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Leadership Style and SMEs Sustainability in Nigeria: A Multiple Case Study

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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2019

Abstract

Leadership Style and SMEs Sustainability in Nigeria:

A Multiple Case Study

by

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MA, University of Lagos, 1997

BS, ESUT-ENUGU, 1987

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

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Abstract

Leadership in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) has remained an under-researched area in the management literature, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. SME owner-managers in Nigeria lacked in-depth understanding of their leadership style to objectively evaluate its implication on long-term performance and growth of their enterprise. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the experiences of SME owner-managers in Nigeria to gain an in-depth understanding of their leadership style and its implication for long-term performance and growth of their enterprise. The conceptual framework for this study was anchored in two key concepts; leadership styles and leadership in SMEs, with the full range leadership model as the theoretical foundation. The research question sought to explore the role of SMEs owners and managers leadership styles in the long-term success of their enterprise. Interview data were collected from 6 SME owner-managers who employ less than 200 employees within the manufacturing, education, and trading sectors. The cross-case synthesis technique was used for data analysis which allowed for within-case analysis and cross-case comparisons. Findings from this study showed that Nigerian SME owner-managers do not follow any specific leadership style. They exhibited few characteristics of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors, leaning more to transactional leadership. This study has significance for positive social change by providing insights on how leadership styles can improve the performance and sustainability of Nigerian SMEs, thus increasing their capacity to create employment.

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Dedication

This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to my lovely wife Juliet and my six children: MaryCynthia, Emmanuel, Kingsley, Vincent, Michael, and Charles for their love, support and understanding throughout this journey. I appreciate you all and I hope that this will become a motivation for all of you to strive for greater academic achievements.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Despite the large body of research in the literature regarding the phenomenon of leadership style and its implications for organizational performance in large firms (Boehma, Dwertmanna, Bruch, & Shamir, 2015; Boies, Fiset, & Gill, 2015; Deichmann & Stam, 2015) leadership style in small and medium-sized firms remains an under-researched area of inquiry (Franco & Matos, 2015). The reason for this neglect is because of the faulty conception that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are merely miniature versions of large firms (Carson, 1990; Darcy, Hill, McCabe, & McGovern, 2014). Following a resource-based view, Darcy et al. (2014) found that internal human resource capabilities of SMEs are characteristically different from what is obtainable in large firms. A critical element of organizational human resource capability is leadership, and evidence from the literature suggests that the strategic behavior of SME owner-managers is a defining characteristic of the leadership process within the SME firms (Darcy et al., 2014).

SMEs are the engine of economic development (World Bank, 2015) and the main drivers for job growth (Ayyagari, Demirguc-Kunt, & Maksimovic, 2014; OECD, 2017). According to the World Bank, SMEs account for over 60% of employment generation and 40% of national income in emerging economies (World Bank, 2015). Given the positive relationship between leadership style and organizational performance

(Almatrooshi, Singh, & Farouk, 2016; Grobler & Du Plessis, 2016), it becomes pertinent to fully understand leadership style in small and medium-sized firms.

This chapter contains the background to the study, the problem statement, purpose of study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, implications for social change, and a summary and transition.

Background of the Study

SMEs (including micro enterprises) constitute the highest number of business enterprises in Nigeria but their slow pace of growth and lack of sustainability limit the overall contribution of these firms to Nigeria's GDP (Gbandi & Amisah 2014; Ikharehon & Briggs, 2016). SMEs in Nigeria hardly grow to large enterprises and are often characterized by poor performance (Agba, Ogaboh, & Ebong, 2015), with most of them closing down their operations within the first 5 years of existence (Ajike, Nnorom, Kwarbai, & Egwuonwu, 2015). The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN; 2013) in a collaborative study with the National Bureau of Statistics found that SMEs in Nigeria fall short of their potential to promote economic growth especially in job creation and poverty alleviation. One of the reasons identified by SMEDAN (2013) for these shortcomings is that the nature of leadership within these SMEs did not support organizational performance and growth (SMEDAN, 2013) as most of the SME owner-managers do not understand the impact that leadership style could have on organizational performance and growth.

Several studies point to the existence of different factors that impact the performance of SMEs around the world. Some of these factors include managerial skills (Arasti, Zandi, & Bahman, 2014), the competence of employees (Anggadwita & Mustafid, 2014), leader's attitude and leadership style (Arham, 2014; Ozer & Tinaztepe, 2014). SMEs characteristically have a small number of employees; the leadership style of an SME's owner-manager can easily permeate and influence the culture of the entire organization and have direct implications for the SME's performance (Lofving, Safsten, & Winroth, 2016). The argument by Lofying et al., (2016) was consistent with the findings by Ozer and Tinaztepe (2014), that leadership styles influence different organizational phenomena in SMEs such as enterprise performance, enterprise growth, and sustainability. Thus, any evaluation of enterprise performance among SMEs within a particular local environment will require an in-depth understanding of the leadership styles adopted by SMEs in that local environment (Sakiru, D'Silva, Othman, DaudSilong, & Busayo, 2013).

Leadership style has been described as the manner that a leader uses to influence followers to achieve set objectives (Burns, 1978; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015). In a recent study, Franco and Matos (2015) conceptualized leadership as the process of getting others to understand what needs to be done and how to get it done more effectively. This conceptualization by Franco and Matos (2015) supported the argument of some researchers that effective leadership is required to deliver positive organizational outcomes (Dinh et al., 2014). Porter (1996) described effective leaders as

those that drive their firms to take the right decisions in response to changes in the business environment and ensuring that organizational objectives and identity are sustained. Thus, it is important to understand how SME owner-managers apply different leadership styles to achieve improved organizational performance and the growth of their enterprises.

Evidence in the literature suggests that leadership styles have both cultural (Aritz & Walker, 2014; Manaf & Latif, 2014; Srivastava, 2016) and organizational (Dias, Muniz, Borges, & Guimaraes, 2017) perspectives. Some researchers have found that the nature of leadership styles may differ from one country to another (Anggadwita & Mustafid, 2014; Arham, 2014; Koe, Omar, & Sa'ari, 2015), and that specific leadership styles have varying levels of influence on SME performance across different countries (Dunne et al., 2016; Oladele & Aleke, 2016). For example, Long, Yong, and Chuen (2016) found that transformational leadership style had more impact on organizational commitment and performance of SMEs in Malaysia than transactional leadership style; Mesu, Sanders, and van Riemsdijk (2015) found that a combination of transformational and directive leadership styles positively influenced organizational commitment within Dutch SMEs in the service sector but not in the manufacturing sector. These findings by Long et al., (2016) and Mesu et al., (2015) showed that there is need to understand the implications of leadership styles on the performance of SMEs from cultural and organizational perspectives.

Two recent studies indicated that the coercive style of leadership adopted by SME leaders in Nigeria often undermines employee engagement and job satisfaction, contributes to high employee absenteeism, and results in the poor management of human and financial capital (Longe, 2014; Uchenwangbe, 2013). These two studies do not provide in-depth understanding of leadership styles within Nigerian SMES. Longe (2014) used a quantitative research approach and focused on a large cement manufacturing company. The study by Longe (2014) was not exploratory in nature as it did not address the nature of leadership styles in Nigerian SMEs. The study by Uchenwangbe (2013) focused on leadership in Nigerian SMES, but the methodology was quantitative and therefore not exploratory in nature. There is the need for an in-depth understanding of leadership styles among SMES in Nigeria by adopting a qualitative multiple-case study methodology.

Problem Statement

SMEs (including micro enterprises) represent most of the business enterprises in Nigeria, but their slow pace of growth limit their overall contribution to Nigeria's GDP (Gbandi & Amissah 2014; Ikharehon & Briggs, 2016). The evidence from the literature suggests specific problems in SMEs' business growth (Uchehara, 2017) and performance (Franco & Matos, 2015) may be the result of a poor leadership style for these types of enterprises (Anggadwita & Mustafid, 2014; Franco & Matos, 2015; Ozer & Tinaztepe, 2014). Little has been done to examine the relationship between leadership styles and management within the local context of SMEs.

The general problem is that it remains unknown what role leadership style plays in the long-term sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015; Oladele & Akeke, 2016; Uchegara, 2017). The specific problem is that SME owner-managers in Nigeria need to gain an in-depth understanding of their leadership style to objectively evaluate its implication on long-term performance and growth of their enterprise (Koshal, 2017; Oladele & Akeke, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to gain an in-depth understanding of specific knowledge gaps among SME owners and managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability (Koshal, 2017; Uchegara, 2017). To address this gap in the leadership literature and the research problem, I collected qualitative data from multiple sources, including semistructured interviews, historical, seminal, and current peer-reviewed scholarly papers and observational field notes. I conducted data triangulation to establish the trustworthiness of the findings on the phenomena under study (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011; Patton, 2015). This study has added the Nigerian experience to the theoretical conceptualizations of leadership styles in SMEs.

Research Questions

The central research question of the study was as follows: What are the specific knowledge gaps among SME owners and managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in Bass's (1990) concept of *leadership style* and Franco and Mato's (2015) concept of *leadership in SMEs*. The traditional and emerging leadership theories (Dinh et al., 2014) are characterized by a diversity of opinions on what constitutes the appropriate leader attributes and leadership styles that can deal with the challenges of the modern-day dynamic and highly competitive business environment (Dinh et al., 2014). Despite the diversity in the theoretical understanding of leadership, there seems to be a convergence of opinion by scholars and practitioners on the positive impact that leadership can play in enterprise performance and growth (Almatrooshi et al., 2016; Oladele & Akeke, 2016).

Leadership style has been described as the manner that a leader uses to influence followers to achieve set objectives (Burns, 1978; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015), and it is the most critical factor that drives organizational performance and growth (Almatrooshi et al., 2016; Grobler & Du Plessis, 2016). Some scholars have argued that leadership style could also reflect a leader's indifference to any form of relational engagement with followers (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Avolio & Bass, 2004). Much research in the literature on leadership styles has focused on large organizations, leaving the SME context substantially under-researched (Franco & Matos, 2015).

In a recent study, Franco and Matos (2015) explored the nature of leadership styles in SMEs using the mixed method approach. The researchers focused on three

leadership styles: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and passive-avoidant (*laissez-faire*) leadership. The first leadership style explored by Franco and Matos (2015) was the transformational leadership. This leadership style is founded on the premise that organizational performance can be improved when leaders inspire their subordinates to a stronger commitment to the organization rather than pursuing narrow personal interests (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; 1990). Transformational leaders engage with followers and inspire them to focus on higher-level human needs for personal achievements and self-actualization (Burns, 1978). It is a win-win situation for the employees and the organization. The organization benefits from high employees' productivity while the achievements of the employees will translate to better rewards and higher career positions for them.

With the multiplicity of leadership styles in the literature, it is reasonable to say that there are no best leadership styles. In practice, leaders may align more with a leadership style and less to others (Franco & Matos, 2015). This is especially true in SMEs, where leadership styles depend to a large extent on the operating environment of the SMEs (Franco & Matos, 2015). SMEs are increasingly faced with the ever-changing competitive global business environment (World Bank, 2016a). Thus, the role of leadership in ensuring SME firm performance and growth (Oladele & Akeke, 2016) has become very critical (Franco & Matos, 2015). SME owner-managers lack the necessary understanding of how leadership styles can be used to improve firm performance and organizational sustainability (Agwu & Emeti, 2014,) especially under very volatile and

competitive business environment (Kotter, 1990; World Bank 2016a). Given the globally acclaimed importance of SMEs for driving economic growth and poverty alleviation (World Bank, 2016a), and the strong association between leadership styles and SME performance (Franco & Matos, 2015), it became imperative for a proper understanding of the implications of leadership styles for the performance and growth of the SME firms from a geographical context (Franco & Matos, 2015).

Nature of Study

The methodology that I selected for this research was the qualitative multiple-case study. In qualitative inquiry, researchers use the lived experiences of individuals to gain an in-depth understanding of complex human phenomena (Baskarada, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The choice of an appropriate qualitative methodology for any inquiry will depend on the phenomenon that will be explored or examined in the study and the nature of the research questions (Maxwell, 2013, Patton, 2015). For a contemporary phenomenon like leadership styles, Yin (2017) argued that a case study design is the most appropriate methodology for exploring or examining such phenomenon. Case study design attracts a lot of variations in literature. Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2014) argued that the variation in case study design in literature is because case studies are often uniquely designed to suit the peculiarities of the case and the research questions.

I used a multiple-case study design to achieve the purpose of this study which was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences SME owner-managers in Nigeria

regarding their leadership style and its implication on long-term performance and growth of their enterprise. The contextual nature of the case study method provides the researcher the opportunity to deal with multiple cases in a single study. According to Yin (2017), the flexibility in multiple case study design was appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to align the research design with the peculiarities of each case that is used in the study. As this study was exploratory and intended for theory building, a multiple case study design was the most rigorous strategy for building or extending theory on an organizational phenomenon in doctoral level research as recommended by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007).

Understanding the unit of analysis is one of the fundamental choices that underpin case study research. Unit of analysis can be individuals, groups, and organizations among others (Yin, 2017). The unit of analysis for this study was the organizational level, and the cases are the SMEs I selected using the purposeful sampling technique as recommended by Maxwell (2013) and Patton (2015). The main goal for using the purposeful sampling technique was to ensure that the selected samples will provide rich information that will answer the research question on the specific knowledge gaps that exist among SME owner-managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' performance and growth. The use of multiple case study strategy as recommended by Baxter and Jack (2008) allowed for data analyses within and across cases, while ensuring representativeness and heterogeneity in the study population as recommended by Maxwell (2013). In multiple case study research, Yin (2017)

advocated the use of cross-case synthesis as the most appropriate data analysis technique. Cross-case synthesis is more efficient than content analysis for a study where we must also compare and contrast cases, not just analyze individual cases (Yin, 2017).

Definitions

Enterprise Growth: A sequence of “phases or stages of development through which the business may pass during an enterprise lifecycle” (Gao & Banerji 2015, p.180) to achieve its long-term objectives. Enterprise growth is not limited to only the quantitative financial indicators such as turnover and profit growth, but also include qualitative factors such as innovation and management capacity (Gao & Banerji 2015)

Enterprise Performance: The ability of an enterprise to effectively implement strategies to achieve institutional objectives (Almatrooshi et al., 2016) and it depends largely on the “level of skill its leaders possess when it comes to implementing strategies” (Almatrooshi et al., 2016, p.844)

Leadership: The process of getting others to understand what needs to be done and how to get it done more effectively (Franco & Matos, 2015)

Leadership style: The manner that a leader uses to influence followers to achieve set objectives (Bass, 1985; 1990)

Owner-manager: A person who establishes and manages an enterprise for the principal purpose of furthering his/her business goals. The enterprise is the primary source of income and consumes the majority of the owner-manager’s time and resources. She/he exercises significant control over the day-to-day operations of his/her firm and

shapes the firm's culture (Escrivão Filho, Albuquerque, Nagano, Junior, & de Oliveira, 2017)

Small and medium enterprises: Firms that are “formally registered, privately owned and managed, with a small number of paid employees and their annual turnover/revenues are limited or not that high” (Agba et al., 2015, p.89). The classification of small and medium enterprises based on the number of employees differ from one country to another. In Nigeria, they are classified as firms employing 10-199 persons.

Sustainability: The process of "maintaining well-being over a long, perhaps even an indefinite period" (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010, p. 3441).

Assumptions

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to gain an in-depth understanding of specific knowledge gaps among SME owner-managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability. I collected from the owner-managers of the selected SMEs through semistructured interviews. Thus, this study was based on the following three assumptions. First, I assumed that the owner-managers of the selected SMEs are each capable of self-expression and can provide in-depth explanations to the interview questions. Second, I assumed that the interview questions reflect the research questions such that the answers received will provide in-depth explanations to the research

problem. Third, I assumed that the responses furnished by the SME owner-managers are not biased but reflect their real experiences in leading their organizations.

Scope and Delimitations

This study involved an exploration of leadership styles in Nigerian SMEs with the purpose of understanding the knowledge gaps among SME owner-managers in Nigeria regarding leadership styles and its implications for the performance of their enterprises. This study was not intended to assess the impacts of any specific leadership styles on the performance of SMEs in Nigeria; rather, the study was used to expose the leadership experiences of SME owner-managers with regards to their enterprise performance. An in-depth understanding of the leadership experiences of these SME owner-managers may provide opportunities for further research on the impact of leadership styles on the performance of Nigerian SMEs.

Even though the theoretical foundation for this study was rooted in transformational, transactional, and laissez-fair leadership styles because they have been found to be the predominant leadership styles among SMEs (Kacem & El Harbi, 2014), the three theories were not specifically assessed in this study. As advocated by Patton (2015), the theoretical foundation for the study was meant to enhance its transferability by helping readers to establish a connection between the outcome of this study and other similar studies in the literature.

The population for this study was limited to six SMEs that I selected through a purposeful sampling technique. Within the six selected SMEs, I collected data from the

owner-managers to understand their lived experiences with the phenomenon of leadership style within their organizations. I did not obtain interview data from the employees of the selected SMEs since such data will not provide insights into what the owner-managers know or do not know regarding leadership styles and enterprise performance.

Limitations

This study had three limitations. First, only six SMEs are involved in the study. Thus, the findings may not be generalizable to the larger Nigerian SME population. Second, the background of the SME owner-managers to be interviewed in the study may not be representative of the Nigerian SME population especially in the areas of age, gender, educational attainment, and entrepreneurial orientation. The third limitation of the study was that the interviewees may, for various reasons, have been restrictive in volunteering answers to the interview questions. To mitigate this limitation, I collected information from multiple sources including but not limited to field notes, document reviews, observations, and my reflections.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it addressed an under-researched area on the implications of leadership style on SME performance and growth in a developing economy such as that of Nigeria. Researchers have stressed the need for a better understanding of the nature of leadership styles in SMEs (Koshal, 2017; Oladele & Akeke, 2016; Uchegara, 2017). This research was needed to gain a deeper understanding of specific knowledge gaps among SME owner-managers in Nigeria regarding leadership

style and its implications on their enterprises' performance and growth. Leadership style has a significant influence on the performance of SMEs (Anggadwita & Mustafid, 2014; Arasti, Zandi, & Bahmani, 2014; Arham, 2014). The impact of leadership styles on SMEs varies across countries and organizations (Franco & Matos, 2015; Ozer & Tinaztepe, 2014). Some researchers have established a relationship between leadership style and the performance of SMEs in Nigeria (Oladele & Akeke, 2016; Ejere & Abasilim, 2013). The studies by Oladele and Akeke (2016) and Ejere and Abasilim (2013) were based on a quantitative deductive methodology that did not offer data on specific leadership styles on the performance of Nigerian SMEs and an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Ejere & Abasilim, 2013; Oladele & Akeke, 2016). This study is significant in that it will lead to a better understanding of the phenomena under study and provide information-rich data and recommendations for future studies (Patton, 2015) on the relationship between leadership styles and the performance and growth of Nigerian SMEs.

Significance to Practice.

This study is significant to practice because it will provide explanations on the implications of leadership styles adopted by SME owner-managers in Nigeria for enterprise performance and growth. Oladele and Akeke (2016) suggested that a relationship exist between leadership styles and SME performance. Though there is evidence in the literature suggesting a relationship between leadership style and the performance of SMEs in Nigeria (Arham, 2014; Ozer & Tinaztepe, 2014), the nature of this relationship is not fully understood. This study will provide management

practitioners and scholars a deeper understanding of the knowledge gaps among SME owner-managers in Nigeria on how leadership styles can be used to improve enterprise performance.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) will benefit from this study being the Nigerian Government Agency responsible for formulating and implementing policies on the operation of SMEs. The Agency has already identified that leadership in Nigerian SMEs did not support organizational performance and sustainability (SMEDAN, 2013). This study will provide SMEDAN with a better understanding of the knowledge gaps on leadership styles among Nigerian SME owner-managers with a view to addressing these gaps within the context of the Nigerian SME Policy Framework. I will benefit from this study because of my interest in management consulting career that will focus primarily on supporting Nigerian SME owner-managers to improve their leadership capabilities.

Significance to Theory

This study is significant to theory because it will offer in-depth qualitative data on the experiences of Nigerian SME owner-managers regarding the phenomenon of leadership style. The data from this study will provide opportunities for advancing the existing theoretical conceptualizations on the relationship between leadership styles and performance of SMEs; an area that has remained under-researched in the management literature (Franco & Matos, 2015). Though some specific leadership styles have been found to be predominant among SMEs in certain countries (Aritz & Walker, 2014), in

Nigeria, no studies have explored the understanding of the phenomenon of leadership style among SME owner-managers. This study has brought the Nigerian experiences to the conceptualizations of leadership in SMEs within the management literature.

Significance for Positive Social Change

This study has implications for Nigeria's economic development as SMEs can provide opportunities for job creation and the reduction of income disparities (Ilegbinosa & Jumbo, 2015) while playing a significant role in poverty alleviation (Banito, Daantos, Mateo, & Rosete, 2017). SMEs in Nigeria lack the necessarily leadership capabilities and experience to ensure sustained organizational performance and growth (SMEDAN, 2013). Since SMEs account for the highest number of business enterprises in Nigeria, their failure has negative impact on the incomes of the families that depend on them for economic survival. Such families will not be able to provide for themselves the basic needs of life such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education for their children. This study will ensure a better understanding of leadership in Nigerian SMEs and provide recommendation that will strengthen leadership capabilities of SME owner-managers to improve the performance of their enterprises. Such enhanced performance of SMEs in Nigeria will produce positive social change through employment generation and poverty alleviation within the country.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the study that explored the leadership styles in SMEs which has remained an under-researched area in the management

literature (Franco & Matos, 2015). From a Nigerian context, the few applied studies that examined leadership in SMEs utilized quantitative approach (Oladele & Akeke, 2016; Ejere & Abasilim, 2013). These studies are mainly deductive and involved statistical testing of specific leadership styles on the performance of Nigerian SMEs without offering an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of leadership style (Ejere & Abasilim, 2013; Oladele & Akeke, 2016). There is the need for a deeper understanding of what SME owner-managers in Nigeria know regarding leadership styles and its implications for their enterprises' performance and growth (Oladele & Akeke, 2016).

Chapter 2 examined the existing literature on leadership styles and leadership in SMEs, and provided a conceptual framework that anchored the study. Chapter 3 described the research approach and the rationale for method selection and design.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The specific problem is that SME owner-managers in Nigeria need to gain an in-depth understanding of their leadership style for them to objectively evaluate its implication on long-term performance and growth of their enterprise (Koshal, 2017; Oladele & Akeke, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the experiences of SME owner-managers in Nigeria to gain an in-depth understanding of their leadership style and its implication on long-term performance and growth of their enterprise. Today's organizations are witnessing increased competitive and complex global economic environment, and consequently, the challenges faced by organizational leaders regarding enterprise performance and sustainability have increased as well (Aritz & Walker, 2014). Leadership has implications for organizational outcomes in both large, medium, and small firms (Almatrooshi et al., 2016; Franco & Matos, 2015). Understanding the implications of leadership for the performance and sustainability of SMEs has become increasingly important (Franco & Matos, 2015) because of the fundamental roles that SMEs play in the economic development of countries (Lee & Xin, 2015) especially in the areas of employment creation, poverty alleviation, and entrepreneurial development (Delalic & Oruc, 2014).

Little has been done to examine the relationship between leadership styles and organizational performance in local SMEs. The few studies conducted to specifically investigate leadership style in local SMEs include Franco & Matos's (2015) in Portugal;

Matzler, Schwarz, Deutinger, and Harms (2008) in Austria; Craciun, Nastase, Stamule, and Vizitiu (2015) in Romania; Mihai (2015) in the Netherlands, Lindgren (2012) in Denmark and are specifically targeting developed economies. Within a developing country such as Nigeria, the few studies on leadership style in SMEs are applied studies, confined to specific private sectors and do not offer new knowledge in the topic (Longe, 2014; Waziri, Ali, & Alliagha, 2015). Thus, the range of SMEs owner-managers' knowledge on the contribution of leadership styles to SME performance and growth in a developing economy such as Nigeria remains an under-researched area in the literature (Ofili, 2014). It remains unclear if SME owner-managers in Nigeria know or understand the implications of leadership styles for their enterprises' performance and growth.

This chapter contains four sections. In the first section, I discussed the strategy adopted for the literature search. In the second section, I discussed the conceptual framework for the study. In the third section, I discussed the literature on the SME firm and its socio-economic implications. Finally, I discussed the literature on the Nigerian SMEs.

Literature Review Strategy

My strategy for literature review in this study was to search for peer-reviewed journal articles within the broad and specific areas of the study as reflected in the key research concepts and methodology. The search was restricted to articles published in 2013 and beyond. The research concepts that I used for the key word search on the databases were as follows: *leadership styles, leadership in SMEs, organizational*

performance, and *sustainability of SMEs*. Seminal articles that I identified in the reviewed articles were searched and retrieved for review. I conducted literature search for peer-reviewed journal articles using the Walden University online library and Google scholar. The search for peer-reviewed journals was conducted on three business and management databases: Academic Source Complete, Emerald Insight, and SAGE Journals. I also used three Multidisciplinary Databases: Thoreau Multi-Database, ProQuest Central and Academic Search Complete.

I conducted a search on key management and leadership journals to ensure that no important articles are left out. This specific journal search covered the ten top Academic Journals that published leadership articles in the past 25 years (Dinh et al., 2014). These include *The Leadership Quarterly*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Management*, *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes*, *Personnel Psychology*, *American Psychologist*, *Academy of Management Review*, and *Organizational Science*. I searched these 10 journals from 2013 to 2017 for articles relevant to my study.

The methodology was qualitative multiple case study. Most of the literature on qualitative research methodology is found in books and edited book chapters (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon., 2015). In using the case study methodology, Gentles et al. (2015) argued that the most popular authorities are: Merriam (2009) Stake (1995, 2005, 2006), and Yin (2017). In addition to these books, I also searched some key methodology

journals for articles published from 2013 to 2017. These included *Qualitative Research*, *Qualitative Report*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Health Research*, and *Qualitative Social Work*. Finally, I used the Google Scholar to run a general check on the broad areas of my topic (using the following key search terms: *leadership styles and organizational performance*, *leadership in SMEs*, *SME performance and growth*, and *SME sustainability*) to see if there are critical articles that have been published in other peer-reviewed Journals outside the ones that I have selected.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in Bass's (1997) concept of *leadership style* and Franco and Mato's (2015) concept of *leadership in SMEs*. The traditional and emerging leadership theories (Dinh et al., 2014) are characterized by a diversity of opinions on what constitutes the appropriate leader attributes and leadership styles that can deal with the challenges of the modern-day dynamic and highly competitive business environment (Dinh et al., 2014). Notwithstanding this diversity in the theoretical understanding of leadership, there seems to be a convergence of opinion by scholars and practitioners on the positive impact that leadership can play in enterprise performance and growth (Almatrooshi et al., 2016; Oladele & Akeke, 2016).

Leadership has attracted several definitions among scholars and practitioners. The central theme that is common to most of the leadership definitions is the attempt to explain or create a relationship between antecedents and outcomes of leadership processes as it affects the leader, follower, and the organization (Dinh et al., 2014). Bass

(1999) argued that the various definitions of leadership are influenced by the purpose for which the definitions were made. Kotter (1990) described leadership as the ability to cope with change in a competitive and volatile business world. Some definitions of leadership in the literature are predicated on the leader behavior and leadership environment (Bass and Stogdill, 1990). Leadership environment has both organizational and cultural contexts. Aritz and Walker (2014) brought a cultural perspective to the definition of leadership and argued that there are cultural differences in the values that different people attach to the essence of leadership. The implication of this finding for leadership research is that different leadership styles could have varying levels of impact on the organizational participation of employees from different cultural environments.

Leadership styles are often associated or used interchangeably with the underlying leadership theories. For example, it is common for researchers to use transformational leadership theory and transformational leadership style interchangeably or transactional leadership theory versus transactional leadership styles. Several leadership theories exist in the management literature. Dinh et al. (2014) presented a typology of leadership theories and examined their use within the top ten management journals and concluded that the neo-charismatic theories (transformational/charismatic/transactional) were the most widely used theories in management and leadership research. The full range leadership model (FRLM; Avolio & Bass, 1991) includes two of the neocharismatic theories: transactional leadership and transformational leadership. The third

neocharismatic theory is the charismatic leadership that is seen to be very closely related to transformational leadership principles (Boehma et al., 2015).

Leadership style has been described as the manner that a leader uses to influence followers to achieve set objectives (Burns, 1978; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015), and it is seen as the most critical factor that drives organizational performance and sustainability (Almatrooshi et al., 2016; Grobler & Du Plessis, 2016). Some scholars have argued that leadership style could also reflect a leader's indifference to any form of relational engagement with followers (Antonakis et al., 2003; Avolio & Bass, 2004). From an organizational perspective, employees remain the critical agents for delivering organizational goals. Derecskei (2016) argued that leadership style is one of the most influential factors that impact employee creativity which is an enabler for organizational performance and sustainability. This view is supported by Grobler and Du Plessis (2016) who argued that the elements of leadership styles that enhance organizational sustainability are those that focus on providing direction, ensuring employee well-being, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship among employees, and backed by appropriate recognition and reward schemes. The majority of the research in the literature on leadership styles has focused on large organizations, leaving the SME context substantially under-researched (Franco & Matos, 2015).

In a recent study, Franco and Matos (2015) explored the nature of leadership styles in SMEs using the mixed method approach. The study focused on three leadership styles: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and passive-avoidant

(laissez-faire) leadership. The first leadership style explored by Franco and Matos (2015) is the transformational leadership. This leadership style is founded on the premise that organizational performance can be improved when leaders inspire their subordinates to a stronger commitment to the organization rather than pursuing narrow personal interests (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders engage with followers and inspire them to focus on higher-level human needs for personal achievements and self-actualization (Burns, 1978). It is a win-win situation for the employees and the organization. The organization benefits from high employees' productivity while the achievements of the employees will translate to better rewards and higher career positions for them.

Transformational leadership theory explains how leaders drive followers beyond personal interests using four tools: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized considerations (Bass, 1999). Idealized influence reflects the charisma of the leader and how this charisma is used to influence a high-performance work attitude on followers (Bass, 1999). Inspirational motivation connotes the degree to which a leader can articulate a vision and use the vision to inspire followers to strive for higher performance (Bass, 1999). Intellectual stimulation reflects the ability of a leader to bring out the cognitive and creative potentials of followers (Bass, 1999). Individualized considerations reflect the degree to which a leader can mentor followers, addressing their needs from personalized perspectives with the objective of enhancing their performance (Bass, 1999).

The second leadership style that was explored in SMEs by Franco and Matos (2015) was transactional leadership. This leadership style focuses on improving organizational productivity by getting followers to accomplish assigned tasks and to achieve established goals (Burns, 1978). It is an exchange relationship between the leader and the follower where each party tries to achieve self-interests. In return, transactional leaders provide tangible rewards and assurances to followers on the achievement of self-interests thereby reducing work-related anxiety (Bass, 1985). Burns (1978) established transactional leadership as a distinct leadership paradigm. Bass (1985) established the fact that there is a positive relationship between transactional leadership paradigm and the leader's effectiveness.

The third leadership style explored in SMEs by Franco and Matos (2015) was the passive-avoidant (*laissez-faire*) leadership. Unlike transformational and transactional leadership that focuses on follower engagement, the passive-avoidant leader lacks a sense of commitment and responsibility with followers (Bass, 1999; Burns, 1978). A passive-avoidant leader does not demonstrate any specific form of leadership style (Antonakis et al., 2003; Avolio & Bass, 2004), and does not engender positive relationships with followers. Avolio and Bass (1991) identified two elements of passive-avoidant leadership: the 'laissez-fair' leadership style in which the leader exhibits an attitude of indifference toward employees and their tasks (Avolio & Bass, 1991), and the 'management by exception' in which the leader applies punitive corrective measures in response to employees' deviations (Avolio & Bass, 1991).

With the multiplicity of leadership styles in the literature, it is reasonable to say that there are no best leadership styles (Longe, 2014). In SMEs, leadership styles depend to a large extent on the operating environment of the SMEs (Franco & Matos, 2015). SMEs are increasingly faced with the ever-changing competitive global business environment (World Bank, 2016a). Thus, the role of leadership in ensuring SME firm sustainability has become very critical (Franco & Matos, 2015). SME owner-managers lack the necessary understanding of how leadership styles can be used to improve firm performance and organizational sustainability (Agwu & Emeti, 2014,) especially under very volatile and competitive business environment (Kotter, 1990; World Bank 2016a).

SME firms are characteristically small-sized. Thus, the influence of leaders on their followers is more pronounced in these firms (Lofving et al., 2016). There are different leadership styles adopted by SME owner-managers, and each style produces different results across different SME firms (Franco & Matos, 2015). Given the globally acclaimed importance of SMEs for driving economic growth and poverty alleviation (World Bank, 2016a), and the strong association between leadership styles and SME performance (Franco & Matos, 2015), it becomes imperative for a proper understanding of the implications of leadership styles for the sustainability of the SME firms from a geographical context (Franco & Matos, 2015).

Among all the factors associated with the poor performance of Nigerian SMEs, leadership style is seen as the most critical factor that impacts the long-term sustainability of these firms (Abdullahi & Sulaiman, 2015; Agwu & Emeti, 2014; Uchegara, 2017).

With the high mortality rate of SMEs in Nigeria (Ajike et al., 2015), it is doubtful if SME owner-managers in Nigeria understand the implication of leadership styles for the performance and sustainability of their organizations as evidenced by previous research (Abdullahi & Sulaiman, 2015; Franco & Matos, 2015; Uchenwamgbe, 2013). Abdullahi and Sulaiman (2015) argued that the success of the Nigerian SMEs in today's volatile business environment is dependent on entrepreneurial skills and the effectiveness of leadership styles adopted by the SME owner-managers. This argument is supported by Ajike et al. (2015) that found a strong association between human capital and the performance of SMEs in Nigeria. Given that leadership styles in SMEs is still an under-researched area (Franco & Matos, 2015) especially from a Nigerian context (Anigbogu, Okoli, & Nwakoby, 2015; Longe, 2014; Sakiru et al., 2013), it becomes imperative to conduct a study that will explore the specific knowledge gaps that exist among SME owner-managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability

Literature Review

The objective of this literature review was to understand the existing knowledge in the literature that is relevant to this study. The key sections covered in this literature review include leadership styles, leadership theories, leadership in SMEs, leadership in Nigerian SMEs, and the operating environment of SMEs in Nigerian. Each section is discussed in details to ensure that the outcomes of this study can be related to the existing

knowledge in the literature regarding the implications of leadership styles on the performance of SMEs.

Leadership Style

Leadership style has been described as the manner that a leader uses to influence followers to achieve set objectives (Burns, 1978; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015), and it is seen as the most critical factor that drives organizational performance and sustainability (Almatrooshi et al., 2016; Grobler & Du Plessis, 2016). Some researchers have disagreed with the organizational relevance of leadership style, insisting that the essence of leadership and its adaptability are the more critical factors in the leadership process (Silva, 2014). There are also criticisms regarding the overwhelming influence of a researcher's ideological beliefs (Alvesson & Karreman, 2016), which has led to a multiplicity of opinions on the relevance of leadership styles for organizational outcomes. We have a situation where ideas are increasingly subduing intellectualism and cognitivism in the field of leadership research (Alvesson & Karreman, 2016).

Irrespective of the criticisms regarding the relevance of leadership style in enhancing organizational performance, there is substantial evidence in the literature that some positive organizational outcomes are attributable to the style of leadership (Chege, Wachira, & Mwenda, 2015; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015; Ozer & Tinaztepe, 2014). These findings indicate that the phenomenon of leadership style will continue to attract the attention of researchers in the leadership field. Leadership styles help us to understand the relationship that exists between leaders and followers in an organizational

context, though, some scholars have argued that leadership style could also reflect a leader's indifference to any form of relational engagement with followers (Antonakis et al., 2003; Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Organizational performance is a phenomenon that has been widely discussed in the literature. Researchers have identified several factors that influence organizational performance and growth. Notable among these factors are the issues of firm size (Hirvonen, Laukkanen, & Salo, 2016), and leadership style (Dinh et al., 2014; Wu, 2014). Notwithstanding the lack of consensus in the literature on what constitutes effective leadership (Dabke, 2016), researchers in the field of leadership share a common sentiment that leaders influence the fortunes of their organizations (Dinh et al., 2014), and that context and culture have influence on leader behavior and leadership effectiveness (Grobler & Du Plessis, 2016). Researchers have found that some specific leadership attributes have varying levels of influence on organizational performance. Some of these attributes include emotional intelligence (Dapke, 2016), personality (Chollet, Geraudel, & Mothe, 2014), social capital (Chollet et al., 2014), and leadership style (Mekraz & Gundala, 2016). Despite the multiplicity of studies and opinions in the literature regarding the relationship between leadership styles and organizational performance, there are still research opportunities for a better understanding of both phenomena (Malmira, Esfahanib, & Emamic, 2013) especially from the SME context (Franco & Matos, 2015).

Sustainability is a relatively new terminology in the field of management, and it attracts different definitions in the management literature. Kuhlman and Farrington (2010) described sustainability as a process of maintaining well-being over a long period; for business enterprises, this means a sustained performance over time. From an organizational perspective, employees remain the critical agents for delivering organizational goals. Derecskei (2016) argued that leadership style is one of the most influential factors that impact employee creativity which is an enabler for organizational performance and sustainability. This view is supported by Grobler and Du Plessis (2016) who argued that the elements of leadership styles that enhance organizational sustainability are those that focus on providing direction, ensuring employee well-being, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship among employees, and backed by appropriate recognition and reward schemes. There are also demographic and gender contexts to leadership styles. In a survey of companies in Macedonia, Bojadjiev, Kostovski, and Buldioska (2015) found that age of leaders and their gender influenced their leadership styles. The authors found that while top-level managers in Macedonia exhibited the attributes of autocratic leadership, middle-level managers are more aligned with laissez-faire leadership style.

Studies have shown that leadership styles have a significant influence on organizational performance and sustainability (Wu, 2014) and that different leadership styles may produce varying results in different cultural settings (Aritz & Walker, 2014; Srivastava, 2016). SMEs characteristically have a small number of employees, as such,

the leadership style of an SME's owner-manager can easily permeate and influence the culture of the entire organization. Such levels of leadership influence have implications for the SME's performance (Lofving et al., 2016) and long-term sustainability (Szczepanska-Woszczyna & Kurowska-Pysz, 2016). SMEs typically have deficiencies in managerial capabilities (Arasti et al., 2014) and may lack the capacity to employ and retain competent personnel.

There are several leadership styles that have been established in the literature, and each leadership style has varying levels of impact on organizational activities, corporate performance, and sustainability. In an international study involving data from 43 countries around the world, Van Hemmen, Alvarez, Peris-Ortiz, and Urbano (2015) found that leadership style was a significant determinant of innovative entrepreneurship which enhanced enterprise performance and growth (Oladele & Akeke, 2016). Derecskei (2016) argued that leadership style is the most influencing factor that impacts employee creativity, while Mekraz and Gundala (2016) found that transformational and transactional leadership styles had varying levels of positive influence on specific performance measures such as employee turnover rate, customer service efficiency, and profit margin percentage. In a quasi-experimental study, Arthur and Hardy (2014) found that transformational leadership interventions produced positive organizational outcomes which were attributable to an increase in desirable organizational behaviors among leaders and followers.

SMEs are very important for economic growth (Lee & Xin, 2015) because they play significant roles in employment generation, equitable distribution of income, and poverty alleviation, especially in the rural communities (Delalic & Oruc, 2014). While SMEs contribute significantly to the GDP of developed economies (OECD, 2017), the developing economies such as Nigeria have not tapped the full potentials of SMEs as engines for economic growth (Banito et al., 2017; Khatun, 2015). SMEs provide the opportunity for the deployment of domestic savings right from the grassroots level and provide employment opportunities and economic empowerment to rural communities. SMEs further provide opportunities for resource utilization at the rural levels by harnessing rural raw materials, encouraging skills acquisition, and stemming the tide of rural-urban migration.

The reasons for the poor performance of SMEs in developing countries are largely attributable to institutional and infrastructural gaps (Delalic & Oruc, 2014), and internal organizational deficiencies (Etuk, Etuk, G., & Baghebo, 2014; Olowu & Aliyu, 2015). From a Nigerian context, researchers have adduced some reasons to explain the poor performance, lack of growth and non-sustainability of SMEs in Nigeria. Some of these problems arise from ineffective government policies (Ocheni, 2015), inefficient public institutions, and lack of critical infrastructure (Etuk et al., 2014; Obokoh & Goldman, 2016). There are other problems that are attributable to organizational shortcomings of the Nigerian SME firm, especially in the areas of inadequate leadership skills.

Leadership Models

The leadership model used to discuss the conceptual framework for this study is the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM) (Avolio & Bass, 1991). The FRLM comprises of transformational leadership theory, transactional leadership theory, and the laissez-faire leadership theory. The three elements of FRLM are seen to encapsulate most of the contemporary leadership behaviors (Bass, 1999) and the use of FRLM as a managerial development tool have been found to improve leadership effectiveness among medium level managers (Chaimongkonrojna & Steane, 2015).

Leadership styles are often associated or used interchangeably with the underlying leadership theories. For example, it is common for researchers to use transformational leadership theory and transformational leadership style interchangeable or transactional leadership theory versus transactional leadership styles. Several leadership theories exist in the management literature. Dinh et al. (2014) presented a typology of leadership theories and examined their use within the top ten management journals and concluded that the neo-charismatic theories (transformational, charismatic, and transactional) were the most widely used theories in management and leadership research. The FRLM includes two of the neo-charismatic theories; transactional leadership and transformational leadership. The third neo-charismatic theory; the charismatic leadership is seen to be very closely related to transformational leadership principles (Boehma et al., 2015).

There is evidence in the literature that the three leadership styles in FRLM have a positive influence on the performance and growth of SMEs (Asiimwe, Kavoo-Linge, & Sikalieh, 2016; Linge, Shikalieh, & Asiimwe, 2016). Transactional leadership is associated with contingent reward mechanism, transformational leadership is associated with inspirational motivation, while laissez-faire leadership is associated with a lack of leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Evidence in the literature suggests that transactional and transformational leaderships have universal applicability and acceptance (Bass, 1997) as every leader exhibits some form of transactional and transformational leadership behavior (Bass, 1999).

The FRLM includes a hierarchical categorization of the three constituent leadership styles with the transformational leadership seen as most effective (Mekraz & Gundala, 2016; Ozer & Tinaztepe, 2014) followed by transactional leadership, and lastly the laissez-faire leadership. This categorization has been contested by several authors (Dias et al., 2017) on the ground that different leadership styles may be more appropriate in specific cultural environments (Aritz & Walker, 2014) and different organizational contexts (Dias et al., 2017). For example, Iscan, Ersari, and Naktiyok (2014) argued that transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership in producing positive organizational outcomes in small firms, while Masa'deh, Obeidat, and Tarhini (2016) found that within the same organizational and cultural setting, transactional leadership positively impacted employee knowledge sharing behavior whereas transformational leadership did not yield the same result.

Apart from the leadership styles in FRLM, there are other leadership styles that are closely related to the transactional and transformational leadership styles. Bass (1999) argued that directive, participative, and leader-member exchange (LMX) paradigms are very closely related to the transactional and transformational leadership styles. Some leaders can exhibit the attributes of transactional and transformational, as well as the attributes of directive, autocratic, participative, and LMX leadership styles (Bass, 1999). Another highly discussed leadership paradigm in literature is the charismatic leadership (Dinh et al., 2014). This leadership paradigm focuses on how leaders obtain loyal followership and improved organizational citizenship behavior through the charisma of the leader. Studies have shown that charismatic leadership may not have a direct influence on firm performance except if mediated by transformational leadership principles (Boehma et al., 2015). Also, Dunne et al. (2016) found that inspirational leadership influenced organizational innovativeness in small firms. The findings from Boehma et al. (2015) and Dunne et al. (2016) are consistent with Bass (1985) that conceptualized charisma and inspirational motivation as part of the four elements of transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership theory is founded on the premise that organizational performance can be improved when leaders inspire their subordinates to a stronger commitment to the organization rather than pursuing narrow personal interests (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). The transformational leadership theory incorporates various known leadership behaviors. For example,

transformation leaders may exhibit the characteristics of participative, democratic or autocratic leadership styles (Bass, 1995). These three leadership styles are often categorized as behavioral theories (Dinh et al., 2014) because they deal with the ways that individuals act in managerial activities (Mihai, Schiopoiu, & Mihai, M., 2017).

Transformational leaders engage with followers and inspire them to focus on higher-level human needs for personal achievements and self-actualization (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leaders influence their followers to perform above expectations regarding their contributions to organizational results (Bass, 1995). It is a win-win situation for the employees and the organization. The organization benefits from high employees' productivity while the achievements of the employees will translate to better rewards and higher career positions for them.

Transformational leadership theory explains how leaders drive followers beyond personal interests using four tools: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized considerations (Bass, 1985). Idealized influence reflects the charisma of the leader and how this charisma is used to influence a high-performance work attitude on followers (Bass, 1999). Inspirational motivation connotes the degree to which a leader can articulate a vision and use the vision to inspire followers to strive for higher performance (Bass, 1999). Intellectual stimulation reflects the ability of a leader to bring out the cognitive and creative potentials of followers (Bass, 1999). Individualized considerations reflect the degree to which a leader can mentor

followers, addressing their needs from personalized perspectives with the objective of enhancing their performance (Bass, 1999).

Notwithstanding the interrelationship between the four dimensions of transformational leadership, each dimension may have varying levels of impact on organizational performance (Boies et al., 2015). Among the four dimensions of transformational leadership, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation are seen to have a greater impact on team performance (Boies et al., 2015), especially when mediated by proper communication within the team (Boies et al., 2015). Some researchers have found a strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and some measures that are often associated with positive organizational outcomes including organizational learning (Imran, Ilyas, Aslam, & Ur-Rahman, 2016), innovativeness (Kacem & El Harbi, 2014), team work (Lehmann-Willenbrock, Meinecke, Rowold, & Kauffeld, 2015), and organizational growth (Katou, 2015). This finding further reinforces the strong impact of intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation in the achievement of leadership results through the transformational leadership theory.

While the fundamental principles of transformational leadership are focused on improving employee outcomes through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized considerations, questions have been raised about the ethical and moral implications of how leaders achieve their transformational agenda with their followers under the transformational leadership principles (Bass &

Steidlmeier, 1999). Latham (2014) argued that researchers have ignored the issue of abuse of power by transformational leaders who may focus only on organizational outcomes to the detriment of the social well-being of followers and other people that could be impacted by the leadership environment. Organizational outcomes that result from unethical or immoral transformative leadership behaviors may have serious consequences for the leader, the followers, and the organization as a whole. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) argued that "authentic" transformational and transactional leadership must be grounded in ethical and moral foundations as ethical attributes of leaders enhance good corporate governance (Othman & Rahman, 2014). This argument is consistent with the position of Burns (1978) that transformational leaders should also transform themselves in the process of transforming their followers.

There is an overwhelming acceptance among scholars regarding the relationship between transformational leadership and positive organizational outcomes, yet, some researchers have argued that transformational leadership theory is excessively mystified and questioned the veracity of its effects and outcomes (Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). There is no consensus in the literature on the specific leadership behaviors that can be classified as transformational (Spector, 2014), and there is the tendency for researchers to attribute extraordinary organizational outcomes to transformational leadership principles (Spector, 2014) probably because of its wide acceptance as a theoretical construct in contemporary leadership research. For example, there is a paradigm shift in the understanding of an individual's charisma within the context of transformational

leadership theory. Beyer (1999) argued that charisma is an emergent social structure that is much broader than the phenomenon of leadership and that the discussion of charisma from the context of leadership largely ignores the situations in which leadership occurs (Beyer, 1999).

Geier (2016) argued that transformational leadership within the context of full range leadership model is adaptive and not some static behavioral phenomena. Some managers are more transformational in extreme situations than they are in normal situations (Geier, 2016). There is also the argument that the conceptualizations of transformational leadership in the literature have mostly focused on individual-level behaviors with little attention paid to group-level behaviors. While some researchers have mostly associated individual attitudes and personal disposition of leaders to their transformational behavior (Jina, Seo, & Shapiro, 2015), there is the need to distinguish the conceptualization of transformational leadership between individual and group levels. For example, Li, Mitchel, and Boyle (2016) argued that while group level transformational leadership improved group innovativeness in organizations, it had a negative impact on individual-level innovativeness within the group.

One area that researchers have criticized the conceptualization of transformational leadership is the issue of leader's self-esteem. Andersen (2015) argued that the theoretical conceptualization of an individual's transformational behaviors is more aligned with political and social orientations in leader-follower relationships, and, therefore has limited applications from a managerial and organizational context. In a

related development, Matzler, Bauer, and Mooradian (2014) argued that self-esteem of leaders has been neglected in the emerging research and discussions on transformational leadership. The argument by Matzler et al, (2014) is supported by the traits approach to leadership theory which suggests that leadership behaviors emerge from individual personality traits (Landis, Hill, & Harvey, 2014)

Andersen (2015) argued that there is insufficient empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of transformational leadership from organizational contexts. The argument by Anderson (2015) is collaborated by Alvesson and Karreman (2015), who argued that the ideological beliefs espoused by scholars in the field of transformational leadership research far outweigh the intellectual and cognitive content that they bring into their research. These two lines of argument (Alvesson & Karreman, 2015; Anderson, 2015) are further supported by McCleskey (2014) who emphasized the need to fit leadership capabilities with organizational situations.

Despite the several criticisms of transformational leadership theory in the literature, it remains one of the most widely used theories in leadership research. It has been seen to be effective in yielding positive organizational outcomes (Arthur & Hardy, 2014) especially in SMEs (Franco & Matos, 2015). Transformational leadership is therefore considered an appropriate theoretical construct to anchor a study involving the examination of leadership styles in SMEs.

Transactional Leadership Theory. Transactional leadership theory focuses on improving organizational productivity by getting followers to accomplish assigned tasks

and to achieve established goals (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). It is an exchange relationship between the leader and the follower where each party tries to achieve self-interests (Bass, 1985). In return, transactional leaders provide tangible rewards and assurances to followers on the achievement of self-interests thereby reducing work-related anxiety. Burns (1978) established transactional leadership as a distinct leadership paradigm. Bass (1985) established the fact that there is a positive relationship between transactional leadership paradigm and the leader's effectiveness.

There are three dimensions of transactional leadership namely: contingent reward, in which employees are rewarded for meeting or surpassing set targets (Bass & Avolio, 1995); management by exception actively, where leaders are actively involved in helping and monitoring followers for increased performance (Bass & Avolio, 1995); and management by exception passively, where leaders support followers only when problem arises (Bass & Avolio, 1995).

Some scholars have criticized the transactional leadership theory because it does not bring into perspective the situational and contextual dimensions of organizational leadership (Beyer, 1999; Yukl, 1999; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). These authors argued that the fundamental principles of transactional leadership are universal in its conceptualization, neglecting the obvious varying circumstances of different organizational settings and leader-follower relational environment. Regardless of this criticism, transactional leadership theory will be used as one of the theoretical constructs in this study. The organizational contexts limitations of transactional leadership theory as

noted by Beyer (1999) and Yukl (1999) will be addressed in the current study based on the multiple-case study design.

Laissez-faire Leadership Style. Unlike transformational and transactional leadership that focuses on follower engagement (Bass, 1999; Burns, 1978) the passive-avoidant leader lacks a sense of commitment and responsibility with followers. A passive-avoidant leader does not demonstrate any specific form of leadership style (Antonakis et al., 2003; Avolio & Bass, 2004), and does not engender positive relationships with followers. Avolio and Bass (1999) identified two elements of passive-avoidant leadership: the 'laissez-fair' leadership style in which the leader exhibits an attitude of indifference toward employees and their tasks (Avolio & Bass, 1999), and the 'management by exception' in which the leader applies punitive corrective measures in response to employees' deviations (Avolio & Bass, 1999). Though some researchers view the laissez-fair leadership style as ineffective, evidence in the literature suggests that laissez-fair leadership allows freedom and empowerment among followers (Linge et al., 2016) and this engenders creativity among SME employees with resultant positive impact on performance and growth of SMEs (Linge et al., 2016).

Comparing Transformational and Transactional Leadership Styles. In their conceptualization of the FRLM, Bass and Avolio (1994) affirmed that transformational and transactional leadership were the most effective leadership styles when used collectively. Both leadership styles complement each other but cannot substitute each other. But some researchers argue that both leadership styles have different impacts on

specific organizational performance factors. For example, Moriano, Molero, Topa, and Mangin (2014) found that transformational leadership positively influenced employees' entrepreneurial behavior whereas transactional leadership had a negative influence on employee entrepreneurial behavior. Also, some researchers argue that transformational leadership is only effective in an environment with strong organizational commitment, thus raising the question whether the positive outcomes of transformational leadership is attributable to the transformational behavior of the leader or the organizational commitment of the employees. The multiple-case study design in the current research is an opportunity to understand how both leadership theories are applied from multiple organizational contexts.

Leadership in SMEs

SMEs are characteristically small-sized with a limited number of employees, such that the behavior and leadership style of an SME's owner-manager can easily permeate and influence the culture of the entire firm (Jansson, Nilsson, Modig, & Vall, 2015; Lofving et al., 2016; Quan, 2015). Evidence in the literature suggests that the attitudes and behaviors of leaders within an organizational setting influence their leadership orientation (Jin et al., 2015) and leadership outcomes. For example, Shehu and Mahmood (2014) found that SME owner-managers that influence their organizations with innovative and supportive cultures tend to achieve higher levels of organizational performance. SMEs typically operate with limited resources, such that leadership quality and style becomes a key variable for stimulating organizational commitment (Pyngavil,

2015; Quan, 2015) and achieving positive organizational outcomes in this type of firm (Garavan Watson, Carbery, & O'Brien, 2016). This argument is supported by Tsai, Wang, and Yuan (2015) who argued that the positive outcomes associated with transformational leadership in SMEs are mediated by organizational commitment and employee competence.

The quality of leadership in SMEs is seen to be low compared to larger organizations (Quan, 2015), therefore, improving leadership skills in SMEs will depend to a large extent on the disposition of the SME owner-manager to learning, and the resources available to the firm to engage in leadership development practices (Garavan et al., 2016; Mendes & Lourenco, 2014). Majority of the research in the literature on leadership styles have focused on large organizations, leaving the SME context substantially under-researched (Franco & Matos, 2015). The few studies in the literature on leadership in SMEs suggest the existence of different dimensions of leadership across different cultures, thereby making the ability of SME owner-managers to understand their local socio-economic environments (Sejjaaka, Mindra, & Nsereko, 2015) an important factor for SMEs performance and sustainability.

Among the vast number of leadership styles in the literature, researchers have found that transactional and transformational leadership are the dominant leadership styles in SMEs (Kacem & El Harbi, 2014; Long et al., 2016; Mesu et al., 2015). These two leadership styles have positive impact on several performance enablers in SMEs including entrepreneurial orientation (Muchiri & McMurray, 2015), organizational

commitment (Long et al., 2016; Mittal 2016), employee innovativeness and productivity (Gross, 2016; Kacem & El Harbi, 2014), quality of work life (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015), team performance (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2015), and organizational growth (Katou, 2015). This further justifies the need to anchor the theoretical framework for this study on the transformational and transactional leadership styles.

There is a cultural dimension to the leadership styles in SMEs. The leadership styles that have been found to be dominant among SMEs in specific cultures are as follows: India, autocratic leadership (Pyngavil, 2015); Turkey, transformational and transactional leadership (Ozer & Tinaztepe, 2014); Netherlands, democratic leadership (Mihai et al., 2017); Romania, democratic leadership (Mihai et al., 2017); Malaysia, transformational leadership (Tajasom, Hung, Nikbin, & Hyun, 2015); Saudi Arabia, transactional leadership (Albloshi & Nawar, 2015). These findings justify the need for an exploratory qualitative study to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between leadership styles and firm sustainability from more organizational and cultural contexts (Pyngavil, 2015). In this current study, the organizational context is the SME firm, and the cultural or geographical context is Nigeria.

Though Bass (1999) argued that every leader displays both transactional and transformational attributes with each leader aligning more to either transformational leadership style or the transactional leadership style, evidence in the literature from recent articles suggest that transformational leadership have stronger influence on SME

performance than transactional leadership (Mekraz & Gundala, 2016; Mgeni & Nayak, 2016). Transformational leadership is an enabler for a creative environment in SMEs (Mittal & Dhar, 2015) because it promotes knowledge sharing (Rawung, Wuryaningrat, & Elvinita, 2015) and engenders trust between SME owner-managers and their employees (Mittal, 2016). Transformational leadership increases the levels of organizational commitment within the SME firm, thereby reducing employee turnover intentions (Mittal, 2016). Transformational leadership is also seen as a predictor of entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance in SMEs (Muchiri & McMurray, 2015). In a study that reviewed the effectiveness of leadership styles on Turkish SMEs, Iscan et al. (2014) found that transformational leadership had a strong influence on the performance and innovativeness of SMEs in Turkey.

In a recent study, Franco and Matos (2015) explored the nature of leadership styles in SMEs using the mixed method approach. The study involved three SMEs from three different sectors in the Portuguese economy. The study was conceptualized based on the three leadership styles in the FRLM: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and passive-avoidant leadership (*laissez-faire*). The results of the study indicate that SME owner-managers do not faithfully follow any pure leadership style. The authors found that in one firm, transformational leadership was dominant; in the second firm, transactional leadership was dominant; while in the third firm, there was a near equal exhibition of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors. Therefore, the appropriateness of leadership styles in SMEs depends to a large extent on

the dynamics of the operating environment and specific organizational contexts (Franco & Matos, 2105) of the SMEs. This conclusion is consistent with the findings by Mesu et al. (2015) that explored the sectoral dimensions of leadership styles in SMEs in the Netherlands and found that a combination of transformational and directive leadership styles positively influenced organizational commitment within Dutch SMEs in the service sector but not in the manufacturing sector.

With the multiplicity of leadership styles in the literature, it is reasonable to say that there are no best leadership styles. In practice, leaders may align more with a particular leadership style and less to others (Franco & Matos, 2015), especially in SMEs where leadership styles depend to a large extent on the operating environment and geographical locations of the SMEs (Franco & Matos, 2015). From a geographical context, some researchers see the consciousness of SME leaders about their environment (Sejjaaka et al., 2015) and their perseverance to survive within such environment (Sejjaaka et al., 2015) at all odds as critical factors for the sustainability of the firm. SMEs are increasingly faced with the ever-changing competitive global business environment (World Bank, 2016a). Thus, the role of leadership in ensuring SME sustainability has become very critical (Franco & Matos, 2015). SME owner-managers lack the necessary understanding of how leadership styles can be used to improve firm performance and organizational sustainability (Agwu & Emeti, 2014,) especially under very volatile and competitive business environment (Kotter, 1990; World Bank 2016a).

The Nature of the Small and Medium Enterprises

The concept of the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) is explained with different criteria depending on the local context, country, and economic development of the region in which it is located. In some instances, SMEs' definitions vary according to the industry classification. These definitions are mostly associated with the number of employees, net assets, and revenues of the SMEs. The most widely adopted SME classification criterion in the literature is the number of employees. In the developed economies, the threshold for SMEs is 250-500 employees (Aga, Francis, & Rodrigue-Meza, 2015), while in the developing economies, the threshold is 100 employees or less (Aga et al., 2015). The World Bank defines SMEs as enterprises with a maximum of 300 employees, annual turnover of 15 million Dollars and net assets of 15 million Dollars. According to OECD, SMEs are firms employing up to 249 persons broken down into micro enterprises (employing one to nine persons), small enterprises (employing 10 to 49 persons) and medium enterprises (50-249 persons).

The European Commission (2003) defined SMEs as organizations employing less than 250 persons with annual revenues of 50 million Euros or less, and net assets not exceeding 43 million Euros. In the United States, SMEs are defined according to industry classification by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) developed by statistical agencies in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. In some countries, there is still ambiguities and multiplicity of policies in the conceptualization of SMEs (Khatun,

2015). Some of the policies suffer from lack of effective implementation especially in developing economies (Khatun, 2015).

In Nigeria, the first national policy on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) was developed by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and approved by the Federal Executive Council (FEC) in 2007. The policy was revised in 2015 to reflect the unfolding economic and social circumstances affecting MSMEs in Nigeria. The policy defined small enterprises as organizations employing 10-49 persons with an asset base of 10-99 million Naira (excluding land and building). Medium enterprises are classified in the policy as organizations employing 50-199 persons with net assets in the range of 50-1000 million Naira (excluding land and buildings). Organizations employing less than ten persons are classified in the policy as micro-enterprises. In Nigeria, the number of persons employed takes precedence over asset base in the classification of SMEs.

Evidence from the study of various workplace processes of small firms suggests that they are not merely miniature versions of large firms (Carson, 1990; Darcy et al., 2014). Following a resourced-based view, Darcy et al. (2014) found that internal human capital capabilities of SMEs are characteristically different from what is obtainable in large firms, and a critical element of organizational human resource capability is leadership. Some of the distinguishing characteristics of SMEs from large firms include strategy formulation and implementation (Darcy et al., 2014), and the role of the owner-manager (Darcy et al., 2014).

Significance of SMEs

The significance of SMEs in economic development varies across countries. SMEs in the developed economies contribute more to employment generation than what is obtainable in the less-developed or emerging economies (OECD, 2017; World Bank, 2015). Most SMEs in the emerging economies operate in the informal sector, with a limited number of them operating in the formal sector (World Bank, 2015). The SMEs in the informal sector find it difficult if not impossible to benefit from various government interventions including the critical issue of finance. In a cross-sectional study involving data from 104 countries, Ayyagari et al. (2014) found that SMEs within the threshold of 250 employees or more contributed more to employment generation in the developed economies compared to SMEs within the threshold of 100 employees or less. The lower employee-threshold SMEs are more predominant in the developing economies (Ayyagari et al., 2014), which explains the observed lower contributions to employment growth and GDP by SMEs in these countries (World Bank, 2015).

SMEs in the developing economies typically employ low income to lower-middle income earners, while the higher employee-threshold SMEs are more prevalent in the developed economies with significant upper middle-income to high-income earners (Ayyagari et al., 2014). A recent European Commission report indicated that 25 million SMEs in Europe generated over 3.9 trillion Euros in value added and employed 90 million people accounting for two-thirds of employment in Europe in 2015 (Muller, Devani, Julius, Gagliardi, & Marzocchi, 2016). While there is a lot of research in the

literature on SMEs in the developed economies, there remains a paucity of research regarding the SMEs in the developing economies (Aga et al., 2015)

Performance and Sustainability of SMEs

Though the operating environment of SMEs is traditionally assumed to be local, the modern-day advances in information and communication technologies have exposed SMEs to the same global forces of competition that are faced by large firms. SMEs are not shielded from the competitive pressures faced by large firms (Darcy et al., 2014, Yusuf & Dansu, 2013). Therefore, today's SMEs must be able to adapt to local and global competitive pressures as a strategy for organizational sustainability. SMEs have to grow to make a meaningful contribution to economic development. There is a connection between the profitability of SMEs and their ability to grow (Yazdanfar & Ohman, 2015) and contribute to economic development. Lee and Xin (2015) found that expansion in the size of SMEs contributes more to economic development more than absolute increase in their numbers. Mendes and Lourenco (2014) argued that the educational attainment and priorities of SMEs' managers influence the disposition of these firms to improvement programs that can enhance their enterprise performance and growth (Oladele & Akeke, 2016). Therefore, it is important to understand how an organizational process such as leadership impact the performance and growth (Oladele & Akeke, 2016) of SMEs.

Regardless of the low level of leadership in small firms, Jansson et al. (2015) argued that most SMEs have strong market orientation which can be explained by the close connection between SMEs and their customers. A close connection with customers

gives SMEs some advantage in markets where they compete with large firms. Lonial and Carter (2015) argued that strong marketing, entrepreneurial, and learning orientations are critical factors that influence the performance and sustainability of SMEs, and entrepreneurial orientation has been associated with specific leadership styles (Koe et al., 2015). Evidence from the literature suggests that the relationship between market orientation and performance of SMEs is mediated by organizational culture (Shehu & Mahmood, 2014). Therefore, it becomes very important for SME leaders to fully understand how their managerial behaviors and sustainability practices (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2014) impact their stakeholders or influence the culture of their organizations, and the impact of these behaviors and practices on organizational performance and sustainability.

Researchers have identified several factors that influence the performance and sustainability of SMEs. Some of these factors include location and sector (Woldeyohanes, 2014), access to finance (Govori, 2013; World Bank 2015); managerial skills and experience (Fatoki, 2014); and leadership styles (Iskan et al., 2014; Franco & Matos, 2015). There is also the argument for researchers to look beyond quantitative factors in the evaluation of performance and sustainability of SMEs. Gao and Banerji (2015) argued that qualitative factors like growth in employee skills and customer satisfaction are important factors that can sustain the SME firm. Equally, the character of the SME owner-managers is an influencing factor on the performance and sustainability of their organizations. For SMEs, existing studies show that several attributes of

managers like personality and social capital (Chollet et al., 2014), leadership qualities (Craciun et al., 2015) and leadership styles (Franco & Matos, 2015; Iscan et al., 2014) influence the performance of the SME firm. Also, the experience and competence of SME owner-managers (Brien & Hamburg, 2014), their leadership orientation (Chanut-Guieu & Guieu, 2014), and the ability to adapt to economic challenges (Brien & Hamburg, 2014) are important success factors that drive organizational performance and sustainability among the SME firms.

Most of the existing research in the literature on organizational sustainability has focused on large firms leaving the phenomenon of organizational sustainability in SMEs relative under-researched. The reasons for this neglect have been attributed to the notion by some researchers that SMEs are scaled-down versions of large firms (Darcy et al., 2014). This argument has been challenged in the literature as there are underlying characteristics of SMEs that justify the need for them to be examined as distinct organizations when compared to large firms (Carson, 1985; 1990; Yusuf & Dansu, 2013). SMEs typically have different organizational orientations compared to large firms (Lonial & Carter, 2015), and this makes it imperative for more research on various organizational phenomena that impact the performance and sustainability of SMEs including the critical issue of leadership style (He, Standen, & Coetzer, 2017).

There is the need for a better understanding of leadership styles as organizational phenomena in SMEs. Szczepanska-Woszczyzna and Kurowska-Pysz (2016) argued that leadership is the most influential factor impacting the sustainability of SMEs because

SME owner-managers play a key role in strategically shaping the culture of their organizations to align with sustainable economic, social, and environmental practices. Sustainability factors associated with pollution and environment, economic growth, social well-being, and performance management are very relevant to the SME firm (Tan, Yeo, Nga, Tjandraa, & Songa, 2015). SME firms are closer to their cultural environment compared to large firms, and cultural adaptability has been found to mediate the effectiveness of transformational leadership in SMEs (Manaf & Latif, 2014). Thus, SMEs can be more responsive than larger firms in meeting the needs of customers within their immediate operating environment. This is an important competitive advantage that can enhance the performance and growth of the SME firms.

The Nigerian Context

According to the World Bank (2016b) population report, Nigeria ranks number 7 in the world with 2016 population estimate of approximately 186 million people. The fertility rate in Nigeria is among the highest in the developing world, with an annual population growth rate averaging 2.7% (World Bank, 2016b). Nigeria's GDP is the largest in Africa with 2016 GDP estimate of approximately 405 billion Dollars (World Bank, 2017b). Nigeria's economy is highly dependent on oil and gas exports (World Bank, 2017a). The collapse of oil prices in the international market from 2015, coupled with serious sabotage of oil and gas facilities in the Niger Delta region led to a substantial decrease in Nigerian government revenues (World Bank, 2017a).

The Nigerian economy went into full recession in 2016 (World Bank, 2017a) with a GDP contraction of 1.5% in 2016 (World Bank, 2017a), and a sharp depreciation of the Naira by over 50% against the United States Dollars in the official market and as much as 250% at the parallel market. Inflation rate as at December 2016 was 18.6% (World Bank, 2017a). With improving international oil prices in 2017, reduction in the sabotage of Nigerian oil and gas facilities in the Niger Delta region, and with improved economic policies of the Nigerian government, the Nigerian economy showed signs of recovery in 2017 with a minimal positive GDP growth of 1% projected for 2017 (World Bank, 2017a).

Unemployment and inflation rates were estimated at 5% and 9.6% respectively for the year 2016 (World Bank, 2017b). The unemployment rate was measured as a percentage of the total labor force (World Bank, 2017b). The Nigerian socio-economic environment is characterized by high levels of poverty and income inequality. There is a serious gap between the economic growth indices and the rate of decline in poverty. It is estimated that for every 1% growth in GDP, the poverty rate declined by only 0.6% (World Bank, 2016b). Part of the problem is that there are limited economic activities and opportunities in the rural communities leading to very high levels of rural-urban migration.

The Nigerian SME Environment

SMEs (including micro enterprises) are the vastest business enterprises in Nigeria but their slow pace of growth and lack of sustainability limit the overall

contribution of these firms to Nigeria's GDP (Ikharehon & Briggs, 2016). In Nigeria, the conceptualization of SMEs is based on the number of employees and net assets (excluding land and buildings) of the firm, with the number of employees having precedence over net assets. The Nigerian national policy on MSMEs (SMEDAN, 2015) defined small enterprises as organizations employing 10-49 persons with an asset base of 10-99 million Naira (excluding land and building). Medium enterprises are classified in the policy as organizations employing 50 to 199 persons with net assets in the range of 50-1000 million Naira (excluding land and buildings). Organizations employing less than ten persons are classified in the policy as micro-enterprises.

According to the 2013 National MSME collaborative survey (SMEDAN, 2013), the estimated number of micro enterprises was 36.99 million with minimum total employment of 57.84 million; small and medium enterprises stood at 68,168 and 4,670 respectively, with combined employment figures of 1,903,820 persons. The SMEs in Nigeria mostly operate in the formal sectors of the economy while the micro enterprises operate in the informal sector (SMEDAN, 2013). Available statistics show that 53,000 out of the about 73,000 SMEs in Nigeria are sole proprietorships, about 10,000 limited liability companies, and about 5,000 partnerships (SMEDAN, 2013). SMEs cut across various sectors of the Nigerian economy, and their contributions to the Nigerian GDP vary by sector. For example, Nigerian GDP estimates for 2013 show that in the administrative and support services sector, SMEs contributed 80.96% to Nigeria GDP; 50.46% in the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector; 41.66% in the accommodation

and food services sector; 41.25% in the manufacturing sector; and 39.17 in the educational sector (SMEDAN 2013).

SMEs can play important roles in employment generation, income redistribution, poverty alleviation, and an overall increase in the level of economic activities; especially in the rural communities. Nigeria has a high rate of unemployment, and this could partly explain the high rate of crime and sectarian violence among Nigerian youths. Well managed SMEs can provide opportunities for employment generation in Nigeria (Etuk et al., 2014). Unfortunately, SMEs in Nigeria operate under very harsh economic and infrastructural environment (Motilewa, Ogbari, & Aka, 2015). This explains the very low survival rate for SMEs in Nigeria, with most of them going into extinction within the first 5 years of existence (Ajike et al., 2015). This problem is further compounded because the owner-managers of most SMEs in Nigeria have limited knowledge on the factors that might contribute to business sustainability (Uchegara, 2017) including the critical factor of leadership style (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015; Oladele & Akeke, 2016). This makes it imperative for a proper understanding of the possible knowledge gaps regarding leadership and human resource development within the Nigerian SME context.

Challenges of SMEs in Nigeria

SMEs in Nigeria operate under difficult and challenging economic environment (Motilewa et al., 2015; Nassar & Faloye, 2015; Ocheni, 2015), and therefore, find it difficult to perform and grow. The economic difficulties faced by SMEs in Nigeria is due

to the lack of appropriate infrastructure and sustainable government policies (Ikharehon & Briggs, 2016) that have propelled the success of SMEs in the developed economies. Successive Nigerian governments have failed to put the necessary infrastructure and policies in place to engender entrepreneurial activities that can promote economic development (Ofili, 2014).

A recent World Bank report (World Bank, 2016a) ranked Nigeria as 169th out of 189 countries on the ease of doing business index. This low ranking is indicative of the difficulties faced by organizations doing business in Nigeria including SMEs. The Nigerian unfriendly economic environment hinders creativity and innovativeness (Nassar & Faloye, 2015) within the Nigerian SME firms and this easily translates to stagnation and closure of these firms.

The Infrastructure Problem. The Nigerian business environment is characterized by lack of enabling infrastructure that can support the development and growth of small businesses. Electricity generation and distribution infrastructure are marred by low capacity and operational inefficiencies. Small business owners are forced to generate their electricity. The road infrastructure is in very bad condition leading to severe financial losses in the movement of goods across the country. Telecommunication service providers are very unreliable, and users often pay for services that were not rendered. All these infrastructural challenges increase the cost of products and services of SMEs in Nigeria making it impossible for them to grow and survive.

Unstable Macro-Economic Environment. The Nigerian economic environment

is characterized by unstable fiscal and monetary regulatory policies. Inadequate and unstable government policies have negative consequences for economic activities and the performance of SMEs. For example, Arasti et al. (2014) found that inappropriate and unstable government policies were responsible for high failure rates of SMEs in Iran. The situation in Nigerian is not different. There are the problems of inadequacy or lack of continuity of government policies in Nigeria. The resulting unstable economic environment does not support the growth and long-term survival of SMEs (Ocheni, 2015; Ofili, 2014). It becomes important to understand the role that leadership style can play to improve the survival chances of SMEs under an unstable economic environment such as Nigeria.

The Funding Related Problems. Traditionally, SMEs all over the world are initially funded from owners' savings, though in the advanced Western economies, opportunities exist for SMEs to obtain initial funding from Venture Capital institutions and other financial institutions that provide start-up capital for new enterprises. In the less developed economies such as Nigeria, there are no established financial institutions that provide start-up capital for SMEs (Agba et al., 2015). Owners or promoters of these SME firms in Nigeria rely on own capital which is often jeopardized by lack of personal savings due to high poverty rates and high cost of living. Evidence in the literature suggests that the provision of adequate funding for SMEs in Nigeria will have a significant positive impact on their performance and sustainability (Ilegbinosa & Jumbo, 2015).

SMEs in Nigeria are often unable to borrow money from the Commercial Banks due to lack of collaterals to secure such loans (Ilegbinosa & Jumbo, 2015); either because they do not own assets of sufficient value or due to the high cost of documenting and perfecting title documents in Nigeria. Commercial banks in Nigeria see SMEs as high-risk ventures (Imoughele & Ismaila, 2014); such that even when a few of the SMEs provide the necessary collaterals, the funds come at very high cost with severe consequences on their financial condition (Imoughele & Ismaila, 2014), which in turn impact performance and growth of the SME firms.

The Human Capital Problem. Employees are critical organizational resources irrespective of firm size. The ability to source, develop and retain capable employees is one of the challenges facing organizations. The inability to deal with this challenge could have serious consequences for organizational performance and sustainability. There are the issues of skills gap, and poor employee-job fit among SMEs in Nigeria. SMEs in Nigeria do not understand the competencies that are required by their employees to effectively fulfill their roles (SMEDAN, 2013). This position is further supported by the finding from Ugheoke, Isa, and Noor (2014) that ensuring individual-firm fit improved the performance of SMEs in Nigeria.

It is common knowledge that large organizations poach experienced personnel from smaller firms making it impossible for them to retain sufficiently experienced people that can help the organization to drive innovation and growth. In Nigeria, the problem is further compounded because the SMEs lack the financial capacity to pay good

salaries that will attract or retain competent and experienced personnel. This results in poor organizational commitment and high employee turn-over rate among the SMEs in Nigeria.

The Profitability Problem. SMEs in Nigeria are prone to low profitability primarily because of the high cost of doing business in Nigeria (World Bank, 2016a). The efficiency of sales and marketing activities have an impact on the sales volume and profitability of any business enterprise. Researchers in Nigeria have found that a significant relationship exists between the marketing problems faced by SMEs and their low sales volumes (Ebitu, Ufot, & Olom, 2015). Some of these marketing problems include poor marketing skills and the lack of financing to support upscale marketing activities that will enable their products to compete with those made by larger firms (Ebitu et al., 2015). The marketing problems faced by SMEs have also been reported in other developing economies around the world. Khatun (2015) argued that SMEs in the rural areas in Bangladesh lack access to information that will enable them to properly price their products and this has negative consequences for achieving profitability and growth.

Performance of SMEs in Nigeria

Since SMEs in Nigeria operate under difficult economic environment, it becomes imperative for SME owner-managers in Nigeria to devise survival strategies that will ensure the sustainability of their enterprise (Ifekwem & Ademola, 2016). Researchers have adduced several reasons to explain the poor performance, lack of growth and non-

sustainability of SMEs in Nigeria. While some of these problems arise from ineffective government policies (Ocheni, 2015), inefficient public institutions, and lack of critical infrastructure (Etuk et al., 2014; Obokoh & Goldman, 2016;), others are attributable to organizational shortcomings of the Nigerian SME firm which include lack of managerial skills and poor human capital development (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016; Olowu & Aliyu, 2015; Roman et al., 2016), poor risk management (Yusuf & Dansu, 2013), and the existence of knowledge gaps on the implications of leadership styles for organizational sustainability (Etuk et al., 2014).

SME owner-managers in Nigeria have very negative attitudes toward risk management (Yusuf & Dansu, 2013) and this increases the vulnerability of SMEs in high-risk economic environments such as Nigeria. Local business risks in Nigeria include financial risks, operational risks, environmental risks, competitive risks, and security risks. In most cases, the Nigerian SMEs cannot take appropriate insurance policies that can cover these risks. Furthermore, the Nigerian SME firms lack access to modern information communication technologies (ICT) which can support creativity and innovativeness (Rufai, 2014), and at the same time, help to address some of the local business risks. This development is different from what is obtainable in the developed economies where creativity and innovativeness supported with modern ICT infrastructure have been proven to be the major driver for SME performance and growth (Lee & Xin, 2015). Since some researchers have attributed innovativeness in SMEs to specific leadership styles (Mittal & Dhar, 2015), it, therefore, becomes imperative to fully

understand the role that leadership style can play in transforming the Nigerian SMEs into creative, innovative, and sustainable organizations.

Summary

Chapter 2 examined the existing resources regarding the key concepts in this study which are leadership styles, leadership in SMEs, the relationship between leadership styles and SME performance, and SME sustainability. The studies that were reviewed examined leadership styles from different contexts including firm size, multiculturalism, organizational performance, and sustainability. Evidence from the literature suggests that specific leadership styles have varying levels of influence on SME performance (Dunne et al., 2016; Oladele, 2106), and this influence has both organizational and cultural contexts. The conceptualization of the study was anchored on the FRLM (Avolio & Bass, 1991). The key elements of the FRLM are transformational leadership theory, transactional leadership theory, and the laissez-faire leadership theory.

From a Nigerian context, there remains paucity of studies regarding the relationship between leadership styles in SMEs and its impact on organizational performance and sustainability. Among all the factors associated with the poor performance of Nigerian SMEs, leadership style is seen as the most critical factor that impacts the long-term sustainability of these firms (Abdullahi & Sulaiman, 2015; Agwu & Emeti, 2014; Uchehara, 2017). With the high mortality rate of SMEs in Nigeria (Ajike et al., 2015), it is doubtful if SME owner-managers in Nigeria understand the implications of leadership styles for the performance and sustainability (Abdullahi &

Sulaiman, 2015; Agwu & Emeti, 2014; Franco & Matos, 2015) of their organizations. In Chapter 3, I presented the research method for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the experiences of SME owner-managers in Nigeria to gain an in-depth understanding of their leadership style and its implications for long-term performance and growth of their enterprise. The outcome of this study has added the Nigerian contexts of leadership styles in SMEs into the leadership literature. Majority of the research in the literature on leadership styles have focused on large organizations, leaving the SME context substantially under-researched (Franco & Matos, 2015). SMEs are characteristically small-sized and operate with limited resources. As such, leadership quality and style become a key variable for stimulating organizational commitment (Pyngavil, 2015; Quan, 2015) and achieving positive organizational outcomes in this type of firm (Garavan et al., 2016).

In this chapter, I discussed the research approach and the methodology for conducting the study. I explained the role of the researcher in detail to deal with issues of researcher's bias and how it was controlled in the study. In the design rationale, I provided the reasons for adopting the case-study method over other qualitative methods. I discussed the strategies for participants' selection and the procedures for recruiting participants. I described the data collection instruments, methods, and the data analysis procedures and ensured that these procedures were aligned with steps that were taken to address the issues of internal and external validity, dependability, and confirmability.

Finally, I discussed and justified the ethical procedures that was followed to ensure confidentiality and protection of the study participants.

Research Design and Rationale

The phenomenon that I explored in this study is leadership styles in SMEs from the context of a developing economy such as Nigeria. The gap in the literature is that it remains unknown the specific knowledge gaps that exist among SME owner-managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' performance and long-term sustainability. Leadership style has been described as the manner that a leader uses to influence followers to achieve set objectives (Burns, 1978; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015), and it is the most critical factor that drives organizational performance and sustainability in SMEs (Franco & Matos, 2015; Oladele & Akeke, 2016). Evidence in the literature suggests that leadership styles have both cultural (Aritz & Walker, 2014) and organizational (Dias et al., 2017) contexts. In this study, the organizational context was the SME firm, and the cultural context was Nigeria.

There is a relationship between the philosophical worldview of a researcher and the research approach that is adopted for a study (Patton, 2015). Constructivist worldview advocates rely on the views of individuals that have experienced the situations under investigation (Baskarada, 2014; Kim, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This worldview is consistent with the qualitative research approach that focuses on understanding the

meaning that individuals ascribe to their experiences on different types of social and human problems (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The quantitative approach was not suitable for this study because it focuses on the relationships between variables. Patton (2015) and Cronin (2014) argued that the quantitative approach cannot be used to discover some hidden aspects of a human phenomenon such as leadership style. Patton (2015) argued that appropriate research questions must be raised to address the purpose of a qualitative study. The research questions to a large extent determine the nature of method design that the researcher will undertake. To address the purpose of the study, I raised one main research question:

What are the specific knowledge gaps among SME owners and managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability?

The choice of an appropriate qualitative methodology for any inquiry will depend on the nature of the phenomenon that will be explored, and the research questions raised by the researcher. In choosing a specific qualitative method for a study, there is the need for a proper understanding of the research questions and a full consideration of the strengths and limitations of each qualitative method in dealing with the research questions (Patton, 2015). The researcher must justify the rationale for choosing a particular methodology over others (Boddy, 2016). Some of the methods commonly used by qualitative researchers include narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. This study involved exploring how people understand and

apply the phenomenon of leadership style within specific organizational contexts. Ridder (2017) argued that case study design is the most appropriate methodology for exploring or examining such phenomenon within specific contexts.

Unlike other qualitative approaches such as phenomenology and grounded theory that have more coherent design strategies in literature, case study design attracts a lot of variations in the literature (Yazan, 2015), such that each design is aligned to the specific circumstances of the case under investigation. Hyett et al. (2014) argued that the variation in case study design are often attributed to the peculiarities of the case and the research questions. This allows the researcher the opportunity to construct theories both from within-case analysis and across-case analysis.

Case study design can involve single or multiple cases. Baskadara (2014) argued that multiple-case study design is preferred to a single-case study unless there are special justifications that suggest that single-case study will be more appropriate for the study. In this study, there was no rationale for the existence of critical case, an extreme case, a representative, or typical case that would have justified the use of single-case study design for the study. Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007) argued that multiple-case study is the most rigorous strategy for building or extending theory on an organizational phenomenon in doctoral level research. Also, some researchers have argued that the multiple-case study strategy allows data analyses within and across cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cronin, 2014), thus providing a better understanding of the study phenomenon. I selected the multiple case study as the most appropriate type of case study for this research because it

allowed an in-depth understanding of leadership in SMEs from multiple contexts. To deal with the cost and schedule challenges inherent in multiple-case studies, Yin (2017) recommended the use of "replication" in the design of the study similar to the use of multiple experiments in experimental designs. The introduction of contextual perspectives in the replication of multiple-case studies allows the anticipation of contrasting outcomes in what Yin (2017) referred to as "theoretical replication." This type of replication provides the basis for cross-case comparisons within the multiple-case study design.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the main instrument for conducting the study (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher has the primary responsibility for collecting all the data to be used in the study through interviews, observations, document reviews, and researcher's reflections. The researcher is an active participant (Kim, 2014) in the process, acting in collaboration with the selected study participants in the construction of meanings (Kim, 2014). As the main instrument for this research, I took all necessary steps to ensure that richly informative and unbiased data were collected and analyzed in the study.

The interpretative nature of qualitative studies requires that the researcher makes explicit their experiences, biases, personal background (Greene, 2014), such that these considerations add value rather than undermine the researcher's interpretations and propositions. Though it is helpful for the researcher to bring relevant personal

experiences into the research process, care must be taken to ensure that these experiences do not bring bias or constitute ethical flaws in the research. Maxwell (2013) recommended the use of "researcher identity memo" (p. 34) to fully describe the researcher's beliefs and experiences that might influence the research process. I ensured that no personal biases were brought into the interviews, observations, and documentary reviews such that my personal opinions were not included in the collected data.

The relationships that exist between the researcher and the participants before the research, during the research, and after the research are critical elements of the research design. Maxwell (2013) recommended that the researcher must reflect on these relationships and take decisions in the design such that these relationships do not affect the outcomes of the research. It is also important that any prior personal or professional relationships between the researcher and any of the participants are well explained before the commencement of data collection. During the participants' selection stage, when I noticed any prior personal or professional relationships with any of the purposefully selected participants, I took all necessary steps to avoid conflict of interests that may have undermined the objectives of the study. I ensured a purposeful and equitable selection of participants such that no potential participants were unfairly included or excluded.

In conducting research that requires interaction with human beings, the researcher must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the objectives of the study do not take precedence over the ethical and moral protection of the rights of the participants (Haines, 2017). The researcher must ensure that the selected research methodology is ethically and

morally acceptable, and protective of the participants throughout the process of gaining access to them, data collection and interpretation, and up the point of using or publishing the outcomes of the study. I ensured that this study was be conducted in full compliance with the Walden University research protocols and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations. I ensured the anonymity of the research process, maintaining the confidentiality of informants, obtained the informed consent of participants, and properly assessed and mitigated the potential influences of researcher-participant interactions (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014).

Methodology

The choice of methodology for a qualitative study must address the purpose of the study and the research questions (Stake, 2013). For this study, I ensured a methodological rigor by adhering to recommendations from the methodological literature. The methodology for this study was the multiple-case study design. Stake (2013) established that, though multiple-case study design may not be suitable for all research purposes, it is an appropriate methodology for studies advancing the generation of theory. In using the multiple-case study design, the researcher must first establish the unit of analysis which can be a person, event, organization, or other unit of analysis (Noor, 2008). If the unit of analysis is an organization, the researcher must also establish the number of participants within each unit (Noor, 2008) that will provide data for the study.

For this multiple-case study, I adopted Yin's (2017) concept of replication logic that allows each case to be treated as a unit of analysis (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

The unit of analysis for this multiple-case study was the SME firm. Six SME firms that met the selection criteria were used in the study, and each SME firm was treated as a single case. To meet the selection criteria for the study, the SME must be owner-managed and employing 10–199 persons (SMEDAN, 2013). For multiple-case study, Yin (2017) recommended the use of six to 10 cases, while Patton (2014) argued that five to 10 participants are sufficient for a qualitative study because larger samples will not allow for an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon of interest.

Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research because it generates information of greatest utility to the study instead of relying on chance which is what random sampling connotes (Maxwell 2013). Because of the limited number of cases and participants in this study, it was appropriate to use the purposeful sampling technique as recommended by Palinkas et al. (2015). I selected the six SMEs for the study purposefully across three SME-dominant sectors (education, whole/retail trading, and manufacturing) in the Nigerian economy; with each case selection following the maximum variation (heterogeneity) and the snowballing sampling strategies as recommended by Patton (2015). According to Merriam and Tsidell (2015), the snowballing sampling strategy involved asking participants that met the selection criteria to provide references for other participants that will meet the selection criteria.

To address the research problem and research questions, I collected qualitative data from multiple sources including interviews of SME owner-managers, which will be triangulated with researcher's field notes, observations, review of internal documents of

SMEs, and my reflections. The triangulation of data in qualitative research was supported by Baillie (2015). I used the cross-case synthesis data analysis technique for the analysis of data and adopted the triangulation of data sources to improve the trustworthiness and robustness of data and the findings therefrom as recommended by Guion et al. (2011) and Patton (2014). The use of multiple-case study design allowed for comparing and contrasting data within and between cases. The data collection process followed the participants' selection logic for the study.

Participant Selection Logic

Understanding the unit of analysis is one of the fundamental choices that underpin case study research (Baskadara, 2014). Unit of analysis can be individuals, groups, and organizations among others (Cronin, 2014). In qualitative case study research, a case is the unit of analysis. In this study, a case represented an SME that has met the sample selection criteria. My research involved the exploration of leadership styles within Nigerian SMEs using a multiple-case study strategy.

In multiple-case study research, there is the need to choose the number of cases, as well as to select participants within each case (Maxwell, 2013). In deciding the number of cases and choice of participants, there is the need to first understand the relationship between the sampling numbers and the other sampling elements like settings, events, and processes (Maxwell, 2013). There is no consensus in the literature on the number of cases in multiple-case study design. Merriam (2009) argued that there is no set number of participants for multiple-case study design, while Yin (2017) recommended six-10 cases.

The number of cases in my multiple-case study was six SMEs. The use of six cases in the study provided me with the opportunity to cover some of the sectoral variabilities among SMEs in Nigeria.

In selecting the cases for my study, I used the purposeful sampling technique as recommended by Maxwell (2013) and Patton (2015). In qualitative research, sample selection does not have to be representative of any given population because of its theory-building nature (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Random sampling is not appropriate for this study because it can only achieve representativeness and typicality if large samples are involved (Maxwell, 2103). With a limited number of cases or participants, it becomes more appropriate to use the purposeful sampling technique to generate information of greatest utility to the study rather than relying on chance which is what random sampling connotes (Maxwell 2013). The purposeful sampling technique involves the deliberate selection of cases, events, settings, groups, persons, and activities that are most relevant to answering the research questions and meeting the overall objectives of the study (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Though there is still ambiguity and lack of clarity in the use of purposeful sampling in qualitative research (Gentles et al., 2015), it remains the most widely used method of sampling in qualitative research especially for case study methodology (Patton, 2015)

In selecting the cases for my study, I was guided by the following principles. The first goal was to ensure that the selected samples meet the Nigerian SMEs classification criteria (SMEDAN, 2015), which are organizations employing from 10-199 persons. The

second goal was to ensure that the selected SMEs will provide rich information that will answer the research questions on leadership within SMEs (Maxwell, 2013) and provide representativeness and heterogeneity for contextual cross-analysis of data (Gentles et al., 2015). Franco and Matos (2015) used sectorial variation to introduce opportunities for cross-case analysis in a multiple case study that explored leadership styles in three Portuguese SMEs. The third goal was to ensure that each case can provide information that can be related to the theories that have been used to anchor the study (Maxwell, 2013). The fourth goal was to ensure that I can have sufficient access to each case to achieve a productive research relationship with the owner-managers of the selected firms (Maxwell, 2013).

Instrumentation

The main instrument for data collection in this study was semistructured interviews. McIntosh and Morse (2015) recommended the use of a semistructured interview over structured interviews because it ensures a focused and consistent stream of questions with reasonable objectivity across cases while allowing sufficient flexibility to the researcher for full exploration and contextual interaction with each of the interviewees. The development of the semistructured interview protocol was guided by the following considerations: a) revelations regarding leadership styles from existing studies in the leadership and b) ensuring that every interview question is aligned with the problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions.

The semistructured interview protocol contains two sections. The first section contains participants' information. The second section consists of seven pre-determined questions that was asked to the interviewees across all the selected cases (See Appendix A). Answers to these questions addressed the main research question in the study. The interview questions were created in simple language such that ambiguity and misrepresentation of questions by participants are not anticipated. Responses from the interviewees was audio recorded during the interview.

To comply with the requirements for approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I will carried out a validation of the main data collection instrument (interview questions guide) by sending the proposed interview questions to one subject experts from the Walden Faculty excluding members of my Dissertation Committee. The feedback from the subject experts was used to refine the interview questions to ensure that the questions were easy to understand, relevant to the study, and valid (Stake, 1995).

The response to the first interview question, "Describe the nature of relationships between you and your employees?" was used to examine the SME owner-managers' behavioral and relational traits and provide insights into the research question. Researchers have long associated certain personality traits and behavioral competencies to the effectiveness of leadership (Grobler & Du Plessis, 2016). In the process of providing organizational leadership, personality traits manifest in the form of different behaviors which underpin the relationships that exist between a leader and the followers. This argument is supported by the traits approach to leadership theory which suggests

that leadership behaviors emerge from individual personality traits (Landis et al., 2014). Some researchers have argued that leader personality should be given more attention in the examination of the concept of leadership styles (Deichmann & Stam, 2015).

The response to the second interview question, "Describe your leadership experiences in your organization?" was used to examine the leadership characteristics of the SME owner-managers and provide insights to the research question. Context and culture have been found to influence leader behavior and leadership effectiveness (Grobler & Du Plessis, 2016). Researchers have found that specific leadership attributes have varying levels of influence on organizational performance factors like emotional intelligence (Dabke, 2016), personality (Chollet et al., 2014), and social capital (Chollet et al., 2014).

The response to the third interview question, "Describe how you get your employees to resolve problems and achieve organizational goals?" was used to examine the leadership orientation of the SME owner-managers and provide insights into the research question. Leadership style has been described as the manner that a leader uses to influence followers to achieve set objectives (Burns, 1978; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015), and it is seen as the most critical factor that drives organizational performance and sustainability (Almatrooshi et al., 2016; Grobler & Du Plessis, 2016). Some researchers have disagreed with the organizational relevance of leadership style by arguing that the essence of leadership and its adaptability are the more critical factors in the leadership process (Silva, 2014). Regardless of this criticism, there is overwhelming

evidence in the literature that some positive organizational outcomes are attributable to the style of leadership (Chege et al., 2015; Ozer & Tinaztepe, 2014).

The response to the fourth interview question, "Describe how you help your employees develop themselves to achieve organizational goals?" was used to examine the manner in which SME owner-managers use specific leadership styles in their organizations and provide insights into the research question. Researchers have found that different leadership styles have varying levels of influence on different organizational circumstances (Long et al., 2014), and are critical in stimulating employee work-related attitudes (Longe, 2014). Leadership style is one of the most influential factors that impact employee creativity (Derecskei, 2016), which is an enabler for organizational performance and sustainability. The elements of leadership style that enhance organizational sustainability are those that focus on employee well-being and providing an enabling environment for innovation and entrepreneurship among employees (Grobler & Du Plessis, 2016).

The response to the fifth, sixth and seventh interview questions provided insights into the research question regarding specific leadership styles. The response to the fifth interview question, "Describe your experiences setting targets for your employees?" was used to examine the SME owner-managers' transformational or transactional leadership behavior. The response to the sixth interview question, "Describe how you reward your employees when they achieve or surpass set targets?" was used to examine the SME owner-managers' transformational or transactional leadership behavior. The response to

the seventh interview question, "Describe how you feel when your employees fail to do what you expect of them?" was used to examine the SME owner-managers' laissez-faire leadership behavior. Bass (1997) argued that transactional and transformational leadership have universal applicability and acceptance and that every leader exhibits some form of transactional and transformational leadership behavior.

To ensure completeness and integrity of the interview data, a digital audio recorder was used to record all interviews with the SME owner-managers. During each interview session, the researcher made handwritten field notes regarding the interviewee's attitudes, emotions, and body language that could provide more insight into the interviewee's responses to the interview questions. At the end of each interview, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings and sent the transcript to the interviewee to solicit feedback regarding any discrepancies in the transcribed content of the interview sessions. All participants were distinctly identified using a numerical classification system to maintain confidentiality of the participants (Patton, 2015). The audio recording of each interview, the transcripts, and the researcher's handwritten field notes were securely stored for easy retrieval during data analysis and interpretations.

Procedures for Recruitment and Participation

The location for this study was Port Harcourt, in the South-South of Nigeria. SMEs that participated in the study were selected from the manufacturing, education, and wholesale/retail trade sectors of the Nigerian economy. These three sectors account for more than 75% of SMEs in Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2013). Two SMEs were selected from

each of the three sectors based on purposeful sampling technique that will allow for either literal or theoretical replication. For literal replication, the cases are selected such that they will predict similar outcomes while in theoretical replication, the cases are selected such that they produce contrasting outcomes based on explainable reasons such as sectorial variability (Franco & Matos, 2015).

In Nigeria, there are no comprehensive and reliable databases on SMEs. This did not pose a problem for the study because, in multiple-case design, the most critical thing is to select cases that are fully accessible to the researcher and provide data that will comprehensively address the research questions (Noor, 2008). The selection of cases was driven by insights into the phenomenon and not by representativeness of any population (Patton, 2015). As such, potential participants (cases) were selected using a combination of two purposeful sampling techniques; the maximum variation (heterogeneity) and the snowballing sampling techniques (Patton, 2015).

The maximum variation technique allows for diversity (Patton, 2015) which will provide an opportunity for synthesis within and across cases. The snowballing technique allows the creation of participants through "people who know people" (Patton, 2015, p.270) that will be appropriate to provide rich information on the study phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013). In using the snowball technique, researchers can rely on "personal networks and word-of-mouth referrals" (Ponelis, 2015, p.540) to get access to informants that will be suitable for the study.

Potential participating SMEs were invited in writing (Appendix B) after being purposefully selected using the maximum variation and snowballing sampling techniques. For the SMEs that provided positive responses, the researcher made further personal contacts with the SME owner-managers to ensure that the researcher will have full access to the interviewees and obtain their commitment to a productive research relationship that will produce rich information regarding the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). The six selected SMEs for the study each signed the informed consent form (Appendix C) before the interviews were conducted.

SMEs that did not meet the selection criteria after the personal interaction between the researcher and the SME owner-manager were dropped, and reasons for dropping them were documented. Those that rejected the offer to participate upon receipt of invitation letter were excluded, and the reasons given by them for non-participation were documented. This process was repeated until two cases that best fit into the theoretical replication design for the study were selected from each of the three identified SME sectors to be covered in the study. All the successful and unsuccessful selection attempts were reported.

The interviews were scheduled with the SME owner-managers within their premises, preferably in the SME owner- manager's office to allow for physical sighting and review of documents where necessary and when agreeable by the interviewee. The date and time for the interviews were fixed at the convenience of the interviewees. The interviewees were informed in advance that the interview will be tape-recorded and later

transcribed. Each interviewee received a draft of the transcribed interview for re-confirmation or clarification of their recorded statements. If the need arises, an interview may be structured as a prolonged case study interview to suit the convenience of the interviewee. In prolonged case study interviews, the interview can take place in more than one sitting (Yin, 2017) and could last for up to two hours or more.

Each SME owner-manager was interviewed individually and privately to allow for relaxed discussion and good audio recording. There was no group interviews. Each SME owner-manager was asked the same set of the eight listed interview questions (Appendix A). The researcher used personal discretion to determine which follow-up questions were appropriate for each interviewee based on their responses to each main interview question. Every participating SME was referenced by coded names to protect their confidentiality. The names of the SME owner-managers that were interviewed were not mentioned.

Data Collection

Upon the receipt of approval from the Walden University IRB committee to conduct the study, I commenced the process of contacting potential participants (SMEs). In case study research, data can be collected from multiple sources including but not limited to interviews, documents, archival data, and the researcher personal observations and reflections (Vissak, 2010). Face to face interview remains one of the most important sources of data in case study research (Yin, 2017). When the study participants are well informed about the phenomenon of study, they can provide the researcher with additional

sources of information (Vissak, 2010) that can reveal relevant information about the phenomenon. Multiple sources of data are highly recommended in a case study research (Baskadara, 2014). The sources of data for this study were semistructured interviews, researcher's field notes, observations, document reviews, and researcher's reflections (Yin, 2017).

In making contacts to set up interview appointments, I ensured that the interviewees understood that participation was voluntary (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and that each interviewee has signed the informed consent form. The purpose of the research and the basis of selection of the participants was communicated to each interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) before the actual interview process. Interviewing strangers can be particularly difficult (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To deal with this problem, the researcher kept a close communication with the participants from the initial time of obtaining the participants' consent and commitment until the proper interview was conducted.

Managing emotions, stress, and fatigue are a challenge the researcher has to contend with (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher will showed respect to the interviewees and demonstrated enough empathy when any interviewee became emotional in answering some questions. The researcher discontinued any particular question if it became obvious that the interviewee was uncomfortable with such question. The targeted duration of each interview was one to two hours. If for any reason, the interviewee seeks to postpone the interview before or during the interview, the researcher will oblige the

request and seek another convenient time for the interviewee for completion of the interview. The tape recorder will be paused and backed up by the researcher.

At the start of the interview, the interviewee received a briefing from the researcher regarding the purpose of the study, the expected duration of the interview which is 1-2hrs, and the plans for data analysis, utilization, and reporting. The researcher was very open to take any questions from the interviewee and provided all necessary clarifications before the commencement of the interview. The interview questions were arranged in a sequence to provide a logical examination of the main research question. The researcher asked each interviewee the same questions in the same sequence to ensure that the same structure is adopted for each interview and to produce the theoretical replication (Baskadara, 2014) that is intended in the method design

Though the interview process was rooted in the interview protocol, it remained flexible to allow for probing questions and at the same time accommodate the interviewees' convenience. A digital audio recorder was used to record the interview proceedings, and the interviewees were made aware of when the recording starts and ends. The researcher took field notes of any observations and reflections that gave more insights into the interviewee's responses. Field notes included researcher's observations, reactions and reflective comments from the interviewee, and researcher's initial interpretations (Merriam, 2009).

Whenever the interviewee referred to documents, the researcher took note and requested to have a look at such documents at the end of the interview subject to the

convenience of the interviewee. The researcher ensured that note taking, and references to documents are carried out in a manner that did not disrupt the flow of the conversation with the interviewee. The note-taking is part of the initial analysis of data as it is collected (Merriam, 2009). The researcher did not request the interviewees to divulge any confidential company or personal information. At the completion of the study, and upon approval by Walden University, relevant sections of the research will be made available to the participants.

To end the interviews, the researcher followed a standardized debriefing procedure for all the participants. The procedure started by telling the participants that there are no more questions for them. Next, the participants were asked if they have any questions regarding the interview or their participation. The researcher asked the participants to convey their feelings regarding the interview process and any concerns that they may have. Finally, the researcher thanked them for participating and requested their cooperation for follow-up clarifications if the need arises.

The researcher created a log using an excel sheet to track critical information and correspondences with the study participants. The excel sheet contains participants' information such as contact addresses, email, and phone numbers. The log was used to track appointment dates and any related changes. The log was stored in the researcher's laptop computer and backed-up in OneDrive along with other research documents.

Data Analysis

Maxwell (2013) identified three groups of data analysis strategies in qualitative research. These include the use of memos, categorizing strategies such as coding and thematic analysis, and connecting strategies such as narrative analysis. There is no best way for the analysis of qualitative data (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher has to choose an analysis option that fits the available data to answer the research questions. Participants will be re-approached if additional clarifications are required at the data analysis stage.

In the categorization strategies, researchers use coding to categorize words and phrases that have a similar meaning in relation to the research questions. Maxwell (2013) argued that the essence of coding in qualitative data analysis is not to count items but to "fracture" data by rearranging texts to facilitate the comparison of items within the same category. Codes are used to capture words and phrases that have the same meaning, and the categories are used to connect them (Maxwell, 2013).

The researcher adopted the descriptive coding method (Saldana, 2016) as the basic analytical technique for this study. The descriptive coding method is used to symbolically assign meanings to segments of data providing an inventory of words or phrases for indexing and categorization of data (Saldana, 2016). The descriptive coding method is highly recommended for novice qualitative researchers (Saldana, 2016) who are still learning how to code qualitative data.

There is a lot of criticism and controversy among scholars on the validity and reliability of the process of sorting, coding, and categorization of data in qualitative

research (Choudhary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2013). The argument is that there is a high element of human judgment involved in qualitative data analysis and this human influence could render the outcomes of qualitative research unauthentic and questionable. This line of argument often ignores the fact that qualitative data analysis offers researchers the opportunity for an in-depth contextual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014) as opposed to the more structured statistical analysis in quantitative research.

In using the case study methodology in a qualitative study, the researcher must immerse oneself fully in the data to ensure proper understanding of each case (Cronin, 2014) from all possible contexts of the phenomenon under investigation. Unlike in the statistical analysis that follows the collection of quantitative data, there are no fixed procedures for the analysis of qualitative case study data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This makes the analysis of qualitative case study data very challenging especially for the novice researcher (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The analysis of qualitative data follows the same flexibility with the data collection process, such that how evidence has been presented, and the choices made between alternative interpretation possibilities depends on a researcher's style of rigorous empirical evaluation (Baillie, 2015).

For multiple case studies, there is the need for consistency in the processes used for data collection, recording, and analysis across all cases to provide an enabling platform for appropriate cross-case synthesis of data. Yin (2017) advocated the use of cross-case synthesis as the most appropriate data analysis technique in multiple case

study research. Cross-case synthesis is more efficient than content analysis for a Ph.D. study where we must also compare and contrast cases, not just analyze individual cases (Yin, 2017). Though some researchers argue that content analysis present a flexible approach to analyzing contextualized qualitative data (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014), this will depend on the type of qualitative design and the nature of data involved (Maxwell, 2013).

The cross-case synthesis technique involves treating each case as a separate study and aggregating findings across a series of individual cases. In this way, the cross-case synthesis does not differ materially from other research syntheses that aggregate and compares findings across a series of individual studies. Designs that use both within-case and cross-case synthesis have been found to provide a better platform for the generation of theoretical propositions and constructs than those that use only the within-case analysis (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011).

Yin (2017) recommended four strategies for the analysis of case study data. The first strategy involves reliance on the theoretical propositions that underpin the case study. This strategy is not appropriate for this study because the research questions seek to understand emerging concepts rather than deductions from theoretical propositions. The second strategy involves analysis of the data from "ground up," thus allowing key concepts to emerge by close examination of data. This strategy is the most appropriate for the analysis of multiple-case study data that will emanate from this study, as it will allow for an alignment between the emerging concepts and the research questions. This strategy

is also consistent with the descriptive coding method (Saldana, 2016) which is the analytical technique that will be used in the study.

The third strategy involves the use of a descriptive framework, while the fourth strategy involves the definition of possible rival interpretations. These strategies are not appropriate for the analysis of data in this study because they do not support the emergence of concepts from close examination of data. There is the need to ensure that the emerging concepts from the analysis of data can be used to generate answers or explanations to the research questions.

Data analysis in this study involved two stages. The first stage involved the within-case analysis of each of the selected cases. The second stage involved a cross-case analysis of data to seek for similarities and differences across the categories and themes (Yin, 2017). For individual within-case analysis, data collected from transcribed interviews and field notes were arranged in segments (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014), indexed with line numbers, and arranged according to the interview questions for easy identification of codes (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). The identified codes were recorded in matrix form using Microsoft Word table that have columns to capture the data segments, the assigned codes, and the researcher's notes that will among other things capture emerging patterns (Saldana, 2016). Codes that share common meanings were classified into categories and themes (Saldana, 2016) as the researcher deemed necessary.

For the cross-case synthesis, a Microsoft Word table was used to aggregate the themes from each case across common patterns and categories for easy comparisons. The

researcher closely examined emerging similarities and differences across the cases. The similarities were subjected to "pattern matching" (Yin, 2017) and used to create literal replications (Yin, 2017) that were aligned with existing literature. The emerging differences across the cases was used for theoretical replications (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) that provided opportunities for future research.

The use of manual coding techniques for the analysis of qualitative data is seen as very laborious and time-consuming (Basit, 2003). The alternative use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) programs will require several weeks for a novice qualitative researcher to understand and use effectively. Basit (2003) examined the use of manual and CAQDAS coding techniques in qualitative data analysis and concluded that "the choice will be dependent on the size of the project, the funds and time available, and the inclination and expertise of the researcher" (p. 143).

Being a novice qualitative researcher, the author adopted both manual and CAQDAS techniques for data analysis in this study. As only six interviews were conducted, excessive and unmanageable data is not anticipated. A combination of Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel programs were used to organize and document the manual coding process. The CAQDAS program that was used to support the data analysis was NVivo. The program will be used to store, organize, and manage data to support the researcher's analytical reflections (Saldana, 2016). The CAQDAS program does not generate codes; it remains the responsibility of the researcher to identify codes and aggregate the codes into categories and themes for analytical reflections (Saldana, 2016).

The researcher manually carried out first and second cycle coding (Saldana, 2016) to ensure that the identified codes are streamlined before the process of aggregation into categories and themes commenced. The CAQDAS was only used to search the main body of data for keywords and phrases that were used to generate the manual codes to ensure that no important segments of data are ignored in the analytical reflections and compilation of emerging themes and concepts.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The qualitative method of inquiry has faced several criticisms in the literature for its lack of rigor and trustworthiness (Cope, 2014). Irrespective of these criticisms, qualitative researchers have continued to defend the critical role of the qualitative approach to a scientific inquiry for understanding different human phenomena in their natural settings (Maria, 2015). It was Lincoln and Guba (1985) that proposed a pragmatic shift from the "rationalistic" to "naturalistic" method of inquiry that allows research outcomes to unfold naturally without manipulations thus increasing trustworthiness and reliability, especially in the qualitative research process.

Though the qualitative approach to inquiry offers a lot of flexibility to researchers, strategies to ensure rigor must be put in place (Houghton et al., 2013) to enhance the trustworthiness of its findings. The need to embed strategies that will ensure rigor into the qualitative research design is even more compelling (Baxter & Jack, 2008) for a novice researcher. There is the need for a detailed and transparent description of all the strategies adopted in the process of recruiting participants, interactions with

participants, data collection, data recording, and data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, in the case study research, the researcher must present comprehensive methodological description of the case selection strategies that were adopted to ensure that readers fully understand why specific cases were selected over others (Hyett et al., 2014).

Trustworthiness has to do with the quality that can be ascribed to qualitative research (Patton, 2015). There are two sets of criteria in the literature for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research. The first set of criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) addresses the issue of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The second set of quality criteria include internal validity, external validity, reliability, and construct validity (Yin, 2017). Patton (2015) drew parallels between credibility and internal validity; transferability and external validity; dependability and reliability; confirmability and construct validity (objectivity). These set of criteria which enjoy wide application among qualitative researchers (Houghton et al., 2013) formed the basis for ensuring rigor and trustworthiness in this qualitative multiple case-study design.

Credibility and internal validity provide assurances that there is a fit between the participants' responses and their experiences with the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015; Baillie, 2015). To ensure credibility and internal validity in this study, I used multiple sources of data, and also ensured that purposeful sampling is used to select participants that provided rich and in-depth information about the study phenomenon.

Transferability and external validity provides assurances that readers can establish a relationship between the study and other similar studies in the literature (Patton, 2015; Baillie, 2015). To address the issue of transferability and external validity, I provided detailed and transparent description of all the strategies adopted in the process of recruiting participants, interactions with participants, data collection, data recording, and data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability and reliability provide assurances that the researcher has followed a systematic and well-documented approach that can be replicated by other researchers to achieve the same conclusions (Patton; 2015; Baillie, 2015). To address the issues of dependability and reliability, I ensured that the study methodology was well defined and documented; the criteria for selection of study participants were clear and documented, all interviews were properly recorded, transcribed, and stored; the techniques for data analysis and interpretations were well documented, and all researcher's reflections that informed the researcher's conceptualizations and conclusions were well documented. The researcher ensured that data was collected based on a systematic in-depth field work that yielded credible information regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015).

Confirmability and construct validity (objectivity) provide assurances that the data, interpretations, conceptualizations, and conclusions emanate from information provided by participants and not from the researcher's opinions or imaginations (Patton, 2015; Baillie, 2015). To ensure the confirmability and construct validity of the study, I

carried out reflexivity of oneself as the researcher to eliminate any issues of personal bias that will influence the quality of data and its interpretations. During the semistructured interview, the researcher did not lead the interviewees to conclusions through researcher's preconceptions; rather, the researcher allowed a natural flow of information from the interviewees. In all cases, I sought disproving evidence to reduce bias (Baskadara, 2014).

Ethical Procedures

There are ethical considerations to deal with whenever a research involves interactions with human subjects (Sanjari et al., 2014). In this study, I made contacts with selected SME owner-managers, first to obtain their consent for their organizations to participate in the study, and secondly, to interview them during the process of data gathering. I ensured complete compliance with the Walden University IRB guidelines, and did not commence interaction with participants until the IRB approval was obtained for the study to commence.

Participation in this study was voluntary, and I made this known in clear terms to potential participants at the point of recruitment. All participants were required to sign the consent form (Appendix C) before participation in the study. The purpose of the study, the level of involvement of participants, and the possible uses of the research outcomes were made known to the participants. I was very transparent in dealing with the potential participants to avoid any forms of deceit, coercion, and miss-representations.

Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants is a critical ethical issue (Sanjari et al., 2014). I ensured that the privacy and confidentiality of SME

owner-managers and their enterprises are strictly maintained. This was achieved by using codes to represent each of the participating SMEs. Only demographic data like age, educational attainment, sex, nature of business, and size of the organization were requested from the participants. Personal information like names, place of birth, ethnicity, religion, and family background were not be requested from the informants. Data were stored in passworded files and access to all data storage devices are restricted by using passwords where applicable in addition to physical security of devices.

Summary

In chapter 3, I described the research approach and the appropriate methodology that was adopted for the study. I provided justifications for the choice of qualitative approach over quantitative approach for the conduct of this research. The study involved the investigation of a human phenomenon in an environment where the phenomenon has not been sufficiently researched, and this explains my choice of qualitative approach for conducting the study.

I provided a detailed description of the multiple-case study methodology in this chapter that was used in the study and provided the rationale for the choice of case study design over other qualitative methodologies like narrative research, ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory. I provided justification for adopting a multiple-case study strategy over a single-case study strategy in line with the study purpose, the research questions, and the contextual nature of the study. I described the linkage between the semistructured interview questions and the research questions.

I described the participants' selection logic, instrumentation, the procedures for the recruitment of participants, and the techniques for data collection and data analysis. I described the steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, providing specific strategies and steps to deal with the issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. As the study involved interactions with human elements, I provided steps on how to deal with ethical challenges that are inherent in the study. Chapter 4 covered results while Chapter 5 covered discussions, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to gain an in-depth understanding of specific knowledge gaps among SME owners and managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability. SME owners and managers lack the knowledge on how leadership styles can help improve organizational sustainability (Koshal, 2017; Uchegara, 2017). There is limited research in the literature on the nature of leadership styles in Nigerian SMEs, and it remains unknown the role that leadership style plays in the long-term sustainability of these SMEs. In this research study, I explored the leadership experiences of SME owner-managers in Nigeria to understanding their knowledge gaps regarding leadership styles and its implications for SME long-term sustainability. Because of a limited understanding of the nature of leadership styles in Nigerian SMEs, it is not clear how the use of specific leadership styles have contributed to the poor performance of SMEs in Nigeria (Oladele & Akeke, 2016).

The one main research question that guided this study was: What are the specific knowledge gaps among SME owners and managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability? The emphasis of the study was on owner-managed SMEs. A multiple-case study approach was adopted for the study. The unit of analysis for this study was the SME firm. Each selected SME was treated as a case, while the main source of data within each SME was a semistructured

interview with the SME owner-manager. I collected interview data from six purposefully selected SME owner-managers and data analysis was carried out in two stages. The first stage was a within-case content analysis of data, and the second stage involved thematic cross-case analysis of data.

In this chapter, I explained the research setting and described the research participants including their demographic information. Next, I described the procedures for data collection and data analysis. Further, I provided a summary of the codes identified from raw data based on the within-case analysis of responses from each participant for the interview questions and described the themes that emerged from the categorization of the codes. Finally, I provided a justification for the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Setting

This qualitative multiple-case study involved the collection of data from owner-managers of six purposefully selected SMEs through semistructured interviews. I gave all the participants the privilege to choose their preferred location for the interview. Five participants chose to be interviewed within their organizational environment, while one participant chose to be interviewed at home. For the five participants that chose to be interviewed at their organizations, the interviews were held in their offices. For the participant that chose to be interviewed at home, the interview was held in a private study at his home. Each participant chose a convenient date and time for the interview.

Before the commencement of each interview, I reminded the interviewees that participation in the study was voluntary. We first went through the letter of invitation to participate in the study and the informed consent form which were sent to them earlier. I also reminded them that our conversation would be audio recorded and that the transcripts would be sent to them subsequently to ensure that the experiences that they described during the interviews have been properly represented in the transcripts. Following a reconfirmation of their intention to participate in the study, each participant signed the informed consent form. I signed the form in their presence and gave them a copy for their records. Four of the interviews lasted between 52 and 56 minutes, while two interviews lasted between 20 to 30 minutes.

After each interview, I played some sections of the recording in the presence of the participant to ensure that the quality of the recording was good. I then transferred the audio recording to my password-protected laptop computer in the presence of each participant and immediately backed-up the audio data on OneDrive. When I returned to my location, I played back the audio recording and transcribed the audio data into Microsoft Word files. I created a separate folder for each participant, and both the audio recording and the transcripts were saved in the same folder for each participant.

Participants' Description and Demographics

I selected six participants based on the eligibility criteria that was set out in the design for the study. The eligibility criteria included: (a) each organization (a case) must be an SME employing 10-199 persons, (b) ability to provide rich information that will

give insights to the research question, (c) sufficient access to the SME owner-manager to ensure productive research relationship, and (d) must be from the manufacturing, education, and wholesale/retail trade sectors of the Nigerian economy (two participants from each sector). These three sectors account for more than 75% of SMEs in Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2013). All participants are located in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Participant 1

Participant number 1 (P1) was the owner-manager of an SME enterprise providing educational services at the nursery and primary schools level. The enterprise commenced business in the year 2007 and employed more than 40 persons, thus, falling in the category of ‘small enterprise’ within the Nigerian SME classification criteria. P1 started functioning as owner-manager of this enterprise in the year 2012. Before assuming this position, P1 previously worked in various engineering positions for a multinational oil and gas company in Nigeria.

Participant 2

Participant number 2 (P2) was the owner-manager of an SME enterprise involved in the wholesale and retail of industrial chemicals. The enterprise commenced business in the year 1996 and P2 started functioning in the capacity of owner-manager in the same year. The enterprise employed over 60 persons, thus, falling in the category of ‘medium enterprise’ within the Nigerian SME classification criteria. Before assuming the position as owner-manager of this enterprise, P2 functioned in various engineering positions for a medium-sized company involved in the manufacture and sales of industrial chemicals.

Participant 3

Participant number 3 (P3) was the owner-manager of an SME enterprise involved in the manufacturing and distribution of concrete blocks and paving stones. The enterprise also manufactures sandals for school children and provides some minor support services to the industrial sector. The enterprise commenced business in the year 2001 and P3 started functioning in the capacity of owner-manager in the same year. The enterprise employed over 35 persons, thus, falling in the category of 'small enterprise' within the Nigerian SME classification criteria. Before assuming the position of owner-manager of this enterprise, P3 worked briefly for two organizations providing technical services to the Nigerian Industrial Sector.

Participant 4

Participant number 4 (P4) was the owner-manager of an SME enterprise involved in the manufacturing and distribution of pre-formed plastic bottles for water and beverage companies. The company also produces bottled water in its brand name. The enterprise commenced business in the year 2014 and P4 started functioning in the capacity of owner-manager in the same year. The enterprise employed over 20 persons, thus, falling in the category of 'small enterprise' within the Nigerian SME classification criteria. Before assuming the position of owner-manager of this enterprise in 2014, P4 worked in a family business that was engaged in providing small logistics services to the Nigerian oil and gas sector.

Participant 5

Participant number 5 (P5) was the owner-manager of an SME enterprise providing educational services at the nursery and primary school levels. The enterprise commenced business in the year 1993 and P5 assumed the position of owner-manager in the same year. The enterprise employed over 80 persons, thus, falling in the category of 'medium enterprise' within the Nigerian SME classification criteria. Before assuming this position, P5 previously worked as a teacher for other schools in Port Harcourt.

Participant 6

Participant number 6 (P6) was the owner-manager of an SME enterprise involved in the retail trading of household electronics and white products. The enterprise commenced business in the year 2013 and P6 started functioning in the capacity of owner-manager in the same year. The enterprise employed over 50 persons, thus, falling in the category of 'medium enterprise' within the Nigerian SME classification criteria. Before assuming position as the owner-manager of this enterprise, P6 functioned as support manager in a small family business for over ten years. Table 1 shows a summary of the participants' demographics.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics and Characteristics

	Business Sector	Year Commenced Business	Number of Employees	Gender	Years in Position	Education Level
P1	Education	2007	40	Male	6 Years	Bachelor's degree
P2	Trading	1996	60	Male	22 Years	Bachelor's degree
P3	Manufacturing	2001	35	Male	17 Years	Bachelor's degree
P4	Manufacturing	2014	20	Male	4 Years	Bachelor's degree
P5	Education	1993	80	Female	25 Years	Bachelor's degree
P6	Trading	2013	50	Male	5 Years	Bachelor's degree

Data Collection Procedures

I conducted the collection of data for this study in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Data collection commenced on June 18, 2018, following IRB approval from Walden University (IRB approval #: 06-12-18-0561590). Data collection was concluded on October 5, 2018, being the date that the last interview transcripts (P6) were discussed and agreed with the participant. I collected data from four sources, namely: (a) review of participants' websites, (b) semistructured interviews, (c) document reviews including the literature, and (d) researcher observations and reflections.

Expert Review of Interview Protocol

I sent the interview protocol consisting of seven main interview questions to a three-member expert panel for review and inputs. The panel consisted of my committee chair, my second committee member, and a leadership expert/author from the Walden Faculty. The panel returned their recommendations which required the breakdown of one of the interview questions because it addressed two different competencies. Thus, the interview question “Describe how you get your employees to resolve problems and achieve organizational goals” was broken down into two questions, namely: a) describe how you get your employees to resolve problems, and b) describe how you get your employees to achieve organizational goals. These amendments were reflected in the data collection procedures approved by the Walden University IRB.

Selection of Participants

In Nigeria, there are no comprehensive and reliable databases on SMEs. Repeated visits to the offices of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) in Port Harcourt did not yield any positive results. This situation did not pose a restriction for the study because it was anticipated in the research design. The research design provided for the use of any available open-access databases as well as the snowballing technique to identify and recruit participants for the study. An open-access database, <https://www.businesslist.com.ng> was initially used to search for eligible study participants in Port Harcourt. One participant was successfully selected using this database, while the other five participants were selected using the snowballing technique.

Patton (2015) recommended the identification of eligible participants using the snowballing technique through "people who know people" (p.270).

As recommended by Patton (2015), the purposeful selection of participants for this study using the snowballing strategy was driven by insights into the study phenomenon and accessibility of key informants, and not by representativeness of any population. Three SME sectors were represented in the study namely education, manufacturing, and trading. I selected two participants from each of the three sectors to allow for diversity and synthesis across cases. The six participants that I selected all met the eligibility requirements for the study which include SME characterization, sectoral diversity, an understanding of the study phenomenon, and a strong commitment by the participant to free access and volunteering of information.

The first step in my participant recruitment process was the review of the database <https://www.businesslist.com.ng>, from where I shortlisted 50 organizations involved in the three business sectors of education, manufacturing, and trading. Following a review of the organizations' websites, the number of shortlisted organizations was reduced to 37. In reviewing the potential participants' websites, I sought for critical information regarding the participants like the nature of business, number of employees, date of commencement of business, contact telephone numbers, office location, and any other information on the website that I found useful for the study. I used information retrieved from the websites for a preliminary assessment of the eligibility of each organization to participate in the study.

The second step in my participant recruitment process involved making initial contacts with the shortlisted organizations to identify those that are owner-managed. I called the 37 shortlisted organizations using the telephone contacts that I found on their websites and sought to speak with the chief executive officer, or in some cases any member of the management team. During the conversation, 22 of the organizations declined to divulge any information regarding their management status, while 15 organizations agreed for me to visit their offices for further discussions based on pre-scheduled appointments. I visited these 15 organizations (three organizations every day) between July 2 and July 7, 2018. From my discussions with the CEOs, four were eligible to participate in the study. One gave me a commitment to participate in the study and provided references to other potential participants. Three declined to participate in the study but provided me with further references. For the 11 organizations that did not meet the criteria, I politely explained to the CEOs why they did not meet the criteria for the study, and some of them gave me references to other potential participants. At this stage, I needed a commitment from an additional five participants to complete the six cases for my study.

The third step in my participant recruitment process was the use of the snowballing strategy. I used the references that I gathered from the first and second steps to compile a list of additional potential participants. For some of them, I already had relevant contact details from my experience in stage two. For those I didn't have their

contacts, I obtained relevant information regarding them from their websites. I built a list of 28 potential participants using the snowballing strategy. I reviewed the website of all of them and ranked them in the order of better eligibility according to the three business sectors selected for the study. I started making appointments in order of eligibility for each sector until I obtained the commitments to fill the remaining five slots. This process occurred between July 10 and July 21, 2018.

Document Delivery to Participants

From July 2017, I started sending the letters of 'invitation to participate' to the SME owner-managers that I found eligible for the study, and who had indicated strong commitment to participate. I sent out letters and informed consent forms to five of the six participants using my Walden University email. One participant requested for hard copies of the invitation documents, and I delivered same to the participant in person. I made follow-up calls/visits to them for a reconfirmation of their intention to participate in the study and to schedule a date for the interview. I received positive responses from the six of them to participate in the study, and I subsequently scheduled interview dates with each of them. I obtained interview dates as follows: P1, August 1; P2, August 7; P3, August 9; P4, August 16 (later rescheduled to September 3); P5, August 22 (later rescheduled to September 5); and P6, August 30 (later rescheduled to October 2). I maintained regular communication with the selected participants from the time of obtaining their initial commitment to participate in the study until the day that the interview was conducted.

Interviews

I interviewed a total of six SME owner-managers between August 1 and October 2 at venues selected by the participants. Five interviews were conducted at the participants' offices, while one interview was conducted at the participant's home. Before the commencement of each interview, I briefed each participant regarding the purpose of the study and the plans for data utilization and reporting. This briefing was conducted in line with Appendix C (Informed Consent Form). After that, each participant and the researcher signed the Informed Consent Forms. Each interview was audio recorded with a Sunny Audio Recorder model ICD-UX560F and subsequently transcribed into Microsoft Word files.

The semistructured interview protocol contained eight main interview questions. I asked each interviewee the same set of eight main questions. I asked follow-up questions to the interviewees to provide more detailed information on the study phenomenon. I ensured that the interview process followed a 'discussion' pattern and not a situation where the researcher questioned the interviewees. This approach made the interviewees more relaxed such that they provided very useful information that will help to answer the research question.

The interview with P1 lasted for 30 minutes, and this resulted in 10 pages of transcribed raw data. The interview with P2 lasted for 56 minutes resulting in 16 pages of transcribed raw data. The interview with P3 lasted for 52 minutes resulting in 10 pages of transcribed raw data. The interview with P4 lasted for 55 minutes resulting in 20 pages

of transcribed raw data. The interview with P5 lasted for 20 minutes resulting in nine pages of transcribed raw data. The interview with P6 lasted for 52 minutes resulting in 14 pages of transcribed raw data.

Reflective Field Notes

Once I received a commitment from a potential participant, I immediately reflected on all my observations and interactions with the participant from my initial contact up to the time that I obtained his or her commitment to participate in the study. My reflections regarding each participant were recorded in my field notes. During my various visits to each participant office; before, during, and after the interviews, I made observations on the participants' environment and took notice of visible interactions between the interviewee and the employees. I reflected on these my observations and recorded my reflections in the field notes. During the interviews and audio transcription of data, I observed and reflected on the interviewee's body language, tone, motions, and word emphasis. My reflections were recorded in the field notes.

Member Checking

After I completed the transcription of the audio recorded interview for each participant, I sent the transcripts to the interviewee for review and comments. I sent the transcripts by email to five participants and delivered a hard copy to the office one of the participants (P5) as requested during the interview. Two of the participants opted for a face-to-face discussion of the transcripts, while four of the participants opted to discuss

the transcripts over the telephone. For all cases, I updated the transcripts following the comments obtained from them.

Data Analysis

I adopted the descriptive coding strategy as recommended by Saldana (2016) for the analysis of raw data collected in this study. The descriptive coding strategy was used to assign meanings to segments of raw data, thus providing words and phrases that were used for categorization and thematic analysis. The raw data (transcripts) collected from the interview of the participants contained the lived leadership experiences of six SME owner-managers in Nigeria. These narrated leadership experiences followed from eight semistructured interview questions that I asked to each of the six participants. I designed the eight questions such that answers from the participants will provide detailed information for an in-depth contextual understanding (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014) of the leadership styles in Nigerian SMEs.

According to Yin (2017), for a multiple-case study, it is important to use a consistent procedure for the collection and analysis of data across all cases to provide a common platform for cross-case comparisons and thematic analysis. In this study, I followed the same procedure for the collection of data for all the six participants. I adopted a consistent process for manual coding, categorization, and identification of emergent themes across the six cases. The analysis of data was done in two stages: within-case content analysis (Yin, 2017) of data collected from each participant, followed

by a cross-case synthesis of data and comparison of emergent themes (Yin, 2017) across the six cases.

Within-Case Analysis of Data: Identification of Codes and Categories

The analysis of data for this study was driven by the responses obtained from each of the eight interview questions. I tailored the interview questions to provide answers to the main research question. As recommended by Saldana (2016), I subjected data from this study to descriptive coding to symbolically assign meanings to the segments of data that I found relevant to the research question. Data segmentation and assignment of codes were organized according to each interview question. This approach allowed for a contextual understanding of codes and themes emanating from each interview question. In some instances that a participant's response was found to be out of context for a specific question but are relevant to other questions, I reported such responses in the relevant questions during the coding process.

I adopted the descriptive coding method (Saldana, 2016) for the study. I used the 'ground up' data analysis strategy (Yin, 2017) to identify codes from raw data. Phrases or sentences that I found to be relevant to answering the research question were extracted from the transcribed interview data for each participant. I evaluated the extracted segments of data and assigned codes to them. I recorded the codes according to each interview question. I grouped codes that share common meanings and patterns into categories.

Interview question 1. "Describe the nature of relationships between you and your employees?" The responses obtained from this question provided information regarding how the SME owner-managers relate or interact with their employees. Examples of additional probing questions against interview question 1 include: (a) How do you make your employees feel good to be around you, and (b) Explain how your employees feel associating with you. These additional probing questions provided more evidence on how the behavioral and personality traits (Chollet et al., 2014) of the participants informed the relationships with their employees. Some of the codes that were used to describe these relationships include family, mutual, cordial, personal, situational, contingent, structured, co-owner, caring, openness, and common identity. Table 2 shows examples of extracts from responses of participants to interview question 1 with the codes and categories assigned to them.

Table 2

Examples of Data Extracts and Codes from Interview Question 1

	Data Extracts	Codes	Categories
P1	“We have a familiar rapport. I have a rapport, a good rapport with all my staff”	Familiar Good Rapport	Mutual Relationship
P2	“My relationship with my employees is that of a family. I do not really like to see my workers typically as my workers, I see them as friends and colleagues and we relate freely”	Family Friends/Colleagues Relate freely	Collective identity Mutual relationship
P3	“Well the relationship is cordial but it's a sort of situational. When you're not doing what you're supposed to do; the relationship gets rusty”	Situational Gets rusty	Contingent Relationship
P4	“We have a very cordial relationship. For me I look at employees as part of the owners of the business because without them you can't really make a headway. I get involved with their welfare”	Cordial Co-owner Welfare	Mutual Relationship Collective identity Employee welfare
P5	“From the very beginning, the goal has been kind of family set up. Family in the sense that you have good welfare packages”	Family Welfare packages	Collective identity Mutual Relationship Employee welfare
P6	“My relationship with them is one that is cordial. I see them like a family and as a team”	Family Cordial Team	Collective identity Mutual Relationship

Interview Question 2. "Describe your leadership experiences in your

organization?" Responses from this question provided insights into the leadership behavior of participants and their experiences in managing their employees toward achieving organizational objectives. Some of the additional probing questions that followed interview question 2 include: (a) How do you convey to your employees what you expect them to do, (b) How do you help your employees to appreciate the relevance of their work in the organization. Table 3 shows examples of extracts from responses of participants to interview question 2 with the codes and categories assigned to them.

Table 3

Examples of Data Extracts and Codes from Interview Question 2

	Data Extracts	Codes	Categories
P1	“Once you are dealing with human beings you have to be very careful. I have heard some very bitter experiences. I listen to gossips.”	careful with employees bitter experiences listen to gossips	Employee untrustworthiness
P2	“They have a boss who is grounded in what he is telling them. Infact, there is no staff here who will claim to be more experienced than me in what I am doing .I know it better than you because I have passed through it. I just try to understand the challenges staff will normally have. Their problems are taken into consideration ”	A boss More experienced Boss knows-better Employee problems Employee challenges	Restrictive leader influence Employee welfare
P3	“Most times Nigerian workers try to dupe you, they try to be dishonest, they try to be greedy. When my workers deviate from my directives and take their own initiatives, I am happy if such deviation goes well, but when it goes bad, I am usually very mad with that person and uncontrollable”	Workers dupe Dishonest workers Greedy workers My directives Mad when employee deviations goes bad	Employee untrustworthiness Restrictive leader influence
P4	“Leadership is tasking because you have to lead by example. I need to be involved in the process of production. I know all the customers one-on-one. I need to make sure I meet my target. You need to show care. The discipline is stern. If you misbehave, you go. You must check your people while they are working”	Tasking Exemplary leadership Involved in process Know customers Meet target Show care Stern discipline Checking people	Restrictive leader influence Employee untrustworthiness
P5	“I shouldn’t have made them too comfortable. Negativity came into play because there was an open-ended disposition all around. they had opportunity to make extra money from parents all around because they knew they are doing it for themselves”	Too comfortable Negativity Employee deviations Doing for themselves	Employee welfare Employee untrustworthiness
P6	“When you start a business, most times you see the business just go down because of a whole lot of things associated with staff. Most times, it is 60% percent problems that are coming from the staff .I monitor on a daily basis what happens in the business in terms of the finances, sales, profits, overheads.”	Employee deviations Monitoring employees	Employee untrustworthiness Restrictive leader influence

Interview Question 3. "Describe how you get your employees to resolve problems?" The responses obtained from this question and the follow-up probing questions provided insights on how SME owner-managers involve their employees in resolving organizational problems. Transformational leaders stimulate the creative and cognitive abilities of their followers (Burns, 1978, Bass, 1985) to enable them to innovatively resolve problems in a manner that advances organizational objectives. Table 4 shows examples of extracts from responses of participants to interview question 3 with the codes and categories assigned to them.

Table 4

Examples of Data Extracts and Codes from Interview Question 3

	Data Extracts	Codes	Categories
P1	“General problems in the organization rarely occur. But you cannot say. Sometimes you have their private problems. I told you we listen to gossips”	Personal problems Listen to gossips	Structured problem-solving
P2	“Problems are resolved first of all along the line of reporting. If you have an issue, you report it to your immediate supervisor. If it’s beyond your supervisor, he escalates it to the next person ”	Resolving problems Reporting lines Supervisor He escalates	Structured problem-solving
P3	“When you have a problem and I am within reach, I like to contribute to the problem. My rule is that you must have your own solution no matter how foolish. I will now tell you that your decision is foolish and stupid”	Have a problem My rule Own-solution Foolish decision Stupid decision	Structured problem-solving Leader unsupportive behavior
P4	“Sometimes we have teething problems. We have issues where something might go bad and they start trying how they can fix it. But my own way of doing it is once it is bad, can we change it”	Teething problems Things go bad Trying to fix it I say change it	Leader unsupportive behavior Structured problem-solving
P5	“We all noticed that this place was going downhill. We called a meeting and told everybody this is what is happening and everybody resorted to prayers, but that’s not where it is”	Going downhill Called a meeting Resort to prayers	Structured problem-solving Spiritual problem-solving
P6	“She tries to handle some issues at her level, but there might be some issues that will get to my level and I am the one to handle or advise especially things that have to bother on finance”	Levels of issues Employee restrictions	Structured problem-solving

Interview Question 4. "Describe how you get your employees to achieve organizational goals?" The responses obtained from this question and the follow-up probing questions described how SME owner-managers involve their employees in achieving organizational goals. Transformational leaders inspire their employees to believe in the organization's visions while transactional leaders drive their employees to achieve assigned tasks against tangible rewards (Bass, 1990). Table 5 shows examples of extracts from responses of participants to interview question 4 with the codes and categories assigned to them.

Table 5

Examples of Data Extracts and Codes from Interview Question 4

	Data Extracts	Codes	Categories
P1	“School has curriculum. At the beginning of every session, we sit down; I sit down with the administrator and the head teacher and we review the curriculum”	Follow curriculum Periodic review of curriculum	Focus on transactions Structured approach
P2	“Every team lead sits with his team and analyses the challenge that they have. Every team has a goal. I must sit with team leads to know what their challenges are ”	Team leads Team challenges Team goals	Focus on transactions Structured approach
P3	“I want my employees to follow instructions to execute assignments because if they don’t follow instructions and make a mistake, it is a problem.”	Follow instructions Execute assignments	Focus on transactions Structured Approach
P4	“You need to get them involved. They should see that their welfare is key to you. I share where I want to go to. I share where I want to be. Like when the bankers came in, I got them involved”	Involve employees Welfare is key	Focus on transactions Employee welfare
P5	“By the welfare package I talked about. I thought it will make staff happy, and make them comfortable every way you can, that they will be devoted to duty and carry out their functions effectively”	Welfare package Make staff happy Comfortable Devotion to duty Function effectively	Employee welfare Focus on transactions
P6	“Achieving goals in this part of the world, most times people are motivated with money. We have a salary structure. But I also go out of my way to set targets among them”	Motivation with money Salary structure Set targets	Focus on transactions Structured approach

Interview Question 5. "Describe how you help your employees develop themselves to achieve organizational goals?" The responses obtained from this question

provided insights on how SME owner-managers inspire their employees to contribute to the achievement of organizational goals. Transformational leaders use vision to inspire their employees to strive for improved organizational performance (Bass, 1990). Table 6 shows examples of extracts from responses of participants to interview question 5 with the codes and categories assigned to them.

Table 6

Examples of Data Extracts and Codes from Interview Question 5

Data Extracts	Codes	Categories
P1 “In fact every session we have what we call workshop and seminars. We invite people from outside to teach them on modern techniques of impacting knowledge to their pupils”	Workshops Seminars	Task-specific training
P2 “What do we do here is that every year there is a scheme of training as it affects your job”	Job-related training	Task-specific training
P3 “I send my staff on training.”	training	Task-specific training
P4 “Here it is constant training”	Training	Task-specific training
P5 “We have annual workshop every year about this time before resuming another academic year. So they learn new skills”	Workshops Learning new skills	Task-specific training
P6 “The people we represent come to do training. We also do our own internal training”	Training	Task-specific training

Interview Question 6. "Describe your experiences setting targets for your employees?" The responses obtained from this question provided insights into the transactional leadership behaviors of the SME owner-managers. Further probing

questions were used to extract more detailed information from the interviewees.

Examples of these probing questions include: (a) Describe your feelings when targets are met or not met, and (b) what drives you to introduce changes to how your employees work. Transactional leaders get their followers to achieve assigned targets in exchange for tangible rewards (Bass, 1990). Transactional leaders may actively help/monitor their employees to achieve organizational goals or allow them operational freedom and provide support to them only when a problem arises (1997). Table 7 shows examples of extracts from responses of participants to interview question 6 with the codes and categories assigned to them.

Table 7

Examples of Data Extracts and Codes from Interview Question 6

Data Extracts	Codes	Categories
P1 “Setting targets in our establishment is to make sure that the fourteen weeks you have in each session you cover all the curriculum. At the end of the year we do a general kind of party where we do some award”	Cover curriculum for each session.	Nonspecific targets
	General reward	Nonspecific rewards
P2 “Every unit has their targets. The targets have to be reasonable, it has to be justifiable ”	Unit targets. Reasonable and justifiable targets.	Nonspecific targets
P3 “I noticed that generally workers like targets that is accompanied with something, a reward, material reward, not just thank you. Every year we do best drivers award based on pre-set parameters”	Best performance awards.	Nonspecific targets
	Material reward.	
P4 “It is setting your priorities right by making sure you are giving them the enabling environment to work. No fixed targets are here”	Setting priorities. Creating enabling environment. No fixed targets.	Nonspecific targets
P5 “The targets that we use as a measure is the entrance examination into secondary schools of their choice. And the children have been passing those exams”	External benchmarks.	Nonspecific targets
P6 “At the end of the month, for each staff we print out all the sales that the staff has made and we compare it with the other staffs. There is a minimum target that a staff should make. If you go below that, it means that you are not performing”	Comparative targets. Use of minimum targets.	Nonspecific targets

Interview Question 7. "Describe how you reward your employees when they achieve or surpass set targets?" The responses obtained from this question provided further insights into the transactional leadership behaviors of the SME owner-managers.

Further probing questions were used to extract more detailed information from the interviewees. Examples of these probing questions include: (a) Describe your feelings when targets are met or not met, and (b) what drives you to introduce changes to how your employees work. Transactional leaders actively support their employees to achieve or surpass set objectives (Bass, 1990). Transactional leaders deliver tangible rewards to employees when targets are met or surpassed and punish employees when targets are not met (Avolio & Bass, 1991). Table 8 shows examples of extracts from responses of participants to interview question 7 and the codes assigned to them.

Table 8

Examples of Data Extracts and Codes from Interview Question 7

Data Extracts	Codes	Categories
P1 “We have a standard practice. If a teacher has stayed with us and has met his target, we remunerate him or we reward him by giving him a 5% increment in his package but that is across board. We have not had an experience of targets not been met”	Standard practice Fixed percentage reward for targets. Across-board reward.	1) Focus on transactions 2) Nonspecific rewards
P2 “Apart from financial encouragement, you can also move the person up like promotion. We are lucky here that targets are met because the targets are reasonable. We move the staff to the role he can play better ”	Financial encouragement. Discretionary promotion. Reasonable targets. Switch staff roles.	1) Nonspecific rewards 2) Focus on transactions
P3 “When targets are met, I am the best man to deal with because I can reward you excessively. When targets are not met, I react instantaneously. My madness comes instantaneously”	Focus on meeting targets. Negative reaction to employee deviations. Uncontrolled emotions.	1) Nonspecific rewards 2) Focus on transactions 3) Punitive measures
P4 “when they achieve targets, they are all happy because they know they have extra pepper; that’s what they say, and it cuts across board”	Across-board rewards for achieving targets.	1) Nonspecific rewards 2) Focus on transactions
P5 “The reward we used in those days was the Christmas bonuses and we give all of them 13th month pay. Those who did not perform well don’t earn that.”	Team-based rewards. Period rewards. No performance, no reward.	1) Nonspecific reward 2) Punitive measures
P6 “For each month we set a target and the manager will communicate to everybody that this what the reward is. It is normally a monetary reward. If you go below them, these are the consequences too.	Monthly target. Monetary reward. Consequences for going below target.	1) Nonspecific rewards 2) Focus on transactions 3) Punitive measures

Interview Question 8. "Describe how you feel when your employees fail to do what you expect of them?" The responses obtained from this question provided insights into the Laissez-faire leadership behaviors of the SME owner-managers. Laissez-faire leaders show indifference toward their employees and their tasks but apply punitive measures against employee deviations (Avolio & Bass, 1991). Table 9 shows extracts from responses of participants to interview question 8 and the codes assigned to them.

Table 9

Examples of Data Extracts and Codes from Interview Question 8

Extracts	Codes	Categories
P1 "I feel very very upset. You have to call the person, sit him or her down, discuss to find out what the problems are and try to make amends."	Feeling upset Call the person to discuss Identify problems and make amend.	Focus on transactions Supportive measures to perform
P2 "I feel terribly bad because I know that I have provided everything that will make them to do well. Most times, when they do tell you their challenges and you address those issues, you see a sudden turnaround"	Feeling terrible Provided everything to do well Address issues Sudden turn around	Focus on transactions. Supportive measures to perform.
P3 "I am a mad man when my employees don't do what I expect of them. Do what you are supposed to do. Once you don't, you will go"	Frustrations Non-performance You will go	Focus on transactions. Punitive measures.
P4 "It is really heart-broken. I could speak to you now and say you have done something wrong, and we are able to talk, and am able to correct you and you now have another chance"	Frustrations Speak to you Correct you Another chance	Focus on transactions. Supportive measures to perform.
P5 "I normally feel depressed. So you just caution the person and say if you don't do things in this area you will have to find your way out"	Frustration Caution the person	Focus on transactions. Supportive measures to perform. Punitive measures.
P6 "Most times I feel bad about when employees fail to do what I expect of them. If turns out to be that this staff is incompetent, for sure we will try to develop the staff"	I feel bad Staff incompetence Develop the staff	Focus on transactions. Supportive measures to perform.

Cross-Case Synthesis and Thematic Analysis of Data

The use of cross-case analysis in multiple- case studies involves treating each case as a separate study and aggregating findings across individual cases (Yin, 2017). In this study, I did the categorization of data based on the interview questions to allow for an understanding of similarities and differences across all cases. I reported the categories identified for each participant against each interview question. I aggregated the categories according to the interview questions and identified the emerging themes from these categories. I assigned frequencies to each category based on the number of occurrences across the six cases.

For example, in interview question 1, the category ‘mutual relationship appeared in five of the six cases and was assigned a frequency of 5/6, ‘collective identity occurred in four cases with a frequency of 4/6, while the category ‘contingent relationship’ occurred in one case with a frequency of 1/6. I took the frequency of occurrence of each category into consideration in defining the emerging themes. The frequencies show the prevalence of categories across the six cases used in the study. I identified a total of 10 themes across the eight interview questions. Some categories and themes appeared in more than one interview question. Categories with high frequencies showed a prevalence of the emergent theme across the six cases used in the study. Some categories with lower frequencies of occurrence were also evaluated from the context of discrepant cases or treated as exceptional occurrences. Table 10 below shows the categories, their frequencies, and the emergent teams.

Table 10

Categories, Frequencies, and Themes

	Categories	Frequency	Emergent Themes
Interview Question 1	1) Mutual Relationship 2) Collective identity 3) Contingent relationship 4) Employee welfare	5/6 4/6 1/6	1) Fostering employee sense of belonging and collective identity. 2) Focus on employee welfare as a performance motivator
Interview Question 2	1) Employee untrustworthiness 2) Restrictive leader influence 3) employee welfare	5/6 4/6 2/6	1) Lack of trust between owner-managers and employees 2) Over-bearing influence of leaders and employee innovative behaviour 3) Employee welfare as in Q1
Interview Question 3	1) Structured problem-solving 2) Spiritual problem-solving 3) Leader unsupportive behaviour	5/6 1/6 2/6	1) Lack of employees' intellectual stimulation and independent thinking 2) Criticism of failure and its impact on employee morale
Interview Question 4	1) Focus on transactions 2) Structured approach 3) Employee welfare	6/6 5/6 2/6	1) Emphasis on specific transactions over long-term organizational goals 2) Employee welfare as in Q1
Interview Question 5	Task-specific training	6/6	1) Limited owner-manager visionary influence on employees
Interview Question 6	Nonspecific targets	6/6	1) Setting open-ended targets for employees
Interview Question 7	1) Nonspecific rewards 2) Focus on transactions 3) Punitive measures	6/6 5/6 2/6	1) Lack of clear and explicit reward systems. 2) Emphasis on specific transactions over organizational goals
Interview Question 8	1) Focus on transactions 2) Supportive measures 3) Punitive measures	6/6 5/6 3/6	1) Emphasis on specific transactions over organizational goals

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Strategies for rigor in qualitative research must be put in place by the researcher to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and its outcomes (Houghton et al., 2013). To enhance the trustworthiness of this multiple-case study, my data analysis followed a ground-up strategy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which ensured that findings unfolded naturally and reflected the true lived leadership experiences of the participants (Yin, 2017). I have taken the following steps to ensure that the rigor and trustworthiness of the processes used for conducting this study: 1) I provided detailed description of the strategies and procedures for recruiting study participants, 2) I provided detailed description of my interactions with the participants during and after data collection, and 3) I provided a detailed description of how the interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and member-checked.

Trustworthiness reflects the quality that can be ascribed to qualitative research (Patton, 2015). In this multiple-case study, I have used the following four criteria to address the issue of rigor and trustworthiness: Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These four criteria draw parallels (Patton, 2015) with the four criteria established by Yin (2017) namely: Internal validity (credibility), external validity (transferability), reliability (dependability), and construct validity (confirmability).

Credibility

The credibility criteria provide assurances that the responses given by the participants during the interviews reflected their lived experiences regarding the study phenomenon (Patton, 2015; Baillie, 2015). I ensured the credibility of this study by taking the following steps: 1) by using purposeful sampling technique, I ensured that the selected participants were capable and amiable to volunteering credible information regarding the phenomenon of leadership in SMEs; 2) the interviews were held in the participants' natural environments making them more relaxed to volunteer in-depth information regarding the study phenomenon; 3) I used data from multiple sources (Baskadara, 2014) including the interview responses, document reviews, field notes, and my observations/reflections (Vissak, 2010); 4) I carried out member checking (Houghton et al., 2013) by face-to-face or phone review of the interview transcripts with each participant to ensure that their experiences are correctly reflected in the interview data; and 5) my prolonged engagement with the participants before, during, and after the interviews (Houghton et al., 2013) provided further reflective notes for triangulation of data.

Transferability

To ensure the transferability of a qualitative study, the researcher must provide assurances that the procedures adopted for the study and its findings can be applied in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Houghton et al., 2013). To address the issue of transferability in this study, I provided a detailed and transparent description of all the

strategies adopted in the process of recruiting participants, interactions with participants, data collection, data recording, and data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I provided detailed description of each participant such that the contexts under which data for this study was obtained will be helpful to readers in understanding or possibly applying the outcomes of this study in other settings. My personal experiences as an SME owner-manager ensured robust scrutiny of data to provide reliable answers to the research question.

Dependability

Dependability of a study refers to the assurances that other researchers will accept the methodology used for the study and its outcomes. It also means that the replication of the study by other researchers is feasible and can yield similar conclusions (Patton; 2015; Baillie, 2015). I ensured the dependability of this study by taking the following steps: 1) the conceptual framework for this study was rooted on a strong and widely accepted theoretical foundation (The Full Range Leadership Model) for leadership research. This ensured that there is an alignment between the outcomes of the study and other existing knowledge in the literature regarding the phenomenon of leadership in SMEs. 2) I adopted the multiple-case study design for the study, thus, allowing for the understanding of the study phenomenon from multiple contexts. 3) I followed a rigorous purposeful sampling technique for the selection of participants to ensure that data obtained were in-depth, rich, and reliable. 4) I ensured detailed documentation of all the procedures for participants' selection, contacting of participants, interview recording, interview

transcription, and data analysis. 5) I ensured that all the records used or obtained during this study were properly and securely preserved.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the steps taken in the study by the researcher to ensure that the interview data reflect the actual experiences of the respondents and not biased by the researcher's opinions, experiences, imaginations, or preferences (Patton, 2015; Baillie, 2015). I ensured that I did not lead the participants to conclusions during the interview. The interview questions were open-ended allowing the participants to describe their experiences without any limitations or boundaries. Because I own and manage an SME, I carried out reflexivity of myself to ensure that my personal experiences and viewpoints did not influence the probing questions that I asked each participant. Where a participant omitted specific areas that were relevant to the research question, I drew their attention to elucidate on those areas without making any assertions or inferences relating to the study phenomenon.

Study Results

This qualitative multiple-case study was designed to provide a rigorous way of understanding the nature of leadership styles in the Nigerian SMEs. The main research question for this study was "What are the specific knowledge gaps among SME owners and managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability." The conceptual framework for this study was based on the full range leadership model (FRLM) with a focus on three leadership

behaviors: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire (Avolio & Bass, 1991). By conducting detailed interviews with six SME owner-managers, I obtained in-depth descriptions of their leadership experiences in managing their various organizations.

In analyzing the data from this study, I looked out for how the emerging categories and themes aligned with the leadership theories used in the conceptual framework, and how the themes provided answers to the research question. Being a theory-building study, I also sought for similarities in categories and themes that were used for pattern-matching (Yin, 2017), and differences across the cases that can be used for theoretical replications (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) in future research. I used a laborious and time-consuming manual coding technique (Basit, 2003) to ensure that every segment of data was considered in determining the emerging categories and themes that I found to be relevant to the research question.

By using the manual descriptive coding in this study, I was fully immersed in the data (Cronin, 2014) such that there was an effective and a contextual understanding of data (Fingeld-Connett, 2014). As a novice researcher, the descriptive manual coding method (Saldana, 2016) was more effective for me than the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) programs for the analysis of data from this study. The data analysis took into consideration all data obtained from the study including transcribed interviews, review of documents (including websites), literature review, field notes, and researcher's observations/reflections. I used the field notes and observations to reflect on participants responses during the within-case and cross-case data analysis.

A total of 10 themes emerged from the thematic analysis of data. These themes include: 1) Fostering employees sense of belonging and collective identity, 2) Focus on employee welfare as performance motivator, 3) Lack of trust between SME owner-managers and their employees, 4) Over-bearing influence of leaders and employee innovative behavior, 5) Lack of employees' intellectual stimulation and independent thinking, 6) Criticism of failure and its impact on employee morale, 7) Emphasis on specific transactions over long-term organizational goals, 8) Limited owner-manager visionary influence on employees, 9) setting open-ended targets for employees, and 10) lack of clear and explicit reward systems.

Theme 1 emanated from interview question 1; theme 2 from questions 1, 2, and 4; themes 3 and 4 emanated from question 2; themes 5 and 6 from question 3; theme 7 from questions 4, 7, and 8; theme 8 from question 5; theme 9 from question 6; and theme 10 from question 7. In the rest of this section, I described the emerging themes and provided examples of specific participants' quotes that support these themes.

Theme 1: Fostering employees sense of belonging and collective identity

This theme shows that the SME owner-managers have close relationships with their employees while fostering a sense of collective identity within their organizations. It portrays a positive transformational behavior with a leaning toward the 'idealized influence' element of the transformational leadership model. Idealized influence is one of the four elements of transformational leadership (Bass, 1999) that explains how transformational leaders make others feel good and proud to associate with them. From

table 10, it can be seen that five out of the six participants described the relationship with their employees as mutual, while four participants emphasized the existence of a collective identity within their organizations. The views of five of the participants regarding the relationship with their employees are exemplified by Participant 2; he stated in response to interview question 1:

My relationship with my employees is that of a family. Am sure when you worked into this premises you would have noticed that there is one commonality today. Everybody is wearing a particular identity in terms of shirt. Everybody in this company today is wearing the GGI shirt including myself. So what does that tell us; what it tells us is that I relate with my staff at that level of equality.

Participant 4 further emphasized the issue of mutual relationship and common identity when he responded to interview question 1. He stated:

We have a very cordial relationship. For me, I look at employees as part of the owners of the business because without them you can't really make a headway. So I try to run a one-on-one relationship with everybody here. For me, the key word here is just mutual respect.

One discrepant case was noted concerning interview question 1. Participant 3 explained that the relationship with his employees was contingent on the behavior and performance of the employees. He stated:

Well, the relationship is cordial, but it's a sort of situational. When you're not doing what you're supposed to do; the relationship gets rusty. But when you do

what you are supposed to do; its good, is a cordial relationship but that's it. So the relationship you can't say is consistently cordial. So it depends on your task, your attitude, your commitment that makes my relationship to be cordial with you once those things are dysfunctional the relationship doesn't get cordial.

To a large extent, my interactions with the SME owner-managers revealed that they have firm believe that a close relationship with their employees will increase their organizational affective commitment as well as enhance their job performance.

Theme 2: Focus on employees' welfare as performance motivator

This theme explains a strong emphasis by SME owner-managers on employee welfare as a performance motivator. Though research shows that employees' welfare facilities influence their workplace performance (Moruri, Evans, & Jennifer, 2018), but inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation have been proven to be the most effective elements of transformational leadership (Boies et al., 2015). This theme will be evaluated from the context of individualized considerations; an element of transformational leadership that focuses on the follower's needs for growth and achievement (Bass, 1995). A strong emphasis on employee welfare was noted in the responses to interview question 1 by P4 and P5; responses to question 2 by P2 and P5; and the responses to question 4 by P4 and P5. The strong emphasis on employee welfare was exemplified by Participant 5 in her response to interview question 1. She stated:

From the very beginning, the goal has been kind of family set up- family in the sense that you have good welfare packages. We wanted an organization where

you have the interest of the staff at heart all the time. You cared about their welfare and their family.

In response to question 2, P2 also emphasized the importance of employee welfare as a motivational factor. He stated:

I just try to understand the challenges staff will normally have, accommodation is one, especially in Rivers state here. But frankly, I had to spend over 100 million Naira to build staff quarters. I have 1-bedroom staff quarters, I have 2-bedroom, I have 3-bedroom, and they pay basically like nothing.

The individualized consideration element of transformational leadership implies that the leader is transformed not to simply focus on the socio-economic needs of followers, but rather to focus on individual's differences in needs that will potentially develop them to higher levels of performance and organizational commitment (Bass, 1999).

Theme 3: Lack of Trust Between SME Owner-Managers and Their Employees

This theme explains the lack of trust between SME owner-managers and their employees. The 'idealized influence' element of transformational leadership is dependent on how a leader uses charisma to influence high-performance behaviors among followers (Bass, 1999). It will be difficult for a leader to use charisma to positively influence followers when there is lack of trust between the leader and the followers. Zhu, Newman, Miaoc, and Hooke (2013) found that affective trust enhances positive organizational outcomes from transformational leadership. The issue of trust between owner-managers

and their employees manifested in five of the six cases. The statements by Participant 3 exemplifies the fact that SME owner-managers do not trust their employees. He stated:

Most times Nigerian workers try to dupe you, they try to be dishonest, they try to be greedy. Now you say: what do you do, set a standard that this is this, if you do this, if you don't do this, this is what it should be.

This statement shows that the SME owner-managers do not trust their employees.

Participant 1 also reinforced this statement. He stated: "Once you are dealing with human beings you have to be very careful. I have heard some very bitter experiences with employees" The issue of trust under this theme reflects only one side of the leader-follower exchange relationship. Data from this study reflects only the experiences of the owner-managers and not that of the employees. So data from this study does not show if SME employees trust their managers. This deficiency is not a problem because the research question focuses on understanding the leadership behaviors of the owner-managers and not the followership behaviors of the employees. Notwithstanding the close relationships with employees as portrayed by the SME owner-managers, this theme is indicative of limited transformational behavior among the SME owner-managers.

Theme 4: Overbearing influence of leaders and employees' innovative behavior

Theme 4 explains how the overbearing influence of SME owner-managers could hinder creativity and innovative behaviors among their employees. Grobler and Du Plessis (2016) found that the elements of leadership style that promote organizational sustainability must in addition to employee well-being, encourage innovation and

entrepreneurship among employees. In his response to interview question 2, P2 exposed how SME owner-managers impose their experiences and opinions on their employees.

He stated:

At times when it gets tough I put on my coveralls, and I go to work. There is no staff here who will claim to be more experienced than me in what I am doing. I know it better than you because I have passed through it. I have more experience, and I ask you why did you do this, you could have done it this way, and he says I am sorry, next time I will do it that way.

The behavior portrayed by P2 is reflective of what Howell and Avolio (1992) described as transformational 'idols' whereby leaders see themselves as having unconventional wisdom and capabilities that other people cannot attend.

The overbearing influence of SME owner-managers was manifested in different ways in this study. The element of close monitoring of employees by SME owner-managers can also impact employees' innovative behavior. This form of overbearing attitude was exemplified by P6 in his response to interview question 2. He stated that "I monitor on a daily basis what happens in the business in terms of the finances, sales, profits, overheads." Also, in response to interview question 2, P4 stated that "Leadership is tasking because you have to lead by example. I need to be involved in the process of production. I know all the customers one-on-one." When leaders claim to know everything, it leaves little room for them to see any value in the creative or innovative potentials of their followers.

Theme 5: Lack of employees' intellectual stimulation and independent thinking

The SME owner-managers interviewed in this study do not encourage employees to approach organizational problems with innovative behavior, rather they encourage a structured approach to deal with organizational issues. This theme was identified from the responses of five of the six participants to interview question 3. These participants described in different ways how they encourage their employees to follow a structured approach for solving organizational problems. P2 exemplified this structured problem-solving attitude. He stated: "Problems are resolved first of all along the line of reporting. If you have an issue, you report it to your immediate supervisor. If it's beyond your supervisor, he escalates it to the next person". This structured behavior is characteristic of transactional leadership. The transactional leader relies on organizational structures, procedures, and guidelines to drive the exchange of agreements with followers for specific results against predetermined rewards (Bass, 1997).

P5 explained how her employees resorted to prayers in response to a major organizational problem. She stated: "We all noticed that this place was going downhill. We called a meeting and told everybody this is what is happening and everybody resorted to prayers." P5 did not inspire her employees to think of creative ways of dealing with the problems of the organization. She resorted to punitive measures like demotions and outright termination of employment. She stated:

People were already used to that way of doing things. They couldn't help themselves because it has gone too deep the way they did their job. So we needed

some outsider to come and get into the system and sort it out, and that's what they did. They just flushed out all those staffs.

Theme 6: Criticism of failure and its impact on employee morale

This theme explains the non-supportive attitude of SME owner-managers to their employees when they attempt personal initiatives toward addressing organizational issues. An important element of transformational leadership style is that leaders collaborate with employees to effect changes in the organization (Bass, 1990). A responsive and supportive leadership behavior has been associated with a strong positive influence on organizational growth (Katou, 2015). The unsupportive attitude of owner-managers toward employee deviations manifested in two cases; P3 and P4. For example, in response to interview question 3, P3 stated:

My rule is that you must have your own solution no matter how foolish. Then I will now tell you that your decision is foolish and stupid, why did you say that this is this, why did you not think about it this way or that way.

P4 also exemplified lack of support to employee's technical initiative toward resolving problems. In response to interview question 3, P4 stated:

Sometimes we have teething problems. We have issues where something might go bad, and they start trying how they can fix it. But my own way of doing it is once it is bad, can we change it or do something. But they might say can we just adjust.

This attitude of not supporting employees' initiatives for resolving problems can affect their morale and dampen their disposition to creative thinking. Shehu and Mahmood (2014) found that SME owner-managers that influence their organizations with innovative and supportive cultures tend to achieve higher levels of organizational performance.

Theme 7: Emphasis on specific transactions over long-term organizational goals

This theme describes how SME owner-managers focus more on specific transactions rather than long-term goals in their engagement with employees. Transactional leaders drive their followers to achieve specific tasks (Burns, 1978), while transformational leaders emphasize the organizational vision (Bass, 1985) and long-term goals. In response to interview question 4, all six participants exhibited transaction-based behaviors in their engagement with employees.

For P1, achieving goals means complying with the school curriculum. This restricts the employees from looking for other ways to achieve performance and competitive advantage for their institution. P1 stated: "School has a curriculum. At the beginning of every session, we sit down; I sit down with the administrator and the head teacher, and we review the curriculum." P2 focuses more on team goals instead of organizational goals and vision. He stated: "Every team lead sits with his team and analyses the challenge that they have. Every team has a goal. I must sit with team leads to know what their challenges are" It means that employees are not made to think about long-term organizational goals and vision. P6 emphasized the issue of money as a

motivation for achieving targets. He stated: “Achieving goals in this part of the world, most times people are motivated with money. We have a salary structure. But I also go out of my way to set targets among them.” Again, organizational long-term goals and vision were not emphasized. The attitude of the SME owner-managers as reflected in this theme depicts a leaning to transactional leadership behavior.

Theme 8: Limited owner-manager visionary influence on employees

This theme describes the focus by owner-managers on task-specific training and less of intellectual stimulation. There is no emphasis on inspiring the employees to believe in the vision and long-term goals of the organization. This theme is similar to theme 7 concerning exhibiting transactional leadership behavior. The difference is that while theme 7 reflects an attitude toward transactions, theme 8 reflects an attitude toward training and development of the employees. In response to interview question 5, all six participants described how they organize seminars and workshops on task-specific training for their employees, or how they send them for third-party organized job-related training. This attitude depicts transactional leadership behavior. Transformational leaders use vision rather than tasks to inspire their followers to achieve high organizational performance (Bass, 1999). The views of the six participants are exemplified by P1 who stated: “In fact every session we have what we call workshop and seminars. We invite people from outside to teach them on modern techniques of impacting knowledge to their pupils.” Similarly, P2 stated: “What we do here is that every year there is a scheme of training as it affects your job.” The emphasis here is on job-related training rather than

the vision and goals of the organization. P5 stated: “We have annual workshop every year about this time before resuming another academic year. So they learn new skills”, while P6 said: “The people we represent come to do training. We also do our own internal training.” Again, these statements are all related to job-specific training.

Theme 9: Setting open-ended targets for employees.

One of the three dimensions of transactional leadership is contingent reward whereby leaders set targets for employees and reward them for achieving or surpassing those targets (Burns, 1978). In response to interview question 6, all the six participants reported setting one form of target or the other for their employees, but these targets are open-ended and have no specific correlation with the performance and long-term sustainability of their organizations. In response to question 5, P1 described targets as the completion of the school’s curriculum within the specified period for an academic term. This is an open-ended target that has no specific correlations with job performance and organizational growth. He stated: “Setting targets in our establishment is to make sure that the fourteen weeks you have in each session you cover all the curriculum that is required to be covered within that fourteen weeks for each term.” The covering of school curriculum may not be an appropriate standalone yardstick for measuring employee job performance.

In some cases, the SME owner-managers had no specific targets. For example, P4 responded thus: “It is setting your priorities right by making sure you are giving them the enabling environment to work. No fixed targets are here.” For P6, targets are assessed

relative to the performance of other employees and not based on specific performance expectations. He stated:

At the end of the month, for each staff, we print out all the sales that the staff has made and we compare it with the other staffs. There is a minimum target that a staff should make. If you go below that, it means that you are not performing

Though the setting of targets for employees as reflected in this theme depicts a leaning toward transactional leadership behavior, Bass (1997) argued that the conceptualization of contingent reward in transactional leadership requires a clear and structured exchange relationship that arise from negotiations, supportive resources, and mutually beneficial agreements (Bass, 1997) between the leader and followers. Thus, it can be said that regarding target setting, the SME owner-managers are aligned to transactional leadership behavior but do not fully follow the principles of contingent reward as conceptualized in the transactional leadership theory.

Theme 10: Lack of clear and explicit reward systems

This theme explains the nature of employee reward systems that exist in Nigerian SMEs. In response to interview question 7, all the six participants described employee reward as an important factor that engenders employee organizational commitment.

Contingent reward is one of the elements of transactional leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1995). The conceptualization of contingent reward in the transactional leadership theory is predicated on the existence of structures and procedures that guide employees to achieve pre-determined tasks against predetermined rewards (Bass & Avolio, 1995). The

followers know exactly what they will get from the leader if they achieve specific tasks. Both the setting of tasks and the contingent rewards in transactional leadership are not arbitrary but clearly understood by all parties within the context of leader-follower exchange relationship (Bass, 1985).

P1 explained that the reward system in his organization is structured and broad-based. In his response to interview question 7, he stated:

We have a standard practice. If a teacher has stayed with us and has met his target, we remunerate him, or we reward him by giving him a 5% increment in his package, but that is across board. We have not had an experience of targets not been met.

P4 also described the broad-based reward system in his organization. He stated: “When they achieve targets, they are all happy because they know they have extra pepper; that’s what they say, and it cuts across board.” The experiences described by P5 regarding the reward system in her organization is similar to the responses obtained from P1 and P4. P5 stated: “The reward we used in those days was the Christmas bonuses and we give all of them 13th-month pay. Those who did not perform well don’t earn that.” The 13th-month pay represents an additional one-month salary that is paid across-board in December.

Similarities and Differences Across Cases

The cross-case synthesis of data in multiple-case study research can reveal similarities and differences within the emerging patterns and themes across the cases. The emerging similarities are subjected to pattern matching and used for literal replications

(Yin, 2017), while the emerging differences across the cases can create theoretical foundations to support future research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Theme 1: 'Fostering employee sense of belonging and collective identity' was dominant across five of the six cases. The SME owner-managers fostered a very close relationship with their employees. P3 was the only discrepant case as the relationship with employees was described as situational and contingent on the employees' tasks and attitudes. P3 stated: "So the relationship you can't say is consistently cordial. So it depends on your task, your attitude, your commitment."

Theme 2: 'Focus on employees' welfare as performance motivator' emerged from three of the six cases (P2, P4, and P5). Welfare was described by these three participants as the provision employee needs such as accommodation, health care, Christmas bonuses, 13th-month salary, and providing support for employees in private social issues like the burial of loved ones and other personal needs. For the other three participants (P1, P3, and P6), employee welfare was described by fixed salary structures and additional rewards for meeting targets. This behavior is consistent with the contingent reward element on transactional leadership.

Theme 3: 'Lack of trust between SME owner-managers and their employees' emanated from five of the six participants. The five SME owner-managers do not trust the technical competence their employees and their moral standing. P2 was the only discrepant case for this theme. P2 demonstrated some level of trust between himself and his employees. For example, he stated: "I am always very much on the move. I can do

that because I have a stable management here because there's a lot of commitment on the part of the workforce." He further emphasized that: "Today we are strong in so many areas because our representatives are delivering."

Theme 4: 'Over-bearing influence of leaders and employees' innovative behavior' emanated from four of the participants. These SME owner-managers impose their experience on the employees thus hindering the capacity of the employees for independent thinking. Two discrepant cases were noted. P1 relied on the experiences of his key personnel to run his school, while P5 believed that the employees knew what they were doing. In answer to interview question 1, P1 stated: "The head teacher and the administrator do the day-to-day running of the school", while in answer to interview question 2, P5 stated: "Negativity came into play because there was an open-ended disposition all around" The two discrepant cases under theme 4 are both from the education sector.

Theme 5: 'Lack of employees' intellectual stimulation and independent thinking' emanated from five of the participants because of their structured approach in dealing with organizational problems which could hinder creative thinking among the employees. P5 did not describe any structured approach for dealing with organizational problems. She noted that her employees resorted to prayers when she informed them at a general meeting that the school was going down. Theme 6: 'Criticism of failure and its impact on employee morale' emanated from the same interview question 3 as theme 5. Two of the

participants (P3 and P4) were critical of employee deviations. For example, P3 stated: “I will now tell you that your decision is foolish and stupid.”

Theme 7: ‘Emphasis on specific transactions over long-term organizational goals’ emanated from all the six participants. The SME owner managers exhibited transactional behavior by focusing on specific transactions and ignoring the need to inspire their employees to believe in the long-term goals of the organization. The only discrepant finding came from P4 who stated; “I share my vision with them.” There was no further emphasis to show how P4 inspired or developed his employees to transcend beyond self-interest and focus on the vision and goals of the organization.

Theme 8: ‘Limited owner-manager visionary influence on employees’ emanated from all six cases. Interview question 5 was used to examine how SME owner-managers develop their employees to achieve organizational goals. Responses across the six cases focused on task-related training. There was no emphasis on developing the employees to think along the lines of futuristic state of the organization and its long-term sustainability. This demonstrates an absence of the ‘individualized influence’ element of transformational leadership and leaning toward the ‘contingent reward element of transactional leadership. For example, P2 stated: “What do we do here is that every year there is a scheme of training as it affects your job.” Similarly, P4 stated: “Here it’s constant training. Like I told you we are in a process of sending Junior first of all to China. He needs to go and see the new machine we are trying to order for”; and P5

stated: “We have annual workshop every year about this time before resuming another academic year. So they learn new skills.”

Theme 9: ‘Setting open-ended targets for employees’ emanated from all six cases. Though the six participants demonstrated that they set targets for their employees, but there is no evidence of correlations between the targets and the long-term goals of the organization. Employees may be pursuing set targets without a clear understanding of how these targets tie into the long-term goals of their organization. For example, P5 stated: “The targets that we use as a measure is the entrance examination into secondary schools of their choice”. This target is open-ended because other external factors can impact the performance of pupils in external exams.

Similarly, P6 stated: “So it means that at the end of the month, for each staff we print out all the sales that the staff has made and we compare it with the other staffs.” Target setting as conceptualized in transactional leadership is structured, negotiated, and specific to individuals (Bass, 1985). It is not based on a comparison of the performances of different individuals.

Theme 10: ‘Lack of clear and explicit reward systems’ emanated from all six participants. Themes 9 and 10 are similar because the two themes reflect a transactional behavior among the SME owner-managers regarding the setting of targets and the accompanying reward systems. Themes 9 and 10 emanated from the same category: ‘focus on transactions.’ It demonstrates the fact that the SME owner-managers focus more on getting their employees to achieve specific tasks rather than inspiring them to

believe in the long-term organizational goals. This raises the question of whether SMEs in Nigerian have long-term performance objectives with clear organizational vision and goals. Figure 1 shows the frequencies of emergent themes across the six cases used in the study.



Figure 1. Cross-Case Analysis (Theme Frequency of Occurrence by Case)

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the research setting, participants' demographics, and the procedures for participants' selection and data collection. The data collected was analyzed in two stages. The first stage involved the within-case analysis of data using the descriptive coding method to identify codes and categories from relevant segments that provide answers to the research question: What are the specific knowledge gaps among

SME owners and managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability? I presented the codes and categories identified from the six cases in tables according to the eight interview questions.

The second stage of data analysis involved a cross-case thematic analysis which led to the emergence of 10 themes from the 14 categories that I identified in the first stage analysis across the eight interview questions. I found these ten themes to be relevant to the research question. I described the ten emergent themes in details in this chapter and I presented examples of participants' statements that supported these themes. I evaluated the similarities and differences in the themes across the six cases, and I presented the frequencies of the ten themes across the six cases.

I presented evidence of trustworthiness for this study and its outcomes. I ensured credibility by recruiting capable participants that volunteered credible information regarding the study phenomenon. I ensured transferability by presenting detailed and transparent procedures for the recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis. The study was rooted in a generally accepted theoretical foundation for leadership studies thus ensuring dependability for the study. The results of this study reflect the experiences of the study participants and not my personal opinions and biases, thus ensuring the confirmability of the study.

In chapter 5, I presented interpretation of my findings and discussed how these findings relate to existing knowledge in the literature regarding leadership styles in SMEs. I also discussed the implication of the study findings for positive social change,

theory, methodology, and advanced recommendations and opportunities for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to gain an in-depth understanding of specific knowledge gaps among SME owners and managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability. The nature of the study was qualitative. The research question which was: What are the specific knowledge gaps among SME owners and managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability? The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in Bass's (1990) concept of leadership style and Franco & Mato's (2015) concept of leadership in SMEs. The full range leadership model (FRLM) (Avolio & Bass, 1991) was used as a theoretical foundation for the study. The FRLM comprises three leadership theories: transformational leadership theory, transactional leadership theory, and the laissez-faire leadership theory.

The thematic analysis of data from the six cases used in the study produced 10 themes that explained the leadership behaviors of SME owner-managers. These themes included: (a) fostering employees sense of belonging and collective identity, (b) focus on employee welfare as performance motivator, (c) lack of trust between SME owner-managers and their employees, (d) over-bearing influence of leaders and employee innovative behavior, (e) lack of employees' intellectual stimulation and independent thinking, (f) criticism of failure and its impact on employee morale, (g) emphasis on specific transactions over long-term organizational goals, (h) limited owner-manager visionary influence on employees, (i) setting open-ended targets for employees, and (j)

lack of clear and explicit reward systems. These 10 themes formed the basis for interpreting the findings from this study. In the rest of this chapter, I presented my interpretation of findings from the study; implications of the study for theory, practice, and positive social change; limitations of the study; and the recommendations.

Interpretation of Findings

Most of the findings from this study confirmed or extended the existing knowledge in the literature regarding leadership style and leadership in SMEs. Bass (1999) asserted that the FRLM encapsulates most of the conventional leadership styles and that every leader exhibits some form of transformational and transactional leadership styles, with each leader aligning more to either transformational or transactional leadership styles. This assertion was reaffirmed in this study. Likewise, Franco and Matos (2015) found that SME owner-managers in Portugal did not faithfully follow any specific leadership style. The SME owner-managers in Portugal were found to exhibit some levels of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors with some aligning more to either transformational or transactional leadership style. My findings from this current study on leadership in Nigerian SMEs show that SME owner-managers do not follow any specific leadership style. They exhibited some elements of transformational and transactional leadership styles, with most of them aligning more to the transactional leadership behaviors.

Fostering employees' sense of belonging and collective identity

This theme provided evidence that the SME owner-managers fostered a close relationship with their employees. This finding is consistent with previous research by Franco and Matos (2015) that indicated that SME owner-managers feel that closeness with employees increases their organizational commitment as well as enhancing their job performance. The SME owner-managers interviewed in this study portrayed a strong family-like relationship with their employees in exchange for loyalty. The existence of a high sense of collective identity and mutual relationship between leaders and followers in Nigerian SMEs suggest a leaning toward the individualized consideration dimension of transformational leadership behavior.

Bass (1999) argued that transformational leadership is more likely to thrive in places with high level of group orientation, and that collective identity mediates a leader's individualized consideration because of a perceived moral obligation to attend to employees' personal needs. The moral spectrum of transformational leadership canvassed by Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) to some extent described the transformational behaviour of Nigerian SME owner-managers. Five out of the six participants enjoyed a good and cordial relationship with their employees while at the same time taking care of their social and financial well-being. That affective organizational commitment is seen as a positive outcome of transformational leadership (Long et al. 2016), but research shows that the dimensions of transformational leadership that engenders SME performance and growth is intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation (Boies et al., 2015) of

followers which are obviously lacking among the SME owner-managers that I interviewed in this study.

Focus on employee welfare as performance motivator

This theme showed that the interviewed SME owner-managers cared a lot about the general welfare of their employees. There was much emphasis on employee social needs, like providing affordable accommodation, healthcare, and participating in social functions like employee's birthday celebrations, burial of loved ones, marriages, and other sociocultural factors that put emotional and financial burden on employees. From a transformational leadership theoretical lens, the emphasis on employee welfare partially reflects the principles of 'idealized influence' in the transformational leadership model (Bass 1985). Though idealized influence is conceptualized under transformational leader to focus on individual needs, the context of needs is not limited to welfare.

Individualized consideration as conceptualized in transformational leadership is developmental, focusing on the follower's needs for achievement and growth (Bass, 1995). Individualized consideration as exhibited by SME owner-managers interviewed in this study focused on meeting the employees' socio-economic needs. Thus, the employees become dependent on their organization for socio-economic sustenance rather than the organization depending on the employees for growth and sustainability.

The finding from this theme is consistent with the research findings by Aritz and Walker (2014) that cultural differences impact the values that different people attach to the essence of leadership. Equally, Bass (1997) argued that leadership is affected by the

cultures that it occurs. The socioeconomic climate in Nigeria is very harsh (Motilewa et al., 2015), such that employees in Nigeria attach great importance to personal survival and family sustenance. Unfortunately, SME owner-managers in Nigeria have limited knowledge on the factors that might contribute to business sustainability (Uchehara, 2017) including the critical factor of leadership style (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015; Oladele & Akeke, 2016). This explains why they put more emphasis on employee welfare over higher-order developmental needs of the employees. To become transformational leaders as recommended by Bass (1985), there is the need for a pragmatic shift in the Nigerian SMEs from the short-term focus on employee welfare to long-term developmental processes that will benefit the individuals, the organization and the society.

Lack of thrust between SME owner-managers and their employees

Trust is a very important factor in the exchange relationship between leaders and followers. Research showed that trust mediates the idealized influence element of transformational leadership (Zhua et al., 2013). The absence of trust between the SME owner-managers interviewed in this study and their employees provided evidence that they do not exhibit transformational leadership behavior from this context. Mittal (2016) found that transformational leaders in SMEs create trust between them and their employees; thus, providing the psychological empowerment that enhanced organizational commitment.

Though the SME owner-managers interviewed in this study maintained a close relationship with their employees and cared about their welfare, these are short-term measures that tend to address the immediate socio-economic circumstances of the employees. My interpretation from this theme is that the SME owner-managers do not operationalize the transformational leadership principles, rather, they obtain the loyalty of their employees by ensuring a good relationship with them and attending to their immediate welfare and social needs. This approach will not create the innovative environment (Kacem & El Harbi, 2014) that is required for the growth and long-term sustainability (Katou, 2015) of the SME firms. Thus, these SME owner-managers lack the necessary understanding of how transformational leadership styles can be used to improve enterprise performance and organizational sustainability.

Over-bearing influence of leaders and employee innovative behavior

This theme indicates a leaning toward the transactional leadership behavior by the interviewed SME owner-managers. Transactional leaders use predetermined structures and procedures to promote compliance among their followers for the achievement of assigned tasks (Bass, 1985). The element of transactional leadership exhibited under this theme by the SME owner-managers interviewed in this study is ‘management by exception actively.’ The SME owner-managers exercised strong influence over the way employees attended to their jobs. This influence sometimes could become over-bearing such that the innovative potentials of the employees remain latent and the organization

will only rely on the experience and capability of the owner-manager for growth and sustainability.

Bass (1997) argued that in a knowledge-dominated era, leadership must go beyond the contingent reward/punishment mechanisms in transactional relationships (Bass, 1997). When SME owner-managers impose their knowledge and experience on their employees, knowledge creation and knowledge sharing become restrictive among the employees. The organization is thus limited by the knowledge and the experience of the owner-manager and may not survive in a competitive, dynamic, and challenging economic environment. This finding is consistent with the argument by Howell and Avolio (1992) that over-bearing leaders may become 'idols' by seeing themselves as possessing unconventional wisdom that their employees cannot attain.

The interviewed SME owner-managers lack the understanding of how to take advantage of specific leadership styles to influence the innovative behavior of their employees (Derecskei, 2016). Idealized influence as conceptualized in transformational leadership theory describes how a leader's charisma is used to influence high-performance work attitude among followers. In essence, followers are influenced to innovate and to bring in their own perspectives for driving the growth and sustainability of the organization. Nigerian SME owner-managers need to ensure that their employees understand that they have a role to play in the growth and long-term survival of their organization and should not be limited by the knowledge and experiences of the owner-manager.

Lack of employees' intellectual stimulation and independent thinking

This theme shows a leaning toward transactional leadership behavior by Nigerian SME owner-managers because they focused on a structured approach for dealing with organizational issues and influenced their employees in that direction. The theme emanated from the category 'structured problem-solving' which means that the SME owner-managers influenced their employees to follow structured processes and procedures for addressing organizational problems. In essence, the employees are simply extending the knowledge and experience of the owner-managers without bringing their own initiatives into context in dealing with organizational issues.

The interpretation of this theme further confirmed the existence of limited transformational leadership behavior among the SME owner-managers because transformational leadership thrives better in a dynamic environment where work emphasis goes beyond the effectiveness of employees under routine performance. Research showed that intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation are the most effective elements of the transformational leadership model that impact team and organizational performance (Boies et al. (2015). The SME owner-managers need to become more transformational by influencing their employees to learn and explore new ways of improving and sustaining the performance of their organization. Bass (1999) argued that when leader-member exchange starts as a transactional relationship, there is a need for it to become transformational for more effectiveness.

Criticism of failure and its impact on employee morale

Although this theme arose from only two of the six participants, it is an important finding because it further reinforced the transactional leadership leaning of the SME owner-managers. Typical of the transactional leadership model, the SME owner-managers described how they reprimanded their employees when they took initiatives that went wrong or even prevented them from taking personal initiatives to deal with problems or challenges that they encounter in the course of performing their duties. In contrast, transformational leaders are not punitive but support their employees in the areas where personal development is required to enhance their performance and growth (Bass, 1995).

Shehu and Mahmood (2014) found that SME owner-managers that influenced their organizations with innovative and supportive cultures tend to achieve higher levels of organizational performance. Responsive and supportive leadership behavior has been associated with strong positive influence on organizational growth (Katou, 2015). Research showed that transactional leadership may have a negative influence on employee entrepreneurial behavior (Morianio et al., 2014); thus, it is important for Nigerian SME owner-managers to fully understand the principles of transformational leadership which have been found to promote innovation and positive entrepreneurial behavior among employees in small firms ((Muchiri & McMurray, 2015). In cases where transactional leadership have been found to be effective, it is substantially mediated by transformational behavior (Bass, 1999).

Emphasis on specific transactions over long-term organizational goals

The SME owner-managers interviewed in this study did not set long-term goals for their enterprises. They focused more on short-term transactional objectives without any clear plans for growth and long-term sustainability of their enterprises. As such, SME employees struggled to achieve immediate tasks without an understanding of any correlations between their tasks and the long-term sustainability of their organizations. This finding demonstrated a leaning toward transactional leadership behavior by the SME owner-managers. Researchers have found that transactional leadership is not very effective for the performance and long-term sustainability of SMEs (Mekraz & Gundala, 2016; Mgeni & Nayak, 2016).

The findings from this study have not produced any evidence of significant transformational leadership behavior among the interviewed SME owner-managers. Research show that where transactional leadership have been found to be effective, it is substantially mediated by transformational behavior (Bass, 1999). Existing evidence in the literature suggest that transformational leadership is the most effective leadership style for the performance and sustainability SMEs (Mekraz & Gundala, 2016; Ozer & Tinaztepe, 2016; Iscan et al., 2014). Also, since there is evidence that transactional leadership has a negative impact on the entrepreneurial behavior of SME employees (Morianio et al., 2014), thus the dominance of transactional leadership behavior in the Nigerian SMEs could partly explain the poor performance and slow pace of growth in these firms.

Limited owner-manager visionary influence on employees

Inspirational motivation as conceptualized in the transformational leadership theory describes how leaders articulate a vision and inspire followers to believe in this vision (Bass, 1985). Research show that inspirational leadership influence organizational innovativeness in small firms (Dunne et al., 2016). This theme provides evidence that the SME owner-managers lack the knowledge of how visionary leadership can positively impact the growth and long-term sustainability of their enterprises. This theme further demonstrated the fact that the SME owner-managers interviewed in this study exhibited limited transformational behavior in the management of their organizations.

The finding from this theme is consistent with the finding by Boies et al. (2015) that intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation are the most effective dimensions of transformational leadership that impact team performance. Thus, the absence of inspirational motivation in the leadership behavior of the interviewed SME owner-managers could to some extent explain the poor performance and lack of sustainability of SMEs in Nigeria. This theme arose from the question on how the SME owner-managers develop their employees to achieve organizational goals. Responses obtained from the SME owner-managers indicated that they have a preference for transaction-related training rather than long-term developmental objectives that are aligned with their organizational vision and long-term goals.

Inspirational motivation is used to imbue the vision of any organization on its employees (Bass, 1985). The absence of inspirational motivation as a managerial tool

could mean that employees may not be familiar with the vision of their organizations even when such a vision exists. In a study involving 100 retail pharmacies in Australia, Jing, Avery, and Bergsteiner (2014) found that the communication of organizational vision to employees had a significant positive impact on organizational outcomes such as financial performance, staff productivity, and staff retention in small service firms. Thus, the poor communication of organizational vision to employees in Nigerian SMEs could have a negative impact on the performance and long-term sustainability of these firms. Research show that small firms that are characterized by visionary leadership outperformed those that are characterized by transactional leadership (Jing, 2018).

Setting open-ended targets for employees and lack of explicit reward systems

The finding from themes nine (setting open-ended targets for employees) and ten (lack of clear and explicit reward systems) are similar because both themes can be associated with the contingent reward mechanism in transactional leadership. Though findings from other themes identified in this study show that the SME owner-managers lean more toward the transactional leadership behavior, these two themes revealed that the SME owner-managers do not follow the contingent reward leadership mechanism as conceptualized in the transactional leadership theory. Transactional leadership ensures that tasks are accomplished by followers, and in exchange, their personal interests are fulfilled (Bass, 1985; 1990). Transactional leaders set clear standards and procedures for accomplishing tasks and monitor followers to ensure full compliance of these standards and procedures (Bass, 1990).

The targets and the rewards set by the SME owner-managers interviewed in this study were nonspecific. The targets and the accompanying rewards were not mutually negotiated between the owner-managers and their employees. For example, some of the targets set by the SME owner-managers for their employees are impacted by external factors, and as such, it is difficult to measure and reward employees' performance based on this type of targets. From a theoretical perspective, it can be said that the SME owner-managers interviewed in this study do not exhibit full transactional leadership behavior. This outcome is consistent with the finding by Franco and Matos (2015) that SME leaders in Portugal do not faithfully follow any specific leadership styles.

Limitations of the Study

While there is no consensus in the literature on the number of cases that is sufficient for qualitative multiple-case study research (Merriam, 2009), for this study, I have relied on Yin (2017) that recommended six to 10 cases as sufficient sample size for qualitative multiple-case study design. In this study, I have used six cases (SMEs), and collected interview data from six SME owner-managers. Thus, the findings from this study were limited to the experiences of the six participants and may not be generalizable to the larger SME population in Nigeria.

The participants in this study were selected using the purposeful sampling technique. One of the criteria for the selection is the ability of the potential participants to provide rich information that can provide answers to the research question. Thus, communication and self-expression were critically important for the participants'

selection. As such, the six participants selected for the study all had a minimum educational attainment of a college degree. Given that the level of literacy among SME owner-managers in Nigeria is not known, a significant number of the SME owner-managers may possess much lower levels of educational attainment compared to the six participants in this study. Thus, the findings from this study may not represent the experiences of the Nigerian SME owner-managers with lower levels of educational attainment. This limitation becomes more pertinent because of the finding by Mendes and Lourenco (2014) that educational attainment of SME managers has an influence over their disposition to organizational improvement programs.

The six participants for this study were chosen from one geographical location-Port Harcourt in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Nigeria is a multicultural society, and evidence in the literature suggest that leadership in SMEs have geographical and cultural implications (Aritz & Walker, 2014). Thus, findings from this study may not be generalizable across the multi-ethnic regions of Nigeria which is a limitation on the dependability of the study (Patton; 2015; Baillie, 2015).

Though several steps were taking to enhance the credibility of the study, there is still the possibility that the responses given by the participants during the interviews do not accurately reflect their lived experiences regarding the study phenomenon (Patton, 2015; Baillie, 2015). Participants may have been restrictive in volunteering information during the semistructured interviews. I took several steps to address the limitation of credibility for the study. Interviews were held in the participants' convenient environment

to make them more relaxed to volunteer reliable information. Equally, interview data were member-checked, and additional data were collected from other sources (including a historical review of literature) and triangulated to enhance the credibility of the study

Recommendations

My research has provided insights into the nature of leadership styles in the Nigerian SMEs. Findings from this research have shown that Nigerian SME owner-managers do not faithfully follow any specific leadership styles. This research has also cast doubts on the knowledgeableability of the Nigerian SME owner-managers regarding the phenomenon of leadership style and its implications for enterprise growth and long-term sustainability of their enterprises. This study was exploratory, and the findings provided opportunities for both qualitative replication and quantitative validation in future research.

Methodological Recommendation 1: Qualitative Replication

The data for my research was collected from the city of Port Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria. There is the need to replicate this exploratory multiple-case study in other cities or geographical locations in Nigeria. Since research have shown that leadership behaviors have cultural implications (Aritz & Walker, 2014), and given that Nigeria is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, additional exploratory multiple-case studies with participants selected from other geographical locations will greatly enhance the existing knowledge on the nature of leadership styles in Nigerian SMEs.

Methodological Recommendation 2: Quantitative Validation

The theoretical foundation used in this my study was based on the full range leadership model (FRLM) (Avolio & Bass, 1991) which comprises of the transformational (four dimensions), transactional (three dimensions), and laissez-faire leadership styles (two dimensions). All the dimensions of the three leadership models in the FRLM have been validated in the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio & Bass, 2004) for use as measures in quantitative research. Findings from my study indicated that the interviewed SME owner-managers lean more toward transactional leadership style. They also exhibited limited transformational leadership behavior. While this finding is consistent with Bass (1999) that every leader exhibits some form of transactional and transformational leadership behavior, there is the need to use a large population of SME owner-managers to examine the extent of their leaning toward each of the dimensions of transactional and transformational leadership.

Recommendations for Future research

Some of the themes that emanated from my study provided opportunities for future research that will allow for a more contextual examination of the nature of leadership styles in Nigerian SMEs, and how a full or partial application of specific leadership styles can improve the performance and sustainability of these firms.

Impact of organizational collective identity on SME performance. The theme ‘fostering employees’ sense of belonging and collective identity’ showed that the SME owner-managers interviewed in this study have close relationship with their employees.

The impact of this close relationship between SME owner-managers and their employees on the performance and growth of their organizations needs to be investigated. It is also important to understand from the employees' context how the nature of the relationship that they have with the management of their organizations impact their motivation and organizational commitment. Franco and Matos (2015) found that SME owner-managers in Portugal associated their closeness with employees to enhanced organizational commitment and job performance. Since my study has revealed a close relationship between Nigerian SME owner-managers and their employees, it is equally important to evaluate how this relationship impact employee organizational commitment and job performance in the Nigerian SMEs.

Between employee welfare schemes and work performance. The theme 'focus on employee welfare as performance motivator' is suggestive of a leaning by the SME owner-managers toward the 'individualized consideration' dimension of transformational leadership. Individualized consideration as conceptualized in the transformational leadership model focuses on the followers' developmental needs for higher performance and achievement (Bass, 1985). The welfare system practiced by the SME owner-managers interviewed in this study is focused on meeting employees' basic socio-economic needs. More research is required to fully understand if these welfare packages have a significant influence on the performance and organizational commitment of the SME employees.

Engendering trust in the Nigerian SMEs. The theme ‘Lack of trust between SME owner-managers and their employees’ indicated that some of the SME owner-managers interviewed in this study do not trust their employees. Mittal (2016) found that trust provides an enabling environment for transformational leadership to thrive. Thus, more exploratory studies are required to understand why the Nigerian SME owner-managers do not trust their employees and the various contexts that can improve trust within the exchange-relationship.

Implications

In my study, I have explored the nature of leadership styles in the Nigerian SMEs. Before my study, there was no exploratory research in the literature on the nature of leadership styles in the Nigerian SMEs. Specifically, my study was intended to answer the research question: What are the specific knowledge gaps among SME owners and managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises’ long-term sustainability? The outcomes from my study have revealed that the interviewed SME owner-managers do not faithfully follow any leadership style. They were found to exhibit some elements of transactional and transformational leadership behaviors leaning more toward transactional leadership. These my findings have implications for positive social change; as well as theoretical, methodological, managerial, and institutional implications.

Positive Social Change

There is high level of youth unemployment in Nigerian and SMEs have been identified as the major engine for employment generation in Nigeria (Ilegbinosa & Jumbo, 2015). Given the evidence in the literature that leadership styles influence the performance of SMEs (Anggadwita & Mustafid, 2014; Arasti, Zandi, & Bahmani, 2014; Arham, 2014), an understanding of the nature of leadership styles in the Nigerian SMEs is important to ensure the growth and long-term sustainability of these firms (Oladele & Akeke, 2016). Findings from my research show that Nigerian SME owner-managers do not faithfully follow any specific leadership styles. Thus, these SMEs may not be benefiting from the proven positive influence of leadership styles on SME performance and growth. Findings from my study have implications for positive social change at individual, organizational, and societal levels

Individual level implications. Findings from my study revealed that the interviewed SME owner-managers focused more on an individual's personal socio-economic needs rather than their developmental needs as conceptualized in the transformational leadership model. Bass (1995) argued that the concept of individualized consideration in transformational leadership is not limited to satisfying followers' needs but require the development of the followers' potential to achieve increasing levels of performance. The findings from this study provide the opportunity for SME owner-managers to focus more on employees' developmental needs rather than immediate

socio-economic needs, thus enhancing their innovative and entrepreneurial behavior in their jobs.

Organizational-level implications. The findings from my study have exposed the knowledge gaps of the Nigerian SME owner-managers regarding leadership styles and its implications for enterprise performance and growth. Research show that specific leadership styles have been associated with increased organizational performance and growth in SMEs (Mekraz & Gundala, 2016; Mgeni & Nayak, 2016; Iscan et al., 2014). The outcomes of this research provided opportunities for the Nigerian SME owner-managers to seek a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of leadership styles and transform themselves (Bass, 1990) by aligning more with the leadership styles that are more appropriate for higher organizational performance and growth.

Societal-level implications. An improved performance of SMEs in Nigeria will translate to an increase in job opportunities for the unemployed youths. The outcomes of my study can provide opportunities for improving the performance of SMEs through better understanding and application of the phenomenon of leadership style. SMEs are the type of businesses that can easily operate from rural communities. Thus, their growth and sustainability will support poverty alleviation (Banito et al., 2017) and reduce income disparities (Ilegbinosa & Jumbo, 2015) between rural and urbanized communities.

Theoretical Implications

The multiple-case study design was adopted for my study with the aim of advancing theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) regarding the leadership styles in

SMEs. Findings from my study supported some of the existing theoretical postulations regarding leadership styles and leadership in SMEs. From my study, I found that Nigerian SMEs do not faithfully follow any specific leadership styles which is consistent with the finding by Franco and Matos (2015).

My study also revealed that Nigerian SME owner-managers exhibited some elements of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors but leaning more toward transactional leadership. This is consistent with the postulation by Bass (1997) that transformational and transactional leadership have universal applicability, and that every leader exhibits some elements of transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, 1999), sometimes leaning more to one more than the other. I also found that the interviewed SME owner-managers in my study focused more on the short-term socio-economic need of their employees which is consistent with the existing knowledge that leadership is influenced by the culture in which leadership occurs (Bass, 1997; Aritz & Walker, 2014)

Existing research suggested that transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership for the performance and long-term sustainability of SMEs (Egere & Abasilim, 2013; Asimwe et al., 2016; Moriano et al., 2014). Findings from my study show that the interviewed SME owner-managers align more to transactional leadership behavior than transformational leaders. This finding could explain the lack of performance and growth in Nigerian SMEs, and further supports the existing theoretical

propositions in the literature that transformational leadership is more effective in SMEs than transactional leadership (Asiimwe et al., 2016; Moriano et al., 2014).

Methodological Implications

In most of the existing studies in the literature regarding leadership style in Nigerian SMEs, researchers have adopted the quantitative research approach (Agwu & Emeti, 2014; Oladele & Akeke, 2016). These studies are mainly deductive and involved testing the impact of specific leadership styles on the performance of Nigerian SMEs (Ejere & Abasilim, 2013; Oladele & Akeke, 2016). The findings from my research suggested that the Nigerian SME owner-managers do not faithfully follow any specific leadership style. These my findings call for a change of methodical emphasis in the research regarding leadership style and performance of Nigerian SMEs. There is the need to place more methodological emphasis on exploratory qualitative approach for a deeper understanding of leadership styles in SMEs across the different geographical locations in Nigeria.

Managerial Implications

My study has provided evidence that SME owner-managers in Nigeria have limited knowledge regarding specific leadership styles and their implications for enterprise performance, growth, and sustainability. Researchers have found that specifically, transformational leadership style is more effective than transactional leadership for the performance and long-term sustainability of SMEs. My research showed that the interviewed SME owner-managers lean more toward transactional

leadership behavior. The implication of my findings is that SME managers and management practitioners in Nigeria should emphasize the adoption of the transformational model as a more effective leadership style for Nigerian SMEs. Bass (1997) argued that when a leader-member exchange starts as a transactional relationship, there is the need for it to become transformational for more effectiveness.

Institutional Implications

SMEs are recognized all over the world as engine rooms for economic development, employment generation, and poverty alleviation (OECD, 2017; World Bank, 2015). Some countries have different policy frameworks for the regulation of SMEs though research showed that the implementation of these policies has been ineffective especially in developing countries (Khatun, 2015). In Nigeria, the body responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies for SMEs is the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN). The findings from my study have policy implications for SMEDAN. My study has exposed the fact that SME owner-managers have limited understanding of leadership styles and its implications for organizational performance and sustainability. There is a need for SMEDAN to incorporate leadership development and training for SME managers in its policy and operational framework. Bass (1999) posited that significant progress has been reported in the elevation of leaders from transactional leadership to specific elements of the transformational behavior depending on individual needs of the leaders.

Conclusion

There is limited research in the literature regarding the nature of leadership in SMEs (Franco & Matos, 2015). Most of the research on leadership style in the literature have focused more on large organizations (Franco & Matos, 2015) probably because of the wrong notion that SMEs are miniature forms of large organizations (Carson, 1990). Recent research showed that SMEs are characteristically distinct from large firms especially in the areas of human resource capabilities (Darcy et al., 2014). SMEs have a lower quality of leadership compared to larger firms (Quan, 2015), thus making it compelling for more research that will provide a deeper understanding of the nature of leadership in SMEs because of their critical role in economic development (World Bank, 2015).

From a Nigerian context, the few studies on leadership style in SMEs have focused on a deductive examination of the relationships between specific leadership styles and organizational performance of SMEs (Agwu & Emeti, 2014; Ejere & Abasilim, 2013; Oladele & Akeke, 2016). Findings from my study suggested that Nigerian SME managers lack specific knowledge of the different leadership styles and their implications for the growth and sustainability of business enterprises- thus justifying the need for more exploratory studies that can provide an in-depth understanding of the leadership styles in Nigerian SMEs.

In this study, I adopted a qualitative multiple-case study research approach which resulted in the interview of six purposefully selected SME owner-managers located in

Port Harcourt. The six participants were very cooperative in sharing their experiences regarding the study phenomenon with me. The themes identified in this study and the interpretations that arose from the themes represent the experiences of the SME owner-managers that participated in the study and not my personal opinions or biases. Being exploratory in nature, my research has opened up opportunities for future qualitative and quantitative studies on the implication of leadership styles for the performance of Nigerian SMEs. Findings from my study have implications for positive social change especially in the areas of job creation and poverty alleviation through enhanced leadership performance in SMEs. The outcomes from my study have also provided collaborative evidence regarding the existing theoretical conceptualizations in the literature on leadership styles in SMEs (Aritz & Walker, 2014; Bass, 1997; Franco & Matos, 2015).

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Appendix A: Semistructured Interview Guide

The Implication of Leadership Style on SMEs Sustainability in Nigeria: A Multiple Case Study

Date-----

Introduction

To the Interviewee

“This interview will be recorded so that your responses can be transcribed and analyzed. Is this acceptable to you? Please upon your request at any point during the interview, the recorder can be turned off”

“Please read the following information concerning the study and sign the informed consent form to participate in this study”

“The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of specific knowledge gaps among SME owner-managers in Nigeria regarding leadership style and its implications on their enterprises' long-term sustainability”

“Do you have any questions regarding the study or procedures before we begin?”

Section One: Participant’s Information

1.1 Participant’s ID Number-----

1.2 Sector-----

1.3 Business Description-----

1.4 Date of Commencement of Business -----

1.5 Number of Employees-----

1.6 Interviewee’s Age-----

1.7 Number of Years as owner-manager of the firm-----

1.8 Number of Years in similar previous similar position-----

1.9 Gender-----

Section Two: Main Interview Questions

1. Describe the nature of relationships between you and your employees.
2. Describe your leadership experiences in your organization.
3. Describe how you get your employees to resolve problems and achieve organizational goals.
4. Describe how you help your employees develop themselves to achieve organizational goals.
5. Describe your experiences setting targets for your employees?
6. Describe how you reward your employees when they achieve or surpass set targets.
7. Describe how you feel when your employees fail to do what you expect of them.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in the Study

You are invited to participate in a study for my doctoral research study titled “The Implication of Leadership Style on SMEs Sustainability in Nigeria: A Multiple Case Study”. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked 7 semistructured questions with possible follow-up questions to clarify or to seek out additional information. The interview should last approximately 45-60 minutes.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study is to explore the experiences of SME owner-managers in Nigeria to gain an in-depth understanding of their leadership style and its implication on long-term performance and growth of their enterprise. Your in-depth responses can contribute to improve the performance of SMEs in Nigeria as a key agent for employment generation and poverty alleviation. Once the dissertation is approved by Walden University you will be provided with a copy of the manuscript.

The interview session will be recorded, and you will have the opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and to provide comments regarding accuracy. The data collected during the interview session will only be used for the purposes of this study. Your identity and responses to interview questions will be kept confidential and anonymous.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the attached informed consent and return to me via email to _____@waldenu.edu. After receiving the signed consent form, I will contact you to schedule an interview. You can contact me by phone number xxxxxxxx if you have any questions about the study.

Best regards,

xxxxxxx Ph.D. Candidate
Walden University

xxxxxxxxxxxxx Ph.D. Dissertation Committee Chair
Walden University xxxxxxxxxxx@waldenu.edu