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Exploring Leadership Skills for the Sustainability of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Exploring Leadership Skills for the Sustainability of Small and Medium-Sized

Enterprises

by

Yvette Peters

MBA, Andrews University, 1997

CMA, Society of Management Accountants of Ontario, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2019

Abstract

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) contribute to the stability and growth of economies by creating employment in rural and urban areas. More than 60% of SMEs do not survive for longer than 5 years; a lack of leadership skills is among the key problems. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the leadership skills owners-managers used to sustain their businesses for longer than 5 years. Research participants were 4 owners-managers of SMEs from the manufacturing industry in Trinidad and Tobago that sustained their businesses for at least 5 years. The contingency leadership model and the skill-based leadership model formed the conceptual lens for this study. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and direct observations. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's analytical strategies and Morse's cognitive process of coding, pattern matching, interpreting, and summarizing the data. Five themes emerged from the data analysis: leadership skills, leadership values, development of leadership skills, leadership challenges, and improvement in leadership skills. The findings from this study could influence positive social change by providing insights on leadership skills SME leaders could use to sustain their operations for the longer term, resulting in reduced failure of SMEs. A decrease in the failure rate of SMEs might contribute to improved economic conditions, leading to the reduction of poverty in families and communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Emmanuel Peters, and children,

Stacy Donkoh, Sean Peters, and Sherzelle Peters, to whom I am appreciative for their

prayers, love, encouragement, and support during my doctoral journey.

Acknowledgments

First, I thank God for His unfailing love and guidance through this doctoral journey. He gave me the strength and courage to persevere along and to the end; I could not have made it without Him. Thanks to my husband and children, especially Sherzelle Peters, who encouraged me daily and assumed some of my responsibilities to ensure that I could fully dedicate time to my studies. To my mother, Doris Langley, I say thanks for instilling in me, from early childhood, the importance of learning and perseverance. My deepest appreciation to my brother, Selwyn Louison, for caring even when I was unable to respond quickly to his calls. I acknowledge my Chair, Dr. Richard Boyd Johnson, whose expertise, and patience were valuable throughout the proposal and final stages of the process. My appreciation to my Second Committee Member, Dr. Karin Mae and my University Research Reviewer, Dr. Annie Brown. I greatly appreciate the feedback you provided which were valuable for improving the quality of my study in many aspects. Dr. Marcia Reid-Grant and Dr. Thecla Fitz-Lewis thanks for your support, sharing of ideas, prayers, and encouragement. We met in the classroom and I am forever grateful for that encounter; you always responded whenever I reached out to you. Thanks to the owners-managers of the SMEs for taking time off from your busy schedules to participate in this study.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The business market is global with the advancements in technology, competition, radical change, and creativity as primary features of the environment (Bohlooli & Ghahari, 2014). Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operate in most business sectors and the same business environment as large organizations (Nowicka, 2015). In this business environment, SMEs require leaders with the appropriate skills to explore and adopt strategies for business survival (Bohlooli & Ghahari, 2014; Franco & Matos, 2015).

Background of the Problem

Leaders operate in a complex business environment, entrenched with uncertainty and ambiguity (Arham, Boucher, & Muenjohn, 2013). In a business environment of increasing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, leaders require new skills to lead their organizations in achieving successful performance outcomes (Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2015; Morrison, 2014). Manufacturing employers, in particular, expressed that a need exists for a focused regional approach to skills development and networking at a managerial level within the local manufacturing sectors (Jack, Anderson, & Connolly, 2014). The business issues within the manufacturing industry include pressure to attain higher growth rates, new regulations, and an increasing demand to remain competitive in a volatile and complex business environment (Canals, 2014). For example, business owners in the apparel manufacturing sector experienced increased risk in the supply chain because of globalization (Kodithuwakku & Wickramarachchi, 2015). The fashion industry is also a challenging and competitive manufacturing sector because of

the high number of raw material suppliers and retail channels as well as the volatile

nature of customers' requirements during the product lifecycle (Auliana, 2016).

The potential exists for SMEs to maintain their competitiveness and survive in the

manufacturing sector; however, a user-friendly manufacturing strategy framework did not

exist to fulfill a majority of the empirical requirements of SMEs (Löfving, Säfsten, &

Winroth, 2014). To remain competitive, SMEs may employ various strategies for

offsetting their inherent resource and size disadvantages (Abebe, 2014). Organizations

use product, service, and process innovation to maintain their competitive advantage

(Jack et al., 2014). However, some manufacturers, such as manufacturers in the

Caribbean, did not capitalize on sustainability as a competitive strategy (Russell &

Millar, 2014). To improve the performance of their operations, SMEs need to be

innovative in the introduction of new products and in updating their manufacturing

processes (Nowicka, 2015). To respond appropriately, leaders should understand shifts in

the business environment and have the ability to recognize changing patterns (Marques,

2015).

Problem Statement

Owners-managers of SMEs face survival problems and a high rate of failure

(Raude, Wesonga, & Wawire, 2015). SMEs tend to fail in 5 years with 66% of SMEs

failing within 2 years of operation and 49.6% failing within 5 years of operation

(Nnamseh & Akpan, 2015). The general business problem was that SMEs in the

manufacturing industry, in diverse geographical regions, failed within 5 years. The

specific business problem was that some owners-managers of SMEs lacked the leadership skills to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership skills owners-managers of SMEs need to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. Owners-managers of four SMEs in the Trinidad and Tobago manufacturing industry with more than 5 years of sustainability comprised the targeted population for this study. The findings of this study provide insights that owners-managers could use to improve or pursue development of their leadership skills and capabilities. With such development, owners-managers might enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of their businesses. The enhancement or improved practice of leadership skills could result in a reduction of the failure rate of SMEs that would contribute to an increased employment rate in the local communities.

Nature of the Study

The methods of research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Abro, Khurshid, & Aamir, 2015; Bernard, 2013). Qualitative research involves understanding a phenomenon in the context of the participant with a focus on the research setting and the observation of processes and transactions (Parker, 2014). By contrast, the quantitative and mixed methods approaches involve the examination of statistical data to test hypotheses (Abro et al., 2015; Bernard, 2013). Neither the quantitative nor mixed methods approach met the needs of this study because their focus on numerical and statistical analysis did not align with the exploratory focus of this study. Another valuable

feature of qualitative research is the opportunity to obtain an understanding of the experiences linked to the phenomenon from the personal explanations of participants (Sefiani & Bown, 2013). The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because the aim was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the leadership skills owner-managers used to survive beyond 5 years.

The research designs considered for this study on leadership skills for SMEs included case study, ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative. Researchers use the case study design to explore the phenomenon from the perspectives of participants within a natural context, using more than one source of evidence (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). I selected a case study design to obtain comprehensive details about the phenomenon through interviews and observations with owners-managers of SMEs. An ethnographic design is appropriate for understanding a phenomenon through the shared beliefs, behaviors, and experiences of a group in its environment over a prolonged period (Willgens et al., 2016). An ethnographic design was not suitable for this study because of the absence of an emphasis on the cultural features of a group in this research. A phenomenological design involves exploring a phenomenon based on participants' lived experiences and the meaning they ascribe to the phenomenon (Bernard, 2013). I did not select the phenomenological design because my goal was to explore the owners-managers' experiences and not the meanings they assigned to the phenomenon of this study. Narrative research design involves exploration through the chronological narration of the life stories and experiences of individuals (Willgens et al., 2016). The narrative

design was unsuitable because the aim of this study was not to report the personal stories of owners-managers.

Research Question

What leadership skills do owners-managers of SMEs need to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

I asked the owners-managers of SMEs in the manufacturing industry the following interview questions:

1. What is your background of experience in the SME business sector?

2. What leadership skills have you used to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years?

3. What skills and capabilities are necessary for owners-managers in the manufacturing industry to sustain their firms in the long term?

4. How do you reinforce the practice of leadership skills for long-term sustenance in your organization?

5. What are some of the leadership challenges you faced as an SME owner-manager in the manufacturing industry in Trinidad and Tobago?

6. How can owners-managers improve the leadership skills in SMEs to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years?

7. What additional information regarding leadership skills to ensure sustainability would you like to add?

Conceptual Framework

The contingency model of leadership (Fiedler, 1964) and the skills-based model of leadership (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000) comprised the conceptual framework for this study. Fiedler presented the contingency theory of effective leadership in 1964. The underlying concept of this model was that a single leadership style does not apply to all situations or organizations (Fiedler, 1964). Effective leadership depends on situational factors and the environment in which the organization functions (Fiedler, 1964). Owners/managers of SMEs in the 21st century must manage their operations in a business environment with diversified forms of competition, a high level of uncertainty, and volatility (Jovović, Femić-Radosavović, & Đurašković, 2017). Because no one universal style of leadership exists, individuals must apply the relevant strategies for their business operations and employees (Dinh et al., 2014).

Mumford et al. (2000) presented the skills-based model of leadership in 2000. The key proposition of this model was that effective leadership ultimately depends on a person's capability to formulate and execute solutions to complex social problems (Mumford et al., 2000). A leader's knowledge and skills are necessary features for solving problems and creating effective leadership (Mumford et al., 2000). Another premise regarding the model was that leaders could acquire knowledge and develop the requisite skill through experience and education (Mumford et al., 2000). An organization could fail because of a leader's inability to assess the business holistically and to make appropriate decisions within the context of the situation and the needs of all stakeholders (Arasti, Zandi, & Talebi, 2012). Owners-managers are responsible for leading their

organizations and ensuring the long-term survival of their businesses (Arham et al., 2013). Mumford et al.'s model and the contingency leadership model aligned with the goal of this study to explore the skills owners-managers need to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Operational Definitions

Business failure: A situation in which a company terminates its operations because of its inability to meet its obligations (Arasti et al., 2012).

Business survival: The state of the operations of a business in which the company creates and executes strategies for competitive advantage. The company may or may not generate high levels of profit margin (Filho, Albuquerque, Nagano, Philippsen, & de Oliveira, 2017).

Leadership: This process involves an individual exerting influence over followers to attain organizational goals by guiding, structuring, and facilitating activities and relationships in an organization (Arham et al., 2013).

Owner-manager: An individual who is the major shareholder or sole owner of his or her business, with responsibility for managing and making major decisions in the organization (Fassin et al., 2015).

Small and medium enterprise (SMEs): The definition of SMEs differs among countries (Balu, 2016). In Trinidad and Tobago, SMEs are businesses with six to 50 employees and that carry assets of TT$250,000 to TT$5,000,000 (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2009).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Restrictions in conducting scholarly research include the method of reasoning and human shortcomings, the availability of resources, access to participants, and truthful responses from participants (Connelly, 2013). It is important to recognize and accurately describe the deficiencies and to make the most appropriate adjustments as they relate to the study (Denscombe, 2013). In the following subsections, I will identify the potential restrictions as they pertained to the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the topic of this study.

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts integral to the research that are not within the researcher's control (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I assumed that the responses obtained from the SME owners-managers provided a truthful description and representation of their experiences and practice of leadership skills. Regarding the design of the study, I assumed that the multiple case study was appropriate for exploring the phenomenon of leadership skills in SMEs. Another assumption was that the participants provided comprehensive and relevant information useful in understanding leadership skills and practices in SMEs of the manufacturing sector in Trinidad and Tobago. I also assumed that the sample was an appropriate representation of the SMEs in the manufacturing industry of Trinidad and Tobago.

Limitations

Limitations are the features of a methodology or design that impact the application or interpretation of the results of a study (Connelly, 2013). Researchers must

describe the limitations of a study for interpreting the findings and for assessing the reliability of the study (O'Leary, 2014). Openness and honesty concerning the potential of the research and identifying the assertions that readers might attribute to the results of the study are also credible (Denscombe, 2013). One of the limitations of this study involved using a sample of participants solely from Trinidad and Tobago. In this study, I did not incorporate the perspective of leadership skills from owners-managers in other international territories. The experience of owners-managers from those territories might have provided a different result. Another limitation was participants' inaccurate recall of their experiences or uncomfortableness in disclosing information about the operations of their business. To discourage such responses, along with the participants, I signed the consent form assuring them of the confidentiality of any information they provided.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the parameters and factors that the researcher uses to define the boundaries of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first delimitation of this study was that the research population consisted only of owners-managers of SMEs in the manufacturing industry of Trinidad and Tobago. Another delimitation was the exclusion of employees from sharing their experiences regarding the leadership skills of the SME owners-managers.

<div align="center">

Significance of the Study

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This study on leadership skills in SMEs is significant in two areas. The first is its contribution to business practice with the likely application of the results by various interest groups. The second is its implication for social change, which could emanate

from improved business practices and lead to the reduction of poverty. These two areas

established the relevance of the study and contributed to the existing literature on

leadership skills owners-managers need for their SMEs to survive beyond 5 years.

Contribution to Business Practice

My goal with this study was to explore the leadership skills SME owners-

managers in the manufacturing industry use to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. SME

owners-managers might use the findings of this study to gain a more in-depth

understanding of the leadership skills required to sustain SMEs beyond 5 years. The

results might also be useful for the development or adjustment of leadership programs for

training new and existing owners and managers of SMEs. Using the findings of this

study, SME owners-managers in Trinidad and Tobago's manufacturing sector might

improve or pursue development of their leadership skills and capabilities that may

contribute to the success of SMEs. Government and nongovernment agencies might use

the findings of this study to develop programs that will address the leadership needs of

SMEs.

Implications for Social Change

The benefits of increasing the success rate of SMEs might apply to the owners,

their families, and other groups in which the SME owners operate. These groups include

employees, local entities, suppliers, and customers. Owners-managers could derive an

opportunity for learning from the failure of their businesses; however, the financial,

emotional, and psychological effects of failure could offset the benefits and result in the

owner-manager opting to permanently exit from business endeavors (Ucbasaran, Shepherd, Lockett, & Lyon, 2013).

My focus was to explore the leadership skills owners-managers could use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Accordingly, from the results of this study, practitioners and researchers might find new strategies for reducing the failure rate of SMEs in the manufacturing industry. The potential benefits of new strategies might result in positive societal effects such as job creation and increased stability in the lives of citizens. Government agencies might use the findings as input in their development of policies that relate to SMEs.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This section of the study includes a review of the academic and professional literature pertaining to the research topic and the conceptual framework. The topic encompasses leadership skills that SME owners-managers need to survive beyond 5 years. Literature regarding the conceptual framework incorporates literary works related to Fiedler's (1964) contingency leadership model and the skills-based model of leadership. An integral aspect of this literature review process was for me to understand, analyze, and synthesize information from numerous sources on issues surrounding leadership skills and the survival of SMEs.

The literature review incorporated articles from peer-reviewed scholarly journals that I retrieved from the following databases: ABI Inform, Business Source Complete, Proquest Central, SAGE Premier, and Sage Research Methods Online. Other sources of literature include information found in government websites, published books, and the

Google Scholar search engine. My search involved the use of the following key words: *small and medium enterprises, manufacturing industry, Caribbean manufacturing, small and medium business failure, small and medium business success, leadership styles, leadership in SMEs,* and *leadership skills*. The literature review includes 230 references. The total references also included two from government websites, one dissertation, two seminal works, and three books. Ninety-seven percent of the sources are peer reviewed, and 85% were published within 5 years of the expected date of chief academic officer's approval.

My approach for searching the literature involved identifying and reviewing essential issues associated with leadership and the sustainability of SMEs in the manufacturing industry. I organized the review by initially providing a comprehensive analysis of the leadership models identified in the conceptual framework. Fiedler's (1964) contingency model and Mumford et al.'s (2000) the skills-based model of leadership formed the basis for contextualizing and exploring leadership skills in SMEs. Multiple topical issues emerged from the sources of literature I reviewed. These issues were useful as a guide in organizing the review. The categories of issues by subsections are (a) leadership definition and the role of the leader with respect to styles and practices, (b) concerns of leaders in the manufacturing industry, (c) SMEs in the manufacturing industry, (d) the organizational sustainability of SMEs, (e) business failure in the manufacturing industry, and (f) causes of SME business failure. The review and synthesis of these topics were sources of consideration concerning the leadership skills SME owners-managers need to survive.

Leadership Models

An understanding of the historical development of leadership theories provides context as well as a perspective within which to understand the practice of leadership skills in SMEs (Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2015). One meaningful approach is to understand leadership by examining leadership theories based on the conceptual viewpoints of models, philosophies, and styles (Landis, Hill, & Harvey, 2014). Following the era of research on trait-based leadership, researchers focused their theoretical studies on leadership styles, behavior, and situations (Gregoire & Arendt, 2014). The emphasis in the 21st century includes theories on leadership that involves leaders who are visionaries (Dinh et al., 2014). These leaders must also be change agents, equipped and willing to handle the complexity and volatility of the new business environment (Dinh et al., 2014).

Leadership theories are integral in establishing the framework for leadership models; these theories represent ideas researchers used to describe the effectiveness and attributes of leadership (Landis et al., 2014). Until the 1970s, the classical model was the dominant leadership construct with the philosophy that the personal traits and characteristics were the necessary attributes that leaders must possess to be successful (Dinh et al., 2014; Kutz, 2012). One conclusion of this model concerning the emergence of leadership is that genetics and environmental factors are determinants of who should lead (Boerma et al., 2017). Another principle of the classical model is that a leader's influence and power are innate, and the visionary element of leadership is not necessary to ensure the support of followers (Kutz, 2012; Smalley, Retallick, Metzger, & Greiman, 2016).

The popularity of the classical model declined as employees became more skilled and the access to knowledge became ubiquitous and available to different classes of workers (Kutz, 2012). Within the latter segment of the 20th and early part of the 21st centuries, research related to the trait model regained momentum, with a focus on the traits of the leader as well as of the follower (Marques, 2015). The transactional model became prominent in the early years of the 1970s with emphasis on the followers, the achievement of objectives, and the leaders making decisions with the expectation that followers will comply (Dinh et al., 2014; Gregoire & Arendt, 2014; Kutz, 2012; Landis et al., 2014). The underlying premise of the transactional model is that the leader's influence emanates within the context of contractual arrangements between the leader and the follower (Kutz, 2012; McCleskey, 2014).

The visionary model became popular in the mid-1980s, and although focus on this concept waned in the early 2000s, the model remains of interest to practitioners and researchers in the mid-21st century (Dinh et al., 2014; Kutz, 2012). Visionary leadership, as Kutz (2012) advanced, is synonymous with charismatic or transformational leadership. A fundamental premise of the visionary leadership model is the leader's approach of using emotions to inspire and influence followers (Landis et al., 2014). Another intrinsic feature of the visionary model is the leader having a vision and the ability to encourage followers to contribute to the vision (Dinh et al., 2014; Kutz, 2012; Landis et al., 2014).

Interest in the organic model also emerged in the 21st century (Kutz, 2012). The primary tenet of the organic leadership model is that, collaboratively, the leaders and followers create and own a vision integral for achieving and sustaining effective

leadership (Kutz, 2012; Zhang, Avery, Bergsteiner, & More, 2014). Leaders, who operate within the framework of this model, facilitate the implementation of a vision that the group and team create collectively (Yammarino, 2013). Influence in the leadership process stems from the relationship and mutuality of people in the group (Kutz, 2012).

One of the challenges with the evolution of leadership paradigms is that the introduction of a new model does not result in obliteration of preceding models (Ronald, 2014). Many leaders attempt to use multiple models to execute their leadership responsibilities (Kutz, 2012). The application of different models for practicing leadership may be contradictory; however, the argument exists that a combination of leadership styles is positive for effective leadership (Latham, 2014; Mishra, Grunewald, & Kulkarni, 2014). Leadership models serve as a philosophical basis for the practice of leadership (Kutz, 2012). Organizational leaders, including SME owner-managers, should understand the leadership styles of the different models and their applicability to different business encounters (Gregoire & Arendt, 2014; McCleskey, 2014). Such understanding is necessary because different leadership styles affect employee satisfaction, which can affect organizational performance (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015).

Fiedler's contingency model of leadership. Fiedler's (1964) contingency leadership model is one of the underpinning theories for this study. Fiedler advocated that effective leadership depends on the interaction of two forces: the leadership style and situational favorableness, or the degree to which the situation is an enabler for the leader to exercise influence and control. Leadership styles, which align with Fiedler's description, comprise two elements: task oriented and relationship oriented. The

argument is that to make the most appropriate decisions for the organization, a leader must have the capability to address a range of situational variables (Fiedler, 1964). Endorsing Fiedler's contingency theory, Dinh et al. (2014) advocated that one leadership style does not universally apply; instead, leaders must be conscious of the environment and undertake strategic actions to achieve short- and long-term survival. An interrelationship of internal and external forces is present in the operational domain of the leader's organization (Fiedler, 1964). Organizations whose leaders ignore the environmental forces are on a path to potential collapse (Fiedler, 1964).

Similar to Fiedler's (1964) findings, Hersey and Blanchard (1982) presented a theory, integrating task, relationship behaviors, and the situational context. To achieve effective leadership, Hersey and Blanchard posited that leaders should modify their behavior based on their assessment of the level of development of members in the group. The follower's level of development or the situation depends on two factors: commitment and competence (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). Another theory that emerged in the situational-contingency category of leadership was House's path-goal theory. In an examination of this theory, Gregoire and Arendt (2014) noted the emphasis of the path-goal theory is that the leader's behavior is within the construct of four sets of situations or circumstances.

Expounding on the survival of SMEs in the manufacturing industry, Bourletidis (2013) noted the important role of strategic management of market information and the performance of SMEs during periods of extended economic crisis. Bourletidis emphasized Fiedler's (1964) contingency theory with the view and assessment of

handling information to secure business benefits in the face of financial challenges. During an economic crisis, SMEs whose owners decided to manage information strategically capitalized on business opportunities that seemed impossible for other SMEs to embrace. In such economic times, leaders, who observed the shift in market conditions, used information to serve the market differently from their competitors, thereby securing economic benefits and the survival of their businesses during the crisis (Bourletidis, 2013). Owners-managers are directly responsible for the long-term survival of their businesses (Appelbaum, Karasek, Lapointe, & Quelch, 2015). Fiedler's contingency model remains relevant to the process of leading employees and managing customers in volatile times and situations (Appelbaum et al., 2015).

Studying leadership style and organizational citizenship behavior, Ndubueze and Akanni (2015) proved Fiedler's (1964) contingency theory. Knowledge of the types of leadership styles and their applicability to different work situations is important for fostering a positive work environment (Ndubueze & Akanni, 2015). Leaders should understand how the styles of leadership are conducive for promoting organizational citizenship behavior among employees (Ndubueze & Akanni, 2015). Through understanding and sustaining the practice of citizenship behavior in their organizations, leaders encourage employees to assume responsibility for the success of the organization (S. Z. Malik, Saleem, & Naeem, 2016; Ndubueze & Akanni, 2015).

In their studies, Arasti et al. (2012) and Hamrouni and Akkari (2012) explored the reasons for failure in SMEs and confirmed Fiedler's (1964) theory, concluding that leadership and management skills are among the main factors for business failure. SMEs

also failed because of infrequent follow up on changes in the environment and the inability of managers to adjust their decisions based on the situation (Fatoki, 2014). Businesses need leaders who can direct the organization in adapting to internal and external situations (Özkan, Tokel, & Çakmak, 2017).

The skills-based model of leadership. Leadership skills are another aspect essential for leading effectively and influencing followers (Mumford et al., 2000; Prieto, 2013). Researchers and practitioners are aware that leadership skills are crucial for leaders to manage traditional and contemporary business issues (Campbell & Radford, 2014; Morrison, 2014). These business issues include pressure to attain higher growth rates to enhance the financial performance, more regulations, and an increasing demand to remain competitive in a volatile and complex business environment (Canals, 2014; Morrison, 2014).

Mumford et al. (2000) developed the skill-based approach to leadership, identifying complex problem-solving skills, social judgment skills, and overall knowledge as the primary competencies a leader requires. The leaders' attributes, their experiences, and the nature of the internal and external environment shape the knowledge and skills of leaders as they encounter and address complex problems in their organizations (Mumford et al., 2000). Developing other leaders is an avenue for leaders to enhance their leadership skills (Prieto, 2013). Leaders need skills, not only to work with individuals and groups, but also to manage different situations while performing their leadership role (Campbell & Radford, 2014; Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2015; Prieto, 2013).

The leaders' abilities and knowledge are the focus of the skills-based approach to leadership (Redick, Reyna, Schaffer, & Toomey, 2014). Focusing on SMEs, Ates, Garengo, Cocca, and Bititci (2013) concluded that when these organizations use a skill-based approach to address competitiveness, leaders secure an advantageous position to balance the survival and growth of their businesses. In their study of three entrepreneurs, Chew and Dovey (2014) observed that these businesses remained competitive over decades by sustaining customer value through innovation. The ability of an organization to adapt and remain competitive through innovative strategies necessitates a leader with the skills to foresee changes and prepare the organization to respond appropriately. Other researchers noted that the skills leaders of an organization possess remain increasingly important for the attainment and sustenance of competitive performance (Garavan, Watson, Carbery, & O'Brien, 2015; O'Connell, 2014).

From a study of a section of managers in the banking sector in Pakistan, Batool (2013) concluded that leaders who mastered the leadership skill of emotional intelligence (EQ) outperformed their peers. As Batool found, leaders high in EQ positively impact the performance of the organization by creating and maintaining an appropriate work climate. The primary characteristics of such leaders include their ability to (a) sense employees' feelings, (b) be alert in discovering problems and providing solutions, (c) comprehend the social and political dimensions of the organization, (d) influence and communicate effectively, and (e) manage their own emotions (Batool, 2013; Meisler, 2014; Redick et al., 2014).

In their model of competencies for effective leadership, Redick et al. (2014) highlighted self-leadership as one of the core skills leaders require in performing their role. Self-leadership consists of personal values, EQ, disposition to change, and self-evaluation (Redick et al., 2014). Noteworthy, in their study, Redick et al. emphasized communication and conflict resolution as important skills leaders should utilize to attain organizational goals. Using the results from 1,200 surveys, McCarthy (2014) also found that communication and integrity were the two top competencies managers, direct reports, and peers viewed as leadership strengths. Owners-managers who understand themselves can manage their emotions according to the situation or environment in which they operate (Redick et al., 2014). These managers know their strengths and can effectively communicate with employees and other stakeholders to achieve the organization's objectives for success (Taylor, Cornelius, & Colvin, 2014).

As the business world becomes more unpredictable and complex, organizations also depend more on leaders who possess the relevant balance of skills as a source of competitive advantage (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014; Garavan et al., 2015). The development of effective leadership skills is also a priority for business organizations (Day et al., 2014; O'Connell, 2014). A prominent view among researchers is that leadership skills are learnable, and leaders can acquire these qualities via different methods (Crețu & Iova, 2015; Prieto, 2013). SMEs compete in the environment where changes occur in all segments of business operations and practices (Quan, 2015). Owners-managers must acquire the necessary leadership skills to secure and maintain their businesses in the short- and long-term. Leaders of SMEs should view continuous

development as a competitive tool and pursue affordable strategies obtain new knowledge (Missioura, 2014).

Leadership skills become more important to SMEs as they compete with large organizations in a globalized and competitive marketplace (Quan, 2015). The skills are particularly essential for SMEs because the owners-managers of these organizations hold multiple roles, with responsibility for strategic, operational, and tactical functions (Garavan et al., 2015). Leaders in SMEs may experience time-and financial-constraints (Z. O. Bilal & Al Mqbali, 2015). A deficiency in such resources is an impediment for SMEs to pursue formal leadership development (Garavan et al., 2015). The use of informal leadership development practices is the norm in SMEs, including developing leaders through experiential and other practical methods (Ates et al., 2013; Smallbone, Kitching, & Blackburn, 2015). Some practical methods for developing leadership skills among owner-managers in SMEs include (a) on the job experience, (b) peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge, and (c) observation and adoption of new business trends (Creţu & Iova, 2015; Garavan et al., 2015; Kempster & Parry, 2014; O'Connell, 2014). Another perspective is that as SMEs grow, owners-managers need to engage in leadership development using both formal and informal techniques (Garavan et al. (2015).

The development of leadership skills is essential for owners-managers of SMEs (Mitchelmore, Rowley, & Shiu, 2014). Implementation of a program to support such development is a challenge (Garavan et al., 2015). Commenting further, Garavan et al. (2015) found that leadership development skills and the skill gaps in leadership are indicators of the implementation of practices related to leadership development in SMEs.

Owner-managers' attitude and strategic perception towards leadership development are indicators of their acceptance of leadership practices (Garavan et al., 2015). Crucial for the survival of SMEs are owners-managers, who possess effective and relevant leadership skills (Smallbone et al., 2015). A requirement for survival in the 21st century is for business leaders to continuously examine and develop skills in such areas as communication, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal relationships (Smallbone et al., 2015). By embracing leadership development practices, leaders of SMEs can enhance the management of their employees (Schlosser, 2015). Rapid change is a common feature of all industries in the global economy; to survive organizations must respond quickly and competently (Redick et al., 2014). Leaders must possess the necessary skills along with the appropriate leadership style to initiate changes in their businesses (Redick et al., 2014).

Leadership Definition and the Role of the Leader

Leadership is dynamic and complex with many dimensions and no single definition (Nikolic & Robinson, 2013; Yanney, 2014). One view is that leadership is a process in which the leader uses power and influence to direct followers in their activities to accomplish the goals of an organization (Franco & Matos, 2015). Other researchers asserted that leadership is a science of encouraging persons to participate voluntarily in the achievement of individual and organizational targets (Bohlooli & Ghahari, 2014; Moghadam & Chakherlouy, 2014; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015). Leadership is also a behavior that involves the way an individual behaves and expedites actions in motivating and stimulating individuals to pursue and achieve the organization's goal

(Arham, 2014). Advancing a definition of leadership, Nikolic and Robinson (2013) explained leadership as the practice of virtuous characteristics in inspiring followers to accept and work towards goals that will benefit the organization. By contrast, Crossan, Mazutis, Seijts, and Gandz (2013) defined leadership as individuals who can utilize their best capabilities to enable and support others in achieving the company's objectives at the highest level, and by extension contribute positively to society.

The leader's role extends beyond personal abilities and includes creating and sustaining balance in the organization through employees' empowerment and satisfaction (Bambale, Girei, & Barwa, 2017). An alternative view is that the role of the leader is to influence and engage persons in attaining the organization's goals in a complex business environment (Marques, 2015). Effective leaders, according to Taylor et al. (2014), are individuals who secure the relevant knowledge and skills to assess and respond appropriately to issues that affect the operations of their organizations. Leaders, who understand their role, could be in a better position to identify and develop the skills necessary to practice the leadership style that aligns with varying situations (Taylor et al., 2014).

Leadership styles. Leadership styles pertain to the behavioral patterns that leaders demonstrate when influencing others (Mishra et al., 2014; Puni, Ofei, & Okoe, 2014). Leaders use different leadership styles depending on the followers, the environment of the organization, and the culture in which the organization operates (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Richardson, Millage, Millage, & Lane, 2014). Another perspective is that leaders demonstrate more or fewer attributes of one leadership style or

another (Franco & Matos, 2015).

A multiplicity of leadership styles exists. From 2000, the transactional and transformational styles of leadership emerged as the focus of interest among researchers (Franco & Matos, 2015; Özer & Tinaztepe, 2014). The two most popular theories related to leadership styles are transactional and transformational, pioneered by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass in 1985. The fundamental premise of the transactional theory involves the use of reward and punishment to influence followers' behavior (Bass, 1985). In their studies on leadership, Franco and Matos (2015) concluded that transactional leadership is an exchange process between the leader and the follower. The influence of the leader determines the level of compliance from the follower (Holten, Bøllingtoft, & Wilms, 2015).

While transactional leadership has a positive impact on the behavior and performance of followers, researchers criticized the theory for (a) its lack of emphasis on shared team values and (b) its limitation in fostering an environment conducive to employees' innovation and creativity (McCleskey, 2014). In their study on transactional leadership, Mhatre and Riggio (2014) commented that the only bond between the leader and the follower is mutual benefits each receives in the exchange. Transactional-style leaders exhibit both corrective and constructive behaviors, using reward and punishment as the source of influence (Franco & Matos, 2015).

Regarding the transactional concept, the emphasis is on the behavior the leaders apply to influence followers while the effect of the leader on the follower is the primary point of focus of the transformational theory (Bass, 1985). The basis of transformational

leadership theory is that leaders, through certain behaviors, can inspire followers to think and achieve beyond their current level of expectation (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). In a study of naval officers, Breevaart et al. (2014) found that the employees' performance improved when their leaders demonstrated transformational leadership and included contingent reward in the exchange process. The results also revealed that transformational leadership fostered a more favorable work environment by providing support to employees and allowing them to be autonomous (Breevaart et al., 2014).

Paramount in the literature is the understanding that the transformational leader enhances employees' willingness to engage in behavior for the benefit of the organization (Effelsberg, Solga, & Gurt, 2014). The notion is that employees would otherwise direct their interest to self-serving objectives (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Moriano, Molero, Topa, & Mangin, 2014; Tyssen, Wald, & Heidenreich, 2014). Exploring the influence of transformational leadership on intrapreneurship, Moriano et al. (2014) concluded that this form of leadership positively affected employee's intrapreneurial behavior. The benefit of such positive influence, as Moriano et al. indicated, could foster competitive positioning for the organization. Leaders must be flexible and responsive to the rapid pace of change in the business environment (Bottomley, Burgess, & Fox, 2014).

The leaders who create and maintain successful organizations are those who practice behaviors to inspire employees to perform amidst the changes (Bottomley et al., 2014). Such behaviors are intrinsic in the construct of the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985). Many organizations need transactional and transformational leadership styles to achieve optimum effectiveness (Franco & Matos, 2015).

Some other styles of leadership include autocratic, participative, laissez-faire, paternalistic, and relationship- and task-motivated (Franco & Matos, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Özer & Tinaztepe, 2014). Leaders who practice the autocratic leadership style maintain full authority in decision-making with minimal involvement of staff in the process (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Mishra et al., 2014). Autocratic leaders apply punishment or threat instead of rewards to motivate followers (Mishra et al., 2014). Individuals strongly embrace the autocratic style of leadership in circumstances of self-uncertainty (Mihai, Schiopoiu, & Mihai, 2017). Autocratic behavior is most effective under conditions where little time exists for decisions by the group or where the leader has the most experience and knowledge in the group (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). The practice of autocratic style can have demoralizing effects on followers (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2015). Despite its negative impact, many leaders still practice the autocratic style (Mishra et al., 2014).

Laissez-faire leadership is the least productive among the leadership styles (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). Followers in this group make continuous demands on the leaders showing little cooperation and ability to perform (Franco & Matos, 2015; Saeed, Almas, Anis-ul-Haq, & Niazi, 2014). Laissez-faire leaders provide minimal or no guidance to the followers, leaving decision-making as a responsibility of the members (Saeed et al., 2014). The laissez-faire style is appropriate and effective in situations where the members are highly competent and qualified in an area of expertise (Franco & Matos, 2015; Saeed et al., 2014).

Leadership practices. Effective leadership practices are necessary for companies as they progress through stages of development with the aim of attaining optimal and sustained performance (Marques, 2015). Identifying organizational goals and determining the achievement of such goals are uncertain (Mumford et al., 2000). To maintain organizational stability and accomplish positive outcomes, leaders must explore new goals and the means to achieve these goals (Morrison, 2014; Mumford et al., 2000; Redick et al., 2014). Leadership in SMEs is an entrepreneurial focus that involves directing members to accomplish organizational goals through the recognition and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities. Yammarino (2013) emphasized that the leader and follower share a common vision or goal and willingly work together to achieve objectives. By embracing leadership development practices, leaders of SMEs can enhance the management of their employees and engender organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Schlosser, 2015).

Leadership is also important to SMEs in the creation and maintenance of successful performance (Arham et al., 2013; Franco & Matos, 2015). The role of owners-managers is important in facilitating and encouraging employees' performance and in identifying and embracing opportunities for the benefit of the firm (Koryak et al., 2015). In their study on leadership, Özer and Tinaztepe (2014) concluded that transformational leadership style positively related to job satisfaction and firm performance. In another study, Mishra et al. (2014) reported comparable findings of the effect of strategic leadership styles on the performance of the firm. Nusrat and Bose (2014) conducted a study to provide a better understanding of the SME owners' competencies to operate a

business in the manufacturing industry in Khulna. The criteria for measuring the

competencies of SME owners' in Nusrat and Bose's study included: (a) opportunity, (b)

organizing, (c) relationship, (d) strategy, (e) commitment, and (f) conceptual

competencies. The results revealed that SME owners in the manufacturing industry need

all the competency criteria to increase their organization's performance (Nusrat & Bose,

2014).

Definition of SMEs

SMEs differ in smaller countries, such as New Zealand, to their counterparts in

larger countries, such as the member countries of the European Union or the United

States (Garg & Wheele, 2012). Some researchers associated the variation in definition to

the global diversity and features of the SMEs' businesses (Garg & Wheele, 2012).

Another dimension regarding the definitions for SMEs is that the criteria are according to

countries, industrial sectors, accounting standards, revenue, asset value, the number of

employees, and size (Balu, 2016). For example, the U.S. Small Business Administration

(SBA, 2015) indicated that in the United States, depending on the industry, the eligibility

for consideration as a small business is the number of employees for 12 months or

revenue volume over a 3-year duration.

In the United Kingdom (UK), Balu (2016) noted that the definition of a SME is

within the context of accounting requirements. Other developed and developing countries

such as Australia and Thailand incorporated the same factors, with variation in some

aspects, like those adapted in the UK, the European Union, and Canada (Charoenrat &

Harvie, 2017). Concluding from a study, Anastasia (2015) advanced that the definitions

for SMEs seem principally dependent on the phase of development in different countries and on the political and economic focus of a particular nation. Despite the differences, understanding the definition of SMEs is an integral aspect for researchers and other interest groups in shaping the development, advancement and stability of SME businesses in the manufacturing industry (Balu, 2016).

Business Leaders Concerns in the Manufacturing Industry

Manufacturing industries are important as a component of the economic sector and as the highest provider of employment in developing countries (De & Nagaraj, 2014). However, the manufacturing environment of the developing countries remains relatively more uncertain than the environment of developed countries for SMEs (Majid & Yasir, 2013). The opinion among some decision-makers in the Caribbean is that entrepreneurs do not have (a) sufficient economic resources, (b) the adequate skills, (c) the size and scope of operations, and (d) limited reliance on Western businesses to pursue development in the manufacturing industry (Bailey & Karagiannis, 2013).

Having concerns about the decline in the performance of SMEs of the manufacturing industry in Pakistan, Majid and Yasir (2013) explored the reasons for this trend. The attributive factors include the high level of uncertainty in the business environment, limited information available for decision-making, and lack of appropriate education and dynamic capabilities on the part of management (Majid & Yasir, 2013). SMEs' success is vital for economies and their development in all industries, including manufacturing, could be a lucrative avenue for economic advancement and sustenance (Tsai, 2014). An understanding of SMEs and the factors that affect their progress could

form the basis for planning and developing strategies for the growth of SMEs (Akinboade, 2015).

SMEs in the Manufacturing Industry

SMEs in the manufacturing sector provide an abundance of jobs in countries annually (Nowicka, 2015). A large percentage of the country's workforce includes SMEs' employees (Resende, Cardoso, & Façanha, 2016). The composition of businesses includes in excess of 90% SMEs (Ardjouman, 2014). These businesses are important in creating employment and sustaining economic growth (Ardjouman, 2014). Bischoff and Wood (2013) explored constraints on the job creation capabilities of micro and small enterprises by observing a panel of owners within the manufacturing sector. Most small firms' owners demonstrated extreme reluctance to expand because of inappropriate regulation, outright regulatory failures, and poor labor relations (Bischoff & Wood, 2013). Owners of these SMEs, whom Bischoff and Wood interviewed, expressed that the majority of their employees were skilled and semiskilled employees doing unskilled labor.

In many countries, micro and small enterprises, which represent a larger percentage of businesses, are the drivers of the country's economic growth (Gebremeskell, 2014). A common view is that SMEs are the core economic contributors to many countries and the global economy (Bohlooli & Ghahari, 2014). The SME business sector is one of the main sources through which the country could mitigate poverty and increase employment (Gjini, 2014; Resende et al., 2016). SMEs' contribute to the development and efficiency of the private segment of the country's economy

(Gjini, 2014). In Pakistan, the textile industry, comprising mainly SMEs, is the primary source of foreign exchange revenue and contributes 46% of overall manufacturing activities, 31% of total investment, and 35% of that country's labor force (Syed, Shah, Shaikh, Ahmadani, & Shaikh, 2012). Some of the primary skills and capabilities of leaders of SMEs which Syed et al. (2012) concluded from their study are: (a) job creation, (b) fostering of a self-help culture, (c) resource allocation, (d) pioneering the development of new products, and (e) promoting quality control. The trend in developed countries such as the United States and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development countries is that SMEs account for 56% and 60%-70%, respectively, of employment (SBA, 2015).

Many developing countries lack a significant manufacturing sector or dependable data to provide statistical evidence of performance for SMEs (De & Nagaraj, 2014). However, most governments strengthen their SMEs through support institutions and programs, because of SMEs' importance to the economy (Gjini, 2014). Notwithstanding their importance and governments' efforts to foster and sustain SMEs' businesses through financial and commercial initiatives, SMEs remain vulnerable to challenges that impede their survival (Rao, 2014). One of the impediments is the high cost and a cumbersome regulation process (Akinboade, 2015).

Since 2000, SMEs could not enhance the growth of the manufacturing industry through value-added activities and employment (Aldaba, 2012). The primary reasons for such performance are the difficulties SMEs experience in acquiring finance, in accessing

technology and in acquiring the appropriate skills (Aldaba, 2012). Product quality and marketing are other challenging areas for SMEs (Bulak & Turkyilmaz, 2014).

Policies to increase the survival rate of SMEs in traditional manufacturing industries should include a joint assessment of strategic alternatives concerning internationalization and location (W. Wu & Parkvithee, 2017). Many SMEs, from developed countries such as the United States, operate manufacturing organizations in developing countries such as China (Kabirou & Gao, 2014). Unfortunately, the increase in global economic partnerships and transactions led to an increase in corrupt practices and unethical behavior (Rahman, Uddin, & Lodorfos, 2017). Corruption and unethical behavior may contribute to the failure of SMEs (Fatoki, 2014). SMEs require leaders with the appropriate skills to direct the organization in this new business environment of globalization and diverse challenges (Marques, 2015). Owners-managers who operate in such an environment need to understand leadership and its relevance to the survival of their businesses (Perez, 2017).

The Organizational Success and Sustainability of SMEs

The concept of success in SMEs remains a topic of debate, varying between enterprises, context, and stakeholders (Oyeku, Oduyoye, Asikhia, Kabuoh, & Elemo, 2014). This variation exists despite the extensive research on the success of SMEs (Sefiani & Bown, 2013). The link and interchangeable use of the terms *success*, *growth*, *profit*, and *survival* is prevalent in the literature regarding the short- to long-term sustainability of SMEs (Oyeku et al., 2014; Sefiani & Bown, 2013). Owners-managers'

viewpoint concerning the success of their businesses was a noteworthy topic in the literature on SMEs.

A common and traditional definition of success among owners-managers of SMEs relates to a firm's financial performance in the areas of sales, profitability, return on investment and positive cash flows (Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). Financial indicators are simple to define and measure. However, these indicators lack appropriateness for defining success in the context of the personal objectives of the owner-manager (Kirkwood, 2016). Other owner-managers regard success within the context of intrinsic measures to include, job satisfaction, autonomy, responsibility to the community, personal satisfaction, and ensuring adequate provision to satisfy family needs (Oyeku et al., 2014).

The inclusion of short- versus long-term survival is another element owners-managers perceive as essential in defining business success (Krejcí, Strielkowski, & Čabelková, 2015; Lekhanya & Mason, 2014). Evident in the literature is the postulation that financial and nonfinancial components are complementary and provide a more realistic description of performance in the SME business (Kemayel, 2015). Financial viability and nonfinancial indices are essential for monitoring and ensuring the long-term survival of SME businesses (Oyeku et al., 2014). Success is a central construct in the study of SMEs' survival (El Makrini, 2015). Understanding the definition and importance that owners-managers' ascribe to success is pivotal in exploring the skills SMEs require to achieve sustainability (Kirkwood, 2016). The factors that affect the survival of SMEs are as multi-dimensional as the components in defining success (Sefiani & Bown, 2013).

Establishing the criteria for success is important in determining the success factors of an SME (Kirkwood, 2016).

Intellectual capital. One of the main sources of SMEs' success and sustainability is their capabilities in securing and using knowledge to create value for their businesses (Daou, Karuranga, & Su, 2014). Intellectual capital is the synergy of an organization's intangible assets or resources such as knowledge, customer relationships, experience, innovation, and influence in the community (Khalique, Bontis, Abdul Nassir bin Shaari, & Hassan Md. Isa, 2015). Intellectual capital is an integral requirement for competing in the 21st century of advanced technology and volatility in customers' demands (Marzo & Scarpino, 2016).

Owners-managers could influence the various components of intellectual capital that impact the performance and survival of their organizations (Daou et al., 2014). Relying on their study of the survival of SMEs in the manufacturing industry in Argentina, Jardon and Martos (2012) noted that those firms used intellectual capital to enhance strategic factors for long-term competitiveness. Owner-managers of SMEs should recognize and embrace opportunities their businesses could derive from intellectual capital (Kaveh, Bamipour, Far, & Far, 2015). Through knowledge acquisition, Kaveh et al. (2015) concluded from their study, organizations could attain a competitive advantage, such as cost leadership. The results of a study of SMEs in the manufacturing sector of Pakistan showed that intellectual capital positively affects the performance of a firm (Khalique et al., 2015).

Another focus of SME research is the characteristics of owners-managers' and their attitude towards the success of their business (Gittins & Fink, 2015). The characteristics of emphasis in the literature review pertain to the owners-managers' education and work experience, gender, age, risk tolerance, personality, and commitment (Basyith & Idris, 2014; Gittins & Fink, 2015). Studying the performance of SMEs in the UK region, Blackburn, Hart, and Wainwright (2013) concluded that these traits remain influential in the performance of this business group. Despite the association, Blackburn et al. suggested that the structural stipulations of the firm moderated the effects of the owner-manager's characteristics on business outcomes. In another study, Molodchik and Jardon (2017) found that intellectual capital endowment, in SMEs, is important for shifting the firm to a higher level of innovation in its products, both locally and internationally.

Innovation. Creativity, innovation, and flexibility are compulsory features organizations, especially SMEs, should possess to achieve a sustainable competitive edge (Abdullah, Shamsuddin, Wahab, & Hamid, 2014; Love & Roper, 2015). Innovation and creativity relate to generating new ideas and recognizing opportunities to modify a product, process, or service (Woschke, Haase, & Kratzer, 2017). Innovative activities are propellants for SMEs' growth and economic sustainability (Abdullah et al., 2014). Some SMEs embrace innovation as a competitive tool to survive (Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). Incremental innovation results in an improvement to the organization's existing processes rather than replacement of its current products (Woschke et al., 2017).

Organizations achieve radical innovations and competitiveness through the generation of new products, technologies, or services that could result in current assets, processes, or services becoming obsolete (Woschke et al., 2017). SMEs may use e-commerce tools to pursue new business opportunities, respond to changes in the business environment, and create new products or services (Abebe, 2014). Innovation, whether as continuous improvement or intermittent radical changes, is a driver for long-term survival and competitive positioning for SMEs (Blackburn et al., 2013; "Ten Top Tips," 2014; V. Gupta & Gupta, 2014). The execution of radical innovation results in major strategic changes in the organization while the application of incremental innovation could lead to a minor transformation in the company (Woschke et al., 2017). SMEs with high levels of participation in innovative activities are more profitable and retain larger market shares than their counterparts (V. Gupta & Gupta, 2014). Deliberating on the growth of small businesses, Bello and Ivanov (2014) suggested that the focus on innovation is imperative for leaders. By undertaking innovative activities, owners-managers could introduce different processes or products that are beneficial to the long-term survival of their businesses (Taneja et al., 2016).

Technology advancement. Business leaders cannot ignore the role of information and communication technology (ICT) because employing technology contributes to economic activities through an increase in aggregate productivity in the global environment (Onu, Ibrahim, & Segun, 2015). Information and communication technology is a significant factor in manufacturing because strong ICT investments can play an important role in regaining lost business (Ji, Zhang, Wu, & Wang, 2016).

Ardjouman (2014) advanced a similar view, claiming that the use of technology in the management of SMEs could be beneficial to the development of African countries. The acquisition of information technology skills, by owners, is critical for manufacturing organization to survive in the global market (Onu et al., 2015). In their study of SMEs in the Indonesian fashion industry, Setiowati, Hartoyo, Daryanto, and Arifin (2015) identified a positive relationship between the use of technology and marketing capabilities of the firms. SMEs with such capabilities experience enhanced customer satisfaction, market expansion, and ultimately improved financial performance (Onu et al., 2015).

The owners-manager's knowledge and innovativeness are primary predictors of the incorporation of technology within the business (Setiowati et al., 2015). Owners-managers, whose focus is on the survival of their businesses, accept and implement technology to improve all areas of operations in their businesses (Setiowati et al., 2015). In SMEs, the owner-manager's support is necessary for fully utilizing and maintaining technology on a sustained basis in the firm (Romero & Martínez-Román, 2015). For example, Marnewick (2014) concluded that underutilization of information technology (IT) exists in SMEs in Soweto because owners view IT as a tool for traditional usage rather than for business growth and competitive positioning. The leadership style of the owner-manager is another determinant regarding the usage of ICT in the production activities of manufacturing firms (Onu et al., 2015). SMEs, whose owners-managers practice an autocratic leadership style, realize minimal return from IT applications compared to firms with a visionary leadership style (Onu et al., 2015).

The role of ICT as an enabler for the growth and survival of SMEs is a common theme in the literature (Marnewick, 2014). However, some SMEs lack the ability to realize the full benefits of ICT in areas of business process improvement and market expansion (Purnama & Subroto, 2016). This pattern exists in SMEs where the owners-managers hold the view that the survival of their businesses is short-term (Sharafizad, 2016). Owners-managers with such opinion might lack the vision and skill to initiate long-term planning and unable to conceptualize the business returns from investing in technology (Nguyen, Newby, & Macaulay, 2015). Survival of the business is one of the primary foci for SMEs (Marnewick, 2014). Leaders of SMEs should also rationalize that business growth is an integral requirement for sustained survival in a competitive environment (Abebe, 2014). The use of ICT as a tool to foster operational performance is an important consideration for owners-managers in their decision to grow and sustain their firms (Kabongo & Okpara, 2014).

Ivanova and Arenas (2014) particularly focused their study on e-leadership skills for SMEs. E-leadership skills are necessary for leaders of the 21st century, to pursue the myriad of opportunities that exist in an era of ICT (Ivanova & Arenas, 2014). The use of ICT is mandatory for a business to survive in the era of digitization, not only for enhancing their financial performance, but also for job creation and expansion of customer and market range (Ardjouman, 2014). Leaders can use ICT to improve the processes of their organizations (Purnama & Subroto, 2016).

Communication. Communication is an integral aspect of leadership (Men, 2014). Changes in the mode of communication might require that leaders transform their skills

in this area of leadership (Bloom, Garicano, Sadun, & Van Reenen, 2014). Better communication and coordination increase the flow of information, improve the decision-making processes, and allow efficient allocation of resources (Purnama & Subroto, 2016). In their study of SMEs in Tehran, Bohlooli and Ghahari (2014) found that a strong relationship exists between the advancement of SMEs and components of leadership such as power, influence, motivation, and communication. Evaluating the leadership role, Bohlooli and Ghahari concluded that leadership is important for SMEs in finding new solutions to the radical changes and volatility of the 21st century. For example, the mode of communication changed fundamentally with the advancement of technology, especially the Internet (Bloom et al., 2014; Jara, Parra, & Skarmeta, 2014).

Effective organizations require leaders who possess expertise in ICT and other business skills. Such skills and expertise include communication, problem-solving, critical thinking and strong negotiating capabilities, and entrepreneurship (Ivanova & Arenas, 2014). The leader's responsibility is to satisfy stakeholders' needs by ensuring the formulation of organizational goals and the development of strategies (Holten et al., 2015). Communication is a primary activity for the successful execution of this responsibility (Jing, Avery, & Bergsteiner, 2014). Owners-managers should commit and motivate employees to participate in the realization of the firms' goals (Ates et al., 2013). In a study of small enterprises, Jing et al. found that organizations in which the owners communicated the vision and objectives to employees, realized operational benefits. These businesses demonstrated improved customer service, employee satisfaction, and

financial performance. The results were the opposite in companies that exhibited a contrary practice (Jing et al., 2014).

The operating environment is volatile and under such a condition, leaders of SMEs should accept strategizing and execution of plans as a continuous process (Ates et al., 2013). Inclusive in this process is the obligation to communicate continuously with internal and external stakeholders of the firm (Miletic & Đurovic, 2015). Networking is one approach owners-managers use to market their products and services (O'Donnell, 2014). Communication is a primary content of the linkages that comprise the framework for networking (O'Donnell, 2014). Through successful business communication, leaders can monitor movements in the market and adjust their strategies accordingly (Miletic & Đurovic, 2015).

In an assessment of SMEs, Miletic and Đurovic (2015) advocated that the use of proper communication techniques could enhance the competitiveness of the firm and the economy. Business owners, who emphasize the long-term survival of their organizations, select relevant communication methods for effectively promoting products and services to customers (Lisita, Prinsloo, & Pelser, 2015). Leadership involves communicating with stakeholders in different and changing situations to achieve successful and sustained outcomes for the organization (Bottomley et al., 2014). Viewed as the foundational process in many business areas, Miletic and Đurovic promoted communication skill as a necessity for effective leadership. Owners-managers who understand and possess this skill, can position their firms to compete in the short- and long-term (Jing et al., 2014).

Business Failure in the Manufacturing Industry

The manufacturing sector faces challenges such as weak global economic growth and a labor force unprepared for the 21st century (Chandran & Devadason, 2017; S. Wu, 2016). Present also are opportunities such as improved climate for international trade, strong productivity growth, and strength in innovation (Kunday & Şengüler, 2015). Early identification of weaknesses, as Rymaszewska (2014) explained, has the potential for making companies more aware of their capabilities. For example, Kodithuwakku and Wickramarachchi (2015) viewed risk assessment in the supply-chain management system as an important process to identify the risk profile of an organization.

Another issue is the impact of the location of new manufacturing ventures and spinoffs on these businesses' productivity, growth, and survival (Lööf & Nabavi, 2014). In their study of this issue, Lööf and Nabavi (2014) concluded that productivity in manufacturing spinoffs in metro cities was higher than new manufacturing ventures. However, among the manufacturing organizations, solely spinoffs outside the metro area are likely to survive the initial 5 years versus new entrants (Lööf & Nabavi, 2014). The two factors that affect the viability of the new firms were knowledge of the manufacturing industry and technology (Lööf & Nabavi, 2014). Leaders, who experience difficulty in coping with the volatility, uncertainty, and complexity of the environment, can apply pattern recognition to be more aware of business opportunities and to avoid or mitigate risk (Holten et al., 2015). Recognizing trends and understanding patterns in the environment is a competitive advantage for leaders (Holten et al., 2015).

Notwithstanding their importance and contribution, the survival rate of new SMEs is low. In reality, only 50% survive to 5 years (SBA, 2015). The failure rate among SMEs is high, ranging from 50% to 75% within the first 5 years of commencement (Arasti et al., 2012; SBA, 2015). The focus for development of SMEs relates to the regulatory framework, whereas the difficulties that SMEs experience are high costs, inability to cushion the impact of regulatory changes, reliance on government's support, and inadequate experts in regulation (Akinboade, 2015).

Causes of SME Failure

Different terminologies and connotations apply to the failure of businesses within the SME segment (Arasti, Zandi, & Bahmani, 2014). The definition of SME failure includes many and a variety of parameters, covering insolvency of the business to the owner's decision to exit (Eggers & Lin, 2015; Ucbasaran et al., 2013). Dissimilarity in meanings could depend on culture, professional interest, and/or type of industry (Fatoki, 2014; Kosmidis & Stavropoulos, 2014). Knowing the different definitions is essential to understand the meaning of SME failure in relation to the survival of this business sector (Filho et al., 2017). This awareness is particularly important because business closure might not be synonymous with failure (Filho et al., 2017).

The range of definitions for failure among business practitioners include (a) the involuntary discontinuation of the operations of a business following bankruptcy or assignment; (b) involuntary termination, resulting in financial loss to creditors; (c) voluntary termination of the company; and (d) inability of a company to meet its obligation (J. Gupta, Gregoriou, & Healy, 2015). The notion of using the word *failure*

interchangeably with the closure of a business is another dimension that can lead to a different interpretation of a phenomenon (Fatoki, 2014). A business closure may involve voluntary discontinuation of a business because of the retirement of the owner or the owner's pursuit of more lucrative ventures (J. Gupta et al., 2015). In such circumstances, the business could continue under the management of a new owner. Despite the numerous descriptions concerning the failure of SMEs, Ucbasaran et al. (2013) advocated that providing an unambiguous definition is important for use in research. A common and clear definition enables comparative analysis across studies (Ucbasaran et al., 2013).

The SME sector is a notable fraction of the economic structure and has the potential to respond to the needs of market segments that large organizations cannot serve (Etuk, Etuk, & Michael, 2014). This unique advantage is an avenue, through which, owners-managers can pursue opportunities for business growth and survival (Nowicka, 2015). Despite this opportunity, SMEs continue to experience failure at unacceptable rates (Akinboade, 2015).

The failure of SMEs is a consequential and complex phenomenon, requiring the attention and involvement of practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders of the community (Williams, 2014). Owners-managers might learn valuable lessons from failure but such knowledge is only beneficial if leaders apply the learning to the practices of their existing or new businesses (Filho et al., 2017). Using the lessons for internal reflection on the deterrents of business survival might assist in curtailing the reoccurrence of failure (Eggers & Lin, 2015). An existing notion is that an in-depth knowledge of success is an automatic awareness of the causes of failure (Arasti et al., 2014). However,

this perspective might not be useful to mitigate the trend of failure among SMEs because of the multifarious activities and views of failure (Williams, 2014). Understanding the cause of business failure among SMEs is an important consideration for leaders to ensure the survival of their firms (Fatoki, 2014).

The literature contains numerous reasons for the failure of SMEs. The main contributing factors are poor leadership and management skills, lack of financing, and employee related issues (Etuk et al., 2014; Mutoko, 2014). Other primary causes are matters in the areas of product quality and marketing (Ramukumba, 2014). Williams (2014) also identified environmental factors such as globalization, government regulations, and macroeconomic stability as some of the main sources of SME failure. Unethical practices, corruption, and the location of the SME's business were not prevalent topics in the literature; however, Mutoko (2014) contended that these factors contribute to the collapse of some SMEs. A delineation of the primary causes of SME failure was the focal point of the discoveries from the literature.

Leadership and leadership skills. Regardless of the type of organization, leaders of the 21st century face increased challenges than leaders of the previous decade because of the elevated complexity and dynamism of the business environment (Marques, 2015). Leadership is essential to the success and performance of an organization, particularly in the competitive business environment of the 21st century (Franco & Matos, 2015). In their assessment of leadership in SMEs Arham et al. (2013) and Franco and Matos (2015) concluded that leadership remains necessary to avoid organizational failures. Lekhanya (2015) conducted a study of leadership and corporate governance of SMEs in South

Africa. In this study, Lekhanya found that the respondents perceived a lack of leadership skills among owners-managers as one of the factors leading to the high failure rate of SMEs in South Africa. A similar conclusion was evident in the results of Z. O. Bilal and Al Mqbali's (2015) research on the performance of SMEs in Oman.

Reinforcing the role of leadership in SMEs, Franco and Matos (2015) viewed the concept as a process and indicated that SMEs are part of an economic, social, and environmental framework of conducting business. Within such a context, the decision and actions of owners-managers could impact society. For example, Crăciun, Năstase, Stamule, and Vizitiu (2015) conducted a study with the aim of acquiring a more in-depth understanding of leadership role in enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs. Employees perceived cooperation, charisma, confidence, motivation, and adaptability as the main characteristics of a leader who could inspire and direct their interest toward strong organizational performance (Crăciun et al., 2015).

Typically, owner-managers of SMEs assume the leadership role, and in many instances, might apply beliefs and practices that are incongruent with the leadership paradigms of the 21st century (Acar, 2016). The role befits owners-managers because of their in-depth knowledge of the processes, clients, and employees (Franco & Matos, 2015). However, Lawal, Ajonbadi, and Otokiti (2014) suggested that, in this age of rapid change, SMEs require leadership with leaders who are visionary and focused on the long-term survival of the firm. Leadership continues to change because of developments regarding new tools, context, concerns and concepts (Kutz, 2012; Yammarino, 2013). Some consistency may obtain concerning abstract principles in the field; however, the

operational and practical aspects of leadership may vary considerably (Marques, 2015). Using an appropriate style of leadership is necessary for owners-managers to overcome the challenges of the environment (Franco & Matos, 2015; Lawal et al., 2014).

Equally important is the use of different leadership styles to achieve beneficial outcomes and to avoid business failure (Kamalakara, Naik, & Venkateswarlu, 2014). Leaders of SMEs practice different styles of leadership but one style may be more predominant and effective than the other (Arham et al., 2013; Bambale et al., 2017). By contrast, Kamalakara et al. (2014) and Lawal et al. (2014) argued that owner-managers assume leadership styles depending on their situational decisions. Leaders who can discern the changes in the environment and adjust their styles accordingly are in a position to enhance the competitiveness of their organizations (Yanney, 2014).

Present and future organizations require a combination of traditional and new leadership skills to remain competitive (Tucker & Lam, 2014). SMEs encounter many challenges, which are weaknesses and/or threats to their existence (Hyder & Lussier, 2016; Lee, 2014). The challenges include the interdependence of diverse issues such as advanced technology, globalization, competition, and customers' ability to easily switch between suppliers or service providers (Nummela, Saarenketo, & Loane, 2016). A combination of interdependence and diversity is fundamental to the complexity present in many business activities (Acar, 2016; Mac & Evangelista, 2016). Leadership problems differ from routine problems, making leadership a representation of a complex state of social problem solving (Mumford et al., 2000).

The array of skills leaders should acquire or possess to overcome organizational challenges includes the ability to create and articulate a vision, communication, teamwork, listening, and adaptability to change (Morrison, 2014; Tucker & Lam, 2014). Leaders, who are innovative and understand their businesses, are proactive and creative in their response to the challenges they encounter (Yasin, Nawab, Khalid, & Nazir, 2014). Individuals who lack the relevant leadership skills may have difficulty leading the organization to achieve success (Acar, 2016). The lack of knowledge and practice of leadership skills is a cause of failure among SMEs in Botswana (Mutoko, 2014). This deficiency is also one of the causes which Fatoki (2014) associated with the failure of SMEs in South Africa.

The application of EQ whereby leaders manage their feelings and recognize the emotions of stakeholders in the conduct of their business is a skill that researchers considered essential for the progress of SMEs (Godday, Kenneth, & Tor, 2014). Another attribute for effective leadership is the entrepreneurial orientation of owners-managers (Wang, Hermens, Huang, & Chelliah, 2015). Entrepreneurial orientation is about leader's pro-activeness, determination, resilience, assertiveness, and tolerance for risky initiatives (Alhnity, Mohamad, & Ishak, 2016).

Concluding from their study on competencies of entrepreneurs, Forster, Parrer, and Wöss (2013) posited that owners should modify their operational structures to address the challenges the organization encounter as it grows. The personal competencies of the owners, which are the area of focus at the start-up of the business, become less effective and relevant to the firms at various phases of their development (Forster et al.,

2013). Forster et al. also found that leadership competencies contributed to the financial growth of firms and for SMEs to grow and survive, owners-managers need to replace personal competencies with leadership competencies. A different perspective is that the traditional leadership approach, example, problem solving, will be insufficient to cope with future external factors that will radically disrupt the modus operandi of organizational life (Aggarwal, 2014; Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2015; Tucker & Lam, 2014).

Financial constraints. Literature on the role of finance, regarding the failure of SMEs, is voluminous and includes studies reflecting different approaches to this topic (Jindrichovska, 2013). Access to funds at start-up and for the development and expansion of business is one of the determinants of SMEs' failure (Z. O. Bilal & Al Mqbali, 2015,). In a study of small businesses in Botswana, Mutoko (2014) identified the lack of access to funding as an impediment to growth in this sector. Conducting a similar study in Pakistan, Hyder and Lussier (2016) concluded that most of the small businesses failed because of insufficient capital.

The problems associated with initial and working capital is a constraint to the performance of some SMEs because of the impact on their ability to embrace innovation as a competitive strategy (Taneja et al., 2016). Typically, at the start of their businesses, owners of SMEs source financing from their personal savings, borrowings from family and friends, or from government agencies (Etuk et al., 2014). This method of funding may not suffice as owners attempt to improve the competitive position of their businesses and may need to acquire additional assets (Omer, Wahab, Elzein, & Edrees, 2015).

External financing, through loans from banks and other financial institution, is an option (Pticar, 2016). However, some financial organizations remain hesitant to finance SMEs because of business risk factors such as the owner's inability to collateralize the loan and demonstration of unsatisfactory cash flows to liquidate the debt (Mazzarol, 2014; Ramukumba, 2014). In their review of SME financing in Bangladesh, Hasan and Jamil (2014) found that access to financial organizations for funding is a serious challenge for this business group. Many SMEs also use trade credit to supplement cash deficits but this alternative may only be lucrative in the short-term (Belás, Bartos, Habánik, & Novák, 2014; Jindrichovska, 2013). Presenting a similar view, Raude et al., (2015) found that SMEs' high dependence on trade creditors for financing is a major cause of their failure.

An analysis of the financing patterns and determinants of indebtedness for manufacturing SMEs in India revealed that the primary source of financing was external borrowing from banking institutions (Majumdar, 2014). Evident also was the average borrowed capital of 35.63% for a 6 year financing consideration (Majumdar, 2014). Offering another perspective, Tolba, Seoudi, and Fahmy (2015) observed from their study that many owners-managers of SMEs in Egypt placed minimum reliance on bank loans to fund their businesses. Lack of funding from bank loans has insignificant impact on the output of SMEs in that country. Karadag (2015) emphasized that not only is a lack of financial resources a challenge for SMEs but also the absence of efficient and effective financial systems is another major problem. Other financial issues are impediments to the efficient operations and long-term survival of SMEs. These issues include bureaucratic

and lengthy duration of procedures to obtain funding from financial institutions and public sources (M. O. Agwu & Emeti, 2014).

Owners-managers' lack of or poor skills in financial planning is a further cause towards the failure of SMEs (Jindrichovska, 2013). Effective management in finance, particularly in relation to working capital and cash flow, remains crucial for the prevention of insolvency and bankruptcy of businesses (J. Gupta et al., 2015). A leader's knowledge of financial issues is an essential element in the decision to implement sound practices in that area of the business (Karadag, 2015). Accurate accounting information is useful when planning and making financial decisions concerning the company's operations (Nwobu, Faboyede, & Onwuelingo, 2015). Many owners-managers do not focus on proper documentation of the financial transactions of their businesses (Jindrichovska, 2013). Having an efficient accounting system to capture, store and retrieve data is valuable for reporting and decision-making (Pleis, 2014). In assessing the failure of SMEs, Pleis (2014) attributed the cause of this phenomenon to tax and accounting issues.

Human resource issues in SMEs. Examining the cause of failure among SMEs should extend beyond financial issues to include human resource (HR) matters (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2014). As small organizations strive to survive in the globalized business world, personnel increasingly become an important resource for success and long-term survival (Shafeek, 2016). In most SMEs, the owner-manager is responsible for managing HR functions (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016). The challenge is that in many firms the leaders who hold this responsibility, lack an understanding of

human resource management (HRM) and its benefit to the business (Ahmeti & Marmullaku, 2015).

Some owners-managers do not view the HR aspect of their operations as critical because of the low headcount and the cost associated with the function (Cuervo & Cheong, 2017; Virág & Albu, 2014). The pervasive issues that pertain to inefficient HRM include employee satisfaction, deficiency in the acquisition of new skills and employee development, suboptimal levels of productivity, and customer satisfaction (Bametha, Ruwali, & Ruwali, 2015; Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). These issues affect the competitiveness of the firm and its ability to generate/sustain profitability (Aktar & Md Adilur, 2016). The impact of not understanding and not using efficient HR practices contribute to the failure of the business (U. A. Agarwal & Jha, 2015). The owners-managers' role is pivotal for establishing and ensuring the existence of effective HR activities and employee commitment within the organization (Sheehan, 2013). In strong and especially in weak economic times, the expectation is that leaders must identify and exploit opportunities, as well as influence people to engage in activities that will sustain the organization (Marques, 2015).

Organizations need leaders to foster an environment for the realization and concretization of creativity and innovation (Love & Roper, 2015). For instance, Mittal and Dhar (2015) concluded that through the promotion of creativity, leaders encourage employees/followers to examine the firm's practices and provide progressive solutions for sustainability. Viewing the HR practice through the lens of Fiedler's (1964) contingency theory is appropriate, particularly pertaining to the owner-manager and the

employee (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). The theory holds that the favorableness of a

situation depends on (a) the relationship between the leaders and followers, (b) the

structure of the task, and (c) the position of power. Fiedler proposed that if the followers

like and respect the leaders, a higher probability exists that the leaders will receive the

support of others. Leaders are in a better position to exert influence if they articulate and

control the goals, the standards of performance, and the methods of the task (Fiedler,

1964). The influence of a leader, according to Fiedler, may increase if the group or

organization attributes powers on the leader for achieving objectives. Owners-managers,

who lead the SME, must also have the knowledge and skill to determine the leadership

approach suitable for achieving positive organizational outcomes in different

circumstances (Franco & Matos, 2015).

Despite the positive impact of transformational leadership, Gross (2016) revealed

that transactional leadership is essential in small firms where the culture of the

organization is more conducive for establishing and monitoring contracts. Transactional

leadership styles might be more appropriate in promoting innovation in small companies

as leaders can more effectively reward and monitor employees (Love & Roper, 2015).

Arham et al. (2013) conducted studies on the effect of leadership and leadership styles on

the business performance and success of SMEs in Malaysia. The results from their

studies showed that transformational leadership style is more effective than transactional

and passive-avoidant styles and has a more profound impact on the performance of the

organization. Özer and Tinaztepe (2014) reported similar findings in their study on

leadership of SMEs in Turkey. The results showed that transformational leadership has a

more positive effect on organizational performance than transactional and paternalistic styles (Özer & Tinaztepe, 2014). The leaders of SMEs, who practiced transformational leadership, communicated a clear message of their companies' vision to employees and encouraged the employees to achieve their objectives (Özer & Tinaztepe, 2014).

The owner-manager and employee relationship is an integral dimension of the HR dynamics in SMEs (Sheehan, 2013; Virág & Albu, 2014). Understanding and influencing followers are skills Mumford et al. (2000) emphasized in the leadership skill-based model. Leadership includes both leaders and followers (Manning & Robertson, 2016). The follower's readiness to accept direction from the leaders is what contributes to establishing the leader's status (Alias, Ismail, & Sahiddan, 2015). Leadership behaviors that promote employee satisfaction include two-way transparent communication, feedback on employee performance, creating an environment that will encourage creativity, employee development, and employee involvement in establishing objectives for the organization (Manning & Robertson, 2016).

Leaders provide direction for an organization (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). However, leaders are unable to execute and achieve the company's objectives without commitment from employees (Manning & Robertson, 2016). When employees experience a high level of job satisfaction, they enhance the level of productivity in the organization thereby contributing to the success of the firm (S. Z. Malik et al., 2016). Low job satisfaction can negatively affect the organization, manifested in high absenteeism, increase cost, decline in profits, and dissatisfaction among customers (Akanji, 2017). Leaders play an important role in fostering happiness at work for

employees (Alias et al., 2015). In a study of manufacturing SMEs in Japan, Gamage (2014) concluded that the use of effective HR practices reduces the level of voluntary turnover among employees. Such a positive outcome is beneficial to the organization's performance and is a restraint to its failure (Gamage, 2014). The lack of motivated staff and the high cost of retaining skilled staff are two HR issues Arasti et al. (2014) identified as reasons for the failure of SME's businesses.

Training and development are essential for SMEs in this 21st century where the business world continues to change rapidly and as global access to HR intensifies (Mansoor, Shah, ur Rehman, & Tayyaba, 2015). Inadequate training and development may inhibit leaders from pursuing viable opportunities for their firms to compete effectively (Yazdanfar, Abbasian, & Hellgren, 2014). The organization and employees increase efficiency and effectiveness through training and development (Omolo, 2015). Firms benefit from HR development with the acquisition of new and improved skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes of their employees (Yazdanfar et al., 2014). These improvements, as Yazdanfar et al. (2014) posited, contribute to the competitiveness of the organization and possible survival.

Despite the advantages that SMEs could amass from training and development, owners-managers tend to consider this aspect of their business as an expense rather than an investment (Mansoor et al., 2015). This consideration, as Mansoor et al. (2015) advanced, is particularly common among SMEs in developing countries. Proffering a similar view, Rabie, Cant, and Wiid (2016) expressed that some SME owners do not promote any form of training and development in their businesses.

Presenting a different view, Omolo (2015) concluded from a study of SMEs in Kenya, that some owners encourage HR development. The businesses of these owners outperformed those of their counterparts who ignored the benefits of enhancing employees' skills and knowledge (Omolo, 2015). Training and development are fundamental elements for owners-managers to sharpen and maintain their leadership skills and the competencies of their employees (Rabie et al., 2016). In the context of globalization, lack of openness to HR development might be a restraint to competitiveness and eventually business failure (Omolo, 2015). Considering the impact of such deficiency, owners-managers of SMEs in the 21st century will need to focus seriously on the development of the requisite skills within their organizations (O'Connell, 2014). Customers continue to shift their value paradigm with demands for diversified services and products and reduction in delivery time (Taneja et al., 2016). By developing their skills and competencies, leaders of SMEs improve their ability to address the changing requirements of customers (H. Singh & Mahmood, 2014).

Product quality and marketing. Product quality and marketing are other areas of weakness for SMEs (Aldaba, 2012). Speed and change are characteristics of the marketplace in the 21st century along with the advancement of new technologies (Milojevic, Damnjanovic, & Milovanovic, 2015). The progress of technology gives rise to new marketing possibilities and potential growth for SMEs (Milojevic et al., 2015; Setiowati et al., 2015). However, many SMEs fail to incorporate marketing activities into their operations; thereby, weakening the firm's capability to respond to customer demands (Milojevic et al., 2015; van Scheers & Makhitha, 2016). Marketing

management is one of the causes of failure for SMEs (van Scheers & Makhitha, 2016). The challenges that impede the progress of SMEs include marketing variables such as low demand for services and products and insufficient knowledge of potential customers (Rabie et al., 2016).

Exploring the practice of marketing in SMEs in Malta, Izvercianu and Miclea (2015) affirmed different attitudes toward marketing activities among owners-managers. The conclusion was that some owners-managers paid slight attention to marketing, acting impulsively while others considered marketing sporadically, in response to threats or opportunities (Izvercianu & Miclea, 2015). The behavior is seldom to secure long-term competitiveness (Izvercianu & Miclea, 2015). Parilla (2013) provided a different view with specific reference to a study of management practices in small businesses. The owners of small businesses intensively promoted their products and services (Parilla, 2013).

In the competitive global environment, SMEs can establish their market position by enhancing the quality of their products and productivity of their processes (Ahmad & Saber, 2015; Sharma & Kharub, 2014). Diversification of products and services is also an approach SME leaders can explore to improve their offering and extend their customer base (Dhandapani & Upadhyayula, 2015). Coad and Guenther (2013), in their study, focused primarily on the relationship between age and diversification patterns of German machine tool manufacturers in the post-war era. The findings of the study showed firms have lower diversification rates as they mature, larger firms tend to have more diversified product portfolios and, diversification activities reduce the risk of exit in general (Coad &

Guenther, 2013). Another observation, Coad and Guenther noted, was that owners of firms experiencing diversification do not repeat the same behavior in the following year.

The neglect of marketing as a competitive tool in SMEs is because owners-managers might lack the time and funds for such an investment (Izvercianu & Miclea, 2015). Owners' limited knowledge and skills in marketing, and their reliance on intermediaries to distribute their products are also hindrances to the development of marketing in SMEs (Omer et al., 2015). SME owners should focus on improving resource productivity to lower manufacturing costs, which support cost competitiveness and lead to better performance (Russell & Millar, 2014). For example, Kabirou and Gao (2014) observed that some business owners of manufacturing firms in the United States use Chinese resources to minimize the costs of production. Exploring the survival of SMEs, Lyons, Brown, and Li (2013) analyzed the value chain for Chinese manufactured goods such as garments and textiles sold in sub-Saharan Africa. Lyons et al. also studied the opportunities for Africans SMEs in the export trade from China. The conclusion from the analysis was that the value chains for low-cost goods varied, whereas traders derived diverse strategies for entry levels and opportunities for socioeconomic mobility (Lyons et al., 2013).

A leader's failure to acknowledge and accept the role of marketing technologies for business growth and survival, may lead to the demise of the enterprise (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014). Owners-managers also need to acquire an understanding of the importance of marketing management in building relationships with and keeping valuable customers (Ramukumba, 2014). Proficient knowledge of marketing variables is essential

for SME leaders in establishing and adjusting their competitive strategies to align with changes in the environment (Omer et al., 2015).

Globalization and internationalization. Another apparent issue for SMEs is competition in a global market and, in some instances, with seamless boundaries across industries (Aggarwal, 2014; Canals, 2014; VanderPal, 2014). Organizations of the 21st century, including SMEs, operate in a complex and global environment with rapid changes (Yanney, 2014). In such an environment, SMEs should pay attention to opportunities and manage risk to achieve long-term sustainability (Nikolic & Robinson, 2013). Effective leadership requires leaders with a global perspective (Canals, 2014; Ensari & Karabay, 2014). The leaders, who think globally, understand and appreciate cultural diversity, and possess strong interpersonal skills to form partnerships and alliances across international borders (Tuleja, 2014).

Cultural adaptability and consciousness are skills leaders require to influence stakeholders in achieving the organization's goals (Fiedler, 1964). These skills are notably important for global leaders because of the cultural differences across markets (Perez, 2017). A contributory factor to SMEs' survival or failure, in the global market, is the owner-manager's ability to assume a leadership approach is in alignment with the culture of a specific environment (Charoensukmongkol, 2015). Leading in a global market necessitates critical thinking with an international focus in all areas of decision-making (Jovović et al., 2017). Global leaders must be aware of and consider the various facets of internalization (Charoensukmongkol, 2015). Furthermore, Charoensukmongkol, (2015) opined global leaders should consider how decisions remain contingent on the

context of the respective culture.

An opinion in the literature is that participation in the global economy is a valuable strategy and a necessity for large and small businesses operating in the 21st century (Ocloo, Akaba, & Worwui-Brown, 2014). As a strategy, globalization is especially useful for SMEs functioning in a domestic market with limited demand for a product or service (W. Wu & Parkvithee, 2017). Some owners perceive globalization as an opportunity to increase demand and to position their businesses through product and service differentiation (Kunday & Şengüler, 2015). Leaders of SMEs might have the vision to expand globally, but these firms, principally in developing countries, encounter many hindrances to their expansion in the global market (Şener, Savrul, & Aydın, 2014). The overarching barrier for SMEs is the inability to respond effectively to the rapid and unexpected changes in the domestic and international markets (Kunday & Şengüler, 2015).

Owners-managers' lack of management and business skills, insufficient financial resources, and inadequate technology are the main impediments for SMEs to develop in the global arena (Ocloo et al., 2014; Toulova, Votoupalova, & Kubickova, 2015). Exploring the internationalization of SMEs in Turkey, Yener (2014) concluded that managers lack the commitment to adapt the firm's operations to compete in the international environment. Leaders in SMEs could pursue globalization strategies to improve the competitiveness of their businesses and to minimize the risk of failure (Kadivar & Bastani, 2016). Owners-managers need to understand and explore new methods or improve existing business practices to globalize their operations, (Yener,

2014). Such initiatives are components of the framework for competitive positioning in the global environment (Jovović et al., 2017).

Globalization within the Northern Ireland agri-food sector created both opportunities and threats for companies (Jack et al., 2014). An increase in competition was one of the main threats (Jack et al., 2014). In their review of Lithuanian furniture manufacturing, Zybartaite and Dzemyda (2014) presented a similar observation, stressing that the businesses face continually changing conditions when expanding internationally. The relationship between internationalization and continued existence of new ventures in conventional manufacturing was the focus of Puig, González-Loureiro, and Ghauri's (2014) examination of the industry. The finding was that the highest failure risk relates to new domestic ventures in the manufacturing industry (Puig et al., 2014). A manufacturing owner increases the chances of success and survival through internationalization (Puig et al., 2014). The unprecedented pace of change and the increase in financial and reputational risks are other trends that organizations experience with the onset and continuance of globalization (Tuleja, 2014).

Literature Review Summary

Some conditions that give rise to 21st century organizational context of complexity, dynamism, and conflict are (a) the social, economic, and technological changes in the environment; (b) incongruence of subsystems that comprise the organization in relation to goals or strategies for change; and (c) diversity in the needs of people who are part of the subsystems in the organization (Mumford et al., 2000). To address such issues, leaders need to apply skills such as: communication, decision-

making, ethics, interpersonal relationship with people of diverse cultures, networking, self-awareness, and flexibility to cope with unexpected change (Canals, 2014; Prieto, 2013).

Some researchers emphasized the role of different aspects of leadership in the success of SMEs. For example, Arham (2014) posited that management's leadership behavior is one of the factors that affect the performance of SMEs. In their study of SMEs in Portugal, Franco and Matos (2015) found that leadership is essential for management in achieving the results of the organizations. Arham et al. (2013) postulated from their study of SMEs in Malaysia, that owner-managers with effective leadership behaviors enhance the success of the firms they lead. Leadership is essential for the long-term sustainability of large and small organizations (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2014). Leadership is also for creating an effective organization that can generate and sustain success amidst the unpredicted changes and complexity of the market (Marques, 2015).

Small business owners often interpret the business as successful when it is barely surviving and ignore the signs of imminent failure (Filho et al., 2017). Sefiani and Bown (2013) found similar results in their study of success factors of manufacturing SMEs in Tangier. However, in that study, owners-managers articulated their perception of success factors based on their concept of personal behaviors, availability and use of equipment (technology included), and obligation to stakeholders (Sefiani & Bown, 2013). Other factors emerged as relevant and important for the success of SMEs such as innovation and incorporation of strategic planning to include the development and implementation of formal business and strategic plans in operations of the firm. Since 2000, political,

economic, social and technological discontinuities increased the importance of

knowledge and intangible resources and accelerated the pace of innovation to support

companies' value creation dynamics. In the 21st century globalized competitive arena,

intellectual capital may be a crucial (potential) source of competitive advantage for firms.

Intellectual capital may also be a fundamental mechanism to restore sustainable growth in

advanced economies, which were severely hit by the global crisis (Blackburn et al., 2013;

"Ten Top Tips," 2014).

Abebe (2014) recommended that future researchers expand research by

conducting similar studies among SMEs in different regions of the United States to

examine how e-commerce adoption affects SMEs' performance. Focusing on the future,

Abebe suggested conducting several studies over a longer period to investigate how e-

commerce is a source of strategic benefits to SMEs before and after an economic

recession. Bennett (2014) explored the changes taking place in manufacturing technology

management. The recommendation is that future researchers should articulate

collaborative manufacturing and extended enterprises, knowledge-based engineering, and

manufacturing, industrial application of rapid manufacturing techniques, and

manufacturing outsourcing (Bennett, 2014).

Regarding the importance of SMEs towards productivity, Nowicka (2015)

commented on the keen focus that researchers, practitioners, governments, and

nongovernment organizations place on the overall progress and development of SMEs.

Governments and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) acknowledged the crucial role

of SMEs and view leadership and the development of leadership skills as essential for the

survivability and efficient performance of SMEs (Hamrouni & Akkari, 2012; SBA, 2015). However, no empirical study is available concerning the failure of SMEs in Trinidad and Tobago and whether the lack of leadership skills is a contributory factor to such an outcome. The view exists that more in-depth understanding of leadership and the development of leadership in SMEs may contribute to solutions in curtailing failure and fostering success in that business sector (Arham et al., 2013). Research to understand leadership skills in SMEs of Trinidad and Tobago might help policymakers, owner-managers, and academic institutions to secure the long-term success of SMEs.

Transition

Section 1 contained an overview of the manufacturing industry and leaders in the business environment. This overview is the foundation for the study, leading to a statement of the business problem and the purpose of the study. Section 1 also included a proposal to use the qualitative research method and the multiple case study design to explore the leadership skills owners-managers need to survive beyond 5 years. The interview questions, the conceptual framework, the significance of the study, and the literature review are other elements of Section 1. The literature review entails a discussion on SMEs with an initial focus on the manufacturing industry, the definition of SMEs, as well as the contingency and skills-based the leadership models. Furthermore, the literature review includes a discussion of the leadership styles and leadership in SMEs. I also addressed the issues of business failure in the manufacturing industry and the factors related to the failure of SMEs.

Section 2 includes the purpose of the study and comprehensive explanations concerning the research study process. The process encompasses the research method and design, the role of the researcher, and the population and sampling approach. Section 2 also contains details regarding the data collection and analysis process and other aspects. The final elements of the section pertain to the validity and reliability of the study. A component of Section 3 is the application of the findings of the study to professional practice. Another aspect of Section 3 is implication of the findings for social change. Recommendations for action and further research, and reflections on this research experience also comprise components of Section 3. The final subcategories consist of the conclusion and the appendices identified in the preceding sections.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I describe the research process, techniques, and strategies, for exploring the leadership skills SME owners-managers used to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Commencing with a restatement of the purpose statement, I continue with discussions on (a) the role of the researcher, (b) the participants, (c) the research method and design, (d) the population, and (e) the sample. Section 2 also includes details regarding the ethical considerations of this study. The other areas of discussion in Section 2 are the data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization, and data analysis. I conclude Section 2 with an explanation of the reliability and validity strategies and techniques for this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership skills SME owners-managers need to ensure sustainability in the manufacturing industry beyond 5 years. Owners-managers of four SMEs in the Trinidad and Tobago manufacturing industry with more than 5 years of sustainability comprised the targeted population for this study. The findings of this study provide insights that owners-managers could use to improve or pursue development of their leadership skills and capabilities. With such development, owners-managers might enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of their businesses. The enhancement or improved practice of leadership skills could result in a reduction of the failure rate of SMEs and contribute to an increased employment rate in the local communities.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role involves designing the study, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting the findings (Yin, 2014). As the researcher, I collected data using semistructured interviews with owners-managers of four small-to-medium manufacturing businesses in Trinidad and Tobago. Data collection included direct observations of the interactions between owners-managers and employees at their work sites and the processes of their operations.

I have functioned at the senior leadership level for over 15 years and currently lead in the liquidation of an institution. The application of leadership skills in the role of manager is relevant to achieve the company's objectives; however, the topic on leadership skills that SME owners-managers need to survive beyond 5 years is not an

element of my current or past professional or social domain, with no working exposure or familiarity with issues related to the topic. As a native resident of Trinidad and Tobago, I had no direct relationship with the participants from the manufacturing industry for this study.

Ethical issues arise mainly because of the close interactions between the researcher and the participants of the study; therefore, researchers must be aware of the ethical challenges and take full responsibility to manage ethics in the research process (Greenwood, 2016; Khan, 2014). *The Belmont Report* outlined the guidelines and ethical principles for the protection of human rights in the conduct of research studies (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [USDHHS], 1979). The three basic ethical principles are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (USDHHS, 1979). Individuals should agree to participate in a study, and people, such as children, who cannot consent, have the right of protection (USDHHS, 1979). Beneficence is the avoidance of any form of harm to the participants as well as optimizing their benefits while mitigating any possible risk(s).

The researcher must also apply equitable treatment to all participants (USDHHS, 1979). I completed the National Institutes of Health web-based training on extramural research and developed an in-depth understanding of ethical consideration about the protection of human participants in the conduct of research. I received the Walden University Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval to conduct research before contacting potential participants to assure their rights and safety. Upon receiving IRB's approval, the owner-manager of each SME received a request to gain access to the

research site and to recruit them as participants. The media of contact included telephone calls and letters. Each potential participant also received an invitation to participate in the study. To ensure voluntary participation, I had participants sign a consent form at the time of the interview.

To reduce researcher bias, I used Yin's (2014) recommendation and identified my personal experiences, assumptions, and attitudes before starting the study. The researcher must be aware that personal bias may also exist during data collection and analysis (Orange, 2016). Managing researcher bias involved reflecting and recording any preconceptions, assumptions, and values in a journal before and during data collection.

I asked the same open-ended questions to each participant to address researcher bias in this study. I also refrained from prompting the participants and expressing personal opinions during the interview. The researcher should refrain from manipulating the participants' description of their experiences and use a reflexive diary to facilitate the reflection process to avoid bias (Orange, 2016). Member checking is also a strategy researchers use to mitigate personal bias while collecting and analyzing data (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). My application of this strategy involved owners-managers reviewing and verifying the interview transcripts for accuracy in the transcription as well as in my interpretation of what they communicated in the interview.

The researcher's role is also to ensure that the study includes processes and techniques to enhance validity and reliability (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). One useful technique I employed in this study was the interview protocol (see Appendix A). My rationale for using the interview protocol was to ensure the course of action for

conducting all phases of the interview and as a means to reinforce the application of

equitable treatment to all participants. The interview protocol is a guide with which a

researcher can assess each participant's experience related to the central research

question (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I developed an interview protocol for use during the

interviews. An interview protocol is also useful in reducing bias that may arise from the

researcher's prejudgment of the phenomenon (Diete-Spiff, 2015).

Participants

Identifying the target population is important for enhancing credibility and

coherence in the research (O. C. Robinson, 2014). The target population comprised of

owners-managers from four SMEs of the manufacturing industry located in Trinidad and

Tobago. Researchers must select potential participants who have knowledge and

experience regarding the topic of the research (Morse, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). The

selection criterion for participants in this study was owners-managers, 18 years of age or

older, who have more than 5 years experience leading a SME. Another criterion was that

the SME must be in operation for more than 5 years, conducting active business in

Trinidad and Tobago. The rationale for using these criteria was to collect information

from participants who had adequate experience regarding the phenomenon under study.

To ensure that the selection aligns with the overarching question, the researcher

establishes the criteria for participants' eligibility (Elo et al., 2014; Yin, 2014).

I accessed the names of potential SMEs from the website of the Trinidad and

Tobago Manufacturing Association. This website included organizations by the type of

business, with a comprehensive listing of manufacturers in Trinidad and Tobago

(Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturing Association, 2016). Each listing contained the names, type of manufacturing operations, business and e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers of possible manufacturing businesses that could participate in the study.

My initial contact with the owners-managers occurred after receiving approval from the IRB. I called or sent the owners-managers of four SMEs follow-up e-mails or a letter to introduce myself, to explain the purpose of the study, and to obtain permission to conduct research within their organizations (see Appendix A). An important practice in conducting research is to obtain approval from the official gatekeepers of an organization (Gelling, 2015). The owners-managers, who were also the potential participants, received a letter of invitation to participate in the study after granting permission to conduct the study in their organizations. The letter of participation included a request for the participants' consent to take part in a face-to-face interview and a brief statement about the process. Potential participants confirmed acceptance by telephone.

The ability to attract and engage participants is an essential element in the research process (Kornbluh, 2015). To establish a relationship with the participants, I communicated with them consistently and harmoniously via telephone or e-mail about appointment schedules or clarification of participants' concerns. During the initial telephone call, the potential participants also received an overview of the process, their voluntary involvement, and their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Establishing and building a relationship with the participant is an approach the researcher could pursue to encourage openness and the sharing of information about the topic (Burkett & Morris, 2015).

Relationship building also entailed conducting the interview at a place appropriate and convenient to the participant as well as the creation of an atmosphere that was comfortable and safe for the sharing of information. The interview setting should be conducive to openness in the sharing of information (Yin, 2014). Face-to-face communication allows eye contact between the interviewer and the interviewee, thereby providing the opportunity to assess nonverbal cues (Mitchell, 2015). To facilitate this type of communication, I conducted the interviews face-to-face instead of over the phone or by e-mail.

Full disclosure of the process and the objective of the study is an essential element of building trust with the participant (Burkett & Morris, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Before the commencement of the interview, I gave the participant repeated details about the purpose of the study and the interview process. I also allowed sufficient time for the participant to ask questions and to peruse and sign the consent form. Allowing the participant to become familiar with the interview process is another strategy for establishing a relationship and building trust (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The researcher and participant's mutual understanding of the purpose of the research is important to encourage trust and full participation in the interview (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Establishing trust could also facilitate the provision of accurate data from the participant (Burkett & Morris, 2015). Such data are useful in answering the research question and for ensuring validity in the research findings (Morse, 2015).

Issues regarding the disclosure of information might be a concern for participants, and this could impede the sharing of information and trust in the relationship (Donges,

2015). To foster trust, I assured the participants of the use of confidential measures during the data collection and analysis stages of the research. Applying measures to protect the interviewees' identities and the aggregation of research findings to demonstrate confidentiality were practices Yin (2014) recommended.

Research Method and Design

The research method and design are fundamental components of the research process and are essential in attaining reliable outcomes of a study (Garg, 2016). The primary factors researchers consider in selecting a research method and design are the nature of phenomenon and the research questions (Yin, 2014). Other aspects pertain to the worldview assumptions and personal experiences the researcher brings to the study (Ngulube, 2015). Three accepted and prominent approaches to conducting research in organizational studies are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Bernard, 2013).

Equally important is the researcher's choice of an appropriate research design that aligns with the method (Garg, 2016). For example, the designs for qualitative research are the case study, narrative, ethnography, and phenomenology (Willgens et al., 2016). In this section of my study, I discuss the research methods, the research design, and provide a rationale for selecting the qualitative multiple case approach.

Research Method

I used the qualitative research method to explore the leadership skills SME owners-managers in the manufacturing industry need to survive beyond 5 years. Researchers use qualitative approach to explore a phenomenon from the description and meanings people ascribe to their experiences (Thomas, Menon, Boruff, Rodriguez, &

Ahmed, 2014). The qualitative research method meets the need of a study when exploring research questions that require textural data (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). This method is also useful when statistical application is impossible in addressing the phenomenon (Cruz & Tantia, 2017).

Qualitative researchers seek to understand an individual's experience of a phenomenon by collecting data through interviews, observations, and review of documents (S. Campbell, 2014). My exploration of the survival of SMEs involved conducting semistructured interviews with owners-managers as the leaders of SMEs who sustained their businesses beyond 5 years. My focus was to interview participants to gain an in-depth understanding of the research question by using open-ended interview questions and probing to the point of data saturation. Unexpected themes that could be valuable to the research might emerge through the interview process (S. P. Ahmed & Ahmed, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). My intent was also to observe the relationship between the leaders and their followers as another means of collecting data to understand the phenomenon further.

The qualitative approach was appropriate for exploring and capturing a true understanding of leadership skills from the SME owners-managers who had firsthand experience and knowledge about SME businesses that survived beyond 5 years. The underlying paradigm of qualitative research is the concept of social constructivism (Ngulube, 2015). The construct and process of reality are fundamental aspects of social constructivism (Thomas et al., 2014). Social constructivists maintain that individuals

construct reality within the context of their interpretation and knowledge through interaction with others (Thomas et al., 2014).

Another feature of the qualitative method allows for a broader perspective on the issues related to a phenomenon because data collection involves contributions based on the perspectives of different participants (Bernard, 2013). Qualitative research meets the needs for exploring the experiences of human beings (S. Campbell, 2014). The rationale is that the researcher can obtain information from individuals who will construct and communicate the issues about their knowledge and direct experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The quantitative research approach did not meet the needs when exploring the phenomenon of this study. This research approach includes examination of a phenomenon to determine the causal associations among or between variables that are components of the study (Park & Park, 2016). Quantitative researchers formulate questions and hypotheses to direct and anchor the study (Bernard, 2013; Park & Park, 2016). Testing the hypotheses and establishing the existence of a phenomenon based on statistical evidence are the underlying premise of quantitative research (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). The quantitative approach includes the management of numerous variables relevant for studies requiring numerical measurements (Ngulube, 2015). In quantitative studies, researchers consider themselves as separate from the research process and focus on controlling variables and context to ensure objectivity in the study (Park & Park, 2016). The emphasis of understanding or analyzing a phenomenon from the point of the participants' experience makes the quantitative method ineffective for qualitative

exploration (Letourneau, 2015). My goal in this study was not to examine the relationship between leadership variables or to test hypotheses; therefore, the quantitative method was not in alignment with the objective of this research.

I also considered the mixed method approach for this study. The mixed method approach allows researchers the flexibility to design a single study in which they explore the phenomenon based on the perspective of the participants and the examination of the relationship between the measurable variables (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). Describing this method, Abro et al. (2015) expounded on the concurrent use of the techniques, philosophies, and methods applicable to quantitative and qualitative research to address the research question. The mixed method was unsuitable for this study because the emphasis in this study was to understand the phenomenon within the context of the participants' experiences and not to examine or compare variables based on statistical data.

Research Design

Researchers use case studies in organizational and social science research (R. Agarwal, Selen, Sajib, & Scerri, 2014). The aim of this research was to study a business issue of leadership skills in SMEs and the case study design supported the ability to explore the owner-managers' perspectives and experiences of this phenomenon. Case studies are appropriate for researching a contemporary phenomenon because the researchers can gather valuable features of events and simultaneously maintain the holistic context (Yin, 2014). The case study designs are suitable for exploring all the components, their interrelationships, and the contextual conditions that pertain to the

phenomenon of the study (Yin, 2014). Pivotal in case study design is the analysis and reporting of the data within the context of real-life rather than attempting to manipulate the context (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). The process of inquiry to illicit answers from the participants involved the use of open-ended question in a semistructured interview. Using an open-ended semistructured interview is one of the strategies in the case study design, for collecting data through direct communication with the participant (S. Campbell, 2014).

Research in case study involves single or multiple case studies (A. S. Singh, 2014; Yin, 2014). The aim in this study was to explore leadership skills among four SMEs of the manufacturing business sector. Researchers could apply a holistic or embedded technique to describe, explain, or understand a phenomenon in both single and multiple designs (Baškarada, 2014). The single case study design is suitable to understand an issue among subunits that are part of one case (Yin, 2014). Multiple case designs are useful for exploring the phenomenon between cases and understanding the similarities and differences of issues by case (Baškarada, 2014). Such comparison is useful because the researcher acquires a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' practices the concerning the phenomenon (Cruz, 2015). Yin (2014) advanced that the multiple case design is also valuable for literal replication. The researcher obtains more in-depth and breadth of details of the attributes and outcomes associated with the phenomenon (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The multiple case study design was adequate to answer the overarching research question concerning the leadership skills owners-managers need for their businesses to operate beyond 5 years.

Three other approaches to qualitative research design are narrative, ethnography, and phenomenological (Willgens et al., 2016). The narrative approach of inquiry involves exploration through the chronological narration of the life stories and experiences of individuals (Birchall, 2014; Juntunen, 2014). In the narrative design, the researcher explores the reality of a phenomenon, focusing specifically on the events as they happened in the lives of the individuals (S. N. Khan, 2014). This design did not align with the aim of exploring leadership skills in an organizational system versus understanding a phenomenon through the life story of specific individuals. The chronological dimension of the narrative approach was not useful in enhancing the data collection, analysis, or interpretation of this research inquiry.

The researcher uses the ethnography design to develop an understanding of the cultural behaviors of a group by interacting within the group, interviewing and observing members over a prolonged period (S. Campbell, 2014). This design involved interpreting a phenomenon through the shared beliefs, behaviors, and experiences of a group in its environment (Reich, 2014). Exploring the leadership skills owner-managers in SMEs use did not require a determination of the cultural beliefs and practices of the SME community. Cultural immersion is dominant in the ethnographic design, making this approach inappropriate for this study of leadership in SMEs of the manufacturing industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Another option was consideration of the phenomenological design. This research design involves interpreting the meaning of a phenomenon through the lived experiences of individuals (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). The intent, for this study, was to understand

the leadership skills that owners-managers practice in a real-life context rather than to understand the phenomenon based on the participants' lived experiences. The fundamental elements of the phenomenological design did not meet the need for obtaining a contextual view of leadership in SMEs.

Saturation is a technique researchers apply for guaranteeing that the data they collect to support a study are adequate and meet the quality criteria of research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Sample size consideration is essential in ensuring that the researcher collects an extensive volume of information and points of view regarding the research topic (Yin, 2014). Generally, participants who experienced a phenomenon, provide comprehensive responses that lead to data saturation (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). The sample included owners-managers from four SMEs of Trinidad and Tobago's manufacturing industry. Concerning multiple case studies, Yin (2014) stated a minimum of two cases might be adequate to gather comprehensive information.

The strategy for this study was to conduct semistructured interviews with the owners-managers of four different SMEs. To achieve data saturation the study included interviews of the four owners-managers until no new themes emerged. Data saturation is present when the introduction of new information ceases with additional interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Using the semistructured approach in a case study of job creation in small manufacturing businesses, Bischoff and Wood (2013) achieved saturation after 15 interviews. In another study on networking and marketing in small firms, O'Donnell (2014) confirmed the occurrence of data saturation after two participants. To enhance data saturation, I spent time at the workplace observing the interaction between the

owners-managers of the SMEs to obtain additional information. Direct observation is acceptable to achieve saturation in qualitative research (Houghton et al., 2013).

Population and Sampling

The target population included firms that aligned with the selection criteria of being an SME and conducting business for more than 5 years in the manufacturing industry in Trinidad and Tobago. Owners-managers 18 years of age, with more than 5 years leading the business operations of their SMEs, were the participants targeted for this research. The aim was to select a sample from the population; the sample consisted of SMEs and the owners-managers who met the criteria for participating in the study. Defining the target population is a primary step in the sampling stage of research (Hayat, 2013). The target population is the entire body of individuals from which the researcher chooses sample cases for the study (Garg, 2016). O. C. Robinson (2014) suggested that researchers inclusion and exclusion criteria as specification of boundaries for the target population.

The sampling strategy was purposeful selection of participants. This sampling technique involves grouping individuals by the criteria the researcher defined before the selection of the participants (O. C. Robinson, 2014). The rationale for choosing this strategy was to gather explicit and rich details from persons who experienced leadership during and beyond the period identified in the criteria. In purposeful sampling, the researchers apply their judgment to select participants based on the criteria of the study (Weller et al., 2018). An important consideration in my selection of participants was interest in participants who have the most relevant knowledge, through practice, about

leadership skills in SMEs. Purposeful sampling also involves the selection of participants capable of providing rich descriptions of their perspectives, experiences, and practices related to the study problem (Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, 2014). One means of enhancing the validity of a study is through information from persons who practice the phenomenon of the study (O. C. Robinson, 2014). Another consideration was the selection of participants willing to participate in the study and to communicate their experience about the phenomenon

The sample size included four SMEs with the owners-managers of these firms as the participants for the semistructured interviews. Researchers using the qualitative method focus on a sample size from which they can gather rich data and an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Weller et al., 2018). Varied views exist concerning the selection of an adequate sample for qualitative research, including case studies (Boddy, 2016). A sample size is appropriate if the participants can adequately address the research question, with a focus on the depth of data versus the frequency of appearance of the data (Gentles et al., 2015).

The adequacy of a small sample size depends on the degree of certainty the researcher aims to secure in a multiple case study (Yin, 2014). Noteworthy is Yin's (2014) suggestion that a sample size of two to three might be suitable where the question or theory is straightforward while a sample size of six or more might suffice for a study in which the researcher requires a high level of certainty. In qualitative research, the focus is on richness and credibility of the information (Bernard, 2013). Appropriateness and adequacy are the main considerations in determining the sample size (Boddy, 2016).

Achieving saturation is a fundamental condition in choosing a sample size (M. S. Evans, 2014). Advocating that the researcher needs to include theoretical and practical aspects in their consideration of an appropriate sample size, O. C. Robinson (2014) promoted the concept of flexibility in sample size selection. An alternative approach in determining the sample size is to indicate an approximate range at the design stage of the study plan rather than a fixed number (O. C. Robinson, 2014). The research question of the leadership skills owner-managers of SMEs need to survive beyond 5 years is straightforward. I identified a sample size of four SMEs with the view of obtaining data saturation and an increased level of certainty.

I continued in-depth interviews with the participants to the point of redundancy or data saturation. The use of a sample size of four owners-managers from four SMEs, along with the methodological triangulation of semistructured interviews and observation facilitated the achievement of data saturation for this study. Achieving data saturation is possible through interviews and data triangulation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The point of saturation is when no new themes emerge with subsequent interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A direct relationship exists between estimating a sample size and the concept of data saturation (Boddy, 2016). The researcher decides about adequacy of the sample based on the notion of saturation (M. S. Evans, 2014). Another criterion of qualitative research is the use of a sample size that allows the researcher to adequately explore the research question of the study (Boddy, 2016).

Ensuring that the interview setting is comfortable is crucial in creating an atmosphere to foster the participants' confidence, enthusiasm, and eagerness to share

their experiences (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014). The anxiety and fears of participants are fewer when the interviews take place in familiar surroundings (Dikko, 2016). I conducted the interviews at the business locations of the participants or another venue that was conducive to their comfort, and familiarity. Participants increase the probability to disclose their experiences when they are comfortable in the environment and with the interviewer (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Ethical Research

Qualitative researchers must comprehend and consider the issues of integrity, ethics, and honesty in all aspects of their research (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). I completed the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research web-based training and gained an understanding of the ethical issues that affect participants while conducting research. To demonstrate compliance with ethical practices, participants received initial communication for the research only after the IRB approved the application to conduct research. Communication included an invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix C). The letter of participation included the IRB Approval Number 10-12-17-0256814. Researchers' obligation also includes adhering to ethical principles and practices before and while conducting the research (USDHHS, 1979; Wallace & Sheldon, 2015).

Once the participant agreed to participate in the study, by responding via telephone, I consulted with the individual to conduct the interview. Participants received a consent form to sign at the time of the interview. The consent form included the purpose of the study, the right to participate voluntarily, the option to withdraw at any

time, protection of the participant's right to privacy, and the risks and benefits of taking part in the study. Each participant received time to review the consent form before the commencement of the interview. I also ensured the participant had sufficient time to ask and receive clarification on any information in the consent form or any matter related to the study. One of the ethical obligations in conducting research is to provide adequate information about the study to ensure the targeted participant can independently determine his or her participation in the research (USDHHS, 1979).

The consent form also contained contact information of a Walden University's representative whom the participant could contact to discuss the rights relating to their involvement in the study. Affixing a signature to the form demonstrated the participant's and my agreement to pursue the interview following the terms identified in the document. Informed consent is an integral stage of the ethical process in research with social and cultural issues, participants' perceptions, and their comprehension of the process as requirements of reflection for the researcher (Naanyu, Some, & Siika, 2014). The underlying premise of informed consent is that the participant is aware and agrees to provide data to the researcher and also understands the impact on him or her in providing such information (Gelling, 2015). A primary approach to enhance the ethical standards is to explore the participant's understanding of the process (Kornbluh, 2015). The researcher should facilitate the process by providing both oral and written description of the informed consent to the participant (Naanyu et al., 2014).

An ethical step in conducting research is the engagement of individuals willing to participate in the study (USDHHS, 1979). I only recruited and continued the study with

persons willing to participate voluntarily in the process. Inclusive in the informed consent process, was notice to the participants of their right to withdraw before or during the study. In their review of the emergent nature of qualitative research, Gibson et al. (2013) iterated the researcher's role in ensuring that participants right to withdraw from the process at any time. At the beginning the interview, participants had the option to voluntarily withdraw at any time, without any penalty attached. Researchers should communicate this option to participants before the interview (A. S. Singh, 2014).

An issue that researchers should consider when recruiting participants is that of offering incentives (Chen, Lei, Li, Huang, & Mu, 2015; O. C. Robinson, 2014). The use of incentives might increase the possibility of participation and motivation of participants; however, ethical issues may also arise from offering incentives (O. C. Robinson, 2014). For example, the participant may represent an experience in a manner that appears acceptable to the researcher, but is incongruent with reality (O. C. Robinson, 2014). Despite the importance of recruiting participants, Chen et al. (2015) and O. C. Robinson (2014) noted that incentives are not mandatory in conducting research, and the researcher should explore opportunities to obtain a sample from sources where the practice does not apply. The intention was not to give any incentives to participants; however, I will follow O.C. Robinson's alternative suggestion of providing the participants with a summary report of the findings of the study.

USDHHS (1979) addressed the concept of beneficence as an ethical issue researchers need to consider when conducting research that requires the involvement of human beings. Beneficence involves ensuring a balance between possible benefits and

risks of a study (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). If no benefits exist to the participants, the

probable risks must fall within a level ethically acceptable (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015).

The researcher should seek to mitigate risks by practicing the principles of beneficence,

with a primary focus on the participant's safety and overall welfare throughout the

research (McDermid, Peters, Jackson, & Daly, 2014; USDHHS, 1979). The anticipation

is that the information from this study will be useful in understanding the leadership skills

that SMEs need to survive beyond 5 years. The information might be valuable for the

development of owners-managers. There were no apparent risks to the safety of

participants. The consent form contains the benefit of this study and its contribution to

the survival of SMEs.

One of the strategies was to minimize or eliminate participants' anxiety by

consulting with them concerning an appropriate location and time for the interview. I also

monitored such cues as the participants' facial expression, modulation in the tone of

voice, and body language that signaled any level of discomfort. Creating and managing

the participant's level of comfort during the interview, involves active listening and

paying close attention to the participant's physical and emotional cues (Doody &

Noonan, 2013). Avoidance and minimization of circumstances that could affect the

participants physically or emotionally are important ethical practices (Newman & Glass,

2014). The protection of participants from adverse effects of participating in the research

and respectful and fair treatment of the research participants are ethical principles that a

researcher must enforce in the research process (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015).

To demonstrate confidentiality, I secured all information from the interview on a password-protected computer with access restricted only to me. All information will remain secure and confidential in a locked filing cabinet. Maintaining the confidentiality and storage of personal data are ethical issues to address and document in the research process (Johnson, 2014). The duration of data storage will be for 5 years. At the end of the storage period, data disposal shall involve destroying all confidential documents, forms, and journals linked to the study.

One of the primary responsibilities of the researcher when conducting research is consideration for the participants' privacy and security of data (Gibson et al., 2013). I ensured the ethical treatment of the participants by giving equal protection and consideration to all names and personal data received during the study. The measures to establish ethical protection were using a coded reference for the identification of each participant, confidential classification of electronic data and hard copy documents, and identifying participants by codes in the results of the study. Protection of participants' identification consisted of an acronym such as P1-P4. Gibson et al. (2013) included confidentiality and anonymity as core requirements of ethical research. The role of the researcher is to ensure the ethical protection of the participant including maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, accurately reporting the information the participant presented, and creating an ambiance of comfort during data collection process of the study (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Anonymity was not a consideration in this study because data collection involved face-to-face contact with the participant while conducting semistructured interviews.

Data Collection Instruments

I served as the primary research instrument by collecting data directly from each participant using face-to-face semistructured interviews and direct onsite observations of the interaction between the owners-managers and their employees. An important aspect of qualitative research is the use of an instrument that facilitates the collection of valid and reliable data from interviews, examination of documents, and sample observation (Yin, 2014). The researcher assumes the role of the data collection instrument in a qualitative interview with responsibility for curtailing ethical challenges and collecting data that relates specifically to the topic of the study (Hurst et al., 2015). As an instrument, the researcher can explore and obtain a deeper insight into the participant's experience and perspective of the phenomenon (Kaczynski, Salmona, & Smith, 2014). Assuming the role of data collection instrument, the researcher could also exercise some degree of adaptability and flexibility as opportunities arise for deeper exploration of emerging issues (Yin, 2014).

The second data collection instrument was in the form of face-to-face semistructured interviews with each participant. The primary focus of conducting the semistructured interviews for this study was to obtain reliable information that would form the basis for the interpretation and conclusion of the research question: What leadership skills do owners-managers of SMEs in the manufacturing industry need to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years? Conducting interviews is a common approach for gathering data in qualitative research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Semistructured interviews facilitate the preparation of questions before the interview and at the same

time allow the interviewer some flexibility to the extent of probing for additional information (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Rowley, 2012). Researchers use semistructured face-to-face interviews to achieve more interaction with and to elicit depth of information from participants who experienced the phenomenon (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

I developed an interview protocol of procedures and scripts to use in the interview process (see Appendix A). Inclusive in the interview protocol were seven open-ended questions that I posed to each participant to address the research question. The protocol is a valuable tool the researcher could follow as a procedural guide in directing the interview (Stålberg & Fundin, 2016). Researchers could use this tool to keep their focus on the research topic and the procedures they need to follow during and after the interview (Yin, 2014). Emphasizing the importance of an interview protocol in a multiple case design, Yin (2014) posited that this tool is one of the primary means of enhancing the reliability of a study.

Direct observation, at each participant's place of business, was the other secondary data collection instrument used for this research. The rationale for selecting direct observation as a collection instrument was to gain insight into the owners-managers' relationship with employees and the processes of their organization. Direct observation is an opportunity to collect data about a phenomenon as it occurs in reality and within a context (Baškarada, 2014; A. S. Singh, 2014; Yin, 2014). I developed an observation protocol as a guide in observing the interactions and organizational environment of the case study (see Appendix B). Note taking and reflection were also aspects of the observation process.

I enhanced reliability and validity of the data collection instrument and process by using member checking techniques, data source triangulation, and consistent application of the interview protocol across all cases. Member checking is the process in which the researcher shares the interview transcripts with the research participant to solicit feedback on the accuracy of the researcher's transcription and interpretation of the responses provided at the interview (Koch et al., 2014). The participant should have the opportunity to review and acknowledge the contents of the transcript and respond appropriately (Houghton et al., 2013). Participants received an e-mail copy of their transcribed interview responses to verify the accuracy of interpretations and to participate in a follow-up interview.

Data source triangulation strengthens the validity of research findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The principle of triangulation applied to this study was collecting data from semistructured interviews and direct observation. Consistency to enhance validity and reliability involved following the interview protocol with each participant. The application of consistency in data collection is important for establishing credibility, and by extension reliability and validity of the instrument (Morse, 2015).

Data Collection Technique

Researchers use different collection techniques to acquire data from primary and secondary sources in their inquiry of a phenomenon (Choudre & Culkin, 2013). The researcher evaluates data to formulate an answer to the research question. Data collection is an important component of the research process for evaluation of data (A. S. Singh, 2014). Six sources of data collection for case studies comprise documents, interviews,

direct observation, participant-observation, archival records, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2014).

Using more than one data collection technique is a strategy researchers can adopt to reduce biases, to obtain rigor, and to secure diversity of empirical evidence for analysis of the phenomenon (Baškarada, 2014). The focus was to understand the phenomenon by communicating directly with individuals who have the experience and knowledge in leading their SMEs that survived beyond 5 years. Conducting interviews was one of the approaches used to acquire a full account of the phenomenon under study. Another approach was direct observation of the participants' interaction with employees and customers at their workplace. Direct interaction with individuals is an avenue to secure rich and pertinent data, giving voice to the participants and flexibility to the researcher in exploring unexpected themes that may emerge and are important to the topic (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

An integral segment of the data collection progress is the participants' consent of his/her involvement in the research prior the gathering of data (Gelling, 2015). This consent is a demonstration of the researcher's compliance to the ethical requirement in conducting the study. The data collection process involved the issuance of a consent form to the interviewee for review and approval signature. Inclusive in the consent form were the purpose of the study, the right to participate voluntarily, and the option to withdraw at any time. The consent form must comprise sufficient and clarity of information for the researcher's comprehension and decision in providing data for the study (Naanyu et al., 2014).

Primary data collection involved the use of face-to-face semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to elicit in-depth and rich information from four owner-managers who have the knowledge and experience in leading their SMEs in survival beyond 5 years in the manufacturing industry. The semistructured format of the interview and the face-to-face element are dominant data collection techniques in the field of qualitative research involving synchronous communication in time and space (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). One of the advantages of semistructured interviews is that the researcher could develop questions surrounding predetermined themes with sufficient flexibility to allow spontaneous discussions and probing to clarify explanations during the interview (Doody & Noonan, 2013). I conducted the interview according to the guidelines of the interview protocol (see Appendix A), using the same collection tools, format, questions, and introductory and closing remarks for each participant. Rigor is apparent in the study with the application of consistent techniques and approaches across interviews (Cronin, 2014; McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Each interview took place at a time and venue acceptable to the participant, suitable for private and confidential dialogue. Respectful and fair treatment of the research participants is an ethical principle that a researcher must enforce in collecting data (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). All interviews commenced with brief and courteous remarks to establish a rapport and to make the participant comfortable. The introductory remarks entailed an overview of the process to the participants and allowed for clarification of any aspect of the interview. A key consideration in conducting interviews is the creation of an atmosphere in which the participant feels safe, uninterrupted, and

comfortable to share his or her experience (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Another primary consideration in the data collection process was the duration of each interview. The period of interviews was approximately 45 to 60 minutes, comprising seven open-ended questions. An appropriate duration of an interview is a maximum of 60 minutes (Basias & Pollalis, 2018).

Data collection included digital audiotaping of the interviews to ensure the accuracy of the participants' responses. Audiotaping is important to maintain an accurate report of the interview (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013; Naanyu et al., 2014). Redundancy efforts consisted of two digital recorders to address the occurrence of a malfunction of the equipment. Researchers must ensure that the equipment for collecting data, during the interview, is of high quality (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The other data collection technique involved taking notes for clarification of responses and reflection of my preconceptions, assumptions, and values. The researcher could document information in the form of notes during and after the interview (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

Consideration for the participants' privacy and security of data is a fundamental requirement in conducting research (Gibson et al., 2013). To achieve this objective, I secured all information from the interview on a password-protected computer with access restricted only to me. Data storage also includes securing all interview documents and devices in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years. I assured the participants about the confidentiality of the information they provided during and after the process.

Face-to-face administration of semistructured interviews includes verbal and non-verbal communication, thereby allowing for optimization of the communication component of data collection (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). To enhance the collection of data, I used face-to-face interviews. This data collection technique is a useful tool for responding to physical discomfort, confusion, or any distress the interviewee might demonstrate during the interview (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The opportunity to explore data from different perspectives and the openness for new ideas are enriching features of semistructured interviews (A. S. Singh, 2014). Semistructured interviewing is an enabler for the development of a relationship between the researcher and the participant (Doody & Noonan, 2013). This form of interviewing allows for instant clarification on issues the researcher or participant may wish to address about the study (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

A combination of multiple data collection techniques is acceptable in qualitative case study research (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Singh, 2014). The use of multiple means to collect data is a strategy researchers use to enhance the credibility of the data (Yin, 2014). Observation inquiry involves an approach that is nonparticipant or participant (Houghton et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). In nonparticipant observation, the researcher watches, takes notes and refrains from involvement in any of the organization's activities or interaction with the participants (Gelling, 2015). By contrast, in participant observation, the researcher interacts with the participants (Salmon, 2015). In addition to semistructured interviews, I gathered data through direct observation at the sites of four SMEs, using the nonparticipant method. The use of both data collection approaches is evidence of data triangulation and a way of validating the data, minimizing the bias that

could derive from using one source of inquiry for empirical evidence (Choudre & Culkin, 2013; De Massis, & Kotlar, 2014). Direct observation has the advantage of capturing real-life data in a social setting; allowing the researcher to gain rich insights into different aspects of the organization that might be relevant to the study (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014).

A possible downside of the semistructured interview is that in some instances novice researchers may not capture relevant data because of their inexperience to recognize opportunities for probing and prompting (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Another drawback is the potential for power shifts between the interviewer and the interviewee during the interview (Anyan, 2013). For example, the researcher initiates and manages the interview process; however, Anyan (2013) advanced that the participant may opt to redirect the emphasis of the interview or exit the interview. I managed potential power imbalance by constantly examining the interview process and identifying the manifestation of any power manipulation between the interviewee and myself. Management of such manipulation involved repeating the interview question and refocusing the interview. The researcher's awareness and reflection of the dynamics he or she injects in the process are other strategies to minimize power imbalance in an interview (Anyan, 2013).

A problem that could arise when using the semistructured interview is the researcher's interjection of explicit or covert statements that connote personal opinions; such behavior could influence the participant's answer (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The potential to introduce bias in a study because of the poor construction of questions and

participants' basing their responses on personal interpretation are also limitations of semistructured interviews (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Using the multiple case study design, I collected data from participants who functioned in different organizations. Interviewing owners-managers from four SMEs is one of the approaches used to minimize bias. The cost of time and travel to conduct the interview may be exorbitant, highlighting another weakness of face-to-face interviews (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Cost was not a challenge in the data collection phase of this study.

There were also potential challenges in collecting data using the observation technique. Data collection through observation is time-consuming and costly (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Another challenge is that the live events might not reflect the normal practice or behavior because of participants' awareness that observation is in progress (Salmon, 2015). In this research, observation of participants for 8 hours was time consuming and a challenge because of the location of the SMEs.

I did not use a pilot study for this research because of the size of the targeted population. Researchers conduct pilot studies to evaluate the viability of the proposed research or as a guide for determining elements that are essential for the main study (Gelling, 2015). An important consideration in deciding to use a pilot study is that normally the sample sizes are too small to distinguish differences (Watson, 2016).

Researchers may use member checking to establish the validity and accuracy of the information they collected during the research interviews (Koch et al., 2014). Member checking allows the participant to validate the researcher's interpretation of the responses that the participant provided during the interview (Cope, 2014; Leko, 2014).

After transcribing the responses and documenting observations, the member checking process commenced by providing each participant with a copy of the transcript for review and discussions at the follow-up interview. Member checking involved restating the interview questions and the audiotaped responses to the participants to verify the accuracy of the information. Furthermore, the participants received a summary of the information from the first interview to verify the interpretation I ascribed to the responses. Each participant had sufficient time to peruse, to confirm, or disagree with the information in the transcript. I clarified and added information in the transcript that the participant identified. The participant's verification and acceptance of the researcher's interpretation of the responses are important to confirm the validity and truthfulness of the information (Leko, 2014).

Data Organization Technique

Data organization is an essential aspect of research for ease of access and retrieval of data to ensure the confidentiality of participants (Gale et al., 2013). This facet of the research process also ensures the efficient protection of information related to the study (Houghton et al., 2013). Efficient organization and documentation of data is an approach for enhancing the reliability of the study (Yin, 2014).

Data organization for this study began with the capture of data and information using stationary (notepads and audio tape) for taking notes, and computer applications (Microsoft Word, Excel, and NVivo 10 software). I maintained notes of personal reflections, observations of participants' nonverbal cues during the interview, and other matters related to the study using the stationary. Organizing data in the notepads, by

categories, facilitated ease of retrieval. For example, all notes related to the

semistructured interviews in one diary, by case and participant. Organizing data in the

form of notes is a common practice that researchers follow (Orange, 2016; Shek & Wu,

2013). Structuring case study notes by categories facilitates ease of tracking and retrieval

(Yin, 2014).

A primary element of the data organization process included protecting the

identity of participants using labeling. The process involved assigning an alphanumeric

label to each participant, with P representing participant and from 1 to 4 signifying the

number of participants. This study included the use of a naming convention for the

identification of electronic and manual filing and storage of data. The use of pseudonyms

to protect the identity of research participants is an acceptable ethical practice in the field

of qualitative research (Khan, 2014).

Another approach to achieve such protection for subjects of the study is the use of

coding (Donges, 2015). I transcribed audio-recorded data from the interviews using

Microsoft Word and tracked all activities and documents by the case that relates to the

research, using Microsoft Excel. Storage includes the use of a locked filing cabinet for all

hard copy interview data, journals, notes, and any other documents. The use of this

storage strategy is to protect the confidentiality and privacy of participants. Another

storage and protection measure involved securing all electronic data: transcripts, coded

interview material, and contact information for each participant on a password-protected

computer and external hard drive. The participant's confidentiality and privacy is an

ethical issue, which researchers must consider and protect in qualitative research (Gibson

et al., 2013; S. N. Khan, 2014; Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). No other individual has access to the locked cabinet, the password-protected computer, and the external hard drive. I will keep all data for a minimum of 5 years, after which, I will shred the electronic data and paper documents. Security of data is another primary responsibility of the researcher (Ruivo, Santos, & Oliveira, 2014)

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative study entails working with the research data to determine patterns and themes relevant in answering the central research question (Miles et al., 2014; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). A manifestation of the participants' perspectives of the phenomenon becomes apparent from the analysis of the data (Nassaji, 2015). The primary objective of the researcher in analyzing the data is to interpret the meaning of the data that the researcher gathered and its relationship, if any, to the research question (Gelling, 2015).

The focus in conducting the data analysis for this study was to determine the findings for presentation and inclusion of the results in the final research report. Data analysis forms the basis for presenting the results of the research, necessary for arriving at conclusions based on empirical evidence (Baškarada, 2014; Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015). I analyzed the data using the methodological triangulation process of scrutinizing and comparing data from semistructured interviews and direct observation of the participants of each case. Methodological triangulation is the collection and analysis of data from more than one source, which could include, but not limited to, interviews, field notes, and observation (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014;

Cope, 2014). The aim was to corroborate the evidence from participants' responses and their observed behavior regarding the research question of the leadership skills owners-managers of SMEs need to survive beyond 5 years. Additionally, the purpose of using the triangulation process was to ensure completeness of the data in the analysis stage of this research. Triangulation is beneficial for substantiating the existence of a phenomenon (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The analysis of multiple sources of evidence is a means of enhancing the value of data that the researcher collected from one source (Houghton et al., 2015; Yin, 2014).

Commencement of the data analysis process involved familiarization with the transcripts from the audio-recorded interviews, field notes from direct observation, and other reflexive notes. Familiarization with the data is essential for understanding, interpreting, and collating the themes and meanings within and across cases (Donges, 2015; Gale et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2015). The researcher gains a holistic sense of what the participants said and demonstrated concerning the research question by reading the data meticulously and at different times (Gale et al., 2013). Familiarization is a crucial phase in the interpretation of the collected data (Gale et al., 2013). The steps in the data analysis consisted of examining and interpreting the symbolic and meaningful content of the transcript and other data through coding of key words and phrases, loading data into computerized software for analysis, identifying themes that emerge from the data, and categorizing themes within and across cases.

I analyzed the data following the analytical strategies Miles and Huberman (1994) outlined and the cognitive processes Morse (1994) proposed. Miles and Huberman's

strategies entail coding, pattern matching, interpreting, and summarizing the data. Four stages the researcher could apply sequentially in analyzing data from multiple sources include: comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing (Morse, 1994). Other data analysis approaches that qualitative researchers use, and which entails the application of similar strategies are the framework analysis approach and the content analysis approach (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014; Gale et al., 2013). Using a multiple case example, Houghton et al. (2015) supported Morse's and Miles and Huberman's approach to data analysis.

In the comprehending stage of the analysis process, I applied Miles and Huberman's (1994) strategy of broad coding to the interview and observational data, connecting the codes to the research question. My intent was to classify the broad coding by case. Coding refers to the assignment of labels to related words, phrases, or paragraphs (Gale et al., 2013; Miles et al., 2014). The assignment of codes to blocks of data allows the researcher to discover patterns and themes that reoccur within and across cases (Miles et al., 2014). The use of broad coding is for the researcher to identify and establish concepts from the thoughts and meanings in the texts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Broad coding, according to Houghton et al. (2015) is not content specific but is a wide-ranging sphere in which the researcher can develop codes inductively. After applying broad codes to the data, by case, I merged the results of the initial coding to depict common patterns across cases.

Applying Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach in the synthesizing stage, the study included organizing and coding the data based on patterns and themes of

similarities or dissimilarities. Explanatory codes are inferential for pattern matching and appropriate for generating an analysis that is more meaningful (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Another synthesizing strategy is the formulation of memos articulating the primary information that the researcher obtained from the coding system (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Constructing memos or executive summaries for each theme or pattern of the interview or observed data was one of the activities in the data analysis process. Houghton et al. (2015) supported this approach.

The next step of analyzing the information I provided an all-inclusive and logical explanation of the data. In this stage, the primary focus is to analyse the common themes, if any, between the groups or categories of data (Gale et al., 2013). To attain a more integrated comprehension of the analysis, I followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) proposal of disintegrating and organizing the memos and testing the data noted in the executive summaries. This proposal also facilitates comparative analysis across the case sites in the study and the participant's views of the phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process is beneficial for linking participants' views from the interviews and the understanding derived from the observational data (Houghton et al., 2015). Recontextualizing the information involves providing coherent explanations of the themes and patterns that the researcher found in the data (Morse, 1994).

The use of traditional methods to manage qualitative data analysis can be time-consuming and laborious (Houghton et al., 2015). Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software is a valuable tool that researchers could use for management of information in the data analysis process (Gale et al., 2013; Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le,

2014). I used NVivo 11, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, to code, categorize, and build hierarchies of themes that provide meaningful insights related to the use of leadership skills and the survival of SMEs in the manufacturing industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

NVivo is a software tool developed for data analysis in qualitative research designs to facilitate coding large volume of textual data in nodes, showing commonalities, if any, between and among the thematic nodes (Castleberry, 2014). NVivo software allows the user to import information from the source application into the system to manipulate and organize the data into categories and hierarchical order as well as, conduct queries (Zamawe, 2015). Using the software is one method of enhancing the reliability and increase the productivity level in the analysis of large amounts of data from the interviews (Sotiriadou, et al., 2014). Using NVivo enables the ability to add codes during data analysis to the point of saturation (Jørgensen, Friis, & Koch, 2015).

An important element was to establish the correlation, if any, between the conceptual framework and the findings of the study. Fiedler's (1964) contingency model of leadership and Mumford et al.'s (2000) skills-based model of leadership served as the foundation to explore the use of leadership skills for the survival of SMEs. The premise of Fiedler's theory is that a leader's effectiveness depends on his or her ability to adjust the leadership style in accordance with a situation and people. Shaping Mumford et al.'s model is the idea that the leader's effectiveness depends on the skills he or she practices.

The data analysis consisted of identifying key themes relating to Fiedler's (1964) contingency model of leadership and Mumford et al.'s (2000) skills-based model of

leadership. I correlated the themes from the collected data about leader effectiveness, leadership style, and leadership practices based on the contingency model of leadership. Additionally, data analysis was useful in deepening the understanding of the relationship between the skills-based model of leadership and SME owners' skills and ability to solve problems for sustainability beyond 5 years. I anchored the analysis within the field of leadership and the survival of SME, focusing on themes to determine any gap in the current literature and for use the information in the presentation for future research.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity form the framework for determining consistency and trustworthiness in a study (Anney, 2014; Sousa, 2014). In qualitative research, qualitative researchers use the concepts of dependability, creditability, transferability, and confirmability to establish rigour and to demonstrate the existence of a credible alignment between the data and the findings of the study (Kaczynski et al., 2014). Data saturation is another approach researchers use to enhance riguor and validity in qualitative research (Anney, 2014).

Reliability

The concept of dependability relates to the stability and consistency of the research data and the process of the study over time and under different conditions (Anney, 2014). The researcher should provide sufficient evidence of consistency to convince the reader that replication of the study across different methods and researchers would generate similar findings (Hadi & Closs, 2016). In developing a rigorous

qualitative research design, the researcher must demonstrate the existence of a credible alignment between the data and the findings of the study (Kaczynski et al., 2014).

Common strategies for addressing dependability in a study include an audit trail of field notes, reflexivity, and member checking (Anney, 2014; Morse, 2015). The strategies employed to demonstrate dependability in this research were member checking, reflexivity, and the use of the interview and observation protocol. During the member checking process, participants affirmed the accuracy and completeness of the transcribed responses and summary of the first interview. This affirmation was useful in reinforcing the authenticity of the findings. Member checking, commonly used in data analysis, involves the participant's verification and feedback of the information in the interview transcript (Anney, 2014; Koch et al., 2014).

Reflexivity involved continuous reflection and recording of my perceptions, feelings, and actions during all phases of the research process. Recording also included the rationale for any decisions regarding changes in the study. Reflexivity relates to the researcher's reflection on their personal biases, as well as professional and theoretical orientations to the phenomenon under study (Koch et al., 2014). The application of reflexivity during the design and data collection phases is meaningful for transparency in the research process (Darawsheh, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013).

Another approach to address dependability is providing a full description of the research methods and designs of the study throughout the study. To establish consistency in data collection, I documented the guidelines in the interview protocol (see Appendix A) for conducting each semistructured interview and in the observation protocol (see

Appendix B) for observational activities at each case site. Documentation of the case study procedure is another strategy to establish dependability (Baškarada, 2014; A. S. Singh, 2014).

Validity

One of the primary responsibilities of researchers is to verify the trustworthiness inherent in the process and findings of their studies (Elo et al., 2014; Sousa, 2014). Rigor and relevance are important elements a researcher must consider when conducting a study (Munir, Moayyed, & Petersen, 2014). Validity in qualitative research refers to the suitability of the research instruments, the methodology, the designs, and the data for exploring the phenomenon of the study (Dikko, 2016). Validity also pertains to the congruency of the research results and conclusions about reality (Dikko, 2016).

Credibility. Credibility denotes the truthfulness of the data and involves the researcher interpreting and representing the data from the perspective of the participants (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). Some strategies researchers employ to support credibility are triangulation, prolonged engagement and observation in the field, and member checking (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). I used triangulation by comparing the participant's responses and observing their interaction with workers and other stakeholders to ensure credibility in this research.

The different types of triangulation are data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theoretical triangulation, thematic triangulation, and methodological triangulation (Cope, 2014; Kaczynski et al., 2014). I used methodological triangulation by collecting data through semistructured interviews, direct observations and comparing

the data collected within and among cases. The researcher enhances the validity of the study with the introduction of triangulation in the research (Anney, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Othman & Rahman, 2014).

Triangulation reflects the researcher's effort to secure an in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon of the research (Hadi & Closs, 2016). Methodical triangulation is the use of multiple qualitative methods in a study (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). The use of methodological triangulation at the data collection stage involves the application of different collection techniques (A.S. Singh, 2014). The process involves the use of more than one data source, data collection approaches, or researcher to confirm the analysis and interpretation of the results of a study (Anney, 2014; Cope, 2014). Two primary objectives for using triangulation in a study are to validate the findings, and to determine completeness of the data used in the research (Kaczynski et al., 2014; Koch et al., 2014).

Prolonged engagement involved spending 45 to 60 minutes with each participant for face-to-face semistructured interviews. Persistent observation included spending approximately 8 hours at each SME's organization, observing the interactions between the owner-manager and the employees. The member checking approach identified for dependability also applied for assuring credibility of the study.

Transferability. Transferability is the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study are applicable to other context, settings, or participants (Cope, 2014; Morse, 2015; Sousa, 2014). To establish transferability, I thoroughly described and explained the research design, the data collection processes, and the context of the study to allow ease of comparison of this study to another context. Techniques for establishing transferability

in a study include the use of thick descriptions of the data (Elo et al., 2014; Kaczynski et al., 2014). By using the strategy of thick descriptions, the researcher provides in-depth details of the phenomenon and the methodologies of the study (Morse, 2015). To establish transferability, qualitative researchers must attempt to articulate, in rich descriptive language, information concerning the context of their study to ensure participants can determine whether the findings are congruent with their experiences (Anney, 2014; Garside, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013).

Confirmability. An important aspect of confirmability is the researcher's ability to show that the data represent the informant's perspectives and not the researcher's preferences or biases (Eriksson, 2015). My aim was to achieve confirmability through audit trail and reflexivity. Audit trails, reflexivity, and triangulation are useful strategies for attaining confirmability in a study (Anney, 2014; Garside, 2014).

Reflective journaling is a source of insights and ideas in analyzing the information and interactions from the collection phase of the research (Roger et al., 2018). The researcher can demonstrate the application of reflexivity by maintaining a reflective diary during all phases of the research process (Anney, 2014). An audit trail is an assessment of the inquiry procedure and instruments to authenticate the data the researcher presents as explanations for all the decisions and actions in the collection, recording, and analysis of data (Anney, 2014; Cope, 2014). Audit trail, in this study, involved documenting the rationale for all decisions pertaining to the research process. I also maintained detailed notes regarding the data and its context to strengthen the validity of the findings. Another

technique the study entailed to ensure a proper audit trail was producing a verbatim transcript of the raw data from each tape-recorded interview.

I documented a comprehensive chronology of the processes and activities of this research to further enhance the audit trail techniques of this study. The use of in-depth notes related to the interviews and direct observations as well as documenting a full description of the research process are valuable audit trails that enhance the rigor of qualitative research (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014). I further enhanced auditability using NVivo, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software that has a query tool for conducting comparison analyses and coding. NVivo has the functionality to maintain a full and systematic trace of decisions made and codes developed while collecting and analyzing data (Houghton et al., 2013; Sotiriadou et al., 2014). The use of suitable qualitative software in analyzing data meets the need for improving the rigor of the research (Sotiriadou et al., 2014).

Data saturation. Thematic and data saturation are similar to the extent that both forms of saturation involve the collection and analysis of data to the point where no new themes or insights emerge (Cope, 2014). In qualitative research, the researcher could achieve data saturation using multiple data collection methods such as observations, interviews, and documents (Houghton et al., 2013). I conducted semistructured interviews with the owners-managers until no new themes or insights emerged to ensure data saturation, as well as collect data using direct nonparticipant observation. Data triangulation is an approach to accomplish data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data analysis occurred during data collection to ensure the achievement of data saturation.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 contains 11 elements, with emphasis on the purpose of the study and discussion of the plan of activities regarding the execution of this research. I described the role of the researcher and experience pertaining to the topic of the study. Section 2 also includes a description of the research method and design to explore leadership skills owner-managers need to survive beyond 5 years. A detailed discussion of the research population, the selection and the treatment of participants, and the sampling process are components of the section. The population comprised four SMEs from the manufacturing industry in Trinidad and Tobago. In Section 2, I also included discussions of the data, focusing on the data instruments, collection techniques, organization, and analysis. Another important aspect of Section 2 relates to the strategies to ensure the study's reliability and validity.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 includes an introduction with a restatement of the purpose of the study and brief statements of the general business problem, the data collection, and the data analysis techniques relating to this study. This section also includes the results of the study, detailed discussion on the empirical evidence, alignment to the conceptual framework related to the research question, and support for the conclusions of the study. I conclude Section 3 with a discussion concerning the implications for social change, recommendations, and personal reflections.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership skills SME owners-managers need to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. The general business problem that formed the foundation for this study was the failure rate of SMEs during the initial 5 years of operations. Participants for this study consisted of four SME owners-managers in the manufacturing industry in Trinidad and Tobago whose businesses survived for more than 5 years. Using individuals who experienced the phenomenon of the research topic is an appropriate approach to enhance the validity of the study (Morse, 2015).

I collected data for analysis from semistructured interviews and direct observation. Data were gathered from participants' responses to seven open-ended interview questions (see Appendix C). I also observed the owner-managers as they interacted with their employees and customers. Triangulation of the responses from the interview and observations notes helped in validating the themes that emerged from the

data analysis. Different sources of data enrich data validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Five major themes emerged from analysis of the data: (a) leadership skills, (b) leadership values, (c) leadership challenges, (d) development of leadership skills, and (e) improvement of leadership skills. Identification of themes is essential for the researcher in interpreting the results of the study (Gale et al., 2013).

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: What leadership skills owners-managers of SMEs need to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years? To encourage participants to share their experience and knowledge of leadership practices that are effective for sustainability beyond 5 years, I interviewed four owners-managers using open-ended questions. To protect the participants' identities, I assigned the pseudonyms, P1 to P4, to each owner-manager. I transcribed the interviews and used member checking to ensure the accurate capture of participants' responses, thereby strengthening the validity and reliability of the results. Following the member checking stage, I used of NVivo11 to process the data from the transcripts and observation notes.

NVivo was an enabling tool for my familiarization with the data and the identification of emergent themes. Initially, it was necessary for me to review the data in NVivo multiple times to determine preliminary themes associated with the interview questions. Such perusal was also beneficial in the creation of nodes for broad coding. Using the text query, comparison, and other features in NVivo, I further developed and extended the nodes and coded the data. NVivo was also valuable for reviewing and analysing the distribution of the themes across participants.

Through in-depth analysis, I noted the themes pertaining to the research question. Five major themes were apparent from analysis of the data in NVivo. Table 1 is a summary of the findings with respect to the prominent themes. Several subthemes in relation to the major themes also emerged from the data analysis.

Table 1

Summary of Themes

Themes	No. of participants	No. of references
Leadership skills practices	4	204
Leadership values	4	46
Development of leadership skills	4	32
Leadership challenges	4	30
Improvement of leadership skills	4	21

Theme 1: Leadership Skills

All the participants articulated the importance of leadership skills in sustaining their businesses, noting that the application of some skills is primary to the survival of SMEs in the manufacturing industry. In a study on strategies small businesses use to succeed beyond 5 years, Turner and Endres (2017) identified the practice of leadership skills as a contributory factor to the survival of small enterprises. A successful SME needs an owner-manager who can direct the firm using the appropriate leadership skills (Mandhachitara & Allapach, 2017).

Thirteen subthemes, which I refer to as skills in this section, surfaced in the data analysis. All the participants established 10 skills that they use in operating their businesses and that they felt contributed to the long-term survival of their organizations. The skills included (a) business acumen, (b) the ability to inspire and motivate, (c) communication, (d) relationship building, (e) customer management, (f) adaptability and

agility, (g) human resource management, (h) innovation, (i) visionary, (j) self-awareness, and (k) technical and professional expertise. Three participants expressed the practice and significance of three other skills: innovation and creativity, financial management, and the ability to organize. Ninety percent of the skills expressed in the transcript were congruent with the reflections from direct observation in the areas noted in Table B1. Table 2 shows the skills participants viewed as valuable in addressing the practice of leadership for sustainability.

Table 2

Coding Related to Skills Owners-Managers' Practice

Subthemes (skills)	No. of participants	No. of references
Business acumen	4	52
Inspiration and motivation	4	36
Communication	4	33
Relationship building	4	31
Customer management	4	29
Adaptability and Agility	4	27
Human resource management	4	27
Visionary,	4	24
Self-awareness	4	10
Technical and professional expertise	4	10
Innovation and creativity	3	24
Financial management	3	13
Ability to organize	3	4

Noteworthy, was that the skills are consistent with the core leadership skills Fernandez, Noble, Jensen, and Steffen (2014) outlined in their analysis of abilities spanning 20 leadership skills. Business acumen, interpreted as having a comprehensive understanding of the environment in which a business functions as well as being able to manage a situation to attain the best outcome, was the most dominant theme among the participants. P1 expressed that through being "aware of my competitor, I can discover a weakness in my competitor and you call that a cutting edge; I go the extra, so that I now

compete in that." In a similar view, P2 explained that acknowledging the constraint of SMEs to attract the same clientele as large businesses, forces the owner-manager to explore various avenues to work with existing customers. P3 stated, "I am always willing to seek new information and to know my competitors and what is going on out there." Business acumen is a requisite skill for SME owners-managers for identifying and exploiting lucrative business opportunities (Mamabolo, Kerrin, & Kele, 2017).

All participants emphasized the significance of inspiring and motivating employees to achieve the company's objectives from which they will ultimately benefit. P3 demonstrated such skill by encouraging employees, in more than three instances, to use their initiative in the performance of their roles. P4 also regarded the ability to motivate employees as a primary skill having alluded to the concept 19 times in the interview. P1 and P2 shared that one of the reasons for the low employee turnover rate in their organization is because they take and implement staff's suggestions, if appropriate. P1 further claimed, "Leading workers is not about putting things down their throats because everyone has an idea." All participants encourage employees to perform at their best, allowing tolerance for rework with the implementation of a new initiative. P2 iterated inspiration is "giving employees meaningful responsibilities, depending on them, and commending them about a strong point." The participants' behaviors and perspectives aligned with one of the dimensions of transformational leadership: inspirational motivation. Leaders who exhibit such behaviors allow followers to participate in setting organizational goals and provide the necessary support for achievement (Mesu, Sanders, & Riemsdijk, 2015). In a study of manufacturing SMEs,

Mesu et al. (2015) concluded that transformational leadership coupled with the owners-managers' direction was effective in the promotion of employees' commitment.

Communication is important for SMEs because owners-managers have to influence individuals and communicate meaningfully with customers, employees, competitors, and other stakeholders (Rezaeizadeh, Hogan, O'Reilly, Cunningham, & Murphy, 2016). The ability to communicate in a variety of ways is essential for building relationships with stakeholders (Letonja, Jeraj, & Marič, 2016). The experiences participants shared in the interviews and the notes from my direct observation revealed that the participants communicated with clarity and attentive listening to their employees and their customers. The interaction between the participants and employees facilitated ease of communication, particularly the sharing of ideas for improvement in processes. P1 noted, "Whenever I have staff meetings I don't do all the talking; I leave room for questions and for employees' views. I always give the opportunity to express themselves."

P1, P3, and P4 addressed the issue of how to communicate an idea so that the employees and customers understand the message. Both P2 and P3 focused on communicating with staff about issues as they occur to avoid an immediate or long-term negative impact on the company's operations. All participants opined that open discussions, attentive listening, and feedback are the tenets of communication that engender the building of strong relationships. Such opinion is in harmony with the notion that because SMEs focus more often on customer and employee relations, owners-

managers should practice accepting ideas from stakeholders and encouraging mutual communication (Miloloza, 2018).

Customer and HRM were other subthemes that all participants identified as crucial in leading their organizations beyond 5 years. The participants confirmed that customers and employees are the primary contributors to the success of their businesses, and as a result, they expend time and other resources to manage these two groups of stakeholders. P1 expressed "it all boils down to, the success in business is customer service; the customer brings in the money." Three of the participants regarded delivery in terms of quality and timeliness as a key aspect of managing customers' satisfaction and creating a delightful experience for them. The concept of customer satisfaction was a frequent expression among the participants, with 22 references made throughout the interviews. With confidence, P1 intonated, "I ensure the customer leaves happy, with satisfaction guaranteed. I treat them with respect and integrity . . . most of them return." Similarly, P2 articulated "I have made it a point that whatever job I do the customer has to be so satisfied that he/she will bring another job for me." Over the years of conducting business, P4 found that "making sure the customer is pleased was also making sure the client will return." The strategies participants use to manage customers are in alignment with Weber and Elferink's (2017) perspective. To boost customer loyalty, leaders must ensure that their companies deliver a positive experience to customers (Weber & Elferink, 2017).

The focus pertaining to HRM incorporated not only building relationships but also recruiting individuals with professional and technical expertise. P1 admitted,

"Workers could be your success story, and workers could be your failure, your closing story." P2 informed, "The people that I have here are professional in their own way and obtained certification in our local institutions." P4 disclosed, "I am always looking for skilled and strong workers."

All participants professed that employees are the primary source for executing the company's goals and achieving targets. The underlying principle of HRM is to ensure the recruitment and maintenance of competent employees who will execute their duties and fulfil their roles in a manner that secures a competitive advantage for their organizations (Shafeek, 2016). One hundred percent of the participants considered creating a safe and comfortable environment with sufficient workspace and useful amenities as an aspect of managing human resources. P1 presented, "Making the job comfortable by providing a microwave, a fridge, clean water, and adequate bathroom facilities. All my workers feel very comfortable because they know I have them working under humane conditions." There was unanimity that satisfied employees contribute to the success of the business. Staff training and development were also areas of focus. Through a comparison of participants' responses and my observation notes, I identified that the primary form of employee development is on-the-job training. Improving employees' work skills and enhancing their knowledge are crucial for the development of SMEs (Shafeek, 2016). However, because of financial constraints, SME owners-managers are normally unable to pursue formal training for their staff; hence, the informal approach to staff development (Damoah, Ashie, & Kekesi, 2016).

SMEs must rapidly evolve to compete and sustain the long-term viability of their organizations in the business environment of the 21st century (N. Evans & Bosua, 2017). The increased business complexity of and continuous change in the business environment of this century has resulted from new technology, globalization, and new business models (Sraun, & Singh, 2017). The practice of all participants is consistent with the literature. Confirming that willingness and the ability to adapt to new situations is a mandatory leadership skill, the participants advised that they use technology in their business operations. P1 and P3, respectively, commented, "We now advertise using social media and customers can contact us via our website," and "I use Whatsapp and Facebook and I go live on Facebook." Monitoring the downturn of the local economy, P1, P2, and P4 changed some of their business processes and revenue collection approach to remain profitable. P1 and P4 extended to international markets. Furthermore P1 opined, "We have to be vigilant and we have to look for avenues to get quick returns." P3 iterated that "Flexibility is one of the most important skills for leaders in this time. Accept change just as part of doing business. To keep up with the times and customers, I changed my logo." P4 related that the ability to adapt to new developments in the industry and resilience to business challenges were fundamental in "saving [the] business on several occasions."

Having a vision for the business was one of the factors all participants identified as important for the overall and long-term success of their companies. Formal structured documentation of future plans was not an element of the visionary process among the four participants, for reasons of confidentiality. However, all participants voiced their certainty about the medium- and long-term plans they have for their organizations. P1

reported, "I look at the long term and the bigger picture; I am looking at going into other areas of diversifying. I explained to . . . we must have vision, goals and how we want to go about achieving them." Another participant, P2, reinforced P1's focus stating, "As a business person I always have to be looking at the future sustainability of my business . . . to ensure our sustainability and survival we have to plan for the future." Researchers advocated SME owners-managers should know the goals they want to accomplish over a specific period (M. E. Agwu, 2018; Turner & Endres, 2017).

There were 24 references among three participants regarding the ability to be innovative and creative. The participants used the word interchangeably ascribing similar meaning to the words. P2, P3, and P4 practiced these skills and advocated that such skills are imperative for leaders of SMEs in the manufacturing industry to maintain a competitive edge. P2 claimed, "We have to be really creative to remain afloat now, inventing a machine here and there to get things done and to reduce cost. I find other ways to improve the operation and not get involved in external financing." Sustaining the business was also of interest to P3 who shared,

I think about new ideas and I am excited as it relates to implementing them. You

must be innovative and look at ways that you could take your product. I

constantly stretch my product, adding new raw material to authentic a nice flavor.

P4 found a combination of creativity and innovation was a strategy used in business to curb potential failures. P4 also articulated, "Right through you have to be using your creative skills to get things done." Continued involvement in the process of innovation is important for SMEs' survival in the competitive environment (Taneja et al., 2016).

Ten references pertained to self-awareness, representing a skill that all participants practice and presented as essential for leading their organizations successfully. Each participant acknowledged the requirement to assess and understand one's strengths and weaknesses as crucial in being an effective leader. P2 admitted, "I have a problem with how I speak sometimes." Commenting on assessing oneself, P3 stated, "at the end of the day I would reflect and say OK, how things could have been done differently." P3 also mentioned, "Become self-aware, understanding that you don't know everything and know your blind spot so that you can improve." P4 related, "I always take a hard look in the mirror to see me, to see what I am doing right, what I am doing wrong, how could I have done it better and always striving." Further to a leader being aware of weak and strong areas, P1 stressed, "there is always room for growth. Be aware of strengths and weaknesses." The approach participants exercised in relation to self-awareness corresponds with previous literature on leadership in small businesses. Leaders of entrepreneurial firms should consider and examine their impetus for directing a business (He, Standen, & Coetzer, 2017). In their study on leadership, He et al. (2017) emphasized that leaders should also consider how their personal attributes fit with the sustainability of the firm.

Technical and professional skills appeared equally important, with this subtheme showing 10 references among participants. Knowledge and experiential capability of the business was a common theme among P1, P2, and P3. P2 indicated the achievement of academic and professional training in that business sector, while P1, P3, and P4 acquired the knowledge through developmental programs and experience. Formulated differently

but capturing the expressions of the other participants, P2 declared, "You must have an all-round knowledge and must have awareness what is going on in the company." P3 reported using online programs and attending short courses to acquire new and additional knowledge for improving technical expertise. The participants' technical competence was visible during the direct observation.

Theme 2: Leadership Values

Participants believed that leaders should uphold some core personal values in the conduct of their businesses with all stakeholders. Five subthemes emerged in this category of theme, with 48 references among participants. A consideration among researchers is that a leader's values such as honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness contribute to the effectiveness of leadership (M. S. Malik, Awais, Timsal, & Qureshi, 2016). These values and others form the components of ethics (Mayanja & Perks, 2017). Table 3 reflects the subthemes and the associated number of references by number of participants.

Table 3

Coding Related to Leadership Values

Subthemes	No. of participants	No. of references
Empathy	4	12
Positivity	4	7
Spiritual connection	4	6
Integrity	3	14
Trustworthiness	2	9

As noted in Table 3, 75% of the participants alluded to integrity as a value they uphold in leading their firms. P1 and P2 explained "consistency, having a momentum,

and fair treatment" are norms they align with integrity. To reinforce the point P1 shared

an experience,

> Say I am on my way but stuck in traffic but I anticipate I will be there in an hour
>
> time or half hour time, I called the customer and apologise and explain. Always
>
> apologise and do not wait for the customer to call.

P4 noted, "If I tell you I would do so and so, and I can't do it I will come and tell you I

can't do it. I will do it another time." Integrity, the three participants agreed, could affect

their business outcomes and by extension their profitability and survival. In SMEs,

owners-managers make the final pronouncement on decisions of the firm (Grandón &

Ramírez-Correa, 2018). As leaders, SME owners-managers' their emphasis on

incorporating integrity as a cultural value could positively affect the firm's reputation, its

competitive advantage and ultimately its long-term survival (B. M. Robinson & Jonker,

2017).

Empathy, having the second highest number of references (12), was the other

value all participants identified as a requirement for owners-managers. Participants

claimed that by having this value they could assess and understand the emotional state of

their employees and customers. Such an assessment and understanding would allow the

owner-manager to address issues using an appropriate strategy. P1 asserted, "Employees

want a boss who could walk in their shoes. They are not only coming to work to get a

dollar to pay bills but they coming to work feeling my boss is humanitarian." P2, P3, and

P4 acknowledged patience and caring in dealing with employees in the resolution of their

issues. During the direct observation, I noted participants exhibited, in different ways,

empathy to their employees. The participant's views and behavior resonated with the researchers' proclamation that empathy is a welcomed ideal for managers to use in executing their strategies in the volatile business environment (Araújo-Pinzón, Álvarez-Dardet, Ramón-Jerónimo, & Flórez-López, 2017).

Participants declared positivity in disposition and enthusiasm is the source of energy to secure and maintain productivity. This declaration synchronizes with Ullah, Rahman, Smith, and Beloucif's (2016) assertion that positivity is key in the application of leadership skills and the consequent growth of the firm. P1 echoed, "I do what is necessary for my niche market and I am able to sustain and to grow. Put the right ingredients in your business and don't be afraid of the giants out there." During the direct observation, I noted a high level of positivity between participants and employees as they interacted with each other. P3 and P4 were stern about quality and meeting delivery time but they maintained positivity in their attitude and communication.

Fifty percent of the participants cited trustworthiness as an important value for leadership in SMEs and a trait that is in intrinsic in their behavior. These participants revealed being trustworthy engenders trust in building longstanding relationships with employees, customers, and other stakeholders. P1 found in interacting with customers, "They like to see transparency. They like to see honesty." P4 voiced a similar position, claiming that trustworthiness is "mandatory in sustaining business relationships." Trustworthiness is an influential and intangible resource for positive outcomes in business relationships and transactions (Edmond & Brannon, 2016).

All the participants commented that having a spiritual connection was an

important value for successful leadership. All participants opined that spiritual guidance is an integral part of their decision-making process and managing relationships. P1 emphasized, "I put God first and thank Him and ask Him for wisdom and guidance." P2 explained application of spiritual principles to the business, "has been an advantage for my company." The sentiment P4 expressed was, "I praying that through my example, my employees will be able to see a little brighter or a better way and aspiration." Recognition and accommodation of spirituality is an avenue for leaders and employees to counterbalance the demands, stress, and strains of a turbulent life pace (Loo, 2017).

Theme 3: Development of Leadership Skills

Developing leadership skills among employees was the third theme to emerge. All participants agreed that developing employees to lead the organization is pivotal for effective leadership. A common view among the participants was that creating awareness among workers to assume future leadership roles is a booster for loyalty and commitment to the organization. Another reason, participants claimed, for encouraging employees to embrace leadership development is to ensure continuity of the business. P1 posited, "I want this business to continue to a third, fourth, and any other generation, so I want my children to take charge." P2 intonated the business could continue successfully by training and ensuring professionalism among the employees. Table 4 shows the subthemes and the number of references connected to each theme. These subthemes are strategically important and could enhance the transfer of leadership from founders of an SME to a successor (Letonja & Duh, 2016).

Table 4{

Coding Related to Leadership Skill Development

Subthemes	No. of participants	No. of references
Coaching/Training	4	17
Empowerment	4	10
Recruiting right staff	4	6

Participants identified coaching and training as two useful approaches for developing leadership skills in their businesses. P1 advised and encouraged the managers to build relationships with their staff and be alert of the areas that fall within their responsibility. Further, P1 advised the importance of relationship building and awareness through interaction with the staff on a daily basis. To instill these skills, P1 ensures that the managers execute the advice. P1, P2 and P3 solicit employees' participation in creating a vision for the firm by allowing them to present and discuss their ideas. P2 and P3 noted providing examples, verbal and action, of a particular skill is another technique of coaching employees. On observation of P1's interaction with employees, I noted this owner-manager allowed staff to solve problems with minimal intervention from the manager.

SMEs could gain a competitive advantage from the strength of the leadership within their organizations (Dhar, 2015). The attainment of such strength is possible through continued training and development (Dhar, 2015). On-the-job training is the predominant form of development among all participants. Participants found informal training is more cost effective and practical. However, P1 and P4 provide formal training for employees through workshops and seminars. Both participants presented that such training reinforces coaching initiatives and is an approach for increasing employees'

commitment. The participants' approach to leadership development is consistent with the pronouncements noted in literature sources regarding the topic. Development practices are time consuming and costly for SMEs (Garavan et al., 2015). Thus, SMEs modus operandi for developing staff is through informal methods (Mubarik, Govindaraju, & Devadason, 2016; Tam & Gray, 2016). Leadership development, in some SMEs, is part of the daily processes and includes learning from coaching, mistakes, and conversations among supervisors (Garavan et al., 2015).

Participants empowered employees by permitting them to undertake responsibilities and to be accountable for the outcome of their assignments. Another belief among participants was that in preparing employees to assume leadership roles, owners-managers must be accommodating with employees' making mistakes, allowing experiential learnings through errors. During direct observation, I noted the participants' tolerance with their employees. P3 expressed, "I allow them to make mistakes, I point out where they need to improve, and allow them to move on."

Three of the participants opined that in training employees for leadership, owners-managers must provide opportunities for and empower employees to lead. Empowering employees, according to P3, is another technique to inculcate positive work attitudes. One of the antecedents of commitment at the workplace is empowering employees (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). All the participants acknowledged that they have one or more "second in command" who assumes leadership responsibilities during the owner-manager's

absence. P1 commented, "I was away for some months and my managers controlled the business, directing staff, dealing with customers and suppliers, managing the finance, and keeping the business going." Similarly, P2 shared "I could leave 1 week, 2 weeks, as a matter of fact, I do that, and the business continues; and it's not just one of them; I could depend on all of them."

The findings revealed recruiting the right people is a component of raising leaders within the firm. P2 advised, "The workers I have here are skilled. This work is highly specialized. Workers must also have the right attitude." All participants confirmed that employees must have the appropriate technical skills and behavior to be part of the organization. P4 mentioned, "I am always looking for skilled and strong workers, who are willing to grow."

Theme 4: Leadership Challenges

The fourth major theme to emerge was leadership challenges owner-managers encounter. Based on their experience the participants advanced two areas of leadership challenges, outlined in Table 5. Financial management was most prominent with 17 references among the four participants.

Table 5

Coding Related to Leadership Challenges

Subthemes	No. of participants	No. of references
Financial management	4	17
Resisting unethical practices	3	13

P1, P2, and P3 conveyed that with the downturn of the local economy, companies experienced a reduction in cash inflows, emanating from an increase in the number of

days for collection. P2 and P4 noted that managing collection within a short turnaround

time or accessing line of credit from a financial institution in such economic times could

be difficult for SMEs. Planning and managing debt recovery and revenue generation were

also concerns, because of the size of the firm and the skill set of the staff. P3 claimed that

securing an optimal level of cash to sustain the business requires a level of financial

management, which "is not a skill I have." P4's statement of concern in the area of

finance was, "Financial institutions do not understand this business; therefore, I don't

have a large overdraft." P2 asserted, owners-managers of small businesses might lack the

skill to negotiate with financial institutions in securing funds to solve liquidity issues.

All participants iterated the difficulty in obtaining capital and in getting financial

institutions to invest in SMEs. In a study related to financing for SMEs, Kumar and Rao

(2016) found evidence to support the reluctance among financial institutions to extend

loans and short-term credit facilities to SMEs. The criteria that SMEs must acquire to

satisfy financing are usually beyond the financial capacity of the firm (Osano &

Languitone, 2016). Furthermore, the owners-managers may not have the level of

expertise to develop a funding strategy that could optimize the company's financial

resources (Osano & Languitone, 2016).

Three participants spoke, with abhorrence, concerning unethical practices within

the industry among counterparts, customers, and occasionally employees. Referring to a

recent experience, P1 related, "We will give a quote and the customer would know our

quote. The customer would give our competitor the quote . . . so that the competitor

undercuts our price, so they will get the job." P4 alluded that some owners' "challenge is

flexibility and creativity, so they steal peoples' plans. If I have a plan I can't say it because there are many intellectual thieves." Similarly, P3 shared that there are business people who engage in undermining activities to "to steal your dream."

Theme 5: Improvement of Leadership Skills

Four participants stressed the importance of improvement of leadership skills to enhance competitive thinking and to sustain their businesses in the long-term. P1, P2, and P3 shared that improvement in their technical and communication skills have contributed to the increase in their customer base. Table 6 includes the three subthemes emerging from the improvement of leadership skills.

Table 6

Coding Related to Leadership Skill Improvement

Subthemes	No. of participants	No. of references
Education/Training	4	12
Practicing skills	3	5
Networking	2	4

Participants viewed educating themselves and training through workshops as means of harnessing their management skills. P2 indicated, "Education is very very important. You always need to be reeducated, especially when it comes to managerial skills." P2 also shared, "I attended a program on micro small business which improved my professional knowledge in business." Presenting a similar experience, P3 asserted, "I attended a re-training course in terms of leaders." Through this retraining program, P3 acknowledged the acquisition of new technical knowledge, leading to enhancement in operational efficiency.

Three participants alluded to the notion that practicing leadership skills must be fundamental to the owner-manager in the conduct of all business activities. P4 opined, "You must be conscious enough to work those skills, only you can do it for yourself." P2 also concurred that exercising leadership skills is critical "especially with managing a business. A lot of it comes from within you." It takes a lot of hard work but that helps growth." P1, P2, and P4 used communicating with staff and employees as an example of the effects of practicing that skill. All three participants concluded that poor communication could lead to a high turnover of employees and customers.

The analysis showed four references by 50% of the participants relating to networking. Both participants conceptualize networking as belonging to a professional organization, having support from family and friends, or having an affiliation with other businesses within the same industry. D3's support includes family members who are not employees but provide coaching and service to the owner-manager in the areas of process and financial management skills. The owner-manager of D4 submitted that forming alliances with foreign and local individuals and groups enhances business acumen and problem-solving ability. Participants' opinion harmonized with the Ezuma and Ismail's (2017) assessment of networking. Networking facilitates collaboration among business firms, enabling benefits that would be unattainable without such a partnership (Ezuma & Ismail, 2017).

Application to the Conceptual Framework

The contingency model of leadership (Fiedler, 1964) and the skills-based model of leadership (Mumford et al., 2000) formed the conceptual framework for this research. I

applied Fiedler's and Munford et al.'s principles of effective leadership to understand the leadership skills owners-managers use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The tenet of Fiedler's model is that effective leadership is contingent on making adjustments consistent with the organizational environment. The contingents of the environment could include technology, employees, competitors, customers, suppliers, business partnerships, governments, and others (Kasasbeh, Harada, & Noor, 2017).

Mumford et al.'s (2000) outlined in their model that effective leadership results from the leader's abilities in problem-solving skills, social judgment skills, and knowledge. Leaders could develop these skills and knowledge through training and experience (Mumford et al., 2000). Problem-solving skills involve the leader's use of creative abilities, along with the relevant knowledge and experience to solve organizational problems (Mumford et al., 2000). Social judgment skills include considering the perspectives and needs of the organization's constituents. A leader must be capable of executing organizational plans within a social context, communicating a vision, rallying support, and guiding and motivating employees (Mumford et al., 2000). Knowledge involves collecting information and mentally organizing it in a meaningful manner to manage the organization (Megheirkouni, 2016).

The contingency factors that influence the performance and survival of SMEs include advancement in technology, customers' changing demands, globalization, the organization's size, and access to financing (Cherkos, Zegeye, Tilahun, & Avvari, 2017; Lo, Wang, Constance, & Ramayah, 2016). Other internal factors such as employees' professional and technical expertise, the firm's capacity and capability to acquire and

sustain a competitive edge are antecedents for actualizing the firm's performance

(Kasasbeh et al., 2017). A primary activity for owners-managers of SMEs as they operate

within these contingencies is solving problems to achieve the most optimal solution for

their organizations (Renton, Daellenbach, Davenport, & James, 2016). To attain a

positive impact on performance, leaders of SMEs should ensure the right fit between the

environment and capacity of the firms. A strategic requirement for owner-managers is to

equip themselves with the leadership skills that will facilitate speed and flexibility in

making decisions and solving organizational problems (Oyewobi, Windapo, & Rotimi,

2016).

The emergent themes of this study align with various aspects of the contingency

and skill-based theories. Findings in Theme 1, practice of leadership skills, are congruent

with the concept of knowing and adapting to contingency factors to achieve favorable

outcomes for the organization. An alignment is also apparent between theme 1 and

having the skills to direct the firm effectively. For example, participants alluded that the

business environment continues to change and, as leaders, they should adjust their

operations accordingly. Participants expressed that adapting to the 21st century business

environment requires the application of leadership competencies in such areas as business

acumen, communication, emotional connection to employees and other stakeholders, and

knowledge of the business. Mumford et al. (2000) posited the importance of these skills

for effective leadership.

Participants viewed empathy, integrity, and trustworthiness as personal values

owners-managers should possess to lead successfully. Through empathy, according to the

participants, the leaders can assess and understand the factors affecting employees. Based on their assessment, the owners-managers found their businesses were in an advantageous position for developing a suitable strategy to manage the employees. This leadership attribute befits social perceptiveness, a component of the social judgment skills Mumford et al. (2000) delineated in the skill-based model.

Themes 4 and 5, development of leadership skills within the organization and improvement of owners-managers' leadership skills respectively, connect with theories that comprise the conceptual framework for this study. Participants used different methods to develop employees for assuming leadership roles. While all participants proposed that leaders could improve their leadership skills through education and networking, the approach to such initiatives was different among the SMEs. Each SME uses a method dependent on the firm's financial capacity and employee complement, thereby affirming no single approach exists to instill leadership skills in an organization. The findings also connect with the concept that individuals can develop leadership skills through training and experience.

Applications to Professional Practice

This study is pertinent to explore the leadership skills owners-managers of SMEs in the manufacturing industry use to ensure the sustainability of their businesses beyond 5 years. The results of the study might provide owners-managers of SMEs with information regarding the leadership skills and characteristics they could use to direct and manage their operations in the long-term. Owners-managers might quickly discern and embrace

business opportunities that could enhance the performance of their organizations through the practice and improvement of leadership skills.

Leaders of SMEs might use the findings of this study as a guide for developing leadership skills among employees within their firms. Grooming employees to assume leadership roles could provide advantages such as continuity of the business (Mokhber et al., 2017). Furthermore, owners-managers, who are experiencing difficulty in leading their businesses, might gain insights from the results to improve or develop leadership skills. The application of such insights might be useful in acquiring a competitive advantage in the manufacturing industry. In the long term, owners-managers who pursue the acquisition of knowledge and application of leadership skills could achieve a competitive advantage (Salim, 2015).

The findings of this study might also be valuable to government agencies and NGOs in developing programs for the growth and survival of SMEs beyond 5 years. Business consultants and policymakers could use the results to address the suitability of training programs for SMEs. Application of the findings, obtained from this study, to the professional practice of leadership skills could strengthen leadership in SMEs that could positively impact the productivity with long-term benefits.

Implications for Social Change

Globally, SMEs contribute to the economic growth and development of the countries in which they operate (A. R Bilal, Naveed, & Anwar, 2017). Notwithstanding, 66% of SMEs fail within 5 years after commencement (Nnamseh & Akpan, 2015). Positive social change does not emanate directly from the findings of this study. The

change is a benefit that results from reducing the failure rate of SMEs. The impact of increasing the survival rate of SMEs is not limited to the owners-managers and their families but extends to individuals and groups affiliated with or affected by the operations of the business.

The implications for positive social change stemming from this study may include improvements to individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, or societies. This study contributes to positive social change concerning individuals by providing a perspective on the leadership skills owners-managers of SMEs currently use in directing their businesses. These SMEs survived more than 5 years. The insights about practicing and developing leadership skills, if adapted, might improve the survival rate of SMEs, thereby generating economic opportunities such as employment in the communities of the individuals. Opportunities for learning could result from business failure; nonetheless, application of principles of leadership skills might reduce the psychological, financial, and emotional trauma individuals experience from business failure (Ucbasaran et al., 2013).

Increasing the success rate of SMEs with owners-managers who have the knowledge and willingness to apply leadership skills in their organizations might reduce the failure of businesses and turnover of employees. Owner-managers practicing leadership skills and raising leaders within their organizations might improve and expand their operations. Business improvement and expansion might result in generating and sustaining profitability and providing job opportunities for individuals and families of the low income strata of society. The positive social change is improvement in the quality of

living conditions for persons and poverty reduction. In relation to organizations, implication for social change involves developing and conducting training leadership programs that might be valuable to owners-mangers of SMEs in embracing additional business opportunities. The implication for continuous professional advancement of owners-managers is also possible, allowing for the development of organizations to be socially responsible.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the leadership skills owners-managers use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Having experienced the survival of their businesses for more than 5 years in the manufacturing industry, the participants of this study provided valuable information regarding leadership skills. All participants identified the leadership skills they practiced and the contribution of such skills in the successful performance of their firms. Furthermore, the participants noted some ethical values SME leaders should exercise in executing business activities and in relationships with all stakeholders. Other points of emphasis encouraged the development of leadership skills among employees and in improving the leadership skills of existing owners-managers. The recommendations arising from the findings of this study are within the context of the emergent themes from the participants' information.

Government agencies and NGOs, with responsibility for the development of SMEs in Trinidad and Tobago, could factor the findings in their strategies for improving economic and social growth in SMEs, and for training leaders. Academic institutions may also include the findings in the business curriculum on SMEs. Business and professional

organizations could share the results of this study with existing SME owners-mangers and individuals or groups who are interested in starting a business. Professional organizations could also share with their members for use in their private practice with SME clientele. The participants of this study will receive a summary of the findings to use as a reference for their improvement and for on-the-job training of their employees.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this study, I explored the practice of leadership skills in SMEs only from the perspective of the owners-managers. A primary limitation was that the sample of four SMEs were businesses located in Trinidad and Tobago from the manufacturing industry. Future research could include other participants such as employees. Another consideration for future research is to increase the sample size and to duplicate the study in another industry in Trinidad and Tobago and another country in the Caribbean.

One of the findings revealed several skills that owners-mangers should possess to lead their organizations effectively. Prioritising the skills that are most effective in different situations is another area of focus for future researchers. SMEs conduct businesses within societies where behaviors are manifestations of cultural norms and values of the society (Renton et al., 2016). Researchers may study the impact of culture and the practice of leadership skills in SMEs.

Advancement in technology facilitates establishing business in foreign markets. The leadership skills applied in the domestic market may not suit or meet the needs of a foreign culture. Exploring the application of such skills across borders is a recommendation for future research. The research method for this study was qualitative

with a multiple case study design. Future research could involve triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to examine the subject of leadership skills in SMEs.

Reflections

The knowledge and experience gained from writing the doctoral research is phenomenal and positively impacted my academic and professional life. The commencement of the journey was fast paced for a novice researcher but interesting. I greatly appreciated the beginning in moving to the other segments of the process. As a novice researcher, I had little practical experience in conducting interviews in the academic environment. Furthermore, my knowledge about research techniques and tools were limited to my exposure in research conducted in a financial and accounting setting with little or no comparison to that experienced in the doctoral research process.

My research skills improved exponentially through the procedure of developing the problem statement and purpose statement, composing the research question, researching articles on the topic, and writing the literature review. Conducting interviews with owners-managers of SMEs was another means of enhancing research skills. Participating in classroom discussion via the Blackboard was initially a challenge for me because of a personal preference of face-to-face interactions; this was my first participation in an online program. I surpassed this challenge within the first course, realizing that the process of online discussion was an effective means of communication, following all the protocol and ethical behaviors as face-to-face.

I stayed in the program longer than I planned because of personal constraints and difficulty in securing potential participants to adhere to their commitments. The interview process was an opportunity to learn from participants, while ensuring that the interviews were free from personal biases. A key lesson emanating from the findings is a clearer understanding of leadership skills in relation to owners-mangers of SMEs in the manufacturing industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Conclusion

SMEs are important in the socio-economic development of countries across the world. These enterprises create and provide jobs, goods and services for customers, input for other companies, and revenue to governments. Despite their contributions, the failure rate among SMEs worldwide is high (A. R Bilal et al., 2017). The research was a qualitative multiple case study with a focus on exploring the leadership skills owners-mangers of SMEs use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Data sources included semistructured interviews and direct observation. Five primary themes emerged: (a) practice of leadership skills in SMEs, (b) leadership values, (c) leadership challenges, (d) development of leadership skills, and (e) improvement of leadership skills.

The findings revealed several leadership skills owner-managers should use to secure a competitive advantage and the survival of their firms in the long-term. The primary skills include (a) business acumen, (b) the ability to inspire and motivate others, (c) communication, (d) relationship building, (e) customer and HRM, (f) adaptability and agility, (e) visionary, (f) technical and professional expertise, and (g) self-awareness. Possessing and practicing leadership skills is essential. However, to remain current with

changes in the business environment, owners-managers must engage in programs to improve those skills. The results also showed that SMEs could achieve business continuity by developing leadership skills of employees within the organization. Key components of Fiedler's (1964) contingency theory on effective leadership and the concepts of Mumford et al.'s (2000) model on skilled-based leadership aligned with the results of this study.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction: The focus in this phase is to introduce the interview and to arrange the

settings for the interview, with all equipment in place. This will involve hosting the

interview at a time and place that is convenient for the interviewee and is conducive to

unnecessary disturbances.

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interviewee:

Script
     Good day and thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview data.
My name is Yvette Peters and I am a doctoral graduate student of Walden University in
the Doctor of Business Administration program. I am conducting my doctoral research
that is in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree. The topic of my research is
"Exploring leadership skills for the sustainability of small and medium enterprises
(SME)." The primary purpose of the research is to understand the leadership skills
owner-managers of SMEs need to to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. I am
conducting this interview to explore and understand the leadership skills from owner-
managers of the manufacturing sector and who have experience in leadership. I anticipate
that your contribution will be valuable to this study.
     The duration of the interview will be 30 to 45 minutes with seven questions. If
you agree, I will be tape-recording this interview; the purpose of this procedure is to
capture the details of your responses and simultaneously have an attentive conversation
with you. I guarantee you that all your responses will remain confidential and I will
ensure anonymity throughout the research. Your identity will be in the form of a code,
comprising alpha and numeric characters. Additionally, I will not include any identifying
data, such as name, social security number, date of birth etc., on any of the data collection
tools. Feel free to let me know if you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the
interview at any time during the process.
     Before we begin, I invite you to take some time to read the consent form. You are
free to ask me any and as many questions about the contents of the form and I am willing
to provide you with the appropriate answer. If you are in agreement with the contents of
the form, you and I will sign and date each copy with one copy for me and the other for

you to keep. Affixing our signature to the consent form is an indication that we both agree to pursue this interview.

Interview in Progress:

Upon agreement from the interviewee, I will turn on the tape recorder and the interview will commence, noting the starting time. During the interview, I will observe and note, in writing, all nonverbal cues. I will show interest and concern for the interviewee, and listen attentively. I will also paraphrase, as necessary, to ensure the response is what the interviewee sought to present. I will ask probing and follow-up questions after each interview question, if necessary, to gather more in-depth information and to encourage the emergence of unexpected data.

I will present the following open-ended questions to each owner-manager for his/her response:

1. What is your background of experience in the SME business sector?

2. What leadership skills have you used to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years?

3. What skills and capabilities are necessary for owners-managers in the manufacturing industry to sustain their firms in the long term?

4. How do you reinforce the practice of leadership skills for long-term sustenance in your organization?

5. What are some of the leadership challenges you faced as an SME owner-manager in the manufacturing industry in Trinidad and Tobago?

6. How can owners-managers improve the leadership skills in SMEs to ensure sustainability beyond five years?

7. What additional information regarding leadership skills to ensure

    sustainability would you like to add?

Closure of the Interview:

If the respondent is unwilling to sign the consent form I will end the interview.

Script
        Thank you for the time you took to meet with me and should you change your mind I will be delighted to interview you on another date.
Otherwise the Script will end as follows:

        Thank you for the time you took to meet with me. I reiterate that the information you provide will be useful in understanding the leadership skills owners-managers need to survive beyond 5 years. Furthermore, your comments, as one who worked in the manufacturing industry in the SME sector, will form part of the analysis of this phenomenon. Your identity will remain anonymous during all stages of this research, including any publication of the results of the study. If you desire, you will have access to the final report of this study. Again, I thank you for participating.Again, I thank you for participating.
        After reading and transcribing your responses, I will send you a copy of the transcript. The transcript will include the interview questions, your [verbatim] responses to each question, as well as a synthesis of your responses. I may realize that I need further clarification to understand better what you said or meant during the interview and will appreciate your time in clarifying such matters. Moreover, I will like to meet with you to conduct a member check of the information I recorded and transcribed [verbatim]. Therefore, with your permission, I will contact you at a later date to set up the interview at a time and place of your convenience. Do you have another number or email address at which you want me to contact you or can I use the existing number you shared with me?

At this point I will turn off the recording device.

Follow-up Member Checking Interview

Script

Introduction to Follow-up Interview

I will apply similar preparatory practices I used for the first interview.

Date:

Time:

Location:
Interviewee:

Script

      Good day. Thank you for meeting with me again to continue on another phase of our discussion that relates to my research topic on leadership skills in SMEs. I transcribed [verbatim], reviewed, and developed a succinct synthesis of your responses from the previous interview held on XXXX. The purpose of the study, as noted before, is to understand the leadership skills owner-managers of SMEs need to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. Today, we will review the [verbatim] transcripts and if you observe any aspect is not reflective of what you said, please feel free to clarify and/or request amendments. We will also review the synthesis of your responses and please feel free to clarify and/or request amendments if the contents do not reflect what you meant.

      I anticipate that the duration of the interview will be approximately 30 to 45 minutes. If you agree, I will be tape-recording this interview; the purpose of this procedure is to capture the details of your responses and simultaneously have an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential and I will ensure anonymity throughout the research. If you do not wish to continue the process please indicate and I will terminate the interview.

The Follow-up Interview

I will provide a copy of the [verbatim] responses from the first interview with the

interviewee, addressing each question and engaging the interviewee to confirm or change

the information I transcribed from the audio tape. I will also review the synthesis with the

interviewee regarding my interpretation of the interviewee's responses. I will also make

all attempts to bracket preconceptions and/or what I think the interviewee should

articulate. Intense listening and staying focused are behaviors I will practice to engender

responses from the interviewee. Such behaviors may be useful in probing for the

emergence of new information related to other information I discovered. During the

process, I will continually adhere to ethical principles.

Script

With your approval, we will begin the interview and I will turn on the audio tape. We will start with question 1 and the relevant response and synthesis and continue the process to the final question.

Thank you for participating and providing the clarification and additional information. Your input is valuable and will form part of the pool of data I will analyze to determine the leadership skills owners-managers of SMEs need to ensure the survival of their businesses beyond 5 years. I will provide you with a copy of the revised transcript and if necessary, I will appreciate meeting with you at your convenience for additional clarification. If you are amenable to the use of technology, we can schedule a SKYPE meeting for other discussions.

Thank you again.

Interviewer Reflection

After the participant exits the room, I will take a few minutes to reflect on my

observations and reactions concerning the interview.

Appendix B: Observation Protocol

Introduction: The focus in this aspect of data collection arrange with the owner-manager

to visit the worksite at a time that is appropriate and will not disrupt the organization's

employees or workflow as the normal course of operations continue.

Date:

Time:

Location:

Length of Activity:

Participants

Script
      Good day Mr. XXX. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to use your organization to conduct this aspect of the data collection exercise for my study. I am grateful also for the time you have allotted to participate in this activity.
      Today, my focus is to observe the interaction between you and your employees, the processes of your operations, and environment of your organization. The duration of this activity will be eight hours, commencing from today and ending XXX. I will not use any recording device or camera during the process; however, I will be taking, notes in a diary, of interpersonal relationships, processes, and the organizational environment. I reiterate that all data I obtain will be treated with the strictest level of confidentiality and will be stored in a place that is only accessible by me. You have the right, if you wish, to discontinue the activity at any time during the process without any form of penalty or bias.
      I am willing to address any concerns you may have about the process before I commence the observation.

Observation in Progress:

With permission from the participant, I will begin the observation process, following the

format outlined in Table B1.

Table B1

Observation Interview Process

Data Collection		
Observational Factor	Observation Notes	Reflections
Organizational		
Environment:		
Participants:		
Owner-Manager		
Employees		
Workflow Processes:		