

Perceived Influences of Leadership on the Survival of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

Poor leadership practices by managers and business owners contributed to SMEs' demise. This qualitative, descriptive case study examined how leadership affects SMEs' ability to survive. The study looked into how leadership affects SMEs' ability to survive in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The viewpoints and experiences of SME owners and managers provide insights into leadership strategies that help SMEs survive. The interview questions were answered by the twenty participants. Interviews, scheduling, obtaining consent papers, digitally capturing audio, and transcribing participant responses comprised the process. Data analysis was a continuous process that helped provide an analysis that addressed the study questions, which aided in understanding responses and coming to the right findings. The themes were coded with the help of Nvivo 10® data analysis software. The themes were identified during the preliminary data analysis and categorized based on typical responses. The results showed that there were four primary themes: the perspectives of leadership experience, leadership practices, business practices, and sustainable leadership practices on the survival of SMEs. It was recommended that SME owners identify and put into practice the organization's fundamental values, which include work-life balance, integrity, customer focus, valued employees, trust, and creativity and innovation. Because a SME owner may interact with staff members more frequently and directly, their actions can have a big impact on the business. Leaders were advised to foster a culture of cooperation between the public, corporate, and academic sectors.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Thy (2021) and Ngin et al. (2023), a SME's survival in the current unstable global climate may depend on the quality of its leadership and performance. Ngin et al. (2023) found that organizations with a significant emphasis on leadership practices outperformed those with weaker or ambiguous leadership practices, values, or ethics. According to Anastalia (2015), Liu & Saleh (2009), Nelson (2015), Ng et al., (2012), and others, SMEs are crucial to the economic growth of any nation and help it develop quickly. Baily (2008), Thy (2021) and Ngin et al. (2023) assert that leadership is a function rather than a position, and that leadership qualities are implemented at all organizational levels by encouraging cooperation and coordination to enhance an organization's performance. Doherty and Norton (2014) and Ncube (2010) define leadership as having a

compelling shared vision, leading by example, acting morally, being personally involved, and achieving team goals that outperform individual ones.

Stakeholder demands that firms satisfy triple bottom line performance metrics are placed on leaders to either meet or surpass (Ngin et al., 2023). Empirical studies on the impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs (small and medium enterprises) are scarce (Ngin et al., 2023; Latham, 2013). The impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs has been the subject of a few small empirical studies (Baily, 2008; Thy, 2021; Ngin et al., 2023). In addition to the challenge of gathering data from SME owners and managers, especially in developing nations, the lack of empirical research may be mostly due to improper leadership methods.

In order to build the foundation for the study and research questions, the literature search was crucial (Creswell, 2005). The analysis of the literature revealed that there is disagreement among researchers regarding the impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs. The impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs may differ between industries and businesses. The survival of SMEs is vital to a country's economy since it lowers poverty and increases employment. The necessity to investigate the perceived impact of leadership on SMEs' survival was warranted by the high failure rate of SMEs. The general question was part of the study: What effects does leadership seem to have on the survival of SMEs in Cambodia? The following were specific inquiries meant to extract pertinent information to address that question:

1. What kind of leadership experience did SME owners have before starting the business?
2. Which leadership styles do managers and owners of SMEs believe help their businesses survive?
3. How can the effectiveness of SME leadership be assessed?
4. How can managers and owners of SMEs maintain their leadership practices?

By virtue of its importance, this qualitative, descriptive case study investigated how leadership affects the survival of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Small business owners' poor leadership practices are a contributing factor in the high failure rates of SMEs in developing nations. Based on the framework of the research questions, the study examined how owners' and managers' leadership practices contributed to SMEs' survival after five years of operation.

Theoretical Framework and Related Previous Studies

According to Bakker, Albrecht, and Leiter (2011), leadership has a significant impact on work engagement because it not only provides employees with a source of motivation and fulfillment but also fosters a positive workplace culture that sustains an organization for more than three to five years. The impact of particular leadership philosophies, such as transformational (Gandolfi, 2012; Ghadi et al., 2013), servant (Hickman, 2010), authentic (Hassan & Ahmed, 2011), and ethical (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Johnson, 2009), on the survival of SMEs has, however, not been thoroughly studied, particularly empirical ones. Additionally, the impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs has not received much attention in study.

Transactional and transformational leadership styles were endorsed by leadership theorists including Bruce Avolio, Bernard Bass, and their associates (Johnson, 2009). While transformational leadership exhibits greater levels of moral thinking, such as ethical acts, transactional leadership produces observable outcomes that lead to corporate performance and survival (Johnson, 2009). According to Thompson (2008) and Yukl (2010), transformational leaders inspire their teams to go above and beyond their immediate self-interest and change the values and priorities of their followers. Four behaviors are used by these leaders: intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, idealized influence (previously charm), and inspirational motivation (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Thompson, 2008). According to Bass's (1995) theory of transformational leadership, transactional leadership is a subset of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership emphasizes higher order fundamental needs and a purpose that transcends short-term objectives (Gandolfi, 2012).

According to Greenleaf (1977) and Hickman (2010), the servant leadership ideology emphasizes serving first, which entails adopting a service-oriented mindset and functioning as a steward over one's area of responsibility. According to the fundamental tenet of servant leadership, managers should prioritize the needs of their staff. Stewardship, obligation, partnership, and raising purpose are the four fundamental ideas

of servant leadership (Johnson, 2009). Strengthening staff members and promoting a team approach to attaining organizational or company performance are the goals of the servant leader.

Macgregor's Theory X, which is the foundation of task-oriented leadership, calls for managers to pursue organizational objectives in a highly directive and controlling manner. In order to increase organizational performance, task-oriented leadership also addresses Theory Y, which is based on employee-oriented leadership and focuses on enhancing employees' competences, contentment, and commitment through empowerment and trust (Smothers, 2011). While the task-oriented leader concentrates on completing the goals, the person or relationship-oriented leader concentrates on the process of reaching the goals (Thompson, 2008). Task-oriented leaders set up employee responsibilities in a way that optimizes team performance and provide workers with clear instructions for completing tasks. Concern for the sentiments of employees and respecting followers are examples of people-oriented activities (Carpenter et al., 2010).

According to Kivipold and Ahonen (2013), LMX theory encompasses the viewpoint of leader-member interactions in which team leaders initially decide whether a certain person will be a part of the in-group. Leaders' connections improve when they demonstrate the leadership behaviors that their teams and employees expect of them (Kivipold & Ahonen, 2013; Thompson, 2008). Supervisors approach employees differently, according to the foundation of LMX's quality. While out-groups receive little support, trust, and respect from leaders and managers, in-groups benefit from these attributes (Farr-Wharton & Brunetto, 2007). According to earlier studies (Epitropaki, 1999; Janssen & van Yperen, 2005), strong LMX connections and effective communication procedures have an impact on job commitment, job satisfaction, and can lead to increased job productivity.

In order to ensure an enterprise's survival, the theoretical framework evaluated SME performance in terms of key success factors (KSFs). Key success factors (KSFs) are elements that are essential to the company's exceptional performance, according to Ghosh et al. (2001). Critical success factors (CSFs) are those that are essential to the company's survival. For an enterprise to be considered successful, it must have generated at least industry-average profits over the preceding three years; failing to do so is considered a failure (Lussier & Pfeifer, 2001).

According to academics, leadership entails the influence process, the characteristics of the source of influence, and the type of engagement in order to accomplish organizational objectives (Gowing, Morris, & Adler, 2008). Business success was influenced by the behavioral and psychological characteristics that were part of the manager's or owner's psychological makeup (Rauch & Frese, 1998). Intangible elements including training and experience, particular managerial and leadership abilities, and the corporate environment frequently moderate business results (Rauch & Frese, 1998).

According to Teng et al. (2011), their study was a crucial initiative steppingstone for SMEs investigating the impact of critical success determinants for SMEs in certain developing nations. The availability of top managers with strong leadership traits, as well as the empowerment, training, and retention of excellent employees, were the primary intangible elements identified by the writers. Excellent client relationships, the availability of quality goods and services, and the best time to introduce them into the market are other intangible elements. Building both concrete and intangible elements for business success was encouraged by Ng and Kee (2012). Additionally, because these elements were thought to be crucial for the survival of SMEs, the researchers carried out extensive research in the fields of leadership, creativity and innovation, and values. The authors argued that in order to generate intangible factors and enable all members of an organization to collaborate in order to accomplish shared objectives, organizations should have leadership vision and foresight. According to Silva and Santos' (2012) research, a company's profitability and longevity are positively impacted by important success criteria like education, liquidity, differentiated product/service, and customer focus.

The theoretical review revealed a number of elements impacting SMEs' survival. The study looked at SME leadership experiences, leadership philosophies, the effectiveness of SME leadership, and the impact of

SME sustainability on SME survival. The study included a critical analysis of behavioral and trait leadership theories as well as leadership strategies for the survival of SMEs.

METHODS

Research Participants

Twenty SME owners and managers from the manufacturing and services sectors made up the study's sample. The only requirement for participant selection was that each SME must have been in business for at least five years. Twelve male and eight female SME owners/managers participated in the study. Both male and female participants in the industrial and services sectors received special attention. The perspectives and experiences of SMEs' owners and managers helped to clarify how leadership affects the survival of SMEs.

One corporate agriculture company was among the 55% of participants (11 respondents) from the manufacturing sector, and the remaining 45% (9 respondents) were from the various services sector. Purposive selection served as the sample's criterion (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2013). The willingness of SME owners and managers to take part in the investigation of the impact of leadership on SMEs' survival served as the basis for this study. The study was not impacted by any immediate relationship. The study's justification expanded on the impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

The methods used to collect data can differ between qualitative and quantitative designs. While the goal of a quantitative investigation is the number of units, the goal of data collection in a qualitative study is the detailed perception of phenomena (Anyan, 2013). Complementing observations and artifacts were in-depth interviews. The emphasis on in-depth interviews is consistent with the concept of the study. Participants had the chance to respond to the study's five research questions in qualitative, descriptive cases.

For qualitative research incorporating the impression of participant interactions and interpretations, an in-depth interview is suitable. Verbal and nonverbal responses could be observed to supplement interview-related information. Including verbal reactions could enhance tales because they entail passion and intonation. Emotions, posture, and facial expressions are examples of nonverbal reactions. By supplementing narrative data, verbal and nonverbal data collected during observations enhance the validity of the data (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Written or visual information that explains categories, themes, and patterns may be found in artifacts. Narrative and observational data may be enhanced by the addition of tangible and information artifacts (May & Taylor, 2003; Yin, 2012, 2014), such as artwork, posters, and online resources.

Fourteen interview questions, derived from the research questions of the study, were included in the interview instrument. Research participants were asked open-ended questions during the interview. The interview question aided in the narration of opinions and firsthand accounts regarding the impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs. Prior to data collection, a pilot study was conducted to determine the interview instrument's reliability, confirmability, and credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The purpose of the interview questions was to learn more about how owners and managers perceived and experienced the impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs. The creation of the interview instrument made it easier to get input and comprehend how SME owners and managers perceived and experienced the impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs.

The study's pilot or semi-structured interview style for data collecting improved the data's credibility. Five SME owners and managers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, were interviewed on a trial basis utilizing the research questions. The researcher assessed the degree to which interview replies aligned with the subjects under investigation during the pilot interviews.

Data Analysis Procedures

Unlike technical software employed by computers that analyze numerical data and an analyst who provides input data, descriptive case study data analysis takes on a form and a routine procedure that is absent from other research methodologies (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991; Yin, 2012). Computers employ automated algorithms for narrative data analysis, as well as algorithms for estimating particular models and procedures to generate output data (Yin, 2012). When studying, classifying, and utilizing events or behaviors to logically and collectively piece implicit evidence into broad themes, it is essential to define descriptive case study data (Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2012).

Finding patterns that described the situations being looked into was made possible by the data analysis method (Neuman, 2003). Data analysis was a continuous process that helped provide an analysis that addressed the study objectives, which helped interpret replies and develop the right findings (Lauer, 2006; Suter, 2006). Every participant's response was recorded on a digital audio tape and transcribed. Emerging topics were categorized and coded from the sources. Themes and subthemes were identified from the data collection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The themes found in the participants' interviews were coded using NVivo 10® data analysis software, which was based on word frequency within certain concepts. The first analysis of the data identified the themes, which were then split based on standard responses.

The information gathered from interviewees was used to identify word patterns and themes. Along with other recurrent themes, the data gathered offered insights and a meaningful knowledge of the impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs. The content analysis used NVivo 10®, WordStat, and QDA Miner to identify themes from the interview data of the participants. NVivo 10® data analysis software was used to help organize and explore participant interview data so that comparisons could be made (QSR International, 2027). Interviewees' textual data was analyzed using content analysis methods. The data analysis program produced reports outlining each theme and assisted in identifying the category of themes that were most common (QSR International, 2014).

The content analysis of the data association pertaining to the words that constitute themes from the participant interviews was determined with the use of QDA Miner and NVivo 10®. The data analysis program that helped with the decision-making process coded the interviewees' statements. Major themes from the first content analysis produced by NVivo 10® served as the basis for associations; these concepts had several interpretations in the first analysis. The QDA Miner software's word and phrase selection helped uncover concepts related to the information gathered from interviewees. The researcher had to manually link highlighted words or phrases from the first content analysis to help identify themes because the procedure was iterative.

Ethical Considerations

Credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability were all considered when evaluating the reliability of qualitative research findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Sinkovics, Pen, & Ghauri, 2008). Credibility and confirmability were established via the signed informed consent form, confidentiality, and preservation of all data acquired using a unique identification code (Hoepfl, 1997; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Given the time limits and respondents' declared unavailability, all study participants had the chance to confirm and clarify their answers during the interview procedure.

Each interview's audiotape participant's responses, which were backed up by the manuscripts, guaranteed that the assertions offered implicit presumptions of authenticity. The accuracy to support credibility and conformability was guaranteed by this procedure (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Oral interviews were conducted at a convenient location for each of the twenty SME owners/managers in Lagos, Nigeria who volunteered to engage in the qualitative study. 100% of participants filled out a consent form, and no participant withdrew from the study while it was being conducted. The oral interviews were recorded on tape, and the participants voluntarily answered the interview questions. The main focus of the qualitative study was examining the impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs.

For the study respondent, the SME owner/manager classifications were managers and owners. There were 12 owner/manager participants and 8 female study sample participants who completed the consent form. Eighteen owners and two managers made up the study sample participants. Nine individuals from the services subsector and eleven from the manufacturing subsector made up the study respondent. Twelve of the SME owners/managers who took part in the study were men, and eight were women. Forty percent of the respondents are eight female SME owners or managers. Male SME owners and managers made up the remaining 12 participants, or 60%. According to the table, two participants, or 10% of the total, were SME managers, and 18 participants, or 90% of the total, were SME owners.

Results of Research Question 1

The first study question aims to gather respondent's opinions and experiences regarding the leadership experience SME owners had before launching their company. The following subcategories were discussed and their impact on the survival of SMEs: (i) leadership experience; (ii) industry experience; (iii) prior experience; and (iv) educational qualification. The majority of replies said that the survival of a SME's business start-up in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, depends on leadership, past expertise, industry experience, and strong academic and professional credentials.

Three participants disagreed with the statement made by 17 out of 20 respondents that leadership experiences are important before SME survival (see Table 1). Respondents, F-SMEr-1 and F-SMEr-6, for instance, disclosed that although they had exposure to leadership in their elementary and secondary schools as well as the school head girl, they had no formal leadership experience prior to starting their firm. F-SMEr-1 claimed that "main leadership experience previous to SME start-up came from school and being the first child of her mother burdened with moral conduct" while M-SMEr-6 had "a lot of duties, discipline, and exposure to both compliant and creative environments at college levels".

Table 1. Results of SME Dimension, Sub-dimension and Frequency

SME Dimension	SME Owner / Manager (n=20)	
	Sub-dimension	Frequency
Leadership Experience	Experience in industry	20
	Experience in the past	19
	Experience in education	18
	Experience in leadership	17

According to the study, one may have official or informal industry experience. SME survival is positively impacted by official (18) and informal (2) experiences in industry, according to twenty of the respondents. For instance, participant SMEr-4 obtained industry knowledge through a family firm, but participant SMEr-1 had no formal industry experience prior to SME start-up but was introduced to the business sector through her mother's business. Experience and education have a favorable impact on the survival of SMEs, according to 19 of the participants.

According to M-SME-6, "building relationships with the CEO and wife helps employees perceive them as their parents since they are important to their future, even if it means continuing their education." "Teamwork and cooperation" was denoted by F-SME-2. According to F-SME-4, "teamwork is daily fine-tuning

that involves working as a family and restructuring in the afternoon to fulfill an order." "Relationships between coworkers and their families extend beyond their jobs," according to F-SME-7. "Their family-run enterprise" was supported by M-SME-10. "You need to motivate your staff by building rapport and relationships, offering guidance, and keeping them in mind," according to M-SME-12.

Twenty-five percent (5 out of 20) of the participants stated that the survival of SMEs would be impacted by the role model set by SME owners and managers. To support the CEO's goal for the survival of the company, a role model would be someone who lived a transparent life and taught, trained, coached, and mentored staff members or followers. F-SME-1 disclosed that "an achievement process is a technique to identify training needs, where we are, where we want to be, and with whom to work." Additionally, F-SME-1 mentioned "an empowerment to carry out the objective, reengineering that has been ongoing over the last two years, as well as to record these systems and procedures and be more performance-driven." F-SME-3 said that she "enjoys seeing individuals take the initiative, mentors them, is able to support and align with the company's aims and objectives, and can defend employee decisions." According to F-SME-5, "a leader must be innovative, set an example for others, study a lot, educate others how to handle problems, and impart skills to employees." "Mentors her staff yet doesn't tolerate foolishness," F-SME-6 disclosed.

Results of Research Question 2

The research question 2 identified leadership styles of managers and owners of SMEs believe in order to help their businesses survive. As revealed in Table 2 below, the findings indicated that twelve respondents, or 60% of the participant (M-SME-2, M-SME-3, M-SME-4, M-SME-5, F-SME-1, F-SME-3, F-SME-4, F-SME-6, F-SME-8, M-SME-10, M-SME-11, M-SME-12), said that their leadership style or styles contributed to the survival of SMEs. The remaining eight participants, who made up 40% of the participant (M-SME-1, M-SME-6, F-SME-2, M-SME-7, M-SME-8, F-SME-5, F-SME-7, and M-SME-9), did not disclose any specific leadership style or styles, but they did disclose certain leadership traits. Twelve out of the twenty respondents had eight different leadership styles.

Table 2. Results of SME Dimension, Sub-dimension and Frequency

SME Dimension	SME Owner / Manager (n=20)	
	Sub-dimension	Frequency
Leadership Style	Absence of leadership style	9
	Situational leadership	4
	Democratic and autocratic leadership	3
	Inclusive leadership	2
	Value-driven leadership	1
	Transformational leadership	1
	Democratic leadership	1
	Transparent and open leadership	1
Process-driven leadership	1	

Seven of the twelve SME owners/managers that responded about leadership styles were men, and five of the respondents were women. Two respondents (M-SME-11, M-SME-12) suggested a blend of both authoritarian and democratic leadership styles, while three respondents (M-SME-4, F-SME-1, M-SME-10) indicated a situational leadership style. A home-grown or inclusive leadership style was disclosed by two respondents (M-SME-2, F-SME-8). Value or principle-based leadership (F-SME-3), transformational leadership (F-SME-6), democratic leadership (M-SME-5), open and transparent leadership (M-SME-3), and process-driven leadership (F-SME-4) were the remaining five leadership philosophies. According to the evidence, there is no

specific leadership style that affects the survival of SMEs. Regarding research question 2 on the leadership style or styles that contribute to the survival of SMEs, the findings showed that participants' perspectives and experiences varied.

Of the 20 participants, 25% thought that trust affected the survival of SMEs (4 out of 20). According to F-SME-1, the basis of effective management and leadership is the development of trust. According to M-SMEE-10, leadership "attains daily company objectives and is trusted." M-SME-1 supported SME owners and managers ought to have faith in their staff. For SME survival, M-SME-5 stated that "ethical compliance and trust are crucial." F-SME-1 emphasized the need of "reading a book about trust and investing in others doesn't guarantee that they will stay with your company for very long." According to F-SME-3, "she mentors them and encourages them to defend their choices as long as they are in line with the objectives of the business" and can help SME owners and managers trust her.

Open-minded leadership behaviors include being truthful, analytical, and precise, whereas open-hearted behaviors take into account people's feelings and establish a connection with them. According to one of the twenty participants, SME survival was positively impacted by leadership's open mentality and heartset. "Together with leading from the mind, leading from the heart requires factual, analytical, and accurate leadership," according to F-SME-1. "In addition to striking a balance between the two, the heart is emotional and relates to people," the participant said. Just one SME owner, or 5% of the participants, stated that managing her company requires a combination of mindset and heartset.

Results of Research Question 3

This question aims to gather the participant's opinions and experiences regarding: (i) performance measurements, such as earnings and revenues; (ii) customer growth, (iii) differentiated products and services, and (iv) liquidity. The KPIs (key performance indicators) for gauging the success of SME leadership were endorsed by twenty respondents.

Table 3. Results of SME Dimension, Sub-dimension and Frequency

SME Dimension	SME Owner / Manager (n=20)	
	Sub-dimension	Frequency
SME Leadership Success	Performance indicators	20
	Customer loyalty	20
	Differentiated products and services	20
	The degree of liquidity	20

Based on Table 3, performance indicators, client growth and retention, unique goods and services, and liquidity were among the KPIs. Trend analysis of revenues, earnings, ratios, and capital adequacy are among the performance metrics. In order to guarantee repeat business and recommendations, customer happiness will be the key to increasing and retaining customers. products and services that are distinctive and branded. Liquidity is crucial to the survival of SMEs.

The impact of measurable performance on the survival of SMEs was disclosed by all participants (100%). The majority of Cambodian SME owners and managers discussed their perspectives and experiences about leadership success metrics that combine quantitative and qualitative, measurable results. According to the third interview question, M-SME-1 supported measurements of SME leadership success." The CEO must devote a lot of time to expanding his or her company by considering, concentrating, attracting and retaining clients, and boosting liquidity," M-SME-1 said. Measures of SME leadership success were supported by M-SME-2. The answer emphasized that while "understanding financial and accounting data will assist SMEs increase their liquidity; competing by giving consumers ample loans without doing due diligence has badly

impacted a SME's liquidity and caused some of the businesses to fail too soon." According to interview question 3, M-SME-3 supported measures of SME leadership success.

According to F-SME-1, "honesty with clients has been their cornerstone." For instance, if a product is defective, the company reimburses the customer 100%. "Make it obvious that deliveries of goods and content must be made on time," F-SME-2 disclosed. "Social ties with clients: make special trips, go to their events, establish connections, and give them a personal touch; have a good rapport with outside contractors but are firm with them; some were previously suspended," according to F-SME-3.

Results of Research Question 4

The purpose of this research question is to gather participant perspectives on how to create and maintain capacity building for SME owners and managers.

Table 4. Results of SME Dimension, Sub-dimension and Frequency

SME Dimension	SME Owner / Manager (n=20)	
	Sub-dimension	Frequency
Sustainability of SME	Constant learning	20
	Courses on leadership development	20
	Applicable associations	20
	Formal education	19

Table 4 shows that gaining progress through ongoing education, formal education, leadership development courses, exposure through pertinent associations, mentorship, and coaching were all part of the leadership practices. According to twenty of the respondents, SME owners and managers' leadership practices can be developed and strengthened by ongoing education, leadership development programs, and pertinent associations for networking, coaching, and mentoring. One member disagreed with formal education as a sustainable capacity building, while nineteen of the participants supported it.

All participants said that lifelong learning and continual learning have a beneficial effect on SME owners and managers, which helps SMEs survive. A SME leader is "someone who is constantly eager to learn, develop, conduct research, and be creative while doing so, even at home," according to M-SME-1. "Pay attention to staff suggestions' was mentioned in M-SME-3. "Every day, new things happen, thus a leader needs to be a lifelong learner, take the initiative in some new areas, and not be scared to make mistakes," according to M-SME-4. According to M-SME-8, "when employees bring up issues, listen to them patiently, show them where the answer is, and instead of complaining, offer a different option."

As mentioned in interview question 4, F-SME-2 supported lifelong learning in addition to acquiring industry-relevant technical and professional skills. "She attended formal training, focusing on the production process in her industry," she disclosed. M-SME-7 began "sending staff members to technical, management, and leadership development programs for the long-term viability of the company while, as the CEO, he loves to read" following their anniversary.

M-SME-8 observed SMEs' survival is positively impacted by mentoring through membership in pertinent associations, learning from those who have done it before, institutionalized training programs, job training, and learning from others (collaborative). "Enthusiasm for the job or company and the motivation to achieve a goal" was reiterated by him. In order to increase service quality, F-SME-3 encouraged lifelong learning as stated in interview question 4. The significance of "constant learning, formal education to develop capacity, growing awareness, and an expanding technological foundation" was endorsed by M-SME-9.

Discussion

Discussion on the Leadership Experience Perspective on the Survival of SMEs

Value-driven, respectful, personally involved, led by example, teamwork, passionate, and role model were among the leadership experience perspectives on SMEs' survival for research question 1. A central workshop or a planned meeting with important or all employees can disclose a SME's vision and values (ethics), which can be a critical first step in the process of translating into shared goals. According to Martins and Sole (2013), SMEs must build a collaborative culture that upholds their basic principles. According to Martins and Sole (2013), an organization's basic values comprised innovation as the fundamental ideology, empathy, energy and excellence, team spirit, positive social impact, and organizational.

Respect was part of the leadership experience perspective on the survival of SMEs. Believe in and trust your team, and treat everyone as you would like to be treated (Fuller & Tian, 2006). Respect for workers entails following local laws, abstaining from coercion, and paying workers a living wage on schedule (Ngin et al., 2023). avoiding unlawful contracts, prohibiting child labor and forced employment, prohibiting discrimination, prohibiting cruel or inhumane treatment, and maintaining clean and safe working environments (Von Weltzien et al., 2009; Ngin et al., 2023). Under certain circumstances, democratic decision-making for particular organizational challenges may be a suitable way for employees to participate; this is due to human freedom and dignity. According to Reiter (1996) and Held (2006), respect encompasses caring for others, which focuses on interpersonal relationships including reciprocal responsiveness, trust, and shared concern. One aspect of the leadership experience viewpoint on the survival of SMEs was personal participation. According to Doherty and Norton (2014), SME owners and managers should have a strong sense of passion for their sector. A harsh love dictates that a leader should not put up with individuals who aren't ready to contribute to the company's success.

On the other hand, if an employee's actions won't ruin the company, the boss is willing to help them. One aspect of the leadership experience viewpoint on the survival of SMEs was setting a good example. According to academics, leadership is a process that involves focusing on employee engagement and achieving an organization's objective (Kezar et al., 2006). Schraeder, Tears, and Jordan (2005) define leadership as a process in which SME owners and managers take part in every activity and set the example by taking the more challenging route.

Discussion on the Perspective of Leadership Practices on the Survival of SMEs

The study found that recognition, people-tasks balance, empowerment, work-life balance, integrity, openness, trust, and an open mentality and heartset were among the leadership practices that contributed to the survival of SMEs. Recognition was part of the leadership practices viewpoint on the survival of SMEs. Gratitude is part of the leadership practice of recognition, which goes beyond incentives and rewards (Marques 2012). In order to reinforce behavior, recognition entails expressing respect, acceptance, and understanding to others as well as cultivating an appreciation for both the positive and seemingly negative things one encounters (Marques 2012). For their businesses to survive, SME owners and managers have mastered the talent of gratitude. According to academics, one of the characteristics that prevents outstanding leaders from achieving greater success is the inability to express thanks (Goldsmith, 2007; & Marques, 2012). Thanking is a miraculous super-gesture of interpersonal relationships, just like apologizing. It's what you say when you don't have anything good to say, and it won't irritate anyone (Goldsmith, 2007).

People-task balance was part of the leadership practices perspective on SMEs' sustainability. Leadership conduct that strikes a balance between people and tasks is driven more by doing the right thing than by practical considerations for task completion efficiency (Keast & Mandell, 2014). Employees that show concern for others while performing their duties may feel supported and wish to be associated with the company (Marques, 2012). When an individual perceives a lack of support at work, they will not give their best effort (Moore & Casper, 2006; Marques, 2012).

Discussion on the Perspective of Business Practices on the Survival of SMEs

The impact of business practices on the survival of SMEs was demonstrated. Doherty and Norton (2014) endorsed a number of strategic, quantifiable results, including gaining new business or contracts, expanding the company, developing new products, and receiving external acclaim. These could include winning good practice competitions, receiving feedback from partners and customers, being recognized externally through accreditation by industry authorities, and appearing in trade publications, among other things. According to Doherty and Norton (2014), SMEs should learn to be fiscally cautious, avoid borrowing money, and prefer to have cash reserves in the bank so they may do their favorite things. Experience in a few developing nations, such as Nigeria, has demonstrated that SMEs face challenges in obtaining funding intended for their sector and needless delays in receiving the monies for the few successful ones.

The focus on the business was part of the business practices viewpoint on the survival of SMEs. According to Fuller and Tian (2006), SMEs should continue to focus on their core business while continuously improving their work and encouraging employees to put in 200% more than they anticipate through a personal approach to business. Pay attention to how important it is to do it correctly; we will be there at any time and from any location (Fuller & Tian, 2006). Focusing on the business requires disciplined individuals, disciplined ideas, and disciplined behavior (Collins, 2001). Through the organization's vision, SME owners should hire the right people for the proper jobs and maintain discipline while concentrating on the company, its employees, and its clients.

Discussion on Practices from a Sustainable Perspective on SMEs' Survival

The viewpoint of sustainable practices on the survival of SMEs demonstrated the importance of listening to learn. In order to guarantee adaptation to changes in the business environment, Coras and Tantau (2013) advocated for ongoing learning because higher training expenses ought to result in lower transaction costs. To ensure the sustainability of SMEs, owners and managers must learn throughout their lives. Continuous learning is essential for personal development. Developing a mindset that guarantees increased resilience, high achievement, successful performance, and recurrent self-reinvention is necessary to take the appropriate action through lifelong learning (Marques, 2012).

Personal mastery will be enhanced by a dedication to lifelong study that focuses on one's unique energies and clarifies and deepens one's personal vision (Macques, 2012). Integrating intuition and reason is not the goal of those with high levels of personal mastery. Instead, they accomplish it organically as a result of their dedication to making use of every resource available. No more than they would choose to walk on one leg or see with one eye, employees cannot afford to choose between intuition and reason (Senge, 1994). According to scholars (Turvani, 2001; Yeo, 2008; & Marques, 2012), skills renewal is a complicated process that can be accomplished by using market-based training and skill development. According to the earlier research, it wouldn't be unreasonable to conclude that skill renewal and lifelong learning are interdependent learning activities (Marques, 2012). Continuous learning results in either the development of completely new abilities or the expansion and refresh of current ones. Owners and managers need to understand that everyone should pursue lifelong learning since skills cannot be refreshed without learning.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study found that SMEs' survival is impacted by the business practice of performance, which is adopting some strategic measurable outcomes. In the scope of the balance scorecard approach about the survival of SMEs, business practices are critical to employee and organizational success (Ngin et al., 2023). This aligns with leadership experience, sustainable leadership practices, and the framework for the balance

scorecard perspective of organizational performance (Doherty & Norton 2014; Thy, 2021; Ngin et al., 2023). The study is noteworthy because it investigated how leadership affects the survival of SMEs in Phnom Penh City, Cambodia. The research expanded upon and built upon the findings of Ghosh et al. (2001), Teng et al. (2011), and Teng et al. (2011). This study filled a knowledge gap in SME leadership traits that managers and owners believe help SMEs survive and deal with obstacles that keep SME owners from becoming great leaders. SME leadership styles, the effectiveness of SME leadership, SME sustainability, and the leadership experience of SME owners prior to starting a business were all included.

In addition, a greater understanding of the extremely high failure rates of SMEs in developing nations — many of which close within the first three to five years of operation — was made possible by the investigation of the impact of leadership on SMEs' survival (Cant & Wiid, 2013; Liu & Saleh, 2009; Obiwuru et al., 2011). The results may help SMEs' owners and managers (Heck et al., 2008). According to Collins (2005), Coras and Tantau (2013), Doherty and Norton (2014), Rasheed (2005), and Verduyn (2014), the study's findings may improve owner/manager leadership abilities, leadership practices, business practices, and sustainable leadership practices. supplying SME managers and owners with knowledge about leadership traits that could improve their chances of success after the first five years.

The study was limited by sample size, sample variety, and context. The qualitative case study based on a sample of 20 SME owners/managers did not have transferability as one of its objectives. The study's goal was to thoroughly examine how leadership affects the survival of SMEs in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Although the study's goal was not transferable, the results may be because it used a variety of instances to examine how leadership affects SMEs' ability to survive. The study contained distinctive elements pertaining to particular details and a thorough account of the participants, location, research techniques, design, and function in the study. A deliberate sample of twenty SME owners/managers in Phnom Penh City was used to justify time and financial constraints. The use of in-depth interviews for the qualitative case study was also limited by time constraints mentioned by SME owners when they were asked to participate. Finding SME owners and managers in Phnom Penh City, who were willing to talk about the impact of leadership on SME survival was one of the study's limitations. Divergent opinions were expressed by study participants in their answers to the research questions. It was challenging to identify themes because each participant's response was based on their own experiences and perspectives. The challenge in identifying themes and the several industry sectors that included manufacturing and services was exacerbated by the participants' variety. Because they didn't think they could contribute to the study, some individuals were hesitant to take part.

According to the findings, SME owners and managers ought to possess leadership experiences, exhibit leadership behaviors, create and implement business strategies, and use sustainable leadership practices. Thus, a comparison of these leadership experiences, leadership practices, business practices, and sustainable leadership practices required by industry could be included in future research. All SME owners and managers hoping to succeed would benefit from the study. Additionally, it improved knowledge of how leadership affects SMEs' ability to survive. An inclusive understanding of the impact of leadership on the survival of SMEs by owner gender could be obtained by comparing male and female SME owners and managers. SMEs with both male and female owners and managers may be included in the study. The suggested study could be used as a developmental manual for state and federal ministries and agencies in the fields of education, business, and industry.

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