lay the foundation for the integration of KM into the business practice.

Strategies for explicit and tacit knowledge retention. KM is all about managing knowledge and it is necessary to explore strategies that organizations employ to retain knowledge. Kianto, Vanhala, and Heilmann (2016) stated that knowledge retention is one of the facets of KM. Although KM is the source of competitive advantage and excellent performance, investment in KM is not necessarily effective in retaining knowledge (Anwar & Ghafoor 2017). Leaders of SMEs should put in place systems that help the organizations to retain organizational knowledge in cases of employees' departure and should develop strategies for tacit knowledge retention**.** Anbary and Nguyen (2017) found that leadership was the key factor in determining the successful implementation of knowledge retention among SMEs. Lack of documented communication results in gaps in capturing and transferring project knowledge and instant messaging is one of the office routines that managers of organizations fail to document (Donin, Rizatti, Geiger, & Sartori, 2016). Organizational leaders should find ways of documenting instant messaging.

As employees leave the organization, they go away with the knowledge they have that they did not document anywhere. Leaders of organizations should consider the development of knowledge retention strategies to reduce the risk of losing people’s tacit knowledge (Martins & Meyer, 2012). For the proper implementation of KM strategies, business leaders should consider both performance-driven strategies and KM-based competencies (Mia & Hasan, 2016). One of the strategies that organizations may adopt for knowledge retention in the organizations is to motivate employees to share their tacit knowledge with each other (Xue, 2017). To promote acquisition and retention of knowledge, owners of the organizations should ensure that they have the right leadership in place that will enable the successful implementation of KM strategies.

Information and Communication Technologies' Contribution to Knowledge Management Implementation

ICT is necessary for the competitive advantage of any business organization. For organizational leaders to sustain KM processes and practices and to be seen as working within and between organizations, the integration of ICT is necessary for business reforms (Mlay, Zlotnikova, & Watundu, 2013). Technology is an enabler and foundational element of a KM plan; with the advances in ICT, organizational leaders may implement KM by employing technological solutions (Omotayo, 2015). SME leaders need to increase the impact of KM by exploiting the opportunity ICT offers, which include cloud computing, crowdsourcing systems, collaborative filtering, and wiki to enable them to reduce the weight of the human and financial barriers hindering the spread of KM (Cerchione & Esposito, 2017). The technological and innovation trend in ICT is driving the development and the introduction of new KMS and creating new opportunities for SMEs that are cheaper, more user-friendly, and more effective than the traditional ways (Cerchione & Esposito, 2017). SME leaders need to invest in ICT to embrace the benefits that ICT would bring to their organizations.

SME leaders should identify the areas that may be most beneficial to the organization to employ ICT. Leaders of organizations use KMS to facilitate KS, though SMEs may not have dedicated resources to monitor the process of innovation in the field of KMS (Wang, Noe, & Wang, 2014). For leaders of SMEs to utilize ICT and to actualize KM strategies, they should employ techniques that will enable them to foster creation or acquisition, processing, repackaging, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of knowledge within the organization (Enakrire & Ocholla, 2017). From the literature review, managers of SMEs may employ ICT to support KM in the following areas: (a) KS motivation, (b) integrating KM strategy into business strategy, (c) knowledge exchange and teamwork, (d) documentation, (e) knowledge boundaries and knowledge protection, and (f) support to knowledge protection.

Knowledge sharing motivation. Organizational leaders need to motivate their employees to share knowledge. Dasí, Pedersen, Gooderham, Elter, and Hildrum (2017) identified two generic types of motivation for the sharing of knowledge: (a) extrinsic motivation and (b) intrinsic motivation. The former type of motivation is tangible compensation that relates to achieving a goal that affects the individual's behavior resulting in satisfaction that is discrete to the activity or process (Dasí et al., 2017). The latter type of motivation involves the individual's values and leads to personal satisfaction (Dasí et al., 2017). Organizational managers may be able to influence the extrinsic motivation but not the intrinsic motivation.

Organizations can set goals and rewards for their employees as a way of developing extrinsic motivation. Dasí et al. (2017) asserted that extrinsic motivation is important for sharing knowledge across business units because individuals may perceive sufficient tangible rewards in whatever form supervisors provide. One of the ways managers may motivate employees is to involve them in the development and implementation of ICT and KMS and create expectancy outcomes, a common lexicon of KS, and shared meanings between business units and KM (Bashir Memon, Syed, & Arain, 2017). Organizations should create systems of knowledge creation to support the system of KS. Song and Ito (2017) asserted that managers should pay attention to new employees' experiential knowledge, and through the knowledge creation process, managers can achieve enhanced firm performance. Three factors correlate with the process of knowledge creation: (a) employee involvement or empowerment, (b) capability development, and (c) team orientation (Dasí et al., 2017). Extrinsic motivation aligns with what Ouchi (1981) suggested in theory z, concerning motivation and rewards. If managers implement strategies for motivating employees to share knowledge, they would also be implementing the strategy for KMC.

Knowledge management strategy and business strategy. As an organization prepares its business strategy, it should at the same time be able to integrate into it the KM strategy. Dayan, Heisig, and Matos (2017) asserted that the company's business strategy drives its KM strategy, and not the other way round. Organizational managers should realize that as they implement the KM strategy, they direct it toward fulfilling the business strategy, and both the organization strategy and KM strategy are important for the success of the organization (Dayan et al., 2017). For organizational managers to effectively implement the KM strategy, they should motivate the employees to do so. Hume and Hume (2015) noted that effective KM does not necessarily have to be a complex process with large ICT investment; it begins with people by considering what they do and what they know in both tacit and explicit forms. As one of the strategies for implementing KM, organizational managers should start by appreciating the knowledge and skills that the employees have and the knowledge that employees can share with each other.

Organizational managers may motivate employees by focusing on KM practices, providing KM tools and supporting KM initiatives, which would help transfer the impact of organization related resources to the outcome (Dayan et al., 2017). Organizational managers should not implement KM in isolation as an independent managerial practice but as a central mechanism that leverages organizational, cultural, structural, and strategic influence on organizational effectiveness while enabling strategy formulation and implementation (Dayan et al., 2017). The implication is that for the successful performance of the organization, organizational managers should embed the KM strategy into the business strategy.

Knowledge exchange and teamwork. Organizational managers should encourage their subordinates to practice and participate in all KM initiatives for the effective implementation of KM strategies. Lee, Min, and Lee (2017) pointed out that keeping knowledge within a team encourages inter-team coordination and unleash team performance. In the case of explicit knowledge, teams may exchange knowledge through KMS after designing articulate authorization options with all the necessary controls to enable changes at the team's discretion (Lee et al., 2017). The organizational leaders may boost employees' motivation by creating an environment for informal interactions and developing integrated knowledge-exchange channels (Kehoe & Collins, 2017; Sedighi & Isaai, 2017). Organizational leaders may also motivate employees to interact with one another and the community by employing mass collaborative KM (MCKM). Scuotto, Del Giudice, and Omeihe (2017) pointed out that organizations may use MCKM and social media networks (SMN) to enhance productivity in SMEs. When SMEs employ SMNs, they form their virtual communities to achieve a common purpose (Scuotto et al. 2017). The implication is that the implementation of KM becomes easier and more beneficial if managers endeavor to involve everyone in the organization.

Documentation. Managers of organizations should encourage documentation practices for both tacit and explicit knowledge. KM in an organization is about managing explicit and tacit knowledge and organizational leaders should promote methods that encourage the passing on of knowledge through people and documenting of information (Todorović, Petrović, Mihić, Obradović, & Bushuyev, 2015). Through the promotion of documentation, managers may convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Todorović et al. (2015) posited that converting tacit knowledge into an explicit form, contributed to the assimilation of tacit knowledge. A leader of an organization may ask one of his or her experts to document their innovative ideas for the leader to present to management and directors (Stokvik, Adriaenssen, & Johannessen, 2016). The implication is that the expert documents the tacit knowledge he or she is holding, making it simpler for others to understand, then the leader presents it as explicit knowledge (Stokvik, Adriaenssen, & Johannessen, 2016). Managers need to give clear communication about policies, rules, and violations of boundary regulations and document them to protocol the actions of individuals in a team (Lee et al., 2017). The success of KM in an organization depends on the will of individuals to work as a team and managers to promote that teamwork by encouraging documentation practices.

Knowledge boundaries and knowledge protection. KM implementation requires organizational leaders to set knowledge boundaries. Once individuals in the organization start practicing KM, then knowledge becomes an asset to the organization that individuals capture, store and disseminate. Organizational leaders would then consider knowledge as an investment, resist knowledge that undermines what is known, and share knowledge that helps the organization bolster the organization's identity (Newell, 2015). Lee et al. (2017) asserted that members in organizational teams should distinguish between resources they might share and those that they may not, to ensure the effectiveness of knowledge boundaries. Stokvik, Adriaenssen, Johannessen, and Sætersdal (2016) posited that team leaders develop and communicate implicit and hidden knowledge and that organizational managers mobilize, coordinate, and integrate hidden, tacit, implicit, and explicit knowledge. Organizational managers should encourage their team leaders to clarify their knowledge boundaries to benefit the organization while understanding the nature of tasks that would establish more protective knowledge boundaries (Lee et al., 2017). If leaders of organizations establish knowledge boundaries within teams, they will help the organizational managers to protect knowledge.

Support for knowledge protection. Organizational managers should also make use of information technology (IT) to support the implementation process of KM. Organizational leaders should identify the needs for protection, put in place regulations that provide clear guidelines for performing tasks, and use IT to support the knowledge protection implementation (Lee et al., 2017). Knowledge protection is one aspect of KM practices. KM practices include (a) supervisory work; (b) strategic KM; (c) knowledge protection; (d) learning mechanisms; (e) IT practices; (f) organizing work; and (g) human resource management (HRM) practices (Hussinki, Kianto, Vanhala, & Ritala, 2017).

HRM includes recruitment, training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation practices (Hussinki et al., 2017). Knowledge boundaries may hinder KS but may also enhance the coordination and performance of KM. Managers should determine an optimal level for regulating knowledge protection and KS (Lee et al., 2017). Organizational leaders should take advantage of IT to pursue knowledge flow across teams, thereby enabling the teams to better process external knowledge with appropriate IT support (Lee et al., 2017). The implication is that organizational managers may use IT to support the implementation of KM strategies.

Transition

Some managers of SMEs in Uganda do not have strategies to integrate KM into their business practices, yet KM is vital for an organization to succeed and survive in a highly competitive environment (Oye & Salleh, 2013). Exploring strategies some SME managers in Uganda use to integrate KM into their business practices was the focus of this study. The first element of Section 1 is the background of the problem with subsequent discussions on the problem and purpose statements; nature of the study; research and interview questions; conceptual framework; operational definitions; assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; and the significance of the study. Section 1 also includes a review of the professional and academic literature, in which I highlighted models that form the conceptual framework for understanding the integration of KM practices in SMEs.

Section 2 includes details about the participants, further insights into the nature of the study within Section 1, the data collection and analysis, the ethical issues that I considered during the study, and the reliability and validity of the data. The purpose of this section is to understand fully the role of the researcher in the study, the steps for interviewing participants, collecting and organizing data, and interpreting data for analysis. Section 3 includes the findings and recommendations of the research problem. The purpose of this final section is to present the findings from data collection, provide recommendations to the research problem, and explain how the findings and recommendations can improve SMEs’ business practice and contribute to social change.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some SME managers in Uganda use to effectively integrate KM into their business practices. The target population for this study consisted of managers in two SMEs in Uganda who had experience successfully integrating KM into their business practices. The potential contribution to positive social change is that findings from this study may be helpful in expanding opportunities for employees to learn new skills and knowledge. Another contribution to positive social change may be the expansion of employment opportunities because, as SMEs integrate KM into their business practices, SMEs may become more successful, thus leading to the expansion of employment opportunities.

Role of the Researcher

I prepared interview questions and an interview protocol, recruited the participants, conducted interviews, and examined publicly available documents, which included organizations' annual program reports and audit reports. The role of the qualitative researcher is to collect data by interviewing participants, examining documents, and observing behavior (Rossetto, 2014). The role of the researcher is also self-awareness about one's impact on research participants (Chatfield, Cooper, Holden, & Macias, 2014). This was a qualitative multiple case study. Semistructured interviews were my main approach to collecting data. My first role was to construct interview questions that were open-ended, enabling participants to give as much information as possible about the subject under study. In semistructured interviews, the interviewer asks a number of questions and on a number of issues exhaustively, regardless of the order of these questions (Aladsani, 2017). For structured interviews, the researcher prepares a schedule of guide and probe questions in advance and strictly adheres to it during the interviews (Doody & Noonan, 2013). I prepared an interview protocol, adhered to it during all the interviews, and added probe questions whenever I found it necessary.

I did not have a prior relationship with the participants since I did not use organizations where I had worked before. I conducted an intensive study of the topic I researched. In my previous job as a finance and administration manager, I indirectly managed, monitored, and evaluated knowledge through project and staff appraisal reports. I also had no prior relationship with the area of this study, SMEs. The only personal perspective I had as I conducted this study was the knowledge I acquired through this study before conducting the research.

I followed the basic ethical principles in *The Belmont Report*, which include: (a) respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). *The Belmont Report* comprises an account of ethical values and institutes guidelines for the protection of humans. The researcher *respects participants* by getting informed consent from them (Vitak, Shilton, & Ashktorab, 2016). Before engaging the participants or collecting data, I sought approval from Walden University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST). The Walden IRB approval number for my final doctoral manuscript is 06-18-18-0579120. Approval from the IRB and UNCST indicated my awareness of the need for ethical treatment of participants. Vitak et al. (2016) explained that *beneficence* involves weighing relative risks against the benefits of research. Researchers minimize the risk to participants through confidentiality or anonymity (Vitak et al., 2016). To protect the rights of human subjects, researchers may use different approaches, such as using an informed consent process or protecting the confidentiality and privacy of participants (Yin, 2014). Each participant signed an informed consent form.

The informed consent form elements included potential risks and benefits, voluntary nature of the study, privacy, and confidentiality. I used unique identifiers and generic organizational job description information to protect the identities and privacy of the participants. *Justice* is about researchers treating participants with fairness. No individual or group should consistently benefit from or bear the burden of the risks of participation in research (Obenchain & Ives, 2015). Secondly, a researcher should remain constantly alert to reflect on and shape the conversation to learn from the participants' experiences without imposing one's view (Berger, 2015). I remained constantly alert during the interviewing process to avoid projecting my experience and using it as the lens to view and understand participants' experiences. I guarded against imposing my perspective to the participants and remained open to learning from what the participants had to share, and I was ready for any contrary findings. I endeavored to ascertain potentially sensitive issues in SMEs and be able to understand how to enhance my collaboration with the participants about the nature and sensitivity of the information they shared.

A researcher has to consider how best to avoid bias. Yin (2014) explained that the degree to which the researcher remains open to contrary evidence is one test of bias. A portion of the researcher's role is to mitigate biased views that may potentially disturb the data, by carefully self-monitoring the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research (Berger, 2015). As a researcher, I had a personal perspective about the study, and the participants looked at aspects of the study from a different angle. As I carried out the interviews, I bracketed my pre-conception of KM and remained open to any contrary findings. Yin further explained that reporting preliminary findings while still in the data collection phase to two or three critical colleagues is one of the ways a researcher may work to mitigate any possible bias.

I avoided the use of a personal lens during the data collection process by using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and member checking. An interview protocol is a step-by-step plan a qualitative researcher writes down as a guide to help conduct in-depth qualitative interviews and collect well-rounded quality information for analysis by listing key points of exploration, provisional questions and planned probes, and transitions (Arsel, 2017; Turner, 2010). The interview protocol comprised open-ended interview questions and a section at the top to capture information about the interviewee and the time and place I conducted the interview. The researcher should make a plan on how one would guard against presenting one's perspective and represent the perspective of the participants before carrying out any involvement with the participants (Yin, 2018). I used audio recording to ensure that I fully captured the participant's perspectives and guarded against any bias while reporting. I used the interview protocol to ensure that while interviewing the participants, I asked the same open-ended questions to each participant.

To further guard against reflecting a personal lens, I reported my preliminary findings while still in the data collection phase to two colleagues. Yin (2014) pointed out that if a researcher gets findings contrary to one's expectations, the researcher's colleagues may offer alternative explanations and suggestions for data collection. Member checking is a process where the qualitative researcher takes data and interpretations back to the participants in the study for them to confirm the credibility of the information, narrative accounts, and results (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Qualitative researchers use triangulation to provide validity to their findings. Triangulation is the use of multiple and different sources, approaches, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Yin, 2014). I used member checking and within-method methodological triangulation for maximum benefit of reliability and validity. Researchers use the within-method to triangulate data from multiple data collection methods (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). I supplemented the data I collected in the interviews by examining different documents that were publicly available and those at the source to capture implicit and tacit knowledge. I also examined the different reports the organizations produced with the intent of comparing what the organizations capture with what they report.

Participants

Before recruiting participants for any study, the researcher should establish participants' eligibility criteria. Von Elm et al. (2014) recommended that for a cohort study, the researcher should establish the eligibility criteria, the sources, and methods of participant selection. Researchers define the eligibility criteria for participants to ensure alignment with the research question (Berrang-Ford, Pearce, & Ford, 2015). Eligibility criteria for participation in studies are parameters researchers establish to ensure that participants qualify for participation in a study (Tseli et al., 2017). Participants are eligible if they have experience and knowledge related to the phenomenon under investigation (Nawi, Lee, Azman, & Kamar, 2014). Researchers use purposive sampling to select study participants with experience in the phenomenon under investigation (Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). The eligibility criteria for this study were that participants had to be: (a) from Ugandan SMEs with a knowledge-intensive environment, (b) SME managers with some responsibility of KM in the organization, and (c) experienced with at least 1 year of successful KM practices.

Once a researcher has set the eligibility criteria for study participants, the next step is for the researcher to establish strategies for getting access to the participants that fulfill the criteria. Litman, Robinson, and Abberbock (2017) stated that access to participants is of central importance to researchers in the social and behavioral sciences. Saunders, Gray, and Bristow (2017) also recommended that the researcher may check the roster list before contacting participants and ensuring that the list is extensive enough to accommodate a low response rate. To get access to the participants, I contacted leaders of the organizations with written criteria that they used to recommend to me potential participants for the study. Using the lists the leaders of the organizations sent to me, I sent out invitation letters to each potential participant requesting that they participate in the study and asking each to sign a consent form. Obtaining access to participants from SMEs using an internal roster is less complicated than accessing participants from multiple corporations due to the SMEs' simplified organizational structures (Saunders et al., 2017). I also asked leaders of the SMEs to provide me with the organizational structures to enable me to verify the positions of the participants in the organizations.

While working with participants during this study, I established strategies for a good working relationship with them. Establishing a good working relationship with participants is one of the ways a researcher increases the chances of extracting quality data (Holt, 2016). I also made phone calls and follow-up e-mails to every potential participant that the leader of the organization recommended to me. The researcher should listen and adjust questions to what the interviewee commentates and not impose individual's ideas as a way to foster a conversational partnership with the participant and to demonstrate respect towards the participant (Balderrama, 2016). The second strategy I used was to conduct an open and honest dialogue throughout the interview and research process. The interviewer uses probing techniques to provide flexibility and enable participants to feel free to explain their views while keeping the interview relevant to the research (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2014). The third strategy I employed was the probing technique.

For the participants' characteristics to align with the overarching research question, researchers should draw study participants from organizations or systems that are involved in the implementation process of KM and select the individual participants based on the assumption that they possess knowledge and experience with the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). The researcher establishes criteria at the outset, which describe participants' characteristics (Grossoehme, 2014). I explained to the leaders of the SMEs the purpose of the proposed research study since they were in charge of recommending to me potential participants for the study. I emphasized to these leaders that participants should be knowledgeable and have working experience in KM of at least 1 year. Through the letters of invitation, e-mails, and phone calls to the potential participants, I explained that the purpose of the research study was to explore strategies that some SME managers in Uganda use to integrate KM into their business practices effectively. For each participant, before starting to conduct the interview, I further explained the purpose of the research study.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

In this study, I used the qualitative research method. Researchers conduct qualitative research to generate or produce a thick description of the phenomena under study (Yin, 2014). Researchers also carry out qualitative research to be able to conduct an in-depth exploration of the views of the interviewees (Wynne-Jones et al., 2014). The qualitative method was suitable for this study because I had to produce a thick description of the phenomena under study, which are the strategies that managers in Uganda use to integrate KM into their business practices. I collected data by interviewing SME managers in the organizations that I purposefully selected for this study.

In contrast, researchers use the quantitative method to test theories by examining the relationships among variables and constructs and assume that there is an independent reality, regardless of whether or not a researcher is to investigate it (Allwood, 2012). The quantitative method was not suitable for this study because this study did not involve testing any relationships among variables. The mixed-methods research methodology includes both qualitative and quantitative methods elements. Researchers use the mixed-methods when they attempt to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints (Johnson et al., 2007). When researchers use the mixed-methods research methodology, there is no in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon because researchers consider the qualitative element as supplementary to the study and the meaningful integration of qualitative and quantitative data remains elusive that needs further development (Guetterman, Fetters, & Creswell, 2015; Hussein, 2009). The mixed-methods research methodology was not suitable for this study because this study did not include any quantitative elements.

Research Design

I used a multiple case study design. The case study research design is an approach that the researcher uses to integrate the different elements of a study in a consistent way that addresses the research problem, focusing on and retaining a holistic and real word perspective (Yin, 2014). Researchers use case study research to explore areas where current knowledge is minimal or limited; to examine a bounded phenomenon to provide a thick description that is meaningful and applicable to practice and future research (Woodgate & Sigurdson, 2015; Yin, 2014). There is no formula for determining when to use a case study design, but the more a researcher seeks to explain some present circumstance of some social phenomenon works, the more, that a case study research will be relevant (Yin, 2014). Researchers use the case study design to provide answers to *what*, *how*, and *why* questions and select one of the three types of case studies, which are exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive (Yin, 2014). I used the exploratory type of case study. Researchers use the case study design to draft success stories that they may use to demonstrate the effectiveness of practices that they may promote (Lewis, 2015). I used the case study design to explore successful strategies that some SME managers in Uganda use to integrate KM into their business practices effectively.

The case study design may be either single case or multiple case study. Skelton (2015) pointed out that the single case study design can be subject to skepticism among colleagues in the research community. Researchers use the multiple case study design to reinforce the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of a study (Houghton et al., 2013; Skelton, 2015). Yin (2014) explained that analytical conclusions, independently, arising from two cases or more will be more powerful than those from a single case. I used the multiple case study design to explore successful strategies that SME managers in Uganda use to integrate KM into their business practices.

Researchers use the ethnographic design to describe the culture of a society or communities, which would require long periods in the field and detailed observational and interview evidence (Yin, 2014). Phenomenological researchers believe that knowledge and understanding are within one's day-to-day lived experiences and perceptions about a phenomenon (Byrne, 2001; Fidan, 2017). This study is not about culture, interpretations, feelings, or lived experiences. Ethnography and phenomenology research designs were not suitable for this study. Researchers use narrative design to describe and theorize individuals' narratives and, use the narratives to unveil a variety of individual experiences (Clarke & Clarke, 2016; Yin, 2014). This study was not about unveiling a variety of individual experiences and the narrative approach was not suitable for this study.

Data Saturation

As researchers discuss research design, they should also consider the approaches that they will use to reach data saturation. Kang et al. (2016) posited that data saturation is a fundamental principle in qualitative methodology. Data saturation is the point of data collection where new data in a study are no longer feasible despite the researcher probing further or recruiting study participants (Kang et al., 2016). If the researcher does not reach data saturation, the researcher will compromise the quality of the research, which hampers content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I continued interviewing participants until I achieved data saturation.

Researchers may consider different concepts to attain data saturation. The general principles and concepts that researchers agree on to determine the level of data saturation are: no new data, no new themes, no new coding, and ability to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation is more than a matter of no new categories or themes emerging but also denotes a development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, including variation, and possible relationships to other concepts (Pourvakhshoori, Norouzi, Ahmadi, Hosseini, & Khankeh, 2017). Researchers then consider rich and thick data concepts. The difference between rich and thick data is that rich relates to the quality of data and thick to the quantity of data (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

To ensure validity, a researcher should collect data that are both thick and rich (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In qualitative research interviews, the researchers conclude the research when they reach data saturation (Scott, Cavana, & Cameron, 2016). For each participant I probed further to obtain as much information as possible and used codes to identify as many themes as possible. Morsink et al. (2017) reached the point of data saturation when they could not identify any new themes in four consecutive interviews. I attained data saturation when I was no longer able to identify any more themes.

Population and Sampling

In this qualitative multiple case study, the target population comprised of managers from two Ugandan SMEs with successful experience in KM implementation. In qualitative research, researchers use sampling methods that will best achieve the goals of the study, which include: (a) providing a multilayered understanding of the research problem, (b) exploring different viewpoints, and (c) allowing generalizing research findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). For the successful management of population sampling in qualitative research, researchers intentionally select and delineate participants that would best enrich the research study (Emerson, 2015). If the goal is not to generalize to a population but to obtain insights into a phenomenon, individuals, or events, as is most often the case in interpretivist studies, then the qualitative researcher purposefully selects individuals, groups, and settings to increase understanding of phenomena (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). In this qualitative study, I explored the KM strategies that SMEs use to integrate KM into their business practices successfully.

A researcher may use various sampling methods that include census, convenience, purposive, criterion, or the snowball methods. I used purposive sampling for this research study. Purposive sampling is a procedure where a researcher relies on his or her judgment in selecting members of the population to take part in a research study (Robinson, 2014). Yin (2014) posited that if the researcher's objective is to gain insights or a deeper understanding of an event or setting, then purposeful sampling is a suitable approach to maximize collection of contextually rich data. In qualitative research studies, researchers use purposive sampling as a way of identifying and selecting information-rich cases relating to the phenomenon of interest and involving a small number of people and unique cases (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2002; Yilmaz, 2013). For this research study, my goal was to get a deeper understanding of the different strategies that SME managers use to integrate KM into their business practices successfully. I used purposive sampling to be able to understand the integration of KM into business practices.

There are different strategies of purposive sampling. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) pointed out that one of the sampling decisions that researchers should make is selecting an appropriate sampling strategy. The strategies a researcher may employ to get a suitable sample size include parallel, nested, and, or multilevel strategy (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). In qualitative research, researchers place primary emphasis on data saturation to enable them to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issue under research, by continuing to sample until no new substantive information is feasible (Palinkas et al., 2015). To get a suitable sample size for this study, I employed the nested sampling approach shown in Figure 1.

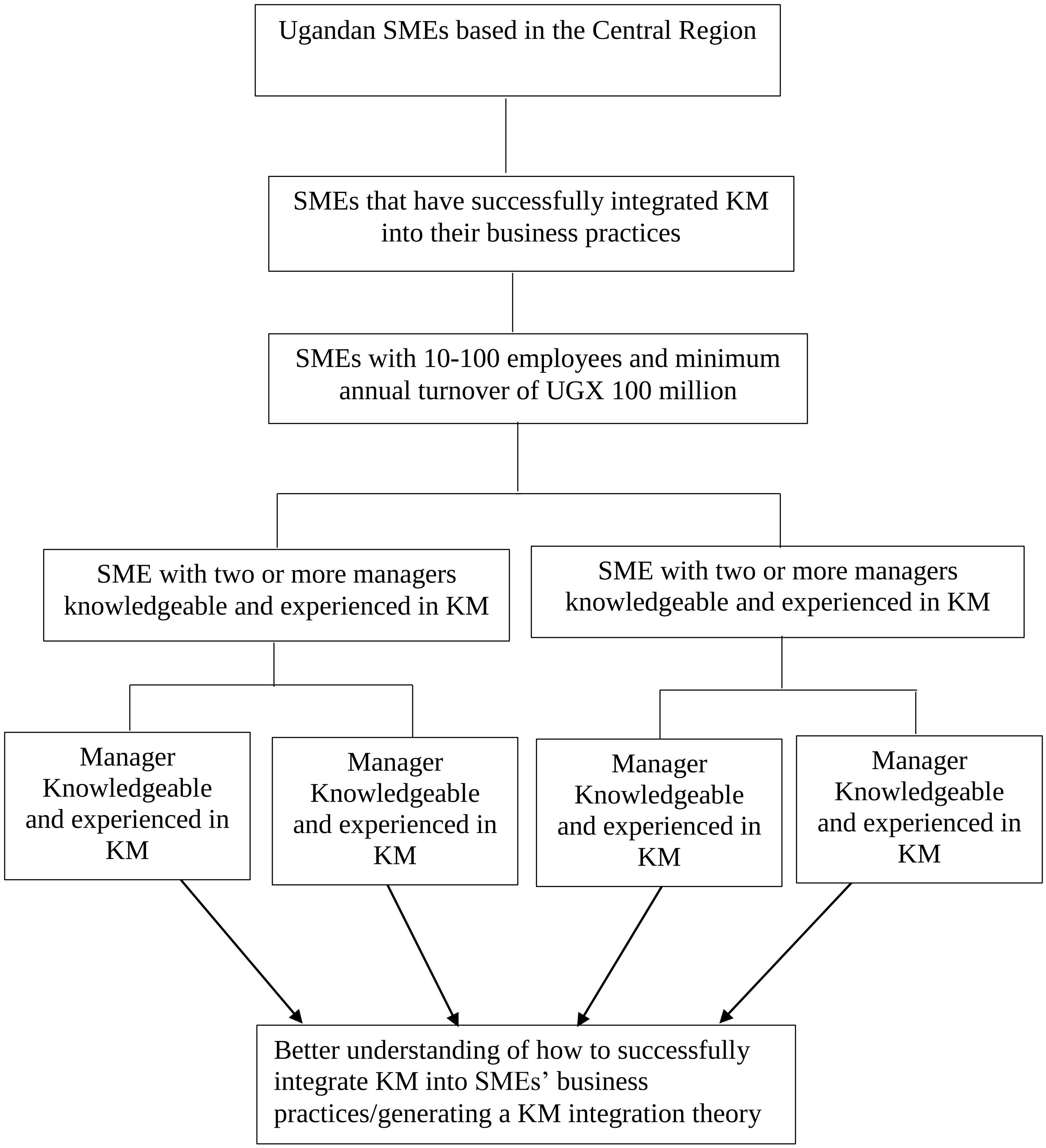

Figure 1. Sampling design chart.

The population for this study consisted of managers in two SMEs in Uganda possessing experience in the successful integration of KM into their business practices. My target for this study was to get a minimum of two participants from each company. I interviewed a total of five participants. Data saturation is about the depth of the data and not necessarily about numbers per se (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). Since I used purposive sampling to select participants, the assumption was that the participants I interviewed were to provide thick and rich data that helped me to attain data saturation. I used the probing technique while interviewing the participants and ensured that each participant gave me as much information relevant to the phenomenon under study as possible up to a point when no new information was feasible.

Data saturation and sampling. In qualitative studies, there is no direct correlation between the sample size and reaching data saturation. Data saturation is an important aspect of the quality of research; data saturation in qualitative research is one approach that researchers use to ensure that they obtain accurate and valid data (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, 2015; Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). Data saturation is not about the numbers or sample size, but about the depth of the data; and the key characteristics of reaching data saturation include no new data, no new themes, no new coding, and ability to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Jessiman, 2013; Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014). Researchers choose the sample size that has the best opportunity for the researcher to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The sample size for a multiple case study should be sufficient to enable the researcher to reach data saturation (Agarwal & Strubler, 2013; Donges, 2015). Anyanwu, Fulton, Evans, and

Paget (2017) suggested that a researcher should select knowledgeable and experienced participants who will recall and provide relevant information to answer the research question. The sample of this qualitative multiple case study comprised five knowledgeable and experienced participants from each of the two SMEs that made up the population of the study.

Another factor that may influence the quality and type of information that researchers collect is the place where researchers are to conduct the interviews. Researchers vet rooms they use for interviews before the actual data collection to ensure adequate privacy, control of excessive noise, temperature, or any other factors that may influence the quality and type of information that participants would provide (Ranney et al., 2015). I worked hand in hand with the leaders of the organizations and the interviewees to ensure that I conducted interviews in a location conducive to the participant’s privacy and confidentiality. Individual interviewees’ preferences as to the time and place for conducting the interview is another factor I considered. McDermid, Peters, Jackson, and Daly (2014) suggested that the researcher should ensure that the location where he or she will conduct the interview protects the participant's privacy. Researchers should ensure that interviews are private, allowing the individual participants to feel relaxed, as this will positively influence the nature, length, and ease of conversation (Parr, 1998). I was able to maximize the time for a fruitful discussion with participants by selecting a private location. I considered individual interviewees’ preferences, participants remained comfortable and relaxed, and the place had low noise and distraction suitable for audio recording.

Ethical Research

Each research study comes with its set of specific ethical issues. To observe research study ethics, researchers should (a) protect participants from harm, (b) offer opportunities for them to have a say in matters affecting them, (c) show respect for their views, (d) trust their competency, and (e) facilitate all participants' willingness to share their views and participate actively (Bergmark, Mitra, & McCormick, 2015). *The Belmont Report* has the basic ethical principles which include: (a) respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The IRB performs ethical reviews of the research study proposals; ensures that research studies do not place participants at undue risk; and that participants give, free of coercion, their informed consent to participation (Abernethy et al., 2014). Before contacting the participants and collecting data for the study, I sought IRB approval to be sure that the proposal met the IRB guidelines and complied with *The Belmont Re*port ethical standards. The Walden IRB approval number for my final doctoral manuscript is 06-18-18-0579120

Informed consent. Researchers should seek informed consent from participants before conducting the research study. Participants should provide informed consent freely and in writing; and in case writing is not appropriate the researcher should make a provision to document and get someone to witness the oral consent (Harriss & Atkinson, 2015). Undue influence is undesirable because it compromises voluntary informed consent (Dekking, Graaf, & Delden, 2014). The IRB application form has the details that guide researchers in presenting the specifics of their research studies. Following the IRB guidelines, the researcher should discuss with the participant procedures for withdrawing from the study, and describe any applicable incentives. The researcher should gain informed consent from all potential participants of the study, alert participants to the nature of the study, and formally solicit their volunteerism in participating in the study (Yin, 2014). I gave each participant of this study an agreement document to sign as consent to take part in the study and informed them that their involvement was voluntary.

Respect of persons. Participants in a study are free to withdraw from the study. The researcher is obliged to treat individuals as autonomous agents and to respect participants' decisions on whether or not to participate in the research (National Council of Research, 2003). The first set of the procedures is about the process of recruiting the participants. I contacted the head of each of the SMEs in this study to discuss the purpose of the study and determined their interests to participate in the study. Upon agreement to join in the study, I requested the business leader to provide me with a list of potential study participants following the selection criteria. I arranged a meeting or teleconference with each participant to discuss the purpose of the study, determined their interest to answer questions, and began the rapport building process. I explained to each participant that he or she may withdraw from the study at any time during the study, before the beginning of the interview or at any point during or after the interview by notifying me through email, phone, or in person. I included a clause about the withdrawal from the study in the agreement document.

Incentives. Another ethical issue pertains to giving participants incentives. Robinson (2014) posited that financial incentives may motivate participation in an interview on a topic that may elicit distress. Robinson further explained that as an alternative to financial incentives a copy of a participant's interview transcript and or a report of the study's findings may suffice. Researchers should be aware that copy of a participant's interview transcript and or a report may not be an incentive to all participants and could in some cases lead to distress, the researcher should, therefore, provide a clear option for participants to opt out (Robinson, 2014). I did not give any incentives to the participants to take part in the study, but I informed participants that they may receive an electronic copy of the summary of the findings of the study. I also pointed out to each participant that one did not have to answer any questions that would make them feel uncomfortable. I included all these clauses in the informed consent form.

Protection of participants. People are not objects and in a research study the researcher should handle the participants with care. The researcher is obliged to secure participants' wellbeing by protecting them from harm to the extent possible and by maximizing the benefits to the participants and the society that may result from the research, by assessing risks of harm and probability of benefits in a systematic manner (National Research Council, 2003). The *beneficence* principle in *The Belmont Report* concerns the protection of participants (U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). As per the IRB, it is mandatory for the researcher to clarify measures for assuring that the ethical protection of participants is adequate and to refer to the agreement documents. Fuller, Shareck, and Stanley (2017) asserted that the main purpose of the research ethics process is to achieve a balance between the requirements of the research and the protection of participants. To ensure adequate ethical protection of participants, I adhered to *The Belmont Report* for conducting the research. Before starting the research, I sought IRB approval for the ethical protection of the research, protected the participants by ensuring their privacy, ensured that participants answered the interview questions voluntarily without undue pressure, and checked the interview rooms before conducting the interviews for the safety of the participants.

Confidentiality. The researcher carrying out a study should care about the confidentiality of the identity of the participants and that of the organizations and their responses. The researcher should protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants in the research study and not put the participants in an undesirable position, like being on a roaster to receive requests to participate in some future study (National Council of Research, 2003; Yin, 2014). I used various procedures in my study to ethically safeguard the participants and to guarantee the protection of each participant's identity and that of the organization and the confidentiality of their responses. The IRB requires that the researcher includes in the research procedures and analysis or write-up plans measures to ensure that the researcher does not directly or indirectly disclose participants' identities to other parties outside what the IRB recommends. Doody and Noonan (2016) posited that to uphold confidentiality, the researcher should give consideration to access and storage of data, and the researcher should assign each participant an identification code or number that only the researcher should access. Doody and Noonan added on that participants should be aware of where the researcher will store their data, for *how* long, and to assure the participants that he or she will destroy the data after this time.

McDermid et al. (2014) pointed out that to protect the identity of the participants, the researcher needs to prepare for the interviews, including consideration of where they should take place. I informed the participants of the protections I incorporated into the study to protect their identity and assured them that their responses were to remain confidential.

I advised participants about Walden University's IRB process, that the university had to approve the study, and that no research can begin without the participants' approval and their consent. I assigned an alphanumeric code to each participant to ensure their privacy and confidentiality and that of the organization. The code to identify a participant from organization X in administration department (A) from whom I collected data electronically (E), may appear as XA4E. Alternatively, the code to identify a participant from organization Y in the finance department (F) from whom I collected data manually (M) may appear as YF2M. I recorded the interview using an electronic device and that their consent was voluntary. In case a participant declined my request to electronically record the interview, I collected data using handwritten notes to document the interview. I informed the participants that I will store all their data, immediately after the data analysis phase, in a locked file cabinet and use a password to protect the information that I will store on the computer. I also informed the participants that I will destroy data in a manner consistent with destroying confidential information when the mandatory period as per the requirement by IRB of a 5-year data retention period expires.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument. A qualitative researcher is the primary data collection instrument and must take steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the data while in the field (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013; Lemon, 2017). The other data collection instruments that I used are semistructured interviews and review of organizational documentation. The interview is the most important source of case study evidence (Yin, 2014). Researchers use interviews to be able to ask the respondent more detailed questions and to record the respondent's words (Mahmood & Visser, 2015). I interviewed participants by using a semistructured interview protocol with open-ended questions (see Appendix A). I interviewed the participants and used an electronic device to record the interview. I used an electronic device to record the interview with each participant.

Researchers when interviewing may also ask participants probing questions. Semistructured interview protocol approach gives the interviewer the freedom to probe further within a particular subject area and to word questions spontaneously while keeping a focus on that area (Robbins, Mulligan, & Keenan, 2015). Good probing is an effective interview technique (Onwuegbuzie & Hwang, 2014). The type of probe questions a researcher may utilize include (a) explanatory, (b) clarification, (c) elaboration, (d) continuation, (e) attention, (f) steering, (f) in-depth, and (g) iterative (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003; Onwuegbuzie & Hwang, 2014). I added probing questions whenever I identified a need during the research study and as I interviewed the participants.

I also collected data by examining public documents of the organizations that included management reports. I examined internal working documents that participants availed me, that included, stock registers, customer diaries, job cards, minutes of meetings, circulars, quotations, local purchase orders, and letters of correspondence or e-mails. One of the principles of data collection is for the researcher to use multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2014). I used data triangulation and member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the data process. Under data triangulation, the researcher collects information from multiple sources but aiming at corroborating the same finding (Wilson, 2014; Yin, 2014). I reviewed publicly available documents and those that the organizational leaders provided. Yin (2014) stated that some of the possible documents that researchers may review include: letters; memoranda; e-mails; agendas; announcements and minutes of meetings; administrative documents, which include proposals and progress reports; and articles that appear in mass media or community newspapers. Aragón, Narvaiza, and Altuna (2016) analyzed data from the website of four SMEs, press releases, databases, and internal documents that the firms provided which included annual results and reports. Other than interviewing participants, I reviewed publicly available documents and those internal to the organization that managers were willing to share with me. I reviewed the documents and took note of my findings.

I used the interview technique to gather most of the information and electronically record the interview. Qualitative researchers frequently use interviews as a primary source of data because it is a natural approach to the inquiry (Frels & Onwuegbusie, 2013; Neusar, 2014). Interviews serve as one of the most important sources of evidence in a case study (Yin, 2014). Audio recording interviews helps the interviewer to give an accurate summary of the interview and acts as a reference point since the interviewer can play back the interview to have clarity on certain points during data analysis (Marambanyika & Beckedahl, 2016). I ensured that I abided by the interview protocol (see Appendix A), asked questions to each participant without bias, and used unobtrusive recording devices to audio record the interview. I also checked and prepared my recording devices in advance to prevent fumbling with equipment during the interview and enabled the participant and I to only focus on the interview at the time of interviewing.

I used member checking to validate my interpretation of participants' responses to interview questions by giving these interpretations back to the participants and asking them to validate their responses. Yin (2014) pointed out that a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence. By using multiple sources of evidence, the researcher can define and distinguish other constructs, with the aim of achieving construct validity (Cronin, 2014). Researchers also use member checking technique to allow for more participatory interpretive research practices (Iivari, 2018). Member checking is important for the researcher to establish the trustworthiness and credibility of results (Birt et al., 2016; Loh, 2013). Before leaving any site of the interview, I validated the information I received with the interviewee and made an appointment to go back for member checking. I also shared my preliminary findings with at least two colleagues to validate my findings.

Data Collection Technique

I collected data using multiple sources of evidence. Researchers use multiple sources of data to contribute to the trustworthiness of the data and the methodological rigor of the study (Chou, 2017). The main advantage of using multiple sources of evidence is to allow the researcher to develop converging lines of inquiry and enhance the construct validity and reliability of the study (Yin, 2014). Researchers use multiple raters, among which are *peers*, and multiple sources of data, among which are *interviews, documents, reports,* and *surveys,* to enable increased reliability and convergent validity to overcome the possible shortcomings of self-reports (Dattalo, Wise, Ford Ii, Abramson, & Mahoney, 2017; Jessor, Graves, Hanson, & Jessor, 2016). As per the IRB guidelines, the researcher should provide the steps he or she will follow to obtain existing data or contact information of potential participants, informed consent procedures, description of any pilot activities and data collection steps, and transcript review or member checking. I gained access to the participants from whom I collected the data, by first contacting the leaders of the SMEs to seek their willingness to provide a *letter of cooperation* granting permission for access to all relevant data, participants, facility use, and use of personnel time for research purposes. The principles that researchers may use to handle problems of construct validity and reliability include (a) multiple sources of evidence, (b) case study database, (c) maintaining a chain of evidence, and (d) exercising care in using data from electronic sources of evidence (Yin, 2014). In this study, to maintain a chain of evidence, I used *research logs, reflective journals*, maintained *case study databases,* and *three electronic devices* to record the interviews.

Data collection procedures may be either paper or electronic. Researchers use electronic devices to collect data to reduce data reentry time, to improve the quality of data, and to offer consistency (Jandee et al., 2014; Subramanian, Tangka, Edwards, Hoover, & Cole-Beebe, 2016). I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews and recorded them using a digital audio device for each participant.

The significant advantage of using semistructured interviews is the opportunity for previously unknown information and experiences to emerge that may otherwise be held back (Bhattacharya & Singh, 2015; O'Keeffe, Buytaert, Mijic, Brozović, & Sinha, 2016). The second advantage is that semistructured interviews are means to gain firsthand information directly from the participants, experienced and well informed of the phenomena under investigation (Zohrabi, 2013). The last advantage is that through the interview method participants get a platform on which to express themselves in their words (Coenen et al., 2012).

Reviewing documentation has advantages as well. Some of the advantages of reviewing documentation as a source of evidence are: (a) the researcher can review the documents repeatedly, (b) the documents are unobtrusive since repetition participants do not create them for the purpose of the study, (c) the information from the documents may be very specific, and (d) the information from the documents may be broad (Yin, 2014). The disadvantages of documentation include: (a) the researcher may find it difficult to retrieve the documents, (b) the documents reflect bias of the document’s author, (c) some documents may be incomplete, and (d) the participants or leaders of the organization may deliberately deny the researcher accessibility to vital documents (Yin, 2014). I employed possible tactics to enable me to acquire from the participants the documents that I needed for this study and, as much as possible, maximized the use of publicly available documents.

An advantage of digital audio recording of face-to-face interviews is that it offers the researcher the freedom to pursue additional issues of interest, without the distraction of note taking and makes it possible for the researcher to capture other statements that may not be obvious by just listening to the interviewee (Williams, 2015). Another advantage is that electronic recording provides a more accurate rendition of an interview than the researcher taking personal notes (Yin, 2014). The implication is that the researcher will have an accurate record and can always play back the recordings for reference.

The main disadvantages of semistructured interviews are the lack of standardization and the impact of the interviewer's bias over the subject area, which may reduce the generalizability and validity of the research (Bernard, 2013). The researcher is obliged to find ways of minimizing bias and ensure credibility of the research. Yin (2014) recommended that to reduce the likelihood of bias and to test for the researcher's tolerance, the researcher should report his or her preliminary findings while still in the data collection phase to two or three critical colleagues. I reported my preliminary findings to three colleagues as soon as I finished the interview process.

I used the interview protocol (Appendix A) to collect interview data from the participants. Researchers use an interview protocol to organize the inquiry, to ask questions for specific information that is in line with the aims of a study, and as an instrument for a conversation about a particular topic (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Before each interview, I documented the work environment, assessed possible interactions with other employees, and the resources available to the participant. I then introduced myself to the participant, and the participant introduced himself or herself to me. Before starting the interview, researchers are obliged to inform the interviewees a second time about what to expect, their rights and obligations, and to explain to them that they were still free to refuse to participate (Vermeulen, Kleefstra, Zijp, & Kool, 2017). I reminded the participants before starting the interview of their right to decline participation in the interview at any time and not to answer a question where he or she would feel uncomfortable. After the introductions and building rapport, and, subject to the participant’s approval, I informed the participant that I was starting to record the interview. I then switched on the electronic recording audio devices to start recording the interview.

I started to interview the participant following the interview protocol (Appendix A). The interview protocol consisted of profile and open-ended questions. During the interview, I listened attentively to the participant to avoid missing an opportunity to identify a follow-up question when appropriate. During the interview, if an interesting line of inquiry arose or if I needed further explanation on a particular issue, I asked unstructured questions with the objective of getting as much information as possible that contributed to addressing the research question.

I interviewed all participants using the same procedure, followed by member checking. Researchers use member checking as a validation technique to ensure that participants agree that the findings that the researchers construct, adequately represent the realities that participants reported and to ensure congruence with each participant's views (Ciemins, Brant, Kersten, Mullette, & Dickerson, 2015; Thomas, 2017). Researchers refer to the process of member checking during the interviews as transactional validity since member checking becomes part of the data collection process to enhance representational aspects of research validity (Thomas, 2017). As soon as I finished interviewing a participant, as part of member checking, I scheduled another meeting with the participant for cross-checking and validating my interpretations of the participant's answers to interview questions.

Data Organization Technique

I organized or classified the data into different themes. Researchers classify data to enhance the readability of data, to easily study the data characteristics, to strengthen data control, and to accord meaning to the data (Sahu, Sharma, Raj, Nagwani, & Verma, 2016; Taylor, Dowding, & Johnson, 2017; You, Li, & Zhu, 2017). I assigned different codes to identify the different themes. I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to maintain and store the codes and themes electronically. Researchers may use NVivo software to code and analyze data in qualitative research (Colombini, Mutemwa, Kivunaga, Moore, & Mayhew, 2014). I used Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to classify data themes, code, and analyze data.

I organized the themes into sections using a matrix-like structure used for pattern matching. Pattern matching is a technique that compares a pattern of findings from a case study with alternative predictions made before the researcher collects the data (Yin, 2014). Researchers acknowledge organizing data into sections with a matrix-like structure as a practical method for facilitating pattern matching of qualitative data (Findlay-Thompson & Mombourquette, 2014; Yin 2014). I used research logs to record field notes immediately after each interview. Research logs help the researcher to keep track of the research process and produce an artifact; researchers, also, use research logs for a wide variety of purposes, which include pedagogy, assessment, and the prevention of plagiarism (Fluk, 2015). I maintained and stored the research logs in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. I saved the data on multiple electronic devices and stored all records in a fireproof, locked safe that will keep for 5 years. After the 5-year period elapses, I will destroy all data.

Data Analysis

Once the researcher is through with collecting and validating the data, the next step is to analyze them. Data analysis involves organizing, examining, categorizing, and tabulating the data, with the aim of exposing ideas that answer the central research question (Burr, King, & Butt, 2014; Yin, 2014). Analyzing data from qualitative research means making sense of relevant data that the researcher gathered from different sources that include interviews, on-site observations, and documentation and then responsibly presenting the results (Paadi, 2014). Presenting results includes data display, drawing and verifying conclusions, and data deduction (Mayer, 2015). Data analysis takes place in two phases, primary and secondary. Primary data analysis involves identifying themes and patterns within each category found in the interview transcripts; that is using the data that the researcher directly collected (Schlomer & Copp, 2014). Secondary data analysis involves identifying, corroborating, contradicting emerging themes and patterns in the documents, and testing several combinations of tools and parameters (Bianchi et al., 2016). In the following paragraphs of this subsection, I discuss the methods and tools I used to analyze the data I collected for this study.

Researchers employ triangulation methods to carry out the data analysis. Braganza, Akesson, and Rothwell (2017) found a range of methods and strategies researchers use to achieve different types of triangulation. Wilson (2014) posited that triangulation is when a researcher uses more than one particular approach in a research to get richer and fuller data and or, to help confirm the results of the research. Fusch and Ness (2015) posited that triangulation is the way through which researchers explore different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon. There are different types of triangulation that a researcher may employ.

There are five types of triangulation, though most researchers only refer to the first four. The five triangulation types are: (a) data triangulation, (b) investigators triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, (d) methodological triangulation, and (e) philosophical triangulation, which was outside the scope of this study (Joslin & Müller, 2016). Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2018) stated that in data triangulation, researchers correlate data of the same event under different circumstances regarding people, time, and space. In investigators triangulation, researchers use more than one investigator in a study to engage in observations, interviews, coding, or analysis of participants' responses in exploring the phenomenon. In theory triangulation researchers provide multiple theoretical perspectives to the data set either in conducting the research or in interpreting the data (Fusch et al., 2018; Joslin & Müller, 2016). Methodological triangulation is in two approaches depending on the research method that the researcher employed.

In this subsection, I explain the two methodological triangulation approaches. Methodological triangulation may either be within-method or between or across-method (Fusch et al., 2018). Researchers use the within-method to triangulate data from multiple data collection methods, among which are, interviews, focus groups, observations, or documentation, in a qualitative case study or ethnography (Fusch et al., 2018; Joslin & Müller, 2016; Turner, Cardinal, & Burton, 2017). For the between or across-method triangulation researchers triangulate data from a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques in a mixed-methods study (Fusch et al., 2018; Joslin & Müller, 2016; Turner et al., 2017). Researchers use multiple sources of data to enhance confidence and reliability in the results of the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In this qualitative multiple case study, I employed the within-method methodological triangulation to analyze the data. Researchers should follow a systematic process to analyze data. The analysis process that the researcher may employ is in five steps: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting the meaning of, and (e) concluding the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2014). In the following paragraphs, I discuss how I employed each of these steps in triangulating and analyzing the data.

Compiling the data. The researcher should put the data he or she collected in a particular order to be able to analyze it well. The process of compiling is gathering and organizing the data that the researcher collected, that is retrieving and tallying specific words and terms from the researcher's notes to find meaningful answers to the research question (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2014). I transcribed all the recordings of participants' interviews and recorded the notes from observations, examinations, and review of the organizations' documentation, in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Disassembling data. After compiling the data, the next step is to disassemble the data. Disassembling entails a proper procedure of coding data, by the researcher moving methodically to a higher conceptual level of assigning codes to like words and terms (Yin, 2014). Themes emerge from keywords and patterns when researchers disassemble the data (Tuapawa, 2017). Color coding is a useful feature in helping to find patterns and relationships in the data, develop themes, and to highlight critical or to elevate results (Hogan, Perks, & Russell-Bennett, 2014; Saltan, 2016; Williams, Furberg, Bagwell, & LaBresh, 2016). Researchers may also use NVivo software to code both transcripts and audio files, as Nvivo helps the researcher to be more creative (Zamawe, 2015). I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and color coding to organize the data into categories, label each category into themes, and code them.

Reassembling data. From disassembling, the researcher reassembles the data. In the reassembling stage, researchers interpret the relationships among codes, their combinations, and conceptually higher patterns, identifying themes and patterns (Essary, 2014; Yin, 2014). The researcher requires a basic understanding of the nature and range of topics and themes within the data before he or she can begin to interpret them, that is, look for patterns, categories or explanations and relate them to a broader body of knowledge (Neale, 2016). The themes that emerge from the data should correlate to the study's propositions, conceptual framework, and the research question (Sangster-

Gormley, 2013). I analyzed the data to extract the themes that directly or indirectly helped me to answer the research question.

Interpreting the meaning of the data. Before a researcher presents his or her findings, he or she should interpret his or her findings. Wickham and Woods (2005) argued that during the qualitative research process the researcher should interpret, transform and categorize disparity in the data, demonstrate crucial relationships, and bring out theoretical conclusions. Researchers interpret data in a way that aligns with the method of the research study. Dillaway, Lysack, and Luborsky (2017) asserted that the qualitative approach to interpreting and analyzing data involves interpreting words, not numbers. I made interpretations and related them to the central research question, taking into consideration that all the themes should exhaustively help to answer the central research question. I analyzed and interpreted the data in line with the conceptual framework and ensured that the findings of the study correlated in providing successful strategies that SME managers may use to integrate KM into their business practices.

Concluding the data analysis. The researcher should conclude the data analysis. The conclusions should be consistent with the findings and, researchers may end the synthesis of the findings by suggesting a model or theory (Ngulube, 2015). The researcher should give clear-cut conclusions that he or she has drawn from his or her multifaceted analysis and yield results that are open for scrutiny into the researchers' decision making throughout the analysis process (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Nissanov, 2017). I drew from my findings and interpretations and suggested a model that managers of SMEs may use to come up with successful strategies that may help them to integrate KM into their business practices successfully.

Reliability and Validity

In qualitative research studies, the reliability concept is about dependability and auditability. The study is dependable if the researcher explains, step-by-step, the process of selecting, justifying, and applying research strategies, procedures, and methods; and an auditor can identify an audit trail to evaluate the effectiveness of the research study (Yilmaz, 2013). Qualitative researchers apply techniques to demonstrate that if another researcher repeats the study in the same context, methods, and participants will yield similar results (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Ritchie and Lewis (2013) posited that the researcher, while carrying out the study, should ensure that the study is robust by carrying out internal checks on the quality of the data, to interpret them, and to assure the reader or the enquirer of the research by providing information about the research process.

The validity concept is about credibility, trustworthiness, authenticity, transferability, and confirmability (Yilmaz, 2013). The researcher should keep on asking whether he or she is accurately reflecting the phenomena under study as the study population perceives it (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). I used member checking to validate the data. I synthesized the responses to the interview questions and asked each participant to check and validate my interpretation of the individual responses.

Reliability

I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) to interview all the participants in the study, asking each participant the same open-ended questions. Researchers may transcribe and analyze interviews using coding and thematic analysis (Crilly, Patel, Ogunrinde, Berko, & Kayyali, 2017). Researchers may then carry out member checking. Pandey and Patnaik (2014) pointed out that researchers may carry out member checking both formally and informally as opportunities for member checks may arise during the normal course of observation and conversation. After conducting the interviews, I immediately transcribed the audio responses into Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, then I reviewed, analyzed, and identified themes from each transcript to make meaning out of the responses. To ensure reliability, I carried out member checking with each participant. A researcher may also achieve dependability of the study when another researcher concurs with the decision trails at each stage of the research process (Cope, 2014). After carrying out the interviews, I immediately shared my findings with and received feedback from two colleagues to test the accuracy of the findings.

Validity

Researchers should ensure that the participants of the study agree with the findings. Credibility is about ensuring that the participants in the study found the results of the study true or credible (Forman, Remirez-DelToro, Brown, & Passmoreirez-DelToro, 2017; Yilmaz, 2013). Researchers may validate and critically assess the thoroughness of the information by detailing the description of in-depth data analysis, repeating review of the transcripts, and providing a process to achieve data saturation and breadth of understanding of the phenomenon (Cope, 2014). Researchers should also verify their findings before concluding the study. Forman et al. (2017) asserted that member checking is a well-established way to evaluate credibility. One of the strategies of increasing the credibility of research is triangulation (Hussein, 2009; Johnson et al., 2017). Data triangulation helps to strengthen the construct validity of the case study (Yin, 2014). I used member checking and triangulation to ensure the credibility of my findings.

Another check for the credibility of the study is transferability. The researcher achieves transferability if the findings of a qualitative study are transferable to similar settings (Yilmaz, 2013). It is the qualitative inquirer's role to provide thick descriptions of the study to enable future researchers determine its transferability (Anney, 2014). During the interviewing process, I gathered as much information as possible from the participants that enabled me to provide thick descriptions of the findings to enable future researchers to determine transferability.

Researchers should also consider confirmability. Researchers ensure confirmability if their findings relate well to the analysis of the data they collected and examined (Yilmaz, 2013). Through an auditing process, the auditor confirms that the study findings are grounded in the data and the inferences that the researcher based on are logical, have clarity, and high utility or explanatory power (Yimaz, 2013). Researchers may achieve confirmability of qualitative inquiry by using an audit trail, reflective journals, and triangulation (Anney, 2014). During the data collection process, I used reflective journals to ensure capturing all the necessary details before leaving a particular point of the interview and made use of research logs to maintain a chain of evidence for audit purposes. I also used data triangulation by using multiple sources of data which included: (a) interviews, (b) observations, (c) company websites, and (d) examining and reviewing available documents, while noting information relevant to my research study.

Researchers use data saturation in qualitative research to enhance the validity of the study. If the researcher does not reach data saturation, he or she will compromise the quality of the research, and this hampers content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A researcher would know the data saturation point when: (a) there is enough information to replicate the study, (b) the ability to obtain additional new information is not possible, and (c) further coding is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I reached data saturation when I obtained no new information from the data collected and when further coding was no longer feasible.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I discussed the purpose of the qualitative, multiple case study, which was to explore the strategies managers of SMEs use to integrate KM into their business practices successfully. I explained the decision to select the qualitative method and the case study design and discussed my role as a researcher and my relationships with the participants. I explained the importance of remaining ethical and avoiding bias while conducting the research study. I explained the criteria used to select participants and described the target population. The section includes the data collection instruments and the process I followed to collect, organize, and analyze data.

In Section 2, I ensured that my findings are dependable by using member checking of my data interpretation. I also addressed credibility, transferability, conformability and data saturation by use of reflective journals and data triangulation. In Section 3, I present the findings and a discussion about these subsections: (a) presentation of findings, (b) application to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, (e) recommendations for further research, (f) reflections, and (g) conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In Section 3, I discuss the results of the study, the study's application for professional practice, and its implications for social change. I also offer recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, reflections, and a conclusion. I derived my findings from semistructured interviews reflecting participants' perspectives on and experiences with successful strategies they employed to integrate KM into their business practices. I employed methodological triangulation and reviewed publicly available and internal documents of the participating SMEs to enhance credibility by utilizing data from multiple sources.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the successful strategies that SME managers in Uganda employ to integrate KM into their business practices. I used a qualitative method and an exploratory multiple case-study design with two sources of data for methodological triangulation: individual semistructured interviews and review of publicly available and internal documents of the two SMEs from which I recruited the participants.

I sent out invitations to 11 potential participants through email and followed up by making telephone calls. Five of the potential participants agreed to take part in the study. The data collection strategy was to collect interview responses from participants, transcribe the interviews, and review public and organizational internal documents to uncover patterns, themes, and rival explanations concerning the participants' KM practices. I coded the transcribed interviews and documentation evidence through the process of open coding, color coding, axial coding, categorization, and thematic analysis. The data analysis process ended when data saturation occurred. These themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews and documentation sources of evidence: (a) having supportive leadership, (b) ensuring sustainability, (c) embedding KM practices into organization culture, (d) socializing, and (e) embracing modern technology.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do some SME managers in Uganda use to effectively integrate KM into their business practices? I used a qualitative research method to explore and understand the managerial processes and procedures that some SME managers in Uganda employ to integrate KM into their business practices. I used an exploratory multiple case-study design to focus on individual cases and maintain a holistic and real-world perspective of these processes. I used semistructured interviews and archival documents that included customer warrant cards, stock register, local purchase orders, job cards, diaries, organization charts, financial audit reports, and management meeting minutes for methodological triangulation. I interviewed five managers from two SMEs located in central Kampala. I interviewed participants using ethical consideration and responsibility, and I adhered to *The Belmont Report* protocols (U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I followed an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to interview the participants.

I used theory z for the conceptual framework of this study. Theory z served as a model to help me understand the context of the research and as a lens during the data collection phase, which helped me stay focused on the research question. Using theory z, I was able to explore the strategies that some SME managers in Uganda employed to effectively integrate KM into business practices. I found theory z a suitable framework to understand the findings of this inquiry. I used Yin's (2014) five-step process consisting of (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding the data to analyze the responses of the interviewees, my field notes, and day-to-day operational forms that participants availed me.

Demographic Information

Both SMEs I used in this study had been in existence for more than 5 years, employed 10 or more employees, and had annual turnovers above UGX 100 million. The participants provided answers to the first three demographic questions addressing the job title, duties or responsibilities in the organization in which the participant was involved, the number of years of experience and in the current role, and their specific responsibilities. Three of the participants had never worked in any organization other than the organization they worked for when I interviewed them. The participants held leadership positions within their departments, and their years of experience ranged from 1 to 26 years. Table 1 below shows the details of each of the companies I used in this study, and Table 2 shows the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1.

Description of SMEs

Company	Years in existence	Annual turnover (UGX Billion)	No. of employees	Employees at managerial level
Company X	26	1.30	20	6
Company Y	6	0.12	12	5

Table 2.

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	Years in the company	Managerial experience (years)
N1	1-2	1-2
T2	6	2
B3	6	6
M4	26	26
F5	6	6

Triangulation

The triangulation process included responses from the interview questions, company's archived documents, information from company websites, and my observations at the company premises. The company's archived documents included audited accounts, job cards, organization charts, stock register, quotations, local purchase orders (LPOs), management meeting minutes, customers' diaries, and company websites. The information I observed on company websites included various products and services offered by the SMEs. My observations at the premises relevant to this study were the desktops, the laptops, photocopiers, filing cabinets and files, storeroom, equipment for sale on display, and other employees at the premises who were not participants in the study.

Findings and Collected Evidence

I identified five themes to answer the research question. I transcribed the interview responses to the open-ended questions in the interview protocol (see Appendix A) of each participant and uploaded these data to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. I triangulated the data from the interview responses with the data from the public and internal documents that participants provided to further support the participants' responses. By coding and employing the theory z lens and using color coding, I identified key phrases and grouped the keywords to form different categories or subthemes that emerged into the five main themes that emerged. Table 3 includes the main themes, subthemes, and codes that I used to describe the strategies that I identified as emergent that SMEs may use for the integration of KM into business practice. Table 4 includes the number of participants whose responses led a particular subtheme to emerge under each main theme.

Table 3.

Strategies for the Integration of KM into Business Practice

Theme	Subtheme	Codes
Supportive leadership	Communication	Communication
	Decision making	Decision making
	Monitoring & control	Follow-ups, monitoring
	Staff support	Staff/Employees
	Exemplary leader	Learn from my boss, motivated by the managing director (MD)
Ensuring sustainability	Training and learning	On job training, skills, knowledge, backup workforce, orientation, staff training, understanding competitors
	Quality	Quality professionals, quality work
	Motivating employees	Incentives, salary increment, job rotation, appraisals, shares, socializing, integrated welfare package, favorable working environment, work upgrading
	Routines	Documentation, recording, and reporting; meetings; replicating
Embed KM practices into organization culture	Knowledge discovery	Discover
	Acquisition, retention and protection	Documentation, recording, training and learning, file, keep, protect
	Dissemination and sharing	Sharing, transparency, timeliness, quick response, dissemination
	Teamwork	Teamwork
	Communication	Communication
	Commitment	Socialization
	Familyism	Family, Prayer
Socialization	Teamwork	Stand in for others, attending to individual challenges, participative decision making
	Networks	Networks, associations
	Familyism	Family
Embracing modern technology	The customer	Trust, customer base, satisfaction, retention
	Limit cost	Marketing, printing paper, transport
	Networking	WhatsApp, Facebook, company websites, local area network (LAN), laptops, desktops
	KM practices	Sharing, storage, protection,
	Marketing products and services	Company website, online marketing, WhatsApp, Facebook, Olx, Jumia

Table 4.

Number of Participants per Subtheme for each Main Theme

Main theme	Subtheme	Number of participants
Supportive leadership	Communication	3
	Decision making	3
	Monitoring & control	4
	Support employees	4
	Exemplary Leader	4
Ensuring sustainability	Training and learning	4
	Quality	3
	Motivating employees	4
	Routines	5
Embed KM practices into organization culture	Knowledge discovery	3
	Acquisition, retention and protection	4
	Dissemination and sharing	3
	Teamwork	3
	Communication	2
	Commitment	2
	Familyism	2
Socialization	Teamwork	3
	Social networks	3
	Familyism	2
Embracing modern technology	The customer	3
	Limit cost	2
	KM practices	4
	Marketing products and services	3
	Networking	2

Theme 1: Having Supportive Leadership

The first theme that emerged from data analysis was having supportive leadership. Within Theme 1, I identified five subthemes: communication, decision making, monitoring and control, supporting employees, and exemplary leader.

Communication. Communication emerged from the participants' responses as a factor that contributed to employees' commitment and proper KM practices in an organization. Participant T2 stated, “The good communication between management and the other workers of the company . . . motivate commitment.” To show that effective communication exists in the company, T2 stated,

> The technicians forward the information that they can't handle to me. The technicians have to talk to me personally. Customers complain through the technicians by calling [making telephone calls], the technicians record them [the complaints] and forward them to me by use of e-mails. Sometimes they come and directly talk to me. When they tell me I record in the customer complainants’ book. When I can’t handle I forward an e-mail to my boss.

Participant B3 stated,

> We communicate by making use of modern technology, we minimize paperwork, and we maximize the use of the cyberspace, WhatsApp, e-mail communication, making use of phones, and sending audio. WhatsApp helps us to keep track of all the communication we do. There is constant training and communication, and discovery and sharing your discovery.

Participant M4 stated,

> Communication is part of our culture. We use a two-way communication system from downwards to upwards and from upwards to downwards, that is vertical communication; then, the peer-to-peer or manager-to-manager communication, that is horizontal communication.

The participants’ responses indicated that communication made a contribution to sharing and discovering knowledge, motivating employees’ commitment to perform, and, in some companies, becoming part of the company culture.

Decision making. From the participants’ responses, participative decision making emerged as one of the factors that motivated employees to perform. Participant F5 explained that as one of the strategies to integrate KM into business practice, management involves staff in decision making. F5 stated,

> We work as a team. There is involvement in decision making since we are working as a team, everyone is involved. Negotiating how something is to be done. I have my way of working and another person has a different view, then we have to negotiate the way forward.

M4 indicated that employees were involved in making decisions through departments and holding meetings. M4 stated,

> In our business, we have four types of works: sales, technicians, shearing and bending, and welders. We get in touch with the different managers of the different departments. In sales, we have the sales manager, workshop manager, head of the technicians. We hold quarterly meetings for all staff. We hold monthly meetings for the managers.

I reviewed the organization chart, and the positions that M4 cited appeared on the chart. The minutes I reviewed that T2 provided me also indicated participative decision making. From the minutes, I noted that members gave priority to the informed position, decisions, and planning on the weekly report agenda.

Monitoring and control. Regular monitoring featured as one of the ways managers ensure that employees adhere to KM practices. Participant T2 mobilized, supervised, and supported the technicians to accomplish their work through weekly meetings and regular monitoring. Participant B3 monitored staff members to ensure that they played their roles, adding that managers made telephone calls and used emails to supervise their subordinates. B3 added that managers held regular meetings to share updates on everyone's progress. B3 further explained that customers also gave feedback through telephone calls and, based on these telephone calls, staff followed up with customers and maintained a record of these customers. B3 stated,

> Use (of) websites is our strength, sit in one place, customer comes in, we do follow-ups [follow-up customers]; we make use of websites. We make the customer happy and give warrant to our customers. Customers give us feedback through calls, and we make follow-ups [and] keep a record of customers.

Participant N1 explained that the main strategies the company used for monitoring and controlling are record keeping and stock taking. N1 maintained a diary for potential customers and job cards for customers with complaints or problems about the equipment they purchased or equipment that needed repair. N1 provided me a copy of a diary sheet for potential customers. N1 further explained that management monitors sales through a record of LPOs and receipts, and monitors potential customers through the records in the diary and copies of the quotations on file. I reviewed the diary and received soft copies of samples of the LPOs and quotations. N1 stated,

> There is a job card, and a diary to record the customers who may call.
>
> The job card is used to record the required repairs as informed by customers. This job card is also used to calculate the price for the job. He [the marketer] gives me information of the customers he has contacted, and I record it in a diary. In the job card, I only record and forward it to my boss who calculates the prices. I receive the money; we maintain receipts, we maintain stock records, [and] there is a stock book.

Participant M4 showed that IT made monitoring and controlling easier since M4 was able to direct subordinates from anywhere. M4 stated,

> In this era, it is very important you have to use the information technology; it has helped us [managers] to ease our work that wherever you are you can direct somebody to do work. We have a LAN system in place so that we are able to communicate from time to time through e-mail.

Through monitoring and control, the participants kept in touch with their subordinates, supported them whenever a need arose, and kept in touch with and made the customers happy.

Supporting employees. Basing on the participants' responses, employees do their best if the leaders are always there to understand and support them. Participant B3 posited that managing staff well and ensuring that employees fit into the company's digitalized way of work or system was part of management's KM strategy to help in ensuring low staff turnover and enabling the company to retain employees that are already knowledgeable to continue supporting the existence of the business. B3 stated, “the turnover is low, whoever comes in does not want to leave. There are contracts and employees go by the terms.”

Conversely, participant M4 stated that upgrading the works of individual employees from time to time kept employees motivated to continue serving the company. M4 stated, “another strategy is upgrading the works [of employees] from time to time. Attending to the challenges of the employees brings them together. If you do not use, that strategy employees will be leaving [the company].”

Participant F5 stated, “I can do practical work, and I can do marketing. The top management sits and assesses one's qualities and then assigns you what you can do best. They [top management] appraise you. You are motivated.” Participant N1 showed that the boss was supportive throughout N1’s work. N1 stated, “I was oriented by my boss, [and] my boss is planning to teach me how to enter receipts in the computer system.” The implication is that leaders of organizations should treasure the employees they have by supporting them to remain motivated leading a low staff-turnover in the company.

Exemplary leader. From the findings of this study, leaders of organizations should be exemplary in what they do, as exemplary leaders impact the people they lead. The leaders of the companies exhibited commitment in their work, and this motivated their managers to perform. Participant F5 stated, “the MD is my number one motivator. Looking at him having run the company alone for 26 years I feel that now we are many then I feel I should make a contribution.” F5 indicated that good leadership kept subordinates motivated to contribute to the growth of the company. T2 stated, “learning is my main motivation, I learn a lot from my boss that I can also use [the learning] in future to start my own company." Participant T2 indicated that the leadership in place should enable subordinates to learn from the leader. In support of subordinates learning from the leader, M4 stated, "if you keep the knowledge to yourself you [the company] cannot move. Like I am a marketer, and I have the technical knowledge as well."

Participant B3 showed that the leader should be available for all. B3 stated, "I pop my nose in everything. I do not even have a permanent place, I sit with them [the employees]. You can't supervise what you don't know, must have basic knowledge in everything." The implication here is that managers should work with their subordinates to give them timely support.

I found that the leaders of the organizations were in touch with the employees through good communication and leading by example. I found that leaders of the companies involved their employees in decision making to motivate them to perform effectively. Leaders also supported their subordinates to carryout work and ensured that they fit well into the working environment. Leaders also made changes in the work that each individual performs when they found it necessary. SME leaders remained in control through monitoring, holding regular meetings, and checking on work progress.

Correlation to the literature. The findings noted in Theme 1 aligned with other researchers' findings. Employees do the work as directed by the leaders in an organization and SME leaders should focus on promoting a favorable working environment for KWs (Malarvizhi et al., 2016). From the findings of Johansson, Miller, and Hamrin (2014), communication and decision making go hand in hand. A communicative leader engages employees in dialogue, actively shares and seeks feedback, practices participative decision making, and is perceived as open and involved (Johansson et al., 2014). Involvement in decision making is one of the ways that would show a democratic leadership. Malarvizhi et al. (2016) posited that one of the things SME leaders should focus on is practicing democratic leadership. Leadership is the key factor in determining the successful implementation of knowledge retention among SMEs (Anbary & Nguyen, 2017). Decision making is one of the cultural dimensions that have high significance on work quality (Khouly & Fadl, 2016). Leaders also take on participative decision making as a way of motivating employees to perform (Fang, Li, & Li, 2015). The implication is that a communicative leader involves subordinates in decision making leading to subordinates to feel involved and supported.

Monitoring and controlling were in line with the findings of other research studies. Castrogiovanni et al. (2016) posited that leaders should align leadership style and KM by laying strategies and establishing processes through which they may capture, record, and spread knowledge. If employees accept the control and monitoring behavior of their supervisors, employees can form high-quality relationships with supervisors, which can, in turn, translate into greater productivity and mutual trust (Romeike, Wohlers, Hertel, & Schewe, 2016). Leaders carrying out the monitoring and control activity should ensure that employees accept and understand the essence for that activity.

Supporting employees goes hand in hand with creating a favorable working environment for them. Malarvizhi et al. (2016) established that to improve the ability to adapt to and survive the changes in the competitive business environment, SMEs' leaders should focus on promoting a favorable environment for KWs. Richter et al. (2016) found that supporting employees and managers serving as role models themselves are some of the several manager activities and behaviors that influence implementation. The implication here that relates to the findings of this study is that leaders of organizations should support their employees to perform but at the same time, themselves as managers should lead by example.

Correlation to the conceptual framework. Theme 1 correlates with Aithal and Kumar's (2016) claim that the managing style that theory z theorists promote emphasizes consensual decision making. Ogbu and Oaya (2017) also established that one of the features of theory z was shared-control and decision making. Theory z-type companies commit to participative decision making to recognize individual and group needs and simultaneously develop exceptional quality control techniques and scientific work methods (Aithal & Kumar, 2016; Indabawa & Uba, 2014). Leaders should have mixed leadership qualities that enable them to control and support the performance of their employees.

From the literature, Aithal and Kumar (2016) showed that leaders of theory z-type companies combine human relations concepts with scientific management techniques. From the findings of this study, SMEs' leaders showed the human relations concept by being supportive to the employees as they did their work, involving employees in decision making, and being exemplary leaders. SMEs' leaders displayed scientific management techniques through monitoring and controlling, and good communication.

Theme 2: Ensuring Sustainability

The second theme that emerged from this study was ensuring sustainability. I found that to sustain KM in business practices, managers were keen on (a) training and learning, (b) quality, (c) motivating employees, and (d) routines. In the paragraphs that follow, I present the details that support these findings.

Training and learning. During the interviews, training and learning often emerged from all participants in a number of ways. Participants N1, B3, M4, and F5 indicated that certain aspects of training are continuous and the aspects include: (a) on the job training, (b) skills and knowledge dissemination, (c) training backup workforce, (d) orientation, (e) organized staff training, and (f) studying and understanding competitors. Participant N1 indicated that bosses oriented new staff members to learn by reviewing the documentation they find in place that was maintained by their predecessors. Participant N1 stated, “I was oriented by my boss. I found a log book in place the previous job holder was using, and I would get the pricing from that book.” Training and learning, as N1 indicated, may take place by managers orienting their subordinates and by the subordinated being keen in using the documentation in place to learn on job.

Participant B3 pointed out that constant training on the job was key for all staff, particularly in the marketing department. B3 also indicated that management organized short training for staff, from time to time and whenever management identified gaps or something new to learn. Participant M4’s emphasis was about passing on skills and knowledge to the rest of the staff. M4 stated, “myself, I am a marketer I disseminate my skills down to the rest of the staff, if you do not have enough knowledge or skills then the business fails.” Participant F5, emphasized identifying new knowledge from the people joining the company, learning, capturing, and sharing anything new they bring on board. F5 stated,

> I engage with the new person, work with that person, and keep on asking; then I go back and type what I have learned and file it; I also share with others [other employees] concerned including the person from whom I have learned.

F5 also indicated that there was continuous training of a backup workforce. F5 explained that two people work with a lead person, in case the lead person leaves the company, work would continue without much interruption. I note that if leaders provide for a backup workforce, they would indirectly encourage managers and other employees to share their knowledge and skills with their colleagues. Then training and learning would be part of the day-to-day activities within the company.

Participants B3 and F5 indicated that understanding their competitors and learning from them was also key to the progress of their businesses. Participant B3 stated, ”we spent a lot of resources discovering the weaknesses and strengths [of our competitors]. We did a SWOT [strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats] analysis of our competitors.” Participant F5 explained that what gave the company an edge over its competitors was that most of its competitors feared to formalize their businesses. F5 stated, “some business leaders fear to formalize, and this is where we beat our competitors in getting formal contracts from government bodies, international organizations, and private entities who prefer to engage with only formalized companies." The lesson is that leaders of organizations, not to miss out on business opportunities, need to endeavor to formalize their organizations.

F5 added that the company was challenged with staff who left the company and joined the competitors. F5 elaborated that in such cases the company would inform the public about such employees that they were no longer representing the company. F5 added that staff who left the company and joined other fields, the company continued to use them on a part-time basis, whenever there was a need.

Quality. I found that managers were mindful of the quality of professionals they took on board and of knowledge that they documented. Participant B3 explained that they quantified each activity and weighed the value addition and whatever activity that SME managers could not quantify was work not done. Participant F5's focus was on the quality of a new employee joining the company. F5 pointed out that it was the company's policy to interview any new person coming on board and to find out the value the new employee would add to the company. Participant T2 indicated that a new person coming on board had to qualify as a technical person to take up the position of a technical manager. Both F5 and T2's focus was on the quality of professionals that join the company. T2 stated, "the technical manager will be enlightened by the technicians, and it is expected that the new person would be a technical person, hence should qualify as a technical manager." Both F5 and T2's focus was on the quality of professionals that join the company.

F5 stated, "a new person is interviewed [by management] and asked what one [he or she] is going to add to the company. Then we focus on that new knowledge and document it.” The indication here was that quality starts right from the point of recruitment.

Motivating employees. I found that management motivated employees to perform by providing (a) incentives and rewards, (b) salary increments, (c) involvement in decision making (d) favorable working environment, and (e) work upgrades. Participant T2 and F5 concurred that one of their motivators to perform well was to get an increase on their salary. I found that the salary increases were incentives in the form of commission or bonus and salary increments. F5 stated, “you need to have something in the pocket. They [top management] give commission, there is an integrated package, like getting a driving permit, health insurance, and passport.” F5 further explained that employees received commission based on individual achievement. Each employee, spouse, and the employee’s two biological children were given health insurance. The good leadership and learning environment that existed in the places of work motivated T2 and T5 to perform. T2 stated,

> Motivation is through increments in salary; I make recommendations to my boss. Learning is my main motivator; I learn a lot from my boss that I can also use in future to start my own company. There is good communication between me and the workers of the company, respect for one another, good relationship and harmony.

Another motivation was the involvement in decision making. F5 pointed out that to make decisions, management involved every employee concerned with what was to be decided upon and negotiated with the employees on the way forward. Participant B3 explained that employees receive a minimum basic salary and get much more in the form of bonuses as a reward for added value to the business. Participant M4 explained that management motivates employees through regular work upgrades that, if an employee does the same thing without upgrades, the performance of the employee might deteriorate and the employee might leave the company. M4 added, “we help the employees to upgrade from time to time, they are trained from time to time.” The indication is that leaders of organizations should put systems in place that may foster the process of upgrading employees’ responsibilities and provide training opportunities as a way of maintaining the employees’ motivation. F5 pointed out that another way managers motivate employees was by availing opportunities to employees to socialize by holding staff parties. I found that to maintain a low staff turnover, leaders of organizations need to motivate their employees continuously.

Routines. I found that managers carried out some routines that helped to sustain the KM practices. Participants N1, T2, F5, and B3 implied that the work practices that supported the routine subprocess included (a) documenting, (b) recording, (c) reporting, (d) meeting, and (e) replicating. Participants N1, T2, F5, and M4 indicated that these activities and processes were done and maintained repeatedly as routines in their companies.

Participant N1 mentioned some of the routines they carry out in the company are (a) monthly stock taking, (b) recording customers in a diary who were expected to contact the company by telephone or to physically come to the office, (c) using a job card to record repairs that customers require, and (d) writing receipts whenever the company receives money. Participant T2 stated,

> The quotation is written by the sales manager. The sales manager also decides the price category where it falls. I maintain a copy of the quotation; I send the other copy to the customer. When the customers get the quotations, they send LPOs. LPOs come directly to me. The technician comes and takes the equipment to the customer. The sales manager approves the supplies based on the LOP.

Participant F5 explained that some of the routines departmental staff carry out include preparation of (a) daily, (b) weekly, and (c) annual reports. Participant M4 pointed out that the company engaged external auditors to audit the company accounts annually. M4 gave me a copy of the last audited accounts of the company.

I found that meetings are part of the routines. M4 explained that regular meetings helped managers to disseminate information. M4 stated, “we hold quarterly meetings for all staff; we hold monthly meetings for the managers; we also have impromptu meetings.” Participant B3 focused on replication and explained that leaders of the company value timeliness and consistency of good things and, hence, the management team keeps on replicating the good things it discovers. B3 stated, “we do things on time and keep the consistency of the good things, and we replicate these good things from time to time.” As one of the strategies for sharing and retaining knowledge, B3 further stated, “we ensure that it [the good thing discovered] is documented, keep revisiting and doing it all the time, repetition makes improvements.” As an example of the good practices, B3 further indicated that online marketing and research helped the company to increase the customer base and the absolute number of customers.

Four subthemes emerged within Theme 2. SME managers carried out training and learning in different forms, frequently, and continuously. I also found that leaders were mindful of the quality of employees they hire and of the work employees produce. I found that leaders motivated employees to perform well by offering incentives and involving employees in decision making. Another finding was that leaders ensured that they maintained the activities and processes that supported KM practices as routines.

Correlation to the literature. I found that leaders were mindful of the quality of the outcome from an activity. Some of the findings aligned with Bharati and Zhang's (2015) findings that volume alone was not enough to ensure the success of KM, but rather the quality of knowledge. I also found that SMEs leaders were concerned about the quality of employees they recruited for their companies. As earlier indicated, quality KM workers employ quality KM practices (Zhang et al., 2014). The implication was that to sustain quality in the organization, leaders of organizations need to start by recruiting QPs. The action of management involving employees in making decisions aligned with what Fang et al. (2015) found in that managers can motivate employees to perform by emphasizing participative decision making and treating employees as family members. Lin (2014) asserted that extrinsic rewards would attract less attention and the focus of KM implementation will shift to other intrinsic motivators that include openness in communication and a sharing culture. Participative decision making featured in this study; it is an intrinsic motivator.

I found that training, quality, motivation, and routines were the factors that contributed to the sustainability of KM practices. From the literature, Spangler et al. (2014) established that the two goals that managers should pursue to ensure sustainable business management are better integration and better leverage of sustainability to create value. Abu Baker and Yosof (2016) found that knowledge played a vital role in the challenging business environment and contributed to sustaining business performance. Abu Baker and Yosof further found that knowledge is a crucial resource that managers of organizations need to manage well to help their organizations achieve growth performance. I found that to sustain both tacit and explicit knowledge, the leaders of the companies promoted continuous training and learning and were also mindful of the quality of knowledge that they acquired and the quality of KWs that they brought on board.

I also found that leaders of the companies did their best to keep the employees motivated to perform. Ismail (2014) asserted that if management looks out for employee wellbeing, employees feel motivated to perform well and organizations may trust workers to do their jobs to their utmost ability. The indication is that leaders realized that employees were part of the KM system and had to keep the employees motivated to sustain the KM systems and processes.

I found that leaders of companies sustained the routines that they found supportive to KM. Carayannis, Grigoroudis, Del Giudice, Della Peruta, and Sindakis (2017) posited that knowledge and intelligence acquisition routines leverage opportunity and value creation, exploration, and discovery competencies. One of the subprocesses that Alwneh and Aouf (2017) established that focuses on knowledge conversion through the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge is the routine subprocess. By applying the routine subprocess, managers utilize the knowledge embedded in procedures, rules, and norms that guide future behavior using work practices as mechanism and management information systems as a technology (Alwneh & Aouf, 2017). I found that continuous training, documenting, monitoring and controlling, reporting, and replicating are some of the routines that managers sustained to ensure that KM is integrated into business practices.

Correlation to the conceptual framework. Theme 2 aligned with the conceptual framework considering that under theory z, the emphasis for sustainability is on trusting employees. Organizations trust workers to do their jobs to their utmost ability and managers look out for employee wellbeing, which serves as motivation to the employees (Ismail, 2014). One of the features of theory z is skills training (Ogbu & Oaya, 2017). I found that continuous training and learning of employees to acquire new skills was crucial to sustain the practices of KM.

I found that the factors that motivated employees included incentives and rewards, in the form of commission and bonus, and involvement in decision making. Ouchi (1981) established that employee motivation factors include (a) incentives and rewards, (b) recognition, (c) organizational value, (d) team building, (e) involvement in decision making, and (f) time management. The findings from this study did not bring out team building and time management. Ho, Mohd Hashim, and Mohd Idris (2015) posited that theory z organizations should instil some degree of discipline in the form of procedures and work instructions and develop self-discipline and self-confidence. Ouchi refined McGregor's (1960) theory and found that self-discipline was important for organizational success. I found that the routines that the SMEs leaders sustained were meeting, documenting, recording, and replicating. The implication is that leaders of organizations should develop self-discipline to be able to sustain the various routines necessary to contribute towards KM implementation.

Theme 3: Embed Knowledge Management Practices in the Organizational Culture

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis was embedding KM practices in the organizational culture. The practices that emerged were (a) knowledge discovery; (b) acquisition, retention and protection; and (c) dissemination and sharing. Also, subthemes, that supported the KM practices, emerged as (a) communication, (b) teamwork, (c) commitment, and (d) familyism. In the following paragraphs are the details that support these findings.

Knowledge discovery. From the study, knowledge discovery emerged as one of the KM practices that helped leaders perform well. Participant B3 showed that consistently carrying out good practices and repeating them, as needed, helped in discovering knowledge. B3 explained that replicating the good practices and discovering new ways of working, was part of the company culture. B3 further added that with constant training and communication, knowledge discovery became part of their day to day accomplishment. I found from B3 that management strived to discover new knowledge from the new staff to create a learning environment. B3 stated, "training is key. Constant training, short, small trainings for myself and the people I work with, especially in marketing. I keep getting informed all the time." The implication from B3's statement is that, through training, management discovers new knowledge that can take the company forward.

F5 discovered new knowledge through engaging new staff that joined the company. F5 stated,

> A new person is interviewed and asked what one is going to add to the company. Then we [the managers] focus on that new knowledge and document it. We are all at the same level in the company as far as working is concerned. Engage with the new person work with that person and keep on asking, then I go back and type what I have learned and file it. I also share with others concerned including the person from whom I have learned.

M4, like F5, considered discovering new knowledge from new employees, even though some employees might find it hard to share their knowledge. M4 stated,

> It is a little bit funny; you find that there are some people who would not like to share because they use it as an edge over the others. Therefore, we encourage employees to share what they have because they also find us sharing, sweet talk to them. We use the strategy of an award, giving incentives, normally we give an incentive, and we are in the process of developing an award scheme.

Motivating employees to share what they know with their colleagues by giving incentives and leading by example was a key theme that emerged from this study. Managers motivated employees to share skills and knowledge with their colleagues by organizing internal trainings. Managers also motivated old employees to orient new employees in various aspects.

Acquisition, retention, and protection. Participants T2, B3, M4, and F5 carried out documenting, recording, filing, and continuous training and learning with ease, an indication that such practices were already part of the culture of the companies that participated in this study. Participant M4 stated, “by virtue of our work [we] normally have information written down and we have a file for such new information which can be used for [in the] future.” Participant B3 pointed out that the company was already in the culture of training and learning and that it was mandatory for everyone to keep documenting and sharing any new aspects learned or anything new that came on board. B3 stated, “we ensure that it [new aspect learned] is documented, keep revisiting and doing it all the time, repetition makes improvements, documentation, repetition of the good systems.” The indication here is that managers valued learning from what they do and constantly documented lessons learned for future reference.

Participant T2 maintained a record of customer complaints and challenges about any equipment that customers purchased. T2 stated,

> The technicians forward the information that they can't handle to me. The technicians have to talk to me personally. Customers complain through the technicians by calling, the technicians record them and forward them to me by use of e-mails. Sometimes they [the technicians] come and directly talk to me and record them in the customer complaints book. When they tell me, I record in the customer complainants’ book. When I can’t handle, I forward an e-mail to my

> boss. Based on the information I get from the customer if it needs to be billed or purchased the salesperson writes the quotation. By referring to the record of complaints and challenges book.

The implication was that, in the future, if customers report similar complaints, the record would be handy to be referred to by technical staff to attend to such similar complaints. Participant F5 emphasized that training and learning was a core value of the company. The company employed some family members as well. F5 stated, “these [family members] are put behind the knowledgeable persons to ensure that they learn how things are done.” The implication is that professional employees help family members to acquire knowledge and skills in various aspects of running the company.

F5 also used modern technology as support to acquire, share, retain, and protect knowledge. F5 used e-mail or WhatsApp to share information and documents, Dropbox or iCloud to save documents, passwords to protect or limit access to important information, and filed hard copies of any important information or documents as a backup. F5 kept all important information in cyberspace to ensure that there is no loss of such important information or documents and to enable accessibility of that information from anywhere and at any time. The use of modern technology emerged as a tool that helped managers in the process of acquisition, retention, and protection of knowledge.

Dissemination and sharing. There was a similarity between the findings for this category and those under acquisition, retention, and protection category. Training, learning, and mandatory documentation also emerged in this category. The new practices that emerged were role sharing, segregation of duties, and transparency. Participant T2 emphasized the role of sharing among employees. T2 stated,

> The quotation is written by the sales manager. The sales manager also decides the price category where it falls. I maintain a copy of the quotation; I send the other copy to the customer. When the customers get the quotations, they send the LPOs. LPOs come directly to me. The sales manager approves the supplies based on the LOP. The technician delivers the equipment.

Participant M4 focused on sharing tacit knowledge, pointing out that, if employees were stingy with knowledge, the company would fail to perform. M4 stated, “therefore, we encourage employees to share what they have because they also find us sharing, sweet talk to them.” Participant B3, on the other hand, showed that the system of operation in place did not enable a person to be stingy. B3 stated, “[when] we identify a knowledgeable person, we ensure that you [the knowledgeable person] train everyone as we also train you. You must train us; you cannot afford to be stingy with what you know.” I found that managers motivate new employees to share knowledge by themselves setting an example of sharing their knowledge with the new employees through orientation programs.

Supporting factors. I found that familyism, commitment, teamwork, and communication were factors that supported KM practices to take root in the companies that participated in this study. Under familyism, Participant F5 mentioned that leaders of the company treated them as a family. F5 added, “we treat ourselves as a family and even a new person will be treated the same way.” Participant M4 pointed out that once a week, as a company, employees held joint prayers to foster togetherness and trust. M4 stated, "[Prayers are in line with our culture;] normally culture is developed. [Employees hold] prayers on every, one day of the week. Prayer is part of our [company] culture." Joint prayers is a practice that managers may promote to keep all employees in the company as a family.

Under commitment, I found that employees were committed to making customers happy and managers supported employees to retain commitment. Participant B3 stated, "we are committed to making our customers happy. There is trust by customers, and they get satisfied. We share information, make follow-ups, carry out [employee] appraisals, and pay according to the satisfaction of the customers." Participant M4 indicated that without supporting employees, the company loses employee commitment and employees might leave the company. M4 elaborated,

> You have to show that you are with them [the employees]. Another strategy is upgrading the works [what they do] from time to time. Attending [as a manager] to the challenges of the employees bring them together. Showing them that we are moving together.

I found that commitment had two purposes: leaders are committed to satisfying the customers and ensuring that employees remain committed to serving the organization. If customers are happy with the services they receive from the company, customers will keep coming back and will recommend other people to the company. If employees are committed to serving the company then the staff turnover will be low, leading to the sustainability of good practices within the company.

The third factor that emerged was teamwork. I found that the performance of managers and their subordinates relied on teamwork. Participant F5 stated, “we work as a team, involvement, decision making, since we are working as a team, everyone is involved.” F5 further mentioned, “there is a WhatsApp group which we use to share new issues that are to take the company forward.” M4 emphasized employees worked as a team and that teamwork identified the company. B3 stated, “we work as a team. We are employees without boundaries. Having knowledge of everything each employee does, for example attending to sales when the salesperson is not available.” The implication here is that teamwork helps managers to minimize levels amongst employees and each employee, whether on managerial level or otherwise, can stand in for another employee when need arises.

The last factor was communication. I found that good communication between employees motivated employees to disseminate and share knowledge. Participant M4 stated, “communication is part of our culture. We use a two-way communication system from downwards to upwards and from upwards to downwards, that is vertical communication; then the peer-to-peer or manager-to-manager communication, that is horizontal communication.” I found that such communication helped to managers to promptly attend to challenges that employees may encounter.

Participant T2 stated, “there is good communication between me and the workers of the company, respect for one another, and good relationship and harmony.” The indication is that managers promoted communication at the different levels within the companies to enhance a good working relationship among the employees. Good working relationship would help employees to trust and support one another.

I also found that leaders of organizations might decide to decentralize the dissemination process. Participant M4 pointed out that dissemination of information sometimes took place through departmental managers. M4 elaborated,

> I get in touch with the different managers of the different departments. In sales, we have the sales manager, [then,] workshop manager, [and] head of the technicians. That is how we disseminate the information, depending on the roles of each individual, through the managers.

I found that some managers focused on more than one factor to support the KM practices. Participant B3's focus was towards teamwork and commitment, and Participant F5's focus was towards teamwork and communication. Participant M4 focused on all the four factors: teamwork, commitment, familyism, and communication.

Correlation to literature. The findings I noted under Theme 3 aligned with various findings from other studies. Mohapatra et al. (2016) found that the more an organization embeds KM in its culture, practices, and processes, the more successful it will be in implementing the KM strategies. In line with Theme 3, Al Saifi (2015) found that organizational leaders can plan strategically and make informed decisions on the type of KM initiatives they would prefer that match their specific type of organizational culture. In line with the supporting factors, El Khourly and Fadl (2016) found that commitment was one of the cultural dimensions that has high significance on work quality. Organizational managers should take care of the human factor and increase their commitment within organizations to take advantage of the knowledge within them (Obeidat & Abdallah, 2014). I found that leaders of the companies motivated employees to ensure that the employees remained committed to performing to their best.

Leaders valued treating their employees as family members to motivate them to remain in the company for a long period. Familyism builds trust among employees, which would influence the sharing of knowledge internally (Benton & Magnier-Watanabe, 2014). I found that familyism helped leaders of the companies to maintain a low staff turnover. About communication, Lin (2014) asserted that extrinsic rewards would attract less attention and the focus of KM implementation will shift to other intrinsic motivations that include openness in communication and a sharing culture. Leaders of companies employed participative decision making and openness in communication to motivate employees to carry out the assigned duties with commitment. Ogbu and Oaya (2017) found that organizational culture can foster commitment to the organization's philosophy and values. Karami et al. (2015) established that if leaders of organizations develop opportunities for teamwork, they would be able to motivate their employees to create and share knowledge. Leaders promoted teamwork in their companies to the extent that there were no differences in levels between the employees and the managers when carrying out duties in the company or attending to customers.

Correlation to the conceptual framework. The findings under Theme 3 match the conceptual framework concepts. Benton and Magnier-Watanabe (2014) basing on theory z found that the sharing of knowledge internally, partly due to long-term employment practices and common cultural values that organizations develop through long-term employment, was likely to promote greater organizational commitment among employees. Theory z relates to the way the organizational culture affects the entire organization regarding management and organizational behavior (Deem et al., 2015; Ogbu & Oaya, 2017). I found that SME managers took on KM practices as part of the daily routines of their companies and, in return, the process helped the employees to show commitment to their duties. The application of theory z leads to the promotion of high productivity, partnership, trust, and teamwork (Jankurová et al., 2017; Pascale & Athos, 1981). By applying supportive factors of familyism, commitment, teamwork, and communication, leaders held trust and togetherness among employees, and achieved the set goals as a team.

Theme 4: Socialization

Another theme that emerged from data analysis was socialization. Within the socialization theme, I identified three subthemes from conducting semistructured interviews with the five participants. The three subthemes included teamwork, social networks, and familyism. I found that teamwork and familyism crosscut between Theme 3 and Theme 4. Teamwork and familyism emerged as supporting elements under Theme 3 and as core aspects of Theme 4. In the following paragraphs, I present the details that support these findings.

Teamwork. The codes that emerged under teamwork included participative decision making and supporting and standing in for one another. T2 stated that every Monday the management team and their subordinates held meetings where they made decisions that affected the company and agreed on how to proceed to enact changes. A copy of minutes that T2 availed me supported T2’s statement of holding meetings and making decisions. Participant F5 explained that the management team involved employees in decision making and negotiated with employees the way forward. F5 stated, “[management] negotiating [with employees] how something is to be done [is the practice in the company]. I have my way of working, and another person has a different view then we have to negotiate the way forward.” F5 further stated, “we are all at the same level in the company as far as working is concerned.” I observed at one of the companies that there was no special place for the leader of the company, as the leader of the company shared an office and a table with other employees.

The leader of the company sitting with the rest of the employees fosters togetherness and helps managers to respond to employees’ challenges promptly. M4 showed that working as a team helped managers to attend to the challenges each employee or department might face. M4 stated, “attending to the challenges of the employees brings them together. Showing them that we are moving together, and even when the earning is little, we go on increasing their salaries little by little.” The implication is that through teamwork, managers promoted togetherness and harmony among the employees.

Social networks. Managers and their subordinates used social media enterprises as one of the ESNS paths to integrate KM into their business practices. Participant F5 explained that employees socialized through a WhatsApp group that the employees created to (a) share challenges and help one another to solve any problems that might arise, (b) develop new and innovative ideas that may take the company forward, and (c) receive encouragement to look ahead. Participant B3 posited that WhatsApp helped managers to keep track of all communication that went on the WhatsApp group and were able to act on issues that needed attention promptly. Participant M4 stated, "we also use Facebook. Facebook has also helped us a lot. Many people communicate to us through Facebook. It has done a lot for us." Through social networks managers are able to keep track of any kind of discussions that go on among the employees, learn their concerns, and address them promptly. Social networks help managers to keep in touch with people outside the company, get feedback, and obtain new ideas that may help managers to serve their clients better.

Participants M4 and B3 participated in external networks as a way of enriching the knowledge in their field of operation and tapping opportunities that may exist outside the individual companies. M4 elaborated,

> We registered with UNCC [Uganda National Chamber of Commerce], UMA [Uganda Manufacturers Association], UNSTA [Uganda National Scales and Technicians Association]. We are registered through paying subscription, and we are members there. Being registered exposes us to new clients and new information. There are those [networks] that organize trips for us. We also network, and we carry out joint ventures. It [networking] also helps us to fight for our rights. We are also registered by KACITA [Kampala City Traders Association]. Like for KACITA as business people, we fight for our rights. UMA helps us in producing quality products. We manufacture shovels.

Participant B3 indicated that social networks, especially WhatsApp, helped the company not only in networking but also in the day-to-day operations. B3 stated, “WhatsApp helps us to keep track of all the communication we do. Writing on paper is not our strength, we make use of the smartphones. Paperwork was a challenge.” When at the premises of B3, I confirmed that the company runs a mostly paperless office as most of the documents I asked to review were provided as soft copies.

Familyism. Another subtheme that emerged was familyism. I found that familyism contributed to socialization. Participant F5 indicated that one of the ways managers used to keep employees motivated to work together was to hold staff parties. F5 stated, “there is an integrated package, like getting a driving permit, health insurance, and passport. We treat ourselves as a family and even a new person will be treated in the same way.” In support of familyism, Participant M4 stated, “if we do not use that strategy [familyism], employees will be leaving [the company].” The implication is that familyism helped the company to maintain a low staff turnover.

Correlation to the literature. Theme 4 aligned with other researchers’ findings in various aspects. Ogbu and Oaya (2017) found that through the process of socialization, managers influenced and determined employees’ outlooks, viewpoints, outputs, attitudes, and behaviors. Fang et al. (2015) showed that through socialization, managers could motivate employees to perform by emphasizing participative decision making. I found that leaders involved employees in decision making and employees were motivated to perform since they contributed to the final decisions. As noted by Fernandes and Mupa (2018), the socialization mechanism helps in transmitting tacit knowledge through teamwork and training. Benton and Magnier-Watanabe (2014) found that familyism helped leaders of organizations to build trust among employees and to influence the sharing of knowledge internally. I found that leaders motivated new employees to share knowledge because the leaders also shared whatever knowledge and skills they had with the employees. Fang et al. observed that managers could motivate employees by treating them as family members. The implication is that managers may apply socialization to easily pass on KM practices from one employee to another and from old to new employees and vice versa.

Correlation to the conceptual framework. Socialization is one of the theoretical components of theory z. Theory z proponents are concerned with human resources, and one of the three interrelated strategies that theory z proponents employ is intensive socialization (Ogbu & Oaya, 2017). I found that managers promoted teamwork among employees and teamwork helped managers to set priorities that everyone owned. Second, I found that managers work with other employees without boundaries, and when challenges arise, they support one another. The findings aligned with Ouchi’s (1980) statement that a variety of social mechanisms reduced differences between individual and organizational goals and produced a strong sense of community, but a disruption of the socialization process inhibited the passing on of traditions and brought about organizational inefficiency.

I found that social networks enhanced working together and helping of each other among the employees. The strong sense of community leads to organizational traditions, which produces a philosophy about the way that organizations should work (Ouchi, 1980). One of the characteristics of theory z is the holistic concern that includes family members as well (Elegbe & Ibikunle, 2015). I found that leaders of the companies treated all employees as family members and employees in the same company also treated each other as members of one family.

Theme 5: Embracing Modern Technology

Another theme that emerged from data analysis was embracing modern technology. Within Theme 5, I identified five subthemes: (a) attend to the customer, (b) limit costs (c) carry out KM practices, (d) market company products and services, and (e) engage in networking. In the paragraphs that follow are the details that support these findings.

The customer. Participants N1, T2, and B3's responses to the open-ended questions during the semistructured interviews focused on the customer. N1, T2, and B3 used modern technology to support the process of integrating KM into business practices and the process impacted the customer to the benefit of their companies. I found that N1, T2, and B3 used IT as support to (a) increase the number of customers, (b) expand the customer base, (c) retain the customers, (d) satisfy the customer, (e) win customer trust, and (f) make the customer happy.

Participant N1 explained that online marketing was an asset to the company and that the company makes sales to customers from other areas, including Kenya, Southern Sudan, and Rwanda. N1 stated, "through online marketing, people get to know about our products. We get customers from far and near contacting us using cell phones or by e-mail." Participant B3 was happy to note that by embracing modern technology, the company staff and the customers carried out business transactions without any of the parties leaving their desks. B3 stated,

> In marketing we capitalize and specialize in online marketing, we are very much informed on modern information technology. We sit on our chairs and sales flow in [the company]. We use [telephone] calls and emails to follow up [customers]. Customers always make [telephone] calls. Use of websites is our strength, [we] sit in one place, customers come in, [and] we do [customer] follow-ups. Our niche is with the companies. [Companies] pay by bank, [and may] pay after 30 days. Few people come to pay directly [at the office].

B3 noted that due to modern technology, customers trusted the company and made payments of purchases before delivery, since all the information the customer needs to know about the company before making any purchase can be accessed online. B3 stated,

> It [IT] has done the greatest bit. Information or knowledge is the biggest asset we have, making use of the information age. There is trust by customers, and they get satisfied. [The] information age has led people to trust others. We have got customers from all over the globe. Because of trust, people in Rwanda and South Sudan pay before we deliver.

N1 got the details of the potential customers from the technician through the use of WhatsApp. N1 stated, “the technician gives me information of [about] the customers he has contacted, and I record it in the diary. The customers feel happy contacting me when I already have full information about them.” Participant T2 explained that the sales manager prepared quotations for customers. T2 stated, "after preparing the quotation, the sales manager sends the quotation to me. I then send it to the potential customer through WhatsApp or by use of e-mail." The implication is that modern technology has helped managers to carry out their day-to-day operations with ease and, promptly, serving their customers better.

B3 explained,

> Customers give us feedback through calls, and we make [customer] follow-ups and keep a record of customers. Customers send LPOs to us using e-mail or WhatsApp. We make the customer happy and give warrant to our customers. The warrant is mainly given to those who may be in doubt of our machines.

B3 added that the technicians would deliver supplies to the customers without the customers leaving their premises. B3 stated, "customers received quotations displaying the full picture and all the details about the equipment." I reviewed the copies of the quotations and I confirmed the quotations had the full picture, with details, of the equipment for purchase. B3 further stated, "customers made payments after receiving the purchases, and the customer[s] was [were] free to make a payment[s] through the bank or mobile money." I found that with the aid of modern technology, managers made sales and customers made purchases in a purely virtual environment, and yet both parties remained happy and satisfied.

Limit costs. I found that managers used desktops, laptops, accounting packages, word processors, smartphones, ESNS, ESM, and LANs in their operations to limit costs.

Participant B3 maximized the use of smartphones and was able to keep tracking documentation and monitoring without spending on transport and paper. B3 stated,

> We make use of modern technology; minimize paperwork and maximize the use of the cyberspace, WhatsApp, e-mail communication, making use of phones to record and send audios; and to make payments. WhatsApp helped us to keep track of all the communication we do. Writing on paper is not our strength we make use of the smartphones, paperwork was a challenge.

Participant F5explained that employees shared information that needed immediate attention in the virtual space using e-mail, social media, Dropbox, and iCloud promptly without necessarily printing it on paper. The use of modern technology helped managers to reduce costs on paper, printing, communication, and transport. Modern technology also enabled customers to make payments to the company without physically going to the company premises.

KM practices. I found that managers used modern technology to support KM practices. Participants T2, B3, M4, and F5 used modern technology to support the implementation process of KM. Participant M4 explained that the company has a LAN in place. M4 stated, “we have a LAN system in place so we are able to communicate [with each other] from time to time, through e-mail.” Participant T2 stated “all the paperwork is also kept in soft copy. Customers complain through the technicians by calling [telephone calls], the technicians record them [the complaints] and forward them to me by e-mail.” Participant B3 explained that the company outsourced the services of an accountant to manage the company accounts. B3 further explained that there was Tally and MS Excel software in place to support the managers while carrying out this function. Participant F5 used MS Excel, MS Word, and Tally software to support most of the company KM practices, which include budgeting and reporting; and as an individual F5 was learning to use QuickBooks application for personal development.

Participants N1, B3, and F5 used e-mail and social media to share information, with smartphones, laptops, and desktops as the platforms for sharing; and for storage and protection of information, they used cyberspace and protected important documents by using passwords. F5 used Dropbox and iCloud for storage and applied passwords to limit the accessibility of important information. F5 used the laptop only as an operational tool but did not store any important information on it. N1 stated "we have desktops and laptops. My boss is planning to teach me how to enter receipts in the computer system." B3 also mentioned that cyberspace was the storage for all company documents, but with limited access to some documents depending on whether the information was for public use or not.

Marketing products and services. I found that managers used modern technology to support them in advertising and marketing of companies' products and services. Participants B3, F5, and M4 used ESM platforms, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram; the free platforms, OLX and Jumia; and companies' websites to market and sell the companies' products. I checked the websites of the two SMEs whose managers participated in this study and verified that their products and services were well-advertised on the companies' websites.

I also crosschecked the WhatsApp numbers of some of the managers of the two SMEs and noted that B3 and F5 advertised some of the companies' products and services via the *status* of their WhatsApp numbers. Participant N1 stated, "people come from very far [to buy our products], because of online marketing. People use cell phones and e-mail to contact us. We use Facebook, WhatsApp, Google and many other sites [to market our products and services]." Participant M4 stated, "we are at www, globally we are seen. We also use radio adverts." B3 stated, "in marketing, we capitalize and specialize in online marketing, we are very much informed on [about] modern information technology." I found that managers used modern technology to support them in the marketing of products and services enabling them to trade globally from wherever they might be located.

Networking. Networking is another subtheme that emerged. I found that some managers used modern technology to assist them in networking. Participant M4 and F5 used ESM to network, with smartphones, laptops, and desktops as the tools for operating ESM platforms. Participant M4 stated, "we network through Facebook and telephone calls. We have our own directory. We network through a directory, and online networks." Participant F5 mentioned that the employees of the company formed a WhatsApp group that helped them to network.

Correlation to literature. Theme 5 aligned with some other researchers' findings in the literature. Scuotto et al. (2017) suggested that leaders of SMEs may use SMNs to form their virtual communities to achieve a common purpose and to enhance the productivity of their SMEs. Lee et al. (2017) recommended that leaders of organizations should take advantage of IT to pursue knowledge flow across teams and enable management teams to better process external knowledge with appropriate IT support. Omatayo (2015) posited that technology is an enabler and foundational element of a KM plan. The literature was silent about embracing technology to limit costs, especially for online marketing. In the case of networking, Schröpfer et al. (2017) asserted that networking starts with managers taking into account that individuals are part of the KM process. In the future, researchers may carry out research to establish whether online marketing costs would be lower than ordinary marketing using the traditional ways of marketing, which include door to door, print, radio, and TV media advertisements; and billboards advertisements.

Correlation to the conceptual framework. I found that managers embraced modern technology to support them in carrying out KM practices and other business activities like marketing online. Shvetsova, Shokola, and Bobova (2017) established that theory z's general availability in the era of advanced information technologies, promoted social networks to occupy an important place in the life of z-generation's representative. Social networks promote socialization, and theory z theorists promote the socialization mechanism. Social networks depend, to a large extent, on technology. The theory z concept to a certain extent motivates leaders of organizations to embrace modern technology.

Summary

In this qualitative exploratory multiple case research study, I used theory z as the lens to identify the findings. The research findings aligned with the purpose of this research study. All the main themes and subthemes that emerged were crucial to the understanding of the overarching research question. This study could contribute to the understanding of the strategies and processes SME managers in Uganda used to successfully integrate KM into business practice.

I found that a good working environment and supportive leadership helped the SME managers to perform. Second, for the sustainability of KM practices, leaders of the SMEs continuously motivated the employees through salary increments, incentives, rewards, appraisals, and training. Leaders of SMEs also continuously upgraded individual employees' working through training, assigning multiple roles, and job rotation. Leaders also supported employees to maintain the routines of all the supporting activities that included documenting, recording, reporting, meeting, and replicating of good practices. Third, I found that for the proper implementation of the KM agenda SME managers embedded KM practices (a) knowledge discovery, (b) knowledge acquisition, (c) retention, and protection; and (d) dissemination and sharing in the organizational culture. Fourth, I found that SME managers promoted socialization among employees through (a) teamwork, (b) social networks, and (c) familyism and that socialization supported the embedding of KM practices in the organizational culture. Lastly, I found that SME managers embraced modern technology as support to (a) socializing KM practices of knowledge discovery, sharing, dissemination, retention, and protection; (b) achieving timeliness; (c) sharing marketing information; (d) widening customer base; (e) monitoring and controlling; (f) cutting down on cost for marketing, communication, and documentation; and (g) networking.

Applications to Professional Practice

I explored successful strategies that SME managers in Uganda employ to integrate KM into their businesses as one of the ways of improving the performance of the organizations. If organizational performance improves, the organization becomes more credible in the community and attracts more clients. I anticipate that the findings of this study could help SME managers to put in place KM strategies for their organizations and to make more informed decisions, which may help the organizations to attract more clients and improve firms' performance and profits.

I also anticipate that the findings of this study may act as a motivation to managers of SMEs to make use of the cheap and modern technology available to support their day-to-day operations; reduce on operation and marketing costs; and adopt online marketing through sharing information online about their products and services. The finding of embracing modern technology was in line with Cerchione and Esposito's (2017) findings that the technological and innovative trend in ICT was driving the development and the introduction of new KMS that availed new opportunities for SMEs that are cheaper, more user-friendly, and more effective than the traditional ways.

Implications for Social Change

The first contribution to social change from this study is that the use of KM by managers of SMEs may expand opportunities for employees to learn new skills and knowledge. The expansion of learning opportunities for employees is important to the economic growth in Uganda and other developing countries. The second contribution is that this study may contribute to the expansion of employment opportunities. SMEs play an important role in the growth of employment by managers improving SMEs' performance in Uganda and other developing countries. When managers improve the performance of SMEs, more jobs and better skilled and knowledgeable people will be available on the Ugandan market.

To sustain the KM practices, one of the findings from this research study is that SMEs motivated employees by treating them as a family. The third contribution towards social change that I anticipate from this research study is that SMEs' managers may learn to treat employees as family and employees will work peacefully knowing that the managers would attend to their family issues within the working family. I also anticipate that the findings from this study will help leaders of SMEs to embrace the use of modern technology to support the sharing, retention, and protection of tacit knowledge that even when an employee leaves the organization, such knowledge will remain accessible to the organization.

Recommendations for Action

Knowledge has a vital role in the challenging business environment and contributes to sustaining business performance; managers of organizations should be mindful that knowledge is a crucial resource which they should manage well to help their organizations achieve growth performance (Abu Baker & Yosof, 2016). SMEs' managers may consider assessing their KM strategies alongside the research findings of this study in the main themes: (a) having supportive leadership, (b) ensuring sustainability, (c) embedding KM practices into organization culture, (d) socializing, and (e) embracing modern technology. To actualize the findings from the research study, I constructed the framework for the integration of KM in business practice as shown in Appendix B.

SME leaders should communicate and socialize the KM practices by employing a management style that combines both human relations concepts and scientific management techniques (Indabawa & Uba, 2014). SME managers may employ the human relations concept to work towards motivating the employees to carry out the KM activities, and the scientific management techniques to support the employees to carry out the KM activities. SME managers may sustain the support to the employees by offering training, both internal and external, on the job training, and orientation; and quality assurance, through monitoring and controlling, recruiting quality staff, appraising employees, and sustaining the routine activities. Leaders of SMEs should support the employees by ensuring that avenues are put in place to enable both managers and employees to embrace modern technology to support them as they carry out the KM activities.

SME leaders should provide avenues that would enable employees to socialize since I found in this study that socialization was one of the strategies that helped participants to work as a team with other employees. By managers sustaining the support activities, they will indirectly be sustaining the KM practices and, eventually, the KM practices would be part and parcel of the organizational culture. I found that the elements of organizational culture that best support the embedding of KM practices in the organizational culture are familyism, teamwork, communication, and commitment (see Appendix B).

I found that the KM integration into business practice would contribute to the performance of the organization in various ways. I make the following recommendations to SMEs' managers for consideration. First, SMEs' managers should support employees in training, networking, and sharing of knowledge to enhance the employees' innovation skills, enabling them to discover new knowledge that may support the organization. Second, SMEs' managers should communicate freely with their subordinates and involve them in decision making. Participative decision making motivates employees to perform (Fang et al., 2015). Involving employees in decision making contributes towards transparency, ownership, and collective responsibility in the organization and employees will trust each other as a family and feel motivated to perform. Familyism builds trust among employees and trust will influence the sharing of knowledge internally (Benton & Magnier-Watanabe, 2014). Treating employees as a family contributes towards a friendly working environment.

Third, in this era of modern technology, leaders of SMEs should endeavor to construct websites for their companies to enable them to tap into the benefits of trading online. If leaders of organizations avail information, online, about the company and the products and services they offer, customers may trust that company, and trust contributes towards the company's credibility. SMEs' leaders should take note that to expose their companies online, they should be operating formally; that is, with transparency without hiding anything. I found that customers checked out all the details about the company from all sources before contacting the owners. I found that formalizing the company had benefits; and one of the benefits was tapping into government and international organizations business contracts. I further found that trading online helped leaders of SMEs to get customers across borders, leading to an increase in their customer base and a reduction in marketing costs.

Leaders of SMEs should motivate and support their employees to access and make use of modern technology. I found that the use of modern technology enabled SME managers to reduce operational costs, supporting cost-effectiveness. I also found that modern technology supported managers to respond to customers’ needs promptly to carry out the different processes of KM, monitoring, and controlling efficiently.

If managers of SMEs implement some of the above recommendations and follow the KM framework (see Appendix B), they may successfully integrate KM into business practice and make a contribution towards the increase in the number of customers and profits, leading to productivity and business continuity. Current and aspiring SME leaders and managers interested in integrating KM into their business practice need to pay attention to the findings in this study. Business researchers also should pay attention to the findings. All participants will receive a copy of the research summary. I will disseminate the findings of this study through conferences, scholarly and business journals, training sessions, and seminars.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the successful strategies that SME managers in Uganda used to integrate KM into their business practices in Uganda. The findings from this study may assist SMEs’ managers to integrate KM into their business practice through sharing of knowledge of the strategies that emerged from this study. This study had two limitations. I considered only two SMEs and the potential participants were free to accept or refuse to participate in the study. The other limitation was that the two SMEs were from Kampala city. I may not generalize the findings to other organizations and areas in Uganda. Further research could include SMEs from other parts of the country.

One of the findings in this research study was that managers used online marketing to do business. Participants indicated that the costs of online marketing were lower than the traditional ways of marketing which include door to door, radio adverts, and street billboards. Further research could be conducted to establish the relative costs of the different forms of marketing that SME managers use to market their products and services.

Reflections

The process of conducting this research study helped me understand what professional research entails and enriched my knowledge about SMEs and the knowledge management field. The research study process was very intense and challenging. Understanding the research and confidentiality protocol enabled me to conduct an effective interview process. The overwhelming data that emerged from semistructured interviews and review of company documents helped me to comprehend further the research problem. The process of data collection evolved from theory to practical application. I enjoyed the data analysis process and was amazed at the way themes emerged; it was very exciting.

To help mitigate bias, I contacted participants with whom I did not have any professional relationship, and this enabled me to follow the interview protocol. Before the interviews, the participants were aware of the purpose of my research study that it was purely for academic purposes. Documenting the data collection and analysis process before the start of this research study helped mitigate bias during data collection. The study helped to broaden my knowledge about KM practices and operations of SMEs, and also exposed me to strategies and practices that may help other SME leaders to manage their businesses effectively.

Conclusion

KM is vital for an organization to succeed and survive in a highly dynamic and competitive world (Oye & Salleh, 2013). The growing awareness of the importance of knowledge for the organization’s prosperity and survival places KM, as a concept, at the forefront of the organizations’ practices, and SMEs’ innovation mediates the relationship between KM and business performance of SMEs (Byukusenge & Munene, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that SME managers use to integrate KM into business practice.

Five themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) having supportive leadership, (b) ensuring sustainability, (c) embedding KM practices into organization culture, (d) socializing, and (e) embracing modern technology. Basing on the findings from this study, I suggest that to integrate KM in business practice (a) SME leaders should be very supportive to communicate, promote, and socialize the KM practices by evoking a management style that combines both the human relations concepts and the scientific management techniques; (b) SME managers should sustain the KM practice through motivation of employees, continuous training, quality assurance, and monitoring the necessary routines; (c) familyism, communication, teamwork, and commitment are the organizational culture elements that support KM practices to be part of the organizational culture; and (d) SME managers should use modern technology and socialization to support KM practices and the whole process of KM integration. I further found that if SME managers successfully integrated KM into business practice, KM would contribute to the performance, productivity, and continuity of the business. I used theory z as the lens for this study to come up with the findings and to construct the framework that SME managers might follow to integrate KM into business practice.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: _______
Time: ______
Case Classification: ___ (X, Y)
Job Function: ___ (A, C, F, H, P, S)
Participant Code: ___ (0 – 9)
Recording Method ___ (E, M)

Interview Protocol	
What I will do	**What I will say**
Introduce the interview and set the stage, by introducing myself and asking the interviewee to introduce him/herself. And answer any questions or comments the interviewee may have before the start of the interview. After that I will then switch on the electronic device and start interviewing the participant.	My name is Josephine Nsubuga-Mugoa. Please introduce yourself as well. Thank you for turning up for this interview. As per what we discussed in the meeting we had earlier, I will be taking you through this interview to explore the successful strategies that you used to integrate KM into business practice. As per my communication during the meeting and as per the consent form you signed, I will electronically record all our discussion during this interview. The interview will take about 45 minutes. You have a right to decline participation in this interview at any time and not to answer a question where you feel uncomfortable. Do you have any questions or comments before we start the interview? If no questions I now switch on the electronic device to start recording the interview.
• Watch for non-verbal queues • Paraphrase as needed • Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth	The Central Research Question is: What strategies do some SME managers in Uganda use to effectively integrate KM into their business practices? **Background/Profile Questions** First I would like you to tell me: 1. What is your title and job duties/responsibilities? 2. How long have you performed in this position?

	3. What other positions have you held in your current or other organizations (you do not have to disclose the name of the organization)? **Interview Questions:** The following questions I am going to ask you are more specific to the central research question. You may give as much details as you can. 1. What strategies did you use to integrate knowledge management in your business practices? 2. How did you disseminate these strategies within the organization? 3. How did the integration of knowledge management in your business practices affect the performance of your organization? 4. How did the integration of knowledge management affect the continuity in business of your organization? 5. How are the knowledge management practices integrated into the organization culture? 6. What strategies do you have in place that help you to retain tacit knowledge in your organization? 7. What strategies do you have in place for sharing and retaining knowledge? 8. What computerized systems do you use to support the integration of knowledge management in your business practices? 9. What additional comments, or experience regarding the use of KM, do you have that you have not discussed?
Wrap up interview thanking participant	Thank you very much for your time and your contribution to this research study.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	I will go through the discussion we have had, synthesize it then I should be able to come back to

	you with the synthesis for your validation. When can we meet again for this?
I will introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	Thank you for turning up for this validation meeting. As promised, I have done the synthesis for each of the interview questions we had last time. Please go through to verify and see whether my interpretation is right and make comments, correction or provide additional information. I will take you through question by question.
Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question I will bring in probing questions related to other information that I may have found—note the information should be related so that as I probe I adhere to the IRB approval. I will walk through each question, read the interpretation and ask: Did I miss anything? Or, What would you like to add?	Here is the printed copy.
	1. What strategies did you use to integrate knowledge management in your business practices? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed
	2. How did you disseminate these strategies within the organization? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed
	3. How did the integration of knowledge management in your business practices affect the performance of your organization? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed
	4. How did the integration of knowledge management affect the continuity in business of your organization? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed
	5. How are the knowledge management practices integrated into the organization culture? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed

	6. What strategies do you have in place that help you to retain tacit knowledge in your organization? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed
	7. What strategies do you have in place for sharing and retaining knowledge? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed
	8. What computerized systems do you use to support the integration of knowledge management in your business practices? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed
	9. What additional comments, or experience regarding the use of KM, do you have that you have not discussed? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed

Appendix B: Framework for the Integration of Knowledge Management into Business Practice